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A critique of Ken Wilber and his integral method

Since the first publication of his ideas at the age of 23, Ken Wilber has sought to bring together the world's far-ranging spiritual teachings, philosophies, and scientific truths into one coherent and all-embracing vision. This integral map of the *Kosmos* (the universe that includes the physical cosmos as well as the realms of consciousness and spirit) should then offer an unprecedented guide to discovering your highest potentials.

Wilber introduces his vision by saying, that during the last 30 years we have witnessed a historical first: all of the world's cultures are now available to us. In the past, if you were born, say, a Chinese, you likely spent your entire life in one culture, often in one province, sometimes in one house, living and loving and dying on one small plot of land. But today, not only are people geographical mobile, we can study, and have studied, virtually every known culture on the planet. In the global village, all cultures are exposed to each other.

Knowledge itself is now global, Wilber claims. This means that, also for the first time, the sum total of human knowledge is available to us – the knowledge, experience, wisdom and reflection of all major human civilizations – premodern, modern, and postmodern – are open to study by anyone.

Wilber asks: What if we took literally everything that all the various cultures have to tell us about human potential – about spiritual growth, psychological growth, social growth – and put it all on the table? What if we attempted to find the critically essential keys to human growth, based on the sum total of human knowledge now open to us? What if we attempted, based on extensive cross-cultural study, to use all of the world's great traditions to create a composite map, a comprehensive map, an all-inclusive or integral map that included the best elements from all of them?

Wilber asks: Sound complicated, complex, daunting? In a sense, it is, he answers. But in another sense, he continues, the results turn out to be surprisingly simple and elegant. Over the last several decades, there has indeed been an extensive search for a comprehensive map of human potentials. This map uses all the known systems and

models of human growth – from the ancient shamans and sages to today’s breakthrough in cognitive science – and distills their major components into 5 simple factors, factors that are the essential elements or keys to unlocking and facilitating human evolution.

Ken Wilber calls these 5 elements **quadrants, levels, lines, states** and **types**; that is: quadrants of development, levels or stages of development, states of consciousness, and a human personality typing system, a typology. All of these elements are, right now available in your own awareness, he claims. These 5 elements are not merely theoretical concepts; they are aspects of your own experience, contours of your own consciousness.

What is the point of using this integral map or model, Wilber asks. First, whether you are working in business, medicine, psychotherapy, law, ecology, or simply everyday living and learning, the integral map helps make sure that you are “touching all the bases.” If you are flying over the Rocky Mountains, the more accurate a map you have, the less likely you will crash. An integral approach insures that you are utilizing the full range of resources for any situation, with the greater likelihood of success.

Second, if you learn to spot these 5 elements in your own awareness – and because they are there in any event – then you can more easily appreciate them, exercise them, use them...and thereby vastly accelerate your own growth and development to higher, wider, deeper ways of being. A simple familiarity with the 5 elements in the integral model will help you orient yourself more easily and fully in this exiting journey of discovery and awakening.

Ken Wilber holds a bachelor in chemistry and biology.

In the following I will present a critique of Ken Wilber’s system. The critique will unfold as

- 1) A critique of Wilber’s theory about spiritual growth,
- 2) A critique of Wilber’s theory of everything
- 3) A critique of Wilber’s classification-system

1) A critique of Wilber’s theory about spiritual growth

In Zen it is said about the process of awakening: ”In the beginning mountains are mountains, and woods are woods. Then mountains no longer are mountains and

woods are no longer woods. Finally mountains are again mountains, woods are again woods.”

This refers to the three forms of states the wholeness can be in: sleep, dream, awake. Wilber is also talking about these three states as the states in spiritual growth, or spiritual evolution, as he calls it. In the following I will explain the concepts of compensatory and progressive karma, because these concepts must be closely related to Wilber’s concept about spiritual growth, or spiritual evolution.

The three states can also be described as the personal, collective and universal images of time, which form the astral structure under your thinking. The personal and collective images work in sequences in past and future, and therefore in absence of awareness. The universal images work in synchronism with the Now, and therefore with awareness, or consciousness.

The Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna said, that the Now’s lawfulness around the function of a universal negationpower, is due to, that energy works as streams and dividings within a superior wholeness. And because the wholeness is a reality, each part will always fit into a correspondent part. This means, that each part only can be understood in relation to its negation; that is: what the part *not* is. Firstly this implies, that each part comes to appear as part of a polarization-pair, or a pair of opposites – like in the teaching of Yin and Yang. In that way Nagarjuna’s philosophy advocates a kind of dualism *if* we shall use our thinking and language in an unambiguous way. Secondly it implies, that each part only can be understood in relation to *everything* else; that is: in relation to the wholeness.

So the more you, through the Ego’s evaluations, isolate these parts from each other, the more the abandoned parts will work stronger and stronger on their polar partners. Therefore these polar partners, in their extremes, finally will switch over in the opposite extreme. Another aspect of this lawfulness, or another way to describe this lawfulness is: energy returns to its starting point. This is also called compensatory karma, and the lawfulness works as wave movements and pendulum movements.

And since everything in this way only work correlative, yes, then Nagarjuna claimed, that we actually can’t say anything about the wholeness, only dualistic about the parts. Therefore he called the wholeness the Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) – a teaching, which had one quite determinate purpose: the neutralization of all the dogmas, theories and viewpoints, which ignorance has created. Wilber doesn’t seem to have this argumentation included in his system, since it in opposition with this directly *creates* a lot of dogmas, theories and viewpoints.

The concept of emptiness refers to the intuitive experience of reality, that all inner and outer phenomena are devoid of independent existence and form of being. What they can be said to be, they can only be said to be in relation to something else, a complementary thing and vice versa. In that way they are nothing by virtue of themselves, and therefore nothing by virtue of something else either, etc. They are insubstantial, or as Nagarjuna calls it: codependent originated (everything that exists does so dependently on other things) (*pratityasamutpanna*). In absolute sense nothing exists independently, eternally or unchangeable. All existence is impermanent; everything that exists is transitory, lasting only a moment.

But this doesn't mean, that Nagarjuna is an advocate of the absolute non-existence of things. Non-existence means namely neither negation nor opposition to existence. Therefore also non-existence is, as everything else, correlative. Codependent origination is what Nagarjuna calls emptiness. The creation of things, images and concepts ends in the emptiness. And by trying to reveal the unreality of the relative, conventional world, you can reach the absolute reality, which is lying in this emptiness. The emptiness is in that way the inexpressible (Nirvana). Because Nirvana is lying in the revelation of the unreality (Samsara), then Nirvana and Samsara is not at all different.

Nagarjuna's teaching is in that way a kind of Dream Yoga (see my article **What is Dream Yoga?**).

What Nagarjuna's teaching also tells us is that *if* we should use thoughts and language in an unambiguous way, it is necessary to advocate a kind of epistemological, or gnosological dualism. In this dualism critical thinking is essential (I will return to this).

So if we should describe a human being in an unambiguous way, then Nagarjuna's argumentation leads to the thought, that human beings have two complementary aspects: an energy aspect and a consciousness aspect. Seen from the energy aspect lawfulness rules: your body is subject to the physical laws of nature, your psychic system is subject to the lawfulness of the energy fields and of the energy transformations. The energy aspect is the area of compensatory karma; it is the area of experiences, the area of the personal and collective images of time, which work in sequences in past and future, and therefore in absence of awareness, or absence of consciousness. And that also means that it in itself is without realization.

Seen from the consciousness aspect, then a human being seems to be akin to the wholeness, to be transcendent in relation to these lawfulnesses. The consciousness is the area of progressive karma, spiritual development, or spiritual growth; it is the area

of realization, the area of the universal images of time, which work in synchronism with the Now. The Now seems to be a quality of awareness, and therefore also of consciousness and wholeness. Realization has to do with the three states the wholeness can be in: sleep, dream, awake. So it is only here you can talk about the spiritual insights of the great mystics. It is only here you can talk about genuine mystical experiences; that is: experiences, which are followed by realization. It is only here you can talk about spiritual growth (also see my article **What is Karma?**).

In Wilber's system everything is reduced to the energy aspect, though. This reductionism is due to the attempt of synthesizing spirituality, science, yes, all kinds of theories. Wilber is here inspired by Darwinism, and its theories about human evolution. But the idea seems to come from Theosophy (though I haven't seen Wilber mention it, it seems like he is very influenced by Theosophy - see my article **The fascism of Theosophy**), and it continues today in New Age and Ufology, where spirituality, apart from Darwinism, furthermore is sought synthesized with new developments within psychology, psychotherapy and natural science, especially biology and quantum mechanics.

Wilber's problem is the integral method itself; that is: the attempt of synthesizing science, spirituality, consciousness, evolution, etc., etc. According to Wilber all evolution is basically the evolution of consciousness. So, consciousness is *reduced* to evolution, or, the energy aspect of Man. And such a philosophy of consciousness ends in serious metaphysical problems, such as the free will problem, and the problem of personal identity, which are quite central, when you talk about spirituality (see my article **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**).

You can't talk about spiritual growth in the energy aspect of Man. You can't talk about spiritual growth in the same area as evolution. In the following I will show the problems that arise when you are doing this.

2) A critique of Wilber's theory of everything

Before we go further it is important to mention, that evolutionism – also in its most modern Neodarwinistic version – is a natural historical report, and not a natural scientific theory. Neodarwinism can – as all other historical science – only *retrospective* explain the development up to now in a rational way. This appears clearly from the fact, that it can't give any scientific well-founded prediction of the future development. It is *not possible* with any reasonable precision *to predict the future biological development* on the background of the theoretical foundation of evolutionism.

Until today Man has not been able to do anything in order to change his genes. This has been changed with the modern genetic engineering, which already in principle has made it possible to change the genes of our gametes. In the future the problem about conscious changing peoples' genes in order to improve certain characteristics is not any technical difficulty. It is in turn a serious *ethical* and political problem about setting limits and about, where these limits have to be set.

As mentioned, then the reductionism of Wilber's system is due to the attempt of synthesizing spirituality, science, and all kinds of other theories. Wilber seems to be inspired by Darwinism, and its theories about human evolution. The idea began with Theosophy, and it continues today in New Age and Ufology, where spirituality, apart from Darwinism, furthermore is sought synthesized with new developments within psychology, psychotherapy, natural science, especially biology and quantum mechanics (about such new theories: see my articles **A critique of The Human Design System, Time Travel and the fascism of The WingMakers Project**, and **The new feminism and the philosophy of women's magazines**).

The whole thing is presented as an ideology with a lot of attempts to predict the future evolution of Man, often connected with eugenics: the applied "science" or the bio-social movement (Social Darwinism) which advocates the use of practises aimed at improving the genetic composition of people, usually referring to human populations.

Using the conventionally conceptions which is lying in our culture, we say, that you must be able to make a theory of everything, as for example, besides Wilber, the New Age philosopher Fritjof Capra.

In New Age pseudoscience it is not (yet) so much a political agenda that distorts science, as occult and religious point of views. In the works of Fritjof Capra, though, you see the beginning of the combination. Fritjof Capra (born February 1, 1939) is an Austrian-born American physicist. He is a founding director of the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California, and is on the faculty of Schumacher College.

Capra is the author of several books, including *The Tao of Physics* (1975), and *The Turning Point* (1982). The abuse of quantum mechanics within New Age seems to have originated with Capra in his book *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*. The book's first two parts are excellent expositions on ancient religions and modern physics. The third part, which tries to connect the two, is an abysmal failure. Nevertheless, it has been this third part, which has influenced numerous New Age advocates to claim that quantum

mechanics proves the reality of everything from Clairvoyance to Time Travel: the so-called quantum mysticism (see my article **Quantum mysticism and its web of lies**).

Capra's other book, *The Turning Point*, shows the ideology in it, where he combines quantum mysticism with reductionism, especially reductionisms such as historicism and sociologism (though he is very aware of the reductionism of the "old" mechanical worldview) – see my article **The pseudoscience of New Age and reductionism**).

It is very popular in New Age, inspired by writers such as Fritjof Capra and Ken Wilber, to term their positions as "Holism". But both Fritjof Capra and Ken Wilber's systems, can be seen as substantive philosophies of history; that is: searches for overall meaning in human history; searches for theories of everything.

In the West, substantive philosophy of history is thought to begin only in the Christian era. In the *City of God*, Augustine wonders why Rome flourished while pagan, yet fell into disgrace after its conversion to Christianity. Divine reward and punishment should apply to whole peoples, not just to individuals. The unfolding of events in history should exhibit a plan that is intelligible rationally, morally, and (for Augustine) theologically. As a believer Augustine is convinced that there is such a plan, though it may not always be evident.

In the modern period, philosophers such as Vico and Herder also sought such intelligibility in history. They also believed in a long-term direction or purpose of history that is often opposed to and makes use of the purposes of individuals. The most elaborate and best-known example of this approach is found in Hegel, who thought that the gradual realization of human freedom could be discerned in history even if much slavery, tyranny, and suffering are necessary in the process.

Marx, too, claimed to know the laws – in his case economic – according to which history unfolds. Similar searches for overall "meaning" in human history have been undertaken in the twentieth century, notably by Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) author of the twelve-volume *Study of History*, and Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), author of *Decline of the West*.

But if we take the creator of quantum mechanics, Niels Bohr, then you will discover that he says, that *you can't make a theory of everything*. Why?

It appears in quantum mechanics, and in the question about what light is (is it waves or particles?), that when you are using a certain type of experimental device, then the electron *always* behaves as a particle, and when you use another type of apparatus,

the electron *always* behaves as a wave (it is *not* the consciousness of the observer, which creates these phenomena!). The two types of experimental devices mutually exclude each other, so that you – by choice of experimental device – can determine, whether you want, that the electron shall behave as a wave or as a particle. The same relationships exist in a number of areas within nuclear physics.

However, both types of examinations are equally necessary, if you want to understand the microphysical world. Bohr speaks about, among a lot of other things, that particle and wave experiments are complementary to each other, because they mutually exclude each other and at the same time necessarily must supplement each other. Generally the same relationship exists in all quantum physical examinations.

General you can formulate Bohr's conception of complementarity in the following way: A complementary description from an area of phenomenon is a description by means of two sets of concepts, which mutually exclude each other, but where both the incompatible sets of concepts are equal necessary for a fully description of the area of phenomenon. You call the mutually excluding sets of concepts complementary.

Bohr himself had the opinion, that complementarity relations are a fundamental feature of the human cognition, which you can find analogies of in many other connections than in quantum physics. And it is exactly this, which the wisdom traditions also speak about, for example in the teaching of yin and yang, and in Nagarjuna's above-mentioned teaching.

As an example, among countless, of an analogy, you can observe the experience of music. In a concert hall you can experience the music so strongly, that you not at all are aware that you are sitting and listening to music. You can describe this as "*to become completely lost in the music*".

On the other side you can also relate *analyzing* to the music, because you are concentrating about noticing, for instance the performance of the violin soloist, the orchestration, the tempo etc. You can switch back-and-forth between these two ways of experience, but you can't have them both at the same time. Both ways of experience are necessary in order to understand, what music is. They mutually exclude each other, at the same time as they supplement each other, they are both necessary in a fully description of the area of phenomenon; they are in other words complementary.

In the same way with subject and object; inside-and-out perspective, and outside-and-in perspective; macrophysical phenomena and microphysical phenomena; etc., etc.

And now back to the problem of light. Could you then not imagine, that light is an entirely third phenomenon, which both consists of light and particle properties? No, Bohr claims. No matter how we try to imagine it, it is not possible to imagine, that anything can be a wave and a particle at the same time. It is not possible.

In 1927 Bohr invented the so-called two-split experiment, and it has been discussed ever since. He says, that if you send electrons against a plate with two openings, it produces a wave phenomenon. But what happens along the way? He answers, that along the way you can't see, what happens. But there must happen something? Yes, but you can't make a description of it. But this you will be able to some day? No. If you intervene into it in order to see, what happens along the way, the whole of the phenomenon disappears.

The movements of the electrons are fundamentally not able to be experienced. But we can very well talk about it. Should we eventually create theories about everything, it is not in three dimensions, then it is in nine or several dimensions; this we can't. It would end up in the thought distortion called *Endless split of the thought* (see my book **A Dictionary of Thought distortions**).

My professor in philosophy David Favrholt followed Bohr's lectures and talks closely from 1951 to his death in 1962. He has read all his letters from his earliest youth, has edited parts of the world edition of *Niels Bohr: Collected Works*. He has worked together with many of Bohr's students, inclusive Aage Bohr, has had discussions with Werner Heisenberg and corresponded with many of the great names within nuclear physics. So, Favrholt is one of the World's leading experts in quantum mechanics, and is probably the only person, who in depth has investigated Bohr's philosophy (read more in my article **Quantum mechanics and the philosophy of Niels Bohr**).

Favrholt claims, that Bohr's philosophy originates from his physics. And Favrholt says, that Bohr's philosophy hasn't gained so much a footing as his discoveries within the physics. But this it ought to. Bohr's basic view on language is epochal, Favrholt claims, though he must admit that the epoch not yet has turned up.

What is Bohr's philosophical viewpoint?

According to Bohr's philosophy, then it is correct that we actually from our thoughts, language and interpretations construct our self-images and world-images. But we can precisely *not* do it as it fits us, in the way as for example constructivism claims. On

the contrary it is this idea, which creates the whole of our illusion about reality, and therefore our problems and suffering.

Bohr says: If a person moves from A to B, it takes a certain time, and the faster he moves, the less time it takes. Here we suddenly have the concepts location, distance, movement, speed, time. It is therefore not ourselves who determine, how reality looks like. It is the constitution of nature, which determines, how we shall use the concepts in order to explain reality. This is lying in direct opposition to what the constructivists claim, and by the way to a number of Western philosophers up through time, for example Ken Wilber.

It is not us who put reality in order, it is reality which puts us in order. That is the soul in Bohr's philosophy. Then comes the next, where Man as a rational being suddenly again has entered into the discussion, after that many thought, because of the discovery of quantum mechanics, that rationality not was valid anymore. Bohr says, that when we have to establish the unambiguous language, then this is due to, that two persons can look at a thing and agree about, that the thing is round or square. They can't agree about, whether it is beautiful or ugly. That is subjective. But they have an intersubjective agreement about, what means what, which you then can establish a language of physics about. A language of physics is nothing else but specified every day language.

The rise of quantum mechanics has in this way *not made classical physics invalid*; it is still valid, but Planck's constant (the quantum postulate) has given it a *limitary area of use*.

That classical physics can be regarded as a borderline case of quantum mechanics appears from the fact, that the equations in the matrix mechanics of Heisenberg become identical with the equations in classical mechanics, when you set Planck's constant to zero; an act which is allowed by the observation of macrophysical relationships. In accordance with Bohr *quantum mechanics is a generalization of classical physics* and the complementarity viewpoint is a generalization of the classical causality principle. The theory of relativity is also a generalization in another direction of classical physics.

Nor can you – in Bohr's opinion – replace classical physics with quantum mechanics, because *the validity of classical physics is a necessary precondition for, that you can describe the quantum mechanical phenomena* and make account for the macroscopic ("classical") experimental arrangement. Bohr is writing in a famous discussion contribution against Einstein, who didn't want to accept, that the causality principle has no validity in nuclear physics:

”...the account for all experiences – regardless how far the phenomena are lying outside the reach of classical physics – must be expressed in classical concepts. The reason is simply, that we by the word ”experiment” refer to a situation, where we can tell others what we have done and what we have learned, and that the experimental device and measuring results therefore must be described in the usual language with appropriate use of the terminology of classical physics.”

Niels Bohr: ”*Atomfysik og menneskelig erkendelse*”, Schultz’ Forlag, København 1957, s. 53.

Note, that Bohr here speaks about the usual language (*everyday language*) supplemented with the terms of classical physics. This is due to, that he regards the *concepts of classical physics as a more explicit formulation of everyday language*. In that sense *everyday language is a necessary precondition for all natural scientific realization*, and nor can everyday language be replaced by an unambiguous and formalised, logical scientific language. David Favrholt has developed this important theme in Bohr’s epistemology further in his own philosophy. He works with, what he calls *The Core* in everyday language.

Favrholt asks us: please observe following concepts: Time – object – space – logic – body – person – experience – memory.

The phenomenalist/idealist claims, that we only with certainty can know, that the here italicized concepts stand for something real; that is to say: something from the concepts different: *Time – object – space – logic – body – person – subject – experience – memory*.

The materialist claims, that we only with certainty can know, that the here italicized concepts stand for something real; that is to say: something from the concepts different: *Time – object – space – logic – body – person – subject – experience – memory*.

Favrholt claims, that since these concepts are interdependent, they all represent something. Together they are what he calls *The Core* in everyday language. That they are interdependent means, that they have to be used in a certain way in relation to each other, if we at all want to talk meaningful. The relations between them are not established by arbitrary definitions. We have discovered, that we shall respect the relations between them, if we want to describe something, whether we want to describe, that there is lying a phone book on the desktop, or that we have an experience of the phone book.

What we must say is as follows: When we as ordinary people – before we have heard anything about philosophy – orientate in life, we form a concept about reality. We associate with humans and animals and plants and non-living things in our daily lives, and we learn to discriminate between, what is dream and reality, - and what is lie or illusion, and reality.

Any human being understands, what we mean by saying, that the witness explained in the court, that the thief had a pistol, but *in reality* the thief was unarmed. We also learn to talk about the poetic reality, about the experienced reality etc. We learn to talk about things, which exist, despite that no one experiences them, or have consciousness about them. When they found the Golden Horns at Gallehus, they found something, which no one knew were there. But they *found* them. It wasn't so, that they *arised*, because they were experienced.

Then certain philosophers are coming and saying, that we don't know, whether there is anything behind our experiences. What can you do but ask them about, what they mean with "experiences". Then they explain this. But it turns out, that they only can do this by using the whole of *The Core*. And in this set of fundamental concepts is included the concept "object" or "thing" which represent "things, which exist whether they are experienced or not".

This is included as a necessary precondition for, that we can define or explain, what we shall understand by experience. So, because they have explained, what they mean by "experience" - so that we know the correct use of this concept - they have already accepted, that we in our description of reality must assume a correct use of the concept "things, which exist, whether they are experienced or not".

Why the conceptual relations in the *The Core* not are conventional or accidental, but unavoidable as the relations in the number theory, is precisely because reality - the from our experiences and consciousness independently existing reality - is included in the determination of, how we have to use our concepts in order to be able to realize it, and describe it.

We can choose not to describe it and instead soak ourselves in Hinajana Buddhistic meditation (or music, as already described), but *if* we want to describe it, *if* we want to find out, what is subjective and objective, *if* we want to achieve realization within physics, biology, psychology etc., then we must use our fundamental concepts in a correct, non-arbitrary way.

This involves, not an ontological dualism, but an epistemological, a so-called gnoseological dualism. Unambiguous description has the distinction between subject and object as a necessary precondition. And the fact itself, that we have to discriminate between subject and object in order to communicate unambiguous, actually indicates, that both materialism and idealism (subjectivism, relativism) are mistaken points of views. And Ken Wilber's system is an idealistic system.

And the same is the case in order to think clearly. Critical thinking is about spotting thought distortions created by dualistic unbalance, both in yourself and in others (see my book **A Dictionary of Thought distortions**).

Magical thinking, for example, has a lot of thought distortions built into it, for example the thought distortion *arbitrary inference*, which means, that you make a causal linking of factors, which is accidental or misleading. The main reason for the rise of magical thinking is that you don't discriminate between image and reality, the map and the landscape; or said in another way: between subject and object.

Central in critical thinking is the discrimination between subject and object. And discrimination is also a central virtue in true spirituality. The Dominican mystics call this steps *discriminatio*, the ability to discriminate between how the energy is used temporal or religious. And despite that magical thinking actually can create something magical, then in true spirituality it is still something temporal, or relatively (black magic/occultism), which will create negative karma if practised. The Orientals call it *viveka*, discrimination, the ability to use your will on that part of the energy, you can steer yourself, and steer it towards exercises, prayer, mantras, meditation, instead of towards career, worldliness, self-unfolding, as for example New Thought does (see my article **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**).

So, all this is implying an opinion about, how we observe the world – and here Bohr picks inspiration from his own discoveries within the atom theory. We can't place ourselves outside our own idea about reality, Favrholt explains. The physicist can't be a kind of God's eye, who looks at the world from outside, because he is himself a part of the world. We can't possibly think ourselves out of reality. But that is what for example Fritjof Capra and Ken Wilber are doing in a cultural relativistic way, and New Thought in a subjectivistic way; that is: in constructivistic ways (see my article **Constructivism: the postmodern intellectualism behind New Age and the self-help industry**).

Personally I have had the honour of participating Favrholt's lectures on Chinese philosophy, which is another of Favrholt's passions. And the Taoist teaching in

China matches well with Bohr – it is therefore that Bohr’s coat of arms, when he got the elephant order, carries the yin and yang-symbol.

In accordance with Taoism there is nothing beyond the world, Favrholt explains. You can’t see the world from outside. You are in the world, and you can only define something from its opposition. What is the good? This you understand, if you know what the evil is. You can’t say anything about the world as a whole, because you can’t put the whole in opposition to anything.

As mentioned, then I suggest, in accordance with Nagarjuna, that human beings have two complementary aspects: an energy aspect and a consciousness aspect. Seen from the energy aspect lawfulness rules: your body is subject to the physical laws of nature, your psychic system is subject to the lawfulness of the energy fields and of the energy transformations. Seen from the consciousness aspect, then a human being seems to be akin to the wholeness, to be transcendent in relation to these lawfulnesses.

These thoughts you find in all wisdomtraditions, in all the spiritual directions within the religions. There exists a fundamental dualism, which the spiritual practitioner must understand, in order to reach into nondualism. That is also the soul in Nagarjuna’s argumentation. You can’t say anything about the wholeness, and if you do it will be a distortion.

The problem with holistic theories such as Theosophy, Capra, Wilber, is in short **that they want to reduce the mystical nondualistic (wordless) experience, to a theory.** In this they misunderstand the spiritual traditions. They commit the though distortion called *Nondual bias*, which you see reappear again and again in almost all New Age theories and techniques.

3) A critique of Wilber’s classification-system

A part of Wilber’s system is personality typing. Today there exists several different kinds of personality typing, and there are still coming more. Each new number of a New Age magazine with respect for itself, must include at least one new “revolutionary” system of personality types, in the same way as it must present at least one new “revolutionary” spiritual “Nondual” system “proved” by quantum mechanics.

Both in New Age, and in coaching (which claims to be purely neutral and scientific) the so-called Enneagram is for example very popular. It is a New Age mandala, a mystical gateway to personality typing, and through this to spiritual

consciousness and fuller being. The enneagram represents nine personality types. It is original developed by Oscar Ichazo (b. 1931), who claims to have received it in a vision.

Later the enneagram has turned up in several new versions, funny enough often developed by people, who also claim to have received it in divine visions. So how the types are defined depends on whom you ask. The types seem to have been modified according to the channeler's, or the inventor's, own idiosyncratic beliefs (read more about personality typing in my article **Personality typing is a refined system of prejudice**).

The same can be said about human classification-systems as such. The whole of Wilber's own classification-system, or his integral map, is based on his own idiosyncratic beliefs about what he thinks is "positive". It is selective and not all-inclusive. Actually you would have to make an endless list of all the thoughts and experiences it doesn't include. Here we have to remember both Nagarjuna's and Niels Bohr's arguments. And some of the theories Wilber includes are in other contexts seen as deeply problematic, even misleading. I will return to this.

The problem of personality typing can easily be seen in the devastating effects of the Indian caste system.

Another aspect of this is, that all theories included in Wilber's system, end up as relativistic within the system. This is based on his misunderstanding of the concept of complementarity, where he talks about the theories in his system as "equally valid" because they offer complementary perspectives, but each by themselves they only offer a partial (relative) view of reality.

Relativism has nothing to do with the complementarity principle, and especially not when some of the theories involved are permeated with flaws. This is not what neither Nagarjuna talked about, nor Niels Bohr.

As already examined: The Mādhyamika philosopher Nagarjuna – whom Wilber paradoxical enough claims to be a central influence - denies that there is any position taken, maintaining that his critical arguments are simply reductions to absurdity of views his opponents hold and that he has no view of his own. Therefore he called the wholeness the Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) – a teaching, which had one quite determinate purpose: the neutralization of all the dogmas, theories and viewpoints, which ignorance has created. Wilber doesn't seem to have this argumentation included in his system, since the system, in opposition with Nagarjuna, directly *creates/involves* a

lot of dogmas, theories and viewpoints. Wilber does the exact opposite of what Nagarjuna talked about.

Wilber's system is relativizing all the theories within it, except his own system, as if this *system* is the wholeness, the emptiness itself. He is obviously confusing the nondual state of enlightenment with his own theory (again: read about the *Nondual bias* in my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**). This aspect can be an irritatingly thing to discuss with Wilber devotees, who can be extremely arrogant, especially when they (in their own eyes very tolerant) claim that Wilber's system also includes philosophies, that are a rebellion against all systems (for example the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas) since Wilber's system offers a "complementary" perspective, and the rebellious philosophies only offer partial (relative) views of reality. Wilber's system is also claimed to include all future theories. And guess who has the complete view of reality, the integrated view, the theory of everything?

In his article [The Rise and Fall of Ken Wilber](#) Mark Manson reports from a Ken Wilber weekend seminar:

"At the weekend seminar, I couldn't shake the feeling that what we were participating in was thinly-veiled self indulgence and little more. In hindsight, I think this was as much a branding problem (from a business perspective) as an organizational problem (social perspective). Integral Institute built their movement in order to influence academia, governmental policy, to get books and journals published, to infuse these ideas into the world at large. Yet, here we were, spending money to sit in a room performing various forms of meditation and yoga, having group therapy sessions, art performances, and generally going on and on about how "integral" we were and how important we were to the world without seemingly doing anything on a larger scale about it.

Following Wilber online, the conversation seemed to only become more and more insular. With an onslaught of problems in the world crying out for an integral perspective and solution — terrorism, the Iraq War, climate change, world hunger, financial crises — the silence coming from the Integral crowd was deafening. Major global and social issues were often only referred to in passing as descriptors for a certain level of consciousness development with the overarching implication being that "they" are not as highly developed as "we" are.

We're "second-tier" thinkers. We're going to change the world... as soon as we're done talking about how awesome and "second-tier" we are.

Instead, most conversations involved esoteric spiritual topics, impulsive self-expressionism, and re-explaining the integral model in 4,102 different ways. For a philosophy based on including and integrating as much as possible, its followers sure expressed it by forming a nicely-sealed bubble around themselves.

Evidence of this came when Wilber's critics popped up. Experts in many of the fields Wilber claimed to have "integrated" questioned or picked apart some of his assumptions. In Wilber's model, he uses what he refers to as "orienting generalizations," ways of summarizing entire fields of study in order to fit them together with other forms of knowledge. Wilber admits in his work that he's generalizing large topics and that there is not consensus in many fields, but that he's constructed these generalizations to reflect the basic and agreed-upon principles of each field of study.

Well, a number of experts began questioning Wilber's choice of sources, and claimed that what he portrayed as consensus in some fields such as developmental psychology or sociology, it turned out there was still quite a bit of debate and uncertainty around some of Wilber's "basic" conclusions. Often, what Wilber portrayed as the "consensus" of a certain field actually amounted to an obscure or minority position.

Critics also picked apart Wilber's model itself, showing minor contradictions in it. And a number of people caught on to his shockingly meek understanding of evolutionary biology and his puzzling insinuations of intelligent design.

Wilber's eventual response to many of these critics was nothing short of [childish](#) — a dozen-or-so page (albeit extremely well-written) verbal shit-storm that clarified nothing, justified nothing, personally attacked everyone, and straw-manned the shit out of his critics' claims (Morten Tolboll's note: this also shows that Wilber, who by followers are called "The World's greatest philosopher in our time," might not be such a great philosopher after all).

For many, that was the day the intellectual giant fell, the evolution stopped, the so-called "Einstein of consciousness" took his ball and went home.

From there, the integral movement began to sputter. Rabbi Marc Gafni, a spiritual leader whom Wilber aligned himself and even co-sponsored seminars with, was later indicted in Israel for child molestation. Despite this, Wilber and his movement refused to distance themselves or repudiate him. In fact, the whole integral scene doubled down, claiming that its critics were "first-tier thinkers," and were coming up with lies in order to attack a greater, higher level of consciousness that it didn't understand (Morten Tolboll's note: again this is an example of the Nondual bias

where people are defending themselves against critique by claiming they are on a “higher nondual level of consciousness,” and the critics on a lower dual level, who therefore can’t be taken seriously. This thought distortion is an attempt used to silence critique, and it is seen in numerous New Age connections).

The seminars slowed to a crawl. Wilber’s health deteriorated greatly (he was [diagnosed with a rare disease](#) that keeps him bed-ridden). He stopped writing. Ten years on, despite developing some fans in academia (some in high places) Wilber’s work had yet to be tested or peer-reviewed in a serious journal. Much of his posting online devolved into bizarre spiritual claims (such as [this one](#) about an “enlightened teacher” who can make crops grow twice as fast by “blessing them”).

The brilliant scientist-turned-monk-turned-recluse-turned-New-Age-celebrity, whose ideas changed everything for so many people (myself included), devolved into the butt of another New Age joke. How the mighty have fallen.”

Wilber is a clear inspiration for that kind of New Age relativism, where you constantly hear devotees talk about that all theories, spiritual paths, etc., are equally valid because they are “complementary” but by themselves they only offer partial (relative) views of reality.

Again, this is a misunderstanding of the principle of complementarity. Just because two theories are in opposition, or are different, doesn’t mean that they are “complementary” to each other. Let us try to use Nagarjuna’s own argumentation on Wilber’s system. Wilber’s system is especially marked by two thought distortions (see my book **A Dictionary of Thought-distortions**):

1) Self-refuting arguments

2) Reductio ad absurdum

1) Self-refuting arguments are for example seen in relativism, which considers all views as relative, and therefore equally good. Relativism is logical fallacious, because it of course considers itself as being true. But it can precisely, in accordance with its own built-in relativism, not itself be regarded as more true than for example absolutism. For that reason it is followed by a long line of self-contradictions.

The self-contradiction is that relativism makes an exception of its own position: the very assertion of relativism is itself nonrelativistic. Curious enough that is also what Wilber-devotees claim, when confronted with the problem of relativism: Wilber’s system is not itself relative – or said in another way: it doesn’t support relativism!

Ok, that leads to the next point (besides that we in that case have to do with a confessed totalitarian system – note that almost all totalitarian systems use relativism to attack opponents, at the same time as they claim that they don't support relativism):

As we have seen: a theory of everything is not possible because it itself is in opposition to what the system *not* is. Therefore all theories of everything end in the thought distortion *Endless Split of the Thought*. That is what Nagarjuna's argumentation would claim. The very assertion of any holistic, integral theory, are destroying the holistic, integral claim itself, because it must have a negation.

2) The thought distortion *Reductio ad absurdum* is characterizing positions that would have absurd consequences if true. As mentioned, then some of the theories Wilber includes in his system are in other contexts seen as deeply problematic, even misleading. As one example out of many could be mentioned Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP). According to Wilber NLP is as equally valid as any other theory. In that case there is no difference between true science and pseudoscience, etc. (see my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**).

The acceptance of all theories as equally good (because they are “complementary”), is a central idea in Wilber's system, which, as all relativistic theories, claim to be very tolerant. It is possible for all to be correct and necessary for a complete account of human existence. But how long out in the absurd will Wilber continue to accept all theories as equally good (crazy therapies, delusional and dangerous ideas)?

If you for example preach relativism and believe, that everything is relative and for that reason equal true, you have thereby accepted, that nazism, fascism, dictatorship, popular murder, terror and violence, are as equally great blessings for mankind as democracy, negotiation and dialogue. Then you have no basis in order to criticize, because you haven't got any rational frame to start from. You can't criticize anyone for argumentation bungling, or to replace arguments with machine guns, because this presupposes, that there is a rational foundation in your arguments.

And, if Wilber rejects this relativism, who is then to decide which theories are more valid than others? The whole of Wilber's own classification-system, or his integral map, is, as mentioned, based on his own idiosyncratic beliefs about what he thinks is “positive”. It is selective and not all-inclusive, and it can never be, because of the principle of negation. Wilber seems to have misunderstood his great source of inspiration: Nagarjuna.

Wilber's system can point to many "successes." The devotees can demonstrate that their programs "work". They can bring forth to testify on their behalf hundreds, if not thousands, of satisfied customers. But it is important to know, that testimonials do not validate a classification system. Scientifically seen this is pure nonsense, and deeply manipulative. All talk about that testimonials are a proof, is a sign of pseudoscience. Furthermore, the sense of improvement, might not be matched by improved behavior. Just because devotees feel they have benefited doesn't mean they have. Often they simply have become a nuisance for their non-initiated surroundings. It is for example often a nuisance to have a discussion with Wilber devotees, who uses the typical Wilber jargon, filled with pseudo-profound words such as **quadrants, levels, lines, states and types**. It is also a nuisance to hear their constant talk about Wilber as "The Smartest Man on Earth," "The Brilliant scientist," "The Einstein of Consciousness," "The Greatest Philosopher in History.", etc., etc., etc.

Such people can't have read much philosophy (or theory of science, or spiritual literature, etc.), except perhaps what they have read in Wilber's own books.

When looking at testimonials one must always consider the power of a long line of thought distortions, such as for example *Subjective validation, Selective thinking, Confirmation bias, Motivated reasoning, Classical conditioning and placebo effects, Proof by ignorance, etc., etc.*

Worse is the refusal of critique, that shows that the system already has developed into an ideology.

That a thought-system has developed into an ideology shows in, that it is a closed system, which is shared by a large group of people. Such a closed system has especially two distinctive characters: 1) It allows no imaginable circumstance to talk against the ideology. 2) It refuses all critique by analysing the motives in the critique in concepts, which is collected from the ideology itself.

The typical way devotees refuse critique, is that they are claiming, that the critique already is included in Wilber's system, and that also all future critique are included in his system, because the critique is "complementary", and therefore ok, but of course in itself relative, and therefore not something to be taken seriously.

With such an "argumentation" all rationality and logic have been eliminated; the system has closed itself in an ideology. The same argumentation is by the way seen in other New Age theories as for example Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and The Human Design System, which both claim, that nothing from now on can be developed without including their systems, because they have caused a paradigm

shift. But this use of the concept paradigm shift is based on a misunderstanding of Thomas Kuhn's work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. His is an historical work, described what he believed to have occurred in the *history of science*. He made no claim that anything similar happens in philosophy (also see my article **The Sokal Hoax**).

Ideologies have always been a reflection of time, which manifests itself in the thoughts of human beings, specially the thoughts' direction towards the future. The collective manifestations of the future have either appeared in form of rigid religious believe systems, or ideologies such as nationalism, national socialism, communism and liberalism. They all function with the implied assumption, that the supreme good lies in the future, and that the end therefore justifies the means. The goal is an idea, a point out in a future, projected by the mind, where the salvation comes in some form – happiness, satisfaction, equality, liberation, etc. (the age of Aquarius). It has not been unusual that the means to get there have been to make people into slaves, or by torturing them and murdering them here and now (see my article **The difference between philosophical education and ideological education**).

Wilber's classification-system is harmful because it involves all the problems of what is called The Hermeneutics of Suspicion. There is no evidence for such systems at all. How do we test these kinds of claims? We cant. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur has referred to the "hermeneutics of suspicion" encouraged by writers such as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. What people think, and the reasons they produce, may not be the real reasons at work. It then becomes easy to become suspicious of the motives of everyone, whether as the representative of an economic class, or the purveyor of a morality, or just as an individual with psychological problems to solve. In Wilber the "real" reasons will be sought in his classification-system (read more in my article **The Hermeneutics of Suspicion (the thought police of the self-help industry) and why I am an apostle of loafing**).

In that way it ends in being a refined way of justifying prejudice. Using Wilber's integral method is simply a way of creating a system of prejudice. And that is anti-spiritual.

One of many examples of Wilber-prejudices, is for example Wilber's own view of "lines of development" in relation to the great enlightened master Ramana Maharshi, whom, in Wilber's eyes, can't be considered as an "integral" master, because he was a cripple. Wilber directly says, that they don't want sages, who are crippled, in his system. His reason is, that a future world teacher – that is: an integral master, a master that fits into Wilber's system – has developed "both the gross body, the subtle body, and the causal body." – here we see a clear fascistic element in Wilber.

So, we see how Wilber's classification-system is an idealistic system, that, in devotees, causes a conflict between what you are and what you ought to be in relation to the system. And the ideal is, as mentioned, based on Wilber's own idiosyncratic beliefs and selections.

A system that causes a conflict between what you are and what you ought to be is again anti-spiritual. It involves an existence-philosophical closing of your mind, where you in your opinion formation and identity formation strive towards being something else than what you are, where you imitate others, are a slave of others ideas and ideals, and where your actions are characterized by irresoluteness and doubt. And that is a hindrance for the opening in towards the source.

Spiritual growth is the direct opposite, it involves the existence-philosophical opening of your mind, where you in your opinion formation and identity formation are yourself, live in accordance with your own essence, and thereby achieve authenticity, autonomy, decisiveness and power of action (see my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**).

Prejudice, as Wilber's classification-system ends up in justifying, is a belief held without good reason or consideration of the evidence for or against its being true. Philosophy - that is: rationality and critical thinking - is opposed to prejudice. And true spirituality is philosophy. We are all riddled with prejudices on a wide range of issues, but it is possible to eliminate some of them by making an effort to examine evidence and arguments on both sides of any question. Human reason is fallible, and most of us are strongly motivated to cling on to *some* beliefs even in the teeth of evidence against them (for instance wishful thinking); however, even making small inroads into prejudice can transform the world for the better.

But Wilber's system does the opposite. Though it on the surface sounds rational and logical, it actually removes rationality and critical thinking through the hermeneutics of suspicion. The removal of genuine rationality from the stage leaves open the possibility of accusations of rationalizations for ulterior motives. This form of analysis (leading us to think of groups or individuals like "what is in it for them? what stage of development are they on? what kind of type?"), is not only corrosive of trust in society. It is bound eventually to undermine itself. Why are such views themselves being propagated? What are those spreading them going to gain?

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