



CLIMBING THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Reflections on Ken Wilber's "The Religion of Tomorrow"

Frank Visser

www.integralworld.net

All rights reserved.

2017

Table of contents

1

THE INVOLUTION/EVOLUTION COSMOLOGY

Ken Wilber Holds on to an Outdated Scheme of Existence 3

2

FROM ATOM TO ATMAN

Ken Wilber's Religious View of Evolution 20

3

A MORE ADEQUATE SPECTRUM OF COLORS?

A Comparison of Color Terminology in Chakra-Psychology,
Integral Theory and Spiral Dynamics 33

4

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A SUPER-NOVA?

Ken Wilber's Cosmic Approach to the Mind-Body Problem 51

5

RATIONAL REASONS TO BELIEVE IN SPIRIT?

Evaluating Ken Wilber's Case for A Spiritual Worldview 68

6

IS DARWIN REALLY 'ON OUR SIDE'?

Ken Wilber's Misreading of Neo-Darwinism 80

7

CLIMBING THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Ken Wilber's Mystical Religion of the Future 96

Reflections on "The Religion of Tomorrow", Part I

THE INVOLUTION/EVOLUTION COSMOLOGY

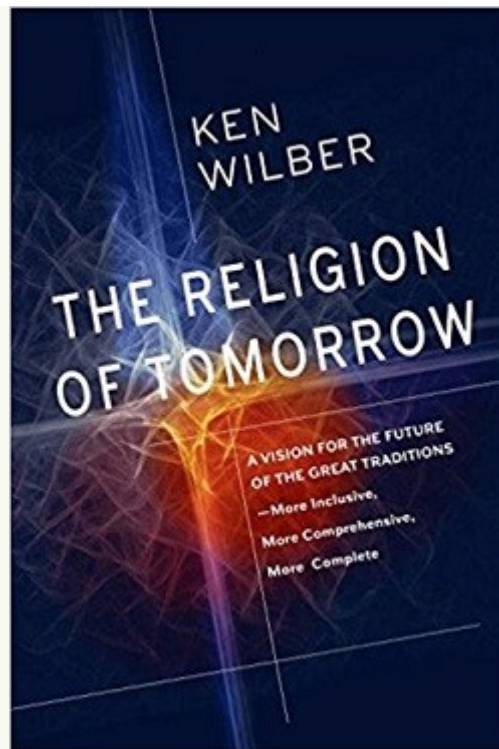
Ken Wilber Holds on to an Outdated Scheme of
Existence

FRANK VISSER

It is also clear from the start, that this is the Achilles-heel of this integral-spiritual outlook on life and the cosmos.

In Ken Wilber's latest book [*The Religion of Tomorrow: A Vision for the Future of the Great Traditions*](#) (2017), a recurring theme is the involution/evolution cosmology as formulated in his integral philosophy, which forms the background to all of his writings. Not many of his readers, even those of his students who have studied all of his books, will be familiar with the notion of "involution", which is the nineteenth century counterpart to the more familiar concept of evolution. As readers of this website will know, [Wilber's understanding of and use of the term "evolution" is debatable](#), and the reason for this will become clear when we examine his use of the opposite term "involution". Both of these two notions are intimately connected to each other. One could even say that Ken Wilber believes in a certain view of evolution *because he also believes in involution*—a process that supposedly preceded both the Big Bang and the subsequent processes of cosmological, biological and cultural evolution.

THE MEANINGS OF INVOLUTION



Hardcover, Shambhala, 2017, 806 pages.

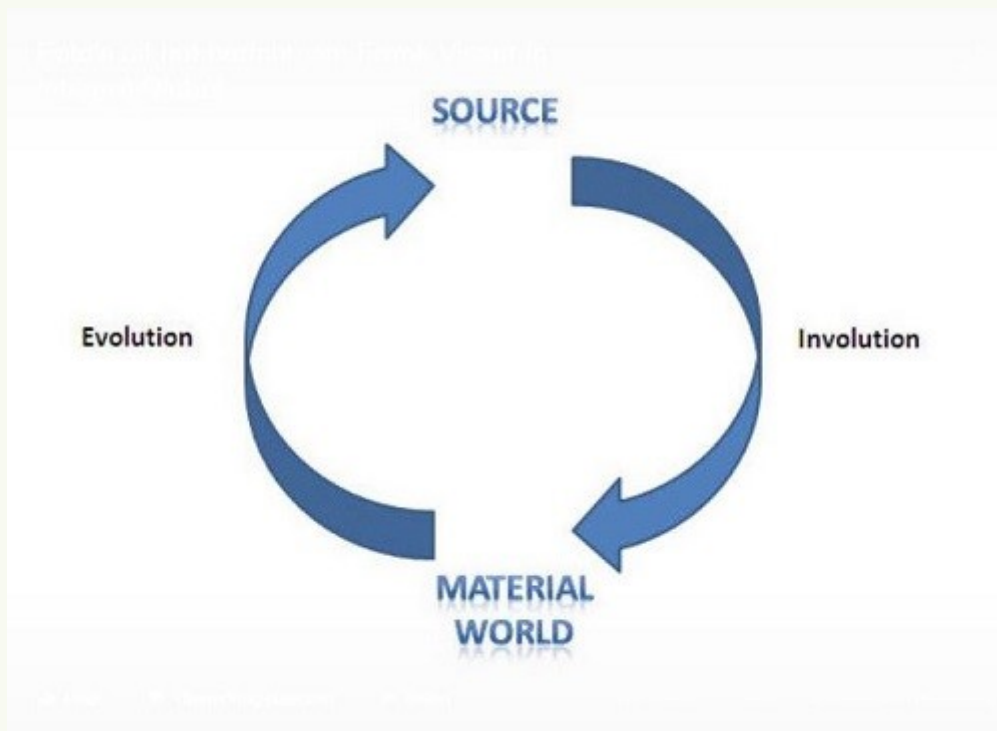
So it seems opportune to first give some background on this rather esoteric concept of involution, both within the context of Wilber's larger oeuvre, as well as by looking at how it has been interpreted in other esoteric or traditionalist schools of thought, before we dive into the details of this doctrine and its critical evaluation. As Wikipedia explains [the esoteric meaning of "involution"](#): "The term involution refers to different things depending on the writer. In some instances it refers to a process that occurs prior to evolution and gives rise to the cosmos, in others an aspect of evolution, and still others a process that follows the completion of evolution in the human form." The involution concept is elaborated in the esoteric schools of [Theosophy](#), [Anthroposophy](#) and [Rosicrucianism](#), in the philosophy of [Sri Aurobindo](#) (1872-1950), a source frequently cited by Wilber, and various other spiritual teachers such as [Meher Baba](#) and [G. I. Gurdjieff](#). It can also be found in the works of the Indian scholar [Anand Coomaraswamy](#) (1877-1947), who features in Wilber's first book *The Spectrum of Consciousness*. And, finally, involution is a foundational concept in the integral philosophy of Ken Wilber.

Actually, in the 20th anniversary edition of this book, published in 1993, Wilber clarified why he has sometimes used the terms

involution and evolution in different and completely opposite meanings:

Let me briefly mention one semantic point. The terms *evolution* and *involution* have been used differently by different authors, sometimes with diametrically opposite meanings. But the overall concept is simple: Spirit first "throws itself outward" to get "lost" in the manifest world of maya.... Spirit then begins the slow and torturous return to Itself, finally to awaken *as* Itself. Spirit is actually never "lost"; it is all a grand play (*lila*)...

Different writers use these terms in one of those two opposite ways, and the results can be confusing. But they are *all* talking about these two simple "movements": away from Spirit and toward Spirit. Now, in this volume [*The Spectrum of Consciousness*] I used *evolution* to mean "the movement away from Spirit" (the "unfolding of maya") and I used *involution* to mean "turning back toward Spirit." In doing so, I was following Coomaraswamy. In subsequent writings, I reverted to the other usage, following Aurobindo: *involution* is the move away from Spirit, getting lost and involved in maya, and *evolution* is the growth back to Spirit *as* Spirit, whereupon it is seen that all of maya is simply Spirit at luminous play. But this is *entirely* a semantic issue. (p. xviii-xix)



The involution/evolution cosmology as taught by many spiritual traditions.

So the basic idea is simple: in this view of things, evolution *presupposes* and *is preceded* by involution. Put differently, as "something cannot come out of nothing", as the saying goes[1], evolution must have been preceded by some mysterious process in which all future complexities are foreshadowed. Many spiritualist evolutionists reason that, since evolution is characterized by the emergence of ever more

complex and conscious forms of life, there has to be a "something" that has produced these evolutionary *potentials* hidden in the depths of unconscious matter.

Just think of it: there was a time there were *no* human beings. Or further back: *no* animals, *no* plants. Or even further back: *no* life. *Where has all this magnificent variety of life forms come from?* Or still fundamental: how could conscious spirit arise from non-consciousness matter? Wilber has often pointed out that even the progression from Hydrogen to the [heavier and more complex elements](#) points in the direction of a transcendental cause. Many spiritually included people nowadays refuse to believe in the [simple creationist answer](#) that "God created it". Does Wilber offer a more sophisticated, if still mystical-creationist philosophy? Is the choice we have really only between a divine special creation of all species, or blind chance alone? Both seem not very credible to the modern mind-set. Spiritual evolutionists such as Ken Wilber believe there is such a Third Way between vulgar creationism and crass materialism.

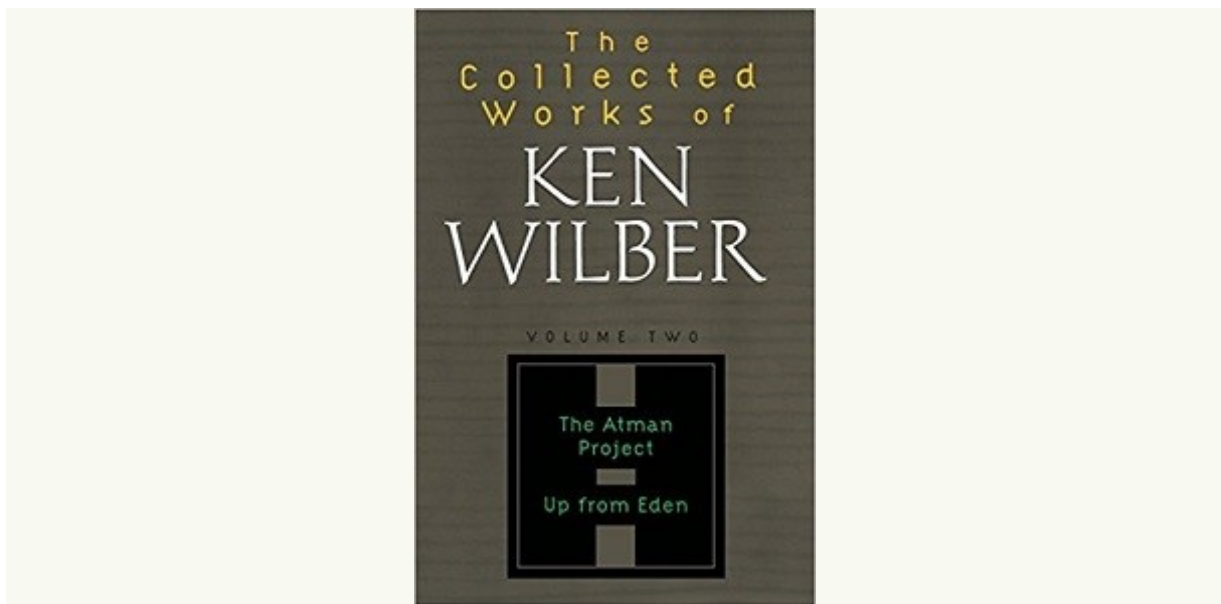
As Wilber phrases the problem in one of his early books, *The Atman Project* (1980), in the last chapter called "Involution" (which, however, deals more with reincarnation process according to the Tibetan Book of the Dead):

According to the perennial philosophy, *in order* for evolution—which is the unfolding of higher structures—to occur at all, those higher structures must, *in some sense*, be present from the start: they must be enfolded, as *potential*, in the lower modes. If not, then evolution is nothing but creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. And, as theologians have long known, out of nothing you get nothing—*ex nihilo nihil fit*. And the story of involution is simply the story of how the higher modes came to be lost in the lower—how they came to be enwrapped and enfolded in the lower states. Involution, or the enfolding of the higher in the lower, is the pre-condition of evolution, or the unfolding of the higher states from the lower. (p. 160-1).

Then follow a very strong statement, vintage Wilber:

One cannot, logically, ontologically, or metaphysically derive the higher form the lower. The higher modes can emerge because, and only because, they were enfolded, as potential, in the lower modes to begin with, and they simply crystallize out and differentiate from the lower modes as evolution proceeds. (p. 174-5)

Make no mistake about it: this is a deeply religious and spiritual view of reality, in which Spirit is the source out of which everything has come forth (during involution) and into which everything will return (during evolution). In Wilber's interpretation of this philosophical doctrine, Spirit is not only the source and the goal, but also the *driving force* behind this whole cosmic drama. This is the reason his brand of spirituality is often called "evolutionary"—a misnomer, in my opinion, given Wilber's scant knowledge of evolutionary theory.



At the end of the Introduction to Volume II of *The Collected Works of Ken Wilber* (1999)—which contains the full text of *The Atman Project* and in which he reflects on this early period of his writing career—we find the following concluding statement on involution. In this statement, embodying Wilber's deepest convictions, he suggests that this notion of involution might even throw much light on many of the thorny scientific questions of how the evolution of complex biological and cultural forms has become possible in the first place:

I think of involution, then, along the analogy of a rubber band: stretch it, and you have involution, which supplies a force (namely Eros) that will then pull the two ends of the rubber band (matter and spirit) back together again—in other words, an involutory force that will pull evolution along. But the actual route taken in that return, and all its wonderful variety, is a co-creation of every holon and the currents of Eros in which it fluidly floats.

Now, of course, you are perfectly free to believe in evolution and reject the notion of involution. I find that an incoherent position; nonetheless, you can still embrace everything in the following pages about the evolution of culture and consciousness, and reject or remain agnostic on

involution. But the notion of a prior involutory force does much to help with the otherwise impenetrable puzzles of Darwinian evolution, which has tried, ever so un-successfully, to explain why dirt would get up and eventually start writing poetry. But the notion of evolution as Eros, or Spirit-in-action, performing, as Whitehead put it, throughout the world by gently persuasion toward love, goes a long way to explaining the inexorable unfolding from matter to bodies to minds to souls to Spirit's own Self-recognition. Eros, or Spirit-in-action, is a rubber band around your neck and mine, pulling us all back home. (p. 12)



Volvox, a colony of thousands of cells. ([Wikipedia](#))

Magnificent as these philosophical or spiritual vistas might be, it is obvious from the start that science frowns at these apodictic statements about how complex life forms can emerge: "*because, and only because, they were enfolded, as potential, in the lower modes to begin with*". Will the notion of involution really "help with the otherwise impenetrable puzzles of Darwinian evolution, which has tried, ever so un-successfully, to explain why dirt would get up and eventually start writing poetry." Here writes Wilber the creationist, who isn't really interested in how things came about during the billions of years of evolution. Perhaps—*just perhaps*—dirt first formed cells, and cells formed multi-cellular proto-organisms, and so on? It is the patient unraveling of these details that gives science its grandeur, not the easy proclamations of a spiritualist claiming deeper knowledge. It requires a patience, and a deep interest in Nature's workings, that Wilber doesn't seem to have.[2]

It is also clear from the start, that this is the Achilles-heel of this integral-spiritual outlook on life and the cosmos. How coherent *is* the notion of involuton actually? What if science *can* explain or make understandable how "higher" forms of life emerged form "lower" forms, *without any necessity of invoking mysterious cosmic forces* like Spirit or intricate mechanisms such as involution and (spiritually understood)

evolution? The whole system will come tumbling down, it will lose all of its dynamic powers. Involution provides Wilber with an apparently convincing explanation for the bewildering variety of cosmological and biological processes—still to be *fully* explained by materialistic science.

But I am getting ahead of my story.

A THEOSOPHICAL DIGRESSION

In the last chapter of my book on Wilber, [*Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion*](#) (2003), I highlighted the fact that Wilber's embracing of the concept of involution sets him apart from many contemporary writers[3]:

Wilber stands out from the majority of his colleagues in the transpersonal world because he has no reservation in espousing the doctrine of involution (though he now prefers to speak of "involutionary givens"). Probably more than anything else, it is this that stands in the way of his vision being accepted by the scientific community, but in my opinion the doctrine of involution is an essential aspect of any complete metaphysical worldview. (p. 281)

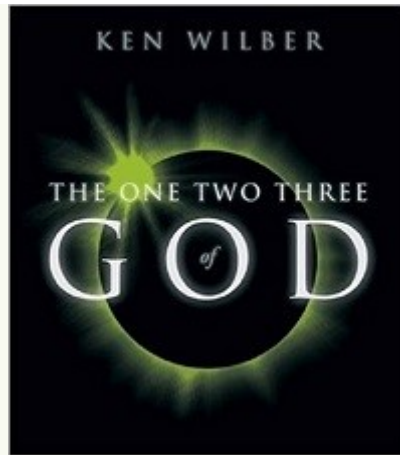
I also criticized Wilber, however, in that book section, for his rather vague understanding of the nature involution (understandable since he had used only Coomaraswamy and Sri Aurobindo as sources). From a Theosophical point of view, a much more precise analysis would be possible—and since we are at it now, let's dive into some of these esoteric intricacies. According to Theosophy many different metaphysical processes can loosely be described as movements "from Spirit to matter" or "from matter back to Spirit". These are related to the Trinity as understood in theosophical theology in interesting ways:

1. The process of **creation or emanation** that gives rise to the various worlds, planes or spheres of cosmological existence, from the highest spiritual realms to the densest material worlds. These worlds are created by Spirit in its Third Person of Brahma or Spirit. Without this deed of creation matter would be only an amorphous whole.
2. The process by means of which these spheres are successively suffused with divine Life, from the highest sphere to the lowest (**involution**), which is then followed by reversal as life begins to move upwards through the

spheres again in order to be able to return to its Source (**evolution**). *Only the first, descending part of this cycle can strictly speaking be called "involution"*. This so-called Live Wave comes from the Second Person of Vishnu or the Cosmic Christ.

3. The process in which an individual, spiritual Self or Ego is formed by **individualization** through an outpouring from above of the First Person of Spirit (Shiva or Father), into a so-called animal group soul. From that moment on, reincarnation as an individual entity is seen as possible (and a reincarnation into the animal kingdom is deemed to be impossible according to Theosophy).
4. And finally there is the descending movement by means of which the spiritual Self or Ego creates a new personality for itself for each incarnation, before connecting itself (**incarnation**) to a new physical body. (p. 281-2)

There are interesting parallels and differences between this esoteric philosophy and Wilber's worldview, but we will pass over them quickly, for that is not the aim of this essay. First, in Wilber's presentation the creation of the world(s) seems to be equated to the process of involution proper—the seed is no longer sown in the fertile earth, it somehow *creates* this earth in the process. And when he is discussing the Tibetan Book of the Dead, in the last chapter of *The Atman Project* (strangely called "Involution"), he seems to fuse these post-mortem process to those of mystical growth and transformation. For Wilber, it is all "simply" a matter of going "up or down", painted with a very broad brush. Supposedly, after death we will rise up all the way to the level of Absolute Spirit—when we are capable of living on these lofty heights, or we will reincarnate again.[4]



Secondly, Wilber has introduced the concept of "[the 1-2-3 of God](#)" in recent years (2006), to clarify the many dimensions of Divinity he acknowledges. On Amazon it is advertised as follows: "Is it possible to develop an all-inclusive embrace of God, one that can satisfy scientists, philosophers, and priests at the same time? It is, teaches best-selling author Ken Wilber, if you are able to understand The 1-2-3 of God. According to this premier modern philosopher, the seemingly innumerable ways humans conceptualize God can actually be broken down into three basic perspectives." The Third Person of God is represented by the material world, which science studies and explores. The Second Person of God is the Mystery of existence, with which we can form an intimate relationship. And the First Person of God is then the Self hidden in the deepest recesses of our consciousness, which we discover through meditative practice. This approach is playful and simple to understand, but lacks the precision and the informative power of the more traditional theosophical views, in my opinion.[5]

WILBER'S CURRENT VIEW OF INVOLUTION

Be that as it may, we are after something else. What are we to make of this esoteric concept of "involution", which turns out to take such a central place—though rarely discussed and reflected on—of Wilber's philosophy? To prove my point and give you an impression of how Wilber uses this concept, I will quote below freely from his latest book *The Religion of Tomorrow* (2017):

Once involution/Efflux is complete—and blows matter into existence with the Big Bang—then the reverse process of evolution/Reflux occurs. (p. 28)

This entire movement 'outward' and 'downward' to create a universe is called involution. Plotinus referred to it as Efflux (the superabundant 'overflow' and 'outpouring' of Spirit). (p. 148)

Whatever you might think of this theory of involution/evolution, or Efflux/Reflux, it certainly solves the problems of where the Big Bang itself came from, and how higher forms manage to emerge from lower forms, a perpetual puzzle to philosophers and scientists alike. 'You can't get the higher from the lower' is a common refrain you hear when philosophers and scientists discuss this issue, but this theory takes care of that problem: the higher emerges 'out of' or 'through' the lower in evolution because it was put there in involution, which is the creation of 'the lower from the higher,' which involves no theoretical problems at all. (p. 149)

Integral Theory takes the idea of involution/evolution and reduces to a minimum the number of forms said to be created during involution (in a metaphysical realm existing prior to the Big Bang) and leaves more of their form and content to being created during evolution (after the Big Bang and in *this* realm). (p. 149)

Thus, Integral Theory postulates a bare minimum of forms and events that were created during involution and sees most forms instead as produced by the forces and processes of evolution itself, which are open to evidence and scrutiny. (p. 150)

Most of the 'metaphysical' forms of the traditionalist theory of involution/evolution are extremely strict—involution created *everything* on every level of existence: physical particles; all forms of cells, and all forms of plant life, and all forms of animal life, with all their physiological processes; all forms of human culture, and all of its products, including all types of technologies and technological products, medicines, types of architecture, forms of law, types of poetry; all the 'beings' in all the realms (gods, goddesses, asuras, devas, elemental spirits); all the books ever written; all the languages ever produced; every form of mathematics and logic; and so on and so on and so on. ALL of those were produced during involution and hidden in the higher unconscious, and evolution is nothing but an unfolding of those already created forms that are lying in our unconscious, or in Spirit, and awaiting their turn to emerge. In this view, evolution is just a rewinding of the involutory videotape—nothing comes out in evolution that wasn't put in there by and during involution. But not only more modern forms of science but higher integral forms of thinking themselves have suggested that evolution is a much more creative process than previously pictured by the traditions, and that much of what was thought to have been created by involution is actually created by and during evolution. (p. 150-1).

We only need original causal archetypes for the fundamental forms and processes that are necessary to get a universe going in the first place—things like space, time, and basic form, and instead of a specific number and types of levels of being, just one large force stretching from matter to Spirit, a force called 'Eros' and responsible for the pull of the reverse trip from matter to Spirit. Eros is a self-organizing force responsible for the ceaseless drive to higher and higher wholes, which are created by evolution itself, not involution. (p. 150)

This process is rather like what happens when one lets go of a rubber band with a rock on one end that has been stretched to its limits. The rock will, through an unpredictable swinging motion, slowly return to its original position. So too, the forms that emerge through evolution will slowly return, through all the grades of separation to Spirit itself, with the actual details of these many

unpredictable swings determined by the numerous forms, processes, and patterns created by the return swings, by evolution itself, which Erich Jantsch defined as 'self-organization through self-transcendence,' an excellent definition. We don't *need* involution to create all these forms; evolution can do it itself—and this theory is one that can be accepted by modernity and postmodernity. (p. 151)

This Eros, or evolutionary drive, when combined with fundamental forms like the 4 quadrants, the form of holons, and space-time itself, creates a 'transcend-and-include' movement to ever-higher, ever-more conscious, ever-more complex holonic forms—interior and exterior, individual and collective—from matter through life through mind through soul to Spirit itself. The original force in the stretching of the rubber band (an 'involutionary given') will provide all the force required to create the different characteristics (forms on all the different levels) of each swing of the returning rock. (p. 151)

Thus you don't need to postulate such pre-given, eternally fixed, meta-physical elements anyway—whatever the phenomena are, evolution could have produced them just as easily as involution, but without all the metaphysical ontologies and otherwise unprovable assumptions. (p. 152)

Taking a bird's eye view of Wilber's oeuvre through the past decades, we see the following.

First, Wilber creates a straw man of the traditional view of involution. He never gives sources or examples, as usual, but plainly states that traditionalist sources have been very "strict" in stating that everything that has emerged, or *can* emerge, in evolution, must have been present in some form during involution—including physical particles, biological life and cultural productions (even to the level of computers, cellphones and iPhones. And since no mystic has ever spotted iPhones in his introspection, according to Wilber this strong version of involution can't possibly be true. A truly weird argumentation!). I don't think that anybody holding on to a notion of involution in past or recent times have ever believed such a thing.[6]

But Wilber needs this view-held-by-nobody to be able to then present his own, "up to date" version of the involution doctrine, which supposedly is acceptable to modern or postmodern ears because it has stripped away all of the metaphysical baggage, to retain only one simple tenet:

We only need... just one large force stretching from matter to Spirit, a force called 'Eros' and responsible for the pull of the reverse trip from matter to Spirit.

This "one large force", however, will never be acceptable to modernity or postmodernity. It is just a question-begging, sanitized version of "God-did-it". It lacks any precision or specification (where is this force active?, how strong or weak is it actually? why does it seem to fail on planets other than our Earth, with its life-friendly geological and atmospheric conditions?, etcetera, etcetera) to be able to compete with the more conventional four forces of nature. Wilber believes that the modern mind can accept the idea that evolution shows an increasing trends towards higher stages of complexity and consciousness, but the mechanism behind this (even if the general trend might be accepted) is hotly debated.



The Lankavatara sutra from Dunhuang

Secondly, for Wilber involution seems to be related primarily to the creation of the cosmos, up to the level of the Big Bang and the genesis of all the subatomic particles, instead of being just one element of the cosmic puzzle. This can be confusing, for his terminology is often psychological: Spirit creates soul, which creates mind, which creates life, which ultimately creates matter. His main source here is the famous Buddhist [Lankavatara Sutra](#), a sutra of Mahayana Buddhism. Wikipedia: "The Lankavatara Sutra describes the various tiers of consciousness in the individual, culminating in the tathagatagarbha (womb of the Buddhas) or "storehouse consciousness" (Skt. Alayavijñana), which is the base of the individual's deepest awareness and his tie to the cosmic." This confusion of psychological and cosmological dimensions (Wilber would most probably prefer to say "integration") is typical for

his writings. So besides providing the necessary "engine behind evolution", the concept of involution also offers to Wilber an "explanation" for how the physical cosmos came into existence—not a line of thought scientists would want to pursue.

And thirdly, the key argument he gives for rejecting most of the traditional notions of involution—leaving aside for the moment the question if these notions were ever held by anyone—is both interesting and revealing: we don't need involution to explain all these evolutionary emergences, he assures us, because

... not only more modern forms of science but higher integral forms of thinking themselves have suggested that evolution is a much more creative process than previously pictured by the traditions, and that much of what was thought to have been created by involution is actually created by and during evolution.

Now this is really ironic, but also somewhat disingenuous, for *these very same modern forms of science have found out that it doesn't take such a force of Eros* to explain any of the diversity of life! Why not take a second, and decisive step and, after stripping involution of much of its metaphysical baggage, also do away with this "[skyhook](#)" (Dennett) of Eros which supposedly explains evolutionary complexity, but does nothing of the kind? These "higher integral forms of thinking" may have finally become aware of the creativity of the evolutionary process—for a true explanation of this diversity it still needs to listen to *and learn from science*.

But, what gimmick is this rubber-band theory of involution and evolution, that pulls us back to where we came from? How far can you get from a viewpoint that is "open to evidence and scrutiny"? If Wilber has proven one thing in his dealings with science (and [evolutionary theory in particular](#)) it is that he could not care less about the struggles of science to discover the laws of reality, as long as they confirm his pre-conceived notions of a cosmic and evolutionary Spirit. Will it seriously be considered as theoretical progress, if we proclaim that [the origin of subatomic particles](#) can be explained because they have been laid down by involution? Will that satisfy anybody working at CERN? A solution, no less, "which involves no theoretical problems at all." Seriously?

Still, Ken Wilber means serious business when he introduces the concept of Eros—one only wonders what he means by "theory":

Modern science now believes that evolution touches essentially everything in existence (even though it is lagging behind theoretically on exactly how to explain this)..

You can even see evolution as driven by "Spirit-in-action," which I think is the only theory that can actually explain the mysteries of evolution satisfactorily. (p. 14)

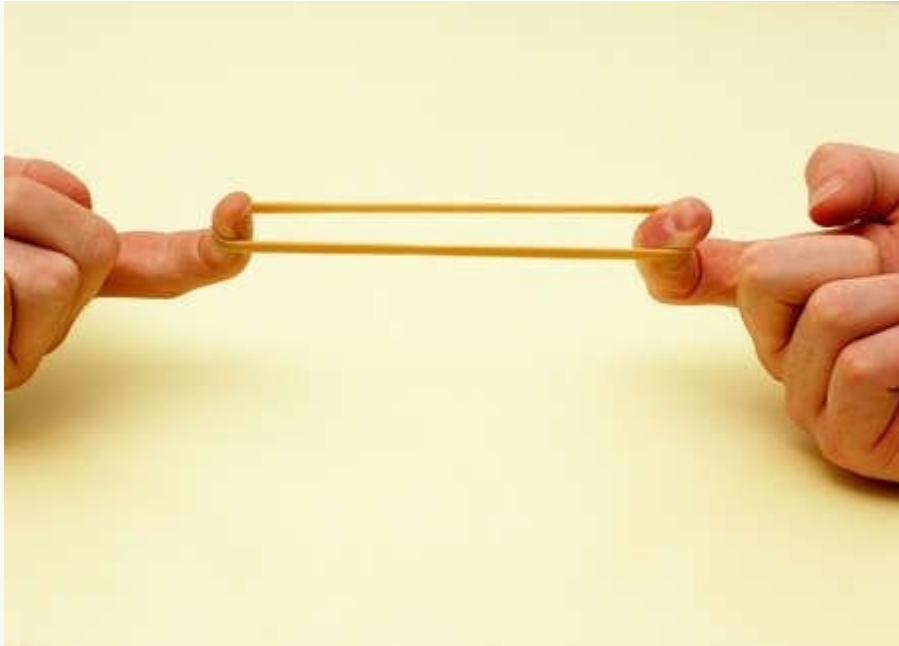
This is in my opinion the real problem. Wilber proclaims confidently,

'You can't get the higher from the lower' is a common refrain you hear when philosophers and scientists discuss this issue. (p. 149)

I am afraid Wilber hasn't really listened to what philosophers and scientists are saying and doing, when they struggle to understand the facts of physical and biological reality. He must be hearing *his own opinions*, as he has consistently expressed them now for over forty years of writing.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, Ken Wilber claims, as expressed in his latest book *The Religion of Tomorrow*—but effectively since many decades—that, to explain evolution (and mind you: that is the original goal of all this traditional and modern reflection), we no longer need the *strong involution* claims of the traditions, but we still need some sort of *weak involution* model, including the "upward pull" of Eros. Science, by contrast, claims we need nothing of the kind, because that approach is completely question-begging. Carbon and Oxygen were not somehow "in the works" the moment that still only Hydrogen existed. Nor were plants, animals or humans. Nor computers, cellphones and iPhones. The involution/evolution model is therefore a completely outdated way of explaining what happens during biological and cultural evolution.[7]



"I think of involution, then, along the analogy of a rubber band."

NOTES

[1] This view is contested brilliantly in: Lawrence Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why is There Something Rather than Nothing*, Free Press, 2012. It seems our notions of "nothing" have evolved quite a lot since the theological times.

[2] A good anti-dote to Ken Wilber's broad-brush anti-reductionistic agenda is Daniel Dennett's *From Bacteria to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds* (W. W. Norton, 2017), in which he explains this difference between asking "what is it for" and "how did it get there." He gives an interesting treatment of the role played by purpose in evolution, and steers a middle course between those who take apparent purpose as proof of creation, and those who want to ban all purpose-talk from biology. According to Dennett, purpose *evolves*, and we can often take an "intentional stance" towards biological organisms, as if they know exactly that they are doing—which according to Dennett is most often definitely not the case: they show "competence without comprehension". But that's for another essay.

[3] Please note that when writing this book, during the years 1997-1999, I myself was a staunch believer in the esoteric/occult view of the world, about which I had written the book *Seven Spheres* (1995). At that time, I literally knew *nothing* about what

evolution means in the scientific sense (the 2009 Darwin year changed that completely). I had even used this particular esoteric perspective to critically evaluate these more obscure aspects of Wilber's integral philosophy. In the next two decades, after deeply researching the field of evolutionary theory, I reached a tipping point and changed my mind, and worldview—contrary to Ken Wilber—about the nature of evolution. From then on, I have criticized Wilber on many occasions for his [misunderstanding of evolution](#).

The reader may judge for him- or herself what is more valuable: to be consistent over four decades, like Ken Wilber, when it comes to evolution (and involution), or to change one's mind when confronted with empirical evidence, as in my own case.

[4] Those interested in these esoteric teaching can still consult some online chapters of my book *Seven Spheres on Integral World*: "[Spheres upon Spheres](#)", "[Three Models of Immortality](#)" and "[Reincarnation and the Spheres](#)"

[5] Wilber's first (*The Spectrum of Consciousness*, 1977) and third book (*The Atman Project*, 1980) were published by The Theosophical Publishing house as Quest Books. The ideological affinity between Theosophy and Ken Wilber is still something to be documented in more detail.

[6] In the Theosophical tradition, for example—which I know best and is the most detailed in this respect—involution is seen as a preparatory stage, in which the materials are "woven" that are used during evolution by the various "kingdoms" of minerals, plants, animals and humans to form their bodies (both physical and subtle). Spiritual monads—the smallest units of consciousness—are attached to matter during this involutory process, but slumber during eons of time until evolution has proceeded enough for them to take ownership of physical (and more subtle) bodies.

As Annie Besant writes in *A Study in Consciousness: A Contribution to the Science of Psychology* (1904) about this process: "In the upward sweep [of evolution] we shall find that bodies are built out of the matter thus prepared." (p. 59). In the same book we find the statement so characteristic of all these "spiritual evolutionists": "It is this involution of Spirit which

makes evolution possible." (p. 18). More detailed information about this world view can be found in the compilatory work A. E. Powell, *The Causal Body and the Ego* (1928). From which: "All this downward sweep of the life-wave through the planes, giving qualities to the many grades of matter, is a preparation for evolution, and is often, and more properly, called *involution*." (p. 19)

[7] *The Religion of Tomorrow*, which runs to 806 pages, contains of course much more than I discussed in this brief essay, which discusses only one foundational integral concept. It is also a very *technical* book, and I mean that as a compliment. When Wilber sticks to what he knows best—the intricacies of the psycho-spiritual domains, their pathologies and remedies—his writing is interesting, truly original and sometimes even inspiring. But when he touches on the wider fields of science or metaphysics—"the universe according to Wilber"—I am no longer on board. A truly post-metaphysical spirituality covers the mystical states and stages of consciousness human beings are capable of. That's all well and fine. But we shouldn't draw any far reaching conclusions from these experiences to "how the world as we know it came about", for that would be asking too much of a map of human consciousness and culture.

Reflections on "The Religion of Tomorrow", Part II

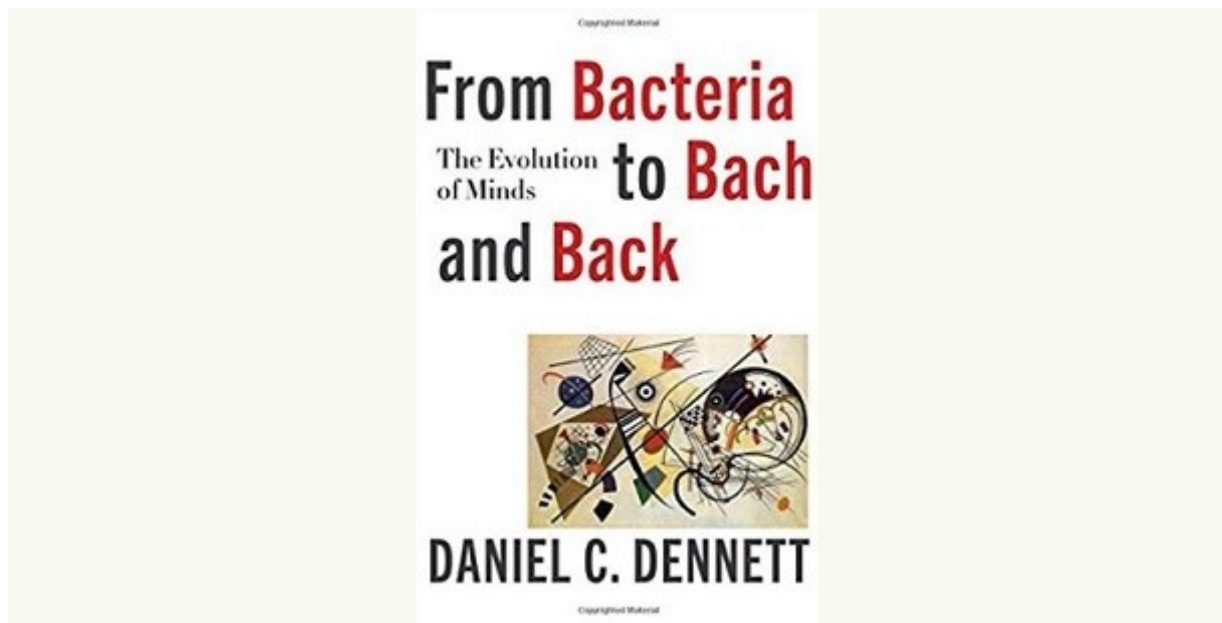
FROM ATOM TO ATMAN

Ken Wilber's Religious View of Evolution

FRANK VISSER

Do we have a common ground here between a religious or a scientific view of evolution, in that both see a trend towards greater complexity?

Ken Wilber's latest book [*The Religion of Tomorrow*](#) (2017) argues, again, for a religious view of evolution. Cosmic evolution is driven by "the Spirit of Evolution" which he prefers to call "Eros": a cosmic drive towards complexity, consciousness and compassion. This view is completely at odds with the standard scientific view of evolution, which doesn't invoke such higher powers to understand why things have evolved in the first place. Does it matter which view we choose? Are there good reasons to believe in this religious view? In Wilber's mystical worldview, Spirit is not only behind every process in nature and culture, but It can be experienced, merged and identified with by the advanced meditator as the "Supreme Identity", the "Ground of Being", "Atman", "what was there before the Big Bang". This constitutes for him a "proof of God", unavailable to rational philosophy or empirical science. These are quite extraordinary claims, that need to be assessed with a sober mind.



An interesting way to do this is by comparing and contrasting Wilber's latest literary production with the approach (I would almost say "spirit") of a similar book from the science field: Daniel Dennett's [From Bacteria to Bach and Back](#) (2017). For over 50 years this arch-reductionist (in integral circles the usual put-down) or ultra-Darwinist (which he would take as a compliment) has tried to explain consciousness and evolution on naturalistic terms.[1] By way of playful contrast we could call Wilber's view of evolution "From Atom to Atman", given his preference for Eastern philosophies and also because one of his first books on developmental psychology was called *The Atman Project* (1980). Though Wilber doesn't use the term "Atman" that much these days, the notion of a spiritual background behind natural and cultural evolution has never been absent from his writings. Given the fact that Wilber is a believer in involution—implying that we have come from Spirit and will return to It some time[2]—the proper phrase would even be "From Atman to Atom and Back." (first comes involution, followed by evolution) Another favorite phrase Wilber is fond of using is "from dirt to Divinity", another nice alliteration.[3]

A few years ago, in an introductory talk at the third Integral Spiritual Experience Seminar ("[Kosmic Creativity](#)", held December 28th, 2011 - January 1st, 2012), Wilber made a rather "accommodationist" comment when briefly, and casually, discussing the genesis of the elements, from Hydrogen to the

heavier elements, and the possible role played by spiritual factors in this cosmic process:

Whether we see this in a spiritual way or in a more material way, the fact is there is creative emergence. There is evolution. Going all the way back to the earliest particles or strings or whatever physics is suggesting...

Ken Wilber is of course not a physicist or a chemist. But it is obvious that these examples serve a didactic function in the context of such a spiritual seminar. His message is: even science is on board if you look at it through a spiritual lens.[4]

Does it not really matter what the *actual mechanism* of evolution is? Do we have a common ground here between a religious or a scientific view of evolution, in that both see a trend towards greater complexity? Wilber seems to hint at this in the following passage from *The Religion of Tomorrow*:

Given this overall, absolutely unmistakable direction to greater and greater wholeness, greater and greater sensitivity, greater and greater consciousness—whether this is an inherent tendency of the universe itself *or the product of chance and necessity doesn't matter*, just look where it is obviously headed! (to more of the same, surely, with something like a superhuman Supermind looming on our collective horizon, whispering into our ears, "Just keep coming, the Kingdom is at hand")—how can we doubt the simple record of what Whitehead calls "the creative advance into novelty," with each new creative step pushing more and more in this utterly obvious direction? (p. 246) [4] (emphasis added)

However, the difference between a religious or a scientific view of the cosmos seems stark and unbridgeable. It is between a caring and even compassionate universe on the one hand, and a cold, indifferent universe on the other.[5] To some, the scientific worldview is depressing and without meaning. But is it really relevant for our discussion that the religious view of evolution provides meaning and comfort (after all: we are heading towards Omega!), whereas the scientific view comes across as meaningless and depressing? Is the universe really full of intelligence, as Wilber claims,

[T]he universe certainly has being, and it certainly has intelligence and there's no reason whatsoever it can't be approached as such... Moreover, just thinking of the trillions of choices that went into the unfolding of evolution at large is to realize the staggering Intelligence that is present in the being of this universe (if nothing else, simply as the self-organizing and self-transcending

drive of Eros, or Spirit-in-action), and to realize that you can approach that Intelligence and directly resonate with it is a profound and powerful spiritual path." (p. 172-3)

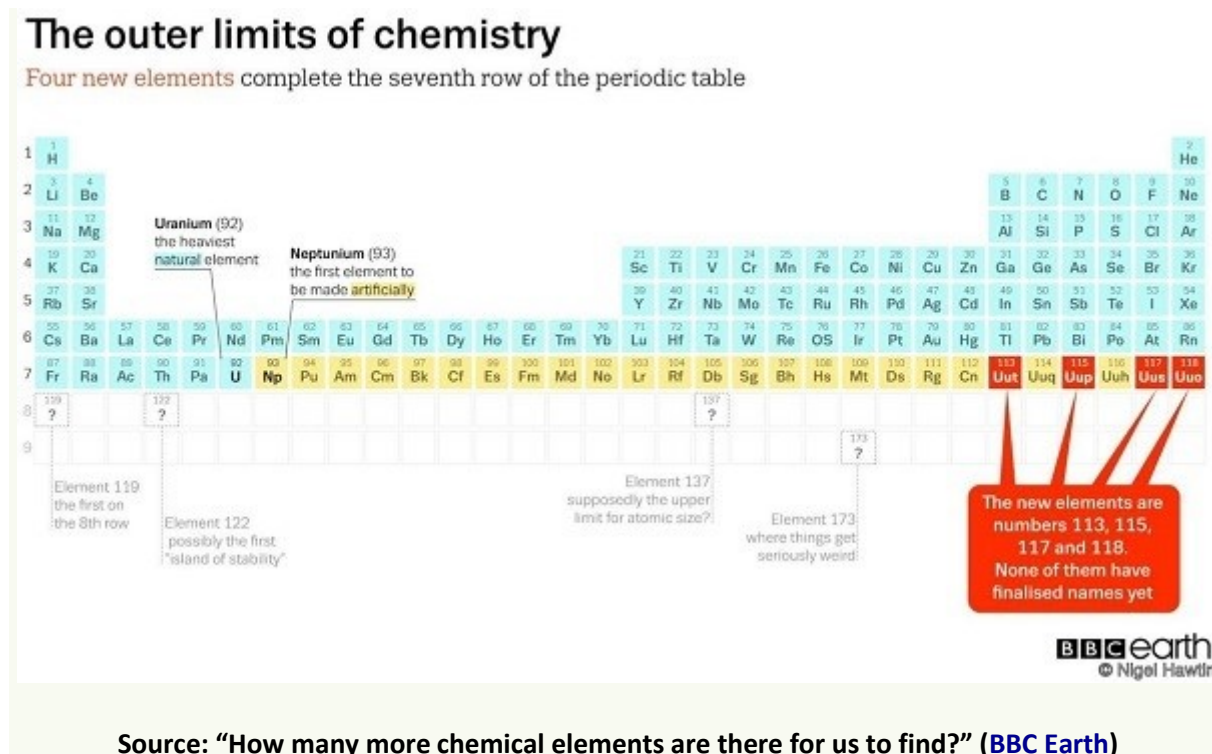
This quote breathes a strange, inflated type of reasoning: "certainly... certainly... no reason whatsoever..." And has cosmic "evolution at large" really been a matter of "choices"? This is all very debatable, and should be debated instead of preached to the converted. And that Intelligence is also "staggering"? Downgrading this lofty spiritual vision to a more mundane one, supposedly acceptable to modernity and postmodernity, Wilber uses phraseology like "simply as the self-organizing and self-transcending drive of Eros, or Spirit-in-action". How "simply" is that exactly? The existence of such a drive, even among complexity scientists, is by far not a done deal. Actually, self-organization is one of these concepts that Wilber has co-opted to promote his spiritual vision of the universe and to give it some scientific standing.

CASE STUDY: THE GENESIS OF THE ELEMENTS

Actually, since we're talking about atoms and particles ("or whatever physics is suggesting"), the question of the genesis of the elements (Hydrogen, Oxygen, Uranium etc.) is a good case in point to differentiate the religious from the scientific worldview. In *The Religion of Tomorrow* Wilber often claims that his model has relevance "all the way back to be Big Bang" and even before that moment in time, given his belief in involution.[2] Briefly, he suggests that subatomic particles have been laid down by involution, thereby reaching it's lowest point, upon which the upward process of evolution takes over and creates all the different elements in nature.

A layman would have no clue about the question why we have so many elements. Recently, four new elements have even been created by scientists, bring the total number of elements to 118). The seventh row of the Periodic Table has been filled up, and some think that this completes our search. Others expect there could be even heavier elements, but they would be very unstable. Even more intriguing: going further down that road of finding new elements, we could encounter "islands of stability" (around hypothetical element #122), full of elements that are more stable than their predecessors. When finally hypothetical

element #173 is reached, we will enter an area "where things get seriously weird"—a fine understatement.



Source: "How many more chemical elements are there for us to find?" (BBC Earth)

What matters is that this whole question of how the elements we know of were formed at the time of the Big Bang, during our cosmic history, or were created in recent decades by ourselves(!), has been a fascinating tale of human perseverance and ingenuity. The excitement and joy of discovery is completely absent in the spiritual view of things: in Wilber's universe novelty can't arise unless introduced by Spirit or Eros. Yes, from Hydrogen to Ununoctium (element #118), we can see some kind of transcendence in progress, even following Wilber's beloved "transcend-and-include" pattern, where heavier elements "include" lighter elements by adding electron shells and adding neutrons. But this abstract understanding should never be mistaken for a true scientific model. This sequence is not driven by a single do-it-all Force (though in most cases, the best candidate would be gravity anyways).

In fact, the scientific model of the genesis of the elements is *much more interesting*. In general, they were cooked due to gravitational compression in the core of exploding stars, but even here there is not a simple gradual and step-wise process. Some elements even have multiple sources of origin. Some new

elements were even created by atomic bomb explosions. There has been even a kind of arms race between the US and Russia about who were the first to create (and name) the new super-heavy artificial elements. The different natural processes that lead to the formation of elements are: ([Wikipedia on Nucleosynthesis](#)):

1. Big Bang fusion
2. Cosmic ray fission
3. Dying low-mass stars
4. Merging neutron stars
5. Exploding massive stars
6. Exploding white dwarfs

So how does, at the level of the elements, complexity in the natural world arise? Through natural processes that are well understood, not through a cosmic "drive towards complexity" or Eros. Suggesting otherwise is bad poetry.[6]

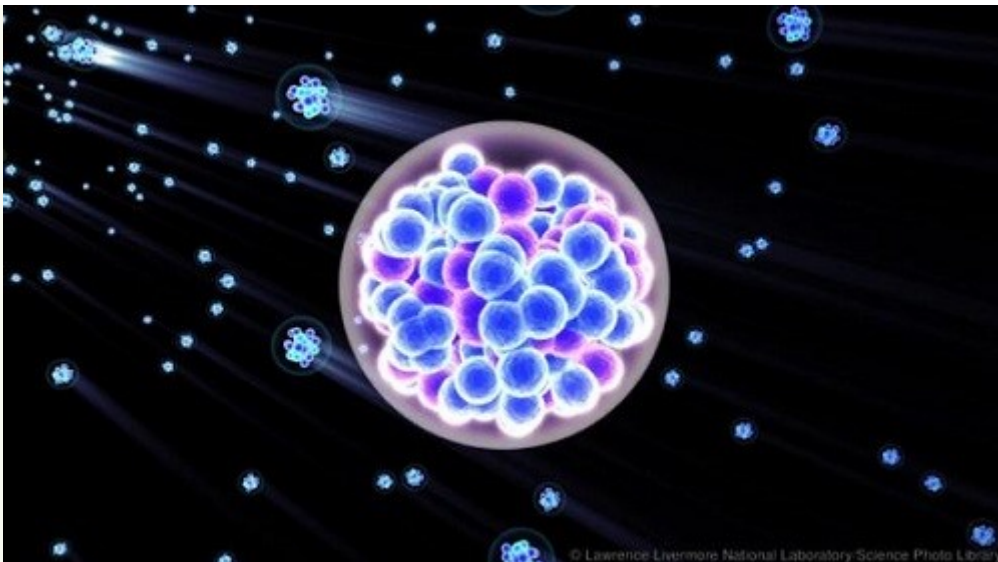
I am bring this up because in his book, Wilber claims *the deepest possible insight* into world processes. In his model of spiritual development, we get presented with many lofty spiritual structures and states of consciousness—the so-called "supra-integral structure-stages: para-mind, meta-mind, Overmind—culminating in the stage of Supermind. In the highest stages, one not only "knows" things, but *sees* them, *feels* them, *is-one-with* them. About this Supermind stage, "the highest structure of consciousness yet to begin to emerge", Wilber tells us, apparently from experience:

Supermind, at this point in evolution, seems to be the highest structure of consciousness yet to begin to emerge, and it is combined with the highest state of consciousness yet to emerge (nondual Suchness). The result is a seeing/feeling/witnessing/being interwoven stream of Whole after Whole after Whole after Whole, which instantaneously present themselves to the mind's eye, or nondual Awakened Awareness, in a spontaneous, effortless, dynamic fashion—while Supermind is also able to concentrate on individual particulars at any point, and to do so in the timeless Now, while also including the entire history of a holon all the way back to the Big Bang. All of this is a constant feature of Supermind consciousness—the entire Kosmos is aware of the entire Kosmos, in the Kosmos, through the Kosmos, as the Kosmos. (p. 214-5)

He doesn't say so explicitly, but Wilber pretends to speak to us from that spiritual domain. Why, then, I would ask, is he not

able to tell us *one interesting thing* about how the elements were formed? "Supermind is also able to concentrate on individual particulars at any point." What's the point of claiming deeper insight, when it never gets beyond these abstractions? And this is still only the *lowest* level of complexity!

Wilber's claims to knowledge go even beyond this—if that can even be imagined. Advanced meditators, he believes, will be able to contact the deepest levels of Reality, Emptiness, Suchness, Godhead, Brahman, Spirit—or whatever term we prefer. Isn't that a little bit *over the top*? It is true that the spiritual traditions of the world were full of this God-talk: the Supreme Identity, Godhead, Brahman, Tao, the Absolute, etcetera. But are we justified in seeing this as legitimate claims to knowledge based on introspection of a handful of individuals? How likely is that? What did the mystics of the past actually *know* about the cosmos they lived in, when they looked up to the starry sky at night? Is "what happened before the Big Bang" really a domain you want to enter into with your timeless I AM-awareness? I am sure they found a lot of interesting details about the workings of human consciousness, but outside that domain?



The nucleus of element 117 (Credit: Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory/Science Photo Library)

THE CROSSROADS WE ARE AT NOW

The matter at hand is, which type of knowledge is more valid? Which strategic approach to solving nature's mysteries should we follow? Are we justified in postulating a cosmic Eros at work in natural and cultural evolution? Or should we take a more modest and agnostic position, and try to work our way through the details of reality without such a pre-conceived "solution"? For me, the second option is both more honest *and* informative. Both views have their riddles and proposed solutions.

As I wrote earlier in an earlier essay, "[Some Paradoxes of Evolution](#)"[7], this is the crossroads we stand at:

If there's a driving Force behind all of evolutionary life, as spiritualists like Ken Wilber ("Eros in the Kosmos") and Andrew Cohen ("the God impulse") argue, the burning question then becomes: why didn't *everything* evolve? Why only some species? For example, why didn't all fish go onto the land, if that was such a good design-idea? Was this Force not strong enough to influence all of life? Or was it directed towards only some of the species around? This doesn't seem a very plausible scenario, unless one wants to believe in some updated form of creationism.

But if there isn't such a Force, as science holds, the opposite question arises: how did *anything* evolve at all? Why did only some species evolve towards higher complexity? Natural selection seems to explain this. But even if evolution through natural selection (for eukaryotes) is true, why didn't bacteria go down that road? Apparently, they did not evolve because the natural barriers are too high. Only the symbiosis of bacteria and primitive unicellular organisms managed to take that barrier.

Or put differently, from my ITC paper "[The Spirit of Evolution Reconsidered](#)", in an endnote[8]:

[4] Also, the scientific or "reductionistic" view of evolution is best seen as a Null-hypothesis:

The apparent design in nature can be explained without invoking some kind of Designer [Read: Spirit, Logos, Eros, Force, Power, Mind, God]. (Visser 2009a)

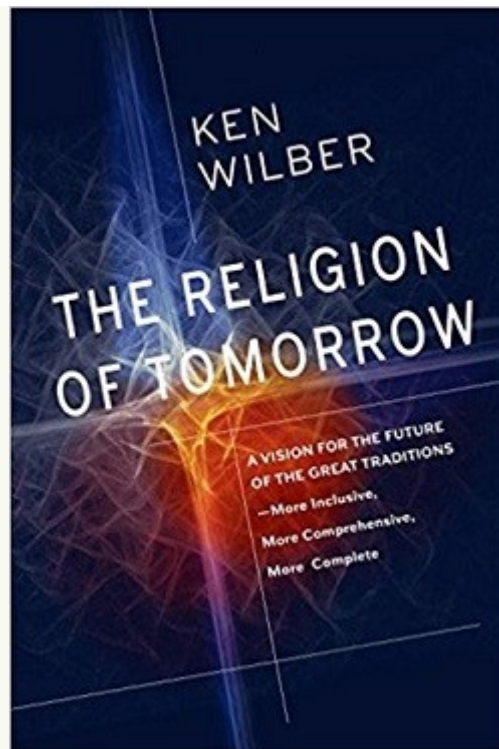
This Null-hypothesis has to be tested thoroughly, before we turn to an alternative hypothesis, as formulated by Wilber, on various occasions:

[T]he strict theory of natural selection suffers from not acknowledging the role played by Spirit in evolution. (Wilber 1983: 205).

The proper approach should be to present the scientific, "reductionistic" view on evolution as strongly as possible. Unfortunately, in Wilber's writings this is far from the case. Two mistakes can be made here: (1) the Null hypothesis is never rejected and (2) the Null hypothesis is rejected too soon. Ken Wilber seems to be guilty of the second mistake.

Integral students have responded to the above train of thought in several different ways. Some were very clear about this: integral philosophy doesn't *need* any Eros in the Kosmos, it can manage very well with the core concepts of AQAL (quadrants, levels, lines, types, the self, pathology, therapy, etc.), without this religious superstructure. Taking this pragmatic, this-worldly approach is something I can understand, given the problems an Eros-guided universe introduces. That does raise the question about the consistency of Wilber's integral philosophy. However, to my mind, the spiritual dimension has been an integral (pun intended) part of Wilber's writing from his very first book, four decades ago by now. Others have defended Wilber against my "flatland" objections by pointing to other fields of knowledge that should be taken into account before closing the accounts on evolution: introspection, phenomenology, systems theory etc. I have never found these defenses defensible. The assumption behind it is that we understand something only when "we take everything into account". That, however is exactly what Wilber claims to have done, looking at the facts of evolution "from on high". The results are not at all promising.

Exploring a scientific, "reductionistic" approach to evolution and the bigger questions of life and mind, Daniel Dennett has presented a summary of half a century of dedicated thought in his *From Bacteria to Bach and Back* (2017). We are entering completely different territory here. No arguments by proclamation, but subtle approaches, retractions and new, fresh approaches can be found here. Dennett provides a healthy antidote to Wilber's airy-fairy musings. Here, we are with both feet on the ground. Here, large scale evolution towards complexity is not denied, but the *mechanism* behind all idealistic mind-first explanations is contested and brilliantly exposed as empty. We see the blind spot in Wilber's scheme of the world exposed here with great clarity. Dennett argues for a close look at *how things have come about* during evolution, even if that goes against our deeply cherished notions of who and what we are (by getting a feel for "how come" vs "what for" questions).



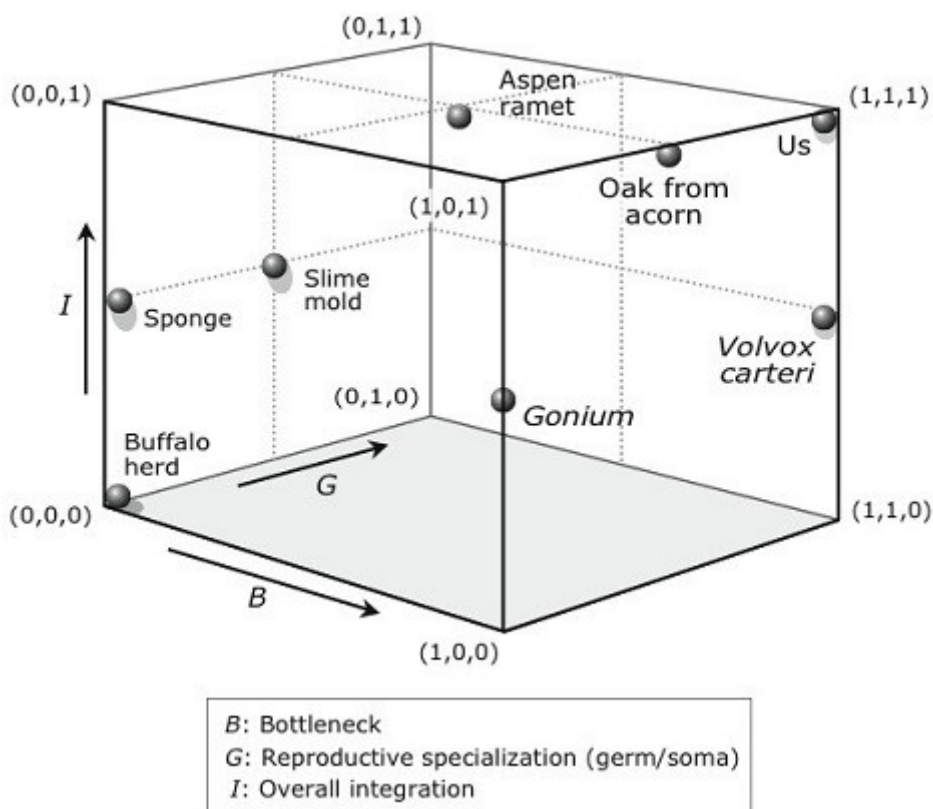
Hardcover, Shambhala, 2017, 806 pages.

Where Wilber caters to the "creationist sentiments" of lay people ("we went from Hydrogen to humans—isn't that astonishing? Isn't it obvious *something* must have guided this process?"), Dennett is content not to know everything, but delights in thinking of ways to tackle and solve the intricate problems of nature. What is more, he is one of the few philosophers who sees merit in applying the *meme* concept to various problems of culture. Ironically, Wilber has adopted the value-meme concept from Spiral Dynamics, but both of these knowledge communities seem to have ignored where the meme concept comes from: the much dreaded reductionist Richard Dawkins. Dennett explores many aspects of this idea, and devoted a separate chapter to the many types of criticism the meme concept has received over the years. Ken Wilber, who changed the [color-scheme](#) he originally adopted from Spiral Dynamics ("it is totally off, according to the Tantric traditions", he now says on p. 692), seems more interested in demarcating his particular interpretation of the value-memes (with some new colors) from those of Spiral Dynamics, claiming to have the better system now, because... it matches the colors of the rainbow (seriously),

The order of colors is important for the traditional psychologies, because each level is said to correspond to a subtle energy, which can also be found in nature, such as in a rainbow, so the order of the colors of levels of altitude, unlike those used by Spiral Dynamics, should match the order found in a rainbow. (p. 349)[9]

That's exactly what I mean, such a difference in spirit: explaining the spiritual doctrines from on high or exploring the mysteries of nature with a genuine eye for detail. Especially Dennett's references to philosopher of biology [Peter Godfrey's](#) "Darwinian Spaces" is tantalizing in their applicability for both gene and meme worlds in nature and culture.[9] Integralists will shout "Reductionism!" and "Quadrant Absolutism!", but given these professional treatments of evolution, Wilberian customary put downs against neo-Darwinism, which occur in *The Religion of Tomorrow* on several pages ("unlikely", p. 217, and even "moronic", p. 219), it is not difficult to choose for expertise when it comes to the topic of evolution.

We don't need a top-heavy, top-down approach from on high but an empirically sensitive bottom-up approach to find out how we got Here from There.



NOTES

[1] Frank Visser, "[Eros as Skyhook: Ken Wilber Meets Daniel Dennett](#)", www.integralworld.net

[2] Frank Visser, "[The involution/evolution cosmology: Ken Wilber Holds On to an Outdated Scheme of Existence](#)", www.integralworld.net

[3] Frank Visser, "'[From Dirt to Divinity](#)': Ken Wilber's pre-Darwinian Understanding of Evolution", www.integralworld.net

[4] Frank Visser, "[Heavy Elements: Why Integral Physics is Lost in Space](#)", www.integralworld.net

[5] According to science, we literally live in a cold universe: the average temperature in the cosmos is a few degrees above absolute zero, or 3 degrees Kelvin—which translates to minus 270.45 Celsius or minus 457.87 degrees Fahrenheit). Who said the cosmos is "fine tuned for life"?

[6] The whole story, with all its surprising twists and turns, can be found in: Marcus Choun, [The Magic Furnace: The Search for the Origin of Atoms](#) (Vintage, 2000)

[7] Frank Visser, "[Some Paradoxes of Evolution](#)", www.integralworld.net

[8] Frank Visser, "[The 'Spirit of Evolution' Reconsidered: Relating Ken Wilber's view of spiritual evolution to the current evolution debates](#)", Paper presented at the Integral Theory Conference 2010, Saturday, July 31st, 2010 - John F. Kennedy University, San Francisco (Honorable Mention Paper in the Category Constructive Criticism).

[9] If we follow that train of rainbow-talk and tie together the systems of yoga-psychology, Wilber and Spiral Dynamics, we get the following picture. Strangely, the color YELLOW seems missing from Wilber's color-palette, and the reddish colors get an extraordinary amount of emphasis ("totally off, anyone?").

See also: Frank Visser, "[A More Adequate Spectrum of Colors?](#)",
www.integralworld.net, June 2017

[10] Daniel Dennett, [Homunuli Rule: Reflections on Darwinian populations and natural selection by Peter Godfrey Smith](#), *Biol. Philos.*, 2010, available from Dennett's website.

A MORE ADEQUATE SPECTRUM OF COLORS?

A Comparison of Color Terminology in Chakra-
Psychology,
Integral Theory and Spiral Dynamics

FRANK VISSER

The primary colors Yellow and Blue are absent, and Reddish colors are way too prominent, in Ken Wilber's new color scheme.

In [Integral Psychology](#) (2000) Ken Wilber introduced the color-scheme of Spiral Dynamics (SD) to his readers, shortly after having discovered it as a practical and appealing developmental model. It provided him a neutral terminology to refer to complex developmental stage descriptions such as "concrete-operational" or "post-postformal thought". Spiral Dynamics grew out of the work of [Clare Graves](#), a contemporary of Abraham Maslow, who devised a developmental model of values and worldviews, closely matching the more well-known Maslovian, but stressing our value-needs and expressions. In Maslow's model of self-actualization, the stages could be grouped into two sub-divisions. The first four (physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs and esteem needs) were called "deficiency" or "D-needs". The last one (self-actualization needs) were called "growth or being" or "B-needs".[1] This division between groups of stages was reflected in Grave's model as the first six so-called "First-Tier" stages, to be followed by two so-called "Second-Tier" stages. Crossing this divide was presented in a magazine article as "a momentuous leap." [2]

The model was taken up and expanded by [Don Beck](#) and the late Chris Cowan in [Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership](#)

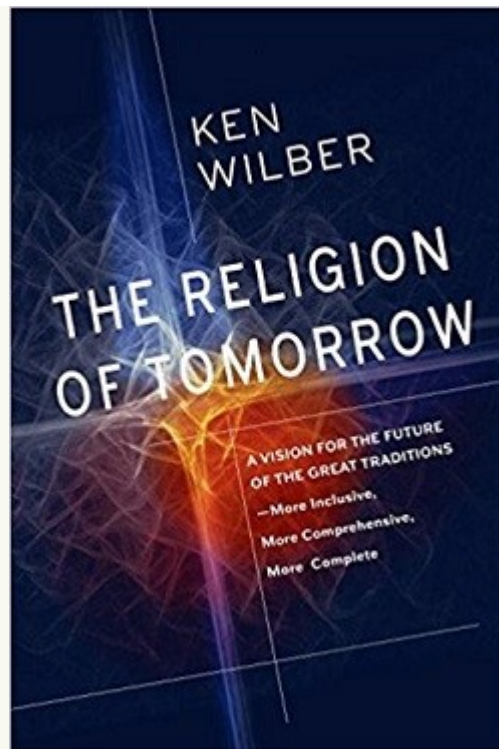
[and Change](#) (1996). Most important, they replaced Graves' abstract stage descriptions (such as G-T or F-S) with easy to remember colors (see), using insights from color psychology.[3]:

1. **BEIGE** — savannah grasslands where early hominids lived
2. **PURPLE** — a color of royalty and chiefs
3. **RED** — hot emotion and bloody excitement
4. **BLUE** — heavens above, blue-bloods, and “true blue” loyalty
5. **ORANGE** — the color of industrial age furnaces at work
6. **GREEN** — eco-consciousness and naturalistic approaches
7. **YELLOW** — solar energy and post-industrial new technologies
8. **TURQUOISE** — the color of earth seen from a meta-level (like the moon) — a holistic living system

An important clarification is given on spiraldynamics.org:

"While there was a loose metaphor behind the colors to make them memorable, Cowan *didn't intend any metaphysical significance or derive the colors from chakras or any other system* . The ordering was deliberately picked to *differ from the visible light spectrum* , though we've received complaints now and then from literal-minded folks asking if we can recognize a rainbow when we see one. The express-the-self systems (odd numbers) got warm colors—beige, red, orange, yellow, coral, etc. The sacrifice/deny-the-self systems were all assigned cool colors—purple, blue, green turquoise, etc." (emphasis added) [4]

Don Beck and Wilber met around 2000 and started a collaboration, which resulted in "[Spiral Dynamics Integral](#) " or SDi. Through Wilber's books the concepts behind Spiral Dynamic could reach a wider public. The system became wildly popular among integral students, and *color-talk* would become the *lingua franca* of the integral community for many years to come. Concepts like BLUE or ORANGE or GREEN as short-hand for the premodern, modern and postmodern segments of society, and YELLOW for the upcoming Integral culture, spread quickly, causing those not in the know to wonder what secret society the Integral Institute had become.



Hardcover, Shambhala, 2017, 806 pages.

Both Wilber and Beck agreed that crossing the divide from First to Second Tier (i.e. to the YELLOW stage) would make a huge difference for society. They shared strong opinions on the "Mean Green Meme", which supposedly prevented this emergence of the first of the integral stages because of its pervasive relativism. Cowan, however, resisted strongly the Wilberian re-interpretation of SD-concepts; where Beck saw opportunities for embedding the SD-model in the larger developmental framework of Integral Theory. After a few years, however, Beck and Wilber split over some conceptual disagreements (or other non-transparent reasons).

In *Integral Spirituality* (2006) Wilber presented a "reformed" SD-model. He had dropped half of the SD-colors from his scheme and had introduced some new ones—without much justification or explanation. For example, BLUE was out, as was YELLOW, which were replaced by AMBER and TEAL. If you hear a lot these days about "Teal organizations", this is where that expression comes from.[5] This effectively created two different color-dialects, and quite some confusion, among color-coding enthusiasts, who no longer spoke the same language. To my knowledge, not many studies have been written about this

revision of Spiral Dynamics by Wilber—from either side of the fence.

SPIRAL DYNAMICS RECOLORED

In his latest book [*The Religion of Tomorrow*](#) (2017), Wilber gives at least a partial explanation for why he changed (some of) the colors in the color-scheme of Spiral Dynamics. He writes:

As more and more research is done into "energy medicine" and "subtle energies," machines evoking various levels will be based, in some cases, on directly eliciting a particular level of consciousness by resonating with a particular color; it's therefore very important that these colors are in the correct order if we are to elicit the levels we actually want. Spiral Dynamics also uses colors for its 6-to-8 basic levels in the values line, but its color assignments are totally off according to the tantric traditions...

With *Integral Spirituality*, *The Integral Vision*, the eBook *The Fourth Turning*, and so on, I explicitly introduced a more adequate spectrum of colors that match a real rainbow—and thus, according to Tantra, more accurately match the actual energies at these various levels of development. (p. 692)

This argument requires some investigation into the why and how of colors within the Spiral Dynamics framework. It also warrants a close comparison of Wilber's new colors and those in use in yogic and tantric chakra-psychology texts. My purpose is not to argue for either one of these systems, but only to see if Wilber's claim to have "a more adequate spectrum of colors that match the real rainbow" is justified. Of course, the adequacy of the model itself is a different question.

Using insights from color-psychology is very effective when introducing the model to newcomers. Wilber's new colors don't have that initial intuitive appeal. Claiming that one should use the spectral colors because they supposedly match subtle energies or frequencies in nature is a more indirect claim. Be that as it may, we should first assess if Wilber's new colors closely match those of yoga and tantra. But let's first have a close look at how Wilber has amended the standard SD-colors—and why.

I have therefore put together a comparative table below, with colors added within the table cells to make the differences more graphic:

**Table 1.
A Comparison of color terminology in Integral
Theory and Spiral Dynamics.**

INTEGRAL THEORY	SPIRAL DYNAMICS
"THIRD TIER"	"SECOND TIER"
WHITE: Supermind	???
ULTRAVIOLET: Overmind	AUBERGINE
VIOLET: Meta-mind	TEAL
INDIGO: Para-mind	CORAL
"SECOND TIER"	
TURQUOISE Integral	TURQUOISE, GlobalView Holistic/Experiential
TEAL Holistic	YELLOW, FlexFlow Systemic/Integrative
"FIRST TIER"	
GREEN, Pluralistic	GREEN, HumanBond Relativistic/Sociocentric
ORANGE Rational	ORANGE, StriveDrive Materialistic/Achiever
AMBER Mythic	BLUE, TruthForce Absolutistic/Saintly
RED Magic-Mythic	RED, PowerGods Egocentric/Exploitative
MAGENTA Magic	PURPLE, KinSpirits Animistic/Tribalistic

INFRARED/CRIMSON Archaic	BEIGE, SurvivalSense Automatic/Instinctive
-----------------------------	---

Comparing the two columns of this table, one can now clearly see what changes Wilber has made in the original SD-model:

1. BEIGE is replaced by INFRARED
2. PURPLE is replaced by MAGENTA
3. BLUE is replaced by AMBER
4. YELLOW is replaced by TEAL
5. "Third Tier" colors have been added

Only RED, ORANGE, GREEN and TURQUOISE have been retained in Wilber's model.

Contrary to the SD-model, Wilber's model explicitly recognizes a Third Tier, which demarcates the transition from personal to transpersonal, "super-integral" or spiritual levels—again, not just a regular stage transition, but one of larger importance. Another "leap", even more momentuous than the one from First to Second Tier. Though Graves apparently did speak of a possible Third Tier, he expected YELLOW and TURQUOISE first to be followed by four *Second* Tier colors, the first three of which were tentatively labeled CORAL, TEAL and AUBERGINE.[4] Thus, the six Second Tier stages would match the six First Tier stages, as some kind of higher "primes" (with Third Tier giving "double primes")—resulting in a rather kabbalistic scheme.

Wilber, however, thought it appropriate to have Third Tier start *earlier* than Graves imagined:

I found that several characteristics that could be considered a new tier (that is, 3rd tier) started much earlier; no need to wait another 4 stages to get to Graves's 3rd tier. (p. 346)

The Third Tier interpretation of Wilber has been opposed by both Beck and Cowan as non-Gravesian. However, Cowan stated on his website about the existence of a possible Third Tier (which would *again* consist of six stages, according to Graves): "That such levels would come to be was pure conjecture on Dr. Graves' part as he projected what might be if human nature continued on track." [7] Wilber, at least, seems to have found a

meaningful and empirically based re-use of this Third Tier concept, given his life-long study of the transpersonal stages of development and methods of personal transformation.

What might surprise many integral students is that for Wilber the TEAL and TURQUOISE stages are not spiritual in any sense. Using his terminology, they represent the low and high versions of "vision-logic", a form of cognition representative of the mind-body integration of the so-called centaur-stage. The "super-integral" stages of Third Tier are decidedly spiritual in nature.

Wilber provides some (unsubstantiated) data about the prevalence of these Second and Third Tier stages:

It's very rare for individuals to develop into 2nd-tier Integral, let alone 3rd-tier Super-Integral structure-rungs of development. As a matter of fact, research based on Claire [sic] Graves's work suggests that about 5 percent of individuals are at 2nd tier at this time, and those at the upper level of the 2nd-tier stage (high vision-logic, late centaur, Fulcrum-8) are not much more than 0.5 percent, which means, one in every two hundred people. The number at 3rd tier is a tenth of that, if that high. Consequently, when researchers investigate the average population, very few of which are long-time meditators, they will find very few people who have developed into 2nd tier, let alone 3rd-tier, transpersonal, Super-Integral, or spiritual structure-levels of development. (p. 181-2)

More specifically commenting on the classical SD-color scheme, Wilber elaborates on the misplacement (rainbow-wise) of YELLOW and VIOLET—and adds that this misplacement is not without consequences.



Chakra painting (Nepal, 17th Century)

As one way (and only one way) to refer to degrees of altitude (or "levels" of altitude), Integral Metatheory followed the ancient practice (found in, for example, Yoga psychology) of giving each major degree or level a rainbow "color"—running, for example, from infrared to magenta to red to amber to orange to green to teal to turquoise to indigo to violet to ultraviolet to white (with subdivisions more than possible). The order of colors is important for the traditional psychologies, because each level is said to correspond to a subtle energy, which can also be found in nature, such as in a rainbow, so the order of the colors of levels of altitude, unlike those used by Spiral Dynamics, should match the order found in a rainbow. This is important because biomachines activating a given level would need to match the real color found at that level. Thus, as only one example, all of the traditions put "violet" or "purple" toward the very highest of levels, whereas Spiral Dynamics puts it at one of the lowest, and this would backfire badly when any actual energies were used. (p. 349)

If this is indeed the case, it highlights the importance of meticulously sticking to the color sequence found in nature. A better color sequence, Wilber feels, would be one in which we go from "raw" and "rough" energies to more "rarefied" and "refined" energies:

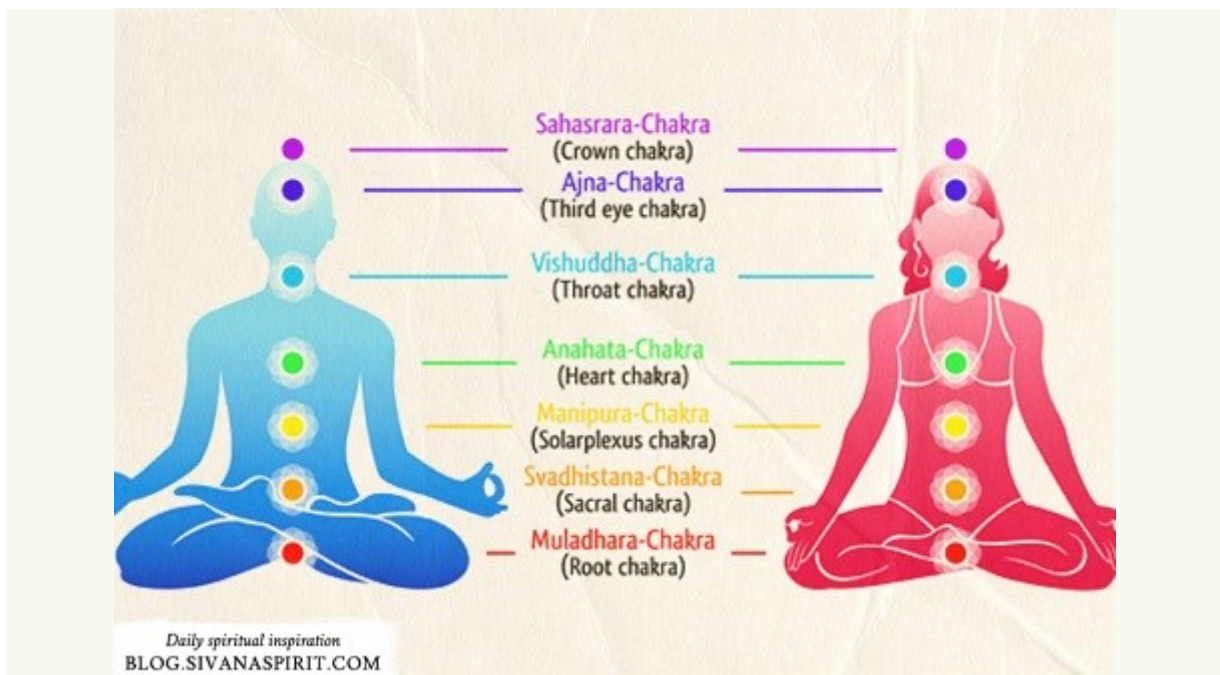
The actual order of the colors of the developmental spectrum turn out to be important, for reasons given by the traditions themselves — each chakra, for example, has a color, and these colors occur, from lowest to highest, in the same order as in a natural rainbow, because the actual energies of the chakras are said to be manifestations of the same Kosmic energies producing rainbows — reflecting the "unified" nature of the Kosmos itself. So there is a reason that the chakras run from "infrared" (or more accurately, "crimson") and "red" at the low end, which are low frequencies of raw, "violent" color associated with anger, hatred, and so forth, to green smooth colors in the

middle, representing more advanced/evolved levels, or bands, of both colors and consciousness, to blue and indigo at the highest end, with their smooth, soothing, peaceful tones. (p. 691-2)

Wilber's new color scheme seems to conform to that rule: we go from warm, reddish colors (actually many hues, more on that later) to the more cool, bluish colors, culminating into ultraviolet and white. Note how Wilber appeals to popular notions about color psychology here. An interesting difference is that in classical SD warm and cool colors alternate (which effectively forms the Spiral). Wilber has completely stripped this spiraling motive from his color scheme. (Again, that the stages should show a spiraling sequence between warm and cool colors, or from I-stages to We-stages, is an empirical question we won't go into now).

THE YOGA/TANTRA COLOR SCHEME

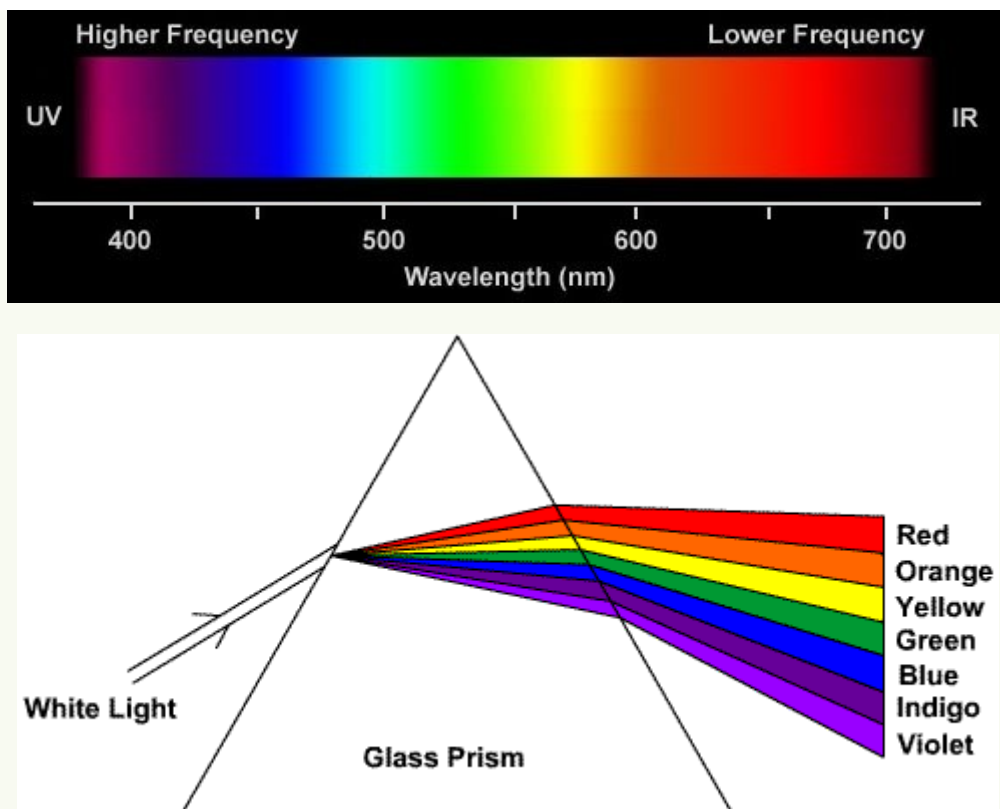
So let's turn to the color scheme of yogic and tantric psychology, to see if Wilber's new model fares better than classical Spiral Dynamics. A search on the internet for "chakra-psychology" brings tons of images detailing the chakras and their supposed corresponding colors. As far as I can tell, they all confirm to the following arrangement:



As always, a wealth of historical information is also give on the Wikipedia page on [Chakra](#) .[7] The chakra-concept can be found

in Eastern traditions (Hindu Tantra, Vajrayana Buddhism, Bon, Qigong and Indonesian and Malaysian metaphysics) as well as Western schools (Western adaptations of Hindu traditions, Eastern Orthodox tradition of Hesychasm, New age and esoteric groups).

For ease of comparison, let's put the color spectrum next to it, to see if, indeed, rainbow colors have been assigned to chakras here, in the very same order. The spectrum ranges from lower frequencies (Red) or long wavelengths to high frequencies (Violet) or short wavelengths, and the seven spectral colors match the seven chakras one by one. This makes intuitive sense, if the symbolism (or energy behind it?) represents a refinement process ascending from matter to Spirit.



Another Wiki page on the chakras provides us with historical background about the chakras, and how they came to us in the West—and tells us that most contemporary Eastern teachers are using the Western interpretations of ancient texts[8]:

It is the shakta theory of 7 main chakras that most people in the West adhere to, either knowingly or unknowingly, largely thanks to a translation of two Indian texts, the *Sat-Cakra-Nirupana* , and the *Padaka-Pancaka* , by Sir John Woodroffe, alias Arthur Avalon, in a book entitled *The Serpent*

Power .

This book is extremely detailed and complex, and later the ideas were developed into what is predominant western view of the Chakras by the Theosophists, and largely the controversial (in theosophical circles) C. W. Leadbeater in his book *The Chakras* , which are in large part his own meditations and insights on the matter.

That said, many present-day Indian gurus that incorporate chakras within their systems of philosophy do not seem to radically disagree with the western view of chakras, at least on the key points, and both these eastern and western views have developed from the Shakta Tantra school.

The website repeats Wilber's arguments about having the colors right, or you would otherwise risk energetic consequences:

It is claimed to be very important to know the right color tone for a specific area because *the wrong hue of color can allegedly do different things to the energetic system*. Yet different systems differ in the colors they ascribe. The colors above simply represent, in order, the colors of the rainbow. In other words, all monochromatic colors. (emphasis added)

WILBER'S STAGE-CHAKRA CORRESPONDENCES

Wilber provides stage-chakra correspondences in *The Religion of Tomorrow* in Chapters 9, 10 and 11, where he discusses the "dysfunctions" of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd tier developmental stages. The stage-chakra correlations are briefly mentioned at the start of each paragraph discussing the separate stages.

Infrared Archaic: "So the self starts out identified with chakra-rung 1 and its alimentary drives..." (p. 282)

Magenta Magic: "This brings us to chakra-rung 2 (the pranic, magenta, bioenergy, emotional-sexual level..." (p. 289)

Red Magic-Mythic: "Similar dynamics, if not as strongly driven, are nonetheless still at play with chakra-rung 3..." (p. 297)

Amber Mythic: "At the next major structure-stage, we find dysfunctions occurring with chakra-rung 4..." (p. 299)

Orange Rational: *no chakra mentioned here, but under Green Pluralistic Orange is assigned to chakra 5*

Green Pluralistic: "...the next major structure (green, chakra 5, Fulcrum 6 [sharing throat chakra 5 with orange Fulcrum-5 since both are self-expressive], pluralistic mind), ..." (p. 321)

Teal Holistic and Turquoise Integral: "...low and high vision logic (teal and turquoise, 2nd tier structures, both chakra 6—the "third eye" or synthesizing chakra..." (p. 332)

Super-Integral: *no chakra mentioned, only in passing in endnote 3, Chapter 9:* "... enters the higher and highest levels of 3rd tier and Super-Integral (chakra 7), as love takes on universal/Kosmic and eventually infinite dimensions." (p. 704)

When we now add the traditional chakra-colors, based on the research on color terminology we have done above, this results in the following table of correspondences—or should we see "non-correspondences"?:

Table 2. A Comparison of color terminology in Integral Theory and chakra-psychology.	
INTEGRAL THEORY	CHAKRA-PSYCHOLOGY
" T H I R D T I E R " - Super Integral	
WHITE: Supermind	Chakra 7: VIOLET CROWN
ULTRAVIOLET: Overmind	
VIOLET: Meta-mind	
INDIGO: Para-mind	
" S E C O N D T I E R "	
TURQUOISE Integral	Chakra 6: INDIGO THIRD EYE
TEAL Holistic	
" F I R S T T I E R "	
GREEN, Pluralistic	Chakra 5: BLUE THROAT

ORANGE Rational	
AMBER Mythic	Chakra 4: GREEN HEART
RED Magic-Mythic	Chakra 3: YELLOW SOLAR PLEXUS
MAGENTA Magic	Chakra 2: ORANGE SACRAL
INFRARED/CRIMSON Archaic	Chakra 1: RED ROOT

The obvious color mismatch between these two systems is painful to the eyes. Only the root-, the sacral and the crown-chakras seem to match Wilber's choice of colors; the rest is completely out of synch.

One wonders why Wilber would claim that his color-scheme exactly matches the color spectrum of the rainbow. While it does better than the SD-model *in this respect* (but as said, it was never the intention of the founders of Spiral Dynamic to give the colors "any metaphysical significance or derive the colors from chakras or any other system"), there seem to be serious mismatches here.

1. YELLOW is missing from Wilber's scheme
2. BLUE is missing from Wilber's scheme
3. Therefore, the First Tier levels are dominated by RED/ORANGE
4. TEAL/TURQUOISE do not match with INDIGO
5. GREEN is out of synch with the Green chakra.

It is quite remarkable, for starters, that, except for GREEN, almost all Wilberian First Tier stages are assigned to RED or Reddish colors—from deep-crimson red to various shades of orange. Weren't they "low frequencies of raw, 'violent' color associated with anger, hatred, and so forth"? What if Integral Institute were to release "bio-machines" based on his

understanding of the chakra-colors, say, to stimulate the Heart chakra, wouldn't that "backfire badly when any actual energies were used"?

And what on earth has happened to BLUE (throat chakra) and YELLOW (solar plexus), two important traditional colors, which are not only spectral colors but primary colors at that. If I were to design a color scheme that closely matches the traditional colors, I would definitely ensure these are included. Also because, as every painter knows, you can't make either green or orange without *yellow* on your color palette.

Another way to put this is: in the yoga/tantra chakra-color model, all three primary colors (RED, YELLOW and BLUE) and their secondary colors (ORANGE and GREEN) make up the human personality. Higher qualities are expressed by non-primary (or even secondary) colors INDIGO and VIOLET. This seems quite balanced and in accordance with the light spectrum. Wilber's model, in contrast to this, paints the human personality with one primary color (RED) and two secondary colors (ORANGE, derived from YELLOW/RED and GREEN, derived from YELLOW/BLUE). As said, the primary colors of BLUE and YELLOW are completely missing. Higher qualities are now expressed by TEAL and TURQUOISE (an echo of Spiral Dynamics, but somewhat at odds with the light spectrum, both making up for the absence of BLUE), followed by the super-integral colors INDIGO and VIOLET. The overall reddish-coloring of the human personality is deeply problematic in this new presentation, not only in terms of color theory but also according to the yoga/tantra list of colors.

If accurate and realistic color-matching is so important, and Wilber stresses the point several times in *The Religion of Tomorrow*, this mismatch needs to be accounted for. The newly introduced TEAL color in no way matches the INDIGO color assigned in yoga psychology to the Third Eye chakra. This would be fatal for any model that places high value on a close correspondence between chosen colors and "natural" colors, *especially* for the much expected TEAL structure! Only the colors at the extreme ends of the spectrum seem to have some resemblance.

SHOWING YOUR TRUE COLORS

One could of course pragmatically (or desperately?) hold on to Wilber's colors even though they contradict the yoga color schemes, but something doesn't add up here. There simply are no other sources for these chakra-colors than the ones we have pointed to—and they don't support Wilber's choices, even if he claims they do. And it's not a simple matter of "all models are wrong" (or "right") in my opinion. Models can be more and less informative, depending on the context in which they are used. The context at hand is human psycho-spiritual development. In that sense, the original SD-colors seem superior, because of their direct psychological appeal. Wilber justifies his choice of colors indirectly (erroneously, as we have seen) through an esoteric tantric theory about rainbow colors and chakras.

Wilber can carelessly write things like:

Spiral Dynamics has yellow as one of its two highest levels, whereas the traditions put it toward the lower end of the spectrum, in the red/orange range. (p. 692)

But for Shiva's sake, the traditional schemes *do have* a unique place for YELLOW, and it's definitely not "in the red/orange range"—although that may be true for Wilber's reddish bottom half of the palette, where he seems to have run out of yellow and blue paint. No, YELLOW is traditionally seen as to correspond to the solar plexus or third chakra.

Casually as ever, Wilber writes in conclusion:

When I first started using Spiral Dynamics as an easy introduction to the levels in one particular line (the values line), the comment I got most often was "Yeah, but they got the colors wrong," and I'd always say, "Yes, but that can be easily addressed." (p. 692)

Wilber claims he has always been on the chakra-trail ever since his first book—at least *implicitly*—but why is the alignment so hopelessly wrong, even after four decades?

Turned out to be not so easy to address, so I had to make explicit a color spectrum that is more accurate, according to the traditions (a color spectrum that was implicit in my work going back all the way to my first book, because I would always draw parallels with the chakra yoga system—and implicitly, its colors) (p. 692)

But calling classical Spiral Dynamics "an inadequate scheme" seems misplaced, given the incoherence of his current color-system:

I regret not addressing this colors problem from the moment I started using Spiral Dynamics as an example of my work on levels and lines—it has contributed to an inadequate scheme becoming fairly widely dispersed; but, I suppose, better late than never to correct it. I'll be using the more adequate color scheme in this presentation. (p. 692)

"Addressing" the classical SD model while ignoring the meaning of the various colors, and the reasons why they have been chosen, comes across as vandalism—and I understand the strongly negative reactions of the founders of Spiral Dynamics to these efforts. It says much about the other-worldly stance of Wilber that the main reason for his color changes that Wilber mentions, is that their possible use in "biomachines" (e.g. electronic meditation devices) might cause unforeseen effects. Compare this to Spiral Dynamics, which has put much efforts in trying to make a difference in the real world, especially in conflict areas such as South-Africa and the Middle-East. The standard SD colors apparently never posed a problem.

But presenting a revised scheme, claiming—without *any* references to tantric sources, ancient or modern—"I explicitly introduced a more adequate spectrum of colors that match a real rainbow—and thus, according to Tantra, more accurately match the actual energies at these various levels of development", is asking too much of my imagination. Wilber's revised color scheme may perhaps not be "totally off according to the tantric traditions", but it seems to be an awkward hybrid between the original Spiral Dynamics model and the rainbow/chakra color spectrum. Wilber's new color scheme lacks the expressiveness of the Spiral Dynamics colors and the natural accuracy of the rainbow colors.

Given his claims to accuracy, this is an area that seriously needs to be looked into:

- Wilber's new color scheme shows a (kind of) rainbow pattern, as it ranges from red to blue/violet hues.

- However, it doesn't match the color scheme of yoga/tantra tradition at the chakra level, many colors are way off.
- Therefore, if colors should be very stage-specific (for energetic reasons), the new model breaks down.
- It would only work in a very general sense, since the colors range from warm-red to cool-blue: energizing => soothing => inspiring.
- Compared to SD and the yoga/tantra model the colors of Wilber's model are less distinct and informative, especially in the personal stages.
- The primary colors Yellow and Blue are absent, and Reddish colors are way too prominent, in Ken Wilber's new color scheme.
- The disproportional preponderance of reddish colors in this lower part (covering 4½ chakras!) is a point of concern, both from the standpoint of color psychology and from the perspective of esoteric tantric subtle energy doctrines.

NOTES

[1] "[Maslows Hierarchy of Needs](http://www.wikipedia.org)", www.wikipedia.org

[2] C.W. Graves, "[Humanity prepares for a momentous leap](#)", *The Futurist*, 1974, pp. 72-87.

[3] A historical overview of this period can be found in Albion M. Butters's essay "[A brief history of Spiral Dynamics](#)" on this website.

[4] "[FAQ Colors and Terminology](http://spiraldynamics.org)", spiraldynamics.org.

[5] "[Teal Organizations](http://www.reinventingorganizationswiki.com)", www.reinventingorganizationswiki.com

[6] "[Levels of Existence](http://spiraldynamics.org)", spiraldynamics.org

[7] "[Chakra](http://www.wikipedia.com)", www.wikipedia.com

[8] "[Chakra](http://psychology.wikia.com)", psychology.wikia.com.

MORE ON THE CHAKRAS

See also: M.Alan Kazlev, "[The Rainbow Theory of Chakras](#)", www.keper.net, which traces many of these contemporary chakra-color theories to the work of English-born [Christopher Hills](#), a spiritual philosopher and researcher, "co-discoverer of the protein-rich plankton [spirulina](#)" (L.A. Times) and author of [Nuclear Evolution](#) (1970). (Thanks to Oliver Griebel and Silvio Wirth for pointing me to this page).

Sanskrit term	position	type	Personality-characteristics
Sahasrara	crown	primordial imagination type	Imagination, shame and wonder
Ajna	forehead	intuitive-visionary type	Intuition, sensitivity, envy or admiration
Vishuddha	throat	contemplative- nostalgic	Mental concepts, authority, reverence
Anahata	Heart	security or self-centred type	Vital force; possession, jealousy, power
Manipura	Solar Plexus	intellectual	Thinking; Intellect, Change
Swadhistana	"Splenic Plexus"	social-gregarious	Social; Ambition
Muladhara	genitals	physical sensation	Sensation; Sex, fear and anger

"Although the psychological aspects of this theory did not catch on, the idea of matching the seven chakras with the seven colours of the spectrum was so appealing that just about every book on the chakras written since then show the chakras in rainbow colours." (keper.net)

Another great read: "[The 6 Most Important Things You Never Knew About Chakras](#)", www.thewayofmeditation.com.au.

"So, we've barely scratched the surface of this subject. No, I'm not kidding. It's really complex, as you can gather by taking a look at the scholarly literature, like Dory Heilijgers-Seelen's work, or Gudrun Bühnemann's. It takes uncommon patience and focus to even read such work, let alone produce it. So here's what I hope will be the result of this post: some humility. A few less claims to authority when it comes to really esoteric subjects. Maybe a few less yoga teachers trying to tell their students what the chakras are all about. Heck, I'm humbled by the complexity of the original sources, and that's with twelve years of Sanskrit under my belt." (Chad Foreman)

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A SUPER-NOVA?

Ken Wilber's Cosmic Approach
to the Mind-Body Problem

FRANK VISSER

It's obvious that playing the game like this, Wilber loses the small chance he had to find a hearing for his solution of the mind-body problem.

In 1974 philosopher Thomas Nagel wrote a paper on consciousness, that would become very famous: "[What's It Like to Be a Bat?](#)"[1] Daniel Dennett, a critic of Nagel's argument, nevertheless called this paper "the most widely cited and influential thought experiment about consciousness." [2] Nagel suggested that no materialist theory of mind could ever explain the *subjectivity* of conscious experience, "what is it like to be" something. Since its publication Nagel's thesis has been widely debated and engaged with in the world of the "philosophy of mind", a philosophical discipline which concerns itself with the nature of consciousness. In 2012 Nagel published [Mind and Cosmos](#), which had the ominous subtitle (most probably thought up by an editor), "Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False". [3] Since neo-Darwinism is, according to Nagel, incapable of explaining human consciousness, the scientific view of the world is incomplete and has to be complemented by some other, unspecified, forces ("principles of an entirely different kind"). Furthermore, he argued that creationists opposing the neo-Darwinian worldview shouldn't be treated with the scorn they usually receive from conventional science. According to Nagel, there is a "bias towards the marvelous" in the cosmos at large. Doesn't that sound familiar?



Thomas Nagel

The affinity of Nagel's position with some of Ken Wilber's opinions on science is obvious even to the casual observer. Wilber too, doesn't believe that neo-Darwinism can explain the complexities of nature. His opposition to an evolutionary worldview based solely on chance and selection has often been [emotional, superficial and mis-informed](#).^[4] Like Nagel, Wilber doesn't provide a theoretically credible alternative, other than the poetic phrase "Eros in the Kosmos". And Wilber too, believes there's a cosmic tendency or force that favors complexity and consciousness.^[5] But more relevant for this essay: like Nagel Wilber subscribes to some kind of "neutral monism" or "double-aspect" theory of the mind. In [Integral Psychology](#) (2000) Wilber presented his "contemplative solution" to the mind-body problem.^[6] His opinion was that neither materialism (the body produces consciousness) nor dualism (consciousness and body are independent realities) were satisfactory. Instead, we should look for a third option where consciousness and matter somehow co-exist and are aspects of an underlying third reality (for Wilber: nondual Spirit). For Wilber, this co-existence goes all the way down to the Big Bang, even to the level of subatomic particles (a view he prefers to call "pan-interiorism", to distinguish it from the more well-known view of "[panpsychism](#)"). Even if only for strategic reasons, it would have been good for Wilber to connect with Thomas Nagel. Even if he was [severely criticized by scientists](#) for his views on science as expressed in *Mind and Cosmos*, he is at least a respected and world famous philosopher, who gets the attention of mainstream media. It would also give Wilber an ally in the philosophy of mind community. Publishing your solution to the mind-body problem in a popular-psychology book chapter

just isn't enough to get heard and be checked by the community of the adequate (which should always be the final step in any knowledge quest, according to Wilber's own theory of knowledge acquisition).

However, Wilber's advanced views on the mind-body problem are actually much more complex and sophisticated than this, given that he enthusiastically subscribes to the Eastern Vajrayana/Vedanta schools of philosophy, which teach that we don't have only one mind and one body, but *multiple versions of both*.^[7] Depending on the classification in use, a subdivision is made into five or three levels of mentality and corporeality. The following tables are reprinted from an essay I wrote back in 2004, when I still believed in these esoteric views of man and the world^[8]:

STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS	LEVEL/STAGE/SHEATH OF CONSCIOUSNESS	BODY-ENERGY/REALM
Deep Sleep	Ananda-maya-kosha	Causal body
Dreaming	Vijnana-maya-kosha	Subtle Body
	Mano-maya-kosha	
	Prana-maya-kosha	
Waking	Anna-mayakosha	Gross Body

UPPER LEFT	UPPER RIGHT
causal mind	causal body
subtle mind	subtle body
gross mind	gross body

Gross body-mind, subtle body-mind and causal body-mind
in the two Upper Kosmic Quadrants.

WILBER ON OUR MINDS AND BODIES

In his latest book [*The Religion of Tomorrow*](#) (2017) Wilber touches on the mind-body problem in several sections throughout the book, and gives his current views on these philosophical topics.

Here's the first passage to consider, in which he brushes aside the mind-body problem rather lightly:

Thus, the traditions have a very sophisticated way of handling the mind/body problem—namely, every mind has its body, or every state of consciousness (or "mind") has a corresponding mass-energy (or "body") realm. It's like a radio signal. If you're listening to a radio station, and music is being played, there are actually two items here: you are hearing the actual radio program, whether it's music or a talk show or whatnot (the "information" or "mind" component of the program), but then there's also the radio signal itself carrying the program to your radio (the concrete mass-energy radiation wave, or "body" component, that is carrying or "supporting" the content). According to the traditions, each mental or conscious state is similar to that: it has a content or information or mind-component (like the actual music you are listening to), and that content is being carried, or supported, by a particular mass-energy wave (like the radio signal that carries the music), which is in a particular "body realm." (p. 88)

The simple point is that the "mind/body" problem is not a real problem for Buddhism or any of the nondual traditions, because every mind has its body—two interwoven dimensions of the same whole event, with no "problem" about how they fit together (any more than we have a problem figuring out how a radio signal and its content fit together) (p. 89)

"The 'mind/body' problem is not a real problem for Buddhism or any of the nondual traditions"? We don't have a problem figuring out how a radio signal and its content fit together, because this is a case of *information being carried by a material substrate*. We could as well give the example of a written word and its meaning. We can easily see and understand these different aspects of these scribbles on paper: their physical characteristics and their meaning (to us). But of course, this *presupposes* the existence of a reading mind, so does not clarify in the least how mind and body are related. With our bodily senses we perceive the printed words, but with our minds we understand their meaning (provided we understand the

language in which the word has been written. If not, the scribbles are gibberish to us). The mind-body problem, in contrast, relates to the problem of how physical processes in the brain can produce or correlate with consciousness, *and vice versa*. Words don't read themselves, nor do radio signals hear themselves. It is an interesting fact that communication always has to use physical substrates, but it doesn't throw any light on the nature of mind or consciousness in the least. (And if it did, it would provide evidence for some kind of materialism or functionalism: many different physical carriers can transmit the same information).

A second rather casual comment by Wilber is even more debatable:

We found that all humans are born with 4 or 5 major states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, deep sleep, unqualifiable witnessing, and nondual unity) as well as their correlative "ontological" realms (or the sum total of objects that can occur in those individual states). And each of those "minds" or "consciousnesses" possesses a correlative body (or concrete mass-energy form—gross body, subtle body, causal body, integrative body, and nondual body), so that each mind has its body: a gross body/mind, a subtle body/mind, a causal body/mind, a nondual body/mind (and thus a mind/body duality is never a problem here). (p. 116)



Christian de Quincey

"A mind/body duality is never a problem here"? If for the moment we forget about ontological realms and subtle mass-energy forms—more on that later—introducing multiple minds and bodies doesn't solve the mind-body problem, it *multiplies* it. *We now have, at least, a triple mind-body problem to solve!* Wilber seems to have trouble understanding that his "solution" to the mind-body problem is not so much a solution as it is a restatement of the original knotty problem. Assigning the mind to the Upper-Left quadrant and the body to

the Upper-Right quadrant—to use some AQAL-ese—doesn't clarify how these two realities are actually related and can impact each other in the least. The good thing about Wilber's AQAL model is that at least these two experiential realities (inner and outer) are put on the integral map—but that should be the start of an explanation, and not be mistaken for one. When Wilber's views on the mind-body problem were criticized by philosopher [Christian de Quincey](#) in the [Journal of Consciousness Studies](#) (2000), for not really having solved *the* mind-body problem, but only having created a smoke screen of conceptual subtleties and distinctions—precisely *how*, and not only *that* the mind affects the body and vice versa is the problem—the ensuing philosophical debate between the two gentlemen was far from agreeable, to put it mildly.[9]

A slightly more precise statement of Wilber's current position regarding the mind-body problem seems to be this quote from *The Religion of Tomorrow*, which can be found practically near the end of the book:

The reason why the "mind-body" problem has been so difficult is that it involves getting things that have no location hooked up with things that do have location—"the ghost in the machine"—but for Integral Metatheory, they are two different perspectives on the same underlying Wholeness. The two different perspectives prevent this from being a mere identity thesis, which ends up equating them, and the "of an underlying Wholeness" prevents it from being merely another dualism. (p. 750)

"Identity thesis" is the technical term for materialism, "dualism" is the belief in a bodiless soul. Here, Wilber clearly seems to subscribe to some form of double-aspect theory or neutral monism: mind and body are two different aspects of one and the same underlying reality, "an underlying Wholeness". The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* actually gives five different versions of this "neutral" point of view.[10]

We leave these subtleties for now. What could this third, or "basic entity" possibly be? Wilber's "underlying Wholeness" (Spirit?) doesn't make us any wiser in this respect.[11] Given his penchant for "transcend-and-include" types of argumentation, he will probably find some transcendental formulation out of this, but it would have served his cause better if he had fleshed out his philosophical position respecting the current positions in the field. Just how an underlying "Wholeness" can "intrinsically

be both mental and physical" sounds hardly as a satisfactory solution to the mind-body problem. For Wilber, however, this is an acceptable solution. Discussing how an immaterial mind can possibly move a material body around, he concludes:

The Idealists handled this by saying that mind and body are both forms of Spirit, and therefore they are not alien or ontologically different entities, but simply *two different aspects of the same thing*. This is an acceptable solution if one acknowledges Spirit, which most modern and postmodern philosophers do not, which is why this is not a commonly discussed option." (*Integral Psychology*, p. 176-7) (emphasis added).

How two realities as different as mind and body can be "simply two different aspects of the same thing" is beyond me—even if that "thing" is Spirit itself. We are, in fact, back to square one if you ask me.

THE THREE FUNDAMENTAL OPTIONS

We are back to square one here, in my opinion, and are faced with a massive lack of understanding.

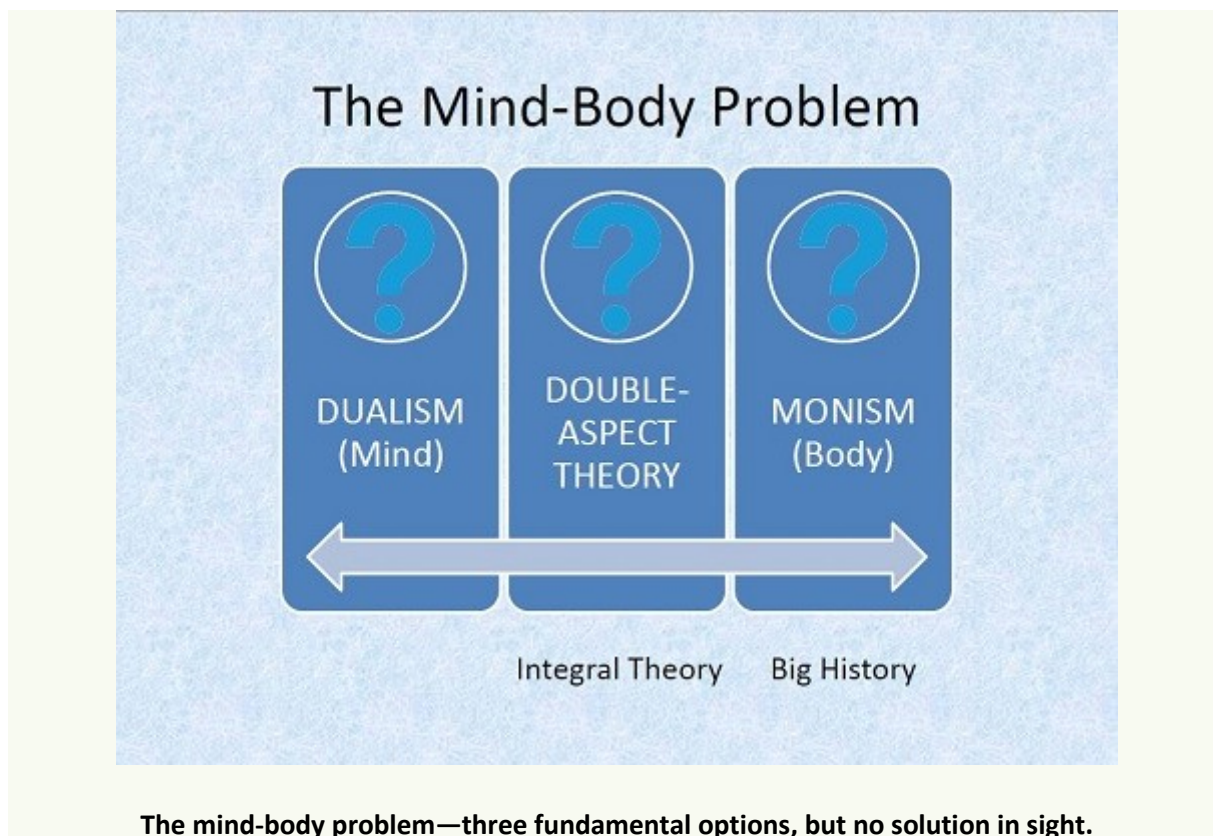
When introducing Ken Wilber's integral point of view at the recent [Big History conference](#) (July 2016) in Amsterdam, I touched on the mind/body problem briefly as well[12]. I will just quote from that paper to present my own view of things:

We have encountered the distinction between interior and exterior reality a few times by now, and we run here smack into the notorious mind-body problem. Is there such a thing as "mind"? Are we not "just" a brain? Or is this purely a matter of what we choose to see? In his book *Integral Psychology* (2000) Wilber has discussed this philosophical conundrum in a fresh and innovative way. He first suggests that there are basically two options in this area: (1) the pre-modern or dualistic idea of a soul, which is independent of the body, and (2) the modern or monistic conception which allows only for the existence of the body/brain. None of these viewpoints have resulted in an intelligible conception of consciousness. The dualistic position is incapable of clarifying how an immaterial soul could ever influence the material body, and vice versa. Except in some fundamentalist religious quarters no one believes this anymore. But the opposite view of monistic materialism fares no better. Nobody in the world have as of yet been able to clarify how consciousness can arise out of material brain processes. It just does not make sense. Body and brain secrete many substances, but consciousness is not one of them. Often the term "emergence" is used here to wave aside this problem, as if consciousness emerges whenever brains have become complex enough, but this is not the same as giving a rational explanation.



David Chalmers

In some areas of philosophical thought a third option has been proposed, that avoids the extremes of both dualism and monism. It has variously been called "double-aspect theory" or "dual-aspect theory" or "neutral monism". Thomas Nagel, a philosopher who shows many affinities with Wilber (minus the spiritual dimension), is a case in point. The idea here is that both mind and body, whatever they are, are two aspect of a third Something. Wilber's "solution" might be classified as belonging to this category. For him, the Left- and Right-Hand quadrants always go hand in hand, and are aspects of Spirit. Of course, while this may look balanced and gives equal due to both interior and exterior reality, it runs head-on into the problem of what this third Something could possibly be? What on earth (or heaven) can have such different aspects as mind and body, given that they have such a different ontology? We are back to square one here, in my opinion, and are faced with a massive lack of understanding. Philosopher of mind [David Chalmers](#)[13] has remarked that the mind-body problem isn't solved at the moment, in the sense that there is no proposed solution that has been accepted by all members of this community.



Wilber has made the observation that most if not all views on the mind-body problem have taken only the Upper quadrants into account (mind and body), but not the Lower quadrants of culture and society, which equally impact the nature of consciousness. His model would therefore have to be classified as a "tetra-aspect" model of consciousness.

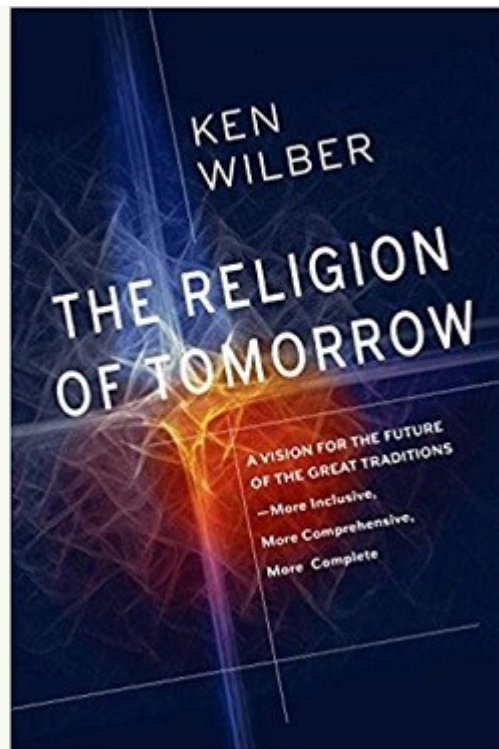
COSMIC CONNECTIONS

In another quote relevant to the mind-body problem, Wilber goes into more esoteric detail about the workings of consciousness and its "coverings". In a rather confusing story, he argues that,

The *waking mind* or state of consciousness (the radio content, sound, or actual thought) is being carried or supported by the gross realm or the *gross body* (the gross mass-energy component; in Buddhism, the Nirmanakaya). Thus the gross mind has a gross body (although the terms "gross," "subtle," "causal," and so forth, *technically* refer only to the body or mass-energy realm; but since there are only so many terms to go around, they are often also used for the corresponding mind—hence, the gross mind is supported by the gross body). The *dream mind* or state of consciousness is being carried or supported by the *subtle body* (the subtle mass-energy component; in Buddhism, the Sambhogakaya). Subtle mind, subtle body. The *deep-sleep mind* is being carried or supported

by the *causal body* (causal mass-energy component; in Buddhism, the Dharmakaya). The Witnessing/Nondual mind (to combine those two, as is often done) is being carried or supported by the integrative body (nondual mass-energy component; in Buddhism, the Svabhavikakaya). The realms, or bodies, are "concrete" mass-energy dimensions (and they are named after the type of "body," which is the literal meaning of the word "kaya," as in "Sambhogakaya" or "Dharmakaya," because they actually exist in the concrete world, although they get, of course, subtler and subtler). Therefore you can actually point to them, you can "put your finger" on them (you can point to your physical body and actually touch it; with subtler awareness, you could actually see or "touch" your subtle body with its auras, chakras, acupuncture meridians, and so on). The "minds" or "states" (or "sheaths") are the nonmaterial awareness components, which don't exist in the concrete world. Where, for example, is "mutual understanding," "love," "care," "insight," or "satori"? You can't put your finger on them, like you can a body. And yet do we really doubt their existence? (p. 671-2)

There was a time when I was deeply into this "subtle bodies" thing[14], and from those days I remember that *koshas, kayas*, sheaths, realms or subtle worlds have a slightly different connotation, at least if we follow the Western esoteric, Theosophical interpretations, which I happen to know best. "The realms, or bodies, are 'concrete' mass-energy dimensions" is a very confused statement, for "bodies", physical or *super*-physical, are understood in the esoteric traditions as "vehicles of consciousness" for their respective "worlds", physical or subtle. As we perceive the physical world through the senses that are part of our physical bodies, it is through the senses in our subtle bodies that we perceive higher or more subtle worlds (for example the "astral world"). It doesn't really help to conflate bodies and realms/worlds—that is, only if one wants to downplay the reality of these worlds and reduce them to "life worlds" of conscious subjects. Nor is saying "the 'minds' or 'states' (or 'sheaths') are the nonmaterial awareness components" very helpful either, for the "sheaths" are said to be "coverings" that can be organized into "bodies", by exercising their mental faculties (just as we build our physical bodies by working out, i.e. putting conscious effort into using our muscles).[15] It's also not so much that we supposedly have multiple minds and bodies, but *one* Self which is clothed in many bodies, physical and super-physical. This equally doesn't solve the mind-body problem, for states the problem a little bit differently.



Hardcover, Shambhala, 2017, 806 pages.

The fact that these bodies "get, or course, subtler and subtler" has never been clarified by Wilber within his post-metaphysical AQAL model. As long as the Upper-Right quadrant is defined as related to physical reality and our waking consciousness, these subtle realms and bodies don't fit, but if we expand it to cover *all* possible worlds or realities, they might fit very well. To claim that auras, chakras and the like can be seen "with subtler awareness", goes wholly against the esoteric understanding that auras and subtle bodies are typically seen by *others*, i.e. clairvoyants. Normally, you don't see/feel your own aura, but *aura descriptions of other people* abound in the occult literature. Again, Wilber has subjectivized these occult realities to fit his psychological model. The fact that we don't doubt the existence of mental phenomena, even if we can't put our finger on them, suggests that these "non-physical" phenomena are realities in their own right. The current AQAL model is obviously geared towards the world we perceive in our waking state of consciousness. This is both pragmatic and practical. In the occult or esoteric worldview, these more subtle phenomena of mind and soul are seen as non-physical, or *super-physical* if you want, but definitely not as "non-local", as the current buzz-word has it.[16] My thoughts and feelings, or even mystical experiences, might not be localizable in the sensory world, but they definitely

don't exist completely some place else either, as I clearly feel them "behind my eyes" or "in my gut". It's easy to say that "heaven is a state, not a location", for states need to be located *somewhere*, to function in embodied, individualized form.

In *The Religion of Tomorrow* Wilber flies really high when describing the benefits and challenges of the super-integral stages and states of mystical consciousness, culminating into Supermind. Here's just one example out of many:

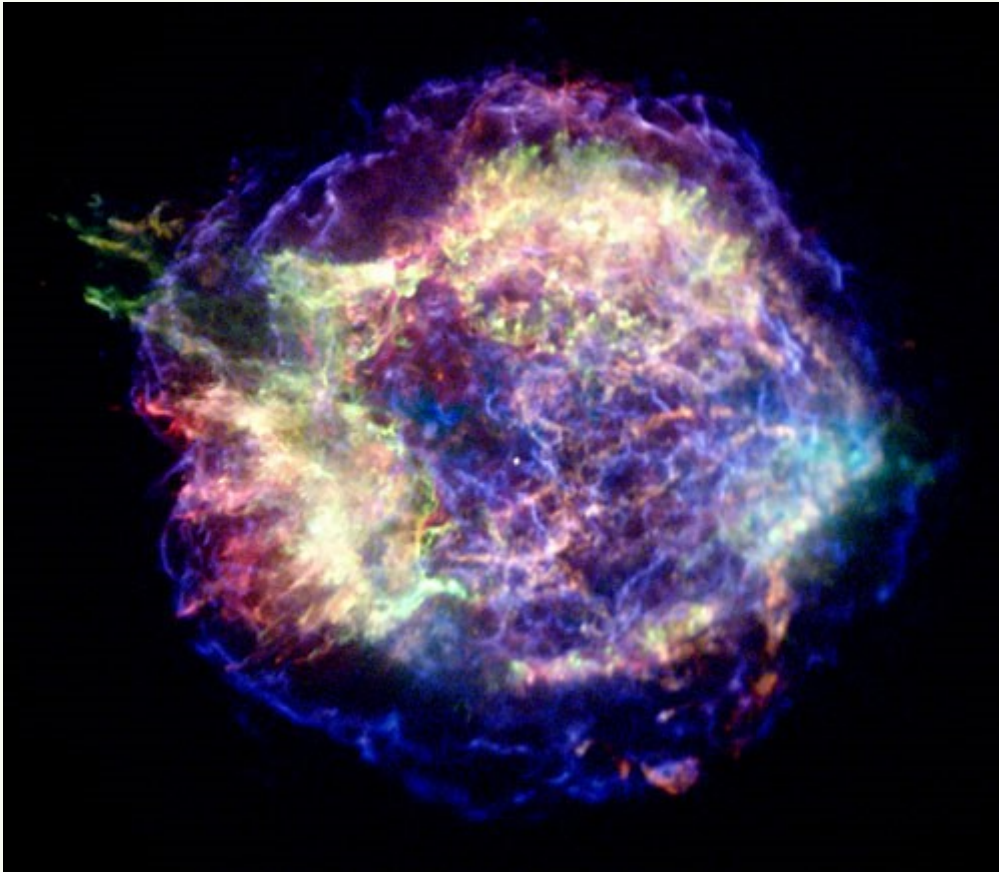
Supermind inwardly touches everything from the dark matter of the universe—which constitutes some 96 percent of this universe and is poorly understood, but no matter in this case, infinity is still its Ground—to countless undiscovered and unknown galaxies, planets, and supernovas. All are touched and grounded and implicitly felt by Supermind—your own deepest *You*—as a direct texture of its own being and as a product of its own hyper-Full overflowing, which you can feel bubbling out of yourself all the way to the ends of the world, and through each and every structure, top to bottom. When functioning as Supermind, every distant supernova, galaxy, and solar system—not to mention your next-door neighbor, the far side of the globe, every sentient being on the planet, the planet itself—feels exactly the way your lungs, heart, hands, and feet now feel: as perfectly seamless aspects of your own you-ness. (p. 403)

If the final end of our spiritual development, following Wilber's guidelines, enables our self-consciousness to include "every distant supernova, galaxy, and solar system", the question raised by Nagel effectively would become: What Is It Like to Be a Supernova? It's obvious that playing the game like this, Wilber loses the small chance he had to find a hearing for his solution of the mind-body problem.

We might well stay on firmer ground when solving the mind-body problem before we venture into such far-out (or delusional?) states of mind. Wilber makes much of the fact that super-integral stages *often deny aspects of the "relative" world*, which results in pathologies that should be cured by adopting the Integral View. He also discusses the rise of the so-called "[New Atheists](#)" (Dawkins, Hitchens, Dennett and Harris) and suspects that most of them suffer from shadow issues related to their own repressed spirituality. Here's a telling comment by Wilber: "These attacks [against religion] are *rabidly* antiritual..., and the 'frothing at the mouth' nature of their attacks is a dead giveaway to the projected shadow material driving it." (p. 318-9). Ironically, when one reads the often

emotional statements Wilber has made about neo-Darwinism and its incapacity to explain Nature's complexities, one is fully entitled to return the compliment and wonder what shadow issues are related to *that*? Does Wilber perhaps deny the possibility that there is in the end *no* cosmic force towards complexity and consciousness in nature and culture? We could therapeutically advise him:

"There is no Eros in the Kosmos. The notion of Eros can't explain shit. Deal with it."



This Chandra X-ray photograph shows Cassiopeia A (Cas A, for short), the youngest supernova remnant in the Milky Way. (Credit: NASA/CXC/MIT/UMass Amherst/M.D.Stage et al.)

NOTES

[1] Thomas Nagel, "What's It Like to Be a Bat?", *The Philosophical Review*, October 1974.

[2] Dennett, Daniel C. (1991). *Consciousness Explained*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p. 441. Quoted on Wikipedia, "What's It Like to Be a Bat?".

[3] Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*, Oxford University Press, 2012. For a review see: Frank Visser, "[Biased Toward the Marvelous?: Integral Reflections on Thomas Nagel's *Mind and Cosmos*](#)", www.integralworld.net

[4] Ken Wilber: "Instead of a religious preacher like Dawkins, start with something like Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. And then guess what? Neo-Darwinian theory can't explain shit. Deal with it." "KW Responds", *Vomiting confetti*, Friday, May 27, 2005 (now offline). And in *The Religion of Tomorrow*: "In some ways, [Intelligent Design] arguments correctly identify several of the inadequacies of the standard, modern Neo-Darwinian view. (I don't want to be obnoxious, but it's not like that's hard to do.)" (p. 305). "Identifying inadequacies" of a model is, of course, not the same as arguing in favor of supernaturalism.

[5] "The universe is slightly tilted toward self-organizing processes, and these processes... escape present-level turmoil by jumping to higher levels of self-organization, and I see that 'pressure' as operating throughout the physiosphere, the biosphere, and the noosphere." See: "[Re: 'Some Criticisms of My Understanding of Evolution'](#)", www.kenwilber.com, December 04, 2007

[6] Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology, Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*, Shambhala, 2000, Chapter 14, "The 1-2-3 of consciousness studies", p. 174-187. According to Wilber, the unity of mind and body can only be disclosed in contemplation, by the "eye of spirit". "In the disclosure known as satori, for example, it becomes clear that the subject and object are two sides of the same thing, that inside and outside are two aspects of One Taste. How to relate them is not the problem, according to the clear consensus of the many individuals who have tapped into this wave of development. The problem, rather, is that this genuinely nondual solution is not something that can be fully grasped at the rational level." (p. 181). So it is more correct perhaps to state that, rather than solving the mind-body problem, Wilber has, in his own words, "dissolved" it.

[7] Ken Wilber, "[Towards a Comprehensive Theory of Subtle Energies, Except G](#)", www.kenwilber.com, 2003/2006. "Forgive

me for repeating myself, but the staggering brilliance of this scheme continues to just floor me. There are no other models even remotely like it in explanatory capacities, and I have incorporated those aspects, virtually unchanged, in my own model of Integral Psychology." (p. 40)

[8] Frank Visser, "[Subtle Bodies, Higher Worlds](#)", January 2004, www.integralworld.net,

[9] In chronological order, these were the Wilber-De Quincey exchanges:

- Ken Wilber, "[Waves, Streams, States and Self: Further Considerations for an Integral Theory of Consciousness](#)", *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7, no. 11-12, November-December 2000. reposted on www.kenwilber.com
- Christian de Quincey, "[The Promise of Integralism, A Critical Appreciation of Ken Wilber's Integral Psychology](#)", *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7, no. 11-12, November-December 2000, p. 177-208 (available from web.archive.org).
- Ken Wilber, "[Do Critics Misrepresent My Position? A Test Case from a Recent Academic Journal](#)", www.kenwilber.com, 2000
- Christian de Quincey, "[Critics Do. Critics Don't. A Response to Ken Wilber](#)", www.deepspirit.com, 2000 (available from web.archive.org).

De Quincy was quite clear in his verdict: "I will argue that Wilber's model doesn't even begin to offer a solution to this perennial 'world knot' as Schopenhauer called it, and furthermore that this omission seriously undermines the rational integrity of his four quadrant system. Instead of explaining how the interior and exterior domains relate and interact, Wilber asks us to be content with promissory integralism." ("The Promise of Integralism").

[10] "[Neutral monism](#)", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, plato.stanford.edu. From which:

What does it mean for an entity to be neutral? Here are five proposals:

1. *The Neither View*: A basic entity is neutral just in case it is intrinsically neither mental nor physical.
2. *The Actual Constituent View*: A basic entity is neutral just in case it is a constituent of both physical and mental non-basic entities.
3. *The Possible Constituent View*: A basic entity is neutral just in case it can be a constituent of both physical and mental non-basic entities.
4. *The Law View*: A basic entity is neutral just in case both mental laws and physical laws are applicable to it.
5. *The Both View*: A basic entity is neutral just in case it is intrinsically both mental and physical.

(1)–(5) are not always clearly distinguished; but even when they are, two or more of these criteria may be used concurrently. This invites confusion on the part of the neutral monists, as well as their critics.

[11] Similar thoughts can be found in: Anne Besant, *A Study in Consciousness: A Contribution to the Science of Psychology*, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1904. "Awareness is essentially awareness of *limitation*, and only secondarily awareness of *others*. This abstract Twain-in-One, consciousness-limitation, spirit-matter, life-form, are every inseparable, they appear and disappear together; they exist only in relation to each other; they resolve into a necessarily unmanifest Unity, the supreme synthesis... To say this is not to materialize consciousness, but only to recognize the fact that the two primary opposites, consciousness and matter, are straitly bound together, are never apart, not even in the highest Being. Matter is limitation, and without limitation, consciousness is not. So far from materializing consciousness, it puts it *as a concept* in sharp anti-thesis to matter, but it recognizes the fact that *in an entity* the one is not found without the other." (p. 27, 29)

[12] Frank Visser, "[Big History and Integral Theory, Bill Bryson Meets Ken Wilber](#)", Paper presented at the third International Big History Association Conference, University of Amsterdam, July 17th, 2016.

[13] When I submitted Wilber's paper "[An Integral Theory of Consciousness](#)" (*Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 4 (1), February 1997, pp. 71-92) to David Chalmers' huge online philosophy of mind online repository (<http://consc.net/online/>, now offline) some years ago, he filed it under "Miscellaneous"—

hardly a sign of recognizing it as a world-shattering solution to the age-old mind-body problem. Chalmers' comment is from: David Chalmers, et al., *Mind and Consciousness: 5 Questions*, Automatic Press, 2008, <http://consc.net/papers/five.pdf> (now offline).

[14] Frank Visser, "[Views of Human Nature](#)", Chapter 2 of *Seven Spheres*, Theosophical Publishing House Amsterdam, 1995.

[15] Annie Besant, *A Study in Consciousness*. "We must distinguish between the primary work of the organization of the mental and astral vehicles that fits them to be transmitters of part of the consciousness of the Spiritual Man, and the later work of developing these same vehicles into independent bodies, in which the Spiritual Man will be able to function on their respective planes." (p. 194)

[16] In my opinion, expanding and complicating the AQAL model to include "non-local" realities of consciousness, as some have argued for, opens the door to unrealistic extrapolations of phenomena from quantum physics (e.g. non-locality) to areas such as the creative force behind evolution, mystical consciousness, life after death and parapsychology. (In *The Religion of Tomorrow* Wilber seems to be able to go all along to the very mystical end very well with his current model.) See: Lex Neale, [The AQAL Cube: A Second Tier Differentiation Of Ken Wilber's AQAL Square](#), www.integralworld.net

RATIONAL REASONS TO BELIEVE IN SPIRIT?

Evaluating Ken Wilber's Case for A Spiritual Worldview

FRANK VISSER

It is doubtful if a religion of the future, if ever there is one, should base itself on half-baked scientific theories or questionable speculations.

In his latest book [The Religion of Tomorrow](#) (2017) Ken Wilber foresees a future, unavoidably and certainly so, in which spirituality will stage a stunning come-back.[1] This time God will no longer be seen as the old-fashioned and proverbial Old Man in the Sky—or any fundamentalistic religious notion you prefer—but as a pervasive cosmic spiritual force (called "Eros" by Wilber) behind natural and cultural evolution. Even a rationalist person, he argues, will have reasons to believe in such a notion of spirituality. We will evaluate these reasons given (assuming they are the most strong ones that Wilber can think of) in this current essay.[2]

In an earlier essay, "[Demystifying Evolution](#)", which featured the famous debate between Bill Nye and Ken Ham, I discussed how Wilber's integralism might fit into the landscape of the creationism-science debate, that especially in the United States has captured the attention of the general public.[3] From this essay comes the following table, which gives you a feel of the positions involved:

THREE VIEWS OF NATURAL HISTORY

MYTHIC: CREATIONISM	RATIONAL: DARWINISM	MYSTICAL: INTEGRALISM
Species have been created by God	All species have a common ancestor	Evolution is driven by Spirit/Love/Eros

In his latest work, Wilber gives a nice expression to the general religious orientations humanity has had and will have in past, present and future. In the past, God was literally everywhere, both in nature and in human culture. But in modern times, God seems to have retreated or disappeared completely from the scene. So we have gone from a GOD IS EVERYWHERE to a cultural phase in which there is NO GOD ANYWHERE. However, we're in some kind of intermediate period between dusk and dawn, for in the future, Wilber optimistically and prophetically relates:

Humanity is headed, one more time, into a staggeringly monumental and wrenching transformation, this time from NO GOD ANYWHERE to another type of GOD IS EVERYWHERE. (p. 421)

It is important to realize, what type of religion will have to be left behind, if this scenario is to be realized on any global scale. No more divine interventions in nature or culture. No more chosen people, of any kind. No special favors for anyone pleading for mercy. No special position for our Earth, or any of its inhabitants. But on the positive side, human nature provides means to contact the divine Spirit directly, through meditative practices that do not require any belief systems or dogma's to be effective. A step-wise path of super-integral stages and states of consciousness awaits us on our way to Supermind. A pervasive, cosmic, impersonal universal force will bring us back home.

That is, in this [Gospel according to Ken](#).

As said, it will be a very different God from the one we were used to and this requires a whole new "God-talk", as he discusses in his last chapter. However, the reasons given for both the old and the new ways of speaking about God might be

very similar in that they both argue against a materialist-reductionistic view of the universe. It is only natural that Wilber has seen some creationist authors as natural allies in this respect. However, his view of spirituality is far removed from the creationism behind both fundamentalism and Intelligent Design, so choosing these authors as allies can easily backfire. What if science refutes creationism on scientific grounds, will integralism suffer the same fate?

Let's explore how Christian fundamentalists argue for the "rationality" of their beliefs. An online search for this brings up hundreds of examples. As only one prominent one, the conservative-Christian website PJMedia gives the following reasons "Rational Thinkers Choose to Believe in God"[4]:

1. **Belief in God Is Logical. God's Fingerprints Cover the Universe.** It Is Irrational to Believe That the Universe Was Created Out of Nothingness.
2. **If God Does Not Exist Then There Is No Objective Definition of Good and Evil.** Everyone's Subjective Feelings Of Good and Evil All Have the Same Level of Authority.
3. **If God Does Not Exist Then Man Is Just A Part of Nature, Of Equal Value to Anything Else.** If God Does Not Exist Then Human Life Is Not Sacred.
4. **There Is Nothing That God Could Do to Prove His Existence Conclusively.** It Is Simply a Matter of Weighing the Evidence For or Against and then Making a Leap of Faith. Rational People Make the Choice Which Is More Likely To Lead to a Happier, More Productive, More Meaningful Existence. Do you Worship an Infinite, Transcendent God or Do You Worship Nothingness? What Do You Worship?
5. **If God Does Not Exist Then Life Is Meaningless.** What Difference Does It Make If You Live Like a Saint or a Criminal if In the End Your Consciousness Disappears Permanently And Eventually Everything You Ever Did Is Forgotten?
6. **If God Does Not Exist Then Freedom Is An Illusion.** We're Just the Pawns of Mother Nature, Programmed Like Robots. It is More Rational To Choose To Believe That God

some sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going." [7] Miracle indeed. (497-8)

So Wilber points to mystical experience as "proof" for Spirit, but one wonders how extraordinary human experiences can provide evidence for something like the driving force behind evolution, or even the creation of the whole cosmos. At most we could say that these experiences provide proof for the existence of some spiritual element in human nature, but that's a far cry from these cosmological or biological extrapolations.

Wilber, however, doesn't see this as a problem, since evolutionary science (supposedly offering "a mere 'chance and natural selection' explanation") is incapable of offering a rational explanation for nature's wonderful complexities. As David Lane has mentioned in his review of *The Religion of Tomorrow*, "[Ken Wilber and 'Moronic Evolution'](#)", quoting Hugo Ross without mentioning that he is a Bible thumping creationist, is misleading to say the least. Apparently, it serves Wilber's agenda of downplaying the accomplishments of cosmological and biological science so much, that he doesn't seem to be hindered by these details. Quoting three famous people—a creationist, poor Einstein and a famous ("Nobel Prize-winning", no less) scientist—completes the "argument" that the notion of a spiritual dimension in the cosmos is secured by "abundant support".

But what did [Francis Crick](#) actually say? Did he argue for a spiritual origin of life and the universe? That is hardly likely, knowing the man and his work. Looking up the source of Wilber's quote I found the following on [Rationalwiki.org](#):



Francis Crick

Being a well-known biologist and one of the best-known proponents of panspermia, Crick is frequently quote-mined by creationists. In *Life Itself, Its Origin and Nature*, he stated:

"An honest man, armed with all the knowledge available to us now, could only state that, in some

sense, the origin of life appears at the moment to be almost a miracle..."

However, the ellipsis there marks the start of a less frequently quoted section (and often creationists citing this comment will leave out the ellipsis to try and punctuate it at "miracle"). Crick continues, lest he be accused of being a total idiot rather than a fairly competent scientist:

"...so many are the conditions which would have had to have been satisfied to get it going. *But this should not be taken to imply that there are good reasons to believe that it could not have started on the earth by a perfectly reasonable sequence of fairly ordinary chemical reactions.* The plain fact is that the time available was too long, the many microenvironments on the earth's surface too diverse, the various chemical possibilities too numerous and our own knowledge and imagination too feeble to allow us to be able to unravel exactly how it might or might not have happened such a long time ago, especially as we have no experimental evidence from that era to check our ideas against."

In short, Crick acknowledges the difficulties in really figuring out the origin of life but doesn't suggest a literal miracle. (emphasis added, FV)

Telling, indeed, that Wilber's paragraph ends with this word: "miracle"—with special emphasis. If creationists like to "quote-mine" Crick and other famous scientists for spiritually sounding statements, Wilber is no different here. This is simply painful.

FOUR RATIONAL REASONS TO BELIEVE IN SPIRIT

But then, in the next paragraph, Wilber gives a more detailed and systematic justification for presenting his speculations that even a rationalistic-secular person could be persuaded to accept the notion of a spiritual universe (we have broken them down in separate bullets visually for clarity):

Rational reasons to believe in this miraculous spiritual dimension to Reality include the following:

(a) the "creative advance into novelty" that is demonstrated by evolution itself and is inexplicable by mere "chance mutation" (the evolution from strings to quarks to subatomic particles to atoms to small molecules to massively interconnected molecules to asexual cells and early organisms—just for starters—is an awful lot of evolution in a universe that is supposed to be "running down" but can easily be seen as yet more evidence of creative Eros or Spirit-in-action, "a self-organizing self-transcendent drive," as Erich Jantsch put it);

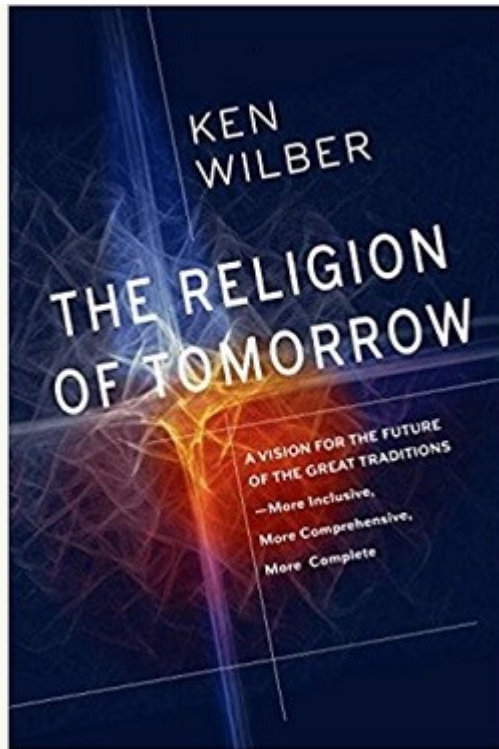
(b) the evidence from numerous sciences on the interwoven, entangled, enacted, interconnected nature of all seemingly separate things and events (these are still 3rd-person deductions and should not replace 1st-person direct meditative evidence, but are further evidence of a self-

organizing drive);

(c) the presence of consciousness as an undeniable reality throughout the universe (the denial of which is a performative contradiction); and most significantly,

(d) the experimental and injunctive proof of Spirit's existence by following paradigms, practices, and exemplars, from contemplation to highest yoga —this is not God taken on faith but based on direct personal experience, a "science of the interior," which, in every major culture the world over, has a practice leading to a "satori" or "Self-realization" that discloses a direct experience of Spirit itself, by whatever name. (p. 498)

Argument (a) has been discussed in several essays by me on Integral World[8]. The phrase "creative advance into novelty" is from process philosopher Whitehead, and is often used by Wilber to refer to this mysterious question of how on earth anything *new* could possibly have arisen. However, postulating "novelty" as a cosmic principle that cannot be explained any further hardly does anything more than begging the questions we have about nature. Science, in contrast, tries to unravel the mechanism behind seemingly mysterious natural phenomena, and books progress every day. It is an anti-science and anti-discovery stance to postulate a cosmic driving force such as Wilber's Eros, to throw light on these phenomena. It is not just that Wilber has meditated a lot and prefers to speak about these extraordinary experiences using some mystical poetry. No, he often uses these notions deliberately and specifically to "explain" natural phenomena—without ever specifying the details, of course.



Hardcover, Shambhala, 2017, 806 pages.

To continue, using the phrase "chance mutation" as catch-all for all the various mechanisms science has suggested to explain the diversity of nature—ranging from natural selection to epigenesis, to genetic drift to catastrophes...—betrays a deeply inadequate understanding of science. And again, using "running down" as a put-down for those well established scientific theories that respect the Second Law of Thermodynamics in that, in the end, our universe is unavoidably cooling down, betrays, again, a deeply inadequate understanding of basic laws of science. Not to mention the fact that some theorists argue that life and its complexity are not going against these cosmic trends but are only possible *because of them* (the field of Big History, about which I have written three long essays for Integral World, offers a much more reliable source of information on science here[9]). And finally, the phrase "self-organizing drive" for some force supposedly present in the universe at large betrays a misunderstanding by Wilber of the sciences of complexity, which to the best of my understanding do away with these cosmic "drives" (otherwise self-organization would not be *self*-organization, which happens decisively only under certain special conditions anyways).

Regarding argument (b), I have no idea what to make of "evidence from numerous sciences on the interwoven, entangled, enacted, interconnected nature of all seemingly separate things and events", nor how this could possibly provide "further evidence of a self-organizing drive". To argue, under argument (c) for "the presence of consciousness as an undeniable reality throughout the universe" is to overlook a vast literature on consciousness and its possible origin, ranging from materialism to panpsychism to idealism. It is not at all obvious how denying the cosmic prevalence of consciousness would deny it in the case of human beings, or evolved organisms as such. And finally, argument (d) consists of one of Wilber's favorite topics: to see meditation as a form of "deep science" in its own right, and to claim that using these contemplative methods "Spirit" can directly be experienced.

It is, however, one thing to respect the fact that throughout history human beings have reported extraordinary spiritual experiences, it is wholly something else to claim, as Wilber typically does, that these insights throw any meaningful light on the workings of the cosmos or of evolution at large. It is clear from *The Religion of Tomorrow* that Wilber claims to know the highest mystical experiences from personal experience (given the authoritative tone of his explanations). But is Wilber's notion of an "Eros in the Kosmos", a driving force behind evolution in nature and culture, even in the [recent US elections](#), really a universal mystical conclusion, or only his idiosyncratic conviction? Does he claim to know Supermind, the "Mind of God" so speak, so he can claim deeper knowledge of what really makes the universe tick?

ON MOVING TOO FAST

This leaves the whole argument for a spiritual dimension to the cosmos in dire straits, and the fate of Wilber's futuristic speculations hangs on this. In the end, integralists are no better off than fundamentalists when they have to make a "leap of faith" after having weighed all the evidence. Believing in a mystical future with extraordinary stages and states of consciousness on the horizon (and Wilber's *The Religion of Tomorrow* provides an exceptionally detailed catalogue of this field), is without any doubt uplifting and inspiring for many

modern-day people who have left traditional notions of religiosity behind and who find the current scientific outlook on reality depressing and devoid of meaning.

That, however, could be a very personal judgment. Most scientists experience their life of wonder and investigation as extremely meaningful. Even if the total universe is devoid of meaning, at least as this concept is understood by us humans, our personal lives can very well be meaningful when we have found relationships or activities that are close to our hearts. It is doubtful if a religion of the future, if ever there is one, should base itself on half-baked scientific theories or questionable speculations of one big, unspecified, force behind all of nature's and culture's complexities.

Wilber is moving too fast through the intermediate phase of rationality and science, in my opinion, enamored as he is by the splendid mystical future that awaits us. But in his own terminology, this can be seen as a developmentally dysfunctional situation, in which the current cultural phase of modernity is not "transcended and included" but "transcended and rejected". It is fueled by, what he calls *Phobos*, a fear of nothingness and meaninglessness perhaps, of a world that doesn't show a Grand Design. It is a questionable assumption of both fundamentalism and integralism that, without some God or Spirit, life couldn't have started in the first place. Or that our own lives are somehow incomplete without such a spiritual dimension. But listen to "arch-reductionist" and "ultra-darwinist" Richard Dawkins (whom Wilber thinks, like all of the New Atheists, suffers from a case of repressed spirituality — p. 319). Does this sound depressed, hopeless, meaningless?

The world and the universe is an extremely beautiful place, and the more we understand about it the more beautiful does it appear. It is an immensely exciting experience to be born in the world, born in the universe, and look around you and realize that before you die you have the opportunity of understanding an immense amount about that world and about that universe and about life and about why we're here. We have the opportunity of understanding far, far more than any of our predecessors ever. That is such an exciting possibility, it would be such a shame to blow it and end your life not having understood what there is to understand. (Richard Dawkins) [10]



A strong sense of meaning and purpose has powerful benefits for mental and physical wellbeing.

NOTES

[1] Ken Wilber, *The Religion of Tomorrow: A Vision for the Future of the Great Traditions — More Inclusive, More Comprehensive, More Complete*, Boulder, Shambhala, 2017, viii + 806 pages.

[2] Since the book *The Religion of Tomorrow* is very big a conventional review seems not appropriate—it is simply "too big to review"—that's why we have chosen to reflect on its content in several topical essays.

[3] Frank Visser, "[Demystifying evolution: How do Creationism, Darwinism and Integralism Compare?](http://www.integralworld.net)", www.integralworld.net

[4] David Swindle, "[6 Reasons Why Rational Thinkers Choose to Believe in God](http://www.pjmedia.com)", April 22, 2013, www.pjmedia.com

[5] Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos: How the Greatest Scientific Discoveries of the Century Reveal God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2001), 198. (Quoted in Wilber, 2017)

[6] Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, ed. Carl Seelig (New York: Three Rivers press, 1995), 40 (Quoted in Wilber, 2017)

[7] Francis Crick, *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 88. (Quoted in Wilber, 2017)

[8] Here's an incomplete list of essays dealing with Wilber's (mis)understanding of basic science:

- Frank Visser, [The 'Spirit of Evolution' Reconsidered: Relating Ken Wilber's View of Spiritual Evolution to the Current Evolution Debates](#), August 2010, www.integralworld.net
- Frank Visser, [Entropy and Evolution, Ken Wilber's arguments for "an infinitely powerful force" behind evolution debunked](#), July 2014, www.integralworld.net
- Frank Visser, ["Is the Universe Really Winding Up?"](#), August 2014, www.integralworld.net
- Frank Visser, ["Equilibrium is Death', Energy, Entropy, Evolution and the Paradox of Life's Complexity"](#), February 2016, www.integralworld.net
- Frank Visser, ["Science Has No Answer, Ken Wilber's Mistaken Strategy of Belittling Science"](#), April 2016, www.integralworld.net

[9] The interface between Integral Theory and Big History is discussed in three of my essays on Integral World:

- Frank Visser, ["Integral Theory and the Big History Approach: A Comparative Introduction"](#), May 2013, www.integralworld.net
- Frank Visser, ["Integral Theory and Cosmic Evolution: A Naturalistic Approach"](#), December 2014, www.integralworld.net
- Frank Visser, ["Big History and Integral Theory: Bill Bryson Meets Ken Wilber"](#), July 2016, www.integralworld.net

[10] https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Richard_Dawkins

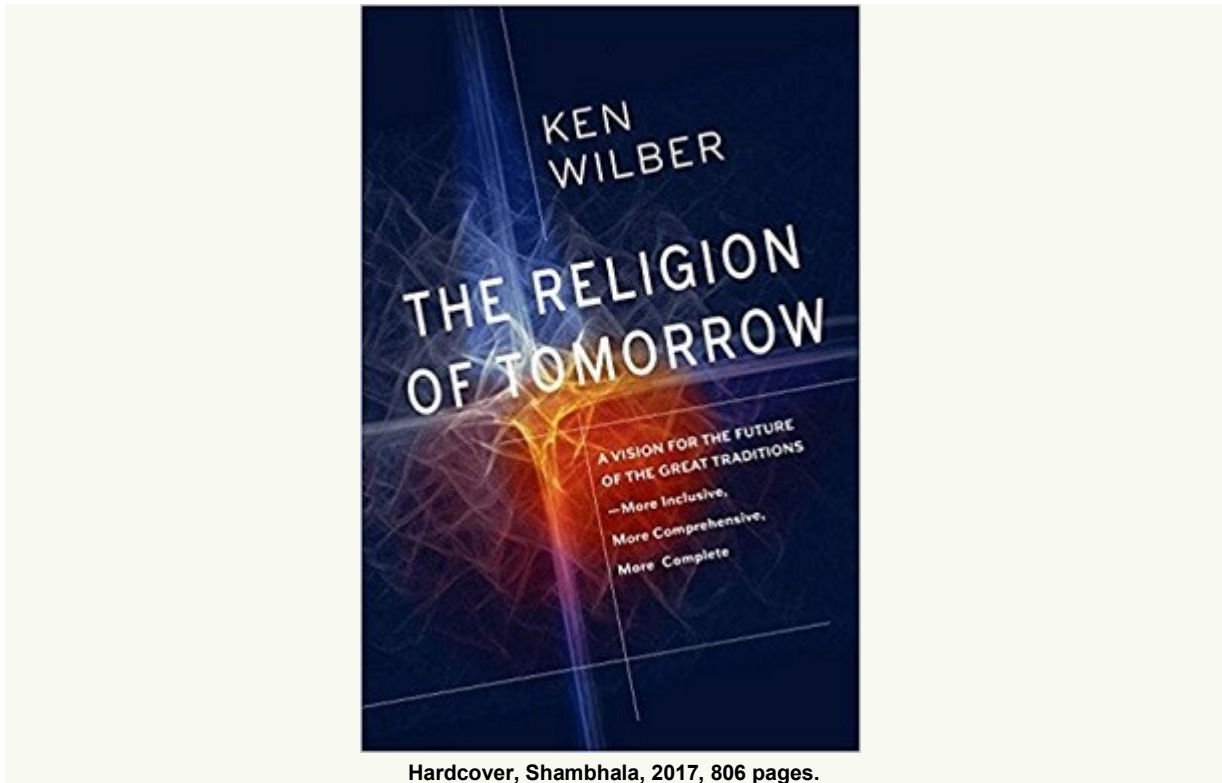
IS DARWIN REALLY 'ON OUR SIDE'?

Ken Wilber's Misreading of Neo-Darwinism

FRANK VISSER

In his latest book [*The Religion of Tomorrow*](#) (2017) Ken Wilber touches briefly on how Integral Theory relates to Darwin, and especially to Neo-Darwinism. As is no secret, Wilber is no fan of Dawkins c.s. and often sees creationists as allies when they point out the "shortcomings" of standard neo-Darwinian accounts of evolution. (A notorious example is [his recommendation of Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box*](#).) Darwin himself, however, seems to be a different matter. Here's what he says about how Darwin would fit into the integral framework:

Many Intelligent Design arguments, for example, fall into this category [of mythic-rationality]. In some ways, these arguments correctly identify several of the inadequacies of the standard, modern Neo-Darwinian view. (I don't want to be obnoxious, but it's not like that's hard to do.[12]) However, it's one thing to elucidate inadequacies of Darwinism, it's quite another to conclude that those inadequacies *prove* the existence of my version of God, his Bible, and his one and only Son. How on earth do the acknowledged inadequacies of Darwinism prove that Jesus is the one and only Son of God? They prove only that a creative drive, Eros, or a self-organizing dynamic is inherent in the universe starting from the Big Bang. (p. 305)



Hardcover, Shambhala, 2017, 806 pages.

In my opinion, the "inadequacies" of Darwinism—even if they existed—would *by the same token* not "prove" Wilber favorite notion that the universe is driven by a spiritual force of Eros. A lot more is needed to accomplish that, for sure. Perhaps they just form an indication that there's more going on than current science knows, but jumping to metaphysical conclusions is not really the proper approach. What is more, the supposed "acknowledged inadequacies" Wilber spots in neo-Darwinism remain to be seen. The credibility of this statement hangs on Wilber's expertise when it comes to matters of evolutionary theory, which is provably inadequate[1]. This contrasts sharply with his supercilious comment that pointing out these inadequacies "is not hard to do". He wouldn't even have to point to creationists to find support for controversies around neo-Darwinism, many renegade scientists within the wider evolutionary biology community would qualify.[2]

In endnote 12 referenced in the paragraph quoted above, clarifying his confidence that neo-Darwinism can easily be refuted, Wilber expands on this topic, by introducing the work of [David Loye](#), who has self-published many works promoting a grand scale reinterpretation of Darwin:

Especially when you basically have Darwin on your side against the Neo-Darwinians. David Loye as [sic] done [a series of superb books](#) that show—with extensive and direct quotes from Darwin himself—that the Darwin of the "selfish gene" and "survival of the fittest" is about as far from the real Darwin as you can get. For starters, Darwin did not believe that "survival of the fittest" was the sole or even the primary driver of evolution. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin's final and definitive statement of evolution as it worked in humans, he specifically mentions "survival of the fittest" exactly two times—once to apologize for ever using the term! Instead, he mentions "love" ninety-five times and "moral sensitivity" ninety-two times... Loye is now working on a book called *Integral Darwin*, which shows, as I just briefly outlined, that Darwin was applying an Integral framework to make sure he had a comprehensive sense of evolution in all 4 quadrants. (p. 709-10)

I invited David Loye, the founder and initiating developer and facilitator of [The Darwin Project](#), to write an essay ("[Darwin and Wilber](#)") for Integral World eight years ago.[4] In response to an audio recording of Wilber with Loye on Integral Life in 2015 I wrote "[Duplicating Darwin](#)" on Loye's work and Wilber's approval of it.[5] I have reposted this essay below for it bears directly on Wilber's recent writing (with an additional long endnote from Dawkins on the misunderstanding of the true, or at least intended meaning of the "selfish gene" concept). I also recommend David Lane and Andrea Diem-Lane's "[Darwin's Moral Sense](#)", another response to Wilber and Loye, in which the authors emphatically state: "Darwin is not in Wilber's camp":

Darwin's invocation of love has absolutely nothing to do with Wilber's ontological positioning of it in his Integral theory. It is sexual selection and survival of individuals within a nested network (family, friends, tribes) that is the real focus and prime mover behind why love arises in the first place. Contrary to Wilber's presupposition, Darwin is not "reifying" love nor equating it in any way with Integral theory's notion of Eros. Using Wilber and Loye's own questionable methodology underlines this very point since the word sex appears nearly twenty times more than the word love in the *The Descent of Man*. Is word count really an insightful way to truly understand a theory? I think not, particularly when such word choices invariably come embedded within an informing and necessary context. Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, for instance, to take just one stark example mentions the word love in some form over 40 times.... Darwin is not in Wilber's camp, no matter how one tries to wiggle him into fit an "Integral" paradigm entrenched as it is with a directional aim for evolution.

This goes to show that the integral scholarship employed to "onboard" Charles Darwin on the integral ship, and give the finger to the neo-Darwinians, is really below any acceptable standard.

-0-0-0-0-0-

"FOR THE LOVE OF DARWIN: BEYOND THE SELFISH GENE"

Facile dichotomies of aggression vs. love don't help our understanding of the processes of evolution.

A recent IntegralLife.com members-only audio "[For the Love of Darwin: Beyond the Selfish Gene](#)" (Feb. 16, 2015, members only audio - insecure connection) features a conversation between Ken Wilber and David Loye about the supposed limitations of neo-Darwinism. They talk about the many books Loye has self-published on a new, more spiritual, interpretation of Darwin, which matches [Wilber's spiritualized view of evolution](#). They both see neo-Darwinism as an extremely limited and even destructive view, which needs to be complemented by a wider and more spiritual view of Darwin. Loye even claims that Darwin, in his later works, was hinting at exactly such an expanded view of evolution.



[Listen to the audio at www.integrallife.com](http://www.integrallife.com)
(currently offline)

Loye contacted me some years ago, and introduced me to his many writings. I've happily published his brief essay "[Darwin and Wilber](#)", which was specifically written for Integral World (Feb. 19, 2009). He is an enormously prolific scientific writer, for well over fifty years, who has self-published a great many volumes on Darwin and evolution in recent years, among which the book titles *Darwin's Lost Theory* and *Darwin on Love* express his vision about Darwin most clearly. For in his understanding, there are two Darwins, one of *The Origin of Species* (1859), and one of *The Descent of Man* (1871). The Darwin of *Origin* proposed natural selection as the main driver of natural pre-human evolution, the Darwin of *Descent* proposed sexual selection (or "love") as the

main driver of human cultural/moral evolution. Where the Darwin of *Origin* is widely known and has become solidified (Loye would say crystallized) into neo-Darwinism, the Darwin of *Descent* is largely forgotten, or "lost", as Loye would phrase it.

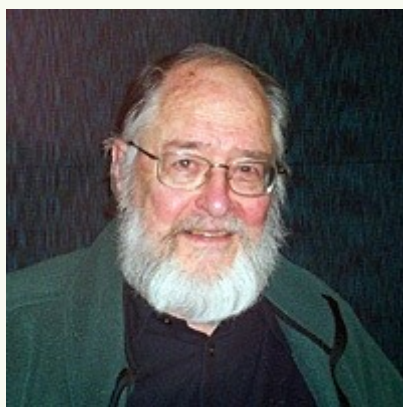
Please check out his website www.davidloye.com for an overview of his works (and also www.osantouniversity.com). From the biographical page on the author's website:

"I am a psychologist, evolutionary systems scientist, and the author of many books unusual, among other aspects, in still being completed and published by a man in his eighties. Among scientific subjects are my books on Darwin, moral evolution, evolution theory, history, prediction of the future, and social action. Of more of the good life are my books of adventure, travel, humor, children's stories, poems, and love."

Loye is co-founder of the [General Evolution Research Group](#) (with Ervin Laszlo and other scientists), and of [The Darwin Project](#). Both initiatives try to correct the erroneous view that Darwin promoted a view of human nature in which selfishness and the "survival of the fittest" were the main ingredient.

So in this presentation, neo-Darwinism is the main culprit of many ills, in culture and society. As the introduction to the audio on IntegralLife.com phrases it:

Survival of the fittest is taken by many as the end-all, be-all of Darwinian evolution—that all evolution comes down to the solitary drive to propagate one's genes at any cost, giving rise to all sorts of "selfish gene" interpretations of life, evolution, and society.



David Loye (b. 1926)

Loye is fond of talking about the "selfish gene/survival of the fittest mindset", which supposedly disastrously dominates modern culture, but which also caused him much trouble in getting his controversial works on evolution published through

regular (or even alternative) publishers. He met with a "wall of resistance" due to the "stranglehold of the selfish gene/survival of the fittest mindset". Having worked in the publishing industry for many years, I find that hard to believe, for if you look at the alternative book market, almost anything gets published. But perhaps the market for these Darwiniana is just not big enough. Wilber accords with this suspicion that Darwin's "true" vision met with great resistance: "There were essential worldview forces out there, if you will, that were bound on misinterpreting him almost from the start."

Wilber then adds his own familiar spin to the discussion, for in his understanding, it is not so much the fittest that get selected, but Truth, Beauty and Goodness:

I think there's a clear sort of grain to the Kosmos, if you will, and there are, indeed, sort of selection processes that are going on. But, in many cases, they're for the good and in many cases for the true, and many cases for the beautiful.... These are, in a sense, being selected for. These are part of the evolutionary push of evolution's strive. And that means that they're really an inherent part of the Kosmos, an intrinsic feature of the Kosmos.

Loye and Wilber even speculate, that Darwin was, "in his own way", hinting at this spiritual view of the Cosmos. In Wilber's philosophy, selfishness characterizes the early stages of evolution, but as evolution proceeds, higher motives and sensibilities come to the fore. So should we in our understanding of evolutionary theory, Wilber and Loye conclude.

FRAMING NEO-DARWINISM THE WRONG WAY

This betrays a superficial reading of even neo-Darwinism's most popular writer Richard Dawkins.

The implication of all this is that if "selfish gene" style neo-Darwinism cannot handle altruism, cooperation or love, some other explanation is needed, even a spiritual one. It's high time to have a look at some neo-Darwinist writing, to see if these accusations have any ground in reality. As readers of this website will know by now, [Ken Wilber's statements about evolutionary theory](#) triggered me to do my own reading in that field, and my conclusions were not pretty. I started reading

Dawkins and other evolutionary luminaries such as Gould, Dennett, Coyne, Mayr, Zimmer, Carroll, Futuyma and others. Contrary to Wilber's opinions about evolutionary theory's failures, I entered a wonderful world of research into the manifold mysteries of nature, with stunning discoveries of its own, which contradicted Wilber's stereotypes. Does Loye have a better grip of the field, given his long involvement with scientists from the General Evolution Research Group?

For Loye, there's a real battle going on in our society between the forces of selfishness and destruction on the one hand, and those of love and creativity on the other. His reinterpretation of Darwin is not just an academic pursuit, but also an activist one. The dichotomy that is set up goes something like this (taken from my [review](#) of Steve McIntosh' recent book *Evolution's Purpose*):

"OLD VIEW OF EVOLUTION"	"NEW VIEW OF EVOLUTION"
<p><i>Evolution is a random, strictly biological process, with no overall progress, purpose or direction, in a materialistic, accidental and meaningless universe.</i></p>	<p><i>Evolution is a wider, universal process of emergence, showing overall progress, purpose and direction, in a spiritual, meaningful and wonderful universe.</i></p>

Loye puts it even stronger in the audio. "The old Darwinian thing was used by robber barons to justify their depredations. It was used by Hitler in his conquest. It was used by Stalin to push forward the idea of, you know, survival of the fittest."



Richard Dawkins: "I should perhaps have gone for *The Immortal Gene*."

It is at such a point that I get wary of these facile dichotomies, so popular in the alternative culture. We have on the one hand "the pseudo-Darwinian celebration of selfishness", which destroys everything that is valuable in society when taken to its logical consequences, and we have an uplifting view of love and unselfishness, which has to be introduced into our culture "before it is too late". The "negative" interpretation of Darwin prevails and leads to disaster. To save the world we need the "positive" interpretation of Darwin, stressing cooperation, mutuality, love and morality.

What I find particularly troublesome in Loye's discourse is his simplistic equation of neo-Darwinism with "survival of the fittest", selfishness and the ills of society. This betrays a superficial reading of even neo-Darwinism's most popular writer Richard Dawkins—a "Super Neo" Loye calls him. (Dawkins has even been held responsible for the rise of Thatcherism in the UK). Similar lines of reasoning equate atheism with immorality, nihilism and the end of the world as we know it. Most creationist objections to evolutionary theory don't hang on scientific details, but on its supposed detrimental moral effects. But if it is in the end all really a matter of "selfish gene/survival of the fittest mindset" vs. "love rules the world/Kosmos" this would mean the end of all mature and informed debate.

I'd like to highlight three points of contention, to start off this debate.

Survival of the Fittest?

For starters, isn't it entry-level understanding of evolutionary theory that "fittest" in "survival of the fittest" (not Darwin's term, but Spencer's) does not mean strongest, or most selfish, or aggressive, but "most adapted to the demands of the environment"? Here's a sample of a popular online source:

A majority of the general public may be able to describe natural selection as "survival of the fittest". When pressed for a further explanation of that term, however, the majority will answer incorrectly. To a person not familiar with what natural selection really is, "fittest" means the best physical specimen of the species and only those in the best shape and best health will survive in nature. This is not always the case. The individuals that survive are not always the strongest, fastest, or smartest. Therefore, "survival of the fittest" may not be the best way to describe what natural selection really is as it applies to evolution. Darwin did not mean it in these terms when he used it in his book after

Herbert [Spencer] first published the phrase. Darwin meant "fittest" to mean the one best suited for the immediate environment. This is the basis of the idea of natural selection. (evolution.about.com)

There's even a quote attributed to Darwin which expresses this beautifully—even if it's authenticity is debated, it captures the spirit of his vision:

"It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change." (www.goodreads.com)

So yes, physical strength can be selected for, but so can speed, or color, or agility, or flexibility—or yes, even human intelligence. *This changes everything.* Sometimes it helps to be big, but in different circumstances it helps to be small. It all depends. Competition and cooperation both exist in nature. Both can be included in a Darwinian perspective. If talent for competition works, it is passed on. If cooperation works, it is passed on too. Ironically, a talent for cooperation is even competitive! One only has to look at the soccer competition, where the team that shows the best teamwork wins from the competition.

As paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould phrased it well, in an essay about [Kropotkin](#), a Russian biologist and activist who emphasized cooperation:

This charge against Darwin [that Darwinism undermines morality] is unfair for two reasons. First, nature (no matter how cruel in human terms) provides no basis for our moral values. (Evolution might, at most, help to explain why we have moral feelings, but nature can never decide for us whether any particular action is right or wrong.) Second, Darwin's "struggle for existence" is an abstract metaphor, not an explicit statement about bloody battle. Reproductive success, the criterion of natural selection, works in many modes: Victory in battle may be one pathway, but cooperation, symbiosis, and mutual aid may also secure success in other times and contexts. ("Kropotkin Was No Crackpot", [Natural History](#), 1997)

Selfish Gene, Selfish Organism?

"Genes may be selfish. But people have evolved to be social."

—Richard Conniff

Secondly, linking the concept of the "selfish gene" to selfishness in general and its consequences for society overlooks the fact (made clear by Dawkins on numerous occasions but especially in

the 30 year jubilee edition of [The Selfish Gene](#), 2006, p. viii[6]) that Dawkins intended the emphasis in that infamous book title to be laid on *gene*, not on *selfish*. The larger theoretical discussion is about which biological level is "selfish"—gene, organism, group, species, ecosystem?—in the metaphorical sense of being selected and passed on to future generations. This is lost on the general public, spoon-fed on journalism, which as Dawkins wittily remarks only reads a book by its title [apparently *half* the title, FV], and not "the long footnote that is the book itself".

It goes without saying that genes can't be selfish, because they don't have feelings in the first place. This most obvious thing still needs stressing, even decades after the book's first publication. This metaphor was rejected at first by Dawkins' publisher, for being too "negative", though alternative titles such as *The Immortal Gene* were considered as well. (As an aside, would we all have become immortal had this title been chosen, instead of selfish?) Dawkins has many interesting things to say about metaphors and "good poetry", which leads to further research, and "bad poetry", which hinders it.

So Dawkins never claimed that we are inherently selfish because our genes are selfish. On the contrary! For assigning "selfishness" to the gene level—even if only in a strictly metaphorical sense—opened the possibility to have these genes create an organism that displays *all kinds of behavior*, from extreme selfishness to extreme altruism and everything in between. In the chapter "The Selfish Cooperator" in [Unweaving the Rainbow](#) (1998) Dawkins opposes both the notion that humans are essentially selfish and that they are essentially good-natured (as Frans de Waal has argued). Not surprisingly, we are both! And both traits have genetic components which can therefore be transmitted to subsequent generations. The easy logical step from selfish genes to selfish organisms is a *non sequitur*.

And yes, Darwinism has been misinterpreted often to imply that selfishness is our natural state, and therefore should rule the world, but the first statement is definitely wrong and the second one doesn't follow from the first. (Is natural always right?). But does the existence of false money disprove the existence of real

money? Former Enron CEO [Jeff Skilling's](#) favorite book was *The Selfish Gene*, which left Dawkins "mortified" when he read about this in *The Guardian* (*The God Delusion*, Chapter 6: The Roots of Morality, p. 215n.) This grave misunderstanding gets corrected in the same footnote, by referring to the article "[Animal Instincts](#)" written by journalist and animal science writer [Richard Conniff](#), who writes perceptively and concisely:

Genes may be selfish. But people have evolved to be social. And these days, the Darwinian view includes an understanding that cooperation and even altruism are part of our genetic heritage. (*The Guardian*, 27 May 2006)

So who's to blame for this misunderstanding? It is Dawkins here, for sure, who gets misunderstood and misrepresented, though the catchy book title hasn't exactly been helpful in removing this widespread misunderstanding.

A Divine Hand in Nature?

And thirdly, it might very well be true that the later Darwin wrote about phenomena that are specific to the human species. (Ironically, it was precisely the "Super Neo" Dawkins who suggested that we need the concept of *memes* to account for cultural phenomena. And no, this was not a later addition to his otherwise "reductionistic" works, but already occurs in chapter 11 of *The Selfish Gene* published in 1978!) Many contemporaries of Darwin, most notably the co-author of the theory of natural selection Alfred Wallace himself, thought that natural selection could perhaps explain the manifold phenomena of pre-human evolution, but that the human species was something entirely different, requiring a metaphysical explanation (Wallace became a spiritualist in his later years).

So Darwin's whole intent and purpose of writing *The Descent of Man* was to argue for a fully naturalistic explanation of the human species.[7] There was no Divine Plan, no Special Creation, no Hand of God infusing the great apes with intelligence. This was "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" in a nutshell, as Dennett's book by the same title has it. Has Daniel Dennett "distorted" Darwin, as Loyal claims in the audio? What is this "dangerous idea"? That evolution is thinkable and explainable *without* postulating purpose, design, a Divine Plan etc. Now *that* was a vision that would meet with strong

resistance in the nineteenth century (and in the US even in this 21st century)! Not the opposite view, that human beings have some special status over nature, for that was and is a common understanding. Tempting as it is to see things in nature as "designed" (by a "Designer" or Eros), a naturalistic explanation is possible that does away with that hypothesis (a temptation Ken Wilber has not been able to withstand).

As I wrote a few years ago in my [paper](#) on Wilber's misreading of evolutionary theory:

In spiritualist accounts, the scientific theory of evolution is often presented in a rather gloomy, not to say *appalling* fashion: according to the scientific worldview, we live in a meaningless and purposeless universe and are the products of random chance. Then, at the very moment you are about to kill yourself, the spiritualists present a much more *appealing* view of evolution: we are part of a universal process which is not only heading for Spirit, but driven by It as well. It's all "onwards and upwards" in this view of life. Who in his right mind would not vote for the second option?

We might well heed Richard Dawkins' admonition here, that in science, what counts is not that an idea is comforting, but that it is true... In the final analysis these emotional judgments don't count. (And for some, of course, science is appealing and spirituality appalling...)

In my opinion, facile dichotomies of aggression vs. love—often a variation of male vs. female, Loye is involved with the [Center for Partnership Studies](#) with his wife, the author [Rianne Eisler](#)) don't help our understanding of the processes of evolution. Framing neo-Darwinism as producing and being responsible for a grim prospect of our society, and contrasting it to a world of love and harmony that should save the world comes across as well-meaning but hopelessly New Age.

I must admit that I haven't read any of Loye's many self-published works on Darwin, but this online dialogue with Ken Wilber supposedly being a good summary of it ("You have done a brilliant job of summarizing all five books I've written!") is not promising. I am actually surprised that someone as erudite as Loye would engage in superficial treatments of neo-Darwinism like this.[8]

NOTES

[1] Frank Visser, [The 'Spirit of Evolution' Reconsidered: Relating Ken Wilber's View of Spiritual Evolution to the Current Evolution Debates](#), August 2010, www.integralworld.net

[2] For example: the website "[The Third Way: Evolution in the Era of Genomics and Epigenomics](#)" provides enough critical evaluations of standard neo-Darwinism, by a group of biologists who try to find a middle way between Creationism and Neo-Darwinism. How many of these theorists would subscribe to Wilber's notion of an "Eros in the Kosmos"? And has he even tried to convince them of its validity?

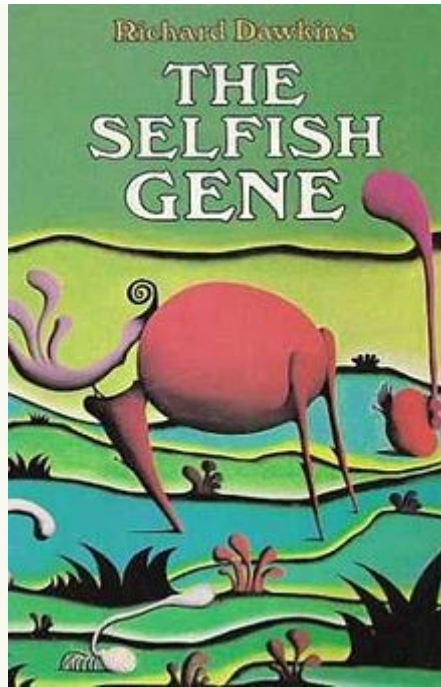
[3] The book *Integral Darwin* can be downloaded from Loye's website

here: <http://www.davidloye.com/darwin/book/index.html>. It isn't yet traceable on Amazon.

[4] David Loye, "[Darwin and Wilber](#)", February 2009, www.integralworld.net

[5] Frank Visser, "[Duplicating Darwin: Ken Wilber's and David Loye's Misreading of Neo-Darwinism](#)", February 2015, www.integralworld.net

[6] Richard Dawkins' reflections on how the title [The Selfish Gene](#) has been misunderstood by many (to the extent that, according to the correct interpretation of this concept, genes are, of course, not selfish, nor are we born selfish), makes for interesting reading about how metaphors can go a long way. He even pleads guilty of occasionally having contributed to this misunderstanding:



Original cover, with details from the painting *The Expectant Valley* by zoologist Desmond Morris

"Let me begin with some second thoughts about the title. In 1975, through the mediation of my friend Desmond Morris I showed the partially completed book to Tom Maschler, doyen of London publishers, and we discussed it in his room at Jonathan Cape. He liked the book but not the title. 'Selfish', he said, was a 'down word'. Why not call it *The Immortal Gene*? Immortal was an 'up' word, the immortality of genetic information was a central theme of the book, and 'immortal gene' had almost the same intriguing ring as 'selfish gene' (neither of us, I think, noticed the resonance with Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*). I now think Maschler may have been right. Many critics, especially vociferous ones learned in philosophy as I have discovered, prefer to read a book by title only. No doubt this works well enough for *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* or *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, but I can readily see that 'The Selfish Gene' on its own, without the large footnote of the book itself, might give an inadequate impression of its contents. Nowadays, an American publisher would in any case have insisted on a subtitle.

The best way to explain the title is by locating the emphasis. Emphasize 'selfish' and you will think the book is about selfishness, whereas, if anything, it devotes more attention to altruism. The correct word of the title to stress is 'gene' and let

me explain why. A central debate within Darwinism concerns the unit that is actually selected: what kind of entity is it that survives, or does not survive, as a consequence of natural selection. That unit will become, more or less by definition, 'selfish'. Altruism might well be favoured at other levels. Does natural selection choose between species? If so, we might expect individual organisms to behave altruistically 'for the good of the species'. They might limit their birth rates to avoid overpopulation, or restrain their hunting behaviour to conserve the species' future stocks of prey. It was such widely disseminated misunderstandings of Darwinism that originally provoked me to write the book.

Or does natural selection, as I urge instead here, choose between genes? In this case, we should not be surprised to find individual organisms behaving altruistically 'for the good of the genes', for example by feeding and protecting kin who are likely to share copies of the same genes. Such kin altruism is only one way in which gene selfishness can translate itself into individual altruism. This book explains how it works, together with reciprocation, Darwinian theory's other main generator of altruism. If I were ever to rewrite the book, as a late convert to the Zahavi/Grafen 'handicap principle' (see pages 309-313) I should also give some space to Amotz Zahavi's idea that altruistic donation might be a 'Potlatch' style of dominance signal: see how superior to you I am, I can afford to make a donation to you!

Let me repeat and expand the rationale for the word 'selfish' in the title. The critical question is which level in the hierarchy of life will turn out to be the inevitably 'selfish' level, at which natural selection acts? The Selfish Species? The Selfish Group? The Selfish Organism? The Selfish Ecosystem? Most of these could be argued, and most have been uncritically assumed by one or another author, but all of them are wrong. Given that the Darwinian message is going to be pithily encapsulated as The Selfish *Something*, that something turns out to be the gene, for cogent reasons which this book argues. Whether or not you end up buying the argument itself, that is the explanation for the title. I hope that takes care of the more serious misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, I do with hindsight notice lapses of my own on the very same subject. These are to be found especially in Chapter 1, epitomised by the sentence 'Let us try to teach generosity and altruism because we are born selfish'. There is nothing wrong with teaching generosity and altruism, but 'born selfish' is misleading. In partial explanation, it was not until 1978 that I began to think clearly about the distinction between 'vehicles' (usually organisms) and the 'replicators' that ride inside them (in practice genes : the whole matter is explained in Chapter 13, which was added in the Second Edition). Please mentally delete that rogue sentence and others like it, and substitute something along the lines of this paragraph. Given the dangers of that style of error, I can readily see how the title could be misunderstood, and this is one reason why I should perhaps have gone for *The Immortal Gene*." ([The Selfish Gene](#): 30th Anniversary Edition, 2006)

[7] See: David Lane & Andrea Diem-Lane, [Darwin's Moral Sense, The Evolution of a Conscience](#), www.integralworld.net.

[8] In his recently released [Science in the Soul: Selected Writings of a Passionate Rationalist](#) (2017) Richard Dawkins knocks down Wilberian-type of explanations for adaptive complexity (closely following a typology of six possible evolutionary theories devised by Ernst Mayr in his massive [The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution and Inheritance](#), 1982, p. 360).

From the 1982 lecture "Universal Darwinism":

Theory 1: Built-in capacity for, or drive towards, increasing perfection

To the modern mind this is not really a theory at all, and I shall not bother to discuss it. It is obviously mystical, and does not explain anything that it doesn't assume to start with. (p. 124)

Reflections on "The Religion of Tomorrow", Part VII

CLIMBING THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Ken Wilber's Mystical Religion of the Future

FRANK VISSER

*And as we wind on down the road
Our shadows taller than our soul.
There walks a lady we all know
Who shines white light and wants to show
How ev'rything still turns to gold.
—Led Zeppelin, 'Stairway to Heaven'*

Perhaps Wilber's "shadow is taller than his soul", in terms of what he neglects to include in his integral model.

My recent six-part series of rather critical topical review essays[1] of Ken Wilber's latest book [The Religion of Tomorrow](#) (2017) will be concluded by this final one, which strikes a decidedly more positive note. Readers of the previous essays could easily have gotten the impression that this book isn't worth reading, but nothing could be further from the truth. The core of this book—and the core-business of Ken Wilber's oeuvre—consists of a stage model of development and consciousness that can fruitfully be applied to all aspects of religion, both in their healthy and their less healthy expressions. Ten years ago I published essays on Integral World, by budding integral religious scholar [Dustin DiPerna](#), on Christianity and Islam which demonstrated exactly that fact.[2] I saw, and see, great merit in using the integral model to clarify the religious landscape, which is so full of tensions and misunderstandings between large groups of society, but without overburdening it

with cosmological, evolutionary or esoteric considerations. Plainly stated: religion can be magical, mythical, rational, pluralistic, integral and super-integral (mystical), and these distinctions hold true both *between* and *within* religious traditions—because they reflect universal human capabilities. Fundamentalism, liberalism and mysticism can be found in all religious traditions.

The general thesis of *The Religion of Tomorrow* can be summarized in a couple of bullet points:

1. Human beings can go through several stages of development, both personal and transpersonal (which is the great discovery of the West)
2. Human beings can have access to several states of consciousness, both natural and meditative (which is the great discovery of the East)
3. Western spirituality has lost of expertise of and access to mystical states, and its cognitive growth is stuck at the mythic stage.
4. Eastern spirituality still has expertise of and access to mystical states, but has no awareness of the various stages of development
5. States can be accessed from virtually any of the cognitive stages but their expression is colored by the prevalent cognitive stage of development
6. All stages and states are susceptible to 'dysfunctions', which can take the form of either 'addictions' or 'allergies' to a certain stage/state
7. Remedies or therapies that can be offered in these pathological cases are intended to restore balance and perspective (through the Right Integral View)

Describing all these aspect in this brief review would not be possible or even practical. Suffice to say that Wilber puts special emphasis on item to #1:

During the one to two thousand years from the founding of most spiritual systems up to today, there has been such a tremendous increase in information about the human system in general that it becomes negligent, in some cases almost criminally negligent, to keep overlooking and failing to

include at least some of this information. One of the central aims of an Integral Spirituality and Fourth Turning would be, indeed, to begin redressing this unfortunate state of affairs. (p. 579)

The general model is brilliant in its simplicity: we go through several stages on our way up to Spirit, and when this development goes less than smooth, we generate shadow issues which no amount of meditation will be able to cure. We are either not able to let go of stages (addiction) or we repress them (allergy), and this can happen both to past or future stages. That's basically the whole dynamics of it all, from the most severe psychosis to the most sublime mystical imbalance. Holding this model in mind allows one to make sense of the chaotic mixture of cultural values, opinions and conflicts that characterize our current Culture Wars. Wilber stresses the point that nobody, including himself, is immune to shadow issues, and that no stage of development is free of possible disturbances, even to the highest mystical level. The book reads a bit like a spiritual DSM-5, which leaves almost no detail untouched of the Spiritual Way ahead of us.



Speaking more metaphorically, in a healthy personal and transpersonal development, we climb to Heaven without denying Earth—that's the message of *The Religion of Tomorrow* in a nutshell. And these same dynamics (either allergy or addiction, or both) apply to *any* level of development, both in

the personal and the transpersonal dimensions (p. 551-5). These are the evocative terms Wilber uses:

- *Heaven allergy*: the denial of any post-rational, spiritual stages - atheism, secularism, rationality
- *Earth addiction*: earth (Gaia) is everything there is and we are part of it - ecological earth-spirituality
- *Earth allergy*: this world is a valley of tears, to be left behind, in the next life or heaven world
- *Heaven addiction*: one gets lost in the bliss of meditative states - other-worldly meditative spirituality

The various stages of development (thirteen in all!) are represented by colors, for easy reference, as becomes clear from Wilber's version of our "Stairway to Heaven". These stages can be subdivided into personal stages (or "First Tier"), existential or centauric stages ("Second Tier") and transpersonal/mystical stages ("Third Tier"):

Table 1. Stages of development and their colors in Integral Theory.	
WHITE: Supermind	"THIRD TIER" OR "SUPER- INTEGRAL"
ULTRAVIOLET: Overmind	
VIOLET: Meta-mind	
INDIGO: Para-mind	
TURQUOISE: Integral	"SECOND TIER" OR "INTEGRAL"
TEAL: Holistic	
GREEN: Pluralistic	"FIRST TIER"
ORANGE: Rational	

AMBER-ORANGE: Mythic-rational	
AMBER: Mythic	
RED: Magic-Mythic	
MAGENTA: Magic	
INFRARED/CRIMSON: Archaic	

Briefly, First Tier colors represent the warring cultural sections in contemporary society: premodern-religious (Crimson to Red), modern-secular (Orange) to postmodern-pluralistic (Green). Second Tier colors represent the imminent Holistic/Integral culture that allows each of the First Tier cultures its rightful place, because it understands their partial truths, but puts them in perspective. Third Tier colors are only relevant at the moment individually, or in small subcultures, because they refer to meditative stages and states of development. That explains the current interest of the integral community in "Teal organizations", and spiritual traditions. Ascending this Stairway to Heaven, our circle of concern widens. Premodern stages limit themselves to their own religious groups. The step from Second Tier (Earth) to the Third Tier (Heaven) of mystical spirituality is paramount for Wilber, and analyzing the missteps that can happen in this area is where he excels.

In the snappy jargon of Integral Theory, these four dimensions of spirituality stand out:

- Waking Up - relates to states of consciousness, meditation, spirituality
- Growing Up - relates to stages of development, personal growth and maturity
- Cleaning Up - relates to shadow work, curing misdirected development
- Showing Up - relates to our social responsibility, being in the world

Perhaps one important item has been forgotten—and I am only half-joking ;-)

- Shutting Up - don't makes claims that fall outside of your particular expertise

Most of *The Religion of Tomorrow* deals with Waking Up and Growing Up, and their complex interactions. A separate section is devoted to Cleaning Up or shadow work. Unfortunately, very little can be found on Showing Up. Is that perhaps symbolic for the heavy emphasis on personal growth in Integral Theory, even if this is done in a multi-dimensional approach of states and stages? We won't go into the further details of state-development, and Wilber's particular Vedanta-Vajrayana model of consciousness. Those interested in these subjects will find a lot in this book. As nobody else, Wilber is able to seduce you into experiencing wider states of consciousness, in his role as [spiritual guide and mystic](#). I want to address some concerns that, so to speak, cast a shadow over this voluminous book.

TURNING TO THE WORLD OF TODAY

This book could have benefited greatly from more real life examples of religious forms of expression, taken from the great religions.

When we look at the world of *today*, and not of *tomorrow*, religion is a hot topic and especially in its more extreme versions. We see both fundamentalists and atheists pitted grimly polarized against each other, the one defending the one true religion, the other rejecting everything spiritual. A developmental model can do much in softening these tensions.[3] That Wilber hasn't dealt with these current tensions in society, especially related to [terrorism](#)—is a missed opportunity, and this is not the first time. A decade ago a promising announcement was made on Wilber's own website of a trilogy-in-progress called *The Many Faces of Terrorism* (which for unexplained reasons never got published), which would once and for all clarify this phenomenon that has grabbed us by the throat since 9/11.[4] But in *The Religion of Tomorrow* Wilber devotes literally *one single sentence* to an explanation for terrorism, in the context of a paragraph on arrested development, especially of the mythic-religious variety:

Indeed, a quick review of the types of terrorism committed in the last several decades shows that fundamentalist religious drives are by far the most common ones. (p. 544)

This is a highly questionable and irresponsible statement. A quick search for "[religious terrorism](#)" on Wikipedia leads us to the following information:

Religious terrorism is terrorism carried out based on motivations and goals that have a predominantly religious character or influence.

In the modern age, after the decline of ideas such as the divine right of kings and with the rise of nationalism, terrorism has more often been based on anarchism, and revolutionary politics. Since 1980, however, there has been an increase in terrorist activity motivated by religion.

Former United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher has said that terrorist acts in the name of religion and ethnic identity have become "one of the most important security challenges we face in the wake of the Cold War." However, the political scientists Robert Pape and Terry Nardin, the social psychologists M. Brooke Rogers and colleagues, and the sociologist and religious studies scholar Mark Juergensmeyer have all argued *that religion should be considered only one incidental factor and that such terrorism is primarily geopolitical.* (emphasis added)

Now consider this: after having written a *Many Faces of Terrorism*-trilogy, supposedly of well over 1.000 pages, which never have seen the light of day, is *this* what Ken Wilber comes up with, contradicting the first Wikipedia page on the subject of religious terrorism? It is a very *un-integral* analysis at that, for it would require at least a look at the other quadrants, especially the collective ones of geopolitics, culture and society, to complete the picture. Here again, one feels Wilber is overplaying his hand.

He *does* offer a valuable theoretical tool to make sense of the deadlock between fundamentalists and atheists—it was already introduced in *Integral Spirituality* (2006): the level/line fallacy. Wilber has become famous for that other fallacy, the pre/trans fallacy, but this one deserves closer attention. When religion is limited to one stage only (so a whole ladder of spirituality is reduced to only one step on that ladder), those who are on the mythic-literal step (amber) see their fundamentalist brand of religion as the only true one, to be defended against all unbelievers in a Holy War. In turn, those who have moved on to the next step on the ladder, the rational-secular step (orange), will fight against this type of religion and see it as the greatest danger in contemporary society. This fallacy is mentioned a couple of times.

But it gets worse. When characterizing the basic amber-mythic level of development, Wilber makes some disturbing comments—and this is not just a slip of the pen:

In terms of what is amounting to a horse race concerning humanity's future, we have in the positive pan a Right-hand coming technological singularity and a Left-hand possible 2nd-tier global transformation; and, in the negative pan, a Right-hand global warming and drastic ecological despoliation and a Left-hand stationing of the center of gravity for 60 to 70 percent of the population at ethnocentric amber (that is, the center of gravity of most Nazis) or lower. (p. 321)

But blue/amber (mythic-membership) order is marked by ethnocentric, extremely absolutistic, very conformist, very rigid thinking (such as found in groups like the Nazis or in fundamentalist religions)—exactly what these organizations and individuals do NOT need. It's like saying, "What we need here are more Nazis! (p. 704-5)

There is blue order, for sure, but there is also orange order, green order, teal order, and so on, and the organization or person who needs more order needs more of some of those higher levels of order, not primitive, lower, blue/amber order (Nazis!). (p. 705)

Blatantly ignoring [Godwin's Law](#), one really wonders what rhetorical effect Wilber is aiming at with these distasteful accusations. It is not only tactless, but it is also simply not true. Wilber could have benefited from DiPerna's distinction between "moderate" and "extremist" versions of any stage, including the mythic-literal one.[5] Just as terrorists can be seen as mythic-literal extremists, some of the more belligerent atheists can be seen as extremist rationalists. But it definitely doesn't help when a basic stage in the integral developmental model is compared to one of the worst atrocities in modern history. Somewhere else Wilber says this about religious fundamentalism, as to impress us with the dangerous nature of the mythic-literal stage of development:

To say it again, in the Left-hand quadrants, the ethnocentric Mythic religious View is perhaps the most dangerous and pernicious impediment to world harmony that now exists. Most of the world's present conflicts, wars, and terrorist acts have at least one foot in this ethnocentric level. (p. 306)

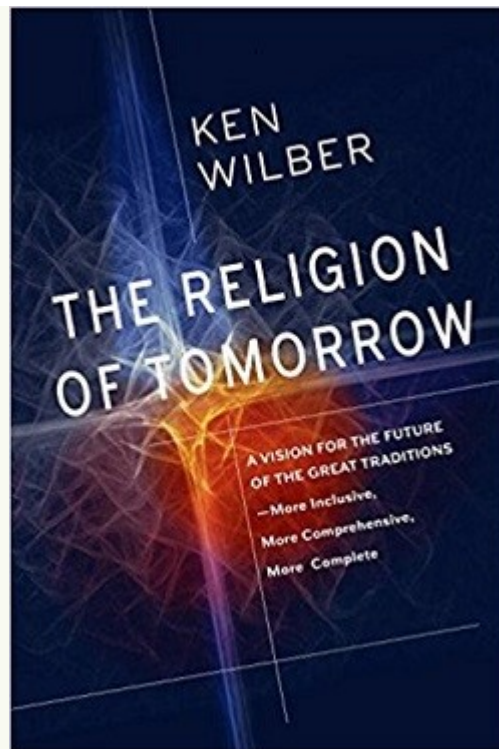
For Heaven's sake, what on Earth is going on here with "the world's foremost integral thinker"? Is this seriously Ken Wilber's attempt to "Show Up" in our world, that cries out for reasonable explanations and solid research instead of cheap stereotypes and grandiose and unfounded claims to expertise? Integral

studies should strive to de-escalate, instead of heating things up like this!

Ironically, when discussing the New Atheists, Wilber is critical of this very same stereotyped approach to mythic-literal, fundamentalist spirituality:

Often known as the "new atheists" (such as Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, and Christopher Hitchens), they aggressively attack all spirituality as being the most dangerous and demented force on the planet. It's not that some of their points aren't true or don't need to be made; it's that the sheer vehemence with which they hold their views (not to mention the cherry-picking of spiritual items chosen to attack—how hard is it, really, to belittle myths like Noah's Ark or Moses's flight from Egypt?) are a tip-off, as always, to projected material. These attacks are *rabidly* antiritual (and notice that when they do attack spirituality, virtually none of them attack meditation or contemplative spirituality—a new atheist like Sam Harris actually says that he is *not* referring to meditative forms, and, as a matter of fact, he himself meditates), and the "frothing at the mouth" nature of their attacks is a dead giveaway to the projected shadow material driving it. (p. 318-9)

But given the prevalence of the mythic-religious mindset, all over the world, it is almost a moral duty to present systematic arguments against it, as Richard Dawkins has done for example in his best-seller *The God Delusion* (2006). If the goal is to bring a large majority of the world's inhabitants up to the level of *rationality* (let's forget about climbing spiritual ladders for the moment), these atheists serve a strategic and necessary function in the wider view of things, and deserve every support. As long as it is impossible for atheist to run for office, especially in the United States, but in most European countries as well, we are nowhere near the religion of tomorrow ([Donald Trump](#) might be the exception that proves the rule).



Hardcover, Shambhala, 2017, 806 pages.

Wilber, however, is already ahead of the pack, and devotes the bulk of *The Religion of Tomorrow* to extremely subtle mystical phenomena. That's where he excels, and it is a joy to read about this, but one should not forget that outside of that domain, Wilber's expertise peters out very quickly. How valid (or sane?) is Wilber's definition that "the ultimate purpose of spirituality and spiritual practice is to discover one's fundamental Supreme Identity with Spirit, with the Ground of all Being, with the ultimate Reality of the Kosmos itself"? (p. 531) Can we have some fresh air please? It's great that Wilber values shadow work within the context of personal growth, but Jung—who invented the shadow concept—is strangely absent from these pages. He is only mentioned in the context of archetypes (which according to Wilber Jung misunderstood[6]). A strange and telling omission indeed.

When it turns out that the biggest allergy of Second Tier is an allergy to Green ("A very common pathology at 2nd tier—perhaps even *the* most common—is a green allergy", p. 332), does that explain perhaps Wilber's unwillingness to engage criticism as posted on Integral World for over twenty years? Of course, when "debate is endless" and "we have truth on our side", who needs critics? But if you want to build a strong

theoretical model, you can't do without challenges from all possible corners.

INTEGRAL FACT-CHECKERS WANTED

With all of Wilber's extolling of mystical spirituality, where does he deal with the many controversial gurus he has supported and promoted in the past decades who have fallen from grace—[Andrew Cohen](#) being the most prominent example. Cohen's glossy magazine *What is Enlightenment?* served as sole printed medium to distribute Wilber's integral philosophy, until it went bankrupt. Between 2002 and 2009, this magazine featured a series of dialogues between Cohen and Wilber—called "The Guru and the Pandit"—in which the new "evolutionary spirituality" was spelled out and promoted in great detail. Wilber enthusiastically endorsed Cohen as a modern-day spiritual teacher, casting him as a "Rude Boy", who could mercilessly shake you from your spiritual slumber:

If you want enlightenment, if you want to wake up, if you want to get fried in the fire of passionate infinity, then, I promise you: find yourself a Rude Boy or Nasty Girl... who scare you witless... who will offer... abject terror, not saccharin solace but scorching angst, for then, just then, you might very well be on the path to your own Original Face. (Wilber's foreword to Cohen's [Living Enlightenment](#), 2002).

In 2013, this same Andrew Cohen stepped down as teacher—no, was *asked* to step down by his senior disciples—because of his dysfunctional behavior. Cohen issued a public "[Apology](#)", disappeared from the spiritual scene but re-emerged in 2016 with a new website and has started teaching again in 2017. With all his sophistication, Wilber has turned out to be quite naive when it comes to selecting spiritual teachers. Is *this* wat "the religion of tomorrow" will look like? If that's the case, the whole topic of the dangers and pitfalls of this spiritual adventure would have deserved a full chapter in the book. [Warning signals](#) have been given on Integral World on Cohen as early as 2009, with updates in [2015](#), [2016](#) and [2017](#) by David Lane and many other authors.

The one-sidedness of Wilber's integral approach (in practice, that is, perhaps not in theory), is most glaring where he

dismisses or belittles science in favor of speculative New Age theories:

As Rupert Sheldrake has consistently (and very rationally) continued to point out, the one item that conventional science has been so very bad at explaining is the form, pattern, or structure of manifest things and events. A long protein molecule, for example, can fold into literally thousands of different forms, and yet, once it folds into one form, all subsequent protein molecules of that type everywhere in the world will fold into the identical form. Where on earth is that network pattern carried? For Integral Theory, it is a Kosmic habit (preserved in the storehouse), and it influences every subsequent protein by a downward involutionary causation each and every moment." (p. 600)

Has science been "so very bad at explaining the form, pattern, or structure of manifest things", or has Wilber completely missed the evo-devo revolution in biology?[7] And does it make even a minimum of sense to suggest that all proteins in the cosmos are governed by mysterious forces coming from some cosmic "storehouse consciousness", as Wilber reads in the *Lankavatara Sutra*? Wilber gets completely derailed when he introduces this "storehouse consciousness" of Buddhism as "explanation" for everything from how proteins should structurally fold to how integral students' integral thoughts might impact the world process in the not too far future. Where is all that stored? "No idea, but clearly somewhere"!

Where is that "form" stored? How do the proteins know the correct form, since it's given *nowhere* in the protein itself? Well, we might say it is stored in the storehouse consciousness of the casual realm, as per the *Lankavatara Sutra* (or perhaps in what some Eastern traditions call "the Akashic record"). But wherever it is stored, it is clearly stored somewhere in the real Kosmos, and it clearly has a *real causative impact* on the sensorimotor world—in this case, the folding of every protein of that particular type all over the world. (p. 645)

The examples can be multiplied with ease. Has Harvard brain surgeon [dr. Eben Alexander](#), author of the controversial bestseller [Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife](#), who is mentioned several times uncritically in *The Religion of Tomorrow*, really been experiencing "the causal/formless/luminous" (p. 633) during a severe coma, or is a more mundane explanation possible? Neuroscientist and meditating atheist Sam Harris, for one, doesn't agree[8]:

I found Alexander's account... alarmingly unscientific... Alexander's account is so bad—his reasoning so lazy and tendentious—that it would be beneath notice if not for the fact that it currently disgraces

the cover of a major newsmagazine. Alexander is also releasing a book at the end of the month, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*, which seems destined to become an instant bestseller. As much as I would like to simply ignore the unfolding travesty, it would be derelict of me to do so.

Nor did the late neurologist Oliver Sacks:[8]

To deny the possibility of any natural explanation for an NDE, as Dr. Alexander does, is more than unscientific -- it is antiscientific.

As soon as a transcendental or idealistic explanation is available, Wilber seems to prefer that without further examination.

And, to conclude this rather unsorted list of concerns, does it really not matter, as Wilber writes, if the United States "could completely cut its carbon emissions and that wouldn't affect global warming in any significant fashion at all" (p. 622)? Wilber has gone on record as [questioning the global warming](#) theory, preferring the late novelist and "friend" [Michael Crichton](#) and his climate-novel *State of Fear* to the majority of climate scientists ("If you look at all the data, global warming isn't occurring..."). Al Gore said on March 21, 2007, before a U.S. House committee: "The planet has a fever. If your baby has a fever, you go to the doctor [...] if your doctor tells you you need to intervene here, you don't say 'Well, I read a science fiction novel that tells me it's not a problem'." Since when is Integral Theory no longer using the orienting generalizations of science? This, in a worldwide emergency situation, where our efforts to mitigate the effects of global warming might [already come too late](#). [9] Whence this lukewarm attitude of Wilber towards one of the most pressing problems of our times?

Australian philosopher Clive Hamilton, author of *Requiem for a Species: Why we resist the truth about climate change* (2010), commenting on Integral World on Wilber's reluctance to accept the data of climate science, gives an interesting explanation [9]:

Yet I think there is something deeper going on with Wilber's embrace of climate science denial. His entire body of theory, everything he has ever written or said, is built on one essential premise: the cosmos displays an inexorable process of evolution, from simple matter through lower to higher forms of life and through lower to higher forms of consciousness until it reaches an ultimate state comprised of highly enlightened beings living in unity with each other and in harmony with the Earth.

The problem is that the world's climate scientists are saying things that directly contradict this utopian vision of spiritual progress. They tell us that life in a hot world will not be one of blissful universal love and higher stages of consciousness but of struggle, conflict and mass death. It will be hard enough to maintain the mundane utopian promise of material progress through economic growth. The warnings are legion; [here](#) is one of the latest.

What would it take for Ken Wilber to embrace the science? It would mean the collapse of his life's work. It would mean his most profound insights into the human condition and the nature of the cosmos don't amount to a hill of beans. Ken Wilber would no longer be Ken Wilber.

EPILOGUE TO THIS REVIEW SERIES

The Religion of Tomorrow is a highly technical and sophisticated book. It could have benefited greatly from more real life examples of religious forms of expression, taken from the great religions, both in their healthy and unhealthy expressions, past and present. Instead, the valuable message gets lost in endless abstractions and repetitions—the full paraphernalia of integral theory: stages, states, levels, lines, quadrants, etc. is repeated over and over again. This is a real shame, for the core integral message about mind and culture, and its implication for religion and spirituality, is worth spreading to a larger audience. But next time, please without esoteric claims about [involution](#) and [chakras](#), without over-generalizing summaries about the [evolution of life](#) and [the genesis of matter](#), and without dubious [proofs for the presence of Spirit](#) in both nature and culture.[1] These questionable topics sidetrack from the essential integral message.

Is Wilber's "shadow taller than his soul", as Led Zeppelin sang in *Stairway to Heaven*, in terms of all the things he neglects to include in his integral model? With all of his magnificent flights to Heaven, does Wilber really embrace the Earth? With his scant attention to neurological science, neo-darwinian theory and the broader sciences of life and cosmology, and his overemphasis on the interior processes of consciousness, I can't help suspecting that he has become the victim of an "earth allergy". But I am sure he will find a cure for that in the pages of his own *The Religion of Tomorrow*. What has been said of Steve Jobs' talent to set up a "[reality distortion field](#)" might very well be true for Ken Wilber as well: he, too, has the "ability to convince himself and others to believe almost anything with a mix of charm,

charisma, bravado, hyperbole, marketing, appeasement and persistence." Does Integral Theory perhaps need a Reformation? Consider this 7-part series of reviews of *The Religion of Tomorrow* then as the equivalent of Martin Luther's revolt against the Church.

Is Wilber's system logically consistent? Does his stage model really *require* to misrepresent neo-Darwinism, or to denigrate the mythic stage as Nazi? Or is this Wilber's particular pathology? Does it *require* an application to the domains, not only of mind and spirit, but also of life and matter, or is this an unwarranted overreaching of a psycho-cultural model? Does it, indeed, *require* a notion of "Eros in the Kosmos" , to explain in one broad stroke the manifold complexities of nature and their genesis in the universe, or is this Wilber's personal pet theory? Can Integral Theory be reformulated as an integrative framework that pays much, much closer attention to the efforts of empirical science? Indeed, a deeper engagement with the relative truths of the world would make Integral Theory a stronger force for good.

To tell you a final secret, I am actually sure that this book was written somewhere in the far future. When Wilber states, on the very last page...:

It is possible to remake this world because you—the very *deepest you*—are its one and only Author, its sole Creator. But it—you—are not alone, because the deepest Self of this deepest you is looking out through the eyes of every sentient being alive, including all 9 billion humans on the planet. You can remake the world because you possess 18 billion hands, more than enough to reshape and refigure all that needs to be done. (p. 663)

... on my count the number of inhabitants currently living on Earth is not even close to that figure (for it is [7.5 billion—and counting](#)). Doing a quick calculation, and given a conservative population growth of 35 million per year, Wilber must be coming from the year 2059! Thank God the world is still there by that time...

NOTES

[1] Frank Visser, Reflections on "The Religion of Tomorrow", www.integralworld.net

- Part I: [The involution/evolution cosmology, Ken Wilber holds on to an outdated scheme of existence](#), May 2017
- Part II: [From Atom to Atman, Ken Wilber's Religious View of Evolution](#), May 2017
- Part III: [A more adequate spectrum of colors?, A Comparison of color terminology in chakra-psychology, Integral Theory and Spiral Dynamics](#), May 2017
- Part IV: [What's It Like to Be a Super-Nova?, Ken Wilber's Cosmic Approach to the Mind-Body Problem](#), May 2017
- Part V: [Rational Reasons to Believe in Spirit?, Evaluating Ken Wilber's Case for a Spiritual Worldview](#), June 2017
- Part VI: [Is Darwin Really 'On Our Side'?, Ken Wilber's Misreading of Neo-Darwinism](#), June 2017

[2] Since then Dustin DiPerna has published [The Coming Waves](#) (2014), [Streams of Wisdom](#) (2014), [Evolution's Ally](#) (2015) and [Earth is Eden](#) (2015), all published by Integral Publishing House, in which he has expanded his ideas on integral religious studies.

[3] See for example: Dustin DiPerna, [Bridging the Chasm: Sam Harris, Ben Affleck, and a Needed Dose of Integral Theory](#), www.integralworld.net, October 2014

[4] "*The Many Faces of Terrorism* is actually a trilogy of books, as indicated, with each book, to be published separately, being around 450 pages long. Book I is the introductory material. Book II lays out a theory of Integral Politics. Book III is an extensive discussion of the role of religion in the modern and postmodern world, with an emphasis on the conveyor belt. More importantly, none of these are merely theoretical; they contain extensive discussions of real-world politics and events, at home and abroad (including terrorism--its nature, cause, and "cure"; presidential politics; the key to a second-tier political campaign strategy; the role of a future World Federation, etc.). This is the first in-depth discussion and commentary on the world by the world's foremost integral thinker." www.kenwilber.com, November 29, 2006

[5] Dustin DiPerna, "[The Muslim Ladder](#)", www.integralworld.net, May 2007

[6] But see for an early critique: Herbert van Erkelens, "[A Jungian Response to Wilber](#)", www.integralworld.net, November 1999

[7] See: Frank Visser, "[Rupert Sheldrake and the Evo-Devo Revolution](#)", and Rupert Sheldrake, "[Morphogenetic Fields: A Reply to Frank Visser](#)", www.integralworld.net, December 2013. On the protein-folding problem, see also: Andy Smith, "[Resonating Out of Phase: Wilber, Sheldrake and Evolution](#)", www.integralworld.net, December, 2013.

[8] Sam Harris, "[This Must Be Heaven](#)", www.samharris.org, October 12, 2012. Oliver Sacks, "[Seeing God in the Third Millennium](#)", *The Atlantic*, December 12, 2012

[9] "[The U.S. Is the Biggest Carbon Polluter in History. It Just Walked Away From the Paris Climate Deal](#)", June 1, 2017, www.nytimes.com. See also: Clive Hamilton, "[Ken Wilber A Climate Denier? Say It Ain't So](#)", www.integralworld.net, August 2015 and Clive Hamilton & Tim Kasser, "[Psychological Adaptation to the Threats and Stresses of a Four Degree World](#)", www.integralworld.net, August 2015. For an alarmist view see: Lawrence Wollersheim, "[How Did We Waste 30 Years of Warnings About Escalating Global Warming? Part 1, Chapter 7](#)", www.integralworld.net, April 2017.