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Ken Wilber  
*in* Dialogue



Conversations  
with Leading  
Transpersonal  
Thinkers

edited by **Donald Rothberg** and **Sean Kelly**

99-06695

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A publication supported by  
THE KERN FOUNDATION

**Quest Books**  
Theosophical Publishing House

Wheaton, Illinois ♦ Chennai (Madras), India

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First Quest Edition 1998

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The Theosophical Publishing House  
P.O. Box 270  
Wheaton, IL 60189-0270

A publication of the Theosophical Publishing House,  
a department of the Theosophical Society in America

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Ken Wilber in dialogue: conversations with leading transpersonal thinkers / edited by Donald Rothberg and Sean Kelly. -- 1st Quest ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8356-0766-6

I. Transpersonal psychology. I. Rothberg, Donald Jay.

II. Kelly, Sean M., 1957-

BF204.7.K46 1998

150.19'8—dc21

97-35286

CIP

5 4 3 2 1 \* 98 99 00 01 02 03 04

Printed in the United States of America

## The Pre/Trans Fallacy Reconsidered



ALTHOUGH THIS CHAPTER IS CRITICAL OF KEN WILBER'S THOUGHT, it is also a tribute to Wilber.<sup>1</sup> For like almost everyone else devoted to transpersonal theory, I am greatly indebted to Wilber. His work—along with that of Stanislov Grof—clearly led the way during the 1970s and 1980s. Wilber's genius at synthesizing ideas and his particular integration of spirituality and psychology, breathtaking in scope, elevated transpersonal theory to a much higher level. Wilber, along with Grof and Jung, was a primary influence on me when I was first struggling to clarify my own thinking on transpersonal issues. My first book, *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*, although critical of Wilber, was very much a product of Wilber's influence, as is evident on almost every page. That book, now out in a second edition (1995), was conceived as a critical response to Wilber's structural-hierarchical perspective. It was written with Wilber in mind as both a formidable intellectual adversary and a towering intellectual role model. Wilber has played a vitally important role in my intellectual development, and I want to begin this chapter—especially because it is a critical chapter—by expressing my appreciation for the immense contribution he has made to transpersonal theory and to my own understanding of transpersonal ideas.

Wilber's work, especially *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977), *The Atman Project* (1980a), and *Up from Eden* (1981), came upon the transpersonal scene in dramatic fashion. These books were stunning intellectual achievements. They integrated a wide range of sources from comparative religion and contemporary psychology within a transpersonal framework of great power. I was extremely impressed with these books and with Wilber's thought as a whole. I eagerly awaited each new work from Wilber's pen to see where he would go next. Wilber's work in the late 1970s and early 1980s had such a great impact on transpersonal psychology that it virtually defined the field. And it still does for many of Wilber's followers.

I was so impressed with Wilber's theoretical synthesis that I assimilated it whole. I not only pored over his writings but also followed his lead by trying to learn some of the many sources from which he drew. I had been trained in Western philosophy and was only superficially acquainted with Eastern philosophy and contemporary psychology. Wilber opened my eyes to the cross-cultural and multidisciplinary riches available—and, indeed, indispensable—to anyone interested in transpersonal theory. As Wilber told Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan

(1994), he does his homework. Indeed he does! And as a result almost everyone in transpersonal psychology owes a significant part of her or his education to him. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Wilber integrated sources that earlier would have been thought to be completely unrelated—for example, sources from Eastern spirituality (primarily Vedanta and Buddhism) and from Western psychology (primarily structurally oriented developmental stage theory). And in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995), Wilber has integrated a good deal of Western philosophy (primarily in its idealistic variations) and evolutionary theory into his system of thought.

In my opinion, Wilber's two most important works are *The Atman Project* (1980a) and "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1980b). These two works at any rate are the writings in which Wilber's mature position was first presented. All of Wilber's subsequent writings have applied or extended, but not significantly departed from, the general position set forth in these works. Also, incidentally, *The Atman Project* and "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" are the works by Wilber which had the greatest influence on my own thinking. Accordingly, in what follows I shall be giving these two works a good deal of attention, without, however, ignoring Wilber's other writings, in particular *Up From Eden* (1981), *Eye to Eye* (1990a), and *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995).

*The Atman Project* (1980a) put the spectrum psychology introduced in *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977) into a new form that for the first time clearly set Wilber's perspective apart from other transpersonal perspectives. As Wilber notes in the preface to *The Atman Project* (1980a), he had only recently understood the importance of the pre/trans distinction, that is, the distinction between preegoic (lower, primitive, or infantile) states on the one hand and transegoic (higher, psychic, or spiritual) states on the other.<sup>2</sup> The pre/trans distinction, he realized, is crucial to transpersonal psychology because preegoic and transegoic states, although widely different, appear similar from the point of view of the ego and, therefore, are frequently mistaken for each other. Lower states are mistaken for higher states or higher states are mistaken for lower states, and in either case regrettable consequences ensue for both theory and practice. Awakening to the importance of the pre/trans distinction, Wilber set about rethinking the ideas of *The Atman Project* (1980a), parts of which had appeared in preliminary form as articles in *ReVision*. He sought to clarify his own thinking on just how preegoic and transegoic states differ and how they are related, if at all.

In reworking *The Atman Project* (1980a), Wilber arrived at a way of explaining the difference between preegoic and transegoic states that laid the foundation for all of his subsequent work. *The Atman Project* is

the first work in which Wilber presented the view that preegoic and transegoic states are expressions of two different, lower and higher sets of psychic structures and, therefore, that developmental movement toward transegoic levels of experience is a purely ascending movement aiming at higher structures. The psyche, in this new view, is a hierarchy of preegoic, egoic, and transegoic structural levels, and human development is a level-by-level climb up this hierarchy.

This structural-hierarchical conception of the psyche and linear-ascending conception of development brought Wilber into disagreement with the Jungians. For Wilber could no longer accept the Jungian view that preegoic and transegoic states have a common basis and, therefore, that transpersonal development follows a course leading back to psychic resources active early in life on the way to a higher, transegoic integration of the ego with those resources. Wilber, having earlier been in substantial agreement with this view, now clearly disagreed. He now believed that preegoic and transegoic states, rather than having a common basis, are expressions of different sets of psychic structures. And he now believed that transpersonal development, rather than retracing old ground on the way to higher ground, is a straight ascent to higher levels of structural articulation and (top-down) inclusive wholeness.<sup>3</sup>

The publication of "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" in 1980 brought Wilber's new view and his disagreement with the Jungians into sharp focus. Wilber graciously sent me a prepublication copy of the paper. In reading the manuscript, I knew that Wilber had written a landmark piece for transpersonal theory. "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1980b) poses what is perhaps the most important theoretical question for transpersonal psychology, and Wilber answers this question in a way that gives decisive formulation to his own position (already set forth initially in *The Atman Project* [1980a]). The question—which I shall call *the pre/trans question*—is, as I understand it, this: Do apparent similarities between preegoic and transegoic states imply that these states are expressions of the same or similar psychic structures? Basing his response on the structural-hierarchical conception of the psyche set forth in *The Atman Project* (1980a), Wilber answered this question with an emphatic no. He held that any similarities between preegoic and transegoic states are merely superficial and misleading and that, in fact, the psychic structures expressed in preegoic and transegoic states differ from each other in the widest possible way. Preegoic and transegoic structures are more different from each other than either is from egoic structures. Preegoic and transegoic states are not expressions of the same or similar structures; they are, rather, expressions of distinct and widely dissimilar sets of structures. This position, first adopted in *The Atman Project* (1980a)

and then vigorously advanced in "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1980b), is perhaps Wilber's single most important theoretical commitment, which he continues staunchly to defend (see *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* [1995], 205–8).

In insisting that preegoic and transegoic states are expressions of dissimilar sets of psychic structures, Wilber allows that these states appear similar to the ego and, therefore, that the structures corresponding to these states can be grouped together in pairs. For example, in "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1980b) Wilber matches the following preegoic and transegoic structures: (1) the primary matrix of infancy (narcissistic oceanic fusion) and higher spiritual wholeness, (2) the polymorphous somatic experience of the body-ego and the higher mind-body unity of the centaur (Wilber's term for existential mind-body integration),<sup>4</sup> (3) illusory magic (imaginal thinking subject to primary-process condensations and displacements) and genuine psychic ability, and (4) prerational mythic thinking and suprarational archetypes (Platonic ideal patterns).<sup>5</sup>

In matching these preegoic and transegoic structures, Wilber's intention is not to suggest that they have any real affinity. His point, rather, is to *contrast* these structures, to match them so that their wide differences can be clearly seen. For, he believes, failure to appreciate these differences leads inevitably to one or the other of two basic pre/trans errors or "fallacies"—namely, either to a misconceiving of the trans as the pre (reductionism) or to a misconceiving of the pre as the trans (elevationism). That is, failure to distinguish properly between corresponding pre and trans structures leads inevitably either to a cynical reduction of the transegoic to the preegoic (which Wilber abbreviates *ptf-1*) or to a naive elevation of the preegoic to the transegoic (which Wilber abbreviates *ptf-2*).

Describing these errors in "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1980b), Wilber says:

In *Up from Eden* I therefore examined eight or so major structures of consciousness in order to discover how they may have been subjected (in the context of both historical development and present-day theories) to either *ptf-1* or *ptf-2*. . . .

My conclusions were that, almost without exception, some lower structure, such as magic, has been and still is confused with some similar-appearing higher structure, such as psychic, and then either the former is elevated to the latter, or the latter reduced to the former. In other words, the pre/trans fallacy. (1990a, 253–54)

Freudians, for example, tend to reduce spiritual wholeness to narcissistic oceanic fusion and transegoic archetypes to the primitive imag-

inal symbols of the primary process. They commit ptf-1. Jungians, Wilber believes, do just the opposite. They, for example, tend to elevate the primary matrix to the transpersonal Self and merely archaic or infantile imaginal symbols to transegoic archetypes. They commit ptf-2. According to Wilber, one must acknowledge that pre and trans are two different levels of psychic structures, or else one will inevitably succumb to either ptf-1 or ptf-2. He insists that there is no middle ground.

In my opinion, there *is* middle ground. One does not need to double the number of nonegoic psychic levels to avoid a pre/trans error. Such a doubling is unnecessary and unparsimonious. It is entirely possible that many nonegoic structures—or, to use a term I prefer, nonegoic *potentials*<sup>6</sup>—have both pre and trans developmental expressions. It is entirely possible that nonegoic potentials such as dynamism, the body, instinctuality, feeling, and the creative imagination express themselves early in life in pre ways and then express themselves later in life—that is, after the ego is mature and has been reconnected with nonegoic potentials—in trans ways. For example, although the primary matrix and spiritual wholeness are by no means the same, they may nonetheless be expressions of a common ultimate ground, what I have called the *Dynamic Ground*. The primary matrix can be understood as preegoic fusion with this Ground, spiritual wholeness as a higher reunion of the ego with this Ground. Also, for example, although preegoic magico-mythical symbols and transegoic archetypes are by no means the same, they also may have a common source: the creative, autosymbolic imagination. Preegoic symbols can be understood as spontaneous productions of the autosymbolic process forged in response to the prerational, preoperational body-ego, higher transegoic archetypes as spontaneous productions of the autosymbolic process forged in response to the mature ego (once it has embarked upon the path of transcendence). I have mapped these and other pre and trans expressions of nonegoic potentials in *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground* (1995) and *Transpersonal Psychology in Psychoanalytic Perspective* (1994).

The point here is that Wilber's conception of the psyche is unparsimonious. Rather than positing an ego in relation to nonegoic potentials (many if not most of which can express themselves in both pre and trans ways), Wilber posits three distinct levels of psychic structures: preegoic, egoic, and transegoic. This positing of an extra psychic level is a consequence of Wilber's unfortunate answer to the pre/trans question. The similarities between many pre and trans states need not be completely misleading, as Wilber maintains. These similarities may indicate—and I believe they do—that pre and trans states draw on many of the same psychic potentials. Wilber is correct in holding that pre and trans should

be carefully distinguished both as psychic states and as developmental stages. Pre and trans *are* widely different as states and stages: preegoic states and stages are developmentally inferior to egoic states and stages, and transegoic states and stages are developmentally superior to egoic states and stages. In recognizing this important difference between pre and trans states and stages, however, it is not necessary to conclude that there is a corresponding difference between pre and trans *structures* (i.e., basic structures or psychic potentials). The fact that pre and trans differ developmentally and phenomenologically does not entail that they are dissimilar structurally, that is, in their underlying psychic sources. To infer structural dissimilarity from developmental-phenomenological difference, as Wilber does, is itself a type of pre/trans fallacy, as I shall explain later. Wilber's answer to the pre/trans question, then, is not the only logically viable one and is itself the product of a faulty inference.<sup>7</sup> There is no need to posit different levels of pre and trans structures in order to distinguish properly between pre and trans as states and stages. Wilber's answer to the pre/trans question, I believe, forced him to proliferate psychic levels and structures beyond need.

In committing himself to the view that pre and trans are different sets of psychic structures, Wilber at the same time committed himself to the view that, for the ego, movement toward the pre and movement toward the trans are movements unfolding in completely opposite directions. For Wilber, any movement by the ego in the direction of the pre (or what *was* pre<sup>8</sup>) is a purely descending movement, and any movement by the ego in the direction of the trans is a purely ascending movement. Accordingly, for Wilber, any return to psychic resources articulated during preegoic stages is necessarily a movement *away* from ego transcendence. The path of transcendence does not retrace old ground; it moves exclusively to new and higher ground. It proceeds straight from egoic structures to higher and previously unarticulated transegoic structures. Wilber, then, rules out the possibility of a *spiraling* path of transcendence, a path that bends back toward origins on the way to a higher integration with lost psychic potentials. In distinguishing between pre and trans not only as states and stages but also as structures, Wilber rules out the possibility that a return to what *was* pre is a return to what *could* be trans.

In rejecting the idea that movement toward the trans follows a spiraling course, Wilber is forced to interpret any process that is said to follow such a course as a merely regressive descent to origins, as a simple U-turn to what is structurally and, therefore, *only* pre.<sup>9</sup> This is how Wilber interprets the Jungian theory of individuation in "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1980b). According to Wilber, the Jungian theory of individua-

tion is dangerously mistaken, for in stipulating that the ego must return to its collective origins in the deep psyche this theory points away from higher trans structures and toward similar-appearing but nonetheless exclusively lower pre structures. That is, it points away from transcendence and toward mere regression. In charging Jung with ptf-2, with misconceiving the pre as the trans, Wilber also charges Jung with misconceiving regression as transcendence. He says:

In my opinion, Jung errs consistently to the opposite side [to the side opposite Freud and ptf-1]. He correctly and very explicitly recognizes the transpersonal or numinous dimension, but he often fuses or confuses it with prepersonal structures. . . . Thus not only does Jung occasionally end up glorifying certain infantile mythic forms of thought, he also frequently gives a regressive treatment to Spirit. (1990a, 225)

Wilber notes that Jung avoids many regressive difficulties because he (properly) stresses the importance of a strong ego. Jungian individuation, Wilber observes (1990a, 228–29), is not as regressive as the paths of self-change promoted by many human potential therapies, which not only glorify the pre but encourage the abandonment of the “rigid” and “repressive” ego as well. Jungian individuation, however, is still regressive according to Wilber, for, he believes, despite presupposing a strong ego, it turns the ego away from the trans and toward what is merely pre and, therefore, sets the ego on a merely descending, regressive course.

But this, I suggest, is a serious *misinterpretation* of Jung. For although it is true that Jungian individuation involves a descent—namely, a descending return of the ego to the nonegoic potentials of the deep psyche—this descent is not a merely regressive U-turn to origins. It is, rather, the first phase of a return-then-ascend, reroot-then-regenerate spiral. It is a retracing of ground that, in submitting the ego to the transformative power of the deep unconscious, leads ultimately to a higher ego-unconscious, whole-psyche integration (the alchemical *coniunctio*, the sacred marriage or *hieros gamos*, the *coincidentia oppositorum*). Jung’s theory of individuation is, accordingly, a spiral theory. Wilber, however, having ruled out the possibility of a spiral to transcendence, interprets Jung’s account of the ego’s return to the collective unconscious as a simple U-turn of regression.

Working my way through “The Pre/Trans Fallacy” (1980b), I realized that I disagreed with Wilber’s answer to the pre/trans question and that, in general perspective, I sided with Jung. Wilber’s challenge to Jung thus helped me clarify my own thinking. Specifically, it led me to the idea of *regression in the service of transcendence*, which is a kind of regression

that, by no means a merely regressive about-face, is the downward loop of a developmental spiral that reconnects the ego with its nonegoic sources on the way to a higher integration with those sources. The idea of such a regression is essentially Jungian (the night sea journey of individuation) and, therefore, is not new.<sup>10</sup> My awakening to this idea, however, occurred as I was in the midst of my own night sea journey and was struggling to find a response to “The Pre/Trans Fallacy” (1980b). Wilber’s “Pre/Trans Fallacy,” which gives expression to his turn *away* from Jung, was the intellectual stimulus that led me to turn *toward* Jung.

After working through “The Pre/Trans Fallacy” (1980b), I reread *The Atman Project* (1980a) and saw that, from a spiral perspective, Wilber’s structural-hierarchical theory of development can be called into question at two main developmental junctures: (1) the transition from preegoic stages to the egoic or, more precisely, mental-egoic stage; and (2) the transition from the *mental-egoic* stage to the “centauric” stage of higher mind-body integration and dialectical-holistic cognition (which Wilber calls *vision-logic*). These two transitions are the developmental turning points at which the spiral model of development and Wilber’s structural-hierarchical model are most emphatically at odds.

According to Wilber, all normal developmental transitions are movements of ascent to higher levels of inclusive wholeness in the sense that new and higher structures are articulated without losing touch with previously articulated structures.<sup>11</sup> In normal development, consciousness *differentiates* itself from the structural level being transcended without *dissociating* itself from that level. Transcended levels are not repressed and lost; rather, they are assimilated and reorganized within the higher level to which consciousness ascends. Wilber acknowledges that repression and dissociation can occur during developmental stage transitions, but he holds that this is pathological, not the pattern of normal development. Wilber makes these points about normal development in almost all of his works.

In Wilber’s structural-hierarchical theory, the transitions from preegoic stages to the mental-egoic stage and from the mental-egoic stage to the centauric stage should, assuming normal development, be movements of straight ascent to higher levels of inclusive wholeness. In a spiral view, in contrast, the two transitions in question are points of disconnection and reintegrating return, respectively. They are points at which the ego loses touch with many of the potentials of the deep psyche (transition from preegoic stages to the mental-egoic stage) and then begins a reintegrating, transcending return to those potentials (transition from the mental-egoic stage to the centauric stage). With this in mind, I looked closely at Wilber’s descriptions of the two transitions in question to see how well they conform to his linear-ascending model of development.

What I found is that these transitions are problematic for Wilber in that his treatment of them—despite his efforts to make them fit the linear-ascending scheme—reveals the disconnection and higher reintegration hypothesized by the spiral view. For instance, in discussing the unconscious in *The Atman Project* (1980a) and *Eye to Eye* (1990a), Wilber acknowledges that the psychic potentials that Freud assigned to the id and that Jung assigned to the collective unconscious are indeed unconscious and unavailable to the mental ego. Here is what he says:

Such is the archaic-unconscious, which is simply the most primitive and least developed structures of the ground-unconscious—the pleroma (physical matter), the uroboros (alimentary drives), the typhon (emotional-sexual energies), and various primitive mental-phantasmic forms. They are initially unconscious but unrepressed. . . . Self-reflexive awareness is out of the question with these structures, so they always retain a heavy mood of unconsciousness. (1980a, 107–8)

At any rate, following both Freud and Jung, we can say in general that the somatic side of the archaic-unconscious is the id (instinctual, limbic, typhonic, pranic); the psychic side is the phylogenetic phantasy heritage. On the whole, the archaic-unconscious is not the product of personal experience; it is initially unconscious but not repressed; it contains the earliest and most primitive structures to unfold from the ground-unconscious, and, even when unfolded, they tend toward subconsciousness. They are largely preverbal and most are subhuman. (1990a, 108)

As these passages make clear, Wilber believes that the somatic, dynamic, and creative potentials of Freudian and Jungian depth psychology are not only inherently preegoic in nature but also inherently unconscious. These potentials, he says, are so primitive in character that they inherently “tend toward subconsciousness.” They belong by their very nature to the “archaic-unconscious.”

The potentials of the archaic-unconscious are inherently unconscious, according to Wilber, because they are prereflexive and preverbal; they cannot be brought into reflective focus or expressed through verbal-conceptual categories. The mental ego, it seems, can neither reflect upon nor translate these potentials and, therefore, is unable to experience them within the boundaries of consciousness. The mental ego, accordingly, is out of conscious contact with much of somatic life, instinctuality, body-based energy, and the creative process that forges the images of the

primary process (Freud) and the mytho-archetypal imagination (Jung).<sup>12</sup> The mental ego, Wilber acknowledges, does not integrate these psychic potentials, as would happen in normal structural-hierarchical stage transition. The mental ego is unable to thematize or cognitively process these potentials—and, as Wilber says in *Up from Eden* (1981), is prone actively to dissociate itself from them as well (more on this in a moment).

Whether Wilber is correct in these views about the ego and the archaic-unconscious is not at issue here. The point here is simply that these views depart from Wilber's account of normal developmental stage transition. Despite holding that normal development includes rather than excludes lower levels, Wilber acknowledges that the somatic, dynamic, and creative potentials of the deep psyche are not assimilated and reorganized within the higher level of mental-egoic consciousness. To accommodate the Freudian and Jungian conceptions of the unconscious, then, it seems that Wilber is forced to allow an exception to his conception of developmental stage transition.

If Wilber's discussion of the transition from preegoic stages to the mental-egoic stage reflects the disconnection implied by the spiral view, his discussion of the transition from the mental-egoic stage to the centauric stage, I believe, reflects the higher integration implied by the spiral view. Even though Wilber explicitly rejects the idea that we need to return to the pre (or what *was* pre) in ascending to the trans, his description of the centaur indicates an awareness on his part that a retrieval and higher integration of previously articulated psychic potentials occurs in the transition from the mental-egoic stage to the centauric stage.

Wilber describes the centaur as a higher unity in which consciousness is able to incorporate all earlier, lower levels into a fully integrated totality. He says:

Now as consciousness begins to transcend the verbal ego-mind, it can integrate the ego-mind with all the lower levels. That is, because consciousness is no longer identified with any of these elements to the exclusion of any others, all of them can be integrated: the body and mind can be brought into a higher-order holistic integration. . . . This integrated self, wherein mind and body are harmoniously one, we call the “centaur.” (1990a, 90)

Precisely because awareness has *differentiated* from (or disidentified from, or transcended) an *exclusive* identification with body, persona, ego, and mind, it can now [in the movement to the centauric level] *integrate* them in a unified fashion, in a new and higher holon with each of them



as junior partners. Physiosphere [the level of material existence], biosphere [the level of life and life processes], noosphere [the level of mind and thought]—exclusively identified with none of them, therefore capable of integrating each of them. (1995, 262) (Wilber's italics)

These passages raise the following question: If normal development includes rather than excludes lower levels *at each stage transition*, why do we need to wait until the centauric stage to integrate all lower levels? In normal development, according to Wilber, each psychic level attained is already an integrated totality including all previous levels; each stage transition to a new level simply integrates a lesser totality within a greater totality. If human development follows a normal course, then, transition from the physiosphere to the biosphere should integrate the physiosphere within the greater totality of the biosphere, and transition from the biosphere to the noosphere (the level of the mental ego) should integrate the physiosphere-biosphere totality within the even greater totality of the noosphere, and so forth. Nothing would be lost along the way; there should be no need to wait until after the noospheric or mental-egoic stage to integrate lower levels.

But Wilber says that there *is* such a need. To be consistent, then, he should acknowledge that human development prior to the centauric level departs from the pattern of normal development by alienating rather than integrating transcended structures. We have seen how, in effect, he acknowledges such alienation in his account of the archaic-unconscious, which, he says, consists of preegoic structures that are inherently unavailable to consciousness. He also acknowledges alienation of previously transcended structures more directly in other discussions. For example, in "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1990a, 233–37), Wilber observes that, since Freud, European society has come to recognize that a pathological split exists between the mind and the body (including sex, instinct, emotion) and that this split needs to be healed. Wilber states that this pathological split reflects a miscarriage of development at some point, but he does not explore the matter further. His point in "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" is not to explain the derivation of the mind-body split; it is, rather, to warn against Reichian and neo-Reichian (and even Rogerian) attempts to mend the split, which attempts, he contends, are susceptible to pre/trans confusions and to a merely regressive capitulation of mental, civilized life.

Wilber returns to the subject of the mind-body split in *Up from Eden* (1981, 191–200, 262–65), where he argues that the emergence of the mental ego carries with it an inherent tendency toward dissociation from "typhonic realms" (the body, instinct, emotion, nature). The mental ego

suffers from this tendency, he says, because self-awareness, which emerges with the mental ego, is at the same time an awareness of finitude and death, which the mental ego tries to deny by defining itself as pure disembodied thought. According to the discussion in *Up from Eden* (1981), the mental ego's tendency to dissociate itself from typhonic life has been especially pronounced in the West, where it has led to what Wilber, following L. L. Whyte (1950), calls the "European dissociation."

Wilber again takes up the subject of the mind-body split in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, where he suggests that the mind-body split—and the split between consciousness and biophysical life more generally—emerges concomitantly with language:

For if it is indeed with language that the child can differentiate mind and body, differentiate the noosphere and the biosphere, that *differentiation* (as always) can go too far and result in *dissociation*. The mind does not just transcend and include the body, it represses the body, represses its sensuality, represses its sexuality, represses its rich roots in the biosphere: Repression, in the Freudian (and Jungian) sense, comes into existence only with the "language barrier," with a "no!" carried to extremes. (1995, 222) (Wilber's italics)

According to Wilber, then, both the fear of death and the language barrier render us susceptible to repressing the psychic potentials belonging to the biosphere.

And the inertia of history also plays an important role. In *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995), Wilber says that the split between the mind and the biosphere has been implicit in the West at least since Plato, that the pathology lurking in this split has been acutely evident since the Enlightenment, and that the mending of this split is the primary task of the postmodern world.

Wilber, then, allows that we suffer from a split between egoic structures and typhonic-biospheric potentials first articulated during preegoic stages. Moreover, he allows that this split is a condition to which we are inherently predisposed, that it has roots going back over two thousand years, and that it has now reached crisis proportions. These acknowledgments suggest that, for Wilber, the mind-body split is deeply enough rooted and sufficiently widespread to count as a statistically prevailing "fact" of the human developmental process.

But is this really Wilber's view? To my knowledge, Wilber never explicitly states that the mind-body split is statistically the rule rather than the exception. If this is his view, though, he should say so. And he



should say as well that, because the mind-body split is the rule, human development does not follow the ascending-inclusive pattern which he stipulates as the norm. If the mind-body split is a deviation from the ascending-inclusive norm and if, as a rule, human development falls prey to the mind-body split, then it follows that human development itself is a deviation from the ascending-inclusive norm. If the mind-body split is statistically the rule, then it follows that human development is not an example of normal development as Wilber conceives it.

But what if Wilber's view is that, despite being deep-seated and widespread, the mind-body, noospheric-biospheric split is *not* statistically the rule, that it is, rather, a pathology that afflicts only a minority of human beings? Wilber says things which suggest that this might be his view. As we saw in *Up from Eden* (1981), Wilber, following L. L. Whyte, calls the mind-body split the "European dissociation," implying that it does not apply to non-European or non-Western people. And in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995) his discussion of the mind-body split focuses exclusively on the Western tradition. Perhaps, then, Wilber believes that most people in the non-Western world do not fall prey to the mind-body split, that they undergo development entirely according to the ascending-inclusive pattern.

Once again, however, if this is Wilber's view, he should say so. And he should say as well, then, that the centauric stage—understood as a stage that integrates previously articulated levels—does not apply to non-Western people.<sup>13</sup> If non-Western people do not succumb to the mind-body split, then they do not need to achieve centauric mind-body integration. If non-Western people avoid the mind-body split, then they remain integrated as *mental egos* and, therefore, do not need to achieve a reintegration with the body, and with typhonic-biospheric life generally, in order to transcend the mental ego.

However, if Wilber does not say that the mind-body split is statistically the rule, neither, to my knowledge, does he say that it is statistically the exception. He seems to straddle these positions without committing himself to either. In acknowledging that the mind-body split is a type of pathology, he leaves it unclear whether it is a pathology that afflicts humankind generally or a pathology that afflicts Europeans exclusively. In allowing that the mind-body split is a deviation from the ascending-inclusive norm, he leaves it unclear whether it is also an exception to the statistical norm.

Wilber needs to clarify his position on this point. Such clarification, however, would create difficulties, for, as we have seen, both available alternatives require concessions that Wilber would rather not make. If, in clarifying his position, Wilber were to say that the mind-body split is

statistically the rule, then he would have to concede that human development is not an example of normal development as he conceives it. And if, on the other hand, he were to say that the mind-body split is statistically the exception, then he would have to concede that centauric integration is statistically the exception as well and, therefore, that centauric integration is not a true developmental stage.

The upshot of these considerations is that Wilber *does* acknowledge both a disconnection from psychic potentials active during preegoic stages and a corresponding need to reconnect with those potentials if and when development moves beyond the stage of the mental ego. He strains the consistency of his theory in accepting these points, but he does recognize both points.

This established, the following question arises: How does Wilber conceive the process of reconnection and higher integration? Does he anticipate a return to the pre (or to what *was* pre) on the way to ascending to the trans, as projected by the spiral perspective? Although Wilber acknowledges the therapeutic value of regression in the service of the ego,<sup>14</sup> he most definitely does not believe that a return to the pre (or what *was* pre) is needed in order to ascend to the trans. As we have seen, he believes that movement toward the pre (or what *was* pre) and movement toward the trans proceed in opposite directions without coinciding at any point. The former movement unfolds in an exclusively descending direction toward lower psychic structures; the latter movement unfolds in an exclusively ascending direction toward higher psychic structures. Wilber rejects the possibility that return to the pre (or to what *was* pre) is part of movement toward the trans. Any such return, he says in "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1980b), would be a mere U-turn to origins forfeiting the gains of previous development. Or, as he puts it in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995), any such return would be a one-way trip on the "regress express" of "retro-Romanticism."

Having thus ruled out the possibility of a descending-then-ascending spiral, Wilber has no choice but to find a *non-descending* route to the higher integration of the centaur. Having rejected the idea that we need to return to psychic potentials that we have left behind if the split in our nature is to be mended, Wilber is left with no alternative but to hypothesize that we are somehow reconnected with these potentials without having to return to them. This is the position he takes in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, where he says that the split in our nature will be mended for us by an Absolute Spirit. He says:

Does not the Good of Spirit, its Eros [i.e., its telic "pull"], release both Nature and Mind from the torments we have inflicted on them in vain attempts to make them each the

source of infinite value? Does not the Goodness of Spirit, its Agape [i.e., its outflowing emanation and grace], embrace both Mind and Nature in a loving caress that heals the self-inflicted wounds? Does not the refluxing movement of God and the effluxing movement of the Goddess embrace the entire Circle of Ascent and Descent? Can we not round out the original insights and see that Spirit always manifests in all four quadrants [i.e., the subjective, cultural, functional-social, and material dimensions of existence] equally? Is not Spirit here and now in all its radiant glory, eternally present as every I and every We and every It? Will not our more adequate interpretations of Spirit facilitate Spirit's rescue of us? (1995, 522)

Rather than allowing a spiraling path to higher integration, Wilber believes that we will be rescued from above by an Absolute Spirit. We do not need to descend in order to ascend because there is an Absolute Spirit, a Supernatural Savior, to do this for us. Absolute Spirit will descend upon us with healing grace and draw us up to a higher, integrated transcendence. Absolute Spirit will somehow reconnect consciousness (mind, ego, culture, reason, operational cognition) with nature (body, body-based energy, instinct, sexual-emotional affect, mytho-archetypal imagination) in a higher harmonious unity.

Moreover, Absolute Spirit will accomplish this reconnection despite the fact that, according to Wilber, the body, body-based energy, instinct, sexual-emotional affect, and mytho-archetypal imagination belong to the archaic-unconscious and, therefore, are inherently unconscious. If we remember, Wilber believes that these psychic potentials, even when unrepressed, are prereflexive and preverbal and, therefore, that they inherently "tend toward subconsciousness." As Keith Thompson (1995) observes, then, the mind-body integration of the centaur is for Wilber not only a *supernatural* integration but also a *miraculous* integration. It is a supernatural integration because it is accomplished from on high by an Absolute Spirit, and it is a miraculous integration because it is incomprehensible in terms of Wilber's own conception of the unconscious.

In sum, although Wilber maintains that normal stage transitions incorporate rather than alienate previous levels and, therefore, ascend to higher levels without needing to return to earlier levels, he nonetheless acknowledges both (1) that basic somatic, energetic, instinctual, affective, and imaginal potentials are excluded from the mental ego's consciousness, and (2) that developmental movement beyond the mental ego requires a mending of a split between consciousness and precisely these potentials. These two admissions, together with the supernatural-mirac-

ulous account of how the split in the human psyche is to be mended, are serious anomalies that call into question Wilber's structural-hierarchical, linear-ascending perspective as applied to human development.

Turning now to concluding observations, let me repeat that Wilber was once a Jungian. It was only in writing *The Atman Project* (1980a) that he posed the pre/trans question and answered it in a way that committed him to an anti-Jungian, exclusively structural-hierarchical, linear-ascending perspective. Moreover, in formulating the notion of the pre/trans fallacy, Wilber argued that his answer to the pre/trans question is the only logically viable one. He tried to prove that any attempt to bring pre and trans together is to fall prey to either ptf-1 or ptf-2. But Wilber, I believe, is wrong on this crucial point. As I have argued, it is possible that pre and trans states are lower and higher developmental expressions of the same nonegoic potentials. This might not be true in all instances, but it is at least possible in some instances (no logical error is committed in thinking so). 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 the trans to the pre or elevation of the pre to the trans. It is a serious mistake to conflate pre and trans states. It is a fallacy to infer structural identity from phenomenological similarity. But inferring structural identity from phenomenological similarity is only one kind of pre/trans fallacy. There is another kind—inferring structural dissimilarity from phenomenological difference. It is equally a fallacy to argue that pre and trans states, in differing in phenomenologically crucial ways, must for that reason be expressions of two different and widely dissimilar sets of psychic structures, the many phenomenological similarities between pre and trans states notwithstanding. Wilber, it seems, commits just this fallacy—which, following his abbreviation scheme, can be called *ptf-3*.

Wilber, in awakening to the many subtle and insidious forms of ptf-1 and ptf-2, understandably wanted to modify his own thinking to avoid these errors, and so he revised *The Atman Project* (1980a) as he was preparing it for publication. But Wilber, I suggest, went too far; he substituted one extreme for another. Not wanting to collapse similarity into structural identity, he made the mistake of stretching difference into structural dissimilarity. He fallaciously inferred a structural conclusion from a developmental premise. He fallaciously inferred dissimilar pre and trans psychic structures from differing pre and trans developmental states. He committed ptf-3.

Pre/trans fallacies, as Wilber has shown, have serious practical consequences. In misconceiving the trans as the pre, ptf-1 runs the risk of

repressing or otherwise forfeiting the trans; and in misconceiving the pre as the trans, ptf-2 runs the risk of regressing—in a merely descending, U-turn way—to the pre. What about ptf-3? What are its practical consequences? The answer, I believe, is that ptf-3 may have the same consequences as ptf-1. Notice that I am saying that ptf-3 *may* have the same consequences as ptf-1, not that it does so *as a matter of fact*. For if the conclusion of ptf-3 is true—namely, that pre and trans states are expressions of two different sets of psychic structures—then ptf-3, although still a fallacy, does not incur the risk of forfeiting the trans. In this case the trans would lie entirely “above” the ego and not at all “below” it, such that movement to the trans would properly be a purely ascending movement, a movement to higher ground that does not need to retrace old ground. If, on the other hand, the conclusion of ptf-3 is false (as I believe it is), then ptf-3 does incur the risk of forfeiting the trans. For if, contrary to the conclusion of ptf-3, pre and trans are (in at least some instances) developmental expressions of the same psychic potentials, then it follows that a refusal to yield to what *was* pre is at the same time a closing of oneself to what *could be* trans. In this case, one *does* need to retrace old ground, and refusing to do so has the consequence of forfeiting the possibility of attaining higher ground.

In *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995), Wilber distinguishes between two types of false transcendents: (regressive) Descenders and (repressive) Ascenders.<sup>15</sup> Descenders are those who, having fallen prey to ptf-2, yield to regression in the false belief that, in doing so, they are achieving transcendence. Ascenders, in contrast, are antiworldly spiritualists (e.g., Gnostics) who believe that to rise to the trans one must distance oneself from everything pre (or everything that *was* pre): nature, body, instinct, desire. Wilber, of course, believes that Jung is a Descender. In “The Pre/Trans Fallacy” (1980b), as we have seen, he charges Jung with ptf-2 and, therefore, with misconceiving transcendence in merely descending, regressive terms. I have already explained why I believe these charges against Jung are unwarranted.

Ironically, Wilber may himself be an Ascender. Again, I use a weak *may* rather than a strong *is* because Wilber might be right in holding that psychic potentials active during preegoic stages are exclusively pre and, therefore, that we should resist any temptation to yield to such potentials in aspiring to the trans. If, however, as I have argued, pre and trans are (in at least some instances) lower and higher developmental expressions of the same psychic potentials, then it follows that to resist what *was* pre in aspiring to the trans is in effect to do exactly what Ascenders do: it is to reach for the trans while denying the very bases of transegoic experience. It is to attempt to get to heaven by refusing to stand on the ground.

## Notes

1. Sean Kelly and Donald Rothberg read earlier versions of this paper and guided me through the revision process. They gave me excellent advice on matters of both substance and style. They also suggested the title. I greatly appreciate their help.
2. Following Wilber, I shall frequently shorten *preegoic* and *transegoic* to *pre* and *trans*, respectively.
3. Wilber's conception of development is not completely linear. He (1990c) holds that each developmental ascent to a higher rung of the psychic ladder involves a death-then-rebirth loop or mini-spiral: movement to a higher rung begins with a disidentifying differentiation from the structures of the rung being transcended (death) and then proceeds to a reappropriating integration and reorganization of those structures within the higher structures of the rung being attained (rebirth). Wilber's conception of development, then, is not a “flat” linear conception. The overall course of development, however, remains linear and ascending. For although there is a loop or mini-spiral at each stage transition, there is no return to structures of previously transcended levels on the way to higher levels.
4. The centauric stage is not a transegoic stage. Wilber places it right at the boundary between egoic stages and transegoic stages. Nevertheless, the centauric stage lies beyond the stage of the mental ego, and for that reason Wilber is able to match it as a higher form of mind-body unity with the lower mind-body unity of the body-ego.
5. In “Structure, Stage, and Self” (1990b), Wilber distinguishes between basic structures and transitional or replacement structures. Basic structures are *constitutional* structures which, as such, belong to the psyche inherently and permanently, whether in a potential-enfolded or actual-unfolded way. Transition or replacement structures, in contrast, are *developmental* structures which, as such, are merely stage specific. Transition structures are “the way the world is experienced” through the basic structures of a psychic level and, therefore, unlike the basic structures of that level, are not preserved when development proceeds to a higher psychic level. Applying this distinction, it seems that most of the matching structures listed here would be considered basic structures by Wilber. Preegoic magic and mythic thinking are exceptions. In “Structure, Stage, and Self” Wilber explains that magic and mythic thinking are merely stage-specific world views, the way the world looks when there are symbolic images but no concepts proper (magic) and when there are conceptual representations but no ability to perform formal operations (mythic thinking). Although magic and mythic thinking are transition structures, the cognitive abilities on which they are based—namely, the ability to form symbolic images (magic) and preoperational and early concrete operational cognition (mythic thinking)—are, according to Wilber, basic structures.
6. Wilber uses the word *structure*—or, more precisely, the expression *basic structure* (see note 5)—to refer to all native psychic resources, whether egoic or nonegoic, whether somatic, dynamic, instinctual, affective, imaginal, volitional, conceptual-operational, supersensory, or spiritual. Since my thinking is grounded in the psychoanalytic, depth-psychological tradition, I prefer a basic terminological distinction between *ego functions* and *nonegoic potentials*. Ego functions are the operations by which the ego unifies, organizes, and exercises control over experience. Principal ego functions are synthesis, reality testing, self-reflection, impulse control, and ego-active thinking (e.g., sensorimotor and operational cognition). In contrast to these ego functions, non-

egoic potentials are dynamic, spontaneously active resources lying beyond the ego's immediate domain and range of control. Principal nonegoic potentials are dynamism (libido, psychic energy, spiritual power), somatosensory sensitivity, conation, feeling, and creative, autotranscendental imagination. All of these nonegoic potentials are semi-independent in relation to the ego. The ego never gains the same kind of control over them that it exercises over its own functions.

7. Fallacious inferences do not always lead to false conclusions. Accordingly, in saying that Wilber's answer to the pre/trans question is the product of a faulty inference, I am not saying that it is false for that reason. I do believe that his answer to the pre/trans question is false, but not because it is a product of a pre/trans fallacy. It is false, I believe, because it unnecessarily doubles the number of nonegoic psychic levels and, as we shall see, because it fails to provide an adequate account of the mind-body relationship.
8. The parenthetical qualification "(or what *was* pre)" is necessary to indicate that psychic potentials first articulated during preegoic stages may not, as Wilber believes, be inherently or constitutionally preegoic. It leaves open the possibility that such potentials may, later in life, be the bases of transegoic states and stages. I shall continue to use the expression "pre (or what *was* pre)" and similar constructions—for example, "what *was* pre could be trans"—to make sure that this possibility, which is easily obscured, is kept in mind.
9. The term *U-turn* is borrowed from Wilber (1982).
10. As Jung realized, the notion of a deep restorative regression is a timeless archetype portrayed not only in images of being swallowed and then disgorged by a beast dwelling in oceanic depths (the night sea journey [see Frobenius (1904)]) but also in such images as those of the hero's journey into the underworld, the alchemical reduction of base metal (the ego) to prime matter and transubstantiation into gold, and the dismemberment and remembering, death and rebirth of shamans, saviors, and gods.
11. More precisely, new and higher structures are articulated without losing touch with previously articulated *basic* structures. See note 5 for Wilber's distinction between basic structures (which are preserved in stage transition) and transitional or replacement structures (which are not preserved).
12. The term *mytho-archetypal* is used here and later to refer to the Jungian archetypal imagination as interpreted by Wilber. I disagree with Wilber's interpretation of Jungian archetypes as exclusively archaic (magical and mythical), preegoic images. This disagreement aside, however, my purpose here is simply to avoid terminological confusion by fixing the term *mytho-archetypal* in the manner indicated.
13. Wilber usually describes the centauric stage as a stage not only of higher mind-body integration but also of *vision-logic*, that is, of holistic, dialectical thought. Unlike mind-body integration, which is a union of structures that have already been articulated, vision-logic is a new, previously unarticulated structure. Accordingly, if, for consistency's sake, Wilber were to drop centauric integration from the developmental agenda, he would not, in doing so, have to drop vision-logic.
14. Speaking of regression in the service of the ego, Wilber says: "In these instances [when stage transition represses and alienates rather than integrates previously articulated levels], as Freud demonstrated, therapy involves in some sense, a reintegration of the dissociated aspects, a re-membering of components previously dismembered" (1990a, 233). Also, in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*; after saying that the noosphere (or mental

ego) can repress and alienate the biosphere, he says that the cure for this is regression in the service of the ego: "Thus the cure: regression in service of a higher reintegration—a regression that allows evolution to move forward more harmoniously by healing and wholing a previously alienated holon" (1995, 105).

15. The parenthetical qualifications are inserted because descent and ascent can be understood in an exclusively structural (rather than developmental) way. For Wilber, one can descend nonregressively to any psychic level that has already been developmentally transcended (provided that the level was transcended in a nonrepressive, inclusive manner). Following such a descent, one can ascend back to the psychic level from which the descent began. This kind of descent and ascent is simply a shifting back and forth between structural levels already achieved. It has nothing to do with developmental regress or progress and, therefore, nothing to do with strategies for transcendence.

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