

(The following discussion on on "[Blind Spots in the Integral AQAL World View](#)" by Joseph Dillard on Integral World

Heinz Wernli· Apr 7, 2021

THANK YOU Joseph Dillard for this excellent article, grateful to Ken Wilber, balanced and critical at the same time. An honest analysis of our human limitations and my own tendencies to overestimate my level of moral development. What is seen is relevant, as for my courage to act otherwise, there is still a long way to go.

Brad Reynolds· Apr 8, 2021

Dr. Dillard – I want to thank you for inspiring me to add a few more sentences to my upcoming book (which I hope you take the time to read with an open mind) – I will post some partial chapters soon here in Integral World.

You seem to do a fantastic job of recognizing some of the important elements about AQAL in your opening paragraphs, including that it attempts to address transpersonal qualities in the universe (and that Ken has heart :) – however I am surprised you have not gotten into a RECONCILIATION stage with Wilber's Integral Theory better; and that you seemed to have taken a somewhat cultic approach by being a "true believer" for so many years... so your critiques seem to be somewhat off-base in many important ways as you break away from your disappointment in discovering Wilber [your parents] is fallible which I cannot address here. You seemed to have missed how important it is to understand and transcend-and-include the ego or self-sense in higher transpersonal awareness... but that's fine: we all have our own journey. Morality is important but not determinate; we grow in wholeness (morally, cognitively, spiritually et al) which is Wilber's main point.

Your political analysis is crippled, imo: what? Because we vote for the better choices offered to us that somehow we are not "integral"? That politicians are not Enlightened beings? But YOU know better? YOU can tell who is integral? Talk about smelling of elitism.

I do not know any "integral person" who doesn't treat ALL people with kindness, care, and compassion, although we all make mistakes (and fail), so I disagree with much of your complaining premise.

Have you heard of real politick? Yes, Obama went too far in drone attacks, imo, but that does not make him immoral; he had a job to do and was following the advice of generals and people around him as well. You can't see the greater good he did considering the forces he was dealing with?

But you can get on your high horse – protected by the military you wish to condemn – and say he isn't moral -- talk about elitism!

And then you label all integralists as not being able to see and understand that?

Could we say you aren't really integral too?

You doubt people's spiritual development and then pigeonhole them in extremes... what happened to your respect that you give the cashier but not to the "integral"

person? Sounds somewhat like hypocrisy to me. I could go on but have limited space here – I do feel perhaps your anger (or disappointment) is directed to the wrong group.

Also, if YOU do not have transpersonal revelations how can you say for sure what they are about? You are not schooled in these higher developments, it sounds to me, so go ahead and cry elitism all you want but if you don't go to the "college" of extensive meditation stop complaining about "PhDs" who do. Better, attend the school of Enlightenment during your remaining years and enjoy the company!

Once again you are throwing out tropes that science PROVES there is no Spirit or GOD behind evolution and the creation of the universe-Kosmos. Have you not heard the counter arguments that science is in no position to make those final judgments since that is NOT its method of investigation?

So you ridicule the "Eye of Spirit" as if YOU know better. I disagree.

And to clear up some factual errors:

(1) Adi Da's name is spelled "Adi Da" (with the "D" capitalized); no competent scholar would make such a mistake,

(2) Adi Da was NOT Wilber's "first guru" as you claim, once again using false statements to make YOUR point. Ken Wilber had Zen Master for his "gurus" in the 1970s (Katagiri Roshi, mostly, but also Maezumi Roshi, Edio Roshi, and Roshi Kapleau) – I make all of this clear in my book Embracing Reality (2004). Yes, Wilber STUDIED Adi Da, and in Grace and Grit (1991) he tells how he and Treya went to see Adi Da ONCE in the summer of 1986 as he and his wife were looking for a Guru, but in the fall they sat with Kalu Rinpoche and chose him as their Guru-Lama and then attended extensive retreats and Kalachakra empowerments, etc. – have you? I doubt it.

(3) Your misunderstanding of Adi Da is HUGE so I won't address it here but encourage you to read my upcoming books. Once more, you are promoting conventional tropes. Andrew Cohen was never a real Guru (imo); in fact, Ken was his "guru" (not just "the pandit"), but that's another discussion.

You are incorrect also about Wilber not including science – he simply does NOT INCLUDE scientism or the final materialistic conclusions of science, so you think you've caught him in a pre/trans fallacy. Wrong. Again, I ask: if you personally do not really know the Transpersonal or Spirit-God for yourself, how can you say? That's fine you have your "beliefs" but some of us disagree.

In your view, I guess ALL the Spiritual Masters and Adepts of our planet are wrong too – you and Mr. Visser have totally missed the boat here (and yet, I agree, Wilber should improve his presentation of those aspects of science he does distort; that is a more balanced view) – but you're throwing out the baby with the bathwater! (as they say)

I'll stop there... for you just go on to complain about all the aspects of integral you personally do not like ("color jargon" etc) which is simply your opinion.

Yes, I agree the Moral "Line" is very important and society has certain moral

guidelines, thank goodness. But true morality ultimately arises from God-Realization and Enlightenment, compassion + wisdom, which is when we discover that LOVE and TRUTH is the essence of the universe and our very being arising as consciousness so we act accordingly.... This is what Wilber has tried to infuse into our discussions.

Many of “integralists” at integral world continue to misinterpret better than you interpret what Wilber’s integral project is about, imho. It is fine to be critical of what is in error, but to make even greater errors seems to be no solution.

Again, I thank you, Joseph, for articulating your opinion, which you do very well, for it helps me know what to address in my writings. Really, I truly believe we both want the same thing: a better world and more wisdom... that is my intent as well. Sorry to be critical but I must defend too what needs defending since Ken won’t do it. All the very best, Brad

Joseph Dillard · Apr 16, 2021

@Brad Reynolds, Hi Brad. Thanks for your thoughtful reply. And thank you for bringing to my attention the misspelling of Adi Da and that he was not Ken’s first guru.

Could I have a broader, deeper, understanding of enlightenment? Of course! Who couldn’t? However, this criticism can be made of anyone, can it not? And is it not best made of those who are gurus and pandits who claim some degree of enlightenment? I do not, nor do I claim to be “integral,” or to represent what integral “should” be. And I have found some of those who do, including Mark Forman and David Long, to be sorely lacking in much other than a cognitive grasp of integral.

You write, “ Yes, I agree the Moral “Line” is very important and society has certain moral guidelines, thank goodness. But true morality ultimately arises from God-Realization and Enlightenment, compassion + wisdom, which is when we discover that LOVE and TRUTH is the essence of the universe and our very being arising as consciousness so we act accordingly.... This is what Wilber has tried to infuse into our discussions. ”

While morality may ultimately arise from enlightenment, the behavior of those claiming enlightenment often demonstrates that both amorality and immorality, as well as submersion in pathological forms of groupthink, are entirely compatible with the experience of enlightenment. To define enlightenment as intrinsically moral is a hedge, that automatically excludes the enlightened from personal accountability. This is lovely among believers, but in the realms of commerce, law, and everyday personal interactions, it does not add up to much.

The problem arises when morality is subsumed as a characteristic of enlightenment: “I am enlightened; therefore I am moral.” This is a cognitive fallacy, a blind spot, a form of spiritual narcissism that is common, in my experience, among those drawn to mysticism and the non-dual.

For the most part, you and I do not care if the other is enlightened; we care about whether we are listened to respectfully.

As you know, Wilber has failed this test on more than one occasion and continues to do so. It implies that a more balanced and worldcentric form of integral is still to be

born, built in large part on the very worthy structural foundation he created.
Thanks for your feedback.

Peter Collins· Apr 9, 2021

Hello Joseph,

I read your article with interest. In fact much of what you stated resonated with me to a considerable degree approaching as it does many of the same issues in practical terms that I raised in a recent article with respect to the need to broaden the AQAL spectrum.

Though in broad agreement with most of what you have written, I would see some issues – as is inevitable given our different backgrounds and experiences – in a somewhat different light.

I accept that Wilber's AQAL approach has indeed proved remarkably useful in the synthesising of information with respect to various fields and has been justifiably widely embraced in many quarters.

And I have always been – despite strong reservations regarding his integral approach – a considerable admirer of his work both with respect to its vast range and intellectual quality.

However I do not accept your somewhat generous view of Wilber regarding criticism. In my own case I have consistently raised fundamental issues regarding Wilber's integral model over the past 25 years, which have yet to be addressed in any meaningful manner.

And I have observed the same pattern with respect to the pertinent observations of others e.g. Mark Edwards, Andy Smith, Frank Visser and David Lane on this forum. Though I would of course accept that a lot of criticism had been indeed uninformed and already satisfactorily dealt with by Wilber in his work, many important integral issues remain which cannot be readily accommodated with his existing system.

My own "honeymoon period" with respect to Wilber did not last long as I formed strong reservations regarding his handling of the pre/trans fallacy dating from "Eye to Eye" in 1982. However I still greatly enjoyed reading his earlier books. Strangely the disenchantment started to seriously set in for me with SES, which despite its broad sweep covering much new ground, suffered from an off-putting grandiose tone. And this I feel has only got stronger with subsequent contributions. So Wilber now appears to me as a man, who through continual promotion of his own version of "Integral Theory" has become somewhat trapped within this one system (which despite many protestations to the contrary suffers from huge – apparently, unseen by him – limitations).

You rightly refer to the need to preserve balance throughout development as between 3 "lines". I also made the same point in a recent contribution, where I used the

alternative terms of modes that can incorporate both differentiated features (as lines) and integral features (as circular or cyclical patterns) of development.

I would agree with you that the cognitive aspect has been over-emphasised with the integral approach often strongly divorced from the broader issues of social justice and morality. Even in his wide ranging work on perspectives, which is designed to get away from exclusive identification with the 3rd person approach, Wilber places special emphasis on the intellectual methodologies associated with all his perspectives (which only serves to underline the predominance of the cognitive mode). However I would see the fundamental balance that needs to be achieved in development as entailing both personal and impersonal aspects (requiring emphasis on both affective and cognitive modes). Then morality in its broadest sense, operating through the will (which could be equally referred to as the self system) essentially serves to maintain an appropriate balance as between cognitive and affective modes.

Though you rightly place emphasis on the comparative neglect in integral circles of practical issues relating to issues of social justice and equality, I think that perhaps it is too easy to criticise others, such as our elected politicians for failures in this regard. Even the most conscientious individual elected to high office quickly faces stark choices that require overlooking many obvious forms of injustice, for what progress can be achieved in this regard is severely limited by the existing set of attitudes embedded in society, which perpetuates inequality in so many ways.

And also while it is correct to suggest for example that the Chinese system has many merits, which are overlooked in Western democracies, it too inevitably suffers from considerable failings which need to be readily admitted. And the Chinese regime is operating, due to its enormous economic influence in an increasingly threatening manner with respect to any opposition arising from within and outside its borders. So the freedom from censorship, which you so much value, certainly does not apply at present in China!

The one suggestion that I would make in this regard is that perhaps while admitting the enormous challenges that all societies face on many fronts, it would be much healthier if politicians at least attempted to promote more honest dialogue on the nature of these issues. For the hypocrisy and pretence engaged in by all parties only serves to obscure the true dimensions of these problems and in the end threatens the very future of democracy.

I think that your later criticism of hierarchy, the pre/trans fallacy, the elitist interpretation of development by “integralists”, absence of emphasis on personal and social morality, confusing treatment of spirituality, failure to integrate states such as dreaming, Wilber’s moral stance etc., point to clear limitations in the existing AQAL approach and is therefore perhaps inconsistent with your earlier glowing assessment at the beginning of the article.

However I am in full agreement with you regarding the stupidity of the colour jargon (stemming from Spiral Dynamics) no which has been much overused and indeed abused by Wilber and his followers.

In conclusion your articles are provocative in a good way by raising many valid points that are not emphasised sufficiently elsewhere by integralists. So keep up the good work!

Orwin O'Dowd· Apr 10, 2021
@Joseph,

*Wilber as the Freud of "we other Victorians" (Foucault) - that's pretty accurate and a refreshing break from the run of commentary. But Freud found himself scooped by Schopenhauer, on the key point of repression. And when Schopenhauer observed that the moral sense persists in dreams despite the loss of the sense of reality, he said something more, of direct relevance to the problem here about moral development and balance between lines. If morality is essentially innate, then the problem lies centrally *between the lines: a matter of "keeping faith" with the moral sense even while developing in other ways. And that perspective also dispenses with heirarchy, for the moral reference-point, while also admitting it where useful, for cognitive structure, and management.*

JK· Apr 11, 2021
@JosephDillard

It's difficult or impossible to make consistently cohere a discriminating and committed ethical orientation with metaphysical Monism (or Non-Dualism, as Brad Reynolds likes to call it). The belief that Reality and everything encompassed by it (including humans and the natural world) is ultimately One, tends towards recognizing the "Other" only in the Mystical State, and not in the world of conditions regarded as principally an illusion. I see Wilber's effective downgrading of and insensibility to the ethical dimensions of society, politics, economics, and the environment, as correlative with a vision that in the end they truly don't matter. A metaphysical perversion grounds and subtly distorts his whole System, however proper and balanced it's literal statement may be.

bjm· Apr 27, 2021

@JK,

You have an interesting proposition about "perverted" monism which I suspect dyed-in-the-wool mystic monists might try to deny, even if they overtly or unconsciously assume or project some "Other" as the ultimate One (state, destination, truth, goodness, beauty...) as opposed to mere everyday existence (and all of its complexities and ambiguities).

If there is only One and everything is already integrated/nondual, then the "Other" is

a dualist, relative, conventional ideation or experience, not matter how wondrous or profound. To hypervalorize (and weaponize) whatever that is clearly not nondual.