

## Introduction

### Wilber's AQAL Map

Ken Wilber is “the world’s most widely published philosopher,” whose “books have been translated into 30 languages” (Meyerhoff 2005). Since he offers a synthesis of science, philosophy, and spirituality, he has been called a spiritual and integral philosopher. His AQAL map of the Kosmos (to which I also refer simply as his map or his AQAL map) is among the most encompassing maps ever devised in the course of human history. It is highly significant and important because it is relevant to all aspects of life and can help to improve the post/modern predicament.

Physicists have also developed increasingly comprehensive maps and theories. Nowadays they seem to be at the verge of unifying the four forces known in physics; in this connection some of them have referred to a Theory of Everything. We must, however, keep in mind that even if they succeed in developing such a theory, it is only a scientific theory of physics. Being objective, it leaves out the subjective realm, personal and transpersonal human experience. Furthermore, it leaves out art and morals as well as biology, psychology, and the social sciences.

Some thinkers have integrated more than matter into their theories. For example, Laszlo's (2004) “integral theory of everything” comprises matter, life, and consciousness; but it is still primarily a scientific vision, although he supplemented it with a poetic rendition that appeals to our hearts and guts.

Wilber's map comprises the self, culture, and nature; the I, you/we, and it; art, morals, and science; interior and exterior, individual and collective views of reality; objectivity and subjectivity, and with regard to the latter, personal and transpersonal experiences, including religious and mystical experience, Eastern and Western. This synthesis of all of these realms is applied to many fields of society and human endeavor such as science, including medicine and environmentalism, business, law, politics, education, philosophy, religion, art, spirituality, psychoanalysis, and personal existence. Because of this extraordinary comprehensiveness, Wilber himself referred to his map as a “Theory of Everything” (Wilber 2001). This theory obviously is far beyond the Theory of Everything scientists are talking about. Maybe it would be more appropriate to refer to it as an integral vision of everything as Wilber (2007) himself has done.

But is it indeed an integral theory or vision of *everything*? Although Wilber (2006: 2) considers his map “the most complete and accurate map we have at this time,” he

emphasizes that a map is always simplified to some extent—it is impossible to accommodate *everything* in a single map. Therefore, “*everything*” has a special meaning in Wilber’s books such as *A Brief History of Everything* (Wilber 1996, 2000) and *A Theory of Everything* (Wilber 2001). Clearly, “*everything*” can only mean major aspects or realms of reality (Wilber 2000a: 197; 2003, Tape 1). A synthesis of these major aspects or realms is indeed an enormous achievement and deserves to be called an integral vision. However, as Meyerhoff (2005-7) and others have pointed out, Wilber often exaggerates the level of agreement in the scientific community regarding the claims he makes, selects only some sources of information that support his views, disregards other conflicting sources, and sometimes misrepresents sources. This limits the scope of his integration considerably.

Now let us look at Wilber’s AQAL map of the Kosmos. It originated from the Great Chain of Being, which by many, though not everybody, is considered the core of the world’s wisdom traditions. Over the years Wilber has become increasingly critical of the Great Chain but retained its hierarchical structure (see, e.g., Wilber 2007: 213-229). Instead of the Great Chain, he prefers to refer to the Great Nest of Being because this indicates more clearly that it is a hierarchy in the sense of a holarchy (see Chapter 1). In its simplest form this hierarchy has only two or three levels, namely, matter and spirit, or matter, mind and spirit; but up to over twenty levels may be differentiated. Traditionally, often five levels are distinguished: matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit (see Fig. 1–2 in Chapter 1). Fig. 1–1 represents four levels: matter, body, mind, and spirit. Regardless of how many levels are distinguished, each successive level includes and transcends its predecessor(s). Thus, in the simple hierarchy of Figure 1–1, body includes and transcends matter, mind includes and transcends body and matter, and spirit includes and transcends mind, body, and matter as the concentric circles graphically indicate it. Each circle can be compared to a nest and thus the most inclusive circle, which is spirit, is the Great Nest of Being that includes all other levels.

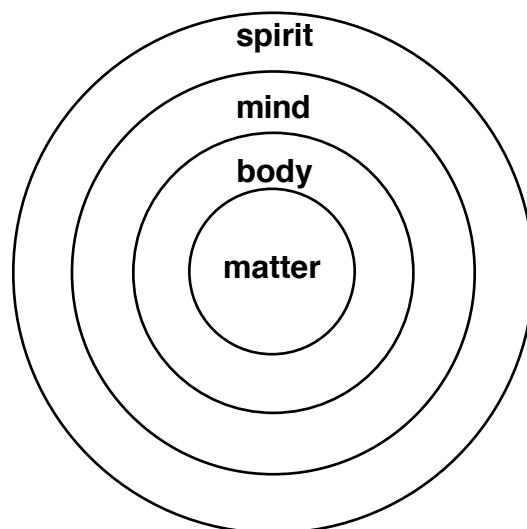


Figure I-1. A simple representation of the Great Nest of Being (for a more complete representation that also includes the level of the soul see Fig. 1-2).

Instead of levels, Wilber often refers to stages or waves. Since the publication of the first edition of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995), Wilber distinguishes four aspects of the waves, stages, or levels: an interior and exterior aspect, both of which have an individual and collective aspect. With regard to the circular map of Figure I-1, this means that it has to be divided into the following four quadrants: the upper left interior-individual quadrant, the lower left interior-collective quadrant, the upper right exterior-individual quadrant, and the lower right exterior-collective quadrant (see, for example, The AQAL Holon in [http://www.kheper.net/Wilber/Wilber\\_IV.html](http://www.kheper.net/Wilber/Wilber_IV.html), or recent books by Wilber such as *Integral Spirituality* (Wilber 2006: 20) or *The Integral Vision* (2007: 70) or Fig. 5-5 (in Chapter 5 of this book). In excerpts from the forthcoming second volume of his Kosmos trilogy (2005a,b) and in *Integral Spirituality* (2006), Wilber pointed out that in each quadrant an inside and outside view has to be distinguished. “The outside view is how it **looks**, the inside view is how it **feels**” (Wilber 2006: 154). Altogether the outside and inside views of the four quadrants constitute eight views disclosing eight zones. Since each view and zone has its own distinctive methodology, this leads to an “Integral Methodological Pluralism” (Wilber 2006). Each methodology, with the insights it provides, presents a different perspective of reality. According to Wilber’s (2006) “Integral Post-Metaphysics,” there are no perceptions of a given manifest reality because there is no given manifest reality. Manifest reality is a construction based on evidence: it is “the realm of perspectives, not things nor events nor structures nor processes nor systems nor *vasanas* nor archetypes nor *dharmas*, because all of those are perspectives before they are anything else, and cannot be adopted or even stated without first assuming a perspective” (Wilber 2006: 42).

In contrast to the traditional Great Chain or Nest of Being, in the four quadrant model matter is no longer at the basis of all levels, but instead is the exterior (that is, the right quadrants) of all levels (Wilber 2005b, Figure 4). This means that each level of consciousness in the interior left quadrants has a corresponding level of matter in the right quadrants (Wilber 2005c). Since modern science has shown that matter is related to and can be transformed into energy, matter (in the right quadrants) has to be understood as matter/energy. Furthermore, matter spans the whole range from gross to subtle to very subtle. The gross level, that we are normally accustomed to, is the exterior view of the body; the subtle level is the exterior view of the mind; and the causal level, which represents the subtlest energy, is the exterior view of spirit. There are further correspondences between the upper individual quadrants and the lower collective quadrants (see The AQAL Holon in [http://www.kheper.net/Wilber/Wilber\\_IV.html](http://www.kheper.net/Wilber/Wilber_IV.html)).

Since both right quadrants represent science (that deals objectively with the exterior view), they can be combined. Then only three cosmic dimensions are distinguished, which Wilber calls "The Big Three": the interior of the individual, the self; the interior of the collective, culture; and the exterior of the individual and collective, nature; or, from another perspective, art, morals, and science; or the Beautiful, the Good, and the True.

Within the four quadrants or the Big Three, Wilber distinguishes a varying number of levels, stages, or waves. He notes that the number of levels is somewhat arbitrary, referring to the analogy of a building where we can distinguish as many levels as there are floors or steps in the stairs that connect the floors. In the simplest version of his map only three levels are indicated: body, mind, spirit in the upper left quadrant and corresponding levels in the other quadrants. In the most complete version of his map seventeen levels are implied of which thirteen are listed. The central point from which everything radiates represents the Big Bang and the numbered stages indicate evolutionary and developmental levels in time. Without going into the detail of all the stages, let me only highlight some of the stages that I shall refer to in the following chapters. In the upper left quadrant evolution led from atoms to molecules to (prokaryotic and eukaryotic) cells to neuronal organism with increasingly complex brains. The lower right quadrant represents corresponding stages of the collective in which the individuals of the upper right quadrant evolved. Thus, atoms evolved in galaxies, molecules on planets, and so on. The upper left quadrant represents the individual interior aspect of evolution, that is consciousness. It ranges from prehension, the proto-consciousness of atoms and molecules, to irritability of prokaryotic cells such as bacteria, to sensation, perception, impulse, and emotion in organisms with increasingly evolved brains. Finally,

with the evolution of the human species, consciousness proceeds to the use of symbols, concepts, rules, formal reasoning, vision-logic (see below), and four transpersonal stages that are not explicitly indicated in the usual representation of the most complete version of his map (see, e.g., The AQAL Holon in [http://www.kheper.net/topics/Wilber/Wilber\\_IV.html](http://www.kheper.net/topics/Wilber/Wilber_IV.html), or Integral Spirituality [Wilber 2006: 250]). The highest of these transpersonal stages is the Nondual. Although Wilber refers to it often as a stage, he also points out that it “is not a stage set apart from other stages, but is rather the Suchness or Thatness or empty Ground that is *equally present* in and as all stages and all phenomena. The metaphor I have repeatedly used is that Suchness is not the highest rung in a ladder but the wood out of which the whole ladder is made (Wilber 2001b: 336). The lower left quadrant represents the environmental or, in humans, the cultural context for the evolution of individual consciousness. For example, the archaic stage is the context for the evolution of the use of symbols, the magic stage for concepts, the mythic stage for rules, the rational stage for formal reasoning, and the centauric stage for vision-logic.

Considering all four quadrants at once, we can see, for example, that the formal (scientific) mind (stage 12) functions in a rational culture in an industrial nation/state, and has a still insufficiently known brain structure-function called SF2. The reader can look for other correspondences across the four quadrants of in the most elaborate version of his map. I do not have to go into all that detail since the focus of this book is on the basic structure of Wilber's map and not the detail of the stages.

Wilber (2001) also produced a version of his map that is specifically focused on human evolution, which means that the stages below the archaic consciousness are omitted and an additional pluralistic stage is distinguished between the stages of formal reasoning and vision-logic. Since individual development repeats to some extent the broad outlines of human evolution, the stages in this map are both evolutionary and developmental stages of an individual human being. (Hugh & Amalia Kaye Martin's ADAPT model [or map] complements and transcends this version of Wilber's AQAL map [see Martin, H. & A.K. 2007]).

For the purpose of this book, a version of levels of consciousness that is intermediate between the most elaborate and the simplest version of his map and that includes the transpersonal stages is useful in many instances. In this version, in which he also referred mainly to human evolution and development, he distinguished the following 10 levels or stages of consciousness (Wilber 2000 b: 108-109): 1. the body or body sensations; 2. emotion; 3. the magical mind; 4. the mythic mind; 5. the rational mind, which is characteristic of the modern scientific mind; 6. vision-logic, which is

integral, that is, it allows for “universal pluralism and unity-in-diversity” (Wilber 2000c: 109); and then the four transpersonal stages: 7. the psychic, which is the home of nature mysticism; 8. the subtle, characteristic of deity mysticism; 9. the causal or formless representing formless mysticism; and 10. the nondual, which is nondual mysticism, and, as pointed out above, should not be considered a stage, but the all encompassing Ground. In his recent book on *Integral Spirituality* (2006), Wilber uses the names of the transpersonal levels and the Nondual for states (see below), not stages or levels. In this book I shall follow Wilber's original usage, that is, I shall use these names for stages, unless otherwise noted. However, I shall be careful not to confuse stages and states. When I refer to stages, I mean structure-stages, unless otherwise noted. Structure-stages are enduring structures, where higher structures incorporate the lower structures. In contrast, temporary transitional stages “come into existence but subsequently are phased out or replaced” (Wilber in Rothberg and Kelly, 1998: 307). Examples of the latter are moral stages such as preconventional, conventional, and postconventional, where one stage replaces the next one, or worldviews such as archaic, magical, mythic, mental, and so on.

Another important component in Wilber's AQAL map is lines or streams that unfold through the stages in the quadrants. With regard to human development in the upper left quadrant, there are over a dozen lines including the following: the cognitive line, the moral line, the emotional or affective line, the interpersonal line, the needs line, the self-identity line of ego development, the aesthetic line, the psycho-sexual line, the values line, and the spiritual line in which spirit is “viewed not just as Ground, and not just as the highest stage, but as its own line of unfolding” (Wilber 2006: 24). A person can be at a high level in one line and at a low level in another line. “Overall development, in other words, can be quite uneven” (Wilber 2001: 44). For example, a person can be a mathematical genius and morally or spiritually very low. Or “some individuals—including spiritual teachers—may be highly evolved in certain capacities (such as meditative awareness or cognitive brilliance), and yet demonstrate poor (or even pathological) development in other streams, such as the psychosexual or interpersonal” (Wilber 2001: 45).

Finally, Wilber distinguishes states and types at the various levels of his map. There are deep sleep, dream, and waking states. In addition, “there are all sorts of different states of consciousness, including *meditative states* (induced by Yoga, contemplation, meditation, and so on); *altered states* (such as drug-induced); and a variety of *peak experiences*, many of which can be triggered by intense experiences like making love,

walking in nature, or listening to exquisite music" (Wilber 2005d: 5). Such states can be reached at virtually any stage, but individuals cannot remain in these states because states are temporary, whereas stages are permanent according to Wilber.

Types may run through all the levels, except the formless, which is unqualifiable. Examples of types are masculine and feminine, personality types such as extrovert and introvert, or the nine types of the enneagram.

In conclusion, Wilber's map is hierarchical, evolutionary/developmental, and progressive. Compared to the Great Nest of Being, from which it originated, it comprises more levels, is subdivided into the four quadrants or the Big Three, and includes further refinements such as lines, states, and types. It can accommodate an extraordinary wealth of information. As I pointed out already, it can be applied to all areas and aspects of society and it is the basis for an Integral Life Practice that is the "conscious exercise of **body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature**" (Wilber 2005d: 48). This practice comprises dozens of modules. The four core modules are: 1. the cognitive module which is the AQAL map that trains the mind to take perspectives, especially the perspectives of the eight zones; 2. the spiritual or meditative module that emphasizes meditative states training, which in turn leads to higher stages; 3. the shadow work module that helps to release the repressed unconscious; and 4. the 3-body workout module that exercises the gross, subtle and very subtle (causal) body.

### **Limitations of Wilber's AQAL Map**

Despite its enormous comprehensiveness, Wilber's map has some limitations. The first part of this book (Chapters 1-3) deals with some of the most fundamental of these limitations and shows how they can be overcome.

Chapter 1 demonstrates the limitations of hierarchical (holarchical) thinking. It shows that hierarchies (holarchies) represent only one limited aspect of reality. Therefore, it is desirable to complement them by nonhierarchical modes of representation that are based on other ways of thinking. The significance of nonhierarchical modes of thinking for our health and our relation to the sacred is pointed out.

Chapter 2 shows that hierarchical (holarchical) thinking entails either/or logic: something belongs either to one level of the hierarchy or to another level; or something belongs to this category or to another category, is either black or white. It is obvious, however, that in the real world we find all shades ranging from black to white; and even black may contain traces of white and vice versa as it is so aptly illustrated in the Yin-

Yang symbol. For this reason, Chapter 2 focuses on alternatives to either/or logic such as both/and logic, fuzzy logic, Yin-Yang and network thinking. The fundamental consequences of these other ways of thinking for the betterment of the human condition and the world are pointed out.

Chapter 3 deals with the evolutionary limitation of Wilber's map. Evolution is, of course, a major aspect of reality. However, it is only one side of the coin, so to speak. The other side is involution. While evolution in Wilber's map leads from the Many to the One (the One that becomes apparent at transpersonal levels and that mystics have referred to), involution leads from the One to the Many. Both movements occur in time. However, they may also happen beyond time in the eternal present. Since Wilber's map represents explicitly only evolution in time, a more comprehensive map will have to include also involution in time and both evolution and involution beyond time in the eternal present. These inclusions point to the important territory of peace and fulfillment.

In general it is very important to keep in mind that the limitations of Wilber's map are not necessarily limitations of his thinking and experience. For example involution, although not indicated in his map, is well known to Wilber.

### **Mandala Maps**

Whereas the first part of this book deals with fundamental limitations of Wilber's map and shows how they can be overcome, the second part presents an alternative map that does not suffer from these limitations. This alternative map is a dynamic mandala, or, more precisely, a self-referential dynamic mandala. Self-referential means that the mandala does not only refer to the Kosmos, but also to itself. Therefore, the dynamic concept of the mandala does not only refer to the dynamic of the Kosmos, but also to the mandala itself, which means that the mandala is also dynamic. In other words, transformation is built into the mandala: the mandala entails countless transformations of itself, each of which is a different mandala or map of the Kosmos. Thus, the mandala actually is a mandala of mandalas, a plurality of maps. It turns out that Wilber's map is one of the transformations that the mandala can undergo. This means that Wilber's map is a special case of the mandala. The mandala, however, is not a special case of Wilber's map since it cannot be generated from Wilber's map. Therefore, the mandala is more comprehensive than Wilber's map.

Chapter 4 presents the mandala in a very simple version and demonstrates that:



1. it can be interpreted in a hierarchical (holarchical) way and also in nonhierarchical ways;
2. it can be interpreted in terms of either/or logic or in terms of other types of logic that transcend the constraints of either/or logic;
3. it can be interpreted in terms of evolution and involution;
4. it can be interpreted beyond time in the eternal present.

This chapter also shows how through its contemplation the mandala can provide insights, how it can alleviate suffering, and how it can be an aid to liberation and healing.

Chapter 5 presents several transformations of the mandala, one of which is a simple version of the Wilber map. The version of Figure I-3 also could be generated.

Chapter 6 emphasizes that all of the transformations of the mandala, including the Wilber map, complement each other. In general, the importance of complementarity is underlined and some of its many consequences—ranging from greater comprehensiveness to world peace and tolerance—are pointed out.

Chapter 7 emphasizes how the transformation of the mandala involves the transformer who has to move from one standpoint to another as he or she transforms the mandala and thus can see different perspectives of reality. When this movement is spontaneous and free, it becomes a dance. Since the dance involves mandalas that represent the fluid Kosmos, the dance is a cosmic dance. In its spontaneity and playfulness it can also elicit a song and laughter that can be transformative, healing, and liberating.