

Creating New Spaces for Transformation: A Response to Richard Slaughter

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Richard Slaughter has made some strong points and arguments in his reflections upon my "Not-so-Integral Futures" article, but appears to have misunderstood my overall intention. Here I will address a few points he made and add a few more insights of my own on the subject.

Firstly, the article was not meant to be an extensive critique of post-conventional futures studies and Integral Futures as a whole. It was made in reference to what I saw and experienced at that conference in November 2005, as was made clear in the article. I took a sometimes light-hearted look at events (and myself) in a deliberate attempt to invite some gentle and unthreatening self-reflection. It was not a criticism of Richard Slaughter's work or the academic work being done at the Australian Foresight Institute or elsewhere. Of course, I made reference to possible implications for Integral and post-conventional Futures – but based predominantly upon my experience at that conference. This was my intention above all else - to express an introspective account of some sense of guilt I felt at many conference participants and myself having missed an opportunity to engage Michio Kaku at a more intimate level. I felt there was a deeper symbolism and resonance that lay behind the events of those few days.

Slaughter calls my use of the phrase "a room full of post-conventional and Integral Futures practitioners" to describe conference participants "a fiction." This is a fair criticism as a generalisation, and I could have worded this more carefully. Indeed my article could and should have made a more clear distinction between those who are practicing Integral Futurists, and those that might simply be classed as post-conventional futurists. In retrospect it is somewhat unfair to criticise conference presenters and participants for failing to be "all-quadrant Wilberian" when they may have had no commitment to Wilber's philosophy. Nonetheless, the essence of my critique was that post-conventional and Integral Futurists should avoid privileging certain domains of knowledge over others, especially the spiritual and inner dimensions. I remain firm in this point.

Another important correction Slaughter made was to point out that Wilber's Four-Quadrant model does not encapsulate the essence of Integral Futures, as I wrote – the IOS model serves that role more adequately.

Still, I do not agree that these points detract from the main point of the piece, which was to encourage greater self-reflection on the part of futurists and especially Integral Futures practitioners: to push them to more openly listen to the voice of others with differing worldviews.

As to the issue of which quadrant we should best situate Kaku, there was a footnote in my paper which qualified my situating Kaku in the UR quadrant. That footnote read:

It must be acknowledged that Kaku is not a strict empiricist. His Visions is quite speculative in nature. However his view of the future tends to be based upon linear extrapolations founded upon the presuppositions of Western mechanistic and patriarchal science... (Anthony, 2006 p.162)

So while I agree that Slaughter has a strong case for situating Kaku in the LR, my own perspective is that he establishes credibility with his emergence from the language and images of the UR. After all, he does describe himself as a physicist. Further, my essential point was to argue that he comes from a different worldview than many others who were present in that room in Taipei, including myself.

Slaughter writes that my "call for 'grounded' futures seems obvious, trivial and unnecessary." As I argued in my original article, this tendency towards being ungrounded is not something unique to Integral Futures, but to all people who seek knowledge in the domains of knowledge that might be deemed transpersonal or spiritual – Wilber's "transcenders." My intention was to express a warning of a potential issue which might develop within the field if some or many practitioners develop too much emphasis on the spiritual components at the expense of the "mundane." I hope that my article at least gave the sense that I include myself in that group! This point became of concern to me during one of the conference "fishbowls", where there seemed to be a yawning chasm between participants. While some were making references to hard science and new technologies, others were talking about hallucinogenic drugs and spiritual dimensions of being. Of course this could be quite a healthy scenario. But were all parties listening openly to each other? Were audience members listening closely? Each of us can only answer these questions within himself or herself. Slaughter certainly has a valid point that conference proceedings do not encourage a free interaction amongst conference participants with differing perspectives. However there is nothing stopping participants moving out of their comfort zones now and again. This simply requires a certain motivation to do so.

I think that the word "pathology" - which Slaughter uses - is far too harsh and emotionally loaded to express my analysis of the behaviour of those present at the conference. I think "blind spot" is a better phrase. I am more for a gentle approach to addressing ones' limitations and self-stultifying habits. The word "pathology" also suggests that I had a great deal of antipathy or harsh judgment towards practitioners at the conference. If this is what my article conveys, then it is certainly not expressing accurately the way I felt about the conference and the participants, whom I hold in great esteem – including Richard Slaughter and the entire field of Integral Futures Studies.

And yes, I agree with Slaughter that the sense of "elitism" that we may unconsciously adopt as futurists is no different from any other field or discipline. In fact it is probably far less pronounced, as in my experience Integral Futures practitioners are generally highly honourable and introspective individuals.

I have learnt something important from Slaughter's response. I have not spent extensive amounts of time in academic environments, and have a different experience in dealing with knowledge and understanding. I spent many years with people in healing groups exploring the shadow side of my own psyche and that of others. That required a great deal more introspection and vulnerability that one typically finds in academic settings. I suspect I did not take this factor into account enough when writing my article. Slaughter called my piece "brave" for its level of honesty and exploration of my own "shadow." I shall accept the compliment, but have to confess it took little or no courage to write the article. Expressing vulnerability, grief, anger and fear at deep levels before other people takes courage. Expressing a little guilt in an academic journal is not quite so difficult!

Academic protocol has long required that academics and scientists be "impartial" and "detached" from the object of their enquiries. I am hoping that more of us can be more open about our personal input into the knowledge that we possess and communicate. I would be interested to know what internal processes might underpin Slaughter's "reflections" upon my article. However that would require a greater degree of vulnerability on his behalf, and I appreciate that well-established academics might be reluctant to take this approach. Rupert Sheldrake – a man known to go out on a limb himself - has an unflattering metaphor to describe the academic environment he experienced at Cambridge.

Shooting people down is a favorite sport of academics, and Cambridge is a free-fire zone. (Sheldrake et al., 2001, p. xix)

Given that the nature of academic debate and culture tends to be heavily confrontational, it is no surprising that academics are not so keen to reveal their "shadow" in public.

Finally, Slaughter's main point appears to be that I have incorrectly critiqued post-conventional and integral futures based on my experience at the Tamkang conference. In this point he may be correct. I remain open to this possibility.

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