

A Critical Appreciation of Ken Wilber's Critique of Eco-Holism

Ken Wilber, whom some consider “a worthy successor to Aristotle in terms of the scope of his knowledge and of his categorizing and synthesizing power,”¹ is recognized within the transpersonal movement as a leading transpersonal theorist.² In his comprehensive work, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution (SES)*,³ Wilber seriously addresses the ecological crisis for the first time. In the Introduction to SES, he asks: “Why are we destroying Gaia in the very attempt to improve our own condition?”⁴ His answer includes a serious critique of eco-holism or radical ecology.⁵

The purpose of this essay is to assess Wilber's critique of eco-holism. It is concerned more with radical ecology in general, instead of any particular articulation of it, whether deep ecology, ecofeminism, ecopsychology, or others. It will (a) summarize Wilber's integral paradigm, then (b) review the eco-holistic paradigm (as interpreted by Wilber), (c) summarize his critique, (d) review the rebuttal and counter-rebuttal, (e) assess briefly the adequacy of Wilber's critique, (f) review his recommended solution to the ecological crisis, then (g) end with a rejoinder and conclusion. This essay does not review all of Wilber's numerous works, the many criticisms of those works, or all elements of his integral theory; rather, it focuses on those elements most relevant to the topic.

The focus of this essay is on the question of the potential validity of Wilber's theoretical model upon which his critique of eco-holism is based. The reason for this focus is that Wilber's specific criticisms of radical ecology are based on his model. In other words, his critique is model-dependent: If Wilber's model can be shown to be implausible or invalid, then his critique of eco-holism is undermined, if not invalidated. On the contrary, if his model is

¹ Roger Walsh, “*Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 32(2), 2000, p. 179.

² This is ironic because Wilber (undated, *Demise*, p. 1) no longer considers himself part of the transpersonal movement and actually quit referring to himself as a transpersonal psychologist in 1983. Wilber has distanced himself from transpersonal psychology and transpersonal studies in favor of *integral psychology* and *integral studies* that he claims are more inclusive; that is, they transcend and include the former (see Wilber 2000a).

³ Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution*. Boston: Shambhala, 1995)

⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

⁵ Wilber's primary interest is in ecofeminism and deep ecology, which Zimmerman (1998a) and Merchant (1992) both classify as *radical ecologies*. Radical ecologies are radical in that they ask deep questions and challenge the assumptions (often implicit) that underlie American culture, society, politics, economics, and mainstream (shallow) environmentalism. Wilber discusses these radical ecologies (and others to a lesser extent; e.g., ecopsychology) as examples of *eco-holism* or the *eco-holistic paradigm*. These terms are considered synonymous.

demonstrated to be plausible or potentially valid, his critique must be taken seriously and then evaluated on other grounds, such as its groundedness in the relevant radical ecological literature.

Wilber's Integral Paradigm

Wilber's primary goal is to develop an "integral paradigm" that incorporates the essential truths of the various branches of the human knowledge quest.⁶ This endeavor resulted in SES in 1995. Reflecting on that work five years later, Wilber (2000b) explains that he:

sought a world philosophy--or integral philosophy--that would believably weave together the many pluralistic contexts of science, morals, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy, and the world's great wisdom traditions. Not on the level of details . . . but on the level of orienting generalizations⁷ ["sturdy conclusions"]--a way to suggest that the world really is one, undivided, whole and related to itself in every way: a holistic philosophy for a holistic Kosmos,⁸ a plausible Theory of Everything.⁹

To do this, Wilber uses a three-step integrative method. As Crittenden [ref] explains, Wilber first surveys the various realms of human knowledge and identifies the important truths that each claims to offer humanity. Second, assuming that the various claims are true but partial [what does this mean? (i.e., they tell only part of the story)], Wilber integrates these partial truths [why partial, in what way?] into a system that incorporates the greatest number from the greatest number of fields of inquiry. Third, Wilber then uses that scheme to develop a new critical theory that "criticizes not their truths, but their partial nature."¹⁰

SES is the fruit of that integrative method.¹¹ It articulates an integral

⁶ More recently Wilber (2006a) refers to his integral paradigm as an Integral Approach, Integral Framework, Integral Map, or Integral Model.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted all italics in quotations are those of the author cited.

⁸ In SES, Wilber reintroduces the Pythagorean term *Kosmos*, whose original meaning was the patterned nature or process of all domains of existence, from matter to theos, and not merely the physical universe, which is usually what is meant today by both "cosmos" and "universe." For Wilber, the Kosmos contains the physiosphere (matter), the biosphere (body), the noosphere (mind), and the theosphere (soul/ spirit).

⁹ Wilber 1995, 38.

¹⁰ Jack Crittenden, What is the Meaning of "Integral"? Foreword to Ken Wilber, *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad*. (Boston: Shambhala. 1997), p. x.

¹¹ All of Wilber's prior works are precursory in that they introduce his essential ideas, and he considers all subsequent works summaries and elaborations. For that reason, plus the fact that Wilber's critique of eco-holism is contained in that work, this summary of his integral paradigm will focus largely on SES. This isn't to say that Wilber has not made significant reformulations and additions to his integral paradigm or integral approach. He has, including such things as Integral Perspectivism and Integral Methodological Pluralism (see n.24).

paradigm summarized in the deceptively concise formula, “all-quadrant, all-level” or AQAL.¹² (See Figures 1 and 2 for diagrams of Wilber’s all-quadrant, all-level model.) As Wilber later explained, he took a structural-developmental approach to examining;

over two hundred developmental sequences recognized by various branches of human knowledge . . . taken from both Eastern and Western disciplines, and including premodern, modern, and postmodern sources. I noticed that these various developmental sequences all fell into one of four major classes [or “quadrants”] and further, that within those four quadrants there was substantial agreement as to the various stages or levels in each. [This] represents an a posteriori conclusion, not a priori assumption.¹³

¹² As Wilber articulates in more recent works (e.g., Wilber, 2006a) AQAL is shorthand for “all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, and all types,” which is particularly apropos when addressing psychological and spiritual realities in the Upper-Left quadrant. However, for the purposes of the discussion at hand I will be focusing on the relevance of the four quadrants and the levels within those quadrants to eco-holism.

¹³ Ken Wilber, “An Integral Theory of Consciousness,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 1 (1997b), p. 73.

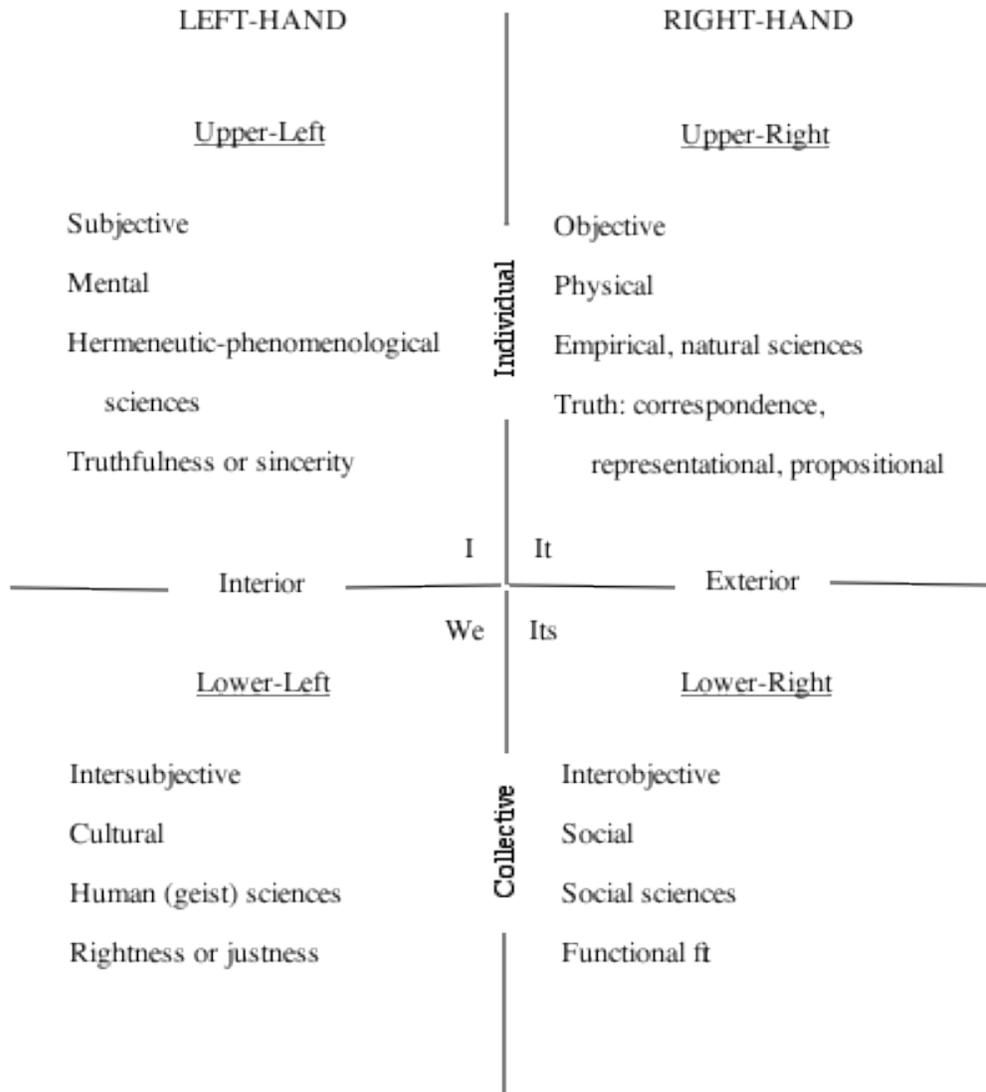


Figure 1. Wilber's all quadrant, all-level model (adapted from SES) with emphasis on the characteristics of each quadrant.

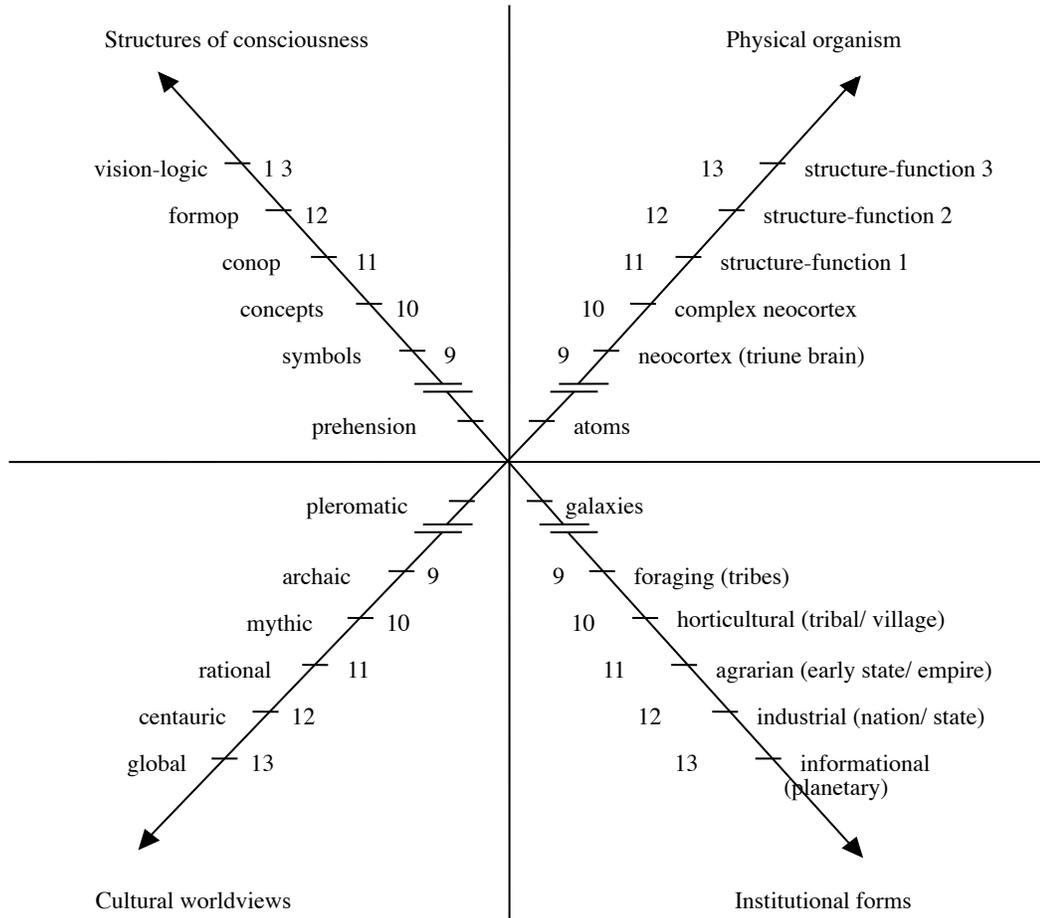


Figure 2. Wilber's all-quadrant, all-level model (adapted from SES) with emphasis on the holarchical levels within each quadrant that depict generally accepted human evolutionary sequences (although Wilber postulates yet higher levels).

On the level of “orienting generalizations,” then, Wilber claims to be in general agreement with the numerous developmental and evolutionary theorists who have identified specific developmental sequences or levels in each quadrant. However, true to his integrative method and resultant all-quadrant, all-level integral paradigm, Wilber critiques each for their partial quality: each “is a legitimate and altogether necessary story. It is just not the whole story.”¹⁴ (For instance, Western developmental sequences of cognition or consciousness (the Upper-Left quadrant), as disclosed by psychological studies, generally stop at Piaget’s formal operational level, but Wilber contends that it is only half the story.) The rest of the story is the higher levels (i.e. those beyond formal operational rationality) first articulated in the perennial philosophy as the higher levels of the Great Chain of Being¹⁵ --levels allegedly experientially disclosed by direct mystical experience, the actual apprehensions and direct developmental phenomenology of the great contemplative and meditative disciplines. This developmental phenomenology--which Wilber¹⁶ argues is true because it follows a valid three-strand epistemology common to all sciences: instrumental injunction, intuitive apprehension, and communal confirmation--has disclosed higher levels of consciousness development. But the Great Chain itself is not the whole story. According to Wilber, the traditional Great Chain (a) focuses on the Upper-Left quadrant and does not address adequately the other quadrants, (b) erroneously stacks its higher dimensions above or meta to the physical (resulting in unnecessary metaphysical claims), not realizing that “they are not above nature but within nature, not beyond matter but interior to it,”¹⁷ and (c) is blind to the important postmodern discovery of the social- and cultural-boundedness of all knowledge. Wilber has systematically set out to correct this situation in his various works.

¹⁴ Wilber 1995, 126.

¹⁵ “Perennial philosophy” is a term first coined by Leibniz to refer to “the common core of the world’s great spiritual traditions. [It is] the view that reality is composed of various *levels of existence*--levels of being and of knowing--ranging from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit” (Wilber 2000a, p. 5). According to the perennial philosophy, these levels of being and knowing follow a vertical hierarchical path of transcendence, what is called the Great Chain of Being. The Great Chain of Being is an ontology that extends from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit, which Lovejoy (1936/1964) considers “the official philosophy of the larger part of civilized humankind through most of its history [which] the greater number of the subtler speculative minds and of the great religious teachers . . . have been engaged in” (p. 26).

¹⁶ Ken Wilber, *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm* (Boston: Shambhala, 1983/1996).

¹⁷ Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Boston: Integral Books, 2006a), Appendix I, p. 222.

Taking this broad, integral view, Wilber is persuaded by the evidence¹⁸ that (a) the universe is multi-leveled (or *holonic*¹⁹), and (b) each level (or holon) is composed of four aspects or quadrants. Specifically, each holon (in the human realm) has: (a) an exterior, objective, individual, physical aspect (the Upper-Right quadrant) that evolves from the neocortex to higher order brain structure-functions and is disclosed by the empirical, natural sciences (e.g., molecular biology) and their validity claim of Truth (i.e., truth as correspondence, as representational, and propositional); (b) an interior, subjective, mental aspect (the Upper-Left quadrant) that evolves from symbols to vision-logic and is disclosed by the hermeneutic-phenomenological sciences (e.g., psychoanalysis) and their validity claim of truthfulness or sincerity; (c) an exterior, interobjective, social aspect (the Lower-Right quadrant) that evolves from foraging to informational societies and is disclosed by the social sciences (e.g., structural-functionalism) and their validity claim of functional fit; and (d) an interior, intersubjective, cultural aspect (the Lower-Left quadrant) that evolves from archaic to global worldviews and is disclosed by the geist or human sciences (e.g., cultural hermeneutics) and their validity claim of rightness or justness. (For brevity I will refer to the quadrants as objective, subjective, interobjective, and intersubjective; or physical, mental, social, and cultural; or Upper-Right, Upper-Left, Lower-Right, and Lower-Left, respectively.) Each quadrant (and the correlative levels between quadrants) is integrally, circularly, and nonreducibly interrelated. “All four quadrants ‘tetra-interact’--they are mutually arising and mutually determining.”²⁰ For instance, the subjective aspect is always embedded in objective, interobjective, and intersubjective aspects. In other words, Wilber argues, a particular mental state will have a measurable, physical correlate in the brain, but is embedded inextricably in the social and cultural matrices in which the person lives.[Problematic because many mental states may be independent of of social and cultural matrices.]

¹⁸ It is not within the purview of this essay to review the evidence, so suffice it to say that the quadrants and levels are based on “a great deal of empirical and phenomenological evidence, and, within the various disciplines addressing them, their existence is largely undisputed by serious scholars” (Wilber 1997b, p. 77). This is not to say, however, that Wilber’s data selection and interpretation have not been challenged; they have, and this will be addressed later.

¹⁹ Wilber borrows the term from Arthur Koestler who coined it to refer to that which, being a *whole* in one context, is simultaneously a *part* in another. That is, in an evolving universe, it transcends but includes, negates but preserves, all lesser constituent holons, just as whole atoms are parts of molecules, and whole molecules are parts of cells, and whole cells are parts of organs. In Wilber’s integral model the holon is fundamental. Additionally, Wilber borrows the term *holarchy* from Koestler, who noted that all hierarchies are composed of holons, or increasing orders of wholeness, and therefore should be called “holarchies.”

²⁰ Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000a), p. 234.

Wilber²¹ argues that the universe is composed only of holons (not parts or wholes, only whole/parts). These holons share certain characteristics: (a) they emerge holarchically; i.e., each emergent holon transcends and includes its predecessor(s); (b) the number of levels comprising a holarchy determines its vertical depth; (c) the number of holons on any particular level determines its horizontal span; (d) each progressive level of evolution produces greater depth and less span (because each higher level is composed of parts, it cannot outnumber those parts; e.g., the number of molecules will always be less than the number of atoms); (e) all deeper (higher) holons are dependent on the less deep (lower) for their existence (but not vice versa), so deeper holons are more significant but less fundamental, and shallower holons are more fundamental but less significant; and (f) their emergent evolution proceeds by a process of increasing differentiation/ integration in each quadrant, from physiosphere to biosphere to noosphere to theosphere.

Specific to human evolution, a recurrent theme throughout Wilber's work is that it proceeds not only by the continual differentiation and integration of levels within each quadrant, but by the overall differentiation and integration of the quadrants themselves. Historically, Wilber stresses the importance of the differentiation of the Upper- and Lower-Left (the Left-Hand) and the Right-Hand (the realms of art, morals, and science; I, we, it; the Beautiful, the Good, the True; self, culture, nature; or, for short, what Wilber calls the Big Three), which represents the "dignity of modernity." Specifically, with the ascendance of rationality as the average mode of consciousness during the Enlightenment, the Big Three were differentiated and each sphere was free to pursue its own endeavors and truths without fear of colonization from the others. Unfortunately, instead of finding a way to integrate them in a mutually respectful synthesis, Wilber suggests that this differentiation went too far and the Big Three became dissociated, which allowed for the domination of art and morals by a now supreme empirical science, which represents the "disaster of modernity." The task of postmodernity, Wilber argues, is to integrate the Big Three into a mutually embracing synthesis, such as suggested by his all-quadrant, all-level model.

Hence, Wilber concludes that an integral paradigm must account for all quadrants of each level of reality (or the four aspects of each and every holon); anything less is partial, mistaking parts for wholes: "an 'all-quadrant, all-level' approach is the minimum degree of sophistication that we need in order to secure anything resembling a genuinely integral theory."²² That is, each of the quadrants, and the developmental levels within each quadrant, must be fully and equally represented in any such theory. Any theories, therefore, that "investigate only one quadrant (not to mention only one level

²¹ Wilber 1995.

²² Wilber 1997b, 82.

in one quadrant) are clearly not giving us an adequate account.”^{23, 24} For instance, Wilber notes that “integral psychology obviously focuses on the Upper-Left quadrant, but the whole point of the integral approach is that for a full understanding of this quadrant, it needs to be seen in the context of all the others.”²⁵

Partiality occurs, then, in one or both of two basic ways: privileging a particular quadrant(s) and privileging a particular level(s) within that quadrant(s) with the claim that it alone is real (or more real). Examples of the first partiality--quadrant absolutism--are systems theorists reducing all quadrants to the objective and interobjective, the Left-Hand to the Right-Hand (what Wilber calls subtle reductionism), or empiricists reducing all quadrants to just the objective (the Upper-Right). The net result is what Wilber terms flatland, the collapse of the Kosmos to cosmos, a “one-dimensional, monological affair,”²⁶ the province of scientific materialism: “Flatland is simply the belief that only the Right-Hand world is real--the world of matter-energy, empirically investigated by the human senses and their extensions. . . . All of the interior worlds [the Left-Hand] are reduced to, or explained by, objective/ exterior terms.”²⁷ Consequently, all intention and consciousness, value and meaning of the Left-Hand (the subjective and intersubjective) are collapsed to their Right-Hand correlates, a flatland holism of external, observable exteriors, what Wilber calls the world of “it.”

Examples of the second partiality (privileging one level[s] over the others) are positivists reducing all levels within the Upper-Right quadrant to the interplay of atoms (what Wilber calls gross reductionism), or rationalists privileging their worldview. The inevitable result is what Wilber calls the pre/trans fallacy or the pre/post fallacy. The essence of the fallacy is the confusion of pre and trans (or pre and post) around a central pivot; that is, with reference to x, it is easy to confuse pre-x with trans-x. For instance,

²³ Ibid., 92.

²⁴ In a more recent work Wilber (2006a, ch.1) articulates the idea that each quadrant is actually a perspective, a way of looking at the world, and that each quadrant has an inside (or interior) view and an outside (or exterior) view of itself. Consequently, each level or holon within each quadrant can be looked at from their own inside or outside which gives us eight perspectives, each with its own scientific method for disclosing truth. A truly integral approach, then, will examine each holon from eight different perspectives with at least eight different research methods. Additionally, in the conduct of research, it is crucial to know what perspective(s) is privileged because to take a particular perspective(s) is an injunction that “brings forth or discloses the phenomena that are apprehended through the various perspectives” (p. 34), each with all the attendant and often implicit perspectival biases. This acknowledgement underscores the importance of cultivating what Wilber calls an Integral Perspectivism along with an Integral Methodological Pluralism for any truly integral approach.

²⁵ Wilber 2000a, 67.

²⁶ Wilber 1995, 373.

²⁷ Wilber 2000a, 70.

Wilber²⁸ argues that the human species has evolved, on average, to the level of a rational worldview or “cultural world space.” When people on the rational level privilege that level as the end point of human evolution, they collapse the Kosmos, denying any continued evolution of human consciousness beyond that level. Hence, when privileged rationality witnesses transrationality, it reduces it to prerationality. The converse is also true; those who privilege transrational levels may elevate prerational to transrational.

Since prerational and transrational are both, in their own ways, nonrational, then they appear quite similar or even identical to the untutored eye. Once this confusion occurs--the confusion of “pre” and “trans”--then one of two things inevitably happens: the transrational realms are reduced to prepersonal status [reductionism], or the prerational realms are elevated to transrational glory [elevationism].²⁹

To illustrate, Wilber contends that Freud tends to reduce the transpersonal to the prepersonal, whereas Jung tends to elevate the prepersonal to the transpersonal. Likewise, the holographic paradigm and quantum theory have been elevated by some enthusiasts as explanations of the transcendent, whereas the Divine has been reduced by others to quarks.³⁰

Both of these partialities--privileging a particular quadrant(s) which results in flatland, or privileging a particular level(s) which results in pre/ trans confusions--manifest in various insidious ways in eco-holism, as we will see.

The Eco-Holistic Paradigm

Historically, Wilber traces the origin of the current “eco-holistic paradigm”³¹ to “the central problem of modernity: human subjectivity in relation to the world.”³² Beginning during the Enlightenment, that debate had two “warring camps,” according to Wilber: one (the Ego) represented the

²⁸ Ken Wilber, *Up from Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution* (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1981/1996).

²⁹ Wilber 1983/1996, 199.

³⁰ See Wilber, 1982, 1984.

³¹ The “eco-holistic paradigm,” as described by Capra (1996), “may be called a holistic worldview, seeing the world as an integrated whole rather than a dissociated collection of parts” (p. 6). It is based on the recognition that we need a “fundamental change of worldview in science and society” and “a radical shift in our perception, our thinking, our values . . . if we are to survive” (p. 4). Wilber (1995), however, accuses the “new paradigmers” of a convenient and self-serving misreading of Kuhn, reducing his notion of “paradigm” (as a rigorous scientific methodology essential to disclosing new data and furthering the knowledge quest) to mere relative theory. But new paradigmers, Wilber charges, actually have nothing resembling a new paradigm: “They had no new techniques, no new methodologies, no new exemplars, no new injunctions--and therefore no new data. All they possessed, through a misreading of Kuhn, was a pseudo-attempt to trump normal science and replace it with their ideological favorite reading of the Kosmos” (p. 275).

³² Wilber 1995, 431.

rational-ego, autonomy,[?] agency, and Ascent; the other (the Eco) represented self in nature, heteronomy, communion, and Descent. The Eco camp, at least as Wilber chronicles, grew out of a rebellion against the Ego camp, which it saw as dehumanized, disengaged, atomistic, aggressively agentic, denatured, and lacking communion. The Eco movement, initiated by the likes of Rousseau, Herder, and the Schlegels, strove to reinsert the subject back into participation with nature, to heal the alienation between a disengaged self and objectified world through self-abnegating communion.

The Eco camp--which is of concern here--is still with us today, Wilber contends, in the guise of eco-holism. Central to the eco-holistic paradigm, according to Wilber, is the notion that

our present environmental crisis is due primarily to a fractured worldview, that drastically separates mind and body, subject and object, culture and nature, thoughts and things, values and facts, spirit and matter, human and nonhuman; a worldview that is dualistic, mechanistic, atomistic, anthropocentric, and pathologically hierarchical--a worldview that, in short, erroneously separates humans from, and often unnecessarily elevates humans above, the rest of the fabric of reality, a broken worldview that alienates men and women from the intricate web of patterns and relationships that constitute the very nature of life and Earth and cosmos.

Furthermore, according to the eco-holistic paradigm, the only way we can heal the planet, and heal ourselves, is by replacing this fractured worldview with a worldview that is more holistic, more relational, more integrative, more Earth-honoring, and less arrogantly human-centered. A worldview, in short, that honors the entire web of life, a web that has intrinsic value in and of itself.³³

What eco-holists maintain is required, Wilber believes, "is some sort of systems theory orientation, some way for us to see and feel that we are all interwoven into the single pattern and web of life. We need . . . a profoundly ecocentric worldview,"³⁴ in which all things are seen as "functional parts of the 'larger' biosphere . . . strands or parts in the wonderful web of life."³⁵

Two obstacles to this view, eco-holists maintain, according to Wilber, are gross reductionism and hierarchy. Gross reductionism or atomism (the mechanistic reduction of wholes to atomic or subatomic particles) allegedly is responsible for the creation and perpetuation of our fractured worldview. The antidote to atomism, then, is wholism (as disclosed by systems theory), the belief that all things are parts in the larger whole, strands in the great web of life.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

The other obstacle is vertical hierarchies which, eco-holists believe, perpetuates differential value and social ranking. Wilber notes that radical ecologists generally are not against hierarchy per se (because hierarchical biological organization is a fundamental principle of the ecological sciences). Rather, they are actually, and rightly, against dominator hierarchies that are responsible for much social oppression, injustice, and abuse of nature. Eco-holists, in truth, acknowledge hierarchies, but only those of the Right-Hand, and generally only when turned horizontal, or so Wilber claims. That is, because eco-holists dislike the value and social ranking of vertical hierarchies, they conceptualize the hierarchies found in nature as lying on a horizontal instead of vertical plane (e.g., networks within networks within networks, or fields within fields within fields, ostensibly thereby avoiding value and social ranking). The antidote to hierarchy, then, is heterarchy, an egalitarian, pluralistic, horizontal linking.

In summary, the eco-holistic paradigm, according to Wilber, is characterized by a reaction against atomism (gross reductionism) and hierarchy in favor of wholism (as disclosed by systems theory) and heterarchy.

Wilber's Critique of Eco-Holism

Although Wilber champions the important insights of eco-holists (e.g., the critique of anthropocentrism by deep ecologists; the critique of androcentrism, dominator hierarchies, and the relationship of the despoliation of the earth and subjugation of women by ecofeminists; and the cultivation of ecological consciousness, wholeness, and connectedness by both), he sharply criticizes their partialities. As Wilber would say, he is a "warm and generous friend" to the parts they get right but a "wretched and bloodless enemy" to the parts they get wrong.³⁶ In this section I examine the parts he believes they get wrong.

From the perspective of his integral vision, Wilber would hope to find an eco-holism that is all-quadrant and all-level; that is, that recognizes, honors, and incorporates the objective, subjective, interobjective, and intersubjective aspects of the developmental levels (holons) within each quadrant. This, and only this, Wilber argues, will heal the fractured worldview of which the eco-holists complain. Rather, what he finds is an eco-holism suffering from the two partialities mentioned previously: privileging a particular quadrant(s) and privileging a particular level(s). Each, and their unfortunate consequences, will be addressed in turn.

Privileging a Particular Quadrant(s): Flatland

"Those that talk of the 'web of life' are basically half right and half wrong (or seriously incomplete), and the 'half-wrong' part has caused almost more

³⁶ Ibid., 21.

problems than the ‘half-right’ part has solved,” Wilber contends.³⁷ They are half-right, he concedes, in that they embrace systems theory³⁸ which correctly intuits the interconnectedness of all things. They are half-wrong in that systems theory reduces the subjective and intersubjective quadrants to the objective and interobjective (the Left-Hand to the Right-Hand) or, even further, to the interobjective (the Lower-Right) only (i.e., flatland). The Kosmos is thereby “collapsed into a monological and flatland holism of observable exteriors, namely, the great interlocking order,”³⁹ a flatland web of life that lacks all subjectivity, interiority, and interpretive depth. What remains is the functional fit of empirically observable objects. “In place of the Kosmos, flatland systems theory.”⁴⁰

The truly devastating contributor to modern flatland ontology, to an erasure of the Kosmos, has been . . . systems theory . . . in its many forms. The systems theorists like to claim that the reductionistic villains are the atomists, and that in emphasizing the wholistic nature of systems within systems, they themselves have overcome reductionism, and that they are therefore in a position to help “heal the planet.” Whereas all they have actually done is use a subtle reduction to overcome a gross one.⁴¹

Wilber is not saying that systems theory is wrong or unimportant, rather “it is true but partial, and being partial, it is not a genuine holism, but merely an exterior/ objectivistic holism, which needs desperately . . . the entire interior dimensions as disclosed in their own terms, by their own methods, with their own truths.”⁴² And not being a genuine holism, “systems theory is the disease for which it claims to be the cure.”⁴³

But wrongly believing that they have found the solution to the fractured worldview responsible for the ecocrisis, Wilber charges that eco-holists, unbeknownst to themselves, have “merely cloned it,” substituting one fractured worldview for another: “Reducing everything to functional fit [the

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

³⁸ For his general discussion, Wilber includes under the heading, “systems theory,” general systems theory, dynamic systems theory, evolutionary systems theory, cybernetics, nonequilibrium thermodynamics, cellular automata theory, catastrophe theory, autopoietic systems theory, chaos theories, and others. What Wilber is really talking about are the “new systems sciences . . . the sciences of wholeness and connectedness” to which he adds “the notion of *development* or *evolution*—the idea that wholes grow and evolve” (1995, p. 6).

³⁹ Wilber 1995, 465.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 532.

⁴¹ Ibid., 131.

⁴² Wilber 2000a, 72.

⁴³ Ken Wilber, *One Taste: The Journals of Ken Wilber* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999a), p. 230.

Lower-Right] destroys completely the integrity of each domain, and further renders true integration of each impossible. The world is indeed fractured; the holists are some of the prime promoters of the fracture.”⁴⁴ Merely replacing the gross reductionism of scientific materialism with a wholism of interlocking strands in the great empirical web, as disclosed by systems theory, Wilber argues, will not heal the fracture, only perpetuate it: “In reducing all domains and all validity claims to merely functional fit, the integrity and true integrations of the other domains are totally devastated.”⁴⁵ As examples, Wilber⁴⁶ accuses the Green movement--for which he has much sympathy--of endorsing the web-of-life systems theory as a central notion in its philosophical platform which, as we have seen, is a form of subtle reductionism. He similarly accuses ecofeminists of privileging the Lower-Right “with an attempt to make it paradigmatic and exclusionary.”⁴⁷

Eco-holists also are half-wrong in their understanding of wholism, the most fundamental principle of the eco-holistic paradigm, or so Wilber charges. Given the holonic nature of the universe, there are no wholes or parts, only whole/parts forever. Furthermore, the “wholes” promoted by various radical ecologies, in practice, are far from whole. In other words, they leave a lot out, especially what they don’t like. “Ecofeminists do not include patriarchy in their ‘whole’; most deep ecologists do not include meditative states in their ‘ultimate wholeness’; ecophilosophers in general do not like industrialization.”⁴⁸

In addition to being “a totalizing lie,” wholism is also a very dangerous concept, Wilber contends, because “it is always available to be pushed into ideological ends. Whenever anybody talks of wholeness being the ultimate, then we must be very wary, because they are telling us that we are merely ‘parts’ of their particular version of ‘wholeness,’ and so we should be subservient to their vision.”⁴⁹ In other words, flatland holistic theories instrumentalize individuals,

since all are really strands in the wonderful web, all are subservient to its overall functions (its functional fit). And the theorists who can describe the “final Whole” (even though there isn’t one) get to tell you what your purpose, your role, and your real meaning is (because they have the final context, the “real Whole” that defines the functional fit--

⁴⁴ Wilber 1995, 143.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴⁷ Ken Wilber, *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision for a World Gone Slightly Mad* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997a), p. 191.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

and therefore the “truth” and “meaning”--of each member). And, indeed, the social systems theorists and eco-holists never tire of telling us our functional fit in their version of the “Whole.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, wholeness is not the solution to atomism that its proponents imagine, Wilber believes. He invokes no less than the patriarch of deep ecology, Arne Naess, to make his point: Naess “clearly points out that ‘wholism’ and ‘atomism’ are actually two sides of the same problem, and that the cure for both is hierarchy. . . . Hierarchy, in short, is for Naess the antidote both to atomism and wholism.”⁵¹ But radical ecologists have a problem with hierarchy, as we will see.

Privileging a Particular Level(s): Pre/ trans Fallacies

Eco-holists are also half-right and half-wrong when it comes to the developmental levels within their privileged quadrant(s), Wilber contends. They are half-right in that they recognize developmental levels. They are half-wrong in that they reject a hierarchy of levels in favor of a heterarchy of levels--that is, horizontal networks within networks within networks, “the Great Chain . . . tipped on its side”⁵²--and then privilege a particular level(s) within that heterarchy.

This position is problematic, Wilber argues. First, eco-holists contradict themselves from the start by hierarchically denouncing hierarchy; that is, they hierarchically value or rank heterarchy over hierarchy, which in itself is a hierarchy. “What they don’t seem to realize is that their valued embrace of heterarchy is itself a hierarchical judgment.”⁵³ From this hidden hierarchy, Wilber charges, they hypocritically and self-righteously condemn hierarchy while, ironically, the sciences of the web of life (which eco-holists depend on for scientific support) insist upon it.

Second, a horizontal heterarchy leads eco-holists to absolutize wrongly the biosphere, Wilber believes. They claim that the biosphere is the most encompassing and therefore significant level of reality; that is, a heterarchy of horizontal span, a web of life with fields within fields within fields, in which the biosphere is the largest field subsuming all lesser fields. But this conclusion is incorrect, Wilber argues, because it violates the holonic principles noted previously; that is, although the biosphere has more horizontal span (because it incorporates a greater number of holons on its particular level), it has less vertical depth than, say, a human being (who transcends and includes more levels). Hence, the biosphere is a more fundamental but less significant holon (because the more deepthed holons--e.g., human beings--are

⁵⁰ Ibid., 142.

⁵¹ Ibid., 50.

⁵² Wilber 1995, 419.

⁵³ Ibid., 25.

dependent on it for their existence). In other words, as Wilber explains, “we could destroy all humans and the biosphere would still exist (but not vice versa), showing that the biosphere is a lower and shallower, not deeper or higher, reality.”⁵⁴ Consequently, in their confusion of depth with span and fundamental with significant, eco-holists wrongly absolutize the biosphere and thereby collapse the Kosmos to a “monochrome flatland” of Right-Hand exteriors. “And this is especially what is so partial about the web-of-life theories: they indeed see fields within fields within fields, but they are really only surfaces within surfaces within yet still other surfaces--they see only the exterior half of reality.”⁵⁵ The Kosmos, then, literally becomes a shadow of its true self: no more vertical depth, only horizontal span; no more qualitative distinctions, only quantitative distinctions; no more subjectivity, only objectivity; no more interiors, only exteriors; no more cultural meaning, only functional fit. Once again Wilber uses a basic idea from the Green movement to illustrate his point. A second notion in its philosophical platform is that “the cultural noosphere is a part of the larger biosphere [which] is simply wrong. . . . The biosphere is indeed more fundamental than the noosphere, not because it is higher but precisely because it is lower and shallower.”⁵⁶ Destroy the cultural noosphere and the biosphere still exists. Destroy the biosphere and the cultural noosphere is destroyed along with it.

Another illustration of the effects of wrongly absolutizing the biosphere is the endorsement of the principle of bioequality--which extends equal value to all life forms--by most ecophilosophers as the basis for environmental ethics. This principle, according to Wilber, is crippled with problems. First, it is self-contradictory because it is a “qualitative distinction that denies all qualitative distinctions.”⁵⁷ Second, the principle of bioequality is not true; some things are more equal than others. As Wilber argues at length, each higher level in the holarchy is less fundamental but more significant, therefore has more value. Third, an environmental ethics based on bioequality is an instrumental ethics. Because intrinsic value is given only to the web of life, the great interlocking order, or the system as a whole, “we are all fundamentally, basically, profoundly, nothing but strands in the wonderful web. This attempt to introduce ‘wholeness’ actually instrumentalizes all of us, instrumentalizes each and every living being, because now living beings only have part value, extrinsic value, instrumental value.”⁵⁸ And fourth, bioequality paralyzes pragmatic action: “The Eco camp’s general attempt to ‘save the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 195-96.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 517.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 519.

biosphere' by privileging it and leveling any distinctions in it (bioequality) paralyzes any actual pragmatic steps that can be taken to reform our anthropocentric stance."⁵⁹

Another result of absolutizing the biosphere is to equate Spirit with nature; that is, elevate nature to Spirit (or reduce Spirit to nature, either of which is a pre/ trans confusion). But the problem with basing one's spirituality in the biosphere, Wilber asserts, is that it leads to a predifferentiated, very this-worldly, strictly Descended (hence one-sided and incomplete), regressive, and dualistic spirituality. It is not the biosphere and noosphere united in the theosphere, it is only the biosphere; not Nature (the nondual One) but nature.

Thus, "the crux of the ecophilosophies to this day," Wilber believes, is the attempt to commune and unite with nature as "the ultimate spiritual occasion."⁶⁰ For instance, deep ecologists champion an ecological self--the notion of an expanded sense of self that includes the nonhuman world--as the basis for sane human-nature interrelationships and a sound environmental ethics. The ecological self, Wilber charges, is in actuality regressive, uni-dimensional, a "mere biocentric immersion" that fails to recognize transcendent Spirit, unlike a multi-dimensional Eco-Noetic self that synthesizes the biosphere, noosphere, and theosphere. And to the extent that an ecological self is regressive, it is not ecological at all because ecological consciousness depends on formal operational cognition, not regression to prepersonal structures. "Formal operational awareness . . . is the first truly ecological mode of awareness, in the sense of grasping mutual interrelationships. [It] begins . . . with the formal operational understanding of mutual relationships, and it does not begin prior to this at all."⁶¹

In a more recent work, Wilber explains that it takes a certain level of consciousness development to have ecological awareness. "In order to have sustainable economies living in harmony with ecosystems, human beings must have interior levels of development that can hold ecological consciousness: there is no sustainable exterior development without correlative interior development. . . . It does no good to emphasize the worldcentric Web of Life if people are still at egocentric and ethnocentric levels of interior development--which an alarming 70% of the world population is."⁶²

Similarly, ecofeminists tend to look for spiritual salvation in the cultivation of a permeable self, which is conceptualized as a sense of self

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 468.

⁶¹ Ibid., 223.

⁶² Ken Wilber, 2006c, 32.

that is empathically connected to nature. Wilber argues, however, that some ecofeminists fail to realize that the permeable self goes through developmental stages (i.e., prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal) and that many confuse the prepersonal permeable self with a “spiritual self.” But the lower stages of the permeable self (the prepersonal stages) are

egocentric, narcissistic, and altogether unpleasant, . . . locked into the orbit of their own endless self-regard, which is, by any definition, the antithesis of all things spiritual. And as for the permeable self and its alleged regard for ecological connections, it is often quite the opposite. The lower stages of the permeable self . . . are altogether prepersonal, preconventional, and egocentric in their stance--which is precisely the stance that is the prime contributor to ecological despoliation in general.⁶³

Radical ecologists are also half-wrong in that they privilege particular levels; that is, they take a less than all-level view. As a result, they are prone to other pre/ trans fallacies (of which there are several forms); that is, privileged levels become pivot points for pre-x and post-x confusions. The pre/ post confusions of primary relevance here are (a) elevating the prepersonal to the transpersonal, (b) confusing differentiation and dissociation, and (c) mistaking indissociation for transcendence (all three of which are related closely, and are variations of the same basic error).

To illustrate the first confusion--elevating the prepersonal to the transpersonal--Wilber targets Roszak's⁶⁴ ecopsychology. Although ecopsychology is correctly hierarchical as far as it goes, it does not go far enough; it is only half the story, therefore half-wrong. The half-wrong part, according to Wilber, is that it does not recognize genuine transpersonal levels, which leads Roszak to commit the pre/ trans fallacy of elevationism:

Roszak traces the rise of the personal out of the prepersonal, . . . and then, instead of further development into the transpersonal, we are given merely the task of uniting the prepersonal and the personal. Instead of integrating Earth, Human, and Heaven (body, mind, and spirit, or prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal)--instead of recommending that overall integration, a balanced Earth and Human is simply confused with Heaven itself. And since children and primal people did not differentiate clearly between Earth and Human, they must have been living in Heaven, and evolution beyond that Eden is a Tragic Mistake. Ecopsychology will reverse this Horrific Crime, and we will all once again be ushered into Heaven.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ken Wilber, “A More Integral Approach,” *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), p. 351.

⁶⁴ Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

⁶⁵ Wilber 1995, 684.

Because Roszak (and the ecophilosophers in general) aggressively denies any truly transpersonal sphere, the prepersonal domain is forced to serve that spiritual function (the “elevationist” version of the pre/ trans fallacy).⁶⁶

To illustrate the second confusion--differentiation confused with dissociation--Wilber picks on the Eco camp in general. As noted previously, central to Wilber’s integral paradigm is the notion of evolution through a series of developmental levels (holons) in each quadrant. This evolution proceeds by a process of differentiation/ integration; that is, each emergent holon differentiates itself out of the lower while integrating the lower in a new synthesis. However, if a new integration or synthesis is not found, the emergent holon may dissociate from its junior holons. This dissociation then may be perceived not as a differentiation on the way to a new and higher integration, but as evidence of a violation of a previously harmonious state. Wilber charges that the Eco camp did exactly that:

Any differentiation was taken to be the sign, not of a newly emerging integration, but of a lost paradise, a sign of a fracture, a sign that a prior “union” was being torn asunder into alienated parts and parcels.

And thus, instead of going forward to a higher but not-yet-emerged integration, we are supposed to go back to nature prior to the alleged crime--back to a time before the differentiation of the noosphere from the biosphere, back to those cultures that do not differentiate the Big Three, back to those idyllic times of the noble savage and the pristine communion with nature, back in any case to some sort of Eden. . . .

In other words, instead of seeing that differentiation is the necessary prelude to a deeper and higher and emergent integration, it was seen, in all cases, as a disruption, a division and destruction, of a prior harmonious state. . . .

And in this confusion--this pre/ trans confusion--all true critical edge was lost, because the cure for the actual dissociations that had indeed beset modernity was mistakenly thought to be a regression to a state prior to all differentiation whatsoever. . . . When differentiation is confused with dissociation, regression is confused with salvation.⁶⁷

Consequently, the advocates of the Eco camp believe that to heal the fractured worldview responsible for the ecocrisis we must go back to a time before the fracture, or so Wilber argues: “this approach . . . simply confuses differentiation and dissociation. . . . Thus, whenever evolution produces a new differentiation, and that differentiation happens to go into pathological dissociation, then this approach seeks to permanently turn back the pages of emergent history to a time prior to the differentiation. Not prior to the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 689.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 448-49.

dissociation--we all agree on that!--but prior to the differentiation itself!"⁶⁸

In the third pre/ post confusion--indissociation mistaken for transcendence--Wilber argues that radical ecologists' embrace of a purely Descended, immanent worldview predisposes them to mistake prepersonal states of indissociation--such as undifferentiated, narcissistic, infantile fusion states--for transcendence: "The only-immanence stance is now quite popular; it fits well with the ecomasculinist preference for tribalisms and the ecofeminist preference for horticulture: indissociation mistaken for transcendence-and-inclusion."⁶⁹ It also drives the search to find ecological wisdom amongst pre-modern peoples--a central endeavor of many radical ecologists--on the mistaken belief that their prerational structures had an integrating power that they simply did not possess.⁷⁰ But any retro-Romantic eulogizing of these structures by radical ecologists mistakes indissociation for transcendence.

Consequently, Wilber asserts that radical ecologists end up counseling regression, the logical result of any of these pre/ post confusions. Beginning during the Enlightenment, the eco-Romantics allegedly launched the Regress Express in search of Paradise Lost, first to the medieval age, then classical Greece:

The Eco camp continued unabated (and virtually unchanged) into many of today's ecophilosophies and "new paradigm" movements, which have taken up the Regress Express but in even more aggressive and violent forms. The ecofeminists do not at all approve of ancient Greece, but rather prefer the immediately preceding period of horticultural society, ruled by the Great Mother.⁷¹

The ecomasculinists view farming as the beginning of the great crime,⁷² so they push back even further to the glorified hunter-gatherer: "And so there we have it. The Regress Express crashes into ground zero, beyond which it cannot go and still call itself human."⁷³

The net result of these two partialities, flatland and regression, Wilber charges, is what he calls "the paradox of damage"⁷⁴: By privileging particular quadrants and levels the Eco-camp, paradoxically, has ended up being its own worst enemy, perpetuating in a new form the fracture it set out to heal.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 583.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁷¹ Ibid., 450.

⁷² E.g., see Shepard, 1982 and Metzner, 1993.

⁷³ Wilber 1995, 451.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 456.

The Rebuttal to Wilber's Critique of Eco-Holism

Given that Wilber's critique of eco-holism falls into two broad categories--privileging a particular quadrant(s), which results in flatland, and privileging a particular level(s) which results in pre/ post confusions--I will categorize the rebuttals to his critique accordingly for the sake of consistency and clarity. My purpose here is to report relevant rebuttals based on good arguments and well-supported claims, then to evaluate them for challenges to the validity of Wilber's integral model.

Privileging a Particular Quadrant(s): Flatland

Wilber's indictment of flatland holism depends on the validity of his all-quadrant model. Therefore, it stands that the indictment is potentially valid only if the model is valid.

The all-quadrant model--which holds that each quadrant must be included equally in any theory that aspires to be integral--in general, is regarded as a genuinely important contribution (as we will see) except, perhaps, by a few who insist on privileging a particular quadrant.

Even though critical of Wilber's holarchical (all-level) model, Rowe considers the all-quadrant theme "a valuable contribution" because it identifies as "narrow" those prophets and problem-solvers who claim "my way only" as they charge off in one of the four directions, seeking to effect radical change in the human condition by reforming either consciousness (Freud), or culture (Weber), or concepts of nature (Skinner), or social institutions (Marx), rather than recognizing the importance of all as parts of a four-dimensional whole. . . . [Each] is one quarter right.⁷⁵

Buchanan, who also finds fault with Wilber's holonic (all-level) theory, concedes that his "differentiation of the four parallel quadrants of evolutionary unfoldment . . . is in itself quite interesting"⁷⁶ and he does not take issue with it per se.

Even Heron, who vociferously attempts to deconstruct Wilber's integral model on numerous points, finds little objection to the four quadrants. His primary concern is that the quadrants are not the equal correlates that Wilber claims. Given the pervasive importance of language in reality construction, Heron argues that "our shared, interior-social, way of construing our reality through the forms of language and the culture which springs from it . . . subsumes all the other three quadrants. They are all subspaces within

⁷⁵ Stan Rowe, "Transcending This Poor Earth--à la Ken Wilber," *The Trumpeter*, Vol. 17, no. 1 (2001), p. 18, available on-line at: <http://trumpeter.athabasca.ca/content/v17.1/rowe.html>

⁷⁶ John Buchanan, "Whitehead and Wilber: Contrasts in Theory," *The Humanistic Psychologist*, Vol. 24, no. 2 (1996), p. 238.

the intersubjective world space.”⁷⁷ In other words, all quadrants ultimately are culturally constructed. Wilber, while fully acknowledging that all data always involve an interpretive component, would counter by saying that Heron’s position is an example of quadrant absolutism in which the Lower-Left quadrant colonizes the other three.

Similarly, de Quincey⁷⁸ finds the Lower-Left quadrant problematic, and Edwards⁷⁹ believes that the entire Left-Hand is privileged. However, both honor the four-quadrant model per se and do not challenge its validity.

Rowe likewise thinks that Wilber “violates the concept of balance in the four dimensions,” not by privileging the Lower-Left but by privileging the “mind-consciousness’ quadrant (Upper-Left) and its transpersonal possibilities.”⁸⁰ He also considers Wilber’s entire all-quadrant model homocentric because it privileges the human mind/ brain in culture/ society through which evolution allegedly will attain its ultimate goals. Additionally, Rowe questions the developmental parallels between quadrants posited by Wilber; that is, he regards it an article of faith to accept, for example, that the stages of childhood cognitive development (symbols to concepts to conop to formop) mirror the social correlates (foraging, horticultural, agrarian, industrial) and cultural correlates (archaic, magic, mythic, rational). Although there may be some merit to these charges, none challenge the potential validity of the model per se.

A trenchant critique of Wilber’s all-quadrant model is leveled by Meyerhoff. As noted, foundational to Wilber’s integral model is his claim that it is a posteriorally-derived from a structural-developmental analysis of numerous branches of human knowledge and their “orienting generalizations” or “sturdy conclusions.” This analysis resulted in an ontological division or classification of Kosmic components in one of four major classes or quadrants. After closely examining the orienting generalizations in SES, however, Meyerhoff concluded that they are not the sturdy conclusions of the respective branches of human knowledge that Wilber maintains; rather, they “are highly debatable and have widely varying degrees of validity,” and there is “extensive and contentious debates surrounding the supposedly already-agreed-upon knowledge that Wilber

⁷⁷ John Heron, “A Way Out for Wilberians,” (1997), p. 13, available on line at: www.human-inquiry.com

⁷⁸ Christian de Quincey, “The Promise of Integralism: A Critical Appreciation of Ken Wilber’s Integral Psychology,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 11/12 (2000), 177-208.

⁷⁹ Mark Edwards, “Through AQAL Eyes, Part 5: Matter, Membership and Mutuality,” (2003).

⁸⁰ Rowe 2001, 18.

uses to construct his integral framework.”⁸¹ According to Meyerhoff, Wilber ignores these debates and selectively uses references and quotations within those references to paint a picture of far greater consensus on major issues than is actually the case. In other words, where Wilber shows consensus Meyerhoff shows debate. Be this as it may, Meyerhoff grants that “that doesn’t mean that [Wilber’s] understanding of the structure of the Kosmos is wrong.”⁸² Similarly, as Smith notes, “one can accept at least some of Wilber’s ideas while being highly critical of his ways or arriving at them.”⁸³ In other words, even if some of the orienting generalizations upon which Wilber’s model is based are debatable, that does not necessarily invalidate the model per se.

In rebuttal to Meyerhoff, Wilber⁸⁴ claims that his method of orienting generalizations has been replaced by Integral Methodological Pluralism (IMP). Consequently, Meyerhoff’s critique of the orienting generalizations as the basis of the integral model is outdated. Meyerhoff⁸⁵ counters, however, that even if this is the case, the fact remains that Wilber’s entire edifice--at least until the publication of SES--is based upon orienting generalizations, and not IMP. Furthermore, Meyerhoff⁸⁶ notes that the orienting generalizations, or already-agreed-upon knowledge of the various knowledge quests, were the result of the same, and more, methodologies that Wilber includes in IMP. In other words, it was these methodologies that disclosed the orienting generalizations in the first place and will continue to do so. Additionally, if Wilber wants to throw out his orienting generalizations, Meyerhoff asks, what justifies Wilber’s construction of his integral model in the first place? It seems that the orienting generalizations are here to stay which, Meyerhoff notes, is in keeping with integral theory’s primary principle of transcend and include; that is, IMP should transcend and include any

⁸¹ Jeff Meyerhoff, *Bald Ambition: A Critique of Ken Wilber’s Theory of Everything* (2003), Introduction, p. 3, available on-line at:

<http://www.integralworld.net/meyerhoff-ba-note.html>

[Needs to be hotlinked]

⁸² *Ibid.*, ch. 1, sec. A, p. 2.

⁸³ Andrew Smith, “Contextualizing Ken: A Review of Jeff Meyerhoff’s *Bald Ambition*,” (2004), p. 6, available on-line at:

<http://www.integralworld.net/smith20.html>

⁸⁴ Ken Wilber, “Do Critics Misrepresent My Position?” (undated), available on-line at: www.kenwilber.com

⁸⁵ Jeff Meyerhoff, “Dismissal vs. Debate: A Reply to Ken Wilber’s Audio Rebuttal,” (2006), available on-line at:

<http://www.integralworld.net/meyerhoff6.html>

⁸⁶ Jeff Meyerhoff, “An ‘Intellectual Tragedy,’” (2006), available on-line at:

<http://www.integralworld.net/index.html?meyerhoff5.html>

[Needs to be hotlinked]

previous orienting generalizations.

Smith⁸⁷ challenges Wilber's four-quadrant model on many points, advancing in its place a single-scale model. He contends that Wilber's all-quadrant model is unnecessarily differentiated (e.g., unnecessarily differentiating the external and interior dimensions), suffers from certain inconsistencies and incoherencies (e.g., conflation of social holons with the social properties of individual holons), and suffers from other serious flaws (e.g., egalitarian and correlative, rather than causal, relationships between the quadrants). As Smith notes, "no model of hierarchy perfectly explains all relationships, but some models are better at explaining them than others. . . . [W]hatever the merits of Wilber's model, the use of four quadrants, per se, does not allow the model to express or incorporate any information or data that a one-scale model can't also recognize."⁸⁸ Smith strongly believes that his single-scale model is "both far more consistently conceived as well as more faithful to well-established evidence."⁸⁹ That being said, Smith acknowledges that Wilber's "synthesis of the human sciences . . . is unparalleled"⁹⁰ and that his works are hardly diminished by what he has to say. Furthermore, Smith's proposition of a one-scale model, even if it is more parsimonious and less problematic, does not invalidate Wilber's four-quadrant model per se.

In sum, although there is considerable argument about the specifics of Wilber's all-quadrant model, and even whether a four-quadrant model is necessary, these critics find considerable merit in it and do not challenge its validity per se. As Edwards contends, the various problems with the model can be addressed adequately within integral theory with its own resources. In other words, in light of valid critiques, the all-quadrant model can be revised, and does not necessarily need to be replaced. Therefore, given that Wilber's all-quadrant model is generally accepted as valid, his indictment of flatland holism is at least potentially valid.

Privileging a Particular Level(s): Pre/ trans Fallacies

Wilber's indictment of pre/ trans fallacies depends on the validity of his developmental all-level model. Therefore, it stands that the indictment may be potentially valid only if the model is valid. If the all-level model is determined to be valid, there is then the question of whether the claims about the pre/ trans fallacy itself is valid.

⁸⁷ Andrew Smith, "Why It Matters: Further Monologues with Ken Wilber," (2001), available on-line at: <http://www.integralworld.net/smith14.html>

⁸⁸ Andrew Smith, "God Is Not In the Quad: A Summary of My Challenge to Wilber," (2002), p. 1, available on-line at: <http://www.integralworld.net/smith16a.html>

⁸⁹ Smith 2001, 1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

The all-level model--which outlines the evolutionary or developmental levels (or holons) within each quadrant--has suffered considerable criticism. The critiques challenge key notions and elements of the model, the data and theory upon which it is based, and its internal consistency. I will address these critiques, then review Wilber's answer before considering the validity of the pre/ trans fallacy itself.

Several critics go right to the heart of Wilber's all-level model: the notions of holarchy and holon upon which it is based. Rowe identifies "logical pitfalls" in Wilber's holarchical all-level theory. As an ecologist, he argues that Wilber misapplies the analogy of holarchy--which is based on the structural organization of isomorphic physical organisms--to non-homologous systems, such as minds, societies, and cultures. In other words, Wilber applies "a false homology between questionable evolutionary series and the holarchy of complex organisms."⁹¹ In so doing, Wilber commits "the fallacy of mixing different categories, and treating them as isomorphic."⁹² Furthermore, his key tenet of emergent holons transcending and including junior holons, a sensible concept when applied to organisms, is nonsensical when applied to mind, societies, and cultures. Additionally, Rowe contends that Wilber's juxtaposition of the holarchies of evolutionary time sequences of consciousness, society, and culture (i.e., the Upper-Left, Lower-Left, and Lower-Right quadrants) with the holarchy of evolutionary spatial sequences of physical entities (i.e., the Upper-Right quadrant) is also illogical. In summary, Rowe believes that "the holarchical idea makes sense when applied to the anatomical structure of the organism--its original inspiration,"⁹³ but the attempt to treat different categories as isomorphic with biological organisms leads to nonsensical holarchies composed of non-homologous elements. Consequently, "Wilber's entire philosophical system is precariously balanced on the 'holon' idea."⁹⁴

Other critics challenge Wilber's appropriation of the perennial philosophy as the basis for the transpersonal end of his developmental hierarchy. In a critical examination of the adhesion of transpersonal theories, including Wilber's, to a perennialist metaphysics, Ferrer argues that perennialism (a) is an a priori philosophical belief in a transcendent unity and not a conclusion of research, (b) privileges a nondual monistic metaphysic as the ultimate Truth, and (c) leans towards objectivism and essentialism which

⁹¹ Rowe 2001, 20.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

fosters dogmatism and intolerance towards nonperennialist views.⁹⁵ Hence, Ferrer concludes that “the esotericist idea that mystics of all ages and places converge about metaphysical matters is a myth that must be laid to rest.”⁹⁶ Similarly, Heron ⁹⁷ challenges Wilber’s claim of cross-cultural mystical consensus (the perennial philosophy) to legitimate his preordained transpersonal structures. This “mystical consensus theory,” Heron argues, is “doomed” because (a) it depends entirely upon the written word which limits the recorded mystical experience of humankind to a “perilously small” sample, (b) any textual consensus “confers no validity on its content” because it “could be evidence of shared pathology,”⁹⁸ (c) the selection of texts is prejudiced by a priori selection criteria (e.g., Huxley’s, 1945, bias towards the nondualistic vedanta of Shankara), and (d) ancient texts are notoriously difficult to interpret accurately due to their embeddedness in foreign cultural and linguistic contexts.

Other critics find Wilber’s linear, structural-developmental hierarchy problematic for reasons of internal inconsistency. For instance, citing transpersonal epiphanies of supposedly prerational indigenous peoples and young children, Kelly⁹⁹ asks how could they experience the transcendence of that which had not yet emerged? In other words, how could they have experiences that supposedly are reserved for those who have developed higher structures of consciousness? Furthermore, he asks why it is possible for transpersonal influxes to occur at “lower” levels of organization, whereas it is impossible for someone at lower cognitive stages to have cognitive influxes from higher cognitive stages (e.g., a preop child having influxes of formop)? Consequently, Kelly believes that it is problematic to conceive of transpersonal states as following the prepersonal in a continuous or linearly holarchical fashion. Rather, he suggests that a more accurate conception is that of a parallelism between the personal and the transpersonal domains of consciousness. Similarly, Combs argues that the ubiquitous availability of the transpersonal implies that “we are not dealing with a one-dimensional evolutionary map of human experience at all, but a two-dimensional map.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Jorge Ferrer, “The Perennial Philosophy Revisited,” *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 32, no. 1 (2000), 7-30.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁷ John Heron, “Spiritual Inquiry: A Critique of Ken Wilber,” *Collaborative Inquiry*, Vol. 18 (1996), 1-10.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁹ Sean Kelly, “Revisioning the Mandala of Consciousness: A Critical Appraisal of Wilber’s Holoarchical Paradigm,” *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), pp. 119-130.

¹⁰⁰ Allan Combs, *The Radiance of Being: Complexity, Chaos and the Evolution of Consciousness* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1996).

Grof seems to agree: "The presence of transpersonal elements on [the perinatal] level seems to be an integral part of this process, rather than a mysterious 'infusion' of material from a remote part of the developmental spectrum."¹⁰¹ Observations from contemporary spiritual teachers leads Rothberg to ask "whether there indeed really are discrete, coherent, stable spiritual 'stages' of 'basic structures'."¹⁰² And Drengrson, representing deep ecologists and ecophilosophers, writes that "many of us are sympathetic with . . . Wilber's theory of transpersonal consciousness . . . yet we are also bothered by some contradictions between his staged hierarchies and our own spontaneous, grounded experience."¹⁰³

Several critics question Wilber's description and classification of prerational cognitive structures, which presents a challenge to his all-level model. Kremer cites anthropological evidence of early hominids and ancient civilizations that "presuppose complex cognitive processes supposedly unavailable to humans during those time periods [including cognitive skills akin to vision-logic]. They suggest that a stage model may not be the most appropriate way to take these data into account"¹⁰⁴ In other words, "anomalous" anthropological evidence that does not fit Wilber's model leads Kremer to doubt the model's ability to account adequately for mental processes of indigenous peoples. Kremer further questions Wilber's apparent nineteenth-century evolutionary conceptualizations that, when applied to the evolution of consciousness and societies, persuades him to rank indigenous peoples as "lower" than Euro-centered peoples. From the indigenous perspective, however, "evolutionary thinking in general has always been problematic because of its (at least implicit) notion of progress toward some better, more complete, or more actualized way of being."¹⁰⁵

Similarly, diZerega argues that (a) there is "no evidence that the early hunter-gatherers didn't possess formal rational consciousness," and (b) that contemporary hunting and gathering peoples "are as rationally competent as moderns. . . . We have no empirical reason to believe these people were mentally less acute than we ourselves [and] the cultural and religious

¹⁰¹ Stanislav Grof, "Ken Wilber's Spectrum Psychology: Observations from Clinical Consciousness Research," *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), pp. 87-116.

¹⁰² Donald, Rothberg, "Toward An Integral Spirituality," *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), p. 382.

¹⁰³ Alan Drengrson, "How Rigid the Hierarchy?" *The Trumpeter*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (1996), 51.

¹⁰⁴ Jürgen Kremer, "The Shadow of Evolutionary Thinking," *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), p. 248.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 249.

practices of contemporary hunting and gathering peoples . . . provides evidence for the existence of formal operational rationality.”¹⁰⁶ Just because these people experience the world differently from us moderns does not mean that they are cognitively inferior. Furthermore, diZerega questions Wilber’s association of all magical thinking with prepersonal cognitive development (a conclusion borrowed from Piaget), arguing that the magical thinking of contemporary tribal people is qualitatively different from childhood magical thinking.

Likewise, Winkelman critiques Wilber’s theory of the evolution of human consciousness (i.e., his developmental spectrum)¹⁰⁷ for its: (a) Euroamerican ethnocentrism, biases, and assumptions; (b) lack of grounding in contemporary archaeological, anthropological, and ethnological research; and (c) biased selection, assessment, and interpretation of data (which tend to confirm his theoretical perspective). Winkelman cites research that questions Wilber’s developmental scheme, at least in its lower levels. He argues that this evidence illustrates the very cognitive processes and abilities that Wilber denies early humans (e.g., formal operational cognition). To the contrary, Winkelman argues that ancient humans were “cognitively equivalent” to modern humans. Although he agrees that “there apparently are stages in human evolution, they are not the ones outlined by Wilber.”¹⁰⁸ Winkelman also advances the cultural relativist argument against any sort of social, cultural, or consciousness ranking: “Culture frames all aspects of human knowledge. . . . Models of human consciousness must incorporate the understanding that any model is necessarily a culturally specific expression.”¹⁰⁹

A comprehensive and constructive critique of Wilber’s holarchical system has been made by Edwards who argues that Wilber’s system suffers from certain “mixing problems” (i.e., the incorrect mixing or combining of holons from different developmental domains and ontological stages).¹¹⁰

Most of these critiques have been addressed by Wilber in various places either with dismissal (i.e., claiming that the critic either misrepresents his position, criticizes him for views to which he does not subscribe, or critiques an earlier work in disregard of his later, more mature thought),

¹⁰⁶ Gus diZerega, “A Critique of Ken Wilber’s Account of Deep Ecology & Nature Religions,” *The Trumpeter*, Vol. 13, no. 2, 61.

¹⁰⁷ Wilber 1981/1996.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Winkelman, “The Evolution of Consciousness: An Essay Review of *Up From Eden*,” *Anthropology of Consciousness*, Vol. 1, no. 3/4 (1990), 28.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Winkelman, “The Evolution of Consciousness? Transpersonal Theories in Light of Cultural Relativism,” *Anthropology of Consciousness*, Vol. 4, no. 3 (1993), 8, 9.

¹¹⁰ Mark Edwards, “Through AQAL Eyes. Part 1: A Critique of the Wilber-Kofman Model of Holonic Categories,” (2002), available on-line at: <http://integralworld.net/edwards5.html>

acknowledgement of intransigent differences (i.e., the inevitable clash of different paradigms), counter-argument, accommodation, or assimilation. Other critiques he simply ignores, sidesteps, glosses over, or promises to address in future works. My purpose here is not to review the nuances of the debate; that largely has been done.¹¹¹ What is important is the validity of the all-level model; that is, the essential question is whether any of these rebuttals invalidate Wilber's all-level model (especially the spectrum of consciousness development in the Upper-Left quadrant because that is the primary domain of the pre/ trans fallacy). Briefly, then, I will look at each rebuttal with that question in mind.

Regarding Rowe's challenge to Wilber's use of the notions of holon and holarchy, Zimmerman notes that Rowe's argument is founded largely on a misinterpretation of Wilber.¹¹² This, in part, may be due to the fact that Rowe's critique unfortunately is based on Wilber's much condensed and popularized version of SES.¹¹³ Rowe may have come to a different understanding and conclusions had he digested the much more comprehensive SES and based his critique on that work. Zimmerman argues that Rowe's holarchy is actually less adequate than Wilber's. Contrary to Wilber, Rowe follows a problematic logic of containment in which each holarchical level volumetrically contains the smaller which wrongly privileges the ecosphere with organisms, including humans, as functional parts. This ignores Wilber's point that humans, as evolved conscious beings, have more depth and less span, which makes them less fundamental but more significant than the ecosphere. Consequently, as Zimmerman concludes, "humans cannot be adequately described as 'part of' the biosphere."¹¹⁴ Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman further note that Rowe "goes astray in creating an unnecessary dualism between space and time, structures and processes"¹¹⁵ and "ignores Wilber's distinction between individual and social holons"¹¹⁶ which addresses some of Rowe's concerns about the non-homologous relationship of holons in different quadrants. Additionally, Rowe's objections seem to be based on a conception of Wilber's non-homologous holons as ontological phenomenal realities, but Wilber's more recent conception of the quadrants as perspectives mitigates this position.

¹¹¹ E.g., see Rothberg and Kelly, 1998.

¹¹² Michael Zimmerman, "Humanity's Relation to Gaia: Part of the Whole, or Member of the Community?" *The Trumpeter*, Vol. 20, no. 1 (2004), 2-20.

¹¹³ Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996).

¹¹⁴ Zimmerman 2004, 16.

¹¹⁵ Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, and Michael Zimmerman, *Integral Ecology: Uniting Multiple Perspectives on the Natural World* (Boston: Integral Books, 2009), p. 86.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

Even if the “logical pitfalls”--which stem from Wilber’s alleged misapplication of the notions of holons and holarchy to non-homologous systems--are correct, it does not necessarily follow that the all-level model is invalid; that is, even if Rowe’s charges are true, the model may still be valid. Even though Wilber may be guilty of “the fallacy of mixing different categories and treating them as isomorphic,” it does not mean that those categories, in and of themselves, are invalid. For example, even though the consciousness category (quadrant) may be non-homologous with the biological category (quadrant) does not mean that it is in itself an invalid holarchy. To the contrary, Wilber’s many works demonstrate that that holarchy is founded on copious amounts of cross-cultural research and the hierarchical, evolutionary models of others.

Regarding Ferrer’s and Heron’s objections to perennialism, it is important first to note that Wilber himself is “a harsh critic of the perennial philosophy” and that he sympathizes with many of the criticisms levied against it.¹¹⁷ In fact, a stated aim of his work is to develop a modernized “neoperennial philosophy”¹¹⁸ by correcting its distortions and omissions. Specifically, Wilber identifies several major inadequacies of the traditional Great Chain of Being--the “core” of the perennial philosophy--that need to be addressed to bring it into the modern and postmodern world. “It is not so much that the scheme itself is wrong, as that the modern and postmodern world has added several profound insights that need to be added or incorporated if we want a more integral or comprehensive view”;¹¹⁹ that is, it has to come to terms with modernity’s demand for evidence and postmodernity’s realization of the cultural-boundedness of all knowledge. Second, Wilber objects that the critics who attempt to deny the perennial philosophy “do so not by presenting counterevidence--but simply by refusing to acknowledge the substantial evidence that has already been amassed.”¹²⁰ Third, many of their objections are disputed by the writings of the perennialists themselves (e.g., Smith, Schuon, Nasr). Fourth, Rothberg argues that the objections to the core claims associated with the hierarchical ontology of the perennial philosophy are not fatal “since they can be interpreted as identifying very significant kinds of historically prevalent distortions of the ‘full’ or ‘essential’ expression of the perennial philosophy,

¹¹⁷ Ken Wilber, *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000b), p. 158 n. 16.

¹¹⁸ Wilber 1997a, 63.

¹¹⁹ Wilber, 2006a, 218.

¹²⁰ Wilber, 2000a, 9.

rather than as rendering invalid the two core perennialist claims.”¹²¹ In other words, “these critiques can be interpreted . . . as critiques of typical ‘distortions’ of such traditions rather than their essence.”¹²²

Regarding the critiques of his developmental holarchy (i.e., Kelly, Combs, Grof, Rothberg, Drengron) that suggest that the data (especially from transpersonal experiences) are better accounted for by a less linear model, Wilber objects that a common misperception is that his model is overly linear, whereas it is not, a point that becomes clearer with each succeeding work.¹²³ For instance, in *Integral Psychology*, Wilber explicates six types of structures (levels/ lines, enduring/ transitional structures, and deep/ surface structures) that are navigated, often erratically, by the self, which is undergoing development in its own self-related lines. Furthermore, the influxes from any state of consciousness can occur at any developmental level.¹²⁴ In *A Theory of Everything*, Wilber adds the notion of “spiraling” streams and waves, and in Excerpt A he emphasizes that transpersonal waves are not predetermined a priori; they are not “pregiven levels already formed.”¹²⁵ Then, in *Integral Spirituality*, Wilber introduces the Wilber-Combs Lattice that articulates the notion “that a person at any stage can have a peak experience of a gross, subtle, causal, or nondual state [but] will interpret that state according to the stage they are at.”¹²⁶ Many of these critiques, then, actually are referring to Wilber’s outmoded models: “That I present a linear or ‘one-dimensional’ stage model is the most common criticism I get, even though that model--phase-2--was abandoned in 1983, to make room for phase-3 and phase-4 models, which emphasize waves, streams, states, and self,”¹²⁷ not to mention phase-5 which emphasizes IMP and an integral post-metaphysics.

Regarding the archaeological and anthropological challenge to the all-level model, Kremer notes that “Wilber has yet to answer the detailed objections by Winkelman and myself [and diZerega] regarding available archeological and anthropological evidence which challenges his model as a

¹²¹ Donald Rothberg, “Philosophical Foundations of Transpersonal Psychology: An Introduction to Some Basic Issues,” *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 18, no. 1 (1986), 16.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²³ Wilber 1997a, 145-47.

¹²⁴ Wilber 2000a

¹²⁵ Wilber 2006b, 29.

¹²⁶ Wilber, 2006a, 90.

¹²⁷ Ken Wilber, “Ken Wilber’s Second Response to Allan Combs,” (1999b), 3, available on-line at: <http://members.ams.chello.nl/f.visser3/wilber/combs3.html>

whole.”¹²⁸ Instead of addressing this and several other of Winkelman’s points (which he chooses to ignore), Wilber focuses on rebutting only Winkelman’s cultural relativism critique by pointing out its inherent performative contradiction and its collapse of cultural value to functional fit (a subtle reduction). Furthermore, in a review of Wilber’s worldview, Walsh and Vaughn, contrary to Winkelman’s cultural relativism argument, point out that “there now exists significant evidence that it is possible to make valid cross-cultural developmental assessments.”¹²⁹ The question remains of what the effect is of the unanswered anthropological objections on Wilber’s stage model? In other words, do they challenge the model’s validity? Wilber had promised that he would answer this question in Volume Two of the Kosmos Trilogy (SES is Volume One), subsequently published in draft form at www.kenwilber.com, but that he did not specifically do. However, even if Wilber’s all-level model is guilty as charged, at least to some degree (i.e., of being Eurocentric; lacking in grounding in contemporary archaeological, anthropological, and ethnological research; biased in its selection and interpretation of data; and under-estimating the cognitive abilities of indigenous peoples), it does not necessarily render it invalid. That Winkelman, for instance, disagrees with Wilber does not necessarily mean that his stage model is wrong. Self-admittedly, Winkelman agrees that there are stages in human evolution, he just disagrees with Wilber’s particular interpretation.

Regarding Edwards critique of various mixing problems in Wilber’s holarchy, he nevertheless firmly believes that the consistent application of the principles of integral theory is sufficient to deal with these problems.

The net conclusion is that Wilber’s developmental all-level model has not been challenged fatally and can be accepted as potentially valid, though problematic (at least in the Upper-Left and then primarily its upper third--i.e., the transpersonal levels--but even then the existence of the transpersonal is not disputed by the critics cited, only its nature and placement). In general I think Walsh’s conclusion is correct: even though “several critics have raised valuable questions about specific elements of the system, . . . none of the critiques seem to have seriously threatened the vision as a whole.”¹³⁰ It follows, then, that the pre/ trans fallacy is at least not invalidated by the developmental model upon which it is based. But is the pre/ trans fallacy itself valid? Because a great deal of Wilber’s objection to eco-holism is based

¹²⁸ Jürgen Kremer, “Lingering Shadows,” *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), p. 393.

¹²⁹ Roger Walsh, and Frances Vaughan. “The Worldview of Ken Wilber,” *Textbook of Transpersonal Psychiatry and Psychology*, eds. Bruce Scotten, Allen Chinen, and John Battista (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p. 66.

¹³⁰ Roger Walsh, “Ken Wilber’s Integral Vision,” *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), p. 371.

on alleged pre/ trans confusions, it stands that his objections are valid only if the pre/ trans fallacy is valid.

The short answer is: no one seriously challenges the pre/ trans fallacy per se, only Wilber's particular interpretation. In fact, even Washburn, who is otherwise a critic of Wilber's structural-hierarchical model, accepts the importance of distinguishing pre and trans: "Wilber made an invaluable contribution to transpersonal theory in pointing out that pre and trans states, despite similarities, are widely different and should not be confused with each other, either by way of reduction of trans to the pre or elevation of the pre to the trans. It is a serious mistake to conflate pre and trans states."¹³¹

The Adequacy of Wilber's Critique of Eco-Holism

To summarize, Wilber's all-quadrant, all-level model--upon which his critique of eco-holism is based--is potentially valid (at least it has not been shown to be invalid). Therefore, his critique of eco-holism cannot be dismissed out-of-hand and must be evaluated on other grounds, especially its groundedness in the radical ecological literature. This groundedness is fundamental to the accuracy of Wilber's interpretation of radical ecology and the soundness of his arguments against it.

Several critics have challenged the adequacy of this grounding, claiming, in effect, that Wilber's critique of eco-holism is based on an inadequate and biased sampling and reportage of radical ecologies and radical ecologists. For example, although expecting "some sweeping generalizations" in a work of such "ambitious reach," Zimmerman believes that Wilber paints the Eco camp with too broad a brush and tends to not differentiate distinct positions:

I expected [his critique] to differentiate more carefully among the varieties of romanticism, as well as among today's ecotheorists, instead of lumping most of them together. Wilber suggests that most ecophilosophers yearn to become reabsorbed in nature, are personally underdeveloped, and are prone to ecofascism and other reactionary views.¹³²

This may be true of a few radical ecologists, Zimmerman concedes, but is not necessarily, or even probably, a true characterization of most. For instance, Zimmerman cites notable exceptions to Wilber's characterization of deep ecologists and ecofeminists as regressive descendents (e.g., Naess, Fox, Ruether, Keller, Eisler, and Warren). Elsewhere, Zimmerman argues that deep ecologists are not anti-rational or anti-modern as Wilber suggests, and

¹³¹ Michael Washburn, "The Pre/ Trans Fallacy Reconsidered," *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), p. 79.

¹³² Michael Zimmerman, "A Transpersonal Diagnosis of the Ecological Crisis," *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), p. 200.

that they actually “share his commitment to the nondualism of the perennial philosophy.”¹³³ More recently, Zimmerman has stated that “deep ecology can be interpreted in a progressive way, one that is generally consistent with Wilber’s point of view.”¹³⁴

Similarly, diZerega believes that “Wilber’s description of environmental thought is a caricature.”¹³⁵ To illustrate, he cites Arne Naess as a prime exception to all that Wilber critiques in deep ecology: Naess does not advocate a return to paleolithic hunting and gathering or pre-egoic indissociation before the alleged “Fall,” nor does he endorse an unrestrained biospheric egalitarianism, nor attempt to explain everything in terms of systems theory. DiZerega writes that an “overview of Arne Naess’s writings demonstrates the complete inapplicability of Wilber’s critique of deep ecology to the primary deep ecological philosopher. Nor is Naess alone here. . . . [Wilber is] extremely selective [in] picking and choosing from among deep ecological writers.”¹³⁶ DiZerega himself appears to be another notable exception to Wilber’s caricature. For instance, contrary to Wilber’s charge that radical ecologists glorify earlier societal forms, diZerega acknowledges that “the modern West has indeed progressed in developing more inclusive and rational forms of social life.”¹³⁷ He also admits having no problem with Wilber’s hierarchical model of consciousness development, including the transpersonal levels, nor has he a quarrel with Wilber’s thesis of evolutionary processes within an ultimately nondual spiritual reality (itself a linear, vertically hierarchical notion). Speaking as a spokesman for Neo-Pagan and nature religions, diZerega claims that the majority of practitioners of nature religion are not in retreat from modernity as Wilber charges, and only some hold the eco-Romantic attitudes and beliefs of which Wilber accuses them. Also, contrary to Wilber, diZerega does not think nature religions are regressive in either motivation or essence; rather, they are dialogical, see no deep contradiction with contemplative traditions, and encompass both ascending and descending insights. Specific to the latter, diZerega and Smoley note that the Native American Navajo, Crow and Lakota, the African Yoruba, and the Western Neo-Pagan Gardnerian Wicca all “recognize both ‘ascending’ and ‘descending’ dimensions to reality.”¹³⁸

Regarding ecofeminism, Wilber leaves one with the impression that

¹³³ Michael Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 209.

¹³⁴ Zimmerman 2004, 17.

¹³⁵ diZerega 1996, 58.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³⁸ Gus diZerega, and Richard Smoley, “Up the Down Staircase,” *Gnosis Magazine*, (1995, Fall), 87.

ecofeminists must spend considerable time worshiping the Goddess in Neo-Pagan rituals. Although this may be true in some quarters, the major concern and effort of ecofeminists, according to Spretnak, is applied to pragmatic action for ecojustice, ecoeconomics, ecopolitics, ecoeducation, and ecopeace.¹³⁹ Quinby argues that ecofeminism is primarily a “politics of resistance” that combats ecological destruction, patriarchal domination, and abuses of power primarily on a local level.¹⁴⁰ And King stresses that ecofeminism is a cultural and political activism, and is not anti-science, anti-rational, or regressive. The “project of ecofeminism,” she asserts, “is the organic forging of a genuinely antidualistic, or dialectical, theory and practice [that] knowingly bridge[s] the classic dualisms between spirit and matter, art and politics, reason and intuition. This is the potentiality of a rational reenchantment.”¹⁴¹ As such, King says that “ecofeminism is not an argument for a return to prehistory” and she does not advocate “return by a great reversal.”¹⁴²

Lastly, Wilber has nary a word, good or bad, for a host of other radical ecologies--such as social ecology, socialist ecology, spiritual ecology, bioregionalism, radical environmentalism, and ecotage--which further reinforces the charge of inadequate and biased sampling and reportage.

Due to these shortcomings, the argument can be advanced that Wilber is guilty of the straw man fallacy; that is, he misrepresents radical ecologists’ positions through oversimplification and then attacks those positions. The same argument can be made regarding his blanket critique of systems theory; that is, discussions of specific theorists and texts are lacking, and no counter-examples are presented. In their absence, the adequacy of Wilber’s critique is questionable. In other words, it is long on accusation, short on evidence. To give a few examples, he charges that deep ecologists and ecofeminists reject the notion of holarchy,¹⁴³ that ecophilosophers, in general, aggressively deny any truly transpersonal sphere,¹⁴⁴ and that radical

¹³⁹ Charlene Spretnak, “Ecofeminism: Our Roots and Flowering,” In *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Irene Diamond, and Gloria Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), pp. 3-14.

¹⁴⁰ Lee Quinby, “Ecofeminism and the Politics of Resistance,” *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. I. Diamond, and G. Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990), pp. 122-127.

¹⁴¹ Ynestra King, “Healing the Wounds: Feminism, Ecology, and the Nature/ Culture Dualism,” In *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, eds. Irene Diamond, and Gloria Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books 1990), pp. 116, 120-21).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁴³ Wilber 1995, 50.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 689.

ecologists do not understand the need for inner transformation,¹⁴⁵ without citing or analyzing any exemplary writers or texts. Therefore, it is at issue whether Wilber characterizes the targets of his criticism accurately; it is not clear, in other words, “to what extent what he criticizes has a relationship to real texts and claims” (Donald Rothberg 2002: personal communication).

Wilber counters the charge of biased sampling of radical ecology with the promise that any such shortcomings or overgeneralizations will be remedied fully in Volume Two. He also asserts that his generalizations about radical ecologies and radical ecologists in SES “are based on a deep level of analysis which reveals that they are all variously caught in profound flatland orientations, and the detailed analysis of Volume Two supports just that strong conclusion. These are not wild overgeneralizations, but the summary of a series of very specific and detailed analyses.”¹⁴⁶ Volume Two was eventually posted in draft form on the internet in 2003 and 2004,¹⁴⁷ however, the promised remedy and detailed analyses were not delivered. Hence, Zimmerman’s and diZerega’s opinions are based justifiably on the evidence before them (i.e., SES) and will be adjusted appropriately when they see further evidence. Short of those “detailed analyses” and the dispelling of the charge of biased sampling, it is open to question whether Wilber accurately interprets radical ecologists and whether his charges of flatland and regression (retro-Romanticism) hold.

Wilber’s Solution to the Ecological Crisis

In SES Wilber does not just critique eco-holism. He also answers that critique (at least partially) by suggesting what needs to be done to heal the fractured worldview that eco-holists believe is responsible for the ecological crisis.

In general, the cure for that fractured worldview, he argues, is an all-quadrant, all-level integral vision. Anything less is fractured, hence part of the problem. Anything less than an all-quadrant approach results in “flatland,” the antidote to which is recognizing and embracing all quadrants. Anything less than an all-level approach results in pre/ trans confusions, the antidote to which is recognizing and embracing all levels. Anything less than all-quadrant, all-level is partial, and partiality is the cause of the illness. All-quadrant, all-level is the cure. The Eco camp, in its partiality, paradoxically hurts what it hopes to heal; it hopes to heal our fractured worldview but in denying an all-quadrant, all-level approach it perpetuates that fracture.

Specifically, Wilber articulates three major developments necessary to solve the ecological crisis.

Vision-logic

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 422.

¹⁴⁶ Wilber 1998, 341.

¹⁴⁷ See www.kenwilber.com [?]

The most immediate and necessary step towards a solution, Wilber insists, is the embrace of formal operational rationality with its global reasonableness and pluralistic tolerance, followed by a transformation to vision-logic (the next level or structure of consciousness above rationality). Whereas the rational is able to take different perspectives--even worldcentric pluralism, a very high and important development--vision-logic (what Gebser, 1985, calls the integral-aperspectival) is able to hold them all in mind and add them up to a total vision. In other words, it is vision-logic that begins to dissolve the rigid dualisms of atomism/ wholism, heterarchy/ hierarchy, mind/ body, self/ nature, nature/ Nature, agency/ communion, autonomy/ heteronomy, Ascent/ Descent, and Ego/ Eco and thus begin to heal the fractured worldview. This ability to take a higher integrating perspective, to see identity-in-difference, and thereby unify opposites, Wilber insists, is crucial to solving the self-defeating, planet-destroying contradictions in the eco-holistic paradigm. Pragmatically, vision-logic will allow, even encourage, the various radical ecologies to cooperate in a larger integral vision (just as Wilber, 1997a, proposed for "integral feminism").

The tremendous integrative power of vision-logic allegedly will help unite world citizens in a centauric-planetary worldview (vision-logic's correlate in the intersubjective quadrant)--by recognizing that we share bodies and minds in a common humanity--then anchor that recognition in the institutional form of pluralistic federated states (vision-logic's correlate in the interobjective quadrant). This higher level integration, which integrates the Big Three and transcends narrow parochialisms, is essential because the ecocrisis is a global crisis demanding a transnational response. "It is the integrative power of vision-logic . . . that is desperately needed on a global scale."¹⁴⁸

The solution, then, to the two partialities discussed previously is vision-logic. Flatland becomes multi-dimensional with vision-logic: The Right-Hand recognizes the Left-Hand; the exterior admits the interior; the individual embraces the collective; the objective, interobjective, subjective, and intersubjective are seen as the four faces of the Kosmos; the natural sciences, the hermeneutic-phenomenological and contemplative sciences, the social sciences, and the human or geist sciences, and their respective validity claims, are granted autonomy in their respective domains; and the Big Three, now dissociated, are reintegrated. And the pre/ trans confusions that encourage retro-Romantic regression become unconfused with vision-logic. "Reintegrating the lower is mandatory," Wilber concedes, "but reintegrating the lower is not finding the higher,"¹⁴⁹ and it is in the higher that true integration occurs. The cure is not to regress to prerational, prepersonal

¹⁴⁸ Wilber 1995, 187.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 498.

levels that undo hard-won developmental differentiations and progress; “rather, it is to evolve and develop into an integrative mode of awareness that will . . . integrate the biosphere and noosphere” for the first time in history.¹⁵⁰

Flatland, then, disappears and pre/ trans confusions dissolve in the all-quadrant, all-level integral perspective of vision-logic. But, ultimately, vision-logic itself is inadequate, for it too is partial. The long-term solution, Wilber contends, is awakening to nondual consciousness and its ultimate intuition: “Spirit manifests always and simultaneously as the four quadrants of the Kosmos [as] the higher self . . . embraced in culture, embodied in nature, embedded in social institutions.”¹⁵¹

The central task facing radical ecology, then, is transformation to universal rationality and then to vision-logic (with their corresponding developments in the other quadrants) because

‘saving the biosphere’ depends first and foremost on human beings reaching mutual understanding and unforced agreement as to common ends. . . . Gaia’s primary problems and threats are not pollution, industrialization, overcultivation, soil despoliation, overpopulation, ozone depletion, or whatnot. Gaia’s major problem is lack of mutual understanding and mutual agreement in the noosphere. . . . In other words, the real problem is not exterior. The real problem is interior. The real problem is how to get people to internally transform from egocentric to sociocentric to worldcentric consciousness, which is the only stance that can grasp the global dimensions of the problem in the first place, and thus the only stance that can freely, even eagerly, embrace global solutions.¹⁵²

Transformation, not Translation¹⁵³

Unfortunately, according to Wilber, radical ecologists believe that we can heal our fractured worldview and tread less heavily on the planet if we change our beliefs from atomism to wholism, from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, from hierarchy to heterarchy, from autonomy to heteronomy, from agency to communion. In other words, translation from one belief system to another. As Wilber argues, however, what is required for meaningful change is transformation, not merely translation: “In recognizing only this ‘single’ change from atomistic to holistic concepts, it misses the crucial fact that change of beliefs does not mean change of consciousness. It

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 168.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 496, 497.

¹⁵² Ibid., 513-14.

¹⁵³ *Translation* refers to changes in the horizontal dimension, and *transformation* to changes in the vertical dimension. That is, in transformation one transforms from one developmental level to the next higher level, whereas in translation, one simply perceives and interprets one’s existing level differently.

means simply a new translation, not necessarily a new transformation.”¹⁵⁴ But the problem is that radical ecologists, in their subtle reductionism, in their rejection of the Left-Hand of the Kosmos, simply do not understand the need for inner transformation; rather, only the need for a more accurate holistic map of the empirically available “whole” in order to have access to “all the truth that is fit to know.”¹⁵⁵ But “this less-than-adequate interpretation makes it appear that the most urgent problem in the modern world is to teach everybody systems theory (or some version of Gaia’s web-of-life notions, or some version of the ‘new physics’).”¹⁵⁶ A change in belief, however, a new translation from atomism to wholism, will not do it, Wilber believes: “Even if the web-of-life ontology were absolutely true . . . global consciousness is not an objective belief that can be taught to anybody and everybody, but a subjective transformation in the interior structures that can hold the belief in the first place.”¹⁵⁷

Wilber is not optimistic about this transformation occurring on a large scale any time soon:

We have an enormous amount of information about how and why those interior psychological transformations occur (egocentric to sociocentric to worldcentric), and the Eco camps by and large display no awareness of, and no interest in, those inner dynamics, fixated as they are on describing exterior mononature in “holist” terms.¹⁵⁸

Even ecopsychologists, in their project to “psychologize ecology,” demonstrate little understanding of the need for this type of radical change in consciousness. Rather, they focus on the question of motivation; that is, how to motivate people to change their environmentally destructive behavior.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, as Wilber notes, ecopsychology is “a goal without a path”¹⁶⁰; that is, it lacks a transformative practice, as evidenced by a survey of the ecopsychological literature.¹⁶¹ The same holds true for deep ecology, as Wilber charges in Volume Two. While he applauds deep ecology as “a wonderful statement of the necessity of a transformation of consciousness to

¹⁵⁴ Wilber 1995, 499-500.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 422.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 498.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 514-15.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Theodore Roszak, “Where Psyche Meets Gaia,” *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind*, eds. Theodore Roszak, Mary Gomes, and Allen Kanner (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), pp. 1-17.

¹⁶⁰ Wilber 1999a, 166.

¹⁶¹ E.g., see Roszak et al. 1995.

realize ecological interrelatedness”¹⁶² through an expanded identification from individual organism to eventually all of humanity to all of life, Wilber faults it for having “absolutely nothing more to say about those actual stages of interior transformation--egocentric to ethnocentric to worldcentric to Kosmocentric. . . . Deep ecology simply asserts the goal without evidencing an understanding of the path to that goal.”¹⁶³ It is “a goal with no path, a noble ideal with no means, a wonderful ambition supported only by vaporware and exhortations and recriminations, not effective practices.”¹⁶⁴

Radical ecologists--who believe that reformist environmentalism is insufficient because it addresses only the symptoms, not the roots, of the ecological crisis--ask deep questions about the basic assumptions and fundamental causes of the problem. Ironically, according to Wilber, radical ecology is condemned to betray its mission because it is ultimately superficial. It claims to be deep, not shallow, but from the vantage point of Wilber’s integral paradigm it is itself shallow. Therefore, Wilber says that radical ecologists simply have not looked deeply enough. To critique anthropocentrism, androcentrism, patriarchal dominator hierarchies, or atomism, for instance, is altogether necessary, but in the absence of an integral vision it succeeds only in swapping one ideology, one fractured worldview, for another. As the all-quadrant, all-level model illustrates, such approaches are limited and incomplete; they are not necessarily wrong, but partial. Ultimately a change in belief system (translation) is insufficient. What is required is transformation:

Thus, without in any way denying the crucial importance of the ecological and economic and financial factors in the world-demanding transformation, let us not forget that they all rest ultimately on a correlative transformation in human consciousness: the global embrace, and its pluralistic world-federation, can only be seen, and understood, and implemented, by individuals with a universal and global vision-logic.¹⁶⁵

Environmental Ethics

Arguably the most urgent task of postmodernity, Wilber contends, is the development of a genuine environmental ethics, a necessary ingredient of any meaningful solution to the environmental crisis. Instead of the bioequality-based environmental ethics advocated by most ecophilosophers, Wilber proposes a multi-dimensional environmental ethics that honors the Great Hierarchy of Being and allows pragmatic action. This ethics includes

¹⁶² Wilber 2006c, 32.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Wilber 1999a, 201. [quote should be from One Taste]

three basic tenets:

1. All holons are perfect manifestations of Spirit. Therefore, they all have equal ultimate value or Ground-value.

2. All holons (whole/parts) have wholeness. As a wholeness, a holon possesses value in itself, or intrinsic value, "from which it follows, the greater the wholeness, the greater the intrinsic value."¹⁶⁶

3. All holons also have partness. As parts, holons have extrinsic or instrumental value. "That is, all holons have value for others. All holons have part-value, or partness-value (as part of a larger whole), and that whole and its members depend upon each part: each part is thus instrumental to the existence of the whole."¹⁶⁷

Rejoinder

De Quincey writes, "Notwithstanding some of the theoretical and logical difficulties buried in the details of Wilber's vast and comprehensive model, his overall contribution has been immense."¹⁶⁸ And Walsh's "overall assessment of his work is that the great majority of his claims are backed by significant data and are integrated into a coherent system, thus at least partially satisfying both correspondence and coherence theories of truth."¹⁶⁹ I concur.

As Rothberg and Kelly and their contributors all acknowledge, "Wilber's comprehensive model is capable of integrating vast amounts of disparate data and theoretical constructs."¹⁷⁰ In fact, Puhakka believes that "Wilber has laid the groundwork for a paradigm of unparalleled scope. . . . This monumental work sets forth a view large enough, holistic enough, to include everything--even itself."¹⁷¹ Again, I concur.

This notwithstanding, I am left with many questions: I question whether eco-Romantics--even those who Wilber may label correctly as such--are really their own worst enemy, unwittingly contributing to the despoliation of the earth as he claims? What, pray tell, are they actually doing to despoil the earth? Aren't they doing more good than harm? Do not ecofeminists and ecomasculinists have much to contribute to ecological healing with their social activism and Green politics, eco-education and community development, habitat restoration and promotion of wilderness, personal development and ecotherapy, and other practices? Furthermore, I

¹⁶⁶ Wilber 1995, 518.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ de Quincey 2000, 203.

¹⁶⁹ Walsh 1998, 371.

¹⁷⁰ Rothberg and Kelly 1998, 403.

¹⁷¹ Kaisa Puhakka, "Restoring Connectedness in the Kosmos: A Healing Tale of a Deeper Order," *The Humanistic Psychologist*, Vol. 23, no. 3 (1995), 383, 390.

wonder how much it really matters if they suffer from pre/ post confusions or are mired in flatland? Would that speak less of the activists arrested at Diablo and Livermore? Is it of concern if those protesting to save the old growth redwoods are eco-Romantics, or base their environmental ethics on the principle of bioequality? Is not the important thing that they are fighting those despoiling the earth? (That their efforts may be less than integral does not alter the fact that they have had significant positive impact.) In practical terms, what import does Wilber's critique and proposed solution have for radical ecology and the ecocrisis? What does it really mean to the people on the front lines of the radical ecology movement, whether deep ecologists, ecofeminists, ecopsychologists, or others? How will a taking into account of Wilber's critique and proposed solution change (ostensibly for the better) what they do (their agency or praxis) to help stop ecological devastation? This Wilber does not say. He does not really answer his own critique in any specific way by spelling out its practical implications. He neglects to say how the taking into account of his critique will (or should) alter the actual practice of radical ecology in any meaningful way, although he likely would say that that is up to those people who interpret his work. And that is precisely what is beginning to happen. Since the publication of SES radical ecologists reportedly are using Wilber's integral model to practical benefit.¹⁷²

I also question whether, as a practical matter, too much attention has been paid to the transpersonal, both by Wilber and his critics, at least in regard to eco-holism and the ecocrisis. Those levels ultimately may be important but, as a practical matter, there is an urgency to finding solutions to the ecocrisis which, as Wilber even admits, can be accomplished with vision-logic. Therefore the transpersonal levels do not seem to be at issue here, except in the instance of pre/ trans fallacies, where Zimmerman warns that radical ecologists "should be aware of the pre/ trans fallacy and the danger of confusing prepersonal with transpersonal states."¹⁷³ In this regard, Zimmerman seems to agree with Wilber that the nature-oriented practices of some radical ecologists (e.g., pagan rituals, goddess worship, and shamanism) represent a risky, even dangerous, exploration of the "magical-typhonic" level of consciousness unless undertaken at the centauric level of awareness.¹⁷⁴ Based on personal explorations of such areas over several decades, as well as a critical evaluation of reports of transpersonal experiences of non-native practitioners of the Native American sweat lodge

¹⁷² See Ervin Laszlo, *World Futures: The Journal of General Evolution*, Vol. 61, no. 1-2 (2005), 1-163.

¹⁷³ Zimmerman 1998b, 199.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

ceremony,¹⁷⁵ I agree.

In this regard it is important to ask: Is retro-Romantic regression strictly prepersonal as Wilber claims? And is it ecologically counterproductive as he also claims? If so, an important question is what percentage of radical ecologists hold regressive ideas and are engaged in prepersonal practices? If it is a minority (which is likely), there is little or no problem and Wilber's critique is minimized. If it is a majority (which is doubtful), there is a problem. (And here, I suggest that it would be helpful to distinguish two types of retro-Romantic regression: (a) regression in service of the prepersonal, which is unhealthy, and (b) regression in service of the transpersonal [a la Washburn and Grof], which is healthy.) In partial answer to these questions is some suggestive research on Neo-Pagans. In a study of the spiritual experiences, life changes, and ecological viewpoints of contemporary pagans, Carpenter found that Pagans exhibit a significant positive correlation between the report of mystical experiences and positive life changes and acceptance of the New Ecological Paradigm (NEP).¹⁷⁶ (The NEP is a scale that assesses the degree to which people have accepted a new ecological worldview that stresses sustainability). These conclusions suggest, contrary to Wilber, that the practice of Neo-Paganism is not regressive or counterproductive ecologically. In another study, Adler found that the majority of Neo-Pagans are not anti-science or anti-technology; science and technology are not viewed as something to retreat from, only to be used more responsibly. Furthermore, while Neo-Pagans "may take inspiration from the past, they do not want to return to it."¹⁷⁷

Additionally, Wilber has a propensity and talent for dramatically stating (or overstating) the often "profoundly" mistaken viewpoints of others. He seems to delight in stating someone's claim, then demonstrating that the "exact opposite" is true. I suspect that this is too black and white. In the spirit of a more integral perspective I venture that both camps (Wilber and the ecologists) are each half-right and half-wrong. As Wilber admits, radical ecologists are half-right in their struggle against atomism and half-wrong in their less than all-quadrant, all-level partialities. As for Wilber, his concern is genuine and he raises real issues (the right half) but he paints with too broad a brush (the wrong half).

In spite of its several problems, and even though it is in need of independent validation and research into its value (as Visser notes), I believe

¹⁷⁵ Whit Hibbard, "Reports of Transpersonal Experiences by Non-Native Practitioners of the Native-American Sweat Lodge Ceremony: A Critical Appraisal," *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, Vol. 26 (2005), 18-32.

¹⁷⁶ Dennis Carpenter, "Spiritual Experiences, Life Changes, and Ecological Viewpoints of Contemporary Pagans," Doctoral dissertation, Saybrook Graduate School, 1994.

¹⁷⁷ Margot Adler, "Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and other Pagans in America Today," revised edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 392.

that Wilber's integral paradigm remains the most comprehensive model with the greatest explanatory and integrative power. Yet Grof stresses the limitations and relativity of all models and theoretical constructs. . . . None of the theories considered definitive at any given time has survived later discoveries, except the most recent ones that have not yet been challenged. Reality is clearly much more complex than any of the theories that we make about it. . . . I therefore feel very strongly that instead of engaging in the battle of models as if they were or ever could be definitive and all-inclusive, it is wise to do the best we can to improve them and bring them into consonance, but leave the field wide open for surprises and new discoveries.¹⁷⁸

Wilber seems to agree. He likes to stress the "extraordinary similarities," the tremendous "overlap and agreement" between his model and that of others (e.g., Grof, Washburn, Combs), "even as we continue to hash out the details. . . . An 'all-level, all-quadrant' approach is simply my way of working with a genuinely integral overview; others, no doubt, are possible. But it will be very difficult to retreat to earlier, less integrative and less holistic stances."¹⁷⁹ It is important to recognize that Wilber regards his integral model as a work in progress: "I will be the first to admit that my call for a more integral approach covering all four quadrants (in both ascending and descending modes) is introductory."¹⁸⁰ "I'm trying to . . . make room for various authentic approaches in a more integral view. At the same time, I tend deliberately to leave the details open and fluid, so that those more competent than me can fill them in (or correct them altogether)."¹⁸¹

Now that radical ecologists have been chastised suitably by Wilber for their partial views, I agree with McDermott that "the transformation of an embattled to a dialogical consciousness should be the first goal,"¹⁸² and Zimmerman's call for "a more respectful dialogue."¹⁸³

The same holds for the proponents of the various radical ecologies who often are at odds (e.g., the deep vs. social ecologists).¹⁸⁴ Towards this end, Wilber already has suggested a path. He demonstrates, for example,

¹⁷⁸ Grof 1998, 114.

¹⁷⁹ Wilber 1998, 327, 339.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 365,

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 359.

¹⁸² Robert McDermott, "The Need for Philosophical and Spiritual Dialogue: Reflections on Ken Wilber's *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*," *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers*, eds. Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly (Wheaton, IL: Quest, 1998), p. 281.

¹⁸³ Michael Zimmerman, "Ken Wilber's Critique of Ecological Spirituality," (2003), 3, available on-line at: <http://www.integralworld.net/zimmerman3.html>

¹⁸⁴ See Bookchin and Foreman 1991.

how a dozen competing schools of feminism can be integrated in his all-quadrant, all-level model; that is, each rather neatly represents one quadrant and often only one level in that quadrant. From the perspective of his integral model, however, one sees clearly how each has a piece of the puzzle, and one realizes that it takes all the pieces embraced in a larger vision to create an “integral feminism.”¹⁸⁵ With vision-logic we similarly can see and appreciate the various radical ecologies as essential components of an “integral radical ecology.”

This project has been well developed recently by Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman. Drawing heavily on Wilber’s integral theory, they have created an Integral Ecology which “advances the development and application of a comprehensive approach to environmental issues [and] organizes insights from various eco-approaches into an all-inclusive framework.”¹⁸⁶ It promises to provide “a robust theoretical model that organizes and integrates various disciplines and methods, and generates the most comprehensive solutions.”¹⁸⁷ (p. 5). It provides a structure for organizing and integrating the radical multiplicity of different perspectives towards its goal of building bridges instead of fences, and to finding comprehensive solutions to entire problems through full understanding. From this higher vantage point the various, often competing, ecological approaches can recognize a common purpose and thereby honor the unique insights and contribution of each. The magnitude and complexity of the environmental problem is simply too great for any one approach to comprehend, account for, or hope to solve. But, even then, due to the overwhelmingly powerful and entrenched anti-ecological socio-political-economic institutions, I share Wilber’s “doubt and sadness [over] what a slim chance any of this has in making any sort of difference at all.”¹⁸⁸

Conclusion

If Wilber’s critique of eco-holism is correct, it is immensely important that it be taken into account and every effort made to answer it in a meaningful and pragmatic way. This is not just an intellectual debate--for as ecopsychologist Deborah Winter warns, “the ecosystem will collapse whether

¹⁸⁵ Wilber 1997a.

¹⁸⁶ Esbjörn-Hargens and Zimmerman 2009, 9.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸⁸ Wilber 1999a, 94.

we win our intellectual debates or not”¹⁸⁹--but has tremendous import to the course and outcome of the ecological crisis. It is especially urgent if, as Wilber maintains, the work of at least some radical ecologists is actually counterproductive; that is, that they ironically are helping to destroy that which they are striving to save.

If Wilber’s critique of eco-holism is incorrect, or even partially so, that does not invalidate his all-quadrant, all-level model. In other words, one may dismiss Wilber’s critique of flatland and pre/ post fallacies, yet still find considerable merit in his integral theory. However, as even Wilber would likely advise, it should be accepted as provisional (i.e., to be refined, reworked, or replaced by a better theory in the future) and one should be careful not to mistake the map for the territory.

So, as I sit at my desk gazing out across my family’s 100 year old Montana cattle ranch, saddle horses grazing in the mountain meadow, a herd of cow elk and their newborn calves across the valley, I contemplate the import of integral theory. Managing a ranch is not as simple and straightforward as it once was. There are multiple stakeholders and interests in the larger community (e.g., state and federal land agencies, sportsmen and recreationists, environmentalists and conservationists) and the issues and concerns are many (e.g., the threat of noxious weeds; encroachment of hungry wolves after their reintroduction in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho; mountain pine beetle laying waste to thousands of acres of lodgepole; economic and political forces beyond local control; water, riparian and wildlife issues).

So, what I need as a land manager is a theory and praxis for accounting for and dealing with the myriad of diverse stakeholders and issues, a pragmatic model that will help me see and hold multiple perspectives while searching for the unifying thread that binds them together. In spite of its shortcomings, I am appreciative of Wilber’s integral model (and the integral ecology it is spawning) because it is helping me take that more comprehensive view in my search for long-term, sustainable solutions in the struggle for the ranch’s survival into the 21st century.

Author bio

¹⁸⁹ Deborah Winter, *Ecological Psychology: Healing the Split Between Planet and Self* (New York: HarperCollinsCollegePublishers, 1996), p. 282.

As a fourth generation Montana rancher, Whit Hibbard has a pressing concern for finding long-term sustainable solutions to complex problems. Hence, his interest in integral theory and the integral ecology it is spawning. Whit has published a comprehensive review of ecopsychology in *The Trumpeter*, articles on his work with reports of transpersonal experiences of non-native practitioners of the Native American sweat lodge ceremony in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, and *Shaman's Drum*, and two books, *Forensic Hypnosis* and *Psychic Criminology*. Whit earned his Ph.D. at Saybrook Graduate School where he focused on studying integral theory and ecopsychology. Whit can be contacted at whithibbard@yahoo.com

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