***About Ken Wilber’s video “Integral Trans-Partisan Politics”***

*Written by* [*Corey W. deVos*](http://integrallife.com/member/corey-devos/profile)

While surveying the current American political landscape, it can be easy to feel as though the country is divided into two radically opposing populations: the Left and the Right. When watching the speeches, interviews, and debates on either side of the fence, there is such an incredible difference between the tone, rhetoric, and messages coming from the two major political parties that many pundits have commented that it is as though we live in two utterly different Americas, with very little overlap between the two. But the truth is, we do not live in two Americas, but in a single America composed of at least four or five different sets of values, all crammed together into a two-party political system that is becoming increasingly incapable of representing these wildly different perspectives. Many are beginning to recognize this systemic inadequacy and are searching for a genuinely Integral “Third Way” politics—a new way to break free from the restrictions of such rigidly calcified party lines, transcending both sides of the partisan divide, including the very best of both parties, without resorting to the effete compromise of mere centrism that has been typical of the political “Third Way” to date.

In order to fully understand and appreciate the different sets of values and beliefs that make up the flesh and bones of America, we must allow ourselves to step back and take a developmental view of American culture—one which can make sense of the full spectrum of perspectives that are currently at play in the political arena, while also being able to account for America’s rich political history, as the oldest functioning democracy in the world.

The premise of this sort of developmental view is simple: people evolve. As people evolve, they move through a particular sequence of stages, a sequence that has been long studied by Western psychologists and has been found to be essentially universal to every culture in the world. Taking a developmental view accounts for the “multiple intelligences” every human being possesses, including cognitive development and intelligence, values and beliefs, charisma and interpersonal skills, etc. There is a long list of these different sorts of intelligences, each growing along its own particular developmental track, but there is enough congruence in their overall development that we can begin to take a meta-view of our growth and development by using a very simple concept known as “Altitude.” Altitude is essentially a barometer of overall human growth, which uses the color spectrum to denote several major stages of development—each of which has slowly evolved over the course of human history, though still very much at play in today’s world:

***"1st-Tier" values***

***Purple / Magenta*** *(egocentric, magic): Magenta Altitude began about 50,000 years ago, and tends to be the home of egocentric drives, a magical worldview, and impulsiveness. It is expressed through magic/animism, kin-spirits, and such. Young children primarily operate with a magenta worldview. Magenta in any line of development is fundamental, or "square one" for any and all new tasks. Magenta emotions and cognition can be seen driving such cultural phenomena as superhero-themed comic books or movies.*

***Red*** *(ego- to ethnocentric, egoic): The Red Altitude began about 10,000 years ago, and is the marker of egocentric drives based on power, where "might makes right," where aggression rules, and where there is a limited capacity to take the role of an "other." Red impulses are classically seen in grade school and early high school, where bullying, teasing, and the like are the norm. Red motivations can be seen culturally in Ultimate Fighting contests, which have no fixed rules (fixed rules come into being at the next Altitude, Amber), teenage rebellion and the movies that cater to it (The Fast and the Furious), gang dynamics (where the stronger rule the weaker), and the like.*

***Blue / Amber*** *(ethnocentric, mythic): The Amber Altitude began about 5,000 years ago, and indicates a worldview that is traditionalist and mythic in nature—and mythic worldviews are almost always held as absolute (this stage of development is often called absolutistic). Instead of "might makes right," amber ethics are more oriented to the group, but one that extends only to "my" group. Grade school and high school kids usually exhibit amber motivations to "fit in." Amber ethics help to control the impulsiveness and narcissism of red. Culturally, amber worldviews can be seen in fundamentalism (my God is right no matter what); extreme patriotism (my country is right no matter what); and ethnocentrism (my people are right no matter what).*

***Orange*** *(worldcentric, rational): The Orange Altitude began about 500 years ago, during the period known as the European Enlightenment. In an orange worldview, the individual begins to move away from the amber conformity that reifies the views of one's religion, nation, or tribe. The orange worldview often begins to emerge in late high school, college, or adulthood. Culturally, the orange worldview realizes that "truth is not delivered; it is discovered," spurring the great advances of science and formal rationality. Orange ethics begin to embrace all people, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...." Ayn Rand's Objectivism, the US Bill of Rights, and many of the laws written to protect individual freedom all flow from an orange worldview.*

***Green*** *(worldcentric, pluralistic): The Green Altitude began roughly 150 years ago, though it came into its fullest expression during the 1960’s. Green worldviews are marked by pluralism, or the ability to see that there are multiple ways of seeing reality. If orange sees universal truths ("All men are created equal"), green sees multiple universal truths—different universals for different cultures. Green ethics continue, and radically broaden, the movement to embrace all people. A green statement might read, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, regardless of race, gender, class...." Green ethics have given birth to the civil rights, feminist, and gay rights movements, as well as environmentalism.*

*The green worldview's multiple perspectives give it room for greater compassion, idealism, and involvement, in its healthy form. Such qualities are seen by organizations such as the Sierra Club, Amnesty International, Union of Concerned Scientists, and Doctors Without Borders. In its unhealthy form green worldviews can lead to extreme relativism, where all beliefs are seen as relative and equally true, which can in turn lead to the nihilism, narcissism, irony, and meaninglessness exhibited by many of today's intellectuals, academics, and trend-setters... not to mention another "lost" generation of students.*

***"2nd-Tier" values***

***Yellow / Teal*** *(worldcentric to “kosmocentric,” integral): The Teal Altitude marks the beginning of an integral worldview, where pluralism and relativism are transcended and included into a more systematic whole. The transition from green to teal is also known as the transition from “1st-tier” values to “2nd-tier” values, the most immediate difference being the fact that each “1st-tier” value thinks it is the only truly correct value, while “2nd-tier” values recognize the importance of all preceding stages of development. Thus, the teal worldview honors the insights of the green worldview, but places it into a larger context that allows for healthy hierarchies, and healthy value distinctions.*

*Perhaps most important, a teal worldview begins to see the process of development itself, acknowledging that each one of the previous stages (magenta through green) has an important role to play in the human experience. Teal consciousness sees that each of the previous stages reveals an important truth, and pulls them all together and integrates them without trying to change them to “be more like me,” and without resorting to extreme cultural relativism (“all are equal”). Teal worldviews do more than just see all points of view (that’s a green worldview)—it can see and honor them, but also critically evaluate them.*

***Turquoise*** *(“kosmocentric,” integral): Turquoise is a mature integral view, one that sees not only healthy hierarchy but also the various quadrants of human knowledge, expression, and inquiry (at the minimum: I, we, and it). While teal worldviews tend to be secular, turquoise is the first to begin to integrate Spirit as a living force in the world (manifested through any or all of the 3 Faces of God: “I”—the “No self” or “witness” of Buddhism; “we/thou”—the “great other” of Christianity, Judaism, Hindusm, Islam, etc.; or “it”—the “Web of Life” seen in Taoism, Pantheism, etc.).*

We can begin to see how the two major political parties have largely become amalgams of several of these stages. In the early history of politics—during the French Revolution—the Right was largely comprised of Amber traditionalists, while the Right were mostly Orange modernists. But over 200 years later, the world has become considerably more complex, having experienced the emergence of an entirely new stage of political consciousness: namely Green pluralism, otherwise known as post-modernism, during the mid 20th century. As such, Republicans now typically represent both Amber traditional values and “Wall Street” or “Ayn Rand” Orange values, while Democrats represent both Orange and Green forms of liberalism—two very different modes of liberalism that have thus far been extremely difficult for the Democratic party to unify.

If we truly want to begin creating some form of Integral “Third Way” politics, it is going to depend entirely upon leaders who have themselves achieved “2nd-tier” values, as it is only from the teal and turquoise stages of development that we can authentically honor and incorporate the entire spectrum of development. To put it another way, we need a form of “enlightened leadership” to enact decisions unfettered by partisan politics, for the benefit of the whole, rather than pandering to the few.

There is no sense in parsing words—what we are talking about here is a very real sort of elitism, a *developmental* elitism in which leaders more evolved than the majority of the populace are elected to office, for exactly that reason. Of course, it is an “elitism to which everyone is invited,” meaning that anyone can continue to evolve to the highest reaches of human potential, despite the fact that so few do. But merely mentioning the word “elitism” puts us on very dangerous ground in today’s political atmosphere, in which voters seem more interested in electing leaders they can “have a beer with” than ones with the moral, intellectual, and perspectival sophistication required to heal the tremendous cultural schisms that exist in America, and in the rest of the world.

Considering this spectrum of human development, it can be easy for liberals to assert that their values are “higher” or “more evolved” than those of typical conservatives—and in certain ways, they would be right. However, one of the fatal flaws of “1st-tier” stages is the complete inability to include the values of other 1st-tier stages, which makes liberals arguably more developed than most conservatives, but equally partial in their own values. As any genuine “Third Way” politics seeks to incorporate the very best of both parties, it must be inherently integral by nature, as only Integral consciousness can recognize the significance of development itself—and it is only by fully acknowledging human development, and accounting for the entire spectrum of consciousness in our conceptions of the world, that we can begin pulling together the many fundamental contributions that both the American Right and Left have made to the world.

Everyone knows about the difference between Democrat and Republican, Left and Right, Liberal and Conservative. But as ubiquitous as these distinctions is, no one has been able to give a theoretical explanation of what drives this split in a way that holds up to careful inspection—that is, until an Integral approach was applied to politics. Ken reveals what appears to be the key to a major piece of the puzzle: camps on the political Left attribute the fundamental cause of human suffering to external causes, whereas camps on the political Right attribute the fundamental cause of human suffering to internal causes.

For example, why are people homeless? Left: because they are downtrodden, they lack opportunities, they are victims of the system—all external forces. Right: because they have no work ethic, they have no family/religious values, no internalized sense of shame—all internal forces. Of course, you can be an internalist or externalist at different altitudes of development, and historically these have changed over time, as we’ve already seen. But what hasn't changed throughout it all? You guessed it: Right is still internalist, and Left is still externalist. And if we hope to have any sort of comprehensive approach to politics and the problems of the world, it is absolutely essential that we include the revelations of both, without limiting ourselves to the tyranny of either.