

Ken Wilber's Critique of Deep Ecology and Nature Religion: A Response

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“the intuition can be genuine, but the interpretation can get fouled up.”

- Ken Wilber ¹

Modern environmentalists and spiritual traditions in sympathy with them constitute a great and dangerous error, according to Ken Wilber in his new books *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, and *A Brief History of Everything*. Wilber argues this in spite of agreeing that we face a serious ecological crisis, and that he is “in complete sympathy” with the attempt by many contemporary people to recapture the ecological wisdom of earlier tribal peoples.²

Emerson's “Critique” of “Nature Worship”

Wilber views Deep Ecology and nature religions such as Neopagan spirituality, as psychologically and spiritually regressive, beckoning their practitioners back to a pre-modern level of intellectual and spiritual development. To lend weight to his assertion, Wilber cites a provocative quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson who, he tells us, is criticizing “nature religion”.

To the senses and the unrenewed understanding, belongs a sort of instinctive belief in the absolute existence of nature. In their view man and nature are indissolubly joined. Things are ultimates, and they never look beyond their sphere [Piaget's egocentric "realism"] His mind is imbruted, and he is a selfish savage.

The presence of intuition mars his faith [in nature]. The first effort of thought tends to relax this despotism of the senses which binds us to nature as if we were a part of it. Until this higher agency intervened [intuition], the animal eye sees, with wonderful accuracy, sharp outlines and colored surfaces. When the eye of intuition opens, to outline and surface are at once added grace and expression. These proceed from imagination and affection, and abate somewhat of the angular distinction of objects. If the intuition be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines of surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen. . . . The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawal of nature before its God.³

This quotation is pivotal for Wilber's argument. About 200 pages later he refers to it again, emphasizing that ". . . In their view [the Eco camp's view] man and nature are indissolubly joined. Things are ultimates, and they never look beyond their sphere. His mind is imbruted and he is a selfish savage."⁴

Wilber tells us that nature's relationship with Spirit takes one of three forms. The first he terms "magical indissociation" where spirit and nature are simply equated, resulting in a very this worldly perspective. Second is "mythic dissociation" where spirit

and nature are considered separate and utterly distinct. Third is “psychic mysticism” such as Emerson’s, where Spirit and nature are joined, with nature a subset of Spirit.

According to Wilber, spiritual enlightenment gradually ascends through a series of stages. Every person attaining higher stages must first go through the lower ones. One of the lowest is that immersion within nature where our sense of self has not yet been developed. According to Wilber, nature mysticism is a return to this pre-personal state of awareness - a classic case of what Wilber terms the “pre-trans fallacy” where pre-personal states of awareness are confused with transpersonal states.

In Wilber’s view, Emerson is a particularly powerful witness against the “nature worshippers”, for Emerson was able to perceive the divine reality of which nature was merely a reflection. To be sure, Emerson is often referred to as a nature mystic. But Wilber argues this is misleading because “this psychic-level mysticism embraces not just **nature** but also **culture**, and calling it nature mysticism confuses it with merely biocentric regression. . .”⁵

Wilber contends that the “nature mysticism” so popular today with environmentalists and within the Pagan revival is simply the first, and most regressive, form of spirituality. As such, it is far more spiritually limited than even the secular rationalism against which its adherents rebel.⁶ He emphasizes that “Indeed, if nature means the biosphere, and Nature (or Spirit) means the All, means the physiosphere and the biosphere and the noosphere and their Ground, then Emerson’s point is very simple: the worshippers of nature are the destroyers of Nature.” This is why Emerson “maintains that nature immersion and nature worship **prevent** the realization of Nature, or the Spirit within and beyond, that transcends all, embraces all.”⁷ The ecological mystics, deep

ecologists, and nature worshippers are at odds with the spiritual insights of men like Emerson. For them “Nature was valued because of the thrill it sent swishing through the ego in ‘pristine’ wilderness encounters. Not a transparency to the Divine, but the divine ego reflected to itself in monological feeling.”⁸

If one of the West’s greatest advocates of divinity in nature can in fact be called in as a witness against those of us who advocate the presence of deep ecological and even spiritual values in nature, it would seem that the intellectual and spiritual foundation for much of modern environmental and alternative spiritual thought may be utterly bankrupt. Wilber’s challenge could not be more direct.

And yet, despite their gravity, Wilber’s charges are completely specious. Most amazingly, Wilber’s use of Ralph Waldo Emerson as the centerpiece of his argument against nature worship is a fabrication. Emerson **never said** what Wilber describes him as saying. The quotation as Wilber presents it is deviously edited and contains a misleading sentence fragment he inserted from elsewhere in Emerson’s **Nature**.⁹ In a footnote Wilber does admit to making one change. He replaced Emerson’s word “Reason” with “intuition.” But far more significant changes are left unmentioned.

What Emerson Really Said

Emerson’s quotation is so distorted that I will give my readers his real words, so they may see for themselves. I have put into **italics** those words Wilber deleted from Emerson’s quote, and leave out the words he added:

To the senses and the unrenewed understanding, belongs a sort of instinctive belief in the absolute existence of nature. In their view man and nature are indissolubly joined. Things are ultimates, and they never look beyond their sphere. The presence of Reason mars this faith. The first effort of thought tends to relax this despotism of the senses which binds us to nature as if we were a part of it, **and shows us nature aloof, and, as it were, afloat.** Until this higher agency intervened, the animal eye sees, with wonderful accuracy, sharp outlines and colored surfaces. When the eye of Reason opens, to outline and surface are at once added grace and expression. These proceed from imagination and affection, and abate somewhat of the angular distinctness of objects. If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; **causes and spirits are seen through them.** The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God.¹⁰

The phrase Wilber added, “His mind is imbruted and he is a selfish savage.” can be found pages later in a different chapter.¹¹

By omitting “causes and spirits are seen through them” Wilber radically changes Emerson’s conclusion, eliminating textual evidence that Emerson himself saw no problem in acknowledging as spiritually significant both an ultimate divine source to all that is and a diversity of spiritual phenomena as emanations from that source. This is precisely the experience that **links** nature religions with the insight that ultimately such a source exists. For example, the Lakota, Navajo, Crow, and traditional Wiccan spiritual

traditions all acknowledge such an Ultimate Source, but focus varying amounts of their attention elsewhere, for reasons that will become plain later in this essay.¹²

Wilber's insertion of the "mind is imbruted" phrase suggests that for Emerson nature mysticism is a degenerate form of consciousness. But, when seen in context, Emerson's entire text says **nothing** about nature worship. Emerson is in fact criticizing the ordinary day to day taken-for-granted understanding of unreflective men and women. That is, people who see the external world as simply a bunch of objects, either useful or useless. This, of course, is exactly the kind of understanding that both deep ecologists and nature mystics also criticize. The "selfish savage" passage which Wilber inserted into the longer quote, appears in this context:

At present, man applies to nature but half his force. He works on the world with his understanding alone. He lives in it and masters it by a penny-wisdom; and he that works most in it is but a half-man, and whilst his arms are strong and his digestion good, his mind is imbruted, and he is a selfish savage. His relation to nature, his power over it, is through the understanding, as by manure; the economic use of fire, wind, water, and the mariner's needle; steam, coal, chemical agriculture; the repairs of the human body by the dentist and the surgeon.¹³

By no stretch of the imagination can this passage be read as a criticism of nature worship. Nor can it be said to refer to Jean Piaget's "egocentric realism". In Piaget's thought egocentrism occurs in childhood, before a true ego has been developed. Wilber

himself observed: “The young child is, in Piaget’s terms, totally egocentric - meaning not that he thinks selfishly only about himself, but to the contrary, that he is incapable of thinking about himself. The egocentric child is incapable of distinguishing himself from the rest of the world.”¹⁴ Wilber’s parenthetical remark is at best, deeply confused regarding Emerson or Piaget or both.¹⁵

In fact, Emerson’s views towards the sacredness of nature come closer to those of many deep ecologists and nature mystics than they do to Ken Wilber. In chapter VII, “Spirit,” Emerson writes that “The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship.” He elaborates that

Of that ineffable essence which we call Spirit, he that thinks most, will say least. We can foresee God in the coarse, and, as it were, distant phenomena of matter; but when we try to define and describe himself, both language and thought desert us, and we are as helpless as fools and savages. That essence refuses to be recorded in propositions, but when man has worshipped him intellectually, the noblest ministry of nature is to stand as the apparition of God. It is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it.¹⁶

Towards the end of this chapter Emerson observes

The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God, a projection of God in the unconscious. But it differs from

the body in one important respect. It is not, like that, now subjected to the human will. Its serene order is inviolable by us. It is, therefore, to us, the present expositor of the divine mind. It is a fixed point whereby we may measure our departure. As we degenerate, the contrast between us and our house is more evident. We are as much strangers in nature as we are aliens from God.¹⁷

These two quotations, and the chapter they are drawn from, occur **in between** the two quotes which Wilber cobbled together into his fabricated evidence that Emerson was attacking “nature worship.” He could not have missed them. Emerson is frequently but selectively quoted in **Sex, Ecology, Spirituality**, giving a truncated view of his true beliefs.

But then, Emerson’s full views do not fit Wilber’s own thoughts on the matter. For Wilber, any encounter with Spirit and nature would see Spirit flowing “**through** me and **into** nature.” Supposedly with the nature spirituality he attacks, “No longer did Spirit or the Over-Soul shine through me and illuminate nature with a spiritual radiance, disclosing nature as a perfect manifestation of Spirit. Rather, now I am flooded by feelings released in myself by and from a mononature.”¹⁸

Given Wilber’s claim to a nondualist spiritual perspective, it is significant to encounter his repeated emphasis of the **one way** character of the relationship between ourselves, nature, and Spirit: “Nature is not the **source** of this spiritual splendor but rather its **destination**. When I can relax my egoic contraction (and many people appropriately find nature a fit and inviting place for this more easily to happen), then I can relax into

the great Over-Soul, and then **through me** comes rushing the spiritual splendor of the One. . . .”¹⁹ In support of this view, Wilber again quotes Emerson that “the spirit does not build up nature **around** us, but **puts it forth through us**, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old.”²⁰

The problem with Wilber’s interpretation is that plenty of other passages in the same text support different interpretations. For example, just before the passage Wilber quotes, Emerson wrote that “The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man. It is a remoter and inferior incarnation of God”²¹ In addition, as quoted above, for Emerson nature “is the organ through which the universal spirit speaks. . . .” These quotations suggest a very different relationship between ourselves and nature than that emphasized by Wilber.

Even in the quotation that Wilber altered, Emerson wrote “When the eye of Reason opens, to outline and surface are at once added grace and expression.” With even “more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent . . . causes and spirits are seen through them.” Neither of Wilber’s two options of Nature as sources or as destination of spiritual splendor are described. Emerson is writing in terms of vision. As my vision improves I see more out there, in nature, through it and pervading it.

In the face of so many superficially conflicting descriptions we might conclude that Emerson was simply confused. In such a case it is illegitimate to pick one of several seemingly contradictory ways of describing our relationship to spirit and nature as the one that Emerson really meant. Alternatively, and I think more correctly, Emerson was attempting to describe an experience which cannot be captured adequately in words. He therefore offered a number of ways for conceiving this sacred relationship between

ourselves, nature, and the divine. Like one of the blind men in the fable of the blind men and the elephant, Wilber has grabbed on to the description which most closely fits his preconceptions, proclaimed it and only it the correct and orthodox Truth, and argued vehemently against any other interpretation.

Wilber's discussion of Emerson presents us with a dismaying puzzle. How could a man of Wilber's evident intelligence treat his material so cavalierly? ²² In my view, Wilber was led astray by his adherence to a fallacious equation of spiritual/psychological with social evolution in conjunction with an unresolved contradiction within his own spiritual awareness. Thinkers such as Emerson probe at the fault line in Wilber's evolutionary model, and challenge the contradiction within his own mind. Deep ecologists and the nature religions challenge both head on. To see why this is so we need to grasp the essential characteristics of Wilber's evolutionary model of psyche and society.

Foundations of The Wilberian Model

Wilber's theoretical framework is a synthesis combining three intellectual currents typified by the work of Jean Gebser, Jean Piaget, and Jurgen Habermas. For Wilber, the most basic of the three is the evolutionary view of spirituality first developed by Jean Gebser and argued for today by Georg Feuerstein as well as by Wilber.²³ Of the three, Wilber is the best known, largely due to his unusually productive writing and the solid reputation he earned in transpersonal psychology.

Within Gebser's basic framework of world wide spiritual evolution, Wilber incorporates Piaget's developmental model of cognitive and moral development,

extending it to levels of consciousness far beyond where Piaget himself stopped. He also incorporates Habermas's model of social and cultural evolution, which he again extends beyond Habermas's own boundaries. The result is a wide ranging framework for making sense of individual, social, and spiritual development along with a unilinear evolutionary trajectory.

The Evolution of the Individual

Jean Piaget's clinical work with children identified a series of cognitive stages they pass through as they develop. This developmental sequence stops finally with "formal operational thinking" characterized by the abstract, analytical, inferential, and hypothetical thought we associate with normal adulthood. People at this level of awareness possess both a highly developed self-consciousness and the ability to assume the perspective of others.²⁴

With Piaget, Wilber identifies a "magical-animistic" mode of consciousness characterizing small children, from two to four years old.²⁵ Their thinking is magical in the sense that they have a "unrestrained and unrefined belief in action at a distance. . . ."²⁶ Their awareness is pre-personal in that the subject has not yet had the encounters which will force it to recognize its separateness from other things in the world. Far from being egocentric, small children have little sense of ego at all.

Over time, growing experience with the otherness of the world undermines this prepersonal view, replacing it with a "mythic" level of awareness. The newly humbled child's feelings of magical omnipotence are initially transferred to others. The first such transfer of power is to its parents, who are considered virtually as powerful as gods.²⁷

This mythic, or “concrete operational,” awareness is characteristically attained by children aged from six to eight.

As the child matures further, increasingly “concrete operational” forms of awareness are replaced by “formal operational” thinking - the rationality of adulthood. Normally it has formed in modern children between the ages of eleven and fifteen. According to Wilber it is this level of consciousness which is manifested in the typical individuals and defining institutions of the modern world since the Enlightenment.

At this point Wilber departs from Piaget’s clinical work, arguing that we are on the brink of developing the next stage in consciousness evolution, which he terms “vision-logic.” With the rise of vision-logic, rationality takes yet another step forward in its internal development. As Wilber says, “The whole point of rationality and its capacity for multiple perspectives is not simply to abstract the commonalities . . . but to put oneself in the shoes of others and thus find a mutual enrichment and appreciation of differences. This is the **same** world centric rationality [as characterizes formal operational thinking], but now celebrating all the multiple perspectives and not merely steamrolling them into monotonous uniformity.”²⁸

Wilber argues that “vision logic,” is holistic in character. It is able to reintegrate the dissociations that occurred between the true, the good, and the beautiful in the modern world. But it does so from a universal perspective rather than a particular culturally privileged standpoint. Vision logic, according to Wilber, is the final stage of human awareness before entering into the properly spiritual modes of consciousness which transcend the personal ego.

These “transegoic” levels themselves consist of a series of stages which Wilber has distilled from accounts by religious mystics such as Plotinus, the Buddha, Meister Eckhart, St. Theresa, Nagarjuna, and others. The Psychic is the first transpersonal level of awareness. It manifests paranormal psychic abilities, spontaneous devotional feelings and Emersonian nature cosmic consciousness. Next is the subtle level, the seat of archetypes, Platonic forms, personal deities, and illumination. It is followed by the Causal level, characterized by unitive consciousness, that is the contemplation of the unity of the human and divine and absorption into the godhead. The highest level of consciousness is the direct experience of nonduality, where no divisions exist, and everything is equally the One.²⁹

Wilber’s description of this hierarchical model of consciousness development with its roots in the work of Piaget and other psychologists and its topmost branches in accounts from the world’s greatest mystics has earned him wide recognition in the field of transpersonal psychology. Were this all that Wilber argued, this paper would be unnecessary.

The Evolution of Society

The German social theorist Jurgen Habermas argues that a kind of parallel exists between the evolution of individual consciousness as described by Piaget, and the evolution of human societies. Thus, individuals and societies evolve in a broadly similar manner, with each being characterized at any given stage by a dominant level of consciousness.³⁰ Wilber agrees with Habermas’s basic model, but again extends it further.

According to Wilber, because each society is defined in part by its dominant level of consciousness, each level of society will possess a different sense of space-time, a different system of law and morality, different cognitive styles and self-identities, modes of technology, and drives and motivation. Each will also possess different kinds of personal pathology, social oppression and repression, degrees of death seizure and denial, and types of religious experience.³¹ Wilber contends that early primitive societies mirror earlier forms of human awareness while in later more developed societies, dominant members possess higher forms of awareness. A qualitative hierarchy of societies and states of awareness can be discerned, with each example located along a **single** developmental continuum having both individual and social aspects.

Human societies may be differentiated into three basic types, with a fourth now beginning to take form. Wilber labels these societal types magical, mythical, rational, and centauric. Early human societies were “magical-animistic” in character. Beginning perhaps 200,000 years ago people began to be aware of their own separate existence. Supposedly, however, the boundaries between self and world were fluid. Cognitively, people confused subject and object, whole and part. While this kind of consciousness may sound mystical, Wilber contends that this “primary process simply can’t tell the difference between the part and the whole to begin with.”³²

Physical objects were experienced as being alive in a personal sense, and human beings did not differentiate themselves from nature. Instead, everything was connected, such that acting symbolically would lead to the same outcome as when acting ‘for real.’ Sometimes even “telepathic hunting-magic” could happen.³³ This is the world of

“voodoo” and of totems. It is a world where humans and animals are kin, and indeed kinship was the basis for human relations as well.

At this early stage “the logical, verbal, and conceptual mind is not developed.”³⁴ At most, the farthest advanced of those possessing magical consciousness probably possessed “**paleosymbols, modifiers, commands, and some nouns.**”³⁵ Social life was ordered by symbols rather than by complex rules, because from this perspective the object and its symbol are confused.³⁶ The magical mode of consciousness was characterized by a deep belief in the law of similarity and law of contagion, fundamental principles of magic which, Wilber claims, demonstrate a relatively undeveloped mind.

In these primitive societies, the highest level of awareness was reached by “a few - a very few - of the truly advanced shamans and medicine men. . . .” They had reached the psychic level of consciousness. But most people, certainly the average, were very primitive indeed, having on balance not advanced beyond the magical state.

In a contention that will later prove crucial in evaluating his work, Wilber emphasizes that “Confusing . . . magic and the psychic - has had the most regrettable consequences for the science of man at large.”³⁷ Even most shamans, according to Wilber “clearly, were quite delusional or at least fraudulent, and in their pitiful attempts to exploit others into believing that they were quite exceptional and heroic souls, we see the saddest side of the Atman project at work. . . .”³⁸ Still, he grants that some were genuine and “saw the All as yet through a glass very darkly. But saw they did . . .”³⁹

Around 12,000 years ago people discovered agriculture. It was at about the same time that humankind entered its next stage of consciousness evolution. While not arguing that farming caused this shift, Wilber tells us that “Impulse delay and control, the ability

to postpone, channel, sublimate, and offset otherwise instinctive body-bound activities and typhonic magic - this is the expanded world of the farmer.”⁴⁰ The true cause of this shift, he suggests, was the final emergence of genuine language and a new awareness of the significance of death.⁴¹ The social and cultural stage was set for the rise of civilization. In time, some of these early agricultural societies became incorporated into larger social orders.

As the scale of human society grew, the basis for social identity ceased being the kin group. Instead, the new mythic systems gave legitimacy to larger, more encompassing communities. Because of their all-encompassing claims, these myth based societies continually tended to expand, incorporating whoever lived along their borders. What held the whole together, along with military force, was a common acceptance of a single mythic world view. What limited their expansion was bumping up against a similar society with enough power to push back.

According to Wilber, the rise of these mythic worldviews, and the social orders they sustained, marks the beginning of reason and abstract thinking. Empires with universal pretensions generated complex systems of rules, rules which could be considered independently of the external world. This development marked the first division of the noosphere from the biosphere. With this division it became possible to think about thinking. People increasingly began to see themselves as separate from their thoughts. They could then begin to examine the rationality of their own views.⁴²

By separating itself from the purely concrete, rationality inexorably leads people to honor impersonal common standards. As is most obvious with mathematics, such standards are free from the perspective of any particular society. This is why rationality

makes expanded cooperation possible. However, in the process rational thought also quickly exceeds the bounds of mythic based societies. This is largely because the myths' universalistic claims cannot be rationally defended once encountering other myths making similar claims in other societies. Mythic society eventually outgrows its bounds, transforming itself into rational society. So far, this transformation has been accomplished most completely within the secular West, culminating in the Enlightenment.

Because modern society is rational rather than mythic in its essence, Wilber argues that despite external appearances, the secular West exemplifies a higher stage of spiritual development than do earlier mythic societies. Modern rational awareness has finally discovered universal concepts and principles able to be applied everywhere and justified through persuasion rather than force. This development is profoundly moral. It signifies our willingness to subordinate ourselves voluntarily to a counter argument in the absence of a physical threat. All human beings are now seen as in principle equal, and so the sphere of rational benevolence eventually expands to include all people.

The triumph of rationality separates right from might. With this development humankind attains its maximal differentiation from nature, where according to Wilber the rule of might has been basic. The noosphere is now completely distinct from the biosphere.

The institutional expressions of rational society are the nation state, the market, and science. Each vastly expands the realm of human cooperation over what it had been in earlier societies. Each is sustained by rules which ideally apply to all equally. These rules themselves can be reflected upon by universal standards.

Despite these achievements we have hardly attained the pinnacle of human development. The secular liberal nation state has unleashed forces which are presently transforming it beyond recognition. The world market, computer technology, and world science are creating the basis for a world culture, no longer purely Western.⁴³ This first truly universal civilization will depend for its existence upon a new level of human psychological attainment: Wilber's "vision logic." However, before such a culture can arise, certain stresses and wrong turns within modern civilization will need to be addressed and overcome. In certain respects reason's triumph carried with it a deep distortion of consciousness, a distortion which threatens us today in the rise of deep ecology and nature religion.

Two Dichotomies

To grasp Wilber's argument, we need to understand two dichotomies he develops. The first distinguishes between "ascending" and "descending" modes of thought. The second differentiates between "Eco" and "Ego" camps within the descending category.

According to Wilber, with very few exceptions such as Plato and Plotinus, the West's intellectual history has been characterized by "a battle royal . . . between those who wanted only to live in 'this world' of Manyness and those who wanted to live only in the 'other world' of transcendent Oneness."⁴⁴ The "ascenders" focus only on the creator, and deny creation. By contrast, the descenders see only creation. Each is a partial view since a proper understanding unites the two "in one ongoing, everlasting, exuberant embrace."⁴⁵

When each recognizes its appropriate relationship with the other Ascent becomes Eros, or transcendental wisdom and Descent becomes Agape, transcendental compassion. When they are separate and alienated from one another, however, Eros appears as Phobos, and Agape as Thanatos. “Phobos is Eros in flight from the lower instead of embracing the lower.” It is a source of repression. “Thanatos . . . is Descent divorced from Ascent. . . . compassion gone mad: not just embracing the lower but *regressing* to the lower. . . . It attempts to save the lower by killing the higher.”⁴⁶

Christianity is fundamentally an ascending religion. When modernity arose, it did so in large part in opposition to the established Church. The Enlightenment was aggressively anti-mythical in spirit, honoring instead universal standards of truth through reason. But opposition to myths could easily become opposition to Ascent as such, since Christianity had attempted to monopolize its claim to the transcendent. In abandoning Christianity, modern reason also abandoned recognition of the transcendent.

Unlike earlier modes of thought, rationality differentiated between art, science, and morality. Each was henceforth to develop along lines intrinsic to its character. In doing so rational differentiation made possible their growth and development. None was handmaiden to another. Wilber sees this as a positive achievement. But without a “vision logic” perspective able to appreciate the uniqueness of all three while simultaneously comprehending them within a holistic framework, differentiation became dissociation. Since the 18th century we have lived in an increasingly fragmented world lacking any deeper meaning, a world of the subjective and objective, with a vast and unbridgeable gulf between them. In such a world, truth, goodness, and beauty have no relation with one another.

For Wilber, the “**central problem of postmodernity**” is to integrate what rationality had rent asunder.⁴⁷ Accomplishing this requires a transformation of Western civilization, because “Instead of an infinite **above** the West pitched its attention on an infinite **ahead**. The West worshipped the “God of all that is visible, and all that can be seen, and all that can be grasped with the hands. . . .”⁴⁸ All the warring currents within Western thought share this same descending frame of reference.

Two basic orientations can exist within this basic descending “Enlightenment paradigm”. In Wilber’s terms, “does the good life consist in (1) following the autonomous *agency* of the rational - ego in order to generate its own self-assured morals and aspirations, or in (2) connecting the ego with the wider ground of its shared **communion** in the natural world and thus finding something ‘larger’ than the isolated ego?”⁴⁹ These two choices Wilber depicts by the short hand of the “Ego” and “Eco” camps.

In Wilber’s view the current rise of deep ecology and the nature religions signifies a resurgence of the eco camp in its struggle with the dominant ego camp of Western civilization. But the standpoint of the “eco” camp is fatally flawed. The question it fails to answer, Wilber holds, is “just how does the ego insert itself into something larger without losing the positive side of the beneficial gains it had just made.”⁵⁰

Wilber does not view progress to higher evolutionary states as inevitable. Instead, he emphasizes how difficult it is to move from one stage of development to another. As it is outgrown, the tensions within a particular level of development begin to build. In our case, people are increasingly disenchanted with the promise and performance of the modern world. This dissatisfaction, while in some respects well founded, can lead to a powerful regressive temptation. The individual or society may then attempt

psychologically to move backwards, to reinhabit forms of life it has outgrown, but which seem preferable to its present discomfort.

Far from improving the human condition, the regressive temptation threatens to worsen it. At a time when humankind's task is to achieve a new integration with the world that retains the ego development and self awareness which we have attained through modernity, many people are tempted to flee back to a pre-egoic state of awareness, the mythic or even magical state. As Wilber puts it, "when culture is seen as only or primarily a repressive force, then the cure is regression, period. . . ." ⁵¹

The ego camp conceived of reason purely as an instrumental tool. Their eco critics correctly saw the shortcomings of such a perspective, where nothing possessed value any more. But they offered in its place "instrumental feelings, feelings that allowed us to fit into the web of life as a part and not try to dominate on the whole. Nature . . . was . . . disclosed to me primarily in feelings; nature was the sum total of what it evoked or awakened in me. . . ." ⁵² Such a purely subjective internal experience can never lead one to the transpersonal. It points in the other direction.

The allure of a supposed primal Arcadia, and the sense of belonging associated with pre-personal states of awareness can seem utopian and transpersonal. But in fact they are profoundly atavistic, hearkening back to magical modes of awareness. It is this common confusion of prepersonal mental states with transpersonal states that Wilber calls the "pre-trans fallacy". Wilber claims ecophilosophers, particularly deep ecologists and nature mystics tempt us to look backwards toward a supposed paradise before human kind was polluted with culture and society. While deep ecology and nature worship and nature religion may claim to be transpersonal, in fact they are prepersonal to their core.

The Eco-Romantic Threat

Wilber's critique of deep ecology, and "eco-romanticism" in general, can be summarized in five basic contentions.⁵³

1. Eco-romantics confuse our differentiation from nature, which is a positive step, with dissociation from nature, which is not. In trying to overcome dissociation they also flee differentiation. This confusion leads eco-romantics to commit the "pre-trans" fallacy. They eulogize archaic indissociation in both its individual and social forms as "spiritual" and "holistic."⁵⁴ Refusing to differentiate leads to "bioequality" where all living things "have equal value. A worm and an ape have equal value. This is quite common with deep ecologists"⁵⁵

2. In denying this differentiation, eco-romantics deny the very qualities of mind that make it possible for them to make their quest in the first place. Only people with a modern rational level of awareness could conceive of the problem and their proposed solution.

3. Eco-romantics believe that at some point in the past a "Heinous Crime" took place that led to our fall from an earlier holistic paradise.

4. Eco-romantics dislike modernity, based upon their desire to regain our supposed lost paradise of the distant past. Ecotheorists "necessarily see culture as a lamentable deviation" from our biological nature.⁵⁶

5. Eco-romantics rely either upon either a purely empirical systems theory with no room for mind, or upon "biocentric feeling and sentimental emoting" which supposedly constitutes our true connecting links to the divine.

Looking at this list, any honest observer acquainted with environmental thought will see familiar themes. All of these ideas are *contending* for dominance within the environmental movement, and some of them are also important currents within communities practicing nature spirituality. The problem with Wilber's analysis of the environmental and nature spirit communities is not that the attitudes he criticizes do not exist. They do. And I agree that all five views are errors on the part of those holding them, although my reasons for disagreeing with these attitudes and beliefs will sometimes differ markedly from Wilber's.

But Wilber's description of environmental thought is also a caricature. And it is a decidedly mean spirited one coming from someone priding himself on his supposed "vision logic" derived ability not only to place himself in the shoes of others, but to appreciate their perspective as well. We might expect such a description of environmental thought from the Wise Use movement or the most rapacious of Republican land looters. But we can reasonably ask for more from someone who claims to believe "one of the most urgent tasks of postmodernity - arguably **the** most urgent - is the development and establishment of a genuine environmental ethics"⁵⁷

Let us see whether Arne Naess fits into Wilber's description of ecotheorists, deep ecologists, and eco-romantics. Certainly Naess, who more than anyone else has made deep ecology an important current in environmental thought, can be considered a good example of one. Indeed, Naess, along with George Sessions, is author of the Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement.⁵⁸ **Not one** of Wilber's criticisms apply to Naess. I shall take them in the order I listed above.

1. Taken out of context, a sentence from Naess seems to justify Wilber's criticism that deep ecology advocates eulogize the archaic indissociation of pre-egoic states, confusing dissociation with differentiation. Referring to the newborn baby's sense of connectedness with its environment, Naess observes "in a sense, it is this basic sort of crude monism we are working out anew, not by trying to be babies again, but by better understanding our ecological self."⁵⁹ Much rests on what Naess meant by "in a sense." We can get a better idea by looking at Naess' more elaborated views of the ecological self in the same essay:

To identify self-realization with the ego-trip manifests a vast underestimation of the human self.

According to the usual translation of Pali or Sanskrit texts, Buddha taught his disciples that the human mind should embrace all living things as a mother cares for her son, her only son. Some of you who never would feel it meaningful or possible that a human *self* could embrace all living things might stick to the usual translation. We shall then only ask that your **mind** embrace all living beings, and that you realize your good intention to care and feel with compassion.⁶⁰

This in no way dissolves the self into a primordial ooze. As Naess observes, even as identification with others grows, Self-realization "breaks in and reinstates the central position of the individual - even if the capital S is used to express something beyond narrow selves. The widening and deepening of the individual selves somehow never makes them into one 'mass'."⁶¹

2. Wilber claims deep ecology denies the needed differentiation of humans from the environment. Of course, long before Wilber learned to write, ecocentrist Aldo Leopold had already observed that with the evolution of human beings “something new under the sun” had arisen: a form of life able to **care** about the well being of other species.⁶² Naess makes a similar point: “A specific feature of human make-up is that human beings consciously perceive the urge other living beings have for self-realization, and we must therefore assume **a kind of responsibility for our conduct towards others.**”⁶³

Interestingly, the **only** time Wilber mentions Naess in his 800 some pages and innumerable attacks on deep ecology, is to quote him approvingly on recognizing the existence and appropriateness of hierarchy, that is, on the ability to differentiate. But in doing so, Wilber rhetorically separates Naess from deep ecology. He describing Naess as a “patron saint” whom “deep ecologists” should listen to, rather than a leading theorist and founder.⁶⁴

Since Wilber approves of Naess on this point, it may come as some surprise to him that Naess was partly responsible for the egalitarian terminology Wilber so dislikes. But Naess explained what he meant by it. “The principle of biospheric egalitarianism . . . has sometimes been misunderstood as meaning that human needs should never have priority over non-human needs. But this is never intended. In practice, we have for instance greater obligation to that which is nearer to us. This implies duties which sometimes involve killing or injuring non-humans.”⁶⁵ With George Sessions, another leading deep ecologist, Naess wrote that “Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity [of life] except to satisfy vital needs.” They elaborate that “The term ‘vital need’ is left deliberately vague to allow for considerable latitude in judgment. Differences in climate

and related factors, together with differences in the structures of societies as they now exist, need to be considered (for some Eskimos, snowmobiles are necessary today to satisfy vital needs).”⁶⁶

Elsewhere Naess observes that “any realistic praxis necessitates some killing, exploitation, and suppression. The ecological field-worker acquires a deep-seated respect, or even veneration, for ways and forms of life. He reaches an understanding from within . . . **the equal right to live and blossom** is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom.”⁶⁷

I believe Naess’s egalitarian wording was unfortunate, but any honest attempt to grasp its meaning would show that one can indeed make distinctions between human beings and others while respecting and honoring all life.⁶⁸ Naess is hardly alone. The most accurate statement of many deep ecologists’ views of human beings and nature is that our most unique capacities can be most completely realized only when we are able to respect and love all beings without exception.⁶⁹

3. To my knowledge, there is no mention by Naess of any primordial “fall” from paradise or any equivalent notion.

4. Consequently, also absent from Naess’ work is any desire to regain that lost paradise. Naess is no primitivist. In arguing for local autonomy and decentralization, he is not arguing for reversion to small independent villages or tribes. For example, when discussing how society might be decentralized, Naess suggests that “a chain consisting of local board, municipal council, highest sub-national decision-maker, a state-wide institution in a state federation, a federal national governmental institution, a coalition of

nations, and of institutions, e.g. E.E.C. top levels, and a global institution, can be reduced to one made up of local board, nation-wide institution, and global institution.”⁷⁰

Along with George Sessions, Naess argues that “Cultural diversity today requires advanced technology, that is, techniques that advance the basic goals of each culture. So-called soft, intermediate, and alternative technologies are steps in this direction.”⁷¹ Naess is hardly advocating a return to paleolithic hunting and gathering - which is one of Wilber’s favorite characterizations of “deep ecology”.⁷²

5. Clearly, the leading deep ecological philosopher is not a theorist attempting to explain everything in terms of empirical systems theory. Mind plays an essential role in Naess’s work. If Wilber wants to describe Naess’s views about the ecological self as “sentimental emoting” he is free to do so. But he will be the first “spiritual” writer to so term such views. Naess is coy with regard to his views about the divine.⁷³ But even if he finds no role for what we might term the transcendental, the least charitable interpretation will find in him an exemplary protagonist of Wilber’s “vision logic.” And it is far from clear that Naess denies such a role.⁷⁴

I think this brief overview of Arne Naess’s writings demonstrates the complete inapplicability of Wilber’s critique of deep ecology to the **primary** deep ecological philosopher. Nor is Naess alone here. But I am not writing a book, and so will not try and give an exhaustive discussion of deep ecological theory.⁷⁵

It would seem that at least powerful elements within the ecological movement would merit Wilber’s enthusiastic endorsement as among the clearest examples of the vision logic which he argues is our next evolutionary step. Yet over and over Wilber virtually ignores those with whom he might find points in agreement in order to attack in

the most uncompromising way the **entire** deep ecology movement. But there is much more going on here than simply Wilber's extremely selective picking and choosing from among deep ecological writers.

PART II.

In Defense of Nature Religion

For reasons very well put by Emerson, encountering wild nature first demonstrated to many of us the inherent limitations within the dominant secular worldview. The environmental movement, particularly its deep ecological wing, and the contemporary revival of nature religions, are efforts to go beyond our culture's dominant secular and scientific paradigm. These movements are broadly based, incorporating many different people and perspectives. Some have moved further from these limiting assumptions than others, who remain trapped within them. I have gone rather a far piece myself. Many avenues are being explored as environmental thinkers use their heads and their hearts to search for ways out of the social and spiritual dead end represented by contemporary Western intellectual orthodoxy.

Unfortunately, as with his critique of Deep Ecology, when attacking nature religion Wilber prefers painting with broad brushes rather than attempting to truly understand his subject. For him, "nature religion" is perhaps even more regressive than deep ecology. His criticism is no better here than in his attack on deep ecology. In understanding why we will find a firm and beautiful foundation for deep ecological insights themselves.

What is Nature Religion?

Our task is hindered in part because Wilber never gives us a clear definition of what he means by nature religion. At least I have yet to find one. But he frequently links its supporters with environmentalism, particularly deep ecology, whose adherents find value in nature separate from the judgments which people make of it. He also links nature religion with bioregionalists, tribalists, ecofeminists, and those attracted to the spiritual beliefs of Pagan times. Another clue to Wilber's target is that when he was criticized by a prominent Neopagan, Wilber claimed that his critic's motives were a "defense of sorcery and magic," clearly a regressive position in Wilber's view⁷⁶ This charge is all the more significant because Wilber's critic never mentioned either sorcery or magic in a favorable context.⁷⁷ So I think I am on sound ground with the following definition.

By "nature religion" I refer to spiritual traditions which focus on the spiritual truths and symbols revealed by natural cycles, such as the turning of the seasons and phases of the moon. In addition, they often find spiritual meaning and instruction in natural processes such as sexuality and birth and death. Further, these religions focus to a substantial degree on spirit realms and phenomena that are not immediately transcendent in character, such as Coyote and Raven in many American Indian religions, the Kami in Shinto, and the Lord and Lady in the Wiccan tradition. They all emphasize that the most appropriate task for human beings is to live in respectful harmony with these forces rather than, as with many of the major world religions of today, viewing earthly existence as a way station, place of trial and testing, problem to be overcome, or otherwise a condition

which is not ultimately satisfying. Consequently, nature religions tend to be genuinely pluralistic and respectful of other religious paths, for they do not claim to have the sole answer for the problem that is human existence. Indeed, there is no problem except for our confusions. This definition of nature religion includes shamanism, many tribal religions, and most contemporary Neo-Paganism.

If these practices do not count as nature religions, I am not sure what would. Are they deeply regressive in either motivation or essence? A fair minded examination will lead to the conclusion they are not.

Descending Into Confusion

From this definition, we can see that Wilber has lumped two fundamentally different views of reality into his “descending” model, wherein he locates the nature religions. On the one hand are the secularists, who deny that a spiritual realm exists, or if it does, that it has any impact of importance upon the world in which we live. In Wilber’s terms, they are “monological” because for them consciousness is fundamentally absent from nature. As a consequence, our relations with nature are not “dialogical” for we cannot enter into a relationship with the natural world. This group of people includes both traditional scientific types (Wilber’s “ego” camp) and those who argue for respecting and honoring purely “subjective” dimensions of experience as well, such as aesthetics and morality (a part of his “eco” camp).

But the nature religions are dialogical. They emphasize that awareness permeates the world. We are never truly alone. Setting aside the issue of the transcendent for the

moment, from their perspective the world is seen and experienced as inspirited. That is why so many tribal peoples say that we should treat everything, even the most seemingly insignificant, with respect. That is also why shamans experience the spirit world everywhere. And finally, that is why Neopagans see the sacred in the phases of the moon and the turning of the seasons. From these perspectives we are not dealing simply with insensate matter. We are continually immersed in psychic relationships in which even our thoughts matter.

To be sure, both secularists and the nature religions focus on “manyness.” But the kind of manyness focused on is different, and the motive behind the focus is different as well. Secular descendents focus on manyness because that is all there is. Further, their focus is either instrumental, with the world of objects existing as potential tools and resources, (Emerson’s embruted mind), or aesthetic and sentimental, a world of feelings. However, the nature religions focus on the world of manyness as a world of *relations*. This perspective is perhaps best captured by the Lakota phrase **Mitakuye oyasin**, or “all my relations” which can be even better, if less succinctly, translated as “For all the above-me and below-me and around-me things: That is for all my relations.”⁷⁸ This manyness is considered a blessing.

Wilber shoehorns two fundamentally different types of awareness into his descending framework. They do not fit together very well because, in Wilberian terms, one is fundamentally monological, the other fundamentally dialogical. The dialogical perspective of the nature religions does **not** see truth, beauty, and goodness (science, art, morality) as dissociated. We live within an inspirited community, and the nature of that community actively defines the character of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Regressive Spirituality?

Wilber might grant me my argument, and admit to sloppy terminology, but counter that my distinctions simply demonstrate that nature religions constitute regressive retreats to a magical world view.⁷⁹ His theoretical framework has yet to be undone. We need to examine the adequacy of his evolutionary model of social and psychological development.

Insofar as we are concerned with nature religion, an obvious place to begin is with contemporary hunting and gathering peoples. To the degree they have maintained their traditional practices, they continue to live within an inspirited world where everything is alive and has its psychic component.

When he wrote **Up From Eden** Wilber believed modern hunting and gathering peoples were contemporary examples of the “magical” world view, or at least he used their practices as illustrative examples. He would have presumably agreed with Georg Feuerstein’s rather unflattering stance towards existing primal peoples. “They are . . . anachronisms inasmuch as they have not made the leap into the mental-rational consciousness, but are still largely under the spell of the magical consciousness in its deficient form.”⁸⁰ The problem with this condescending view is that apparently they are not “under the spell” of the magical consciousness. They are as rationally competent as moderns.

Today Wilber grants that modern hunting and gathering peoples, when tested, score as competently as modern urbanites in terms of their ability to think in “formal operational” terms. He seems to believe this poses no problem for his analysis.

According to him today, the condition of modern tribespeople tells us nothing about the mental development of Paleolithic peoples. Unlike modern hunting and gathering peoples “the first tribal societies **as a whole** did not evidence formal operational cognition in any of their actual, social structures: not in legal codes, not in conflict resolution, not in arbitration, not in modes of group or collective identity, not in worldviews, and so on.”⁸¹

But there is **also** no evidence that the early hunter-gatherers didn’t possess formal rational consciousness. We do not have written records, we do not know the meanings of the cave paintings, we really have no direct knowledge of anything these early peoples thought. That is why these times are called prehistoric. We know still less about their worldviews and modes of conflict resolution, questions which leave no physical evidence. Therefore, we have no empirical reason to believe these people were mentally less acute than we ourselves. We can of course speculate to our heart’s content. But in the absence of clear evidence, we need to evaluate the reasonableness of our speculations.

Wilber tries to get himself off the hook by saying Jurgen Habermas has “demonstrated” his claims. But Habermas has not - nor does he claim to. At best Wilber has misread Habermas, who explicitly **rejects** interpretations such as Wilber’s. In “Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures” which Wilber cites support his views, Habermas emphasizes that “ontogenetically early stages of incomplete interaction have no correspondents, even in the oldest societies, for which (with the family organization) social relations have had from the beginning the form of complementarily connected, generalized expectations of behavior (i.e., the form of complete interaction).”⁸² Habermas explicitly labels preoperational thought, the kind of

thought that Wilber claims applies to primitive hunting and gathering societies, as “incomplete interaction”.⁸³

Habermas is arguing not that hunting peoples could not think clearly, but rather that these people did not distinguish the boundaries **of their societies** from the natural world, which is quite a different thing. He observes that “the personal identity of the individual developed through identification with a tribal group, which was in turn perceived as part of a nature interpreted in interaction categories. As social reality was not yet clearly distinguished from natural reality, the boundaries of the social world merged into those of the world in general.”⁸⁴ The similarities between cognitive development and social evolution is far looser for Habermas than for Wilber, who therefore cannot use him to support his more sweeping claims.

As a secularist, Habermas sees this failure to distinguish society from nature as a shortcoming. Even so, he points out that it is the rise of systems of exploitation and domination that lead to the requisite differentiation. I will return to this question later, after disposing of Wilber’s system.

Habermas also emphasizes that human life as such is rooted in the family, which depends upon “the emergence of developed linguistic communication.”⁸⁵ Habermas can be difficult to interpret, but it seems to me that he cannot be reasonably read as saying what Wilber what Wilber claims he does. Two to four year olds scarcely can be said to have a “developed linguistic communication.”

Setting Habermas aside, the fact that Wilber once used the cultural and religious practices of contemporary hunting and gathering peoples to illustrate “magical” modes of awareness, only later to acknowledge that moderns do not have that consciousness proves

the inadequacy of using such practices to support his point. To the contrary, the existence of such practices provides evidence for the existence of formal operational rationality since they exist together in the only cases to which we have access. Therefore, all empirical examples of tribal practices that Wilber offers in support of his thesis actually better support the **opposite** conclusion.

Ultimately, Wilber is probably pushed in the direction of Feuerstein's argument that the "psychic life and world-experience [of hunting and gathering peoples]. . . is markedly different from that of the contemporary urbanite. And the difference cannot be adequately explained by merely resorting to empirical functionalism"86 In other words, these peoples' experience of the world is different from modern human beings, and therefore cognitively inferior. If ever there were a circular argument this is it: Evolution towards higher consciousness exists, and the evidence that it exists is that tribal peoples have a different way of perceiving their world than I do. Because their consciousness differs from mine, my consciousness is more highly evolved than theirs (presumably because my culture can beat up more on their culture than theirs can on mine, which is why we are dominant). God, as usual, is on the side of the big battalions.

There are very good reasons for completely rejecting claims about the supposed mental incapacity of our earliest human ancestors. The kinds of development Piaget described as taking place during childhood and leading to formal operational thinking are hardly unique to modern times. "Formal operational" thinking typically arises by the time children are between eleven and fifteen. The necessary experiences to develop the rational mind of a fifteen year old will as likely arise in a small group as in a modern city, as Habermas recognized.

To argue otherwise, Wilber would have to point to practices in contemporary hunting and gathering peoples which can reasonably be said to have been absent in very early hunting and gathering societies, and which appear necessary for children to have the kinds of experiences necessary to develop formal operational reason. I cannot even begin to imagine what he might suggest.

There are still other reasons for rejecting this model. The “pre-egoic” tribespeople of Wilber’s and Feuerstein’s imaginations could not clearly differentiate themselves from the world about them. They would be at the mental level Wilber ascribes to children two and four years old. Like such children, they supposedly lacked “Impulse delay and control, the ability to postpone, channel, sublimate, and offset otherwise instinctive body-bound activities and typhonic magic. . . .”⁸⁷

We might ask how long a two to four year old, even one with adult physical capacities, would survive in a world populated by sabertooth cats, cave bears, and lions? How would these beings prepare for the winter, for in Europe, Asia, and North America these “children” survived and flourished during an ice age. Do four year olds paint beautiful pictures of animals or create finely worked tools? Chipping flint spear points, sewing hide clothing, making bone needles, fish hooks, and the other sophisticated tools of Cro Magnon societies certainly required foresight and the ability to postpone gratification. Most of us would not find chipping spear points worth doing for its intrinsic pleasure. Indeed, foresight was far more important for people in those distant times than for us moderns, cushioned as we are against the impact of personal improvidence by Social Security and Medicare.

The claim that these people were barely able to speak is equally absurd. This is so for two reasons. First, we now know that even Neanderthals had the same small bone structures in their throats possessed by modern people, bones which make human speech possible. The hyoid bone, from which the voice box hangs, is indistinguishable between Neanderthals and modern humans.⁸⁸ Second, we know that when new languages develop in the modern world, they do so spontaneously, and with complete grammars. This occurs when children of people who speak different languages play together. They develop a Creole enabling them to communicate easily and completely, through a new language incomprehensible to their parents.

Creoles, the only new languages that have arisen entirely spontaneously, are not primitive in any sense. They have tight rules for sentence structure, grammar, and word order, articles and prepositions, inflections, tenses, and gender forms.⁸⁹ The best evidence we have, then, says that our distant ancestors spoke a language that was both complete and complex.

It is fashionable these days to attach to every critique of a Western point of view the claim that it reflects a “colonialist” and “imperialist” bias. I abhor this trend, for it is usually a favorite tool of second rate academics. But in the case of Wilber and Feuerstein, it is hard not to suspect that their put-downs of nature religions and tribal peoples stems from an entirely unmerited belief in their own superiority. This is why they so confidently write about the supposed inadequacies of peoples about which we know so little. Particularly galling to me was Wilber’s claim that most shamans of the past, where we have no data at all, were “delusional,” “pitiful,” and “fraudulent.”

Quite appropriate is the response of Joseph Medicine Crow to claims such as these

One thing is sure. This unusual and interesting individual was more than just the white man's stereotyped image. . . . He is depicted as deceiving his patient or subject with trickery and sleight of hand. It is said that he lived and thrived by imposing on the credulity of those who depended upon him and by asking exorbitant fees.

On the contrary, the average Indian medical or holy man was a decent sort, hardworking, sincere, aware of the seriousness of his responsibilities, and dedicated to the individual well-being and general welfare of his people and community. It is indeed unfortunate that the true image of this indispensable man of the tribe and his genuine and great contributions have been so long belittled, tarnished, and obscured by the ethnocentric white man.⁹⁰

If modern representatives of hunting and gathering cultures are mentally as competent as, say, Ken Wilber, and continue to find their spiritual perspective convincing, as many do, this particular model of spiritual evolution faces a serious challenge. If there is no **reasonable** evidence that Paleolithic peoples were mentally less acute than we ourselves, this challenge grows stronger still, for the supposed parallel between Piaget's model of individual development and the course of social development breaks down at its inception.

Fracturing the Psychic

Wilber's argument that early peoples possessed a lower average level of consciousness than moderns is aided by his strange treatment of what he terms the "psychic" level of awareness. Wilber splits it in two. A part is demoted to the "magical" realm, and equated most of the time with purely subjective phenomena. The rest remains in the psychic realm. But Wilber then tries to argue away many of the most universally accepted features of that realm. What results is a confused and confusing collection of contradictory claims.

Wilber's ploy is exposed in one revealing instance. He grants that during the "magical" stage of our social development early hunters sometimes practiced "telepathic hunting magic" due to their belief in a kinship with totem animals and ancestors.⁹¹ Here, for Wilber, telepathy is clearly rooted in the "magical" world of indistinct boundaries. Yet within 40 pages, Wilber argues that the "magical body" was "not a truly psychic or telepathic body, but rather represented . . . simple 'magical' cognition. . . ."⁹² Now telepathy has been relegated to the psychic level, practiced at most by a few honest shamans. Telepathy shifted its roots from a magical identification with the animal world to the psychic realm. This seems to me a muddle.

This confusion is accompanied by at least one other far more serious. Wilber quotes Giza Roheim, a secular psychologist and anthropologist, as saying that "all symptoms and defense mechanisms are a form of magic. . . . Primitives have magic in conscious form, whereas with us it can function only . . . if it is unconscious." Roheim, Wilber tells us, "put it just right."⁹³ Today "infantile magic" is simply "neurotic conflict."⁹⁴

Earlier Wilber had described the magical atmosphere of identification with our environment as characterized by examples such as “voodoo, where the practitioner, by sticking pins in a doll effigy, tries to effect a change in the actual person - and usually for the worse. This ‘works’ because, to the magical mentality, the doll and the person are **one**, not symbolical.”⁹⁵

These two arguments do **not** go together. Wilber now admits that tribal people, let alone modern Haitians, possess formal operational consciousness. But formal operational people do not use magic, he says, for now it exists in their unconscious, manifesting as neurotic symptoms. Yet some Haitians do use magic, and do so quite consciously. And Vodou, if Wilber had taken the time to study the subject, turns out to be a religion with many gods and goddesses, and is very far removed from either of his descriptions of magic. It is neither neurosis nor is it a sign that Haitians do not have developed egos. And they speak French. This is so despite their use of poppets.⁹⁶ Wilber’s argument breaks down into inconsistencies and contradictions.

Historically magic has been anything but the provenance of mental children. Sir Isaac Newton was a practicing alchemist. John Dee made advances in mathematics and astronomy, he also was a magician, and indeed founded “Enochian” magic. Practitioners of magic do not equate it with all of the psychic realm, but they universally describe it as one aspect of that realm. As such magic is very far removed from the level of awareness of a child. For example, while emotional energy is an important aspect of magical practice, it must be accompanied by clear visualizations and intense mental focus, by disciplined work and the ability to then “let go” and pay no further attention to the matter.

In very many cases it involves interaction with the spirit world, which is considered very intricate and complex.

A part of the credibility of Wilber's analysis of magic stems from his conflating contradictory conceptions of the word. Paiget, Roheim, and other secularists treat it as delusional. It confuses feelings and emotions with reality, and is purely subjective. At best it is the provenance of small children who do not yet understand their world. Wilber should have paid better attention to his definition in **Eye to Eye** that magic was the "unrestrained and unrefined belief in action at a distance."⁹⁷ No shaman, magician, or Witch believes in this. No practitioner of Vodou or sorcery believes in this. Magic as practiced by tribal peoples and others is clearly distinguished by them from childhood awareness, and focuses in a disciplined way upon physically unseen powers and principles. The same word refers to two different universes of phenomena, real or alleged, depending upon who is using it. They describe different things. Neither is clarified by confusing it with the other.

The incoherence of Wilber's conception of magic undermines his analysis in many places throughout **Sex, Ecology, Spirituality**. For example, according to Wilber, since the Paleolithic age, magic has been simply a regressive temptation to the human mind. Thus, when the rise of science began in earnest, "the Church, beginning around the sixteenth century, was involved in a war on two fronts: fighting regression to magic, and fighting supersession by science. The Galileos and the sorcerers were both introduced to the Inquisitor."⁹⁸ But later, in a footnote criticizing Morris Berman, Wilber writes of "the early scientists who were also mystics, magicians, and/or occultists of various flavors. . . ." He is referring to Berman's description, but lets it pass

unchallenged, except that Wilber calls the same people “mystical scientists,” obscuring just what they were⁹⁹

Either the magicians and occultists were distinct from the scientists, as Wilber’s basic model would contend, or they were not, as these sentences suggest. The historical evidence is that Berman’s formulation is far superior to Wilber’s. The Renaissance revolt against an ossified Aristotelian science was conducted by both mechanists **and** alchemists inspired by the Neoplatonic and Hermetic philosophies of Paracelsus and Agrippa. These latter took magic quite seriously.

Mechanistic scientists argued that the heavens were simply inert matter, and so were subject to the same principles as was the earth. From their perspective both were desacralized. Their alchemical opponents, the magicians and occultists, argued instead that both the heavens and earth should be treated with reverence and respect. Each was, in its way, sacred. **Both** groups rejected the old qualitative division separating the earth from the heavens. **Both** groups advocated observation, experiment, measurement, and prediction. But the model of impersonal objectivism was argued for primarily by the mechanists. For the alchemists nature was not simply inert, and so experiments must be informed by the heart as well as the head. This view of nature was dialogical.

Significantly, the alchemists were bitterly denounced by the mechanists on theological as well as philosophical grounds. The mechanists saw their mission not simply as serving science but also serving a purely transcendent God. To the extent mechanists did not fully endorse Descartes mechanism, they believed the only kind of spirits in nature were demonic. Those emphasizing that nature was alive were literally trafficking with the Devil. Significantly, the mechanists tended to support the witchcraft

trials while the alchemists did not.¹⁰⁰ Newton was attacked because of his reliance upon the “occult” force of gravity, which imbued matter with power, thereby supposedly making it competitive with God.¹⁰¹

Clearly Wilber’s simplistic ascending/descending dichotomy breaks down. In fact, the “descending” mechanism was philosophically dependent upon the existence of a transcendent (ascending) deity in order to get around the obvious objection that it could not account for consciousness. It was only later that mechanists decided rather incoherently that everything could be accounted for in mechanistic terms. The magicians and occultists, by contrast, worked within a framework able to encompass both ascending and descending insights.

It is far from obvious that science depended upon the triumph of the mechanists. While there is not space to develop this argument in detail, a couple of quotations by Nobel Laureate Barbara McClintock prove suggestive. McClintock received the Nobel Prize for her discovery that genetic elements can move in an orderly way from one chromosome to another. Her breakthrough was intimately connected to her method of studying corn, the subject for her genetic studies. McClintock’s approach was one of active engagement and sympathetic involvement with her subject.

Evelyn Fox Keller quoted McClintock as saying

No two plants are exactly alike. They’re all different, and as a consequence, you have to know that difference. . . . I start with the seedling, and I don’t want to leave it. I don’t really feel I know the story if I don’t watch the plant all the way along. So I know every plant in the field. I know them intimately, and I find it a great pleasure to know them.¹⁰²

McClintock's empathy did not stop with plants. She observed of their chromosomes that

the more I worked with them, the bigger and bigger [the chromosomes] got. And when I was really working with them I wasn't outside, I was down there. I was part of the system. I was right down there with them, and everything got big. I was even able to see the internal parts of the chromosomes - actually everything was there. It surprised me because I actually felt as if I was right down there and these were my friends. . . . As you look at these things, they become part of you. And you forget yourself.¹⁰³

I hope that Wilber does not conclude that McClintock was regressing because her ego boundaries were not firm enough against the external world. Four year olds do not win Nobel Prizes. What McClintock is describing is empathetic identification, which when combined with affection becomes love. This is the attitude defended by the Neoplatonists against the alchemists.

I think even the little I have presented on the development of science, and the importance of loving empathy in scientific research today, demonstrates the complete bankruptcy of Wilber's attempt to argue that science had an immaculate development free from the "regressive" influence of magic. Lynn Thorndike put the point quite accurately, saying that "magic and experimental science have been connected in their

development; that magicians were perhaps the first to experiment; and that the history of both magic and experimental science can be better understood by studying them together.”¹⁰⁴ Further, at least one of those attitudes the magicians offered to science - treating the subject studied with respect as a subject, not impersonally as an object - has since proven enormously valuable. Finally, the triumph of mechanism over its alchemical competitor was not due to better science, but to better politics, for the mechanists were in harmony with a hard hearted Protestantism that desacralized all of nature in an ultimately futile attempt to honor their utterly transcendent deity.

Wilber’s other attempt to disparage the centrality of the psychic for much religious experience is his denigrating and explaining away the existence of a spirit realm of gods daimons, and other entities. In an unreferenced quote in **Sex, Ecology, Spirituality** Wilber says John Locke wrote that “We have reason to be persuaded that there are far more species of creatures above us, than there are beneath; we being in degrees of perfection much more remote from the infinite Being of God, than we are from the lowest state of being, and that which approaches nearest to nothing.”¹⁰⁵ Locke was writing in harmony with the view that divine love and creativity was such that every kind of thing that could exist would exist as a gift of the One. Such a view carries troublesome implications for Wilber’s analysis of both “magical” and “mythical” forms of society. And so he sets about eliminating its impact.

Wilber tells us that

. . . since there was definitely a gap between humans and the infinite Source, then that gap simply had to be filled by an almost infinite number of superior grades of

intelligence, grades that, **if they weren't exactly "creatures,"** were at least a series of infinitely receding higher Ideas and forever unattainable Perfections utterly beyond human reach. [my italics]¹⁰⁶

Wilber tells us that in the Middle Ages these were mythologized as angels and the like. For Locke and Renaissance thinkers, according to Wilber, these higher powers were “simply **postulated** to exist. . . . they were a rational hypothesis put forward to ‘fill the gaps’ between humans and Deity.”¹⁰⁷ No one, Wilber claims, really had first hand experience of such things.

According to Wilber, for Plotinus and a few others, however, these higher dimensions were “**potentials**” present in each of us. They could therefore be consciously actualized by any person sufficiently spiritually developed. They were not “angels out there There is absolutely nothing **other** about them, except the otherness created by our own lack of inner awareness.” For children the gods and goddesses exist, but once we grow up “the conceptual angels, are all within.” In a bizarre sentence, Wilber writes that Locke’s higher beings are “all experimental, contemplative, experiential realities that are directly disclosed to immediate awareness under the proper laboratory conditions.”¹⁰⁸

It is by no means obvious that Locke and others considered these conclusions to be simply “postulates”. In his superb history of magical and occult thinkers and organizations from the early Romantic period until the early twentieth century, Jocelyn Godwin observes that the best of them embody both Enlightenment values and deep

personal involvement in magic. Godwin concludes that “The only possible explanation of this paradox is that for occultists of their caliber, magic was not a belief but an experience so concrete as to demand a scientific rather than a superstitious explanation.”¹⁰⁹ Precisely.

Let us look at Wilber’s argument more carefully. Among Western thinkers, the Classical Neoplatonist Plotinus is Wilber’s most admired authority. Plotinus did indeed believe that there were tutelary spirits which represented our higher potentials. But their relationship to us was quite different from that described by Wilber. In Plotinus’s words . . . this guiding spirit to ourselves . . . is not entirely outside of ourselves; is not bound up with our nature; is not the agent of our action; it belongs to us as belonging to our Soul, but not insofar as we are particular human beings living a life to which it is superior. . . . while its presidency saves us from falling much deeper into evil, the only direct agent within us is something neither above it nor equal to it but under it: Man cannot cease to be characteristically Man.¹¹⁰

Wilber does not tell us that Plotinus also believed that human beings living a subhuman life would be reincarnated as animals. Animals were also potentials - but in the other direction.¹¹¹ I do not think Wilber would deny that in some useful sense animals are distinct from us.

These tutelary spirits, then, are in one sense separate from ourselves, in another sense they are potentials. But the sense in which they are separate is important.

Significantly, Plotinus also acknowledges the reality of spiritual possession:

Those divinely possessed and inspired have at least the knowledge that they hold some greater thing within them though they cannot tell what it is; from the movements that stir them and the utterances that come from them they perceive the power, not themselves, that moves them. . . .¹¹²

To be sure, perfect illumination finds one discovering that everything is the One, and is equally the One. But few are given such a gift. It is hardly a result of creating “proper laboratory conditions.” For Plotinus, realizing the One comes through a gift from above. We can at most prepare ourselves for such a gift. For the rest of us, for Plotinus, and indeed, for everyone who has had any contact at all with the psychic world, the world of spirits and deities is also in important respects distinct.

I can only assume that Wilber, perhaps having never experienced this dimension of the world, writes in complete ignorance of it. Frequently, those who practice nature religions will often have contact with the spirit realm, and while at some ultimate level we are all instances of the One, for all purposes of human existence short of complete illumination, these realities are separate in far more than trivial senses. The One also emanates as a truck, but I suspect Ken Wilber steps aside when a semi and he contest the same patch of street.

Wilber's treatment of the psychic world is contradictory, confused, arbitrary, and deeply misleading. He is forced to split its reality in order to attempt to shoehorn the richness of human spiritual experience into his unidimensional evolutionary spiritual framework.

I think these many confusions arise from Wilber's complete lack of comprehension of what is usually termed the psychic realm. I suspect no modern Westerner, if indeed anyone, truly comprehends this realm. I do not claim to. But I have had enough experience with and within it to know when at least some explanations do not even come close to grasping the matter. Wilber's is one of them. But in this article I am avoiding personal experience, lest I be accused of regressing, and keep simply to logic and history, Wilber's chosen venue.

The Pre/Trans Fallacy Fallacy¹¹³

Once we have seen how arbitrary Wilber's treatment of the psychic realm is, we can take a more critical look at his "pre/trans fallacy." This is supposedly the chief error practitioners of the nature religions are supposed to commit.

Wilber offers an excellent rebuttal of the frequent claim that the consciousness of young children is somehow higher than that of adults. Piaget's research powerfully supports this kind of pre/trans fallacy, and I have never seen the case made better than by Wilber. I have made so many criticisms, and have yet more to come, that it seems only decent to praise him where merited.¹¹⁴

Unfortunately, Wilber's muddled understanding of the psychic realm leads him to argue that psychic level experiences are always transcendent. This does not seem to be

the case. Indeed, some are. But deities can also be experienced as separate entities. The shaman visiting the spirit world experiences his spirit helpers, and opponents, as distinct from him or herself. Published accounts of vision quests also describe the spirits and guides as something other than simply aspects of ourselves or of the One. Psychic healing frequently encounters alien forms within others which, once removed, result in a cessation of symptoms. In many of these examples the person having the experience has apparently left their normal body.

I am not denying that at the most subtle levels, everything is the One. What I am denying is that very many people, if any, stay at that level of awareness permanently. When we are not at that level, we are in a world where individuality manifests as a primary aspect of existence. Part of the world of primary individuality extends into the psychic realm. So, these psychic experiences are not transpersonal experiences, but neither are they prepersonal. Yet they are clearly spiritual, in that they deal with orders of existence which are not material in the contemporary sense of that term.

Part of the problem here may be an ambiguity in the meaning of “spiritual.” The One or a high deity are spiritual in two senses. First, they are immaterial (the deity) or transcend as well as include the material (the One). Second, they manifest what we properly regard as spiritual values, such as perfect love. A thought form is merely immaterial. It is in that sense a part of the world of spirit, but does not manifest spiritual values. This is why a person who has never had an experiences with the “spirit world” can be far more genuinely spiritual than one who consorts with spirits on a daily basis. Wilber may argue that he is speaking only of the high spiritual dimension when he writes of the psychic realm. But he then needs to account for the rest of it, a realm almost

universally described by others as the psychic realm. Wilber's inflation of the pre/trans fallacy beyond its proper boundaries turns it into the "pre/trans fallacy fallacy". He appears to confuse the transcendent with the transpersonal.

Wilber's Manicheanism

Wilber emphasizes that humankind's evolutionary process takes place within a spiritual reality which ultimately is nondual. With this view I have no quarrel. From a nondual enlightened perspective, everything is equally the One. But for Wilber this realization can **only** be attained at the end of a long and very chancy evolutionary journey. Humankind is the first form of life, on this world at least, capable of ultimately attaining conscious union with Spirit. Even for human beings, this journey is long and its outcome uncertain. Consciousness proceeds through a series of stages, each with characteristic challenges and dangers. There is no guarantee of success. Wilber's universe is not a friendly one.

While Wilber frequently emphasizes that, seen from an enlightened perspective, everything is holy and divine, he also evidences a deep and incessant undercurrent of intense dislike, even fear and contempt, for the physical world and all its works. This attitude repeatedly arises throughout his writing. Perhaps the mildest term by which Wilber refers to the world as we normally encounter it, that is, the world of samsara, is "ridiculous."¹¹⁵ "We are yet the bastard sons and daughters of an evolution not yet done with us, caught always between the fragments of yesterday and the unions of tomorrow . . ."¹¹⁶ But far from liberating, this evolution is a "nightmare."¹¹⁷ He writes of "the

gruesome conditions known as life in this biosphere.”¹¹⁸ The world manifests only “a pitifully small portion of God.”¹¹⁹ As if any portion of God is “pitiful.” Samsara is “a brutal place. . . . It is inherently a mechanism of terror. And people need to cope with this nightmare.”¹²⁰ Are we “Trapped in hell? Most definitely, as are all stages short of superconscious resurrection.”¹²¹ As if this wasn’t depressing enough, Wilber suggests that the higher evolution rises the greater the opportunities for things to go horribly wrong. Every one starts from scratch, and at every stage “**things can go wrong**. The more stages the more nightmares of possible developmental miscarriages.”¹²² Indeed, Wilber even goes so far as suggest that there may be **no** salvation for people in this nightmare world.¹²³ Pain, nightmares, gruesome suffering, and horrible pathology - for eternity.

At this point Wilber no longer resembles in any sense an advocate of nondualist spirituality. He has become a kind of Gnostic, viewing this world as a **trap** for Spirit, and nothing more. Like the Gnostics, birth is no blessing because “for any given individual, the moment of conception is the greatest point of actual alienation from conscious Spirit, simply because the individual has the most number of conscious stages to go through. . . .”¹²⁴ If this is true, bringing a child into the world is a form of child abuse!

One wonders why a loving and compassionate Source would ever manifest such a ghastly place - and provide so little opportunity ever to leave it? Since Wilber says nothing of an after life and asserts we all start at the same place with next to none making it out, we are justified in suspecting that Wilber better describes a universe created by a

demon than a place of divine beauty and sacredness. Wilber resembles a Gnostic fighting the Demiurge.

And yet, this same man can write beautifully, and in the best nondualist fashion, that “The One manifests as the Many through an infinite act of compassion and charity . . .”¹²⁵ It seems to me that Wilber is deeply conflicted in his own spirituality, alienated from a world he loaths but somehow believes to be the product of infinite love and compassion. I believe Wilber is torn between two contradictory spiritual paths, one seeking to escape the world, the other to love both it and the divine within and beyond it.

This conflict, I think, is the reason for Wilber’s core dislike of both deep ecology and nature spirituality. We who embrace these views do not see our world as gruesome, ridiculous, pitiful, a nightmare and place of terror. As a consequence, we are not desperate to get off the wheel of life. Indeed, we see the Divine in the wheel of life, with death the price inevitably paid for the **blessings** of embodied existence. And death itself is a sacrament. On balance it is worth the bargain. Gary Snyder put this point well:

‘What a big potlatch we are all members of!’ To acknowledge that each of us at the table will eventually be part of the meal is not just being ‘realistic’ It is allowing the sacred to enter and accepting the sacramental aspect of our shaky temporal personal being.¹²⁶

The ancient image of the Great Mother who gives birth and nurturance to her children, and then ultimately eats them, captures this insight at the mythic level, illuminating one of the meanings within life. Nevertheless, to grasp its meaning fully, we

need to understand and integrate **both** sides of her image. She consumes in order to give birth. A rich, varied, and beautiful world offering a maximum diversity of ways of life to all its inhabitants requires each of us, sooner or later, to sustain others.¹²⁷

The Value of Nature Religion

The contemporary revival of nature religions is a major effort to go beyond our culture's dominant secular and scientific paradigm. For many of us moderns who have embraced a nature religion, it was our encounters with wild nature which first demonstrated to us the inherent limitations of the dominant Western worldview.

Modern secular society has squeezed out ready access to the sacred within the purely human sphere. It is in nature that we most easily encounter a reality greater than human plans and aspirations, and do so with a minimum of distortion by our preconceptions and prejudices. Nature religion is hardly the only spiritual path open to human beings, but today it is a particularly powerful one. Spirit in nature reaches to us through beauty, through peace, through the openness of heart that it evokes within us, and through the meaning we experience in its silence. It helps us see that our worries and fears exist within a wider and deeper context that removes their urgency, soothing our minds and opening our hearts. Truly, as Emerson put it, "We are as much strangers in nature as we are aliens from God."¹²⁸

Nature religions focus to a substantial extent upon the psychic realm because they do not see human existence as a problem to be overcome, but rather as a blessing to be comprehended, and a gift to be mastered. We do so by living in a respectful and loving

harmony with one another, with nature, and with the sacred. And so, far from being in a hurry for attaining transcendence, nature religions seek to honor the lives we are given.

This view in no way denies a transcendent dimension to life. The transcendent, and that which embraces both the transcendent and the immanent, is truly there, it is responsible for all that is, it is honored and revered. But the nature religions do not reject the lives we are given or the beautiful and sacred world we inhabit in order to hurriedly try and evolve elsewhere. Everything can come in an appropriate time. Let us honor and revere what we have today. Let us keep our feet on the good earth as our hearts and minds open to embrace All That Is.

Some people may grant us all of this, but still argue that nature religion is ill suited for the modern world of high technology and giant cities. It supposedly romanticizes the natural and denigrates the human world. This is also a misunderstanding. While many practitioners of nature religions, including this author, believe we are better off more integrated into nature and nature's cycles, this belief does not necessarily translate into antagonism towards either science or technology, let alone humanity.

In what is the best study to date of contemporary Neopaganism, Margot Adler concluded that "contrary to my own expectations and the assumptions of various scholars, the majority of Neo-Pagans are optimistic about the uses of science and modern technology."¹²⁹ Adler points out, and my own experience confirms, that Neo-Pagans are disproportionately attracted to scientific and computer oriented professions. Indeed, the largest single profession of Neo-Pagans answering a questionnaire she developed in 1985 was "Computer programmer, systems analyst, or software developer."¹³⁰ Clearly the

Neo-Pagan community cannot be said to be in retreat from modernity, but rather seeks to grow through and transform it.

Nature religion is a pure expression of a spiritual insight which can be powerfully expressed within an urban context. Today it is easy to forget that Plato, Aristotle, and other Classical philosophers, who were all town and city dwellers, wrote in a culture which extended without break back to the Neolithic and earlier. The Classical gods can be traced in many instances back to shamanic and totem deities.¹³¹ Nor did most classical philosophers deny the existence of these gods, although they were highly critical of popular conceptions of them.

A. H. Armstrong put this point well, saying that There is . . . a deep rural archaism built into Mediterranean spirituality. . . He continues

It is of great importance always to bear in mind this continuity of archaic spirituality, carried by the holy places and immemorial observances, always there and underlying all the changes right down to the establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire and after. It is the combination of this archaic base with often intensely sophisticated and, to us, modern seeming thinking and feeling that gives Hellenic and hellenized spirituality and culture its peculiar and enduring fascination. In the development of classical spirituality there were indeed changes. . . . But they were, almost without exception, changes in the interpretation of the old tradition, not changes that aimed at its destruction or radical reformation.¹³²

Classical philosophy differed from modern academic philosophy in that it sought the spiritual and psychological transformation of its practitioners.¹³³ Like the earlier nature religions from which they ultimately descended, they tended to emphasize that we live most appropriately by being in harmony with the world, which is an expression of the good. To live in that harmony, they also tended to emphasize, like the Buddhists, that our suffering arose from our enslavement to our passions and desires.

Pierre Hadot quotes Marcus Aurelius as saying there are many things if we look at them in isolation, . . . are far from being beautiful. Nevertheless, because they are incidental by-products of natural processes, they add to the beauty of these processes, and have an attractive effect on us. Thus, as long as one has a feeling for, and a deep understanding of Nature's processes, there is scarcely any of the things that occur as incidental by-products that will not present to one as pleasant, at least in some of its aspects. Such a person . . . will look upon the gaping jaws of wild beasts with no less pleasure than upon all the imitations of them that sculptors and painters offer us. With his wise vision, he will be able to discern the rich maturity of old men and women, as well as the lovely charm in young children; and there are many such things, which do not appeal to everyone, only to that person who has truly familiarized himself with nature and its workings.¹³⁴

To be sure, there are world-denying strains in some Classical philosophy. But these themes seem to me a reaction to the widespread and obvious injustices prevalent in

the human society of the time. Immersed within a world of purely human affairs, the greater context of the natural world can be too easily lost from sight.

I am struck with the fact that the spiritual systems of hunting peoples, those who are most deeply immersed within the natural world, do not see human existence as a problem to be resolved. Neither fallenness nor evil comprise essential parts of their cosmologies. Their spirituality focuses instead on living in harmony with both Spirit and natural rhythms.

It is only with the rise of societies of rich and poor, powerful and weak, of exploitive hierarchies and perpetual war, that human life increasingly comes to be seen as possibly not a blessing. Suffering and injustice experienced at the hands of other human beings is quite distinct from suffering through a drought, famine or pestilence. The reason is that those causing the suffering are often seen to personally benefit from it. With the rise of such injustice to dominance within society, the basic goodness of existence can easily be called into question.

The causes of humanity's nightmares are largely of its own making. They are not the result of nature. This is why, as Emerson so clearly saw, getting away into nature could open us up relatively easily to an intuition of the Divine that is truly in all things. For a society as saturated with secular values and purposes as our own, where nothing is any longer respected as valuable in itself, the spiritual role of nature can be expected to **increase** in importance.

The nature religions, from European Neopagan to traditional American Indian, share in most respects a common worldview. The world is permeated by Spirit, and a spirit world of teaching and healing powers exists, a world able to assist human beings.

This worldview has ancient roots in the pre-Christian West as well as in the rest of the world, and its renewed vitality among traditional American Indians and Neopagans suggests Spirit is reaching out to humankind through the one avenue of our experience still relatively unobscured by greed and ambition: the world of Nature.

The nature religions constitute the true primordial tradition, whose insights have been the well-spring of inspiration for much that has been most noble within our own civilization. The similarities of spiritual worlds between the deepest thinkers of classical times and Native Americans can be striking. Compare these words of Black Elk, speaking of his vision, with Plato's story of the cave:

I am sure now that I was then too young to understand it all, and that I only felt it. It was the pictures I remembered and the words that went with them; for nothing I have ever seen with my eyes was so clear and bright as what my vision showed me; and no words that I have ever heard with my ears were like the words I heard. I did not have to remember these things; they have remembered themselves all these years. It was as I grew older that the meanings came clearer and clearer out of the pictures and the words; and even now I know that more was shown to me than I can tell.

I saw my vision yonder once more . . . I looked about me and could see that what we then were doing was like a shadow cast upon the earth from yonder vision in the heavens, so bright it was and clear. I knew the real was yonder and the darkened dream of it was here.¹³⁵

Nor was he the only Lakota to peer beyond Plato's cave. Speaking of Crazy Horse's vision, Black Elk's father had told him "that Crazy Horse dreamed and went into the world where there is nothing but the spirits of all things. That is the real world that is behind this one, and everything we see here is something like a shadow from that world."¹³⁶

An Alternative to Unilinear Evolution: Modernity, Nature, and Spirit

In offering an alternative to Ken Wilber's unilinear model of spiritual evolution, it seems to me important to offer an alternative interpretation of modernity's place in the world. If our society is not the pinnacle of all that has gone before, as Wilber would have it, is it simply a degeneration, as Emerson sometimes suggests? I believe it is neither.

In my view, the modern West has indeed progressed in developing more inclusive and rational forms of social life. But it has done so while blinding itself to the reality of the psychic and other spiritual realms. Nor is this the only price our culture has paid.

The modern world differs from its predecessors mostly due to the growth of the abstract human community with universal claims. These claims are of two sorts. First, that its principles apply to all human beings - a powerful step forward for the human race. Second, that this abstract human community legitimately always takes precedence over all other kinds of community membership - an illegitimate claim that devalues Spirit, nature, and concrete human communities such as families and neighborhoods. We have become so entranced by our new discovery in social organization, and the power it

unleashed, that we have lost sight of the context within which it exists, and which sustains it.

While modern Westerners have greatly increased the sphere of human cooperation, in large part through means that Wilber discusses fairly competently, they have greatly diminished the depth of their connection and cooperation with the nonhuman world. This includes both the world of physical nature and the spiritual dimensions which permeate all existence.

The West's gift to the wider human community is a framework for social life which provides through the development of science and the market, universal frameworks for cooperation, and, with liberal democracy, the first political form which does not wage war upon others of its own kind.¹³⁷ These are no small achievements. But our culture lacks the ecological and spiritual grounding needed in order to maintain it. As a society, we have lived off the accumulated spiritual and moral capital of our Judeo-Christian heritage. But most of us no longer deeply believe Biblical theology. Scripture has been contradicted by science too often. Our ethical foundations in scriptural religion have grown weaker, and existing spiritual communities do not appear capable of maintaining them.

Similarly, we have lived off the bounty of nature, and have similarly failed to maintain it. The secular and economistic mindset which functions as official rationality is inadequate to the task of maintaining sustainable relationships with the environment, let alone treating other forms of life with minimal respect or decency. The ethic of expediency and an individualistic time frame, coupled with modern technology, will not

long preserve the fertility of the soil, the bounty of the seas, the sweetness of the water, the purity of the air, or the abundance of life.

Unlike the revealed, both the nature religions and the contemplative traditions are rooted in personal experience. The nature religions focus primarily upon intermediate spiritual levels in the Great Chain of Being, with an attitude of thankfulness for the beautiful and sacred world within which we live. The contemplative traditions focus on the Source of it all. These differences are not mutually exclusive. In a way, they rest with each person's evaluation of the balance of suffering and blessing in the life they live. If we experience the blessings as primary, we are naturally attracted to the nature religions. If we experience suffering and dissatisfaction as primary, the contemplative traditions may speak more compellingly to us. But for many of us there is no deep contradiction between these paths, or in honoring and learning from both. There is suffering and blessing in every life. And sometimes the former turns out to be the latter. There is nothing inferior in the nature religions' when human life is not experienced as a problem to be overcome and our beautiful and sacred world is not experienced as a nightmare.

Environmental thought, particularly deep ecology, is at home here. It is through our experience with nature that we are rediscovering Spirit in the midst of that spiritual desert that is contemporary America. In that compatibility of nature religion with environmental thought is hope that the liberal West will rediscover its soul, and acknowledge that it exists as one among many communities, human and nonhuman, all of whom have as much claim for regard and respect as it does itself. Something must open

the withered secular heart to the sacred, to wonder, and to love without possessiveness. More than anything else, nature seems capable of doing so.

The perspective I am describing views social progress as very real, but contextual. Social progress is situated within communities, and can exist in some while not in others to which we equally belong. When any community unilaterally dominates all others, what was progress when confined within its appropriate sphere becomes increasingly dysfunctional and dangerous. Perhaps this is why some, like Emerson, see the modern abstract society and the secular values it promotes as a degradation, while others such as Wilber see it as progressive. It is both, depending upon different contexts, each of which is valid in its place. But by denying the spiritual, modern secularism can not ever fulfill the ultimate promises it makes.

Because Spirit is everywhere, we always have the opportunity to grow in harmony with it. This possibility exists in all societies, although perhaps it is more difficult to accomplish in some than others. Social progress seems to me something quite distinct from individual evolution. It develops through a gradual extension of the breadth of human cooperation. To emphasize the contrast, individual evolution develops primarily through an increase in the depth of cooperation with others, manifesting most fully as unconditional love. As such individual spiritual evolution can happen anywhere and anytime.

This perspective is in complete harmony with a nondual spiritual perspective and practice. Wilber says that, for Plotinus, one of the most important nondualist philosopher-mystics of all time, spiritual “‘Ascent’ . . . means a change in perception so that more and more of the world is perceived *as* the other world - more and more of this

world is perceived as Perfectly Divine, until there is **only** the Perfectly Divine in **all** perception. . . .”¹³⁸ All nature religions of which I have any knowledge would have no problem with this sentiment. But perhaps they already see the Divine in more than does Ken Wilber. I suggest he take to his own heart another quotation he gives us from Plotinus:

Do not suppose that a man becomes good by despising the world and all the beauties that are in it. They [the Gnostics] have no right to profess respect for the gods of the world above. When we love a person, we love all that belongs to him; we extend to the children the affection we feel for the parent. Now every Soul is a daughter of the [Godhead]. How can **this world** be separated from the **spiritual** world? Those who despise what is so nearly akin to the spiritual world, prove that they know nothing of the spiritual world, except in name.¹³⁹

¹ Ken Wilber, **A Brief History of Everything**, (Boston: Shambhala, 1996) p. 313.

² Ken Wilber, **Sex, Ecology, Spirituality**, (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), p. 166.

³ Ibid., p. 287. The insertions are Wilber’s.

⁴ Ibid., p. 469. Wilber’s brackets.

⁵ Ibid., p. 285

⁶ Ibid., p. 250

⁷ Ibid., p. 288

⁸ Ibid., p. 470. “Monological” means that it is purely personal and private. No dialogue or reciprocity is involved.

⁹ Wilber describes the work he quotes as Emerson’s “essay Nature” but in fact it is not. Emerson’s short essay by that name appears in many anthologies, and is not the work cited. Instead it is from Emerson’s book **Nature**, which is short enough to appear in some anthologies. My citations will be from the easily available **The Portable Emerson**, edited by Carl Bode and Malcom Cowley (New York: Penguin, 1981).

¹⁰ **Nature**, Portable Emerson, pp. 33-34. Wilber does give two page numbers in his footnote, but there is no way to tell what part comes from where in the text.

¹¹ Ibid., p.47

¹² For the Lakota, the term is Wakan Tanka,(Great Mystery), for the Navajo, hózhó (Beauty), for the Crow, Akbaatatdía, (The Maker), for traditional Wicca, Drychton, (the original source of all things).

¹³ Emerson, p. 47

¹⁴ Wilber, **SES**, p. 256

¹⁵ A confusion he repeats on p. 289.

¹⁶ Emerson., p. 41

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 43

¹⁸ Wilber **SES**., p. 469

¹⁹ Wilber, Ibid., p. 471. It is interesting that Wilber acknowledges the ability of wild nature to provide genuinely spiritual experiences, but will allow contemporary advocates of wilderness only a desire for “swishing” thrills.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 289. His italics. See Emerson, op. cit., p. 42.

²¹ Emerson, *Ibid.*, p. 43

²² Wilber may deliberately be making it difficult to check his sources, although I have difficulty crediting him with that much deviousness, and prefer simple arrogance as an explanation. But consider that he urges his readers not to read his endnotes the first time they read his book, although he says this suggestion came from readers of the original manuscript.(p. x). How many will read it twice? Consider also that the second time Wilber refers to his bogus Emerson quotation, he does not give a citation at all.

However, on an immediately previous quotation he does tell his reader “The following quotes are simply repeats from those given in chapter 8, and the references can be found there.”(p. 667, n. 11) Combined with his confusing Emerson’s book *Nature* for the essay “Nature” and the not easily available edition of Emerson’s work which he cites, only those of us who are already deeply suspicious, and care, will take the trouble to track them down.

²³ Along with Wilber’s work, see Georg Feuerstein, **Structures of Consciousness: The Genius of Jean Gebser - an Introduction and Critique** (Lower Lake, CA: Integral Publishing, 1987) and Jean Gebser, **The Ever-Oresent Origin** (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985).

²⁴ See for example, Jean Piaget, **The Moral Judgement of the Child**, (New York: Collier Books, 1962) and **The Essential Piaget**, H. Gruber and J. Voneche, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

²⁵ In **Up From Eden** Wilber identified the magical stage at from 15 months to two years. More recently he argues it is from two years to four years. **SES**, p. 567, n. 51, **Eye to**

Eye: The Quest for a New Paradigm, (Boston: Shambhala, 1990), p. 254. See also **Brief History**, p. 173.

²⁶ Wilber, **Eye to Eye**, p. 254.

²⁷ Wilber, **Up From Eden**, p. 218

²⁸ Wilber, **SES**, p. 460

²⁹ This outline comes from Ken Wilber, **A Sociable God**, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1983) pp. 28-30 and the overall descriptions in **SES**, because in his earlier book “vision logic” was not distinguished from the formal operational reason of the average modern mentality and the psychic realm which arises beyond it. See also **Wilber’s A Brief History of Everything**, (Boston: Shambhala, 1996) p. 146.

³⁰ See Jurgen Habermas, **Communication and the Evolution of Society**, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

³¹ Wilber, **SES**, p. 119

³² Ken Wilber, **Up From Eden**, (Boston: Shambhala, 1986) p. 41n. **Eye to Eye**, p. 263.

³³ Ibid., p. 48 In **Eye to Eye** Wilber describes these capacities as “simple images, symbols, and the first rudimentary concepts. . . .” (p. 263) I am uncertain how different this is from his description in **Eden**, but since these capacities characterize children from two to four, he now grants some greater degree of language ability. Given that Wilber agrees with Gebser that the next stage is “mythic” it is reasonable to interpret him as I have, for this is how Gebser and his followers see the matter.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 42. Georg Feuerstein goes farther, telling us that at this level of consciousness “silence was not yet a magically-based technique but a primary condition. Language had not yet been ‘invented,’ because nature had not yet ‘invented’ the self-conscious

subject.” **Structures of Consciousness: The Genius of Jean Gebser, An Introduction and Critique** (Lower Lake, CA: Integral Publishing, 1987) p. 65.

³⁵ Wilber, **Up From Eden**, p. 65.

³⁶ Ken Wilber, **SES**, p. 166.

³⁷ Wilber, **Eden.**, p. 56

³⁸ Ibid., p. 69 Wilber defines the Atman project as the “attempt to regain Atman consciousness in ways that prevent it and force symbolic substitutes. . . .” p. 13.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 75

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 88

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 89-93.

⁴² Wilber, **SES.**, p. 173

⁴³ Ibid., p. 197

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 320.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 326.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 340.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 392.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 410.

⁴⁹ Ibid., P. 432.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 447.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 664n

⁵² Ibid., p. 466.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 670. Wilber in his own summary lists seven features. I have collapsed them into five. His points 1 and 4 mostly overlap, and I combine them in point 1. I cannot see

anything in his no. 7 that was not also at least implied in his no. 6. I combine them in my point 5.

⁵⁴ One of the strangest things about this charge is that some of Wilber's own writings could be accused of the same shortcoming by the standards he himself creates. Thus, in **Up From Eden**, Wilber describes the magical or "Typhonic" structure as preegoic, constituting the "first stage" of becoming aware. He claims **that "The classical typhon is half serpent, half man; but any figure that is structurally half animal and half man is a typhonic figure."** p. 45. Amusingly, Wilber's favorite term for the kind of culture characterized by "vision logic" is Centauric! The centaur is, of course, half animal and half man. Is this evidence that Wilber himself has given in to the regressive temptation? Is he committing the pre-trans fallacy? The fact that Wilber's own analysis turns back to bite him suggests that he should be a bit more careful about classifying others about whom he knows little as below his own level of understanding.

⁵⁵ Wilber, **Brief History**, pp. 39, 329.

⁵⁶ Wilber, **SES**, p. 539, n. 5; **Brief History**, pp. 46-7.

⁵⁷ Wilber, **SES**, p. 517.

⁵⁸ Reprinted in **The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology**, Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue (eds), (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1995), pp. 49-53.

⁵⁹ Arne Naess, *Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World*, **The Deep Ecology Movement**, p. 20

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶¹ Arne Naess, **Ecology, Community and Lifestyle**, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 173.

⁶² Aldo Leopold, **Sand County Almanac** (New York: Ballentine Books, 1970), p. 117.

See also my Individuality, Human and Natural Communities, and the Foundations of Ethics, **Environmental Ethics**, vol. 17, Spring, 1995, 23-37.

⁶³ Arne Naess, **Ecology, Community and Lifestyle**, p. 170.

⁶⁴ Wilber, **SES**, p. 50, 51.

⁶⁵ Naess, **Ecology, Community and Lifestyle**, p. 170, also 166-169.

⁶⁶ Arne Naess and George Sessions, Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement, **The Deep Ecology Movement**, pp. 49, 51.

⁶⁷ Arne Naess, The Shallow and Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary, **The Deep Ecology Movement**, p. 4.

⁶⁸ The true biocentric egalitarians tend to be many of the “animal liberation” and “animal rights” advocates. These people have been exhaustively criticized by ecotheorists for their abysmal understanding of biology, ecology, and logic. An excellent compendium of such critiques is Eugene Hargrove, ed. **The Animal Rights/Environmental Ethics Debate: The Environmental Perspective** (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1992). Characteristically, Wilber makes no mention of this debate and approvingly refers to leading animal rights theorist Tom Regan’s charge that eco-theorists were often “eco-fascists.” p. 672. Given Naess’s role in the Norwegian Resistance to Nazi occupation during WWII, we might justly term Regan’s charge and Wilber’s amen as obscene.

⁶⁹ diZerega, Individuality, Human and Natural Communities, and the Foundations of Ethics, p. 36-7.

⁷⁰ Naess, The Shallow and Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement, p. 7.

⁷¹ Arne Naess and George Sessions, Platform Principles of the Deep Ecology Movement, **The Deep Ecology Movement**, p. 53.

⁷² Wilber, **SES**, for example, pp. 106, 452, 539, n. 5

⁷³ Naess, Self-Realization, p. 22.

⁷⁴ See Naess's discussion in **Ecology, Community, Lifestyle**, pp. 171-196. Also useful is George Sessions, Arne Naess and the Union of Theory and Practice, **The Deep Ecology Movement**, pp. 54-63. and J. Baird Callicott, **Earth's Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Environmental Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback**, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 50-51, 78.

⁷⁵ The best compilation of deep ecological writing that I have read is Drengson and Inoue's **The Deep Ecology Movement** from which many of the articles by Naess were cited. See also George Sessions (ed.) **Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings in the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism**, (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

⁷⁶ "Ken Wilber's Response to DH Frew re; Plotinus" June 23, 1995, Alexandria listserve. See also **Eye to Eye**, p. 268.

⁷⁷ "The Whole & The Parts: Ken Wilber's Treatment of Plotinus in Sex, Ecology, Spirituality" by D. H. Frew, Alexandria listserve, May 1, 1995.

⁷⁸ T. C. McLuhan quoting George Tinker, **The Way of the Earth: Encounters with Nature in Ancient and Contemporary Thought** (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) p. 441.

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- ⁷⁹ Feuerstein makes the same charge, describing interest in Witchcraft (Wiccan Neopaganism) “as a flight from the light of reason that has been the gain of the mental structure of consciousness.” p. 106.
- ⁸⁰ Feuerstein, op. cit. p. 57, see also 65-66.
- ⁸¹ Wilber, **SES**, p. 571, n. 22.
- ⁸² See Jurgen Habermas, *Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures*, **Communication and the Evolution of Society**, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), p. 102.
- ⁸³ Ibid., p. 83.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 112. J. Baird Callicott has written an excellent essay about this way of living in the world among American Indians. See “Traditional American Indian and Western European Attitudes Toward Nature: An Overview” in J. Baird Callicott, **In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy**, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 177-202
- ⁸⁵ Habermas, p. 137.
- ⁸⁶ Feuerstein, p. 65.
- ⁸⁷ Wilber, **Up From Eden**, p. 88.
- ⁸⁸ Rick Gore, Neandertals: The Dawn of Humans, **National Geographic**, Jan., 1996, 128:1, p. 29.
- ⁸⁹ On creole, see Lewis Thomas, *The Fragile Species* (New York: Macmillan, 1992) pp. 167-170. On the innate capacity for language, see Noam Chomsky, **Syntactic Structures** (London: Gravenhage, 1957).

⁹⁰ Joseph Medicine Crow, **From the Heart of the Crow Country: The Crow Indians' Own Stories** (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1992) p. 116.

⁹¹ Wilber, **Up From Eden**, p. 48.

⁹² Ibid., p. 80. Anyone wishing to cross check Wilber's discussions of this issue will be hindered rather than helped by Wilber's statement on this page that "the previous chapter dwelled on the subject of telepathy . . . " This is in error. Wilber discusses this issue, to the extent that he does, in chapter 2, not chapter 3.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 81. Wilber has not to my knowledge rejected this interpretation, even if he has added a couple of years on to the age where magical thinking occurs. He writes "I still stand strongly behind the main conclusions of those early books." **SES**, p. 567, n 51.

⁹⁴ **Up From Eden**, p. 82.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 46., **Eye to Eye**, p. 268

⁹⁶ A good, brief, and reliable discussion of Vodou may be found in Joseph M. Murphy, **Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora**, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) pp. 10-43.

⁹⁷ Wilber, **Eye to Eye**, p. 254.

⁹⁸ Wilber, **SES**, p. 244.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 683. Even Wilber's expunged terminology is confusing. Wilber's "mystical scientists" are mystical (ascending) scientists (descenders). If they in fact unify both, then these occultists and magicians rank in Wilber's theory with Plato and Plotinus. Since these magicians were often Neoplatonists, this fact does not bother me. But it should bother Wilber.

¹⁰⁰ On these issues see Gary B. Deason, *Reformation Theology and the Mechanistic Conception of Nature*, **God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science**, David Lindberg and Ronald Numbers, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 161-191; Carolyn Merchant, **The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution**, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980); Mary Midgely, **Science as Salvation**, (London: Routledge, 1992) pp.81-82; Evelyn Fox Keller, **Reflections on Gender and Science**, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 43-65.

¹⁰¹ Jocelyn Godwin, **The Theosophical Enlightenment**, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 72.

¹⁰² Keller, **Gender and Science**, op. cit., p. 164. See also Linda Jean Shepherd, **Lifting the Veil: The Feminine Face of Science**, (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), pp. 70-74.

¹⁰³ Keller, p. 165.

¹⁰⁴ Lynn Thorndike, **A History of Magic and Experimental Science**, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923) 8 vols., vol. I, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Wilber, **SES**, p. 411. If Wilber chooses to respond to my arguments, I will appreciate his indicating where Locke wrote this.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 411

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 411

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 412.

¹⁰⁹ Godwin, p. 374.

¹¹⁰ Plotinus, **The Enneads**(London: Penguin, 1991) III. 4, 5, p. 170.

¹¹¹ Ibid., III, 4, 2, p. 167.

¹¹² Ibid., V. 3, 15. Iamblichus, the most important post-Plotinian Neoplatonist, and a nondualist as well, developed his philosophy and his practice through close working with deities, particularly Hecate. The best work on Iamblichus is Greory Shaw, **Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus**, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

¹¹³ I thank D. H. Frew for this felicitous way of labeling the problem.

¹¹⁴ Wilber, **SES**, pp. 256-7.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 739.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 254

¹¹⁷ Wilber, **Brief History**, p. 339.

¹¹⁸ Wilber, **SES**, p. 648

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 612

¹²⁰ Wilber, **Brief History**, p. 177

¹²¹ Ken Wilber, *A Sociable God: A Brief Introduction to a Transcendental Sociology*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1983), p. 83.

¹²² **SES**, p. 627

¹²³ **Brief History**, p. 276. This disturbing claim is also implied on p. 39.

¹²⁴ **SES**, P. 760.

¹²⁵ Wilber, **Brief History**, p. 254.

¹²⁶ Gary Snyder, **The Practice of the Wild**, (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p. 19.

¹²⁷ Wilber writes about the Great Mother most extensively in **Up From Eden**, pp. 111-131. He emphasizes only her fearsome side, and not the spiritual truth of which it is only one facet.

¹²⁸ Emerson, **The Portable Emerson**, p. 43.

¹²⁹ Margot Adler, **Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today**, revised and expanded ed., (Boston: Beacon, 1986), p. 392.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 447.

¹³¹ Carlo Ginzburg, **Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath**, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

¹³² A. H. Armstrong, ed. **Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman**, (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. xv.

¹³³ Pierre Hadot, **Philosophy as a Way of Life**, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995); see also Martha C. Nussbaum, **The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics**, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹³⁴ Hadot, op. cit., p. 190, Marcus Aurelius, **Meditations**, 8, 24.

¹³⁵ John G. Neihardt, **Black Elk Speaks** (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), pp. 41, 142. For a discussion of those criticizing the genuineness of Black Elk's account as transmitted by Neihardt, see Ed McGaa, Eagle Man, **Native Wisdom: Perceptions of the Natural Way**, (Minneapolis: Four Directions Publishing, 1995), pp. 16-17.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

¹³⁷ Gus diZerega, Democracies and Peace: The Self-Organizing Foundation for the Democratic Peace, **The Review of Politics**, 57:2, Spring, 1995.

¹³⁸ Wilber, **SES**, p. 361.

¹³⁹ Wilber, **SES**, p. 342. Unfortunately, the quotation from Plotinus on this page, which Wilber says “justly became world famous” is yet another stitched together passage. The part that I quoted is from **Ennead II**, Tractate 9 “Against the Gnostics” but the following two paragraphs are from **Ennead V**, Tractate I: “The Three Initial Hypostases” and have nothing to do with Gnosticism, having been written years earlier. I am indebted to Don Frew for first drawing attention to Wilber’s distortion of quotes by showing me his misuse of Plotinus.