AQ as a Scanning
and Mapping Device

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Defining the problem space has always been a central task of research and problem solving. In this article I will argue that the Integral or "all-quadrant" (AQ) approach provides a method to define a problem space that is at once elegant, infinitely adaptable, and panoramic. AQ stands for the first two letters of AQAL, the "all-quadrants, all-levels" aspects of Integral Theory created by Ken Wilber. I am choosing to represent AQ separately from the rest of the Integral Theory because it is independently powerful and useful as a means to explore and describe the human territory of experience.

Introduction

In *Integral Psychology*, Wilber (2000a) does for psychology what Jack Crittenden suggests Wilber does for science in general. Wilber offers the most comprehensive treatment of psychology available: he compares and integrates into a coherent map over 100 different developmental theories—from antiquity to the present, from the Eastern wisdom traditions to the leading edge of Western psychology.

The most crucial change from conventional psychology to Integral Psychology (IP) is a noticeable shift in emphasis, which is, in part, a result of increased inter- and transdisciplinary research, our growing understanding of interrelated systems, and postmodern advances in epistemology. Rather than pitting theories against each other, IP aims to deliver a dialectical understanding of how different models interrelate and influence each other in complex ways. IP applies the best discoveries of each approach to create a more viable, broader map of the human experience. IP is strikingly distinct from other approaches in two ways. First, it integrates useful contributions from as many fields of inquiry as possible. Second, it explicitly explores its own

limitation as a simplifying, generative model. It uniquely views the scientific endeavor as an aspect of the human need for meaning making and mapping of reality, and therefore, as an ongoing, dialectical process under evolutionary contingencies. Unlike most models that are static, and to some critic's consternation, the AQAL approach is inherently dynamic and adapts to growing insights and changing circumstances. Intimations of such a view of the scientific enterprise go back to 1962 when Thomas Kuhn presented his interpretation of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

IP delivers what no other psychology accomplishes so far: a simple coherent framework, which includes behavioral, intentional, cultural, and social/structural dimensions—each stretching from body to mind to spirit. According to Wilber, the six main components of a human psychology that any comprehensive or integral model needs to cover are: (1) The four quadrants of interior and exterior, individual and collective; (2) consciousness and its *waves* and *levels*; (3) *lines* of development; (4) natural and altered *states* of consciousness; (5) *styles* or *types* of personality; and (6) the concepts of *ego*, *self*, or *self-system*. For a general overview of these topics, consult Wilber's "Introduction to Integral Theory and Practice" (2006), *A Theory of Everything* (2000b), and *Integral Psychology* (2000a), which cover them in greater depth. In this segment I will only address the quadrants; levels are covered in other essays.

Proponents of adult developmental psychology have come to embrace the Integral vision and the AQAL model as a comprehensive, viable, and productive orientation map for psychology. Indeed, the emphasis of constructivist developmental psychology on interior levels of development has contributed greatly to IP. An AQAL approach to psychology would advocate paying adequate attention to the interconnection between interiors and exteriors in the individual and the collective. It makes room for studying human nature and human experience from every conceivable angle while consciously attempting to privilege none or, at a minimum, explicitly stating and justifying one's specific stance or preferences.

If a functional model is an elegant, simplifying, and generative representation of reality, then AQAL is a superb model. It serves as a scanning and mapping device for any given human territory. It illuminates effectively which aspects are included in a specific purview and which ones have been overlooked, avoided, misrepresented, or not sufficiently taken into account. Whether one fully agrees with Wilber's philosophy, one has to appreciate the AQAL model for its heuristic properties.

More importantly for this essay, using the four quadrants as a stand-alone, orienting map is practical. Dividing human experience into four quadrants in order to explore any problem space is simple and elegant. AQ as a model is simple enough that children can learn about its elements and structure. An AQ scan is elegant and flexible. It allows the user to adapt it for any level of abstraction and scope, from exploring a single object to sketching out the contours of a field of inquiry. An AQ scan is comprehensive: it combines the best of ancient wisdom with the best of modern knowledge; the best of interior phenomenological investigation (individual and collective) with the best of objective science. If used according to the spirit of Integral Theory, it can be a highly productive tool. Under artful management it is not at all the boxy straitjacket as some critics have charged. In the following I will show how AQ can be used as a method and illustrate its application with examples from Integral Psychology.

Wilber suggests that AQ is based on the universal linguistic premise of the four major perspectives all humans can take. Despite the "all" in AQ, the theory does not claim that these are the only four possible perspectives. Natural language philosophy submits that these four perspectives are universal, and thus, part of our very being. The best evidence for their universality is that we find first- ("I"), second- (I-thou, which is often summarized as "We"), and third-person ("It" and "Its") pronouns in all known natural languages. A more complex view and elaboration of the basic first-, second-, and third-person perspectives are given in Excerpt D (2003) of Wilber's tentatively titled *Kosmic Karma and Creativity*.

"I" The personal speaking UL	"You" as "It" The person or thing spoken about UR
LL "You" as "Thou" as I and thou in mutual resonance or "we"	LR "Them" or "Its" The groups or things spoken about as objects

Figure 1. The Natural Language Foundation of the Four Quadrants

In its simplest form, "I" stands for the person speaking, "You" for the person spoken to, and "It/Its" or "Them" for the persons or objects about which we are speaking. In English we have to distinguish between two forms or meanings of "You." Any "You" that is treated like an object becomes objectified and is therefore an "It." To be a real "You," or what Buber (1970) called a "Thou," there has to be an acknowledgment of intersubjective space, a recognition that I see you as you, and you see me as me in mutual recognition. "We" stands for this reciprocal awareness or resonance, implying some minimal level of shared meaning and understanding. We propose that we can fruitfully analyze any topic, any issue, any problem and map its contours more effectively than with other available methods when we take these four basic perspectives into account.

I hope this small paper will encourage professionals from other domains to begin exploring topics in their domain and use AQ as a scanning device, thereby adding examples to our collective database. Ideally, groups of people would use AQ to explore topics collaboratively in order to share insights, to expand and refine a given research/inquiry map or territory, and to open it to alternative positions. In short, those engaged in scanning and mapping using AQ will become more aware of what they pay attention to in their inquiries and be better prepared to address concerns of friends and critics alike.

AQ can serve as a scanning device for any given human territory. It illuminates what aspects are included in a specific purview and which ones have been overlooked, deselected, misconstrued, or not sufficiently explored. It allows one to do this in a systematic fashion, yet with great flexibility. In my view, the purpose of any attempt at mapping a problem space and designing research goals via AQ is not to be as comprehensive and detailed as possible in each instance. Rather, the purpose is to clarify what is included and what is not, and thus be in a better position to characterize the scope, depth, focus, and limitations of a given description, study, or analysis. An AQ scan often leads to additional considerations and inquiries not covered by the initial purview. Dialogue with others and feedback are important aspects of the process.

It may be useful to point out a potential pitfall of the AQ approach to scanning and mapping problems and studies, especially in the hands of novice practitioners. As with any new tool, it can be over applied—just like the toddler who uses his play hammer to hammer everything in his wake, not just the nails on his play bench. Whether one follows the AQ model to the letter or to the spirit is likely a reflection of the practitioner's experience as well as his or her awareness of models as symbolic abstractions or maps—they are always incomplete no matter how much of the territory they depict. It is becoming more widely understood and accepted across the sciences that our maps and theories about reality are always partial. The theories we create can never grasp the whole, intricate unity of the living universe of which we are an inseparable part. The very existence of multiple, often conflicting maps and scientific explanations of human nature helps to point out the relative incompleteness and limitation of each of them. As Wilber jokes, nobody is smart enough to be 100% wrong 100% of the time. Wilber (1995) states that IP's guiding principle is, "everybody is right. More specifically, everybody—including me—has some important pieces of the truth, and all of those pieces need to be honored, cherished, and included in a more gracious, spacious, and compassionate embrace" (p. 48).

The willingness to appreciate whatever furthers our understanding is a trademark of the Integral approach. Outdated conceptions, wrong approaches, ill-advised interpretations, and inadequate experiments all increase our knowledge and add to the trove of experience. Having said that, a clarification is in order. The Integral approach does not contend that all opinions are of equal value or that all research, all statements, and all interpretations are of equal quality. There are three basic steps in science that help to assess the quality and validity of statements in all domains of inquiry (Wilber, 1998, p. 155). These include topic-relevant methods of practice or an "instrumental injunction"; direct experience or "empirical evidence"; and verification or "communal affirmation" (confirmation or disconfirmation) of any truth claims. I will talk about the three steps of science in a different paper. For now, it suffices to acknowledge that all attempts at understanding and interpreting reality throughout history have increased our knowledge even though this often occurred in ways the proponents may not have anticipated or intended.

Thus, in my opinion, AQ mapping of a problem space is always in the service of an ongoing action inquiry. At each turn and in each new generation of application, the map can be adjusted and refined. It must be revamped in light of more viable representations of a given territory, current knowledge, and practices that continually evolve.

All Quadrants (AQ)

To reiterate, AQ represents seemingly universally used perspectives to describe human experience. There is no claim that these are the only possible perspectives, only that they are the most commonly observable and most easily replicated.

The simplest division of the AQ space is between Left and Right—between the interior and the exterior dimensions. The Left interior focuses on experience, the Right exterior on description, categorization, assessment, and measurement. Access to the interior is only available through

self-disclosure and dialogue; access to the exterior is available through observation via the senses and their extensions.

INTERIOR	EXTERIOR
Left Half	Right Half
The domain of the "I" (individual) "We" (collective)	The domain of the "It" (variables) "Its" (systems)
Subjective	Objective
Experience	Measurement

Figure 2. Interior and Exterior

A second way of parsing the same territory is to use Plato's tripartite distinctions of *the Good* (shared understandings of the good life), *the True* (in the sense of objective descriptions and propositions about the world), and *the Beautiful* (as the "aesthetic" response experienced by the beholder).

INTERIOR	EXTERIOR
THE SELF　　　UL	UR　　　NATURE
The Beautiful as experienced by each "I"	*The True* (observable exteriors, behaviors, & patterns) as assessed through the senses and their technological extensions and as described in
The Good as understood in the intersubjective space of culture	neutral, objective 'it' language
CULTURE　　　LL	LR

Figure 3. Self, Culture, and Nature

That each of these three aspects of experience has its own specific validity claims and validation methods is a topic that will not be addressed here (see Wilber, 1997, p. 76, for an advanced treatment of this topic). Nonetheless, knowing about the difference in methods appropriate for studying the different sectors of self, culture, and nature is crucial to understand both the resistance to Integral Psychology (especially its methods for studying the interior dimensions), and its potentially invaluable contribution to the field if the model were more widely appreciated, followed, and tested.

The most common version of the model is divided into four quadrants (4Q). In this representation, we distinguish not only between the Left-Hand (interior) and the Right-Hand (exterior) quadrants, but also between Upper and Lower. The 4Q model segments the exterior (nature) into individual and collective. As is often the case with such tables, there is no inherent reason for placing the interior dimensions in the left column. Wilber could have chosen other positions. However, once a model is in place, it makes practical and communicative sense to use it consistently in the same way even as we remain aware of the basic arbitrariness of the initial choice. Doing so increases simplicity and comparability among different uses and users.

Figure 4. The Four Quadrants

For quick identification, the four quadrants are also referred to as Experience (Upper Left), Behavior (Upper Right), Culture (Lower Left), and Systems (Lower Right). The acronyms UL, UR, LL, and LR serve as the most concise shortcut for those familiar with the map.

However, the greatest power of an AQ perspective lies not only in its simplicity as a comprehensive map of the human experiential terrain, but also in its potential as a heuristic, or method of inquiry. The following elucidates the use of the 4Q as both a scanning and mapping or plotting device.

As a scanning device, AQ is used to elicit as much information as possible at as many layers of abstraction. This step helps us become aware of how each holon is part of multiple nested systems. As a mapping or plotting device, an AQ map allows one to select the most pertinent aspects to be included in an investigation. At the same time it allows one to consciously and explicitly exclude other aspects brought into view by the scan and to do so with clearly expressed justifications.

Application of AQ as a Scanning/Mapping Device

Focusing on the four quadrants allows IP to purview the whole realm of human experience and to locate various scientific disciplines and their methodologies within its model. It also accommodates different scales of inquiry, from general, high-level abstractions (e.g., studying consciousness) to specific, concrete instances (e.g., one peak experience), while always relating the content of inquiry to all four quadrants.

For each point in one of the quadrants at one level, a new 4Q analysis can be created at the next sublevel and so on. Each list is partial and could be written differently with different main points in each of the quadrants. A different emphasis or a different set of bullets, in turn, will lead to different maps and explorations at the next level.
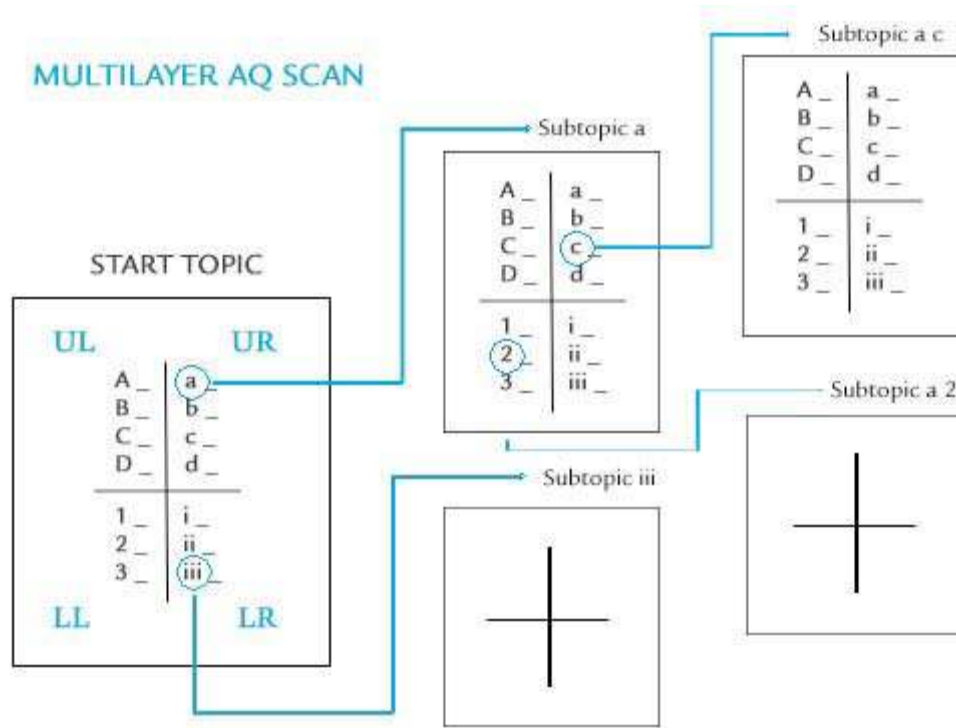
Figure 5. AQ as a Scanning and Mapping Device

Below is a concrete example of what such a sequence of AQ scans might look like. It moves from the main topic (How to approach a research topic in psychology with a basic AQ scan) to subtopic (Who am I as the researcher?) to the sub-subtopic of certifications. One can zero in on any topic to create a new inquiry that spells out relevant connections, benefits, and constraints from any point in any of the layers.

In the context of the first inquiry regarding research in IP, we may next want to know more about the researcher or the specific person inquiring. Thus, we can promote "Who am I?" in the UL of figure 6 itself to a new topic header and create a corresponding map of AQ connections specific to the subtopic.

"Who" wants to know?	What?
❖ Who am I as a person; as a research-practitioner?	❖ Topic/Phenomenon/Issue/Problem
❖ What expertise and experience do I bring to the task?	❖ Description (external features, behavioral aspects; static or dynamic; sporatic or enduring; alone or in conjunction with other phenomenon, etc.)?
❖ What limits or biases blind me in asking/doing this research?	❖ What is already known about this?
❖ For what reasons, motives, and rewards do I want to do this (intrinsic, extrinsic)?	❖ Who else investigated/s it?
❖ What are my concerns (personal, interpersonal, legal, ethical, competence, etc.)? UL	❖ What methods/instruments will be used and why these? etc. UR
LL	LR
Cultural Context?	Social Context?
❖ Within which historical, cultural, and linguistic context is the question asked?	❖ What support (funding, institutional, networking) is available/desirable?
❖ Who are the stakeholders in this?	❖ Where and when is research to take place (conditions and timeframes)?
❖ What are the common/different values, knowledge, and experience of various stakeholders involved?	❖ What are the local external advantages and constraints?
❖ What assumptions, limitations, biases are shared/not shared among us/them?	❖ What institutions/regulatory agencies/laws govern the exploration of the question?

Figure 6. Basic AQ Research for Psychology

If such maps are co-created or shared, it will likely lead to even better and more comprehensive coverage as different people offer different sub-points. It is one thing to share such a map with peers or other interested parties, but it would be even more powerful and illuminating to share it with stakeholders from other camps (if indeed they even accept the mapping procedure as a legitimate approach to sort what is relevant).

Following the third bullet in the UR in figure 7, one could focus on *certification* as a new topic and explore: the meaning it has to the individual bearer (UL); its cultural history, context, social cache, different values attached by different groups (LL); the definitions, properties, varieties of certification, method of creating certification paths, steps to be taken, assessments to be made,

comparison to other similar certifications (UR); and finally, the formal or informal institutions for gaining it and the various rules of acquisition for different types, legal context, and robustness (LR).

Self-Awareness Regarding:

* Emotions, motivations, thoughts, satisfactions, desires, attitudes, values

* Developmental stage/identification: level of differentiation/integration

* Inner strengths and liabilities

* Health/fitness (mental/physical as perceived)

* Age, gender, class, race as experienced

UL

Objective Measures:

* Self as assessed through quantitative and qualitative methods

* Behavior, personality, effectiveness as observable by others (feedback, observations, movies, tapes, interviews)

* Certifications, degrees, specialities, honors

UR

LL

Meaning Making Context:

* Within which general historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts, do I exist and function?

* What are emerging life circumstances relevant to my evolving self-sense (e.g., 9/11, new parenthood)?

* What are the commonalities and differences between this shared perspective and others I encounter?

* What assumptions, limitations, biases do I share or not share with my surroundings and the wider world?

LR

Social Context:

* What external support for the role I am playing (personal, funding, salary, benefits, institutional, professional, network) is available/desireable?

* What is the societal infrastructure (food, shelter, transport, police, healthcare, justice, education, and legal system) that I have access to?

* What advantages and constraints does this create?

Figure 7. Who Am I as a Person? Who Am I as a Research-Practitioner?

Starting with a specific research topic and a particular researcher, we could ask similar questions about a *specific certification* he or she claims to have in order to do the proposed study. Progressing in this fashion—from layer to layer—we can promote what was a sub-topic in one layer to a new header at the next lower layer. Each turn of the scan thus becomes more detailed,

specific, concrete, and focused. It also reveals further connections, ramifications, and possible areas of focus or conflict.

Alternatively, from the initial start topic of the basic research map in IP, we could create a higher-order map in which the initial topic becomes but a sub-topic in one of the quadrants in the umbrella perspective. With figure 6, for example, Basic AQ research for Psychology becomes a subheading under the UR list of currently available methods for the knowledge quest. AQ is powerful because we can choose any topic at any layer of depth in any quadrant and explore it from the other three quadrants to gain a fuller picture and appreciation of its interrelationships. At the same time, AQ allows one to explore a topic at whatever level of abstraction or concreteness one desires from universal topics to specific minute particulars.

While it is important to advocate an AQ approach because of its productive heuristic properties, it could also potentially be used to increase awareness throughout the learning enterprise. Developmental psychologists generally agree that one of the most effective mechanisms to foster development is by exposure to others' perspectives and learning to step into their shoes.

I can envision a transdisciplinary curriculum that embodies and models the structure and flexibility of AQ from kindergarten to University and beyond. The very presence of such an integrated curriculum would have a consistent influence on the development of individual and shared awareness, and thus on the evolution of our planet. If nothing more, such an experiment would have enormous potential with little downside. Implementing such a vision would be difficult and take generations of effort to demonstrate a shift from our current preference of scientific reductionism to a flexible and integrated model that scans the implications of any stance in light of all the quadrants, multiple stakeholders, perspectives, and methods of inquiry.

The Inevitable Question of History and Evolution

Once we begin to ask, "Who is asking these questions," matters of consciousness, evolution, and UL development become pertinent because the developmental level of the individuals scanning and mapping reality inevitably influences what reaches their awareness and what cannot show up on their radars. Similarly, when we empirically observe how contemporary shared cultural meanings (LL) have evolved through history, we can predict that future development will likely follow similar trends of further differentiation and adaptation at increasingly complex levels. The same holds true for the structures in the LR that translate the evolving cultural understandings into policies, social structures, and institutionalized practices. For this reason, AQ is usually coupled with AL—or "all levels"—in the IP approach.

Conclusion

Even though the telescoping AQ scan (quadrants within quadrants within quadrants, all the way up, all the way down) is a powerful stand-alone method for exploring any territory of inquiry, AQ is only a building block in a much broader Integral Methodological Pluralism, as outlined in the post-metaphysical material in Wilber's Kosmos Trilogy. Finally, I suggest that it is the consideration of states, lines, and types, in addition to quadrants and levels, that makes the AQAL model the most comprehensive, coherent, and generative explanatory model we currently have.

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