



## Integral Psychology vs. Humanistic Psychology

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If I rely solely upon my intellect, I would have to conclude that Ken Wilber's integral psychology appears to be a more comprehensive and effective system of psychotherapy than contemporary humanistic psychology (see Ken Wilber, 'Integral Psychology' (Boston: Shambhala, 2000) and Kirk Schneider, James Bugental, J. Fraser Pierson (editors), 'The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology' (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001)). However, I must also say that when I think of Wilber's integral psychology, although I fully appreciate its intellectual brilliance and incredible comprehensiveness, there is something that often leaves me 'unmoved.' When reading Wilber's books that describe his four quadrant approach of individual subjective, individual objective, interpersonal cultural, and interpersonal social systems, he repeatedly stresses that one quadrant is no more important than any other quadrant. This equalitarian philosophical principle has extended into the integral psychology realms regarding an 'equal' appreciation of all systems and psychotherapies for clients with various symptoms and needs, in order to give a client the psychotherapy treatment that will be most effective (see for example many of the articles in the first two volumes of AQAL journal, the leading journal of Ken Wilber's Integral Institute, at [www.integralinstitute.org](http://www.integralinstitute.org)). Thus there is no priority or hierarchy or ranking of psychotherapies; humanistic, behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic, transpersonal, pharmacological, neuropsychological, family systems, existential, nutritional, etc. all have equal merit for integral psychology. And this is precisely what leaves me feeling rather dry and uninspired.

I am in full agreement with the philosophy that is at the crux of integral psychology, i.e. to be an effective psychotherapist it is important to be knowledgeable about various psychotherapeutic treatment modalities and to be able to utilize particular treatments that would be most effective for particular clients at particular times. However, it can be argued that this same philosophy of integration is at the heart of both contemporary humanistic psychology and existential psychology. But there is also a significant difference here as well. For contemporary humanistic and existential psychology fully describe their respective integration with a focus upon the humanistic or existential context. And this I find 'moving'. When I think of the pioneering visions of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow I feel inspired and rejuvenated, reminding me of the uplifting creative potential that human beings are capable of. For me, this kind of humanistic vision includes the existential realities of our tragic human predicament that death looms large for all of us who choose to think about it, as well as the transpersonal realm that has the possibility of experiencing transcendental states that could even transform our notions of the meaning of death itself. At the same time, I realize that changing our thought patterns, focusing upon behavioral reward systems for particular external situations, and if I really stretch myself - even the use of medication to accompany psychotherapy in extreme circumstances, is not

necessarily antithetical to a general humanistic psychology perspective.

I can view all the forms of psychotherapy that are continuously described by integral psychology as taking place in the four quadrants, as revolving around the central themes of humanistic psychology; i.e. the context of genuine, caring, authentic relations between therapist and client involving the client's personal growth, spiritual exploration, quest for self actualization, etc. And I also know very well that I consequently will be labeled as being in the Spiral Dynamics 'Green Meme' (see Don Beck & Chris Cowan, 'Spiral Dynamics: Managing Values, Leadership, And Change' (London: Blackwell, 1996), i.e. stuck in the first tier new age human potential movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Well, perhaps there is some truth to this pronouncement, as I cannot deny that my spirit becomes infused from what I experience as 'real' and 'authentic' relations with other human beings involving what I perceive as genuine creativity and spirituality. I have much knowledge about techniques of behavioristic and cognitive psychotherapy, and I can appreciate their usefulness in an intellectual sense. But the truth is that my heart is not in the picture.

So now I am talking about my 'heart' and not just my mind. Why not go even further and talk

about my 'soul?' What is my 'inner calling' telling me to pursue in the realm of psychotherapy with clients? I have formulated my own version of psychotherapy that I have described as 'the artistic theory of psychology' (see Elliot Benjamin, 'Art And Mental Disturbance' (Journal of Humanistic Psychology, to appear in 2008); see Journal of Conscious Evolution (www.cejournal.org, volume 3, 2006) for an earlier version of this article). And I choose to follow in the footsteps of contemporary humanistic psychology and existential-integrative psychology (see Kirk Schneider & Rollo May, 'The Psychology Of Existence: An Integrative, Clinical Perspective' (New York: McGraw Hill, 1995); i.e. I choose to embrace a multitude of psychotherapeutic techniques while retaining my dominant artistic context and framework. This is what feels right to me, what 'moves' me. Perhaps one could call it 'integral psychology with a twist.' We could

have a humanistic twist, an existential twist, a transpersonal twist, an artistic twist, etc. Actually I suspect that deep down Ken Wilber himself does integral psychology with a transpersonal twist, but I do not believe he would state this publicly. For the official integral policy is an equalitarian one: all things are equal (but perhaps some things are more equal than other things?) However, since we are all human and it is only natural that deep down we have our preferences for what moves us the most, I firmly believe that we as psychotherapists should go in the directions that truly inspire us, while being versatile and integral in the process. So I suggest that we start doing the psychotherapeutic integral twist: humanistic-integral, existential-integral, transpersonal-integral, artistic-integral, etc. Now we are integral but we have some life in us, some colour, heart to accompany mind, with the prospect of even discovering our souls.

## References

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Elliot Ingersol, An Introduction To Integral Psychology (pp. 131-143)

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Annie McQuade, Revisiting The Interiors: Serving The Mentally Ill Living In Our Streets (pp. 116-150)

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Kelly Bearer, Toward An Integral Treatment Methodology For Schizophrenia (pp. 23-39)

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David Zeither, Integral Psychology: Clinical Applications (pp. 60-73)

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