

# **A dialogue on Ken Wilber's contribution to transpersonal psychology**

**John Rowan, Michael Daniels, David Fontana & Malcolm Walley**

*This is an edited, verbatim transcription of a three-hour dialogue on the work of Ken Wilber between John Rowan and Michael Daniels, mediated by David Fontana and chaired by Malcolm Walley. The dialogue was held at the 11<sup>th</sup> BPS Transpersonal Psychology Section Conference at Cober Hill, Scarborough on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2007. Nothing has been added, apart from reference details, some syntactic and explanatory inclusions (indicated with square brackets) and footnotes. To aid clarity, coherence, and ease of reading, some colloquial wording has been excised and some unintelligible or incidental discussion has been omitted (indicated by '...' in the transcript). The formal structure for the dialogue was agreed by the participants in advance and comprised (1) introductory presentations by John Rowan and Michael Daniels, followed by (2) an attempt at reconciliation by David Fontana, (3) responses by all three speakers, (4) further responses, (5) an open discussion, and (6) a summary of key issues by David Fontana. Unfortunately the final fifteen minutes of the dialogue did not record successfully, so that David Fontana's summary ends somewhat abruptly. The paper ends with a postscript on the origins of Wilber's system of levels of consciousness.*

## **Introduction (Malcolm Walley)**

Good morning everybody. This is a real honour and privilege and hopefully a lot of fun as well ... We've devoted a whole morning to a dialogue, discussion, exploration of themes around the work of Wilber ... I just want to take a couple of minutes to introduce our really distinguished guests this morning. John Rowan ... and Mike Daniels who are very central, major contributors to the work of the Section and the life and times of this conference in particular.

I remember starting off in Gestalt therapy training in the early to mid 1970s in London ... doing bioenergetics and all that sort of thing. And John Rowan was then a major figure who I never crossed tracks with actually. But he was a major figure who I knew about as [a] founder member of the *Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners*. He is an honorary fellow ... of the *UK Council for Psychotherapy* ... and he has been a major contributor to the development of our understanding and integration of the transpersonal in the area of ... psychotherapy practice. And his lovely book *The Transpersonal: Spirituality in psychotherapy and counselling*<sup>1</sup> is a really wonderful work which enables practitioners to develop in that direction ... There are aspects about John Rowan that I didn't know about. I hadn't realized how much poetry is part of your life. And also that you developed a men's magazine – *Achilles Heel* – and have been involved in the work of the *Walsby Association*. So these things were all mysteries to me. One could obviously go on and on. But it's a great honour that John has joined us yet again for our conference and we're very interested to hear what he has to say.

Mike Daniels was, until about a year ago, Secretary of the Committee and also a stalwart contributor to the conference and ... his book *Shadow, Self, Spirit*<sup>2</sup> came out a year or two ago. Mike is a founder of the Transpersonal Psychology and Consciousness Masters course at Liverpool John Moores and also has a particular interest in parapsychology ... also enjoys especially a good discussion of various aspects of the world of transpersonal and has been a very major contributor to the life and times of the *Transpersonal Psychology Review* which we've produced through the Section and he'll be taking over as Editor ... in the near future.

Now, I was so grateful here to this gentleman on my right, David Fontana, for taking the mediator role because I felt just not really up to it ... But John said I chickened out – and I did. It's all right being a chicken! I was so pleased, as David was, until, when he was having a nice breakfast ... I showed him the rules of engagement for the morning.

David, of course, needs no introduction, as neither do John and Mike. But he is the Foundation Chair of this Section and you were the first visiting professor of

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan (2005).

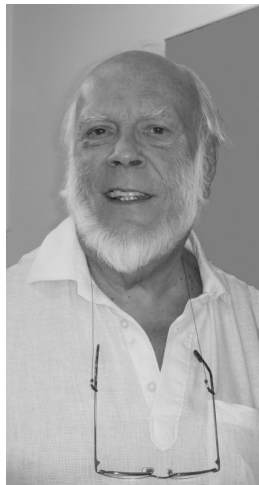
<sup>2</sup> Daniels (2005).

Transpersonal Psychology in Britain and you still have that role at Liverpool John Moores. David has contributed so much. As well as being a former President of the *Society for Psychological Research* – done a huge amount of research in that area – David has also, with Ingrid [Slack] and with Martin [Treacy] – put in so much work in actually getting this Section off the ground ... David, as ever, is working on a book – several books ... It's [now] 40 books in 26 languages ...

Right then, the first part ... John Rowan has 15 minutes to address Wilber's work and are there any alternatives? So John will be speaking from the Wilber perspective and Mike will present from the alternatives perspectives ... David, in his mediator role, will attempt to reconcile the two positions. He'll speak for about 10 minutes ...

### **How I discovered Wilber (John Rowan)**

... Right, in order to stick to time which I want to do, I'm going to read it because otherwise I might improvise.



John Rowan

How I discovered Wilber. First, then, my own history. I was brought up in the Anglican faith, baptised in a little church in Old Sarum, and confirmed in Chester cathedral. My mother was High Church and when I went with her to services there was always incense and processions, bells and changes of costume, little palms on Palm Sunday and so forth, and plenty of stained glass. My father was what he called 'broad church' and when I went with him to services there was plain glass, no

processions, a longer sermon, and an absence of what he called ‘flummery’. His family came from Ulster and he sometimes used strong language when talking about the Pope.

When I turned 12 or so he signed me up for a Bible reading organisation called *The Crusaders* and sent me to summer camps organised by the VPSC – the *Varsities and Public Schools Camps* – these were evangelical affairs and, at some point, you were supposed to take Jesus into your life as your personal saviour which I duly did. I became an evangelist myself and, at the age of 16, I was going around the county delivering talks on ‘What is a Christian and how does one become one?’ When I was called up into the army I used to kneel down by my bedside every night to pray – I got the nickname of Rasputin.

During my army service I went to India and met a tea planter who introduced me to a book called *The Story of Philosophy* by Will Durant. It had accounts of various philosophers, including Socrates, Spinoza, Nietzsche and others. I was particularly attracted to Spinoza. He seemed to take me up to a mountain peak where I could look down on the world and see how it was all put together. He said that God and Nature were one and the same – there was no division between the sacred and the profane. I bought the book of the *Ethics* by Spinoza and was very impressed by that.

It was in India that I had my first mystical experience. I was 19 years old and in hospital with malaria and Dengue fever. I looked out across the veranda at the sunset which was a very unusual green colour. All at once I seemed to be taken out of myself into a realm that was quite different from anything I had experienced before. I could only label it as ‘eternity’. It did not seem to belong to time. It was as if everything stopped. I had been reading about Spinoza for the first time quite recently and had been impressed by these sort of connections. I didn’t make much of it. But I noted it. Later, when I read Maslow, I defined it as a peak experience and after reading James Horne<sup>3</sup> I labelled it as experience of casual extraverted mysticism.

The next thing that happened six years later was that I discovered Hegel. This was not really a mystical experience but it was an important link in the chain all the same. I met Harold Walsby who became my mentor for about 5 years. He was versed in the

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<sup>3</sup> Horne (1978).

philosophy of Hegel, especially as modified by British philosophers F.S. Johnson and Francis Sedlak. We were out in his car and he asked me what my fundamental beliefs were – things I could not doubt were true. As I brought out each one he showed me convincingly that it was self-contradictory and therefore could not be fundamental. Eventually I was left with nothing. All my most basic beliefs had been laid waste, shown to be inadequate and false.

Later I found out that this was a practice taken from the Buddhist tradition known as *Madhyamika*. He then asked me to take for granted nothing and he showed that once nothing was granted, *being* followed from that because this nothing was, yet, being – the being of nothing. So being and nothing were one and the same. Yet they were not the same because they had two different names. So what was true was the movement of being into nothing and nothing into being, indefinitely. But that brought into being a new category – becoming. And so, by carrying on like that, all the categories of logic came into existence one by one until the whole of it was complete. And then this would go on to involve describing the whole dialectical philosophy in Hegel. It was a revelation, and an enormous experience for me. I went on to study Hegel for the next 50 years.

In 1967, I was given what I believe to have been about 400 micrograms of LSD. The set and setting were good. At one point I remember having a sense of strands of thought connecting everything and everybody in the universe. I even seemed to see and hear them. This connection made everything into parts of a whole. It was somehow all one. And this seemed to be the truth. It was as if I had now seen the truth and all other versions were lesser, and less adequate. Things I had read, particularly by Jack Kerouac now made a lot more sense. Zen Buddhism was also around at this time and I liked that a lot. I read Alan Watts and Christmas Humphreys, Daisetsu Suzuki and Philip Kapleau. I also read Evelyn Underhill and was very interested in connections between Eastern mysticism and Christian mysticism. I'd also read Maslow.

In 1972, after being in a number of groups, I had an experience of contacting my real self. Very much like what Rollo May calls the 'I am' experience. This I considered to be a mystical experience and although it was only a glimpse, as the

authors of *Spiritual Choices*<sup>4</sup> say, glimpses like this are very important. This experience did not last, and I could not get it back by an effort of will, but I went to more groups and had the experience again and again. Gradually over the next eight years or so I became able to contact my real self at will and to relate authentically with other people from that position. This contact with the real self, which has been described so well by many people in the humanistic and existential position, is possibly the most common mystical experience. It takes us into what Ken Wilber calls the 'Centaur' level of experience. It is the level of the authentic – of the existential self, of body-mind unity.

Then in 1973, during a session of co-counselling, I had the experience of facing the ultimate abyss. It seemed to me that this was the 'nothingness' that I was most afraid of. To go into it would mean losing everything. My counsellor encouraged me to go into it. I went into the blackness of it, like stepping off a cliff into the unknown. Very soon it changed into a bright light. And I was sobbing with the glory of it all. I opened my eyes and stood up and felt extraordinarily tall – as if I had grown way beyond any normal size. The phrase that came into my mind was 'ten feet tall'. But it was no exact measurement. I felt as if I'd crossed some important line. It seemed more than just a peak experience. I would now describe it as an example of subtle mysticism because the concrete sense of darkness and light were so strong, and the absence of limits so important. Earlier I'd had intellectual insights into nothing, but this was an emotional and spiritual experience – something quite different.

In 1975, in a spontaneous therapy session following an LSD experience the previous day, I had one of the deepest experiences yet of quite a different kind. I seemed to contact my transpersonal self. It was an amazing experience which I have now called experience of the subtle self. I felt the most amazing love and compassion, which seemed everlasting and very deep. I wrote it up in an article entitled 'A growth experience'<sup>5</sup>. It occurred as part of a whole series of experiences to do with my own therapy which brought to an end my hatred of women. And from that point on I was much more aware of the feminine and the Great Goddess. This was an example of what I considered to be the truth about the relationship between deep experiences in

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<sup>4</sup> Anthony & Ecker (1986).

<sup>5</sup> Rowan (1992).

therapy and high experiences in the transpersonal – one helps the other, both ways. Eleanor Merry suggests the image of a spiral staircase on a mirrored floor – every step upward on the stair towards the higher unconscious in Assagioli's terms is matched by a step downwards into the floor – that is, into the lower unconscious.

In 1982 I came across the work of Ken Wilber. I could immediately see its relevance for me since it described my own development so accurately. I thought if he's so accurate about my progress so far he may be accurate about where I should be going in the future, if I carry on with the process of psycho-spiritual development. I began to meditate regularly and did so every morning – up to and including the present day.

In the early 80s, as recounted in my book *The Horned God*<sup>6</sup>, I began to take a serious interest in my soul, or what I would now call the 'subtle' level of consciousness. I joined a Wicca group and was contacted by the Great Goddess and the Horned God. I learnt a great deal about ritual and its importance for the exploration of the subtle. The subtle is the level of soul, just as the causal is the level of spirit. At this subtle level of consciousness, it is very useful to take an interest in symbols and archetypes and myths and images and to learn the ropes of a whole symbol system. I read a good deal of Joseph Campbell and many others. Also about that time I had a number of visions and was very much involved in symbols and symbol systems. I also had the experience of being contacted by the Horned God – under the name of Pan. I started to use my transpersonal consciousness in my work in therapy. Out of this work came the book *The Transpersonal in Psychotherapy and Counselling* in 1993<sup>7</sup>.

In the early 90s I was having ecstatic experiences quite frequently at the subtle level. I was also in therapy, and later in supervision, with Ian Gordon-Brown. Wilber says that people often avoid going on to the next level – the causal – by a sort of contraction. The subtle level was so full of symbols and images and powerful and good experiences that it was hard to move on. I discussed this with Ian and he encouraged me to deal with these issues. So I deliberately set myself to let go of these contractions. I found that it was easier than I thought. I could have experiences of the

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<sup>6</sup> Rowan (1987).

<sup>7</sup> Rowan (1993).

causal level through a process of meditation which led me through the levels, one by one, until I could just let go of the joys of the subtle and enter into the joys of the One – the One without a second – the pure substance of being. And then I kept on having glimpses of the nondual and built up quite a store of insights from that realm. I started to write more and more about the transpersonal.

In 1993 I wrote a series of poems about the Ten Ox Herding Pictures of Zen Buddhism, which were published in the same year<sup>8</sup>. Then, in 1997, the woman I'd been living with since 1978, and who I had started to call my *shakti*, became my wife. We'd talked about handfasting and jumping through the Beltane fires, but in the end we just had a normal wedding in a Registry Office. She had had her own experiences of the Goddess, even though she'd not deliberately cultivated them in the way which I had. Now it seemed that we had sealed and formalized our relationship which was, and is, very deep and rewarding. This is an important part of my whole appreciation and understanding of mysticism.

Now it seems to me that I understand the mystical realms rather well, with the help of Ken Wilber who I still find to be a very good guide. I can move into them at will and come back with things that are relevant and important for me. Recently I came across a quote from an American poet which said '*Along the way to knowledge, many things are accumulated. Along the way to wisdom, many things are discarded*'. And that seems to me to say a lot about my own journey through therapy and into mysticism. More and more assumptions have been discarded at more and more different levels. And each time it has felt like freedom and liberation.

Ken Wilber is probably the best known exponent of the view that mysticism can be mapped and studied like any other phenomenon. However, it must be admitted that this approach is certainly not the only one, and has been criticised from several different angles, for example by Michael Daniels, Jorge Ferrer and Geoffrey Falk.

Daniels criticises Wilber for being too narrow and says: '*Wilber's suggestion that such a philosophy is 'perennial' is highly contentious. In practice his theory is based closely on Vedanta and Buddhism, and on the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo*'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rowan & Rowan (1993).

<sup>9</sup> Daniels (2002, p.13).



Daniels is not the only person to say this, but it is a serious mis-statement and is a mis-statement that devalues the range of the work which Wilber is considering when coming to his eventual conclusions. One only has to take seriously the charts in the back of *Integral Psychology*<sup>10</sup> to see that Wilber's theory of the transpersonal itself is much more widely based than anyone would guess from reading Daniels. What he [Wilber] has done is to trawl through the World literature on levels of consciousness to discover what is common between them. His reasoning is simple. That which all or most agree on is common to them. From a number of independent sources, some based on personal experience (for that is relevant to mysticism) he built up a consistent story with some very well-established way-stations. We can do justice to the range of different sources which he has considered and compared. When we do this, we see that (using the acronym VBA for Vedanta, Buddhism and Aurobindo) Plotinus is not VBA, Grof is not VBA, the Kabbalah is not VBA , Jenny Wade is not VBA, Michael Washburn is not VBA, Rudolf Steiner is not VBA, Hazrat Inayat Khan is not VBA, Evelyn Underhill is not VBA, Muhyiddin ibn 'Arabi is not VBA, Saint Palamas is not VBA, Saint Teresa is not VBA, Chirban is not VBA. Pseudo-Dionysius is not VBA, Saint Gregory of Nyssa is not VBA, and so on.

Ken Wilber's own statement is:

*'I have often been accused of deriving this schema exclusively from Eastern sources, thus marginalizing (oh dear) Western traditions. This is untrue. For example, Evelyn Underhill, whose Mysticism is justly regarded as a classic overview of Western mystical traditions, concludes that spiritual experiences (as evidenced in the overall Western tradition) exist along a developmental continuum, from "nature mysticism" (union with the web of life) to "metaphysical mysticism" (from archetypal illuminations to formless absorption) to "divine mysticism" (states of nondual union) – in other words, virtually identical to my scheme'<sup>11</sup>.*

I get so tired of the repeated assertion that Wilber is putting forward a Buddhist doctrine that it's good to have an opportunity to put the case that he is indeed an

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<sup>10</sup> Wilber (2000a).

<sup>11</sup> Wilber (2000b, p.76).

integral and synoptic thinker, and not to be neatly filed away on a shelf with the Vedantists, the Buddhists, or the Aurobindo aficionados.

Ferrer<sup>12</sup> also criticises Wilber for adopting the perennial philosophy. The argument here is that mystics belong to various races, of various times and various belief systems, and it's wrong to lump them together as if they were all saying the same thing. This seems to me a very strange critique, which again he is not the only one to use, because Wilber continually comes back to the question of experience. Are the experiences similar or different? And it turns out the more precisely the experiences are described, the more similar they seem to be. And Wilber is very sophisticated about the use of the perennial philosophy. He says, quite explicitly: '*I will often refer to the perennial philosophy, (and the Great Nest) as the "wisdom of premodernity"*'<sup>13</sup>.

Ferrer also criticises the whole question of experience. He says that the transpersonal is not a matter of private experience but is rather something participative – it depends on the whole climate and background. This is really quite strange criticism because many of the great mystics, such as Meister Eckhart, broke away from their parent belief systems and relied more on their own experience than on the group from which they emerged. Mystics are not conformists, as the participatory view would suggest.

Ferrer is, of course, a major critic of Wilber. His critique sounds pretty damning. But does this mean that we have to abandon Wilber's model? I think not, for two reasons. Firstly Wilber has answered many of these criticisms in his book *Integral Psychology* which apparently Ferrer was not able to include. And secondly, Ferrer is not interested in psychotherapy. From the point of view of therapy, all we are saying is that Wilber's model is very helpful and immediately applicable. It's also perhaps worth remarking that although Ferrer is a respected figure in the transpersonal community, it is still the case that the majority of transpersonal writers, as Ferrer says himself, still do adhere to a more sophisticated view of the perennial philosophy. So whilst taking Ferrer seriously, his remarks are not enough to make us abandon the Wilber model.

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<sup>12</sup> Ferrer (2002).

<sup>13</sup> Wilber (2000a, p. 9).

Coming on now to Jeffrey Falk, whose critique of Wilber is more like a diatribe than a serious criticism<sup>14</sup>, we find a number of criticisms which are hardly central. Wilber is accused of not doing justice to David Bohm, of getting some details about the theory of evolution wrong, of approving of certain mystics such as Adi Da and Andrew Cohen who have engaged in dubious practices, and so on. Falk applies the approach of the Great Randi and the *Skeptical Inquirer* to matters for which this approach is not suitable.

Michael Washburn is very often quoted as an alternative to Wilber and has been highly respected by many in the field. His theory holds that development beyond the conventional mental-egoic state involves a regressive U-turn. In his earlier work<sup>15</sup>, Washburn explains in considerable detail the nature of this 'regression in the service of transcendence'. Transition beyond the egoic state is seen as a relatively rare occurrence that begins in mid-life, or later, when it does occur. This regression *'begins with the opening of the Dynamic Ground or, equivalently, with the undoing of original repression'*<sup>16</sup>. Washburn identifies two stages or levels of this transitional regression. The first stage is characterised by such states or feelings as alienation, meaninglessness, anomie, nothingness, worthlessness, anxiety, and despair. The second level of regression occurs with the actual opening of the dynamic ground which leads to the encounter with the prepersonal unconscious. Washburn notes that his characterisation is of the pure or ideal type case and suggests that most actual cases probably would not be as severe. But he looks on regression in the service of transcendence as an essential step in moving through the trans-egoic stage, insisting that regression is inherent to transcendence.

Wilber, although rejecting the notion that his model is one of straight ascent, denies the existence of one great U-turn. Rather he suggests that there is a small U-turn, or little death, at the end of each stage. Indeed pathology can result if the individual refuses to let go of a stage. But concerning the requirement that there be regression before movement to higher stages can be made, Wilber makes it clear that *'regression is neither theoretically mandatory ... nor pragmatically always the*

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<sup>14</sup> E.g. Falk (2005).

<sup>15</sup> Washburn (1995).

<sup>16</sup> Washburn (1995, p.155).

case<sup>17</sup>. This idea was checked in an interesting piece of research, conducted by Eugene Thomas, Stephen Brewer, Patricia Kraus, and Barbara Rosen of the University of Connecticut in 1993<sup>18</sup>. They found 10 respondents in England and 10 in India, all of whom were elderly people regarded by those around them as spiritually mature. They interviewed them about the course of their own spiritual development and found that the data supported Wilber's position rather than Washburn's. In other words, the more advanced spiritual development came in a rather straightforward way, which did not necessarily require any kind of regressive experience. So the evidence supports Wilber rather than Washburn.

I've been asked why I say so little about Washburn and Ferrer in my books. The main reason is that the books are about psychotherapy, and Washburn and Ferrer say very little about psychotherapy. But there is also the point that Washburn is appallingly ignorant about early development. He quotes outdated research which has been completely superseded by the work of Daniel Stern and others as if it were the truth. Ferrer is much better in this respect, but it's a pity that in his 2002 book<sup>19</sup>, he writes as if Wilber's 2000<sup>20</sup> book did not exist. This may be due to the vagaries of publishing, but it is still a shame, for he criticises Wilber for holding doctrines which Wilber himself has already abandoned.

### **Ken Wilber's Integral Spirituality (Michael Daniels)**

This is going to be fun, isn't it? So I'm going to start off really where John left off ... One of the points that Wilber makes, very correctly I think, is that most of his critics have criticised ideas that he has long abandoned. And I'm going to try not to do that. John refers to Ken Wilber (2000<sup>21</sup>). When we agreed to do this dialogue we agreed that we would focus on the most recent, and the most recent is Wilber (2006) *Integral Spirituality*<sup>22</sup>...

The subtitle of this [presentation] is: '*An appreciation and critique of recent adjustments to Wilber's theory*'. One of the things I like about the 2006 book is that

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<sup>17</sup> Wilber (1999, p.39).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, Brewer, Kraus, & Rosen (1993).

<sup>19</sup> Ferrer (2002).

<sup>20</sup> Wilber (2000a).

<sup>21</sup> Wilber (2000a).

<sup>22</sup> Wilber (2006).

Wilber has made further amendments in the direction, basically, of agreeing that he was wrong in many respects. I don't know how many of you are quite up to speed with Wilber – I don't know how many of you have read *Integral Spirituality*. So what I'm going to do is give you a brief summary of the adjustments that he's made and then comment on which adjustments I think are useful, and which adjustments I think still need adjusting. So that's basically what I'm going to try and do today.



Michael Daniels

Firstly I want to say some things that I like about the book. One is that he does finally try to introduce the notion of working with the shadow much more clearly than he's done before. And he does try to relate it to the importance of therapy much more than he has done in the past. He's tended to focus in the past really on the importance of the meditation path, and in the latest book he does recognise the importance of therapy. He also concedes in this recent book that he has made earlier errors in his stage model – and I'll look at those in a moment. One of the other things I like is the way that he's extended what he calls AQAL theory, which is basically the quadrant theory. If you're not familiar with that, it won't mean anything. If you are familiar with it, it's important for you to know, I think, that he's made some very useful extensions and modifications to that in the recent book. So if you haven't read the recent book, you should do so. I'm not particularly going to focus on AQAL today. I'm going to focus on the basic structures that John outlined – the psychic, the subtle, the causal, and the nondual – and how Wilber has changed his perspectives really very significantly, I think, in this regard in this recent book. So what has he changed?

Table 1. Correlative Basic Structures<sup>23</sup>

Levels of consciousness		
Nondual	One Taste	Transpersonal
Causal	Formless	
Subtle	Archetype	
Psychic / Gross	Vision	
Postformal	Vision-logic	Personal
Formal Operations	Formal	
Concrete Operations	Rule-Role	
Representational Mind	Conceptual	
Phantasmic-Emotional	Preoperational	Prepersonal
Sensorimotor	Sensorimotor	

This was the model that may be familiar to you. Basically a model suggesting that there are these universal stages, or levels, or structures of human consciousness, and that we start as an infant down at the sensorimotor stage – Piaget basically – go through some other Piagetian stages; we go through a stage of existential authenticity and then there are these stages – structural stages – of transpersonal development, which are the ones that John talked about – the psychic, the subtle, the causal, and the nondual.

What Wilber does in the 2006 book is basically concede that this is wrong – this model is wrong he is saying. And what he is saying is wrong is that he made the mistake – and he admits this very explicitly in the book – of simply adding the stages of the Eastern [meditation] techniques on top of the stages of the Western psychological model. And he says it almost flippantly in the book:

*‘So ... what we did was simply to take the highest stage in Western psychological models ... and then take the 3 or 4 major stages of meditation*

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<sup>23</sup> Adapted from Wilber (2000a).

*(gross, subtle, causal, nondual ... and stack those stages on top of the other stages ... East and West integrated!'*<sup>24</sup>

There's a very strong irony in the way that he's writing here. So he's basically admitting in 2006 that really that doesn't work. You can't actually do that – you can't just take the Eastern stages, stack them on top of the Western stages, and argue that there is this continuum from the sensorimotor right up to the nondual.

*'This complex of problems formed something of a Gordian knot for ... the better part of two decades'*<sup>25</sup>

One of the reasons that he's changed his ideas is that he's realized – and he's realized this for a long time – two decades, as you can see there, that there are certain problems with that. One is, how do you account for transpersonal or spiritual experiences of children if the transpersonal stuff is after all the psychological development has occurred? So there is a little bit of a problem there. And also how can we really argue that earlier peoples were enlightened when they hadn't even achieved perhaps formal operations, or vision-logic, or existential authenticity, if the transpersonal stages occur after all of that? How can you get people thousands of years ago who achieved enlightenment? And so what he's saying there is that it did form something of a Gordian knot for the better part of two decades. And he thinks that he's now unravelled the Gordian knot. I'm not quite so sure.

So how is he doing it? How is he going to try to unravel this knot, or square the circle, or whatever other metaphor we want to use? Basically the way he's now doing it is to say that there's a difference (he's always acknowledged the difference) between states and stages. I don't know how many of you remember that. States of consciousness – mystical experiences – in themselves probably don't mean that much. It's structural stages of development of consciousness that are important. States of consciousness tend to be temporary and have no clear developmental significance. He's always recognised the distinction between states and structures.

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<sup>24</sup> Wilber (2006, p.88).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.89.

What he's now doing is saying well actually the transpersonal stuff that I was talking about – the psychic, the subtle, the causal, the nondual – are actually *states*, they're not stages. They're not structural stages of human consciousness. They are states that we can enter into. And therefore they don't appear on top of the structural stages that we get from Western psychology. They're completely separate from that [Table 2]. They form a horizontal level of development. They don't appear *here* [on top of the prepersonal and personal levels].

Table 2. The Wilber-Combs Lattice (2006)<sup>26</sup>

Vertical Structure-stages		Tier	Horizontal State-stages			
↑	↑		→	→	→	→
			Gross	Subtle	Causal	Nondual
Turquoise	High Vision-Logic (Higher Mind)	2 <sup>nd</sup>				
Teal	Low Vision-Logic (Paradigmatic)					
Green	Pluralistic Mind (Meta-systemic)	1 <sup>st</sup>				
Orange	Formal Operational (Rational Mind)					
Amber	Concrete Operational Rule/Role Mind					
Red	Preoperational (Conceptual)					
Magenta	Preoperational (Symbolic)					
Infrared	Sensorimotor					

So you've got the [vertical] structural stages – sensorimotor; all the Piagetian stuff – up to vision-logic, systemic-type thinking. And there's psychological development that occurs in an invariant sequence through childhood, adolescence, adulthood – you go through those structurally as an invariant sequence – you can't skip them.

<sup>26</sup> Adapted from Wilber (2006).



*Horizontal* stages, the gross (or psychic), the subtle, the causal and the nondual, are *states* of consciousness that you can actually experience at any structural stages – is what he’s now saying. So you can have any of these experiences – mystical experiences, transpersonal experiences – no matter what structural stage of development you’re at ...

The ways these *states* relate to the structures is that the states have their own stage structure, as well as the *structures* having their own stage structure – if you see what I mean. There is a confusion of language here between states and structures. So the *structures*, he is basically saying, are the vertical, developmental achievements, which you have to go up in sequence. The *states* – also there is a sequence. There are certain stages of states. So that if you practice a meditation path – as John pointed out – and your [John’s] own account of your own life experience I think shows this pattern very clearly, where you started off with the low subtle, or the psychic, and then perhaps you get into the high subtle, or archetypal, and then you get into the formless mysticism of the causal level, and then maybe the nondual arises. And there is a sequence that can happen in people’s spiritual development. But that has nothing to do with *this* [the vertical structures]. It has nothing to do with it. You can go through that sequence of stages of mystical experiences no matter what vertical stage of your development you’re at. And that, I think, is a profound and significant amendment to Wilber’s theory.

Many people have pointed out over the years, myself included, that the stages – the psychic, the subtle, the causal, the nondual are – if they are stages – they are only stages found in meditation training programmes. They are not stages that you find in ordinary psychological or spiritual development. And essentially he is conceding this now. Almost.

If he were to stop there, I would have certain technical things that I would like to argue with him, but I wouldn’t have any major arguments with his plan – if he stuck to it. But he doesn’t. I cheated a bit, when I showed you this [Table 2]. I cheated by just showing you that. If you look in the book, you actually see this [Table 3].

Table 3. The Wilber-Combs Lattice<sup>27</sup>

Vertical Structure-stages		Tier	Horizontal State-stages			
↑	↑		→ Gross	→ Subtle	→ Causal	→ Nondual
Clear light	Supermind	3 <sup>rd</sup>				
Ultraviolet	Overmind (previously Causal)					
Violet	Meta-Mind (previously Subtle)					
Indigo	Para-Mind (previously Psychic)					
Turquoise	High Vision-Logic (Higher Mind)	2 <sup>nd</sup>				
Teal	Low Vision-Logic (Paradigmatic)					
Green	Pluralistic Mind (Meta-systemic)	1 <sup>st</sup>				
Orange	Formal Operational (Rational Mind)					
Amber	Concrete Operational Rule/Role Mind					
Red	Preoperational (Conceptual)					
Magenta	Preoperational (Symbolic)					
Infrared	Sensorimotor					

So what he's now done – having said that you can have the gross, the subtle, the causal or the nondual at any structural stage, he still wants the *structural* stages at the transpersonal – he's put them back – as well as having said that you can't really do that. And that confuses me. It confuses me why he's done that. Why he is now

<sup>27</sup> Adapted from Wilber (2006).

insisting that there are still structural stages of transpersonal development beyond, say, vision-logic? And I've looked very carefully in the book and he doesn't really provide a clear answer to this, as far as I can see. So these are the problems that I still have with Wilber's current presentation. This is why I think he still needs to try and get it right – he still needs to make some amendments.

First – just some language. The lower ones [structural-stages] – sort of Piagetian stuff – are the 1<sup>st</sup> tier. The existential stuff is the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier. The transpersonal structures are the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier in Wilber's current model. So the question I still have for Wilber is where do these transpersonal 3<sup>rd</sup> tier structures come from? I understand where the *state*-stages come from – they come from meditation traditions – gross, subtle, causal, nondual. But he's said they're horizontal, not vertical. And he's explicitly said that. So where do these 3<sup>rd</sup> tier, transpersonal structures come from? And I was so pleased when I saw this quote:

*'You find none of these particular types of stages of consciousness evolution in any of the contemplative or meditative traditions anywhere in the world',<sup>28</sup>*

So where do they come from? Where is he saying they come from? He's put them back, it seems to me, really because he wants to believe in them. He's put them back really on faith. And the way that he's identified these structures is very closely based – and you [John] were talking about VBA, and you can't dismiss things as just being Vedantic, or Aurobindo – but the ones he's put in – these are Aurobindo's terms – he's basically put in the Aurobindo stages. I don't think he should do it ...

One of the other very important things in Wilber's new book is – and again I have been going on in writing about this for years, and so have some other people – is about Wilber's theory is very metaphysical. It's based upon metaphysical assumptions about the Great Chain of Being – there's all sorts of assumptions about reincarnation and all this kind of stuff. [Now] he's finally seen the light. Or he's finally seeing the light, I think. Inasmuch as he's now trying to present a model that he seems to think is *post-metaphysical*. It's not making any metaphysical assumptions at all. If that's the case, then he needs to try to explain where these metaphysical structures – the Aurobindo stuff – come from. And his argument is that they're sort of set up by

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.133.

groups of people functioning in that kind of way. That they are – and again he’s using some of Ferrer’s terminology here – they are *cocreated* in a participatory way by people getting together, functioning at some kind of psychological level – at the transpersonal. And then, because you’ve got these small groups of people functioning at that level, those then become what he calls ‘Kosmic habits’.

They’re not pre-given realities – the overmind and the supermind and that kind of stuff. They’re not there to begin with. They’re not metaphysical ontological realities – they are created by people coming together and working together in this cocreative way. But having cocreated them, he is saying, they become Kosmic habits – they become realities that everyone then has to negotiate.

There’s problems with this I think, and we need to compare it with Ferrer, and I hope that we’ll get a chance to do that, to discuss it. Basically what he’s saying is that there are only two people – two percent of people rather –

*Audience(1)*<sup>29</sup>: *Who’s the other one?*

– Now you laugh, but it’s almost like that – at the transpersonal. There are only two percent of people who are at what he now ... If you’re familiar with Spiral Dynamics<sup>30</sup>, you’ll know that they use colour metaphors for different levels. Wilber’s now doing the same, but they’re not the same colours as Spiral Dynamics. So if you know Spiral Dynamics, it gets very confusing. There are only two percent of people who are at the existential level – essentially vision-logic. And the number of people above that, he puts into the few thousands – maybe only a thousand or two, if that. And what he’s saying – mind that’s throughout the whole of history – there have probably been only a couple of thousand people who have gone beyond vision-logic. And what he’s saying is that these less than a couple of thousand people, through whatever developmental achievements they have achieved in their lifetime, just somehow set up new Kosmic habits – almost like archetypes in a way, but he doesn’t like the use of the word archetype – Kosmic habits or patterns that everyone else then needs to negotiate. So that’s what he’s saying ... There are a few people who have developed to *that* [Para-Mind], and that sets up a Kosmic habit. And then presumably

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<sup>29</sup> Audience contributions are indicated using Audience(1), Audience(2), etc. to refer to individual speakers.

<sup>30</sup> Beck & Cowan (1996).

even fewer people who have developed *that* [Meta-Mind], and that has set up another Kosmic habit. And then even fewer people, and so on. And because they've cocreated these realities, those realities have become Kosmic habits that are fixed for everyone – I think that is complete tosh. And the reason it's complete tosh is that he doesn't really understand the notion of cocreative participation.

Ferrer's idea of cocreation is that people cocreate these realities. People might – there might be a few thousand people somewhere who have cocreated Para-Mind. That's fine. That works for them. There are other people who have cocreated some other spiritual ultimate, or spiritual reality. The problem with Wilber's argument is his assumption that these cocreated structures then become parts of the Kosmos. They then become ontological realities that everyone has to negotiate. And I have to say, it's an extraordinary claim and really quite ridiculous.

*Audience(2): How does he define Para-Mind and Supermind and things? How is that defined?*

Well he doesn't really define it. But basically it's very similar to the psychic, the subtle, the causal, and the nondual – that he took away and said they're states. And he's put them back and said – well, he's called them something else. In fact in his book he says 'Para-Mind ... (previously Psychic)',<sup>31</sup> And so he wants to put them back, but he wants to call them something else because he's just said the psychic is now a state and not a stage. So he's kind of tying himself up in knots.

So this is the way he thinks you can solve the problem:

*'There seem to be at least 3 or 4 structures / stages / levels higher than turquoise ... **not pre-existing ontological or metaphysical structures** already existing somewhere, but ... the first very **tentative structures being laid down by highly evolved souls** pushing into new territory – and **co-creating them** as they do ... But to date, the sum total of humans who have stably moved into these higher structures is only a **few thousand individuals**, if that'*<sup>32</sup>

*Audience(2): How does he know that?*

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Fig. 2.4 (facing p.68).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p.245, emphasis added.

Quite – how does he know that?

**Audience(3):** *Is Wilber's idea of Kosmic habits virtually the same as Rupert Sheldrake's morphogenetic fields?*

Yes, very similar – very similar to morphogenetic fields. So these are my questions:

What's really the evidence for those [3<sup>rd</sup> tier] *structure*-stages? Again I can accept that you get the *state*-stages in certain meditation traditions. But what really is the evidence for these *structure*-stages? Given that it's only based on a few thousand people in the whole of history. Is there really good evidence that there is that sequence of transpersonal *structure*-stages? I don't think there is.

Why should the cocreations of a few people form specific structures or Kosmic habits that then everyone else has to negotiate? *Particular* ones that everyone else has to negotiate. And, as I say, compare that with Ferrer who basically is saying that these cocreated realities are cultural constructions, and different cultures and different spiritual traditions will create their own spiritual paths, their own spiritual structures. There isn't anything universal. And Wilber – he wants his cake and eat it. And having claimed to be post-metaphysical, and to argue that what he's really saying isn't assuming any metaphysical realities – there is still a lot of religion and metaphysics in Wilber's book. Because, for a start, these Kosmic habits become given realities – they become metaphysical realities, having been cocreated, according to Wilber ...

Another thing he's been criticised for over the years is ignoring the kind of spiritual experiences that imply the reality of God, or a transcendent Other. It's very much the evolution of the self, in the Eastern meditative traditions, for Wilber. And what he's saying is: Yes there has been this repression, in the transpersonal literature, of the Great You, or the Great Thou. And he's basically saying we need to bring God back into the equation. And we need to recognise that there are three faces of Spirit. It can be Self, it can be God, or it can be the Kosmos. And then he spoils it.

I mean, I would kind of go along with him. But the way he spoils it is to basically say: Yes, there are these three faces of Spirit – Self, God and Kosmos – however, all

three faces of Spirit are simply faces of your own deepest, formless Self. So what he's basically saying here is that, yes, there is God, but really God is just an aspect of your Self. It's not really God. It's not really an Other – it's not really a divine Other. So he's coming up still with this particular metaphysical view which is that the Self is the absolute ultimate spiritual reality and that God is just a way that Self represents itself to you. It's not really an Other.

And there's also still a problem in Wilber's theory relating to reincarnation. In the past, the way that Wilber tried to solve the question 'Why can children have spiritual experiences?' was that they kind of remember them from a previous life. That was his solution. Because if the transpersonal was after all the psychological development, how can a child have a transpersonal experience? Ah! – they have a sort of flashback, to a transpersonal experience in a previous life. In other words, his previous theory was really geared into a metaphysical belief in reincarnation. And if you look in the latest book – I couldn't find the quote when I looked for it again – but there's one page he says: Ah, well there's still the question of reincarnation – I will return to that later<sup>33</sup>. And he doesn't.

Unsubstantiated claims. These are things that I still think he's claiming that there's really no evidence for at all.

*'There seem to be at least 3 or 4 structures / stages / levels higher than turquoise'*<sup>34</sup>

What's the evidence for it?

*'Meditation can help you to move an average of 2 vertical stages in four years ... **3 states over, 2 stages up**'*<sup>35</sup>

You go three states horizontally over, and that will take you two stages – structural stages up. No studies are cited to substantiate that claim.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p.220. The actual quote is 'I know, what about reincarnation? Hang on a minute ...'.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.245.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.137-138, emphasis added.

And even the states – this idea that there are these state-stages. I will partly concede that there's some truth in that, but I think – still think – that he's oversimplifying it. And maybe we can get to a discussion about that ...

Finally ... the other thing I don't like about Wilber is his style ... I call it his imperialism and his arrogance. In this latest book, he basically says that his theory should become an 'integral operating system' that everyone should run – a bit like everyone runs Windows. He calls it an integral operating system. Any other perspective than Wilber's own, he dismisses as either being less integral than his own, or as based on people really not as clever as he is, and people who haven't got up to the higher stages so, of course ... we can't believe anything they say because they haven't got it – yet. And that translates into – there's a whole Appendix<sup>36</sup> in his book made up of really very condescending critiques of his competitors. People like Chopra, William James. He doesn't mention – actually another very interesting thing about this book – having started bringing in all this terminology – cocreation, participation, and the Myth of the Given – all the stuff that Ferrer talks about – there's not one reference – there's not one mention of Ferrer in the book. And there's not one mention of Washburn either, which I think is shocking ...

Some of these critiques that he makes in this Appendix really are disgraceful, I think. It's not to say that I don't agree with some of them, but the way ... is quite condescending. And he doesn't apply the same criticism to his own earlier work, or even his present work. And, as I say, he fails to credit anyone else for the revisions in his own theory – even though there have been people for the last decade and more saying there's problems with this theory, there's a problem with this theory. And his first response is: No, you're wrong; you're ignorant; you're not at as high a level – and if you get to the high level I'm at, you'll realize that I'm right – that's his basic approach. Eventually, when he changes his theory, he comes up with it as if it's: Ah! – I've come up with this change of theory. And he doesn't recognise – he doesn't credit really – the role that other people have played within that.

I don't like the way he's trying to hijack the term 'integral' – almost trademark it – which I think is naughty. There are lots of people who used 'integral' well before

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Appendix III.



Wilber did. But essentially what, I think, his system is becoming, is a cult. It's becoming a closed system of belief and practice: You must run our operating system. You must accept the basic principles of my system. And, if you don't, you're ignorant. Or, you're less integral. And if you look at the *Integral Institute* website<sup>37</sup> – there's a lot of it which has, in my view, elements of cultism to it. So, those are just some things about his style that I object to as well. And I'll stop there.

*Walley: ... In terms of the schedule for the morning, we've overrun a little bit on the individual presentations. But I thought it really important that people have the time to state their piece ... Now, in terms of the schedule which we all agreed upon, it's the role of the mediator now to have a go – You can see why I chickened out now – to help to reconcile the two positions. Thank you David.*

### **An attempt at reconciliation (David Fontana)**

Right. Well, the emphasis is, of course, on *attempt*, and to reconcile, if indeed there is the possibility of reconciliation. But let me start off, if I may, by congratulating both John and Mike on masterful expositions on two point of views which are radically different in many aspects but at the same time contain enormous and important similarities. You will, of course, have spotted all these for yourself. And there will be no need for me, necessarily, to do that.

But what I'm always very impressed by, in John's case, is that he talks from direct personal experience always. His path has been to stay outside the academic world ... in the sense of not taking a formal university position. So this has allowed him a great freedom in his own personal work – running groups, running workshops, writing, publishing, and so forth. And he always speaks from direct personal experience. That's not to criticise Mike at all, who I also know has had great personal experience. But for the purposes of this exercise [Mike] has tended to set out the more academic position. So I'm always very impressed by John's personal experience, and he knows what he has experienced, and he talks from that experience. And I've always tried to make the point within psychology that there is a great mistake in telling people that

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.integralinstitute.org/>

experiences they've had are not what they themselves think them to be. So John knows what he's experienced, and he talks from that experience.

But the point then that strikes me always is that everyone is an individual and so although it is enormously important to speak from personal experience ... there has to be a limit to the sense in which one can assume that other people's experience will follow the same path. Or that, necessarily, part of one's own experience is superior to part of other people's experience. I'm not saying that John says that. I'm talking now generally about experience. And as a consequence, very often, of experience, people build theories.

Now I've always, as a psychologist, been slightly wary of theory building, because people become enmeshed in their own theory. And since human nature is so diverse, and so rich, it is possible to fit [everything] into your theory once you've developed your theory itself. And that is a danger, I feel, with Wilber. And I think that this is something that Mike has really highlighted as well. So a theory can become a cult, as Mike says. And he's absolutely correct in this. Nobody has a monopoly of the truth ... in any area of psychology, or in spiritual or transpersonal life, nobody has the monopoly of the truth.

We have had in the past, of course, great minds, great teachers – Christ, the Buddha, and so on. I'm not talking at that level. I'm talking at our level. We are poor, meagre human beings struggling in a world that presents us with all sorts of challenges and difficulties and trying to do our best to make sense of it. And the sense that we make of it may be very personal, so that if I talk from my experience, or John talks from his experience, that may fit our lives, and our solutions to the problem of meaning, but may not fit the lives of others.

I don't want to spend any time talking about my own personal experiences, but I did start very much within the Christian tradition and then spent many, many years studying and practicing within the Eastern traditions. And I found that the extraordinary revelation that came from this was that it illuminated the Western traditions. So I take Mike's point that Wilber, in his early work, ignored the Western tradition. The Western tradition is enormously powerful. It's enormously rich. It's enormously intellectually satisfying. It's enormously spiritual. It's enormously

uplifting. And it's a perfect path for many people. And right and proper, then, that they should cast their personal experience within the light of Western traditions.

Others would prefer to cast their personal experience within the light of the Eastern traditions. The mistake arises in saying: I'm right and you are wrong. The extraordinary thing – it happens throughout history – the more you study history, the more you study psychology, you see the extent to which people say 'I'm right and you are wrong'; 'Unless you believe what I say; unless you follow my theory, then you are wrong'; 'Unless you follow my spiritual path, my spiritual tradition, then you are being misled and misguided'. I think these points have come up superbly in the debate so far, and I know that John would wish to address many of the points that Mike has made.

If I had to try to score some points between the two of them – and I am sure that John will very quickly redress the balance with this – but I have to say I think Mike has made a very, very good case for where Wilber went wrong in the past and where he has tended to go wrong in his more recent work. And I speak as a great admirer of Wilber – I've always been very impressed with his work.

And at the same time I would want to defend John because he speaks from a therapeutic angle as well. And Mike has not chosen to trespass into that area, for very good reasons, but he may want to attend to it later on. But John speaks as a therapist. Now, if he finds that Wilber's model may be very useful in therapy, he's proved his point.

So if we look at the debate between the two of them, we find that, in a sense, it comes down to a difference on certain key points ... Let me just try and summarise these key points.

Firstly, Wilber's metaphysical assumptions. Yes, there are metaphysical assumptions there in Wilber. They've come from his own experience. Anybody who reads Wilber's account of his own practice – his own experience – can see that this is genuine from his point of view. But there are metaphysical assumptions that creep into this. The idea of Kosmic habits. Perhaps – Mike has criticised these – the idea that a group of people, coming together, with a particular kind of practice, in a sense

create a certain form of reality. Well, I think that, in all the great spiritual traditions, this certainly does happen. And we can describe it perhaps rather better as the idea of personalising certain spiritual forces. So that if, in Christianity for example, somebody says ‘I no longer believe in God as an old man in the sky’, one would say ‘but you have been misled if you regarded God as only an old man in the sky’. But God as an old man in the sky may be a very good symbol for children. God is the father; God is the mother – may be very good symbols through which children can begin to understand the reality of the divine. So these may then become Kosmic habits, in a sense, in Wilber’s terms – although he’s talking about them in a more abstract way than old men in the sky.

So, Kosmic habits – we may need to return to that, although, on the whole I tend to think that Mike has made a very good case. Sorry, ‘on the whole’ – that sounds patronising – Mike has made an excellent case for being very circumspect indeed over this idea of Kosmic habits, and I’m sure John will want to return to that ...

[Secondly] – John hasn’t dealt with these things yet, but I am sure he will – the idea that only 2 percent have done this, only 2 percent have got to this level – one cannot be that concrete in any area of human psychology, as we all know as psychologists. You can’t do it. People are not like that. And he would have to have an enormous amount of evidence before he would even want to make statements like that. So I’m rather concerned at the way Wilber is going at the moment. Again I’m sure John will correct us on this and bring us back on course. But Mike, I take it, is correct, over his [Wilber’s] latest work, where he seems to be critiquing his earlier work, and doing it very well, and then suddenly he makes this extraordinary jump back into this idea that there is some kind of metaphysical given as well – to which he has access, but to which the rest of us are only aspiring ...

[Thirdly] Mike’s last point ... that Wilber has brought God back into the equation but then has done so at the level of an inner reality. Well, all right, yes, I think that all the great traditions have talked about both the inner and the outer. In Hinduism I’ve always found that the best way that this is expressed is through *nirvikalpa samadhi* and *savikalpa samadhi*. *Savikalpa samadhi* is the experience within meditation where you are, in a sense, contemplating the divine – however one wants to define the divine. You are contemplating the divine. Ramakrishna says it is like tasting the

sweetness – tasting the sweetness. And then *nirvikalpa samadhi*, which is that sense of unity with the divine, where you become the sugar. Now the great thing about Ramakrishna and many of the Hindu sages is that they then say we can't look at those two things and say one is better than the other, or one is more complete than the other. These are both ineffable, genuine experiences of the divine. So it may well be that by bringing God back into the equation Wilber had ...been reintroducing a concept of *savikalpa samadhi* – the recognition of the divine as being Other than ourselves ... and therefore we must arise *from* the divine because He couldn't create us out of some stuff that wasn't God. But it does seem as if he's [Wilber's] drawn back from that in a sense. And I would be very interested if John wants to address this, and I'm sure Mike will want to come back to it.

I would say it's an honourable draw so far. An honourable draw – but more fun to come.

*Walley: Right ... so the second section of the morning then implies replies from John first, then Mike, then David. But also, as that sequence continues, there is also room for our audience participation built into it. So that's how we'll proceed. OK, so if I can invite John then to reply to Mike for about ten minutes or so.*

## **Response 1 (John Rowan)**

OK, I'd like to reply to four things – no, five things actually. Because I've just realized that the fifth thing is one dirty trick that Mike's played. I'll come to it in a minute.

But first of all, this business about Wilber being arrogant. You know, I've written back and forth to Wilber since 1982, and I've criticised him many times for this, that and the other. And he's replied nearly always in the same kind, which is: I agree with all the positive things you say – you're quite right about that. I don't agree with the things that you've denied – I have problems with the things that you are negative about.

And so I think his approach to all kinds of people is to say: Well I agree with everything you've said positively, but some of these negative things I think you might, well, rethink – think again about those.

Which doesn't seem to be arrogant – it seems to me to be a very accepting way of relating to people. Taking as much from them as you possibly can. And not rejecting the person, or their whole position, but simply certain things that they say. And also I think there's a humility about Wilber's continual self-revision. I mean everyone who's been into Wilber knows that he distinguishes between Wilber I and Wilber II, Wilber III, Wilber IV, and Wilber V, and so on. And these are all serious revisions of earlier positions. They're not trivial. And they are more devastating to some of his earlier writing than any critic from outside ... So I feel that there is a self-correcting mechanism in there somewhere that is saying, continually saying: Well, is this the right way to say this? Is this the right way to look at that? And so forth. I find that very non-arrogant. I find that actually quite humble.

The second thing – I'd just like to make a small remark about the 1<sup>st</sup> tier, 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier, and so forth. A hugely important distinction. The 1<sup>st</sup> tier thinking is what we're all born and brought up with. And it's essentially the kind of thinking that says: I'm right, and if you say anything different, you're wrong. 1<sup>st</sup> tier thinking is egocentric or ethnocentric. It's saying 'within this tent we're all in agreement; outside the tent they're wrong, they are mistaken, they may be dangerous, better protect yourself against them'. And that can take more virulent forms and more sophisticated forms, but basically 1<sup>st</sup> tier thinking always says that it's right. And there's danger in being right. Somebody once told me that most people would rather be right than be alive. And I think there's some truth in that. But that's 1<sup>st</sup> tier thinking.

And then the whole importance of 2<sup>nd</sup> tier thinking is: I can be right and the other guy can be right too. What a discovery! What an immense step forward in consciousness. To say 'well, there might be more than one way of looking at this thing – maybe that's true'.

And then 3<sup>rd</sup> tier thinking involves an explicit acceptance of spirituality – that we are spiritual beings, and we have a spiritual nature, and so forth. And many, many people in our culture have got into 2<sup>nd</sup> tier thinking. Quite a few – not the majority,

I'm sure, but quite a few. But 3<sup>rd</sup> tier thinking is still pretty rare. To admit that you're a spiritual being is, well, dangerous, you know. Does this put me in the same camp as nasty people who I despise? So that's the difference between 1<sup>st</sup> tier, 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, and 3<sup>rd</sup> tier thinking. I just wanted to underline that.

The third thing is – a lot of what Mike was saying, it seems to me, is about theory. And theory is terribly, terribly interesting to academics and to people who want to prove whether Ferrer is right, or Wilber is right, or Washburn is better, or should we go down the line with somebody else? But I don't think it's so interesting to practitioners. And my real interest in Wilber is as a practitioner. As somebody who wants to work with people in the consulting room, who wants to take people through workshops. Details of my workshops on the back there if anyone wants to take a leaflet! But that's my going-in point. I want to know is this useful or not? Or are there snags in it that prove to be problematic in practice?

And what I've found is that, in practice, the straightforward Wilber story [is useful]... [the] basic, original Wilber position which is now elaborated in ... the very book that we're talking about [Table 4].

Table 4. Some Major Developmental Lines<sup>38</sup>

L E V E L S	<b>Clear Light</b>	Supermind			Ego-aware Construct-aware	3 <sup>rd</sup> Tier
	<b>Ultraviolet</b>	Overmind (previously Causal)				
O F C O N S C I O U S N E S S	<b>Violet</b>	Meta-Mind (previously Subtle)			Integrated	2 <sup>nd</sup> Tier
	<b>Indigo</b>	Global Mind (previously Psychic)				
O F C O N S C I O U S N E S S	<b>Turquoise</b>	Late Vision-Logic (Cross paradigmatic)	Systemic	Global View (Turquoise)	5 <sup>th</sup> Order	Autonomous
	<b>Teal</b>	Middle Vision-Logic (Paradigmatic)		Flex Flow (Yellow)		
O F C O N S C I O U S N E S S	<b>Green</b>	Early Vision-Logic (Meta-systemic)	Relativistic	Human Bond (Green)	(4-5 Order)	Individualistic
	<b>Orange</b>	Formal Operational	Multiplistic	Strive Drive (Orange)	4 <sup>th</sup> Order	
O F C O N S C I O U S N E S S	<b>Amber</b>	Concrete Operational	Absolutistic	Truth Force (Blue)	3 <sup>rd</sup> Order	Conformist 1 <sup>st</sup> Tier
	<b>Red</b>	Preoperational (Conceptual)	Egocentric	Power Gods (Red)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Order	
O F C O N S C I O U S N E S S	<b>(Magenta)</b>	Preoperational (Symbolic)	Magic- Animistic	Kin Spirits (Purple)	1 <sup>st</sup> Order	Impulsive
	<b>Infrared</b>	Sensorimotor		Survival (Beige)	0	
		<b>Cognitive Line</b> Piaget / Aurobindo	<b>Graves Values / Spiral Dynamics</b>	<b>Kegan</b> Orders of Consciousness	<b>Loeinger Cook-Greuter</b> Self-Identity	

And he's now got these new set of colours, which is a simple spectrum. There's something a bit arbitrary about the Spiral Dynamics colours, but this is more logical. Spiral Dynamics scales do overlap here and there, so that they are actually the same in many respects, but not all.

So this is the Wilber that I find very useful in practice. I find that I can run workshops, introducing people to what it's like to work at the subtle level, what it's like to work at the causal level. I've even done one workshop working at the nondual level, which is a bit vast, difficult, problematic. So what I want to say is that although it may be academically very proper and interesting and worthwhile to go into the abstract theory, from a practitioner's point of view this is still a useful way of explaining to people the mental states, the states of consciousness that they might get into, or that they may find useful to explore.

The fourth thing I'd like to say is that I think Mike was quite right in saying that Wilber has been moving recently more towards being able to talk about God. It's

<sup>38</sup> Adapted from Wilber (2006).



quite remarkable that in all his early books, Wilber never mentions God – in terms of a monotheistic deity – and nowadays he is; and in fact he’s gone further in his recent articles in a magazine called *What is Enlightenment?*<sup>39</sup> – it’s a very, very useful magazine I think, in which he has regular conversations and dialogues bringing out his thinking and ideas ... in fact, that very handout [Table 4] is featured in one of those articles. But I think he’s still moving further towards a God and after reading one of those things, in my own meditation I sort of opened myself up more in that kind of direction. And I got this immense kind of sense: ‘God is Love’ here. Not a very original statement perhaps. It was actually a kind of genuine experience of that – that there was something out there – out there, that was *big*, and *love*, and I could have commerce and communion with that Other. Which was a new thing for me. I’m still trying to digest all of that ...

And lastly, I just want to talk about the dirty trick that I think ... Mike pulls. Which was when he gave this quote about – can I have the book? ... On page 133. Let’s look at page 133.

**Walley:** *Yes, we’ve been checking it!*

**Daniels:** *I know exactly what you’re going to say!*

Yes, here we are: The quote he quoted was: ‘*You find none of these particular types of stages of consciousness evolution in any of the contemplative or meditative traditions anywhere in the world*’. What he’s [Wilber’s] talking about there is what he calls ‘Zone 2’. And Zone 2 is the external study of mental states, which is through Spiral Dynamics, through Maslow, through Piaget, through all these studies – from outside of consciousness. And of course, in the Eastern traditions, they look at it from the inside – they don’t study it scientifically from the outside. Which is what happens in Zone 2. In Zone 2, you’re looking at its scientific study from the outside. And of course that doesn’t exist in previous ages ... They didn’t have scientific studies in earlier ages ... So for him to put that up on the screen and suggest that well that applies to all Wilber’s ideas – you know – none of his states of consciousness apply ... I think that’s a very bad, very naughty thing to do. Have I had my ten minutes?

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example Cohen & Wilber (2006).

## Response 1 (Michael Daniels)

Shall I start off with the dirty trick? Actually I was wrong. I thought you were going to make another point, because that page – the quote I took – can be read in different ways and I acknowledge that. The point I thought you were going to make is that he was actually referring to tiers 1 and 2 when he was talking – that you don't find those in the Eastern traditions. He's not saying that. Actually, what he is saying – he's specifically referring to structure-stages ... I mean I agree with you when he's talking about Zone 2, which is another new idea in Wilber's latest book.

*'Not through introspection, but only through history do we come to know ourselves. And some of that history unfolds in structure-stages ... or ways. You find none of these particular types of stages ...'*<sup>40</sup>.

So the point he's making is referring to the idea of structure-stages. So what he's saying is you don't find any structure – as I understand what he's saying – you don't find any *structure-stages* in any of the traditions anywhere in the world. In which case I think the point I was making – about where's he got them from then? If you don't find the structure-stages?

OK, Wilber's arrogance. I've never met Wilber. I'm not sure that John's ever met Wilber actually.

**Rowan:** *No.*

No. You can only judge the man from his writings and, I guess, second-hand through what people who have met him have said about him. Hearsay, of course – and I don't take that on board at all. But certainly – in his writings – I think if you read that Appendix III in his latest book – in fact the whole book, for me, comes across as a very arrogant position. But that's a personal thing ...

**Audience(2):** *There's lots of videos available of him as well.*

Actually his videos are quite good. I quite like some of those videos. He doesn't always come across as particularly arrogant.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p.133.

The 1<sup>st</sup> tier, 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, 3<sup>rd</sup> tier. I agreed with the way that John explained those tiers as they are now currently presented in Wilber's approach. But I still think there's a fundamental problem about them which, actually, you [John] identified in the way that you talked about it – because you said it's the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier that brings spirituality into the equation. And it's nonsense. In fact Wilber's agreeing it's nonsense now because he's saying that you get the transpersonal states at any of the tiers. So even if you're at the bottom of tier 1 you can still bring spirituality into the equation. So it's simply not true any more in Wilber's model that spirituality only appears in the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier.

Theory and practice – actually I'm a pragmatist as well, interestingly, so I have a lot of sympathy with John's position that really the proof of these ideas is in the tasting, and in the practice, and if they are useful in practice then that's a strong argument for them. I'm no longer a therapeutic practitioner and when I was a practitioner, I never used Wilber's model. I concede, from John's experience, that if he finds it useful in his practice, then so be it. But I think from the way that you were explaining it, what you seemed to be saying about what is useful in practice with Wilber's model is precisely what he's talking about with the *states* – it's the *states*, it's not the *structures*. I don't think you're working with the structures at all, in therapy. I think you're working with the states.

God – I haven't read the *What is Enlightenment?* article, so I'm not sure exactly what he's saying about that. But I would agree with you – it seems like he's trying to move towards the recognition of the divine Other as a sort of way of understanding spirituality, and it will be interesting to see how he develops in that way.

I just want to make a few points about some of the things that David identified in his summing up. The metaphysical assumptions which I think I tried to show are still there very strongly in Wilber's framework, even though he's trying to claim that it's post-metaphysical. And it does come down to this issue of what we mean by Kosmic habits ... Are these morphogenetic fields in the Sheldrake sense? ... I think essentially he is understanding it in that way. And I don't deny that groups of people can cocreate (if you want to call them) morphogenetic fields – or habits of working, or patterns of working. I'm not denying that at all. What I'm denying is that they become *Kosmic* habits – that they become realities that are then given in the Kosmos, and are fixed, and everyone has to go through them. So I think you need to contrast that with what

Ferrer is saying about cocreative participation. Which is that, yes, people cocreate spiritual ultimates, and spiritual realities, and spiritual paths, and spiritual patterns, but they create them as *cultural* habits – they’re not *Kosmic* habits. That’s the distinction between Ferrer and Wilber. Wilber wants them to be Kosmic habits – fixed and some kind of absolute that we can then absolutely judge someone ... we can make evaluative statements like ‘you’re working at a lower level in these given Kosmic habits’. Rather than saying ‘you’re working with your Buddhist habit, your Buddhist pattern, or you’re working with your Christian pattern, or you’re working with your Islamic pattern’ – whatever it may be. So it’s the distinction between Kosmic habits and cultural habits that is absolutely crucial, I think, in that.

Percentages at levels – I think he makes it up. You know, this 40 percent at amber. How is he measuring amber? ... I mean he’s making it up. There’s no evidence for it.

The VBA thing – I just want to return to that, because in your [John’s] opening presentation you were saying that Evelyn Underhill is not VBA and all these other people are not VBA. I agree with you on that. But ... there’s two ways of trying to get at the structures ... You could study all of the traditions, including Underhill, and the Christian traditions, and Islamic tradition, and then do a kind of grounded theory on that and then come up with the structures. That’s not what Wilber did. What Wilber did was he took Aurobindo and Vedanta and Buddhism as the structures, and then he took everyone else and plugged them into those VBA structures. That’s what he did. So that’s why I object to it. It’s not that you can’t find parallels between these other traditions and Wilber’s structures, but it’s that he didn’t devise them from these other structures. He’s come up with a system that is essentially VBA, in my opinion, and then plugged things into that ...

*Walley: So thank you both. David has an opportunity to respond.*

## **Response 1 (David Fontana)**

Well, in a sense, the response is already there in what he’s [Mike’s] said. Because I think he very clearly identified some of the major differences, and they have answered them from their own perspectives. And I’m sure that this is something that has to emerge from a debate of this kind. That we each view any theory – any set of

ideas – whether they're spiritual or whether they're psychological, from our own perspective. And our own perspective, of course, includes our own personal experience, which we've already talked an awful lot about.

I like the fact that Mike now recognises – and I'm sure he always has recognised, but now he's been explicit about this – the importance of therapy and the ways in which different models can work in therapy. So that if you're finding as a therapist that certain things are helpful, in your dealing with the client, well then, of course you use them. It was Jung wasn't it ... his definition of truth was that a thing is useful. If you can use it, then it's true.

Because we all know that absolute, ultimate truth may only be discovered when we actually do become enlightened. Which raises a point that I think we ought perhaps to make passing reference to – that when people talk about enlightenment, how can you talk about enlightenment if you're not already enlightened? What do you know about it? So that if one writes a book exploring enlightenment, then one would assume that one is doing it from a position of an enlightened being.

Well, Wilber may well be right about two percent of people – possibly two, possibly less than two, but there aren't that many enlightened people around. So in a sense there is a groping – a groping after truth, rather than a recognition of any absolutes. And yet the very mention of enlightenment suggests a kind of absolute goal that certain people have reached. The Buddha spoke about seeing into the true nature of things. Well, that's a wonderful, wonderful expression – seeing into the true nature of things. Well, how many people have seen into the true nature of things?

And the idea of our being cocreators of our own reality is enormously important, and both speakers have touched upon it. And I think I would like to leave open for general debate as to whether these Kosmic habits are cultural, or whether they are indeed Kosmic. Because I think this is one of the most important things to come out of this exchange of ideas. We often do confuse the two. If one looks across at any of the great spiritual traditions, one can see that there's a tremendous amount of culture involved in them. And one has to, in a sense, try to separate out the culture in order to understand what is really being said. And that is why I think the study of the Western tradition and the Eastern tradition is enormously important. Because it's often at the

overlap between them, that culture drops away, and that one recognises that what is being said does not come from the particular standpoint – cultural or otherwise – but coming from direct revelation, direct experience, direct knowledge – whatever it is that the great saints were able to do and that we can't do.

Then I thought that it's very valuable indeed to come up with the whole concept of what is a theory? I'm glad that both the speakers have returned to this and maybe they'll want to say more about it during the discussion. What is a theory? Well, it is an attempt at meaning. It's an attempt at encapsulating what is meant by something. And again, within human psychology, we all know as psychologists, theories come and go. And that one theory is fashionable for a time and we're all talking about it and saying how marvellous it is. And then, two or three years later, you talk to your students about it and they've never really heard of it. Because it has dropped out of the textbooks. Well, I don't think that will be true of Wilber's work. And I think again John in particular – but also Mike – have stressed that this is enormously important as a stimulus for thought, as a stimulus for introspection, as a way of trying to make sense of our own experience.

And if we take it in that light, then I think it works very well as a theory, as John has stressed again, within the context of therapy. It does work very well – it helps people to make sense of their own dilemmas and the positions in which they find themselves in life. But the mistake then comes in assuming that it is *only* that. If we take a very crude example and go back to behaviourism within psychology. When I was a student, behaviourism was everything ... you couldn't talk about anything else, you could only talk about behaviourism. And if you did talk about anything else, you were not talking as a psychologist. Well, it is not that behaviourism is not very important – it is enormously important – the mistake was in assuming that there's nothing but behaviourism. And, of course, there's a tremendous amount in addition to behaviourism. It is one approach to the understanding of human psychology and, linked in with many, many other approaches, including the transpersonal, it is enormously helpful to us. But if we accept it as the only game in town, it's not going to work.

So, in a sense, when one looks at the complexity of theories, one recognises the fact that sometimes these flashes of insight, when they come, are so simple – are so

very, very simple. And we wonder then at the complexities that the human mind is capable of constructing. It is actually a very simple business when one has a flash of insight. Like the Buddha, if you like, when he saw the morning star when sitting all night under the Bo Tree. He saw the morning star, and then he saw the arising and passing away of all things. So that the experience itself is very simple, but the difficulty is translating it into words that other people are going to have to understand. And it's said of the Buddha that when he received his enlightenment, he said there's no way I can teach this stuff, it's too complicated. The experience itself is very, very simple, but putting it into words that others can understand – that's the difficulty. And in the early Pali Canon, it's said that Brahma, the creator God, came down from heaven himself, with his robe over his shoulder, to plead with the Buddha to stay and actually teach what he himself had experienced. So the Buddha said 'OK, well if that's the way you want it'. And so for forty years he plodded the dusty roads of Asia teaching. Whether, in the end, anybody got it he himself doubted at the end of his life. He said: You know I've never really taught anything. In other words he didn't really feel – apart from the *Flower Sermon* maybe – when Mahakassapa seemed to get the idea. When he held up a flower and Mahakassapa suddenly got the idea. So nothing was said – it was just the experience of seeing this flower in that context.

Well that's really not to criticise the exercise of working with Wilber and Wilber's ideas, and I think that both Mike and certainly John would emphasise that these ideas are enormously important as a pathway towards self-understanding. And I think that now in the discussion and debate, and the points that people would want to raise – you'll be referring back to your own experience and finding what use Wilber has been to you in your own personal life. And that I think is going to be the real value of this exercise. It is one of introspection and self-reflection.

*Walley: Thank you David. And now John and Mike have an opportunity to have a dialogue for a few minutes. And then we'll open the discussion up to the audience.*

## **Response 2 (John Rowan)**

Well I've got three points that I'd like to raise.

What is Wilber's definition of Kosmic? Everybody's used the word Kosmic as if everybody knew what that meant. Well, Wilber has a particular use of it. He spells it with a K, and by that he means taking into account all quadrants, all levels, at all times. And so when he says that something is a Kosmic discovery, what he means is that it's a discovery which is important to understand at all four levels of the quadrants.

Now just in case anybody doesn't know what a quadrant is – I just happen to have [Figure 1]:

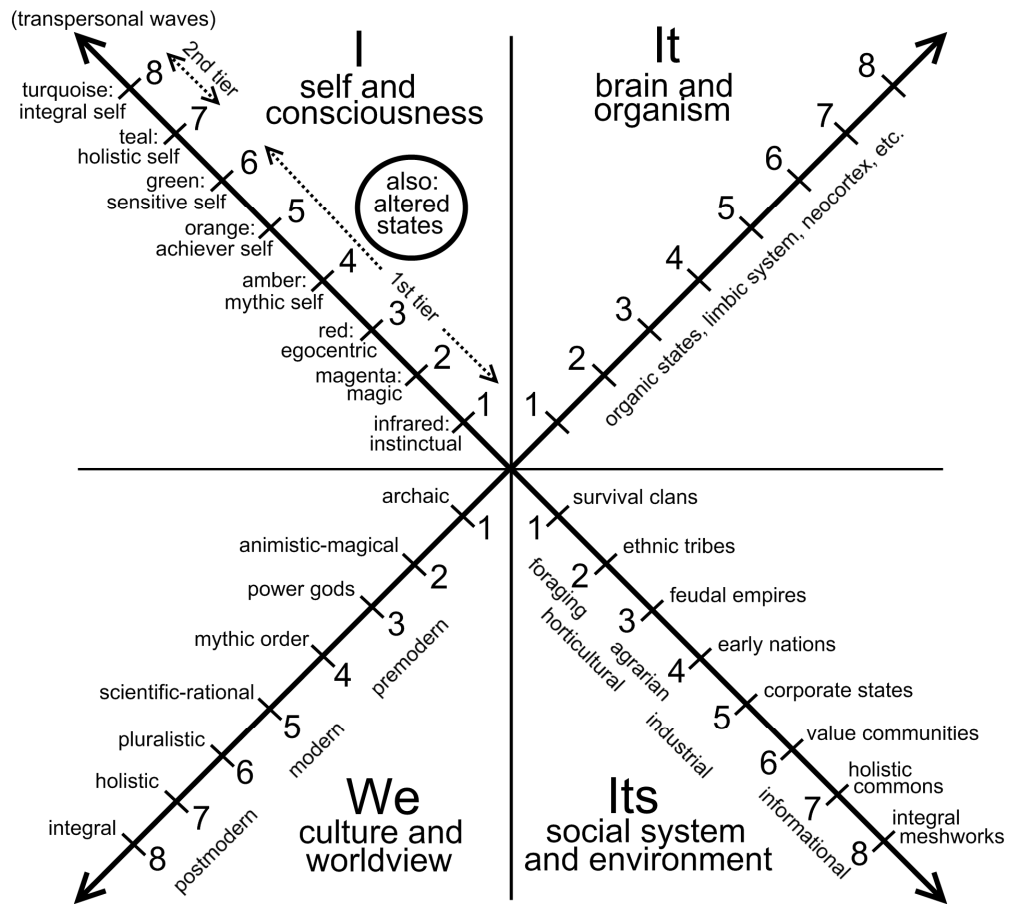


Figure 1. Wilber Quadrants<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Adapted from Wilber (2006).



Now one of the things that's interesting about Wilber is that he invented the idea of these quadrants, which are the individual, the intersubjective, the social, and the body (the medical, the neurophysiology, all that kind of stuff – external study of the individual). And when he uses the word Kosmic, what he's saying is that it must occupy all four of those quadrants and when it's cocreation, it's cocreation in all four quadrants at the same time. So using that word Kosmic is not just cultural. Cultural is the lower left, but Kosmic is the whole lot. And so it's more than saying something *more than self*.

The second thing I'd like to look at is this question of what Wilber did in [developing and cross-referencing the spectrum of levels] – actually one of the first things he did, although he only ever wrote it up in full chart form in the 2000<sup>42</sup> book, *Integral Psychology*. As I understand it – you know I may be wrong about this and maybe Michael knows more about it than I do – but he describes somewhere having a room full of charts all laid out on the floor and trying to reconcile them and make sense of them and so forth. And my impression was that what that meant was that he had looked at all these separate people writing about levels of consciousness and had laid all of them out in a linear form and then tried to see whether they matched or not. And found that the more he went at it, the more they actually matched – the more points they matched at – and then he went back to the original manuscripts and found further details and checked whether they matched, or didn't match, and found that that led to even more, better matching, and so on. Whereas Michael's statement was that he started off with Aurobindo and reconciled everything with that. Well, you know, those are two different impressions and I don't know which is the truth, but I just wanted to talk about that a bit.

And the third thing that I thought was interesting was the question of enlightenment which really David raised more than Michael. And it seems obvious to me that if you're enlightened, it's a fascinating contradiction about that. Because according to the whole idea of enlightenment, there's nobody there to be enlightened. And so, if there's nobody there to be enlightened, nobody can be enlightened, ever. And if somebody ever said 'I'm enlightened', they would speak rubbish. Because they wouldn't really understand what enlightenment was.

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<sup>42</sup> Wilber (2000a).

But also, in this book, Wilber has a very interesting point about enlightenment, which is that in the *Heart Sutra*, I think it is, it says something – I’m going to get this quotation wrong – but it’s something like ‘*form is nothing else than the formless, and the formless is nothing other than form*’ ... So, what he’s saying is (and Wilber is taking this up in very interesting detail in this book) ... that if enlightenment involves form and the formless, and you can’t substitute one for the other, or you can’t omit one in favour of the other, then enlightenment has these two aspects – two ways of looking at it.

One is the formless ... we’re all familiar with the Buddhist idea of *sunyata*, the emptiness, the void, the nothing, all this kind of stuff ... And of course that is the same 500BC or today ... it’s just as empty now as it ever was then. Just as empty then as it ever is now. But the form – if there’s a form side to it as well – then that’s not the same as 500BC. We’re very, very different now from what we were in 500BC. We’ve got science, we’ve got the Internet, we’ve got airships, we’ve got all those things they didn’t even know about – medicine and so on, science, whatever. Now, so if you’re going to be enlightened today, you’ve got to incorporate all that – which is a lot more than Buddha ever had to incorporate in his day. And so enlightenment today is a huger task. It’s a more amazing impossibility today than it even was then ...

## **Response 2 (Michael Daniels)**

Again I’ll start with that last point which I think is actually one of the ... most significant things that Wilber is saying in this latest book, and you’ve picked up on it well – what the nature of enlightenment is. And I think Wilber’s right, and I think John’s right, that enlightenment cannot be the same today as it was 2000 years ago, 5000 years ago. And it cannot be the same in terms of Wilber’s model. Because, according to Wilber’s model, many of the structural stages are very recent emergents. They’ve only happened in the last 500 – 50 years some of them. So, what does it mean to say that the Buddha was enlightened? And if the Buddha came around now and was enlightened today, would it be the same enlightenment today for the Buddha, as it was ... two and a half thousand ... years ago? When the Buddha was about ...

And Wilber’s saying it can’t be – and that actually creates a problem for him and it creates a problem of language for us. What really does this concept of

enlightenment mean? If anything ... We're on shifting sands – it's not something that is fixed and we can say 'now I'm enlightened', and that's the same as the Buddha was two and a half thousand years ago. Shifting sands – consciousness is evolving.

Enlightenment now must mean something different. And, if that's the case, then what does it mean now?

So I think Wilber is absolutely correct, and I think John you're agreeing with that, that we do need to recognise that the concept of enlightenment is not a fixed given for all time. I agree with that. Where I have problems is with Wilber's solution to the problem of what we mean by enlightenment. What enlightenment means at any particular point in time. And I can see where he's coming from, and I can see why he's come up with this solution. It doesn't feel quite right to me.

His solution is – and one of the problems I have with it is I'm not quite sure exactly what he means by it – but his solution is that enlightenment at any particular time is *union with all structures and all states that have evolved up to that point*<sup>43</sup>. So, in other words ... to be enlightened means that you are at the highest structural stage that is possible at that particular moment in time and you've also encompassed all of the ... states of consciousness as well. And that's what enlightenment means at any particular point in time. But it will mean something different in 500 years time, because ... according to Wilber, there may be another structure that has evolved by then. And, as I say, I can see why he's come up with that solution. It doesn't feel quite right to me, but I think that would be unfair of me to criticise him for that, because I think he is absolutely right that we should stop talking about enlightenment as if we know what it is, and as if we assume it's always been the same, and that we're trying to reproduce a state that someone had two and a half thousand years ago. I think we should stop using the term in that way. And so I have a lot of sympathy for that.

The VBA bit – again we have got different impressions about how he [Wilber] did it. You seem to think he ... put all the titles on the floor, and then he came up with his model that he thought fitted them all. If that was the case, it seems to be remarkable that the ... structures he came up with, and the language that he's used to describe them, are precisely those that you get in Vedanta and Aurobindo. You've got the

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<sup>43</sup> See Wilber (2006, p.248).

gross, the subtle, the causal, the nondual. These are precisely the terms used in Vedanta – he’s taken them directly from Vedanta. Now of course it may be that he put them all on the floor and he tried all sorts of variations and then he discovered that actually the one that fitted them best was the Vedanta model. And I guess that seems to be the position you would take. That seems a little bit unlikely to me. It seems to me that he looked at a few of them and he particularly liked the Vedanta model and then he thought ‘do all the other ones fit that?’ That’s what I think – that’s my impression of how it happened.

*Rowan: I remember somebody coming here to this conference – a great expert on Aurobindo – and said that Wilber’s got Aurobindo all wrong.*

Yes – actually I agree with that. I think he has. But Aurobindo isn’t exactly Vedanta. Aurobindo is much more sophisticated and brings in all sorts of Buddhist ideas and Western evolutionary ideas and things – so I would agree that Wilber’s understanding of Aurobindo is not very good. But his terminology, and his understanding, is quite close to the Vedanta model – of the gross, the subtle, the causal, and the nondual.

## **Open Discussion**

**Walley:** Right. Perhaps on that happy note, this would be a good point to open the discussion up to the audience ... You’ve been very, very patient and I’m sure there’s a lot of things that have been building up ...

**Audience(4):** What occurred to me when I was listening to you – to both of you – was, on the one hand we’ve got a grounded theory model. And on the other hand we’ve got a phenomenological model. And one leads to theory and one leads to phenomenology – the experience of it. And it’s perfectly acceptable in IPA<sup>44</sup> to have one version and then to fit the others into it. It’s also acceptable in IPA to look at them all together. So, in the grounded theory model, it’s perfect for looking at the theory that’s embedded in what’s being said. If you want the phenomenology – maybe the other way is just as valid. That’s – I mean we have no way of knowing how Wilber did it anyway.

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<sup>44</sup> Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

**Daniels:** Well, he didn't do it phenomenologically. He didn't investigate people's experiences and then try and come up with a model. He was investigating accounts throughout history of spiritual experiences and practices and structures.

**Audience(4):** But that is also the lived experience. And as a practitioner, that's the bit that gets me, I think. You know – it's wanting to know how this relates to my clients, and my students sometimes. But especially my clients, in their lived experiences.

**Daniels:** ... I agree that I think it does work – that Wilber's model works – and clearly it works for John. If you understand Wilber's approach to *states* of consciousness, which is basically, I think, what you're talking about. Experiences – what do we mean by an experience? It's basically something that's happening now. It's a state that you can talk about ... you can work with it in terms of (if you want to call it) the subtle, or the causal, or whatever. States of consciousness I think are absolutely vital in therapy and I agree that they can be used in the kind of way that you do, and that John does. And it's probably quite useful to use Wilber's model for that. I have no problems with that, basically ... I think it's a bit pat – I don't think that the states are necessarily, for everyone, always going to happen in the sequence that Wilber describes it – from the gross, to the subtle, to the causal, to the nondual. I think it's much messier than that. In fact Wilber agrees it's messier than that, certainly in his latest book. But I have no problems with people working with the model of states of consciousness. The problem again comes down to [vertical] structures. And as I say, I don't think that – I can't speak for you – but my guess is that you're not working with structural levels in the way that Wilber is arguing. And I don't think John in therapy is working with those structural levels. I think you're working with experiences, as you say.

**Audience(4):** Yes, I think in work in transpersonal development, then I'd be working with [structural] stages. In the therapy setting I'd be working with states.

**Audience(5):** The 3<sup>rd</sup> tier aspect that really interested me in what you both said. Because ... Mike was talking about how you can have a spiritual experience during any of those tiers – and at any time in your life ... I thought it was really interesting about we can have a spiritual experience at any time. And I think where Wilber's

model works is ... transpersonal development isn't about spiritual experiences, I think it's about self-identity and the way we think and the way we interact with our universe. I think that's where the developmental stages work and the structure works. I think if you try to relate it to all of spiritual experiences, it doesn't work, but it does in our thinking, and our experience and our identity. I think that's where Wilber's model works ... We can have a six year old child have a transpersonal experience but not think of themselves cognitively as a spiritual being and relating to others at that level ... I've had transpersonal experiences as a child but never thought of myself in that way and didn't relate to others and the universe in that way. And that's the thing that has evolved. And that's why I think that that model's really working ...

**Daniels:** I would just say that I agree very much with that – and it works up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier.

**Audience(5):** I think it works up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier.

**Daniels:** Do you? ... You think there are structural stages in the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier? ... Right OK. So it's a question of where the evidence for those is coming from.

**Audience(5):** Experientially, I would say.

**Daniels:** No, experience doesn't work for Wilber, does it? Because experience is your state of consciousness again. So it's the horizontal. You have to be functioning psychologically at a completely different level. You have to be functioning as a whole being at a spiritual level – a transpersonal level – and that has to have some structure that we can identify. And I'm not saying there aren't transpersonal structures and stages. I'm quite open to the possibility that there might be. I just don't think they're the ones that Wilber necessarily has identified. And I'm not sure they're going to be the same for everyone. I think it's going to depend on which system you're working with.

**Audience(2):** ... It's very easy to think we're right. And we're exploring absolute truth – which I've been searching for all my life and I've always used the term 'absolute truth', and I didn't want to settle for anything less. And now I know I'm probably not going to find it. I'm uncomfortable with that. That's the first thing. The

other thing I picked up on was the enlightenment. That the experience of enlightenment is going to change with evolution. I find that hard because if enlightenment is absolute truth, then it doesn't change. It's absolute. And the third one picks up on ... children getting spiritual experiences and Wilber – I thought it's a really great way to say: Oh it's because of a previous life – what a cop-out because nobody can prove it ... But I think that if they have them – and I'm sure they do – although they may have a different quality from ours, but it nevertheless will be spiritual from their point of view. Because they are where we, or I, and many people, aspire to be. Back to when they were a child – where you're open, trusting, and loving. And when you're open, you're open to these experiences when they come. And I was going to write a book about growing up to be a child. Because when I was a child, I look back and I think I was a much nicer person than I am now. And that's where I want to go back. So those are my three observations ...

**Walley:** Right, thank you ...

**Audience(6):** I just wanted to go back to this question of the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier ... structure-stages. Wilber doesn't give us any evidence, but if both of you had to try and argue well where is the evidence, or where would you feel there is evidence, can you give us a sense of where that may come from? John perhaps first, as he's probably got an argument for it.

**Rowan:** Well – the quest for evidence is always a bit suspect in the transpersonal sphere. Because once you get into even the subtle stage, and you're talking about subtle experiences like 'I saw this angel' or 'I talked to this fairy' or 'I had a conversation with this tree', or 'the spirit of the waters' or whatever it was. The question you ask is NOT 'Is it true?' 'Do you have the photos?', 'Have you got the recording?' and so forth. The question you ask is 'What effect did that have?' Now, at the subtle level, that's a terrifically good question. 'What effect did that have – on you?' Now, to use scientific apparatus of experiment and experience and checking and validity and so forth in that area, it seems to me, is a waste of time – I think it's money not well spent. I don't even bother finding evidence for that. It's a different question. And essentially the question 'Is that the truth and can you verify it?' is an ego question – it's an ego level question. Sometimes it can be an authentic question as well. But it can't be a subtle question. That's my belief.

**Daniels:** Are you saying that we shouldn't even look for evidence to support ...?

**Rowan:** Yes, absolutely not – it's the wrong question.

**Daniels:** But ... if that's the case, why is Wilber banging on about there being these particular structural stages in the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier? If it's an irrelevance. And actually I have a lot of sympathy for that. I have a lot of sympathy for the idea that a lot of this – all this so-called 3<sup>rd</sup> tier stuff, and these transpersonal structures – is an irrelevance. I mean my position is simpler than that. I think if there is a transpersonal structure – if there is a transpersonal level of 'being a spiritual person' – it's probably much simpler than going through lots of structures. It's about integrating your life experience and integrating your spiritual experience into your general being. And I think that's probably all there is to it. And that's very much what Underhill was talking about with her concept of the Unitive Life. So you have all your spiritual experiences; you have these experiences of God; you go through your dark night of the soul, and all that stuff. And then you integrate your spiritual experiences, or states, into your life, so that you become a spiritual person. And I don't think we need to make it more complicated than that. And of course, that's going to be different for different individuals because they're going to integrate different ... spiritual experiences and different life experiences. It's going to be different for different people because they're brought up in different cultures, or they follow different spiritual paths. But in their own particular cultural-habit way, they will be a spiritual person, and they will integrate that in their life.

**Rowan:** It's also a question of what you're going to count as evidence. I mean there's a wonderful bit on the Internet ... where Wilber is – you can see him with this mind machine, mind mirror – reducing his brain waves<sup>45</sup>. And you can see, there go the alpha waves – boom; there go the beta waves – boom; there go the delta waves – boom; there go the gamma waves – boom. Straight down – no waves whatsoever in Wilber's brain. But what does that prove? You see – what is the meaning of that? ... Is it just a trick that you can learn how to do? Or does it reveal something about your spiritual achievement?

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFFMtq5g8N4>



**Audience(7):** I would like to comment on that ... I have a problem with the idea of a spiritual development. And that's because Wilber is, in a nutshell, still Hegel. And the old Hegelian idea is about something like dialectical development going on, which was still mirrored by science, by the way. So if I ask myself: What is actually spiritual development? I cannot really answer this because, in the very end, there is not such a thing like a spiritual enlightened personality. Because if you're enlightened, there's nothing left ... So I feel that Wilber is actually over-stretching Hegel, in a sense that he assumes that you can spiritually develop yourself in certain stages. And I don't think this is necessarily true ... If you go even one step further and ... construct the stages in such a sense that they become ontological truths, this is actually very, very dangerous in a sense.

**Rowan:** Hegel is the King, man!

**Daniels:** If we think of John as a Hegelian then I'm a post-modernist. But I very much agree with what you say. I agree with practically everything you said there.

**Audience(7):** ... I would like to make a last point ... If you look at what's going on within post-modern philosophy, actually if you look very closely, for example, in the works of Foucault, Derrida, what you actually find is that they mirror what is being told within spiritual and religious systems – in such a sense that you have to deconstruct yourself in order to become enlightened. But if you don't believe in a spiritual dimension, this is going to be difficult. And this is exactly what postmodern philosophy is encountering. So if you're deconstructing yourself, so that there's nothing left ... and you don't dare to go over a certain threshold, which I will probably call a spiritual threshold, you just experience nothing, because there is nothing left. So you have to acknowledge a certain spiritual reality in order to achieve the process of melting down the self, and in order to subscribe some purposefulness or meaningfulness to this. So, in some sense, what I would like to say – and this is a basic point – spirituality is about acknowledging that there is something like meaningful suffering going on. And I guess rather than speaking of spiritual development, one should ... focus on the point that suffering is probably much more powerful and more important towards the goal of enlightenment than actually spiritual development. And so, in some sense, you could say suffering is actually spiritual development. And I would like to hear your points on that – with regard to Wilber.

**Walley:** To John and Mike?

**Audience(7):** To John.

**Rowan:** I don't agree. It seems to me that if you're talking about people like Derrida and so forth, I much prefer Slavoj Žižek who is a great Hegelian, and Marxist and Lacanian at the same time. And he is lovely. I adore him. And I don't think he has a great deal to say about spiritual experience, but everything he says about Hegel seems to me to be actually reviving and acknowledging and doing justice to the importance of Hegel in today's world. So don't ever think that Hegel is finished.

**Audience(8):** I was interested in this quotation from the *Heart Sutra*. I think it was something like '*Emptiness is form; form is emptiness*'. Because unless I've misunderstood – I mean it's possible I've misunderstood, but I didn't think that that was a description of enlightenment. My understanding was that was a description of appearance and emptiness. So while the nature of all things is empty, they still appear ... they do take form. So it's a dance between emptiness and appearance. And if Wilber is describing this as enlightenment, I think there's something to look at there. Because if you know the *Heart Sutra*, it goes on to say '*no eye, no ear, no tongue, no body, no mind*'. And I think ... Wilber might have, or all of us might have, difficulty in assuming that if you're enlightened you don't also have those things necessarily. So ... when I hear a quote being used like that and then as a way of defining enlightenment, then that raises a lot of questions for me. And I would completely agree with David that it's best not to try and define enlightenment because we're defining a situation that's beyond the ordinary mind through the ordinary mind. And that's going to lead us into a lot of difficulty which I think it's done with Wilber right here ...

**Walley:** Yes ... there is the union of the two truths really – an emptiness in Buddhist tradition, *Madhyamika* tradition especially – it's not nothingness.

**Audience(8):** Absolutely

**Walley:** It is emptiness of inherent existence ...

**Audience(8):** It's not voidness.

**Walley:** Not at all. It's emptiness of inherent existence and there is union there between dependent origination and emptiness of inherent existence. Form is much other than form is also in there, and as a teaching on the nature of reality ... That's what the teaching is.

**Daniels:** Actually I think that what you were saying there is excellent ... Because the way I understand it, Wilber is specifically using the union of form and formlessness to refer to the ultimate spiritual developmental state – to refer to what he calls the nondual. So it is where the world of form arises out of formlessness that is the ideal state, the ideal structural stage – or state – both. He's wanting his cake and eating it. So in his model he is seeing that very much as a developmental achievement, right at the end of the spiritual path. I was very interested in what you were saying is – it seems like he's misunderstood the *Heart Sutra*.

**Audience(8):** I mean who am I to say, but it occurs to me that he might have done.

**Walley:** Yes. It's also a hugely elaborate teaching. It also includes the five paths to enlightenment, doesn't it? Within the *Heart Sutra*.

**Audience(8):** And the idea that enlightenment is a developmental stage – particularly in Tibetan Buddhism – is totally flawed. Because everyone has enlightenment nature all the time, whoever they are and however screwed up. So the idea that it's a developmental stage one comes to in a structural sense is totally flawed.

**Rowan:** No, actually Wilber agrees with that. One of Wilber's diagrams is very clear on that. He gives a sort of continuum from pre-conscious life to ending up at the causal stage. And then he says if you want to talk about the nondual, think of it as the paper on which this is written. And so he's OK on that.

**Audience(9):** This is fascinating ... A couple of things that seem to be sticking for a few people are the nature of enlightenment, and in a way it's almost not worth the time to talk about it now because even within Buddhist traditions, even within single

sects, single lineages of Buddhist traditions, the arguments about the nature of enlightenment go on and on and on. So it's sort of a waste to follow that –

**Daniels:** But it is worth pointing out that the whole concept of enlightenment is essentially a Buddhist concept – it has its origins in the Buddhist tradition and somehow it's been used broadly and wildly by all sorts of new age people as if it's some absolute thing that anyone can achieve. It has a very specific meaning and origin within Buddhism. And as you rightly point out, there are all different versions of it within the different traditions and sects within Buddhism. It's a very difficult concept to use in transpersonal psychology I think, for that reason. Sorry I interrupted ...

**Audience(9):** – So there are two other things ... One is the nature of this 3<sup>rd</sup> tier. And John, when you were defining it, you talked about the 1<sup>st</sup> tier as being the thinking 'I'm always right'. The 2<sup>nd</sup> tier as 'other people are always right'. And then the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier you sort of identified with this sort of addition of spirituality. Which seemed almost like a category change – that he's not defining the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier in even the same kind of reference as the first two tiers. Now I haven't read *Integral Spirituality* – I'll have to now of course – but I wonder if there seems to be some sort of category error in that definition of the 3<sup>rd</sup> tier in relation to the first two. And can I also just drop in – Wilber raises the ire of many people and I wonder if either of you have anything to say on whether there's any value in some of the *ad hominem* stuff that goes to and from the Wilber camp. Because the emotions are often raised when talking about old KW.

**Rowan:** There is a feud between Wilber's lot and the *California Institute of Integral Studies* ... which Ferrer belongs to (and others) for some reason or other. And I don't know how it all started – they hate each other's guts –

**Audience(2):** It's very transpersonal that, isn't it?

**Rowan:** – in a compassionate way. You will never hear anything good about the *California Institute* from the Wilber lot. You will never hear anything good about the *Integral Institute* from the Californian lot. I don't know how it happened really, because they're all very nice people, all of them.

**Audience(10):** Well I find that one of the most valuable things about this book is the four quadrants, and the inclusiveness of the view *from* and the view *of*. Being inside and outside ... when you look at it. And I think we had a wonderful illustration of that in the two presentations from John and Mike. And that it wasn't a question of good or bad, or either, or competition in any possible way ... One of the things that I've been thinking in image terms – this second part of the discussion too – is that it does bring up for me the validity of Ferrer's 'one sea and many shores', as another way of looking at this. And that from these traditions – from the inside of the tradition – you're looking from the inside of the experience, you're looking from a different shore ...

**Walley:** Thank you. The image of one sea and many shores is a beautiful one ...

**Audience(11):** ... I wanted to draw a parallel – what is there in Hindu philosophy is that everything – all knowledge – exists in the Cosmos. And what we are actually doing is rediscovering or reinventing ... When we were talking about the three tiers, and you can't be spiritual unless you are at that level. And I was just wondering that here we are working with children and people with learning disabilities. And they do have the spiritual dimension within them, and of course we need to work with that ... So here with regard to children, even if they are at the sensorimotor level or one level up a bit, what's happening is that they are getting enlightened at every stage – it doesn't matter how we define enlightenment. So whether it is understanding of insects or flowers or animals, or animal kingdom or whatever – I mean they are getting enlightened.

**Walley:** Right, thank you.

**Audience(12):** I've just been sitting, reflecting ... on the differences between maps of understanding and theory – and Wilber is one of those, there's Washburn, there's many – and following a traditional path, or a tradition in depth, and the actual practitioner experience. And I'd just be really interested to get a sense of your own reflections on that distinction between maps of understanding and following a path.

**Daniels:** Can I just respond to that? I'm not sure the distinction is quite as clear as you draw it out, because I don't think you can follow any spiritual tradition unless

you've got the map that the tradition provides. So the question is whether there's any value in the *meta-map* approach – which is what Wilber is doing – to try to take a map that will apply to all traditions, and is taking a perspective outside any particular tradition ... Direct experience ... you can have and you can integrate into your life whether or not you follow any particular tradition. John was talking earlier about Horne's<sup>46</sup> distinction between serious mysticism and casual mysticism. The serious mysticism is you sit and you meditate for half an hour a day, or three hours a day, or whatever. You follow a particular path. And if you follow a particular path, inevitably you will be following the particular map, the particular structure, the particular system that's been set down before you. And if you do that, you have to have a map. The casual mysticism, I don't think you do have to have a map. It happens spontaneously and then you try and integrate it into your life. So I'm not sure the distinction is quite as clear as the way that you would draw it. I think the distinction is whether it's useful to have these big, integrating operating system type maps – the kind of meta-map that then applies to all of these other ones. And I have doubts about the meta-map idea.

**Audience(12):** That's very interesting ... I think there's a difference between theory and when you practice a tradition in some detail. There are fundamental changes in experience that occur when you do something in depth. I think it's a different experience when you understand theories and models ... and I was just curious about the in-depth, when you follow a discipline as opposed to lots of models. I wonder if John had anything to say ... or David.

**Rowan:** Well I think that Wilber is very astute when he says that most spiritual development is hedged in by old-fashioned formulations that may or may not apply to you today. And each meditative or spiritual tradition has a whole lot of – when you look at them – they're really weird stipulations as to what you're supposed to experience earlier, what you're supposed to experience later, what then you're supposed to discover, and they're all different and they're all totally dogmatic about what you're supposed to do. And if you don't get it right, you don't get marks. I think spiritual traditions are horrible places really. And most of them should be shot ...

**Audience(12):** Can we hear David? David, I just wondered if you'd perhaps ...

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<sup>46</sup> Horne (1978).

**Fontana:** Maybe when I do the summing up ...

**Audience(13):** I was just interested in John's experience – that he experienced the divine love and the divine Other, after reading this book where Wilber mentioned it. So it made me question is there a reality of the divine Other, which is love, or did John simply experience that because he read it in Wilber's book? ... Do we need to see all these from a constructivist position – that once we come across a concept, we can take it on board, learn it, that we can then experience it in that way, like a sort of suggestibility – or are they actual structural realities? It's just a question.

**Rowan:** This is ... does meditation or any kind of spiritual development give you absolute truth? And Wilber's answer, which is the same as Ferrer's answer, is absolutely not, no it doesn't. Because there is no absolute truth, and if you believe that there is, you are engaging in what is called 'The Myth of the Given'. And the Myth of the Given says that there is a real reality out there somewhere – there is a real truth – somewhere out there. And if you do all the right moves you can touch it, you can get it, you can know it, you can contact it. The 'Myth of the [Framework]' says no, no, no – we have to create all this stuff – we're involved in it. It isn't something that's out there that we just have to discover as if it was America or something. It's not that kind of thing. It's the kind of thing where we are involved – deeply, deeply involved in every level, at creating this thing, as well as knowing it. You don't just know it, you create it as well. And this is one of the post-modern insights which, if it's taken to extremes, gives horribly ridiculous results. But I think Wilber has found a way, very well, of absorbing what is good about that idea and trashing the less palatable side of it – which is saying we can never know anything anyway.

**Daniels:** I agree almost with everything you said there except for the bit about Wilber's kind of solved it. But, no, I very much agree with this idea ... it's absolutely true that there are no absolute truths! ...

**Walley:** ... So at this point, may I invite David?

### **Final summary (David Fontana)**

[Cough] Said he clearing his throat uncertainly. But it actually says here '*the mediator clarifies what the main unresolved issues are, for ten minutes*' ... So what

I've been doing is writing stuff down and then immediately crossing it out and writing down something else and crossing that out, and so on. So I don't know to what extent I'm getting to the heart of what the unresolved issues are. But I'm trying to pick up on some of the things, clearly, that require further thought, further discussion, and so on. Maybe these are issues that cannot be resolved. But it's always said that the process of discussion, of thought, of contemplation, is of value in itself. And in meditation certainly, one sits without the expectation of reaching any kind of resolution. One sits because – as we're told in Soto Buddhism – one sits because that is what Buddhas do. So that's simple – you sit down and that is the action of a Buddha. Just as putting a poor helpless insect outside instead of squashing it is the action of a Buddha. We're not perfect human beings, but we can occasionally do perfect actions. Like putting a little insect outside, or sitting in meditation. So this is a perfect action, but an action without a goal, without a specific intention

Having said that, of course, we all sit because we want to be enlightened, we want to be spiritual, we want all these things. And they may come. But they will come as incidentals in a sense. Whereas if you set them as a goal, you're unlikely to reach it. Again, there's always the story in Zen archery when the archer eventually, when he hits the target, hits himself. But if he aims too hard at the target, instead of allowing it to work through him, then he's going to miss the target. Well that's by way of a preamble, so the issues that I'm going to try to outline are not necessarily ones that we can reach any kind of resolution on. But they are amongst the enormously important things that have been discussed.

The point about the quadrants is a very, very important one, and John has raised this and has given us a handout on it. But Wilber's idea of the four quadrants seems to me to be the most enduring, or one of the most enduring parts of his theory. Because it's purely descriptive. It says that there are four different ways in which we approach things, in which we do our science, which we do through personal or through social, and whatever. We're either looking at it from outside, or we're looking at it from inside. It's so obvious, isn't it?

But looking at it from inside is the direct experience that we've been talking about. So that is certainly one issue that we focussed on – the importance of direct experience. You have to work on it yourself. Science is all about ... other people's



stuff – looking at them from the outside, trying to tell what’s going on in the mind by looking at other people’s brains and their brain waves, and so on. Well, the other way is by looking at your own mind. And of course the difficulty then is to try to tell other people whatever it is you’ve experienced.

Which brings me on to the point about enlightenment. Which we tried to tackle, and I think the speakers have done a splendid job on this. But it’s still a question that remains in the air. I think this idea – it’s in many ways a very novel idea, a very important idea, as to whether the nature of enlightenment has changed. Whether, because form has changed, enlightenment has changed. I would have said that the essence of form remains the same – there’s no way in which we can encompass all the various different forms of the world – but the essence behind form would remain the same. And there’s some lovely lines by Sir Edwin Arnold in his beautiful poem *The Light of Asia*:

*‘The nature of the mind, when understood, no human words can compass or disclose. Enlightenment is naught to be obtained. And he that finds it does not say he knows.’*

And, as always in poetry, it encapsulates perfectly the dilemma we face about enlightenment.

And we also touched there on the nature of whatever that experience is that may lead us towards enlightenment. Whether it is complicated, whether it is simple, whether it can be put in words, whether it can be transmitted to others. In the Eastern traditions, there is a very strong idea that you can actually get this from somebody else. You know, the *darshan*. In *darshan* you go and sit with the master. The master doesn’t say anything – you just go and sit with him. And supposedly, and perhaps correctly, one absorbs something or other from him. There is a transmission. Zen Buddhism speaks about the transmission beyond words. The master doesn’t tell you things. He gives you a practice. And the practice is the *koan*, of course. Which is something that is very difficult to resolve. You can’t solve a koan. But you can resolve it. And when you do, there’s a moment of total simplicity and you fall back laughing. I’m not trying to pretend that I’ve really resolved any koan, but I have fallen about laughing. So there is something that goes on certainly.

Wilber's solution is union with all structures and states evolved at that point ... I think that's an excellent way of putting it. It then leads us on, of course, to what do we mean by union? ... There is a practice – I keep referring to Buddhism simply because Wilber tends to start from Buddhism, but I could just as easily do this through Christianity. There is a practice in Buddhism called 'direct contemplation,' where you sit and you contemplate. So you contemplate a tree ... without any concepts, without any labels, without any memories, nothing else to do with the tree, except the treeness of tree. Which is what the Zen artist does – he sits and looks for a couple of hours at a cat and then, in thirty seconds, he draws a perfect essence of what the cat is. And you see ... yes, of course, that's what the cat is. And it's done just in that sense ... of unity that one can get from contemplation ...

Then we have the structures that Wilber has come up with. And I think that this is something again that we have to have a look at in more detail. Because we haven't touched on the importance of ritual. Does ritual have a place? Wilber doesn't talk much about ritual. Yet if you look at any of the great traditions, they're full of ritual ... Particularly in Tibetan Buddhism – you go to an initiation, it's absolute. They're ringing bells, they're blowing on human thigh bones, there are skulls there – a tremendous amount of ritual. Does it have a purpose? Well, in one sense, it has an obvious purpose – it reminds you of your own mortality. If somebody's brandishing human thigh bones and skulls at you, or asking you to go and sit in a graveyard at night – of course you are contemplating the idea of mortality. But is there something else in ritual? I'm not going to pursue this too far because Wilber doesn't really touch on it ... But in the Catholic Church, the Eucharist itself is an enormously moving experience. These are, in a sense, consciousness-altering experiences through ritual. You find it as well, of course, in some of the creative arts which alter consciousness – the very act of listening to a piece of music alters the consciousness in ways which you understand but cannot easily put into words. So the extent to which ritual might fit in with this is also, I think, important.

Hinduism is very good on picking out specific things and Hinduism, of course, speaks about the four different yogas ... There is *bhakti yoga*, which is the yoga of devotion. It's actually good to do the ritual practices of devotion. *Karma yoga*, which is the yoga of good works. Yes, it is good to be concerned about the suffering of

others and to have a compassionate approach to the world. *Jnana yoga*, which is the yoga of wisdom, but it's the yoga of intuitive wisdom and intuitive insights that will come. And, of course, *raja yoga*, which is the yoga of meditation. So these are all practices as well, perhaps, that we might address and I don't know that Wilber really addresses them in great detail.

Then we've touched upon experiences and the importance of experience. But also touched upon the fact that truth is the truth to the individual through his or her own experience. So what is true for one person may not be true for other people. And that there is always a danger in being dogmatic about it and insisting that our truth must also become other people's truth.

Then we've mentioned the word spiritual on many occasions, but we haven't really come to a definition of that. Just as we haven't really come to a final definition of enlightenment. 'Spiritual' – well we all know what we mean by it, but do the things that we mean by it – are they the same as what other people mean by it? Within transpersonal psychology this is very important because psychology is ... amongst other things, the psychology of spirituality. So this is still an issue which remains in a sense unresolved – something to worry away at, rather than perhaps to reach a definite solution.

Then there's the quest for evidence. How can you get evidence to support this stuff? Wilber quite rightly – and both John and Mike have drawn attention to this – Wilber talks about approaching all this stuff from the scientific perspective – trying to find the evidence that will demonstrate the reality of these states. You can do it, he thinks, through brainwaves, looking at somebody else's brainwaves, which is, in a sense, the external way of doing it. Or we can try to do the same thing with our brainwaves. And as John says: is this a trick? Or is this really an objective indication that somebody's reached this enlightened state?

[Recording ends prematurely]



From left to right: David Fontana, Michael Daniels, John Rowan, Malcolm Walley

### **Postscript - Wilber's levels of consciousness**

**Rowan:** On the question as to whether Wilber started his system of levels with an open mind, or began with the VBA categories and fitted everything else into that, I wrote to Ken Wilber after this dialogue took place to check, and was told that it was definitely the former and not the latter. I think that Daniels and others who thought like him should now retreat and admit they were wrong, rather than retiring into pursings of the lips and tappings of the nose.

**Daniels:** Personally, I am willing to accept Wilber's welcome clarification regarding the origins of his system of levels of consciousness. We may therefore presume that Wilber adopted the Vedantic and Aurobindo *terms* because these were found to encapsulate neatly the essential ideas represented by the transpersonal levels of consciousness identified by his own broader analysis, rather than through a direct, *a priori*, borrowing of the Vedanta or Aurobindo *systems*. Of course many of the correspondences that Wilber includes in the charts in *Integral Psychology* (2000a) represent the later assimilation into his theoretical scheme of other people's ideas that were developed after this scheme was first published in 1977<sup>47</sup>. These include Duane Elgin (1993), Jenny Wade (1996), Michael Washburn (e.g., 1995) and *Spiral Dynamics* (Beck & Cowan, 1996). Also, because Wilber does not seem to have kept detailed records of his analytical procedure, we do not know exactly which writers

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<sup>47</sup> Wilber (1977).

and traditions contributed directly to the original iterative formulation of levels and stages, and which ones were later incorporated to his developed scheme.

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