

***Ken Responds to Recent Critics:
Mark Edwards, Jeff Meyerhoff, and Others***

At the Visser site, it is commonly stated that Wilber does not respond to his critics. This is simply not true. In the last several years, Wilber has been in dialogue with over two hundred theorists, writers, critics, and researchers in a series of intense theoretical conference calls at Integral University and Integral Institute. All told, over 300 hours of this material has been recorded! Virtually all of this material will be made available in various libraries at Integral University, which are free and open to the public.

Here we have selected two samples of this material, one of which is an example “good” criticism, and the other an example of “less-than-good” criticism. The first is two hours of discussion with Mark Edwards. Mark is a superb theorist who not only knows Ken’s work well, but has made many significant contributions of his own. “Good” criticism doesn’t mean you agree with the material, but that (1) you state the material correctly before you agree or disagree with it, and (2) the criticism is at approximately the same altitude as the material being criticized. Mark Edward’s work satisfies both criteria and is a superb example of cogent criticism and creative disagreement.

See below for a more thorough introduction to these audio recordings (click on the blue text to listen).

- [Parallel Theories of an AQAL Approach to Relationality. Part 1. Quadrants and Quadri-
via.](#)
- [Parallel Theories of an AQAL Approach to Relationality. Part 2. Altitude,
Perspectives, and Integral Math.](#)
- [Parallel Theories of an AQAL Approach to Relationality. Part 3. What Does it
Mean to Transform a Social Holon?](#)

So on the one hand we have the superb criticism of Mark Edwards, and on the other hand we have the unfortunate case of Jeff Meyerhoff, who's "critiques" can be considered little more than a hatchet job. We will let the audio, which was recorded during a weekly I-I theory call, speak for itself:

- [Ken's discussion about Jeff Meyerhoff](#)

Introduction to Mark and Ken's Dialogue:

Mark Edwards has been a passionate student of integral theory for well over two decades. During that time, Mark has been an enthusiastic and constructive critic of Ken Wilber's work and of integral approaches in general. Mark is pursuing a Ph.D. on integral approaches to organizational transformation through the Integral Leadership Centre at the University of Western Australia.

In this three-part dialogue, Mark and Ken explore an AQAL approach to relationality, or the various relationships that exist between holons.

Their main areas of agreement, which are many, can be summarized as follows:

--The validity and usefulness of the general **AQAL framework**—on this point there is strong and fundamental agreement.

--AQAL can be used to analyze **individual** and **social holons**, and the relationships between them.

--There are four different kinds of wholes (**individuals, groups/societies, artifacts, heaps**) and therefore four types of whole/part relations. "**Holon**" as a term can be used for all four of these if one wishes, but since in practice only two of them have some sort of agency, both authors tend to use holon mostly to refer

to individuals and groups/societies—these are called individual and social holons respectively.

In Ken's work, an individual holon possesses **quadrants** or four dimensions/perspectives. Each of those quadrants also “contains” other holons. For example, the individual human holon possesses an individual-exterior dimension (the Upper Right) and yet the UR-quadrant contains atoms (which are holons), molecules (which are holons), cells (which are holons), and so on. Each of those holons possesses four quadrants. Therefore it is perfectly ok to speak about each holon possessing four quadrants, as well as the quadrants possessing or containing holons. You simply have to be able to take multiple perspectives to be able to understand this.

--Individuals have a **dominant monad** (self or self-system, possessing **agency**). Societies have a **dominant mode of discourse** (governing or regulating system, with **nexus-agency**).

The main areas of disagreement primarily concern the nature and relation of individual and social holons:

--The simplest but strongest disagreement can be stated thus: Mark believes social holons have at least some consciousness and therefore possess four quadrants. Ken believes social holons do not possess quadrants per se, but can be looked at and analyzed as **quadrivia**. Ken believes that many of the points that Mark makes are true if you substitute quadrivia for quadrants when it comes to Mark's analysis of social holons.

--Most of the other disagreements are variations on that theme. For example: Mark sees the four quadrants as **interior** and **exterior** of **agency** and **communion**. Stated that way, both individual and social holons possess four quadrants. Ken sees the quadrants as the **interior** and the **exterior** of the **singular** and **plural**. Seen that way, there's simply an occasion, which possess four dimensions, one of which is individual, and one of which is collective or

social. The four quadrants are therefore four spaces, worlds, or actual dimensions; whereas agency and communion are **drives** (not dimensions), and these drives are drives that occur **in** dimensions. So he believes Mark has confused dimensions and drives. Language sometimes forces Ken to say “only individual holons possess four quadrants”—but that is a concession to pre-quadratic language structure; there’s simply an occasion with four fundamental dimensions. This is a radical move that undercuts the duality of individual and social—as well as the duality of interior and exterior.

--There are subtle disagreements in the ways that that **1st**, **2nd**, and **3rd person** are used as well as **1st-person**, **2nd-person**, and **3rd-person perspective** are used. Ken notes what he believes to be some lack of clarity in this area.

Ken points out that virtually all of Mark’s analysis of social holons is still very useful, and can be brought into alignment with Ken’s view by substituting quadrivia for quadrants. Whether you agree more with Mark or with Ken, Ken urges everybody to study Mark’s work as an example of a terrific AQAL analysis of social holons.

If you’d like to view the PDF version of Mark’s PowerPoint presentation on Integral Relationality, which Mark and Ken refer to throughout the dialogue, [right click here](#) and save the PDF to your computer.

Part 1 explicitly covers the difference between **quadrants** and **quadrivia**, with quadrants being dimensions **possessed** by a (individual) holon, and quadrivia being perspectives **through which** an object can be viewed (even if the object itself does not possess four quadrants, such as artifacts, heaps, and groups/societies). The four quadrants are one set of perspectives that can function as quadrivia. Mark and Ken also discuss the difference between **dimensions** and **drives** as they relate to the quadrants, and the difference between **individual** and **social holons**.

Mark and Ken were rudely interrupted by a power failure in North Denver, but this Part 1 nonetheless a great start to their in-depth dialogue!

Part 2 covers the discussion on altitude and levels of development, and the delicate issue that unless individuals have developed to an integral worldspace—at least cognitively—there is literally no way for them to engage in a critical discussion of AQAL theory in a way that honors the aspects of AQAL that differentiate it from, and transcend and include, mere pluralism. Ken goes on to comment that due to his intense writing schedule he can't directly engage as many critics as he would like, but that he is in regular dialogue with several hundred scholars and professionals throughout the Integral Institute network who provide extremely compelling critical arguments regarding his work. To suggest, as some do, that Ken avoids critics just because they are critics is simply not true.

Mark and Ken go on to discuss several different models of human growth, and the unique emphasis each model places on various quadrants. In particular, Mark explains the important role of Lev Vygotsky in his own work. Vygotsky, a Russian theorist who looked at the effect of social and cultural influences (LR and LL) in developmental growth, is a favorite of Ken's as well.

They finish with an in-depth exploration of an **integral calculus of primordial perspectives** (integral math), and the difference between a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd **person**, and 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-person **perspectives**. To brush up on the difference between a 1p and 1-p, [click here](#).

In Part 3 Mark and Ken focus on what it means for social holons to undergo transformation, and how that relates to transformation in individual holons. They both agree on the notion of transformation as a vertical shift in altitude, but have different views on what exactly is making that shift. For Mark, both individual and social holons have an “I,” and so in both individual and social holons that “I” can shift vertically. For Ken, social holons do not have an “I.” Social holons have a dominant mode of discourse, and that is primarily what shifts vertically. Individual holons do have an “I” or dominant monad, and for them that is what shifts.

Ken goes on to explain that some of the dramatic change that can be seen in individuals is the result of “faux transformations” or “mini transformations.” For example, if an individual—let’s call him Bob—has developed cognitively to an integral altitude, but works in an organization functioning from modern-rational, those forces might keep him locked into that lower altitude. But if a new CEO comes in functioning at integral, and she institutes sweeping company-wide changes based on that integral perspective, Bob might very quickly “pop” up to integral. Bob did not all of a sudden transform from modern, to postmodern, to integral—which, on average, would take 10 years—he was **already** at integral in significant ways, and then the appropriate stimuli helped him jump up, and live up, to the development he had already achieved.

One process by which social holons can undergo significant positive change is **horizontal translation** and **integration**, which can sometimes be mistaken for vertical transformation. As Ken comments, one of the best things you can do for an unhealthy modern-rational organization (for example) is teach it how to be **healthy** at the level it’s currently at, by attempting to take into account all four quadrants as they exist in a modern-rational worldspace. Then, when it seems appropriate, you can think about how to shift the organizational structure, culture, and leadership to reflect postmodern, integral, or higher levels of development.

As Mark and Ken agree, one of the tremendously exciting projects for the future is in-depth testing for the various ways that organizations, and the individuals within them, can change and transform. Tracking and understanding the development of an individual is hard enough, let alone the development of large groups, and so the more information we can gather about how these things unfold in the real world, the better.

These dialogues are recommended primarily for advanced students of integral theory (i.e. there are lots of long and boring details—but with two very cool professors.)