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# The Trans/Trans Fallacy and the Dichotomy Debate

*Burton Daniels*

This paper presents an integration of transpersonal structural theory. It is claimed that a “dichotomy debate” is currently taking place within transpersonal psychology, which involves what Wilber has called the “pre/trans fallacy” (1993) and the “ascender/descender debate” (1995). The pre/trans fallacy states that early, prepersonal life experiences are confused for transpersonal experiences of higher consciousness. Yet Grof (1985, 2000) and Washburn (1995) contend that early, *prenatal*, life experiences are legitimate sources of transpersonal experience, and can be thought of as the presence of *deeper* consciousness. Consequently, it is suggested that confusing prepersonal life experiences for prenatal life experiences—as well as preferring higher stages over deeper stages of transpersonal consciousness—commits the “trans/trans fallacy.” Finally, it is claimed that Avatar Adi Da’s (1997, McDonnell, 1997) spiritual revelation provides the missing link whereby transpersonal structural theory can be integrated: the “conjoining” of the prenatal and prepersonal selves.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty for transpersonal psychology at this time is that it is embroiled in a dispute that can be described as follows: a “dichotomy debate.” Actually, dichotomy debates are taking place all throughout society, among all kinds of people and within all types of professions. A dichotomy debate can be described as follows: taking one end of a particular continuum and arguing on its behalf—to the *exclusion* of its polar opposite (if not, indeed, some other aspect of the continuum). However, because the opposite end (or other aspect) still actually *exists*, one is committed to fabricating some sort of alternative to it, to account for it—while yet denying it exists all the while. Unfortunately, dichotomy debates all too often form the basis of academic argument, where participants only end up working their own side of the street.<sup>1</sup>

A troublesome dichotomy debate currently at issue within the field of transpersonal psychology has been characterized by Wilber in two ways: the “pre/trans fallacy” (1993), and the “ascender/descender debate” (1995). In this debate (and fallacy), Wilber claims that prior periods of development are confused for higher periods of development. In other words, most developmental theories fail to appreciate the *integral* nature of reality. *Both* sides of the debate are necessary for the overall process to occur (Puhakka, 1998). To choose

one over the other is simply a mistaken notion, one that can exist only as an exclusive attachment or preference for one over the other. Either way is a grievous mistake, necessarily committing individuals to a partial understanding of reality.

Wilber puts the difficulty this way:

The great dualism of all dualisms, I have suggested, is between “this world” and an “other world.” It has infected our spirituality, our philosophy, our science; it runs as equally through the repressive Ascenders who wish only the “other world” of eternal release, as through the shadow-hugging Descenders, proper troglodytes each and all, who want salvation solely in the passing glories of “this world.” It slices through every Age of Enlightenment with its upward-yearning Reason and every Romantic reaction that seeks instead to explore every downward-turning darkness and depth. It governs where we seek our salvation, and which “world” we will ignore or destroy in order to get it.... It is the cause of bitter, bitter acrimony between the two camps, with each formally accusing the other of being the epitome and essence of *evil* (literally).... And they are both right. Or, we might say, they are both half right and half wrong. (1995, pp. 345-346)

Wilber suggests that the positions represented here are untenable and essentially based on mistaken notions about what it means for the individual to develop and grow. Wilber states that an immense, all-inclusive hierarchy (i.e., *holarchy*) outlines the various possible levels of being. He maintains that the developmental purpose of human beings is to ascend and evolve—by integrating and enfolding the various levels of being as they go along. Consequently, the individual is thought to scale a great “ladder” of being, in which her/his various levels spread out in an ascending continuum overhead, reaching ever higher into lofty states of awareness and consciousness.

However, others contend that the reverse is actually the case (Washburn, 1995; Grof, 1985, 2000): the developmental purpose of human beings is to *descend* and *recover* lost aspects of themselves somehow jettisoned in the process of their coming into being. Thus, in the process of growth, the individual invariably *loses* aspects of his/her being (perhaps due to repression, if not some form of dissociation). Consequently, the purpose of individuals is to “heal” these divisive wounds and, in the process, recover those aspects of being that have been “split off” from awareness—again, integrating their various levels of being as they go along. In so doing, the individual actually *regains* the original and pristine states of consciousness buried deep within, from which they are otherwise estranged.

The essential dynamic of the dichotomy debate could perhaps be put this way: *one person's apex is another person's apogee*. The two exist diametrically opposed to one another, heading in opposite directions, in fact. Yet, no matter how at odds they might be, they can never escape the fact that each inheres significantly in the other. Certain aspects of each are as true for one as for the other. Nonetheless, reconciling the dispute is not easy to do. Certain aspects of their positions are also unacceptable. Perhaps better said, each side of the dichotomy debate is *threatening* to the other, for good reason: it represents the antithesis—and, therefore, annihilation—of the other. As a result, they end up mortal enemies, utterly at cross-purposes to one another. This explains a good deal of the debate currently taking place in transpersonal psychology.

To address this issue, a review of the debate is offered, focusing on those theorists who most exemplify its dynamics. Most of the notable insights have come from a handful of theorists already identified in a previous review (Washburn, 1995), in which their

specific contributions have been acknowledged: Jung, Maslow, Assagioli, Grof, and Wilber.

Indeed, Washburn is also a significant contributor to the debate and compares the positions of the participants this way:

Similar to the views of Jung, Grof, and Levin,<sup>2</sup> the view presented here is one that postulates the existence of an original dynamic, creative, spontaneous source out of which the ego emerges, from which the ego then becomes estranged, to which, during the stages of ego transcendence, the ego returns, and with which, ultimately, the ego is integrated. Jung, Grof, Levin, and I differ in the specific ways in which we describe the basic source of the ego's existence and the ego's spiral journey of departure from and higher return to this source; nevertheless, the underlying paradigm is substantially the same. Basically, I think Wilber loses sight of the transpersonal potentials of the deep unconscious and consequently mistakenly conceives of the course of (ontogenetic) development as a straight ascent to higher levels rather than as a spiral loop that, after departing from origins, bends back through origins on the way to transpersonal integration. (1995, p. 4)

In other words, whereas Wilber advocates ascending to “higher” consciousness (a view extending the basic position of Maslow), Jung, Grof, and Washburn (not to mention Assagioli, in a manner of speaking) advocate descending to “deeper” consciousness. However, neither side represents a more accurate portrayal of consciousness, because both are actually two sides of the same reality. Perhaps better said, the two are not properly conceived of as *alternatives* to one another. Rather, the essential dynamics of existence encompass them both. Indeed, “an essential task for transpersonal theory will be to set Wilber's paradigm in dialogue with those of Grof (1985) and Washburn (1995), currently the two most substantial alternatives to Wilber's paradigm” (Kelly, 1998, p. 128). At present, the respective positions can be contrasted as follows: whereas Washburn/Grof understate the case for the levels of being involving involution and the deeper Self, Wilber overstates the case for the levels of being involving evolution and the higher Self. Indeed, the debate results precisely from the fact that each side defines the transpersonal Self according to whether it is thought of as deeper or higher—and that over against the portion of the individual typically referred

to as the lower self. Consequently, the amalgam of lower self and deeper Self can be best indicated by the following nomenclature: *the S/self*.

However, this dichotomy does not fully encompass the debate. An important piece is left out. Although Wilber, Washburn, and Grof engage in an exhaustive review of transpersonal and spiritual literature, they do not include a specific spiritual master whose revelation contributes significantly to the discussion: The Ruchira Avatar, Adi Da Samraj. Nonetheless, of equal importance to the notion of the Dynamic Ground and involution and evolution is Avatar Adi Da's (1997, McDonnell, 1997) revelation on the *conjoining* of the deeper and gross personalities (i.e., deeper and lower S/self). This conjoining is the link that closes the gap between the positions of Wilber and Washburn/Grof. Without this link, there is no basis for a reconciliation of their positions—which only leaves transpersonal psychology embroiled in a seemingly intractable argument over provincialism and perennialism (Ferrer, 2000). Indeed, at times, their differences seem almost acrimonious. It is precisely this distinction (and rift) in transpersonal psychology that the present work is intended to overcome.

### The Trans/Trans Fallacy

Wilber's (1995, 2000) account of human development can be seen to elaborate upon and offer further refinements to the peak experiences at the top of Maslow's (1964, 1971) need hierarchy. His spectrum theory of consciousness—the nesting of various levels within a hierarchy—also has a strong correlation with an arrangement in consciousness posited by Advaita Vedanta (Deutsche, 1966) and Mahayana Buddhism (Suzuki, 1968; Conze, 1962). In these spiritual traditions, the vertical 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 involving several levels (or else “sheaths”) of being. In other words, reality most fundamentally exists as an involution/evolution hierarchy: whereas involution indicates preexisting states of deeper consciousness, evolution *initiates* states of higher consciousness presently coming into being.

In this sacred tradition, human beings are thought to descend through a sequence of causal, subtle, and vital manifestations as they enter the material realm of substantive being. From there, one's spiritual objective

is to retrace one's steps and return through this chain, ascending and recovering the lost elements of their compound being that have been jettisoned, or else rendered unconscious, along the way. In involution, each level is utterly pertinent to every other level, subsuming the next descending level that has, itself, passed *through* each of the others along the way.

Wilber explains the progression this way:

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. . . . In other words, each evolutionary unfolding transcends but includes its predecessor(s), with Spirit transcending and including absolutely everything. (1999, p. 10)

This process has been called the Great Path of Return by Avatar Adi Da (2000b, in press). As can be seen, the compound human is composed of five fundamental levels (or “sheaths”) of being.<sup>3</sup> Evolution could be thought of as occurring when the lower levels integrate into a single, unified whole. As a result, an opening to higher consciousness is awakened. In passing through this portal, individuals are inexplicably transformed into the very spiritual levels of being that preceded them as the deeper Self. The experience of the higher levels is ineffable and transcendental to ordinary awareness, and generally said to be utterly and exquisitely blissful—although visitations to these realms, without proper preparation, can be intensely painful and terrifying as well.

Overall, Wilber sees the progress of evolution as something like a rubber ball, bouncing back up the same trajectory outlined in the course of involution. However, the linearity of this position presents a problem for evolution, in as much as simply moving “back up the ladder” of prior involution and descent is

untenable. In fact, numerous difficulties attend one's rising up through the hierarchy, starting from the very beginning with birth (Kelly, 1998; Rothberg, 1998). Repression is practically the first obstacle to greet individuals as they begin their ascent, whereby they jettison *further* aspects of self to join those already lost in involution. Precisely because of the enormous difficulties the self encounters as it struggles with incarnation, one cannot simply "recover" the self and retrace through evolution their prior steps of involution. The point of ascent commonly attained by humanity—the personal, self-conscious self—is only tentatively affiliated with the involuted levels of being, given that much of the evolved self has been lost to repression. In fact, by this time, the evolved levels have very little to do with the involuted levels at all. Indeed, these levels have come ever more "undone" the further evolution has proceeded.

Consequently, the real question for Wilber's theory is this: How does the self *get* to the position where it can enter the transpersonal realm of higher consciousness, if the very involuted rungs—that is, vital, etheric, mental—upon which it must climb are something *from* which it is repressed? Perhaps better said, why did we leave the involuted levels of being in the *first* place? And, therefore, why don't we just leave them *again*, as soon as we recover them? Everything about repression indicates that we have *no* intention of simply climbing back up the involuted ladder—no matter *how* compelling the potential benefits for doing so. In reality, the individual wants no part of development or evolution. The very nature of humanity is to enter into the process of growth and maturity kicking and screaming—as parents guiding their child's development will surely attest (e.g., "terrible twos," "adolescent angst").

In fact, the very nature of the psyche acts as an impediment to evolution. Grof suggests that this greatly impacts things:

Finally, I should mention Wilber's emphasis on linearity and on the radical difference between prephenomena and transphenomena (prepersonal versus transpersonal, or preegoic versus postegoic). As much as I agree with him in principle, the absoluteness of his statements seems to me too extreme. The psyche has a multidimensional, holographic nature, and using a linear model to describe it will produce distortions and inaccuracies.... My own observations suggest that, as consciousness evolution proceeds from the centauric to

the subtle realms and beyond it, it does not follow a linear trajectory, but in a sense enfolds into itself. (1985, p. 137)

However, Wilber does not see this criticism as a difficulty with his model and has sought to assuage Grof's concerns in a number of ways. But most of these efforts have been unsuccessful (see Wilber, 1996; Grof, 1996), as Wilber's comments on linearity are actually beside the point to answering Grof's concerns. The context in which Grof is using the term linearity (and, therefore, "enfold") is entirely different from that of Wilber. Nonetheless, their dispute can be easily resolved by making use of nomenclature already laid out in the pre/trans fallacy. In countering Grof's claims regarding the interpenetrated nature of reality, such that individuals are seemingly transposed to states of superconsciousness the deeper into their unconscious they delve, Wilber describes the pre/trans fallacy this way:

Not a single prepersonal structure can itself, in itself, generate intrinsic transpersonal awareness, but it can become the object, so to speak, of transpersonal consciousness, and thus be "reentered" and "reworked," and it then becomes a type of used *vehicle* of transpersonal awareness, but never its *source*. The pre/trans fallacy, however occasionally paradoxical, remains firmly in place. (1995, p. 743)

However, in this passage, Wilber has side-stepped the nature of the transpersonal Self that Grof has proposed. Although his comments are true enough, they do not address the nature of the transpersonal Self as Grof intends it. Grof and Wilber each conceive of the transpersonal Self in different ways. Grof's schema involves a triphasic S/self, taking place on three levels: *transpersonal*, *perinatal*, *personal*. Wilber's schema, on the other hand, involves a triphasic self taking place on a *different* three levels: *prepersonal*, *personal*, *transpersonal*. In other words, their dispute comes down to a simple misunderstanding: *the two schemas do not match*. The transpersonal Self of Grof is *pre-perinatal*—that is to say, *pre-prepersonal*. Although Wilber rightly states that the prepersonal self has no transpersonal qualities (at least in and of itself), Grof is suggesting that another aspect of self *altogether* is transpersonal—that which is prenatal.

Wilber claims that the transpersonal attributes of



the higher Self arise and exclusively reside in the *post-personal* domain, which forms the ascending end of his triphasic self. In other words, their controversy can be put this way: they see the transpersonal Self as if book-ends, on opposite ends of one's life—either prior to birth or else subsequent to adulthood (i.e., one's present developmental status, in most cases). Consequently they are each talking about the transpersonal Self in two entirely different ways, at cross-purposes to one another. As a result, whereas Wilber sees Grof as committing the pre/trans fallacy, Wilber can rightly be seen as committing the “trans/trans” fallacy—applying the attributes of transpersonal Self solely to the evolution of higher consciousness, while excluding entirely the involution of deeper consciousness.

These two schemas can be contrasted as follows

TIME OF DEVELOPMENT	GROF	WILBER
before birth	transpersonal	
birth	perinatal	
1-7 years	personal	prepersonal
7-21+ years	personal	personal
beyond adult	transpersonal	

Obviously, the question for their schemas is this: How can the transpersonal realm both be *before* birth and *beyond* adulthood? As mentioned, this ambiguity has become a troublesome dichotomy debate for transpersonal psychology in which the deeper and higher Selves are confused for one another. Nonetheless, given Grof's use of nomenclature, a clarification is possible. It is suggested that the term “transpersonal” should be used exclusively for the deeper Self, as it applies to the entire range of involution—causal, subtle, mental, etheric, and vital levels of being; while the terms “prepersonal” and “personal” should be used exclusively for the lower self, as it applies to the evolved levels of vital, etheric, and mental being. In addition, “perinatal” should be used as is already generally agreed upon—the period of transition involving birth.

However, Wilber's depiction of the transpersonal

Self obviously has relevant applications as well. Wilber maintains that the transpersonal Self is actually the higher Self about to come into being. Consequently, Wilber's use of the term “transpersonal,” although phenomenologically appropriate enough (as can also be said of Grof's usage), nonetheless, seems out of place in comparison. Therefore, more appropriate nomenclature is required. It is suggested here that the subtle and causal aspects of one's levels of higher Self should be referred to as “transcendental.”<sup>4</sup> It is precisely in the sense of transcendence that Wilber speaks of entering the higher stages of evolution. In sum, whereas the preexisting deeper Self structure of one's involuted levels of being is most properly thought of as *transpersonal*, that is to say, extending beyond the personal (and prepersonal), the higher Self structure of the evolved levels about to come into being is most properly thought of as *transcendental*, that is to say, extending beyond both the personal *and* transpersonal. In this way, there is no confusing the two.

Consequently, Grof and Wilber's schemas can be combined as follows: Before birth: transpersonal; birth: perinatal: 1–7 years: prepersonal; 7–21 years: personal; and beyond adult: transcendental.

### The Return of the Repressed

At times, Wilber quotes Wordsworth, suggesting that the infant enters the world “trailing clouds of glory” (2000, p. 141), such as the involuted remnants of the deeper Self might be thought to be. However, this is a limited account of the actual state of affairs for the infant. As Grof (1987, 2000) has indicated, the deeper into the repressed memories of infancy one goes, the more full and expansive these “clouds of glory” actually become. This greatly impacts the prospects for one's development. Although Wilber allows for the significance of recovering and repairing infantile repressive states (i.e., “curative spiral”), he does not really appreciate how *far* into “infancy” one must go to really do the job.

It could be said that the individual actually has *two* childhoods, the recovery of *both* being critical to further growth and development. The situation for individuals could be put like this: they are separated and estranged (i.e., repressed) from the involuted levels of being—as a condition of events leading to birth—and become even *further* separated and estranged as they evolve through their present levels of being. Consequently, there are *two* orders of repression—one

for involution and one for evolution—and *both* need repair.<sup>5</sup>

This set of circumstances can be diagrammed as follows (see Figure 1):

Wilber is correct in stating that the individual develops up through evolution (Axis II)—at this point, to the level of rational, self-conscious awareness. However, in doing so, they only *partially* reclaim the axis of the involuted levels (Axis I). A portion of the involuted self remains separated from Axis II, resulting from involuted repression. Further, attenuating this original estrangement, *evolved* repression peels away additional aspects of the self and deposits them into the personal unconscious, creating Axis III in the process. To proceed with further development beyond the mental level, therefore, one must recover aspects from *both* realms of unconsciousness—that which is personal and that which is transpersonal. And, in so doing, one ultimately *returns* to one's prior, involuted substrate—which has been waiting on him/her all the while.

This concept of repression has precedence in contemporary psychoanalysis:

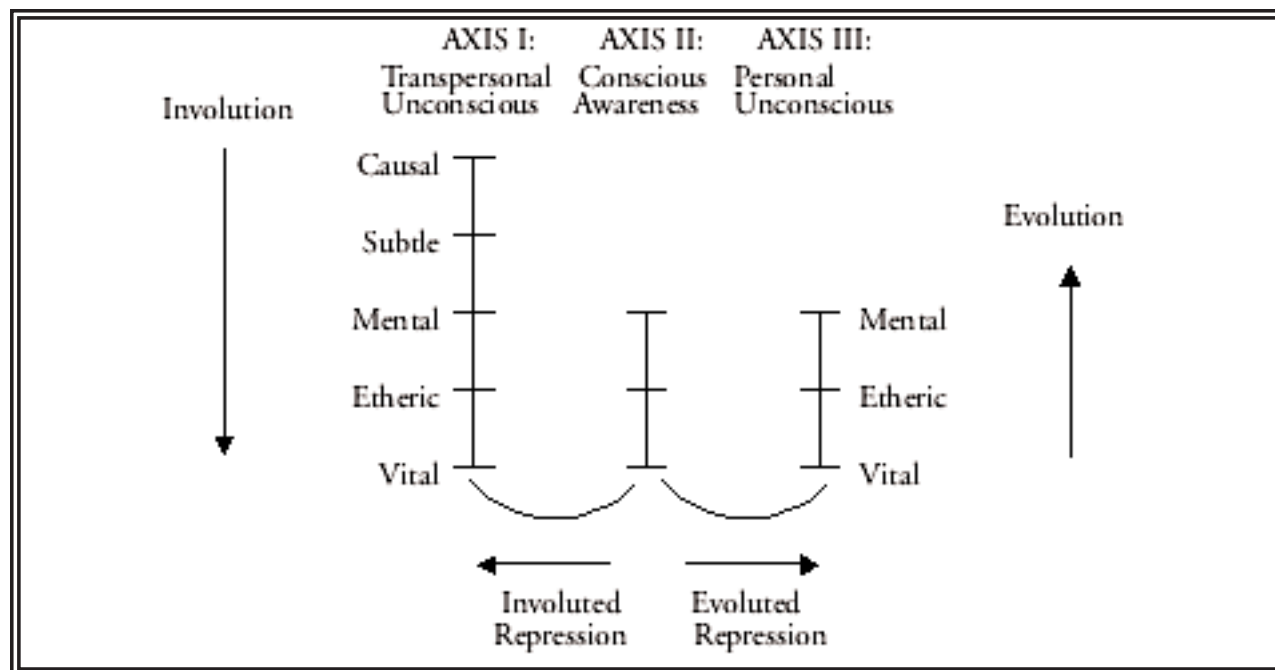
Using Lacanian theory one can distinguish between the ego and the subject. The ego is the small mind-self of Zen Buddhism, while the subject of the unconscious is the Big Mind-Self. This distinction corresponds to a large degree with

Jung's distinction between ego and the self. (Moncayo, 1998, p. 402)

The deeper Self is what comprises the individual's fundamental subjectivity—most of which, however, is diluted in egoic consciousness (Axis II). Yet this situation is unstable, because repressed content—from *both* Axis I and Axis III—continually seep into awareness and could, therefore, be rightly referred to as the “return of the repressed” (Lacan, 1966). As a result, individuals do not merely exist in a conflictual tension between repression and the return of the repressed—they do so from *two* sides. Wilber's “clouds of glory” could be thought of as the return of the repressed that enters into conscious awareness from the transpersonal unconscious, the presence of which created in the process of involution.

But these concurrent processes require a careful reworking to be understood properly. This situation can be best explained by comparing Washburn and Wilber's theories of development. A number of things can be said about Washburn's (1994, 1995) formulations. First of all, except for his “regression in the service of transcendence” (i.e., “U-turn”), his schema is essentially in agreement with that of Wilber. Both indicate that the mental/rational ego goes through an emancipatory process, wherein personal (i.e., “primal”) repression is set in place. Further, both suggest that an integration potentially takes place at this point

Figure 1. The two orders of repression.



in development, whereby the repression is overcome and unconscious material emerges into awareness. The real difference between the two is whether the ego “stays put,” so to speak, and allows the previously repressed material to enter into *its* sphere (i.e., enfold/unfold), and thereby be integrated—or whether the ego “regresses” and enters into the id’s sphere (i.e., return/recover), and thereby becomes integrated. Once it is integrated, however, Washburn and Wilber are, again, essentially in agreement about it: the integrated ego continues its ascent.

However, of course, their disagreement over the U-turn that takes place in Washburn’s regression in the service of transcendence is precisely what makes the difference.<sup>6</sup> Washburn comments on their disagreement this way:

Wilber’s argument against the U-turn notion begs a central question, namely, whether preegoic and transegoic correlates have anything necessary or essential in common.... However, Wilber does not establish this point; he merely assumes it. He offers no argument that refutes the possibility that “pre” and “trans” share common ground or derive from a common source. Accordingly, his argument against the U-turn notion is faulty. It assumes a major point at issue. . . . The spiral view denies that preegoic and transegoic correlates have only illusory affinities . . . and advances the contrary position that these correlates are intimately related, indeed that they reflect the very same potentials at two different levels of expression. (1990, p. 94)

Wilber, however, rejects this claim, replying as follows:

But if this is so—if pre and trans are the same thing at two different levels (a strange notion itself)—it is true in no other area of development that we know. For example, pre-conventional and post conventional moral stages have virtually nothing in common; they are poles apart; they are most definitely *not* “the very same potentials at two different levels of expression.” This would be like saying a Hell’s Angel and Mahatma Gandhi are really doing the same thing from a different angle. Likewise, pre-operational and post-operational (or formal operational) cognitions share virtually no potentials at all, any more than, say, pre-school and graduate school are the same thing seen differently. And similarly in the development of object-relations, motivation, ego development, and interpersonal

relations, the pre stages and the trans (or post) stages have very little in common. The evidence for this is almost overwhelming, so it is rather hard for me [to] see how Washburn states that this view is “unproved and questionable.” (1990, p. 131)

However, Wilber is, in a sense, comparing apples with oranges. The reason he finds Washburn’s position so hard to see is his commitment to the transpersonal Self as being solely a later stage of development (i.e., trans/trans fallacy), as was also the case with his argument against Grof. All of the examples given by Wilber in this passage compare one level of *evolution* to another. Yet (at least in part), Washburn is suggesting that the transpersonal (i.e., transegoic) Self is a component of an entirely different structural process: *involution*. What makes this so difficult to see is that Washburn neither refers to nor conceives of the Dynamic Ground in terms of the involuted levels of being—which, as Wilber rightly points out, is a principle failing of his theory.

Further, Washburn describes the Dynamic Ground as being a part of the *prepersonal* unconscious:

The unconscious that is created by primal repression is the prepersonal collective unconscious, so called because this deepest realm of the unconscious is made up of species-wide powers, potentials, and predispositions that derive from the nonegoic or physicydynamic pole of the psyche as it is repressively organized in “pre-” form.... The first and most basic level is the *Dynamic Ground*, the source of psychic power: libido, energy, spirit. (1995, p. 119)

Consequently, the regression in the service of transcendence and regeneration in spirit that Washburn speaks of involve prepersonal structures of unconsciousness and the overcoming of repression set in place by the prepersonal ego. Indeed, Washburn’s second, and final, stage of regression in the service of transcendence specifically refers to an encounter with the prepersonal unconscious. Nonetheless, he clearly intends to include realities of a truly spiritual nature as part of the Dynamic Ground, defining the prepersonal, psychic powers as follows: “Contrary to the Freudian view, then, according to which spirit is only sublimated libido, the view I am proposing is that libido is repressed spirit” (Washburn, 1995, p. 129).

The real difficulty with Washburn’s position is



twofold: He has conflated the evolved and involuted dimensions of prepersonal, vital being into a single domain, which he calls the Dynamic Ground, and he has conflated the entire continuum of involuted transpersonal being into the involuted *side* of this domain. Although Wilber is entirely correct to point out a violation of the pre/trans fallacy in Washburn's attempt to derive a common source for both preegoic and transegoic (i.e., transcendental) structures, his own commitment to the trans/trans fallacy seems to prevent him from noticing an even graver transgression: Washburn's account of spirit (i.e., transpersonal Self) is an utterly truncated and impoverished affair. Indeed, it is hardly the tip of the iceberg of the involuted levels of being. In a manner of speaking, it is nothing more than the precipice of the descending apex of involution, from which the lowest levels of the deeper Self make their leap into the vital level of evolved being. Referring to the Dynamic Ground as "spiritual," especially given that he affiliates the Dynamic Ground with the prepersonal self, is exceedingly inadequate.

Further, Washburn's account of the process of regeneration in spirit that leads to integration gives a similarly tepid account of what the traditions of spirituality typically refer to as enlightenment. In fact, the enlightenment (i.e., integration) that comes from Washburn's regeneration in spirit closely resembles the level of evolution that Wilber refers to as the centaur:

Integrated people are the true individuals so lauded in existentialist literature.... As we have seen, only a small minority are prophets, saints, or mystical *illuminati*.... The only requirement for attaining integrated existence is that one have an ego that is strong enough to reunite with the Ground. (1995, p. 248)

However, all this does is conflate the different levels of the transcendental Self, ascribing entire ranges of extraordinary spiritual attainment into a kind of postscript to or subset of the self-actualized level of the personal self (ala Maslow). Although Washburn clearly wants to indicate an extraordinary spiritual potential with his concept of the Dynamic Ground and regeneration in spirit, his depiction of the resplendent beings at this stage of development pales in comparison to other accounts offered in the spiritual traditions (see Lee, 1987; Steinberg, 1990). In fact, his depiction hardly enters into the spiritual realms at all.

Nonetheless, if Washburn's position incorporated the entire continuum of the involuted levels of being into his concept of the Dynamic Ground, it would be able to overcome these difficulties and provide a more accurate account of the individual's psychic structure. If Washburn's position were expanded to include the idea that one's progression through involution and evolution results in the formation of dual continua, then it could properly be said that the transpersonal and prepersonal (and personal) S/selves end up existing side by side in precisely the manner Wilber finds so curious. They are, indeed, "the same thing at two different levels," for they participate in the exact same levels of being—mental, etheric, and vital—albeit within their respective continua, either that of involution or that of evolution. In fact, they are actually the "same thing" at *three* different levels, for there are three continua overall (i.e., the three Axes). The continua of transpersonal and personal unconsciousness surround the continuum of conscious awareness like shadows, comprising the eschewed and jettisoned—yet still intimately connected—contents of the personal (and prepersonal) self. Only by understanding these connections between the continua can Wilber and Washburn's theories be reconciled.

### Conjoining the S/self

Wilber's dispute with Washburn comes down to a particular point of contention: whereas Wilber claims we have completely recovered the transpersonal levels of vital, etheric, and mental being along the Great Path of Return, Washburn rightly asserts that the recovery has only been partial thus far, that some "returning" is still left to do. Grof also agrees that a need to recover lost aspects of one's S/self is required in order to reconcile the two stages of separation and alienation. However, the process whereby this might be done is not easy to comprehend. Indeed, it is rife with paradox. As Grof puts it, if individuals go *deep* enough into their unconsciousness, they suddenly "pop" out the other end into *higher* consciousness (i.e., "super"-consciousness). This situation is something like the wormholes that contemporary physicists speculate exist inside black holes, where the gravitation is so immense that the universe itself is sucked into it, such that—somehow—venturing into one suddenly traverses one to the *other side* of the universe.

Perinatal experiences seem to represent an intersection or frontier between the personal and transper-

sonal—a fact reflected in their connection with birth and death, the beginning and end of individual existence. Transpersonal phenomena reveal connections between the individual and the cosmos that seem at present to be beyond comprehension. All we can say in this respect is that, somewhere in the process of perinatal unfolding, a strange qualitative Möbiuslike leap seems to occur in which deep exploration of the individual unconscious turns into a process of experiential adventures in the universe-at-large, involving what can best be described as the superconscious mind. (Grof, 1985, p. 127)

In other words, deeper and higher consciousness are inextricably bound together, for the one leads to the other. Consequently, the idea of return and recovery is really something of a misnomer, for individuals don't have to pursue higher consciousness—*deeper consciousness is already seeking them out*. Thus, the individual need not *literally* “return” and “recover” anything, because the deeper Self is already in the process of emerging from within. Indeed, such a use of language is somewhat misleading. What is really required is that the individual simply submit to (i.e., stop resisting) a process that is already taking place. The process of an already existing emergence is actually the individual's impetus toward evolution. This is precisely why spiritual transmission and the use of altered states of consciousness are so universally recommended for spiritual growth (Kasprow & Scotton, 1999). They facilitate the process.

Wilber occasionally speaks in similar terms:

At each stage of this process of Spirit's return to itself, we—you and I—nonetheless remember, perhaps vaguely, perhaps intensely, that we were once consciously one with the very Divine itself. It is there, this memory trace, in the back of our awareness, pulling and pushing us to realize, to awaken, to remember who and what we always already are. In fact, all things, we might surmise, intuit to one degree or another that their very Ground is Spirit itself. All things are driven, urged, pushed and pulled to manifest this realization. (1997, p. 9)

Consequently, recovery is probably better thought of as reparation. This is what non-linearity (i.e., Grof's “enfold into itself”) really means for the individual: integrating the lower self with the deeper Self as it

emerges. Yet for this to occur, the lower self must maintain its basic structure, thereby enjoining the basic structure of the deeper Self to evolve into that of the higher Self. The lower self provides a kind of platform for the deeper Self, guiding and directing its eventual progress. Indeed, a reciprocal interaction takes place between the two, in which each gives way to the other. Grof puts it this way:

In this process, the individual returns to earlier stages of development, but evaluates them from the point of view of a mature adult. At the same time, he or she becomes consciously aware of certain aspects and qualities of these stages that were implicit, but unrecognized when confronted in the context of linear evolution. (1985, p. 137)

In a manner of speaking, therefore, the relationship between involution and evolution is not so much that of climbing a ladder as it is *zipping a zipper*. The two are separate lines of development that get meshed together in the process of integration, as their shared features fold together. Simply put, “zipping” is how the Great Path of Return *does* its process of return. However, two notable contingencies attenuate this analogy: 1) there are all kinds of “kinks” (e.g., repression) that prevent a smooth meshing of the two, requiring considerable resolution along the way; and 2), more importantly, the evolved side of the zipper is not entirely existent, for the higher Self has yet to emerge. In other words, the higher Self comes into being precisely *because* of the two sides of the zipper joining together. Consequently, the evolved side remains only a partial (i.e., potential) zipper, as the higher Self, so to speak, waits on the joining of its lower and deeper parts.

For this to happen, the process of development must return to its *base*, the vital levels of being, and begin its integrating ascent—zipping the two sides together. However, doing so is not a strictly linear process, as Wilber has so often noted. The zipper can mesh at any point along the way. Nonetheless, it must return to its vital base at some point for the process to be complete. Grof indicates the dynamic at work at this incipient level of development:

The perinatal level of the unconscious thus represents an important intersection between the individual and the collective unconscious, or between traditional psychology and mysticism or transpersonal psychology.... It proved very useful...to pos-

tulate the existence of hypothetical dynamic matrices governing the processes related to the perinatal level of the unconscious and to refer to them as *Basic Perinatal Matrices* (BPM). (1985, p. 100)

There is every indication that the BPM provide the integrative dynamic operating at the vital level—which corresponds to the foundation level referred to by Wilber (1986, 2000) as “fulcrum-0.”<sup>7</sup> The BPM are likely the conduit that connects the involuted and evolved realms at their vital base (Bache, 1996).

However, the BPM are intended by Grof to refer to three entirely separate dynamics of being: the portal between the personal and transpersonal continua of unconsciousness, the memories of a specific sequence of experiences within the birth process, and the prototype for the COEX (Condensed Experience)<sup>8</sup> system of death and rebirth experiences for the individual throughout life. The BPM are primarily a prototype. Grof’s (1975, 1985) research and clinical practice indicate that individuals go through four distinct phases in the birth process, each one of which is intimately related through COEX systems to death and rebirth experiences throughout their life. Yet more than this sequence of experiences is remembered by individual as they are subjected to Grof’s holographic rebirthing techniques. Indeed, extraordinary spiritual motifs and encounters with mythological beings and events are likely to attenuate the actual biographical memories.

Grof sees the motifs and encounters taking place within the BPM as a prototype, linking experiences spread throughout the personal (and prepersonal) and transpersonal domains:

The perinatal unfolding is also frequently associated with various transpersonal elements, such as archetypal visions of the Great Mother or the Terrible Mother Goddess, Hell, Purgatory, Paradise, or Heaven, mythological or historical scenes, identification with animals, and past incarnation experiences.... The perinatal matrices also have specific relations to different aspects of the activities of the Freudian erogenous areas—the oral, anal, urethral, and phallic zones. (1985, p. 101)

These events suggest that there are COEX systems—and, indeed, fulcrums—along *both* the involuted and evolved axes.

Although Wilber (e.g., 1996) criticizes Grof’s con-

cept of the BPM at length for being a prototype, the real issue is actually its being a *portal*. Apparently because of his commitment to the trans/trans fallacy, Wilber has overlooked the fact that the spiritual affiliations of Grof’s BPM are transpersonal in nature, reaching into the involuted domain of the overall COEX system. But, more importantly, what Wilber and Grof have both overlooked is this: *How* can that happen? What is the dynamic by which there *is* a portal between the lower self and the deeper Self—and, more to the point, *where* is it located?

The deeper personality [i.e., deeper Self] is the reincarnate, or the reincarnating personality. Like the gross being, it is also a karmic entity, a product of cosmic exchanges. Just as the body has a karmic destiny by virtue of its lineage, so also the lineage of the deeper personality determines its karmic destiny.... In the birth of any individual this deeper personality conjoins with a gross personality [i.e., lower self], but it functions outside the brain, appearing as tendencies and destinies that it adds to the gross personality. Thus, although this body has inherited many qualities that are like its parents, many other qualities have been demonstrated in the Lifetime of this apparent personality that are nothing like My mother and father.... That deeper personality also has its own destiny, and it has been showing its own signs throughout this life. (Adi Da, 1989, p. 46)

As a result, human infants “conjoin” with the spiritual being of the deeper Self. *Together*, they embark on the journey of one’s life. The gross, lower self is composed of genetic material and any congenital features that might have been formed throughout the gestation period. Soon added to the born human being are the displays of the physical world, impressing upon her/him their necessity and urgency. Therefore, it is the *self* aspect of the S/self that can be thought of as a “tabala rosa.” Yet the deeper Self has been present, too. Indeed, it is *within* the deeper Self that all this impressionable display arises. This experiential bombardment occurs, initially, as a figment of the deeper Self’s imagination—precisely because the lower self hardly even *exists*, at this point, except for the merest filaments of genetics. The one exists within the other—but only for a while, for the lower self quickly begins to “breed” and take over the deeper vehicle (McDonnell, 1997).

Although Grof makes much of the biological birth

process, the conjoining (i.e., portal) can take place at any point during the gestation period, indeed, perhaps not even until well *after* biological birth (which greatly compromises the individual's chances for surviving his/her birth or developing properly). This raises two points that significantly impact the discussion. First, the portal and the prototype of the BPM are *not the same thing*, as the stages of biological birth are very specific and focused in a particular, physical act, while the conjoining of the lower self and deeper Self involves a *transpersonal* act, which can take place at any point along the perinatal continuum. Second, Wilber's conception of involution can be seen to take a startling turn at this point, for the progression of the involuted levels of being *does not quite reach the vital level of being*. This situation has enormous implications for both the BPM and the Great Path of Return.

Avatar Adi Da describes the portal aspect of the BPM, and its relation to the process of birth, as follows:

All right, here comes the definitive statement. [laughter] The ego, or what is traditionally presumed to be an entity, is an activity. The entity is not a "something," but a process. That process is reflected in the causal realm, in the subtle realm, and in the gross realm. The so-called "entity," or process, does not connect with the gross, bodily life of a birth until it begins to "dream," or conceive of, that form.

There is no fixed date for that event because it is not an entity which enters the body. Rather, it is a process of associating with, conceiving of, even hallucinating the gross form. . . . Not everyone enters into association with the physical being at the same point in his or her development.... In general, it does occur within the fetal development state.... It can correspond to conception. It can correspond to the point in which the heart begins to work. It can correspond to the development of the physical body itself around the sixth month, or to the mental accretions in the last three months. The entity may become associated with the body at any of those periods of development. (1997b, p. 53)

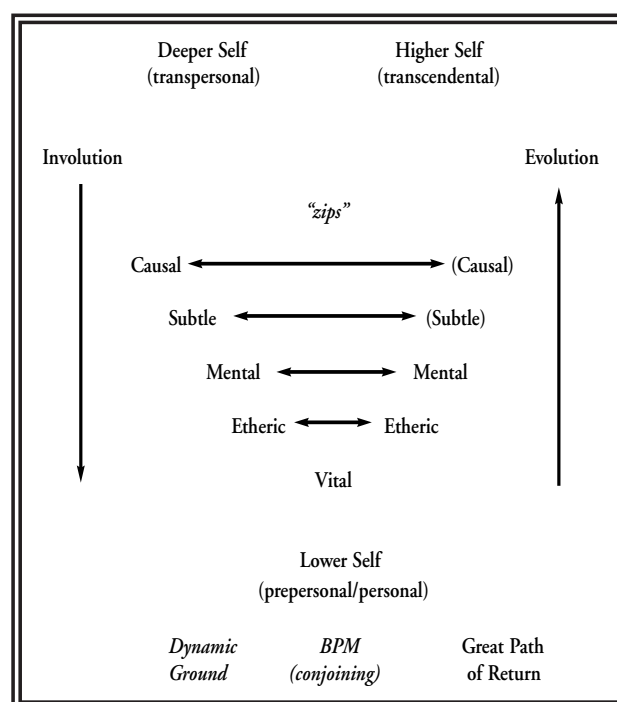
Grof defines the perinatal period as follows: "The prefix *peri-* means literally 'around' or 'near,' and *natal-* translates as 'pertaining to delivery.' It suggests events that immediately precede, are associated with,

or follow biological birth" (1985, p. 435). Therefore, associating the portal of the BPM with the perinatal period is appropriate so long as the events immediately preceding birth include the entire gestation period following conception, and even extend for at least some period beyond the actual birth itself. It is during this "window of opportunity" of the perinatal period that the deeper Self conjoins with the lower self.

However, the deeper Self must be understood to be an entirely separate process (i.e., "entity") from the lower self, *with* whom it conjoins during the perinatal period. The deeper Self includes "everything that is called the 'subtle' dimension of the being and everything that is called the 'causal dimension' of the being" (McDonnell 1997, p. 38). Consequently, the deeper Self includes the entire continuum of involuted levels of being—*except* for the vital. That is to say, the deeper Self includes the causal, subtle, mental, and etheric levels of involuted being. It is this composite that conjoins with the lower self (i.e., gross personality), which includes the vital, etheric, and mental levels of evolved being.

Altogether, these sets of relations can be diagrammed as follows (see Figure 2). As can be seen, confusing the higher Self for the lower self commits the pre/trans fallacy; while confusing the higher Self for the deeper Self commits the trans/trans fallacy.

*Figure 2. The relations between the lower self, the deeper self, and the higher self*





As a portal, the BPM represent the conjoining of the lower self and the deeper Self—itself representing the Dynamic Ground of being. As a prototype, the BPM are best thought of as the initiating instance of a pattern (i.e., the various fulcrums) of death and rebirth that is replicated throughout the Great Path of Return. As can be seen, the two sides exist in tandem. The Dynamic Ground and the Great Path of Return both have their place, surrounding the conjoining interface of the BPM.

### Conclusion

Obviously, these circumstances have significant implications for clinical practice. If the presence of spiritual experience in prepersonal awareness is understood to be the presence of deeper states of consciousness, then there is a possibility for the return of the repressed of the transpersonal unconscious—or what could be called “spiritual emergencies” (Grof, 1985, 2000). In a sense, the positions of Wilber and Washburn/Grof represent a staking out of the territory, with each, in his own way, siding with the emancipatory ego. That is to say, each sees the developmental process from the point of view of the *ego*, as it engages in the arduous ordeal of emancipation and ultimate recovery. Yet, the real significance of the process must be seen from the point of view of the *deeper Self*, trying to regain admittance into the poor circumstances of the rational ego’s limited awareness. The deeper Self is a *living entity unto itself*, with its own awareness and identity (Adi Da, 1997, McDonnell, 1997). In other words, developmental theory presupposes issues of clinical practice. The transpersonal Self has been *injured* in the process of involution. The dynamics taking place in evolution are not merely those of development but also those of healing. Only upon these auspices can further development be engaged (Daniels, 2003a, b).

Grof’s entire purpose is to heal the breach created during birth that allows the transpersonal unconscious to seep into awareness during such emergencies. Ideally, this healing involves a reparation with the transpersonal unconscious, much in the way of Washburn’s “regression in the service of transcendence.” In these cases, spiritual reality emerges into awareness from *prior* psychic structure already present within, as opposed to *higher* psychic structure in the process of being created. Nonetheless, higher psychic

structure in the process of being created presents its own difficulties. Indeed, these realities represent two entirely different situations for the individual, which could, therefore, be thought of as different kinds of spiritual “*emergence-ies*”.

Consequently, Wilber, Washburn, and Grof can each be seen as providing a different piece of the clinical picture:

1. Grof: One must descend through the stages of evolution and return to the initiating breach sustained in birth (i.e., BPM), to heal the trauma inflicted in that process.
2. Washburn: Having thus descended and reunited with the spiritual auspices of the Dynamic Ground (via the conjoining), one must then continue one’s ascent through the stages of evolution.
3. Wilber: In continuing one’s evolution, one must do so by virtue of tracing out the exact same structural dynamics created in the process of involution—which originally produced the Dynamic Ground and, therefore, one’s birth in the first place.

As can be seen, Wilber, Washburn, and Grof have simply split up the territory among them, with each emphasizing the particular continuum (i.e., Axis) he prefers. In other words, the dichotomy debate is extremely insidious and easy to make. The ascension aspect of the individual’s evolution has held much of humanity captive in its allure throughout history, suggesting the primacy of an other-worldly paradise, apart and away from the travails of this world. Traditional explanations of spirituality tend to see this process as an immense hierarchy, with God residing at the top, His intervention into human affairs descending downward—while the individual’s spiritual ordeal is to ascend upward, toward that God pinnacle (e.g., Griffiths, 1991). Consequently, men and women have frequently sought out this reparative succor, while repudiating the pleasures of this world. Those interested in furthering their ambitions to include higher states of consciousness have frequently attempted to climb the ladder of ascent, aspiring to the beckoning realms of consciousness ahead that await us.

On the other hand, the descension aspect of the individual’s involution has beguiled some men and women to forsake the genuine progression of development for levels already acquired, mistaking *them* for realms of highest aspiration (see Wilber, 1995). Lower



levels can, indeed, be misunderstood to be the sole instance of an unspoiled, pristine purity, unsullied by later developments that only serve to corrupt their innocence. However, such romantic notions of undeveloped beauty can exist only as instances of naïveté, at best, simply overlooking the obvious, carnivorous down-side of such increasingly vital realms, departed in the first place precisely because of their unsavory aspects. Such wistful remembrances can be held only in an atmosphere subscribing to the notion that ignorance is bliss, for true understanding, obviously, reveals more complex realities than this.

One must release the deeper Self—to become the higher Self. Yet, the reverse is equally true: one cannot hope to reach the higher Self, if one holds the deeper Self at bay. In psychology, doing the latter is known as denial. On the other hand, preferring an imaginary world over that which is real also has *its* psychological designate: delusion. One way of outlining the difference between ascenders and descenders is their relationships to hierarchy. For the ascender, reality consists of a single hierarchy, headed one-way overhead into the higher stages of life. However, the descender finds this ascent insufficient to account for all aspects of reality and, if this is her/his only choice, prefers *no* hierarchy at all. But, of course, this situation results in nothing but a dichotomy debate. Consequently, to give reality its due, a greater understanding must take place. Manifest reality is actually this: *two* hierarchies, headed in opposite directions. As a result of this basically isometric situation, humanity is in a truly unenviable position: caught in the middle.

However, Wilber has attempted to resolve the dilemma:

In my system...[t]he relation *between* levels is hierarchical, with each senior level transcending and including its juniors, but not vice versa...and that “not vice versa” establishes an *asymmetrical hierarchy of increasing holistic capacity* (which simply means that the senior dimension embraces the junior, but not vice versa, so that the senior is more holistic and encompassing). (2000, p. 31; emphasis in the original)

In other words, Wilber’s spectrum theory actually augments the ascender/descender aspects of the debate, by offering a tertiary option: the “enfolder.” This option suggests that integrating the entire range of involution and evolution in an all-encompassing fold is possible.

In this view, the entire expanse of existence is a single systemic reality, incorporating both tracks of development by virtue of a simple fact: they are really just two sides of the same coin.

Perhaps the easiest way to tease out the distinction between “deeper” and “higher” consciousness is to realize that they are not really so much a distinction in kind as they are a distinction in point of view. In other words, the prior sequence of involuted, transpersonal being is most properly referred to as “deeper,” whereas the subsequent sequence of evolved, transcendental being is most properly referred to as “higher.” However, as it turns out, to *get* higher, one must *go* deeper. It is the *relationship* of the individual to these different realities that is significantly different, depending on whether the Self is conceived of as coming into being before or after the lower self. Therefore, neither aspect of the Self rightly deserves prominence over the other, for both are equally essential to human growth and, perhaps more to the point, both equally inhere in reality. The two are really nothing more than the twin prongs of a single, all-inclusive expanse of Being.

### End Notes

1. For example, in the field of psychoanalysis, the dispute between Freud and Jung is well documented (e.g., Freud & Jung, 1974). Further, Carl Rogers and B.F. Skinner actually engaged in a formal, public debate of their respective positions. Skinner claimed afterwards to have intentionally reinforced Rogers’ behavior during the debate, by smiling and nodding his head at certain intervals—rather than attending to Rogers’ comments and integrating them with his own point of view.

2. The author believes that Levin (1985) does not contribute particularly to this discussion; therefore, his theory is not included.

3. Indeed, the “ego” could be understood as follows: when the Self—in either its sentience or volition aspect—becomes identified with the lower three sheaths, dominated by the body and sensual/perceptual experience. In this case, the Self is no longer able to operate as simple witness consciousness (or even the native intelligence taking place at the level of volition) but, rather, mistakenly sees itself implicated by the interests and concerns of the body/mind and its fundamental imperatives: survival and the pleasure principle. These are the directives governing the operation of

the ego. For a further account of this process, see Daniels (2003a, b).

4. Indeed, the term “Transcendental Self” has been applied by Avatar Adi Da to the very highest instance of the causal Self: “And only the Transcendental Witness-Consciousness, Itself...Is the true “turiya” state, or the true “fourth” state (beyond the three ordinary states, of waking, dreaming, and sleeping). And only the Transcendental Witness-Consciousness, Itself...Is the Domain of the only-by-Me Revealed and Given seventh stage Realization of the True Divine Self, Which Is the Self-Evidently Divine Self-Condition, and Which Is the One and Only True Divine State of “Turiyatita”—“Beyond the ‘fourth’ state,” and, thus Beyond all exclusiveness, and Beyond all bondage to illusions, and Beyond point of view (or egoic separateness) itself, and, therefore, Beyond all conditional efforts, supports, and dependencies” (2000a, p. 204). From this point of view, the Transcendental Self is Realized *prior* to the causal knot that defines the separate being, and pertains exclusively to that level of spirituality, as opposed to the entire range of spiritual being possible.

5. This account addresses the concerns of Wilber’s critics who believe his theory is too linear. For example:

If all levels of the Great Chain manifest the same principles of holarchical integration, why is it possible for *transpersonal* influxes to occur at any lower level of organization...whereas it is impossible for someone at, say, cognitive stage 2 (preop) to experience, again however fleetingly, an influx from cognitive stage 4 (formop)? (Kelly, 1998, p. 122)

However, this confusion is easily resolved. *Two* kinds of transpersonal states exist: involuted and evolved. Those of involution involve the return of the repressed of the deeper Self, whereas those of evolution are actually incipient—indeed, perhaps even *precocious*—developments of the higher Self. *Either* state can appear within the prepersonal and personal levels and is easily confused with the another (i.e., trans/trans fallacy).

6. Wilber’s objection to Washburn’s theory is not so much the *presence* of a U-turn as its *location*. In other words, Wilber has a U-turn in his theory too.

Wilber puts the point of maximum separation from the ultimate Ground at conception, following involution, modeling the entire trajectory of evolu-

tion as the path of return.... Furthermore, he contends, Washburn is led falsely to postulate the state of maximum alienation—i.e., distance from the Ground/Spirit—as occurring at the mental-egoic level. (Goddard, 1997)

Yet both are partly right. Whereas separation and alienation are greatest at birth for the *involved* levels of being, separation and alienation are greatest at the mental-egoic level for the *evolved* levels of being. The two are really just different *stages* of an overall process of separation and alienation.

7. Wilber sees the course of development as taking place throughout a succession of “fulcrums,” each one of which represents a milestone of the “enfolding/unfolding” continuum. Fulcrum-0 begins the ascent and is grounded in the processes of the infant’s birth, ultimately progressing from there through a developmental sequence to the realms of higher consciousness, ultimately represented by the subtle and causal levels of being.

8. The COEX system includes all embedded structures that are products of a primary or core experience, which can be negative or positive. In order for this core experience to be the ground of a COEX system, it must significantly impact the individual. As a result, the COEX system establishes highly defined expectations for and responses to similar experiences. “I coined for them the name COEX systems, which is short for ‘systems of condensed experience’ [COndensed EXperience].... Each COEX has a basic theme that permeates all its layers and represents their common denominator” (Grof, 2000, p. 7).

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