**Evaluation of the Worldview of Ken Wilber and Integral Philosophy**

**Compiled by the Members of the Evolutionary Philosophy Circle**

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this report is to examine the very well documented worldview of Ken Wilber, which has been developing over the last several decades in the many volumes that he has written about his Integral Philosophy. We started our analysis using a framework for worldviews that looks at a person’s positions in the six main branches of philosophy. These positions can also be tied together by a unifying narrative that can be either explicit or implicit. Once we documented all of these elements of Wilber’s worldview, we attempted to analyze it using the three criteria that David Sloan Wilson listed in his essay titled “Evaluating Narratives of Conscious Evolution.” 1. Is the narrative psychologically and emotionally motivating? 2. What does the narrative cause people to do? 3. How well does the narrative comport with current scientific knowledge? In the end, there were serious and substantial points of agreement with Wilber’s worldview that have made our overall efforts worthwhile. However, we believe there are several points in Wilber’s worldview that make our shared goals difficult to reach together. The vision of ProSocial World (PW) is: “To unleash the power of science and inquiry to help us notice what’s within us and between us, to create a more harmonious world for everyone around us.” Some vocal critics in the Integral movement have asked Ken Wilber to update his views based on the latest in evolutionary science. We can only add to that request since Integral Spirituality’s stated goals of understanding life and creating a world that works for all are laudable indeed and deserve as accurate and motivating a worldview as possible.

**INTRODUCTION — THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT**

The Evolutionary Philosophy Circle (EPC) is a discussion group that has formed within the Prosocial Commons, which is an online community with diverse interests being developed by the non-profit organization Prosocial World (PW). The vision of PW is: “To unleash the power of science and inquiry to help us notice what’s within us and between us, to create a more harmonious world for everyone around us.”[[1]](#footnote-1) In line with this vision, the EPC draws inspiration from the Vienna Circle, which tried to take ideas from early-20th Century revolutions in physics and explore their implications for philosophy. In the same manner, but in different directions, the EPC is attempting to update philosophy using ideas from current revolutions in evolutionary biology.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Within PW, the EPC has noticed that there are a number of people who quote Ken Wilber[[3]](#footnote-3) and cite his Integral Philosophy[[4]](#footnote-4) as something useful for expanding one’s prosocial outlook. Wilber has “often been called the Einstein of consciousness” but his ideas “have been mostly ignored in academia”[[5]](#footnote-5) and few of us had heard of Wilber before joining PW. However, PW co-founder David Sloan Wilson has co-authored an article titled “Integral and Prosocial, Integral Spirituality and Prosocial Spirituality” which provides “more details about the interactions of Wilber and Wilson and … introductory comparisons of the major content of these two synergetic and complementary worldviews.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Published in the *Integral Leadership Review*, Wilson et al.’s article did not need to go into any depth about Integral Philosophy, but it did describe Prosocial as four things: “a body of thinking, a practical process, a research agenda and a growing community of practitioners.”[[7]](#footnote-7) While full of interesting details, this provides more of a surface-level description of what Prosocial *is* and *does*. It does not provide an understanding of the underlying worldviews that shape and drive its participants, nor does it begin to touch on the worldview that Ken Wilber has himself espoused. PW is still a relatively new organization with an eclectic and diverse set of leaders and supporters, so its worldview could still be described as *unsettled* and it would therefore be premature to attempt to categorize it. The purpose of this report, however, is to examine the very well documented worldview of Ken Wilber, which has been developing over the last several decades in the many volumes that he has written about his Integral Philosophy. The EPC hopes that this will spark further conversations among current and potential members of PW as they undertake the hard work of aligning towards some very big goals. As Wilson et al. stated at the end of their article:

*How can we enhance conscious evolution within the interior spaces at multiple levels, that is, at both the individual and the collective and cultural? … How specifically might we combine the insights from Integral with the naturalistic action research tradition to conduct better research on “what works” for this enterprise? … How can we take control of the evolution of [cultural institutions such as organizations, governments, policy and global agreements] to be more supportive of life? … [We want to] co-create the world we all hope for—that “works for all”. All of these concerns are, after all, the fundamental wellsprings of both the Integral and Prosocial enterprises and their hopes and dreams.*

**METHODOLOGY**

Worldviews are, by definition, big and all-encompassing things. It should not be surprising, therefore, that they are very difficult to precisely define, and a search through the literature on worldviews does not turn up a single, widely-accepted definition for them. The philosopher Ed Gibney (a co-founder of the EPC) has been developing a framework for worldviews, however, that allows them to be easily and comprehensively compared and contrasted.[[8]](#footnote-8) Gibney’s framework is built using the six main branches of philosophy, which makes it particularly suited to an analysis using the traditional perspectives and methods from philosophy. This framework is also justified by a notable observation about the history of philosophy. Ever since the scientific method was defined during the Renaissance period, subjects were split off into their own discipline from the formerly broad remit of *natural philosophy[[9]](#footnote-9)* as soon as they became well-enough understood to be tested empirically. This is why some people have characterised the history of philosophy as one that *spawns* science. And so now, after hundreds of years, philosophers are left with only the most difficult things that we can’t quite wrap our arms around to measure and gain certainty about. That’s where radical choices can still made about what to believe in or not to believe in. In other words, this is where we can still find the greatest differences in our worldviews and so that is where we will look for the description of Ken Wilber’s worldview.

Gibney’s framework involves looking for evidence for answers to six basic questions that characterize the six main branches of philosophy:

1. What can we know? (Epistemology)
2. What exists? (Metaphysics)
3. How do we reason about things? (Logic)
4. What is good? (Ethics)
5. How do we live together? (Politics)
6. What is beautiful? (Aesthetics)

Altogether, these can be said to form someone’s worldview, whether their answers to these questions are consciously chosen or subconsciously felt. Sometimes, a unifying narrative can also be used to specifically pull these items together, which might otherwise feel disjointed or lack priorities. Such narratives should be identified or formulated where possible too.

Because of the purpose stated in the Introduction above, the EPC decided to review Ken Wilber’s work during its second generation of activity to see how it can be described by this framework. This effort took place during 10 weekly meetings in the Fall of 2022, with concurrent online discussions taking place as well. Since Wilber’s Wikipedia entry lists 30 paperback books where he is the sole author, which altogether have a total of nearly 10,000 pages, there was far too much primary source material for our task. As such, and based on recommendations from members of the Integral community, we focused our efforts on a 71-page summary of Ken Wilber that was written by Paul Helfrich called “Ken Wilber’s AQAL Metatheory: An Overview.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Drawing primarily from that paper, we gathered evidence for Ken Wilber’s worldview, although we were driven to search through several other sources for answers to a few lingering questions.

Once this categorization of Wilber’s worldview was complete, we attempted to analyze it using the three criteria that David Sloan Wilson listed in his essay titled “Evaluating Narratives of Conscious Evolution.”[[11]](#footnote-11) These criteria are:

1. Is the narrative psychologically and emotionally motivating?
2. What does the narrative cause people to do?
3. How well does the narrative comport with current scientific knowledge?

We agree with Wilson’s judgment that a worldview should score well on all three of these questions as judged according to PW’s stated goal of creating a world that works for all.

**SUMMARY OF THE INTEGRAL WORLDVIEW**

Ken Wilber[[12]](#footnote-12) was born in Oklahoma City in 1949. He enrolled as a pre-med student at Duke University in 1967, later transferring to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, but after a few years there he dropped out of university and began a life of independent scholarship. He describes his academic accomplishments as “a Master's degree in biochemistry, and a Ph.D. minus thesis in biochemistry and biophysics, with specialization in the mechanism of the visual process.”[[13]](#footnote-13) In 1973, Wilber completed his first book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, in which he sought to integrate knowledge from disparate fields. This is a task Wilber has continued to worked on for nearly 50 years now, attempting to build a metatheory known as Integral Philosophy[[14]](#footnote-14) in which all academic disciplines and every form of knowledge and experience are supposed to fit together. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide details or even a summary of Wilber’s metatheory, but they can be gleaned quickly from the Wikipedia entry on Wilber’s Integral theory[[15]](#footnote-15) or in far greater detail in Paul Helfrich’s overview paper[[16]](#footnote-16) which we used to inform our analysis of Wilber’s worldview.

A summary of our findings can be seen below in Table 1. Supporting statements that justify these characterizations are cited in detail in Appendix 1.

**Table 1 — The Philosophical Worldview of Ken Wilber**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Epistemology | * Wilber claims that knowledge comes from more than empirical methods based solely on the five bodily senses plus rational mental senses. He claims “*translogical*” methods based on “intuitive senses” are also authentic ways to know. * Communities that have adequate rational and intuitive thinkers confirm or reject knowledge. Mere scientific / rational / material thinking doesn’t do the job, according to Wilber. * All truth claims are interpreted through cultural contexts. * One should identify a scheme that incorporates the greatest number of truth claims, then criticize not the truths but their partial nature. * Wilber developed a way to see all of these ways of knowing that he calls Integral Methodological Pluralism. |
| Metaphysics | * Wilber believes we always start with some metaphysical assumptions, so we need to articulate them up front to be clear. * Wilber’s starting metaphysical assumption is that Spirit preceded “the beginning” and drives the evolution of matter back towards Spirit. This is called *involution* as a balance to, and driver of, evolution. * Wilber believes this is justified because empiricism and materialism don’t explain “impenetrable puzzles of Darwinian evolution.” * For Wilber, the ‘stuff’ of the universe is perspectives, not mass nor energy nor force nor feelings nor perception nor consciousness. * All existence is made of holons (wholes/parts) that have interior sentience and can be mapped in 4 quadrants of a 2x2 matrix with interior/exterior on one axis and individual/collective on another. * The spectrum of human consciousness includes *matter, body, mind, soul,* and *spirit.* But consciousness is not located in the organism; it is distributed across all four quadrants, anchored equally in each. Both individual and social holons are *sentient* and contain *interiority*. * The development of human consciousness moves up stages in irreversible directionality (e.g., from personal to transpersonal). Humans are halfway “up from Eden” in our evolutionary journey toward collectively realizing Spirit, but development is a truly uneven, nonlinear affair, and *not* a simple step by step climb up a ladder. |
| Logic | * “*Translogical*” *methods* based upon deep intuitive senses must be considered authentic means of disclosing the real and true. |
| Ethics | * Integral Philosophy does not attempt to tell us what to think or how everything works in any final way. Instead, Spirit is simply seen as the “ground and goal” of the evolutionary process. * All holons, as manifestations of nondual Spirit, have radically equal ground value. The *higher* the holon’s vertical development, the *more* intrinsic value and depth it has. The *lower* the holon’s vertical development the *more* extrinsic value and greater span it has. Therefore, humans have more intrinsic value than animals, fish, prokaryotes, rocks, molecules, and quantum fields respectively, and vice versa for extrinsic value. |
| Politics |
| Aesthetics |

We found no evidence for an explicit unifying narrative that pulls all of this together. In fact, there seems to be a plurality of narratives that the numerous followers of Wilber draw from his work. But after reading much material from the Integral world, and discussing the elements of Wilber’s worldview identified above, we would posit that one unifying narrative might go something like this:

*Scientific reductionism is a bleak view and doesn’t explain the universe. There are other ways of knowing and every perspective has some “truth” to it; none should be wholly rejected. Our mystical traditions show there is “Eros in the Kosmos” that is pulling life up to higher, broader, and more integrated levels of consciousness. We humans are halfway up in our collective evolutionary journey towards universal Spirit and we can use Integral metatheory to grasp all of human knowledge and speed up the process.*

**ANALYSIS FROM THE EVOLUTIONARY PHILOSOPHY CIRCLE**

Before we discuss any opinions about this worldview that we have identified, we must acknowledge some limitations of the methodology we have used. Firstly, we know we have aimed for a brief summary that merely opens the door for discussion but necessarily omits many details of worldviews that inherently extremely complex. This should not be taken as a comprehensive classification. Also, we had no time to collectively read primary source material from Ken Wilber (although some of the EPC members have previously done so) and the volume of details that Wilber has produced are vast, complicated, and ever-changing. So, we are aware this analysis is based on second-hand reporting, but it appears to come from trusted and well-researched sources. Thirdly, from reading ongoing discussions with other critics, we see that Wilber also seems insistent that his words should only ever be considered vague representations of reality, which cannot be taken as permanently precise pronouncements. We keep all this in mind as we undertake our analyses and therefore intend for them to be considered merely as opening remarks in a dialogue between what we understand and what is meant to be understood. As evolutionary philosophers, we are especially aware that worldviews adapt and change so we are always open to hearing new information about this particular one.

Perhaps it’s best to begin this dialogue by noting areas of agreement. All of the elements in this philosophical framework have vast literatures that could be brought into this discussion, but for brevity’s sake those must be considered outside of the realm of this paper. We therefore present our agreements with Wilber as simple bullet points, which could be elaborated elsewhere if necessary.

*Points of Agreement between the EPC and Ken Wilber’s Worldview*

* As yet, science has nothing to say about what happened before the Big Bang.
* A universe produced by random actions may seem cold and bleak to some and there are many mysteries we cannot yet explain.
* All worldviews must begin with some metaphysical assumption. No philosophical efforts to find bedrocks of truth upon which we can build our knowledge have ever been widely accepted as successful.
* Truth claims are tinged by their cultural contexts. We are embodied persons embedded in social environments so this will always affect what we know.
* Individual sciences, philosophies, and spiritual traditions only provide pieces of the whole story. They are often complementary rather than incompatible, so efforts to join up these “archipelagos of knowledge” are required and fruitful.
* We humans can play a role in consciously evolving a world that works for all and the more we learn from various domains of knowledge the better we can do this.

These are serious and substantial points of agreement that have made our overall efforts worthwhile. However, we believe there are several points in Wilber’s worldview that make our shared goals difficult to reach together. Some disagreements were clear to us based on the worldview we outlined above using Paul Helfrich’s overview article (and detailed in Appendix 1). But Helfrich’s article also left us with many questions, which we searched for answers for in other sources. Those are detailed in Appendix 2, which informed some additional points of disagreement that are summarized here for ease of use.

*Points of Disagreement between the EPC and Ken Wilber’s Worldview*

* We could find no clear explanation of what “translogical” methods and “intuitive senses” are, but they do not sound like ways for knowledge to be shared or collectively built. We believe knowledge is most sturdily built by gaining wide and diverse consensus, which requires agreed upon logical rules and repeatable evidence from empirical methods.[[17]](#footnote-17) And we believe no one person owns the truth or should be trusted if they claim they do.[[18]](#footnote-18) It is a paradox of the scientific method that it has gained the greatest epistemological power by actually giving up any claims to power.
* Wilber’s Integral Methodological Pluralism contains an inherent contradiction with its first component of ‘nonexclusion’. This states: “include as many relevant methodologies and researchers (perspectives) as appropriate,” but that immediately introduces an exclusionary principle based on what is ‘appropriate’, and this is nowhere to be found in Wilber’s writings. We find it far more helpful to be clear about the standards for reason and discourse and then either hold people accountable to those standards or adapt those standards after open discussion.
* The concept of *involution* — where Spirit is driving the evolution of matter back towards Spirit via higher levels of complexity and cooperation — either contradicts the evidence of evolutionary history or it is so unspecified as to add nothing of substance to theories about the world. The random fits and starts and the objective cruelty of evolutionary history is far more easily explained as simply the natural selection of an unguided universe. Rather than seeing this as a bleak view, we see this as an opening for the freedom to consciously guide evolution in directions we want it to go, rather than being pulled by an invisible rubber band towards some inscrutable Spirit.
* Among the “impenetrable puzzles of evolution” that Wilber refers to are the standard tropes of Creationists asking “what good is half a wing or half an eye?” The evolution of these structures is very well known and understood now, and critics of Wilber have made strong arguments that his knowledge about evolutionary science is severely lacking. This needs to be corrected, and then the remaining puzzles of evolution (particularly the origin of life and the Hard Problem of consciousness) should continue to be investigated.
* When Wilber says the stuff of the universe is not matter or forces but perspectives, we believe this is mistaking what exists (ontology) for what we can know about it (epistemology). While we subjective beings may forever be locked in our subjective perspectives, the universe appears to be made of matter and forces that exist independently of these perspectives. Otherwise, our perspectives would never be corrected when our hypotheses about the universe were misguided. Perhaps we are misunderstanding Wilber’s position, but it seems to be just one of the many strands of Idealism, of which there is a large critical philosophical literature.[[19]](#footnote-19) While materialism is still a metaphysical assumption that cannot be proven with certainty, we still find it to be the most productive hypothesis that has yet to be disproven.
* We find Wilber’s spectrum of human consciousness (containing “*matter, body, mind, soul,* and *spirit*”) to be a problematic division of the mind-body problem (we find that “embodied cognition” better captures the bi-directionality in this system) while also including metaphysical entities that have no evidence for their existence in our evolutionary history*.* We also find it difficult for Wilber to claim that consciousness is not located in organisms and that both individual and social holons are *sentient* and contain *interiority*. These claims touch on topics with an enormous philosophical literature,[[20]](#footnote-20) and we would need much more clarity from Wilber about these items in order to evaluate them properly. For now, we simply note that these are very contentious claims that cannot be taken at face value given our current understanding of consciousness.
* Wilber’s claim that the development of human consciousness moves up stages in irreversible directionality is entirely out of step with the findings of evolutionary science where development occurs in fits and starts, goes back on itself, and sometimes moves in parallel but mechanistically different ways. We also find Wilber’s linear characterizations of stages of human development to be overly simplistic at times, although he does acknowledge the diverse paths that can be taken along the six main components of his AQAL metatheory (*quadrants, levels, lines, states, types,* and *self-system*). We would recommend more assimilation of the literature on human development and anthropology.[[21]](#footnote-21)
* We find the supposed lack of prescription in Integral Philosophy to be disingenuous since it clearly contains hidden assumptions about the Buddhist belief in non-judgmental total awareness as the highest form of consciousness. This would seem to allow for non-judgment about walking the planet towards the extinction of life, however, which is contrary to the goals of Prosocial World and some of the ethics and politics proposed within evolutionary philosophy.[[22]](#footnote-22)
* Stepping back one level (to a meta-metatheory?), we have doubts about the whole project of Integral Philosophy and its attempt to integrate all of human knowledge. To *integrate* is to make whole, transforming all parts into a new system that works together. But not all claims about human knowledge are compatible in ways that can be brought together. Setting incompatible theories side-by-side either adds nothing to them or it introduces complexity that cannot be justified. The best theories explain the most data; they do not necessarily explain the most theories.[[23]](#footnote-23)

**CONCLUSION — EVALUATING WILBER’S NARATIVE OF CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION**

As mentioned in our methodology above, David Sloan Wilson provided three criteria in his essay “Evaluating Narratives of Conscious Evolution.”[[24]](#footnote-24) They are:

1. Is the narrative psychologically and emotionally motivating?
2. What does the narrative cause people to do?
3. How well does the narrative comport with current scientific knowledge?

Clearly, based on the number of books that Ken Wilber has sold, and based on the number of people who have become involved in the Integral world, his narrative is emotionally motivating to some people. We can see how it might provide comfort to those looking for a guiding hand from the universe, and a means of feeling special about their ability to rise above the parochial concerns of “less integrated” people. The members of the EPC generally do not find Wilber’s narrative motivating, however, but that may be because we have already developed worldviews with the strong disagreements with Wilber that we noted above. Others who are searching for replacements to the religious or spiritual worldviews in their past may be more inclined to find Wilber to be their next welcome guide.

What does Integral Philosophy cause people to do? We are aware of only a few small groups who are trying to educate the public about Integral Philosophy in the hopes of bringing its highest stages of consciousness to the world as fast as possible. Considering that Integral Philosophy “does not attempt to tell us what to think or how everything works in any final way,” we don’t imagine that it specifically causes people to do much else other than continue to buy Wilber’s books and learn about Integral Philosophy. In this way, the movement is self-propelling, although there are plenty of examples in Appendix 2 showing disillusion and disintegration among its members.

Finally, we in the EPC are very aware that while Wilber’s narrative attempts to integrate many valid psychological theories from around the world, it doesn’t comport with the very latest evolutionary science. But considering the fact that we came together particularly because of our interest in the work of David Sloan Wilson, we are likely to be more aware of the latest findings in that field compared to the general public. As seen in Appendix 2, some vocal critics in the Integral movement have asked Ken Wilber to update his views based on the latest in evolutionary science. We can only add to that request since Integral Spirituality’s stated goals of understanding life and creating a world that works for all are laudable indeed and deserve as accurate and motivating a worldview as possible.

**Appendix 1**

**Specific Quotes Informing the Description of Ken Wilber’s Worldview**

As the Evolutionary Philosophy Circle read through Paul Helfrich’s overview[[25]](#footnote-25) of Ken Wilber’s theories, we noted every passage that was related to Wilber’s worldview as described by the philosophical framework developed by Ed Gibney. The summary of this research is presented above in Table 1, but the details of the justifications for this summary are cited here. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are taken directly from Helfrich’s paper on the page numbers that are noted.

**Epistemology**

* (p.9) what exactly preceded the Big Bang? On that, modern evolutionary sciences are embarrassingly silent, and most defer to philosophers and theologians because the answers are never to be found in their *empirical methods* based solely on the five senses or *dialogical methods* based solely on reason alone. In other words, *translogical methods* based upon deep intuitive senses are not considered authentic means of disclosing the real and true by modern epistemologies. So it is from the mystical seers of premodern Eastern traditions, particularly the Vedic (Upanishads) that the notion of *involution* was introduced by Wilber to account for what preceded the Big Bang. He admits that this is a *metaphysical assumption*, but an important one that has merit and a long tradition in the East.
* (p.11) Wilber was driven *from the very beginning* by an impulse, a deep intuition to provide a more comprehensive view of human development *and* therapy based upon an empiricism whose methods included not only sensorimotor data (five senses), but mental (rational senses), as well as transcendental (inner senses) data into a broader epistemology that would eventually be called Integral Methodological Pluralism (IMP) in Phase-5.
* (pp.17-18) Wilber explored the three eyes of knowing from Christian mysticism to refine his epistemology, since he was already using them: Eye of *flesh* (monologic / sensibilia / physical senses); Eye of *mind* (dialogic / intelligibilia / rational senses); Eye of *spirit* (translogic / transcendelia / inner senses).
* (p.18) A synthesis of Newton’s empiricism, Kuhn’s paradigms, and Popper’s verification- falsifiability principles outlined an essential methodology to explore the *full* spectrum of consciousness: 1) *Instrumental injunction*: formulate exemplars, paradigms, practices, “if you want to know this, then do this.” 2) *Intuited apprehensions*: do the injunctive practice. Account for: Sensory experience, eye of flesh, monologic, sensibilia, empiricism; Mental experience, eye of mind, dialogic, intelligibilia, rationalism; Spiritual experience, eye of spirit, translogic, transcendelia, mysticism. 3) *Communal confirmation or rejection*: by a community adequate to steps one and two.
* (p.27) Postmodernity excelled at showing how both premodern and modern epistemologies (i.e., the *eyes of spirit* and *flesh*) ignored crucial elements in the Lower-Left quadrant, particularly, that all truth claims are interpreted within cultural contexts whose semantics and other cultural values filtered everything (exaggerating the *eye of mind*).
* (p.27) an integrally informed methodology aspires to include all four quadrants and their epistemologies.
* (pp.27-8) AQAL-4 also provided a critical theory to ground Wilber’s integral scientific methodological approach: 1. Identify *orienting generalizations*—the partial truths in symbolic form called metaphors—in a given field or body of work. For the moment, simply assume they are true. 2. Arrange these metaphoric truths into chains or networks of interlocking conclusions. Pose the following question to all of the orienting generalizations: “What coherent system would in fact *incorporate the greatest number of these truths?*” 3. Once we identify the overall scheme that incorporates the greatest number of orienting generalizations, use that scheme to criticize the partiality of narrower approaches, even though we include the basic truths from those approaches. Criticize not their truths, but their *partial* nature.
* (p.28) it is crucial to realize that many of Wilber’s conclusions consist of these metaphoric truths and as such, “People shouldn’t take [them] too seriously. [They’re] just orienting generalizations. It leaves all the details to be filled in any way you like.” … While the devil is indeed in the working out of details, AQAL-4 metatheory provides an elegant way to integrate the world’s knowledge so we can begin to work with it holarchically (i.e., simultaneous tetra-mesh of the *quadrants*, *levels*, *lines*, *states*, *types*, and *self*- *system*). Seen in this light, we can use the quadrants to better organize *all* fields of human knowledge, and see which quadrant their findings tend to emphasize. For example, physics, chemistry, biology, and cognitive sciences emphasize the Upper-Right, and tend to minimize the interiors of the Upper-Left and the intersubjective aspects of the Lower- Left. While systems, chaos, and network theories tend to emphasize or reduce valid data to the Lower-Right and minimize or omit altogether Left-Hand interiors.
* (p.29) another chronic issue that dominates current scientific methods is what Wilber calls *Flatland*, when Right-Hand methods are taken to be the only real ones thereby crippling the many contributions of premodern spiritual and postmodern cultural insights.
* (p.35) The integral Psychograph To finish our survey of AQAL-4, Wilbur formulated a tool to map all developmental lines in the Upper-Left. … Wilbur calls for simul-tracking as part of any integral scientific methodology. … The idea, then, is to ballpark how our cognition, morals, needs, power drives, interpersonal, affective skills, spiritual concerns, etc. color the motivation and scope of research or more accurately, how they provide a developmental snapshot to orient our research claims.
* (p.39) A metatheory is a taxonomy or theory of theories. An Integral metatheory is one that aspires to balance, include, and comprehend all major theories and methods in the quadrants.
* (pp.41-3) *Integral Methodological Pluralism* (IMP) consists of five key components: 1) Nonexclusion (include as many relevant methodologies and researchers (perspectives) as appropriate). 2) Enactment and enfoldment (ensure all researchers and methods are properly situated in the AQAL-5 matrix). 3) Eqpistemology (three modes of knowing — sensorimotor physical senses, reason rational senses, deep intuition inner senses — each of which is valid in its own domain and causes category errors when confused). 4) Three strands of the scientific method (design, experiment, interpret). 5) The nonlinear relationship between scientific hypothesis, theory, and law (these do not flow one to another, they form a simultaneous, complementary, and inclusive set of perspectives).

**Metaphysics**

* (p.7) Phase-1 laid the important foundation for all subsequent work. … In time, his direct experiences, verified by his teachers, validated the existence of a spectrum of human consciousness that included, *matter, body, mind, soul,* and *spirit.*
* (p.8) Spectrum-1 synthesized valid elements found in both Western and Eastern maps, and accounted for preconscious, self-conscious, and superconscious aspects of human development.
* (p.9) The central premise of modern evolutionary theory is that our universe was created by a Big Bang. The early universe consisted of lifeless quantum fields that gradually formed into galaxies, solar systems, and planets (Wilber calls these *physiospheres*). Over billions of years the physiosphere we now know as planet Earth became increasingly complex, diversified, and early cellular life forms emerged to form a *biosphere* (after Suess), which transcended yet included our physiosphere. The third great stage of evolution was the emergence of the *noosphere* (after de Chardin) that transcended yet included both physiosphere and biosphere.
* (p.9) what exactly preceded the Big Bang? On that, modern evolutionary sciences are embarrassingly silent, and most defer to philosophers and theologians because the answers are never to be found in their *empirical methods* based solely on the five senses or *dialogical methods* based solely on reason alone. In other words, *translogical methods* based upon deep intuitive senses are not considered authentic means of disclosing the real and true by modern epistemologies. So it is from the mystical seers of premodern Eastern traditions, particularly the Vedic (Upanishads) that the notion of *involution* was introduced by Wilber to account for what preceded the Big Bang. He admits that this is a *metaphysical assumption*, but an important one that has merit and a long tradition in the East.
* (p.10) With *involution* and *evolution* the basic idea is the *Spirit* as Causal Consciousness “steps down” or “throws itself out” into *soul*, then *mind*, then *body*, and finally *matter* causing a Big Bang of primordial *physios*, which contains varying degrees of proto-interiority that sets the stage for matter to begin its journey back to Spirit through the evolutionary process.
* (p.10) the notion of involutionary and evolutionary “currents,” “fields,” or telos helps explain the plausibility that Spirit is hardwired into all physiospheres “before the beginning,” in the beginning (Big Bang), *and* thereafter providing a “push and pull” or innate directionality and intention to the Kosmos.
* (p.10) According to Wilber, “Now, of course, you are perfectly free to believe in evolution and reject the notion of involution. I find that an incoherent position; nonetheless, you can still embrace everything…about the evolution of culture and consciousness, and reject or remain agnostic on involution. But the notion of a prior involuntary force does much to help with the otherwise impenetrable puzzles of Darwinian evolution, which has tried, ever-so-unsuccessfully, to explain why dirt would get right up and eventually start writing poetry.
* (p.13) Spirit as “Ground and goal” of the evolutionary process.
* (p.13) [Both of Wilber’s first two phases] agree on the great domains of prepersonal to personal to transpersonal.
* (p.13) development [is] ultimately driven by the attempt to regain Spirit.
* (pp.13-14) [The] infantile structure must therefore possess that utter Perfection (even if unconscious). Thus, if God is not *fully* present in the infantile structure, the entire scheme collapses.
* (p.14) assuming good health and supportive life conditions, there is an irreversible directionality in which human development unfolds over time. In short, this is the evolutionary impulse or telos in play.
* (p.14) [Wilber] refined the “approximate mode of self-sense” into seventeen stages from the previous four stage version of Spectrum-1, and began to compare them to other developmental maps.
* (p.14) [Wilber] investigated the *average* level of individual consciousness in relation to the *leading edge* of individual consciousness. … 17. Ultimate (not really a level, but the suchness, Ground, radical emptiness of all levels).\*\*
* \*\* From “The Stages of Life According to Ken Wilber”[[26]](#footnote-26), here is further illustration of how Wilber the jump from the personal to the transpersonal:  
  **7. Centaur (Vision-Logic)**:  Here the soul or self begins to transcend the verbal ego-mind and integrate all aspects of previous stages including not only verbal, cognitive, and emotional ego states, but also the Jungian-derived ”shadow” (or the complementary aspects of unconscious processes). This stage is characterized by autonomy, integration, authenticity, and/or self-actualization, and is the final stage belonging to the Personal category in Wilber’s theory. Now begins the Transpersonal realms.  
  **8. Psychic**:  Here the individual begins to transcend the egoic states of the previous levels.  This stage brings with it the possibility of psychic experiences such as clairvoyance, precognition, and other parapsychological phenomena, and also transcendent states of being related to gender identity (e.g. androgyny), ecological understanding (e.g. shamanism), identification with a World Soul (e.g. Gaia), and other holistic ways of thinking, seeing, and being.
* (p.15) The next two books, *Up from Eden* (1981), and *A Sociable God* (1983) would branch into the collective interiors of cultural development (phylogeny in the Lower-Left quadrant) as the Spectrum-2 model assimilated anthropology, sociology, and mythology. Thus, the *individual* interior spanning a lifetime (Upper-Left) expanded to include *collective* interiors spanning geological time (Lower-Left) to show the linkage between ontogeny and phylogeny. It was a logical step, then, to take the seventeen stage-structures in *The Atman Project* and begin to trace them collectively in *Up from Eden* through eight cultural stage-structures. … Collective stages 1-3 are considered *subconscious*, 3-4 *self-conscious* (there’s some overlap with 3), and 5-8 *superconscious*.
* (p.16) Wilber’s startling conclusion was that we were halfway “up from Eden” in our evolutionary journey toward collectively realizing Spirit, something imagined as an infinite mathematical singularity or Omega Point.
* (p.16) Wilber often cites the example of Nazi doctors who had a high cognitive line (Piaget), average interpersonal line (Gardner), and low moral line (Kohlberg, Gilligan). Thus, overall development is a truly uneven, nonlinear affair, and *not* a simple step by step climb up a ladder.
* (p.17) A massive amount of research continued to demonstrate that the individual developmental lines themselves unfold in a sequential manner—the important truth discovered by developmental studies. But since there are at least a dozen different developmental lines [see Appendix 1], overall growth itself shows no such sequential development, but is instead a radically uneven and individual affair. … None of this could be explained by a single-stream evolutionary model, but all of it made perfect sense according to a levels-and-lines model.
* (p.18) When quantum physicists claim the Schrödinger wave function proves the existence of Spirit, they confuse empirical data acquired through physical senses with transcendental data acquired through the inner senses. That is, they utterly confuse the material level of the spectrum with the psychic, subtle, or causal levels.
* (p.19) Another important refinement published in *Eye to Eye* was the identification of basic (*levels*) and transitional (*lines*) structures navigated by the self-system.
* (pp.19-20) In terms of vertical development, Wilber wrestled with what exactly is included (preserved) and what is transcended (negated) as the self-system’s center of gravity spiraled along. First, he refined the seventeen basic levels from Spectrum-2 into a leaner eleven levels that anchor the self-system’s vertical development. Each one is transcended yet included: 1. Physical; 2. Sensoriperceptual; 3. Emotional-sexual; 4. Phantasmic; 5. Rep-mind; 6. Rule/role mind; 7. Formal/reflexive mind; 8. Vision-logic; 9. Subtle; 10. Causal; 11. Ultimate.
* (p.20) Basic structures endure in terms of collective consciousness evolution because once they emerge they become relatively stable processes or patterns. Transitional structures, on the other hand, are phase specific “self-stages” that get replaced entirely by succeeding phases. For example, Kohlberg’s moral stages of preconventional, conventional, and postconventional replace one another completely. They transcend but do *not* include the specifics of earlier phases.
* (p.21) In *Eye to Eye*, Wilber also defined major characteristics of the self-system to include: 1) Locus of organization (integrator of all *levels* and *lines*); 2) Locus of identification (selective identity based on *levels* and *lines*); 3) Navigator of development (overall self-sense or “center of gravity”).
* (p.21) [Wilber] distanced himself from his perennial philosophy affiliation\*\* of Spectrum-1 and Spectrum-2 as he came to understand that ever-present nondual Spirit is the *only* perennial aspect of the spectrum, but *everything else evolves*. Wilber also began to conceptualize long term evolutionary processes as “Spirit-in-action” within the many physical forms of the spectrum of consciousness.
* \*\* The perennial philosophy, also referred to as perennialism and perennial wisdom, is a perspective in philosophy and spirituality that views all of the world's religious traditions as sharing a single, metaphysical truth or origin from which all esoteric and exoteric knowledge and doctrine has grown.[[27]](#footnote-27)
* (p.22) Wilber also revised his eleven-level conception from *Eye to Eye* into developmental Fulcrums 1- 10, and matched types of pathology to each Fulcrum:
  1. Sensorimotor (psychoses, most adult schizophrenia)
  2. Phantasmic-emotional (narcisstic-borderline disorders)
  3. Representational mind (borderline neuroses, psychoneuroses)
  4. Rule/role mind (script pathology and neuroses)
  5. Formal-reflexive (identity neuroses)
  6. Vision-logic (centauric, existential pathology: depression, inauthenticity, isolation, aborted self-actualization, and anxiety)
  7. Psychic (psychic disorders: inflation, dark night of the soul, split life goals, pseudo-duhkha, pranic disorders, yogic illness)
  8. Subtle (subtle pathology: integration-identification failure, pseudo-nirvana, pseudo-realization)
  9. Causal (causal pathology: failure of complete self-differentiation, failure to fully integrate with physical forms, also known as Arhat’s disease)
  10. Ultimate (not really a level, but the suchness, Ground, radical emptiness of all levels).
* (pp.23-4) The quadrants represent the innate perspectives found in all individual sentient holons (whole/parts), and extend “all the way up and down,”—from physical (atoms) to biological (cells) to psychological (minds) to psychic (souls) to spiritual (causal) holons.
* (p.26) According to Wilber: “The first step toward a genuine theory of consciousness is the realization that consciousness is not located in the organism. Rather, consciousness is a four-quadrant affair, and it exists, if it exists at all, distributed across all four quadrants, anchored equally in each. … Consciousness is not located merely in the physical brain, nor in the physical organism, nor in the ecological system, nor in the cultural context, nor does it emerge from any of those domains. Rather, it is anchored in, and distributed across, all of those domains with all of the available levels.”
* (p.29) The sixth and final core principle of AQLA-4 was added in *A Theory of Everything* (2000e). Types are situated on the horizontal axis and thus color all levels as they unfold vertically.
* (p.31) Wilber stressed that: “Reality is not composed of things or processes; it is not composed of atoms or quarks; it is not composed of wholes nor does it have any parts. Rather, it is composed of whole/parts, or holons. This is true of atoms, cells, symbols, ideas. They can be understood neither as things nor processes, neither as wholes nor parts, but only as simultaneous whole/parts, so that standard ‘atomistic’ and ‘wholistic’ attempts are both off the mark. There is nothing that isn’t a holon (upwardly and downwardly forever).”
* (p.31) *Individual* holons (e.g., quantum fields, fish, humans) consist of all four quadrants, while *social* holons (e.g., galaxies, schools of fish, families/nations) consist of *only* the Lower-Left and Lower-Right quadrants, though they are made up of individual holons. Both individual and social holons are *sentient* and contain *interiority* of some kind.
* (p.32) Growth in terms of vertical transformation *is relatively rare*. For instance, to date we have identified only *three* main vertical evolutionary stages in roughly twelve to fifteen billion years of Kosmic history (i.e., physiosphere, biosphere, and noosphere), and *five* or so main cultural stages of human evolution (e.g., Gebser’s archaic, magic, mythic, rational, integral aperspectival) and roughly *six or seven* general stages of individual development in two million years of hominid history.
* (p.33) All holons have *intrinsic, extrinsic,* and *ground value*. *Ground Value*: All holons are manifestations of Spirit, “radically equal for all holons.” *Intrinsic Value*: The value a holon has for *itself* as a whole (agency/depth of whole/parts relations). *Extrinsic Value*: The value a holon has for *others* as a part (communion/span of whole/parts relations).
* (p.34) The self-system provides a “center of gravity” of individual consciousness at any given time as it navigates its developmental lines. It is responsible for six main functions: 1. *Identification* (locus of self-identity). 2. *Will* (locus of choice within the constraints of present developmental level). 3. *Metabolism* (“digestion” or assimilation of experience). 4. *Navigation* (developmental choices within all levels, lines, and states). 5. *Defenses* (locus of defense mechanisms, phase-specific and phase-appropriate, hierarchically organized). 6. *Integration / organization* (provides cohesion to the psyche within all levels, lines, and states.)
* (p.38) AQAL-4, taken as a whole, does not attempt to tell us what to think or how everything works in any final way. It simply maps six core organizing principles—*quadrants, levels, lines, states, types,* and *self-system*—that provide the most comprehensive, balanced, and inclusive set of checks and balances to study any field of human endeavor. … For instance, do you take first-, second-, and third-person perspectives and use “I”, “We”, “It”, and “Its” references when you speak, write, or read? This reflects the *quadrants* in your use of language. Second, do you recall being an infant, child, adolescent, etc.? This mirrors irreversible, physical and mental *levels* of vertical development. Third, do you do some things better than others? Play the piano, sports, write books, cook, teach, hold relationships, help others, raise a family, etc.? These reflect the different *lines* or intelligences that develop unevenly. Fourth, do you sleep, dream, meditate, peak experience etc.? These are temporary *states* that you cycle through, some every day. And fifth, do you tend toward a more masculine (analytic, agentic, etc.) or feminine (sensing, communal, etc.) expression? This is one horizontal *typology* that colors your awareness. Together, these are complementary aspects of your awareness right now and in every moment, which is constructed and experienced by the *self-system* who navigates and integrates them all. This is the elegantly simple heart of AQAL-4 metatheory.
* (p.41) According to Wilber: “If the universe is composed of sentient beings or holons (all the way up, all the way down)—and not merely things nor events nor processes nor systems—then the ‘stuff’ of the universe is perspectives, not mass nor energy nor force nor feelings nor perception nor consciousness (all of which are always already a perspective).”
* (p.46) *Integral Post-Metaphysics* (IPM) forms the philosophical underpinning of AQAL-5. It is derived from German philosopher Jürgen Habermas’ (1992) post-metaphysical critiques of non-scientific methods. Metaphysics is defined as “a system of thought without experiential proof.” The key difference, then, between metaphysics and post-metaphysics is that there are no longer any assumed, pregiven ontological levels of reality. For instance, the premodern Great Chain of Being posited fixed, pre-existing levels from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. “IPM can generate all the essentials of premodern spiritual and metaphysical systems *but without their now discredited ontological baggage*. … IPM does not itself contain metaphysics, but it can generate metaphysics as one possible AQAL Matrix configuration under the limit conditions of premodern cultures.”
* (p.47) Ontology (*being*) is not “out there” in some fixed, objectified manner waiting to be discovered, mapped, and analyzed. This partiality is also found in the modern Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm. Rather, a post-modern, post-metaphysical approach acknowledges that our experience enacts, colors, and co-constructs ontology. Therefore, an IPM approach is based upon the evidence of our senses—our physical, mental, and deep intuitive senses—as they engage various paradigmatic experiments. *We will always have some metaphysical assumptions*.So we need to articulate them up front.
* (p.60) A key function of Integral Post-Metaphysics is to identify a *minimum* set of metaphysical assumptions in relation to the epistemological pluralism used by any integral community of the adequate. Philosophers like Kant and Heidegger have shown convincingly that we can never do away completely with metaphysics; and Wilber’s approach honors and includes that.
* (p.60) Wilber (2003a) thus postulated *involutionary givens* that exist “before the beginning” of the Big Bang. They exert an influence on all subsequent development and evolution. The *minimum* requirement to set evolution and space-time rolling are simply *Eros* and *Agape*, two sides of the same “pull.” Together, they: “... Constitute little in the way of actual contents or forms or entities or levels, but rather a vast morphogenetic field that exerts a gentle pull (or Agape) toward higher, wider, deeper occasions, a pull that shows up in manifest or actual occasions as the Eros in the agency of all holons. (We can think of this ‘pull’ as the pull of all things back to Spirit; Whitehead called it ‘love’ as ‘the gentle persuasion of God’ toward unity; this love reaching down from the higher to the lower is called Agape, and when reaching up from the lower to the higher is called Eros: two sides of the same pull). This vast morphogenetic pull connects the potentials of the lowest holons (materially asleep) with the potentials of the highest (spiritually awakened).”
* (pp.60-1) Wilber (2003a) also listed additional involutionary givens that are consonant with various philosophers. In summary: *1. Eros* 2. *Agape 3. A morphogenetic gradient*, a “field of potentials, defined not by their fixed contents and forms but by their relative placement in the sliding field.” 4. *Prototypical forms or patterns*, such as the twenty or so tenets of all holons.\*\*
* \*\* THE TWENTY TENETS[[28]](#footnote-28)
  1. Reality as a whole is not composed of things, or processes, but of holons.
  2. Holons display four fundamental capacities:
     1. self-preservation,
     2. self-adaptation,
     3. self-transcendence.
     4. self-dissolution.
  3. Holons emerge.
  4. Holons emerge holarchically.
  5. Each emergent holon transcends but includes its predecessor.
  6. The lower sets the possibilities of the higer; the higher sets the probabilities of the lower.
  7. "The number of levels which a hierarchy comprises determines whether it is 'shallow' or 'deep'; and the number of holons on any given level we shall call its 'span'" (A. Koestler).
  8. Each successive level of evolution produces *greater*depth and *less*span.
  9. Destroy any type of holon, and you will destroy all of the holons above it and none of the holons below it.
  10. Holarchies coevolve.
  11. The micro is in relational exchange with the macro at all levels of its depth.
  12. Evolution has directionality:
      1. Increasing complexity.
      2. Increasing differentiation/integration.
      3. Increasing organisation/structuration.
      4. Increasing relative autonomy.
      5. Increasing telos.

Note from Wilber: "Chapter 2 outlines ‘20 tenets’ that are common to evolving or growing systems wherever we find them. Many people counted them up and didn't get twenty, and they wanted to know if they had missed something. This simply depends on what you count as a tenet. I give twelve numbered tenets. Number 2 contains four tenets, and number 12 contains five. That's nineteen altogether. Throughout the book, I give three additions. That's twenty-two. But one or two of the tenets are not really characteristics, just simple word definitions (e.g., tenet 7 and possibly 9). So that leaves around twenty actual tenets, or actual characteristics of evolution. But there is nothing sacred about the number twenty; these are just some of the more noticeable trends, tropisms, or tendencies of evolution."

**Logic**

(p.9) what exactly preceded the Big Bang? On that, modern evolutionary sciences are embarrassingly silent, and most defer to philosophers and theologians because the answers are never to be found in their *empirical methods* based solely on the five senses or *dialogical methods* based solely on reason alone. In other words, *translogical methods* based upon deep intuitive senses are not considered authentic means of disclosing the real and true by modern epistemologies. So it is from the mystical seers of premodern Eastern traditions, particularly the Vedic (Upanishads) that the notion of *involution* was introduced by Wilber to account for what preceded the Big Bang. He admits that this is a *metaphysical assumption*, but an important one that has merit and a long tradition in the East.

(pp.17-18) Wilber explored the three eyes of knowing from Christian mysticism to refine his epistemology, since he was already using them: Eye of *flesh* (monologic / sensibilia / physical senses); Eye of *mind* (dialogic / intelligibilia / rational senses); Eye of *spirit* (translogic / transcendelia / inner senses).

**Ethics**

* (p.13) Spirit as “Ground and goal” of the evolutionary process.
* (p.33) The *higher* the holon’s vertical development within the Kosmos (e.g., physiosphere, biosphere, noosphere, etc.) the *more* intrinsic value and depth it has. However, the *lower* the holon’s vertical development the *more* extrinsic value and greater span it has. Therefore, humans have more intrinsic value than animals, fish, prokaryotes, rocks, molecules, and quantum fields respectively, and vice versa for extrinsic value.
* (p.33) all holons as manifestations of nondual Spirit have radically equal ground value! Therefore, ground value serves as a kind of wild-card that accounts for anything missing from vertical and horizontal, depth and span, etc. and more importantly, accounts for the essential paradox of nondual Spirit as Ground and goal of the holarchic Kosmos. Together, these three values help to properly situate the ranking values of all holons and holarchy within the Kosmos. However, these values are ultimately a noospheric or human construct, and Wilber is consistent in citing Korzybski’s mantra that “the map is not the territory.” So it remains open to continued critique and refinement and should not be taken as an absolute.
* (p.38) AQAL-4, taken as a whole, does not attempt to tell us what to think or how everything works in any final way. It simply maps six core organizing principles—*quadrants, levels, lines, states, types,* and *self-system*—that provide the most comprehensive, balanced, and inclusive set of checks and balances to study any field of human endeavor.

**Politics**

* (p.13) Spirit as “Ground and goal” of the evolutionary process.

**Aesthetics**

* [Nothing noted at all.]

**Appendix 2**

**Additional Articles Informing Our Understanding of Ken Wilber**

Reading through Paul Helfrich’s paper[[29]](#footnote-29) that provided an overview of Ken Wilber was extremely helpful, but we were still left with many questions about Wilber’s sometimes bewildering worldview. On several occasions, we went looking for more information, the most helpful of which are listed below along with their most relevant quotes. In particular, we found that Integral World[[30]](#footnote-30), established by Frank Visser in 1997 provided a wealth of good material. That site alone had one “reading room”[[31]](#footnote-31) with over 2000 essays on integral philosophy. Adding these to Ken Wilber’s actual books provides a wealth of resources for further education if desired.

* [Integral and Prosocial, Integral Spirituality and Prosocial Spirituality](https://ilr.scholasticahq.com/article/31107-integral-and-prosocial-integral-spirituality-and-prosocial-spirituality) by Kurt Johnson, David Sloan Wilson, Paul W.B. Atkins, Jeffrey Genung
  + Ken Wilber is, of course, noted as the founder of the Integral Vision and author of 25 books translated into over 30 languages. He is often called “the Einstein of consciousness studies”.
  + The purpose of this article is to provide more details about the interactions of Wilber and Wilson and also provide some succinct introductory comparisons of the major content of these two synergetic and complementary worldviews. From these we hope more detailed and critical discussions can evolve in the future.
  + Wilber’s video, which directly refers in numerous places to Dr. Wilson’s work has since had over 255,000 views on YouTube under the title “[An Introduction to Integral Spirituality](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4jcxxJ_0ok&t=3180s)”. Wilson and Wilber met personally that same weekend for a long personal discussion at Wilber’s loft in Denver. They later cooperated in [an extensive audio discussion](https://integrallife.com/evolving-a-multi-cellular-society/) broadcast on Integral Life.
  + Therein they emphasized the importance of this cross-discussion for both the integral community and “mainstream academia”, especially if it could be developed and updated with as many current elements of contemporary academic, scientific and philosophical discussion as possible. They gave several examples of such “updating”, especially emphasizing current studies in cognitive science and contextual behavioral science, which could influence views and understandings of cultural behavior and cultural evolution.
  + Although discussions between Wilber and Wilson available to the public to date have elaborated these and numerous other topics, there has been no succinct general description of the underlying worldviews of Prosocial and Integral which characterize Wilber and Wilson’s synergetic and complementary visions. This is the purpose of this article for the *Integral Leadership Review*. We hope it can serve as an historical background and template for future more critical and detailed discussion.
  + Prosocial is four things: a body of thinking, a practical process, a research agenda and a growing community of practitioners. Here we focus on the former two of these, Prosocial’s perspective upon cultural evolution and the practical tools it uses to help accelerate cultural evolution toward a more harmonious, cooperative and equitable world. **Prosocial as a Body of Thinking** Prosocial draws upon three main bodies of work: multilevel selection (MLS) theory, Elinor Ostrom’s Nobel prize-winning work on the commons, and Contextual Behavioral Science.
  + CBS provides a naturalistic way of understanding how evolution can occur within both our individual symbolic systems and also at a cultural level.
  + How does all of this relate to integral theory? We see some substantial alignment of thinking. First, our work emphasizes both the interior and exterior perspectives on experience. We are deeply interested in evolution occurring in both awareness and behavior. By articulating what ‘awareness’ is (i.e. relating behavior) we can approach the evolution of awareness in a naturalistic manner. Furthermore, we are in a position to relate awareness directly to observed behavior, which in turn can be related to individual and group goals such as wellbeing and collaboration. Second, the emphasis upon evolution occurring at multiple levels is consistent with the distinction between individual and collective levels within AQAL theory. Like integral theory, we see the world in process terms. From our perspective, it is groups all the way up and down. … Third, Prosocial strongly agrees with and supports the ways in which integral theory promotes the need for growth in perspective taking to more complex and inclusive ways of seeing.
  + But there are also some potential differences between the Prosocial approach and integral theory. First, we see both the interior and exterior of individual experience as behavior, all subject to the processes of evolution. … From our perspective it is important to maintain this naturalism, verbal relating is behavior just as kicking a ball is a behavior. What integral theory refers to as ‘spiritual intelligence’ for example, is all just the behavior of more or less complex relational framing from our perspective as people form more and more complex capacity to take the perspective of others and include more diverse viewpoints.
  + Second, and perhaps more importantly, evolutionary theory is more circumspect about the inevitability of growth toward greater complexity than integral theory seems to be. Evolution (physical, symbolic and cultural) can easily take us where we do not wish to go, including toward greater chaos.
  + Recently, the developers of Prosocial have added a spiritual dimension to what we have just described. The scholarly literature on religion suggests that most enduring religions are strong in two dimensions: a “vertical” dimension that defines the relationship between the person and the divine or sacred, and a “horizontal” dimension that defines the social relationships among people (Wilson 2002).
  + Prosocial Spirituality draws upon nine elements of universal spirituality identified by Wayne Teasdale in his book The Mystic Heart, as a vertical counterpart to the CDPs.
  + Here are Teasdale's Nine Elements of a Universal Spirituality that can complement Ostrom's core design principles. 1) Actualizing full moral and ethical capacity. 2) Living in harmony with the cosmos and all living beings. 3) Cultivating a life of deep nonviolence. 4) Living in humility and gratitude. 5) Embracing a regular spiritual practice. 6) Cultivating mature self-knowledge. 7) Living a life of simplicity. 8) Being of selfless service and compassionate action. 9) Empowering the prophetic voice for justice, compassion, and world transformation.
  + We have also mentioned the potential treasure troves of updated, current, scientific knowledge that can help put Integral thinking on an even more solid evidentiary foundation.
  + Concluding, many of the main areas we see for further conversation all tend to gather around the idea of shifting our lens from seeing ourselves as individuals to seeing ourselves as inherently embedded in social and planetary systems.
  + How can we enhance conscious evolution within the interior spaces at multiple levels, that is, at both the individual and the collective and cultural? … How specifically might we combine the insights from Integral with the naturalistic action research tradition to conduct better research on “what works” for this enterprise? … How can we take control of the evolution of [cultural institutions such as organizations, governments, policy and global agreements] to be more supportive of life? … How science and “spirit”, our inherent wirings for both the subjective and the objective, can co-create the world we all hope for—that “works for all”. All of these concerns are, after all, the fundamental wellsprings of both the Integral and Prosocial enterprises and their hopes and dreams.
* [Ken Wilber](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Wilber) entry on Wikipedia
  + Wilber was born in 1949 in Oklahoma City. In 1967 he enrolled as a pre-med student at Duke University. He became interested in Eastern literature, particularly the Tao Te Ching. He left Duke and enrolled at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, but after a few years dropped out of university and began studying his own curriculum and writing.
  + The [AQAL] model's apex is formless awareness, "the simple feeling of being", which is equated with a range of "ultimates" from a variety of eastern traditions. This formless awareness transcends the phenomenal world, which is ultimately only an appearance of some transcendental reality.
  + Wilber believes that the mystical traditions of the world provide access to, and knowledge of, a transcendental reality which is perennial, being the same throughout all times and cultures. This proposition underlies the whole of his conceptual edifice, and is an unquestioned assumption. The perennial position is "largely dismissed by scholars", but "has lost none of its popularity". Mainstream academia favor a constructivist approach, which is rejected by Wilber as a dangerous relativism.
  + Wilber has been categorized as New Age due to his emphasis on a transpersonal view and, more recently, as a philosopher. Publishers Weekly has called him "the Hegel of Eastern spirituality".
  + Cultural figures as varied as Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Deepak Chopra, Richard Rohr, and musician Billy Corgan have mentioned his influence.
  + Critics in multiple fields cite problems with Wilber's interpretations and inaccurate citations of his wide ranging sources, as well as stylistic issues with gratuitous repetition, excessive book length, and hyperbole.
* [Integral Theory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory_(Ken_Wilber)) entry on Wikipedia
  + Integral theory is a synthetic metatheory developed by Ken Wilber. It attempts to place a wide diversity of theories and models into one single framework. The basis is a "spectrum of consciousness," from archaic consciousness to ultimate spirit, presented as a developmental model.
  + In Wilber's later framework, the AQAL (All Quadrants All Levels) model, it is extended with a grid with four quadrants (interior-exterior, individual-collective), synthesizing various theories and models of individual psychological and spiritual development, of collective mutations of consciousness, and of levels or holons of neurological functioning and societal organisation, in a metatheory in which all academic disciplines and every form of knowledge and experience are supposed to fit together.
  + Wilber's ideas have mainly attracted attention in specific subcultures, and have been mostly ignored in academia.
  + Ken Wilber's "Integral Theory" is a synthetic metatheory, a theory whose subject matter is theory itself, aiming to describe existing theory in a systematic way.
  + In Wilber's model, development starts with the separation of individual consciousness from a transcendental reality. The whole course of human development aims at restoring the primordial unity of human and transcendental consciousness. The pre-personal and personal stages are taken from western structural stage theories, which are correlated with other theories. The trans-personal stages consist of psychic and supernatural experiences (psychic and subtle stage), and of models of spiritual development from a variety of eastern religious traditions as interpreted by Wilber (subtle and causal stage).
  + **Interior individual perspective** (upper-left quadrant) describes individual psychological development, as described in structural stage theory, focusing on "I";
  + **Interior plural perspective** (lower-left) describes collective mutations in consciousness, as in Gebser's theory, focusing on "We";
  + **Exterior individual perspective** (upper-right) describes the physical (neurological) correlates of consciousness, from atoms through the nerve-system to the neo-cortex, focusing on observable behaviour, "It";
  + **Exterior plural perspective** (lower-right) describes the organisational levels of society (i.e. a plurality of people) as functional entities seen from outside, e.g. "They."
  + According to Wilber, all four perspectives offer complementary, rather than contradictory, perspectives. It is possible for all to be correct, and all are necessary for a complete account of human existence. According to Wilber, each by itself offers only a partial view of reality.
  + According to Wilber modern western society has a pathological focus on the exterior or objective perspective. Such perspectives value that which can be externally measured and tested in a laboratory, but tend to deny or marginalize the left sides (subjectivity, individual experience, feelings, values) as *unproven* or having *no meaning*. Wilber identifies this as a fundamental cause of society's malaise, and names the situation resulting from such perspectives, "flatland".
  + Some individuals affiliated with Ken Wilber have claimed that there exists a loosely defined "Integral movement". Others, however, have disagreed. Whatever its status as a "movement", there are a variety of religious organizations, think tanks, conferences, workshops, and publications in the US and internationally that use the term integral.
  + In 2007, Steve McIntosh pointed to Henri Bergson and Teilhard de Chardin as pre-figuring Wilber as integral thinkers. (Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution)
  + The independent scholar Frank Visser says that there is a problematic relation between Wilber and academia for several reasons, including a "self-referential discourse" wherein Wilber tends to describe his work as being at the forefront of science. Visser has compiled [a bibliography of online criticism of Wilber's Integral Theory](https://www.integralworld.net/criticism.html) (131 entries) and produced [an overview of their objections](https://www.integralworld.net/visser11.html) (3 strong positive, 4 positive, 6 weak positive, 6 weak negative, 1 negative, 10 strong negative). [Frank Visser considers himself weak positive.]
* [The Wild West Wilber Report](https://www.integralworld.net/visser15.html) by Frank Visser (Post #15)
  + In June 2006 Ken Wilber embarrassed himself in front of the world by abusing and insulting those of his critics who did not "understand" his work, and invited those who "did" to come to his integral "sanctuary". His main complaint was the low level of the criticism he had received so far, especially from Integral World authors. Well, even if that were true, make sure you get better critics then, I would say. Start playing the game by the rules. Behave yourself. Enter the academic arena. Start debates with people who *really* matter in the fields of science and philosophy, instead of either preaching to the converted, or abusing those who don't seem to "get it". It was an attack on reason and free enquiry, basically, which was applauded by the closest of his followers.
* [If You Meet Wilber on the Road, Kill Him](https://www.integralworld.net/visser19.html) by Frank Visser (Post #19)
  + In the current essay I'd like to highlight three areas of criticism that seem relevant to me: evolutionary theory, postmodernism, and meditation research.
  + Wilber's statements in these areas have generated some of the fiercest criticisms available, and — characteristically — Wilber has not taken the trouble to respond to them (and on the rare occasion that he did respond, the reply — equally characteristically — did not settle the issue at all).
  + In SES, the topic of evolution was discussed within the context of the so-called Twenty Tenets, which stated that evolution showed a directionality, an increase in complexity, hierarchy and integration. Darwin himself was mentioned in passing as the first who noticed directionality in the biosphere: amoebas become apes, but never the other way around.
  + In the now infamous passage he bluntly states that eyes and wings cannot have been evolved through a blind, evolutionary process, since only their finished form has adaptive value. So why would all intermediary forms have evolved at all? A half-wing has no purpose: “Take the standard notion that wings simply evolved from forelegs. It takes perhaps a hundred mutations to produce a functional wing from a leg—a half-wing will not do. A half-wing is no good as a leg and no good as a wing—you can't run and you can't fly. It has no adaptive value whatsoever. In other words, with a half-wing you are dinner.”
  + From Lane: “What makes Wilber's remarks on evolution so egregious is not that he is more or less a closet creationist with Buddhist leanings, but that he so maligns and misrepresents the current state of evolutionary biology, suggesting that he is somehow on top of what is currently going on in the field. And Wilber does it by exaggeration, by false statements, and by rhetoric license.”
  + Ironically, in the very same year that Brief History was published, Richard Dawkins published his *Climbing Mount Improbable*, which contains a full chapter on the evolution of the wing (see Chapter 4: Getting Off the Ground, pp. 108-137). There's another chapter on eyes — or rather, the many ways eyes have evolved in the course of evolution (see chapter 5: The Forty-Fold Path to Enlightenment, pp. 138-198 — sixty pages on this topic alone!).
  + Compare that to Wilber's sweeping statements. That alone disqualifies Wilber as an authority on the science of biology. In one of his rare public statements about this issue, Wilber has dismissed Dawkins as "a preacher".
  + This situation is typical of Wilber's relationship to the academic establishment. He can freely and confidently assert whatever he wants in his books and online publications; he will never be corrected by those who are thoroughly at home in a given subject, but don't take the trouble to consult Wilber's views.
  + Wilber is content to give a sketchy caricature of the problem, use emotive language to persuade the reader that there's nothing of value to be expected here from science, and move on to his more spiritualized musings.
  + Favorite among these is Wilber's declaration that "there's an Eros to the Kosmos", a force that drives us towards higher and higher states of being and complexity. What explanatory value does this Eros have? None whatsoever. If it was Eros that created the eyes and wings of biological organisms, how and why did this happen? And where was this Eros, when the Dodo lost its wings?
  + The Intelligent Design movement tries to argue for a creationist view of evolution, in more or less sophisticated form. This debate has caught the attention of large audiences worldwide. Wilber obviously falls into the non-materialistic camp, since he holds to a spiritual view of evolution (or does he, in his "post-metaphysical" phase?).
  + Wilber's favorite line of attack is to say that postmodernists suffer from a "performative contradiction": to state that everything is relative is in itself an absolute truth. Ergo, the statement cannot be true. In my opinion, this ignores the fact that to say that no theory is absolutely true is not a statement about facts but about theories.
  + In another infamous passage, this time in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, Wilber argues (in the context of Jacques Derrida's thought and especially his later years), that if postmodernism were true, we could not say anything about anything, because none of our words would point to facts (my paraphrasing, leaving out the technical postmodernist jargon for the moment). Translation, for example, would not be possible. Many critics have objected to this presentation of the postmodernist viewpoint.
  + Wilber claims that even Derrida, the intellectual father of constructivism, admits there are transcendental signifieds. This is surprising because it runs counter to Derrida's famous statement: “there is nothing outside the text” — no signifieds that escape the play of signifiers. Wilber's even able to find a quote where he thinks Derrida affirms the existence of the transcendental signified. However, in the quote and its context Derrida is clearly arguing for the opposite of what Wilber says he is.
  + Wilber's reading is a bad misreading. In fact, it is a misreading that twists what Derrida says into its opposite. The possibility for such a misreading serves only to reinforce Derrida's claim that language can never guarantee a particular understanding.
  + For why bother about postmodernism, perennialism, feminism, relativism, or any other —ism, if Wilber has told us what and how to think about these fields? This inevitably strengthens the conditioning and cultic tendencies latent in all spiritual communities, including the integral ones — When such a group starts his own Integral University, chances are high that it will become a religious school where integral concepts are taught to its students (after which they receive certifications), instead of a true university, where theories and beliefs are validated regardless of one's own private convictions. Where criticism is invited and welcomed.
  + This essay, incidentally, marked the beginning of my "critical" phase in relation to Wilber, having gone now through those of fan, student, biographer, critic and finally... outcast (hey, let's call it Visser-5 ;-).
  + Another area for concern is Wilber's reporting on empirical research, for example in the fields of consciousness research.
  + Meditation is central to Wilber's view of spirituality, and on many occasions he claims that meditation can speed up your own development. Only one of Wilber's similarly confident statements: “We now have abundant evidence that meditation does not alter or change the basic stages of the development of consciousness, but it does remarkably accelerate that development. (*One Taste*, page 263)”
  + Andrews concludes that Wilber's many claims concerning the benefits of meditation are "unfounded, misleading, and potentially harmful." He sums up his major concerns regarding Wilber's careless statements about meditation research: 1) KW asserts that meditation accelerates the development of human consciousness, yet he typically provides no supporting evidence. 2) KW suggests that 20 to 25 years of meditation can yield full enlightenment, yet he admits that he has not achieved this state nor met anyone who has. 3) KW states that only meditation has been demonstrated to accelerate the development of human consciousness, yet he also recommends other spiritual practices. 4) KW praises the research of Skip Alexander and his colleagues, yet he also acknowledges that their studies are subject to “valid criticisms”. 5) KW claims that meditators can advance two levels in only three or four years, yet the cited study is subject to “valid criticisms”. 6) KW reports that 38% of meditators advanced to the highest levels on Jane Loevinger’s scale of ego development, yet the cited study is subject to “valid criticisms”. 7) KW advocates the use of meditation and community verification to establish spiritual truths, yet this recommendation is not “good science”. 8) KW asserts that even skeptics acknowledge that “the Maharishi effect” is authentic, yet skeptics have repeatedly rejected “the Maharishi effect”. 9) KW is aware that meditation can have “negative effects on practioners,” yet he provides only a very few warnings of the potential hazards.
  + One should realize that Wilber is not a researcher himself, he deals with theories, not facts, and selects theories whenever they fit his larger integral frame of reference. When it comes to reporting about empirial research, he rarely goes into the intricacies of it, but instead is content to assure the reader that "the evidence is simply overwhelming", we have "truly staggering research" or "absolutely nobody believes this anymore". We should really take these statements with a large grain of salt.
  + Doesn't Wilber's own agenda — trying to scientifically prove that spirituality is valid in the modern world; getting even with materialism, postmodernism and the scientific establishment — shine through all too clear from his writings?
  + There's a famous saying in Buddhism that goes: "If you meet Buddha on the road, kill him". That, among other things, points to undue attachment to someone — dead or alive — who once was an inspirational force — Buddha or Wilber doesn't matter here — but has now become an obstacle to independent and free thought. So yes, let's keep up the spirit of free and fearless investigation! If you meet Wilber on the road, kill him!
  + Actually, this is a win-win strategy. If Wilber is validated, good for him. If not, good for truth. Wasn't that after all what we were looking for, when we started reading Wilber?
* [The Wilberian Evolution Report](https://www.integralworld.net/visser20.html) by Frank Visser (Post #20)
  + WILBER ON EVOLUTION: *A Brief History of Everything*, 1996, p. 20. "The standard, glib, neo-Darwinian explanation of natural selection--absolutely nobody [in later editions changed to: very few theorists] believes this anymore." "Evolution clearly operates by Darwinian natural selection, but this process simply selects those transformations that have already occurred by mechanisms that absolutely nobody understands.... " "A half-wing is no good as a leg and no good as a wing--you can't run and you can't fly. It has no adaptive value whatsoever." "Talk about mind-boggling. This is infinitely, absolutely, utterly, mind-boggling. Random mutations cannot even begin to explain this." "For the moment, everybody has simply agreed to call this "quantum evolution" or "punctuated evolution" or "emergent evolution".
  + David Lane: “Wilber and the Misunderstanding of Evolution”, 1996. "Having taught Darwinian evolution (and its various manifestations, including punctuated equilibrium) in grammar school, in high school, in community college, in university, and in doctoral programs, for the past seventeen years I must say that Wilber's take on what evolution is about baffles me." "Wilber does not seem to understand that the processes of evolution are blind."
  + WILBER RESPONDS, PART I: "Folks, give me a break on this one... I know evolutionary theory inside out, including the works of Dawkins et al." "Instead of a religious preacher like Dawkins, start with something like Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. And then guess what? Neo-Darwinian theory can't explain shit. Deal with it." "But overall integral theory doesn't hang on that particular issue. If physicalistic, materialistic, reductionistic forces turn out to give an adequate explanation to the extraordinary diversity of evolutionary unfolding, then fine, that is what we will include in integral theory. And if not, not." "But so far, the "nots" have it by a staggeringly huge margin, and scientists when they are not bragging to the world, whisper this to themselves every single day of their lives. I know, I lived in that community for the better part of a decade. And it's truly fascinating, to say the least...." "This is a great thread, from what I have seen of it, and I hope it continues. But please don't do so by claiming that I don't know evolutionary theory, because in that particular instance anyway, you are absolutely off your nut."
  + Geoffrey Falk: “None of the above alters the fact that Wilber has completely misrepresented the truth that half-wings do exist, and have been documented as existing since Darwin's own Origin of Species." "So what we have here from Wilber is no documented facts, no relevant details, just his "Einsteinian" authority, his rampant hyperbole, and a laughable appeal to other discredited "thinkers" to back up his own claims to expertise."
  + WILBER RESPONDS, PART III: "Do I think Mayr or Dawkins or Lewontin or Kauffman believe[s] in telos or Eros that is Spiritual in any way? Absolutely not. Virtually all mainstream theorists embrace scientific materialism." "I am simply saying that most mainstream biologists accept that there are problems and issues at the leading edge of their science, and I am saying that I recognize the same leading-edge problems that they do, but at that point we quickly part ways--virtually all of them believe those issues can be fully solved using scientific materialism, and I of course do not accept that..."
  + WILBER RESPONDS, PART IV: "I have no belief whatsoever that the wing actually took 100 mutations--that's just a way to state what you are stating, and also, more generally, that the complex forms of evolution that we see--such as the immune system--are not the products of mere chance mutation and natural selection. Rather, there is a force of self-organization built into the universe, and this force (or Eros by any name) is responsible for at least part of the emergence of complex forms that we see in evolution. "
  + Frank Visser: "This reply by Wilber leaves one speechless - the mind just goes blank. So the original extreme and dogmatic statements about the evolution of eyes and wings in A Brief History of Everything - "nobody has a clue" - were never meant to be taken literally? They were meant as metaphors for creative emergence? How careless can one get in writing about science?"
  + Geoffrey Falk: "The thing is, even if Eros did exist, any (guided) mutations it might produce toward some "evolutionary goal" would only be passed on to offspring if they conferred survival (and reproductive) value on their organisms more than was conferred by the other genes they were competing against. Any mutations or even outright creations, even Eros-guided ones, which didn't act to propagate themselves through the gene pool at that particular period in history, would get selected out of the population in exactly the same way as "random" mutations get selected against."
  + Frank Visser: "So what exactly is the "novelty" that evolutionary theory supposedly fails to account for? Telling enough, this is never specified in Wilber's talks and writing. An eye? A wing? A horse? A dinosaur? Fish getting onto land? Where exactly does science fail and is it in need of a spiritual hypothesis? If this isn't specified, everything becomes meaningless. The pathos is misplaced, as is the casualness of Wilber's pronouncements on evolutionary theory throughout his entire writing career."
  + Frank Visser: "While I am not an evolutionary biologist, my extensive reading in this field demonstrated to me that the world and worldview of science is quite different from what one learns from spiritualist accounts of it. I consider Ken Wilber's view of evolutionary theory to be deeply flawed and disconnected from the scientific literature. " "By not being responsive to online criticism directed at this theory, Ken Wilber has not lived up to the ideal of Habermasian "communicative rationality", in which viewpoints are freely exchanged in search of the best arguments. Nor has he taken responsibility for extreme statements on neo-Darwinism done in the past, when confronted with criticism. He has misrepresented a major field of science in a less than respectful way."
  + Scientists are supposed to believe in such a "reductionist" world view, spiritualists (such as Wilber -- "I, of course, don't accept that") don't, they reject such "reductionism".  This is, however, a misconstruction popular in spiritualist circles. Paint the reductionist universe as black and grim as possible, and then offer your own glowing alternative spiritual vision. What is conveniently overlooked is one simple fact: evolutionary theory does NOT rely on blind chance as an explanatory principle, alone. And that makes all the difference.
  + Richard Dawkins, in Climbing Mount Improbable, (1996, p. 67, and many other places), states it in his own way: “It is grindingly, creakingly, obvious that, if Darwinism were really a theory of chance, it couldn't work.” On the contrary, Dawkins explains that evolution works through chance mutations and... natural selection. It is through selection that minor improvements are preserved and passed on to the next generations. And minor improvements lead to major improvements in the long run.
  + Looks like the real debate on the integral take on evolution still has to begin... But ironically, if you want to know about evolution, Wilber might very well be the worst place to start. However, the prospects for such a debate are grim, given Wilber's track record so far, and the notable fact that all three responses by Wilber on this vexed topic of evolutionary theory were set in the context of barely disguised anger at those who have the guts to disagree. Until this issue is cleared, I would advise to not even use the term "evolution" anymore, for whatever it is ("Evolutionary Spirituality") that Wilber tries to convey with his ideas on psychological and cultural development.
* [What Good is Half a Wing?](https://www.integralworld.net/visser21.html) by Frank Visser (Post #21)
  + [Wilber:] “But my point lies in a different direction, which is what these critics miss: the necessity of a self-organizing force (or Eros) intrinsic to the universe.”
  + The more biology succeeds in explaining complex life forms or organs (such as eyes and wings) on a naturalistic basis, the less need there will be for such a Force – if there ever has been one, as far as science is concerned. Since Wilber has invested much in his theory of an Eros in the Kosmos, he has a deep interest in not telling his readers how far biology has come. Or in exaggerating the difficulties encountered in that field of science. Misrepresentaton anyone?
  + Why does Wilber never go beyond the laymans-level argument-from-ignorance? Because that suits his purpose.
  + This is what the *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* has to say on evolution: "Some conclusions are well established, for example... that natural selection, the process postulated by Darwin, explains the adaptive configuration of such features as the human eye and the wings of birds." (1991, vol. XVIII, p. 859). "There is probably no other notion in any field of science that has been as extensively tested and as thoroughly corroborated as the evolutionary origin of living organisms." (Ibid, p. 862)
* [Integral Design: Ken Wilber’s Views on Evolution](https://www.integralworld.net/visser32.html) by Frank Visser (Post #32)
  + For *is there, or is there not*, a spiritual Something at work in evolution? And if so, can science in any way get hold of this Something? Or is speaking and writing about Spirit as a Force in evolution ("Spirit-in-action"), as Wilber has extensively done in his many works, by its very nature a matter of mere poetry?
  + Unfortunately, Wilber has not yet given a coherent account of his views on evolution. That is quite strange for someone who has subtitled his major work "The Spirit of Evolution", and who is currently advocating an "Evolutionary Spirituality". Wilber often is satisfied to declare that "there's an Eros [his term for Spirit] to the Kosmos", i.e. there's a spiritual influence at work in the cosmos, which can account for the evolution of complex forms of life. (Implying that, without the postulation of such a Force, this complexity cannot be accounted for in any scientific way.)
  + The structure of his arguments, his strategy when writing about evolutionary theory, is very close to those of the ID-proponents.
  + These statements are so far removed from the academic literature on the subject that it makes one cringe. … And mind you, this is the only field of study Wilber can claim to have at least some formal training in—given his degree in biochemistry.
  + Wilber makes the following ominous suggestion: “Instead of a religious preacher like Dawkins, start with something like Michael Behe’s *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. And then guess what? Neo-Darwinian theory can’t explain shit. Deal with it.”
  + Again, a quick search on the Internet about the reception of Behe's ideas makes clear that he has been discredited wholesale by the scientific community. In a recent book, *The Edge of Evolution*, Behe has even retracted many of his earlier statements!
* [The ‘Spirit of Evolution’ Reconsidered](https://www.integralworld.net/visser33.html) by Frank Visser (Posy #33)
  + Paper presented at the Integral Theory Conference 2010, Saturday, July 31st, 2010 - John F. Kennedy University, San Francisco. *Honorable Mention Paper in the Category Constructive Criticism.*
  + Daniel Dennett (1995: 21) once called Darwin's notion of evolution through natural selection "the single best idea anyone has ever had". The integral community has virtually ignored this event. One can agree or disagree with Dennett's assessment, but one can't ignore the topic. Not surprisingly, evolution in the Darwinian or neo-Darwinian sense has been largely ignored by Ken Wilber as well.
  + Contrary to what the casual reader of his works may expect—given the prominence of the term "evolution" or "evolutionary" in the integral vocabulary—a detailed engagement with Darwinism is virtually absent from his writings—except for some notable exceptions we will have a chance to focus on later in this talk.
  + Wilber has tried to make a case for "spiritual evolution", or the general idea that evolution at large is driven by some transcendental Force—variously called "Spirit" or "Eros". "There's an Eros to the Kosmos" is one of his favorite phrases.
  + The idea of a "Spirit of Evolution" is Wilber's key concept—more central than holons, heaps, or artifacts; quadrants, levels, lines, states and all that jazz... Long before the quadrants, even before the stages, there was the involution/evolution scheme—it is the most consistent element in all of Wilber's works.
  + In spiritualist accounts, the scientific theory of evolution is often presented in a rather gloomy, not to say *appalling*fashion: according to the scientific worldview, we live in a meaningless and purposeless universe and are the products of random chance. Then, at the very moment you are about to kill yourself, the spiritualists present a much more *appealing* view of evolution: we are part of a universal process which is not only heading for Spirit, but driven by It as well. It's all "onwards and upwards" in this view of life. Who in his right mind would not vote for the second option?
  + Wilber's take on evolution has had no impact in academia so far. Evolutionary science did not change its course after Wilber published his "20 Tenets" on evolution, in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* in 1995, or when he tried to dismiss neo-Darwinism briefly in its popular sequel *A Brief History of Everything* published a year later (1996). However, his occasional statements on evolutionary theory have met with strong criticism on the Internet.
  + I consider Ken Wilber's view of evolutionary theory to be deeply flawed and disconnected from the scientific literature.
  + As he explained later, in the 20th anniversary edition of the book (Wilber, 1993: xix), at that time he was following A.K. Coomaraswamy's usage of these terms. Briefly, "Evolution", in this sense, means a movement from the One or God to the Many or the manifested world. (Other traditions would call this "emanation"). "Involution", then, is the opposite movement: from the Many to the One. In the first phase, Spirit loses itself in the world, in the second, Spirit returns to itself again as Spirit. In such a book, one would sooner find a reference to Dante than to Darwin.
  + In *The Atman Project* (1980), the meaning of these two terms is reversed. This time, Wilber follows Sri Aurobindo's understanding (Wilber, 1993: xix). This time, involution is the "downward" movement from Spirit to the world of the Many; and evolution the "upward" movement from the world to Spirit. This would remain the dominant model in Wilber's mind for years to come: evolution is seen as a movement that is both driven by Spirit and directed towards Spirit.
  + In *Up from Eden* (1981) … Wilber (1981: 304-305) summarizes his view on evolution (following Jan Smuts) thus: “Everywhere we look in evolution... we find a succession of higher-order wholes: each whole becomes part of a higher-level whole, and so on through the evolutionary process. I am not going to argue the point, but take it as plainly obvious that "natural selection" per se cannot account for that process. Natural selection can account, at best, for the survival of present wholes, not for their transcendence into higher-level wholes. To the average biologist, this sounds shocking, but the conclusion, of those whose specific field is the theory of scientific knowledge is straightforward: "Darwin's theory... is on the verge of collapse...."
  + Rather typically—I must say—we are not informed of this by either Smith or Wilber, who relies solely on spiritualist sources. And spiritualism has a vested interest to see Darwinism fail.
  + Turning to the Twenty Tenets (Wilber 1995: 35-78), the one that stands out in this context is Tenet 12: "Evolution has directionality". Though it takes Wilber twelve pages to argue this point, for which he claims support from numerous authors—mostly philosophers or social scientists, such as Whitehead, Derrida, Foucault, Freud, Marx, and chaos theorists—notably absent are those who should be consulted first: evolutionary theorists. Wilber fails to mention that the notion of directionality in evolution has been and is highly problematic. It was, again, Gould (1989) who vehemently opposed this concept and brilliantly argued for its non-validity (Wilkins, 1997).
  + To give only one example from Michael Ruse, author of *Monad to Man: The Concept of Progress in Evolutionary Biology* (1996: 535, quoted in Meyerhoff, 2006a, in a critical review of the Twenty Tenets in his book *Bald Ambition*), which is the first volume of a trilogy (Ruse 1996, 1999, 2003) on precisely this vexed question of progress or purpose in evolution: “More recent work, for instance on measures of complexity, simply shows . . . that there is just no good reason to think that complexity is a necessarily ever-increasing product of the evolutionary process.”
  + Somehow one gets the feeling that Wilber systematically overlooks the relevant literature.
  + Meyerhoff's (2006) conclusion about [the 20 Tenets](https://www.integralworld.net/20tenets.html) is sobering: “[T]here are many anomalies and contradictions which show that the 20 tenets do not describe the "'laws' or 'patterns' or 'tendencies' or 'habits'" that "all known holons seem to have in common," as Wilber contends.”
  + *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* was followed by the more accessible *A Brief History of Everything* (1996), and this time, Wilber descends to the level of specific examples when arguing his points about evolution. He again resorts to statistical considerations: “Calculations done by scientists from Fred Hoyle to F.B. Salisbury consistently show that twelve billion years isn't enough to produce even a single enzyme by chance. In other words, something other than chance is pushing the universe. For traditional scientists, chance was their god. Chance would explain it all. Chance—plus unending time—would produce the universe. But they don't have unending time, and so their god fails them miserably. That god is dead. Chance is not what explains the universe; in fact, chance is what that universe is laboring mightily to overcome. Chance is exactly what the self-transcending drive of the Kosmos overcomes. (Wilber 1996: 26)”
  + Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986), written a full decade before *Brief History*, is a brilliant treatise on evolution NOT being the product of mere chance but of random chance and non-random natural selection (a distinction lost on Wilber).
  + It is equally obvious, then, that Wilber leaves essential information out of his presentation when making his points about evolution and its mechanism. He apparently disagrees with Dawkins on this matter, but without confronting Dawkins' arguments, Wilber's thesis becomes empty.
  + After *Brief History* Wilber rarely if ever again touched on the topic of evolutionary theory, and only so when pressed by his students, most of which is posted on the Internet. … Some online critics have characterized Wilber's view of evolution as "pop-evolutionism", the popular view that evolution displays an onward and upward trend, so alien to the scientific view of evolution (Markus, 2009).
  + Not only is Wilber inaccurate about how evolution is presently viewed among working biologists (remember Wilber says "absolutely nobody believes this anymore"—tell that to the two most popular writers on evolution today) but he is just plain wrong in his understanding of the details of how natural selection operates. One can only wonder how well he has read Darwin, or Gould, or Mayr, or Dawkins, or Wilson, or even Russell. None of these individuals would agree with Wilber's assessment.
  + How are we to respond to statements made by Wilber on science, when they are taken back a decade later, without acknowledging they were a mistake?
  + Wilber concludes his reply to Astin with unshaken confidence: “So, no, I don't take this criticism of my work seriously, although it is a good example of flatland thinking.” I rest my case.
  + Ken Wilber has engaged neo-Darwinism basically only once in his complete oeuvre spanning three decades and twenty plus books, by giving specific examples of organized complexity, such as eyes and wings, that supposedly cannot be explained by natural selection (contrary to what leading scientists such as Dawkins spell out to the public at that same time). And now, a full decade later, these biological examples are to be understood in a purely *metaphorical*sense, merely illustrating the "extraordinary capacity of creative emergence that is intrinsic to the universe"? Has science turned into poetry? So Wilber doesn't even *try* to make his case in the arena of science?
  + One is sadly reminded of Sir Peter Medawar's (1961) devastating review of Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man*, in which he wrote: "it is the style that creates the illusion of content"... In this context, Medawar also wrote: "its author can be excused of dishonesty only on the grounds that before deceiving others he has taken great pains to deceive himself."
  + In 2009 IntegralLife.com featured a video on evolution, in which Wilber (2009) kept repeating his ideas for an audience of eager students. From this members-only video: “Science is helpful with phenomena once they have arisen, but is unable to explain phenomena when they appear for the first time.” I consider this view to be the result of lazy thinking and in the end harmful (Visser 2009a). It does not explain anything. It is anti-discovery.
  + In summary, Wilber's statements in this field have been less than helpful. He echoes objections to evolution from creationist corners, but never provides enough details to be convincing. And when he finally does give details, he retracts them a decade later in what has been, above all, a rather lame and inauthentic reply—by not taking ownership of extreme statements on evolution done in the past and turning everything into metaphor.
* [From Dirt to Divinity: Ken Wilber's pre-Darwinian Understanding of Evolution](https://www.integralworld.net/visser37.html) by Frank Visser (Post #37)
  + "Why this dirt would get right up and eventually write poetry was not explained." In fact, evolutionary science goes a long way into explaining all this. The interesting questions here are, of course, not why dirt gets right up to write poetry, but how dirt leads to cell walls and replicating molecules, or how human beings have learned to use metaphor—not to mention the endless evolutionary steps in between that have been and are investigated by science.
  + In one of his earlier works, *Up from Eden (1981)*: “The point, in a phrase, is that the orthodox scientific theory of evolution seems correct on the what of evolution, but it is profoundly reductionistic and/or contradictory on the how (and why) of evolution. But if we look upon evolution as the reversal of involution the whole process becomes intelligible.” An embarrassing statement indeed. No scientist will greet this "evolution as reversal of involution" solution with enthusiasm for one second. It is obvious that Wilber is promoting an ideological approach to evolution. And even if this quote was from 1981, when Wilber still believed in perennialism (Wilber-2), in his current, post-metaphysical phase (Wilber-5), he still holds on to the notion of a spiritual Force behind evolution.
  + Mayr defines three versions of evolutionary thinking: “1) transmutational — Evolution occurs through the production of new species or types, owing to a mutation or saltation. 2) transformational — Evolution occurs through the gradual transformation of an existing species or type into a new one, either a) by the direct influence of the environment or by use and disuse of the existing phenotype, or b) by an intrinsic drive toward a definite goal, particularly toward greater perfection, and c) through and inheritance of acquired characters. 3) variational (Darwinian) — A population or species changes through the continuous production of new genetic variation and through the elimination of most members of each generation.” Ken Wilber's view of evolution seems to be of the pre-Darwinian 2b. variety.
  + Mayr concludes his discussion of these "transformational" ideologies, otherwise known as finalism, in a sobering way: “These theories were abandoned when no mechanism could be found to drive such trends. Furthermore, such drives, if they existed, should result in "rectilinear" (straight) evolutionary lineages, but the palaeontologists showed that all evolutionary trends sooner or later change their direction or may even reverse themselves. Finally, one can explain linear trends as the product of natural selection. Indeed, there is no evidence whatsoever to support any belief in cosmic teleology.”
* [The Involution/Evolution Cosmology: Ken Wilber Holds on to an Outdated Scheme of Existence](https://www.integralworld.net/visser99.html) by Frank Visser (Post #99)
  + Not many of [Wilber’s] readers, even those of his advanced students who have studied all of this books, will be familiar with the notion of "involution", which is the nineteenth century counterpart to the more familiar concept of evolution.
  + One could even say that Ken Wilber believes in a certain view of evolution *because he also believes in involution*—a process that supposedly preceded both the Big Bang and the subsequent processes of cosmological, biological and cultural evolution.
  + As Wikipedia explains the esoteric meaning of "involution": "The term involution refers to different things depending on the writer. In some instances it refers to a process that occurs prior to evolution and gives rise to the cosmos, in others an aspect of evolution, and still others a process that follows the completion of evolution in the human form."
  + Now, in this volume [*The Spectrum of Consciousness*] I used *evolution* to mean "the movement away from Spirit" (the "unfolding of maya") and I used *involution* to mean "turning back toward Spirit." In doing so, I was following Coomaraswamy. In subsequent writings, I reverted to the other usage, following Aurobindo: *involution* is the move away from Spirit, getting lost and involved in maya, and *evolution* is the growth back to Spirit *as* Spirit, whereupon it is seen that all of maya is simply Spirit at luminous play.
  + Wilber has often pointed out that even the progression from Hydrogen to the heavier and more complex elements points in the direction of a transcendental cause.
  + As Wilber phrases the problem in one of his early books, *The Atman Project* (1980): “According to the perennial philosophy, *in order* for evolution—which is the unfolding of higher structures—to occur at all, those higher structures must, *in some sense*, be present from the start: they must be enfolded, as *potential*, in the lower modes. If not, then evolution is nothing but creation *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. And, as theologians have long known, out of nothing you get nothing—*ex nihilo nihil fit*. And the story of involution is simply the story of how the higher modes came to be lost in the lower—how they came to be enwrapped and enfolded in the lower states. Involution, or the enfolding of the higher in the lower, is the pre-condition of evolution, or the unfolding of the higher states from the lower.”
  + A few pages later, this is followed by a very strong statement, vintage Wilber: “One cannot, logically, ontologically, or metaphysically derive the higher from the lower. The higher modes can emerge because, and only because, they were enfolded, as potential, in the lower modes to begin with, and they simply crystallize out and differentiate from the lower modes as evolution proceeds.”
  + Make no mistake about it: this is a deeply religious and spiritual view of reality, in which Spirit is the source out of which everything has come forth (during involution) and into which everything will return (during evolution). In Wilber's interpretation of this philosophical doctrine, Spirit is not only the source and the goal, but also the *driving force* behind this whole cosmic drama. This is the reason why his brand of spirituality is often called "evolutionary"—a misnomer, in my opinion, given Wilber's scant knowledge of evolutionary theory.
  + At the end of the Introduction to Volume II of *The Collected Works of Ken Wilber* (1999)—which contains the full text of *The Atman Project* and in which he reflects on this early period of his writing career—we find the following concluding statement on involution. … “I think of involution, then, along the analogy of a rubber band: stretch it, and you have involution, which supplies a force (namely Eros) that will then pull the two ends of the rubber band (matter and spirit) back together again—in other words, an involutionary force that will pull evolution along. But the actual route taken in that return, and all its wonderful variety, is a co-creation of every holon and the currents of Eros in which it fluidly floats. Now, of course, you are perfectly free to believe in evolution and reject the notion of involution. I find that an incoherent position; nonetheless, you can still embrace everything in the following pages about the evolution of culture and consciousness, and reject or remain agnostic on involution. But the notion of a prior involutionary force does much to help with the otherwise impenetrable puzzles of Darwinian evolution, which has tried, ever so un-successfully, to explain why dirt would get up and eventually start writing poetry. But the notion of evolution as Eros, or Spirit-in-action, performing, as Whitehead put it, throughout the world by gently persuasion toward love, goes a long way to explaining the inexorable unfolding from matter to bodies to minds to souls to Spirit's own Self-recognition. Eros, or Spirit-in-action, is a rubber band around your neck and mine, pulling us all back home.”
  + How coherent *is* the notion of involuton actually? What if science *can* explain or make understandable how "higher" forms of life emerged form "lower" forms, *without any necessity of invoking mysterious cosmic forces* like Spirit or intricate mechanisms such as involution and (spiritually understood) evolution? The whole system will come tumbling down, it will lose all of its dynamic powers.
  + The key argument [Wilber] gives for rejecting most of the traditional notions of involution…is both interesting and revealing: we don't need involution to explain all these evolutionary emergences, he assures us, because, “... not only more modern forms of science but higher integral forms of thinking themselves have suggested that evolution is a much more creative process than previously pictured by the traditions, and that much of what was thought to have been created by involution is actually created by and during evolution. (p. 150-1)” Now this is really ironic—but also somewhat disingenuous—for *these very same modern forms of science have found out that it doesn't take such a force of Eros* to explain any of the diversity of life! Why not take a second, and decisive step and, after stripping involution of much of its metaphysical baggage, also do away with this "skyhook" (Dennett) of Eros which supposedly explains evolutionary complexity, but does nothing of the kind?
  + If Wilber has proven one thing in his dealings with science (and evolutionary theory in particular) it is that he could not care less about the struggles of science to discover the laws of reality, as long as they confirm his pre-conceived notions of a cosmic and evolutionary Spirit.
* [Rational Reasons to Believe in Spirit? Evaluating Ken Wilber's Case for A Spiritual Worldview](https://www.integralworld.net/visser103.html) by Frank Visser (Post #103)
  + In his latest book *The Religion of Tomorrow* (2017) Ken Wilber foresees a future, unavoidably and certainly so, in which spirituality will stage a stunning come-back. This time God will no longer be seen as the old-fashioned and proverbial Old Man in the Sky—or any fundamentalistic religious notion you prefer—but as a pervasive cosmic spiritual force (called "Eros" by Wilber) behind natural and cultural evolution.
  + Human nature provides means to contact the divine Spirit directly, through meditative practices that do not require any belief systems or dogma's to be effective. A step-wise path of super-integral stages and states of consciousness awaits us on our way to Supermind. A pervasive, cosmic, impersonal universal force will bring us back home. That is, in this Gospel according to Ken.
  + Wilber points to mystical experience as "proof" for Spirit, but one wonders how extraordinary human experiences can provide evidence for something like the driving force behind evolution, or even the creation of the whole cosmos. At most we could say that these experiences provide proof for the existence of some spiritual element in human nature, but that's a far cry from these cosmological or biological extrapolations.
  + If creationists like to "quote-mine" Crick and other famous scientists for spiritually sounding statements, Wilber is no different here. This is simply painful.
  + Wilber’s Four Rational Reasons to Believe in Spirit: “Rational reasons to believe in this miraculous spiritual dimension to Reality include the following: (a) the "creative advance into novelty" that is demonstrated by evolution itself and is inexplicable by mere "chance mutation" (the evolution from strings to quarks to subatomic particles to atoms to small molecules to massively interconnected molecules to asexual cells and early organisms—just for starters—is an awful lot of evolution in a universe that is supposed to be "running down" but can easily be seen as yet more evidence of creative Eros or Spirit-in-action, "a self-organizing self-transcendent drive," as Erich Jantsch put it); (b) the evidence from numerous sciences on the interwoven, entangled, enacted, interconnected nature of all seemingly separate things and events (these are still 3rd-person deductions and should not replace 1st-person direct meditative evidence, but are further evidence of a self-organizing drive); (c) the presence of consciousness as an undeniable reality throughout the universe (the denial of which is a performative contradiction); and most significantly, (d) the experimental and injunctive proof of Spirit's existence by following paradigms, practices, and exemplars, from contemplation to highest yoga —this is not God taken on faith but based on direct personal experience, a "science of the interior," which, in every major culture the world over, has a practice leading to a "satori" or "Self-realization" that discloses a direct experience of Spirit itself, by whatever name. (p. 498)”
  + Postulating "novelty" as a cosmic principle that cannot be explained any further hardly does anything more than begging the questions we have about nature. … It is an anti-science and anti-discovery stance to postulate a cosmic driving force such as Wilber's Eros, to throw light on these phenomena.
  + I have no idea what to make of "evidence from numerous sciences on the interwoven, entangled, enacted, interconnected nature of all seemingly separate things and events", nor how this could possibly provide "further evidence of a self-organizing drive".
  + Argument (d) consists of one of Wilber's favorite topics: to see meditation as a form of "deep science" in its own right, and to claim that using these contemplative methods "Spirit" can directly be experienced. It is, however, one thing to respect the fact that throughout history human beings have reported extraordinary spiritual experiences, it is wholly something else to claim, as Wilber typically does, that these insights throw any meaningful light on the workings of the cosmos or of evolution at large.
  + In the end, integralists are no better off than fundamentalists when they have to make a "leap of faith" after having weighed all the evidence. Believing in a mystical future with extraordinary stages and states of consciousness on the horizon (and Wilber's *The Religion of Tomorrow* provides an exceptionally detailed catalogue of this field), is without any doubt uplifting and inspiring for many modern-day people who have left traditional notions of religiosity behind and who find the current scientific outlook on reality depressing and devoid of meaning.
  + Most scientists experience their life of wonder and investigation as extremely meaningful. Even if the total universe is devoid of meaning, at least as this concept is understood by us humans, our personal lives can very well be meaningful when we have found relationships or activities that are close to our hearts. It is doubtful if a religion of the future, if ever there is one, should base itself on half-baked scientific theories or questionable speculations of one big, unspecified, force behind all of nature's and culture's complexities.
* [Wilber and the Misunderstanding of Evolution: Ken Wilber's Achilles' Heel](https://www.integralworld.net/lane1.html) by David Lane
  + Wow! I can almost see Charles Darwin turning in his grave, Stephen Jay Gould fainting at a New York Yankees game, Richard Dawkins spitting out his beer at an Oxford Pub, Daniel Dennett shouting, "That's the biggest Sky Hook I have ever seen!," and Pat Robertson praising Jesus saying, "When did Wilber convert to Creationism? He's on our side now. Hey, the New Age is okay!"
  + Having taught Darwinian evolution (and its various manifestations, including punctuated equilibrium) in grammar school, in high school, in community college, in university, and in doctoral programs, for the past seventeen years I must say that Wilber's take on what evolution is about baffles me.
  + Not only is Wilber inaccurate about how evolution is presently viewed among working biologists (remember Wilber says "absolutely nobody believes this anymore"—tell that to the two most popular writers on evolution today) but he is just plain wrong in his understanding of the details of how natural selection operates.
  + Not to sound like a groggy professor, but if Wilber turned in the above quote to me as a college student trying to explain the current view of evolutionary theory, I would give him an "F" and ask to see him in my office. Why? Not because there can't be healthy debates about evolutionary theory, but because Wilber has misrepresented the fundamentals of natural selection.
* [The Rise and Fall of Ken Wilber](https://markmanson.net/ken-wilber) by Mark Manson
  + Wilber believes that every field of knowledge contains at least one aspect of truth, no matter how small, and that reconciling disparate disciplines is a matter of integrating what’s right about them rather than discounting them for being partially wrong. As Wilber often puts it: “No one is smart enough to be wrong 100% of the time,” and therefore we should focus on what’s right and leave out the rest.
  + After understanding his model, the rest of the world felt simpler. Also, I had a very powerful spiritual experience when I was a teenager, but could never reconcile any sort of spiritual practice or belief with scientific knowledge and rigor. Wilber did that for me.
  + Nothing is 100% right or wrong, they merely vary in their degree of incompleteness and dysfunction. No one or nothing is 100% good or evil, they just vary in their degree of ignorance and disconnection. All knowledge is a work in progress.
  + In 1999, coming off the success of his monster 1,000-page magnum opus, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, and the model of consciousness and development it presented, Wilber started Integral Institute, a think-tank and academic institution to set the foundation to disseminate Wilber’s ideas to the world.
  + Integral Institute built their movement in order to influence academia, governmental policy, to get books and journals published, and to infuse these ideas into the world at large. Yet, here we were, spending money to sit in a room performing various forms of meditation and yoga, having group therapy sessions, art performances, and generally going on and on about how “integral” we were and how important we were to the world without seemingly *doing* anything on a larger scale about it.
  + Experts in many of the fields Wilber claimed to have “integrated” questioned or picked apart some of his assumptions. In Wilber’s model, he uses what he refers to as “orienting generalizations,” ways of summarizing entire fields of study in order to fit them together with other forms of knowledge. Wilber admits in his work that he’s generalizing large topics and that there is no consensus in many fields, but that he’s constructed these generalizations to reflect the basic and agreed-upon principles of each field of study. Well, a number of experts began questioning Wilber’s choice of sources. And as for the claims that what he portrayed as consensus in some fields such as developmental psychology or sociology, it turned out there was still quite a bit of debate and uncertainty around some of Wilber’s “basic” conclusions. Often, what Wilber portrayed as the “consensus” of a certain field actually amounted to an obscure or minority position.
  + Critics also picked apart Wilber’s model itself, showing minor contradictions in it. And a number of people caught on to his shockingly meek understanding of evolutionary biology and his puzzling insinuations of intelligent design.
  + Wilber’s eventual response to many of these critics was nothing short of childish—a dozen-or-so page (albeit extremely well-written) verbal shit storm that clarified nothing, justified nothing, personally attacked everyone, and straw-manned the shit out of his critics’ claims.
  + Rabbi Marc Gafni, a spiritual leader with whom Wilber aligned himself and even co-sponsored seminars, was later indicted in Israel for child molestation. Despite this, Wilber and his movement refused to distance themselves or repudiate him. In fact, the whole integral scene doubled down, claiming that its critics were “first-tier thinkers,” and were coming up with lies in order to attack a greater, higher level of consciousness that it didn’t understand.
  + I do believe he will be written about decades or centuries from now and will be seen as one of the most brilliant minds of our generation.
  + He also tapped into some of the farthest reaches of consciousness, spiritual or not, that humans have self-reported. I do believe that. But ultimately, he was done in by his pride, his need for control and, well, ironically his ego.
  + When he was younger, he notoriously followed Adi Da, a spiritual leader who was later found to be sexually abusing female followers. Yet he stood by him. Later in his career, he also aligned with Andrew Cohen, a spiritual leader who was found to be physically and emotionally abusing his followers. And again, he stood by him. Why? Because Wilber maintained they had genuinely reached the farthest limits of human awareness and understanding.
* [Integral and Me: A Brief (Partial, but True) History of My Years as a Meta-Revolutionary](https://www.metapsychosis.com/integral-and-me/) by Marco Morelli
  + I was one of the so-called ‘Integral kids’—in my early 20s when I discovered Ken Wilber.
  + The book’s title, *A Brief History of Everything,* intrigued me, and I thumbed the pages, briefly, feeling a strange lust for cosmic comprehension seize my brain.
  + Wilber expressed an appreciation for certain postmodern thinkers I was studying at the time (Foucault, Derrida…) but then made the argument that what they lacked, and what postmodernism in general lacked, was a practical conception of *radical emptiness—*a direct experience of the “true nature of reality,” as described by various schools of Buddhist thought.
  + What most impressed me at the time was the fact that a writer so steeped in the world of Eastern spirituality (in fact, often stacked on the New Age shelf in bookstores for this reason) was conversant with contemporary Western philosophy as well. Indeed, he proposed to broadly reconcile these traditions. Further, to my mind, Ken’s writing style was compelling—sharp, deft, lucid, witty, refreshingly polemical, encyclopedic and visionary in scope.
  + But something was driving or pulling me forward. I needed to open up a space within myself where *something bigger* could emerge in me—I didn’t exactly know what. And though I hadn’t yet formally encountered the integral idea, I was making my way to it instinctively.
  + I moved into an apartment in Brooklyn with a friend whom I’d met at IICD, Mark Binet—who, it turned out, had also been bitten by the Wilber bug (independently, yet almost exactly at the same time I was). Like me, he was an artist and spiritual seeker. He was a kind of trickster, always haranguing for the nondual mystical experience.
  + That meeting with Ken changed my life in ways that continue to surprise. … Hours later, he emailed back with an offer almost too good to be true: not only a job working for I-I, but also a room in his old house in Boulder, where the core I-I staff (three other “integral kids,” also young men) were staying.
  + I was 28 years old. I had been out of college for five years. My accomplishments during this time included two self-published books of poetry and a job history consisting of various low-wage stints. Yes, I had done the volunteer work, and had glowing recommendations from my professors—but academia felt like a spiritual dead end, and I was reluctant to devote myself to another activist cause that didn’t include a philosophical or aesthetic dimension. A corporate job was out of the question.
  + it was a lonely struggle, and I felt alone and irrelevant. I was beginning to feel desperate for that *something,* to happen…
  + For me, the chance to be at the “leading edge” (as we called it) of a transformational movement—a revolution in human consciousness, is what Ken’s version of Integral promised—was more than seductive: it was irresistible.
  + We were hurtling toward an Integral “tipping point,” where our Integral Vision would finally catch on in the mainstream and change the world. That was the big dream, the narrative we spun.
  + We were selling the idea, as I came to see it, that one could be *special*, part of a “leading-edge” movement in consciousness and culture, and by implication slightly more *evolved* than everyone else. This, simply by virtue of joining our tribe and consuming our products. There were certainly many highly intelligent and I would say “enlightened” people attracted to I-I. But our message was off-putting to many more who I would consider just as evolved, but looking for a more grounded, egalitarian, less self-aggrandizing kind of approach.
  + *And it worked.* Thousands of people from across the world got involved: connected with the institute, and with each other.
  + I won’t detail everything that went wrong, because then I’d have to write some kind of nauseating tell-all book, and I have better things to do before I die. Some have thrown around the “C” word; but if I-I was in any way a cult, it was a pretty lame cult—no murders or sex slaves or apocalyptic pronouncements or money laundering or fleets of Rolls Royces. The problems were *human, all too human.*In-group/out-group type stuff. An overly male-centric culture with no women in senior leadership. Mismanagement of limited funds and resources. Failure to distance the organization from abusive spiritual teachers. Suffice it to say, *mistakes were made*.
  + This seems to be what happens when one puts more energy into *promoting* an idea—which requires constantly reiterating a pre-established story or narrative, (which one easily becomes defensive around)—rather than *questioning* one’s ideas within the context of a broader intellectual debate.
  + Ken’s public talks became increasingly repetitive, and it seemed he only engaged with critics who already agreed with him on most points, or were already operating within the terms of his AQAL Integral Framework. On a couple occasions, he lashed out at his more disagreeable critics. … Ken’s take-down of these critics, where he suggested, among other things, that they (metaphorically) fellate his manhood, became a fault line within the community. It was harsh, sarcastic, funny, one might even say brilliant from a certain literary perspective…but also unfair and unbecoming of a leader of a global institution purporting to address the big, serious problems of our time.
  + By mid-2006, I-I’s own operating system had become chaotic and unstable; staff were speaking out, on the verge of revolt; finances were strained; and Ken’s health was deteriorating. In late 2006, the interior and exterior conflicts became too severe and Integral Institute…*disintegrated*. At an infamous meeting in Ken’s loft, a number of staff walked out in protest. It was dramatic. It was sad. It was pathetic. But it needed to happen.
  + I’ve come to believe that the problem with integral culture is not the marketing of it per se—but the *bad* marketing. Marketing that insults one’s intelligence. One of the features of integral discourse that unfortunately emerged with I-I and has continued for the last ten years (some of which I even helped write) involves a subtle *flattery* of the self in the attempt to define a psychographic market segment and attract it to one’s cause. A typical message goes something like this: “*You’re Integral.* Here are five things about you that are different and amazing…but you also feel pain: you feel alone in this incredibly fragmented world, and need to be connected to, and supported by, other integral people like you who long for greater wholeness, etc.”
  + More often than not, the signal I’m receiving is too easy to interpret as saying: “We don’t expect you to *think*, or do real work, or deeply question yourself (or us) or the underlying order of things, or truly participate (as a peer and equal) in a larger, more meaningful and collaborative endeavor.” I’m being treated not as a real person but as a mere consumer—albeit a highly spiritually evolved consumer—and I can’t help but smell a very fragrant yet all the same execrable bullshit.
  + I’d love to see a conference where *every* presentation focused on some aspect of enacting an “integral revolution”—inquiring into what that might really mean in the present moment, in the most concrete social and political terms, as well as in consciousness and culture.
  + At the same time, there is something beautiful and essential about metatheory. It’s an art as much as anything is art, and to practice theorizing for the sake of theorizing is no different, in the end, than poetry for the sake of poetry.
* [The Stages of Life According to Ken Wilber](https://www.institute4learning.com/2020/02/05/the-stages-of-life-according-to-ken-wilber/) by Thomas Armstrong at the American Institute for Learning and Human development
  + In my mind, Wilber’s model is something like a Lego structure.  He begins by building a train of blocks based on traditional Western thinkers such as Piaget, Freud, and Erikson.  He then tacks onto this structure a train of blocks related to humanistic psychologists such as Maslow, Rogers, and Rollo May.  Finally, he adds to this structure the traditions of Eastern mysticism, including descriptions of the higher chakras, higher states of being, and transcendent experiences.  One can appreciate this theory as a triumph of integral thinking, or alternatively, criticize it as merely the conglomeration of widely disparate world views.  Nevertheless, it is an intriguing way of looking at human development, and like all good theories, provokes the mind into asking lots of questions and seeing coherence where before there was merely chaos.
  + **7. Centaur (Vision-Logic)**:  Here the soul or self begins to transcend the verbal ego-mind and integrate all aspects of previous stages including not only verbal, cognitive, and emotional ego states, but also the Jungian-derived ”shadow” (or the complementary aspects of unconscious processes).  This stage is characterized by autonomy, integration, authenticity, and/or self-actualization, and is the final stage belonging to the Personal category in Wilber’s theory.  Now begins the Transpersonal realms.
  + **8. Psychic**:  Here the individual begins to transcend the egoic states of the previous levels.  This stage brings with it the possibility of psychic experiences such as clairvoyance, precognition, and other parapsychological phenomena, and also transcendent states of being related to gender identity (e.g. androgyny), ecological understanding (e.g. shamanism), identification with a World Soul (e.g. Gaia), and other holistic ways of thinking, seeing, and being.
  + **9.** **Subtle:** Wilber defines this stage as follows:  ”you are seeing something beyond nature, beyond the existential, beyond the psychic, beyond even cosmic identity. You are starting to see the hidden or esoteric dimension, the dimension outside the ordinary cosmos, the dimension that transcends nature. You see the Light, and sometimes this Light literally shines like the light of a thou­sand suns.” (from an interview published in *Quest Magazine*, 1994 Spring , pp. 43-46).
  + **10. Causal**:  Wilber describes this stage in this way:  ”This is total and utter transcendence and release into Formless Consciousness, Boundless Radiance. There is here no self, no God, no final-God, no subjects, and no thingness, apart from or other than consciousness as Such” (from his book *The Atman Project*, p. 84).
  + **11. Non-Dual:**  Wilber explains this stage as follows: ”The entire World process then arises, moment to moment as one’s own Being, outside of which, and prior to which, nothing exists. That Being is totally beyond and prior to anything that arises, and yet no part of that Being is other than what arises.” (*The Atman Project,* p. 86).
* [Ken Wilber and Definitions of “Spiritual”](https://medium.com/@andrew.field81/ken-wilber-and-definitions-of-spiritual-or-how-i-made-sense-of-a-recent-spiritual-experience-d2551c3297bf) by Andrew Field
  + Wilber observes in his 2006 *Integral Spirituality*, and perhaps elsewhere in his body of work as well, that there are really four definitions of “spiritual” or “spirituality,” and that conversations that don’t off-the-bat make known which definition they are using usually go off the rails quite quickly.
  + Here are Wilber’s four definitions, with some context for background:
  + 1. our first definition of spirituality is that it is the highest level of *any of the developmental lines.*According to this definition, spirituality refers to the higher levels of cognition, or the higher levels of interpersonal relating, or the higher levels of appreciating the beauty in the world (aesthetics), and so on.
  + 2. Our second definition of “spiritual” or “spirituality” can be seen on the Integral Psychograph as well. On the fifth vertical line from the left, we see a developmental line called “spiritual.” This means that “spiritual” can be defined as its own developmental line, as opposed to being the higher levels of any of the developmental lines. Spirituality would then be its own intelligence, different from aesthetic or musical or kinesthetic (insert whatever developmental line you want here) intelligence.
  + 3. A third way of defining “spiritual” or “spirituality,” according to Wilber, is as a religious or spiritual experience. Therefore, in this third definition, spirituality would be understood as a *state of consciousness*, what is sometimes called in other contexts a peak experience. In this definition, we are not talking about the higher levels of any one developmental line, nor are we talking about one specific developmental line. Instead, we are talking about a *state* of consciousness.
  + 4. For our fourth definition, “spiritual” or “spirituality” could refer to a a special kind of *attitude*. Not a developmental line, not the highest level of a developmental line, and not a state of consciousness, but rather a kind of attitude at any of the structures of consciousness. This attitude could be involved with love, or compassion, or wisdom, as Wilber points out in his definition — but it can be found at any of the structures of consciousness. That’s our fourth definition of “spiritual” or “spirituality” — a special attitude.
* [Response to Ken Wilber's, "Integral Theory of Consciousness"](https://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_jacob_response_frameset.htm) by Garry Jacobs
  + Although he calls his approach an 'integral' theory, it appears more like a summation or a best a synthesis, rather than a true integration. He stresses that true knowledge of any holon involves knowledge in all four quadrants.
  + [Wilber] argues we cannot understand consciousness by exclusive focus on any one of the four. Nor can we adequately interpret phenomenon from any of the four quadrants solely as expressions of developments in that quadrant. This approach has the appeal of placing different approaches to consciousness in a wider perspective and curbing attempts to explain everything by one set of narrow concepts, which is especially characteristic of the positivist-empiricist approach. For example, on this basis he is able to strongly reject the view of biological scientists that consciousness can be wholly explained in terms of brain development.
  + Wilber adopts a hierarchical, evolutionary model of consciousness based on Sri Aurobindo's ascending planes of consciousness from matter to satchitananda. He also accepts the common view of many Eastern spiritual traditions that each of these planes, including even matter, possesses inherent consciousness.
  + Wilber describes consciousness as a summation of changes in all four fields and suggests that its evolution is dependent on all four fields. But this model, just like those he criticizes, does not actually define what consciousness is. Nor does it explain the fundamental (essential) relationship between the four quadrants, i.e. By what process do they evolve? At what level and in what manner are they integrated? How is evolution in each quadrant related to the others? What is the power that governs this evolution? What is the design or intention that determines its direction? He says they are all based on and manifestations of Spirit, but says nothing about the manner or degree to which Spirit determines their evolution or manifests through them.
  + The important point is that Wilber's model is replete with implicit assumptions and worldviews like those he condemns. Each of these assumptions deserves to be made explicit and examined rather than just taken for granted as obvious or self-evidently valid.
  + Wilber condemns the tendency to collapse reality into a single quadrant. But he then procedes to categorize – collapse? – major theories and theorists into specific quadrants they focus on, lending the impression that he is the first to look at all four quadrants are parts of a single reality. For instance, he places Sri Aurobindo as a theorist in the subjective-individual quadrant, ignoring the fact that Sri Aurobindo thought and wrote extensively about the interaction between evolution of subjective consciousness (interior individual) and the transformation of material substance (exterior individual), the subjective existence of society (interior collective) and objective (exterior collective) social and political evolution of humanity. It is likely that some other theorists have been similarly collapsed.
  + Even if we accept that all four quadrants represent aspects of reality, it does not follow that they are equal aspects or that some are not subordinate to others. This is precisely the type of thinking that Wilber condemns in the positivists. Would he equally condemn it in the subjectivists?
  + Does a four quadrant model really integrate objective and subjective, individual and collective perspectives of reality? Wilber's approach appears more additive than integrative. He does not explain the precise relationship between the quadrants or the process by which they mutually interact and develop in parallel with one another.
  + Wilber might argue that the physical form limits the development of subjective consciousness and therefore it is an equal partner in evolution of higher consciousness. But Sri Aurobindo would disagree. He would say that if the inner consciousness chooses to evolve, it will evolve the necessary changes in external biology required for that manifestation, as Mother describes in the Agenda. Actually, the development of inner consciousness is not limited by the external development of the form in its ascent to higher planes of consciousness at all. It is only when we want to transform the human consciousness, rather than rise out of it, that the structure of the current biological form needs to change.
  + But the greatest limitation of Wilber's four quadrants is the danger that we may mistake them for something real! The reality he is categorizing and pigeonholing into four quadrants is a single, indivisible whole. Mind's attempt to capture it in clear abstract terms gives us a sense of security and satisfaction, but not real knowledge. Thought and language require the use of divided concepts and opposites for their self-expression. But whereas Sri Aurobindo constantly reminds us that any such division of reality is only perceptual (being is indivisible), Wilber seems to really believe in the separate existence of these four.
  + Wilber postulates that all four quadrants share three common tests for knowledge, which he terms injunction, apprehension and confirmation (i.e. method of taking evidence, observation of results, and validation of results). His distinction between narrow or superficial science (sensory) and broad or deep science (sensory, mental and spiritual) and his insistence that all three can be approached by the same common tests is helpful because it broadens the field of phenomenon that can be studied scientifically. This view acknowledges that subjective experience is a valid field for science but that it can only be fully studied by resort to appropriate subjective methods, which he states may require in some instances a change in the consciousness of the observer. This is precisely Sri Aurobindo's view that spiritual experience can be systematically repeated and scientifically validated, but only by subjective rather than objective methods.
* *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis: An Integration* by Stephen Mitchell
  + [From Steve Gilbert:] Although the book is about an integration of different object relations theories in psychodynamic psychology, Mitchell discusses how to think about the value of mixed-model theorizing in general. I think his observations are useful in assessing the merits of Wilber’s integrative theory, which is a mixed-model theory on steroids.
  + "Theories are not facts, observations, or descriptions – they are organizational schemes, ways of arranging and shaping facts, observations, and descriptions. Why choose, the eclectic asks? Why not retain all theories as potentially useful? Adding observations enriches one’s vision; [but] adding new ways of arranging them may or may not, depending on the compatibility of the organizational schemes. Mixing theories can result in greater richness, subtlety, and complexity, or in a jarring assembly of fragments, in partial perspectives, which do not lend themselves to a cohesive, larger vision. Choice, although difficult, is sometimes essential." p. 15
  + "Any attempt to synthesize different theoretical systems succeeds or founders on the question of what it looks like when the different systems are made to stand side-by-side and are used together. Do they seem to work together in a smooth, consistent fashion that is mutually enhancing? Does the synthesis establish a coherent frame of reference, or a sense of being jolted back-and-forth between fundamentally different and mutually inconsistent vantage points?" p. 53
* “The Use and Misuse of Metatheory” by J. Turner
  + "Some approaches to metatheory are criticized for their tendency to avoid scientific sociology's central task: to explain how the social universe operates. While much metatheory is intellectually stimulating, it can also be debilitating in that it pulls social theory into reviews of the history of ideas, textual debate, philosophical discourse, ideological critique, and other unresolvable intellectual issues. In so doing, metatheory directs attention away from the analysis of the operative dynamics of the social world.”
  + [From Steve Gilbert:] That quote comes close to the objection I raised when I said “the best theory while inclusive (explanatory) of the most data is not necessarily inclusive of the most theories.”

1. <https://www.prosocial.world/about-us> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://thisviewoflife.com/the-vienna-circle-and-pragmatist-clubs-variations-to-select-from-for-evolutionary-philosophy/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Wilber> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory_(Ken_Wilber)> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory_(Ken_Wilber)> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://ilr.scholasticahq.com/article/31107-integral-and-prosocial-integral-spirituality-and-prosocial-spirituality> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://ilr.scholasticahq.com/article/31107-integral-and-prosocial-integral-spirituality-and-prosocial-spirituality> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See <https://www.evphil.com/blog/what-i-learned-from-100-philosophy-thought-experiments> and <https://www.evphil.com/blog/what-can-evolution-teach-us-about-humanism>, which inform the rest of this section. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_philosophy> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.paulhelfrich.com/library/Helfrich_P_AQAL_Overview.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://thisviewoflife.com/evaluating-narratives-of-conscious-evolution/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ken_Wilber> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://www.integralworld.net/erdmann10.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory_(Ken_Wilber)> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integral_theory_(Ken_Wilber)> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://www.paulhelfrich.com/library/Helfrich_P_AQAL_Overview.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See *Why Trust Science?* by Naomi Oreskes, Princeton University Press, 2019. <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691179001/why-trust-science> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See *Kindly Inquisitors* by Jonathan Rauch, The University of Chicago Press, 2013 edition. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/K/bo18140749.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See the entry on Idealism in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, particularly the section called “The Fate of Idealism in the Twentieth Century.” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/idealism/#FateIdeaTwenCent> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See *An Evolutionary Theory of Consciousness* by Ed Gibney for lists of the various definitions of consciousness, issues with panpsychism, discussions of whether entities like the United States are conscious, and several other relevant topics. <https://www.evphil.com/uploads/9/2/0/3/9203498/evolutionary_theory_of_consciousness_and_free_will.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See for example *Human Evolution* by Robin Dunbar and *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* by Tyson Yunkaporta. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See for example “Bridging the Is-Ought Divide” by Ed Gibney and “Rebuilding the Harm Principle” by Gibney and Wyatt. <https://assets.sfc.edu/content/documents/publications/ASEBLv11n1Jan15.pdf> and <https://www.crimejusticejournal.com/article/view/1280> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See *Relational Concepts in Psychoanalysis: An Integration* by Stephen Mitchell and “The Use and Misuse of Metatheory” by J. Turner. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://thisviewoflife.com/evaluating-narratives-of-conscious-evolution/> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. <https://www.paulhelfrich.com/library/Helfrich_P_AQAL_Overview.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. <https://www.institute4learning.com/2020/02/05/the-stages-of-life-according-to-ken-wilber/> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perennial_philosophy> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. <https://www.integralworld.net/20tenets.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. <https://www.paulhelfrich.com/library/Helfrich_P_AQAL_Overview.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. <https://www.integralworld.net> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. <https://www.integralworld.net/readingroom.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-31)