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Primal Spirituality and the Onto/Phylo Fallacy: A Critique of the Claim that Primal Peoples Were/Are Less Spiritually and Socially Developed Than Modern Humans

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Many theorists—including Freud, Habermas and Wilber—have suggested that there are strong parallels between ontogeny and phylogeny, and that the development of the human species has followed the same basic pattern as the development of the individual from birth to adulthood. I discuss this view in relation to archaeological and anthropological knowledge of the world’s “primal peoples.” I look at the spiritual, moral, and social development of primal peoples and find that, in almost every instance, they are more advanced than these theorists suggest, possessing characteristics which only occur—ontogenetically—at the higher “fulcrums” of development. I argue that Wilber’s spectrum model cannot be applied to species development and suggest the basis of a new (non-ontogenetic) model of phylogeny.

The question of whether the world’s “primal peoples”—both those who existed during earlier epochs and those who existed until recent times—are genuinely “spiritual” or not is a hotly contested issue, which has important consequences for transpersonal psychology. The two sides of the argument will be familiar to every reader of Ken Wilber’s works. On the one hand there is what Wilber calls the “Retro-romantic” view, which holds that primal peoples were more “spiritual” than modern human beings. They possessed a strong sense of connection to the cosmos and an awareness of esoteric forces and phenomena, both of which we have lost. With the development of our powerful intellect and strong sense of ego—and especially with the development of modern industrial civilisation—we “fell” away from their higher state of being.

But according to Wilber (e.g., 1995), this is to fall victim to the pre/trans fallacy. Applying his spectrum of consciousness model to phylogenetic development, Wilber argues that primal peoples were at a pre-personal level of consciousness. The hunter-gatherers of the Paleolithic Era belonged to what he calls the typhonic stage of evolution, which is characterised by “magical thinking,” including voodoo practices, taboos, and an animistic worldview. The farmers of the Neolithic era, beginning around 10,000 BCE,

belonged to the mythic stage, where individuals began to realise that magic no longer works and instead projected the existence of elaborate systems of gods, demons, and other forces. At around 2500 BCE the “solar ego stage” began, with the “low egoic” phase lasting until 500 BCE when the current “high ego” began. Only at this stage did human beings become capable of rationality and hypothetico-deductive reasoning; and only at this stage did human beings become capable of experiencing the higher transpersonal levels, including nirvikalpa samadhi itself. Every age has an “average” level of consciousness, and some gifted individuals are able to “jump” from that level to the higher realms, but because their average level was relatively low, earlier human beings could not leap the full height of the spectrum. Even during the mythic stage individuals could only “peak” at the psychic realms, which they attained with the help of shamanic rituals and trances (Wilber, 1981, 1995). Recently, however, Wilber (2000a) has modified this view, and now suggests that “a truly developed shaman in a magical culture, having evolved various postconventional capacities, would be able to authentically experience the transpersonal realms (mostly the psychic, but also, on occasion, *subtle and perhaps causal*)” (p. 146, my italics).

In other words, according to Wilber, primal peoples are actually less spiritual than we, both in the

sense that their average level of consciousness was lower than ours—and therefore further away from the transpersonal spiritual realms—and in the sense that their exceptionally developed individuals could not “leap” as high as we can (or at least far fewer of them were capable of doing so). One of the problems here, Wilber warns us, is that the lower levels of consciousness have superficial similarities with the highest levels. At fulcrum-2, for example, (during the typhonic stage), the individual experiences a state of pre-personal fusion with the world, which is superficially similar to the transpersonal state of oneness that highly developed mystics experience. This pre/trans fallacy is so prevalent, Wilber argues, that we have developed a completely romanticised view of our earlier human cultures. We believe that there was once a golden age (or at least a more golden age) when human beings lived at one with each other and with nature, when there was no war, oppression, selfishness, or environmental destruction. But Wilber takes exactly the reverse view: rather than seeing human history as being shaped by a Fall away from an earlier more pristine condition, he sees human history as a series of “leaps”—or a slow progressive forward movement—propelled by the *atman telos* of evolution (Wilber, 1981). He contends that, like young children, earlier human beings were at the pre-operational stage of cognitive development and a pre-conventional level of morality, and therefore egocentric. According to his model, individual and social attributes such as compassion, democracy, and sexual equality only become possible at fulcrum-5, when formal operational cognition develops. As a consequence, in order to fit his ontogenetic model to phylogeny, he has to contend that earlier human beings lacked these “higher” attributes.

Wilber’s stance here is controversial, and has uncomfortable echoes of the Eurocentric colonial mentality, which saw primal peoples as inferior or backward. Habermas’ model of social evolution (1979) and the Spiral Dynamics model of Beck and Cowan (1996)—both of which relegate primal peoples to a low level of development—are vulnerable to this criticism too. As Kelly (Rothberg and Kelly, 1996) points out, if we say that human beings during the typhonic stage were at a pre-personal level of development, we are close to suggesting that they were not persons at all, even that they were nonhuman. And as he continues:

If so, the same would have to be said for the many

aboriginal cultures encountered by modern, mental-egoic, “rational” cultures capable of formal-operational thinking. Given Wilber’s adoption of the principle of ontogenetic recapitulation, this would hold as well for the very young (or mentally challenged, for that matter) who fail to manifest fully differentiated operational thinking (p. 121).

Similar “progressivist” views were put forward by early neo-colonial thinkers such as Fraser and Comte, both of whom saw the “magical” religions of primal peoples as the “lowest” expression of religion. According to Comte (in Hamilton, 1995) the primitive “fetichistic” stage is transcended—in sequence—by the polytheistic, monotheistic, metaphysical and positive stages. To Fraser (1959), the magical stage was transcended by the religious and the scientific. Freud’s model of phylogenetic development—which he also believed ran parallel with ontogeny—puts “the primitive” at the “narcissism” stage of young children (Freud, 1946).

I am certainly not suggesting that Wilber has a neo-Colonial outlook himself, or accusing him—or Habermas or Beck and Cowan—of fascism. Wilber has written that he eulogises primal tribal societies because they are “literally our roots, our foundations, the basis of all that was to follow...the crucial ground floor upon which so much of history would have to rest” (1996, p. 175). He has also pointed out that, whatever their position on the holarchy, all holons ultimately have “Ground value,” since they are all “a radiant manifestation of Spirit, of Godhead, of Emptiness” (2000b, p. 324). Nevertheless, there is a denigration of primal peoples here which is—I intend to show—unjustified. I believe there is a great deal of evidence suggesting that primal peoples did possess many of the higher characteristics that Wilber believes can only arise at the egoic and post-egoic levels. Or more generally, I believe that in some respects primal tribal cultures reached a higher level of development than modern postindustrial societies. However, above and beyond this, I believe that the primary problem is not a parsimonious view of primal peoples, but the application of ontogeny to phylogeny which *leads to* this parsimonious view. In my opinion, this application is a fallacy, similar to Wilber’s pre/trans fallacy, in the sense that a number of superficial similarities prompt one to take the giant leap to complete identification. Primal peoples seem to possess a simple, undivided consciousness and a strong sense of connection to the natural world; they also seem to have less

developed powers of rationality and intellect, and a less developed sense of individuality and separateness. But to leap from these similarities to the conclusion that their level of consciousness is exactly that of ontogenetic fulcrum-2 or 3, and that they share exactly the same state of pre-egoic fusion which children experience, is unwarranted. Wilber himself recognises that the application of ontogeny to phylogeny is sometimes unfounded, noting that there are “many places that strict onto/phylo parallels break down” (Wilber, 2000a, p. 146), but in my view the matter is much more problematic than he believes.

Before I begin with this, however, I ought to define exactly what (or who) I mean by “primal peoples.” In the sense I am using the term, it refers both to hunter-gatherer tribal and early horticultural peoples who lived during earlier epochs but whose cultures have now disappeared (e.g., the pre-Indo-European inhabitants of Europe and the pre-Semitic inhabitants of the Middle East), and also to tribal peoples whose cultures survived until recent centuries (e.g. Native Americans, Australian Aborigines, traditional Africans). Some writers have warned against inferring from contemporary to prehistoric tribal groups (e.g. Roszak, 1992), and I believe this is justified in the sense that every tribal culture in existence now has been disrupted—and in many cases destroyed—by external influences. There is probably no genuinely primal culture left in the world. The culture of the Native Americans and the Australian Aborigines was disrupted centuries ago, while lesser known peoples such as the Trobriand Islanders, the Muria of India, the Nuer of Africa, the Mbuti (or pygmies) of central Africa, the Andaman islanders and others have suffered the same fate relatively recently.¹ But I believe it is valid to see these peoples *at the times when Europeans first had contact with them (and for a period afterwards)*, as a kind of window through which we can look back at the history of the whole human race. These were cultures that had been unchanged for thousands of years. As the anthropologist Robert Lawlor (1991) writes, for instance,

Traditional archaeological evidence holds that Aboriginal culture has existed in Australia for 60,000 years, but more recent evidence indicates that the period is more like 120,000 or 150,000 years. The Aborigines’ rituals, beliefs and cosmology may represent the deepest collective memory of our race (p. 9).

In any case, what anthropologists tell us of these peo-

ples corresponds very closely to Wilber’s (and Habermas’) depiction of early human beings at the typhonic stage (e.g., their tribal system, hunter-gatherer lifestyle, animistic and magical worldviews). And in fact most scholars accept that archaeological and ethnographic evidence are closely related. As Lenski (1978) wrote, “Comparisons are not only valid but extremely valuable....The similarities are many and basic; the differences are fewer and much less important” (p. 137).

However, I must first say that in some respects I agree with Wilber and Habermas. I believe it’s justifiable to say that primal peoples were at a “pre-rational” level, or at least did not possess rational-logical powers to the same extent that we do. This is a controversial issue in itself, and many “retro-romantics” will take me to task for this, but I believe that the prevalence of magical beliefs and practices, irrational taboos and superstitions amongst primal peoples is clear evidence of this. These show an inability to come to grips with causal mechanisms and logical systems, and a less developed ability to analyse and systematise.

The relative lack of technological and scientific development of primal peoples may also seem to offer some evidence for this. This is problematic, however. It’s true that, apart from a few exceptions, early human beings and primal peoples like the Aborigines and Native Americans had only rudimentary engineering and building skills, rudimentary medical science, and no written language. However, to see Aborigines and Native Americans as “backward” because of their lack of technology ignores the fact that most primal peoples were so well adapted to their environments that they did not actually *need* technology. The lives of hunter-gatherer tribes were actually much easier than those of the horticulturalists and agriculturalists who came after them—even easier, in some respects, than *our* lives. Far from exhausting themselves in their search for food, hunter-gatherers actually spent only 12 to 20 hours per week searching for it (Rudgley, 1993; Sahlins, 1972).² The diet of hunter-gatherers was also extremely healthy. Apart from the small amount of meat they ate (10%–20% of their diet) their diet was practically identical to that of a modern-day vegan, with no dairy products and a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, roots, and nuts, all eaten raw (which nutrition experts tell us is the healthiest way to eat.) This partly explains why most of the skeletons of ancient hunter-gatherers that have been discovered

have been surprisingly large and robust, and show few signs of degenerative diseases and tooth decay (Rudgley, 1998).³

In terms of evolutionary theory, then, we can probably say that primal peoples' low level of technology is largely the result of a lack of survival pressure. After all, why would they *need* to invent the wheel, the plough, or even electricity or computers, when they could live perfectly well without them?

However, despite this there is a good case for accepting Wilber's view that earlier human beings were at a "pre-rational" level of development. (Both he and Habermas believe that hunter-gatherer societies were "preformal," but since the issue of whether Piaget's formal operational cognition exists as a genuine stage is so controversial, I would stop short of this.) In almost every other area, however, Wilber's analysis of early human beings and primal peoples is, I believe, inaccurate—necessarily so, since he is forced to make fallacious judgements in order to hitch his ontogenetic spectrum of consciousness to phylogeny.

Primal Religion

According to Wilber, at the psychic level (fulcrum-7) we experience nature as divine. We sense the presence of brahman in everything—or, as it has elsewhere been called, dharmakaya (Mahayana Buddhism), God (Christian Mysticism), consciousness-force (Sri Aurobindo), or the One (Plotinus). As we've noted, Wilber contends that primal peoples cannot have access to the psychic levels, except as exceptional individuals. A thorough examination of primal cultures, however, strongly suggests that primal peoples in general (not just through a few exceptional individuals) were aware of the presence of "consciousness-force" everywhere around them. They do not simply see nature as Spirit but as an expression of it. Spirit is *in* nature, rather than exclusively identified with it.

The concept of "God" can have two meanings in relation to primal peoples. Although most hunter-gatherer and simple horticultural societies do not conceive of a supreme creator, some do conceive of a "God" who created the world, a personal being who then stepped aside and is no longer involved with his creation. According to Eliade :

Like many celestial Supreme Beings of "primitive" peoples, the High Gods of a great number of African ethnic groups are regarded as creators, all

powerful and benevolent and so forth; but they play a rather insignificant part in the religious life. Being either too distant or too good to need a real cult, they are involved only in cases of great crisis (1967, p. 6). However, "God" can also refer to an animating force which pervades all things. The Iroquois called this *Orenda*, to the Hopi it was *Maasauu*, the Nuer of Africa call it *Kwoth*, the Ufaina of the Amazon call it *Fufaka*, Melanesian peoples refer to it as *Mana*, and so on. Every primal culture without exception has a term for this force. The word the Plains Indians used for "Great Spirit," *Wakataka*, literally means "the force which moves all things." Here a member of the Pawnee tribe describes their "supreme God":

We do not think of *Tirawa* as a person. We think of *Tirawa* as [a power which is] in everything and...moves upon the darkness, the night, and causes her to bring forth the dawn. It is the breath of the new-born dawn (Eliade, 1967, p. 13).

In my view this force is clearly one and the same as brahman or consciousness-force. The important point, again, is that Spirit is *in* nature, rather than actually *being* nature. The passage above invites comparison with any of the passages from the Upanishads which describe the presence of brahman within the manifest world. For example,

Shining, yet hidden, Spirit lives in the cavern. Everything that sways, breathes, opens, closes, lives in Spirit....

Spirit is everywhere, upon the right, upon the left, above, below, behind, in front.

What is the world but Spirit?

(in Happold, 1963, p. 146).

The attempts anthropologists have made to translate primal peoples' terms for "consciousness-force" make this connection clearer. The German anthropologist F. Speiser (speaking of the natives of the New Hebrides) used the term *Lebenskraft* (lifepower); Dr. Pechuel-Loesche (speaking of the Loango of Africa) called it *Potenz*; while another German anthropologist, R. Neuhaus (speaking of the natives of New Guinea) used the term *Seelenstoff* (soulstuff) (Levy-Bruhl, 1965). Perhaps clearest of all though is this description by the British anthropologist J.H. Holmes of what the natives of the Purari Delta in New Guinea called *imunu*. Holmes translates this as "soul" or "living principle," and writes:

[*Imunu*] was associated with everything, nothing arrived apart from it...nothing animate or inanimate

could exist apart from it. It was the soul of things....It was intangible, but like air, wind, it could manifest its presence. It permeated everything that made up life to the people of the Purari Delta....[It was] that which enables everything to exist as we know it, and distinct from other things which, too, exist by it (in Levy-Bruhl, 1965, p. 17). In other words, consciousness-force doesn't just pervade all reality, it is the *source* of all reality—which is exactly what the Upanishads (and the world's other mystical traditions) tell us of brahman.

Wilber might contend that I am falling victim to the pre/trans fallacy here, and say that primal peoples' apparent sense of the divine is the result of their pre-personal fusion with the world. But primal peoples do not, strictly speaking, experience a state of fusion with this force. Although (as we will see in a moment) they recognise that Spirit is the essence of their own being as well, they experience a sense of differentiation between themselves and consciousness-force. They speak of it as something external, something which is "out there" in the world, which they perceive with a degree of subject-object duality. In other words, this is not the same state of pre-egoic fusion with the world which young children experience, but the differentiated experience of the divine of fulcrum-7. Wilber accepts that an individual at the magical stage may have a peak—or peek—experience of the transpersonal realms, but here we appear to be dealing with enduring structures—a permanent, consolidated awareness of the divine.

The third main aspect of primal religion, after the creator God and the consciousness-force, is the presence of spirits. There are, generally, two kinds of spirits: those which are the spirits of dead human beings, and those which have always existed as spirits. These are everywhere; every object and every phenomenon is either inhabited by or connected to a particular spirit. As E.Bolaji Idowu writes of traditional African religion, "there is no area of the earth, no object or creature, which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be inhabited by a spirit" (1975, p. 174). These spirits are not autonomous beings with personalities, like gods—as Idowu writes, "they are more often than not thought of as powers which are almost abstract, as shades or vapours" (pp.173–174). And although to some extent they are conceived as individual forces, they are also seen as an expression of the "Great Spirit." As Evans-Pritchard (1967) notes of the Nuer, "God is not a particular air-spirit but the spirit is a fig-

ure of God....The spirits are not each other but they are God in different figures" (pp. 51–52). (Note here that the term "God" does not refer to the creator God but to God as spirit-force.)

Wilber maintains that this animism is the result of pre-personal fusion, the lack of a clear distinction between subject and object. But I believe that animism is both pre-personal and transpersonal, in the sense that it is the result of a combination of elements associated with both these levels. At the most basic level, primal peoples see all things as alive because they are aware of the Spirit in all things: Spirit makes the world alive. However, as we have noted, their lower level of rationality means that the causal mechanisms by which the natural world operates are not easily comprehensible to them. But they were obliged to find some way of explaining these, and they did this by translating their sense of the general aliveness of things into a belief that phenomena were individually alive with individual spirits, rather than generally alive with a common Spirit. These individual spirits had powers of agency and influence, and could therefore be responsible for events and processes. When a wind suddenly arose, for example, this could be explained as the action of a wind-spirit; when somebody became ill this could be explained as the influence of "evil" spirits. This was, you might say, a distortion of the original sense of Spirit, which would certainly not occur in post-rational spiritual evolution. We should remember, however, that, as Evans-Pritchard (1967) indicates, belief in spirits does not occlude primal peoples' awareness of Spirit itself, since ultimately individual spirits are an expression of the Great Spirit.

Other Spiritual Characteristics

Another characteristic of higher spiritual states is the sense that Spirit is not only out there, pervading the world, but also inside us, as the very essence of our beings. Brahman exists inside us as atman; or as Meister Eckhart puts it, at our deepest essence there is an "inner noble man in whom God's form is stamped, in whom God's seed is sown" (1996, p. 95). When awareness of this divine Self arises, the individual becomes something of a "divine schizophrenic," consisting of two selves: the superficial ego-self and the true, spiritual self, or the "outward" and the "inward" man, as Eckhart called them.

According to Wilber, this identification with inner

divinity only becomes possible at fulcrum-7. We have to first “dis-identify” ourselves with the world, then with the body and then with the ego. But again, although this is clear enough from an ontogenetic perspective, primal peoples do not seem to fit into this framework. This is admittedly not quite so clear from my research, but there seems to be a general recognition that the individual human spirit is in essence divine too, as a part of the great ocean of Spirit which pervades the whole world. In fact, since all natural things are seen as divine in essence, it would be very surprising if this was not the case. As the anthropologist H. Sindima writes of traditional African peoples, for example, “All life—that of people, plants and animals, and the earth—originates and therefore shares an intimate relationship of bondedness with divine life; all life is divine life” (1990, p. 144). Similarly, the Ufaina of the Amazon believe that when a human being is born a small amount of *fufaka* (or Spirit) enters her body. She, and the group to which she belongs, “borrow” it from the total “stock” of Spirit. While she lives, therefore, Spirit is always the essence of her being, and at death it is released and returns to its source (Hildebrand, 1988).

This incidentally works against Wilber’s claim that when individuals at lower levels have peak experiences, the experience will be coloured by and interpreted in terms of their level of development. When individuals at the magic stage experience the transpersonal, they will, he claims, suffer from massive ego-inflation, and believe that only *they* are one with God. This is inevitable since they “cannot take the role of the other and thus realize that all people—in fact, all sentient beings—are equally one with God” (Wilber, 2000a, p.15). But primal peoples’ recognition that “all life is divine life” strongly suggests that this does not apply to their experience of the psychic realms.

Some primal peoples show clear awareness of the “two selves” concept as well. We might take the example of the Australian Aborigines. As we’ve seen, and in common with the other peoples we have looked at so far, their animism, magical thinking, and hunter-gatherer lifestyle locate them squarely at Wilber’s typhonic stage, corresponding to fulcrum-2 or early fulcrum-3. At this stage, according to Wilber, their self-sense should only be associated with their body; there should be no sense of ego and certainly no sense of Spirit. But the aborigines appear to possess both of these simultaneously. Many aboriginal tribes believe

that human beings contain two souls, one of which is the “true soul” and the other of which they call the “trickster.” As the anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner wrote of the Murngin tribe:

One is looked upon as fundamental and real, and is felt to be the true soul....The other is considered a trickster, of little value, and only in a vague way associated with the “true man.” The “shadow soul” causes evil and badness within the personality. The true soul supplies the eternal element to the cultural life of an individual Murngin. It lifts man from the simple profane animal level and allows him to participate fully in the sacred eternal values of the civilisation (in Eliade, 1966, p.185—86).

Another anthropologist who has intensively studied aboriginal culture, Robert Lawlor (1991), describes the “trickster” as the “source of the individualised ego [which] can be characterised as the ego soul. This spirit force is bound to locality; to relationships with wives, husbands and kin relatives; and to material things such as tools and items of apparel” (p. 345). This sounds frighteningly similar to the ego as we understand it—especially when we learn that, as Lawlor also notes, the trickster resents death because it takes it away from these material and emotional attachments. It wants to be immortal, in eternity with its pleasures and possessions. But in the same way that, according to the perennial philosophy (and Wilber), we can only truly find eternity by disidentifying with the ego-self and orienting ourselves around inner Spirit, the aborigines recognise that every soul “must find true immortality in identifying itself with the enduring energy emanating from the celestial realms of the Dreamtime ancestors” (Lawlor, 1991, p. 345). In other words, since the Aboriginal concept of “Dreaming” corresponds roughly (with distortions possibly due to magical thinking) to consciousness-force, we must identify ourselves purely with Spirit.

In the light of this, Fraser’s and Comte’s “progressivist” view of religion does not seem to be justified. If anything, this primal religion is “higher” than the theistic religions which came afterwards. Theistic religion can be seen as a fall away from this direct awareness of the divine. Once theistic religion developed, direct awareness of the divine became confined to a tiny number of mystics. And once again, this contradicts Wilber, who believes that the development of polytheistic and then monotheistic religions—following the “magical” religion of primal peoples—were progressive

steps towards the divine (Wilber, 1981).

In fact, in terms of Wilber's model we are already dealing with impossibilities. I am suggesting that primal peoples existed at two different levels of consciousness simultaneously. Their lack of rationality and their magical thinking locates them at fulcrum-2 (or the early stages of fulcrum-3), but at the same time their awareness of the divine locates them at fulcrum-7. Kelly has noted a similar discrepancy, citing the case of an eight-year-old Hopi girl who seems to inhabit a "transpersonal world space" whilst only having reached—according to Wilber's model—the concrete operational stage (Rothberg & Kelly, 1998).⁴

I believe that Wilber's model works extremely well for ontogeny, and it is clear that ontogenetically this is not possible: as individuals we clearly have to pass through the pre-personal levels of childhood and the egoic levels of maturity before we can stabilise ourselves at the transpersonal levels. But this does not appear to be the case phylogenetically—which suggests that Wilber's spectrum model cannot be applied to species development. This might be compatible with the idea that spirituality is a relatively separate developmental line (e.g., Wilber 2000a), in which case we would have to say that with primal peoples the development of their spiritual line massively outstrips their cognitive line. But this is very problematic, since this direct awareness of the divine is surely related to the psychic *stage* rather than linear development. The lines which Wilber classifies as "spiritual" are care, openness, concern, religious faith, and meditative stages (2000a), but *not* this apprehension of spirit.

Egocentrism

Following Piaget, Wilber suggests that before they reach the operational stages, children are extremely egocentric. Experiments such as Piaget's famous "Swiss mountain scene" (Piaget & Inhelder, 1956), purported to demonstrate that children are unable to see the world from other people's perspective. As a result, they are—according to Piaget and Wilber—incapable of empathy and compassion, since these depend on looking at the world from the perspective of others, and "feeling with" them.

If primal peoples have only reached Wilber's fulcrum-2, corresponding to Piaget's preoperational stage, we would expect them to be similarly egocentric. But the reality could hardly be more different. In fact,

primal peoples are characterised by a pronounced lack of egocentrism. They generally display a strong sense of empathy and compassion for other living beings, and for nature in general. The fact that hunter-gatherers obtain 10 to 20 percent of their food through hunting might seem to contradict this, but most primal peoples approach hunting with great respect and compassion for their prey. Hunting is usually seen as an unfortunate necessity, and the act of killing is never performed with pleasure. Turnbull (1993) describes how, to the Mbuti of Africa, hunting is the "original sin," which occurred when a mythical ancestor killed an antelope and then ate it to conceal his act. Since then, all animals—including human beings—have been condemned to die. Partly because of this philosophy, they are "gentle hunters" who never show "any expression of joy, nor even of pleasure" (p. 7), when they make a catch. They never kill more than they need for one day, since "to kill more than is absolutely necessary would be to heighten the consequences of that original sin and confirm even more firmly their own mortality" (Turnbull, 1993, p. 7). Similarly, Rudgley (1998) compares traditional hunters to modern fox or game hunters and concludes the former are characterised by "a great degree of respect for their quarry and even a pang of regret at having to kill animals at all." There are, he states, "numerous cases of empathy and even reverence for animals among the hunting peoples of northern Canada and elsewhere" (p. 113).

This strong sense of empathy means that primal peoples are reluctant to damage or destroy any natural phenomena. Edward T. Hall (1984) cites the case of an agricultural agent who was sent to work with the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. Through the summer and winter he got along well with them, but when Spring came around their attitude to him suddenly became hostile. The Indians refused to say what the problem was, just that "he just doesn't know certain things" (p. 92). Eventually, however, it emerged that the agent had tried to make them start "early spring plowing," which offended their empathic sense that in spring the earth is pregnant with new life and must be treated gently. In spring, Hall noted, the Indians remove steel shoes from their horses, and refuse to wear European shoes or to use wagons, for fear that they might damage the earth.

Even now there is continual conflict between American Indians and European-American companies who want to "develop" lands which the Indians believe

are sacred. Often the Indians refuse to let mining take place on their reservations, even though this would bring them massive financial benefits. In the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana, for example, it is estimated that there are around 50 billion tons of coal, but despite large scale poverty and unemployment on the reservation, the Indians' empathic sense of the aliveness of nature means that they will not allow mining to take place (Bryan, 1996).

(This is incidentally a reason that I dispute Wilber's view that primal peoples were potentially—apart from their lack of technology—as environmentally destructive as we are. Their awareness of Spirit pervading the whole of nature, their sense of the alive-ness of natural phenomena, and their sense of connection to nature, meant that they had—and have—an extreme reluctance to damage or even interfere with nature. Correspondingly, our lack of connection to and empathy with nature is, I believe, one of the root causes of the ecological crisis. Wilber maintains (in 1995, for example) that ecological awareness can only arise with formal operational cognition, when we become capable of grasping mutual interrelationships. But surely there is another kind of ecological awareness which is nonrational, and which stems from the sense of empathic connection with the natural world—in other words, from direct perceptual awareness and a shared sense of being, rather than from rationality).⁵

The quality of compassion is so central to Aboriginal culture that mothers take care to “teach” it to their children. Often, when a child grabs some food or another object and holds it to its mouth, the mother—or another female relative—pretends to be in need of it, to encourage a spirit of sharing. Similarly, whenever a weak or ill person or animal comes by, the mother makes a point of expressing sympathy for it, and offering it food (Lawlor, 1991). As Lawlor notes, by these means “the child experiences a world in which compassion and pity are dramatically directed towards the temporarily less fortunate. The constant maternal dramatization of compassion in the early years orients a child's emotions toward empathy, support, warmth and generosity” (p. 247).

Egocentrism gives rise to a whole host of negative human traits. The individual is dominated by his or her own needs and desires, and refuses to let the needs of other individuals or of the community as a whole come before them. After all, since he cannot “put himself in other people's shoes,” he cannot understand, or

even be aware of, the needs and desires of others. This leads to behaviour that we associate with greed and selfishness. And according to Piaget and Wilber, for children below the age of 7—at the pre-operational level—this selfishness is inevitable. Children are extremely reluctant to share, and so might eat a whole bag of sweets themselves instead of offering them to their siblings, or throw away toys they are bored with, without thinking that another child might like them.

But we do not find any behaviour resembling this amongst primal peoples. In fact, again, we find the complete opposite: a powerful spirit of reciprocity and sharing, and ethical systems which negate any expression of greed. One of the fundamental cultural differences that made Native Americans unable to adapt to the European way of life was that, whereas Europeans became successful and respected as a result of accumulating wealth for themselves, the Indians gained kudos by distributing wealth. Even the Incas, who shared many negative European traits—such as militarism, patriarchy, and social stratification—possessed a welfare system, the like of which the U.S. and Europe have only seen during the last few decades. Every town had a large number of warehouses, full of provisions and supplies which—except in times in war—would be distributed amongst the poor, the disabled, widows, and the old (Wright, 1992). The same is true of traditional African culture, where to hoard any wealth for oneself, and so to deprive the other members of the community, is regarded as a heinous sin. To traditional Africans, hospitality is a moral imperative; greed breaks the communitarian principles which sustain the universe. As Magesa writes:

What constitutes misuse of the universe? This question can be answered in one word: greed....Greed constitutes the most grievous wrong. Indeed, if there is one word that describes the demands of the ethics of African Religion, sociability (in the sense of hospitality, open-hearted sharing) is that word (1997, p. 62).

This lack of egocentrism and selfishness is probably the main reason that both hunter-gatherer and early horticultural societies are generally completely egalitarian, with no private property or social stratification. Many primal peoples seem to exist in a natural state of communism—a fact which Marx himself recognised, and referred to as “primitive communism.” According to Lenski's statistics in *Human Societies* (1978)—based on the data in Murdock's *Ethnographic Atlas*—only

2% of contemporary hunter-gatherer societies have a class system, while private ownership of land is completely absent in 89% of them (and only “rare” in the other 11%). Similarly, Lenski notes that slavery is “extremely rare” amongst hunter-gatherers (in contrast to “advanced horticultural” societies, 83% of which possess it) and that they tend to have a strikingly democratic system of making decisions. Many societies have nominal chiefs, but their power is usually very limited, and they can easily be deposed if the rest of the group are not satisfied with their leadership. Political decisions are not taken by the chief alone, but are usually “arrived at through informal discussions among the more respected and influential members, typically the heads of families” (Lenski, 1978, p. 125). As Briggs (1970) wrote of the Utku Eskimos of northern Canada, for instance,

The Utku, like other Eskimo bands, have no formal leaders whose authority transcends that of the separate householders. Moreover, cherishing independence of thought and action as a natural prerogative, people tend to look askance at anyone who seems to aspire to tell them what to do. (p. 42)

While as Christopher Boehm (1999) summarises, “This egalitarian approach seems to be universal for foragers who live in small bands that remain nomadic, suggesting considerable antiquity for political egalitarianism” (p. 69).

Some anthropologists have attempted to explain this egalitarianism in terms of socioeconomic factors. For example, Cashdan (1980) suggests that hunter-gatherers are inevitably egalitarian because of their mobile lifestyle, which means that there can only be a very limited amount of private property. Alternatively, Gluckman (1965) suggests that egalitarianism comes from the absence of role-specialisation, which means that no one can have a more important role than anyone else, so that status differences cannot occur. However, it’s difficult to see how equality merely in terms of possessions or social roles should necessarily lead to a lack of leadership, or group decision-making processes. And in any case, egalitarianism is by no means confined to hunter-gatherer societies. There are many horticultural peoples who do not live a mobile lifestyle and do have different social roles, and yet are also completely egalitarian. As Boehm summarises again,

Many other nonliterate [besides hunter-gatherers], people who live in permanent, settled groups that

accumulate food surpluses through agriculture, are quite similar politically [to hunter-gatherers].... These tribesmen lack strong leadership and domination among males, they make their group decisions by consensus and they too exhibit an egalitarian ideology. (p.38)

Democracy and egalitarianism appear somehow *natural* to primal peoples, whether they are hunter-gatherers or simple horticulturalists.

This was another source of problems between Europeans and American Indians. The latter could not comprehend the concept of private ownership of land, or the massive inequalities that ran through European society. As Sitting Bull complained, “The White Man knows how to make everything, but he does not know how to distribute it....The love of possession is a disease with them. They take tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich who rule” (Wright, 1992, p. 344). While the Europeans, for their part, saw the “communism” of the natives as a defect which had prevented them from becoming “civilised.” As Senator Henry Dawes—whose “Dawes Act” attempted to make Amerindians into small-scale landowners—said of the Cherokee Nation in 1887,

There is not a pauper in that nation, and the nation does not owe a dollar....Yet the defect of the system was apparent. They have got as far as they can go, because they hold their land in common....There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilisation. (Wright, 1992, p. 363)

Primal peoples are clearly not, then, egocentric to anything like the degree that children at fulcrums 2 or 3 are. They clearly can take the role of the other—or perhaps more strictly, their less strong sense of ego means that they experience a *shared sense of being* with other holons. Perhaps we are dealing with two different kinds of empathy here, corresponding to the two different kinds of ecological awareness I mentioned earlier. There is a typically “Eurocentric” empathy, which is the result of heightened rationality, and comes from taking the perspective of the other. And there is a typically—more powerful—“primal” kind of empathy, which does not come from role-taking, but from actually *sharing identity* with the other, and actually experiencing its state of being and its suffering or joy.

Again, this suggests that Wilber’s ontogenetic model cannot be applied to phylogeny. In fact, like their awareness of Spirit, primal peoples’ pronounced ability to empathise puts them way above the develop-

mental level which he allocates to them. According to his model, there is a widening circle of identity—and of empathy—which develops as we move through to higher fulcrums. At fulcrum-4 we cease to be completely egocentric, and become sociocentric, identifying with our tribal or social group (in Kohlberg's terms, we move from pre-conventional to conventional morality). At fulcrum-5, our circle of identity and empathy expands to the whole human race; we become worldcentric. At fulcrum-7, the circle widens to include all living beings; and at fulcrum-8, it expands to all reality, all manifestations of Spirit (Wilber, 1995). Based on the above evidence, it seems entirely justifiable to place primal peoples at fulcrum-7, perhaps even higher.

Once again, this makes absolutely no sense in terms of Wilber's model. In terms of Kohlberg's hierarchy of moral development, primal peoples should—according to Wilber—only have a pre-conventional morality, with their sole moral motivation the completely egocentric goal of avoiding punishment and gaining rewards. But they clearly have a much higher level of morality than this. As Magesa indicates above, the main motivation of their morality is not personal or even communal, but universal: to preserve the harmony of the universe. This clearly suggests that, at least in some respects, they possess a post-conventional morality.

Another conundrum to which the above analysis gives rise is the apparent fact that we Europeans are *more* egocentric than primal peoples. This is evident from a number of factors: our much more pronounced desire for status and power and material goods (i.e., greed), the extreme competitiveness of our culture, the emphasis on the individual over the community, social stratification, and—perhaps most emphatically—our lack of empathy with the natural world, our inability to “feel with” nature. According to Wilber's analysis—and those of Habermas and Beck and Cowan—as evolution progresses there should be a decline in egocentrism. And again, in ontogenetic development this is indisputably the case. But equally indisputably, in terms of the development of our species this is not the case. Lenski (1978) has also noted that, rather than showing a forward movement away from savagery and toward greater democracy and humanity, our cultural evolution actually shows a regression in this regard. As he states, “as numerous scholars have noted, it is one of the great ironies of evolution that progress in tech-

nology and social structure is often linked with ethical regress” (p. 176). He noted that the evolution from hunter-gatherer societies to horticultural and then agrarian societies is marked by “the decline in the practice of sharing and the growing acceptance of economic and other kinds of inequality” (Lenski, 1978, p. 176).⁶

I am not trying to turn the tables completely though, by suggesting that our egocentrism is the same as young children's. We might say that there are two different kinds of egocentrism: a pre-egoic level and post-egoic one. The first stems from not having an ego as an organising centre with which to control your desires and impulses and take the perspectives of others; as a result you are dominated by your selfish desires, and can't see beyond them. The second stems from having a sense of ego which is too developed, which is too separate—so separate that it is “walled off” from other human beings and occludes the capacity for empathy. Its separateness also creates a new surge of selfish desires as a compensation for isolation. The ability to take perspectives is possible here, but often it is sacrificed to these powerful egocentric desires. But native peoples, it seems, lie somewhere between these two. They do have a sense of ego, of course (this is another area where I disagree with Wilber), but their egos are less developed than ours. To them the ego is developed enough to act as an organising centre, enabling them to transcend selfish impulses, but is not strong enough to “wall them off” from each other and the world.

Enlightened Social Characteristics

This obviously contrasts with the “progressivist” view of human history put forward by Wilber, Habermas, and Beck and Cowan—and in particular, with Wilber's view of phylogeny as a gradual advancement of the human species, progressing from one fulcrum to the next, and leading to higher levels of cultural and social development.

And there is another persuasive argument against his progressivist view of phylogeny, which is the apparent prevalence of “higher” social and cultural characteristics amongst primal peoples.

According to Wilber, enlightened social characteristics such as nonmilitarism, democracy, and equality can only occur when societies as a whole move to the formal-operational level. This is happening at the present time, and has been since the beginning of the

“high ego” or egoic-rational phase at around 500 BCE. This phase reached its fruition in the sixteenth century, with the rise of the modern state, and gradually began to manifest itself in the “Enlightenment” principles of equality and democracy. It led to the end of slavery, the end of autocratic monarchies, women’s rights, workers’ rights, a decline in militarism, and the like (Wilber, 1995).

Again, since primal peoples are allegedly at a pre-operational stage of cognition, and have only reached fulcrum-2 (or early 3), we would expect to find a complete absence of these characteristics, or at the very least to find that they were as warlike, as socially stratified, and as patriarchal as more recent societies have been. Wilber maintains that this is the case—or at least that, if it is not, this is only because of accidental economic factors. He agrees that patriarchy was absent from hunter-gatherer and simple horticultural societies, for example, but argues that this was a simple consequence of the fact that women had a much more prominent role economically—in fact during both phases they produced around 80% of the food. Patriarchy began, he argues, with the transition from horticultural to agrarian society—in other words, when the plough began to be used, which meant that women began to be excluded from economic life (since working with heavy ploughs would have made them miscarry) (Wilber, 1995). At the same time, he flatly denies that war and inequality were less prevalent amongst these societies.

However, we have already seen that social stratification and inequality were generally absent from primal cultures. Most hunter-gatherer groups, and many sedentary horticultural tribes, were strikingly democratic to a degree which the modern world has only recently begun to reach, and is still some way from equalling. In fact there is a very good case for suggesting that, at least to some extent, the modern concepts of democracy and equality were derived from primal peoples: specifically, from the Native Americans. The authors of the American constitution borrowed their concept of a union of different states from the centuries-old “Six Nations” confederacy of the Iroquois Indians—in fact the idea was actually recommended to the Europeans by a leader of the Six Nations at a treaty signing in 1744, at which Benjamin Franklin was present (Wright, 1992). Similarly, the constitution’s concept of a non-hierarchical society - which was, after all, completely alien to Europe at that

time—was to a large extent inspired by the authors’ observations of Native American societies. In the words of Alvin M. Josephy Jr (1975),

Colonial records show that many of the Indian peoples of the Atlantic seaboard taught the European settlers much with regard to freedom, the dignity of the individual, democracy, representative government, and the right to participate in the settling of one’s affairs. (p. 39)

It’s ironic that, as well as being the originators of modern capitalist democracy, the Iroquois were also partly responsible for modern communism. In 1851 Lewis Henry Morgan published his book *League of the Iroquois*, reporting his anthropological observations of Iroquois society. Both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels read the book, and were inspired by what they saw as an example of a Utopian socialist society. As Engels wrote to Marx, “This gentle constitution is wonderful! There can be no poor and needy....All are free and equal—including the women” (Wright, 1992, p. 276).

The great majority of primal cultures are also strikingly unwarlike.⁷ Lenski (1978) notes, for example, that for hunter-gatherers “the incidence of violence is strikingly low....[W]arfare is uncommon and violence between members of the same group is infrequent” (p. 422). This was also true during the early to middle Neolithic period of history, when simple horticultural societies developed. As Lenksi notes, “there is little evidence of warfare during the early Neolithic. Graves rarely contain weapons and most communities had no walls or other defenses....Later in the Neolithic the picture changed drastically and warfare became increasingly common” (pp. 148–149). The idea that “war is old as humanity” is now disputed by the majority of archaeologists and anthropologists. In *The Origin of War* (1995), for example, J.M.G. van der Dennen surveys over 500 primal peoples, the vast majority of whom he finds to be “highly unwar-like,” with a small proportion who have mild, low-level, or ritualized warfare. Similarly, R. Brian Ferguson (2000) has stated that “the global pattern of actual evidence indicates that war as a regular pattern is a relatively recent development in human history, emerging as our ancestors left the simple, mobile hunter-gatherer phase” (p. 160).

In other words, when we look back at history we do not see a gradual ascent to present day Western democracy, equality, and (relative) nonmilitarism. First of all, we see an earlier time when these qualities were already present. The ancient hunter-gatherers and sim-

ple horticulturalists clearly possessed “enlightened” social characteristics which should only, according to Wilber, manifest themselves at the formal-operational level. Beck and Cowan’s view that from 50,000 to 10,000 years ago—when the “red meme” was dominant—human beings were extremely self-assertive, battling with one another for status and demanding attention and respect, does not hold true. These authors appear to fall for the pernicious—and totally unjustified—myth of prehistoric cave-dwelling “savages” whose lives were a harsh and bleak struggle for survival, and who constantly fought over food and women and used any excuse to bash each other over the head with clubs. Again, there are hints of a kind of neocolonialism at work, with a very Victorian—and very false—view of human history as a slow progression from primitive chaos and ignorance to increased enlightenment and order.

After this early more “idyllic” phase, we see an apparent “Fall” into war, patriarchy, and social stratification (as well as greater egocentrism). And later still—during recent centuries—we see a gradual re-emergence of these “higher” social characteristics.

Summary

To summarise, then, Wilber’s view of prehistoric human beings—and the application of ontogeny to phylogeny that prompts this view—is problematic for the following reasons. Firstly, primal peoples exhibit higher spiritual characteristics, including a) an awareness of Spirit pervading the manifest world, b) an awareness of the inner Spirit or atman, and c) an awareness of the “two selves,” the ego and the divine self. This would paradoxically locate them at fulcrum-7, while their lack of hypothetical-deductive reasoning and their magical thinking locates them—according to Wilber’s model—at fulcrum-2 or 3.

Secondly, primal peoples show no sign of the egocentrism which, according to Wilber and Piaget, children at preoperational levels exhibit. Their “universal” empathy suggests fulcrum-7 or higher, and a post-conventional morality. They experience an intense intersubjectivity, a shared sense of being with other creatures and with the phenomenal world in general, which generates compassion and an ecological sensibility.

Thirdly, primal cultures exhibit enlightened social characteristics, such as democracy and peacefulness, which, according to Wilber, should only emerge at ful-

crum-5, or during the high egoic period.

There is, however, another point I would like to add briefly, which in my view further undermines the application of ontogeny to phylogeny. Following Gebser, Cassirer and Neumann, Wilber suggests that, like young children, the earliest human beings had no sense of separation from their environment, and no sense of subject-object duality. As Wilber (1996) writes, at fulcrum-2 “mind and world are not clearly differentiated, so their characteristics tend to get fused and confused” (1996, p.173). Or as he elsewhere puts it typhonic man would “tend to confuse psychic with external reality, almost as a man does when he dreams” (1981, p. 46). As we saw earlier, this is the basis of Wilber’s interpretation of animism: because of their pre-personal fusion, children and primal people see the whole world as an extension of themselves. But if primal peoples really did confuse internal and external reality, their survival chances would have been drastically impaired. How could you be sure whether things were really there or just images in your mind? If you were out hunting and saw a bear, you might find yourself running after an apparition and throwing your spear into empty space. Or you might see a wolf or a lion and decide that it was probably only an image in your mind, only for your flesh to be ripped to pieces a few seconds later. And even if you knew that there was something real there, in your dream-like state it would be difficult to find the alertness to react to it quickly. The business of keeping yourself alive requires a sense of differentiation between yourself and your environment. Babies live in a state of “pre-personal” fusion with the world, and obviously wouldn’t survive without the help of adults—not just because of their physical inability, but also because of their lack of a sense of subject-object duality.

The truth is probably that, as I have already hinted (e.g., in my discussion of the aboriginal notion of the “two-selves”), early human beings did have a degree of separate-self development, but a smaller degree than ours. The difference between them and later peoples is that the latter developed a sharper and more defined sense of ego. The egos of primal peoples are not so developed that they result in a sense of disassociation from the physical body or from nature, or that individual desires take precedence over communal or universal welfare (or that they possess hypothetical-deductive reasoning powers). However, later human beings—including us moderns—possess what Barfield

describes as “the individual, sharpened, spatially determined consciousness of today” (Wilber, 1981, p. 28) and so do experience a painful sense of separation from the world, from other human beings, and even from our own bodies (and are capable of hypothetical-deductive reasoning). In other words—again in opposition to the application of ontogeny to phylogeny—primal peoples are not at a pre-personal level, but at a *less* developed personal level. And as I suggested earlier, their less developed sense of ego means that whereas we experience a “post-egoic” egocentrism, they exhibit a lack of egocentrism and selfishness.

What we really need, in order to fully substantiate the argument of this essay, are two things. First, we need a different view of spirituality, which could account for the fact that primal peoples are “spiritual” and pre-rational at the same time. (Kelly [1998] has suggested one possibility here, namely that the “psychic” should not be seen as a stage but as “the ground, depth dimension, or ‘implicate order’ of typhonic consciousness” [p. 122].) Second, we need a different view of phylogeny, to replace the ontogeny-based models. I do not have space here to investigate these areas properly, and hope to deal with them in future papers. But I would like to suggest briefly that the basis of a different view of phylogeny should be what the myths of many different cultures describe as a “Fall.” As many of the myths indicate, the “Fall” was precisely the development I referred to earlier: the development of a much stronger and sharper sense of ego in certain human groups. A bare skeleton of a three-stage model of phylogeny might be as follows:

1. The “pre-Fall” period (from the beginnings of the human race to 4000 BCE, and later in many places). This covers both the hunter-gatherer and the simple horticultural phases of human history (or the Paleolithic to the mid Neolithic). During these phases human groups were peaceful, democratic, free from social stratification and private property, highly attuned to the natural world, and nonpatriarchal. The negative aspects of this phase were the lack of understanding of causal relationships—especially in terms of natural phenomena—and the irrationality of superstitions and taboos.

2. The “fallen” period (from around 4000 BCE onward). The “Fall” appears to have begun with certain human groups inhabiting the Middle East and central Asia at this time, whose psyche was apparently transformed by an environmental catastrophe; namely,

a massive process of dessication of previously fertile lands (see DeMeo, 1998, for a discussion of this). Forced to leave their homelands, these peoples—including the Indo-Europeans and the Semites—migrated throughout the Middle East, Europe, and Asia and in this way their “fallen” culture eventually spread to large areas of the globe. The characteristics of this stage include patriarchy, intense warfare, social stratification, a hostile attitude to the human body and nature, theism (both polytheism and monotheism), capitalism, private property, and the like. The Fall also resulted in the increased egocentrism which I mentioned above, and a sharp decline in ecological awareness. Positive aspects of this phase include increased rationality, enabling a transcendence of magical thinking.

This phase corresponds to the change that Lenski (1978) identifies as the shift from simple horticultural society to advanced horticultural. Lenski himself states that this phase began at around 4000 BCE, and as we’ve just noted, his statistics show a sudden increase in private property, patriarchy, war, and belief in an active supreme creator—all of which can be explained in terms of a sudden “ego explosion.” This shift was marked by technological innovations, such as the use of new materials like metal and leather and new crafts such as weaving and pottery (which were very rare amongst simple horticultural societies). These can probably also be explained in terms of an “ego explosion,” as a consequence of the intensified powers of self-reflection and abstract thinking which came with these peoples’ “sharpened” sense of ego (or in Piaget and Wilber’s terms, this would be the beginning of formal-operational cognition). And of course, as technological development progressed further, these advanced horticultural societies gave way to agrarian and then industrial societies.

3. The “trans-Fall” period (16th century onward?). This is the phase that we are moving through at present, corresponding to what Wilber calls the “high egoic” phase. This period features a re-emergence of pre-Fall characteristics on national and global levels, including democracy, equality, nonmilitarism, a healthy acceptance of instincts, a sense of connection to the natural world, increased sense of empathy with other beings, etc. Significantly, however, human beings at this phase retain the positive aspects of the Fall, and are capable of heightened rationality and spirituality at the same time.

Such a model as this dispenses with the need for phylogeny to recapitulate ontogeny and fits more closely with the archaeological and anthropological evidence than Wilber's, Habermas' or Beck and Cowan's, admitting the possibility that, in some respects, primal peoples were more advanced than modern human beings.

For us, spiritual states of being, universal empathy, post-conventional morality and enlightened social characteristics do lie at post-rational or post-egoic levels of development. But this is precisely *because* of our intensely egoic "individual, sharpened, spatially determined consciousness," which entailed a loss of the shared sense of being and intense intersubjectivity of primal peoples. We have to transcend our separate sense of ego in order to regain these characteristics. But primal peoples never developed our intensely egoic consciousness and never lost their shared sense of being, and so for them there is nothing to transcend.

End Notes

1. For example, the culture of the Trobriand Islanders was almost untouched by European influence when the British anthropologist Malinowski studied them during the 1920s. But now most of the islanders are Christians, and have become so distanced from their own traditions that anthropologists from the University of Papua New Guinea have organised projects to help them relearn them. The Muria of India were completely "primal" when the anthropologist W. Elgin lived with them, also during the 1920s. But now over half of them are Hindus, and they are also under assault from Christian missionaries who are determined to spread the gospel to all the world's remaining "unreached" peoples. Even more tragically, only four decades after the publication of Colin Turnbull's *The Forest People*, the rainforest of the Pygmies is being chopped down by European and Japanese lumber firms, and the government of Zaire is pressuring them into giving up the hunter-gatherer way of life and becoming farmers or city dwellers.

2. This still holds true for the Australian Aborigines (at least those who still live as hunter-gatherers); they only spend around 4 hours per day searching for food, and devote the rest of their time to leisure activities, such as music, storytelling, artwork, and being with family and friends (Lawlor, 1991). This fact contradicts Beck and Cowan's (1996) claim that at the pur-

ple level, life was/is largely a matter of subsistence and survival. In fact life only really became "hard" following the advent of agriculture, when people had to work longer and harder, disease was more widespread, diets were not as healthy, and lifespans were shorter (Lawlor, 1991; DeMeo, 1998; Rudgley, 1998).

3. The other main reason for this is that the ancient hunter-gatherers were less vulnerable to disease than later peoples. In fact, until the advances of modern medicine and hygiene during the 19th and 20th centuries, they may well have been less afflicted with disease than any other human beings in history. Many of the diseases to which we are now susceptible arrived when we domesticated animals, who transmitted a whole host of diseases that human beings had never been exposed to before. And later, dairy products increased our exposure to disease even further (Rudgley, 1998, 2000).

4. Kelly also suggests that evidence of telepathy between mother and child conflicts with Wilber's model, since he believes telepathy—and other paranormal abilities—can only arise at the psychic levels. And in connection with this, it is interesting to consider the large amount of evidence suggesting that animals have psychic powers. Sheldrake (2000) puts forward much of this evidence, and suggests that, rather than their lying in wait for us at a higher level of development, we have lost these powers along the way to our present state.

5. It's true that a lack of foresight did sometimes lead to environmental problems for unfallen peoples. Prehistoric animals like the Mammoth, the giant Armadillo of South America, and the pygmy hippopotamus of Cyprus seem to have disappeared as a result of over-hunting or changes to their environment caused by humans. And prehistoric humans seem to have caused some major environmental changes by burning off massive areas of forest or grassland, or overgrazing land (Sheldrake, 1990; Roszak, 1992). Nevertheless, whereas the ideology of our culture promotes environmental destruction, the ideologies and moral systems of most primal cultures encourage respect for nature. Many see themselves as stewards or custodians of the Earth, and perform ceremonies which they believe will maintain cosmic harmony. They also try to maintain harmony through their lifestyles, by not abusing natural phenomena, and showing respect to animals and plants. As Mbiti writes of traditional African religion, man "has to live in

harmony with the universe, obeying the laws of natural, moral and mystical order. If these are unduly disturbed it is man who suffers most” (1975, p. 237). Their sense of the sacredness of nature may not stop primal peoples from unintentionally damaging the environment by over-farming or over-hunting, but it certainly makes them very reluctant to harm their environment in a more direct way, by chopping down trees, ploughing the land, killing animals, and so on.

6. Since Lenski provides us with much of the evidence to support this view, Wilber’s frequent use of Lenski’s statistics to support his *own* views seems puzzling. Lenski’s data in *Human Societies* does generally contradict Wilber’s views. He clearly shows that warfare, social inequality, slavery, and private property are largely absent from both contemporary hunter-gatherer and simple horticultural societies, and become progressively more prevalent in more technologically advanced societies (at least until we reach industrial societies, when they begin to decline). For example, whereas only 2% and 17% of hunter-gatherer and simple horticultural societies have class systems, 54% and 71% of advanced horticultural and then agrarian societies have them. Whereas war is rare or absent in 73% and 41% of hunter-gatherer and simple horticultural societies, it is perpetual in 34% and common in 48% of advanced horticultural societies (Lenski, Lenski & Nolan, 1995). In view of this, Wilber’s use of Lenski’s data has to be selective in order to seem to justify his views. Perhaps the main problem though is that Lenski is referring to *contemporary* examples of these societies, whereas Wilber treats them as historical examples. When Lenski says that war is common in 27% of hunter-gatherer societies, and 10% of them have slavery, this emphatically does *not* mean that 27% of ancient hunter-gatherer societies had war, and 10% had slavery. In fact, given the lack of archaeological evidence for war from the Paleolithic and early Neolithic periods of history, and given the cultural disruption of contemporary hunter-gatherers and simple horticulturalists (and the influence of colonial cultures), we can assume that these figures would be lower still for ancient societies. Of course, as we have seen, Lenski believes that we can usefully *compare* contemporary primal peoples with their historic counterparts, but he never states that his statistics apply equally to historic peoples. A more puzzling matter is where Wilber obtains the statistic—also attributed to Lenski—that 58% of foraging peoples practise (or

practised, according to Wilber) frequent or intermittent warfare (1995, 1996). I can’t locate this statistic in either of my two editions of *Human Societies*. It’s difficult to see how this would be possible when war is absent or rare in 73% of foraging societies.

7. This doesn’t apply to *all* primal peoples, of course. Some primal peoples became much more warlike and socially oppressive through contact with European peoples—for example, the Plains Indians or the Jivaro of central America. In Africa, from around 700 C.E., a number of states developed in reaction to Arabic and European influences—such as Ghana, Mali, Songhai and later the states of the Zulu and Ashanti. These were all relatively warlike, socially stratified and patriarchal (Martin & O’Meara, 1995). But there are also a small minority of primal peoples who appear to have had a high level of warfare, social inequality, and male domination from the beginning. In the Americas, there were three main areas where this was the case: the North-West Pacific, Caribbean MesoAmerica (where the Aztecs and the Maya lived), and Peru (where the Incas lived) (DeMeo, 1998). The reasons for this may have been environmental, or perhaps, as DeMeo (1998) suggests, they were due to a prehistoric migration of groups who were already warlike and socially stratified from Japan and China. In Africa mild warfare, social inequality, and patriarchy spread as a result of the ancient migrations of Bantu-speaking peoples from the southern edge of the Sahara desert (DeMeo, 1998).

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