



The Big Three As One: Integrating the Integral

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Introduction

As our capacity for thinking about complexity increases we see singularity of choice (one right way), become alternatives of choice (present best way), then a reconciling of duality (balancing both ways), to multiplicity without choice (balancing all ways) and eventually an integration of the essential all (working with all-ways). So what comes next, or rather what was there before as the original face of our existence?

Reconciling Duality

A stage of development occurs when our cognition allows us to hold pluralistic concepts in dynamic equilibrium. It is here we move from simple decisions of advantage to being able to hold and balance multiple complexities.

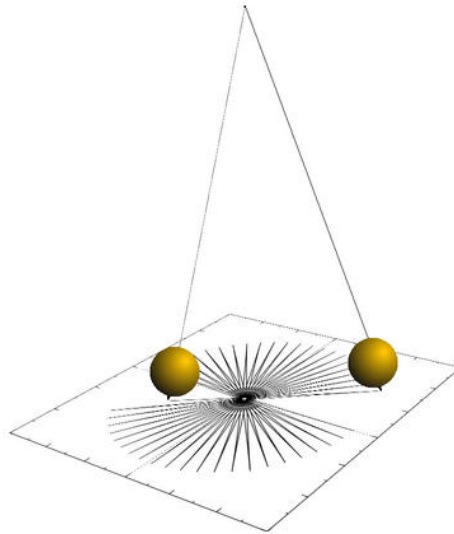
Within this realm we have a different existential tension. Not the tension of choice that requires action, but the tension of not choosing - the tension of holding.

At first this occurs when we balance duality, where 'either/or' becomes resolved into 'and'. A priority of family or career becomes a success in both. Firstly this occurs as alternates, like the outer swings of a clock pendulum, reaching a balance overall. Later we learn to exist between these polarities in a dynamic tension of mutual balancing.

Holding Multiplicity

As pluralism increases, the dynamics of tension increase, and we find irreconcilables in all directions. As any life-balance map shows, there are many dimensions of well being; work, family, income, play, spiritual devotion, physical fitness, physical relaxation, self-nurturing, community contribution, a stable home environment and experiences of time away.

As each duality is resolved in this way more two-dimensional pulls-and-pushes occur. We begin to oscillate, not as a clock pendulum, but as a central weight pushed by multiple forces in every direction, reconciling the forces in a pluralism of balanced choices.



The list of things we need to keep in balance continues to expand. Eventually, when the multitude of competing tensions become significant enough we find, with insight, that they reconcile into the Big Three.

The Big Three

Wilber describes the Big Three simply – using a few aspects of these crucial dimensions (Wilber 1998: 74):

I: Consciousness, subjectivity, self, and self-expression (including art and aesthetics); truthfulness, sincerity, irreducible and immediate lived awareness; first person accounts.

We: Ethics and morals, worldviews, common context, culture, intersubjective meaning, mutual understanding, appropriateness, justness; second person accounts.

It: Science and technology, objective nature, empirical forms (including brain and social systems); propositional truth (singular and functional fit); objective exteriors of both individuals and systems; third-person accounts.

The Big Three is distinguished here from the four essentials – being the four quadrants – or (I), (We), (It) and (Its) which are the mapped dimension of the

individual and collective expressions of the integral trilogy - on two axis; the interior and exterior; and the individual and the collective.

The essential four is not a substitution for the Big Three, but merely a representation of it. It extends the truth of the individual holon to include the full perspective of its related social holons.

This simply acknowledges that where there arises an individual truth of an individual holon, so there will also arise collective truths within the social holons which the individual holon is in relationship with. In this way we cannot fail to see the whole (truth) when dealing with the perspectives of the whole/parts (of any truth).

Reduction of the Many

The Big Three is not a new invention. Philosophy through the ages has not gone far in travelling the contours of consciousness without coming to the same destination.

"Sir Karl Popper's 'three worlds' (subjective, cultural, and objective); Plato's the Good (as the ground of morals, the 'we' of the Lower Left), the True (objective truth or it-propositions, the Right Hand), and the Beautiful (the aesthetic beauty in the I of each beholder, the Upper Left); Habermas' three validity claims (subjective truthfulness of I, cultural justness of we, and objective truth of its). Historically of great importance, there are also the three major domains of Kant's three critiques: science or its (*Critique of Pure Reason*), morals or we (*Critique of Practical Reason*), and art and self-expression of the I (*Critique of Judgment*)." (Wilber 1997: 71)

The 'fact that they show up cross culturally and nearly universally; the fact that they recur in philosophers from Plato to Popper; the fact that they strenuously resist being reduced or erased from consideration – ought to tell us something, ought to tell us that they are etched deeply into the being of the Kosmos, that they are the warp and woof of the fabric of the Real, announcing abiding truths about our world, about its insides and outsides, about its individual and communal forms.' (Wilber 1998: 75).

The impact of the Big Three is not in their identification, but in the recognition that, as a set, they can satisfy validity claims. We begin then to speak about some form of integral truth. We find in the Big Three the capacity for the reductionism of complexity to simplicity without exclusion of the multiple parts.

Wilber (1995) provides us with the linkage of the Big Threes already found. He says, describing this as the Habermasian revolution:

“We are inescapably situated in relation to the Big Three, each of which has its own validity claim and its own standards, and none of which can be reduced to the others.... Likewise, each of these validity claims (for truth, truthfulness, and justness) can be exposed to its own different kinds of evidence, and thus its own kind of truth claims can be exposed to evidence and checked for their actual validity.” (Wilber 1995:150)

Each is valid, all are found, and all three comprise an all. Once the Big Three are seen, we find that ‘none of them will go away, no matter how tightly we close our eyes’ (Wilber 1998).

Integrating Complexity

In understanding the Big Three we can hold any amount of complexity as an integral whole by recognition of these crucial dimensions. We see the manifestations of the (I), the (We) and the (It) (and Its) everywhere.



I

The Beautiful

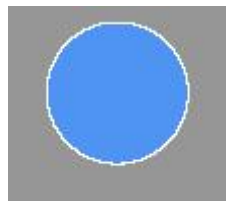
Art

Buddha

Thought

Mind

Faith



We

The Good

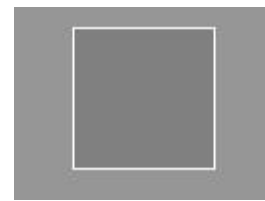
Morals

Sangha

Word

Heart

Fidelity



It

The True

Science

Dharma

Deed

Body

Purity

Subjective	Cultural	Objective
Truthfulness	Justness	Truth
Judgment	Practical Reason	Pure Reason
Psychological	Cultural	Biological
Personal	Interpersonal	Practical
Feel	Listen	Look
Self	Culture	Nature
Ego	Ethno	Eco
Honest	Helpful	Harmless

Integration of the Integral

If the sin of omission is the gross or subtle reductionism of the whole to some of its parts, the Big Three is the furthest we can go with a clear conscience. Our desire to reduce complexity, without making the simple simplistic, might end here.

However, Wilber (1995) describes humanity's present conflict within the perceived real being because 'modernity's world-view is indeed fractured, not because everything isn't reduced to the Lower-Right quadrant of functional fit [Its], but *because the four quadrants themselves have yet to be integrated.*'

The next stage is not the holding of multiplicity in an integral conception of reality, but the integration of the integral. What is seen as three (or four) is always one.

Seeing and holding for ourselves the integration of the Big Three truly as one, is the step to come. However, the step is not one, but a sequence.

Heavenly Path

Occasionally, when we are looking forward, we need to first go back to retrieve what we have left behind. In Plato's *Symposium* in the conclusion to this Socratic dialogue the Good, the Beautiful and the True arise. In this we find Plato's belief of the Eros pervading all human activities and how the physical love of an object of beauty (be it a person or a thing) leads to the appreciation of the moral good, and eventually the philosophers' search for truth. The path as a sequence of steps is outlined for us and summarized thus (with additions):

"This is the right way of approaching or being initiated into the mysteries of love, to begin with examples of beauty in this world (IT), and using them as steps to ascend continually with that absolute beauty as one's aim, from one instance to two and from two to all, then from physical beauty to moral beauty (WE) to the beauty of knowledge (I), until from knowledge of various kinds one arrives at the supreme knowledge (I-I) whose sole object is that absolute beauty, and knows at last what absolute beauty is."
(1959:94)

It is by following this ancient path that the Big Three are found as one. The result is to find absolute beauty, goodness and truth – in Spirit, which is described exquisitely by Plato in the words of Diotima recounted in her dialogue with Socrates:

"And here I must ask you to pay the closest possible attention. The man who has been guided thus far in the mysteries of love, and who has directed his thoughts towards examples of beauty in due and orderly succession, will suddenly have revealed to him as he approaches the end of his initiation a beauty whose nature is marvellous indeed, the final goal, Socrates, of all his previous efforts.

This beauty is first of all eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away, neither waxes or wanes; next it is not beautiful in part and ugly in part, not beautiful in this relation or ugly in that, not beautiful here and ugly there, as varying according to its beholders; nor again will this beauty appear to him like the beauty of a face or hands or anything corporal, or like the beauty of a thought or a science, or like beauty which has its seat in something other than itself, be it a living thing or the earth or the sky or anything else whatever; he will see it as absolute, existing alone with itself, unique, eternal, and all other beautiful things as partaking from it, yet in such a manner that, while they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution, nor suffers any change."

(Plato 1959:93-94)

Conclusion

The Big Three integrated as one, held in all its complexity as an integral whole of the perceptions of all sentience, and of all sentients – of all their beauty – all their goodness – and all their truth, is where we come to rest, only to find what we already knew.

To find that place calls each of us to have the wisdom to see the world as seen by all. To hold that span of perspectives with integrity (wholeness, soundness and moral honesty) is to inescapably find compassion for all those holding the many perspectives within that frame.

It is in the span of care that envelops all consciousness and all perceptions of the real that the greatest wisdom finds greatness in compassion. Here we come '... finally to peace, finally to a home that structures care into the Kosmos and compassion into the world'. (Wilber 1998)

Those who choose this, are called to it:

“And we are called, you and I, by the voice of the Good, and the voice of the True, and the voice of the Beautiful, called in exactly in those terms, to witness the liberation of all sentient beings without exception.

And on the distant, silent, lost horizon, gentle as fog, quiet as tears, the voice continues to call.” (Wilber 1998:214)

And as you listen with care you realise that the voice you are hearing, is yours.

It is the voice of our original face calling.

A voice that has always been there.

A voice that will continue to call.

For it calls to you as Spirit ... in beauty, from goodness, with truth.

By
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