



9-1-2017

Circular Reasoning Is Not the Uroboros: Rejecting Perennialism as a Psychological Theory

Glenn Hartelius

California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA, USA

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijts-transpersonalstudies>

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#), [Religion Commons](#), [Theory and Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Transpersonal Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hartelius, G. (2017). Circular reasoning is not the uroboros: Rejecting perennialism as a psychological theory. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 36 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.121>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

This Special Topic 2 Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals and Newsletters at Digital Commons @ CIIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Journal of Transpersonal Studies by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CIIS. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@ciis.edu.

Circular Reasoning Is Not the Uroboros: Rejecting Perennialism as a Psychological Theory

Glenn Hartelius

California Institute of Integral Studies
San Francisco, CA, USA

Efforts to present valid evidence for perennialist models do not withstand critical scrutiny. One strategy common to most versions of perennialism points to perceived patterns in reports of spiritual experiences, whether from traditional, clinical, or phenomenological accounts as evidence for such an approach; the shortcoming is that these same patterns are the basis for perennialist premises. Offering one's premises as evidence for their conclusions is circular reasoning, and does not constitute valid support for an idea. Pointing to similarities between reports of spiritual or other transformative experiences is what inspires perennialist models, but is not evidence for their validity. Careful consideration is given to Wilber's use of this and other efforts to support his integral perennialisms, with subsequent consideration of Studstill's mystical pluralism and Taylor's soft perennialism. Perennialist models are considered metaphysical because there does not appear to be any way to obtain independent evidence with which these appealing notions could be validated, and the authors considered here have not achieved effective solutions. However, a review of these three separate approaches reveals some similarities in what may be a genre of perennialist New Age religion.

Keywords: *perennialism, mystical pluralism, soft perennialism, circular reasoning*

Introduced into psychology by Wilber (1975), perennialism has gained a foothold in subdisciplines such as transpersonal psychology. While Wilber's work has received extensive and substantive critique that may disqualify it from use in scholarly contexts (e.g., Ferrer, 2002, 2011; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013; Hartelius, 2015a, 2015b), new versions of perennialist thought continue to be put forward. Some of these, following Wilber, claim to provide evidence for perennialist views. Yet, as with Wilber, these efforts typically rely on circular reasoning to support metaphysical claims, employ boutique descriptions of conventional terms, and overstep bounds of logic and evidence, in service of some version of universalizing truth. This paper will critically review evidence for perennialist views as put forward by Wilber, Studstill, and Taylor, and rebut claims that there is valid evidence for perennialism. In this process, common factors in what appears to be a particular genre of New Age perennialism will be identified.

Wilber's Evidence for Perennialism

Wilber has made various attempts to evade the criticism that his system is metaphysical, yet

careful consideration of what might be called his *integral perennialism*, suggests that the metaphysical speculation at its core may be inseparable from this approach. Using a blend of complex circular reasoning, ideological conviction, and privileged knowledge, his perennialist theories typically offer their premises as evidence for their conclusions. While it is worthwhile to examine reports of subtle phenomena associated with mystical and spiritual experiences, and to consider whether these might prove amenable to some form of crosscultural inquiry that is less encumbered by the assumptions of conventional empiricism (Ferrer, 2009, 2014), integral perennialism is too flawed to credibly serve in this role. Wilber's integral theory, as a creative product of the religious imagination, may prove appealing and inspiring to popular audiences (cf. Hartelius, 2015a), but it should not be advanced as work that meets the standards of scientific scholarship.

Perennialism generally, and Wilber's work in particular, has been the subject of numerous critiques (e.g., Falk, 2009; Ferrer, 1998, 2002, 2009; Rothberg & Kelly, 1998). Prior papers have focused in part on establishing that Wilber's work remains perennialist

in nature despite revision (Hartelius, 2015a, 2015b; Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013). Here I develop the argument that Wilber's integral thought remains an inescapably metaphysical proposition partially obscured by defective approaches to evidence, and hence not a psychology in any formal, scholarly, or scientific sense of the term.

Metaphysics has several meanings. In popular usage it refers to topics such as esoteric teachings, based on an erroneous translation of the term as pointing to that which is transcendent or beyond (meta) the physical; hence, metaphysical bookstores are commonly ones that offer works on magic, the occult, crystal healing, and so forth. This popular etymology is incorrect, since the term derives from *meta ta physica*, referring to one of Aristotle's works that was located after (*meta*) his work entitled, *Physics*; in this meaning, metaphysics refers to the topic of that book, namely statements on being, existence, and first principles (Gifford, 2015). There is also a third relevant definition, in which metaphysics (2015) refers to speculations that cannot be subjected to scientific inquiry or empirical verification—a definition that for most purposes conveniently encompasses the first two. This last definition is the most relevant in demonstrating how integral perennialism necessarily fails as anything beyond an inspiring exercise in meaning making through metaphysical speculation.

Within the field of transpersonal psychology, perennialism (e.g., Wilber, 2000a, 2006) has moved from dominant paradigm (Needleman & Eisenberg, 1987; Rothberg, 1986) to a more contested status (Ferrer, 2011) in the face of critiques that it tries to remedy the Western mind-body split by merely tacking on speculations about a transcendent spiritual dimension (e.g., Ferrer, 2002, 2009). In addition to Ferrer, other critics have claimed that appealing to hidden or undemonstrable causes makes this model unsuitable for scholarship (Hartelius, 2015a), and have pointed out that failure to resolve the Cartesian divide between mind and matter, or subject and object, reduces its usefulness for understanding mystical, spiritual, and other exceptional human experiences (Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013).

Perennialism begins with a conventional objective understanding of the world and attempts to add an interior dimension that fuses conventional psychological development with postulated mystical and spiritual ranges of attainment; it uses this approach for individuals as well as for human cultures (cf. Wilber, 1979, 2000a, 2006). Resolution of these

largely incompatible objective and subjective schemas is proposed by suggesting that they both emerge from a nondual spiritual ultimate that is beyond sensory apprehension; the existence of this nondual ultimate is evidenced mainly by interpreting accounts from various spiritual traditions as if they were all references to this same ultimate, with the numerous differences in their reports attributed to diversities of cultural situation.

Critics have noted that if this ultimate is problematically taken to be the unchanging goal of human spiritual aspiration, regardless of cultural situation, then it has qualities that are consistent with objectivity, even though it is deemed to be the source of both objective and subjective aspects of the world (Hartelius & Ferrer, 2013). One might imagine this as a sandwich model reality: the top slice of bread is the objective physical exterior of the world, as conventionally described by science. Underneath this is a subjective interior—the filling of the sandwich—psychological and spiritual in humans but shared by everything that has an exterior. Yet if one explores the depths of subjectivity one arrives at the bottom slice of bread, the nondual ultimate.

One might say that a perennialist model accepts the common notion that equates objectivity with reality, and then redeems the reality of mind and experience by giving it an objective source: a nondual ultimate. However, this is only achieved by proposing a transcendent universal cause. This move creates the paradoxical idea of an ultimate source that is both objective in nature and beyond the reach of scientific inquiry, and subjects perennialism to valid critiques that it is a metaphysical system rather than a scientific one.

Once his work had been called out as metaphysical, Wilber initiated a series of revisions that could be seen as attempting to retain his method and his conclusions, but evade this critique. However, given that metaphysical speculation supported by circular reasoning and elite perception remains at the heart of Wilber's (2000a, 2006) perennialist model, it seems doubtful that perennialism is possible without such a strategy.

Beginning with experiential realities—sensory, mental, and spiritual—Wilber posited that there were regularities in the way that consciousness developed within individuals and cultures. This proposed pattern was his premise, his proposition, which served as the basis for his conclusion that consciousness emerged into the world from a nondual spiritual ultimate. So far, so

good—much scientific work begins with the detection of possibly meaningful patterns, along with theories of what such a pattern might mean.

However, describing a pattern that is consistent with a particular theory is not enough to demonstrate the veracity of the theory. For example, in 2005, Bobby Henderson sent a tongue-in-cheek letter to the Kansas School Board advocating for the teaching of Flying Spaghetti Monsterism—a theory that the universe was created by an invisible Flying Spaghetti Monster (FSM)—in school curricula as an alternative to evolution and the Christian-inspired theory of *intelligent design* (e.g., Dembski & Colson, 2004; Forrest & Gross, 2007). At the time the Board was under pressure to include intelligent design, and Henderson's letter was designed to illustrate the fact that once you open the academic door to one metaphysical explanation, it becomes difficult to make a case for excluding other explanations that are equally without independent evidence.

One of the pieces of evidence offered by Henderson in his letter demonstrates how simple it is to use a pattern of observable facts as pseudo-evidence for a favored theory. He noted that it was disrespectful to teach his beliefs without wearing the chosen outfit of the FSM—full pirate regalia—and that He (the FSM) would become angry if this were not done. As evidence for this claim he argued that global warming and other natural disasters were caused by a decline in the number of pirates since the 1800s, and offered a graph demonstrating an inverse relationship between the number of pirates in the world (declining) and global average temperatures (rising). While this graph provided evidence that was consistent with Henderson's theory, its intentional absurdity pointed to the weakness of such patterns alone as evidence. Merely showing that there is a pattern of facts that can be interpreted in a way that is consistent with a theory is not valid evidence.

What is required to validate a theory is additional, independent evidence. For example, in a noteworthy coincidence, around the time that Henderson first published his deliberate pseudo-evidence (2005), there was a sudden rise in incidences of piracy in international waters surrounding Somalia. While believers in the FSM might argue with mock sincerity that this was because He had been revealed to the world, this fact offered a unique opportunity to test Henderson's claim. By Henderson's logic, it would be possible to predict that this spike in piracy would cause global average temperatures to fall—

which of course they did not. The point here is that in order to validate the relationship between a pattern of observed evidence and some theory about what that pattern might mean, it is necessary to formulate and test predictions based on the associated theory.

Of course, Wilber has offered evidence for his model—evidence that comes directly from empirical descriptions of experiential realities in the literatures of psychology and spiritual traditions. The shortcoming of this evidence is that it is identical with the material that served as the basis for his premise. In place of obtaining separate evidence, Wilber has taken the pattern he claimed to find in various facts (his premise) and offered it as evidence for his conclusion—a model of unfolding consciousness arising from a nondual ultimate. As noted, this is circular reasoning, a process that does not generate evidence no matter how many times it goes round and round.

Circular reasoning is a shortcoming, an obvious and serious defect in evidence—one that deserves to be faced soberly. All of the evidence typically offered for perennialism—experiential reports, phenomenological studies, quantitative studies using self-report measures, religious texts, anthropological accounts, and so forth—falls within this circularity rather than relieving it. All of these sources of evidence are different types of reports of experience, and as such are the basis for the premise of perennialism; they cannot also be valid independent evidence that confirms this premise. Nor can patterns described within one such category be used to verify a similar pattern perceived in another category, because they are the same class of evidence. Claims to this effect are akin to imagining that a hearsay account can be used to confirm a rumor, when in fact hearsay and rumor are both similar forms of information that require independent verification. Given that there is as yet no independent evidence for perennialism, claims that any one of the categories of data is evidence for the accuracy of perennialism is an instance of circular reasoning.

This fallacy emerges as a clear and potentially fatal flaw to the perennialist enterprise. While it is typical for proponents of such views to distract from weaknesses in perennialism ingenious ways, circular reasoning cannot be evaded or elevated. Not even mystical images of circularity such as the uroboros—a snake that swallows its own tail—will transform circular reasoning into a numinous asset for perennialism within the context of psychology.

An example of this circularity, along with efforts to sidestep its weakness, can be observed in Wilber's (2000a) introduction of his integral model:

It should be realized from the start that these levels and sublevels presented by the perennial sages are not the product of metaphysical speculation or abstract hairsplitting philosophy. In fact, they are in almost every way the codifications of direct experiential realities, reaching from sensory experience to mental experience to spiritual experience. ... Moreover, the discovery of these waves, over the years, has been communally generated and consensually validated. The fact that wherever they appear, they are often quite similar, sometimes almost identical, simply tells us that we live in a patterned Kosmos, and these richly textured patterns can be—and were—spotted by intelligent men and women in almost every culture. (p. 8; emphasis in original)

In the same breath that Wilber (2000a) claimed his categories are “not the product of metaphysical speculation” (p. 8), he outlined a process that constitutes precisely this kind of speculation: identification of a hypothetical pattern that is consistent with a theory for which no independent evidence can be obtained. It matters not whether the premise arises from abstract theory or from empirical studies of experience, nor how large the database of facts from which the pattern is deduced, nor whether the alleged pattern was proposed by one person or by a thousand; what matters is that one's premise cannot be advanced as evidence for one's conclusion, and tentative interpretations of patterns that cannot be verified by independent evidence constitute metaphysical speculation.

While circular reasoning is a defect in argument, circular propositions are not always wrong. If the premise is true, as evidenced by other means, then the conclusion may also be true even if the premise does not itself constitute proper evidence for the conclusion. For example, if I claim that large stones weigh many pounds because they are heavy, the statement may be true even though it uses circular reasoning. But when there is no separate evidence, such as the ability to place a boulder on a scale, then the conclusion must remain as a speculation—and speculations that cannot be submitted to a process of separate evidence are, by definition, metaphysical speculations. Since there is no separate evidence for Wilber's theory, other than the data

from which the pattern was surmised, his perennialist theory—as well as every other version of perennialism—necessarily remains metaphysical speculation. The fact that other individuals in other ages and cultures have noticed similar patterns—Wilber's (2000a) so-called “perennial sages” (p. 8)—confirms the appeal of this interpretation but adds no evidence for the correctness of perennialist speculations.

To draw an example from history, a similar kind of metaphysical speculation has been suggested as the inspiration of the cult of Mithras, a Roman mystery religion that appeared around the 1st century B.C.E. and survived for a few centuries (Ulansey, 1991). Around 128 B.C.E. the Greek astronomer Hipparchus discovered that the astrological location of the Spring equinox—considered the starting point of the year—had moved from the constellation of Taurus to the constellation of Aries. This phenomenon is now understood as the precession of the equinoxes, in which the Spring equinox rotates around the celestial horizon approximately once every 26,000 years.

In the view of Hipparchus' time, however, the cosmos was centered on the Earth and immovable; if the cosmos had shifted, then this must mean that there was a force greater than the cosmos, capable of creating this shift (Ulansey, 1991). Looking to astrological explanations, this move out of the constellation of Taurus was interpreted as the end of the Age of the Bull. Mithras, the slayer of the Bull in a Persian legend, was apparently identified as the transcendent force that was capable of moving the very cosmos in this way. The cult of Mithras then sought to do homage to this great power, the logical conclusion to an inspiring line of metaphysical imagination. Note that the existence of Mithras as a supremely powerful force was deduced from the movement of the Spring equinox, and after this force had been postulated, the movement of the equinox then served as evidence of his existence. The approach in this case was to posit a hidden force in order to explain observable facts, and then use those observable facts as evidence for the hidden cause. While this sort of circular reasoning may be a perfectly fine way to found a religion, its utility in science has yet to be demonstrated.

Given that it seems unlikely there can be independent evidence for the correctness of perennialist theories any more than there is for Mithras, integral perennialism remains an approach inherently constituted on metaphysical speculation—a shortcoming it is

unlikely to transcend. One might argue that affirming the reality of human spirituality is so important that permitting metaphysics into scholarship in this one area is justified. However, as demonstrated by Henderson's (2005) letter of appeal to the Kansas School Board, once one such metaphysical cause is allowed, there is no way to exclude any number of other potential hidden causes and no evidence-based way to discriminate between various theoretical agencies. Perhaps the stock market rises because Nanabozho the trickster deity is pleased, or maybe an earthquake in Greece was caused by Zeus making love with Hera after a long separation. Perhaps metaphysics are beyond the reach of evidence because the Flying Spaghetti Monster wishes it so.

However, this critique addresses only the process of discerning a pattern among reports of spiritual experience and using the pattern as evidence for validating itself. There is also the argument of *radical empiricism*, an idea proffered by James (1912). James' vision proposed a sort of phenomenology by another name, in which the world should be analyzed as discrete elements of experience in relationship with each other. He held that the relations between these elements should be as important as the elements themselves. He also held consciousness as an obvious and necessary element in any experience, and in this sense offered a system that spanned the typical Cartesian divide between the experience of inner and outer.

While a Jamesian radical empiricism theoretically allows inner experience to be included as empirical data, what James (1912) put forward was an aspirational view rather than a ready research method. Qualitative methods do study reports of personal experience systematically, but these are subject to the various ways experiences are reported by individuals with different histories, educations, temperaments, and different contexts of culture and language. Variation may sit even more deeply, since environment may shape not just experience, but the architecture of the brain itself (e.g., McEwen, 2012). While radical empiricism offers potential validity to inner experience, the task of comparing experiential data across numerous traditions in an effective and reliable way remains at very early stages. This means that, as already noted, evidence for perennialism remains reliant on identifying patterns in reports of spiritual experience. As yet, neither these perceived patterns, nor the reports from which they are drawn, can be independently validated. The

Rejecting Perennialism as a Psychological Theory

personal experience of an individual may convince that person of some particular philosophical or religious view. However, experiential reports do not resolve the problematic circular reasoning that currently underpins perennialist views. Perceived patterns in such reports serve as the basis for the premises of perennialism; these same perceived patterns cannot be used as evidence for the validity of such patterns.

Wilber's approach, then, in simple terms, is one of pasting together a collage of snippets from vastly different contexts, describing patterns that he has perceived within these, varnishing the results with a coat of integral theory, and then offering them as valid evidence for an idealized construct drawn from these same patterns. This strategy has been identified as characteristic of New Age religion, as described by Hammer (2001):

Bits and pieces of non-Western traditions are disembedded from their original religious contexts. Through an incessant bricolage carried out by leading religious virtuosi, these fragments are re-embedded in a modern, Western esoteric religious setting. The principal mechanism of doing this, is by forcing these exotic elements into a fairly rigid, pre-existing interpretive mould. Thereby, to the believer, the same message does indeed seem to come from everywhere. (p. 56).

As an avenue of evidence, this is no more reliable than what holds together a conspiracy theory, or reads signs that an unrequited love is destined to succeed into newspaper horoscopes or everyday events.

Transpersonal scholars such as Daniels (2001) and Ferrer (2002) have pointed to the liabilities of metaphysical positions, and Friedman (2002) has called for a wholesale ban on these within transpersonal psychology. While the latter may be impracticable in the short term within a field that found its early and middle footing on Wilber's (e.g., 1975, 1979, 1981, 1984a, 1984b) consistently metaphysical theories, a worthy first step would be to acknowledge such musings as metaphysical. To this end, it is unhelpful that Wilber has continued to obfuscate the shortcomings of his perennialist model by strategies such as distancing himself from perennialism (Wilber, 1997), denying that his notions are metaphysical speculations (Wilber, 2000a), and most recently joining in the critique of metaphysics while claiming his work to be post-metaphysical (Wilber, 2006)—stances that

depend on carefully tailored and limited definitions of perennialism and metaphysics that inaccurately exempt Wilber's work from these categories (Ferrer, 2009; Hartelius, 2015a).

In addition to acknowledging metaphysical visions as speculative, transpersonal approaches can also support advances by seeking independent evidence for its theories (cf. Friedman, 2002, 2015). This is not a facile call for objective empirical evidence, in the spirit of debunkers who would marginalize or trivialize transpersonal as unscientific or dangerous (Ellis, 1986, 1989; Ellis & Yeager, 1989; Kurtz, 1991; Shermer, 2002), or who would ridicule the possibility of any human capacities that fail to conform to conventional materialist expectations (e.g., Charpak, Broch, Holland, & Randi, 2005). The phenomena of mystical and spiritual and other exceptional human experiences are often subtle and ephemeral events (Ferrer, 2009) that require conducive inquiry methods capable of eliciting these and being present to notice their character and qualities, and perhaps even structure, without disrupting (cf. Hartelius, 2007, 2015c). An approach that sees only insubstantial subjective imaginings or else object-like things that can be scrutinized under the harsh lights of a simplistic materialism (cf. Ferrer, 2002, 2014; Strawson, 2006) may impose metaphysical assumptions commonly embedded in scientific endeavors (Ferrer, 2014), thereby prematurely dismissing these phenomena.

For example, if mystical and spiritual phenomena are better understood as relational or participatory processes (cf. Ferrer, 2008) rather than either just inner experiences or external objects that conventional approaches are designed to research, then such methods may be inadequate—a shortcoming that may be projected onto these phenomena. One would hardly be surprised if a noisy expedition into wildlands failed to find elusive species; it would be more disconcerting if the explorers used this methodological shortcoming as evidence that such animals did not exist.

Relational or participatory models may also have value for psychology in areas other than the study of exceptional human experiences; there is evidence that long term outcomes in certain severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia may be significantly affected by cultural factors (Mehl-Madrona, Jul, & Mainguy, 2014). If some mental disorders are in part relational patterns co-created within culture, rather than solely biological conditions requiring pharmacological intervention, then

approaches that consider only changes in chemistry or biology or physiological structure may overlook other factors that could be of equal value. Contemporary research in medicine and psychiatry, which still focuses primarily on object-like variables, might have as much to gain from the consideration of relational and participatory models as does the study of mystical and spiritual phenomena.

What must be firmly excluded from the list of conducive methods is the elitist notion advanced by Wilber (e.g., 1984c, 1999) and members of the traditionalist school of perennial philosophy such as René Guénon and Fritjof Schuon, that the ultimate evidence for their metaphysical schemas comes from direct experiential apprehension of transcendent realities. While there is no need to question the validity of mystical experiences in themselves, the sensate phenomena of the experience are not the same as the meanings attached to them. If I am walking through the desert in midday heat, the fact that I see something shimmering ahead of me (the sensate experience) does not mean that I see a lake (one possible attached meaning). To claim that one can directly apprehend transcendent realities is to conflate the particular qualities of the experience with some specific attached meaning, which may or may not be accurate pending some sort of independent evidence.

For Wilber (1984c) this claim of experiential validation was couched as the eye of contemplation, the highest capacity of mind, that elevated one to knowledge of realities that happen to be identical with Wilber's theories. In circular fashion, how much this higher eye was open in any given individual seemed to depend directly on how much they agreed with Wilber's ideas. While the eye of contemplation has disappeared from Wilber's (2006) latest major work, the argument of privileged knowledge by elite knowers remains central; this is an authoritarian argument by other means that should not be confused with evidence.

In scientific research converging evidence from separate lines of inquiry adds confidence to findings; multiple lines of specious reasoning are not additive in the same way. Metaphysical models based on reading patterns into cultural or experiential data do not receive additional weight or confirmation on account of agreement by respected figures for whom authoritative knowledge is claimed. Accordingly, Wilber's integral approach is a complex theoretical construction for

which there is no independent evidence, rather than a psychological theory in any conventional sense (cf. Friedman, 2002, 2015). As such, it seems unlikely to advance the project of recovering knowledge from spiritual experiences, practices, and traditions for use in the context of academic scholarship.

To bring this argument current, the error in Wilber's (2006) so-called post-metaphysical position is the assertion that his process of circular reasoning, allegedly confirmed or even constructed by elite seekers, somehow constitutes "some version of ... objective evidence" (p. 234); this evidence supposedly places it apart from metaphysics and above the world's spiritual traditions. In fact it matters little whether Wilber's (2006) "Kosmic habits"—the alleged levels of consciousness created by spiritual pioneers and then "etched into the Kosmos" (p. 246) for future generations to navigate—are pre-existing or co-constructed. The only evidence for these levels is circular reasoning and the opinion of supposedly elite knowers; there is no independent evidence, and no version whatsoever of objective evidence, for these claims. Wilber's ideas have been branded as metaphysical since at least the 1980s (Needleman & Eisenberg, 1987; Schneider, 1987, 1989), in the sense that they posit notions that are not amenable to scientific inquiry, and no volume of complex argument can obscure this simple fact. To raise the stakes, as Wilber has done, and claim that this *ad hoc* system of analysis creates results that are superior to all the spiritual traditions of the world, is bold at best. At worst, it fosters unsound and elitist approaches to evidence for these phenomena (cf. Hartelius, 2015d).

Perennialist approaches, by their very nature, posit elusive spiritual phenomena based on patterns in observable data in the time-honored tradition of human religious imagination. Their proponents follow in the footsteps of the so-called perennial sages—not a tradition as Wilber would rewrite it, but the visionary here and there whose creative reach for a larger understanding flowed in a similar vein as Wilber's. Rather than a universal truth gleaned by Wilber and his colleagues, integral theory may be more of an ingenious synthesis drawn from a hundred inventive seers and thinkers whose innovations inspired, and continue to inspire. These are gifts that deserve to be honored, but honored as art and religion, not uncritically recast as science, not elevated as an elite esoteric tradition, not touted as a way to resolve science and spirit.

Rejecting Perennialism as a Psychological Theory

Contemporary Evidence for Perennialism: Studstill's Mystical Pluralism and Taylor's Soft Perennialism

Since the development of Wilber's integral theory, a number of additional authors have attempted to advance new lines of evidence for a perennialist position; some of these deserve brief examination to determine whether any real advances have been made in identifying critically sound evidence for such perspectives. Studstill's (2005) mystical pluralism and Taylor's (2016) soft perennialism will be considered here. Taylor's work is represented as part of ongoing dialogue with the author, and Studstill's has been selected because it delves into careful and detailed comparison between two traditions as evidence for its perennialist ideas. After this, the outlines of a genre of perennialist New Age religion will be offered.

Studstill's Mystical Pluralism

An inventive version of perennialism has been advanced by Studstill (2005), who has attempted to reframe his approach as essentialist rather than perennialist—though it is both. Strictly speaking, Studstill's work pertains most specifically to the study of mysticism, while the context here is that of psychology. He has rejected strictly constructivist views on the grounds that these define mystical experiences solely as products of various contexts and deny any meaningful coherence in such phenomena across cultures; this, in turn, strikes at the reality of these experiences and undercuts the validity of claims regarding their significance. Conversely, if mystical experiences do reflect access to something beyond conventional reality, then it becomes difficult to explain their great variety. In seeking cross-traditional understandings of these phenomena, Studstill has acknowledged that intra-traditional views are inadequate since these are constructed to serve the specific beliefs and goals of some particular community; Studstill affirmed that any contemporary approach of mysticism would need to be couched within a scientific understanding of how the human mind works.

Studstill's (2005) mystical pluralist frame proposes that mystical experiences lead to similar transformative shifts in state of consciousness through "encounters with the Real" (p. 20), where what Studstill meant by the Real is his own particular account of the nature of absolute, ultimate reality. Studstill's solution can be summarized as follows: Mystical experiences

disrupt the conventional egoic mental state and “induce a structural transformation of consciousness” (p. 6) by means of “an increasingly sensitized awareness/knowledge of Reality” (p. 7). This transformation is a deconstruction of cognitive conditioning that sustains an ordinary awareness of oneself and the world, and cultivation of an attitude of trust.

Reality, for Studstill (2005), is not an objective transcendent dimension, but an experience of Reality that more closely approximates its objective character as a transcendent dimension. In this light, conventional states of mind would provide a deluded reflection of Reality, whereas mystical states would offer a relatively more accurate view. The benefit of this view is that it affirms mystical experiences as more real than the mundane mental states of those who dismiss them as social constructions.

While Studstill (2005) has offered articulate framings of inherent challenges in the study of mysticism, his solutions are built on questionable definitions and applications of key concepts. For example, for Studstill, essentialism is the notion that things of the same sort “share some type of common characteristic” (p. 8). This broad definition makes it sound as if his approach to mysticism should be seen as no different than grouping objects such as books or clouds or mammals, which is a considerable oversimplification. Essentialism claims that some properties are essential or necessary to an object, whereas others are accidental (Robertson & Atkins, 2016); other than in *maximalist essentialism*, which claims that every property of an object is essential to it, a simple way of determining what is necessary is to compare an object with others of the same type. For example, if I have a red plastic ball and a blue plastic ball, it is easy to notice that color is not essential to *plastic ball*. Essentialism in this example is a claim that shared properties in a particular context are more important than those that differ.

Yet essentialism functions differently in various philosophical frames. In the plastic ball example one might add a red woolen scarf to the set, and then argue that in considering *red things*, the red plastic ball might belong with the red scarf rather than with the blue plastic ball; in this context it would be redness that is an essential property of the ball. Within a constructivist or relational philosophy, essentialism can be a pragmatic, flexible, and contextually informed approach to various ways that different phenomena have something in common.

Essentialism functions quite differently in a naive realist frame that assumes a separate and objective external

reality. In this context essentialism is a claim that there are necessary qualities of an object or phenomenon that are ontologically, objectively, and immutably true, regardless of context or relationship to an observer. Since this claim is conjecture, and cannot be demonstrated with independent evidence, it constitutes a metaphysical claim. For example, the experience of redness results not from an object, but from how the wavelength of light reflected by the surface of an object interacts with the cones of the retina, and how neural signals from the cones are interpreted in the visual cortex. An essentialist view of redness in a naive realist context would claim that a red plastic ball continues to be red even when it is in total darkness, or when bathed in blue light that it cannot reflect—that is, that the redness is inherent rather than the product of interactions between the ball's surface, light, and a sighted observer.

Another characteristic of essentialist views in the frame of naive realism is that they are at times justified by appeal to the fact that the entire process of knowing, absent naive realist metaphysical claims as criteria for evaluation, would devolve into meaningless relativism (Nussbaum, 1992). Yet relativism, like naive realism, seems to assume a world that is separate from the person or object, one in which any relationship—or no relationship at all—is possible; everything seems to exist, and every choice or action appears to be made, in the interconnected context of many specific relationships that have actual impact. In this matrix, located decisions and relationships seem quite capable of proceeding based on local knowledge—since it would be difficult to argue that accurate, uniform, and universal knowledge guides any great portion of human activity. The fictive bogeyman of meaningless relativism that naive realism at times uses as justification for its retreat into undemonstrable metaphysical claims, seems unconvincing.

With this background it becomes clear that Studstill (2005) has offered a seemingly innocuous definition of essentialism as it might function in a constructivist or relational context, but what he has applied to the problem of mysticism is a naive realist essentialism, complete with an argument that such metaphysical claims are the only alternative to a meaningless relativism. This is not to say that Studstill (2005) has ignored possible distinctions within essentialism. He has identified a number of different types of essentialism based on topics to which essentialism may be applied within the cross-cultural study of mysticism: phenomenological (similarities in mystical experience), doctrinal (common

core doctrines), epistemological (revealing of a single divine reality), cognitive (identical psychological impact), and therapeutic or soteriological (effects are similarly beneficial). While these distinctions may be helpful, Studstill's (2005) identification of his work with only epistemological and therapeutic essentialism is illuminating. Consideration of therapeutic essentialism is beyond the scope of the present discussion; more relevant here is Studstill's (2005) epistemological essentialism, which is a radically metaphysical claim that all mystical experiences "are nevertheless oriented toward a common Reality" (p. 9)—a position consistent with a naive realist approach, and with perennialist philosophy.

It is noteworthy that Studstill (2005) has identified as perennialist only doctrinal essentialism, which his mystical pluralism omits. Without argument or evidence, he has separated epistemological essentialism—which is central to his approach—from perennialism. Yet if one considers the words of Steuco, who gave perennial philosophy its name in the 16th century, it is difficult to maintain this distinction:

"Reason, as well as the proofs of many races and of much literature, bear witness to the fact that there is one principle of all things and that there has been as such one and the same knowledge about it among all men." (Celenza, 2007, p. 91)

In this description, the original author of the perennial philosophy clearly included philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of reality; indeed, perennialism could hardly be a philosophy without these. If one relies on any conventional definition of perennialism, Studstill's (2005) category of epistemological essentialism should also be identified with this philosophy, as should his work, which is clearly perennialist in nature.

Having shown that Studstill's (2005) mystical pluralism is a version of metaphysically grounded perennialism, it remains to consider what evidence he has offered in support of this project. The intuition that there might be some commonality behind mystical experience arises from seeming similarities: If there are numerous accounts of some shifted relationship to reality, are there then dimensions of existence that can only be apprehended under particular conditions? Even apart from potential spiritual value, the topic is fascinating in much the way a mystery or detective novel might be. The tantalizing premise of a hidden reality rests on the same resonances that place these

experiences in the same category. What Studstill has offered is a respectable yet selective account of Dzogchen Buddhism and 13-14th century German mysticism that emphasizes points of similarity in their doctrines and accounts of how their practice transforms consciousness. These similarities are then offered as support for Studstill's (2005) mystical pluralism.

There are several problems with this evidence, the first and simplest being that, as with Wilber, Studstill (2005) has offered an articulation of evidence for the premise as evidence for his conclusion, so that his case is built on circular reasoning. Similarities between traditions cannot simultaneously be grounds for the premise, and the evidence that the premise is correct. If I bought a used car and it broke down two days after the purchase, I might suspect that the seller had withheld information about its mechanical problems. The car's breakdown would be the basis for my suspicion, which is my premise. I could not also use the same mechanical failure, or even a subsequent failure, as evidence that my initial suspicion was correct, without being guilty of circular reasoning. I would need to find some other specific evidence in order to confirm my suspicion in a valid way, such as a note in the glovebox documenting that a mechanic had diagnosed the problems leading to the breakdown before the sale of the car. Any approach that appeals to similarities between traditions as its evidence for a perennialist model, including Studstill, is using circular reasoning, which is insufficient in a scholarly or scientific setting.

Nor does Studstill's (2005) appeal to systems theory mitigate this problem. Complex systems do call for more complex approaches, and he is not wrong in noting that cognitive theory, as an example, relies broadly on a computer metaphor. However, his claim that the complexity of a system removes the necessity of independent empirical evidence is incorrect. Cognitive models are not merely constructed as metaphors and then adopted, they are used to make testable predictions. It is only when a model is able to predict in ways that can be verified that it gains credence. Studstill's (2005) mystical pluralism does not, and likely cannot, meet this basic test.

An additional issue is that Studstill (2005) has used argument for the existence of a particular phenomenon—a cross-cultural pattern of change in consciousness—as evidence of his explanation for that

phenomenon: that this similarity is due to a discrete and objective ultimate reality revealed only by certain mystical experiences that concur with his definition of that reality. It cannot be mystical experiences themselves that suggest this solution; rather, given the great variety in which such experiences occur, it must be that Studstill has correctly discerned which among these reflect ultimate Reality the most transparently. Even if one agreed that there is a uniform process of transformation of consciousness across at least these two traditions, this would not serve as anything approaching evidence for the rather bold claim that out of the myriad definitions of reality throughout human culture and across time, Studstill's metaphysical claim is privileged knowledge of the one version that is ultimately true and correct.

Studstill's (2005) perennialist vision might be useful hermeneutically for some individuals seeking meaning in a therapeutic context. Other than this, the fact that it remains rooted in metaphysical assumptions, and that its efforts to provide evidence for its stance rely on circular reasoning, are sufficient to make it as unsuitable for psychology as Wilber's integral perennialism. It matters little that Studstill has labelled his work essentialist rather than perennialist, or that he has done a thoughtful comparison of two specific traditions; the flaws in critical structure and evidence required for psychology remain central and unresolved. His work offers no advances in evidence for a perennialist model.

Taylor's Soft Perennialism

An equally ingenious version of perennialism has been advanced by Taylor (2016). This has been considered in some detail elsewhere (Hartelius, 2016, 2017), but a brief review is warranted here. For Taylor (2016), the origin of all spiritual experience in every human society and tradition is encounter with an all-pervasive spiritual force that is the foundation rather than the goal of spiritual development. This force is the source out of which all the world arises, the essence of everything and everyone, yet something that can be directly experienced in expanded states of being. Various traditions experience this all-pervasive spiritual force differently, and come to name and describe it in a variety of ways. This range of potential experience that underlies and shapes the various traditions might be conceived of as a vast landscape where there are many paths and many destinations, but all arising out of engagement with this

all-pervasive spiritual force, which may or may not be ultimate. Yet because it is separate from those traditions that it informs, this force can also be experienced apart from any spiritual tradition.

This is Taylor's (2016, 2017) openly metaphysical and perennialist explanatory framework for the phenomenon that some individuals report durable psychological transformations in contexts apart from any religious tradition or spiritual practice—shifts that seems resonant with some accounts of spiritual transformation. Such findings are directly in line with the intuitions of transpersonal psychology founder Maslow (1970), who held the opinion "that the common base for all religions is human, natural, empirical, and that the so-called spiritual values are also naturally derivable" (p. 4). Taylor's (2016) approach is somewhat of an inversion of Maslow's: he has claimed that a naturalistically demonstrable phenomenon is partial empirical evidence for a metaphysically-based spiritual vision.

A strength of Taylor's (2016) approach is that he has set out to ground his concepts in phenomenology. Among various weaknesses, some already noted elsewhere (Hartelius, 2016, 2017), are flaws in Taylor's approach to phenomenology, and indeed to scientific processes of evidence more generally. Phenomenology, in the Husserlian tradition, is an approach that attempts to ground science in the fully accessible appearances that occur in direct experience—what Kant had termed *phenomena*—rather than things-in-themselves, the more elusive *noumena*. Husserl wished this to be a philosophical method without prejudices or prior metaphysical commitments (Pivčević, 1970/2014). As such, a phenomenological approach typically requires that one's preexisting beliefs or assumptions be identified and actively set aside, or *bracketed*. This step is not one that Taylor appears to have pursued with any thoroughness.

For example, in Taylor's (2012) paper, *Spontaneous Awakening Experiences: Beyond Religion and Spiritual Practice*, he examined various terms that might be applied to the particular type of transformative experience he was reporting on, rejecting both *spiritual experience* and *mystical experience* as too closely associated with religion. Taylor (2012) found Maslow's term, *peak experience*, more satisfactory, but then offered *awakening*

experience as a "psychologically more neutral" term (p. 88). The difficulty here is that Taylor's term, though less associated with religious contexts, is not neutral; in fact, it is specifically resonant with his preexisting beliefs that certain nonordinary experiences provide access to a higher state of consciousness and a truer perception of reality (Taylor, 2005, 2010), reflecting his metaphysical commitments to a philosophy and cosmology that he has not made any obvious efforts to set aside. This is just the opposite of what is required in phenomenology, or in scientific work.

There are many forms of phenomenological research, but this example of Taylor's (2012) research would appear to have been designed to confirm preexisting beliefs about a particular type of experience deemed to exist across cultures; that he did not identify and bracket his prior beliefs suggests a lack of the rigor that would encourage confidence in his findings. In this light, it is difficult to accept Taylor's (2016) claim that an approach such as his allows "a conceptual framework to emerge organically from the study of experience rather than interpreting experiences in terms of a preexisting framework" (p. 38). While Taylor's approach of collecting accounts of a particular type of experience outside of religious settings is potentially of value to psychology, an apparent confirmation bias limits the reliability of his research to date in this area, and raises concerns about the psychological neutrality of his preferred term, awakening experiences. To his credit, Taylor (2017a) has acknowledged some of the shortcomings of his earlier research and has attempted to address these issues in more recent research.

Yet the failure of evidence for a perennialist model is not dependent on Taylor's methodology. Even if his phenomenological research practices were impeccable, his findings would not serve as any kind of evidence that certain states of consciousness are higher, nor that they provide a more accurate experience of reality—which by implication would seem to situate Taylor's own type of nonordinary experiences as privileged insights into the nature of reality. These latter are metaphysical claims simply because it is hard to imagine any empirical way of demonstrating their validity. Taylor's (2016) *perennial phenomenology*, as he has termed his approach, seems to argue that because his phenomenological results are logically consistent with his perennialist schema, they must

constitute at least partial evidence for the correctness of that frame. This is not the case, of course, since any number of interpretive frames might be consistent with the same empirical facts, not all or any of which would be necessarily true; in scientific work, evidence is held to a considerably higher standard.

Taylor's version of a *descending perennialism* (Hartelius, 2017) may be inspiring as a meaning frame, but it is not based on credible evidence any more than other forms of perennialism. Despite these problems, there may be some quite important human developmental phenomenon that his work has touched on. The fact that he has conflated evidence for a type of experience with evidence for the metaphysical schema he has extrapolated to explain such experiences should not distract from the real potential value of this line of inquiry. Perhaps Taylor's future work in this area will be able to make a stronger contribution.

Common Characteristics of Perennialist New Age Religions

Having reviewed three versions of contemporary perennialism it becomes possible to suggest that these share common properties. The utility of such a characterization may be in aiding in the recognition of this type of phenomenon, so that as new forms of this genre are created it becomes easier to recognize these as contributions to spiritual visions rather than to a psychology of spirituality. Seven characteristics have been identified as shared by the three examples: (1) an implied claim of privileged knowledge concerning the nature of reality; (2) a single dimension, experience, or phenomenon as the source of all spiritual experience or goal of all spiritual striving; (3) a universalized spirituality based on recontextualized appropriations from spiritual traditions; (4) other views or experiences characterized as distortions of the one true view or one authentic type of experience; (5) reliant on metaphysical claims; (6) evidence for a particular phenomenon is advanced as evidence for a particular explanation of that phenomenon; (7) key terms are defined in nonstandard ways.

The first three of these can be combined into the central vision of this approach to spirituality: revelation of privileged insight into the underlying spiritual nature of reality that provides for a true and unified understanding of both secular and spiritual phenomena. The subsequent four characteristics are necessary correlates of this vision, strategies required and justified

by its allegedly imperative truth. Taken together, these features are recognizable as more reflective of a New Age religious movement than of a psychology, or any other scientific or scholarly field.

Wilber's version of perennialism is in some senses a foundation for what has come to be called New Age religion: systems of belief and practice that include holism and interconnectedness, a unified worldview, a universalized spirituality based on appropriation and recontextualization of content from spiritual traditions, an evolutionary perspective, a blurring of psychology and spirituality, a focus on subjective experience, a mystical idea of the inner self, and a belief in the imminent dawning of a new and better era of human existence (Flere & Kirbiš, 2009; Hammer, 2001; Hanegraaff, 2009; Heelas, 1996). Studstill's (2005) and Taylor's (2016) works are also resonant with this genre.

Whether advanced in a psychology context, as with Taylor (2016), or within the scholarship of mysticism, as with Studstill (2005), or as a new form of scholarship across multiple fields, as with Wilber (2000a, 2000b, 2006), these are more accurately described as religious visions attempting to acquire scientific credibility. In their locations as spiritual views of life and reality these may provide inspiration and meaning. As substitutes for science and scholarship, and specifically as some component of psychology, they deserve a wide and skeptical berth.

Transpersonal Alternatives to New Age Spiritual Visions

The impulse to understand human spirituality, and to reach for a grasp of what different individuals and diverse communities may share in common or contribute from their unique location, is a worthy one—and it is only one of various things that a transpersonal approach may aspire to study. For such work there are a number of avenues available other than metaphysics or pattern reading or authoritarian claims: scientific methods (Friedman, 2002, 2015) that include transpersonally-informed anthropology (Laughlin, 2013), phenomenology and other qualitative methods (Anderson & Braud, 2011), and participatory research approaches (Ferrer, 2014), to name a few. Going forward, some of these might usefully be paired with neuroscience in ways that may bring fresh perspectives to the latter; given the extraordinary sensitivity of neural measurement techniques, it should be possible to gain

valuable insights into how the body reflects complex states, and to determine how spiritual achievements in one tradition are different from or similar to those gained through practice in a different tradition.

In addition, studies of beliefs or practices situated within a metaphysically constructed cultural context, that also consider their possible hermeneutic or psychological value beyond that context (e.g., Gifford-May & Thompson, 1994; Lancaster, 2015; Miovic & Newton, 2004), seem well within the scope of defensible transpersonal approaches so long as metaphysical claims are not intermingled with evidentiary claims. Were Wilber's integral theory, Studstill's mystical pluralism, or Taylor's soft perennialism to claim status as a New Age religious vision, it seems reasonable that these could also be considered for their possible hermeneutical or psychological value as such.

The work of coming to an understanding of human spirituality that is psychologically sound, yet that does not reduce or reject its claims, remains challenging. Tart's (1972) and Varela's (1996) proposals toward state-specific scholarship remains a promising way forward, since religious teachings often derive from experiences in nonordinary states, and spiritual practices often cultivate such states. A state-specific approach might be able to situate religious claims within the context of related states of consciousness, just as scientific knowledge might be understood as associated with a rational cognitive state of mind. This would not provide an ultimate solution, since the relative value of insights from various states would necessarily remain a topic of debate, but it might locate various types of knowledge claims within their respective modes of mental functioning, which at least share commonality within the range of human experience.

References

- Anderson, R., & Braud, W. (2011). *Transforming self and others through research: Transpersonal research methods and skills for the human sciences and humanities*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Celenza, C. S. (2007). The revival of Platonic philosophy. In J. Hankins (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Renaissance philosophy* (pp. 72–96). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052184648X.005>

- Charpak, G., Broch, H., Holland, B. K., & Randi, J. (2005). Debunked! ESP, telekinesis, and other pseudoscience. *Physics Today*, 58(5), 67.
- Daniels, M. (2001). On transcendence in transpersonal psychology. *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 5(2), 3–11.
- Dembski, W. A., & Colson, C. W. (2004). *The design revolution: Answering the toughest questions about intelligent design*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Ellis, A. (1986). Fanaticism that may lead to a nuclear holocaust: The contributions of scientific counseling and psychotherapy. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 65(3), 146–151.
- Ellis, A. (1989). Dangers of transpersonal psychology: A reply to Ken Wilber. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 67(6), 336–337. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1989.tb02619.x>
- Ellis, A., & Yeager, R. J. (1989). *Why some therapies don't work: The dangers of transpersonal psychology*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Falk, C. D. (2009). "Norman Einstein": *The disintegration of Ken Wilber*. Toronto, Canada: Million Monkeys Press.
- Ferrer, J. N. (1998). Speak now or forever hold your peace. An essay review of Ken Wilber's *The marriage of sense and soul: Integrating science and religion*. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 30(1), 53–67.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2002). *Revisioning transpersonal theory: A participatory vision of human spirituality*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2008). Spiritual knowing as participatory enaction: An answer to the question of religious pluralism. In J. N. Ferrer & J. H. Sherman (Eds.), *The participatory turn: Spirituality, mysticism, religious studies* (pp. 135–169). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2009). Participation, metaphysics, and enlightenment: Reflections on Ken Wilber's recent work. *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 14(2), 3–24.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2011). Participatory spirituality and transpersonal theory: A ten-year retrospective. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 43(1), 1–34.
- Ferrer, J. N. (2014). Transpersonal psychology, science, and the supernatural. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 46(2), 152–186.
- Flere, S., & Kirbiš, A. (2009). New Age, religiosity, and traditionalism: A cross-cultural comparison (Comment on Houtman and Aupers, *JSSR*, September). *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48(1), 161–184. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2009.01435_1.x
- Forrest, B., & Gross, P. R. (2007). Creationism's Trojan horse: The wedge of intelligent design. In N. Koertge (Ed.), *Scientific values and civic virtues* (pp. 191–214). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Friedman, H. L. (2002). Transpersonal psychology as a scientific field. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 21(1), 175–187.
- Friedman, H. L. (2015). Further developing transpersonal psychology as a science: Building and testing middle-range transpersonal theories. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 34(1–2), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2015.34.1-2.55>
- Gifford, C. S. (2015). How to teach metaphysics. *Teaching Philosophy*, 38(2), 193–220. <https://doi.org/10.5840/teachphil201532735>
- Gifford-May, D., & Thompson, N. L. (1994). "Deep states" of meditation: Phenomenological reports of experience. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 26(2), 117–138.
- Hammer, O. (2001). Same message from everywhere: The source of modern revelation. In *New Age religion and globalization* (pp. 42–57). Aarhus, Denmark: Universitetsforlag.
- Hanegraaff, W. J. (2009). *New Age religion and Western culture: Esotericism in the mirror of secular thought*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hartelius, G. (2007). Quantitative somatic phenomenology: Toward an epistemology of subjective experience. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 14(12), 24–56.
- Hartelius, G. (2015a). A startling new role for Wilber's integral model: Or, how I learned to stop worrying and love perennialism (A response to Abramson). *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 17(1), 38–48.
- Hartelius, G. (2015b). Participatory thought has no emperor and no absolute—A further response to Abramson. *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 17(1), 49–53.
- Hartelius, G. (2015c). Body maps of attention: Phenomenal markers for two varieties of mindfulness. *Mindfulness*, 6(6), 1271–1281. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0391-x>
- Hartelius, G. (2015d). Non-duality: Not one, not two, but many (Editor's introduction). *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 34(1–2), iii–vi. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2015.34.1-2.iii>
- Hartelius, G. (2016). Taylor's soft perennialism: A primer of perennial flaws in transpersonal scholarship. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 35(2), 42–47. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.2.42>

- Hartelius, G. (2017). Zombie perennialism: An intelligent design for psychology? A further response to Taylor's soft perennialism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 36(2), 93-110. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2017.36.2.93>
- Hartelius, G. & Ferrer, J. N. (2013). Transpersonal philosophy: The participatory turn. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 187–202). Malden, MA: Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118591277.ch10>
- Heelas, P. (1996). *The new age movement: The celebration of the self and the sacralization of modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Henderson, B. (2005). Open letter to Kansas School Board. Retrieved from <http://www.venganza.org/about/open-letter>
- James, W. (1912). *Essays in radical empiricism*. New York, NY: Longmans, Green.
- Kurtz, P. (1991). *The transcendental temptation*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Lancaster, B. L. (2015). Hermeneutic neurophenomenology in the science-religion dialogue: Analysis of states of consciousness in the Zohar. *Religions*, 6(1), 146–171.
- Laughlin, C. D. (2013). The ethno-epistemology of transpersonal experience: The view from transpersonal anthropology. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 32(1), 43-50.
- Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Religions, values, and peak experiences* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Viking.
- McEwen, B. S. (2012). Brain on stress: How the social environment gets under the skin. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(Supplement 2), 17180–17185. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1121254109>
- Mehl-Madrona, L., Jul, E., & Mainguy, B. (2014). Results of a transpersonal, narrative, and phenomenological psychotherapy for psychosis. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 33(1), 57–76.
- Metaphysics [Def. 3]. (2015). In *American heritage dictionary of the English language* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Miovic, M., & Newton, W. (2004). Sri Aurobindo and transpersonal psychology. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 36(2), 111–133.
- Needleman, J., & Eisenberg, R., (1987). States of consciousness. In M. Eliade (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of religion* (Vol. 4, pp. 52–59). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1992). Human functioning and social justice: In defense of Aristotelian essentialism. *Political Theory*, 20(2), 202–246.
- Pivčević, E. (2014). *Husserl and phenomenology*. New York, NY: Routledge. (Original work published 1970)
- Robertson, T., & Atkins, P. (2016). "Essential vs. accidental properties" (Rev.). In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Spring 2018 ed. [forthcoming]). Retrieved at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/essential-accidental/>
- Rothberg, D. (1986). Philosophical foundations of transpersonal psychology: An introduction to some basic issues. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 18(1), 1–34.
- Rothberg, D. & Kelly, S. M. (Eds.). (1998). *Ken Wilber in dialogue: Conversations with leading transpersonal thinkers*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- Schneider, K. J. (1987). The deified self: A “centaur” response to Wilber and the transpersonal movement. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 27(2), 196–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167887272006>
- Schneider, K. J. (1989). Infallibility is so damn appealing: A reply to Ken Wilber. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 29(4), 470–481. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167889294005>
- Shermer, M. (2002). *Why people believe weird things*. New York, NY: Henry Holt.
- Strawson, G. (2006). Realistic monism: Why physicalism entails panpsychism. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 13(10–11), 3–31.
- Studstill, R. (2005). *The unity of mystical traditions: The transformation of consciousness in Tibetan and German mysticism*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Tart, C. T. (1972). States of consciousness and state specific sciences. *Science*, 176, 1203–1210. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.176.4040.1203>
- Taylor, S. (2005). The sources of higher states of consciousness. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 24(1), 48–60.
- Taylor, S. (2010). *Waking from sleep: Why awakening experiences occur and how to make them permanent*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.
- Taylor, S. (2012). Spontaneous awakening experiences: Beyond religion and spiritual practice. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 44(1), 73–91.
- Taylor, S. (2016). From philosophy to phenomenology: The argument for a "soft" perennialism. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 35(2), 17–41. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.2.17>

- Taylor, S. (2017). *The leap: The psychology of spiritual awakening*. Novato, CA: New World Library.
- Ulansey, D. (1991). *The origins of the Mithraic mysteries: Cosmology and salvation in the ancient world*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195067880.001.0001>
- Varela, F. (1996). Neurophenomenology: A methodological remedy for the hard problem. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 3(4), 330–349.
- Wilber, K. (1975). Psychologia perennis: The spectrum of consciousness. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 7(2), 105–132.
- Wilber, K. (1979). A developmental view of consciousness. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 11(1), 1–21.
- Wilber, K. (1981). Ontogenetic development: Two fundamental patterns. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 13(1), 33–58.
- Wilber, K. (1984a). The developmental spectrum and psychopathology: Part I, Stages and types of pathology. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 16(1), 75–118.
- Wilber, K. (1984b). The developmental spectrum and psychopathology: Part II, Treatment modalities. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 16(1), 75–118.
- Wilber, K. (1984c). *Eye to eye: The quest for a new paradigm*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (1997). *The eye of spirit: An integral vision for a world gone slightly mad*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (1999). Spirituality and developmental lines: Are there stages? *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 31(1), 1–10.
- Wilber, K. (2000a). *Integral psychology: Consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (2000b). *Theory of everything: An integral vision for business, politics, science and spirituality*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

About the Author

Glenn Hartelius, PhD, is Founding Chair of the online PhD program in Integral and Transpersonal Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) in San Francisco, CA, where he is Associate Professor. He serves as main editor for the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, coeditor of *The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of Transpersonal Psychology*, and Secretary

of the International Transpersonal Association. His research on the definition and scope of transpersonal psychology has helped to define the field. His work in attention and somatic phenomenology strives to make states of consciousness measurable. He also maintains an executive coaching practice.

About the Journal

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a peer-reviewed academic journal in print since 1981. It is sponsored by the California Institute of Integral Studies, published by Floragades Foundation, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at www.transpersonalstudies.org, and in print through www.lulu.com (search for IJTS).