

THE MODERNIZATION OF RELIGION

A Meeting of Extremes. It is often observed that in some cases, extremes meet, and in an age marked by entropic breakdowns of distinction between formerly separate realities, there is now nothing beyond the range of hybridization. One of the most improbable of these meetings is the subject of the present article, I mean the modernization of tradition itself, a process of bringing it into line with the techniques, values and objectives of the majority of educated people today. On the positive side, it means that tradition contains something too important to be ignored, which becomes more and more of an issue as the movement of modernism runs short of ideas. Thus it is forced to feed itself on the traditional wisdom it was originally meant to replace. The idea of a self-sufficient practical materialism only appeared credible in the first place because of surviving remnants of spirituality which were ignored.

This return to tradition would be hopeful if it were motivated by a repentance and a desire for conversion but, like all things modern, its basic aim is to convert everything to itself, and make traditional wisdom serve purposes for which it was not intended. True wisdom belongs equally to all ages, of course, but that is on the assumption that it remains the same. Part of the essence of tradition is that truth cannot be created or invented, but only transmitted. The politically-minded should note that this transcends the standard political divisions, because it is obviously conservative on the one hand, but on the other it inspires a radical opposition to corrupted and deviated forms of tradition, even where they are powerful.

What follows is mainly a critique of the system taught by Ken Wilber, because it is a clear example of the way in which modern culture tries to convert everything to itself, and because of the need to understand the challenge this offers to traditional ideas of religion. From his point of view, and that of his followers, this critique may appear to be merely a product of a stage of development which they have surpassed, but I shall try to show that there is a truth here which cannot be disposed of so easily.

The point of view from which I shall examine New Age religion, of which Ken Wilber's work is an example, will be that of Christian and Platonic beliefs and values, because such values are almost by definition closer to the mind of tradition than what can be found in New Age thought. If, after all, the individual person should be essentially an immortal soul, created by a God whose grace is necessary for human efforts to be effectual, it would mean that the pantheistic edifice of the new spirituality would be untenable, owing to its assumption that our spiritual nature is both intrinsic to us and necessarily good.

The idea of the soul as a rational and moral agent and everything that follows from that is at the opposite extreme from systems like this one in which various forms of mental development are treated as self-subsistent objects which somehow hang in the air with no visible means of support, like helium balloons. And yet one cannot rationally discredit the idea of a self-agent who is also a centre of perception unless there is a more credible alternative. That condition is not met by the idea of

conscious states which subsist without a mind to think them. Such an alternative would require a world in which there was no basis for moral responsibility or self-motivation, given that there are no permanent substances to be determined by these things.

Instead of a real person who could be saved or lost, therefore, one is offered an ascending scale of experiences and viewpoints and activities which are thought of as self-subsistent, rather as the ideas of subatomic particles are supposed by some scientists to exist independently of human minds. These two cases are related, because both assume that things *as we know them* are independent of our minds, and that is an idea which can easily be shown to be just a form of ignorance.

Where modern and traditional thought relate to the same things, they do so with the difference that for the former, things are thought of solely in terms of reason operating in relation to the sensory level of experience, without the dimension of timeless and universal realities. Yet the latter is essential to traditional thinking, which is the thinking of those who do not live wholly in time, and for whom truth is known independently of historical context. But when the self is seen solely as a natural phenomenon defined by its relations to others of the same nature as it is by most modern minds, spiritual life and its possibilities are misconceived as a programme of exploratory activities which can only serve for the enhancement of the ego, even though the reality of the ego is denied in principle.

This suggests a way of self-development which is only very loosely attached to moral values, not least because the motive

of obedience to a revealed doctrine is not involved, nor acceptance of legitimate authority. Besides, hard choices between right and wrong, and between desire and self-denial have no central position in it, if any. Instead, the individual is free to behave like a landowner making use of his own property. Such a position is a logical result of a belief that spirituality is good without qualification and can constitute one's whole justification. In such a thought-world, traditional teachings about spiritual evil like that of the devil as being a pure spirit like God, are rejected as being just the mythology of people at a relatively low level of development.

There is therefore no idea of an objectively real God, with Whom one may or may not be in a right relationship. In one respect, Ken Wilber differs from most New Age thinkers in not being anti-modern with a mindset which remains essentially modern, because his position is intentionally modern and therefore in harmony with the moral reflexes and values of his time. In this way, traditional wisdom can be taken as a means of personal development where the aspirant is master in a realm outside the traditional ideas of reality. Thus there is no suggestion of hostility either to tradition or to modernity, but rather of a combination of the two which is calculated to give both a new lease of life.

The real but unconscious hostility to tradition apparent in works of this kind is therefore owing to the mental formation of their authors rather than to conscious intentions. At the same time however, there can be similarities with traditionalist thought of the kind inspired by René Guénon, because of the anti-personalist point of view of his thought. On this basis, one can

espouse a traditionalism which assumes that the focus and goal of all religion and spirituality is the same as that of Nondualism. This conception of spirituality combines perfectly with the modern belief that spirituality can never be anything but good, combined with an inability to understand the implications of creation and of the immortal soul which is also a part of creation. These things should be enough to make any believer in traditional religion have doubts as to its traditional credentials.

The historical development of Hinduism has been increasingly theistic over the past thousand years, whence the relevance of Nondualism as the key to religious orthodoxy, and as the common meaning of all traditions, is not adequately supported by the history of the principal religions. The monistic kind of doctrine is frequently welcome to modern thinkers with no religious affiliation, and for this reason Theistic values should be a safer guide as to what is and is not traditionally valid in New Age thought, as exemplified by Ken Wilber's writings.

A Critical Divergence.

The conclusion that the tendency of Ken Wilber's books is anti-traditional is not difficult to arrive at because he makes his point of departure as clear as possible in *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, Chapter 8, where he gives an account of the way in which all the ancient traditions have taught that the overall pattern of historical time is one of spiritual decline and removal from God. Then,

without arguing the question, he turns to the modern idea of universal progress as follows:

"But sometime in the modern era - it is almost impossible to pinpoint exactly - the idea of history as devolution (or a fall from God) was slowly replaced by the idea of history as evolution (or a growth toward God). We see it explicitly in the work of Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854); Georg Hegel (1770-1831) propounded the doctrine with a genius rarely equalled; Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) made evolution a universal law; and his friend Charles Darwin (1809-1882) applied it to biology. . . we humans are in the process of *growing toward our own highest potential*, and if that highest potential is God, then we are growing toward our own Godhood."

This quotation makes clear the author's modernist standpoint, which is meant to be regarded as a merit. There can be no doubt about the attraction exerted by the way in which the progressist and evolutionist doctrine transforms one into a member of an irresistibly-advancing army. For the mindset this gives rise to, even things most apparently opposed to it, like traditional religion, can be assimilated along with everything else. The adoption of a modernised kind of Hegelianism is thus proposed, despite the fact that Hegel's philosophy has been indirectly the source of Marxism and Communism, and by way of reaction, of Nazism as well.

All movements of this kind are typified by a militant this-worldly optimism, in the name of which there is no limit to the crimes it is taken to justify. If there is any truth in the saying "By their fruits ye shall know

them," therefore, this founder-figure of the progressive ideology must be among the least credible sources of spiritual leadership it is possible to find. The malice of what such thinkers teach can be seen from its effect on religious belief. The religious unbeliever who believes in universal progress and evolution is under no necessity to attack religion openly, because all its authority figures, past and present, are reduced at a stroke to yesterday's men by the progress dogma. Traditional religion would still be of use, of course, but with every successive generation its relevance must grow less and less. Those who think in this way are committed to an implicit belief that they know the truth, while those who reached the highest perfection in earlier times did not; conversely, if ever the truth in its fullness was known, there could be no such condition as "out of date" in this realm, and the only progress would be the progress of individuals in assimilating a wisdom which had been complete from time immemorial.

According to Karl Popper, Hegel effected a "tribalization" of thought, one which rationalized the conflation of facts with values, and events with principles, and truth with the advance of worldly power. Such thinking offers high-sounding reasons to justify the belief that might is right, following a monistic denial of any independent realm of intelligibles to which things in the sense world could be referred and judged by. In this way, a supposedly great mind created a master-plan for a world in which the role of mind as such would be reduced to nothing more than a tool in the service of mindless

forces. This position defines the standpoint of those for whom modernity is not just a fact, but a value in its own right, just as it is for Teilhard de Chardin. For those who think in this way, modernism cannot be anti-spiritual, because it is spiritual as such, in its capacity of a manifestation of the truth of God's design for the world. In this way, history is reinterpreted as a Divine revelation which is always new and different. Christians are particularly liable to be taken in by that, because it is a clever travesty of the historical form of Christian tradition.

A collective advance towards God in which one can participate just by living in modern times seems to have everything in its favour except the fact that it is not taught by any of the traditional religions, even though Christianity comes closest to doing so, with its idea of doctrinal development and clarification of beliefs through history. There are those for whom the wisdom of tradition can be made part of modern culture, therefore, despite its commitment to a world-centred optimism. Those who believe in such an assimilation do not stop to think that if the ancient traditions could all be so completely wrong about the meaning and tendency of history, they could just as well be wrong about everything else.

A Map of the Universe.

The central feature of Wilber's thought is the system of four quadrants within which he classifies and relates all known realities, material, organic, psychical, and spiritual. By means of it, one may discover one's place in

the spiritual scheme of things, and see where one's future progress must take place. The Upper Left quadrant contains all the stages and states of first-person consciousness from the lowest stages of sensation to the highest consciousness through such things as impulse, emotion, and graduated stages of conceptual thought. The intellect and intellectual intuition are notably absent, however.

The Upper Right Quadrant consists of all the material components of organic bodies, starting from atoms, molecules, living cells in increasingly large groups, neuronal cords, and a series of brain-types from the reptilian upward. In short, all the things by which materialists claim to be able to explain the conscious events in the Upper Left quadrant. Here, one speaks of such things as "Prokaryotes," and "Eukaryotes" rather than the familiar idea of "living cells."

The Lower Left quadrant is a reflection of the Upper Left inasmuch as its contents consist of the standard manifestations of the states and functions in the Upper Left, these being the cultural forms they give rise to in nearly all human societies. They are given names which can only be meaningful to anthropologists, but the essential entities here are all the cultural forms in which the mental functions of the Upper Left are expressed in the course of social life.

The Lower Right quadrant contains the macrocosmic counterparts of the entities in the Upper Right, so comprehending all the orders of collective physical existence. These range on a scale from galaxies to planets, to the biosphere or "Gaia system" of the earth, to human societies with division of labour, through families, tribes, nations and empires.

Each one of these quadrants can be seen as a pattern of growth or evolution, if it is looked at in that way, although this creates a problem in view of Wilber's emphatic and repeated rejection of "the Myth of the Given," owing to his acceptance of the Postmodernist objections to our usual ideas of objective reality. The grand sum of all reality is denoted by AQAL, which is a contraction of "all quadrants, all lines and all states," each quadrant comprising its own "line" of development from lowest to highest. We must remember that this universal map is not just a means of organizing information, but an image of the total reality which the aspirant must assimilate and realize so as to be "one with everything." The latter expression is ambiguous, as will appear later.

This system of all things has to be accepted as though it were a brute fact, and in no way a cultural artefact, and one does not consider what, if anything, lies beyond the highest states in each quadrant. Are the latter the limits of reality, or just the limits of human knowledge? If they were both, man's knowledge would be total, like God's, however unlikely that may be. Here, then, is an outline of the multitude of realities which hang in the air as it were on "sky hooks," while being as objectively enduring as the Pyramids. In this way, Wilber is being consistent with his own religious position, which is evidently that of Buddhism, for which there is no such thing as a soul or soul-agency, and for which the self is no more than a product of ignorant craving or, as Christians would say, sin. There are States of

consciousness, Structures of consciousness, Structure Stages, and Phenomenal States, all of them treated as free standing, and effectively self-created. This makes it the more remarkable that consciousness is taken to be next to nothing, as will be considered separately later.

The combination of Buddhism and Postmodernism which appears in the above thinking presents the same problem as that of Linguistic Philosophy: the self-subsistent States and Stages are in the same category as the Linguistic idea of reality in general, which it conceives as being exclusively third-person. It assumes that the external world is a reality, while the individual mind is not real at all. The result of this is a substantive Solipsism, because the denial of the existence of the mind and the affirmation of that of the outside world performs exactly the same function as does the affirmation of the reality of one's own mind and the denial of that of the outside world, as in classic Solipsism. In either case, relationship is narcissistically destroyed, although Wilber is ready to stigmatize narcissism where he perceives it. Those who think the mind is unreal derive an emotional security from this belief, rather as one can escape pursuit if one can make other people believe one to be dead. Such thought would naturally exclude Christianity, because the Christian idea of God is objective, i.e. independent of all personal experiences of God.

A Ladder of Spiritual Development. The different spiritual levels through which we all pass as we mature are helpfully denoted by the colours of the spectrum. These

range from infantile egoism referred to as Red; basic self-centred rationality as Orange; formal religion and morality as Yellow, or "Amber," as he calls it;(should we say "ruby" instead of "red"?) At the level of Green, one is supposed to perceive that the formal structures of one's own religion and morality are relative without being false, and that there is an equivalent truth in many other, quite different faiths. (C.S.Lewis has argued convincingly in *The Abolition of Man* that the principal moral values are the same in all traditions).

At the Blue or Turquoise level, one is supposed to see more and more clearly the absolute truth which appears as embodied in the multiple truths of Green. At the Indigo and Violet levels, one is supposed to be at one with the non-dual reality above and beyond all values. The idea of being "one with" all things or all higher states is a theme of Wilber's, although it can be a mere truism in the sense that you are necessarily one with the universe inasmuch as your physical being is derived from it and sustained by it, besides which one can be likewise one with an idea by understanding it and assenting to it. In such cases, the desideratum is too close to one to constitute an objective.

But where it is not just a truism, "one with" can mean in effect "replaced by", but in this case it cannot count as an objective either; who achieved it? Since this system is non-personal, one cannot raise questions Of whom, For whom, and In whom these States and Stages exist, despite the fact that they are intended to be a matter of personal interest.

Consistently with this, there is no room for belief in a God who creates the whole material, psychic and spiritual world, and Who is active in relation to what goes on in it, answers prayers and helps the seeker where his own powers are inadequate. That, we are given to understand, belongs to an "ethnocentric" stage (denoted by Yellow) which we ought to leave behind, since theism grows out of a particular cultural tradition. The "ought" involved in this does not come from the will of God, therefore, but from somebody's explanation as to why things just happen to be the way they are. In this case it could hardly have any moral force, given that its appearance in history is a complete explanation of it.

The three most basic stages of spiritual development are said to be the "egocentric" (Red), the "ethnocentric" (Orange and Yellow or "Amber"), and "world centric" (Blue, Indigo), although "cosmocentric" seems to be required for the latter. It should be possible to go from any of these stages to the next without discarding the previous one; if not, we are not told why. They would then exist simultaneously in the same subject, if the subject is recognised. These are the basic levels of objectivity, of the recognition of truth and reality beyond our own cravings, passions and conditions of life. The Absolute toward which all these stages are directed, however, has no determinations and is passive in relation to our world. This implies that no mode of being, whether "Red" or "Violet," or good or bad, is demanded by it, and that the only real agent is man, or rather, the human will.

Consciousness and Self-Contradiction. As already remarked, Wilber justifiably rejects the "Myth of the Given," by which term he denotes the common sense belief that reality presents itself to us ready-made, entering our minds rather as images appear in mirrors. This is the myth, while the truth is that our world in individual and collective experience is largely made up of the mind's constructs, that is, the results of the ways in which it processes, selects and combines its representations of the objective realities. Here, he is definitely in the philosophical mainstream, while waiving the question as to how far his system of Quadrants and Levels is some such mental construct. Could it not be one among the countless cultural artefacts in the Lower Left quadrant?

Here is a problem of which Wilber has given a useful account in *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*, this being the classic problem of all systems which tacitly ask for exemption from a condition which they impose on all other forms of thought. This is a demand for a special exemption from a law which is presented as being universal, and the problem that raises is usually solved in a rather unsubtle way by what Wilber aptly calls "the narcissistic move." Thus one exempts one's own thought from its own strictures by a kind of intellectual nepotism, granting it this favour because it is one's own offspring.

Thus there is one kind of self-contradiction lurking in this issue of self-exemption, not least because it is an example of the narcissism which he presents as a characteristic of the spiritually undeveloped. But besides that, there is another, more prominent one, where his

justifiable denial of "the Myth of the Given" is mingled with an almost completely negative idea of consciousness, as in *Integral Spirituality*. Here, Wilber treats consciousness as though it were wholly passive, being a mere openness for the entry of experiences, or a hole through which a ready-made reality comes in:

"It is not a thing, or a content or a phenomenon. It has no description. It is said not to be any kind of intelligence or world-view, but is merely the space in which lines arise." (*Integral Spirituality*, p.68)

We must, however, judge one or the other: if consciousness really is as passive and negative as this, all our reality must in fact be *given* after all, and the perceiving subject would effectively be nothing; conversely, if the given is indeed only a myth, consciousness must needs be essentially a complex creative act, performed by a real agent. This kind of thought does in fact assume that there is a given objective reality which is ordered towards a non-personal, nondual goal, whether Buddhist or Advaitist. That much must be given, even if nothing else was.

The emptiness of consciousness as such is argued for with a determination which is at bottom dogmatic, where it is said not to have any nature of its own. The idea that it is merely "the space in which lines arise," and "the openness in which phenomena arise," flies in the face of the fact that our ability to perceive the world around us depends on an interpretational process of the same kind as the ability to read a passage of text. Conversely, a purely passive consciousness, if such a thing were

possible, would be an open door to absolutely any amount of knowledge, no matter how advanced. But reality is notoriously not like that; the limits to the knowledge of which any individual is capable are inflexible.

At the same time we are bidden to reject "the belief that reality is simply given to me," or that there is any pre-given world which consciousness delivers to us more or less as it is. That rejection, at least, must be right because, if it were not, we would have to believe that the cause of our sensations of, say, a large white cup of hot, sweet coffee was - a large white cup of hot sweet coffee; in which case everything would be effectively self-caused, and therefore presumably divine. What is wrong here is the common sense view of reality, which avoids the tests of consistency and causal connection wherever possible, and remains on the surface of things.

The question, then, is why an utterly inadequate idea of consciousness should be asserted almost without argument while one rightly denies the givenness of our perceived reality. How is it possible to confuse consciousness with passivity? If one knows that there is no prefabricated reality dropping in through an open trapdoor in our heads, one also knows that the essence of rational consciousness is the power of *self-reflection*, without which its creative activities would be impossible. That is something which is solidly resistant to explanation either on its own level or from below it, as I have said elsewhere, not least because it is always infuriatingly liable to explain any attempt to explain it. This means that it must also be resistant to attempts to enclose everything in a single system. It defies attempts

to create the spiritual equivalent of the Ultimate Truth Machine, and this explains the contradiction involved here. The only way to make people think one has escaped this *impasse* is to promote an idea of consciousness which *needs no explanation*, whence the attempts to equate it with passivity and vacuity. But that is merely ideology and dogmatism.

At the same time, this goes with a professed allegiance to Postmodernism which is undiminished, as he denies the belief that "the consciousness of an individual will deliver Truth," because "the truth that the subject delivers is constructed in part by intersubjective control networks." On this basis he is subverting the truth which he too is trying to deliver; are these control networks themselves constructs of the mind, or are they a pre-existent reality dropping in on us? Either way, we are in trouble. As with other systems, this one bids us takes the awkward realities to be just mental constructs, while the favoured and necessary ones are taken to be ready-made primal realities hurled in through our broken doors and windows, whether we like it or not.

Evolution and Enlightenment. These are two essential elements in the system of *Integral Spirituality*, and the way in which one understands Buddhism is relevant here. One may take Buddhism purely as a practical way of life for personal training, one which could be fitted into almost any religion. That view of it could account for its lack of any doctrine concerning God and the soul. It may also be taken for a divine revelation, however, and in

that case its lack of theological doctrine will then be taken to be *doctrine*, however improbably. That seems to be the position adopted here, which appears to be both spiritual and atheistic.

Where personal immortality is not regarded, it is still felt to be necessary to offer the devotee some kind of reward to look forward to at the end of it all, in this case enlightenment, for all the doubt as to who or what is enlightened. In this context it would be more consistent to offer a life of ascetic discipline which professedly had no result for oneself or anyone else, but bare logic alone is no more acceptable for those who defy the human state than for those who accept it.

As in most non-theistic systems, evolution is the fundamental condition of everything in it; there being no Creator, things must either make themselves or grow out of the ambient conditions. The idea of a Creator is excluded on the grounds that there is a vast number of different creation myths all round the world. That is taken to imply that the idea of creation belongs to mankind's mythical and pre-logical state of development, one among those which Wilber classifies according to his code of quadrant reference numbers. This kind of thinking is rooted in the premise that God can only be approached by stages of ever-greater generality and universality, since the highest has no attributes. (This is in opposition to the more orthodox idea that the Divine infinity includes the extremes of both universality *and* of particularity, besides having real attributes).

There is also the problem that creation as such is not

a self-contradictory idea, in which case it is always possible that the traditional accounts of creation could correspond to a reality. Either we were created or we were not, so the probability of creation cannot be less than one chance in two, no matter how naively it may be expressed. In that case, they cannot be equated with an attempt to explain something we are too ignorant or too irrational to understand, because a complete account of creation could not be possible for minds which had been created by a top-down process which transcends their created order of intelligence. In other words, if our origin really was outside the natural order, no possible extension of the intelligence we were given would suffice to comprehend the exact nature of that origin, although Revelation can do so in its own way.

A similar kind of reasoning as the above can be applied to the belief in God as becoming man, and rising from the dead for man's salvation. One cannot exclude the possibility that in one instance this belief should derive from something which actually happened, given only that the Divine nature transcends the distinction between universal and particular, and so is both at once for our understanding. The belief that truth and divinity must be exclusively universal comes from a Nominalistic philosophy which is consistent with Buddhism, but destructive for most traditions.

Accordingly, a universal evolution toward ever-higher levels of abstraction and generality is presented as an indisputable fact, not in a Darwinian manner, but rather as the returning or sublatory movement which follows a

previous emanatory one. Darwinism is accepted inasmuch as it is compatible with this pattern. This idea of evolution makes it a cosmic movement balanced by an opposite cosmic movement before it, which is referred to as "involutionary" in the first Appendix to *Integral Spirituality*, where it is said that the higher levels of being extend themselves into successively lower levels where they become more and more weak and diluted. After the limit of this process, the whole thing goes into reverse, and with evolution everything begins to converge upon the Source of the outgoing movement. This Source is of course non-personal, non-dual and is in no sense a creator.

Personal salvation is not an issue in this cosmic process because the evolution so conceived here proceeds to a point where there can be no longer any person or determinate being. Consequently, references to "nondual experience" are made frequently by Wilber, despite the fact that "nondual experience" is a contradiction in terms: an experience is nothing if not a relation between a subject and an object. Thus if I say "I have had a nondual experience," the statement is false because (a) it was not *I* who had it, or it could not have been nondual, and (b) because, whatever it was, it was unverifiable, since no one can claim it. However, no matter what one wants to say about such a mysterious thing, one must be safe from contradiction, both because of its obscurity and because very few people have any idea of the difference between a "non-dual experience" and an experience for which there is no verbal expression.

Wilber is enough of a realist to be aware of the conflict between the idea of universal evolution and his idea of Enlightenment as a state of absolute finality. A state of absolute finality is premised despite the absence of any context which could give it meaning. Without some idea of finality, the kind of doctrine offered would hardly be distinguishable from paganism. But if evolution is an ultimate reality, it must follow that there can be no such thing as finality. The idea of Enlightenment offered here is defined as "being one with everything," but that state would have to be beyond evolution in order to be a goal of endeavour. Subject to evolution, one can only be "one with" a continually changing cosmos. The deep ambiguities involved in being "one with" anything have already been considered.

What is at issue here is a belief that the highest goal or perfection must be an absolute finality, which is presented by means of the formula that it is "the realization of oneness with all states and all stages that have evolved so far, and that are in existence at any given time." (see: *Integral Spirituality*). However, this cannot rule out further cosmic evolution, and it is hard to see how or why the idea of "realization" in relation to an ever-indefinite "everything" can be sustained. How can one be "enlightened" about something which never stays the same and which must always be out of date? This idea contrasts with the traditional idea of life as a spiritual journey in which God is endlessly approached, with perfection as an ever-growing perfection.

On this basis, evolution would have a proper place in doctrine as an account of the interior, subjective life of

the soul as it develops in relation to a created universe. What one normally encounters as evolutionism would therefore be just a confusion between objective and subjective realities. In any case, in the realm of the spirit, approach and attainment are not the hard alternatives which they have to be in the natural world. The finality envisaged by nondualistic ideas of spirituality indicates that they are not as open to the infinite as they profess to be. They deny the reality of contingent beings, only to reintroduce finitude in the idea of finality in relation to Divinity. The issue of finality here is inseparable from the idea of purpose, however dubious that may be in a system which gives no meaning or basis to self-agency. It cannot be ignored because the idea of purpose is deeply embedded in human consciousness, and consequently every spiritual system must include it, whether its presence there is consistent with the system or not.

Postmodernism: A Non-Issue. Wilber is concerned to show how his conception of spirituality must accommodate Postmodernism, because his system, being designedly all-inclusive, must include every development of subjectivity and every development of objectivity, both inwardly and as expressed in the world. Accordingly, his idea of "Upper Right imperialism," for example, refers to an over-valuation of objectivity which goes so far as to make it an ideology. The rights of the subjective are affirmed against this, even where it includes Postmodernism, which is taken to be necessary in order to overcome the myth of the given. This would only be the case if all objects of knowledge were equally real on the same basis.

In reality there is no need to assume this, if we have a metaphysic which includes psycho-physical dualism. This conception is of vital importance for any doctrine which is to be proof against being reduced to some form of materialism. This issue is ignored here, because this system, like Hegel's, is monistic, and just as Hegel's system was easily materialized by Marx, so this one is in principle vulnerable in the same way.

Given the essential dualities between the Forms and their instantiations and between minds and the world which is represented in them, we have ample scope for both the objective element in experience together with the element which is created by the operation of the mind on it. Without that, the only solution available is that of mixing exclusively objectivist thought with a form of thought which denies objective reality altogether. That creates a balance between them of a kind, but one which is wholly confined to the phenomenal level, where mind is present not as mind but only as its productions, whether objective or subjective in form.

The supposed need for Postmodernism is therefore artificial, and results only from the modern phobia for dualism in any shape or form. In any spiritual context it should be clear that dualism or essential dualities are never a problem for those who believe in God, because the ultimate unity of all disparate realities is bound to exist first and foremost in the God Who created them, if nowhere else; the existence of dualities and polarities is therefore always well founded and legitimate. This is why those who have an atheistic mindset feel a need to deny dualities make all things one, not in God or in the realm

of Forms, but *on their own level*. Their position thus involves a demand that the grand unity of all things, like the AQAL Matrix, must be understandable for human minds. This unlikely proposition has long been an atheist assumption, at least since Hegel, and those who subscribe to it are not deterred by the lack of evidence for it.

Another reason why something like Postmodernism is not needed to combat the Upper Right imperialism of scientific materialists, is that philosophy has always been able to show that science and the laws it discovers are in a relative way productions of the human mind, without a systematic denial of objective reality. Here again, it is a matter of trying to fill the gap in the argument left by the rejection of an intellectual tradition he has no idea of reviving. The AQAL system would not be an adequate alternative, therefore, even if it really comprised all realities as it is supposed to, but in fact the claims made for it are unprovable, since one can never rule out the possibilities that either this system may be part of a larger system, or that alternatives to it will be found.

Its systematic structure is founded on the usual assumption that the whole universe can be enclosed in two containers, one called "Objective Realities" and one called "Subjective Realities." But this is just a convention, and this simple dichotomy cannot be definitive. It is open to challenge, as by Patrick Harpur for example, whose study of the paranormal in *Daimonic Reality* is based on the counter assumption that there is at least one more category besides that of "subjective/inner" and "objective/outer," and that is a

reality which partakes of both objective and subjective at once, *not* as a result of mental confusion or ignorance in the observer, but as a separate kind of reality. It is not clear whether this is sufficient to validate the paranormal, but it does show how systems like Wilber's are, after all, products of human ingenuity, rather than mediated expressions of a revealed truth. Accordingly, they are unable to exclude other conceptions of the same kind.

In fact the AQAL system appears to have no place for the paranormal as such, because it recognises magic as being nothing more than an expression of the intellectual incapacity of primitive minds. Instead, we are invited to a mystery-free universe, where the range of realities is systematically limited. The Lower Left exclusivism of the Postmodernists is taken to be the antidote to the Upper Right exclusivism of the scientific materialists, as if we could get the truth from a mixture of these two. But from a traditional point of view, that would be like expecting to get the truth from a mixture of two different falsehoods, or expecting to be able to drink one poison safely if we mix it with another one.

The difference between Forms and particulars is ignored, and everything is treated wholly on the empirical level, where one can only make aggregates of phenomena, and never comprehend things in their archetypes, and the archetypes in God. The two competing exclusivisms referred to above are both expressions of the modern passion for reductionism and simplification at any price, which Wilber apparently does not share, but in reality does so by his

conception of leading everything toward a nondual or attributeless finality. But that is just a more abstract form of the same thing. This attitude arises in materialistic minds when they perceive correctly that as phenomenal beings we have no long-term power to conserve our own being, and conclude that we must therefore be helped out of existence as smoothly and efficiently as possible. The idea that we are created by a God Who actively wills our existence in this world and in the next is regarded by them as inconceivable.

The Mixing of Tradition and Anti-Tradition. Finally, the way in which recycled selections from traditional wisdom can interact with modern culture should be given some consideration. It can be seen that we are confronted by a form of New Age spirituality with an idea of self-perfection which has no dependence on personal morality. There is a passage in *Integral Spirituality* (p.98) where Wilber contradicts a statement, reportedly by the Dalai Lama, where the latter endorses a traditional view of sexual morality, in this case to the effect that some kinds of sexual acts are objectively wrong or bad. Instead, Wilber affirms that almost any kind of sexual act can be "good" or "bad", regardless of its objective nature, leaving one with no criterion for good and bad apart from the degree of satisfaction of those who engage in it. But this is just the exaltation of subjectivity which is typical of Boomeritis culture, the very thing this book is intended to free us from.

What is being ignored here is the fact that imposed constraints on behaviour are not always matters of

cultural preference, but can be a reflection of objective realities over which man's will has no power. This issue shows why a critique of religious teachings based on the Pre/Post Fallacy cannot be valid unless it is made from the standpoint of tradition. Psychology is inadequate for any such purpose, and therefore Boomeritis will not be cured by other forms of spiritual individualism. The Pre-Post Fallacy is only a symptom of the real problem, which is the near-universal modern belief that every ascent to higher spiritual levels must leave orthodox religion behind. This belief is common to those of Wilber and of the Boomers, which are both in the same anti-traditional mould.

In reality, higher stages of development do not compete for space with the lower ones, because the process is additive, not one of substitution, as the practice of the Catholic Church has always made clear. In Catholic religious communities the higher spiritual developments have never been taken as an excuse for dispensing with orthodox religious practice. The latter never ceases to be necessary for as long as one is in this world, no matter how far we progress. A determination to ignore this is the biggest single cause of heresy, which is always waiting to turn spirituality into a means of worldly self-advancement.

Thus, when religious orthodoxy is left behind, and it is believed that "world-centric" people in the Blue end of the spiritual spectrum are superior and highly-rated persons, many people will respond by using their Red egoism to attain it, as though it were a professional

qualification and as though God had nothing to do with it. This is why there be nothing truly spiritual in psychic equivalents of mountaineering, muscle-building, and combat training. That is poles apart from what the mind of tradition really requires of us, namely, to practise the religion of one's own culture like anyone else, to do all one can to improve one's moral character, to give as much time as possible to the pursuit of truth, and not to be involved in worldly life beyond necessity. The rest is in the hands of God.

The prevalent mindset is deeply opposed to such values, because of an absorption in the ego. In modern people there is a passion for heroism which is mingled in the oddest way with a determination to be just one of the crowd. This is the exact inverse of the traditional way of standing out from the crowd in ways which make no show and are unlikely to be understood or be popular. The spiritual inversion involved in this is connected with a contradictory attitude to tradition. On the one hand, it is the attitude of those who on the one hand cannot accept the values of tradition, but on the other, they are unable to reject it and move on. This is because acceptance would involve some kind of spiritual death in today's world, while refusal could make life too dangerous. In times of confusion and crisis like the present, the permanent relevance of traditional wisdom is frequently perceived and even acted on, but in the unspiritual manner of creating a spiritually ineffective mixture with typically modern purposes.

In the face of this situation, Wilber sees himself as a doctor of souls who has diagnosed the spiritual disease of his contemporaries, especially in connection with "Boomeritis" and the "Pre/Post Fallacy," which result from confusions caused by some perceived similarities between higher and lower stages of spiritual development. But it goes wrong because he is too much part of it himself, however unwittingly, albeit in a more subtle form. Like the Boomers, he takes it for granted that the world of the spirit is wide-open country, just waiting for the brave and the resourceful to conquer it. This involves a denial of the need for grace, even if it is compatible with the practices of some forms of Buddhism and Advaita.

The Great Chain of Being plays an important part in Wilber's thought, and this gives an argument to those who wish to see his work as a part of tradition, but his work is all too much part of a culture which is committed to the destruction of the "Golden Chain," which is the manifestation of the Great Chain of Being in human life. That destruction is also the dominant purpose in nearly all modern political movements, and it comes from a passionate conviction that nature as such is evil, so that it could only be made half-acceptable through constant human control, rearrangement, and equalization, which all more or less openly gather strength from the late cyclic pattern of entropic reduction.

Wilber is surely right in thinking that there is a psychic realm which is open to a grace-free conquest by all comers, but it has hardly anything to do with God or

salvation. There appears to be nothing more than a pursuit of power in all this, and the question as to whether that could be compatible with traditional religion is never considered. Some will argue that traditional or orthodox religion has always served to increase the freedom and power of its followers (even where such things are disregarded for devotional reasons).

True religion cannot fail to bring freedom from the entrapments of natural life, and that in turn must liberate the power which belongs essentially to every self. Therefore, why criticise those whose religion gives first place to freedom and power? The answer is that freedom and power always partake of the qualities of the means and motives with which they are sought. When sought for their own sake, they are substituted for God, and so do not go beyond the human level. There is a world of difference between that and practising a religion because one believes it to be based on truths revealed by God, and which require a commitment which is independent of any personal benefits which may or may not occur during this life. What is right must be *rightly chosen*, that is, for itself alone; if it is chosen for benefits that are believed to result from it, they are the real objects of the choice, which is then not a religious choice at all.

It is true that God must will that everyone should rise to the level of their potential, since He created it, but this can still become a lived falsehood when it is substituted for what is known as "the obedience of faith." Where that is ignored, the substitution of man for God follows as a matter of course, no matter what powers or good qualities may result from it.

