

***On the Nature of a Post-Metaphysical Spirituality  
Response to Habermas and Weis***

The publication of Jurgen Habermas's *Nachmetaphysisches Denken* (Post-Metaphysical Thinking) and the publication of a Hans-Willi Weis article about my work prompted several people in Germany to approach me with questions about my response to those pieces. What follows is a brief reply to both.

Questions were submitted by Edith Zundel and Frank Visser, among others. I have simply listed their questions and my brief responses. Part I deals with issues raised primarily by Jurgen Habermas, and Part II with Weis.

Part I: Habermas and Post-Metaphysical Spirituality

**Mr. Wilber, your view is evolutionary from beginning to end.**

Well, be careful right there. My view has been summarized as "quadrants, waves, streams, states, types, self"--and of those, only waves and streams (or levels and lines) are essentially developmental or evolutionary. The other variables and dimensions are not. For example, states of consciousness do not usually show development. And when you are at a given stage or wave, the types at that stage do not develop. And most important of all, the timeless Urgrund does not develop (although its manifest aspects often do). But my approach does include developmental and evolutionary aspects as part of the integral model, because that is what the evidence demands at this time.

**The scientific doctrine of evolution is a reconstruction of the past; any view of future evolution is by definition speculative. On what data do you base your ideas of future evolution?**

My ideas of future evolution are based largely on a *reconstructive science*, and are predictive only within that range. That is, we watch individuals of today who develop into stages that are *beyond* the *average* or typical, and based on a reconstruction of these individuals' development (namely, their own realized higher stages), we suggest that *future* higher development on the whole might be similar in certain deep patterns.

Here is an example from natural science: let us say that we are a "Martian scientist" watching life evolve on Earth. We see quarks emerge, then atoms, then molecules. And then, in a few rare instances, we see molecules gather together into cells. Based on that empirical observation, we conclude that if other molecules continue their evolution, they too will likely form cells. This is NOT a metaphysical speculation, but an empirical conclusion based on a reconstructive science.

Just so, in today's world, we watch those individuals (the molecules) who develop into higher stages (the cells), and we predict, based on empirical research, that future development will likely follow those general trends. But those trends themselves are an open system, based on realities in all four quadrants (intentional, behavioral, social, and cultural),<sup>1</sup> and we cannot predict with any certainty the actual forms and surface features of the future realities, which is why the system remains open in so many ways.

Unlike the perennial philosophy, the details of which I mostly reject, I believe that the levels of consciousness are largely plastic, and the "Great Nest" is actually just a vast morphogenetic field of potentials (see *Integral Psychology* for a discussion of this idea) and not a predetermined set of levels through which humanity must rigidly march on the way to its own realization. *However*, once a level of consciousness emerges in enough people, then that level becomes a Kosmic pattern for future development, and thus it becomes something of a fixed level, not in a Platonic sense, but in the sense outlined by Charles Peirce, namely, a set of Kosmic habits, habits that are consequently repeated in stages of subsequent development (just as atoms and molecules are part of all subsequent evolution). This approach overcomes and rejects a metaphysical viewpoint and replaces it with an empirical, phenomenological, experiential and evidential approach.

Under those circumstances, a *past* reconstructive science can predict the general features of some *future* forms. Let me give an example, using the stages of Spiral Dynamics<sup>2</sup>: When humanity was first evolving, it was at the beige (or archaic) stage, generally speaking. But certain evolutionary pioneers pushed into the next developmental stage, the purple (or magic) stage. When they did so, this stage was not predetermined in any substantial fashion. Rather, all that was given (by the Great Nest) was a *potential* for higher, more complex functioning--a principle of creativity (according to Whitehead), or a principle of Eros (Plotinus), or simply a possibility of self-organizing systems (as today's complexity and chaos theories maintain--the work of Stuart Kaufman, for example). Furthermore--and this is quite important in my own system--the actual form of the purple wave was created and molded by all four quadrants (intentional, behavioral, social, and cultural) operating at the time. None of those items were predetermined at all.

Now jump forward around one-hundred-thousand years to the time of, say, the Roman Empire: humanity has evolved from beige (archaic) to purple (magic) to red (mythic) to blue (mythic-rational). In each case of evolutionary emergence, the same principles were at work: namely, a principle of creativity or self-organization to a higher level of complexity, whose actual features were not predetermined but were filled in by all four quadrants. Again, none of those particular features are Platonically determined, and the actual form of each major stage--purple, red, blue, etc.--could have unfolded in an almost infinite number of ways. But once the wave unfolded and took on its manifest form, that form became a Kosmic habit that was then repeated wherever it emerged. This is very similar to, e.g., Rupert Sheldrake's theory of morphic fields.

What this means is that, for example, a person born into a blue culture is still born at square 1--is still born at beige, and then evolves to purple, and then to red, and then to blue.... How do we know this? Only through extensive empirical and phenomenological

research into stages of development (see *Integral Psychology*), which is itself a reconstructive science. But this means that, if we see somebody *today* who is at, say, purple, we can *predict* that if they continue their development, they will develop into red and then into blue capacities, and that *prediction* is based on nothing but a past *reconstructive science* of those who have developed beyond purple. There is precisely nothing metaphysical about any of this--and developmental psychologists do it all the time!

We cannot say, however, what the actual form the future development will take in any person. Nor can we say what form leading-edge evolution will take. All of those are still open and fluid--and they are molded by all four quadrants which are constantly changing in many aspects. So any given future development will be a mixture of at least these five factors: the potential for higher development contributed by Spirit (or the Great Nest, or Eros, or self-organization); a person's own autonomous intentions and desires; a person's actual behavioral patterns; social systems and institutions; cultural values and shared meanings--all of which have aspects that are always open and free (in addition to the many aspects that are conditioned, determined, or karmic and habitual).<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, the subtle dimension is not a fixed level but a great reservoir of future stages of consciousness unfolding. This is why I state, in SES, that leading-edge evolution can continue into literally billions of worlds. None of those future "levels" is fixed or predetermined.<sup>4</sup> But once a particular level/stage emerges in evolution, its deep pattern becomes a Kosmic habit that is then repeated wherever it emerges--just as purple and red and blue waves are patterns that human beings now repeat in their own development (as cross-cultural research has consistently shown).<sup>5</sup> Again, none of this is metaphysical; it is entirely empirical, phenomenological, and experiential, occurring under the province of a reconstructive science. Metaphysics is an approach I specifically and strongly disavow.

**This question is perhaps a bit unfair, for nobody can do everything at once. In what sense do you see your system as helpful for meditative practice? I sometimes feel that a spiritual traveler not only needs a good map (such as the one you have produced) but also a kind of Lonely Planet guide book, that goes into the descriptive details of the territory. Does your stage model also answer questions such as: what happens to beginning meditators, what ordeals do advanced meditators have to face?**

The question is not unfair at all; it makes a lot of sense. But perhaps I should say that the way that I work is to try to provide the most generalized map possible, because the specific details can only be filled in by concrete practice, usually with an experienced guide in a particular tradition. The same is true whether studying Zen, cooking, gardening, mathematics, or car racing. It would be silly of me to try and give all those details, when most of them are experiential, not theoretical.

Rather, what I am trying to do is this: If we take all of the truths that have been advanced--in the West and the East; in premodern, modern, and postmodern times--and we put

them all together, then what system of thought can honor, acknowledge, and integrate the most number of truths from the most number of traditions?

I believe that the integral system that I have suggested can honor and include more truths from more traditions, and therefore it is a system that can better offer people a way to open their minds and hearts to the vast array of the Kosmos--its goodness, its beauty, and its many truths.<sup>6</sup> But for the details, as always, we must immerse ourselves in the concrete realities and particularities of this moment. When it comes to spiritual practice, this means studying with a teacher whom you trust and working out your own salvation with care.

**How do we handle different cultural meditative backgrounds in the interpretation of meditative experiences (e.g. the self vs. no-self debate between yogis and Buddhists)?**

This is exactly why we need something like the four quadrants (or the realization that all actual occasions have intentional, behavioral, social, and cultural dimensions as intrinsic features of their being-in-the-world). The "levels" of consciousness that are now available to human beings are not given in some sort of predetermined Platonic (or Hegelian or Aurobindoian) fashion: rather, they are given as potential forms and patterns (reflecting the gradient of evolutionary tension that is the Great Nest), and those emergent forms take their flesh and content from the intentional, behavioral, social, and cultural patterns operative at that time. Certain of those features we find to be universal (based on a careful reconstructive science), but those universals are simply universal habits and not pre-given, unyielding molds (and they could have conceivably been quite different in a different universe created by the same Spirit, because Spirit's "play" involves all four quadrants).

This suggests that specific meaning (in any given historical-cultural context) is a combination of both universal (or context-transcending) aspects and context-bound aspects (a view similar to that of Habermas, although his developmental map does not include the higher, post-rational states and stages of consciousness, which limits his otherwise wonderful contributions). In my view, the universal aspects that we find in human endeavors come from at least two sources: the potential of Spirit as a capacity for creativity or self-transcendence (which allows virtually anybody to transcend into higher states; this universal potential for transcendence is the gradient of potentials or morphogenetic field known as the Great Nest, although none of its surface forms are predetermined); and the deep patterns of Kosmic habits that have already been laid down by past development (as we saw with Spiral Dynamics).<sup>7</sup>

Let me give a major example: say that you have an powerful experience of cosmic consciousness, or a sense of being one with the entire manifest world. Now the deep pattern of that experience is quite similar no matter what culture it appears in--you can have this experience of oneness if you are Chinese, Indian, German, or Mexican, living now or a thousand years ago (reflecting the universal capacity for self-transcendence). But the actual contours, contexts, surface features, and specific meanings of that experience will usually vary from culture to culture and even from person to person. In

my integral model, the universal features (which reflect a universal capacity for self-transcendence that is not fixed and determined but open and fluid) *and* the relative or context-dependent features (determined by the four quadrants as they "tetra-evolve") are *both* included. This approach therefore offers what I believe is a more comprehensive view of these intricate problems.

Likewise, the various waves (or stages) of consciousness that unfold in meditators show certain context-transcending similarities (certain experiences in meditation are universal, reflecting the universal gradient of potential for transcendence that is the Great Nest); but the specific details, the actual path, the types of states of consciousness experienced along the way, and the concrete meanings given to them, vary from culture to culture, from tradition to tradition, and often from teacher to teacher. This is simply part of the wonderful diversity of manifestation that needs to be included along with the demonstrable universals and similarities.

**Which brings me to a question about the status of "spiritual science" such as meditation. What is the role played by conditioning (Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi) in all this, and to what extent does that color our experiences in meditation? Isn't that pure conditioning? Where is the objectivity here, where the discovery of inner reality, and where cultural and religious conditioning?**

That is where a reconstructive science has the most to offer. If you look at the studies on the stages of meditation made by Daniel P. Brown (Wilber et al, *Transformations of Consciousness* [CW4]; and Wilber, *Integral Psychology* [CW4]), it appears that the same general waves of higher consciousness development can be found in most of the major spiritual traditions, at least in their deep patterns (although their surface patterns vary considerably). Likewise, meditators today who develop into permanent nondual consciousness have been shown to traverse the same general waves (Wilber, "Waves, Streams, States and Self," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* , 7, no. 11-12, 2000, pp. 145-76), although again the surface features vary (because the four quadrants are different). The question then becomes, is it possible that these stages of consciousness development are merely conditioning?

That does not appear to be the case. The same charge can be made against any stage conception, including that of, for example, Lawrence Kohlberg in moral development. How do we decide if these stages are merely conditioned? We pursue a reconstructive science to the best of our ability. Using Kohlberg as an example, his model of moral development has now been tested in several dozen First-, Second-, and Third-World countries, and to date *no major exceptions to his stages have been found* . The green-meme (or merely pluralistic) mentality rebels violently at this conclusion, but the research is quite clear: "Similar findings [about Kohlberg's stages] have emerged from studies in Mexico, the Bahamas, Taiwan, Indonesia, Turkey, Honduras, India, Nigeria, and Kenya.... So it seems that Kohlberg's levels and stages of moral reasoning are 'universal' structures...[and] Kohlberg's morals stages do seem to represent an invariant sequence." Shaffer, D., *Social and Personality Development*, 1994, 417-8. As another researcher summarizes the evidence: "Comprehensive reviews of cross-cultural studies

suggest that Kohlberg's theory and method are reasonably culture-fair and do reflect moral issues, norms, and values relevant in other cultural settings. Further, these data also support the developmental criteria implied by his stage model [giving] impressive support for his developmental theory and its nonrelativistic stance...." Vasudev, J. 'Ahimsa, Justice, and the Unity of Life,' in M. Miller and S. Cook-Greuter, *Transcendence and Mature Thought in Adulthood* , 1994, 241. This does not mean that Kohlberg's model covers all the relevant morals issues in various cultures, only that it has proven to be universal in those stages that it does address (not because they are Platonic/Hegelian/Aurodindoian archetypes, but because those stages have now become Kosmic habits of development). Kohlberg's stages are nonrelativistic and not due to conditioning, as far as the evidence of a reconstructive science can determine.

Just so with any stages of meditation that we may find. We carefully check the evidence in as many cross-cultural settings as possible, and we see if any commonalities or similarities emerge. If so, we are justified in suspecting "quasi-universals." Again, there is nothing metaphysical or merely theoretical about any of this; it is based on empirical and phenomenological evidence subjected to rational analysis after the fact, even if some of the stages themselves are transrational (stages that are directly known, not by rational analysis or a reconstructive science, but rather by direct meditative practice or spiritual science--see below). *Both* the rational reconstructive science and the direct spiritual practice are aspects of the more integral approach that I am suggesting.

This does not mean that all the experiences of today's meditators are already laid down as Kosmic habits, because (1) the leading-edge stages are always open and free in any event; (2) the reality of the higher stages are given as potentials by Spirit, not yet as Kosmic habits (the gradient of transcendent potential that is the Great Nest is universal, even if its surface features are not); (3) any specific experience is a product of all four quadrants, so an individual's experience of the higher stages (or any stages) will always be unique in many ways.

**One of your books, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* , is subtitled: "Integrating Science and Religion"--this could be seen as the motto for your oeuvre as a whole. Many scientists I have met get very skeptical when they hear about this. They suspect that, instead of integrating religion and science, you smuggle religion into science, which can only lead to bad science. Science and religion are two discourses that never meet--water is H<sub>2</sub>O or holy water, there is nothing in between. What would your comment be on that?**

Well, your scientist friends would be entirely correct if by "religion" we meant the common or typical meaning, which is that religion is essentially the mythic wave of development (red to blue). Most "integrations" of science and religion involve things such as Christian theologians attempting to smuggle their theology into the tenets of natural science, and thus "prove" that the Big Bang was created by their specific God--Jehovah--and that "integrates" science and religion!

I reject that approach entirely. It is yet another example of the metaphysical approach to the problem of higher states and stages. A post-metaphysical and reconstructive science proceeds by quite different means: it is based on direct evidence gathered by an investigation of those who have repeatedly demonstrated competence at the post-rational waves of development. This involves both a rational reconstruction of the essential elements or deep features of these higher stages and a call to develop these higher stages in oneself by taking up the practices of transformative practice that have been empirically demonstrated to accelerate the unfolding of these higher waves. These direct spiritual experiences are entirely compatible with a general scientific attitude that demands evidence, carried out through research, and grounded at every point in experiment and experience. This is the post-Kantian and post-metaphysical approach that I have suggested for spiritual studies as part of a larger integral studies. The "religion" you refer to is pre-Kantian, dogmatic, and mythic, an approach suited only to premodern waves of evolution.

**You have identified common procedures in both natural science and social science. On top of that, you have postulated a third type of science, almost nobody has mentioned so far--"spiritual science"--such as yoga and meditation, which would result in repeatable conclusions about the spiritual. Are you really suggesting we can now prove the existence of God as simply as we can prove the existence of the moon?**

No. It's actually much simpler, but that's another story!

Let me start by pointing out that, just as with the word "religion," there are numerous meanings of the word "science." In my various writings, I have pointed out that reputable scholars have used at least two major different *meanings* of "science" and at least three *levels* of "science." To take them in that order:

The two major meanings are "narrow science" and "broad science." Narrow science refers to a science that accepts as real nothing but sensorimotor occasions, or, secondarily, attempts to tie its rational and theoretic analysis to nothing but sensorimotor occasions. Most of the "hard sciences," such as biology and chemistry, are taken to be examples of narrow science. For the narrow sciences, "empiricism" likewise means "experiences originating in the five senses or their extensions" (microscopes, telescopes, etc.).

But many philosophers of science have pointed out that there are other types of science that do not depend strictly on the senses: mathematics and logic, for example. Likewise, there are the social sciences or geist sciences, which function in many ways with symbolic and not just sensory occasions. These are called the "broad sciences" or "deep sciences," and even the narrow sciences (such as physics) depend in part on the deep sciences (such as mathematics and logic).

The deep sciences often deal with realities that can only be seen with the "inward eye" (such as Boolean algebra and imaginary numbers). For all of the broad or deep sciences, *empiricism* is used in a much wider and richer fashion: namely, an occasion is *empirically real* if it can be directly *experienced* by individuals in a peer group competent in the means of accessing the occasion. Thus, competent mathematicians can *mentally experience* the string of symbolic equations constituting the Pythagorean Theorem, and they have concluded that the Pythagorean Theorem is true (or that it represents genuine realities). In other words, most forms of deep science reject the radical dualism between thought and experience, since *thoughts* can themselves be *experienced* by consciousness. This is the general basis of the geist sciences, including the interpretive sciences of hermeneutics and introspective sciences of the phenomenological variety. That is, the geist sciences can investigate the objects or the phenomena or the experiences that present themselves to any subject or consciousness, whether the objects or experiences are sensory, mental, or spiritual.

I have suggested that both of those two major forms of science (narrow and deep) share at least three common features--namely, they both operate by injunction/exemplar, experience/evidence, and confirmation/rejection--the so-called "three strands" of all good science. That is, all "good science," whether narrow or deep, attempts to follow these three strands (which is what grounds their truth claims and makes them "scientific"). These three strands were suggested in order to explicitly incorporate the valid aspects of the theory of science advanced by Thomas Kuhn (the necessity of exemplars/injunctions/paradigms), empiricism (the necessity of experiential grounding), and Karl Popper (the importance of potential refutation). I further claim that these three strands are generally followed by sensory science, mental science, and spiritual science.

Which brings us to the *levels of science*. Since broad or deep science investigates any *direct experiences* presented to consciousness that can be shared and communicated within a peer group of competence, and since we have already seen that there are *levels of consciousness*, it follows that there are as many levels of phenomenological science as there are levels of consciousness. Since there are demonstrably three great levels/states of consciousness (namely, gross, subtle, and causal--correlated with, e.g., waking, dreaming, and sleeping), it follows that there are (at least) three major levels of science--gross, subtle, and causal--or, more commonly, sensory, mental, and spiritual science.

Thus, a more integral approach suggests that there are sensory, mental, and spiritual sciences (based on an investigation of gross, subtle, or causal objects/phenomena of consciousness, respectively). Narrow science generally refers to level one: it investigates primarily material, sensory, or gross objects of consciousness. Broad or deep science goes further and investigates both the second and third levels of phenomenological experience: namely, the mental, symbolic, hermeneutic, and interpretive objects or phenomena of consciousness (level two), as well as--further yet--the spiritual, causal, transrational, supramental phenomena of consciousness (level three).

All of those levels of science, if they involve good science, involve the three strands of all good science, namely: injunction, experience, validation/refutation. I have given

extensive examples of this from various mental and spiritual disciplines (e.g., *Eye to Eye* , *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* , *A Theory of Everything* ).

And I have made one final suggestion: using the quadrants, we can correlate the findings of broad science (e.g., meditative experiences) with the findings of narrow science (e.g., brainwave patterns during meditation registered by an EEG machine). This "all-quadrant, all-level" approach therefore allows us to do something that neither premodern spiritual traditions nor modern science can do on their own: namely, track all four dimensions of an actual occasion (intentional, behavioral, social, and cultural) and therefore offer, for the first time, a more integral approach to science, consciousness, and spirituality.<sup>8</sup>

**In your view of human pathology you have not only restructured the field of conventional psychiatry, but also added new fields of "therapy": the personal and the transpersonal domains. Aren't you imposing the categories of therapy and pathology on these domains? Shouldn't we see spirituality with completely fresh eyes?**

Shouldn't we see spirituality with completely fresh eyes? Sure, if we could--which of course we can't, since all perception is always already context-bound, and those who suggest otherwise simply mean, shouldn't we see spirituality as they see it?

My simple point is that, based on a reconstructive science, we find that certain patterns of development, as judged by the individuals undergoing the development, are more appropriate, authentic, or "healthy," and other patterns are more fractured, unhealthy, or pathological. All traditions--even Zen--recognize "sickness" on their paths. For example, "Zen sickness," as Hakuin called it, is related to improper concentration and can result in debilitating physical, emotional, and mental problems.

All that a more integral approach does is to take all of these possible pathologies and list them as warning signs that a therapist, teacher, or student might watch out for during their own practice. I am certainly not attempting to pathologize the higher waves or turn them into a therapeutic endeavor. But for those who wish to take advantage of this more integral approach, then various therapeutic interventions are available for those who are having trouble in the transpersonal stages or states of their own being and becoming.

**Your system seems very normative. As you wrote in *A Sociable God* , it delineates what can go wrong (critical) and how things should be (normative). In what sense can science and norms go together?**

Depends, as usual, on which "science" you mean. Narrow science has no norms. Broad science deals with norms all the time.

Generally, the objection that science only deals with facts (what is) and not values or norms (what should be) is an objection raised solely by those who believe *only* in narrow science (even though narrow science itself depends on broad science, as we saw above,

and broad science embraces norms as inescapable). Moreover, broad science itself offers guidelines to more authentic and less authentic norms, based (in part) on a reconstructive science.

For example: broad science investigates the unfolding of the stages of consciousness (as we saw with Kohlberg and Spiral Dynamics). In that development, the *what is* of one stage becomes the *what should be* of a previous stage, and thus facticity is converted into normative trends with every evolutionary unfolding. What is gives way to what should be, scientifically tracked and demonstrated. The gradient of potential given by Spirit turns out to be a normative gradient unfolded in developmental evolution-- *as discovered by a broad reconstructive science* .

Let me give a specific example from Spiral Dynamics. A developmental psychologist using good, broad, reconstructive science (i.e., science that uses all three strands--that's the "good" part--when investigating interior/phenomenological realities--that's the "broad" part--in a population of those who have already demonstrated competence in a particular developmental task--that's the "reconstructive" part) finds that, in a general fashion, consciousness development proceeds from beige to purple to red to blue to orange (to perhaps higher waves). That is the conclusion based on a *reconstructive science* that finds these stages after the fact, not imposes them in any *a priori* fashion.

But once a reconstructive science has demonstrated the *what is* of each stage--that is, after it has merely described, in a largely phenomenological fashion, the contours of each stage of development in a competent population--then the reflective intellect is able to spot patterns in the unfolding development. One such pattern is that each succeeding stage involves an increase in perspectivism and thus an increase in the capacity for mutual care and compassion (i.e., it is scientifically demonstrable that orange has a wider capacity for compassion than red). The *what is* of each stage of consciousness development gives way to a pattern of certain increasing variables, and thus the *factual* *what is* of each stage unfolds into a series of *normative* trends and tendencies, such that it is factually true that normative compassion increases with consciousness development (established by a reconstructive science). Thus, for example, IF you value compassion, then a reconstructive science can tell you this: what *should* a red meme do? It *should* continue its development to orange.... (And a more integral reconstructive science, which carries its investigation into the transpersonal domains, would be able to say: IF you value compassion, then orange should continue its development into causal and nondual waves, *as a scientific fact* .)

Can normative value be read *directly* and *merely* off the direction of evolution itself? Only in a metaphysical, pre-Kantian fashion. A post-metaphysical, experiential approach--which denies the ontological status of "levels of reality" divorced from the knowing consciousness--suggests instead that normative tendencies can be read not merely from evolution, but only into evolution with the help of a realization of the higher waves of development. That is, a realization of causal and nondual waves of consciousness development--secured by a good, broad science of the transpersonal domains--brings with it the normative grounding of the entire sequence. As Buddha said when asked why

a person should be moral, "Because of nirvana." "Nirvana," of course, is not a mythic heaven or everlasting afterlife, but is rather a state of consciousness. Buddha is saying that moral actions help secure the higher state of consciousness known as nirvana, and thus, in addition to whatever relative value they might have in their own right (such as increasing good karma for the egoic self), their ultimate value lies in the fact that they are conducive to the direct realization of Spirit itself. Thus, the ultimate normative grounding of the entire developmental unfolding cannot be read from any stage or series of stages, but only from a direct realization of the Urgrund itself, which is secured by a *good, broad science* of the post-rational waves of development and confirmed by a *reconstructive science* of those who have demonstrated competence in that regard.

Thus, ultimate normative grounding--or *what should be*--is found in the *what is* of the transpersonal domain, demonstrated by good broad science and confirmed by careful reconstructive science. And in the developmental unfolding itself, normative tendencies of certain variables can be shown to increase with further development, so that IF one values those variables, normative statements can be read off the stages themselves.<sup>9</sup> Both of those factors--the relative increase in certain normative values during development, and their ultimate grounding in the transpersonal domains (or Spirit itself)--are open to good broad science and reconstructive science.

Of course, those who believe only in narrow science will believe none of this. But then, they don't even believe in the geist sciences, so what can I say? (Of course, ask a narrow scientist why he defends narrow science so aggressively as being the *only* correct approach to truth--ask him, that is, why he *values* narrow science so much when he claims that narrow science completely lacks values and yet is the only truth--and that is when the conversation gets really interesting. Since, according to him, there are no values in reality, then where exactly did his come from?)

### **What is the status of a "critical science," in relation to the more "objective" sciences?**

A "critical theory" can be established in any major discipline--whether in art, morals, or science. It simply depends on whether one has an approach that one *claims* to be more authentic, or more comprehensive, or more accurate, or more valuable, or "more something." The Frankfurt School, for example, developed a critical social theory that they claimed offered more political and personal freedom. You can have a critical art theory, critical moral theory, critical spiritual theory, and so on. But all *critical* theories are *internally* bound to a series of normative claims that they then must *justify* as compelling and in some sense binding on others. That's the tricky part, of course.

Since I have offered an "integral theory" that I *claim* honors more types of truths than the alternatives, then I must offer a series of justifications for this claim, and that is what my books attempt to do. Since I believe that in many cases I can justify my claims to be more integral than the alternatives, I have often criticized the alternative views as being partial and "less integral" or "less comprehensive" (and therefore presumably "less true"). So

yes, I have offered a "critical integral theory." (See Jack Crittenden's Foreword to *The Eye of Spirit* , where he summarizes my critical theory.)

But I should say that I hold this integral critical theory very lightly. Part of the difficulty is that, at this early stage, all of our attempts at a more integral theory are very preliminary and sketchy. It will take decades of work among hundreds of scholars to truly flesh out an integral theory with any sort of compelling veracity. Until that time, what I try to offer are suggestions for making our existing theories and practices just a little more integral than they are now....

**How do you see your position in relation to Habermas, who advocates a critical science?**

As many people know, I consider Habermas the world's greatest living philosopher. This does not mean, however, that I agree with all of what he has to say. But in very general terms I do find much agreement with his quasi-universalist approach; his developmental perspective; his dialogical methods; his three domains and three validity claims (art, morals, science--one version of the four quadrants); his championing of the lifeworld in addition to the systems world; his attempt at a reconstruction of the pragmatic history of embodied consciousness; his normative boldness; his blend of both transcendental and context-bound claims; and his critical stance.

I respectfully disagree on many of the details of those broad programs, however; and I strongly part ways with Habermas on his treatment of both the pre-linguistic and trans-linguistic realms. Habermas relates humans to both preverbal Nature and transverbal Spirit in ways that I believe are profoundly incorrect. A more integral (or "all-quadrants, all-levels, all-lines, all-states") approach allows us to handle a much larger view of the Kosmos than Habermas allows.

**Many people feel spirituality should be approached through image and metaphor, not through rational and academic discourse.**

Well, again, it depends on what you mean by "spirituality." Some levels of consciousness have spiritual aspects that are best approached through image and metaphor; some through rational and academic discourse; and some through direct practice and realization. My approach attempts to include and honor all of those.

At the same time, a critical integral theory does indeed make suggestions about which of those approaches are more authentic than others, and the conclusion is that different types of spirituality are appropriate at different stages of consciousness development.<sup>10</sup> There are different types of spirituality found at virtually every level of the spectrum of consciousness, using "spirituality" or "religion" interchangeably in this case to mean that which is one's ultimate concern and that in which one puts ultimate faith.

For example, at the magic and mythic stages, dogmatic mythological religion is not only the most prevalent type of spirituality, it is virtually the only type of spirituality that can

be sustained at those levels. This spirituality is metaphysical and pre-Kantian in almost every sense, because it confuses structures of consciousness with ontological levels of reality separate from consciousness--which happens to be entirely appropriate at those waves, and, anyway, we can't really change the contours of those Kosmic habits now.

We can, however, continue our own growth and development beyond the mythic waves and into the rational waves. At the rational stages, spirituality (or one's ultimate concern and one's ultimate faith) involves a type of rational-scientific approach to the universe (where "science" means level-one and level-two science). At these intermediate levels of consciousness, one believes in rationality and empirical phenomena with a type of blind religious faith, even though there is no rational-empirical proof for it: there is no scientific proof that scientific proof alone is real, and yet the egoic-rational level believes with all its heart and soul that rationality alone offers the secrets of the universe. Just as at the previous stages, where one identified with mythology and therefore found religion in mythic dogma, at these rational stages one identifies with reason and therefore finds religion in rational proclamations of scientific faith. Habermas's religion or ultimate concern, for example, is communicative reason, which is entirely appropriate at these waves.

A rational-stage believer puts his faith in reason, just as at the previous stage a person puts his or her faith in myths. "Faith" in all these senses is not meant in a derogatory fashion, but in a positive way: one has faith in that which one "knows" to be real, and at each wave of consciousness development, a person is directly introduced to various phenomena of consciousness: at the magic waves, one sees magic phenomena (which are real as phenomena); at the mythic waves, one sees mythic phenomena (which are real as phenomena); at the rational waves, one sees rational phenomena (which are real as phenomena); and at the spiritual waves, one sees spiritual phenomena (which, it is further claimed, directly shade into noumenon itself, not in a metaphysical but experiential sense, demonstrated by a good, deep science in the direct experience of satori, for example).

When development continues from the mind and into the supramental or transpersonal or postrational realms (a development that can be rationally reconstructed but not rationally attained), one's spirituality shifts from an ultimate concern with the contents of the mind to an ultimate concern with the contents of transcendental consciousness as such (which, because it transcends and includes the previous levels, results ideally in an integral approach to spirituality, science, and the universe at large)--shifts, that is, from a faith in mind to a faith in spirit itself. As with the previous stages, this "faith" is not misplaced; it results from a direct realization of the spiritual reality disclosed at the postrational waves of consciousness development. Of course, some individuals see spiritual realities more clearly than others, just as some use reason more brilliantly than others. But for all who continue their development into the transpersonal waves, a reconstructive science of that development shows unmistakably its supramental and spiritual character--but this is now a spirituality that is based on direct experiential evidence (satori) that can be communicated in a peer group of those who have demonstrated competence in this development (sangha).

This is therefore a thoroughly post-metaphysical, post-Kantian spirituality. It shuns ontological levels of reality for postmodern levels of consciousness (which are real as phenomenological occasions ultimately revealed as Spirit's potential for transcendence and known directly by a good broad science).

This type of post-metaphysical spirituality was most clearly announced in the East by the Buddhist genius Nagarjuna, who used a transcendental dialectic similar to Kant's (although Nagarjuna discovered it fifteen hundred years before Kant) to demolish belief structures and radically deconstruct myths in order to make way for direct experiential evidence (or science in the broad sense).

Thus, where myth and dogma are the material of metaphysical, pre-Kantian spirituality, direct experience and deep science are the material of post-metaphysical spirituality. As I stated in the introduction to SES: "If metaphysics means thought without evidence, there is not a metaphysical sentence in this entire book."

Hence, Habermas states that "there is no alternative to postmetaphysical thinking," I agree entirely. But what Habermas does not yet appear to realize is that this is exactly the foundationless foundation for a postmetaphysical spirituality of direct spiritual experience disclosed in post-rational waves of consciousness development investigated by a good, deep science of those who have demonstrated developmental competence in those dimensions and confirmed by a reconstructive science of the entire range of human lifespan development.

**Habermas writes of the New Age movements: "These more serious thinking movements oscillate within a surreal garland of closed worldviews that are composed of badly-specified pieces of scientific theory. New Age satisfies in an ironic way the longing for the lost One and Whole with the abstract authority of a system of science that becomes more and more impenetrable. But closed worldviews can stabilize themselves in the sea of a decentralized comprehension of the world only on subcultural islands." What is your position towards this statement?**

Oh, I agree with virtually all of it. But I believe we can be more precise in the analysis than Habermas. First of all, it is true that much New-Age thinking satisfies the longing for the lost One and Whole, but not merely in an ironic fashion, but by actual regression to earlier stages of "oneness" and "wholeness," which are not actually whole in any developed sense, but merely stages of infantile fusion and indissociation, magically and mythically charged (e.g., the purple and red waves). Second, the more sophisticated New-Age approaches do indeed use a type of recourse to science, but the science is almost always distorted (especially the "new physics" and the "web of life")--but Habermas is right, this pseudo-science is indeed impenetrable (which means, it hides from evidence and thus is not really science--it is simply a new mythology, hence its often regressive nature). Those New-Age worldviews are indeed closed, both in terms of development and in terms of falsifiability (and thus, once again, they are not real science, since they are immune to the three strands of good science). And finally, Habermas is quite right that these movements can survive only in subcultural islands. In America one of these

subcultural islands is found in San Francisco, which is why I call the most prevalent version of the sophisticated New-Age approach the "415 Paradigm" (415 is the area code phone number of San Francisco). Another island of such beliefs is Boulder, Colorado, the town in which I live. Yikes.

This is why it is so important for integral psychology and all serious postmetaphysical movements to detach themselves wherever possible from such New-Age movements (which is why I myself no longer am a member of the transpersonal movement in America, which has all the earmarks of the New-Age movement as described by Habermas, alas).

This is why it is also important to sharply differentiate a postmetaphysical spirituality from the perennial philosophy, which is why I have not identified myself with the perennial philosophy in over fifteen years. Some of its conclusions are of course important and demand the utmost respect--but only if they can be reconstructed using good, broad science and reconstructive science.<sup>11</sup> I have repeated the necessity for this postmetaphysical and critical approach in several recent books, including *SES* and *Integral Psychology*. For those who have not read some of this material, I have included several endnotes from *Integral Psychology* in Appendix 1 following this article.

Finally, with reference to the Habermas quote, I would like to point out that a generalized type of New-Age belief is very appealing, not only to the prerational purple and red waves (magic and mythic), but also to the green meme (or the pluralistic stage of development), simply because this pluralistic stage is marked by its strongly subjectivistic stance. The green meme is around 25% of the adult population in America and Europe, so this part of the subcultural island is actually more like a huge continent, which both Habermas and I are doing our best to transcend.

## Part II: Hans-Will Weis and Ironic Put Downs

### **Ken Wilber's Philosophy--A Critical Appraisal by Hans-Willi Weis**

Hans-Willi Weis recently published an article highly critical of my work, replete with ironic put-downs of my position and filled with a lovely spirit of ill-will and mean-spiritedness. How refreshing! I shall try to respond, although I am probably not as good at ironic put-downs as Meister Weis.

The following are summaries of Weis's criticisms. If these do not accurately represent his position, I apologize for any errors. If I ridicule a position and it is not actually Weis's position, then please apply the ridicule to some other accurate position of his. :-)

#### **1. The spectrum of consciousness and its fulfillment through the transpersonal**

**KW's system is closed, the transpersonal stages are not just some further stages that might or might not exist (this is for science to decide), but the final stages of development--period.**

This is quite incorrect. The system is open at almost every point. As I explained above, the nature of future evolution of humanity (and the Kosmos at large) is not predetermined, but is rather a product of (at least) all four quadrants as they manifest and interact. I call this "tetra-evolution," and it is open in almost every way, constrained only by the generalities of the twenty tenets, which are not a priori postulates but a posteriori conclusions based on empirical investigation. Once certain patterns emerge, they often become Kosmic habits, but when they first emerged, they had a great deal of creative freedom and openness.

Most of all, development is open in the subtle dimensions, which are part of the great creative fountain of Spirit. As I clearly state at the end of Part I of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, evolution can (and might) continue into billions and billions of other worlds. There is no period, period.

**Wilber's system claims universal validity, is immune for criticism and uses empirical data only by way of illustration.**

The system I have proposed does not *claim* universal validity in any *a priori* fashion, but *concludes* that there are some aspects of the system that appear to be universal, and it makes this conclusion based on empirical and phenomenological investigation by hundreds of researchers from around the world using reconstructive broad science. Weis is clearly unaware of my writing in this regard. He might start to learn about my work in this area by reading *Integral Psychology*. In many ways, my position here is not much different from aspects of Jurgen Habermas's approach.

## **2. The Great Chain of Being and its formulation by the Philosophia Perennis**

**By relating the spectrum of consciousness to the Great Chain of Being, Wilber crosses the border between science and metaphysics, between psychology and ontology.**

I do not identify myself with the perennial philosophy, and I have not done so for over fifteen years. As I have stated on many occasions, I categorically reject most of the work of the major perennialists, including Schuon, Coomaraswamy, Pallis, Guenon, etc. (For the latest statement of my rejection of the perennial philosophy, see TOE).

My major criticisms of the perennial philosophy are numerous and too detailed to summarize here. But perhaps my strongest criticism is that we can no longer conceive of "levels of reality" in a separative ontological sense. I reject entirely the notions of levels of reality as separate ontological existents (as explained in many endnotes in *Integral Psychology*; see the following Appendix 1). Rather, any levels of reality must be conceived in a post-Kantian, post-metaphysical sense, as being inseparable from the

consciousness that perceives them. This consciousness is investigated, not by metaphysical speculation, but by empirical and phenomenological research (see part I).

I have outlined this post-metaphysical and postmodern approach in numerous places, including several endnotes in SES, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (which specifically addresses the need for, and methodology of, a post-Kantian spirituality), and long endnotes in *Integral Psychology*. I suggest Weis start with those if he would like to learn more about my position.

**What has an dogmatic repetition of concepts found in the wisdom traditions to do with empirical transpersonal research?**

Nothing, which is why I categorically reject them--unless they can be reconstructed using good broad science and reconstructive science. Some of them can, many cannot; but we repeat none of them on blind faith.

**3. Philosophia Perennis as foundation--the argument from authority**

**Conceiving the transpersonal realistically as the ens perfectissimum of theology, one can only point to the authority of the spiritual scriptures.**

True, which is why I categorically reject that approach as well. I am a major critic of the perennial philosophy for all those reasons. The only areas of the perennial philosophy that I have been willing to support are those that have continuing and ongoing grounding in empirical and phenomenological investigation, such as the existence of three major states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, sleeping). But otherwise, all of the perennial philosophy is up for review based on good, broad science and confirmed by reconstructive science.

**What empirical proof do historical spiritual figures present us with?**

None, which is why their claims must be open to ongoing experiential research.

**What proof do we have that they represent our future development?**

None, which is why their claims must be open to ongoing experiential research. I have said that some of the great sages "represent our future," but only in the sense--and to the extent--that they have experienced higher or wider or deeper states of consciousness that humanity as a whole might discover (as I explained in Part I). But whether or not that happens depends on events in all four quadrants, each of which is an open, evolving system. Again, Weis is taking a very superficial and narrow reading of my work and trying to extrapolate it, and the results are his own dogmatism, not mine.

**4. The transpersonal as a promise of the evolutionary future**

**Wilber sees the transpersonal as potential evolutionary stages, not as actual realities, which is another proof his thoughts move on an abstract level, high above the empirical world.**

That is incorrect on both counts. As I explained above, the transpersonal realms are universal potentials for transcendence that can be experienced by virtually anybody right now, as a concrete reality, but its actual forms are filled out by all four quadrants. These higher potentials might become higher evolutionary stages, but that will only happen based on concrete realities in all four quadrants.

Further, as my overall writings make clear, I maintain, based on empirical and phenomenological evidence, that "the transpersonal" actually contains "states," "stages," and "realms." As states, they are ever-present realities, not future potentials. In other words, my model can accommodate both Weis's position and an evolutionary position, whereas his model does not.

**Ideas about future evolution can only be speculative and have nothing to do with the scientific concept of evolution, which is retrospective, reconstructive.**

Correct, which is why, as I explain in SES, the higher stages can only be explicated with a reconstructive science (see Part I above). Weis might have missed these sections. The point is that if we take a *reconstructive* approach to those who have *already* demonstrated a *present* competence in *higher* stages of development (i.e., stages beyond turquoise), then those stages will likely give us some of the general patterns that *future* evolution on a larger scale might follow (as a Kosmic habit), but even then, the actual forms will only be determined by emergent realities in all four quadrants. I don't think Hans-Willi is quite following the argument here, but I'm sure if he did, he could still find something wonderfully nasty to say about it. :-)

## **5. Meditation as scientific proof for metaphysical statements?**

**Metaphysics is concerned with understanding the (higher) world, science with facts. Science does not know if development is in itself desirable.**

Correct, and again Weis repeats much of my own position as if it were merely his. My stance here is again somewhat similar to Habermas's, but whereas Habermas stops his account of development at the centaur (turquoise), I continue the account into the transpersonal as it becomes a concrete reality in development (and can be demonstrated with a reconstructive science). And, as I said, I categorically reject metaphysical approaches in every way. We need a postmodern, post-Kantian, empirically and phenomenologically and experientially grounded science of the transpersonal, which operates through a reconstructive science to suggest the higher stages and states that are available as present realities (facts) to those who continue their development beyond the stages recognized by conventional theorists such as Habermas.

**Does meditation prove in a "scientific" way the metaphysical statements of the spiritual traditions? Metaphysics and science can never meet. (A scientific proof of the existence of God is a contradiction in terms.)**

Generally I agree with the points that Weis is making here, but only from within his own narrow definitions. There is an enormous literature--in both Germany and America--on what the meaning of "science" is. Weis typically collapses my position--which contains at least three separate answers to that question--into one lump answer, which is nowhere near my actual stance. So let me unfold my actual position on "science," if I may, and repeat a few points I made previously:

1. If by "science" we mean sensorimotor empiricism, then there is no scientific proof for God. Nor is there any scientific proof for any realities higher than sensory (including mathematics, logic, etc.--all of those become "nonscientific" because they are nonsensory). This is often called "narrow science."

2. If by "science" we mean propositions ground in direct experiential evidence, then of course there is a "proof" of God's existence, and it is called "satori," the direct realization of the Suchness or Isness (tathagata) of the world. This is often called "deep or broad science."

3. I believe that both of the above statements are true, but I have added a third and I believe very novel consideration to this debate, namely: that when a person experiences satori (in the Upper-Left quadrant) and thus has a "deep science" direct experience of Spirit, then narrow science (in the Upper-right quadrant) can simultaneously track the brain changes that occur during satori (or sahaj samadhi, moksha, unitive consciousness, etc.), thus fleshing out our understanding of higher states of consciousness and giving us a much fuller, "all-quadrant, all-level" overview of higher realities. This approach is spelled out in *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* and briefly outlined in *A Theory of Everything* and *Integral Psychology*.

**Meditation does not follow the three strands of science, for the data of meditation cannot even be put in words. So this is an empty analogy.**

Oh, here Weis is showing his old grandmother Zen. He only has half of the Zen truth. "You Must Say Something!" is the name of Katigiri Roshi's latest book, and it points out the other half of Zen: of course the Real is ineffable, but you must say something! So what can you say? Quite a lot, it turns out, which is why real Zen Masters talk about Emptiness all the time. This is acceptable IF you have had satori, in which case you will know exactly what they mean.

There is a long section in SES, which Weis might not have read, where I talk about why ALL experiences are ineffable unless you have had the experience yourself. Experiences such as making love, watching a sunset, listening to Bach: none of them can be fully put into words. The same is true of mystical experiences, but that does not stop us from communicating quite a bit about them--just as we can talk quite a bit about sex, even

though it is ineffable. All that is required is a bit of good will and mutual understanding, which Weis might want to consider as a happy alternative to his resolute desire to not agree with a single thing I have ever said. :-)

**Stripping Wilber's system from its ontological and cosmological assumptions leaves us with an attempt at classifying transpersonal phenomena, which is neither compelling nor necessary. It is only one out of many other possible interpretations of the transpersonal.**

First, there are no ontological assumptions, as I explained, but rather conclusions reached by empirical and phenomenological research based on broad sciences and reconstructive sciences. Weis is free to ignore this research, but his own model or system will clearly suffer for doing so.

Second, the "classification" system that results from including this data and research involves several dimensions--including states, stages, and realms--and Weis shows no indication that he is familiar with this research, so I would imagine that he would not find it compelling.

## **6. The clinical approach to the transpersonal**

**Wilber's classification of stages, pathologies and treatment modalities sees the field of spirituality with the eyes of a therapist, as if all deviations from the "norm" are pathological.**

Not at all. The idea is simply that, wherever we find development occurring, including transpersonal development, we often find that there can be problems, snarls, or miscarriages in this development, and if that happens, painful symptoms of the developmental problem can occur. We naturally do not want to reduce transpersonal problems to merely personal problems, and therefore, if we are acting as transpersonal therapists, we want to extend our therapeutic compassion to these higher dimensions as well. It's a simple matter of kindness and consideration.

**If we are to understand transpersonal phenomena in an empirical way, we have to let go of all normative and finalizing assumptions about how things should be.**

Obviously. But once we collect a great deal of data and experiential evidence on the unfolding and development of consciousness, then we can legitimately draw normative conclusions in a very general sense (again, just as Habermas does; see also Part I). There is nothing suspect about this; it is very straightforward; and it certainly does NOT include finalizing assumptions.

**Who are we to say that the world-rejecting Gnostics were "pathological," an assessment Wilber attributes to Plotinus? Each spiritual/existential viewpoint is valuable in itself.**

Here Weis's green-meme (or merely pluralistic) orientation asserts itself clearly. He exhibits the standard performative contradiction: no view is higher or better than another, except his own view, which is the one correct way to see things. It is exactly to avoid such performative self-contradictions that a more integral approach to spirituality would be helpful.

## **7. Weis' proposal for an alternative view of the transpersonal**

**Wilber's system is far too abstract to be useful for transpersonal researchers, who have to deal with specific and detailed issues.**

Then Weis should quickly alert the millions of readers around the world who are using this system and finding it quite useful. And please hurry, they are clearly wasting their lives! :-) But the point is, use the abstract framework and also *apply whatever details you wish* (my work offers a fair amount of details as well), and then you will have the best of both worlds.

**Let's not focus on stages but on states (induced or spontaneous) in empirical transpersonal research. That is something we can handle.**

My model includes *both* states and stages, since that is what is warranted by the empirical and phenomenological evidence to date. If Weis wants to ignore this huge body of evidence, then he must tell us why he ignores this evidence, and he must tell us what defects in the researchers led to their finding this evidence. Until he does that, any truly integral model will include all the relevant facts as disclosed by reputable researchers. I do not think we should toss out evidence as easily as Weis does.

**Let's see how people integrate these states into their personality, and how they affect their larger behavior.**

That's exactly what my approach does. But it also includes the effect of stages, types, developmental lines, the self as integrating tendency, and so on, which gives us a much more complete and integral view than that of Weis, in my opinion.

**Trying to fit the transpersonal in an abstract and theoretical framework is a hopeless enterprise, all mystics have said the spiritual cannot adequately be formulated.**

Yes, and all of traditions of the mystics have nonetheless offered general maps of the journey to Spirit (such as the ten Zen Ox-Herding pictures). It turns out that there are family resemblances to these maps, and these resemblances seem to reflect certain deep potentials in the human bodymind (deep potentials for self-transcendence given as the Great Nest). We don't try to fit anything into an abstract and theoretical framework. Instead, we attempt a reconstructive science that concludes, based on empirical and phenomenological research and evidence, that there are higher states and stages available to men and women (but again, not in a predetermined fashion, since their manifestation is

molded by all four quadrants--behavioral, intentional, social, and cultural). This is a much fuller approach than Weis offers, I believe.

Let me finish by saying that I believe I truly resonate with some of the genuine worry and concerns that Weis demonstrates--particularly the concern about closed systems, authoritarian control, lack of openness, and potential for abuse. But I have already written extensively about those issues and about why we therefore need a post-metaphysical, deep-scientific or experiential approach to such issues, and why we must sharply differentiate such post-metaphysical spirituality from both the perennial philosophy and the many New-Age movements. I'm sure if Weis would read my work in this area that he could find something to hate about it, too, and we are all eagerly looking forward to his next round of criticism, although I'm sure that I will be forgiven if I don't respond, since I might have more important things to do, like feed my goldfish.

#### Appendix 1: On The Need for a Post-Metaphysical and Critical Spirituality

The following endnotes are taken from *Integral Psychology*. They point up, once again, my belief that we need to move from a metaphysical approach (which assumes that numerous planes or levels of reality exist in a radically independent fashion from the consciousness that knows them) and move toward a much more critical approach (which investigates the structures of the subject that knows the object, or in this case, that knows the levels of reality). In the following notes, I try to make two major points: (1) we can no longer conceive planes or levels of reality as entirely pre-existing, pre-given ontological structures; (2) we can, however, continue to refer to ontologically real levels of reality, but *only* if they are conceived as fundamentally codependent on the consciousness that perceives and co-creates them. This allows us to retain planes, levels, or realms of reality as separate and quasi-independent variables, but only by realizing that those levels of reality are *internally* related to levels of consciousness, and that if a particular human consciousness does not perceive a realm, that realm can exist only because it is a realm of consciousness held in Spirit (a Spirit that human consciousness itself can directly realize in satori or enlightenment). This dramatically shifts independent levels of reality known by *a priori* metaphysical speculation, to levels of consciousness *known by direct experience* (and hence open to continual criticism and refinement via deep science, research, and investigation)--the shift, that is, from metaphysical to postmetaphysical spirituality.

Some of the following notes might not make complete sense unless one reads the book from which they are taken (*Integral Psychology*), but by and large I think they are clear enough to get the general idea. I have edited these notes slightly for emphasis. This appendix is followed by several follow-up questions and my responses.

1.3 [which means, endnote 3 to chapter 1]. As Huston Smith points out in *Forgotten Truth*, in the great traditions, the levels of consciousness (or levels of selfhood) are sometimes distinguished from the levels of reality (or planes of reality), and I also follow

that distinction. However, for most purposes they must be treated together, as the being and knowing aspects of each of the levels in the Great Nest. In other words, the *basic structures of knowing* (the levels of consciousness/selfhood) and the *basic structures of being* (the planes/realms of reality) are intimately and internally connected, and unless otherwise specified, both of these are indicated by the terms *basic structures* or *basic levels* of the Great Nest. (Huston Smith indicates this by using the same figure of concentric circles to cover both levels of reality and levels of selfhood.) But the reason it is necessary to distinguish them is that a given level of selfhood can encounter a different level of reality, as we will see in subsequent discussions, and thus these need to be preserved as two independent variables. Nonetheless, there are advantages, in modern discourse, to emphasizing the epistemological component over the ontological, as I will point out in the following discussion.

1.5 This is similar to the Mahayana Buddhist notion of the *alaya-vijnana*, the "collective storehouse consciousness," which is present in every person, and which is said to be the repository of the memory traces (*vasanas*) of all past experiences, both of oneself and others (i.e., it is not just collective but transpersonal, embracing all sentient beings; in my system, it is the high-subtle to low-causal). It is said that, in higher stages of meditation, one can contact this transpersonal consciousness, which helps to release one from a narrow and restricted identity with the individual self. Thus, according to Mahayana Buddhism, the *alaya-vijnana* is: (1) a real transpersonal realm, an *actuality*, that exists in all people; (2) it is, however, rarely contacted in a conscious fashion, so for most people, that conscious contact is merely a *potential*; (3) as a collective storehouse, it is *evolving* and changing as more and more *vasanas* are collectively accumulated; (4) thus its actual contours are constantly coevolving with people's experience--it is definitely *not* a pre-given, unchanging mold or eternal archetype; (5) *even though* it is constantly evolving, any individual, at any given time, by directly experiencing that realm, can be released from the constrictions of individuality; (6) thus, the fact that this subtle realm is evolving and changing does not mean that it cannot confer transpersonal liberation at any given time.

Of course, final liberation is said to be beyond even the subtle forms or *vasanas*, into the formless or causal (and then nondual). The causal is the only basic "level" that does not change and evolve, because it is purely formless. But even the nondual evolves in part, because it is a union of causal emptiness (which does not evolve) and the entire manifest world (which does).

To my mind, this conception (which is a reconstruction of the Buddhist view) is more adequate than that of eternally unchanging archetypal molds (see the Introduction to volume 2 of the *Collected Works* for a fuller discussion of this theme [this is reprinted below in Appendix 2, "The Nature of Involution"]); some aspects of the Kosmos must still be assumed to be archetypal, but far fewer than the perennial philosophy generally imagined). In my opinion, all of the holons of existence (including the basic structures) are, in part, these types of evolutionary memories or habits. And, for the present discussion, it should be remembered that the higher levels are still evolving themselves,

and thus they are great potentials, not pre-given absolutes, but this still does not prevent them from being able to release us from the constrictions of the lower realms.

8.1 As indicated in the text, states of consciousness are very important, but for them to contribute to *development* they must become structures/traits. Planes or realms are important, but they cannot be conceived pre-critically as ontologically independent realities, but rather as coproductions of perceiving selves (see note 8.2 [which follows]). Thus, the simplest *generalization* is that individual development involves waves, streams, and self, without in any way denying the importance of all of those other factors, from states to planes to numerous heterarchical processes and patterns.

8.2 In my view, the basic structures in the Great Nest are simultaneously levels of both knowing and being, epistemology and ontology. For reasons discussed in the text (namely, modernity rejected most ontology and allowed only epistemology), I usually refer to the basic structures as "the basic structures of consciousness" (or "the basic levels of consciousness"); but their ontological status should not be overlooked as long as their internal connection to consciousness is not ignored. Generally, the perennial philosophy refers to the former as levels of consciousness (or *levels of selfhood*), and the latter as realms or planes of existence (or *levels of reality*), which we should understand as inextricably interwoven (see note 1.3). Thus, as Huston Smith pointed out (*Forgotten Truth*), the body level of consciousness corresponds with the terrestrial realm or plane of existence; the mind level of consciousness corresponds with the intermediate realm or plane of existence; the soul level of consciousness corresponds with the celestial plane of existence; and the spirit level of consciousness corresponds with the infinite plane of existence. Since these are correlative structures (levels of consciousness and planes of existence), I include both of them in the idea of basic structures or basic levels of the Great Nest.

However, on occasion it is useful to distinguish them, because *a given level of self can experience a different level or plane of reality*. I have often made this distinction when analyzing modes of knowing (see *Eye to Eye*, chapters 2 and 6; *A Sociable God*, chapter 8), and I will do the same in the text when we discuss modes of art. Moreover, in ontogeny, the structures develop but the planes do not (the self develops through the already-given potential planes or levels of reality [which pre-exist only as a potential gradient of transcendence]); however, in both Kosmic involution and evolution/phylogeny, the planes/realms also develop, or unfold from Source and enfold to Source (so we cannot say that planes show no development at all: they involve and evolve from Spirit; see note 1.5 [above] for the ways in which the planes themselves coevolve). But a given level of self, generally, can interact with different levels of reality, to various degrees, so that we need to keep these two (structures and realms) as independent variables.

Thus, for example, as I pointed out in *Eye to Eye*, consciousness can turn its attention to the material plane (using its epistemological eye of flesh), the intermediate plane (using its epistemological eye of mind), or the celestial plane (using its epistemological eye of contemplation). The material, intermediate, and celestial *planes* are the *ontological*

levels; in *Eye to Eye* I refer to them using the terms *sensibilia*, *intelligibilia*, and *transcendelia* (i.e., the objects in those planes or realms). The eyes of flesh, mind, and contemplation are the *epistemological* levels correlated with (and disclosing) those ontological planes of *sensibilia*, *intelligibilia*, and *transcendelia*. (Of course, this is just using a simple three-level version of the Great Nest; if we use five levels, there are then five planes of existence and five correlative levels of consciousness, and so on. In my scheme, since I often use 7 to 9 general levels of consciousness, there are likewise 7 to 9 general realms or planes of reality.)

But notice: you can make essentially the same points using only the levels of consciousness (since being and knowing are two sides of the same levels). You can say that the mind can investigate the intermediate realm, or you can simply say the mind can investigate other minds. You can say the mind can investigate the celestial realm, or you can simply say the mind can investigate the subtle level. They are essentially saying the same thing, as long as you realize that any given level of selfhood (or consciousness) can turn its attention to any level of existence (or plane of reality). These two independent scales, in other words, can be stated as "level of consciousness investigates planes of existence"; but they can also be stated as "level of consciousness investigates other levels of consciousness," as long as we understand the correlations involved.

I often use the latter formulation, simply because, as I said, it avoids the ontological and metaphysical speculations that modernity quite rightly finds so questionable. Premodern philosophy was unabashedly *metaphysical* (i.e., it assumed the nonproblematic ontological existence of all the various planes, levels, and realms of transcendental reality); whereas modern philosophy was primarily *critical* (it investigated the structures of the subject of thinking, and called into question the ontological status of the objects of thought), and thus modernity brought a much needed critical attitude to bear on the topic (even if it went overboard in its critical zeal and sometimes erased all objects of knowledge except the empirical and sensorimotor).

A crippling problem with the perennial traditions (and the merely metaphysical approaches) is that they tend to discuss ontological levels (planes or axes) as if they were pre-given, independent of the perceiver of those domains, thus overlooking the substantial amount of modern and postmodern research showing that cultural backgrounds and social structures profoundly mold perceptions in all domains (i.e., the perennial philosophy did not sufficiently differentiate the four quadrants). For all these reasons, simply talking about "planes" as completely independent ontological realities is extremely problematic--yet another reason I have tended to emphasize the epistemological facets over the merely ontological ones.

Follow-Up Questions

**In a 1983 article in *The American Theosophist* you called your approach the "Neo-Perennial Philosophy," to distinguish it from the anti-modern, anti-evolutionary versions. Do you still stand by that article?**

Yes, I do still stand by that article. In fact, if you look at it, that article specifically defends only ONE item of the perennial philosophy: namely, the existence of the timeless, spaceless, formless Ground or unqualifiable Spirit as such. That article in itself is therefore a radical rejection of virtually everything the perennial philosophy has claimed. The title itself was an ironic put-down: you can't have a new version of that which claims to be unchanging!

However, that does not mean that all of the conclusions of perennial philosophy are necessarily invalid; it only means that they have to be re-assessed to include a modern and postmodern perspective and reconstructed in the light of Spirit's own ongoing evolution and development. That was the major point of that article, and it marked my break with the perennial philosophy as such. (That article is included as chap. 2 in *The Eye of Spirit* ).

**Does that mean that between 1977 (with your first book) and 1983 you did embrace a version of the perennial philosophy, but you have stopped doing so?**

Yes, that is basically right. But there are several items here that need to be treated separately.

First is the issue of a perennial philosophy itself: is it true that there is a set of doctrines, ideas, and practices that are essentially the same in all of the world's great wisdom traditions or religions? That is a very difficult proposition to demonstrate, obviously. Nonetheless, I believe that there are a handful of spiritual tenets that can indeed be found in most of the world's great religions. However, they are not "perennial," for they mostly appear *only* in those spiritual traditions that originated around 500 BCE. And even then, those original spiritual insights show a great deal of growth and evolution themselves (as I try to point out in the article you mention).

Thus, it is one thing to say: there are some extremely important spiritual ideas to be found in the various wisdom traditions. It is quite another thing to say: there is a group of spiritual ideas that can be found in *all* of the wisdom traditions and that is essentially *identical* in all of them. I definitely believe the first assertion; but I think the second assertion is much less accurate, although I think a few general items can be extracted if we are careful (Huston Smith does a fairly good job of this in *Forgotten Truth* , mostly because he states his conclusions in extremely general and abstract ways).

And yes, I used to be an unabashed subscriber to the notion of a perennial philosophy (until roughly, as you say, around 1983 or so--almost twenty years ago). I was raised and educated in the modern West and its rampant belief in flatland, where no levels of consciousness higher than the egoic-rational (or centauric) are even acknowledged. And so it came as a stunning revelation that, first of all, there are levels of consciousness

higher than the egoic-rational, and second, many premodern cultures acknowledged these higher states and stages of consciousness. In fact, some of the great geniuses of premodern cultures had given sophisticated maps of these higher states and stages of consciousness development (at least as they appeared at that time). The best of these maps were actually based on direct experiential and phenomenological investigation--that is, they were based on good, deep science (Plotinus, for example), which is why their maps are still relevant and useful in today's world (even if the surface features have shifted considerably and need to be reconstructed in an AQAL fashion--"all-quadrant, all-level").

But all of these premodern investigations were set in a cultural context that was thoroughly mythic in its general features, and that cultural background unavoidably colored the interpretations, maps, and methodologies of even the greatest of sages and philosophers in those eras. And the less sophisticated philosophers were even more drenched in mythological assumptions--or assumptions based, not on direct evidence and experience but merely speculation and ontological implication.

For example, we saw (in Appendix 1) that the traditions often conceived the planes of reality as being the terrestrial, the intermediate, the celestial, and the infinite. These were usually believed to be actual territories existing "out there," populated with mythic beings walking around and talking and having experiences on a different type of actual, concrete territory. The Buddhist "six realms of existence," for example, are clearly of this nature. They are said to be actual places inhabited by hungry ghosts, titans, animals, demigods, angels, and so on.

Now, when modern Buddhist teachers look at those six realms, they almost always interpret them as *actually* referring to six major *psychological states* that humans can experience. Trungpa Rinpoche does this, for example, in his many books. He says that the hungry ghost realm actually means states of psychological jealousy and envy. The titan realm actually means states of egoic inflation and narcissism. The god realm actually means states of meditative bliss, and so on.

Well, that is exactly a switch from metaphysical to critical--a switch from postulating these realms as separate ontological realities that can be known only by speculation, to seeing these realms as actually being *structures of the perceiving subject*--that is, as being psychological states of being that can be directly known and experienced by a shift in consciousness--and therefore directly investigated by a phenomenological science (or deep science) of shared introspection and confirmed by a reconstructive science of those who have demonstrated competence in those consciousness shifts.

Thus, some of the major tenets or ideas of the great wisdom traditions can still be generally valid, but only if they are reconstructed along modern and postmodern lines, just as Trungpa and so many other sophisticated present-day teachers (in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, etc.) are already doing.<sup>12</sup> My work is simply giving a philosophical foundation and methodology for doing so--for moving from a metaphysical to a critical, post-metaphysical, and more integral spirituality.

This is why I respectfully but firmly object to those theorists who summarize my work as a modern or postmodern version of the perennial philosophy. I understand why they do so, especially if they give a historical presentation of my ideas, but to do so misses the major shift that marked phase-3 and especially phase-4 of my work (namely, all the books that appeared after the 1983 article, and especially all the books that appeared after SES)--it is to miss the radical shift from metaphysical to postmetaphysical. Presenting my mature work as simply an updated version of the perennial philosophy guarantees that it will get the reception that Meister Hans-Willi gives it.

**In your earlier work (esp. *The Atman Project*, 1980), you wrote: "Involution, or the enfolding of the higher in the lower, is the pre-condition of evolution, or the unfolding of the higher states from the lower" (p. 160-161), suggesting that the future evolutionary stages do not follow a random path, but mirror the steps of the stratified Kosmos. This is definitely a metaphysical point of view, isn't it?**

Not in the technical sense, no. It would be metaphysical if it were postulated in an *a priori* fashion to be a reality that is known only by speculation, not by direct experience. But the existence of higher states of consciousness can be directly known, and thus the difference between the higher states and the lower states--a difference known as "involution"--can be seen based on direct phenomenological evidence and experience. Involution in these terms is thus a post-metaphysical conclusion based on direct experience, not a metaphysical postulate based on mental speculation.

But notice, what is directly experienced is simply the higher states and stages of consciousness development (and hence the difference between higher and lower can be immediately understood based on evidence or phenomenological data). But the idea that all of the specific stages themselves are enfolded in a process of involution is not directly experienced, nor can it be legitimately inferred by the reflective intellect based on evidence. All that is required by the deep science of contemplative evidence is that *a gradient of potential transcendence* is pre-given. This is the pre-given "stratification" that you mention, but in order for evolution to occur, it is not required that all of the precise steps be explicitly included in that stratification--the *gradient alone* is all that is required--what I previously called a morphogenetic field.

Let me give a very simplistic example: in order to walk down a mountain, it is necessary that you first walk up it. But the path up the mountain--the exact steps or stages--might not be the same as the path down the mountain. But one thing is the same: the height of the mountain is unchanged in either path, so if from the bottom to the top of the mountain is, say, 10,000 meters, then that is the same distance from the top to the bottom. Now you might end up walking down the mountain in a very uneven path, so that you eventually end up walking, say, 17,000 meters. But you still descended only 10,000 meters.

It is the same with involution and evolution. When Spirit throws itself outward to create the manifest world (starting with the Big Bang of the material level), all that is given is the *gradient* of 10,000 meters, which creates a vast potential that will pull all objects placed on the top of mountain downward. That pull is called Eros. Of course in this

example the directions are reversed: we usually speak of Eros and evolution as an Ascent, but since gravity (representing Spirit) is downward for us, then in this example going up the mountain is involution and going down the mountain is evolution. Spirit creates the mountain, puts all of us on top of it, gives us a push (the Big Bang), and then gravity (or spiritual Eros) does the rest, although there are all sorts of different paths down the mountain, with all sorts of ups and downs and spirals and regressions and so on.

When I speak of "levels of reality" or "levels of consciousness" or "stages of development," what I basically mean is: how far down the mountain is a particular person at any given moment? Thus, we can for convenience divide the path down the mountain into ten stages, each of which is marked by a descent of 1000 meters. So to say a person is at "stage 4" simply means that they are 4000 meters down the mountain--but that does *not* tell us exactly how they got to 4000 meters. In some people it will be a straight and steady descent. Others will descend to 3000 meters, then go back to 2000 meters, then down to 4000. We can still refer to ten stages as *perfectly real markers down the mountain* because each stage simply means another 1000 meters of greater descent has occurred, however you got there. So we can also say that everybody that goes all the way down the mountain has gone through ten real stages. The "deep structure" of each stages simply means the *depth* of the descent at that stage, so that if you are at stage 7, it means that you are 7000 meters down the mountain, and everybody who is at stage 7 is also 7000 meters down (however they got there), and this is *universally* true for everybody--but each person's journey will have very unique features (and *these will vary from culture to culture and from person to person* ). And none of those steps were put there in involution.<sup>13</sup>

Now here is the final point: in the *metaphysical* version of involution, the mountain itself is created and is already pre-given. All of its contours and details are already created and are fully existing (although they are hidden or enfolded). We are placed at the top of the mountain, and as we descend we simply encounter items on the mountain that were already created and enfolded by Spirit. In the *postmetaphysical* version, however, all that is given is the potential gradient of 10,000 meters. The mountain itself is not given; rather, the mountain and its features are co-created as consciousness on the whole descends down the 10,000 meter gradient, and it is created by interactions in all four quadrants.

In the postmetaphysical version, there are still universals, and as previously suggested they are of two major types: (1) As consciousness on the whole descends the 10,000 meter gradient of transcendental potential, the mountain and its features are co-created by factors in all four quadrants, and once they take on form, they become Kosmic habits. Henceforth, all individuals starting at the top of mountain will have to negotiate these already-existing features (such as, for human beings living today: atoms, molecules, cells, organisms--and psychologically, the early stages of beige, purple, red, blue, orange, etc.--these are all now Kosmic habits that form the early stages of all subsequent development). And (2), individuals can still "jump down" the mountain and experience, say, a depth of 8000 meters, even though humanity on the whole is no further down than, say, 3000 meters. But even if an advanced sage "jumps further down the mountain," he or

she will still experience that greater depth only in terms of his or her own four quadrants. But this still allows the *pregiven reality of all ten stages of descent* --all ten stages are fully present and fully available, because all 10,000 meters are fully pre-given.<sup>14</sup> But *none* of their surface features are filled in, for individuals or collectives; moreover, we don't know the exact path that the future stages of evolution will actually take for an individual or for the collective. Maybe the descent from 7000 meters to 6000 meters--in a particular individual or for humanity on the whole--will be straightforward and easy; maybe it will involve cataclysmic regressions and spirals. All we can say is that these potential stages do exist as a *gradient of transcendental potential* (i.e., the morphogenetic field represented by the general pull of gravity or spiritual Eros--or simply the capacity for systems to self-organize, if you wish to be more agnostic), but we cannot say anything about the actual form and contours until they unfold.<sup>15</sup>

I discuss this postmetaphysical version of involution more fully in the Introduction to Volume 2 of the *Collected Works*, which I will reprint below as Appendix 2 ("The Nature of Involution").

**If Spirit is the only thing you have retained from the perennial philosophy, what does your view of the Kosmos look like?**

No, I didn't say that Spirit was the only thing that should be retained from the perennial philosophy. I said that we should retain only those tenets that are compatible with good, deep science and that can be confirmed by a reconstructive science of those who have demonstrated competence in the post-rational waves of development. As it turns out, many of the great premodern sages were *already* doing that--they had themselves *already* taken the critical turn, as I pointed out for Nagarjuna, Plotinus, Shankara, al-Hallaj, St. Teresa, Eckhart, and so on. Therefore, numerous of their tenets, ideas, practices, and conclusions are already based on exemplars, injunctions, direct experiential data and evidence, and confirmation/rejection procedures, and thus those tenets are likely still valid today (even if their details need to be updated for the postmodern world). In fact, many forms of contemplative and meditative spirituality already follow those guidelines, and thus they are likely still valid--but the point is that they are at any event open to further critical testing; and if they pass those tests, they can and should be retained.<sup>16</sup> This is why I still sometimes refer to the perennial philosophy (as I did in *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*), but *not* so as to uncritically accept the argument from authority, but *only* insofar as its tenets can (or could be) reconstructed in terms of both good deep science and reconstructive science.<sup>17</sup>

But when any contemplative endeavor steps away from its direct experiences and its empirical and phenomenological grounding, and slips back into its premodern metaphysical speculations (which actually represent lower levels of development and are regressive in their announcements), those speculations need to be met with a severely critical attitude. For example, whenever a Christian monk moves away from direct contemplative experiences of transpersonal love and announces that *only* if you accept Jesus as your personal savior can you have this experience, then that claim must pass the test of good, broad science, and of course it fails miserably to do so, because that claim is

a myth, a metaphysical assertion without evidence. On the other hand, a phenomenological experience of Christ consciousness might represent, say, an experience of 8000 meters down the mountain--a very "high" experience of a subtle realm--but if it is *interpreted* merely in the terms of the mythic level of consciousness--about 3000 meters down--then a *postrational* experience of a very real higher state is being (mis)interpreted in the terms of a premodern, *prerational* state, and that is what causes modernity to deny altogether the existence of deeper/higher realms than that of the egoic-rational.

But notice, even if we include all of those reconstructed tenets, practices, and conclusions from the world's wisdom traditions, we still will *not* discover *any* of the stages in the intersubjective realm (the Lower-Left quadrant), because those stages do not appear in any phenomenological investigation (they are uncovered only by intersubjective, developmental-structuralist approaches, which were discovered just a few decades ago). I explain this crucial point in "A Summary of My Psychological Model," which is posted at [wilber.shambhala.com](http://wilber.shambhala.com). Further, the perennial philosophy had no access to the modern scientific data about the Upper-Right quadrant (brain neurophysiology, neurotransmitters, etc.). Nor did the perennial philosophy have any understanding of the stages and detailed nature of the Lower-Right quadrant (techno-economic modes of productions, the history of social systems, etc.).

In other words, even an updated perennial philosophy is a severely limited worldview. And what the perennial philosophy did with the limitations and lacunae in its worldview was to fill those vacancies in understanding with metaphysical assertions. That's the real problem.

### **So if you deny all those metaphysical aspects, then what IS your ontology?**

Well, as I said, I believe that all ten levels of reality-consciousness are real (the 10,000 meters are pre-given but unendingly open);<sup>18</sup> some of these waves have already emerged and stabilized as Kosmic habits--that is, as stable holons that have become the fundamental constituents of the World (such as, in the Right Hand, quarks, atoms, molecules, cells, organisms...; and in the Left Hand, prehension, sensation, perception, images, symbols, purple, red, blue, orange, green, yellow, turquoise, which are now available as general stages of human development, as far as reconstructive science can tell at this time).<sup>19</sup> The "four-quadrant" diagram that I often present is a simple representation of some of the ontological realities or holons that exist to date ( *all* of those holons exist independently of any particular human mind, although some of the intermediate-to-higher holons do not exist independently of human minds in general). Also, the higher levels that have not yet emerged at large are nonetheless present as real potentials, and every human being has access to them in altered states that access these major realms. Those levels/realms are realities, and they can emerge in *stable* fashion as developmental *stages* for any who wish to move ahead of humanity and climb further down the mountain of transcendental potential. Involution and evolution are real. And so on.... That is a very large "ontology," so to speak, but an ontology that is not ultimately divorced from some form of consciousness.

**It is interesting that a Dutch philosopher, J.J. Poortman, who died in 1970, had a philosophy he called "twofold subjectivity" or "realism within idealism." He agreed with the mystics that ultimately everything existed in the consciousness of the Self ("there is nothing outside God"), but for us individual selves, there is a VAST reality around us, both in its visible and its invisible aspects. Paradoxically, this mystical philosophy leads to a firm support for scientific research, in all its aspects (physical, parapsychological, mystical).**

Yes, I would generally agree with that view, very much. The important point is that nothing exists outside the consciousness of the Self, but for individual selves much of this reality remains unconscious (or remains a mere potential for them), BUT the consciousness of the individual and the consciousness of the Self exist along a single spectrum, and individual selves can develop to a consciousness of the transcendental Self and thus experience it directly. But that is a critical, not a metaphysical, proposition, and it can be tested by a good broad science and then confirmed by a reconstructive science of those who have demonstrated competence in postnatal development. However, many of the ontological realities that I mentioned in the previous response exist outside of any individual mind at any given moment, which is why "quasi-independent realms of reality" must be retained in a postmetaphysical philosophy and spirituality. The major difference is, we postulate the existence of ONLY those realms that can be accessed by a developed human consciousness *at some point* (i.e., realms whose existence is tied as closely as possible to some degree of direct experience and evidence at all of the known stages of consciousness development).

**Since you keep returning to the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep as foundational in your recent writings: many people are puzzled by the fact that according to the traditions dream (subtle) and sleep (causal) are somehow related to more spiritual states of being, contrary to the experience that they normally lead to more UNconsciousness--deep sleep being the ultimate state of unconsciousness. Can you throw light on this?**

What we find in the contemplative traditions is that the three great realms of existence--generally called gross, subtle, and causal--are tied to three major states of consciousness--waking, dreaming, and sleeping. This is consistent with the critical turn that most of the contemplative traditions took about fifteen hundred years ago (namely, no realm of being is postulated to exist that cannot be accessed by consciousness of some sort).

Now, for the average or typical self, only the waking state is experienced *in consciousness*. The other two states--dreaming and sleeping--are indeed "less conscious" or even "unconscious." This also means that the typical self has access only to the *gross realm* of material reality. This conventional state is usually referred to as "ignorance," because the average self is ignorant of the deeper or higher realms and states.

However, if the self continues its growth and development, then its consciousness becomes stronger and stronger, so to speak, and eventually the self can enter the dream state and remain conscious throughout the dream. This is often called "lucid dreaming."

A self that lucid dreams does not "pass out" in the transition from waking to dreaming, but rather remains awake in both states--and thus this self has access not only to the gross realm of material reality but a direct access to subtle states that are created only by the mind (and thus this self can investigate the inner workings of its mind more fully than can a person who passes out during the subtle states).

If consciousness growth and development continues even further, a person can remain subtly awake even during deep dreamless sleep. In fact, we now have substantial EEG evidence that this can occur (which is an excellent example of how we can combine good deep science with good narrow science in order to offer compelling evidence for the existence of these higher states).<sup>20</sup> In this case, the person can remain conscious in the waking, dreaming, and deep sleep state, and this gives the person access to types of experiences that present themselves as more significant, more real, and more valuable than the states confined only to the gross realm.

How do you know if that is true? How do you know that these deeper states appear "more real" and "more valuable"? Well, you take up the broad science of contemplation and check it out yourself. If you do not perform this scientific experiment yourself, then of course we are not obliged to listen to your opinion in this regard, since your opinion at that point is mere metaphysics, or thought divorced from actual experience and evidence. The claim that only the gross waking realm is real is a metaphysical claim that any genuine postmetaphysical thought must reject.

So the mystics maintain that these deeper states of dreaming and sleeping, if entered in consciousness, give us epistemological tools that show us dimensions and realms of reality that are "invisible" to the average self living in ignorance. According to these investigators, the deeper realms/levels of reality--the subtle and causal--give us the epistemological tools or modes of knowing that better disclose the realities of soul and spirit. In my example, if the average self of ignorance is at, say, 2000 meters down the mountain, then the dream realm entered in consciousness is 5000 meters down, and the deep sleep state entered in consciousness is 9000 meters down. There is a fourth state, of course--called "turiya"--that represents the fully conscious Self that is capable of witnessing (or remaining awake) through all three major states, and whose realization is generally considered enlightenment (or 10,000 meters down--whereupon you realize that the entire mountain itself and all of its levels is actually Spirit, and that *in the manifest world* the mountain itself just keeps on going down forever: evolution is unending, but you are one with its timeless Ground).<sup>21</sup>

I hope that my comments shed some light on these difficult issues. What is so exciting to me is that we who are living today have an extraordinary opportunity to take the very best of premodern, modern, and postmodern approaches to reality and include all of them in a truly integral approach that honors and includes the best of each. This is not only a generous move on our part, it has the best chance of opening our hearts and minds and souls to the incredible treasures that Spirit has so freely conferred on this radiant Kosmos.

Thank you all for participating in this discussion. And Hans-Willi: please take care of yourself, my friend.

## Appendix 2: The Nature of Involution

Both *The Atman Project* and *Up from Eden* discuss evolution at length, with a brief but important overview of involution. According to the perennial philosophy--or the common core of the world's great wisdom traditions--Spirit manifests a universe by "throwing itself out" or "emptying itself" to create soul, which condenses into mind, which condenses into body, which condenses into matter, the densest form of all. [In the mountain analogy I just gave, "soul" is not a pre-given substance or structure but the potential to descend to 8000 meters; mind is the potential to descend to 5000 meters; body, to 2000 meters; and matter is the top of the mountain, with 0 meters of descent, the starting point for the return to spirit at 10,000 meters "down." The point is these "levels" are simply levels of the potential gradient exerted by gravity or spiritual Eros, and not any given structures or completely independent realities.]

Each of those levels is still a level of Spirit, but each is a reduced or "stepped down" version of Spirit. At the end of that process of *involution*, all of the higher dimensions are enfolded, as potential, in the lowest material realm. And once the material world blows into existence (with, say, the Big Bang), then the reverse process--or *evolution*--can occur, moving from matter to living bodies to symbolic minds to luminous souls to pure Spirit itself. In this developmental or evolutionary unfolding, each successive level does not jettison or deny the previous level, but rather includes and embraces it, just as atoms are included in molecules, which are included in cells, which are included in organisms. Each level is a whole that is also part of a larger whole (each level or structure is a whole/part or holon). In other words, each evolutionary unfolding transcends but includes its predecessor(s), with Spirit transcending and including absolutely everything.

This arrangement--Spirit transcends but includes soul, which transcends but includes mind, which transcends but includes body, which transcends but includes matter--is often referred to as the Great Chain of Being, but that is clearly a very unfortunate misnomer. Each successive level is not a link but a nest, which includes, embraces, and envelopes its predecessor(s). The Great Chain of Being is really the Great Nest of Being--not a ladder, chain, or one-way hierarchy, but a series of concentric spheres of increasing holistic embrace. The Great Nest of Being is a holarchy, composed of holons, a *development* that is *envelopment*. And the deep features of this development were, at least in some significant ways, said to be deposited in involution.

This naturally raises the thorny question, Since the major dimensions of existence are laid down in involution, is evolution a completely determined course of action? Are the higher levels (or structures or holons or stages) given as Platonic Forms, ready to fall from the sky on their appointed cue?

Most of the traditionalists--such as Huston Smith, Fritjof Schuon, and Ananda Coomaraswamy--would reply with a strong "Yes." But that part of the "perennial

philosophy" is something with which I could never really agree (which is one of the reasons I wrote "The Neo-Perennial Philosophy," replacing its central tenet of static Platonic Forms with an evolutionary panentheism). Like most of the structuralists, the traditionalists believed in ahistorical, completely pre-given Forms, untouched by time, history, or evolution. I, on the other hand, believed that there was indeed an involutory arc, but all that it "predetermined" were some very general *potentials* for evolutionary unfolding [e.g., the pull of spiritual gravity].

To say that matter, body, mind, soul, and Spirit are evolutionary potentials is to say both quite a lot and not very much. With the traditionalists, I agree that these higher realms of being (or higher states of consciousness) are potentials that are available to us in any moment we can open our eyes wide enough. And the reason they are to some degree available is *involution*: all of these potentials were made available during efflux or involution, when Spirit threw itself outward to create the realms of soul, mind, body, and matter, realms that await rediscovery by any and all who can transcend the shallower to find the deeper.

Those individuals, for example, who have a strong religious experience, satori, or enlightenment, almost always report that they are simply *rediscovering* something that they once knew (in eternity) but forgot (in time). Profound mystical experience always carries the sense of "coming home," and never the sense of stumbling onto something completely unknown. Plato, in that regard, was quite right: this type of spiritual knowledge is a remembering, not an inventing. And we remember our higher states because they are already there, as potentials, awaiting rediscovery (a rediscovery of something we possessed, not in childhood, but in the depth of the timeless moment). In this specific sense, then, we absolutely need a concept of involution in order to be true to the phenomenological evidence of spiritual experience.

But that does *not* mean that everything about evolution is therefore laid down in involution, so that evolution is nothing but a rewinding of the videotape, so to speak. At most, certain deep features of the major realms are given by involution as potentials, but all the surface features are created, molded, shaped, and formed by historical currents and evolutionary forces. In that sense, certain deep features are remembered, but surface features are learned. And, as I explained above, I think even the deep features of holons are partially molded by time's formative powers. I say "partially," because if they were totally formed by evolutionary pressures, we would still have to account for the formation of the evolutionary pressures themselves, which would require at least some forces that did not come from evolution. Spirit, in other words, is not by any means a deterministic machine, but rather an organically playful Spirit, whose own sport and play (*lila*) includes the wonderful game of "surprise" at every possible turn, undermining determinism as all creativity does.

I think of involution, then, along the analogy of a rubber band: stretch it, and you have involution, which supplies a force (namely Eros) that will then pull the two ends of the rubber band (matter and spirit) back together again--in other words, an involutory force that will pull evolution along. But the actual route taken in that return, and all its

wonderful variety, is a co-creation of every holon and the currents of Eros in which it fluidly floats.

Now, of course, you are perfectly free to believe in evolution and reject the notion of involution. I find that an incoherent position; nonetheless, you can still embrace everything in the following pages about the evolution of culture and consciousness, and reject or remain agnostic on involution. But the notion of a prior involutory force does much to help with the otherwise impenetrable puzzles of Darwinian evolution, which has tried, ever-so-unsuccessfully, to explain why on earth dirt would get right up and eventually start writing poetry. But the notion of evolution as Eros, or Spirit-in-action, performing, as Whitehead put it, throughout the world by gentle persuasion toward love, goes a long way to explaining the inexorable unfolding from matter to bodies to minds to souls to Spirit's own Self-recognition. Eros, or Spirit-in-action, is a rubber band around your neck and mine, pulling us all back home.

## Notes

1. The "four quadrants" refer to the four dimensions of all actual occasions, namely, intentional, behavioral, social, and cultural. See *A Brief History of Everything* for an introduction to this idea.
2. Spiral Dynamics is a model of human development based on the pioneering work of Clare Graves and formulated by Dr. Don Beck and Christopher Cowan ("Spiral Dynamics" is copyrighted by the National Values Center of Denton, TX, and is used here with permission). Spiral Dynamics is a reconstructive science of development that discovered that human beings pass through eight major stages or waves of development: beige (archaic), purple (magical), red (mythic), blue (mythic-rational), orange (egoic-rational), green (pluralistic), yellow (holistic), and turquoise (integral). Higher stages are postulated to be emerging at this time. See *Integral Psychology* for a critical discussion of Spiral Dynamics.
3. The other major requirement is that of "transcend and include," in the Whitehead sense. That is, any future development mustprehend (include) its past occasions, as well as introduce its own novelty (transcendence). This is covered in the twenty tenets (see SES).
4. For example, the *leading edge* of *collective* evolution today is somewhere around the mature centaur (turquoise). Imagine a thousand years from now: perhaps 10 more levels/stages would have crystallized out of the subtle dimension of almost infinite possibilities. Those levels would have then become Kosmic habits (or stable holons) that would be re-used in all subsequent development beyond that point. The Spiral Dynamics of that time would then find that people go through 18 major waves of development. There is no upper "end" to evolution in the manifest world.

However, vis a vis spirituality, note that there are several "constants" that remain: at virtually any stage of development, a person can have a peak experience of the gross,

subtle, or causal realms (because everybody wakes, dreams, and sleeps [see below]), and this would presumably be true a thousand years from now. Likewise, a person would still have access to the pure formless Self or Witness, which does not change because it is indeed formless (the causal realm)--that is, today's experience of the formless Self (or unmanifest absorption, Ayin, formless Urgrund, nirvikalpa samadhi, etc.) carries the self-given understanding that this timeless state, precisely because it is timeless and formless, is fully present at all points of time (much as the "wetness" of an ocean is fully present in all of its waves), and thus, IF that experience is true today, it is true at all points of time in the manifest realm. Therefore, if the formless Self exists today, it will exist a thousand years from now. Likewise, if one further discovered the *union* of the formless Self with all of manifestation (the union of Emptiness and Form), then one would have access to the ever-present Nondual (sahaj samadhi, turiyatita, etc.). Of course, the Forms of manifestation that exist a thousand years from now would be largely different, but the state of subject-object unity consciousness would be similar in that it is a union of the timeless unchanging Formless with whatever manifestation is present at that time. In other words, the ever-present and timeless existence of the formless Witness and the formless aspect of the Nondual allows somebody at virtually any stage of development to find some degree of realization and enlightenment (at least as a state, or further as a stage)--whether a thousand years ago, today, or a thousand years hence. These timeless, spaceless, formless aspects of Spirit, disclosed by direct experience in contemplative development, appear to be part of Spirit's ever-present grace....

5. See *Integral Psychology* and *The Eye of Spirit* for a summary of this cross-cultural research in the stages of development.

6. See Jack Crittenden's Foreword to *The Eye of Spirit* for a summary of this aspect of the integral approach.

7. For a fuller account of the "universal ontology," see below, Part II, the answer to the question, "So if you deny all those metaphysical aspects, then what IS your ontology?" That answer involves those realities that I believe are universal.

But again, these universals are not metaphysical tenets merely postulated as *a priori* by the intellect, nor are they primarily deduced to be *a priori* by a type of transcendental criticism (a la Kant). Rather, in my view, these universal structures and patterns are in many ways open to direct phenomenological investigation, following a simple discovery of developmental studies: the *a priori* structures of one stage of consciousness become *a posteriori* experiences of the next stage of consciousness. That is, the embedded unconscious structures of one stage of development are largely *a priori* forms that co-create and co-structure the objects/phenomena of experience at that stage (but cannot themselves be experienced as phenomena--they help to structure phenomena). They are *a priori* because they themselves cannot be consciously experienced. However, because the subject of one stage becomes the object of the subject of the next stage (in both micro fashion, described by Whitehead, and in macro fashion, described by Robert Kegan), then the subjective/*a priori* structures of one stage become objective/*a posteriori* structures of the next, and thus they can be more directly experienced and therefore more directly

investigated by both good broad science and good broad reconstructive science. Thus, most of the universals postulated by my system are once again post-metaphysical. Of course, some metaphysical postulates are necessary for any complex system of thought (see note 16), but the more of those that can be tied to direct *a posteriori* experience, the better the chance of confirmed validity.

8. To say that the higher levels/stages of consciousness can be accessed by deep science is *not* to say that these higher levels are only reached by science or that science reveals all of the essential features of these higher levels. Like all the levels of consciousness, each higher level has aesthetic, moral, and scientific features--or I, we, and its dimensions--that is, all levels have four quadrants. I am emphasizing here merely those aspects revealed by deep science. See chap. 4 in *A Theory of Everything*.

9. This approach to values discloses at least three types of value: intrinsic value, extrinsic value, and ground value. See *A Brief History of Everything* for a discussion of these values.

10. See, for example, Fowler's research (using a reconstructive broad science) of the stages of religious belief and faith. His work is summarized in *Integral Psychology*.

11. Many of the enduring perennial philosophers--such as Nagarjuna--were already using postmetaphysical methods, which is why their insights are still quite valid. But the vast majority of perennial philosophers were caught in metaphysical, not critical, thought, which is why I reject their methods almost entirely, and accept their conclusions only to the extent they can be reconstructed, which my books attempt to do in several ways. See the following discussion for more on this theme.

12. Great present-day spiritual teachers like Trungpa have intuitively made the shift from metaphysical to critical--but so did many of the earliest Buddhist teachers, simply because, as previously noted, the great shift from metaphysical to critical had already been made by the Buddhist genius Nagarjuna around 200 CE (and followed by the great Shankara for Vedanta). This is why so much of the work of these great geniuses--and others who took similar critical paths, such as Plotinus--still speaks (or at least can speak) to us of today, because they had all taken the critical and postmodern turn even in premodern times. This is why I have tried to incorporate so much of their work into my own system (by reconstructing it along AQAL lines). As I earlier suggested, many of the great premodern sages were already doing good, deep science of the higher waves of consciousness development, which is why it is important to always touch bases with these pioneers.

13. All that is put there is the gradient of 10,000 meters--this gradient or morphogenetic field is the self-organizing capacity of the Kosmos--Eros by any other name.

14. In my system, these pre-given realms for humans are represented primarily by the four (or five) great states of consciousness: waking (gross realm), dreaming (subtle realm), sleeping (causal realm), transcendent Witness (turiya or the fourth state), and

ever-present Nondual suchness (turiyatita or the fifth and ultimate state). These pre-given realities represent, as it were, 2000 meters down, 4000 meters down, 6000 meters down, 8000 meters down, and 10,000 meters down or fully enlightened. The point is that these realities can be experienced because they are given potentials that are ever-present; however, as these states are converted to permanent traits or stages, they are filled in by realities in all four quadrants. None of this, however, is metaphysical speculation but reflective analysis on direct experiences.

For further aspects of these ideas, see the discussion of *past actuals* (or Kosmic habits) and *future potentials* in SES (endnote 17 for chap. 14 in the English version). See also the discussion of the relation of *stages*, which have to unfold in actuality, and *states*, which are pre-given, in "A Summary of My Psychological Model," which is posted at [wilber.shambhala.com](http://wilber.shambhala.com) (see especially endnote 24).

15. A few more points to qualify this simplistic example: in reality, there is no bottom to the mountain (i.e., there is no final level of ascending Eros)--the "highest" level is simply formless Emptiness, which is not really a level among other levels but the ground that is itself *fully present* at every level as the suchness or isness of that level. Evolution in the manifest realm, in other words, is potentially unending. Enlightenment is not finding the highest level but the ground of all levels, but that paradoxically occurs only at the higher levels of development. See the end of chapter 8 in SES for a discussion of this idea. See also note 4 above.

16. A certain amount of metaphysical (or meta-theoretical) thinking is unavoidable in any system of complex thought, including scientific, because first principles are always assumptions without evidence (which is why not all scientific propositions are open to the fallibility principle [see *A Theory of Everything*, chap. 4]). The point is simply that, when engaged in unavoidable metaphysical thought, we tie as many of our metaphysical constructions as possible to the web of available empirical and phenomenological evidence.

17. In addition to passing whatever tests we might suggest for critical aesthetics and critical morality. Remember that in this response I am focusing *only* on the scientific aspects of the higher realms, not on the aesthetics and morals of the higher realms, which cannot be reduced to scientific procedures. Each higher level has I, we, and its dimensions--art, morals, and science--and I am outlining merely the broad and narrow sciences of the higher realms, not the aesthetics and morals of the higher realms. There is always somebody who fails to notice this and then accuses me of positivism....

18. As I said, the 10,000 meters can be divided and subdivided in any number of legitimate ways; I am using "ten levels" as a convenience. Other maps might have 20 levels of 500 meters each, and so on. All of them are real if they can be confirmed by a reconstructive science of those who have already made the descent.

19. I am of course using the stages of Spiral Dynamics as a simple example of the interior holons for human development up to the average expectable level of development

(centaur, turquoise). See *Integral Psychology* for a fuller statement of the waves and streams of development.

20. See *One Taste* for examples of this.

21. Of course, that realization is actually the "fifth" state of turiyatita or ever-present, nondual One Taste. See note 14.