



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Futures

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/futures

Carrying fire: A Way forward for integral foresight

J.P. Jakonen

University of Turku, Finland

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Integral
Foresight
Futures studies
Cultural studies
AQAL

ABSTRACT

One of Richard Slaughter's central innovations has been to bring the other half of reality to the field of Futures Studies. Slaughter has argued for the inner dimension of ideas, developmental levels, and mentation to be as central – if not more so – than the technical, systemic and concrete reality the field was founded upon. In this article I will present an overview of Slaughter's central innovations that have carried the field towards a more Integral age. I will also propose a way forward for Integral Futures that is dependent on a simple heuristic model that can help simplify the complexity of Integral Theory.

1. Introduction

Forging iron into a more elaborate shape and structure is a laborious task. Some, still, feel called upon it, or, due to circumstances, find themselves in the midst of such labors. Richard Slaughter has been doing just that by, first, pioneering Futures Studies, and then, adding Integral Theory into the mix, effectively producing the field of Integral Futures. This has been a long road, and we all in the foresight and integral communities are better off for it. We should also feel gratitude for the efforts, since the road is now a little more traveled than the one Dr. Slaughter embarked on four decades ago.

This endeavor has demanded a unique set of strengths, innovative capacities and abilities from the synthesis of two not-so-well-known worlds: futures studies and Integral theory. In my professional work as a consultant and coach¹ (trained by Integral Coaching Canada), I often look for abilities that a coaching client needs to develop to go from their current way of being into a new way of being (Jakonen & Kampainen, 2015; 2018). In what follows, I will highlight some of the essential capacities Richard Slaughter has presented that have helped to field of futures studies to move from a non-Integral way of being to a more Integral way of being. The list is just one version of what is called for in those of us who feel the need to apply Integral Theory to whatever our professional or academic calling may be.

2. Seven capacities for integral foresight

Integral Theory has been applied to over 70 disciplines, from fishery supply chain development, psychiatry and mindfulness to

E-mail address: jp@stressivapaajohtaja.fi.

¹ During a consulting project involving the use of applied foresight – a Nordic workshop for Governmental Audit Offices – I decided to better reflect my own intentions for my work in the name of my company and registered the name Integral Foresight Finland INC. That has served me well, if not only in that it looks rather good printed in the window of my office. I often think Richard Slaughter to be partly responsible for the company name, as I would never have had the courage and inspiration to see “Integral coaching as applied foresight” (Jakonen & Kampainen, 2015) without his influence and encouragement on the subject. Later, I went on to research that very concept in my PhD dissertation (Jakonen, 2020), so his influence is visible in both my academic and professional undertakings.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2021.102795>

Received 13 November 2020; Accepted 18 June 2021

Available online 24 June 2021

0016-3287/© 2021 The Author. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

futures studies (Jakonen, 2020). There are crucial factors for succeeding in such an effort. First, intellectually, one must know what one is applying and where. Second, emotionally, one should be willing to withstand the personal and social strains of being a pioneer. Third, in an embodied manner, one should have an open mind, heart and will to combine two relatively novel fields of inquiry – Integral Theory and Futures Studies. Richard Slaughter has taken on a sizeable challenge in attempting to do just that. For the most part, he has not only succeeded well, but also furthered our knowledge of what it means when two worlds at the leading edge of conceptual evolution collide. For anyone attempting to apply Integral Theory to a professional or academic field, these capacities can function as a checklist for what is needed in order to be successful, or at the very least, to make headway in forging the raw iron of flatland into the multi-dimensional tool of applied integral wisdom.

- 2 **The capacity to interpret Integral in a nuanced manner.** Distinguishing what actually constitutes Integral from more superficial interpretations is a key skill in applying the Integral Theory². This is evident throughout Slaughter's writings. In order to apply Integral Theory and thinking, one should be hermeneutically prepared to sustain the original difficulty of the subject (Caputo, 1987). Throughout his writings, Richard Slaughter has succeeded in this task. This is evident already in an earlier article where Slaughter points out a central feature of Integral developmental theory this is easily missed by less shrewd observers. Instead of transpersonal aspirations as the next step, the world needs universal reason, the stage of rationality and scientific thinking (Slaughter, 1987, 67–69). This is timely, as the pre-rational mentality has not only been fortified but also promoted by many Western statesmen and leaders during the past few years.
- 3 **The capacity to delve into the interior dimension of the mind.** As Slaughter says, many possible futures are future states of *things* (Slaughter, 1987, 55). We need a broader frame within which to situate our intellectual and imaginative journeys so that "the future without interiors" is not the default mode of futures thinking (Slaughter, 1998, 994). The bold introduction of the other half of reality, without which the future would belong to the engineer-style thinking of surfaces without "no inner dimension at all" (ibid, 996), is – literally – a lifesaver for futures thinking, as *life* appears through all four quadrants (Wilber, 1995). Some 20 years later Slaughter's clarion call still holds. After the shutdown of postmodernist reductionism, we seem to suffer from a form of *altitude sickness* or "a level negligence" (Jakonen & Kamppinen, 2015), where not only the inner dimension, but the all-important gradation of the inner stages of development, i.e. the levels of interiority and the Views³ from those levels are made culturally taboo, placed outside of discourse altogether. These unexamined cultural assumptions are an unacknowledged problem for much of futures writing, a culturally marginalized phenomenon (Slaughter, 1998, 996–1001). In arguing for societal evolution and progress to be dependent on "individuals being committed to their own inner transformation and growth" (Slaughter, 1987, 69–70), Slaughter shows courage for steering the conversation to the direction of the obvious – and often neglected – solution for our species survival.
- 4 **The capacity for Big Question thinking.** If one were to ask layperson what people do when they do futures studies or foresight, the answer would be possibly along the lines of what comparative religion scholar and professor of philosophy Wesley Wildman labels "Big Question Philosophy" (Wildman, 2010). Slaughter argues that the field should ask more world-centric, *civilizational* questions, those that "really matter" (Slaughter, 2016)⁴. He goes on to ask about the implications of foresight practitioners plying their trade without locating it more explicitly in a clear understanding of the unstable global context. Seen in this light, it is as if we were tuning the instruments of the band that plays on the sinking Titanic! Slaughter steers us away from the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, whereby we treat as important only that which we can study with the natural sciences (Wildman, 2010, 12), and towards the essential existential questions that should constitute more of the intellectual terrain of futures studies.
- 5 **The capacity to co-create, sustain, and co-evolve a strong systemic, Lower Right component.** Articles, journals, books, editorial work, participation in organizations, workshops, symposiums, seminars, and setting up the Australian Foresight Institute in 1999 at Swinburne University in Melbourne are examples of how Richard Slaughter has institutionalized Integral Futures. This Lower Right component requires a conglomerate skill of intellectual, social and institutional intelligence (if there is one!). To produce a societal structure around a new paradigm entails the ability to retain and understand the older paradigm(s), and to use existing features in order to hold a space for the new to emerge.
- 6 **The capacity to further professional discourse by introducing a whole new paradigm.** As evident in Integral Futures controversy, an Integral approach to futures studies has raised suspicion and caused criticism (Slaughter, 2011). One of the capacities needed to withhold such criticism includes courage in defending a perspective which one sees as containing more truth than narrower approaches. This is bound to ruffle some academic feathers, as scientists do not particularly enjoy being out-contextualized. However, when one has viewed the Integral toothpaste, it is hard to un-view it, or to put it back into the tube. This depth-vision can cause one to permanently be ill at ease with narrower perspectives; however, if one has sufficiently embodied

² Slaughter also maintains an ability to speak about complex topics in a comprehensible manner, which has been, as he himself states, a goal throughout his career. (Cf. Slaughter, 2019)

³ View is a term Ken Wilber uses to represent a particular perspective that is visible from a certain altitude of consciousness, e.g. a Red View, Amber View, Orange View, etc. See Wilber, 2017 for more detailed description.

⁴ In his review of *Foresight* journal, Slaughter argues that only a few articles from the issues between volumes 12 to 16 contained a wider orientation towards "Civilizational foresight", as contrasted with intellectually less comprehensive and – from the point of view of the survival of our species – less important "Progressive foresight" and "Pragmatic foresight" (Slaughter, 2016). We are now at a point, says Slaughter (1987), 70 where crude reductionist notions of future can be discarded. We need a more integral approach, and to introduce it, to defend it, and to argue for it requires a capacity for intellectual, moral and emotional resilience in the face of the criticism that a new paradigm is bound to produce. See capacity 5 for more on this.

Integral Theory, this being-ill-at-ease usually leads to empathy for narrower frames, instead of antipathy – which is a hallmark towards a View that one is yet to reach, and thus is unable to grasp, and see from. In my reading, Slaughter has presented a balanced approach towards less-than-Integral worldviews, while remaining firm in his Integral stance.

- 7 **The capacity to take an existentially melioristic stance.** Richard Slaughter approaches the canvas of futures studies from the perspective of possibilities, change and the pragmatics of betterment (Rescher, 2014) This is clear in the call for people to re-define their reality and respond to their deeper needs, the wish to see” the growth of wisdom and foresight in all of world’s culture” and the” wish to see morality and ethics more widely applied(...or ecocatastrophe will overrun us” (Slaughter, 1998, 1000). Slaughter sees the purpose of futures studies as a vehicle for going beyond the humdrum, with a planetary and civilizationally coherent vision, that helps us to live in a deeper and unbounded present (Slaughter, 2020, 37). This invokes a” human agenda inspired by the perennial tradition yet reinterpreted by changing human needs” (Slaughter, 1987, 68). These are the words of a prophet disguised as a theorist, and we should all be thankful, as that is exactly the hybrid form we need in creating wisdom cultures and futures beyond dystopia: we need someone to give us a permission to create a better, more meaningful and wiser future. But Slaughter is also a pragmatist. He calls for futures and foresight work to step outside of the shadows of administrative, organizational, and business contexts, and into the arena where it matters the most: to the wider world of public education, media discourse, and local governance (Slaughter, 2016, 68).
- 8 **The capacity to intuit an Integral universe.** Existence can be approached from a dry-biscuit or from a plum-cake perspective (Mehta, 1962), from a flatland of exterior surfaces, or from an integral multidimensional chain of being, which, to paraphrase Whitehead, was the official philosophy of humankind until the early 20th century. The latter approach is, if not inherent, then more available to others, or chosen by some, or consciously cultivated as it seems to be one of those things that are too good *not* to be true. This capacity for intuiting such a plum-cake vision of reality (if it is a capacity at all, and instead more like a tendency) is one the hallmarks of Slaughter’s approach (Slaughter, 2020). This sensitivity is a red thread running from earlier articles (Slaughter, 1987), where real progress regarding external threats is measured in terms of internal growth, to more recent works (Slaughter, 2016), where Slaughter invites the reader to assess the field of futures studies through the consequences of working in a limited number of focal domains, where the lack of interest and capacities for engaging that interest towards inner realities make for a future with a slight dry-biscuit taste in it.

These are only some capacities Richard Slaughter has presented in his attempt to bring forth a more Integral version of the futures studies and foresight field. Next, I will look at the issue of translation and its relation to forging a way forward for Integral foresight.

3. The problem of translation

For a complex phenomenon to become useful and to be involved in the pragmatics of betterment (Rescher, 2014), it should be translated into a form that retains the idea but presents it in a simpler fashion. Think of the discovery and control of fire by humans - a long and convoluted process, starting approximately 1,5 million years ago (Gowlett, 2016), and culminating in a small, pocket-sized lighter. Like the fire we can now carry in our pockets, the endurance and participation of any complex phenomenon in our day to day living is dependent on whether we can grasp their essence and function without too much headache. It may sound trite, but I argue it is the opposite: the simplicity on the other side of complexity escapes the hasty mind.

Questions of translation from one language to another are fairly straightforward, as they are translations between levels. Having translated three of Ken Wilber’s books from English into Finnish, I can attest to that. More difficult are translations across levels, where the original complexity of the idea (like anthropocentric fire, or Integral Theory) needs to be retained but the structure or the form needs to be simplified or condensed (think of a lighter, or a conceptual mnemonic device).⁵ These require proficient and proper hermeneutics of the original text, idea or concept to be translated, as well as a” universal cultural donor” (UCD) or a vehicle through which translation is conveyed. Cultural traditions such as myths, legends and fairy tales are some examples of universal cultural donors used in translations across levels, where a complex subject matter is presented for a heterogenous audience with a varying Kosmic address (see later in this chapter).

Integral approach to foresight (Integral Foresight) is a case in point. For Integral Theory to emerge as a useful tool both inside and beyond the field of Futures Studies, the base theory (Integral Theory, or the AQAL model) needs a radical reduction in structure while retaining the original conceptual complexity. In a word, Integral Theory needs to be popularized, presented in a version that can be understood by essentially anyone, instead of the alleged 5 percent of people at the Integral altitude (Wilber, 2017, 38). This can be done, if (i) the reduction is done while retaining the original complexity of the subject (Caputo, 1987), (ii) a suitable mnemonic or metaphor is used, and (iii) the mnemonic or the metaphor leads to transferring the meaning of the translation, so that translation across levels is achieved. An early version of this is presented in Jakonen and Kamppinen (2021). A new iteration is given here.

4. Carrying fire, or how to explain integral theory so that regular people (including futurists) can understand

Integral Theory can be seen through the metaphor of a house with several floors in it, an apartment building, a high-rise, or a multi-

⁵ The attempt to simplify complexity is a transcultural phenomenon, apparent, for example, in the tradition of sacred Hindu and Buddhist texts known as *sutras*, where the *sutra* style is a mnemonic device attempting to condense as much meaning into as few words – even syllables – as possible (Rocher, 1987, 183).

storey building. From the first floor I am only able to see my own, first-person view: my own front yard, so to speak. From the second floor, I can see my point of view and your point of view, giving me abilities for a second-person perspective: our mutual front yards. From the third floor, I can see a universal view, a scientific point of view, the rationalist-universalist view, the third-person view: all of the world's front yards, as an abstract concept. From the fourth floor, I am able to see a fourth-person point of view: the cracks between those universals, their differing contexts, and how those contexts conceal and reveal. These views, like those we would see from a building, are ontological territories which emerge as real for us *only when we are at a given level*, at a given floor.

From these floors or storeys, we see the world appearing as Views, dependent on the structural floor – Altitude of development – we are currently at. Here we are not talking about a theory, let alone Integral Theory. Rather, we are presenting a *picture of a multi-storey house* that almost anyone can understand, basically anywhere in the world. The house comes first, and to that we (only) add another spatial analogy: the View that appears before our eyes as we peek out from a certain floor. To these Views we can easily add rooms (Room 1, Room 2, Room 3, Room 4) with a window in each: four rooms at a given storey, giving us four windows, or four quadrants of viewing. So to be a resident of, say, the third floor of the house, with a strong emphasis to look outside the right hand windows (UR and LR), gives us – in the form of a heuristically simple, easy to grasp, and intuitively understandable metaphor – a version of our Modern Worldview. We stay, all the time, with a concrete, spatial analogy whose referent is known to everyone – a multi-storey house – *upon which* the theoretical part is added. This direction is intentional, of course, as most people are familiar with multi-storey houses but not with Integral Theory.

Thus, in one fell swoop, the essence of Integral Theory is explained.

I have used the above metaphor, usually visualized with anything from a PowerPoint presentation to a napkin in a restaurant, to explain and apply Integral Theory. I have done this in my profession as a coach and consultant, and, together with my academic colleague Dr. Matti Kamppinen, written a popular book using the illustrative model (Jakonen & Kamppinen, 2017). It usually lands well. It seems easy to remember, and people from many walks of life – public library lecture audiences, foresight students and leadership teams in copper manufacturing, finance and real estate development – find it easy to grasp. People in leading positions can apply it to communication challenges in their organizations. Government auditors have applied it to broaden their understanding of foresight. It is not a very original or inventive metaphor. It is, however, a surprisingly useful as a mnemonic device, that captures the essence of Integral Theory, and delivers it from mind to mind rather intact. Add to the picture the developmental lines going through each of the floors and each of the rooms (“Values Line”, for example, is a structural element of the house – keeping with the metaphor here – like a piece of plumbing, that usually resides in the Upper Left room, and can extend from the first floor, with Egocentric Values, all the way through whatever is pictured as the uppermost level or floor), the decorative style used in any of the floors and rooms (being a metaphor for the Type structure element, like Enneagram, DISC, Myers-Briggs, of the AQAL model), and the states that blow like the changing wind from an open window, either hot or cold, sudden or gradual, pleasant or unpleasant (a metaphor for the States of consciousness element). All of the AQAL elements can be (and have been, cf. Jakonen & Kamppinen, 2017; Jakonen & Kamppinen, 2021) integrated into a rather simple metaphor.

Using this metaphor requires us to see Integral both with fresh and squinted eyes: through the intentionally blurred vision-logic of the artist-scientist, who understands how science and art are both complementary symbolic forms that we use to paint a more complete picture of the world (Cassirer, 2021). We are a symbolic animal, and to convey meaning we use hybrid symbols, metaphors that utilize scientific understanding, retaining the original complexity but discarding what is not needed in order for that meaning, the essence, the gist of it to better traverse from one mind to another and across levels. The most successful of these symbols are the ones that enable us in our concrete and conceptual efforts of carrying fire.

References

- Caputo, J. D. (1987). *Radical hermeneutics. Repetition, deconstruction, and the hermeneutic project*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Cassirer, E. (2021). *Philosophy of symbolic forms* (Vol. 3). Oxon: Routledge. Translated by Steve G. Lofts.
- Gowlett, J. A. J. (2016). The discovery of fire by humans. A long and convoluted process. *Philosophical Transactions Biological Sciences*, 371. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2015.0164>.
- Jakonen, J. P. (2020). *Ken Wilber as a spiritual innovator. Studies in integral theory*. PhD Dissertation. University of Turku.
- Jakonen, J. P., & Kamppinen, M. (2015). Creating wisdom cultures: Integral coaching as applied foresight in leadership development. *Approaching Religion*, 5(2), 15–26. <https://doi.org/10.22316/poc/03.2.03>.
- Jakonen, J. P., & Kamppinen, M. (2017). *Kokonaisuuden näkemisen taito. Johdatus integraaliseen ajatteluun (“How to see the big picture. Introduction to integral thinking.”)*. Helsinki: Basam Books.
- Jakonen, J. P., & Kamppinen, M. (2018). Integral approach as a systemic foundation for coaching. *Philosophy of Coaching an International Journal*, 3, 27–43. <https://philosophyofcoaching.org/v3i2/03.pdf>.
- Jakonen, J. P., & Kamppinen, M. (2021). Integral foresight as a method and practice. *Integral Review*. In press.
- Mehta, V. (1962). *A flight of the crook-taloned birds* (pp. 47–129). The New Yorker. December 15.
- Rescher, N. (2014). *The pragmatic vision. Themes in philosophical pragmatism*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Rocher, L. (1987). Sutra literature. In M. Eliade (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of religion* (Vol. 14, pp. 183–184). London: Macmillan.
- Slaughter, R. (1987). Future vision in the nuclear age. *Futures*, 19, 54–72. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287\(87\)90039-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-3287(87)90039-5).
- Slaughter, R. (1998). Futures beyond dystopia. *Futures*, 30, 993–1002. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287\(98\)00101-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-3287(98)00101-3).
- Slaughter, R. (2011). The integral futures controversy. An introduction. *Journal of integral theory and practice*, 6, 105–111. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0->
- Slaughter, R. (2016). Academic publishing in transition. The case of Foresight. *World Futures Review*, 8, 63–74. <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0->
- Slaughter, R. (2020). Futures studies as a quest for meaning. *World Futures Review*, 12, 26–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1946756719870277>.
- Wilber, K. (1995). *Sex, ecology, spirituality. The Spirit of evolution*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (2017). *The religion of tomorrow. A vision for the future of the great traditions*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wildman, W. (2010). *Religious philosophy as multidisciplinary comparative inquiry. Envisioning a future for the philosophy of religion*. Albany: Suny Press.