

Book Review

Review of Ken Wilber's Book: Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World

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ABSTRACT

Wilber writes of the great repression of spirit by the intellectual West. He writes (page 183): "They jettisoned the amber God, and instead of finding orange God, and then green God, and turquoise God, and indigo God, they ditched God altogether, they began the repression of the sublime, the repression of their own higher levels of spiritual intelligence. The intellectual West has fundamentally never recovered from this cultural disaster." I agree the tragedy is very apparent, sense-certain in fact. Nevertheless, Wilber's investigation of 8 perspectives carries the weakness presented by his caricature-mode thinking here, and any caricature is revealed to be a strawman if we care to dig deeper. You can find this book at Amazon http://www.amazon.com/Integral-Spirituality-Startling-Religion-Postmodern/dp/1590303466/ref=cm_cr-mr-title.

Key Words: integral spirituality, religion, postmodern, God.

Ken Wilber's "Integral Spirituality" provides yet another example of the author's dynamic thinking; one in a long list of books. Wilber presents his four-quadrant model again: It (upper right); Its (lower right); We (lower left); and I (upper left). Make no mistake, the four originates from the Big 3 (I, we, it), a point that can be very confusing. Wilber (page 19) writes: "The Beautiful, the Good, and the True are simply variations on 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person pronouns found in all major languages, and they are found in all major languages because Beauty, Truth, and Goodness are very real dimensions of reality to which language has adapted." Wilber (page 20) writes: "If you leave out science, or leave out art, or leave out morals, something is going missing, something will get broken." The movement from I and It to We and Its, is the passage from singularity to plurality (see his Figure 1.2). Wilber does not say it, but as the present moment offered by I is witness, the same movement is also the passage from the present into the past. The four quadrant model has spatial the temporal extent.

Wilber's integration is provided by all Levels, all Quadrants, leading to the heavily used acronym ALAQ. To this he includes the experiential state and the line of speciality (state and line for short). Wilber also takes great care to integrate structuralism (stages) into his model. For example, Clare Grave's spiral dynamics is referred to in several places. Structure provides outside support, and our introspection is not immediately aware of this structure. Wilber (page 55) writes: "Phenomenology looks for the direct experience and phenomena, structuralism looks for the patterns that connect the phenomena." As each quadrant (as holon) can come with an interior and exterior, this generates 8 perspectives (or methodologies). Wilber dedicates most of his book to exploring the 8 perspectives. As the interior and exterior are not easy to differentiate (to first "negate" then "preserve" so as to "transcend" to use Wilber's words), the discussion can be very confusing. And in fact the interiors are mostly denied in world-views that favor the right-side quadrants. Nevertheless, by now Wilber is an expert in seeing these different perspectives. And the point that may get lost is that Wilber's integration is necessarily spiritual.

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Wilber is somewhat critical of the Great Wisdom Traditions (e.g., religions), i.e., before transformation and integration. He writes (page 43), "Modernist epistemologies [rationalist science] subjected them to the demand for evidence, and because the premodern traditions were ill-prepared for this onslaught, they did not meet this challenge with a direct elucidation of the one area of their teachings that could have met the challenge: the phenomenological core of their contemplative traditions, which offered all the verifiable evidence one could want within a remarkably modern paradigm." Likewise, Wilber tells us that postmodernity presents its own challenge, knowledge of the exterior structures (the necessary social culture required for introspection) appears to negate much of the mythic beliefs that are dear to the wisdom traditions.

Wilber (page 57) writes: "you can sit on your meditation mat for years and never see Spiral Dynamics stages, and why you therefore find none of these types of stages in any spiritual or contemplative text anywhere in the world." As an example, Wilber tells us that "Boomeritis" is a dysfunction in some of the less developed stages, hinting that contemplation cannot deal with these irritations that source a narcissistic attachment to an exterior shell. As a reader, I don't understand why introspection is seen isolating itself from information coming from an exterior source; clearly, an irritation is still a feeling and finds itself subjected to our introspection just the same. I guess Wilber is saying that some folks just don't get it! And clearly a humble fisherman, unaffected by the lofty status of science or the self exaltations of postmodernity, may only face personal issues that have to do with caring for his family. His responsibilities do not entail integral psychology, nevertheless this traditionalist may find comfort and guidance in contemplation. Wilber (page 194) concedes that the ideal is not change for change's sake, but something else: "Human beings, starting at square one, will develop however far they develop, and they have the right to stop wherever they stop. Some individuals will stop at red, some at amber; some will move to orange or higher."

Wilber (chapter 9) writes of the great repression of spirit by the intellectual West. He writes (page 183): "They jettisoned the amber God, and instead of finding orange God, and then green God, and turquoise God, and indigo God, they ditched God altogether, they began the repression of the sublime, the repression of their own higher levels of spiritual intelligence. The intellectual West has fundamentally never recovered from this cultural disaster." I agree the tragedy is very apparent, sense-certain in fact. Nevertheless, Wilber's investigation of 8 perspectives carries the weakness presented by his caricature-mode thinking here, and any caricature is revealed to be a strawman if we care to dig deeper.

An assumption has been made that introspection cannot deal with irritation that sources the exterior structures, and even after reading "Integral Spirituality" I am uncertain of Wilber's position with this issue. The extreme narcissism that takes no prisoners (beyond the first negation that breeds only irritation), coming from both scientism and postmodernity, leads to a spiritual repression and a dysfunctional shadow, yes we agree. But seeing the dysfunction is seeing the second negation, the sense-certain irritation is a feeling that neither science nor postmodernity has explained, and the feeling transforms into a euphoria as the spirit returns to source. The shadow is no longer dysfunctional, as it is doing the work of the second negation, and all through the eyes of introspection. The self-love of scientism and postmodernity is found betraying itself.

Like magic, the strawman given only as caricature is found carrying an inexplicable feeling, a feeling that can no longer be denied and pushed into repression. And the first negation has always been the first necessary step to generate the precognitive feeling as an irritation. Wilber (page 186) writes: "what emerged in modernity, as differentiated, was only 'the Big 3' -art and morals and science. Spirituality due to an [Line/Level Fallacy] was frozen at the mythic level, and then that mythic level of

spirituality was confused with spirituality altogether." But the irritation also reveals the strawman (the second negation), and the precognitive feeling passes over into the mature cognition. Our feelings are beneath the caricature offered by the Big 3, but the Big 3 with its feeling is found doing the work of the second negation. We find Wilber's Trinitarian God, strong and healthy. The sublime shadow (repressed as it was) is our lover! Wilber (page 160) writes: "the Big 3 (I, We/Thou, It), are the 3 fundamental dimensions of your Primordial Unmanifest Self's being-in-the-world." But the formless primordial spirit that manifest has an inexplicable feeling, and with time passage what we see written is only in 3-dimensional space, the magic slips away leaving the feeling as it goes.

References

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