

It is true that he has brought into being the Integral Institute, which produces vast numbers of courses, DVDs, books, exercises and so forth, but personally I do not find all this very interesting. Wilber has produced many short talks on YouTube, which are excellent and well worth tuning into, but it is all rather bitty and ad hoc compared with the great days of his best books.

And he has produced some great books. *The Atman Project* was a brilliant contribution, and so was *No Boundary. Up from Eden* was remarkable and extraordinary, and *Integral Psychology* a master work. *Grace and Grit* is, I think, his most personal and moving book, and of course *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* is a masterpiece. Personally I like *Boomeritis* very much, with its brash, cheeky approach to Spiral Dynamics, but I fear its excitement has already faded. Wilber did probably publish too many books, not always of the highest quality, but his best work has to be hailed as superb.

I value Ken Wilber as a very helpful writer for the jobbing therapist, and I am not very interested in his wordy battles with Jorge Ferrer and others. As an academic he may or may not be of the finest, but as a guide for the therapist I find him superb. His basic map seems to be very easily understood, and very useful, particularly in distinguishing between the Mental Ego and the Centaur.

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Wilber and me – or is it I, it or thou? A commentary on Bazzano and Rowan

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These two articles on Wilber by Manu Bazzano and John Rowan hint at the range of topics and the opinions raised by a careful consideration of Wilber's work. As with all innovative thinkers Wilber is worth the struggle of reading in the original without someone's commentary, however helpful. So it is to be hoped that one consequence of these articles is that more readers of *Self & Society* will familiarize themselves with Wilber's writings first hand.

Indeed, John Rowan invites us to apply Wilber's thinking to our selves and to our clients with clarity and insight. Manu Bazzano takes Wilber to task on a more theoretical and philosophical basis and seeks, finds and challenges some of the more conservative aspects of US culture writ large in Wilber's writings.

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In responding to these two very differing views on Wilber, I think it is necessary to indicate my own take on Wilber. In this piece I will mostly refer to Wilber's 'spectrum of consciousness model' (Wilber, 1979) since it was through this model that I first became really interested in him, and I think it remains one of his key contributions, especially to transpersonal thinking. John Rowan has done a lot to make this model, and Wilber's thinking in general, more accessible to British practitioners over the years (see Rowan, 2005).

I first came across Ken Wilber's work in the late 1980s when a therapist friend of mine, Mark Rowan (no relation to John), lent me two of Wilber's books, *No Boundaries* and *The Atman Project*. Later when I had the pleasure of studying for a PhD on integrating therapy and spiritual healing in the early 1990s (West, 1995, 1997), I read more of Wilber's various writings. I was trying to make sense of how therapy and spiritual healing relate, and Wilber's work became key texts for me. Indeed, in my first book (West, 2000), I critically looked at Wilber's spectrum of consciousness model. Later I had the rich experience of reading and reviewing Wilber's book *Grace and Grit for Self & Society* (West, 2002).

An important critic of Wilber is John Heron (1998), who challenges Wilber's spectrum of consciousness model in six important ways which are well worth considering, and who echoes a number of the points made by Manu Bazzano. Heron's points are:

- 1) It shows no grasp of dynamic dipolarity of inwardness, i.e. the inner spiritual path is seen as being all about 'ascent' rather than 'descent'.
- 2) This focus on ascent is related to traditional oriental practices such as sitting meditation as a means of spiritual transformation in which the person is alone and immobile. However, there are other forms of spiritual development that use the voice and dance, e.g. Sufis.
- 3) Heron argues that his own experience of spiritual development is not a linear process of ascent.
- 4) Heron suggests that we can have a working relationship with higher beings on the high subtle level rather than merely pass through this level.
- 5) Heron's model involves ascent and decent and horizontal movement, and that the differing versions of our selves do not need to be discarded for spiritual development.
- 6) Heron does not regard the end-point of our development as returning to the one from which we are created.

So is Wilber useful, and how? Well yes – if the map is not mistaken for the territory!

I think Wilber's spectrum of consciousness model, especially John Rowan's simplified version, is a useful map and way of thinking about human spiritual development, albeit bearing Heron's and Bazzano's criticisms in mind. It is most useful to think about what levels of development might be inferred by a client's presenting problems, including what their sense of self is at that point. It can be most helpful to ponder on why some work with some clients is more spiritual than with others and what this might imply. I have known young men on the spiritual path with their heart seemingly closed as if they have bypassed the relationship work that most (all?) of us seem to need

to do in our teenage years. The problem becomes when we try and impose any model on the territory.

Wilber has been called the ‘Einstein of the transpersonal’ world, which is a huge claim. I certainly am of the opinion that, like Freud and therapy, anyone seriously thinking about the transpersonal and spirituality in general should consider him and his work. I would not, however, place myself in Wilber’s ‘camp’. I do have several friends, some therapists, some not, who are very keen on him and his theories. But for me I am not sure that I am in anybody’s camp any more!

I do, however, have a lot of time for him, and feel that he deserves to be read and taken seriously by those of a spiritual/transpersonal bent (and others). I am therefore more pro than anti. So I guess that I come to praise Wilber, not to bury him!

Like Freud, Wilber is sometimes ignored or misunderstood and naively criticized; and just as therapy cannot and probably should be explored without considering Freud, so transpersonal and spiritual therapy should not be explored without considering Wilber (and more besides).

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Wash your plate: rejoinder

Manu Bazzano

In the heyday of Greek thought the term ‘symposium’ marked a convivial event, a rousing drinking party spiced up by weighty philosophical discussion and held together by friendship. A Greek-style philosophical symposium even engendered friendship, which was considered by Epicurus the highest value. I know this is an incurably starry-eyed picture, yet I am certain one thing did take place in ancient Greece. Participants would come out transformed, their assumptions altered, their mutual respect enhanced.

Leaving aside the lack of wine and face-to-face encounter in a virtual exchange of ideas, I found this particular symposium, so generously promoted by editors David