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Nondualism and the Divine Domain

Burton Daniels

This paper claims that the ultimate issue confronting transpersonal theory is that of nondualism. The revelation of this spiritual reality has a long history in the spiritual traditions, which has been perhaps most prolifically advocated by Ken Wilber (1995, 2000a), and fully explicated by David Loy (1998). Nonetheless, these scholarly accounts of nondual reality, and the spiritual traditions upon which they are based, either do not include or else misrepresent the revelation of a contemporary spiritual master crucial to the understanding of nondualism. Avatar Adi Da not only offers a greater differentiation of nondual reality than can be found in contemporary scholarly texts, but also a dimension of nondualism not found in any previous spiritual revelation.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the fundamental nature of reality, which is frequently confused in transpersonal psychology: *nondualism*. Perhaps nowhere in transpersonal psychology has nondualism received a more thoughtful treatment than in Wilber's (1995, 2000a) spectrum/quadrant theory. Wilber initially posited a spectrum theory of consciousness, in which he integrates all psychological, philosophical, and spiritual treatises on the development of human beings—from the inception of one's Very Being into an incarnated birth to their attainment of Divine Enlightenment and immersion in nondual reality. His quadrant theory goes on to elaborate on this depiction of consciousness, organizing the vast expanse of existence into four fundamental dimensions: interior and exterior, as well as individual and collective. Every aspect of existence is thought to be subsumed within the general structure of an all-inclusive consciousness—indeed, even the nondual reality that serves as its ultimate ground and final denouement.

Wilber has written extensively, lucidly, and beautifully about nondual reality. His passages on God and Spirit are carefully crafted and offered lovingly. Perhaps no one since Jung (1964) has done more to authenticate spiritual reality within the professional community of psychology and make its lofty precepts accessible to the lay reader. His synthesis of spiritual revelation from the various traditions of humanity's great saints and sages is remarkable, not only because of their prodigious scope, but also because of the sub-

tle and profound realizations inherent within them. His body of work covers a sprawling expanse of spiritual literature and can be deemed not only a mammoth undertaking, but a work of extraordinary value for both science and spirituality. Humanity has benefited immeasurably from his work. However, for all its scope and remarkable cogency, it is not unprecedented.

The Ruchira Avatar, Adi Da Samraj (1991, 2000b) has also written extensively, lucidly, and beautifully about nondual reality. Avatar Adi Da's revelation of nondual reality takes place as part of an overall schema that accounts for all aspects of human development and incarnate being: *the seven stages of life*. These stages progress through a potential sequence of human maturation, spiritual growth, and Divine Enlightenment in any given individual's life (see Adi Da, 2000b, pp. 103-131, 385-390):

First Stage: individuation and adaptation to the physical body.

Second Stage: socialization and adaptation to the emotional-sexual (or feeling) dimension of being.

Third Stage: integration of the psycho-physical personality and development of the verbal mind, discriminative intelligence, and the will.

Fourth Stage: ego-surrendering devotion to the Divine Person and purification of body-based point of view through reception of Divine Spirit-Force.

Fifth Stage: Spiritual or Yogi ascent of attention into psychic dimensions of the being and mystical experience of the higher brain.

Sixth Stage: Identification with Consciousness-Itself (presumed, however, to be separate from all conditional phenomena).

Seventh Stage: Realization of the Divine Self and Inherently Perfect Freedom and realization of Divine Love-Bliss—no “difference” experienced between Divine Consciousness and psycho-physical states and conditions.

Upon examination, considerable correlation exists between Wilber’s spectrum theory and Avatar Adi Da’s seven stages of life. Both represent the individual as consisting most fundamentally of five levels of being—each of which correlating to one or another stage of life—following in the spiritual tradition of Advaita Vedanta (Deutsche, 1969), as well as Mahayana Buddhism (Suzuki, 1968; Conze, 1962).¹

Avatar Adi Da refers to the spiritual process of these traditions as the “Great Path of Return” and acknowledges that it represents a generally accurate depiction of the first six stages of life. However, this depiction gives only a limited and inadequate account of unmanifest, nondual reality, out of which manifest existence arises. Wilber and Avatar Adi Da are essentially in accord relative to the first six stages of life. In fact, Wilber’s meticulous and detailed account of these stages of life is probably unsurpassed in the history of human ideas. Although his quadrant theory has certain difficulties (Daniels, 1999), his spectrum theory is a superlative treatment of the first six stages of life, virtually mirroring that of Avatar Adi Da. Even so, at the point of the seventh stage of life—the Divine Domain of “Radical” Non-Dual Reality—striking differences between their accounts can be discerned.

Not recognizing this difference has serious consequences for any understanding of nondualism. The difference between the accounts of nondualism by Wilber and Avatar Adi Da can be summed up this way: Wilber does not clearly differentiate between the sixth and seventh stages of life. The two often appear intermixed and conflated in his writings—as is frequently the case in the great sixth stage literatures of the Great Tradition (where accounts of the seventh stage appear at all). Further, the Great Path of Return of the spiritual traditions can be seen as not only inadequate to account for true nondual Enlightenment, but actually incidental to that purpose, for the essential dynamic of this process happens elsewhere. Indeed, the Great Path of Return only ends up *obscuring* a true understanding of nondual Enlightenment—*precisely* because its essential dynamic happens elsewhere. This set of circumstances might tend to confuse

the reader who is not well-informed about the seventh stage of life. Because Wilber’s account of nondual reality exists within an impressive overall theory of consciousness, and his prominence within the transpersonal community has been established thereby, it would be useful to consider these differences more closely.

S/self and the Divine Domain

Relative to spiritual reality, human beings can be most fundamentally described as consisting of two aspects: *lower self and deeper Self*. By this, it is meant that psychic structure involves a concomitant interface between two entirely different, yet intimately connected, aspects of one’s being—what Jung (1919, 1964) referred to as the Self and the ego. However, Jung’s description of the Self is frequently vague and inexact. Unfortunately, other descriptions of the Self in Western philosophy typically fare no better—for example, Husserl’s transcendental ego (1960), Sartre’s non-positional consciousness (1957), and Hegel’s soul (1993). Better descriptions can be found in the tenets of Eastern spirituality—for example, the “big mind” of Zen Buddhism (Muzuka, 1990), or the “buddhi” of yoga psychology (Rama, et al., 1998). Assogiolì described the S/self this way: “There are not really two selves, two independent and separate entities. The Self is one; it manifests in different degrees of awareness and self-realization. The reflection appears to be self-existent but has, in reality, no autonomous substantiality. It is, in other words, not a new and different light but a projection of its luminous source” (1965, p. 20). Consequently, this amalgam of lower self and deeper Self can be best indicated by the following nomenclature: *the S/self*.²

Further, this depiction of S/self has significant implications for the understanding of nondualism. The relationship between the lower self and the deeper Self could be put this way: “This abiding dependence of ‘I’ upon Self amounts to an ontological union of ‘I’ and Self. They are so fundamentally related that a true break in that relationship would mean personal annihilation, the nonbeing of ‘I.’ So complete is this union that it may be called ‘nondual’, a unity transcending any sense of duality, isolation, or separation” (Firman & Gila, 1997, p. 45). Yet, this relationship cannot be so simply stated. This passage indicates the kind of confusion obscuring a true understanding of nondualism. In fact, to use the term in this way is misleading. Although nondualism is frequently used to refer to the relationship between Self and self, it most accurately—and most auspiciously—refers to the rela-

tionship between *S/self and God*. The Divine Reality of ultimate nondualism is not realized by virtue of the self more accurately approximating the Self, or else actualizing the self. Rather, Divine Reality is realized by *eliminating the S/self*—and, in the process, being *absorbed into God*.

Nondual reality has been expressed in numerous texts from various spiritual traditions, including not only Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, but certain texts of Taoism. These orientations can be described according to several features typically attributed to nondualism. A good account of these features has been put this way:

The following types of nonduality are discussed here: the negation of dualistic thinking, the nonplurality of the world, and the non-difference of subject and object...although there [are] two other nondualities which are also closely related: first, what has been called the identity of phenomena and Absolute, or the Mahayana equation of samsara and nirvana, which can also be expressed as “the nonduality of duality and nonduality”; second, the possibility of a mystical unity between God and man.

The critique of thinking that employs dualistic categories (being vs. nonbeing, pure vs. impure, etc.) usually expands to encompass all conceptual thinking, for such thinking acts as a superimposition which distorts our immediate experience. That is why we experience the world dualistically in the second sense, as a collection of discrete objects (including *me*) interacting causally in space and time. Negating dualistic thinking leads to experiencing the world as a unity, variously called Brahman, Dharmakaya, Tao, the One Mind, and so on.... This leads to the third sense of nonduality, the denial that subject and object are truly distinguishable...which is...the root delusion that needs to be overcome. (Loy, 1998, pp. 17, 178)

In other words, dualistic thinking separates the nonseparate unity of reality into component parts or categories (i.e., dualistic perception). Consequently, reversing the process, by *eliminating* this separation, reverses the self/other dichotomy and returns the multitude of discrete objects to their pristine state—the original unity of reality—which was always already the case to begin with.

However, although the passage by Loy suggests that different “types” of nondualism are possible, what

is actually referred to by this passage is a *single* account of nondualism, applicable to the different aspects of any individual: cognition, perception, behavior, and, ultimately, their very Being. Yet, there actually *are* different kinds of nondualism, indeed, even going beyond that mentioned by Loy. Overall, Avatar Adi Da (2000b, pp. 144-153) indicates that there are five possible orientations to reality: “*Conventional Monism*,” “*Conventional Dualism*,” “*Primary Dualism*,” “*Secondary Non-Dualism*,” and “*Ultimate Non-Dualism*.” These orientations to reality summarize all of the possible perspectives of the various traditions of psychology, philosophy, and spirituality.

According to the point of view of “*Conventional Monism*,” the world or domain of nature is all that exists. Reality is a material unity of natural laws and processes. In this orientation, the defining principle could perhaps be put like this: “*What you see is what you get*”—or else perhaps this: “*When you’re dead, you’re dead*.” This point of view accounts for all the bodily-based and mortal beliefs about existence. It motivates the individual to struggle and search for fulfillment in the context of the first three stages of life, especially as it culminates in the third stage of life and the development of the rational mind. Indeed, the period in which this faculty of mind first most fully emerged in the West was dubbed the “*Age of Enlightenment*” (Tarnas, 1991). However, this depiction is a startling misnomer. In actual fact, it represents the *least* of what could be called “*lesser*” enlightenments.

Following upon this stage, “*Conventional Dualism*” interjects an awareness and appreciation of spiritual reality into that which is merely physical. According to this point of view, the world is made up of a number of principal pairs, which, ultimately, includes God. Typically, God is paired with either the world or the psyche (e.g., Platonic Forms). Each half is related to and even interrelated with the other—but each half is also paradoxically conceived to be utterly different than or inherently separate from the other. Consequently, the “*goal*” of each lesser (or dependent) half is to submit (and eventually ascend) to the greater (or higher) half. In other words, the obligation is for the psyche (or even all of existence) to submit and eventually ascend to “*God*” (i.e., the “*Good*”). As a result, the individual traverses an immense hierarchy of existence until they finally ascend to the pinnacle of salvation, which is God-realization (Griffiths, 1991). This process takes place within the fourth and fifth stages of life, the subtle and essentially spiritual domains of human development. Recently, the New Age movement has sought to usher in what amounts

to a new Age of Enlightenment, but has only actually succeeded in emulating one or another of the “lesser” enlightenments (see Wilber, 1995, 1999b).³

Following upon this stage, the highest transcendental position begins to emerge, starting with the point of view of “Primary Dualism”— for example,, Jainism and Samkhaya Yoga (Larson, et al., 1987). This position ushers in the sixth stage of life. According to the point of view of this position, the totality of existence is a combination of only two primary realities: *Purusha and Prakriti*. Purusha is traditionally understood to be nonconditional and inherently perfect Being and Consciousness. Prakriti is traditionally understood to be objective energy, which, when modified, appears as the body, mind, and all objects or others. The spiritual practice associated with this point of view requires the individual to separate from Prakriti, usually by willful ascetic disciplines, so that the individual might participate exclusively as Purusha. This orientation begins the process that takes place within the sixth stage of life, the causal and ultimate spiritual domain of human development.

Following upon this stage, the first form of a truly nondual position appears. In “Secondary Non-Dualism” (or “Secondary Absolute Monism”), no inherently independent or separate Purusha exists, whether as an eternal and nonconditional, individual Self or, as some traditions would have it, an absolute Being or Consciousness Itself. Rather, the totality of existence is only Prakriti, conditionally appearing as a beginningless and endless continuum of causes and effects (Satorakashananda, 1977; Verma, 1993). The spiritual practice associated with this point of view indicates that Prakriti appears only as an ephemeral and observable sequence of changes until, by the process of observation, insight, and self-pacification, the inherent and original (or nirvanic) state of Prakriti is realized. However, a difficulty exists with this point of view, for it seeks to accomplish incompatible purposes: to be released from both the illusory need to eternalize the conditional self and the equally illusory need to annihilate the conditional self.

This orientation is superseded by the ultimately nondual position. In “Ultimate Non-Dualism” (or “Primary Absolute Monism”), the tables are turned for the preceding position. In other words, no separate and independent “objective energy” (i.e., Prakriti) exists, or any separate and independent body, mind, or object at all. Rather, the totality of existence is only the One and Absolute Purusha (i.e., Self-Existing and Self-Radiant Consciousness Itself). The spiritual practice associated with this orientation involves Its Very

Presence being understood and directly intuited to be actual (or *really* so)—and then perfectly or utterly affirmed by direct identification with Consciousness Itself.

Avatar Adi Da speaks of this orientation to nondualism as follows:

This point of view and Process (which may follow upon, or be “Uncovered” by, the point of view and Process of “Secondary Non-Dualism,” and which may even immediately follow upon, or be “Uncovered” by, the point of view and Process of “Primary Dualism”) is the third (and final, and Principal) possible point of view and Process traditionally (and inherently) associated with the sixth stage of life (and such great sixth stage schools as have appeared in the form of the traditions of Advaitism, and also, secondarily, or with less directness, within the schools of some varieties of Buddhism, especially within the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, and, but with even less directness, within some of the schools of Taoism). (2000b, p. 147)

The essential realization is that only Consciousness exists, whether “things” arise or not. If “things” do arise, Consciousness is happy to participate in them—*whynot?* It is a play of life, and infinitely amusing. The Love-Bliss characterizing this state exists in the *Awareness*, not in the arising. Consequently, nothing is ever threatened or at risk for the sixth stage sage. They can *afford* to be humorous and amused by all that arises—none of it *means* anything. Only the existence of Consciousness matters, for in this existence is a direct realization of Divine Love. Everything else pales in comparison.

Yet, the point of view of “Ultimate Non-Dualism” is actually somewhat more complex than this. This position of nondualism not only originates in the sixth stage of life, but it can also lead to or culminate in the seventh stage of life. In such a case, exclusive attachment to Consciousness Itself is released and all of existence is seen as the manifestation of this One Reality. So to speak, “Ultimate Non-Dualism” can be thought of as straddling the sixth and seventh stages, acting as a bridge between them. Avatar Adi Da also refers to seventh stage “Ultimate Non-Dualism” as “*Radical*” Non-Dualism, indicating its immediate and direct association with the Divine Condition Itself.

Avatar Adi Da describes this orientation to nondualism as follows:

Most ultimately, this point of view and Process (of “Ultimate Non-Dualism,” or “Primary

Absolute Monism”) is (if it is, by Means Of My Avatarically Self-Transmitted Divine Grace, Most Perfectly Realized) the “Point of View” (and the Most Perfect Process) that (by all the Graceful Means I have Revealed and Given for the sake of all who will be My devotees) establishes and characterizes the seventh stage of life. And, because (from the thoroughly Non-Dualistic “Point of View” that necessarily characterizes the seventh stage of life) the “Ultimate Absolute” Is both Self-Existing (As Absolute Being Itself and Absolute Consciousness Itself) and Self-Radiant (As Absolute, and Perfectly Subjective, Love-Bliss-Energy Itself)...indicating (in each case) the One, Absolute, and Non-Separate (or Inherently All-Inclusive, or Perfectly Non-Exclusive) Real God, or Truth, or Reality. (Ibid., p. 148)

Avatar Adi Da frequently refers to this condition as “*Open Eyes*.” In this state, all conditionally manifested events and objects are spontaneously and inherently recognized to be illusory or merely apparent modifications of the Divine Fullness of Being Itself. The seventh stage of life is the Divinely Self-Radiant process by which all of conditional existence is “*outshined*” (see Adidam, 1991, pp. 707-708). In other words, body, mind, and world are no longer noticed—but not because the Divine Consciousness has withdrawn or dissociated from manifest phenomena (i.e., sixth stage “Ultimate Non-Dualism”). Rather, the Ecstatic Recognition of all arising phenomena (by the Divine Self, as a modification of Itself) has become so intense that the “Bright,” Love-Blissful Radiance of Consciousness now Outshines all phenomena. Therefore, all phenomena become immediately and directly recognized as nothing other than the Divine Condition Itself.

Although this kind of language might sound similar to revelations made throughout the spiritual traditions (e.g., Lankavatara Sutra, Avadhoota Gita, Tripura Rahasya), they can be distinguished from the revelation of Avatar Adi Da in three significant respects:⁴

1. No historical text mentions *all* aspects of the seventh stage realization,
2. Certain aspects of the seventh stage realization appear in *no* historical texts at all, and
3. No historical text mentions *only* the realization of the seventh stage of life.

Even the texts mentioned previously (among only a handful of others) represent primarily the sixth stage

point of view of “Ultimate Non-Dualism”—with only certain passages within them suggestive of the more profound and all-pervasive Realization of “Radical” Non-Dualism.

Avatar Adi Da explains the difference between His unique revelation of the seventh stage of life and the seventh stage intuitions of these premonitory texts as follows:

The traditional premonitory “seventh stage” texts are advanced sixth stage literatures that express a few philosophical conceptions (or yet limited and incomplete intuitions) that sympathetically resemble the characteristic seventh stage Disposition (in and of itself), and (thus) somehow foreshadow (rather than directly reflect, or directly express) the truly Most Ultimate (or Transcendental, Inherently Spiritual, and Most Perfectly Divine) “Point of View”.... [N]one of the traditional texts communicate the full developmental and Yogic details of the progressive seventh stage Demonstration (of Divine Transfiguration, Divine Transformation, and Divine Indifference). Nor do they ever indicate (nor has any traditional Realizer ever Demonstrated) the Most Ultimate (or Final) Demonstration of the seventh stage of life (Which End-Sign Is Divine Translation). Therefore, it is only by Means of My own Avataric Divine Work and Avataric Divine Word that the truly seventh stage Revelation and Demonstration has Appeared, to Complete the Great Tradition of mankind. (in press)

The Illusion of Relatedness

The absence of the seventh stage point of view has significant implications for any understanding of nondualism. The difficulty for most accounts of nondualism, whether in the spiritual traditions or transpersonal psychology, is twofold:

1. They suggest that God is the *goal* of development, and
2. They misrepresent the actual *mechanics* whereby God manifests into human beings.

Wilber’s spectrum theory offers an account of precisely these misrepresented mechanics. In his spectrum theory, the development of evolution, climbing up the ladder of ascent—itsself resulting from a prior, vertical deployment of involution, sliding down the ladder—can be traced through a hierarchy (i.e., holarchy) involving several levels of being. Whereas involution

indicates preexisting states of deeper consciousness, evolution initiates states of higher consciousness coming into being.

According to the perennial philosophy—or the common core of the world's great wisdom traditions—Spirit manifests a universe by “throwing itself out” or “emptying itself” to create soul, which condenses into mind, which condenses into body, which condenses into matter, the densest form of all. Each of those levels is still a level of Spirit, but each is a reduced or “stepped down” version of Spirit. At the end of that process of involution, all of the higher dimensions are enfolded, as potential, in the lowest material realm. And once the material world blows into existence (with, say, the Big Bang), then the reverse process—or evolution—can occur, moving from matter to living bodies to symbolic minds to luminous souls to pure Spirit itself.... Each level is a whole that is also part of a larger whole (each level or structure is a whole/part or holon). In other words, each evolutionary unfolding transcends but includes its predecessor(s), with Spirit transcending and including absolutely everything. (Wilber, 1999a, p. 10)

However, although involution and evolution are intrinsic processes of human life, they do not truly indicate the mechanics whereby God manifests into human beings. Indeed, Realizing God involves one in a different dynamic than that of involution and evolution entirely. The process of “Radical” Non-Dual Enlightenment is far from easy, for embarking upon this process immediately embroils one in a perplexing paradox: *nirvana and samsara are the same*. Yet, this paradox exists only on the *samsara* side of the equation, not that which is *God*. Therefore, the paradox can be resolved in this way: There is *only* God—even if spread upon the illusory levels of mind (or *samsara*). Whereas God is Reality, mind is illusion. That very defining feature is precisely how they can both be—and *not* be—one and the same. Although it is true that the illusion *exists*, nonetheless, it's not *real*. It's an imitation (and, therefore, an imposter) of what *Is* Real: *God*. The two exist as a duality—*within* nondualism. Whereas the one *Is* God, the other is merely arising in (and as) God.

Consequently, the mechanics of human manifestation actually occur as follows: There is *only* God. The causal Self comes into being as an utterly spontaneous contraction occurring in the pure state of

Consciousness that *Is* God. It arises spontaneously, without cause or reason, and tends to persist, or else to be repeated. If Consciousness identifies with this self-contraction, It will falsely presume that It is no longer *Itself* but, instead, an illusion of *Itself*. It will regard *Itself* to be *other* than, or separate from, *Itself*, simply existing as this very activity of painful self-contraction. In so doing, It will also tend to resolve the discomfort of this separate state of being through attention and falsely presume that It is, therefore, *related* to *Itself*, across the non-existent gulf of this (apparent) separateness. Yet, there is still only prior Reality (which the Self continues to actually *Be*). This tension of separation goes both ways, like a rubber band stretched taut, simultaneously pulled both toward and away. Consequently, the Self can only feel its own, inherent feeling of Love-Bliss when it *relaxes* this contracted state, releasing the Illusion of Relatedness into what is its own, true state of Consciousness—as God, meanwhile, continues to merely exist in a Blissful state of Awareness of all that is arising.

All that appears to be not-Consciousness (or an object of Consciousness) is an apparition produced by apparent modification (or spontaneous contraction and perturbation) of the inherent Radiance (or Native Love-Bliss) of Consciousness *Itself*.... However, once objects (or conditions) arise, they tend to persist (or to demand repetition)—and Consciousness may, therefore, tend to dwell on them with fascination.... All of this arising is (in itself—or separately) an illusion—the principal signs of which are the presumption of relatedness (and of “difference”), the presumption of a separate self... (Adi Da, 2001a, pp. 346-347)

Consequently, *two* aspects of reality come to exist, engaged in an intense paradox of God and Self, respectively—the latter tussling with the former in a struggle over the sovereignty of its assumed identity. However, this dynamic tension surrounds a further process arising within its midst. The two aspects of the paradox originally defined as God and Self are simultaneously delineated further into that of Self and Other, the latter compensating the former for its comprised identity.

From here, the duality of this simultaneous paradox (God/Self and Self/Other) further extends itself through all the levels of being (i.e., involution). The entire range of the human individual's various levels of being are nothing but a diminution of the fundamental Reality that is God, laboring against *Itself* and what is *Its* own True and Real state. This diminution takes

place within mind, which is not other than the illusions of S/self that comprise it. In other words, the S/self is an *alternative* to God, lived out in its various levels and diminutions. There is a price to be paid for this error, which is continually lived out in the suffering of every life, for the activity of contraction in the midst of the Living Love-Bliss that is God is *painful*—resulting in nothing but the loss of the Love and Happiness of True Being. Further, it is an activity that every individual is *presently* doing. Even *now*.

This “sequence” of simultaneous paradox ultimately traces out the agony of humanity’s suffering. The two are self-contained, one within the other, like the hard and brusque case of a nut, with the worm in its seed. The two unfold in their turn, like steps ever diminishing—one turning away, even in facing itself; while the other, in turning away, turns against itself. Each is writhing upon the pillars of its own end of the dichotomy. Indeed, even as the causal Self emerges into awareness, this fundamental separation is still present. However, this is ultimately just an illusion. It could all be understood differently.

If the separate “I” and its separate “other” are Most Perfectly Relinquished (or Most Perfectly transcended), such that the complex presumption of separate “I” and separate “other” (or of the feeling of relatedness itself) is transcended (and is not superimposed on what otherwise arises, or on what is otherwise perceived conditionally)—then what arises?

This Unique and Original Freedom may be likened to the perception of waves from the point of view of the ocean (as compared to the perception of waves from the point of view of any single wave)... There are no separate waters in the seas, but every wave or motion folds in one another on the Deep... Such is the Disposition of the only-by-me Revealed and Given seventh stage of life. (Ibid., pp. 344-345)

Most accounts of spirituality and nondualism are problematic, precisely because they attempt to resolve the paradox from the side that is the *ego-“I”*—but not that which is *God*. In other words, they try to make sense of the paradox from within the parameters of the paradox, which is, certainly, a futile effort. However, God can be understood only on the *other* side of the paradox, *prior* to its formation. Put somewhat differently, the *ego-“I”* consists essentially of lack and is empty, imploded inward upon itself; whereas God is full and effulgent—indeed, radiating Ecstatically to *Infinity*. Clearly, the two operate upon very different

principles.⁵

This confusion probably manifests itself most commonly in a concept typically attributed to Judeo-Christian religion: *the Fall of Man*. Contrary to the biblical account, Wilber speaks of the “Fall” this way: “Thus, involution is not something that merely or even especially occurred prior to birth or in some distant cosmological past. Involution is actually said to be occurring right now, in this moment, as we separate or alienate ourselves from Ground and Source. For moment to moment, we move away from Spirit, we involve, we descend; and thus we must *return* to Source and Self—we must grow and evolve to reverse the Fall” (1990, p. 125). However, like the Judeo-Christian account, this passage suggests that the “Fall” operates according to dynamics similar to gravity, such that the individual plummets through the levels of being on their way to birth—as if Falling from the sky of heaven en route to an impact with the Earth. Therefore, this process could be thought of as a “*vertical*” Fall. Only in this sense does the idea of growing and evolving so as to reverse the Fall makes any sense.

However, the Fall could be understood very differently—as the Illusion of Relatedness. In this sense, the Fall could be thought of as a “*horizontal*” (i.e., lateral) process, taking place at every level of being equally. Indeed, the Fall that is involution actually *falls through* the Fall that is the Illusion of Relatedness—which precedes it and pervades it all along its descending path. Involution arises as a *consequence* of the Illusion of Relatedness, tracing out its trajectory based on this more fundamental gesture within God and Reality—and does so at *every* level of its descent. The causal Self Falls *away* from God and then, having thus Fallen in this sense, now Falls through the involuted levels of being. Consequently, reversing the Fall that is the Illusion of Relatedness occurs irrespective of growth and evolution. Instead, it is a matter of *not* Falling in the first place—which requires no additional effort or process to reverse it—precisely because one has not Fallen.

“Radical” Non-Dualism

Much of the confusion surrounding nondualism can be cleared up by considering an ambiguity in the principal term of the discussion: *consciousness*. The usual definition of consciousness (as opposed to unconsciousness) does not mean Consciousness Itself—indeed, precisely because it derives its meaning as an *alternative* to unconsciousness. Consciousness is usually thought of as a state of awareness, that is to say, the ability to “notice” things. However, Consciousness

Itself is not aware *of* things. Conventional notions of consciousness associate it with an object, over against which that consciousness can be said to *be* aware. But Consciousness Itself is more primal than that. It simply *is* Awareness. To be aware *of* something is to *attend* to it—and is, therefore, attention itself, the essence of the Illusion of Relatedness. Perhaps one way to clarify this distinction is by comparing it to the principal therapeutic imperative of psychoanalysis: making the unconscious conscious (Pulver, 1995). When all unconscious (not to say, subconscious and self-conscious) aspects of S/self are made conscious, then there is only Consciousness Itself.

The epistemological position of simple awareness is typically referred to in the spiritual traditions as “*witness*” consciousness. However, such a position represents the point of view of the sixth stage of life (e.g., Shankara, 1979). Here, the individual no longer perceives and understands experience from the point of view of the lower self or even the subtle Self. Rather, the individual participates in experience as the *causal* Self, identified with the very consciousness that is observing all that arises. In that state, one takes the position of the “*witness*,” merely observing all that exists—even *while* they perhaps continue to participate in the events of life. This is the beginning of the ultimate stages of life.

Wilber conceives of this state of consciousness as follows:

I became extremely serious about meditation practice when I read the following line from the illustrious Sri Ramana Maharshi: “That which is not present in deep dreamless sleep is not real”.... That is a shocking statement, because basically there is nothing—literally nothing—in the deep dreamless state.... Ultimate reality (or Spirit), Ramana said...must also be fully present in deep dreamless sleep, and anything that is not present in deep dreamless sleep is not ultimate reality.... Thus, if we want to realize our supreme identity with Spirit, we will have to plug ourselves into this current of constant consciousness, and follow it through all changes of state—waking, dreaming, sleeping. This will: 1) strip us of an exclusive identification with any of those states (such as the body, the mind, the ego, or the soul), and 2) allow us to recognize and identify with that which is constant—or timeless—through all of those states, namely Consciousness as Such, by any other name, timeless Spirit. (2000b, pp. 64-65)

This passage is notable for it presents an excellent example of the “*witness*” consciousness associated with the causal Self and the sixth stage of life. However, it does not indicate “*Radical*” *Non-Dual* consciousness, which is associated with Divine Being and the seventh stage of life. In other words, this passage is an excellent example of what could be called the “*lesser*” enlightenment associated with sixth stage “*Ultimate Non-Dualism*”. Although this state represents an extraordinary level of being, nonetheless, it is not “*Radical*” *Non-Dual* Being.

The confusion Wilber makes is in attributing Consciousness Itself (i.e., “*Consciousness as Such*”) with one or another of the various modes of possible awareness: waking, dreaming, or sleeping. However, the “*Radical*” *Non-Dual* state of Enlightenment actually represents the *transcendence* of each level of being—whether waking, dreaming, or sleeping. “*The Right Side Of The Heart Is The Base Of the state of deep sleep... (And The Right Side Of The Heart... Is Fully Awakened, or Most Perfectly Resolved In Its Perfect Source... The Most Ultimate and Inherently Most Perfect Awakening Of Perfectly Subjective Transcendental, Spiritual, and Divine Consciousness Itself)* (Adi Da, 2000b, p. 223).⁶ Even deep, dreamless sleep arises—and is ultimately Awakened and Resolved—in the Ultimate Source of Being that is Consciousness Itself.

However, more is at stake in Wilber’s point of view than this, for he also makes the fundamental error associated with the sixth stage of life: regarding the sixth stage to be the culminating denouement of existence. Yet, Wilber also suggests that an even more profound dimension of being exists beyond this: the non-dual reality out of which all manifest existence arises. Although this latter comment might sound like “*Radical*” *Non-Dualism*, a curious quality is associated with it. Wilber has *both* manifest and unmanifest existence refer to the *same* level of being. But, in so doing, Wilber only *reduces* the seventh stage to the sixth stage, which is a version of what Avatar Adi Da calls the sixth stage error. In trying to have it both ways, the result is to confuse them both.

Wilber put it this way:

[This] brings us to the most notorious paradox in the perennial philosophy. We have seen that the wisdom traditions subscribe to the notion that reality manifests in levels or dimensions, with each higher dimension being more inclusive and therefore “*closer*” to the absolute totality of Godhead or Spirit. In this sense, Spirit is the summit of being, the highest rung on the

ladder of evolution. But it is also true that Spirit is *the wood out of which the entire ladder and all its rungs are made*. Spirit is the suchness, the isness, the essence of each and every thing that exists.

The first aspect, the highest-rung aspect, is the *transcendental* nature of Spirit—it far surpasses any “worldly” or creaturely or finite things. The entire earth (or even universe) could be destroyed, and Spirit would remain. The second aspect, the wood aspect, is the *immanent* nature of Spirit—Spirit is equally and totally present in all manifest things and events, in nature, in culture, in heaven and on earth, with no partiality. From this angle, no phenomenon whatsoever is closer to Spirit than another, for all are equally “made of” Spirit. Thus Spirit is *both* the highest *goal* of all development and evolution, and the *ground* of the entire sequence, as present fully at the beginning as at the end. Spirit is prior to this world, but not other to this world. (1997, pp. 43-44) (emphasis in the original)

The sixth stage error is most clearly indicated by this passage and can be seen as comprised of two parts: the term “spirit” is used ambiguously—to indicate both Self and God—and, further, the goal of the stages of life is attributed to both Self and God. Wilber sees his theory as an attempt to align with spiritual presentations made traditionally: “That simple witnessing awareness, the traditions maintain, is Spirit itself, is the enlightened mind itself, is Buddha-nature itself, is God itself, *in its entirety*... Thus, according to the traditions, getting in touch with Spirit or God...is your own simple witnessing awareness” (Ibid., p. 287). However, a significant problem exists with this: *the spiritual traditions are in error*. Consequently, nothing is gained by being so aligned. Yet, the error is not so much a mistaken notion—for it does accurately represent the casual Self—as an error of omission, failing to accurately represent God. Virtually no precedence for the seventh stage revelation is present in the spiritual traditions, apart from a handful of texts that are premonitory in nature.⁷

Wilber collapses the sixth and seventh stages together, claiming that nondual reality is essentially comprised of two aspects: goal and ground. However, only the latter applies to “Radical” Non-Dual Reality (i.e., Real God). The former applies to the causal Self alone (i.e., sixth stage “Ultimate” Non-Dualism), and this is what makes all the difference. Nonetheless, this

confusion is easy to make and, indeed, stems from the traditional understanding of nondualism. That is to say, nondualism is typically thought to result whenever the self/other distinction is eliminated. But such is not the case for “Radical” Non-Dualism. Only the *other* is dissolved in the elimination of the self/other distinction—not the causal *Self*, which is to say, the Illusion of Relatedness. What actually results for having eliminated the self/other distinction is not “Radical” Non-Dualism, but merely a partial aspect of reality: the Self. Although the elimination of the self/other distinction has been traditionally associated with the emergence of what might be thought to be “Radical” Non-Dualism, such is simply not the case. A subtle dualism yet remains: *Self and God*. The forms of dualism are not resolved until the *entire S/self* structure is eliminated, dissolved in the True and “Radically” Non-Dual Enlightenment of Real God. Simply put, the real significance of the sixth stage error is this: confusing the causal Self for Real God.

In another context, Wilber has correctly identified the ultimate significance of this difference, by paraphrasing Avatar Adi Da’s own revelation about it:

Adi Da...originally taught nothing but “the path of understanding”: not a way to attain enlightenment, but an inquiry into why you want to attain enlightenment in the first place. The very desire to seek enlightenment is in fact nothing but the grasping tendency of the ego itself, and thus the very search for enlightenment prevents it. The “perfect practice” is therefore not to search for enlightenment, but to inquire into the motive for seeking itself. You obviously seek in order to avoid the present, and yet the present alone holds the answer: to seek forever is to miss the point forever. You always already ARE enlightened Spirit, and therefore to seek Spirit is simply to deny Spirit. You can no more attain Spirit than you can attain your feet or acquire your lungs.... [T]hus seeking Spirit is exactly that which prevents realization. (1997, p. 26)

Yet, Wilber has not applied this same understanding to his own theory, for it is precisely the act of setting God up as a *goal* that inserts seeking into the equation—and eliminates God thereby. Further, Wilber makes a different sort of error in his comments, as well, suggesting that “you always already are enlightened Spirit.” However, the truth is this: even though you are always already God, you are *not* always already Enlightened (at least, certainly, in terms of “Radical”

Non-Dualism). Indeed, it is precisely the fact that you are suffering a “veil of ignorance” that indicates your need to *be* Enlightened. God is your true state—but the Illusion of Relatedness is also true of you, and what requires elimination in the process of “Radical” Non-Dual Enlightenment. Wilber simply has no account of the Illusion of Relatedness in his theory. Although Wilber states that you can “no more attain Spirit than you can attain your feet or acquire your lungs,” attaining Spirit is precisely what is meant by the Great Path of Return he is advocating.

Ironically, conceiving of consciousness as if a “spectrum” only ends up undermining the nondual reality it is intended to advocate. Indeed, the metaphor of a spectrum is really only useful in conceiving of the involuted/evolved levels of being on *this* side of the Illusion of Relatedness. Avatar Adi Da (1997, 2001b) frequently speaks of “Radical” Non-Dual Reality as being a state of “Brightness”—which is a state of unfathomably Blissful Light, without form or function or any referents to dilute it. It is by way of the Illusion of Relatedness that this “Brightness” is corrupted and transmuted *into* a spectrum—as if by a prism. The difference between the seventh stage account of this process and the sixth stage is that the sixth stage sees the prior unity of Light *while within the prism*. Although this witnessing of reality exists prior to the Light’s transmutation into a spectrum, it does not exist prior to the Light’s *entering the prism*. In other words, the sixth stage is still captivated by the mechanics of the prism—even *as* the “Brightness” exists within it. Although the Light has not yet transmuted into the spectrum, nonetheless, the forces are building by which it will do so. The seventh stage, on the other hand, exists as the absolute purity of “Brightness,” on the *other* side of the prism, before its dreadful mechanics of incarnation even come to exist—and, indeed, remains even after the fact, in the event that they do.

S/self-Transcendence and Real-God-Realization

Perhaps the most difficult part of understanding the seventh stage of life is that it does not “follow” the sixth stage, as if another level of construction in the overall holarchy. Rather, the seventh stage of life is the *context* of every stage, including the sixth. Consequently, the seventh stage is present as much at the beginning as in the culmination of the holarchy. Further, this context can be *accessed* at every stage—directly and immediately. And to do so captivates one in a swoon and rapture of God’s Love-Bliss: “Therefore, the only right asana is utter ‘in-love’ of Me, unconditional love-feeling of Me. Fundamentally,

the asana of ‘Ruchira Avatara Bhava’ (or the love-‘Intoxication’ of true devotion to Me) is a devotional, Yogic gesture in heart-Communion with Me” (Adi Da, 2000a, p. 325). This Bhava is available to every individual at any time, not just those in the higher stages of life. However, it is accessed only through the spiritual process of worship and devotion—precisely because the Blessing of Bhava is Given as a Gift, to everyone. Therefore, it must be *received* as a Gift—and given in return.

Unfortunately, Wilber’s concept of transcendence is at odds with this revelation. Although Wilber includes a “Unity Consciousness” in his formulations of the ultimate ground of existence, his emphasis and orientation all point toward the moving from one level of consciousness to another—rather than the immediate and direct immersion into Consciousness Itself.

Self-transcendence (or self-transformation)...is not just a communion, self-adaptation, or association.... In self-adaptation or communion, one finds oneself to be part of a larger whole; in self-transformation one becomes a new whole, which has its own new forms of agency (relative autonomy) and communion.... Eros, as Socrates (Plato) uses the term, is essentially what we have been calling self-transcendence, the very motor of Ascent or development or evolution: the finding of ever-higher self-identity with ever-wider embrace of others. And the opposite of that was regression or dissolution, a move downward to less unity, more fragmentation (what we called the self-dissolution factor, tenet 2d). (Wilber, 1995, pp. 42, 335)

For Wilber, the choice is to either ascend—and develop into greater embrace and unity—or else descend—and disintegrate into greater fragmentation and regression. What he fails to appreciate, however, is a third option: *transcend*—into direct and immediate communion with God. In fact, “Radical” Non-Dualism has nothing to do with progression of *any* kind, whether ascension or descension—or, indeed, even an integration of the two. Transcendence, in this sense, is a matter of *releasing* one’s hold on life and its developmental trajectory. Unfortunately, Wilber has the process go a step further, *attaching* to the next higher level of development. But the whole point of transcendence is the *release*—disengaging one’s affiliation and identification with their particular level of being (that is to say, *all* levels of being).

The conundrum of Wilber’s spectrum theory could perhaps be put this way: although holons *consist*

of God, they do not actually *comprise* God. That is to say, no assembly or arrangement of holons—even ones that integrate into higher levels of the holarchy—*will ever result in God*. Indeed, holons are nothing but the effect of the Illusion of Relatedness having taken place. In other words, the difficulty for Wilber’s theory is this: seventh stage “Ultimate Non-Dualism” is mistaken for the collapse of the self/other distinction—when seventh stage “Ultimate Non-Dualism” is, in reality, the collapse of the *Self/God* distinction.

Avatar Adi Da puts it this way:

Because each and all of the first six stages of life are based on (and identical to) egoity (or self-contraction, or separate and separative point of view) itself, not any one (or even the collective of all) of the first six stages of life directly (and Most Perfectly) Realizes (or Is the Inherently egoless and Inherently Most Perfect Realization and the Inherently egoless and Inherently Most Perfect Demonstration of) Reality, Truth, or Real God.

I Say Only Reality Itself (Which Is, Always Already, The One, and Indivisible, and Indestructible, and Inherently egoless Case) Is (Self-Evidently, and Really) Divine, and True, and Truth (or Real God) Itself. . . . I Say the only Real God (or Truth Itself) Is the One and Only and Inherently Non-Dual Reality (Itself)—Which Is the Inherently egoless, and Utterly Indivisible, and Perfectly Subjective, and Indestructibly Non-Objective Source-Condition and Self-Condition of All and all. (2000b, pp. 250, 295)

Wilber likens the situation relative to nondualism to that of a ladder (if not, indeed, a river). However, this is something of a pantheistic (i.e., “Secondary Non-Dualism”) view in which the mere *aggregate* of component parts represents God and Reality—whereas, in truth, God and Reality are *other* than the ladder. That is to say, the ladder *itself* arises within God, only then to divide into its corresponding rungs. Wilber states that the ladder gives a good description of manifest existence because the highest rung of the ladder and, indeed, the very wood of which it is made are, in essence, the very same thing: Spirit. However, this statement is based on an illusion, which can be sorted out in the following way: when the highest rung of the ladder (i.e., causal Self) originally emerges, *that is all the ladder there is*. At this causal point of “origin,” it is easy to see how the wood and the rung are identical—they are all there is. Still, this causal rung is not God.

It arises *in* God. The Illusion of Relatedness yet separates the two.

However, as involution proceeds, this rung does, indeed, “throw itself out” into further levels—*each one of which simply a continuation of the causal rung*. To suggest that the “ladder” is the origin of “each rung” is misleading—at least in the same sense that God Is the Source and Substance of all existence. Although the language sounds similar, the dynamic underlying them is entirely different. It is the *causal stage* that is the origin of each subsequent rung of the ladder, “stretching” out into ever diminished forms until it finally reaches bottom. It is in this manner that it makes sense to speak of an “origin” and a “goal” to existence—for the whole developmental sequence is really nothing more than the causal rung expanding and contracting upon itself.

Avatar Adi Da makes use of a different metaphor entirely to speak of “Radical” Non-Dual Reality: *the waves of the ocean*. Each apparently separate entity or being is nothing but a wave—comprised of the same water as every other wave and, indeed, the entire ocean. No real difference or separation between them—at least on the level of the ocean. But on the level of the waves, it seems that there is no end to the difference and separation, as they appear to spread out in all directions. For the sake of sorting out the essential difference between these two metaphors, imagine there are only *six* waves in the ocean. Further, imagine that five of these waves have all emerged, or descended, out of the original sixth wave. In fact, imagine that these waves are all somehow *connected* together, assembled by the very fact that they *inhere* in one another. All the waves of the ocean can be thought of as an immense matrix (or else spectrum), aligned together and arising, level upon level, into an ascending hierarchy. As can be seen, this arrangement is *exactly* that of a ladder. However, there is more to existence than merely this ladder. Wilber is correct in asserting that there is a ladder of existence—it is just that the ladder is *floating in the ocean!* And, therefore, its rungs are not actually comprised of wood—they’re comprised of *water*.⁸

The true significance of this arrangement suggests that there is only one way to Realize God or “Radical” Non-Dual Enlightenment: *one must leave the ladder*. Yet, to do so involves a concomitant—and Ecstatic—activity: *submit to being absorbed back into the ocean*. One must release their attachment (i.e., addiction) to manifest existence *and submit to God*. But this is exactly what the ego-“I” loathes to do (Vitz, 1994)—and for good reason. To release one’s hold on manifest exis-

tence is to *die*. However, the difference between this spiritual realization and the misguided judgment of so many unfortunate souls who have made headlines in recent years requires an understanding of exactly what it is that must die: *the ego-“I”*—not the human body. It is the ego-“I” that stands between S/self and God—and it does so at *every* stage of life, including the sixth stage (however subtle its presence at that point). To overcome the Illusion of Relatedness one must come to a dual understanding: 1) realize that the ego-“I” is actually an obstruction to God (and, therefore, a painful denial of Ecstasy), and 2) realize that this is something *you are doing*—even right now. Consequently, the true means to God-Realization is simple: *stop doing it!* No amount of development will ever ease or replace this obligation, for even the sixth stage of life has its own sense of ego-“I” to overcome. The S/self in its entirety must accept and submit to being absorbed into God. In a manner of speaking, there is really only one means to God-Realization: you must take the *“plunge”!*

Any other understanding only confuses the issue. Wilber speaks of the ladder metaphor in this manner: “But according to the traditions, it is exactly (and only) by understanding the hierarchical nature of samsara that we can in fact climb out of it, a ladder discarded only after having served its extraordinary purpose” (1997, p. 45). Perhaps nowhere is the contrast between the Great Tradition and “Radical” Non-Dualism more evident than in this passage, for Enlightenment actually occurs based upon an entirely different dynamic.

[T]he “radical” approach to Realization of Reality (or Truth, or Real God) is not to go gradually “higher and higher” (and, thus, more and more “away”), but (by surrendering your “self,” or total body-mind, to Me—just as it is, in place) to directly enter into heart-Communion with Me (the Avatic Self-Revelation of the Reality, or Truth, That Is the Only Real God), and (in this Manner) to Realize Reality, Truth, or Real God In Place (or As That Which Is Always Already The Case, Where and As you Are, Most Perfectly Beyond and Prior to ego-“I,” or the act of self-contraction, or of “differentiation,” which act is the prismatic fault that Breaks the Light, or envisions It as seeming two, and more). (Adi Da, 2000a, p. 276)

Put somewhat differently, the error of the Great Tradition is this: in having climbed the ladder, one

only reaches the *top rung*. There is nowhere else to go in scaling the ladder but the top rung. And, more to the point, mistakenly thinking that God-Realization involves “climbing” out of samsara only ends up obscuring the *real* process of God-Realization. Although Wilber claims you must first climb the ladder, so as to position yourself to discard it, the truth is you must discard the ladder *right now*, nevermind your apparent unpreparedness to do so. And the same is true at every stage of life—indeed, even that of the causal, sixth stage sage. In other words, you don’t need to *experience* the ladder first to discard it (at any or all of its rungs). You need only to *understand* it. It is at *this* point that you discard the ladder—when you understand that it is unnecessary.

Indeed, contrary to Wilber’s account, at the point of one’s “highest climb,” a surprising development could be said to occur: the ladder is *not* actually discarded. Rather, it *collapses*, something like a telescope, each rung simply enfolding within the others until only one is left. To think that no more ladder exists simply because only one rung is left is an illusion. The causal, sixth stage sage—no matter how truly illustrious and profound—is simply perched upon their final plank of wood, so close to the ocean that they are everything except immersed within it. It is all around them, yet, this one, final piece of wood keeps them buoyed.

“Radical” Non-Dualism and the seventh stage of life, on the other hand, yield an entirely different participation in Reality:

In the only-by-Me Revealed and Given seventh stage of life, all conditions (or all motions, or patterns, or waves of My Avatarically Self-Transmitted Divine Spirit-Energy) Are (each in its moment) Divinely Self-Recognized On and In and As the Deep (or Self-Existing and Self-Radiant Consciousness Itself.... Therefore, Deep (Inherently egoless, and Self-Evidently Divine) Self-Recognition Realizes Only Self-Existing and Self-Radiant Love-Bliss where the conditional patterns of merely apparent modification rise and fall in their folds.

At first, this Realization Shines in the world and Plays “Bright” Demonstrations on the waves.... At last, The “Brightness” Is Indifferent (Beyond “difference”) In the Deep—There, Where Primitive relatedness Is Freely Drowned. And, When “Bright” Self-Recognition Rests Most Deeply In Its Fathomless Shine, the Play of motions Is Translated In Love-Bliss, Pervasive In the

Water-Stand—and, like a Sea of Blankets, All the Deep Unfolds To Waken In the Once Neglected (Now Un-Covered) Light of Self-Illuminated and Eternal Day. (Adi Da, 2001a, pp. 345, 346)

Conclusion

God both is and is not the S/self, and understanding this fundamental paradox is the only means by which one can understand their true relationship to God. Merely considering the S/self to *be* God—indeed, even as it exists at the truly profound level of the causal Self—only trivializes the very real dynamic of separation that exists in its midst, for the S/self is also *not* God. One cannot Realize God by pretending the difference between them does not exist. One can Realize God only by *eliminating* that difference—which is only one's own doing, nevermind how spontaneous and without reason.

Clearly, confusing the sixth and seventh stages is easy to do, for the difference between them is extremely subtle. Yet, this difference is of ultimate significance. The state that Wilber advocates as nondual is really nothing more than the causal Self emerging in the midst of the collapse of the self/other duality. Wilber (2000b) refers to this state as the “Unborn.” To see how this reference could be made is understandable, for the causal Self does exist prior to involution (i.e., prior to being “born” as the various levels of being). However, it does not exist prior to the *Illusion of Relatedness*—nor, therefore, as Real God. Although the “Unborn” is an utterly profound state of reality, its realization is predicated upon the *development*—rather than the *dissolution*—of manifest being. But it is the latter that makes the difference. Ultimately, God-Realization is a matter of being absorbed into that which is truly Unmanifest. The traditions have, at most, only intuited the seventh stage of life. They have not fully *Embodied* it, as is the case with Avatar Adi Da. This is precisely why Avatar Adi Da is the unique and only means to seventh stage God-Realization—for He *Is* That Very Reality which is to be Realized.

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Footnotes

¹This sequence of S/self structure is summarized in Wilber (1995, 2000) as follows: *spirit, soul, mind, body, matter*. Avatar Adi Da (2001a) agrees with this five-tier structure overall. However, there is a significant difference in the two schemas. He depicts this sequence as consisting of the following levels of being: *causal, subtle, mental, etheric, and gross*. Indeed, Avatar Adi Da indicates that there are *three* basic tiers overall, as the subtle actually subsumes the mental and etheric within it. Structurally, there is a significant difference between the two schemas, for the emotions (i.e., etheric level) are omitted in Wilber's model, while the levels of "body" and "matter" are differentiated into the two lowest levels instead. As a way of clarifying what Wilber means by his nomenclature, a somewhat simplistic correlation can be drawn between these levels of being and certain domains of science: matter represents physics and geology; body represents chemistry and biology; and mind represents psychology and sociology. Unfortunately, at this time science has no correlates for the subtle and causal levels of being (i.e., soul and spirit). The schema of these levels of being relates to Avatar Adi Da's revelation of the seven stages of life as follows: the first three stages of life conform to the gross, etheric, and lower mental levels, respectively; the fourth stage of life is a transitional state between the lower and higher levels; the fifth stage of life conforms to the higher mind of the subtle level; and the sixth stage of life conforms to the primal Self of the causal level. The seventh stage of life subsumes them all as the inherent Substance and Source-Condition of Existence.

²For a fuller account of the S/self, especially as it relates to the ego, see Daniels (2003a, b).

³However, note that even in being "lesser," the states of spiritual attainment emulated here are profound and exalted levels of being and should not be dismissed or taken lightly. Although they fall short of the most profound level of Enlightenment—"Radical" Non-Dualism and the seventh stage of life—they, nonetheless, represent extraordinary states of awareness, far exceeding those attained by the vast majority of humanity at this time. Indeed, the remarkable few capable of attaining these stages of life represent an enormous boon to humanity, which is so critical at this stage of evolution. These levels of "lesser" enlightenment are advocated in the recent works of numerous authors—for example, Cohen (2002), Chopra (1995), and Beck & Cowan (1996).

⁴For a fuller treatment of these aspects of the seventh stage of life, see Adi Da (2000b, 2001a).

⁵These may be easily confused for one another. Indeed, Cohen and Wilber give this example: "You really, really, really need to let go of self and egoic self-esteem altogether. And the problem is that therapists... want to hold onto the egoic

self-contraction and make it feel good about itself... [Yet] as one goes deeper and deeper into the process of transformation, it gradually becomes clear what a daunting foe the ego really is, and what a poison narcissism is" (2002, pp. 45-46). However, although these precepts sound similar to the revelation of Avatar Adi Da, they are not actually situated in the context of the seventh stage of life, precisely because they do not take into account the Illusion of Relatedness. Rather, they advocate the *evolution* of Enlightenment, which only ends up making God into a *goal* of spiritual practice—rather than an ongoing, present relationship of worship and devotion. This approach to Enlightenment is what Avatar Adi Da calls either *Emanationism* or *Transcendentalism*. For a fuller treatment of these different approaches to spiritual awareness and awakening, see Adi Da (2000b) and Daniels (2002).

⁶According to Avatar Adi Da's (2000b, 2001a) schema of development, the right side of the heart is the anatomical reference point for both the sixth stage of life and the causal Self—which are ultimately subsumed within the anatomical reference point of the seventh stage of life: *amrita nadi*.

⁷To this point, all spiritual masters have necessarily worked within the cultural constraints imposed by their particular time and place. Only in the last half of the twentieth century has technology and affluence allowed for the creation of a true world community. Consequently, the conditions have only recently occurred whereby the provincialism of local customs and loyalties could be overcome and the Great Tradition consummated in a single, all-inclusive revelation. Avatar Adi Da has Incarnated precisely for the fulfillment of this purpose (see Lee, 2003).

⁸Note that Wilber has sought to distance himself from the criticism that his theory is linear by employing the imagery of a "river" to replace that of the "ladder". Although this more "watery" metaphor may appear to have some similarity to that of the ocean, Wilber's use of the river is in no way the same. The metaphor of the river is employed to suggest the "flux" and "fluidity" of development—over against that of a rigidly linear course. Wilber has chosen the river to suggest the "*flow*" of development (that it courses through many eddies and cross currents)—not its "*Source*" or "*Substance*." If the rungs of the ladder could be conceived of as being in flux or fluid, then it would serve the exact same purpose as that of the river—and the situation would remain essentially the same: a ladder (i.e., "river") floating in the ocean.

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