

# Toward Post-metaphysical Enactments: On Epistemic Drives, Negative Capability, and Indeterminacy Analysis

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**Abstract:** Various approaches and interpretations of post-metaphysics are described, followed by an exploration of methods and approaches to enacting a post-metaphysical attitude toward beliefs, and in particular beliefs commonly held within the community of integral theory and practice. Integral Post-metaphysics is described in context with the larger trend of post-metaphysical thought. Along the way several concepts and themes are introduced, including the epistemic turn in reasoning, misplaced concreteness, epistemic drives, and negative capability.

**Keywords:** Epistemic turn, integral theory, post-metaphysics.

## Introduction

A number of scholars referenced in integralist texts, including philosopher Jürgen Habermas and developmentalists Robert Kegan, Michael Basseches, Clare Graves, and Suzanne Cook-Greuter, have pointed to the emergence of, and need for, more sophisticated and reflective approaches to reasoning about complex phenomena.<sup>2</sup> Reflective reasoning here refers to the habit or skill of reasoning about the character and limitations of reasoning itself, including reflecting critically on one's sources of certainty and methods justification. Kegan refers to “fifth order consciousness” and Basseches to “dialectical thinking” in discussing skills sets related to highly reflective thought (Kegan, 1994; Basseches, 1984). It has been suggested by many (including David Bohm, 1980) that current global problems have more to do with limitations in human reasoning processes than natural constraints, and that any deep resolution of these problems will require a different *relationship to* our beliefs (knowledge, thoughts, certainty, mental processes, etc.), transforming these mind-phenomena from unexamined subjective experiences into objects of awareness and reflection.

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<sup>2</sup> Editors' note: Also see Jordan, in this issue: *Skillful engagement with wicked issues: A framework for analyzing the meaning-making structures of societal change agents*.



Habermas' term "post-metaphysical" refers, in part, to this more reflective form of reasoning, which can be seen as emerging in academic circles but also characterizes a (quite nascent) emerging sophistication in informal reasoning in (post-) modern society (Habermas, 1992). Metaphysics traditionally concerns questions about what is real beyond concrete sensory reality, and post-metaphysics refers to a more reflective approach to not only questions of what is real, but also questions of what is true (and how truth can be agreed upon or understood). The integral community has much to offer in the practical and theoretical aspects of this area, due to its explorations into second-tier, integral, post-formal, and/or post-post-modern levels or stages of development (and in supporting the transition from prior levels into these levels).

In recent years, new developments in Ken Wilber's integral theory have focused on ontology, metaphysics, epistemology, and method, i.e., philosophical questions about the nature of knowledge and what is knowable (Wilber, 2006). Wilber's "Wilber-5" theoretical stage, and related work by Sean Esbjörn-Hargens that extends this work, includes integral post-metaphysics (which in turn includes integral methodological pluralism) (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2005; Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009). Post-metaphysics,<sup>3</sup> concerned with the nature of knowledge, truth, reality, and belief, might seem like an esoteric philosophical topic, but the ideas behind post-metaphysics have strong implications for everyday life practices. Also, post-metaphysical thinking is implicated in embodying "second tier" (or integral stage) development, which is a central developmental marker for integralists.<sup>4</sup>

As I did for the topic of methodological pluralism in a 2010 paper (Murray, 2010a), in this paper I will explore the topic of post-metaphysics in terms of what it might look like to more fully apply and enact it within the community of integral scholars and practitioners (henceforth "integral community," in which I am a participant), or more generally, within any knowledge building community. I will discuss its meaning and implications from several perspectives, and suggest a number of principles and approaches that can help us take a post-metaphysical stance to our own knowledge creation and belief promotion activities. Though I will refer to the problems in finding rigorous truths in domains such as the human sciences this article does not intend to address empirical researchers, who must aim for as much rigor as their subject matter will allow, but rather is for inter/trans-disciplinarians who are trying to integrate many fields of knowledge in holistic applications.

Second-tier skill development includes a high level of reflective understanding of self, belief, and the human condition. Previously (Murray, 2010a), I used the term "epistemic wisdom" to point specifically to the aspects of second tier skill (especially construct awareness) related to questions of knowledge, belief, and truth; and later (Murray, 2010b), I described second tier skills in terms of four types of "wisdom skills": ego-awareness, construct-awareness, relational-awareness, and systems-awareness. Taking a (second tier) post-metaphysical stance involves moving further away from black and white, us versus them, and either-or thinking into ever more nuanced, complex, and dynamic perspectives, which Walsh (2009) calls "perspectival range." It includes moving further from basing beliefs on authority, peer pressure, magical thinking, and

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<sup>3</sup> I will speak to "post metaphysics," more broadly than Integral Post-metaphysics.

<sup>4</sup> Second tier is a term used within the integral community to refer to a level of adult cognitive/emotional/social/spiritual development that is post-formal. Associated terms include vision logic, post-rational, Metasystemic, dialectical thinking, and construct aware.

emotional or unconscious drives, toward forming beliefs using rational systematic thought, critical thinking, cognitive empathy, a tolerance for paradox and uncertainty, and intuitions grounded in deep ethical sensibilities. It even includes understanding how authority, peer pressure, magical thinking, and emotional and unconscious drives are unavoidable and important aspects of normal belief formation. That is, it tries to see these aspects of thought more objectively for what they are, and use that understanding in forming, defending, or transforming one's beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

In a companion paper to this one titled “On the development of beliefs vs. capacities: post-metaphysical implications of second tier skillfulness” (Murray, 2010b) I proposed that developmental narratives within the integral community often conflate the development of *skills* (or capacities) with the development of *beliefs* (including values or worldviews), and that this conflation leads to several problems. I suggested that our approach to describing and promoting human development be more oriented around the skills or capacities that people have than around the ideas (models, theories, principles, facts) that they believe. Much of my argument centered on the problems of unreflectively holding or promoting ideas, models, or belief systems. (Compared with other knowledge-building communities, the integral community does quite well here, but it also has the potential to go much further in practicing what its leading-edge principles imply). In the next section I will broaden this exploration of integralist beliefs from the focus on narratives about human development to include the set of beliefs commonly espoused by integralists (without going into any in detail). At issue is how we can not only create but disseminate and promote these useful beliefs, while still actively taking a reflective distance (or post-metaphysical stance) on them, fully allowing for alternatives, indeterminacies, and unknowing.

Integralists often employ the adages to “not confuse the map with the territory” and avoid the “myth of the given,” but closer inspection shows that enacting these slogans is indeed difficult, and subtle forms of metaphysical thinking and “misplaced concreteness” exist throughout integral discourse. In dealing with disagreements or contradicting knowledge it can be easy to back into a relativistic (or even so-called “non-dual”) stance and claim that the truth is subjective, perspectival, unknowable, or meaningless. This can serve the positive functions of supporting humility, opening to new ideas, or releasing attachment. But, it can also become a cavalier or defeatist move away from a topic or interlocutor to avoid the conflict—missing opportunities that a disagreement may tender. In order to move forward rather than back (when appropriate) and engage more intimately with the topic, the self, and the other, it helps to have specific knowledge and skills implicated by the epistemic wisdom alluded to above. That is, just accepting or succumbing to the indeterminacies of knowledge (and thought) is often not adequate, and understanding how these indeterminacies *work* and how to *manage* them can be beneficial. This paper attempts to make a small contribution in this direction.

In what follows I will explore various meanings of post-metaphysics, anchor the discussion in beliefs commonly held by integralists, and provide a context for post-metaphysics by describing the “epistemic turn” in philosophy and culture. Then I will introduce a number of ideas meant to support a post-metaphysical stance on knowledge creation and dissemination, including

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<sup>5</sup> As is commonly understood, we transcend, include, and transform the earlier modes, rather than leaving them behind.

“negative capability,” “indeterminacy analysis,” “epistemic drives,” a developmental treatment of misplaced concreteness, and an argument for the validity of “meaning-generative” claims.

## Integralists’ Beliefs and Metaphysics

As a way to ground the topic of post-metaphysics in everyday life practices, let us look at the beliefs we hold as integralists and ask about our relationship to those beliefs. We integralists often define ourselves by how we differ from the prior cultural developmental level (variously called green meme, New Age, or postmodern). We also live with the challenge of trying to describe and defend our beliefs to friends and colleagues who hold different world views. In Table 1, I list some common integral community ideas (concepts and beliefs) and contrast them with New Age ideas. (In the middle column are beliefs that seem to exist in both categories; some are New Age beliefs that can be held in an integral context.) In that table, I focus on contentious beliefs about what is real or true, though one could list many others less ontologically problematic or “edgy.” “Integral beliefs” here includes not only quasi-formal models like AQAL, but also the whole set of beliefs, theories, and principles held causally by integralists. This is a rough caricature and accuracy of this categorization is not important. The point is to help the reader reflect on beliefs that one has that associate one with one's intellectual or social compatriots.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1. New Age vs. Integralist Beliefs**

New Age	New Age and Integral	Integral
UFOs and lost ancient advanced civilizations; the healing power of crystals; the earth is a living conscious being (Gaia); we can manifest our wishes through intention alone; astrology, and other prognostication systems and personality typing systems; various schools of mystical and occult beliefs; “all you need is love” (and peace); everything is perfect as it is.	Channeling and the existence of non-physical beings; ESP and psychic phenomena; intuitions can offer sturdy truths and directives; existence of a soul/spirit (and constructs such as Over-soul, Authentic Self), reincarnation and past lives; synchronicity; psychic energy and the chakra system; the reality of collective consciousness and parts of the self such as ego and shadow; all is one.	The universe is evolving – through us; Eros, Agape, involution, morphogenetic fields, Omega Point; the 4 quadrants (or 8 zones) are discrete and ontologically fundamental; cultures and people can be categorized in terms of general developmental levels like Blue, Green, and Turquoise; there is a non-dual ground of being beyond space, time, energy, matter, and mind.

Readers identifying with the integral community have probably had frustrating experiences trying to explain integral ideas to peers or trying to critique New Age beliefs (this notion was born out in a seminar discussion at an integral community event). For the purposes of our post-metaphysical explorations, we can ask: How confident can we be in such discourses? How can we characterize the difference between these two sets of ideas (what differentiates “ours” vs.

<sup>6</sup> If you don't identify with the beliefs in that column, just substitute any beliefs, skills, values, or knowledge that you feel developmentally differentiates you from others, along any "line" of development.

“theirs”)? Are there particularly integral ways to justify and critique? We will look at the *metaphysical* aspects of such beliefs and then inquire into implications of *post-metaphysics*.

First I will point out that some of the items in the table are centrally about controversial questions about what is real or what exists, while others are statements or principles that make a claim *about* things that are less problematically assumed to exist (while a few are in both categories).<sup>7</sup> For example, contentions about Gaia, flying saucers, ESP, omega point, and morphogenetic fields are largely or firstly about whether such constructs are objectively real. In contrast “healing” and “crystals” are thought to exist without contention, while the claim “crystals have a healing power” is controversial. This rough distinction between existence claims and other types of claims built upon them is not philosophically air-tight by any means, but is made because there are different points I want to make about *concepts vs. statements vs. models/theories* (and because the topic of metaphysical vs. post-metaphysical often hinges around what is considered to exist and how). Concepts are things that exist in some way; statements are claims *about* (and built up using) multiple concepts; and models/theories are more complex ideas built from multiple statements.<sup>8</sup> In a very rough sense, concepts are about what is *real*, statements are about what is *true*, and models/theories are about what is *useful*. (See the Appendix for a diagram illustrating these distinctions).

A main point is that statements and theories/models are built up from concepts, and thus any indeterminacy or assumptions at the level of concepts (the things we point to as definitively existing) will strongly affect the validity of statements and models/theories. Questions about the existence of many of the phenomena listed in Table 1 have metaphysical implications. Metaphysics deals with questions of what is real (vs. not real), and the fundamental nature of, essence of, or first principles behind abstract ideas such as being, substance, cause, time, and space.

Metaphysics is often about objects or phenomena that are said to exist both outside physical reality *and* independently outside the subjective realm of human thought forms.<sup>9</sup> Metaphysical claims, whether made by esteemed philosophers or by your hairdresser cousin, are particularly problematic because of this. We have methods and conventions, including the scientific paradigm, for justifying and testing claims about physical reality. We also have methods and conventions, albeit less rigorous, for justifying and testing claims about subjective realities. But on what basis does one make a metaphysical claim? How could one ever test such a claim when it refers to something beyond both matter and mind? Unexamined personal or cultural metaphysical assumptions about what legitimately exists and does not exist can lead to “repressive metaphysical projections” (Cooke, 1994, p. ix). This problem is what led to so-called post-metaphysical approaches.

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<sup>7</sup> In Murray (submitted) I explore issues of ontology and what can be considered “real” from a post-metaphysical and “embodied” philosophical perspective.

<sup>8</sup> Also, I will avoid the quagmire of defining what is meant by reality, and simply assume, in alignment with both New Age and integral world views, that interior (human mental) realities have an equal ontological status with external physical realities.

<sup>9</sup> Metaphysics originally meant the body of Aristotle’s work *after* his Physics, but later took on its current meaning of the science of things transcending the physical or natural.

## Post-Metaphysics

The concept of post-metaphysics figures prominently in recent integral discourse. Integralists have aligned themselves with the post-metaphysical turn in philosophy and a post-metaphysical orientation to truth and knowledge. Integralists follow Wilber in repudiating “confusing the map with the territory” and “the myth of the given.”<sup>10</sup> Wilber describes his latest work (“Wilber-5”) as AQAL plus post-metaphysics.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it could be argued that the post-metaphysical perspective is at the heart of the evolution of human meaning-making capacity that integral theory points to. Post-metaphysics constitutes a post-post-modern approach to what we think is real or true; i.e., it is about our evolving relationship to *belief* and the *skills* we use to construct and reflect upon beliefs. Below we will look into the concept of post-metaphysics to see how it is understood and then propose some alternative perspectives on its use. As we will see in the quotes below, the construct of post-metaphysics exists as a family of related ideas, with different authors having somewhat different interpretations.

In *Integral Spirituality* Wilber (2006, p. 231) says that “[arguably,] metaphysics...ended with Kant [who realized that] we do not perceive empirical objects in a completely realistic, pregiven fashion; but rather, structures of the knowing subject import various characteristics to the known object...Metaphysics is then a broad name for the type of thinking that can't figure [out that] reality is not a perception, but a conception...thinking that falls prey to the myth of the given.”<sup>12</sup> In terms of philosophy, Wilber says that post-metaphysical approaches avoid “postulating fixed, eternal, [ahistorical,] independently existing archetypes” [or Platonic Forms] (p. 247).

In a transcribed dialog with Wilber, Andrew Cohen says: “Your ideas about a post-metaphysical spirituality have had a powerful impact on me...Specifically, I am endlessly compelled by the notion that higher stages or levels do not preexist, that is, they are not 'given' but are literally created by brave individuals who actually venture into new, uncharted territory...A post-metaphysical worldview means we are not separate from the creative principles or God-impulse itself” (Cohen & Wilber, 2006). This interpretation of post-metaphysics, common in the integral community, replaces the fixed and eternal aspects of metaphysical ideas with an emergent dynamics, but seems to retain some of metaphysics' sense of essentialism and esotericism.

In *Integral Ecology*, Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman (2009, p. 65) draw from Wilber's work and emphasize the multi-perspectival and participatory nature of post-metaphysics, which “avoids positing realities independent of the viewer,” and they note that all claims must be understood as “perspectives from somewhere by someone” (p. 484). They link the post-metaphysical approach to Wilber's four quadrants and eight indigenous perspectives

<sup>10</sup> “Myth of the given” was coined by Sellars (1956). The map/territory phrase is attributed to Korzybski (1948).

<sup>11</sup> See Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman (2009, p. 564, note 38).

<sup>12</sup> George Lukas describes “the Kantian understanding of Metaphysics” as “[dealing] with entities about which we can know nothing since they are not given in experience. Metaphysics is said to claim entities, and knowledge of entities such as first cause or God that go to explain what appears to us. The hiddenness of the explanatory entity is, for Kant, sufficient do discount it, except as a topic for thought” (Lucas, 1986, p. 65).

(methodological families), and to his method of Kosmic Addresses, which I describe later. They echo above descriptions of post-metaphysics avoiding preordained and eternal metaphysical constructs (p. 141).

In *Integral Consciousness* McIntosh proposes some problems with the post-metaphysical turn, and says that metaphysics will remain with us.

In between the hard facts of science and the revealed truths of religion, there are to be found questions about the nature of reality that seek answers within the realm of reason. Metaphysics can thus be understood as philosophy's attempt to discern that which is beyond the external, material realm without resorting to explanations that rely solely on the unquestioned authority of spiritual teachers of sacred texts." (McIntosh, 2007, p. 205)

He points out that Wilber routinely uses what could be called metaphysical concepts (e.g., involution, Agape, Eros, morphogenetic field; pp. 215-216). McIntosh's point that metaphysical questions and metaphysical thinking will remain with us is important, a topic I take up further below. But he misunderstands the post-metaphysical project (and Habermas' and Wilber's approach to it) as being anti-metaphysical as opposed to post-metaphysical (he assumes that it rejects metaphysical concerns and thinking rather than transcending and including them).

Stein links post-metaphysics to the scientific method and, more fundamentally, to a reflective (or meta-) perspective on not just the contents of our beliefs, but the methods by which we produce and justify knowledge (i.e., "the conditions that allow us to get on with inquiry") (2008b, p. 20).<sup>13</sup> "Understanding philosophy in this way entails turning away from speculative metaphysics and toward the rigorous analysis and critique of inquiry itself" (p. 2). He claims that "to adopt a properly post-metaphysical approach to development [is to] turn away from the stories describing development and toward the making of the metrics that justify these stories" (2008a, p. 1).

Stein's approach follows closely that of contemporary philosopher Jürgen Habermas, the acknowledged expert on the topic of post-metaphysics. Cooke (1994) summarizes Habermas' notion of post-metaphysical philosophical trends as having: (a) called into question the substantive conceptions of rationality (e.g., "a rational person thinks this") and put forward procedural or formal conceptions instead (e.g., "a rational person thinks like this"); (b) replaced foundationalism with fallibilism with regard to valid knowledge and how it may be achieved; (c) cast doubt on the idea that reason should be conceived abstractly beyond history and the complexities of social life; and has contextualized or situated reason in actual historical practices (i.e., collaborative action and dialog); and (d) given up philosophy's traditional fixation on theoretical truth, to the extent that they also recognize the moral and expressive functions of language as part of the [reasoning process] [which is thus affected by notions of rightness, sincerity, and authenticity].

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<sup>13</sup> Stein (2008a) credits Pierce as a founder of the post-metaphysical approach: "by relinquishing philosophy's claim to a unique privileged mode of insight, Peirce...recast philosophy in terms of the same fallibilistic self-understanding that characterizes scientific endeavors" (p. 2).

The post-metaphysical turn in philosophy and culture can be understood as a product of an “epistemic turn” of increasing human understanding of the role of human thought processes in the production of knowledge and belief.<sup>14</sup> This trend, which I discuss in the next section, began with Kant, blossomed with the American pragmatists, then deepened with the advent of modern cognitive and social sciences.<sup>15</sup>

## The Epistemic Turn as a Deeper Understanding of the Mind

The last 500 years of human history from the Renaissance through the scientific and industrial revolutions can be viewed in terms of humanity's accelerating understanding, and partial mastery, of the *physical world*. Both the accomplishments and the calamities of this period, marked by increasingly sophisticated use of the rational mind to penetrate the truths of the physical world, have been established at length by scholars and pundits.

In the last one to two hundred years another type of understanding has emerged: an *understanding of the mind*, including advances in psychology, consciousness studies, language, culture, meaning, cognition, and neuroscience. This “epistemic turn” (which includes the linguistic turn in philosophy) embraces an evolving acknowledgment that human flourishing is mind-bound in several senses. First, the human happiness or satisfaction that is the ultimate goal of rational problem solving and efforts to control the physical world is itself a mental state that depends on much more than external realities. That is, “happiness is all in our heads,” at least after basic physical needs are met, and creating happiness is very much about understanding the mind (as Buddhists have always said). Second, most if not all of the major problems facing humanity are problems (“crises”) in rationality, imagination, education, and/or compassion, not hard limitations put up by the physical world. They have been caused more by human thought, including short sightedness, greed, ignorance, and the “negative emotions,” than by “natural causes.”<sup>16</sup> Third, the primary source of techno-scientific advancement, the rational mind, is seen to be seriously flawed or limited. From a post-rational perspective, we can see that logic has limited scope, rational thought is systematically distorted, and that the constructs and models that form the building blocks of language and theories are unsettlingly indeterminate and fallible (Gilbert, 2006; Gilovich, 1991; Kahneman et al. 1982). Again, a deeper understanding of the workings of the human mind is called for.

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<sup>14</sup> In Murray (2006, 2010a) I quote Bohm and Einstein in support of the idea that contemporary global mega-issues can be traced to a general lack of understanding of how the human mind works, individually and collectively. We can see in Walsh's (2009) analysis of common factors of the great wisdom traditions that, even though “know thyself” is implied and contemplative traditions focus on awareness of thought, the wisdom traditions had little to say in the way of what we are calling epistemic wisdom. We can posit that the complexity of thought and culture has reached a level that an epistemic turn is greatly needed.

<sup>15</sup> The post-metaphysical turn is closely related to the philosophy of pragmatism, which has strongly influenced Wilber and integral theory (through scholars including James, Whitehead, and Habermas). Louis Menand described pragmatism as *an idea about ideas*: “The idea is that ideas—theories, beliefs, convictions, principles, concepts, hypotheses—are essentially means of adaptation...Ideas are not “out there” waiting to be discovered, but are tools that people devise” (2004, p. 1, 8).

<sup>16</sup> Of course, the current developmental state of humanity is simply what it has become, and thus in one sense is a product of the natural world.

George Lakoff warns that “what we take truth to be is...a matter for cognitive science because it depends on the nature of human understanding” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, p. 108).<sup>17</sup> Thus, a central element of this epistemic (or post-metaphysical) turn is to understand mind in its individual and collective manifestations, which, like nature in the prior period, can be seen to hold both the shackles to and the means of liberation from humanity's current predicaments. This injunction is constructive for both scholars investigating the limits of knowledge, and to everyday practitioners whose more casual, yet still highly reflective, understanding of how the mind works impacts their communicative and learning processes.

The emerging understanding of mind has many branches. Scholars are coming to understand the nature of ego, identity, motivational drives, adult cognitive development, and the unconscious (including shadow); the nature of group dynamics and cultural development; and the nature of concepts and reasoning itself. It is this last set that is central to epistemic wisdom and the post-metaphysical turn.

Research and theory on human cognitive development has provided deep insights into epistemic questions about the nature of belief and knowledge. Wilber's integral post-metaphysics uses these theories to clarify questions about what seems true or real for different observers.

## Integral Post-Metaphysics

Wilber's integral post-metaphysics (Wilber 2006; Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009) proposes an elegant framework for addressing many perennial ontological, metaphysical, and epistemological conundrums about what is true or real. It follows from Schumacher's (and, earlier, Plotinus') notion of *adequatio* which says that “the understanding of the knower must be adequate to the thing to be known” (Schumacher, 1977, p. 39). That is, what we perceive as real or true is determined in part by our perceptual and cognitive apparatus, and thus both our developmental level (along all of the numerous lines relevant to any situation) and the perspective we are taking. It shifts the blunt question of *whether* objects (e.g., Santa Claus, past lives, Agape, morphogenetic fields) exist, to *in what way* do they exist *for whom*?

Integral post-metaphysics includes a model for representing what Wilber calls the “Kosmic Address” of a claim, which includes the AQAL-based developmental altitude and perspectival quadrant of both the perceiver (claimant) and the object of perception (plus additional parameters if more precision is needed). For example, Santa Claus can be said to “exist,” to be real, for those within a circle of 5 year old believers having a conversation about him. “What kind of cookies does Santa Claus like best?” is a valid question in such a circle. Santa Claus can also exist for *us* if we take the magical-thought perspective of that developmental level, which remains ever-available within our consciousness (some would call it suspension of disbelief). One might say “but Santa Claus doesn't *really* exist at all.” But someone living 1000 years from now may see concepts such as “gravity,” “the flu,” “consciousness,” and “spirit” to be as naïvely insubstantial and imaginary as Santa Claus seems to us, yet contemporary adults treat these constructs as very real indeed. This illustrates the perspectival nature of all claims about truth and reality. We must assume that an objective reality exists beyond the self (to do otherwise is absurd), but any

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<sup>17</sup> In Murray (submitted) include an in-depth exploration of Lakoff & Johnson's Embodied Realism.

particular claim about that reality must be made by a person (or people) and is thus fallible and perspectival.

Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman give the example of “ecosystem.” An ecosystem can exist, and claims about one can be made, only for those who have an adequate understanding of the concept, which in itself requires the capacity to think at a certain level of complexity (one that can understand how phenomena and wholes emerge from the chaotic and extremely complex interdependencies of a large number of parts). Another example is the construct “legal system of common law.” For those who, due to inexperience or insufficient developmental capacity, have not built up and worked with the concept of one, it cannot exist.

These are questions about the adequatio of the *who* of a claim. In terms of the *how* of a claim, i.e., methodology (and the types of *what* enacted by different methods) we can turn to Wilber, Habermas, and others who explain how different methods give access to different types of knowledge (e.g.: *look* through this telescope at...; *imagine* a body traveling faster than light...). In particular subjective, objective, and intersubjective truths or knowledge are discovered and argued for differently.<sup>18</sup> For example a community of practitioners who have practiced a certain contemplative method are in a position to dialog about the causes and nature of what they experience. Those who have not enacted this practice or spoken deeply with those who have are in less of a position to engage in the conversation. To give a blunt example, we give little credence to someone pontificating about romantic love when we believe that they have a minimal or distorted experiences of romantic love.

## Enacting Post-Metaphysics

Up to now I have been attempting to tie together what others have said about post-metaphysics, epistemology, and the mind. In succeeding sections I will introduce the ideas of “negative capability,” “indeterminacy analysis,” “epistemic drives,” a developmental treatment of misplaced concreteness, in an attempt to offer some new perspectives and principles that may help us take a more post-metaphysical stance on our knowledge creation and dissemination work.

## Integral Post-Metaphysics and Positive vs. Negative Capability

Integral post-metaphysics is a powerful framework. Yet its full potential remains to be seen (especially outside the integral community) in part because it is not yet apparent whether the concept of Kosmic Address is sufficiently determinate. In contentious dialogs about the validity of specific claims, will participants be able to agree on the parameters of the Kosmic Address itself? How contentious will the specification of the developmental levels or formal perspective of interlocutors become?<sup>19</sup> In general this illustrates the *positivistic* style of Wilber and AQAL-

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<sup>18</sup> The details of Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action and the eight primordial methodologies of Wilber's integral methodological pluralism are beyond our scope here (see Habermas, 1981; and Wilber, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> The strategy of concluding that another person is developmentally not up to snuff and accepting that they simply don't have the capacity to engage with our beliefs or engage at the level of discourse we hope

centered approaches—they provide high level models and concepts enabling more reasoning power, and thus may increase clarity and confidence of beliefs. This contrasts with approaches that expose indeterminacy (uncertainty, fallibility, paradox, dissonance) in human beliefs. The evolving understanding of mind and thought that enabled the “post-metaphysical turn” reveals ever higher layers of positive knowledge (increasing abstraction and nuance thought reflection, differentiation and integration), but *also* reveals ever deeper unsettling territories of unknowing and fallibility that call for the “*negative capability*” of being able to tolerate and work within this indeterminacy (in Murray, 2006, I elaborate on this concept, first coined by the poet John Keats; see also a treatment on “Dark Knowledge”—what we don't know that we don't know— by Fischer & Stein, 2008). This territory is acknowledged by Wilber but not much explored or highlighted in his work.

For Wilber, post-metaphysics is a method for avoiding the errors of metaphysical (and magical) thinking, mostly through an analysis of different categories of truths or claims (based on categories of the who, what, and how of a claim). My approach is to add to this a perspective on post-metaphysics that is about acknowledging what is unknown, fallible, or uncertain about *any* claim, and to base this on what we know about human thought processes.

Integral post-metaphysics includes Wilber's “three strands of good knowledge” which frame the justification of claims in terms of *injunctions* (*if you do X then you will see or conclude Y*) and *social deliberation*, (*a group of the adequate has followed the injunction and agreed upon the conclusion*). This framing, again, has a positivist slant in the following sense. For the critical question of “What if people carry out the method but come away with different beliefs?” If we want to move more deeply than the stop-gap conclusions that “investigators disagree, the question remains open,” into understanding why others came to different conclusions, integral post-metaphysics would seem to steer us toward the conclusion that others must not all have followed the injunction accurately; or must not all be operating from an adequate developmental level or perspective. Potentially useful answers, but not particularly applicable to many real, contentious questions. The question of how we account for the inherent indeterminacy and variation of concepts, perceptions, worldviews, etc., yet still “get on with it,” is not fully addressed. Wilber's three strands model for knowledge validation allows for, but does not include, the following important knowledge validation questions which are more acknowledging of indeterminacy and fallibility, and the calling for negative capability (and reflect the approach of the Habermasian school):<sup>20</sup>

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for is, though sometimes perfectly valid, also problematic. In doing so we (a) risk misdiagnosing the other using a simplistic categorization system; (b) miss an opportunity to connect more deeply with both the person and the ideas in front of us, and (c) miss an opportunity to more seriously reflect on our beliefs and selves in the face of an authentic encounter with another (and see Kögler, 1992). Admitting that I, and all of us, unavoidably constantly make these sorts of calls to judge the “adequatio” of the listener and gauge how deeply we will engage, we want to take seriously the question of how integral beliefs are explained and argued for in rational public discourse.

<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Mark Edwards (2000) critiques Wilber's three strands model, claiming that it is missing a strand of “interpretation” between steps 2 and 3 that is needed. Others, including Hampson (2007) make the broader argument that Wilber's theories too quickly “transcend and include” key insights and principles from post-modernism, and do not deeply enough acknowledge the fallibility of knowledge into the theory-building.

- What are my/our biases, assumptions, motivations, and incentives (i.e., “systematic distortions” of thought)?
- How far are we removed from experiential data along the Ladder of Inference (see below)?
- How indeterminate (fuzzy, ambiguous) are the fundamental concepts?
- What are the known alternatives, limitations, and fallibilities of this idea?
- What other parties/perspectives should be invited into the inquiry?<sup>21</sup>

Enacting the injunctions to ask the above questions requires the development of both knowledge and skill: knowledge of certain aspects of how one's mind works, and the skills of negative capability that come with practice in applying this knowledge.

In the rest of this section I will outline several post-metaphysical epistemic principles or approaches to belief-holding that address negative capability. These form a preliminary and incomplete set of answers to the question “What would a post-metaphysical or second tier approach to belief-holding look like?” In one sense to even propose concrete ways to deal with indeterminacy and fallibility is a more of a positivist “problem solving” than a negative “opening to the unknown,” but we will let this paradox be.<sup>22</sup> As described above from Habermas, post-metaphysics is a term pointing to a set of related positions that are in a corrective relation to certain historically prior dominant modes of thought. But, as the term implies, at its core it is corrective toward “metaphysical” modes. As we will see below, metaphysical thinking is like a type of magical thinking but at a higher developmental octave. Metaphysical and magical thinking are essentially about how we attribute aspects of physical reality to ideas; concrete ideas in the case of magical thought, and abstract ideas in the case of metaphysical thinking. Because the nature of abstract concepts is a common theme to several principles in post-metaphysics, I take some time to elaborate on this topic next.

## The Indeterminate Nature of Concepts

As has been mentioned, statements, models, and theories are built up from basic conceptual building blocks (see the Appendix). Concepts, for our purposes here, are the categories we explicitly use to differentiate things—for example: “chair,” “democracy,” “god,” “red,” and “love” (almost every word or phrase we use points to a conceptual category). A concept can be characterized through two interdependent aspects: its definition and its exemplars. The definition is any general or abstract description, such as a tree being “a woody perennial plant.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Of course, to avoid the postmodern trap, we also must attend to the meta-question of: How urgent and important is the decision and how much effort should be expended before we end the inquiry process (for now) and act upon our (ever fallible) conclusions?

<sup>22</sup> It is like the paradox that fully “letting go” takes a kind of effort and commitment; or the paradox that achieving “beginners mind” requires a kind of sophistication. Epistemic wisdom includes an understanding that such paradoxes point to characteristics of language and thought, not to deep puzzles about reality (some such paradoxes are resolved with a “pre/trans” analysis).

<sup>23</sup> Abstract concept definitions are often thought of as having necessary and/or sufficient conditions, but our intention is to include more informal definitions as well.

Exemplars are individual examples of the things that are contained in the category.<sup>24</sup> Both aspects are important to consider. Exemplars must be given to help ground abstract concepts; and general definitions must be given because it is impossible to list every example. But there are often problems in alignment between definitions and examples. For example, a group engaged in deliberation about “scarce resources” or “indigenous people” or “concealed weapons” may at first seem to be in agreement about the wording of definitions, conclusions, or policy. But further discussions about concrete implementation may reveal great disparity in the things participants consider to be valid examples—they may “draw the line” in very different ways. One person’s “scarce resource” or “concealed weapon” is not another’s.

Researchers have shown how the nature of concepts differs from what we normally assume about them (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Mervis & Rosch, 1981). We often treat conceptual categories as if they were well-defined boxes that things either fall within or outside of. But this is almost never the case. Concepts as psychological phenomena are “graded,” meaning they have fuzzy boundaries such that (a) we can always think of things that are in the fuzzy gray area between being X and not-X; and (b) the meaning associated with a concept varies within each individual or group because they rely on different (usually implicit) exemplars.<sup>25</sup>

Due to the indeterminate nature of concepts, when we say “X is Y” it would be more useful to interpret it as in “any X is Y to the extent that X falls near the central meaning of X” (X is marginally or contingently Y for X’s near the boundary of the central meaning of X). We can ameliorate this indeterminacy by trying to be as specific as possible about definitions and exemplars, to minimize the fuzzy gray areas, which is a necessary positivistic strategy, but we must not lose sight of the inevitable indeterminacy in any concept, which calls for an ongoing humility and openness (i.e., negative capability). Interlocutors who disagree about claims—for example, “democracy supports economic growth” or “blue meme cultures rely on authorities to validate beliefs”—often erroneously assume they have the same meanings or exemplars for the concepts, and thus waste effort arguing about the statement per se rather than clarifying the non-overlap in concept meaning.

### **Issues with Abstract Concepts and Statements.**

Lakoff’s work on conceptual structures indicates that the indeterminacy of concepts becomes progressively worse the more abstract they are, i.e., the further removed from concrete sensory experience and exemplars. Here are examples of sequences of concepts of increasing abstraction (these are from Dawson & Wilson’s, 2004, and Dawson & Gabrielian, S., 2003).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> To clearly specify or teach the boundaries of a conceptual category it is most useful to give central exemplars, clear non-exemplars, and also positive and negative exemplars near the boundary (Tennyson, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> In addition, Lakatos’ (1976) investigation of the knowledge building processes illustrates the dynamic interplay between abstract definitions and the examples we consider important; each of which evolves continuously through inquiry. Therefore, in any area where there is active inquiry, such as in science or the law, meanings evolve continuously.

<sup>26</sup> Dawson’s research shows that the probability of observing higher indexed concepts increases notably with age and developmental level (as measured here in a task involving thinking about knowledge and other epistemological themes). Dawson & Wilson give these as examples of increasing “hierarchical

1. boys, camping, puppies, school, friend
2. know, guess, think, learn, question
3. believe, certain, trust, imagine, possible
4. actual, accuracy, certainty, plausible, justify
5. cognizant, rationality, skepticism, plausibility, materiality

Concepts at each level of abstraction can be shown to be (in their typical use) built up from (they coordinate, organize, and/or transform) concepts at lower levels of abstraction. Concrete level concepts relate to sensory experiences. Abstract concepts are ideas *about* concrete concepts, and more highly abstract concepts are ideas about ideas (about ideas, about ideas, etc.) about concrete concepts. The natural world of physical reality (the AQAL right hand side) has certain characteristics that make it amenable to scientific study and repeatable, reliable conclusions. It is *relatively* stable and consistent in its lawfulness. The world of *ideas*, in contrast, is more ephemeral (the world of ideas covers much of, but not all of AQAL's left hand side). A claim about the healing power of crystals is fairly concrete. There is a fair chance that, with appropriate resources, it can be tested in a fashion agreeable to many stakeholder perspectives. But with ideas about more abstract concepts such as spirit, omega points, holons, collective consciousness, or non-duality, how do we account for the indeterminacies in our arguments? How can we claim anything with certainty?

Moving from concepts to statements, this is related to Argyris' (1958) "ladder of Inference" description of belief formation.<sup>27</sup> We select *data* from our raw sensory observations, add personal and cultural *meaning* to that data, make *assumptions* based on those meanings, draw *conclusions* based on those assumptions, adopt *beliefs* about the world from the conclusions (these beliefs then effect both our actions and our selection of data in the first place). Argyris says "*the likelihood of differences in the interpretations of different observers increases the higher one goes on the ladder of inference*" (my emphasis).<sup>28</sup> More abstract concepts are less likely to be automatically accepted by out-group, and special care is needed in establishing mutual understanding with out group when in-group is disseminating its valued beliefs.

To summarize the above treatment of abstract concepts: (a) both definitions and exemplars play a role in how concepts are understood, and interlocutors may agree on one of these while diverging on the other; (b) we can differentiate between the "espoused" intellectual understanding of a concept (in terms of definitions or exemplars) vs. its tacit or unconscious manifestation which determines how it is enacted; (c) abstract concepts have graded boundaries; (d) statements made with abstract concepts therefore have a graded validity or truthfulness; (e)

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order of abstraction." They do *not* make claims (to my knowledge), as Lakoff does, about the metaphorical nature abstract concepts and the problems with increasingly abstract concepts I mention here.

<sup>27</sup> See the Appendix for more on addressing indeterminacy in Concepts vs. Statements.

<sup>28</sup> Argyris continues with "Hence some cardinal rules of action science are: Begin at the lowest rung of the ladder of inference, state the meanings at the next higher rung and check for agreement, and continue to the next higher rung only if there is agreement at lower rungs. These rules are meant not only for action scientists but also for agents in everyday life whenever they are dealing with important and threatening issues" (Argyris, 1985, p. 58). Along similar lines Senge (1990) instructs us to recognize "leaps of abstraction" in our and others' mental models (p. 186).

more highly abstract concepts and statements are more susceptible to these communicative and epistemic indeterminacies.

### **An Indeterminacy Analysis of Some Integral Theory Constructs**

We can apply the above principles to integral theory through an “indeterminacy analysis” (Murray, 2010a), which makes explicit how the fallibility of constructs impacts generalizations made about them. The principle that anything we treat as a rigid category is really more like a graded spectrum is easy to understand with concepts like “third-world country” where the category is clearly not intrinsic to the object but is an abstract property that is assigned. “Third-world country” is (but decreasingly so) clearly a useful though fallible conceptual tool that works well for some countries that fall within its central meaning, and becomes problematic for case at the boundary (such problems, in addition to social justice concerns, have led to new terms such as “emerging” or “developing” countries). But consider how the more foundational categories “subjective vs. objective” and “singular vs. plural” are often treated as distinct categories (the AQAL left hand side vs. right and upper vs. lower quadrants), as if nothing falls in the gray area between them and nothing falls outside each pair of opposites. As *ideas* they can certainly be defined as distinct, but in *practice* (and in cognition) the objects and phenomena of reality do not pre-exist in definite categories.

For example, unconscious mental processes are not exactly subjective, but are they objective? It seems to me that the category fails to be useful here.<sup>29</sup> As to the category singular vs. plural, we can find or imagine things that are sort of singular but also sort of plural, for example a county (set of towns within a state) which does not have a strong central county government (here there is only a partial or incomplete “dominant monad”). The problem with primarily positivistic approaches that are not balanced with negative capability is that phenomena that don't fit the normative definitions of key concepts become marginalized. They will seem to be merely outliers, special cases that are easily and rightly ignored.<sup>30</sup>

We can also apply indeterminacy analysis to the integral theory concept of holon. The four quadrant model and Wilber's twenty tenets (Wilber, 1997) are essentially about the nature of holons. Interpreters of the theory have raised questions about what counts as a holon. Wilber addressed these in a positivistic way by clarifying the difference between holons and heaps, and later as other counter-examples were discovered, clarifying that artifacts are not holons. This process of clarification can and should continue (perhaps indefinitely, as pointed out by Lakatos,

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<sup>29</sup> An individual who feels as if unconscious processes *must* fall into one category or other will find a way to interpret the concepts so that everything seems to fit tidily, but in doing so may deny some important aspects or exemplars (the dross left when the conceptual knife makes its cut).

<sup>30</sup> A number of alternatives have been proposed to address limitations in the four-quadrant model. Edwards (2002) addresses the fact that “second person” “we” in the “I vs. we” categorization does not adequately capture important differences between the *you* to whom I am speaking and the *we* that transcends and includes you and I (and others). He proposes an alternative to Wilber's 4 quadrants that has six-categories (a singular and plural of 1st, 2nd and 3rd person). But this and most other alternative models also use rigid categories without fully acknowledging the indeterminacies of such categories. A more flexible scheme is seen in Roy's (2006) Process Model which treats the categories of singular/plural and whole/part as potentially overlapping aspects of any phenomena.

1976), but what is also needed is an acknowledgement, including examples, that some objects of interest may fall into a gray area between heaps and holons, or between holons and artifacts, and that AQAL-based conclusions for these objects will be less definite.<sup>31</sup> Other central concepts within integral theory that have significant indeterminacy include “the true, the good, and the beautiful,” I/we/it, gross/subtle/causal, and state/stage treatments.<sup>32 33</sup>

Issues with abstract concepts arise with Wilber's three strands method as well. He acknowledges but does not dwell on the fact that between the steps of an injunction (look this way) and the social agreement (many with adequate cognition see the same thing) is a step of *interpretation*. Interpretive differences do not go away simply by constraining participants to operate from and point to the same Kosmic Address (even assuming this was possible and desirable). This is less problematic (but not unproblematic) in areas where the exemplars are experiential. The examples that Wilber gives include looking through microscopes and telescopes and using meditative practices. We gain direct experience through such practices and can (a) give clear injunctions to others on how to access those experiences; and (b) have some clarity about what we are pointing to as we engage in intersubjective processes (dialog) to give meaning to those experiences. Wilber makes the critical point that the same sort of reasoning process (i.e., the three strands) that is used for scientific conclusions based on sense data (“the eye of the body”) can be used to make valid conclusions in the realm of pure ideas (“the eye of the mind”) and in the spiritual realm (“the eye of spirit”) (Wilber, 1997). This point provides an important launch pad for rigorous inquiry into realms ignored and devalued in the Western scientific paradigm, but we must not mislead ourselves into thinking that conclusions based on the datum of ideas or intuitions will have the same character as that based on physical realities and sense experiences. Cognitive science has illustrated that such ideas have significant indeterminacy.

Bracketing aside the realm of mathematics and logic,<sup>34</sup> conclusions grounded in ideas about ideas (the eye of the mind) will be more problematic, more indeterminate, than those grounded in the senses. And what can be said of “the eye of spirit?” Contemplative practices yield direct experiences and insightful ideas—but what third type of data would constitute spiritual data? In my experience there *is* a certain character to what we might call spiritual insights—a kind of deep and quiet certainty. But once that experience is translated into the realm of words and

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<sup>31</sup> It may be too much to expect the creators of exceptional theories to do a thorough indeterminacy analysis—they are too close (if they were not they may not have had the focused insight and perseverance to birth the theory in the first place). That is the job of the knowledge-building and practice community as a whole.

<sup>32</sup> Truth, goodness, and beauty are highly useful and meaning-generative concepts. But they are also highly abstract. This does not mean we should avoid making claims using them, but it does call for a non-positivistic approach to making claims using them.

<sup>33</sup> The phenomena of human states, even if we limit it to those aspects relevant to development, epistemology, and spiritual growth, is much more complex than can be captured in the “gross/subtle/causal” or “waking/dreaming/deep sleep” classification. The paucity of this vocabulary limits our ability to inquire. Also, the difficulties in teasing apart state-relevant and stage-relevant phenomena point to a possible need to revisit whether this dichotomy is overused and an alternative is needed.

<sup>34</sup> Which some argue are essentially tautologies, and are at least special cases not relevant to the claims in integral theories.

shared ideas it falls prey to all the usual forms of indeterminacy that post-metaphysics recognizes. How are we to treat these insights as valuable while not being constrained by modernist rational modes of justification, yet not fall prey to metaphysical thought? I return to this question in the section on “meaning generative claims” but next I will continue our exploration of the nature of abstract concepts.

### Misplaced Concreteness through Developmental Levels

Underlying the “myth of the given” and the “map/territory confusion” is a cognitive phenomena that Whitehead (1929) called “misplaced concreteness,” wherein one treats an abstract concept as if it had physical reality (or a reality outside of human interiors). Philosophers and cognitive psychologists arguing from the “embodied mind” perspective note that misplaced concreteness (and related phenomena) are an unavoidable consequence of the fact that the development of the human mind has its foundation in concrete physical interactions and needs (in Murray (submitted) I explore this idea from two directions: genetic/evolutionary and individual cognitive development. There seems to be something deep and strong within us that wants to treat abstract concepts (e.g., democracy, African-American, god, ego, compassion, spirit, evolution, formal operational thinking, left hand quadrant, green meme, or Eros) as if they somehow really existed in the way that we perceive them, or that they represent a-priori nature-determined categories. We “reify” them (or at an extreme, some would say commit an *idolatry of ideas*) that do not so much exist “out there” as they are tools we invented to make meaning of reality. And as mentioned, there is also the strong tendency to treat the boundaries defined by concepts and models as fixed or concrete, and ignore their fuzziness, malleability, ephemerality, and indeterminacy.<sup>35</sup> The deeply metaphorical nature of thought causes us to imbue abstract ideas with traces of the properties of concrete objects (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

We can take a developmental perspective on misplaced concreteness (I am not aware of others having done this; but see Ross, 2008 for a developmental analysis of communications based on Hierarchical Complexity). Misplaced concreteness (and its repudiation) begins at more concrete levels and persists through ever more abstract constructs. In magical, concrete operational, and early pre-conventional modes of thought there is insufficient differentiation between imagined and perceived events. The monster under the bed and the mermaid said to live in the pond are very real. With mythic and early conventional forms of thought we differentiate personal imagination from reality but the beliefs given to us by culture are (still) taken as inherent aspects of reality. We believe the “stories” and myths given to us by authorities and peers. My team *is* the best, my country the strongest, my holy text contains the truth. Moving into late-conventional and modernist/rationalist forms of thought we enact the types of misplaced concreteness Whitehead was referring to, and give *abstractions* the gloss of concrete reality. We take our maps and models too seriously (treating them as “the territory”), and tacitly expect reality to conform to them as if these models and equations were properties of matter rather than tools invented by minds. At each succeeding level the limitations of the prior level are seen and transcended, but new forms of misplaced concreteness or reification await us. At each level it is the newly developed capacity (rules at Blue; models at Orange; systems at Green) that seem overly “real.” It should also be noted that all prior forms of thinking and misplaced concreteness

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<sup>35</sup> Whitehead warned against misplaced concreteness but did not, to my knowledge, discuss its psychological source or natural persistence.

remain active, though we develop habits to avoid or compensate them (e.g., “knock on wood,” or “the weather is out to get me today”).

How this phenomenon continues into second tier is less explored. At construct aware or vision logic we more fully understand that the map is not the territory, that our theories are fallible approximations, and that we are perceiving the world through a thick worldview bubble. But we still maintain habits of language use and enaction that treat abstract categories such as subject/object, singular/plural, and state/stage with fixed and well-defined boundaries. At first the realizations of the indeterminacy and fallibility of ideas is unsettling and overwhelming (the post-modern or relativist position), but with deeper understanding and development we eventually understand such phenomena not as unsophisticated or faulty thought modes to be outgrown, but as inevitable dimensions of thought that must be accounted for and, when appropriate, compensated for or neutralized to the extent that we can. We can allow for the meaning-generative power of cultural myths, magical thinking, metaphysical entities, and elegant model while maintaining objective clarity of these beliefs as useful tools for certain purposes. We can flexibly assume perspectives that reveal the valid “reality” of a wide range of cultural world views, personal beliefs, and developmental thinking modalities. We begin to be able to observe concreteness-producing and certainty-producing mental processes as they arise within us.<sup>36</sup>

## Epistemic Drives

Misplaced concreteness is a natural tendency of thought. We will call such tendencies that influence what we think is real or true “epistemic drives.”<sup>37</sup> Fabrice Clément describes the phenomena thus:

Understanding goes then hand in hand with a phenomenal experience that is highly positive...Still from an evolutionary angle, the “aha” experience that follows the puzzling “hmm” has been selected to (1) indicate to the organism that an explanation has been reached, (2) encourage the explanatory effort by providing a rewarding emotion. This kind of “cognitive emotion” could therefore explain the epistemic drive that can be observed in children (and *scientific* [my emphasis]) behavior (Clément, 2003, pp. 74-75).

Within this general phenomenon of the drive to understand or find meaning we can differentiate a number of sub-phenomena. The above mentioned “drive” toward certainty and the “dive” to create definitive category boundaries are examples of epistemic drives. There are others worth exploring. If we inspect our own thoughts, and evaluate the ideas of others, it is clear that the human mind is propelled in part by drives toward oneness, completeness, and wholeness. Some of this can be linked to low-level brain processes that turn perception into categories. One of the most basic functions of animal cognition is to group experiences into more abstract or encompassing categories; to efficiently distinguish friend from foe, food from poisonous plant, for instance. Beyond or abstracted from the basic biological imperative to

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<sup>36</sup> As is alluded to in the Appendix, we can show related but distinct types of developmental progressions related to experiences, concepts, statements, and models.

<sup>37</sup> In an earlier version of these ideas presented at the ITC-2010 conference I thought I had coined this term, but a quick Google search shows that this is not the case.

categorize, in *human* thought we can see at work an interior ecology of polarities of epistemic drives that expose important fundamentals of thought itself. I call it an ecology because for each drive there is one or more opposing drives, all competing for attention and keeping each other in check. For instance, there is a drive to notice differences as well as one to perceive wholes. I list below some polarities of epistemic drives that are significant to epistemology and metaphysical thinking. This is not intended as rigorous treatment but as a rough list of overlapping phenomena to illustrate the concept of epistemic drive.

### Some Polarities in Epistemic Drives

- Abstract (ideas) vs. concrete (tangible, sensory, real)
- General (generalization) vs. specific (specialization)
- Universal vs. relative (or contextual)
- Fundamental (essential, central, root) vs. consequential (peripheral or subordinate)
- Permanent (unchanging, fixed, predictable) vs. changing (transient, unpredictable, chaotic)
- Oneness/singularity/unity vs. multiplicity (the many)
- Whole (holism; integration) vs. part (differentiation)
- Completeness (comprehensiveness; totality; systemic) vs. partiality (details, deconstruction)
- Perfection and purity vs. imperfection

It seems that integralists, and those drawn to theories and models in general, have a particular unconscious affiliation with the first item in each pair above. We can become aware of that in the human mind which wants to pull the disparate, the many, the diverse into a unifying whole; to achieve the simplicity and power of a general concept or rule; to determine and rest in what is at the center of, or underneath things. We can identify these drives or urges working within us at the level of felt experience. There is a sense of ease, certainty, and mastery when we can ignore details and differences and trust a sturdy generality. There is a sense of elegance and wholeness when we can embrace many things into a circle of unity. We get a certain satisfaction from ordering things or collecting them into tidy groups. The inquisitive and meaning-hungry mind wants to know the causal root, foundation, source, or origin of things. The constructs of the good/true/beautiful and I/we/it and gross/subtle/causal have a pleasing epistemic pull to them that makes it more difficult to see the manifestations of misplaced concreteness.

I use the term “drives” in analogy with other biologically innate “emotional” drives such as the drive to reproduce, the fight/flight/freeze responses, territoriality, maternal/paternal care, and social dominance/submissiveness drives. A plethora of drives exist within us, mostly dormant until conditions trigger them, and often in competition (will I eat or play? fight or run?). Our drives are essential tools for surviving and thriving, and can also create problems. In humans basic drives get transformed or built upon, sometimes in ways that seem quite distorted compared to their original intent (fear becomes anxiety, sexual drives become fetishes, the drive for hygiene becomes obsessive-compulsive disorder, etc.). In naming “epistemic drives” I call attention to their unconsciousness and pervasiveness, but also to our ability to meta-manage them. With our drives to eat (or over-eat), sexually flirt, become angry when challenged, and so on, our lives are improved when we reach a stage of development in which we are aware of and can control or compensate for them (i.e., when subject becomes object for any given drive). The

term epistemic *drive* also emphasizes that we never completely outgrow or eliminate them, that they can raise their heads unexpectedly in many contexts, calling for an ongoing awareness and cognitive management. As shown with misplaced concreteness, epistemic drives are like emotional drives in that we become aware of and learn to manage them at ever deeper and more nuanced levels, but meanwhile they keep showing up in ever subtler ways, so the developmental learning process continues indefinitely.

The epistemic drives toward wholeness, completeness, and essentialness not only help us accurately understand and make meaning of the world but can over-function to create biases, errors, and ethical problems. Phenomena such as grandiosity, hegemony, elitism, and proto-fascism are extreme cases. But in less extreme ways the subtle influence of such drives pervades the creation, consumption, and promotion of theories, models, and belief systems. As with prescriptions to avoid bias and be objective or avoid selfishness and be altruistic, avoiding metaphysical thinking to take a post-metaphysical stance is more about ongoing attention and deepening wisdom (i.e., skill building) than adopting a belief or philosophical position. Simply understanding and agreeing with the prescription (to, for example, avoid bias, selflessness, or metaphysical thinking) is only the first step in enacting the idea; and seriously taking on the project requires developing a deeply felt understanding of the push and pull of cognitive and emotional forces within.

### **Doing Post-Metaphysics: Integrity and the Role of Emotion**

This brings us to the issue of *enacting* the post-metaphysical stance. First, as mentioned above, we must distinguish between the explicit or “espoused” belief in or knowledge of post-metaphysical principles (such as “don't confuse the map with the territory”) and their skillful and habitual application. Second, we see that enactment requires both a deep familiarity with a number of habits of mind (misplaced concreteness and other epistemic drives) and the multi-context practice and trail-and-error learning required for development. Third, we can acknowledge how the emotional and ego-related characteristics of each situation affect our ability to enact the post-metaphysical stance. Developmental capacities can “gear down” to lower levels in the face of stress or complexity. The drives to have our abstractions and ideas be more true, more real, encompassing, fundamental, and essential is exacerbated to the extent that fear, anger, urgency, or ego-attachment are involved.

Phenomenologically (and epistemologically), the ascription of reality or truth to an idea is a matter of intensity or degree of certainty, rather than an all-or-nothing matter. We assign more concreteness to abstract ideas that matter more and that we are more certain of (and vice versa). One's degree of certainty in an idea (how strongly we hold to its reality or truth) is tied up in emotion-laden evaluations of the importance, urgency, and consequences of an idea. Thus we can acknowledge that, regardless of one's developmental level, misplaced concreteness and a number of other epistemic drives and cognitive biases are affected by emotional context. Though a description of the findings in this area are beyond my scope here, I will merely point to the vast body of scientific work showing strong connections between emotional processes and reasoning processes (Damasio, 1999; Fischer et al., 1990; Goleman, 1995; Matthews et al., 2002).

Integralists, in embodying their philosophies and visions, are called to a particularly high level of *integrity* and ethical development. I define integrity as congruence between four categories of phenomena (actions, words, conscious beliefs, unconscious beliefs, in order of increasing difficulty and development): that actions follow words (e.g., we do what we say we will do); that words follow conscious beliefs and thoughts (i.e., authenticity and transparency); that conscious thoughts and beliefs align with unconscious ones.<sup>38</sup> The final step can be expected only in the high developmental levels of self-reflective capacity that turn emotional reactions, unconscious drives and motives, and even the processes of thought and language themselves, into objects of inquiry. Thus, though it is difficult, integralists are called to hold deeper reflective meta-perspectives on how their own cognitive and social belief-generation processes work, in able to hold their beliefs post-metaphysically.

Yet even as we call for a more fully post-metaphysical approach to integral beliefs, post-metaphysics, based on modern revelations about how the mind works, brings with it the humbling understanding that we are wired with epistemic drives that unavoidably compel us into magical, mythical, and conventional modes of thought. The more that useful prescriptions like “don't confuse the map with the territory” become catchphrases that are repeated without an acknowledgement that doing so can be difficult and subtle, the greater the social pressure against admitting the natural prevalence of such phenomena. The social pressure to avoid these sorts of errors hinders authenticity and inquiry. One measure of second tier community is a group's capacity to empathically consider, allow for, and learn from such vulnerabilities.<sup>39</sup>

## The Validity of Meaning-Generative Claims

In this section I will suggest that for many of the knowledge claims that constitute integral theory and the integralist belief system, it is better to use “meaning generativity” as a source of validity, expanding the established set of validity types beyond the standard model of the true, the good, and the beautiful. The concept of meaning-generativity may help integralists assert and promote important ideas with sufficient forcefulness, while still communicating a post-metaphysical or reflective stance that acknowledges the fallibility of ideas.

In *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Culture of Theory*, Amanda Anderson (2006), siding with Habermas, attempts to reclaim the concept of “critical distance” from the deconstructive and relativist malaise that, she argues, overtook scholarship in the late 20th

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<sup>38</sup> Integrity also implies congruence among the objects within any of the four levels (actions, words, conscious beliefs, unconscious beliefs) in different life contexts. For example: acting or speaking to one group in ways that contradict what one does or says to another group constitutes lack of integrity. Also, if conscious beliefs or unconscious drives exist within us in a kind of unhealthy conflict or turmoil, this points to a subtler lack of integrity. Technically we can not know what is in the unconscious, but a large body of work deals with revealing this territory and healing it (making it whole and harmonious).

<sup>39</sup> Shifting from the mundane uses of metaphysical thinking to its philosophical uses, we can note that the post-metaphysical approach has been made possible only with relatively recent understandings of mind and epistemology. Great philosophers including Plato and Hegel were trapped in metaphysical binds. Habermas notes (1992, p. 6) that “even Nietzsche, in his rejection of Platonism, remained attached to the tradition's strong concept of theory, its grasp of the totality, and its claim to a privileged access to truth.” Metaphysical thinking is in esteemed company, and not to be derided out of hand.

century. The concept of rational, reflective, or critical distance gained a dismissive reputation for being “impersonal, abstract... arid... irrelevant, or elitist” as its detractors “valorized ideals of embodied identity, feelings and passions, ethics and politics...existential meaningfulness and moral force” (p. 2). As is often noted in integralist texts, it is not necessary to throw the rational and reflective baby out with the dirty bathwater identified by postmodern scholars. Even in conversations that valorize identity, feelings, ethics, etc., it is the reflective powers of reason that allow us to manage the complexity that arises in practical situations involving numerous interacting and often conflicting voices, needs, and perspectives (both externally and within oneself).

Let us return again to the question of how one holds what integralists think are highly important or useful ideas (see Table 1); for example, “spirit is evolving through us;” ideas about involution and evolution; the integralist understanding of the traditional, modern, and post-modern cultural systems; or that something like spirit or higher self exists. Pick any cherished idea that you have tried to explain to another. To make a claim is to imply that one has reasons to back it up (see Habermans, 1981).<sup>40</sup> There are numerous types of reasons or justification modalities that one can use to explain or justify a claim. Though some have argued that his scheme is too simplistic to cover all cases (e.g., Cooke, 1994), I will refer to Habermas' model as it is widely acknowledged and is consistent with integral theories. Habermas claims that, in modern (and post-modern) cultures we make three types of claims, which, in integral-ese we would call claims about truth, ethical goodness (or moral justness), and beauty (which are intended to reveal something about objective, intersubjective, and subjective realities). Claims in each domain have a different basis for validity.<sup>41</sup> Though there is much in integral theories that speaks to ethics, for the most part integral theories are truth claims. Theories such as AQAL describe the way the world works (in all four quadrants), and only secondarily make claims about how people *should* act or how society *should* be structured. Thus our concern here is primarily with truth claims.<sup>42</sup>

In modern (or post-modern) contexts the nominal “gold standard” for the validity of truth claims rests on something like the scientific method, i.e., something like Wilber's three strands (or any extension of it) as described above. In the ideal case we anchor our explanations in objective facts, rigorous empirical methods, trusted impartial sources, multiple validations and perspectives, etc. To base the certainty of ideas in the authority of a holy text, a religious leader or king, a gut feeling, what our ancestors said, what a popular film or sports personality said, or what “everyone” says (or even “because I said so, stupid”), would, though these are common modes of reasoning that we all use, be judged by many as using an inferior mode of reasoning. From a developmental perspective we would call these (sub-gold-standard) modes of reasoning conventional or pre-conventional—while the gold-standard is a post-conventional mode.

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<sup>40</sup> Habermas suggests that “we understand an utterance when we know what makes it acceptable.” Thus to agree with an idea is to make assumptions about reasons that back up an idea, and to make a claim is to implicitly guarantee that the claim can be justified with reasons (Habermas 1983, V. 1, p. 297).

<sup>41</sup> Habermas says that speech acts actually imply claims in all three domains, with one being primary (Habermas, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> “Pathos” and “ethos” are essential elements in belief formation. We don’t dismiss them here but rather focus how to talk about the truth-related and epistemological aspects of claims.

In exploring or promoting integral ideas we are called to at least live up to post-conventional modes. There is a certain burden of proof that falls upon us in promoting or explaining integral ideas in a way consistent with our aspirations to communicate from a post-conventional stance (not to mention the more demanding post-metaphysical stance).<sup>43</sup> Both the importance and difficulty of doing so is exacerbated by the fact that many of the ideas traded in integral circles are from the domains of social science or philosophy (including “reconstructive” sciences and, even more problematic, spirituality)—domains which are plagued with indeterminacies that the physical sciences (or mathematics) are relatively immune from.

According to Oberschall (2000) ninety percent of social theories rise rapidly only to fall into oblivion (as cited in Wallis, 2008). In general, social and human science theories are difficult to test (validate or falsify; see Popper, 2002; Wallis, 2008). Bent Flyvbjerg claims that “we must drop the fruitless efforts to emulate natural science’s success in producing cumulative and predictive theory; this approach simply does not work in social science” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 166). Roy Bhaskar, in his theory of critical realism (1975; and see Collier, 1994), notes how all human systems are complex *open* systems in which we can never isolate any causal mechanism for rigorous experimentation. According to Bhaskar, we are thus constrained to positing the existence of “tendencies” (rather than laws) that occur “all other things being equal” (which they never are, actually).

If we are constrained to a more classical truth-claim model of validation in such domains, making strong claims or advocating that others should take up ideas, is problematic. Modern norms do seem to imply that we should offer solid “proof” or rigorous argumentation for these highly fallible ideas—yet often none exists. While, if we are honest with ourselves, we can admit to a conviction, even a strong sense of validity, for some of our ideas that can not be backed up in this classical modernist way. In his book *Alchemies of the Mind*, social scientist Jon Elster (1999) notes, in agreement with others mentioned above, that psychology, sociology, ethnography, political science, etc. have had little luck in predicting phenomena, and he views “the ideal of law-like explanation [in] the social sciences as implausible and fragile” (p. 1). However, he offers an alternative path to truth-claim-like justification. He suggests that claims in such areas, even if they do not provide the predictive power of laws from the hard sciences, provide powerful *explanatory* power. Elster suggests “explanatory mechanisms” as a term for claims that are not as provable as scientific laws, yet have more explanatory power than mere descriptions. Integral theories are rife with such principles which help us explain but not predict human behavior.

This begins to suggest that there may be valid ways to justify our highly fallible beliefs in post-conventional or post-metaphysical ways. Before offering my argument for a “meaning-generative” type of validity, I will add one more element which touches on the ethical questions

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<sup>43</sup> Cooke, in explaining Habermas' approach to communicative rationality, refers to *post-conventional* modes of dialogue as including "the idea that no validity claim is exempt in principle from critical evaluation in argumentation" whereas in conventional (or post-traditional) modes "what counts as relevant is narrowly and rigidly defined according to fixed prevailing conventions" (1994, pp. 32-33) *Post-metaphysical* modes, as used in this paper, are more sophisticated than post-conventional modes, in that they not only admit to the fallibility of knowledge, but incorporate some insights about the nature of that fallibility (and thus the nature of knowledge and communication, as discussed in this paper).

in making claims in highly fallible areas. The post-metaphysical stance to beliefs takes seriously questions such as: How can we speak passionately or forcefully about ideas for which we can offer little evidence? And: Is it ethical to speak with certainty about beliefs that we know are quite fallible? These are difficult questions in part because we are often at the same time trying to communicate some idea we hold as true (the locutionary or so-called “communicative” aspect of the speech act) while we are also trying to influence the listener to take some action (the illocutionary or strategic aspect of the speech act).

The full elaborated “truth” of an idea as we understand it may entail many elements that mitigate our certainty in it. For example, one may say that “medical costs are high mostly due to profit hoarding in the pharmaceutical industry.” Yet one may also know facts, or be familiar with valid perspectives, that argue against the claim. In any discursive contexts we do not pass on facts or ideas for no reason—we have reasons, and they may be hidden from the interlocutor (and may even be invisible to us). In the above case let us assume one’s attempt to argue for this idea is part of a more encompassing agenda to influence another’s worldview about some larger topic (government, or medicine, or the economy). Given this goal one will focus on facts supporting one’s idea and ignore contrary facts; and one will speak with more certainty than if one were engaged in an open inquiry rather than a persuasive act. But this presents ethical dilemmas—we are allowing for a partial falsehood in order to affect some greater social good. One partial way out of this ethical bind, in which we must balance our desire to persuade with our desire to be completely truthful, is to enact a more reflective stance to our communicative acts.

Arguments from a post-metaphysical stance tend to be more self-reflective, authentic, transparent, and ethically centered. For example, one might say “I will argue strongly for this because I think that is what is needed here but I will also admit up front that I sometimes have my doubts;” or “I think this theory is a perfect fit for moving your agenda forward but I need to hear more about how you understand how it meets your needs before I continue,” or “I will be putting on my activist hat here, and will be trying to connect with your emotional mind more than your rational mind, and might be ignoring some of your counter-arguments while I do so.” This level of reflectivity and transparency gives us another tool for explaining or promoting integral beliefs.<sup>44</sup>

The act of communication is a balancing act in which we weigh (1) sincerely communicating what we know (or suspect) to be true and relevant about a topic (which can have many layers, branches, and ambiguities) against (2) what we strategically wish to accomplish (which can include not only persuasion, but things like making a good impression, avoiding conflict, and not wanting to spend too much energy on this conversation); and (3) our moral/ethical sensibilities about how to do right by others.

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<sup>44</sup> This approach has commonalities with many progressive communication and facilitation models. For example, Roger Schwarz’s “mutual learning” approach for empowering participants and minimizing a group’s dependence on a facilitator suggests that facilitators be transparent about their facilitation strategies, communicating the reasoning and intent behind their comments, questions, or actions (Schwarz, 2002, p. 113).

Putting all the above together I suggest that what is needed to balance these three goals when we promote some integralists beliefs is a more general acceptance of (and transparent communication about) “meaning-generative” claims.<sup>45</sup> That is, that we can note explicitly that we hold and promote an idea simply because it helps us make sense of the world, and offer that it may do the same for others. Just as truth, ethical, and aesthetic claims each have their own rules of engagement (or valid ways to counter them), so do meaning-generative claims. Just as “but you can't prove it” is not a reasonable counter to an ethical or aesthetic claim, it is also not a valid counter to meaning-generative claims.<sup>46</sup> Meaning-generative claims are akin to Elster's explanatory mechanisms, but can be broader. They are different than aesthetic claims, which need only expose one's personal subjective impression, in that they presume that the idea will help another make sense of (or explain) some aspect of the world.<sup>47</sup>

Beliefs that cannot be “proven,” or that we don't even care whether they can be proven, can nevertheless be quite valuable to hold and communicate to others. For example, I “believe in” reincarnation because, though I have no direct empirical experience supporting it, it counteracts existential despair, is held by people I admire, and coordinates well with a number of other beliefs and intuitions I have—I do not expect to or need to convince anyone that reincarnation is real,<sup>48</sup> though I might offer an argument for it. A claim affirming reincarnation is valid for many because it is meaning-generative, not so much “true;” yet it is more than merely “good” or “beautiful.” The same approach can be taken with the teleological “evolutionary spirituality” perspective on human development: that “the universe is evolving—through us.” This Eros-based belief has strong meaning-generative power for many, but to have to “prove” it in any logical way is impossible and beside the point, yet it is not merely a moral/ ethical/normative claim.<sup>49</sup>

I will not argue that adding “the meaningful” to “the true, the good, and the beautiful” adds some perfect missing link to the formulation—the idea has not been worked out with much rigor here. Rather, I am suggesting that it performs an important function in post-metaphysical communication that the other three do not adequately address. Two hundred years ago, Kant saw that culture evolved to differentiate the true, good, and beautiful as separate validity claims in the modern area, and I am suggesting that in the (post-) post-modern era we are beginning to (or needing to) differentiate yet another form that is something like the meaning-generative. The *meaning-generative potential* of a claim can be as or more important than its truth value for highly fallible or un-falsifiable claims.

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<sup>45</sup> I will not present any full theory of meaning generative claims, but outline how the concept might be useful in practical communication.

<sup>46</sup> Note that I am not talking about the move from definitive knowledge or facts to simply a hypothetical or probabilistic framing of claims, but rather am describing an explicitly reflective stance on idea communication.

<sup>47</sup> This uses a simplistic I/we/it definition of aesthetic claims—other more elaborate interpretations of the aesthetic claim are possible that may be closer to the meaning-generative claim (see Duvenage, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> See the Appendix for an explanation of how most beliefs have multi-sourced justifications.

<sup>49</sup> In Habermas' theory a truth claim implies an argument for universal validity—i.e., even if put tentatively, it implies that, if it turns out to be “true” then it should be true for all who yield to the force of the argument. Meaning-generative claims are more akin to aesthetic claims in this regard, in that we do not expect them to be true (or even useful) for everyone.

If we can speak in terms of meaning-generative potential we gain some freedom from the straightjacket of conforming to modernist/quasi-scientific justification modalities and have more flexibility in talking about beliefs that might be called metaphysical or quasi-scientific (even pseudo-scientific). For example, though personality and capacity typing systems such as Meyers Briggs, Enneagram, Spiral Dynamics (though they vary greatly in their demonstrated empirical validity) all suffer from serious discrepancies and other challenges within the body of empirical research. In addition, users and adherents to each type of framework have an affinity to their chosen model that is best explained by pointing to its meaning-generative potential for them. Empirical studies may not impact one's affinity to such models, in part because experimentation in such domains is so difficult that it is easy to dismiss any single study.

I am not suggesting that society (or the integral community) adopt an even more rampant lack of rigor or “truthiness” (or “bullshit,” as described by philosopher Harry Frankfurt, 2005) than exists already. Rather, the current modernist valorization of logical and scientific results, in providing no way to speak to meaning-generativity as a validity type, creates an unhealthy pressure to use and misuse scientific evidence (which then begets pseudo-scientific arguments) as a false justification for ideas and frameworks that are used largely because of their meaning-generative potential. The post-modern swing in the opposite direction is equally incomplete.

The suggestion here is not to de-valorize rigor, but to provide valid alternative justification modes that allow us to more rigorously and reflectively differentiate when we need scientific rigor (or modernist forms of rationality) and when we don't. The invitation is not to abandon the modernist aim for sturdy truths in favor of appeals to identity or pathos, but to explicitly include a reflective level that speaks directly to the nature and fallibility of communication and belief.

## Conclusions

In this paper I have explored the concept of post-metaphysics and what it might mean to entertain a deeply post-metaphysical approach to integral beliefs and frameworks. I have mentioned the developmental progression in the way people hold and justify beliefs. Developmentally earlier modes, including magical, mythical, and conventional thinking, are less concerned with the universality or portability of claims, that is, at first tier one is less aware of how those who do not hold one's worldview might interpret one's claims. The New Age beliefs listed in Table 1 are often held in this way. As in all communities of affiliation, inquiry and/or practice, the integral community also demonstrates an insular belief reproduction “echo chamber” effect. Constructs such as “non-dual,” “development,” and “Agape” take on a particular meaning that is treated as if it is the only meaning, and certain ideas like “the cognitive line precedes other lines” get passed around the circle as truths taken for granted. A deeper “indeterminacy” analysis of the truth or reality of these constructs and beliefs is all too rare.

Though this phenomenon is not only typical but it is an unavoidable aspect of group belief formation (including academic disciplines), there are several things to note about it relative to the integral community. First, because (we will assume that) the integral vision tends to attract individuals at relatively high developmental levels (compared to other communities of theory or practice), it has a relatively high capacity to reflect with epistemic wisdom upon its constructs and beliefs. Second, counteracting this, the integral community is unusual (though far from

unique) in how much of its core constructs and truths are attributed to one (extremely talented and productive) person or founder, i.e., Wilber. This, and the fact that the integral project blurs the lines between scholarly and social spheres (e.g., with Integral Institute sponsoring Integral Life as well as academic programs) has the effect that much of the knowledge passed around is not viewed as critically as it might be. “Wilber is brilliant, and we are all pretty smart, so these things I keep hearing others say over and over are pretty likely to be valid.” Third, because integral theory is so fundamentally interdisciplinary, broad, and far-reaching, and has such great potential for wide impact, it must pay exceptional attention to the portability of its constructs and beliefs to realize its potential.

Thus, within the integral community there is great potential and a particular calling to bring epistemic wisdom to our inquiries, yet factors exist that make it more difficult to do so. In this paper I have tried to offer some preliminary suggestions and tools supporting the enactment of post-metaphysical approaches to the creation, critique, and proliferation of integral knowledge and belief systems. These focus on epistemic skillfulness around one's relationship to belief, knowledge, truth, reality, critique, justification, and certainty. These suggestions and tools include:

- Suggesting that enacting post-metaphysics (and second tier development) involves a deeper understanding and awareness of *cognitive processes* as mentioned below;
- Highlighting how the indeterminate nature of *abstract concepts* influences the fallibility of statements and models;
- Mapping out the different epistemic concerns involved in *concepts, statements, and models/theories*;
- Relating epistemic questions of truth, reality to psychological phenomena such as *misplaced concreteness, epistemic drives*, and emotion; one's judgment of certainty or reality is influenced by factors such as importance, fear, and urgency;
- Pointing out how *magical and metaphysical thinking* are manifestations of misplaced concreteness; which occurs in different ways at different developmental levels;
- Articulating the difference between positivist approaches and *negative capability* in integral theories, and suggesting additional focus on or balance of the later;
- Suggesting how *indeterminacy analysis* can bring a more post-metaphysical perspective to models and theories;
- Suggesting that *meaning-generativity* be used more widely as a way to justify claims that have metaphysical implications.

In conclusion, for second tier thinking, wisdom skills are more fundamental than any particular set of beliefs or models. *Whether* we believe in a god, or in capitalism, or an evolutionary omega point, is less important than *how* we hold that belief, and *how* we hold it is a matter of skills. I have made an early exploratory stab at describing some approaches useful for post-metaphysical belief-holding. With these and further developments, we can aim for the *ego-awareness* to reflect on our attachment to it; the *relational-awareness* to listen deeply to someone with an opposing belief; the *construct-awareness* to hold the paradoxes implied in the belief; and the *systems awareness* to see how that belief relates to other beliefs and to systems of action. And we can aim for the second tier wisdom to reflectively choose what and how to believe and to use that belief as a sturdy tool in ethically-relevant work, and let go of it when it is

not useful. The long road ahead brings the challenges of how we will define, assess, and support such skills in our domains of application.

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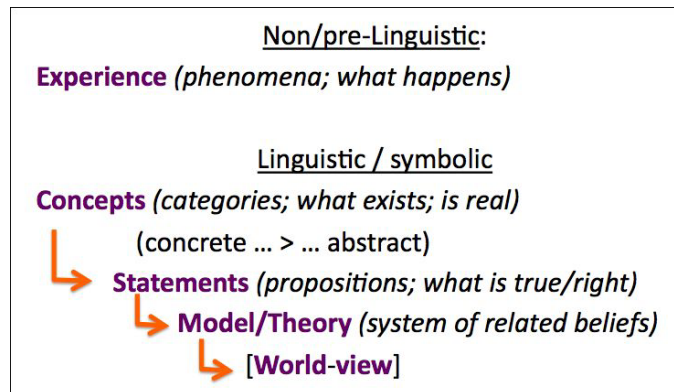
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## Appendix: From Concepts to Statements: Modes of Justification and Critique

In this Appendix I discuss several ideas referenced in this article that I believe contribute to taking a post-metaphysical stance, which I will work out in more detail in future papers.

In discussing post-metaphysical approaches to knowledge it is useful to differentiate several types of knowledge as in the following figure:



**Figure 2: Categories of Knowledge/Belief**

### On Experience

Experience and other non-linguistic or pre-linguistic phenomena exist in the top category. These form the basis of (symbolic) concepts and ideas. These are not meant to be completely raw or unfiltered, as all experience and sensation gets filtered at a very early point. This category points to one's belief that “this is a tree” or “I should take this job” before I put words to it (internally or verbally). Included in this category are “intuitions” before they are conceived in words and symbolic categories. This category is a catch-all that points to everything that we “know” prior to (or without its) manifestation into symbols and language. I offer no detailed or scientific treatment for this vast category (though many exist; see Martin Heidegger; Jason Brown; Antonio Damasio), but name it to point out that all attempts to ground knowledge, belief, or mutual understanding draw upon this level. The validity of verbal abstractions, i.e., the linguistic/symbolic forms listed in the figure, depends on references to this Experiential level.

I will make one interesting point about Experience in light of our discussion of metaphysical thinking. Though we treat an experience such as the taste of chocolate as mundane and an experience such as a meditative state of witness-consciousness or non-dual oneness as sublime, they share some interesting properties along with all experiences. They are essentially indescribable to any who have not experienced them. In the movement from experience into language describing the experience both lose what they are and become something else. Concepts and abstractions built upon the taste of chocolate are not so different than concepts built upon sublime spiritual experiences in that they are equally susceptible to indeterminacies. Both are equally beyond words and in that sense mysterious. The main difference is that tasting chocolate is common whereas advanced meditative states are not. Therefore there is more

intersubjective commonality about the taste of chocolate—less ambiguity about what one means when they speak of it. Because of our tendency to take abstractions too seriously (misplaced concreteness) it seems to us that that *concepts*, the *ideas*, and the *theories about* meditative states are particularly sublime, esoteric, and special. However it seems more accurate to say that it is only the *experience* that is sublime and special.

## On Concepts and Models

The primary purpose of the diagram in Figure 2 is to illustrate that (a) models/theories are built from statements and statements from concepts; (b) that indeterminacies at any level accumulate from indeterminacies at lower levels; and (c) that each level has its own epistemic concerns. Example Experiences include the taste of chocolate; a gut certainty; a meditative state; and what it is like being a parent. Example concepts include tree, democracy, interior, and consciousness. Statements have forms such as “trees are...” “we should...” and “the cognitive line leads other lines...” Example models/theories include AQAL, Spiral Dynamics, Einstein's Theory of Relativity. Concepts are primarily about what we think exists (or can be differentiated from other things). Statements are claims about what is true, good, right, beautiful, etc. Models and theories are systems of related beliefs. I include “world view” in the diagram to note that we also speak of larger scale belief systems.

## Justification Types

In this paper I emphasize the ontological functions of the mind that infer what is *real*, i.e., the conceptual level in the Figure. But the post-metaphysical turn also involves the related epistemological functions that infer what is *true* and determine how we argue for claims—i.e., the level of Statements and their justification. Figure 3 lists most of the modes we use to justify or explain claims.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| – | First hand <b>experience</b> (seeing is believing)                                     |
| – | <b>Someone I know</b> and trust believes it;   |
| – | Someone in an <b>authority role</b> suggests/demands that I believe it;                |
| – | Most people ( <b>peers</b> in my group/tribe) believe it;                              |
| – | I have a deep <b>intuition</b> (or gut feeling);                                       |
| – | Is <b>ethically</b> right to believe it;   |
| – | Is pragmatically <b>useful</b> (it works);   |
| – | Is <b>consistent</b> with my other beliefs (as are its explicit/implicit implications) |
| – | Has the support of <b>experts</b> or ;trusted sources (journal, NPR, etc.)             |
| – | Has reasonable <b>assumptions</b> /bases/ premises                                     |
| – | Follows from <b>Logical</b> inference (supporting truths);                             |
| – | I used a trusted <b>method</b> .   |

**Figure 3: A list of knowledge justification modes**

In the section on misplaced concreteness I gave an account of how misplaced concreteness, or the real-ness with which we treat abstract concepts, manifests itself through developmental levels. We can do the same for the level of Statements and justification types. Many theorists have demonstrated a developmental progression in the ways that humans (explicitly and tacitly) understand and justify beliefs (e.g., Perry; Fisher; Kegan). Very roughly, early forms are based on appeals to authoritative people and texts, sacred objects or beings, group norms, intuition, and direct experience. Later forms are based on logical inference, coherence with foundational tenets and existing “truths,” and methodologies and sources that minimize bias. Yet later forms acknowledge and try to compensate for the fundamental indeterminacies and fallibilities of all of the validity bases. *All* of the mentioned modes of justification are (almost) *always* involved in complex life deliberations. It is not a matter of leaving any behind but of having more options to choose from and becoming more skilled in when to use each.<sup>50</sup>

As compared with Modernist or Integral modes, beliefs associated with New Age (and Green) culture rely less on logic, bias-checking, and rigorous methodologies (such as the scientific method). Assessing the Green worldview is complicated because of a combination of influences from both higher and lower developmental levels. Though sometimes the more primitive thought modes are embraced unreflectively, in other cases sophisticated postmodern arguments (e.g., deconstructive arguments) are used.

In rejecting Modernist ways, Green opens the door to magical thinking (indulging non-differentiation of ideas and concrete realities) and narcissistic thinking (including grandiosity and wishful thinking) (see Hanley, 1992; Habermas, 1991; Murray, submitted). Green thinking also applies valid postmodern insights about the fallibilities of rational thought and the scientific method, and the inevitability of human bias (it also is drawn to Romanticism which values feeling good and aesthetic value over rationality). The topic of *intuition* becomes particularly interesting, because, while basing belief on intuition can be a cover for non-rigorous thinking, Habermas' entire project is based on the 'rational reconstruction' of quasi-universal intuitions.

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<sup>50</sup> It is not clear where Wilber's "eye of spirit" knowledge would fit in this scheme. Though it may come from a deeper realized state or stage experience, I suggest that in dialogue it is the same set of justification principles that must apply.