

NON-DUALITY IN KEN WILBER'S INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY:  
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL AND ALTERNATIVE PHYSICALIST  
PERSPECTIVE OF MYSTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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2009



Ken Wilber

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I declare that *NON-DUALITY IN KEN WILBER'S INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL AND ALTERNATIVE PHYSICALIST PERSPECTIVE OF MYSTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS* is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Signature

Jeremy John Jacobs

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Date

## **DEDICATION**

To Kim and St John

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My deepest gratitude goes to my wife Kim for her endless patience, encouragement, and support. I gratefully acknowledge Professor Celia Kourie's professionalism. Her courteous manner of guidance and correction, and also the hospitality she extended to my alternative perspectives are an indication of her academic integrity. Special thanks to my sister Tania Jacobs who typed up reams of notes that I had gathered over the years, and finally my friend Andre Croucamp whose brilliant mind inspired me to think beyond the strictures of my creeds.

## ABSTRACT

Since the advent of human consciousness all manner of theoreticians from mystics to philosophers, and linguists to scientists have considered why and how it is that an individuated self seems to occupy or indwell a physical body. There is a common experiential sense, in other words, in which personal consciousness and our bodies are felt to be two different things. Two broad areas of opinion attempting to explain this apparent bifurcation are defined for the purpose of addressing this problem: Essentialists who variously maintain that there are non-physical properties inherent to all forms and functions of physicality; and Physicalists who claim that the extant universe as a multiplicity of complex material processes is the only reality. The respective natures of body and mind and the ways in which they relate has yielded an extraordinary variety of hypotheses within and between these two broad categories. In this thesis the dilemma is called the *Hard Problem* and it focuses particularly on the relationship between consciousness and the brain. Recently, Ken Wilber has constructed an Integral Philosophy which attempts a synergistic gradation of all possible genres of experience and knowledge into one cohesive scheme representing the total Reality. The culminating point of Wilber's theory claims resolution of the *Hard Problem*, indeed of all appearances of duality, in the realisation of consummate emptiness in mystical consciousness. Wilber's proposal therefore tenders a version of Essentialism since it implies that an *Absolute* principle is inherent to all existence. The problem explored in this study considers whether the epistemological architecture of Wilber's Philosophy is coherent and consistent. Following a critical appraisal of Wilber's system it is proposed that epistemological coherence is more likely to be achieved by retaining the ontology of consciousness and matter to only one kind. In this way the scientific protocols which Wilber imports to validate his truth-claims are protected from ontological confusion. Whether this non-dual Physicalism is adequate as a means of explaining consciousness, and particularly mystical consciousness, is moot. Perhaps there remains an inalienable quality in mysticism which will always elude our ability to apprehend it.

## KEY WORDS

Consciousness, Duality/Dualism, Epistemology, Essentialism, the Hard Problem, Integral Philosophy, Mysticism, Non-dual Consciousness (NDC), Ontology, Phenomenology, Physicalism, Science.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Finding the Right Questions

How should mysticism be studied? Since mysticism transcends all the faculties of reason is it possible to study it at all – should such an attempt even be made? Does it require a uniquely tailored epistemology that operates only within its own noetic and experiential domain? If so, is it sufficient for it to be self-legitimising, or should its truth-claims be valid in other disciplines? Is it possible, for example, for science to study mysticism? How would it do so and what would the results reveal? Would the research be useful for our understanding of science and of mysticism? What methodological instruments would need to be included and how would the ontological terrain be demarcated? What epistemological protocols would have to be set in place to ensure coherence and consistency? Answers to these questions are fraught with difficulties. Would mystics welcome or resist such research and are scientists interested enough to take on the challenge? Research which embodies affirmation of existing knowledge is generally welcomed by those who prioritise the preservation and promotion of orthodoxy. All disciplines have their protectors, but vigilance seems at its keenest when it comes to matters of religion.<sup>1</sup> Alternative or hybrid theories which challenge the hegemony are therefore vulnerable to criticism or dismissal in strongly bonded environments (Brockman 2006:xxi). Prior learning, personal preference, cultural demographics, beliefs, fears, and a variety of other variables will thus determine our readiness to receive new knowledge. In other words, says Gamez (2007:1), there is, ‘... a sense in which we *are* our theories.’

Heuristics traverses the fertile, if treacherous middle-ground between that which we currently believe to be true and that which we might discover through alternative hypotheses and exploration. Heuristic pursuits must therefore accommodate the possibility that new knowledge may dislodge the sovereignty of established beliefs (Moustakis 1985:41).<sup>2</sup> Propagandists exist on both ends of this noetic spectrum; those who wish to preserve and nurture established knowledge, and those who wish to alter or transcend it, and their

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<sup>1</sup> Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause (2001:164) similarly comment that, ‘Any challenge to the authenticity of that truth, therefore, is an attack not only upon ideas about God, but also upon the deeper, neurobiologically endorsed assurances that make God real. If God is not real, neither is our most powerful source of hope and redemption. There can be only one absolute truth; it is a matter of existential survival. All others are threats of the most fundamental kind, and they must be exposed as impostors.’

<sup>2</sup> Douglas and Moustakis (1985:40) describe heuristics as, ‘... a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self ... It requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, sifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. Its ultimate purpose is to cast light on a focused problem, question, or theme.’

respective epistemologies will be complicated in the extent to which they assign different properties to the ontology of shared experience.<sup>3</sup> The shared experience under consideration in this thesis is the non-dual, unitive, or enlightenment experience variously described by mystics as the highest or most integrated realisation of consciousness.

The structure of this study will firstly establish the experiential and theoretical contexts of mystical consciousness as the field of research. In so doing Ken Wilber's Integral Philosophy will be introduced as the framework within which the ensuing dialectical process secures focus and direction. As the content and fabric of the subject takes form, distinctions will be drawn between two primary modes of inquiry: Essentialism and Physicalism. This basic distinction does not overlook the varieties of alternative solutions or intermediate positions that have been posited and some of these will be acknowledged shortly. In the mean time, Essentialism, as it will shortly be defined in this study, rudimentarily refers to the belief that there is a quality - a trans-elemental property like consciousness, mind, or spirit, which is inherent to the nature of physicality. Physicalism, on the other hand, simply asserts that there is only one reality, the universe itself, and that consciousness is simply one mode or expression of these physical processes.

The epistemological differences between these two types of knowing necessitate clarification of meanings ascribed to ontology. Moreover, in the course of classifying these distinctions, a fundamental and perennial problem, the mind-body problem, or so-called *Hard Problem* is identified as the linchpin of this analysis. In an attempt to address the *Hard Problem* as it pertains to mystical consciousness, an answer will be proposed in an alternative Physicalist rendition of consciousness.

The cornerstones of this thesis are thus set in place and the central problem is then elucidated. The complexity and philosophical ambiguity of the problem requires a coherent and systematic methodology if the argument is to remain sensible. Additionally, since Wilber's Integral Philosophy suggests the synthesis of all possible experience and knowledge, a uniquely constructed multi-methodology may facilitate a more consistent re-

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<sup>3</sup> Reference to noetics is deliberate in this context. Colloquially, noetics simply refers to the general faculties of intellection, reason, learning or understanding, but more accurately the Greek *νοῦς* (*nous*) implies a quality akin to soul as the source of the manifest realm. Pythagoreans in the sixth century BCE used *νοῦς* as a descriptor for the World Soul, and for neo-Platonists in the third century CE it implied the essence of the One or the Non-dual. The correlation to the priority of intellectual percipience illuminates the paradoxical gap between reason and mystery. The paradox is revealed in the extent to which mystery can only be described as mystery by employing the faculties of reason. Reason and mystery are not, in other words, descriptively exclusive and noetics clearly captures the essence of this integrated dimensionality.

conceptualisation of the subject under scrutiny within the inevitable density of information packed into this study. The structure and division of chapters in this thesis are therefore demarcated to carefully evaluate the primary issues in Wilber's interpretation of mystical consciousness. Following the appraisal of Wilber's Integral Philosophy an attempt to reveal the importance of a more coherent hypothesis will be proffered in the penultimate chapter. The scope of potentially relevant literature in this study is staggering. Criteria therefore need to be set in place to distil the most pertinent and current theories which speak most specifically into present understandings of mysticism and consciousness.

## **1.2 The Quest for Consistency and Coherence: The Purpose of this Research**

### **1.2.1 The Context of this Research**

Studies in Christian mysticism are commonly, though not exclusively, tendered from Essentialist vantage-points which employ the epistemological instruments of theology, spirituality, mystagogy, phenomenology, and various types of psychology. In this case however, a view from the opposite Physicalist end of the spectrum will be proposed which utilises varieties of rational-philosophical and scientific media. The precarious heuristic terrain in this alternative approach is revealed in the degree to which a Physicalist explanation deigns to venture into theological-spiritual territories. It furthermore aims to do so with consistent and coherent renderings of the non-dual phenomenon in mysticism. Such an endeavour risks raising the ire of both the Essentialists and the Physicalists; the former claiming reductionism and the latter a breach of scientific or empirical protocols. However, in today's interdisciplinary environment such sharp territorial demarcations may foreclose heuristic inquiry. Schneiders (1993:13), writing from the emerging academic study of spirituality, similarly encourages examination of the theoretical and existential character of spiritual phenomena by considering their inter-faith variety, structure in consciousness, criteria for adequacy, and position in socio-cultural and aesthetic contexts. Is it possible within this more intentional and positive approach to the study of spirituality for a Physicalist rendering to make a meaningful contribution to research in non-dual mystical consciousness?

In an attempt to answer this question a clear understanding of the general differences between Essentialism and Physicalism must first be delineated. As these distinctions are elucidated, a recurrent problem in their respective explanations of the nature of consciousness, and more particularly the nature of mystical or non-dual consciousness, comes to the fore. The age-old conundrum now called the *Hard Problem* still haunts attempts to explain what consciousness

is, how it arises, and how it relates to the brain.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, since Essentialists perceive the ontology of consciousness differently from Physicalists, the *Hard Problem* will also straddle the divide between Essentialist and Physicalist definitions. In this thesis I shall follow Wilber's preference for Chalmers' description of the *Hard Problem* (Wilber 1997b:84). Chalmers, who coined the phrase, presents the *Hard Problem* simply as the question of how consciousness as the inner subjective experience of the self is related to the physical objective domain of matter (2005:36). More colloquially, McGinn (1991:40) asks:

What is it about our brains, and their location in the world, that could possibly explain the way consciousness *arcs out* into the world? Consciousness seems to extend an invisible hand into the world it represents. (If I may put it so): how on earth could my *brain* make that possible? No ethereal prehensile organ protrudes from my skull! Phenomenologically, we feel that the mind 'lays hold' of things out there, mentally 'grasps' them, but we have no physical model of what this might consist in. We flounder in similes.

With this background in place, the thematic quest of this study may now be tendered: *is there a way in which a Physicalist interpretation of non-dual mystical consciousness can move towards a resolution of the Hard Problem without diluting the mystical phenomenon as it is described by Essentialists?*

This is a tall order and it is fraught with difficulties. Human consciousness is arguably the most charged and labyrinthine frontier in any field of research today. Andresen and Forman (2000:1) are therefore right to encourage interdisciplinary heuristics by pointing out that, '... human physiology, cognitive science, neuro-psychology, developmental psychology, philosophy of mind, anthropology, and [a] myriad other fields have joined together to investigate the phenomenon of consciousness.' Because self-consciousness is the definitive description of humanness, and because consciousness studies are advancing so rapidly, it is incumbent upon those who have a special interest in spirituality and mysticism to learn what they can about the functioning of consciousness from the many disciplines now exploring it. In so doing, the mystical heart of traditional religions has an opportunity to reanimate the spiritual aspirations of a world that is increasingly resistant to the socio-cultural, political, economic, and doctrinaire institutions associated with traditional religious paradigms.

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<sup>4</sup> Schopenhauer (1788-1860) described the problem as the *Knot of the World* in *The World as Will and Representation* (1966). He argued that humans are essentially perceiving subjects which means that objectivity exists only as an effect of perception and reason.

Possible new avenues of pursuit in consciousness studies are however too vast and diverse for general surveys to offer standardised cartographies, particularly when spiritual experience is also included. Among new voices offering interesting arguments around the problems implicit in interdisciplinary heuristics is Wilber, and his Integral Philosophy is particularly pertinent to this study because it prioritises mysticism as an ultimate definition of consciousness.

### 1.2.1.1 Ken Wilber's Integral Philosophy

Wilber creates a comprehensive and inclusive model which claims a brand of synergistic, or in his terms *holarchical* integration of all definitions and expressions of being and consciousness. In this model he categorises all aspects of human cognition and experience into quadrants of association and levels of integration resulting in an AQAL (All Quadrant All Level) schematic of consciousness. The most integrated condition of consciousness realises *Reality* or *Mind* as an *Absolute Subjectivity* through forms of mystical *gnosis* wherein *Reality* is simultaneously realised as the fundamental essence of the entire cosmic process. Wilber utilises varieties of mystical language to describe this realisation of *Mind* as Supreme Identity, enlightenment, *satori*, *moksha*, *wu*, release, or liberation (1976:236; 1993a:287). In Christianity this mystical realisation approximates versions of divine union or oneness with God in Christ, but in its most generic sense Wilber describes it simply as *Non-Dual Consciousness*, and for the sake of consistency and simplicity it will henceforth be abbreviated to NDC.

Wilber explains further that this *Reality* exists not only as a spiritual quality, but as a cosmic impetus in the evolution of matter, through conscious matter, to non-dual conscious matter. Whilst Wilber's integral kernel is clearly mystical, he believes that this *Reality* or *Spirit* cannot be exclusively associated with religious constructs since non-duality is revealed as the unrealised *Suchness* of every developmental domain in all aspects of existence (1997a:59).<sup>5</sup> In Wilber's view, all phenomena in all noetic and experiential categories are perpetual, dynamic, and transformative interactions in holonically graded levels of consciousness that aspire in evolutionary fashion to fully realised integration – NDC (1999b:2-3). *Reality* is therefore the fundamental definition of everything that is, and NDC as the *Ground of All* must

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<sup>5</sup> For Wilber, *Reality* is neither exclusively Source (Alpha/Agape), nor Summit (Omega/Eros), but, '... the timeless, ever present Ground, the *Suchness*, of both Descending and Ascending movements of Spirit and matter' (2000a:357).



therefore be a *Kosmic Consciousness*. Wilber's central intention evinces Aristotelian notions which propose orienting generalisations for a convincing 'theory of everything', but he chooses a stronger Platonic ideal of non-duality as the consummate definition of the *All*.

It must be asked however, whether a 'theory of everything', even if it only claims orienting generalisations, is a conceptual possibility? Krauss (2006:107) argues that whilst the, '... ultimate goal of physics, as it is often described, is to have a *theory of everything* ...' physics will always be adjusting itself to a universe in evolutionary flux, and as long as change implies even the slightest possibility of unpredictability there can never be a conclusive *theory of everything*. Krauss (2006:108-109) therefore reckons that the pursuit of fundamental formulae to describe the universe is a disingenuous etherium and that we should rather recognise, '... that all so-called fundamental theories that describe nature are purely phenomenological - that is, derivable from observational phenomena - and don't reflect any underlying grand mathematical structure of the universe...' If Krauss is right, how could notions of absolutism and ultimacy be justified in Wilber's rendering of NDC since he claims to establish its veracity through scientific methods? Does it not also imbed the problem of duality between that which is absolute and a cosmos which is still in evolutionary flux?

Wilber's point of departure as he constructs his theory is indeed primarily concerned with the resolution of dualistic modes of apperception which artificially bifurcate matter and spirit; earth and heaven; and body and mind.<sup>6</sup> A substantial portion of this thesis is therefore devoted to deeper explorations of the problem of duality. For Wilber, duality is resolved when consciousness no longer sees itself as subject experiencing objects, but as the *Absolute Subjectivity* which transcends subject-object duality (1993a:70, 264-265; 1997a:4).<sup>7</sup> Whilst it is true that Wilber recently tempered reference to absolutism, mainly as a result of ongoing criticism from epistemologists, his theory is nonetheless dependant on an absolutist assumption if he is to be consistent in his claim that non-duality is the consummate definition

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<sup>6</sup> Wilber explains that these unfolding levels of the Matter-Mind continuum display, '... only circumstantial dualities from the vantage point of those levels, but when viewed integrally and holonically, the dualities, conflatons and paradoxes are seen for what they are – the Ascending and Descending reflexes of a single continuum of conscious matter' (1999c: 500).

<sup>7</sup> Wilber draws heavily on the Eastern wisdom traditions to explain this point and places special emphasis on Buddhist philosophies. Tarthang Tulku (1976:42-43) provides an example in keeping with Wilber's definition, 'Mind itself has no substance. It has no colour and no shape. It has no form, no position, no characteristics, no beginning, no end. It is neither within nor without: it cannot be discovered as this or that thing: it is not mixed together with other things, yet it is not apart from them. This mind cannot be discovered, invented, destroyed, rejected, or accepted. It is beyond reasoning and so-called logical processes, beyond time and beyond all existence.'

of the *All*. If, as Wilber maintains, this *Absolute Subjectivity* is synonymous with the *Ground of All* as *Spirit*, and if *Spirit* is inextricable from the cosmos, then it follows that *Spirit* naturally extends into every aspect of existence and our experience of it.<sup>8</sup> This is indeed a solution to the problem of duality, but only if prior assent to the existence of *Absolute Subjectivity* is conceded as a consummate pre-condition of all existence. Such notions imply forms of Essentialism and the legitimacy of Wilber's claim to non-dual assertions through scientific media should therefore be challenged.

Wilber's Integral Philosophy thus presupposes three cardinal precepts, and these are of particular relevance to this study: firstly, that *Mind*, *Spirit*, or *Suchness* subsists as the fundamental *Essence in and as the Kosmos*; secondly, that humans can experience this *Suchness* directly in NDC as the *Ground of Being* through forms of mystical awakening; and finally, that it is possible to establish the empirical veracity of NDC through scientific exemplars. For Physicalists, questions must be raised against Wilber's supposition that the veracity of mystical experience can be ratified through scientific instruments. From an epistemological vantage point it would not ordinarily be possible to synthesise Essentialist and Physicalist philosophies without compromising either consistency or coherence, and a critical appraisal of Wilber's approach reveals the need for a more congruent theory.

Since Wilber maintains irreducible non-duality as the elemental definition of the *All*, his theory must also claim transcendence of the dualist-Essentialist and monist-Physicalist schism, but does such a pretext not still classify him as an Essentialist? What kind of ontology, for example, would describe such transcendence? A type of supervenient *Reality in and as reality* which is neither logically nor causally limited is akin to Wilber's preference, but the idea remains Essentialist. A monistic Physicalist alternative, on the other hand, would dismiss any suggestion of *Absolute Subjectivity*. The problem of duality in Wilber's rendition of consciousness and mysticism therefore remains a constant refrain and the *Hard Problem* lingers as an ever-present companion. There are clearly good reasons for vigorous debate with Wilber when matters of epistemological consistency are considered in his Integral Philosophy. Of particular importance are problems pertaining to duality in general and the *Hard Problem* in particular, but these are inter-braided through other aspects of his

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<sup>8</sup> Wilber refers to this process as *Kosmology* and believes that the Pythagoreans introduced the term which we subsequently translated as *cosmos*, but its original form embraced all domains of existence and not merely the physical realms of space (1997a:139).

philosophy which similarly warrant careful assessment. Among these are his approaches to phenomenology, ontology, methodology, science, post-modernism, linguistics, consciousness, and of course mysticism. Wilber's Integral Philosophy is therefore a useful referential framework for gaining insight into the debate around the nature of non-dual or mystical consciousness. The questions which this thesis raises against Wilber's postulations suggest the necessity for alternative perspectives.

### 1.2.1.2 What is Essentialism?

At its simplest, Essentialism pertains to the view that certain properties necessarily inhere to the modes of existence which are defined by them. For example, all persons are human *essentially*, that is in *essence*, whereas aspects or expressions of humanness such as personality, ethnicity, and language remain contingent and variable. The origins of Essentialist understandings are rooted in Aristotle's (384-322 BCE) *Principle of Non-contradiction* where he argues that manifest forms have essential or necessary properties without which the form and function of objects could not exist (2007: *Metaphysics IV [Gamma] 3-6*). For Aristotle, this principle is inviolable to philosophy as a fundamental criterion for ontological descriptions. Aristotle therefore argues that there is an ontological difference between what something is fundamentally, and what it is like *accidentally*. Within this seeming clarity, the actual distinction between *essence* and *accident* is not always obvious, and as a principle of rational inquiry into the nature of consciousness it stands to reason that the *Hard Problem* will remain a core difficulty. This is so because there appears to be no way of establishing sufficient certainty as to whether *essences* subsist as the Real or Ideal nature of things in the Platonic sense or whether they are merely descriptive instruments for philosophical constructs. The latter generally intimates nominalism – the view that only individual existents and their particular sensible properties can be real.

The sagacity of Aristotle's theory of Essentialism transcends that of his master's. Plato (427-347 BCE) argues in his theory of *Forms* or *Ideas* that objects imply the real existence of abstract entities of which objective manifestations are imperfect reproductions.<sup>9</sup> Plato's thought therefore implicates *essences* with seemingly transcendental ontologies of the type that Judeo-Christian theologians subsequently adapted and imported through Neo-platonic

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<sup>9</sup> Taylor (2001) explains in detail that Plato's understanding of *Forms* and *Ideas* are recurrent themes, but that his dialogues in *Cratylus* [439-440: The Problem of Knowing Form]; *Laws* [721: The Form of Immortal Man]; *Meno* [71-80: The Impossibility of Knowing Forms]; and particularly *Phaedo* [73-80: The Soul Before Birth in the Land of Forms] describe this aspect of his philosophy most precisely.

nuances to explain the Divine ‘image and likeness’ in which humanity is believed to be created (Genesis 1:26). This belief is foundational to Christian panentheistic interpretations of God’s simultaneous immanence and transcendence.

Plato and Aristotle may have delineated the foundational principles of Essentialism, but many variations have since been developed. For example, Essentialism may refer to the more pragmatic assertion that something has an *essence* by virtue of its inextricable definition *in* form and function rather than something which *pre-defines* form and function. In this sense the form and function of things *are* the *essence*. This more co-substantive version of Essentialism may also refer to conceptual and linguistic expressions which do not imply the existence of ethereal qualities as ‘other’ to the literary forms in which they are manifest. Furthermore, *essences* may refer either to objective or subjective categories of existence. They may, in other words, be either material or ideational, but in both cases discrete ontologies will be applied as determined by their respective epistemologies. Oxygen, for example, is *essential* to the definition of water as a *substance* and it is discerned as such through basic chemistry. *Thought* is *essential* to the generation of ideas, but this may be discerned as such either physiologically, that is through the neurological functioning of the brain, or metaphysically as a category of existence which is in some way independent of the brain. It is particularly the latter option which now constitutes the *Hard Problem*. With this bifurcation seemingly entrenched, Platonic and Aristotelian notions nonetheless indicate that it is possible to have unmediated knowledge or direct experience of this *Essence*, and this kind of knowledge, in the context of the present research, embodies the peculiar *gnosis* of mystical consciousness. Paradoxically, the phenomenology of mystical *gnosis* may appear as a kind of *unknowing*, but the reference is to the type of knowledge rather than its structural content. This is so because mystical *gnosis* is generally defined by transcendence of rational-conceptual modalities and this explanatory gap will also feature prominently throughout this thesis as a substrate of the *Hard Problem*.

Latterly René Descartes (1596-1650) clarified and invigorated the Essentialist notion as a result of his more intentional consideration of the *Mind-Body Problem*. Cartesian dualism will be explored in due course, but the term ‘Essentialism’ appears to have gained modern popularity through Karl Popper’s (1902-1994) *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1971,

1995).<sup>10</sup> In broader terms, current definitions of Essentialism are inheritors of philosophically ambiguous histories. In keeping with the purpose of this thesis however, Wilber's version of Essentialism is better understood as a kind of 'spiritualised' extension of Locke's (1632-1704) notion that matter has a real though unknowable *essence* which causally explains the objective or nominal properties of matter and form.<sup>11</sup> In his own words, Locke explains that:

... the *ideas of primary qualities* of bodies, are *resemblances* of them, and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves; but the ideas, *produced* in and by these *secondary qualities*, have *no resemblance* of them at all. There is nothing like our ideas, existing in the bodies themselves. They are in the bodies, we denominate from them, only a power to produce those sensations in us: and what is sweet, blue, or warm in idea, is but the certain bulk, figure and motion of the insensible parts in the bodies themselves, which we call so (1997:136-137).

Wilber, we have seen, expands this concept of essence into an *Ultimate Essence* which he variously refers to as *Mind*, *Geist*, *Spirit*, or *Suchness*. As such, Wilber qualifies Essence as an *a priori* definition of the cosmos to which humans gradually awaken in the process of spiritual ascent. This approach to Essentialism expressed through the process of consciousness coming into the full realisation of non-dual Being, as to Realism or Existentialism, provides Wilber with the latitude to defer to mysticism when reason reaches its epistemological limit – a loophole which Locke would not have permitted.<sup>12</sup> By way of qualification, Wilber explains that this *Suchness* cannot be ontologically distinct from matter, thus implying a form of Panpsychism whilst simultaneously, and paradoxically, maintaining panentheistic irreducibility. To an extent this view resembles Spinoza's (1632-1677) *Double Aspect* theory which claims that all reality has both mental and physical qualities (Della Rocca 1996).<sup>13</sup> Spinoza therefore argued that the universe is a single substance which is both conscious and extended, but Wilber distinguishes his approach by attributing absolute qualities to Consciousness. In other words, Wilber's notion of this essential *Suchness*, whilst both *in* and *as* all form, nonetheless remains irreducible to form since form is transitory and

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<sup>10</sup> As a point of distinction, Popper would have rejected the view, as espoused by Plato and Aristotle, that it is possible for humans to have direct intellectual intuition into the nature of form.

<sup>11</sup> Whilst it may be argued that Locke's approach is reminiscent of Platonic-Aristotelian notions which appear to imbue *essences* with types of pre-substantial ideal forms, Locke would favour a much stronger rationalist approach. He would not therefore recognise the legitimacy of truth-claims based on intuition or faith unless veracity is endorsed through the rigorous application of reason. This is expressed clearly in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1998).

<sup>12</sup> Existentialism, with deference to Kierkegaard's (1813-1855) rendition as a Christian, conversely prefers the precedence of existence over *essence* and thus establishes the primacy of experience phenomenologically.

<sup>13</sup> *Double Aspect* theory is problematic in the extent to which it leaves the nature of this common substance undefined. If matter and mind are only attributes of reality, then what is it? Spinoza's views therefore fail to answer the *Hard Problem* in all its complex facets.

ephemeral whereas *Suchness* is Absolute and timeless. In this sense Wilber's view may indeed resemble a form of Property Dualism which assigns mutual irreducibility to bifurcated qualities of a single substance, but does Wilber's subscription to absolutes not expose his non-dual epistemology to inconsistency?

It will become evident that it is difficult to draw precise conclusions from such perplexing mystical and rational-theoretical conflations, but Wilber's unique variety of Essentialism seems to imply the co-existence, or perhaps the co-substantiation of both dualism and monism depending on the degree of integration from which the problem is viewed on the spectrum of consciousness. The amalgamation of these subjects in Wilber's Integral Philosophy appears contradictory and can be bewildering, and Wilber's claim that the conundrum can be solved in the realisation of the ineffable *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC presents methodological challenges which will also be frequently encountered in this debate.

Despite these equivocations, the central principles of Essentialism indicate that a type of *ontos* or *ousia* is elementally necessary to particularised manifestations of *being* in existence. If this is so, what, in the context of this argument, is the *Essence* of NDC? Is it a highly abstracted, complex, and integrated sophistication of the human brain within its socio-cultural and religious milieu, or is there indeed an elemental *Consciousness* which pervades and pre-defines the universe which may be realised as the apex of spiritual aspiration as Wilber claims? How would it be possible to tell the difference experientially? Are there perhaps other heuristic possibilities to establish consistent and coherent explanations of mystical consciousness?

### **1.2.1.3 What is Physicalism?**

Physicalism simply eliminates the need for an explanation of consciousness as something apart from or in the brain. This also means that Physicalism of any kind cannot contain an explanation of consciousness that is defined by non-material ontologies, but the meaning of ontology in the context of this argument must first be clarified.

### 1.2.1.3.1 A Qualification: What does Ontology Mean?

The general terrain of ontology refers to inquiry into the nature of *being* in the capacity of *being*, but since there are any number of possible assignments to notions of *being* it follows that the capacity of *being* will be variously defined. There are, in other words, theoretical disparities in the modes and capacities ascribed to concepts of *being* which necessarily define and direct the process of ontology. For example, material, metaphysical, theological, linguistic, and technological variants will imbue *being* with different properties and require appropriately stylised epistemologies. Ordinarily such variations cannot be synthesised without breaching epistemological protocols and it is not only a matter of propriety, but sound academic process to test the integrity of such syntheses. Is Wilber's Integral Philosophy epistemologically consistent and what criteria should be applied to discern its methodological soundness?

More to the point in this study are two seemingly diametric approaches to ontology. The first, with deference to Wilber's usage, focuses on metaphysical aspects of *being* which are historically rooted in theoretical philosophy. As the process of Wilber's theory of consciousness and mysticism are explored, fundamental questions concerning the nature of human consciousness and Consciousness as *Mind* or pre-eminent *Essence* will be probed. My alternative Physicalist approach in response to Wilber's rendering is rooted in analytical philosophy which utilises rational-philosophical and scientific instruments.<sup>14</sup> In this case questions are focused more directly on what can be said to exist. With reference to mystical consciousness, ontological questions will first ask whether such phenomena can be said to *be* at all? If yes, then what kinds of properties are implied in such highly abstracted notions of *being*, and what can we know about them? Moreover, how would such knowledge be acquired and validated?

Clearly then the character of *being* will be translated differently between Essentialists and Physicalists. The former will be accommodating of an 'is-ness' that inheres or pre-defines phenomena – be they material or subjective, whereas the latter will be concerned only with *being* as a material phenomenon. Though Essentialists and Physicalists will render the ontology of mystical experience differently, need such variance necessarily dilute the

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<sup>14</sup> In this context the use of 'premise' is specifically intended to imply a, '... proposition upon which an argument is based or from which a conclusion is drawn. In other words, it is a statement presumed true within the context of the discourse for the purposes of arguing to a conclusion' (*Farlex Free Dictionary 2008*).

transformative fecundity of the mystical experience as such? Does a Physicalist explanation have to censure the non-dual phenomenon as it is described by mystics? The possibility that such questions may educe new understandings is promising, but care must be taken to observe sound academic techniques and for this reason the interpretation of Physicalism in this thesis needs to be finely clarified.

#### **1.2.1.3.2 An Expanded Understanding of Physicalism**

Modern Physicalism has roots in the *Vienna Circle* of logical positivists and latterly came to be associated with *Identity Theses* of mind which explain conscious states exclusively in terms of brain states. Positivism generally connotes a world-view in sympathy with the tenets of modernist empirical science.<sup>15</sup> It implicitly rejects metaphysics and therefore eschews religious epistemologies since sense experience is deemed the only reliable source from which valid knowledge may be derived. Trans-rational allusions to non-dual or mystical consciousness are thus anomalous to positivists since such intimations transcend the bounds of rationalism and empiricism. Thus observed, such sharp demarcations tended to soften between analytical and continental, and Essentialist and Physicalist approaches to ontology after the Second World War. For instance, the attention to procedural detail often applied by analytical philosophers contrasts the more ambitious and grandiose hypotheses espoused by continental philosophers. Nowadays, analytical approaches tend to be less apprehensive of mystical phenomena and continental approaches more rigorous in their methodology. Moreover, whilst rationalists may authenticate knowledge based on reason and thereby interpret phenomena axiomatically, and empiricists may locate experience as the primary ontological referent, it no longer follows that rationalists or empiricists will perforce discount mystical type phenomena – although many still would. The suggestion is not that mutually agreeable syntheses have been established between Essentialists and Physicalists, on the contrary, but rather that dialogue is now commonplace and the results of these conversations are generating new theoretical and scientific possibilities.

There are, in other words, growing tendencies for traditionally opposing disciplines to view disagreement as opportunities for animated engagement, but following my opening remarks,

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<sup>15</sup> Among the best known proponents of this form of Physicalism is Francis Crick who co-discovered the structure of the DNA molecule with James Watson and Maurice Wilkins in 1953. According to Horgan (2006:1-2) Crick's explanation in *The Astonishing Hypotheses: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (1994), '... argued that the soul is an illusion perpetuated, like Tinkerbell, only by our belief in it. Crick opened his book with this manifesto: "You," your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behaviour of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules.'



this requires a degree of heuristic courage. Whilst positivist versions of Physicalism may be viewed as reductionistic, there has been a move since the 1970's to construct non-reductive variants of Physicalism which attempt explanations of phenomena like mystical consciousness without simultaneously degrading the personal import of the experience itself.

Inasmuch as pure or 'hard' Physicalism insists that all categories of existential being must be reducible to material predicates, Phenomenalism assumes basic predicates and propositions to be *about* sense data which simply means that the two views differ in their choice of basic propositions. The latter leaves some leeway for subjectivity in its more considered inclusion of phenomenology, but any conscious processes nevertheless remain definitively physical. Moreover, contemporary Physicalist approaches emphasise that as long as the laws of science are consistently applied, science can legitimately reach into any ontological domain. The allure of such hospitality can be misleading and disappointing. The main hurdle seems to be idiomatic: how can scientific language with its epistemology governing and delimiting methodological processes be applied to the typically trans-rational and ineffable qualities of mysticism? Attempts have nonetheless been made and Wilber's proposal is deserving of such consideration.

So whilst reductive Physicalists maintain that consciousness is entirely reducible to neuro-physiological processes, non-reductive Physicalists attain tenuous recognition in modernist versions of Property Dualism wherein consciousness is viewed co-extensively with neuro-physiological properties. Panpsychism approximates types of Property Dualism which claims that consciousness, whilst properly physical, qualifies for an ontologically unique status. Another approach gained currency in theories of Supervenience which similarly maintain that consciousness is a physical process, but that it is somehow 'built on' and thus 'superior' to physicality. Physicality must therefore be ontologically 'lower' than consciousness and clearly nuances of dualism remain implicit. More recently, types of emergent materialism attempt explanations of consciousness in terms of brain complexity. Consciousness in this sense is surmised to be generated by the extraordinary sophistications of the human brain, but the moment a quantity *generates* a quality two ontologies are implied which complicates the application of consistent and mutually applicable epistemologies.

Amidst fluctuating opinion around the epistemological value of the aforementioned attempts to resolve the *Hard Problem* is a more pertinent contribution proffered by Katz (1978, 1992).

Katz's argument is deserving of special mention because, as Glenn- Friesen (2007) points out, 'Constructivism is the dominant model of religious experience used today in Religious Studies, at least in North America.' Friesen's opinion is indefinite, particularly since some commentators defend Katz from Constructivist labels.<sup>16</sup> By way of explanation, Katz argues that phenomena like Wilber's version of NDC, '... are inescapably shaped by prior linguistic influences such that the lived experience conforms to a pre-existent pattern that has been learned, then intended, and then actualised in the experiential reality of the mystic' (1992:5). This view will be partially defended in the discussion on linguistics in Chapter 6.5 since non-dual phenomena are epistemologically inextricable from the socio-cultural, religious, and psychological idiom which contextually communicates it. I differ from Katz's suggestion that NDC is necessarily *constructed* from or upon these variables. That there is a connection between NDC and its foundational contexts is beyond doubt, but is it necessarily a causal connection?

Katz (1978:26) explains that, '... the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape his experience... [which therefore] set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be ...'<sup>17</sup> This description classifies NDC as an epiphenomenon of other existential qualities thus reducing the alleged transcendence of the non-dual experience to 'ordinary' conscious phenomena. Katz's notion suggests Kantian overtones insofar as the alleged emptiness of NDC provides insufficient data to establish the veracity of the experience.<sup>18</sup> Emptiness, in other words, has no form as a representation of an Ideal. In order for NDC to be veridical, Katz intimates that it must embody an informational quality which is in some way representative of *a priori* knowledge, but this type of Constructivism is epistemologically precarious in mystagogy. How, for instance, could form 'construct' emptiness of the type narrated by Buddhists who speak of *sunyata* or the void? Moreover, does Constructivism not

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<sup>16</sup> It may be more appropriate to view Katz's theory in terms of Contextualism. In this sense Contextualism explains the fabric of all knowledge in terms of the contexts within which it arises and functions.

<sup>17</sup> Wainwright (2005:148) explains a possible distinction between two approaches to Constructivism, 'Constructivism underscores the conceptual "construction" of mystical experience. Let us call *soft Constructivism* the view that there is no mystical experience without at least some concepts, concepts being what construct an experience. Let us call *hard Constructivism* the view that a mystic's specific cultural background massively constructs - determines, shapes, or influences - the nature of mystical experiences... On the assumption that mystical traditions are widely divergent, *hard Constructivism* entails the denial of perennialism. *Soft Constructivism* is strictly consistent with perennialism, but, since consistent with there being some trans-cultural mystical experience involving concepts common across mystical traditions. Both hard and soft Constructivist arguments have been mobilised against the existence of PCE's (Pure Consciousness Events, or in terms of this thesis - NDC).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Donovan (1979:35) also argues that in religion, as in science, '... there is no neutral description without interpretation.'

imply that it is impossible to experience something radically new - like NDC? Surely all experience was once 'experienced' for the first time? The problem seems to be linguistically imbedded. Language can communicate 'something' of the nature of NDC – usually retrospectively and typically in narrative or metaphorical forms, but what kind of epistemology would 'shape' or 'form' it pre-emptively? Forman (1989, 1990, 200) is among Katz's foremost critics and, to some extent, he shares the argument for coherence and consistency in this thesis. Forman maintains that the ubiquity and correspondence of PCE (Pure Consciousness Events) narratives justifies its unique classification. He therefore argues that NDC transcends and deconstructs noetic structures, but again I differ on its fundamental nature since Forman's view is closely aligned to Wilber's Essentialist bias.

Katz's theory is also problematic for Wilber's version of NDC since Wilber maintains an irreducible and utter emptiness in his description of NDC. Wilber (1998a:121; 1999d:595) consequently describes Constructivism as a post-modern attempt to construct reality from perception which reduces the Absolute to narcissistic and pluralistic temporalities.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, if prior experience predetermines the form and content of NDC then, given cultural and religious diversity, it cannot be phenomenologically universal in the perennialist sense in which Wilber describes it. Hargiss (2001) endorses Wilber's view that the Constructivist-Essentialist debate entrenches stalemate polemics, but nonetheless questions how an objective study of NDC can proceed. In an attempt to answer this question the argument presented in this thesis supports the experiential novelty of NDC, as Forman does, but simply locates it physically rather than ethereally. In another sense the argument of this thesis shares Katz's view that prior experience plays a mediating role which enables a coherent epistemology to describe phenomena like NDC, but departs from Katz's view that experience of pure emptiness is phenomenologically impossible. The problem will be explored further in Chapter 4, but by way of summary introduction Wynn (2008:Np) cogently explains the problem of researching non-dual phenomena:

... philosophical treatments of the phenomenology of religious experience draw quite diverse conclusions: religious experience (in at least some central cases) is said variously to have no phenomenological content (not to be like anything), or to have a content which at any rate cannot be communicated readily in verbal terms, or to have a phenomenological

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<sup>19</sup> Wilber explains that extreme constructivists deny the existence of objective truth since all phenomena are mentally constructed, but in so doing fall into self-referential contradiction by claiming their own premises as true (1997a:25-26).

content that can be described because it is analogous to the “sensational” quality of ordinary sensory experience, where this content can then be interpreted in doctrinal terms, or to have a phenomenological content which is given in the doctrinal scheme of the relevant faith tradition, where this scheme functions rather like a lens through which religious reality is viewed, or to have a phenomenological content which never comes clearly into view in public discourse, since reports of such experiences typically focus upon the implied doctrinal meaning of the experience which is, on this account, to be sharply distinguished from its phenomenological content.

Moreover, since the epistemology applied to brain physiology is different from the epistemology applied to subjective conscious phenomena, on what basis can it be assumed that they respectively apply to the same thing? Such notions can be philosophically capricious and fall into phenomenological fallacies, the dangers of which will be considered shortly. With these philosophical variations as background, it now appears that conscious experience as phenomenally ‘other’ to the brain can be integrated with Physicalist explanations without reduction, but theories based on Phenomenalism, Property Dualism, Panpsychism, Supervenience, Emergence, or Constructivism are not necessarily the most viable solutions. Can more recent advances in Physicalist approaches to consciousness bring us any closer to more sensible explanations?

Whilst Physicalism as a concept (variously known as materialism or materialistic monism) is as old as philosophy itself, the term ‘Physicalism’ was introduced more recently by Otto Neurath in *Physicalism: Analytic Philosophy: Beginnings to the Present* (1983, 2001). The science of consciousness has however come a long way since Neurath’s definition. Nonetheless, as a significant starting point to the versions of Physicalism explored in this thesis, Neurath, who remained committed to logical positivism, includes statements about interior mental phenomena within the empirical domain of spatio-temporal objects on condition that they are sensible, that is, that they are not tautologous. It is therefore necessary to guard against phenomenological fallacies.

Ullin Place (1924-2000) explains phenomenological fallacies in *Is Consciousness a Brain Process?* (1956). In this book he elucidates an aspect of the *Hard Problem* by pointing out the mistaken assumption that descriptions of manifest forms are simultaneously descriptions of their manifestation in inner subjective consciousness. This observation may be initially enticing, but it also reveals a problem because it implies that there are no phenomenal

properties other than the phenomena themselves. This quandary indicates the importance of distinguishing the meaning of *is* in a definition from the meaning of *is* in its composition.<sup>20</sup> A sunset, for example, *is* composed merely of reflections and refractions of electromagnetic waves in visible light, but in consciousness its *is-ness* may be something quite different – a spectacular array of colours inspiring emotional or religious responses of wonder and awe. The appreciation of a beautiful sunset, in other words, cannot be experientially defined as electromagnetic waves, even if it *is* composed of them. In summary, it does not follow that an identity of composition equals an identity of perception. Phenomenological fallacies are therefore revealed in the extent to which personal experience is ontologically confused with the physiology that mediates it. How would this distinction apply to an interpretation of NDC? The relational problem between subjectivity and objectivity in Physicalism is consequently self-evident and it goes to the heart of the *Hard Problem*.

A scrupulous application of coherent and consistent epistemological methods must therefore be observed. In this thesis an attempt will be made to explain the plausibility of subjective phenomena within a unified scientific language without necessary recourse to the ontological paradoxes implicit in mysticism. This does not mean to suggest that the metaphorical utility of the mystical idiom should not have its place, indeed it must, but need it simultaneously submit to Essentialist ontologies for it to establish its veracity? Moreover, are there possibly ways in which the phenomenon of mystical consciousness and physiology can be simultaneously described without succumbing to phenomenological fallacies?

The basic premise of this alternative Physicalist view is that experiences which appear *in* consciousness as *other than* the mere physical properties of the brain can avoid phenomenological fallacies by reviewing traditional definitions of consciousness and mysticism. This is a bold and potentially inflammatory hypothesis, but many researchers now interested in the science of consciousness are innovating compelling challenges. Moreover, suggest Andresen and Forman (2000:3), it is also time:

... for scholars of religion to leap with both feet into the discussion of consciousness, spirituality, and the role of direct experience as important and creative elements of human religions... We must explore the nature of spiritual experiences in more detail by drawing more guidance from

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<sup>20</sup> Deikman (1996:350) similarly explains that awareness, '... cannot be made an object of observation because it is the very means whereby you can observe.'

consciousness studies. We must learn how physiology connects with spiritual experiences by increasing research on the biology of religious experience... We also must understand how significant conscious experiences may have shaped and redirected the world's religious traditions... It is time for scholars of religion to open their conceptual doors to a fuller range of analyses and to embrace the total phenomenon of religions and religious experiences... It is time to include more of human life in the study of religion.

Andresen and Forman therefore suggest that the heuristic pursuit is not solely the responsibility of science, but that spirituality and mystagogy must contribute equally to the debate. Since the Physicalist approach tendered in this thesis attempts to reach into mystical narratives without reduction of the non-dual phenomenon, it must simultaneously be willing to include highly abstracted states of consciousness to the point of Wilber's non-dual premise. It must also accommodate the linguistic limitations of describing mystical consciousness in natural language, but may view the paradoxes in mystical narratives merely as typological idiosyncrasies. This description is not intended to be discourteous, but simply classifies ineffability as an identifying trait of mystical narratives. Notwithstanding the usefulness and even the transforming capacity of religious type language, Physicalist theories which permit the inclusion of mystical phenomena remain relatives of monism which means that they cannot permit the inclusion of Essentialist ontologies, but perhaps they can permit the phenomena described by Essentialists by reorienting such ontologies.

Whilst monistic Physicalism is the theory that the stuff that *is* the universe is the only stuff that there *is*, the emphasis here is less on the actual 'energy as matter stuff', and more on the unity and consistency of the theory which defines it. It therefore asserts the truth that there is only one kind of stuff that *is* the universe, but it need not thereby imply that this truth can only be described by one kind of language. Smith (2006:273) endorses this view:

The natural world is all there is... But to say that everything that exists is just part of the one world of nature is not the same as saying that there is just one theory of nature that will describe and explain everything that there is. Reality may be composed of just one kind of stuff and properties of that stuff, but we need many different kinds of theories, at different levels of description, to account for everything there is. Theories at these different levels may not be reduced one to another. What matters is that they be compatible with one another.

Smith may be right to a point, but to prescribe ‘compatibility’ may be easier said than done. At least in the recognition of theoretical variability, Physicalism accommodates more open approaches which find expression in two primary versions of monism. Neutral monism as proposed by William James (1842-1910) claims that consciousness and physical phenomena are constructed from more ultimate constituents which are neither exclusively physical nor conscious (James 1904:477). Anomalous monism, on the other hand, as proposed by Donald Davidson (1917-2003), claims that there are no universal statements which are equally true of phenomenal states and physical states (Davidson 1980:214). Either way, monism cannot contain any notion that there are two types of stuff in the universe – the essential and the material. Spinoza, we have seen, is among the best known exponents of this view, but the more qualified theories of anomalous monism and neutral monism, despite ontological and epistemological disjunctions, importantly include the possibility of degrees of subjective ambiguity in monistic philosophy. In this case, experiences may consist of entities which include the subjectivity of metaphorically interpreted states of consciousness, but they remain by nature one with the natural fabric of the universe. The ‘real’ existence of God as ontologically ‘other’ is therefore untenable, but the *experience* of God may be interpreted as real experience on condition that the ontology of the phenomenon is *physically* rather than *essentially* defined, but even this idea is epistemologically treacherous.

Gamez (2007:32-33), for example, points out that, ‘... as the extensive discussions of consciousness show, a number of problems arise when everything is reduced to a single substance.’ The most obvious, we have seen, centres on the *Hard Problem* which identifies the segregation between phenomenological experience and the processes of brain physiology. We do not, for example, describe moments of intense pleasure or happiness as ‘increased dopamine or heightened serotonin moments’ even though both statements are true of the same experience. Perhaps it is just a matter of idiomatic habit that mediates our descriptive choices. Does the use of language change the experience, or is the experience just rendered differently by different uses of language? In other words, is the actual ‘ontology’ of experience affected by language? Strong arguments can be made for, and against, the supposition, but the matter is not that simple. Language, for example, can claim truths which cannot be experientially verified. The phenomenon of NDC cannot, in other words, be shown by language to have any causal link with the existence or non-existence of God. Thus qualified, *belief* in God within the context of a faith system, which is necessarily linguistically conveyed, may be a determining criterion for the import of mystical experience.

Can current versions of Physicalism accommodate this possibility by recognising such variance as purely idiomatic rather than ontological?

By now this introduction has made it clear that phenomenology, ontology, and epistemology function as the intra-dynamic sides of a triangle and that the contents of this triangular set and its relational angles will be calculated by either Essentialist or Physicalist premises, but never both simultaneously. In which ever way they are configured, Essentialist triangles will contain the basic premise that materiality is not all that there is whereas Physicalist triangles will insist that there is only one substance and that it *is* the universe itself – albeit variously described. Staying with this metaphor, is it possible for Wilber to include and transcend Essentialist and Physicalist notions in one triangle without breaking the rules of triangles, that is, the rules of reason and science? The answer may be affirmative if the Essentialist premise remains *a priori*, but is Wilber’s philosophy then authentically non-dual?

#### **1.2.1.4 What is the *Hard Problem*?**

Chalmers called the *Hard Problem* ‘hard’ for good reason. The matter can become inordinately complex. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) asserted in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: On the Despisers of the Body* (2005:31) that:

You say ‘I’ and you are proud of this word. But greater than this – although you will not believe it – is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say ‘I’ but performs ‘I’.

Nietzsche’s wish is that the performance of the ‘I’ should aspire to an ideal he calls the *Übermensch*. This *Over-man* or *Super-person* is distinguished by transcendence to ideals in every capacity of what it means to be a fully realised or perfected human. This notion, if it is metaphorically de-contextualised, is not totally dissimilar from renditions of the ‘image and likeness’ of God which the spiritual journey in Judeo-Christian traditions is intended to realise. Nietzsche however, remained vitriolic in his abjuration of metaphysical and particularly Christian spiritual ideals. He does not, in other words, submit explicitly to any Essentialist notion that something spiritual exists ‘out there’ or that body and mind are two different things. And yet, interpreting the ‘I’ as something ‘performed’ or *generated* by the body, as has been shown, remains an Essentialist notion.<sup>21</sup> It may conversely be argued that

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<sup>21</sup> With typical candour, Nietzsche scathingly snipes in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1998) that, ‘... others even go so far as to say that the external world is the work of our organs... But then our body, as a piece of this external



Nietzsche's description tenders a form of Physicalism wherein physicality 'performs' or *generates* consciousness in keeping with theories of Constructivism or Emergence, but this still remains problematic. If the brain *generates* or gives rise to consciousness then the brain and consciousness may be in some way contiguous, but consciousness is still implied as something other than just the brain. Moreover, for Nietzsche, ordinary human consciousness is something lesser and therefore other than the ideal *Übermensch*. If so, different ontologies need to be applied to the lesser 'I' and the '*Übermensch*' which still means that Essentialist nuances are implied. In the Aristotelian sense it may be argued that both the substandard 'I' and the '*Übermensch*' are *essentially* human and only *accidentally* different in quality thereby avoiding Essentialist dualism. However, it may also be argued that they may not be *essentially* the same since the *Übermensch* embodies a kind of 'perfect' humanity of a kind almost reminiscent of Platonic Ideals, but are such 'Ideals' realistically attainable – are they, in other words, *essentially* human given that humanity is patently imperfect? Either way, Nietzsche's postulation illustrates the 'hardness' of the *Hard Problem*, and it seems there is no way of escaping its cunning.

Nietzsche's philosophy is commonly viewed not only as reductionistic, but nihilistic by Essentialists who hold him responsible for 'the death of God' whereas Physicalists remain suspicious that the *Übermensch* conceals shades of Essentialism. How is it possible to be certain of the difference, where should the line be drawn, does the difference actually exist? Of course this is purely conjectural and it serves only to illustrate the point, but it gives an indication of the potentially complex varieties of approach to the devious *Hard Problem*. To date there has been no solution equally persuasive to Essentialists and Physicalists and perhaps there never will be, but the quest must continue if we are to remain faithful to our heuristic adventure. Nevertheless, cautions Gamez (2007:7), we must realise that when, '... philosophy is pushed hard enough it dissolves through its own logic and any attempt to describe this dissolution dissolves as well. This total liquidation is the circling limit of philosophy.' It must therefore be understood from the outset that it is beyond reason and necessity to follow the profusion of possibilities aimed at solving the *Hard Problem*. For the purpose of the present argument a particular intention therefore needs to be identified and elucidated.

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world, would be the work of our organs! But then our organs themselves would be – the work of our organs' (Gamez 2007:63). The circularity of the *Hard Problem* is clearly evident in this example.

The *Hard Problem* has arguably occupied the largest portion of philosophical debate since Descartes and its mystery centres on the nature of consciousness. Descartes relayed the problem in terms of the interface between materiality and inner, subjective, first-person experience, but what if Cartesian dualism is false; what if there really is no contra-distinguished matter and mind (or *Mind* in Wilber's case)? And yet, as Bloom (2006:4-5), a committed Physicalist, rightly observes, '... the rejection of the immaterial soul is unintuitive, unpopular, and, for some people, downright repulsive... belief in immaterial souls has led otherwise sophisticated commentators to defend a distinction between actions that we do and actions that our brains do.' This is an extraordinary puzzle which science has yet to solve, and religion usually deposes to paradox or mystery.

Not many substantial contributions had been made to the resolution of the *Hard Problem* since Descartes' time until recent progress in the science of consciousness started asking different classes of questions. Consequently, disciplines as diverse as psychology, anthropology, archaeology, information processing, physics, evolutionary theory, philosophy, theology, biology, and especially neuroscience have added new lustre to the debate. Even so, a coherent science of consciousness requires some agreement on the phenomenon under consideration, but such consensus has yet to be secured and the field consequently remains highly theoretical rather than empirical. Not surprisingly, the *Hard Problem* endures as the pivotal culprit. Whilst consciousness in all its manifestations may be variously defined and described by Physicalists, the fact remains that no Physicalist explanation seems adequately able to explain the feeling of 'what it is like to be me' (Devlin 2006:34).

Science therefore continues its struggle with subjectivity in consciousness, but when it comes to matters of existential anxiety, affection, and questions of meaning and ultimacy, it does not enjoy the succour that religious persuasions are able to provide. Schneiders (1989:31) substantiates the view by suggesting that spirituality, '... is not only religious experience in the technical sense, but those analogous experiences of ultimate meaning and value which have transcendent and life-integrating power for individuals.' The reason for this distinction, explains Atran (2006:171), is that science, '... describes fundamental interactions with (non-intentional) objects (including objects of thought), [whereas] religion manages fundamental interactions with (intentional) subjects...' Atran (2006:172) nonetheless maintains that, '... the fact that [consciousness] can be objectively studied by no means implies that its subjective importance to human life is any less.'

It is thus in the degree to which the objectivity of science is able to speak into subjective intentionality that the *Hard Problem* will be proportionately simplified, but is this possible? Nisbett (2006:279), writing as a Physicalist, claims that, ‘If reason cannot be counted on to reveal the causes of our beliefs, behaviours, and preferences, then the idea of human perfectibility is to that degree diminished.’ Nisbett and Wilber may therefore mean quite different things by ‘perfectibility’ and they would aspire to it from contrary vantage-points; the former from a rationalist empirical stance, and the latter from an integral mystical stance. Would they arrive at the same kind of ‘perfectibility’ despite their variance in epistemological and ontological methods? It seems unlikely since Nisbett’s sense of perfection will probably resemble an image akin to Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* characterised by wizened intellectual, physical, and social expertise, whereas Wilber’s notion requires the non-dual vision of enlightenment. Nisbett celebrates reason and competence as the apex of human definition, whereas Wilber celebrates trans-rational spiritual vision. The former is existential, the latter mystical – can they be described in terms of the same ontology? We may never know the answer for certain, principally because there is no way of knowing whether either approach can realise such perfectibility since all instruments of measurement are themselves imperfect. This means that neither approach can prove itself absolutely and neither can prove or disprove the other absolutely. Nørretranders (1999:x) reiterates this important point by reminding us that, ‘In mathematics, physics, and computation theory, it has become increasingly clear since 1930 that the basis of objectivity is itself subjective; that no formal system will ever be able to substantiate or prove itself.’ Nørretranders is, of course, referring to Kurt Gödel’s (1931) famous *Incompleteness Theorem* and Gödel will be encountered several times in this study. The problem of explaining consciousness, and the more challenging problem of explaining NDC, seems ineluctably cryptic. Can a ‘formal’ system be constructed to study mysticism? How is it that a single brain with approximately one hundred billion neurons and more potential connections than all the particles in the universe can process stimuli, responses, and neurological systems into something capable of hypotheses, dreams, and spiritual abstractions, and yet seem unable to explain itself?

Part of the problem, suggests Freeman (2000:12-13), is that every person is endowed with ultimate privacy – there is no way of knowing for sure whether the contents of our minds are actually representative of any reality ‘out there’. It also means that we can never have certain

knowledge of the contents of other minds.<sup>22</sup> Freeman refers to this apparent limitation as ‘epistemological solipsism’ meaning that, ‘... all knowledge and experience is constructed by and within individuals [as distinguished from] metaphysical solipsism which holds that the whole world is a fantasy of each individual’ (2000:13). Hoffman (2006:216) similarly maintains that there are, ‘... no public brains, only my brain experiences and your brain experiences.’ If Freeman and Hoffman are right, where would the study of NDC, given its alleged transcendence of ordinary perception, intellection, and language, even begin? In the brace of this noetic *cul-de-sac* it is tempting to defer to belief in Essentialist notions of an unknowable, greater, and mysterious *Cause* and leave it at that. On the other hand, challenges Hoffman (2006:217), ‘The chances that our brain experiences resemble some mind-independent *truth* are remote at best, and those who would claim otherwise must surely explain the miracle.’

Does such jousting between Essentialists and Physicalists move us any closer to a resolution of the *Hard Problem*? How can we know what is fundamental? If the answer is consciousness as Hoffman (2005:93) claims, ‘... then we should not be surprised that despite centuries of effort by the most brilliant minds there is as yet no Physicalist theory of consciousness...’ The converse however, remains equally true. Hoffman explains that, ‘... if we assume that consciousness is fundamental, then the *Mind-Body Problem* changes from an attempt to bootstrap consciousness from matter into an attempt to bootstrap matter from consciousness’ (2005:95). Neither option is alluring since it seems to imbed rather than resolve the *Hard Problem*. ‘Bootstrapping’, in other words, is not a useful approach to the problem. Clearly alternative approaches are called for. Forms of non-reductive Physicalism have recently gained some currency, but these still remain problematic. Nevertheless, according to Ross (2002:70), Murphy (1999, 2006), ‘... made the useful point that neurobiological determinism did not supplant the concepts of free will ..., but seemed to require us to develop some new terminology. In sum, [Murphy] argued that the Jewish and Christian traditions contain minority voices that are not only consistent with the results of current cognitive-neuro-scientific research, but also provide grounds for celebrating the monistic-physicalistic accounts of human nature that science promotes.’ Murphy therefore challenges anthropological dualism and argues that Physicalism offers more viable

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<sup>22</sup> Gilbert (2005:107-108) believes, comically perhaps, that, ‘We take each other’s consciousness on faith, because we must, but after 2000 years of worrying about this issue, no one has ever devised a definitive test of its existence.’

explanations than dualistic theological renditions of body and soul. In this way Murphy is able to propose that whilst the matter-energy continuum is all there is, the laws governing its multifarious manifestations from gross matter to consciousness ought not to be curtailed by epistemological and ontological insularity.

Baker (2004:327) likewise observes that, ‘... Christians have almost automatically been *Mind-Body* dualists... [and] have thought of themselves as composite beings, made of two substances - a material body and a nonmaterial soul.’ The *King James Authorised Version* of Matthew 16:26 indeed endorses this view, ‘For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?’<sup>23</sup> Despite this embedded heritage, Baker believes that Scripture and Christian doctrine are not incompatible with Physicalist interpretations. Baker’s form of non-reductive Physicalism situates physics as the fundamental, but not exclusive idiom for interpreting human life. Like Murphy, Baker also believes that there is only one kind of stuff and it is the universe itself, but argues that feeling, thinking, and imagining are not substantially identical with physical processes. She explains that, ‘Proponents of non-reductive materialism hold that the mental is ontologically part of the material world; yet, mental properties are causally efficacious without being reducible to physical properties’ (Baker 2008:1).

At this point a problem in Murphy and Baker’s non-reductive arguments comes to the fore. The distinctions which Murphy and Baker draw between substance and manifestation approximate forms of Property Dualism and these, we have seen, provide inadequate substantiation for the argument of this thesis. Moreover, Baker (2008:3) claims a form of dependency in her argument which means that no changes in conscious states can occur without commensurate changes in brain states. This necessitates the inclusion of causality which suggests that mental properties possess relational and effective agencies. The advantage of Baker’s (2008:12) subscription to causation is that it allows for the inclusion of theories of intentionality and free-will, but causation also implies interactionism which, by logical extension, implies dualism at which point the argument for non-reductionistic Physicalism again begins to unravel. Gasser, Stefan, and Wehinger (2008) make the important point that, ‘... claiming that our mental life is irreducibly different from physical entities and contributes causally to what is going on in the world commits one to the

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<sup>23</sup> Although the *New Standard Revised Version* and the *Revised English Bible* translate ‘soul’ as ‘life’ and this difference changes the dualistic sense of the passage.

existence of mental properties...’ The notion, say Gasser, Stefan, and Wehinger, is clearly dualistic and it skirts too close to Property Dualism to have any advantage over it. More to the point of the *Hard Problem*, Murphy and Baker’s versions of non-reductive Physicalism have still not explained what consciousness is and we are, alas, effectively back to square one.

Gamez (2007:83) aptly summarises the dilemma, ‘The *real* problem of consciousness is how phenomenal experience arises from the physical world; the *Hard Problem* of consciousness is how one part of phenomenal experience [inner personal subjectivity] can be reduced to another part of phenomenal experience [the phenomenal brain].’ Gamez intimates that it is possible to speak scientifically about the problem of consciousness, but that it is not possible to speak about the *Hard Problem* without a practicable theory of resemblance. A case may be made, in other words, for the physiological capacity of the brain to simulate states ‘like’ NDC – a special condition of the brain determined by particular neurophysiological dispositions. The phenomenal experience of enlightenment however, will submit to no such explanation in rational-empirical terms. Is it possible to conceive of a constructive theory of resemblance at all? Should we even try given the inevitable circularity of the argument?

### **1.2.2 Is there an Alternative Solution?**

In the process of appraising Wilber’s Integral Philosophy as a context for debate around the *Hard Problem*, it becomes increasingly apparent that gravitation towards Physicalist renditions is more likely to resolve the problem than attempts at synthesis or transcendence typical of Essentialist initiatives. Thus stated, it appears that popular forms of non-reductive Physicalism are not necessarily the answer either – although they may point in the right direction. Is there a way in which the non-dual phenomenon in mysticism can retain its experiential legitimacy within a pure Physicalism by reframing definitions of consciousness and de-contextualising NDC?

This question subsists as a refrain throughout this thesis. The purpose is therefore firstly to survey the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of Wilber’s theory and thereby assess his integral conclusions. In so doing the adequacy of the epistemology he applies to his theory of non-duality will also be determined. Following this appraisal an attempt will be made to show that Wilber’s assent to the experience of non-dual phenomena typical of

mystical realisation may be conditionally validated in Physicalism – a possibility which Wilber denies on the basis of the irreducibility of *Spirit*.<sup>24</sup>

I maintain that this can be done if consciousness constitutes both the substance and relationships between the ‘perceived’ bifurcations of objectivity and subjectivity. Consciousness, in this sense, simply means that the (current) incomprehensible complexity of the human brain is merely physicality interacting dynamically within its own and extended types of physicality. The mind, in other words, is what the brain does (Kosslyn 2005:154). We may choose to call this interactive biological sophistication experience, response, or hypothesis. We may also experience it as something other than just physicality interacting, a vision of God perhaps, but that does not make it so, or at least we have no way of showing that it *is* so, and that is the *Hard Problem*. Even so, a Physicalist epistemology of NDC need not be limited, as Wilber supposes, to the inexpressible trans-rational province of mysticism. No doubt the outcome of the Physicalist approach must dispense with the Absolute and its contingent implications if it hopes to remain epistemologically coherent, but it will be argued that the transforming vitality of NDC need not be diminished as a result. This does not mean to say however, that this thesis aims to hit upon a conclusive theory, but that exploration of emerging knowledge in the Physicalist science of consciousness is raising questions and possibilities which are interesting enough to pursue.

### **1.3 Philosophy, Science, Mysticism, and Non-duality: The Integral Problem**

The former summary indicators reveal a spectrum of potential and real intellectual predicaments within the purpose of this research, but through the appearance of such confounding multiplicity, the central problematic is easily distilled. In keeping with the purpose of this study, the intellectual integrity of ontological definitions are claimed to be epistemologically dependent on the consistency and coherence of their foundational axioms. In this way the soundness and stability of intellectual processes are established by the sensibility of the criteria which determine their truth-claims. The formal results of such methods therefore reveal the viability of theories pertaining to the ontological status of properties – in this case the ontology of NDC and the possibility of ascertaining the veracity of such knowledge through scientific instruments. However, since this criterion emerges

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<sup>24</sup> Wilber (1997c:94) insists that, ‘... we cannot solve the mind/body problem theoretically, and therefore we cannot state the solution... only with the higher stages of consciousness development ... does it become obvious that absolute and relative, consciousness and form, Emptiness and Form, One and Many, are not-two or non-dual.’

from the subjective curiosities, uncertainties, and hopes of human consciousness in search of empyrean or supreme meaning, is it possible for this same wavering consciousness to proffer answers in mystical claims to ultimacy in NDC without compromising the coherence of its epistemology?

Beneath this question the fundamental problem centres on the possibility of consciousness explaining itself without contradiction. More to the point in this thesis, if theories of consciousness defer to transcendental ontologies to describe its ultimate or true definition as Wilber does, can the theory still be axiomatically consistent? In varying ways, other critics share these concerns. Hanegraaff (2002:28), for instance, asks whether, ‘... an analysis of religion and culture in all their dimensions, can be based upon religious axioms without losing scientific credibility?’ It has been suggested that answers to this problem are generally tendered from one of two broad perspectives, Essentialists who maintain a variety of relational philosophies between at least two types or qualities of existence, and Physicalists who maintain that there is only one type of stuff which *is* the universe itself. Ordinarily mystics would not pretend any concern with axiomatic criteria for justifying truth-claims in their narratives, but Wilber’s epistemology does, and the legitimacy of his postulations warrant critical examination.

Wilber’s Integral Philosophy is therefore chosen as a context for debating this problem for a number of important reasons. The first and most obvious is that Integral Philosophy, by theoretical definition, must include all possible ways of knowing - it is, in short, a *philosophical synthesis of all possible philosophies*. As such, an interdisciplinary approach is implicit. In this way, notes Meyerhoff (2003:Np), it is possible to consider the value and contribution of a variety of perceptions:

For example, phenomenology studies individual human subjectivity or the interiors of individual consciousness; the history of consciousness studies the consciousness or “subjectivity” of social groups through time; physics studies the individual and social exteriors of matter such as sub-atomic particles and galaxies; demographics studies the exterior or objective aspect of human social aggregates. Each established science gives us information about a part of the larger whole.

Wilber attempts a collaborative integration of all these disciplines – a formidable task indeed, but does he succeed? Kazlev (2004a:Np) is consequently right to acknowledge Wilber’s



staggering knowledgebase by noting that, ‘Wilber is credited with developing a unified theory of consciousness, synthesising all of the world’s great psychological, philosophical, and spiritual traditions, and using as a starting point a laudable eclecticism and the Perennial Philosophy’s *Great Chain of Being* and progressing ever further and broader with each successive iteration of his thought.’ Crittenden (Wilber 1997a:viii) summarises the breadth of Wilber’s integral inclusiveness in more detail:

Wilber’s approach appears to have provided a coherent vision that seamlessly weaves together truth-claims from such fields as physics and biology; the eco-sciences; chaos theory and the systems sciences; medicine, neurophysiology, biochemistry; art, poetry, and aesthetics in general; developmental psychology and a spectrum of psychotherapeutic endeavours, from Freud to Jung to Kegan; the great spiritual theorists from Plato and Plotinus in the West to Shankara and Nagarjuna in the East; the modernists from Descartes and Locke to Kant; the Idealists from Schelling to Hegel; the postmodernists from Foucault and Derrida to Taylor and Habermas; the major hermeneutic tradition, Dilthey to Heidegger to Gadamer; the social systems theorists from Comte and Marx to Parsons and Luhmann; the contemplative and mystical schools of the great meditative traditions, East and West, in the world’s major religious traditions. [Wilber also includes] ... psychoanalytical theories of personality and developmental psychologists like Piaget ... [and] Indian, Tibetan, and Sino-Japanese non-dualist schools of mysticism and metaphysics in Advaita Vedanta (especially Ramana Maharishi), Madyamika (Nargajuna), Mahamudra in Tibetan Buddhism, and Ch’an/Zen for the East (along with Western guru Da Free John) ... and a few others like ... Sri Aurobindo; [and] perennial traditionalists like Fritjof Schuon and Huston Smith.

Whether such an enormous variety of knowledge-types can be *seamlessly* woven together remains to be seen. Schneider (1987:1) aptly notes that Wilber’s books, ‘... cover so many topics that probably no one person could hope to give informed critiques on all of them, and doing so would demand another book.’ Wilber’s formidable learning and his ambitious, certainly courageous, and perhaps foolhardy attempt to integrate such vast and diverse knowledge-structures into one synthesising scheme reveals potential problems and further reasons for using his philosophy as a locus for debate. Preliminarily, Hanegraaff (2002:28) remarks that, ‘... despite [Wilber’s] powerful intellect, huge sweep of knowledge, and tremendous sincerity, [he] is not an original thinker in the style of, say, Plato, Hegel, Spinoza, Whitehead, or Sri Aurobindo, to name just a few.’ In a sense this makes Wilber a gatherer and consolidator of existing knowledge rather than a progenitor of new knowledge. Meyerhoff (2003:Np) asks whether this makes Wilber, ‘... *The Einstein of Consciousness* [or a] *New Age pseudo-scientist*?’ This is a matter of opinion, but it may be argued that Wilber’s

holarchical models of integration are sufficiently innovative to constitute new knowledge and he will be defended on this point. Thus qualified, it must nevertheless be asked whether it is possible for Wilber to incorporate such vast bodies of information without error or misunderstanding, and if there be such errors, whether they destabilise his hermeneutic process?

Wilber indeed testifies to at least five evolutionary phases in his thinking, but he claims that each phase transcends and includes its predecessor in a sublatory way thereby preserving the integrity of the scheme as a whole. Is this a legitimate dialectic in the nature of dialectics as it is attributed, mistakenly perhaps, to Hegel (1770-1831), or is it just a guise for old mistakes?<sup>25</sup> In witty defence, Wilber claims that, ‘... all of my books are lies. They are simply maps of a territory, shadows of a reality, grey symbols dragging their bellies across the dead page, suffocated signs full of muffled sound and faded glory, signifying absolutely *nothing*’ (Visser 2003:vi-vii). It must then be asked what this ‘territory’ or this ‘reality’ is? Wilber immediately answers that, ‘... it is the *nothing*, the Mystery, the Emptiness alone that needs to be realised: not known but felt, not thought but breathed, not an object but an atmosphere, not a lesson but a life’ (Visser 2003:vii).

Despite Wilber’s evasions, he clearly submits to absolutist and Essentialist premises, and so he must since his entire philosophy hinges on the truth of *Spirit* as Absolute. By way of cursory example, Wilber (1996c:132) quotes Galatians 2:20, ‘I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.’ He goes on to qualify that, ‘... the ultimate I *is* Christ...’ This, Wilber (1996e:297) explains, is the ‘... Ultimate State of Consciousness...’ in which case he claims that you have, ‘... discovered your own Buddha-mind, your own Godhead, your own formless, spaceless, timeless, infinite Emptiness, your own *Atman* that is *Brahman*, your *Keter*, Christ consciousness, radiant *Shekhinah*’ (1999a:70).

No temporal partialities are admitted in such designations, but it is precisely these attributes, says Meyerhoff (2003:Np) which, ‘... make Wilber’s integral synthesis look more attractive to those outside than inside academia.’ There are, in other words, academic reservations

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<sup>25</sup> It is common to attribute the well known dialectical process from thesis, through anti-thesis, to synthesis to Hegel, but it was Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus (1796-1862), whose exegetical interpretation of Hegel, expressed dialectics in terms of the now famous three-fold process. More accurately the process should be attributed to Fichte (1762-1814).

about the epistemological integrity of Wilber's Integral Theory. Meyerhoff goes on to explain that Wilber's argument loses strength through processes of exclusion of certain knowledge structures which do not 'fit' his integral purpose. He therefore questions Wilber's belief that all partial truths must fit together in holonic syntheses to create integral wholes since, 'There is no one world against which all true versions of it can be compared as Wilber assumes' (Meyerhoff 2003:Np). Additionally, whilst Wilber's holarchical spectra of emergence embody a synergistic rather than syncretistic character, he also imbues the entire process up to its non-dual apex with an absolute and ineffable principle. Does this not presume too much of the 'whole' since the 'whole' is clearly still in evolutionary flux and therefore punctuated by unpredictability (Gamez 2007:10)? Trehub (2006:239) explains the reason for this concern:

The entire conceptual edifice of modern science is a product of biology. Even the most basic and profound ideas of science - relativity, quantum theory, the theory of evolution by natural selection - are generated and necessarily limited by the particular capacities of our human biology. This implies that the content and scope of scientific knowledge is not open-ended.

Trehub's observation is profoundly important for the problem under investigation in this thesis. Lawson explains in *Closure* (2001:xxix-xxx) that, 'In order to provide a complete account of the physical world it will be necessary to give an account of how ... the theories of science themselves, as part of the physical world, are also the outcome of the laws which the theories express.' Physicalism, in other words, cannot reach beyond its own ontology without betraying its epistemology. Since a Physicalist interpretation of mystical consciousness will be tendered as an alternative to Wilber's Essentialist approach, it follows that scientific and biological premises must delimit ontologies attributed to the capacities of consciousness. Are Wilber's mystical descriptions of NDC as the unmediated realisation of irreducible *Absolute Suchness* not therefore inconsistent with the scientific exemplars by which he claims to verify them?

A common counterargument questions how the physical, if it is so limited, can conceive of or experience the Absolute? A twofold answer may be presented: Physicalists would not necessarily contest the brain's capacity to simulate an experience which is experienced as absolute (although some would), but it does not thereby prove the truth of that which is experienced. In other words, scientists may explain and even prove the brain's capacity for

imagination, but they cannot prove the independent existence of that which is imagined. Secondly, given that consciousness as physiology is clearly not absolute, how can it know whether it is actually conceiving of, or experiencing the absolute? At best then, science may accept the subjective report of a person who narrates an experience that *feels* absolute in the descriptive sense of something akin to being ‘one with the all’, but that does not make the experience absolute, or at least it cannot be shown to be so. If therefore, the ideational capacities of science are circumscribed by the biology of the brain, then should Wilber’s claim not be challenged? Neither science nor biology can be shown to be absolute or infinite; indeed legitimate scientific epistemologies would resist notions of ultimacy because it forecloses the necessity for further research. Is it not therefore impossible for Essentialist ontologies proclaiming absolutes to be proven true by science? This is the central problematic investigated in Wilber’s Integral Philosophy, and its contingent anomalies constitute the siren-songs luring careless epistemologies to moribund fates.

Additionally, given Wilber’s huge span of gnosiological inclusions, it should be borne in mind that hermeneutic processes become unstable when multiple theories, which may be independently viable, are allied in ways which confuse their epistemologies. Epistemology, as has been noted, is complicated in the extent to which it implies ontology. Disparate ontologies cannot therefore be synthesised without contravening epistemological protocols unless the disparity is purely idiomatic and accepted as such. A simple example, explains Gamez (2007:22), is, ‘... the assertion that everyone is correct...’ This assertion must therefore include itself in its belief that all theories are, in some sense or context, correct. Wilber is clear in his submission to this belief:

I have one major rule: everybody is right. More specifically, everybody - including me - has some important pieces of the truth, and all of those pieces need to be honoured, cherished, and included in a more gracious, spacious, and compassionate embrace (Wilber 2000a:49).

Wilber would object to my question, but does this belief not imply pluralism and do his holarchical syntheses not insinuate relativism? For this reason it will also be important to consider the vital role of phenomenology and linguistics in the problem of explaining mystical consciousness scientifically. Whilst Wilber’s intention may be noble, the notion that ‘everybody is right’ remains epistemologically incongruent. Gamez (2007:23, 201) explains that an integrative theory such as Wilber’s comes undone when it includes absolutes because

it retains relativistic undertones. In order to honour his definition, the relativist must include the views of the absolutist, but surely a theory cannot be relative and absolute at the same time? Does Wilber's integral hospitality not fall prey to this contradiction – not only in terms of his inclusion of all possible forms of knowledge, but in his *a priori* definition of its non-dual nature as an absolute truth?

It has been indicated that one of the general purposes of this research is to ascertain whether a form of existential fallacy lies at the root of Wilber's Integral Philosophy. The problem therefore emerges in consideration of the coherence and consistency of the epistemology Wilber applies to the ontology of non-dual phenomena. In other words, are Wilber's integral hypotheses invalidated by his universal claims to synthesise temporal ontologies of evolutionary space and time with ontologies of absolute spacelessness and timelessness in NDC? Do these premises not classify Wilber as an Essentialist despite his claim to have developed a non-dual Integral Philosophy?

As these core concerns are investigated a variety of associated anomalies are revealed and these will be addressed as they arise in the course of my debate with Wilber. The potential value of an alternative Physicalist approach to the problem of NDC, which is by definition also non-dual, nonetheless spawns problems of its own. However, the problematic from a scientific vantage point has heuristic advantages as the science of consciousness progresses, whereas subscription to Essentialist absolutes, at least in this respect, forecloses the necessity for further investigation since absolutes cannot be found to be any more absolute than they already are. Thus distinguished, it must be clear from the outset that the value of the Physicalist alternative resides, for the moment, more in the nature of its questions than the persuasiveness of its answers, but the potential for coherent explanations should be enticing enough to make a meaningful contribution to the debate between science, philosophy, and mysticism.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology: The Challenge of Interdisciplinary Consistency**

##### **1.4.1 The Problem of Discerning an Appropriate Methodology for Wilber's Integral Philosophy**

Integral Philosophy, we have seen, is by definition an inter- and intra-disciplinary initiative which aims to organically plait a multiplicity of knowledge systems without betraying the integrity of their respective approaches to the theory, acquisition, and validation of

knowledge. It must do so, in other words, without confusing epistemologies by conflating ontologies. The very idea is a mire of methodological complexity and potential conflict. It may be maladroitly asked, what methodology could be applied to the study of the methodology of all possible methodologies?

It has been shown, in an effort to simplify these multifarious possibilities into two broad categories, that when it comes to questions of 'being', Physicalists and Essentialists approach theories of knowledge differently. Their means of investigation, criteria for validation, and respective truth-claims are usually antipodal. In keeping with the theme of this thesis, theories of knowledge in mysticism and science appear antithetical – not only within, but between Essentialist and Physicalist methodologies. Integral Philosophy must nonetheless accept the validity of both views and synthesise all their phenomenological, epistemological, and ontological faculties without contradiction. Is the idea *Reductio ad absurdum*; moreover, does it require us to believe in impossibilities, or does Wilber succeed in his integral endeavour? Meyerhoff (2003:Np) reminds us that Wilber, '... is a mystic and a thinker and so inhabits both worlds... This is a problematic conflation of intellectual and spiritual insight.' Meyerhoff does not mean to suggest that mystics cannot be thinkers, but thus observed, what methodology would be appropriate to a critical appraisal of Wilber's Integral philosophy? More to the point, what methodology can be applied to a study of the *trans-methodological* ontology of Wilber's description of NDC? Additionally, what methodology should prescribe the viability of my alternative Physicalist interpretation of NDC?

This is obviously a complex challenge and possible answers, given the spectrum of intellection which needs to be embraced in integral studies, can easily decline into generalised or groundless speculation. Methodological proprieties attached to the simultaneous study of mysticism, spirituality, theology, phenomenology, philosophy, linguistics, and the varieties of natural and social sciences are too disparate for consistent and unified methodological principles to be distilled and applied without dilution or contradiction. Wilber (1997a:ix) bypasses this dilemma in two ways. By way of introduction, his Four Quadrant Integral Model allocates the external, objective, and empirically measurable variables of existence to the right quadrants of his model, and the inner subjective aspects of personal reflective experience to the left. For the most part, the right quadrants submit to varieties of quantitative methodologies applied to the natural and social sciences whereas the left are more likely evaluated qualitatively. The right submits to direct exoteric observation

and the left to literary surveys of subjective interior or esoteric senses and intuitions. Additionally, the top quadrants apply to the individual, whereas the bottom quadrants apply to the collective. This means that divergent methodologies apply to each of the four quadrants. Wilber's thesis claims holarchical parallels between levels of emergence in each of these quadrants and demonstrates their developmental co-dependence thereby embracing the entire model in all its aspects as a holistic and complete definition of consciousness. Is there a systematically coherent methodology which can be applied to the model as a whole?

Wilber recognises that the variety of methodologies applicable to different levels of emergence in each of the four quadrants cannot be sensibly correlated without the risk of contradiction. The first of the two ways in which he overcomes this problem is to couch his theory in 'orienting generalisations'. By so doing Wilber is able to identify and draw out general principles from categories of existence which are most naturally compatible or at least co-substantiating. He achieves this, secondly, by 'bracketing' the intrinsic priority of all phenomena in a way which de-prioritises their objective particularities. He achieves this by imbuing all aspects of existence and experience with the same subjective value in order to create a mutually applicable idiom. Wilber's understanding of 'bracketing' resembles Husserl's (1859-1938) *epoché* (1931) in terms of its experiential immediacy, that is, that no distinctions exist between the perceiver and that which is perceived in consciousness, but Husserl would have resisted Wilber's generalisations. The point is that 'bracketing' in the Husserlian sense excludes the necessity for assent or dissent. Moreover, it means that the privacy of inner personal experience is invulnerable to scientific appraisal and cannot therefore be proven wrong, and this supposition naturally, and conveniently, suits Wilber's ontology of NDC. Meyerhoff (2003:Np) is therefore right to question Wilber's presumption that all objective or distinct categories of existence actually subsist in an ultimate non-dual value. Is Wilber's methodological approach to these premises epistemologically credible?

Wilber's principle methodology is therefore to seek out the 'integrated-ness' of all that *is* by imbuing the *All* with a single fundamental ontology – non-dual *Suchness*. 'Orienting generalisations' enable Wilber to circumvent responsibility for conflicts or inaccuracies in the objective details of his theory, but is this methodology then authentically integral? Non-dual *Suchness* as the fundamental essence of the *All* is methodologically useful, but is it true? To what extent, in other words, are methodology and epistemology related in the pursuit of consistent and coherent argumentation? Scientific epistemologies establish truth by

determining what occurs, how things occur, and (in some cases) why things occur. They do not generally reach into what it *means* that things occur. Wilber's Integral methodology claims the ability to do both without contradiction. What methodologies must this thesis apply to appraise Wilber's Integral claims, and particularly his theory of NDC?

#### **1.4.2 A Multi-Method Proposal**

It is clear from the aforementioned problems that a methodology that could be uniformly applied to the study of Wilber's Integral Philosophy would be difficult to engineer. Within the integral context it is therefore given that interdisciplinary techniques must be applied to this literature study. It is not uncommon for qualitative and quantitative methods to be used in conjunction and in this particular context it has obvious advantages. Before these benefits are delineated the primary methodologies employed in this study must first be explained.

This thesis was introduced with a heuristic challenge. To an extent, heuristics stretch conventional research protocols by sanctioning degrees of 'permissiveness' as open-ended strategies that rather loosely mediate the investigative process. However, they do not thereby permit random inclusions or correlations to the point of incongruity. Whilst heuristic endeavours should not be constrained by axiomatically closed systems, they must nevertheless be guided by a defined set of methodological maxims to remain intellectually credible.<sup>26</sup> The maxim claimed in this study is that the intellectual integrity of ontological definitions is epistemologically dependent on the consistency and coherence of their foundational axioms. This rule is not intended to be reductionistic, but functions as a canon by which the assessments, comparisons, and critiques of Wilber's theories may be ordered. It may also facilitate new insights and understandings of the subject under consideration (Valle 1989:334).

In keeping with my title, this thesis therefore critically appraises the central tenets of Wilber's prodigious writings by measuring it against my guiding maxim. In the process of explaining these themes I constantly raise questions and enter into debate with Wilber by employing analytical instruments from an alternative Physicalist vantage-point. The principle methodology is therefore a literary study in which a polemical approach consistently hones

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<sup>26</sup> Moustakas (1985:40-41) explain that, 'Because heuristic inquiry challenges the extremes of perceptions, passionate yet disciplined commitment is vital if the search is to attain scientific credibility. Heuristic inquiry is not guided by rules or mechanics, yet it is not a casual process.'



in on the problem of duality in Wilber's Essentialist bias to focus specifically on epistemological and ontological problems pertaining to NDC.

Within this dialogical process, due consideration must be given to a variety of other methodologies. Phenomenological techniques, for example, will be appraised differently between Wilber's Essentialist disposition and the Physicalist proposition put as an alternative in this thesis. The ontology of phenomena is therefore alternately described, but the personal value of the non-dual experience need not be negated as a result. Valle (1989:279) endorses the importance of existential-phenomenological methodologies because they accredit and add meaning to our inner worlds as we share our experience with others who resonate similarly. Valle therefore suggests that, '... phenomenological philosophy and method offer us the perfect, perhaps only, mirror to approach transcendent experience.' Valle's position would suit Wilber's argument, whereas mine would acknowledge the experience, but question the epistemological basis of its alleged transcendence. It is therefore the experience of NDC itself which is under particular scrutiny, not just the theory about it. Schneiders (1993:15) similarly and encouragingly explains that:

... there are scholars who want to study religious experience as such, not just the subject of such experience, or the ritual and creedal and moral expressions of such experience, or the history of such experience, but the experience itself. It is going to take some time to delineate precisely the subject matter of this new field and to distinguish it adequately from that of other fields but we know that we are interested in studying something that exists and that does not fit precisely into any of the existing fields of study. The birth last year of the *Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality* and the appearance last spring of the first issue of its official organ, *The Christian Spirituality Bulletin*, indicates a growing consensus and confidence among scholars in this new field.

The methodological inclusion of spirituality as an emerging discipline must imply the inclusion of theology in general. In this sense Ashley's (1995:14) explanation of theology is most appropriate because he describes it as, '... the disciplined and self-critical attempt to construe all of reality - God, the human person, society, human history and the natural cosmos, individually and in their inter-relations - in the light of the symbols and narratives of the Christian tradition...' If theology is placed as a mediating agency for the whole life experience, it must gauge the propriety of the *All* through Christological and soteriological conventions. At this juncture my Physicalist premise necessarily reinterprets the ontology of

the Divine in order to avoid contradiction of my foundational premise. This is an awkward and controversial distinction to make in a theological degree because the Physicalist approach of this thesis necessarily assigns notions of God to hypotheses of consciousness. The implicit question is therefore whether it is possible to tell the experiential difference between God as a construct of consciousness and God as Real? Wilber's clear recourse is to the Reality of *Spirit*, but his belief is therefore metaphysically categorised and his claim to an empirical epistemology must be challenged. A multitude of religions testify to phenomena like NDC, but it is also narrated by philosophers, poets, scientists, and persons of no religion at all. Experience of NDC, in other words, is not the exclusive preserve of religious mystics and Divine causality cannot therefore be the only criterion.

Akin to these aspects, epistemology as the primary agency of true belief is also substantiated differently between Essentialist and Physicalist versions of ontology. Epistemologists will seek out reliable information as a means of transforming mere belief into verifiable knowledge. Since NDC is claimed to transcend empirical methodologies, language may be our only recourse to information, but if so it must 'somehow' construct descriptions and validations of that which is deemed indescribable. The *expressibility* of the non-dual experience therefore embodies metaphorical qualities which naturally make NDC idiomatically variable: we may describe it theologically, mystically, poetically, or scientifically, and in integral philosophy these genres must all have their place. Notwithstanding these variations, it is particularly the quality of ineffability in mysticism which complicates the construction of Physicalist methodologies which attempt to recognise the experiential legitimacy of phenomena like NDC. Within this expanded methodological milieu, the role of linguistics is clearly of fundamental importance. The ways in which being, consciousness, and spiritual experience are perceived within given contexts have significant bearing on the ways in which they are described and *vice versa*. Language, in other words, mediates communication within and between disparate knowledge systems.

It has thus been determined that this critical appraisal of Wilber's Integral Philosophy utilises methodological instruments appropriate to reason and rationality implicit in analytical philosophy. This standard operates as a threshold of viability against which all other methodologies are reckoned and it therefore functions as the guiding maxim in my heuristic endeavour. For this reason the quantitative injunctions of general scientific procedures of verification; the qualitative interpretations of spirituality, mysticism, and phenomenology; the

interpretive constructs of theology; the apparatus of linguistics in the conceptualisation and explication of experience and ontology; and a variety of criteria imported to construct any type of epistemology will all be measured against my foundational premise.

In response to my rather crude introductory aphorism seeking an ‘ultimate’ methodology, the integral regimen clearly contains a potentially bewildering spectrum of possibilities which necessarily imply a methodology of all possible methodologies - what might otherwise be called a ‘multi-methodology methodology’. The importance of maintaining the ‘guiding maxim’ as a standard is therefore vital to the congruent inclusion of auxiliary methodologies in this study. This dialogue with Wilber will therefore utilise varieties of methodologies interchangeably as circumstance necessitate, but never simultaneously since this would violate my injunction not to confuse ontology by melding disparate epistemologies. A multi-method proposal is not, in other words, a methodology of randomness or compromise, but a useful way to comprehensively address the scope of Wilber’s integral syntheses without risking contradiction or inconsistency.

With this guiding maxim securely in place, it is now possible to delineate the advantages of a ‘multi-method’ approach. Quantitative approaches, most naturally applicable to physical, objective, or observable properties, have the advantage of predictions based on replicable evidence. Quantitative studies are also generally invulnerable to idiomatic variance which means that they may have more universal appeal. Qualitative approaches, on the other hand, are able to abstract meaning from objective properties and personal inner phenomena. This implies categories of subjective interpretation and aesthetic appreciation and imagination. A wider spectrum of validating criteria may therefore be assigned, but the interpretive contexts may be culture or discipline specific. A Christian rendition of NDC may not, for example, be credible to a scientist. The acceptance of pre-assigned philosophical premises therefore determine the qualitative interpretations of subjective properties. An obvious advantage of recognising the integral viability of both quantitative and qualitative methods is that quantities can be imbued with qualities, or more simply, that objects can have meaning. Conversely, the results of quantitative research can make qualitative narratives more scientifically precise. Qualitative interpretations are thereby more easily corroborated if they submit to quantitative endorsement. In this case, for example, advances in technological expertise in neuroscience may contribute meaningfully, perhaps even validate, the metaphorical narrations of mystics claiming NDC. The multi-method approach also allows

for interdisciplinary perspectives which increase the probability of a more complete knowledge of the subject under consideration.

It is clear by now that the merits of Integral Philosophy come at a price. Interdisciplinary inclusions, with their respective interpretations of ontology, reveal a plethora of epistemological and methodological challenges. The cardinal divide subsists between physical and metaphysical disciplines, and this duality refers to the purpose of this research. In the quest for consistency and coherence in studies related to consciousness, it is the Essentialist and Physicalist divide which abets the tenacity of the *Hard Problem*. Constructing a methodology appropriate to this enterprise thus requires degrees of heuristic inventiveness which can only remain congruent by observing a pre-established standard. Even so, reminds Gregory (1987:481), ‘Metaphysics is generally taken to mean philosophical speculation beyond the current or even seemingly possible limits of science...’ If Gregory is right, the problem under investigation in this thesis may denude my Physicalist approach to nothing more than erudite guesswork. And yet it is by no means clear to what extent science is free of metaphysical assumptions in its pre-experimental hypotheses and post-experimental interpretation of results. Are they really that independent? Where precisely is the line between Physicalism and Essentialism? Is there indeed an absolutely neutral or theory-free observational technique which records only brute facts? Given that the question emerges from the subjective speculations of consciousness, it seems unlikely. Thus acknowledged, the most exacting and thoroughgoing methodology must still, in one sense or another, be inadequate to its ideal purpose. The truth, in other words, is that we may never know it, and yet humanity will always pursue it.

### **1.5 Demarcation of Chapters**

The foundational elements of this debate have now been put in place. The effort to distil systematic precision from the confounding multiplicities implicit to Integral Philosophy therefore requires careful structuring if the ensuing argument is to be fluent and cohesive. The Literature Survey which follows will identify the key sources and introduce concepts to be developed as the argument unfolds. The primary sources, of course, comprise Wilber’s prodigious writings, but some of his critics, together with my questions raised from various Physicalist views of consciousness, will substantiate the need for an alternative perspective in the latter part of the thesis.

As a natural extension of the Literature Survey, **Chapter Two** introduces us to Ken Wilber as a living philosopher and sets out the key principles which underpin the development of his theory. This is a necessary and logical point of departure since the Perennial Philosophy and Wilber's considerable contribution to Transpersonal Psychology inform the genesis of his Integral Philosophy. In so doing Wilber's holarchical or nesting principles of sublation explain the synthesising apparatus of Integralism.

With this background in place, **Chapter Three** narrates and evaluates the composition of Wilber's Four Quadrant Model. Wilber explains the holonomy of Structures, Streams, and States of consciousness as the purpose of Transformation to ultimately realise non-duality as the fundamental essence of the *All*. At this crucial juncture, Wilber's epistemology is critically evaluated for its distinctions between sensory knowledge (*Sensibilia*), rational knowledge (*Intelligibilia*), and spiritual knowledge (*Transcendelia*). Moreover, the four quadrants of Wilber's model submit to validity claims particular to the ontology of each quadrant. For Wilber, the veracity of knowledge construed from each of these modes of apperception is ascertained by following a simple *Three Step Exemplar*- the injunctions of which are to perform an experiment, gather the data, and corroborate the results. This is a rudimentary scientific sequence, but can its application to NDC claim empirical results from transcendental ontologies? The argument is clarified by defining epistemology more thoroughly and measuring Wilber's approach against criteria ordinarily engaged in scientific methods.

Having judiciously surveyed the full embrace of Wilber's Integral Philosophy, the challenge to his epistemology is extended in **Chapter Four** as the contextual implications of his views on the science-religion debate and post-modernism are considered. These facets are important because of their significant influence in contemporary philosophies and sciences of consciousness. Moreover, they nuance the currency of religion by focusing attention on the apparent degradation of religious institutionalism in favour of spiritual and mystical aspirations. Since spiritual experience is increasingly prioritised, it follows that scientific interest in the nature of mystical encounters will be proportionately roused. However, since mysticism is usually retained within religious contexts, it follows that Essentialist interpretations will be hegemonic. From a scientific vantage point, and in keeping with Wilber's purpose, the problem of duality will therefore present the most significant and pervasive epistemological hurdle to Physicalists.

**Chapter Five** therefore examines the problem of duality in Wilber's theory in greater depth. The bifurcation of subjectivity and objectivity, and the absolute and the relative speak directly into the mind-brain debate and the *Hard Problem* naturally lies at its root. The conundrum is surveyed from its earliest philosophical origins and its various extrusions yield a variety of theories about the relationship between brain and consciousness. These relational definitions necessarily inform descriptions of mystical consciousness since NDC, particularly according to Wilber, claims the highest expression of consciousness, and it also claims resolution of the *Hard Problem*.

In further elaboration, **Chapter Six** surveys the evolutionary history of mysticism in order to arrive at the principles which commonly characterise mystical consciousness. These descriptive features are ordinarily distilled from phenomenological investigations as they are reported by those who claim mystical encounters, and the idiom is usually context specific. The cultural neutrality of Physicalism, on the other hand, must delimit the ontology of non-dual phenomena if it is to retain its scientific credibility. There are, in other words, a variety of hypotheses which pre-define the parameters of phenomenological interpretations. As a result, it becomes apparent that Wilber's interpretation of consciousness presumes criteria for describing non-dual phenomena which comprise only one view among many which may be equally, or perhaps even more persuasive. Does Wilber's exclusivism not disaffirm his integral claims?

A series of questions and challenges consequently emerge as Wilber's postulations are scrutinised. In the course of this debate it becomes increasingly obvious that language mediates the operational efficacy within and between philosophical and scientific vacillations. Phenomena *in* or *as* consciousness are therefore conceptualised and mediated through language to the extent that meaning, language, and consciousness become inextricable. The theories of eminent linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Gottlob Frege, Saul Kripke, Noam Chomsky, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Bertrand Russell will assist in this debate and substantiate NDC as a linguistic anomaly. Thus argued, the frontier of language poses additional challenges to Wilber's theory and his claim to integral consistency and coherence is queried further.

By now the accumulation of epistemological incongruities in Wilber's Integral Philosophy are sufficiently demonstrated to motivate an alternative perspective. **Chapter Seven** therefore proposes a Physicalist interpretation of NDC. In keeping with the guiding maxim tendered as a canon in this research, clarification of Wilber's claims to ultimacy, absolutism, Reality, and Truth will be metaphorically reconfigured. Wilber views this reconstitution as a form of reductionism, but it will be argued that the personal and transforming import of the non-dual phenomenon described by mystics need not be diluted in Physicalist interpretations. The proceeding argument proposes the possibility of validating mystical experiences without existential diminution in Physicalist terms by repositioning and refining recent definitions of consciousness.

The conclusions in **Chapter Eight** naturally consolidate the evolution of this appraisal to distil the salient features of Wilber's Integral Philosophy through a Physicalist polemic. Principally, the guiding priority of my foundational maxim underscores the importance of coherence and consistency in my non-dual Physicalist alternative to Wilber's Essentialist interpretation of mysticism. The desired outcome is, in a manner of speaking, to establish 'reasonable doubt' with respect to the epistemological adequacy of Wilber's Integral Philosophy. The heuristic invitation which introduces this thesis is thereby animated in the hope of working towards more viable explanations of consciousness and mysticism in ways that are epistemologically coherent in terms of the non-dual premises which define it.

### **1.6 Legitimacy and Responsibility: Literature Survey**

If Integral Philosophy aims to be the synthesising 'theory of all possible theories', it follows that a literature survey of Integralism should include all possible literature. The suggestion is clearly hypothetical since a measured inclusion of all relevant literature must surely be a practical impossibility. By sensible extension, Wilber's Integral Philosophy must also be hypothetical since it is distilled primarily from literature. What criteria should be set in place to select an adequate and appropriate body of literature to survey the hypothetical inclusion of all possible knowledge? A representative sample of notable supporters and critics of Wilber's Integralism appears to be the only recourse. On the basis of the 'laws' of averages and probabilities it is assumed that this sample will be generally reflective of the wider body of opinion. As a safety-measure, supporters and critics have been selected on the basis of their understanding of Wilber's work and their recognition in academic disciplines beyond Wilber's Integral Philosophy. In this way it is hoped that a balanced reflection of Wilber's

integralism can be achieved. Not all the commentators listed below are therefore chosen for their expansive contributions, but rather for the incisiveness or significance of their views to this debate. Even so, it is inordinately difficult to select a thoroughly representative and objective sample of opinion of a philosopher who claims to have constructed an integrated theory of all possible theories. Richard Rohr entitled one of his recent books *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (2003) wherein he commends a holistic spirituality of centeredness and freedom through awareness within the whole life experience rather than something set apart from it. Rohr's view coheres well with Wilber's Integralism and both authors are careful to qualify the nature of such *belonging*. For Wilber, Integralism is neither a form of pluralistic 'clumping' nor a version of relativistic compromise. Whilst Wilber would endorse the idea that *everything belongs*, 'things' will neither belong in equal senses, nor with the same degrees of integration. Part of the problem is reflected in the extent to which commentators on Wilber's work are able to relinquish attachment to their own disciplines and implicit epistemologies, and step into the unbounded hospitality of Wilber's graded systems of inclusion and synthesis.

Wilber's scheme therefore allocates all aspects of life into developmental and appropriately discerned levels of functional and relational propriety with ultimate integration or non-dual awareness at its mystical apex. Wilber refers to this consummate mystical point as *vision-logic* because of its capacity to synthesise or sublimate all perspectives within the transcendental *gnosis* of NDC. In this sense all literary inclusions will likewise have categories of *belonging* on Wilber's spectrum, but this also means that literature in 'lower' holons will never not be able to evaluate literature in 'higher' or more integrated holons. This assertion reveals another problem. Well integrated mystical literature, because it points to non-dual transcendence, naturally belongs in the higher holons of *vision-logic*, but that means that the application of any other epistemology to mysticism, no matter its cogency, will be viewed as definitively reductionistic. According to Wilber, in other words, matter and reason can never aspire to explain *Spirit* without reduction, and it is principally this belief that classifies Wilber as an Essentialist. Wilber will therefore view my Physicalist approach to his Integral Philosophy as a *de facto* mistake. This is not a happy starting point to this debate. Thus acknowledged, an objective understanding of Wilber's work by means of a critical appraisal of central principles should secure sufficient grounds for postulating a viable alternative. The ensuing argument is thus designed to go some way towards narrowing the conceptual gap between Wilber's Essentialism and the Physicalist rendering tendered in this thesis.



A thorough and objective reading of Wilber's expansive writings must therefore be a prerequisite for this argument to have any legitimacy. Among his multitudinous journal articles, forewords, internet postings, and other publications, Wilber's books constitute the primary sources and their priority in this thesis will be explained as his emergence as an Integral Philosopher is narrated. A substantial portion of this literature survey is therefore exported to Chapter Two because it embraces too much material for it to fit naturally into this Introduction. As the argument unfolds I will participate alongside Wilber's supporters and critics in a dialogical process of comment, explanation, defence, and criticism. Thereafter a selection of theorists conducting research in the science of consciousness will provide necessary support for my Physicalist counter-proposal.

Wilber has too many supporters for general surveys to be useful, but some writers with more learned credibility should be briefly mentioned as useful points of entry to general understandings of Wilber's philosophy. Reynolds (2004), a devout student of Wilber's Integral Philosophy, is among the first authors to provide a systematic overview of Wilber's entire work. He attempts no significant critique and leaves Wilber to explain himself, but the book serves as a useful summation of Wilber's theories for first-time readers. Walsh (1996a; 1996b) and Vaughan (with Walsh 1994) are significant transpersonal and integral theorists in their own right and tender more balanced and objective views in support of certain aspects of Wilber's earlier philosophy – particularly those pertaining to the Perennial Philosophy, Transpersonal Psychology and transcendent or mystical states of consciousness. Walsh is professor of Psychiatry, Philosophy and Anthropology at the University of California and wrote the Preface to Wilber's *A Sociable God: Toward a New Understanding of Religion* (1983b). Vaughan is a psychologist and pioneered much of the early developmental work in Transpersonal Psychology. She now works in the Clinical Faculty at the University of California Medical School. The value of Walsh and Vaughan's combined research is in their ability to distil and explain some fundamental essences of Wilber's philosophy. Wilber's voluminous writings may seem inaccessible to many who would otherwise be interested and Walsh and Vaughan not only simplify concepts, but endorse them with academic rigour which is sometimes wanting in Wilber's literary style. Rothberg (1996a; 1998), a recognised authority on socially engaged Buddhism and member of the *Buddhist Peace Fellowship*, acclaims Wilber's philosophy with more circumspect precision. He teaches socially engaged spirituality, Buddhism, and Transpersonal Psychology at Saybrook Graduate School and is

the author of *The Engaged Spiritual Life: A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World* (2006). Wilber and Crittenden launched *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation* in 1978, and when Wilber and Crittenden left, Rothberg stepped in as editor for ten years. Rothberg also co-edited *Ken Wilber in Dialogue: Conversations with Leading Transpersonal Thinkers* (1998) where he queries, rather than directly challenges some of Wilber's foundational premises.

Crittenden (1992; 1997) remains one of Wilber's more significant allies. He now teaches Political Science at Arizona State University and co-founded the Integral Politics and Integral Education departments of Wilber's Integral Institute. Crittenden boldly claims that, 'The twenty-first century literally has three choices: Aristotle, Nietzsche, or Ken Wilber' (Foreword in Wilber 1997a:viii). Such audacious asseverations about Wilber's philosophical prowess are insufficiently supported in the academy for Wilber's contribution to be matched to the innovative acuity of the world's great philosophers. It is therefore noteworthy that many authors in support of Wilber's work are often classified as metaphysicians within loosely categorised *New Age* paradigms, whereas many critics are rooted, and in some cases entrenched, in established academic disciplines. Thus, whilst many publications by and about Wilber appear in academic journals, their status would not generally be considered equal to those which engage the great philosophical masters.

Wilber's critics are as numerous, and in some cases as voluble as his supporters. Among those who are uneasy about Wilber's inflated status are Schneider (1987; 1989; 1996), Hanegraaff (1998; 2002), Helminiak (1998; 2008), Heron (1992; 1996; 1998; 2002), Meyerhoff (2003) and De Quincey (1994; 2000). Before their views are briefly surveyed, mention should also be made of Frank Visser's book: *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion* (2003). Visser's paraphrase of Wilber's books provides the most comprehensive and objective overview of his philosophy, but Visser adds his own interpretations and evaluations which Wilber latterly denounced as inaccurate or biased. That said, it is by no means unusual for Wilber to respond to criticism or correction with defensive and accusatory indignation. Visser (2003:28) therefore notes that, '.... for all his academic phraseology, [Wilber] is not embedded in a corrective academic community.' Most significantly, Visser founded a website entitled *Integral World: Exploring Theories of Everything* (integralworld.net). At any time there are upwards of one hundred critical or expository essays in Integral World's reading room and submissions are mostly of high academic quality. Visser hones his

attention on Wilber's roots in Perennialism and is concerned that Wilber's post-metaphysical views are lacking in academic cogency. The *Hard Problem* is central in much of Visser's work and he urges that too many grandiose self-validating assumptions are implied in Wilber's writing which, at the very least, should be carefully measured by epistemologists. Visser also intimates that Wilber's academic arrogance and seeming inability to respond professionally and civilly to legitimate critique denudes Wilber's credibility in the academy.

Kirk Schneider (1987; 1989; 1996) works mainly in humanistic psychology at Saybrook Graduate School, the California Institute of Integral Studies, and the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology. He is also the editor of *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and is a member on several other editorial boards. Schneider's primary concern is in keeping with the central criticism tendered in this thesis that Wilber's claim to the empirical verifiability of transcendentalism is epistemologically inconsistent. Schneider (1987:196-217) justifies a form of necessary dualism in humanity's quest for spiritual freedom. The complete sublation of opposites in NDC is therefore anomalous to Schneider because it seems that the perfect equanimity of NDC disintegrates rather than consummates consciousness (1989:470-481). For Schneider therefore, bifurcated tensions in consciousness are necessary for consciousness to be properly human. Schneider goes on to challenge Wilber's non-dual claims by questioning whether NDC is truly attainable since it cannot be shown to exist. Furthermore, human beings are patently incapable of perfection and to claim NDC as the experience of *Absolute Subjectivity* therefore seems contradictory. Moreover, Schneider asks whether NDC is useful and interesting, and how it can be shown to contribute to the furtherance of humanity. Schneider's (1987:196-217) critique nonetheless misapprehends some of Wilber's arguments and I will defend Wilber on some of these points .

Wouter Hanegraaff teaches in hermetic philosophy at the University of Amsterdam and presides over the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE). His seminal work, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (1998) established his academic status and he is also a member on several editorial boards. Hanegraaff acknowledges Wilber's astute application of the pre/trans fallacy to many *New Age* philosophies (2002:28-30). It has been shown that Wilber's spectrum model narrates psychological development from pre-personal, through personal, to transpersonal levels of consciousness akin to *vision-logic*. Wilber claims that a high percentage of *New Age* spirituality is pre-rational in its dependence on magical-mythical, or essentially

superstitious mindsets. This distinction is well discerned, but Hanegraaff is unconvinced that Wilber escapes his own judgements. Whilst Hanegraaff's analyses are less acerbic than those of other critics, he makes the important observation that Wilber's attempted integration of science and spirituality is susceptible to inconsistency (2002:28-30).

Daniel Helminiak (1998, 2008) teaches humanistic and transpersonal psychology at the universities of Texas at Austin and West Georgia. He is also a Catholic priest, but his sensitivity to Eastern spiritual philosophies aligns him with Wilber's thought. Helminiak's emphasis on the interconnection of grace and nature parallels Wilber's supposition that *Spirit* advances from gross matter, through conscious matter, through self-conscious matter, to spiritually actualised matter. Helminiak's (2008) particular concern is therefore with Wilber's epistemological expression in the *Three Eyes of Knowledge* (2008). Helminiak argues that each eye represents the noetic structure of different kinds of sciences. These differences reveal discrete types of information which, in turn, represent different species of knowing which cannot be synthesised without infringing the epistemological architecture of each science (1998:213-284).

John Heron is the founder of the Human Potential Project at the University of Surrey and the pioneer of a participatory research methodology called *Co-operative Inquiry*. His technique is designed to facilitate relational and participative spiritual practice in transpersonal approaches to holistic life paradigms. Heron is exercised by Wilber's supposition that the evolutionary impetus of the cosmos from matter to *Spirit* reveals conclusive arguments that can be extrapolated into future states of ultimacy (2002). Heron thus maintains that Wilber tries to abstract objective variables from subjective qualities whereas Heron prefers to view the spiritual impetus of humanity as a process of discovery with uncertain outcomes. Heron therefore challenges Wilber's claim to a provable absolute as the pinnacle of humanity's vocational enterprise and he describes Wilber's premise as a form of 'transcendental reductionism' (1992:192). Reason therefore serves as a necessary criterion for Heron, and in spiritual inquiry, given its epistemological limits, the existential authority reported by co-inquirers precedes the deductive authority of Wilber's theory of cosmological impulses towards non-duality (1996). Heron is right in his description of Wilber's theories, but misconstrues the precedence Wilber assigns to cosmological processes. Wilber, like Heron, affords priority to the immediacy of first-person experience.

Jeff Meyerhoff is qualified as a social worker, but as an aside considers himself an independent student of Integralism with a particular interest in spirituality and psychoanalysis. His web publication entitled *Bald Ambition: A Critique of Ken Wilber's Theory of Everything* (2003) identifies epistemological inconsistencies in Wilber's use of language. If language is central, or even definitive of consciousness as Meyerhoff maintains, then any discourse around NDC, no matter its mystical perspicuity, must be subject to rational debate. Discourse of any kind therefore initiates the tools of reason. Meyerhoff (2003:Np) notes that:

The 20th century's "linguistic turn" in the humanities and the social sciences has not, contrary to Wilber and Gebser, led to a 'transparency' of rationality and a superior vision-logic, but instead to the inescapability of language... Vision-logic, and the integral synthesis that justifies its status as an advanced form of consciousness, is one perspective among many... It is doubtful as a new type of socio-historical consciousness...

Meyerhoff is clearly concerned that the epistemology Wilber designs for establishing the veracity of his truth-claims utilises a subtle instrument of exclusion based on the alleged trans-linguistic priority of NDC. Wilber's description of mystical consciousness may, in other words, be an attempt to, '... avoid rational discussion, the standard way of adjudicating differences between differing intellectual perspectives' (Meyerhoff 2003:Np). It must therefore be asked whether Wilber deutes the limitations of reason to mystery in NDC and if so, how the *Three Eyes of Knowledge*, given their linguistic context, can verify such mystery if NDC claims to be trans-linguistic?

Christian De Quincey does not deal extensively with Wilber's philosophy, but his perception of Wilber's approach to the *Hard Problem* is of particular interest. De Quincey teaches philosophy and consciousness studies at John F Kennedy University, and he also directs the Conscious Evolution Programme at The Graduate Institute. His best-known publication is shared with Willis Harman and is entitled *The Scientific Exploration of Consciousness* (1996). De Quincey argues that Wilber's Integral Philosophy as it is presented in his *Four Quadrant Model* does not adequately address the *Hard Problem*. For de Quincey this flaw weakens the epistemological integrity of Wilber's entire philosophy because he is unable to convincingly validate the integral relationship between matter and mind. De Quincey maintains that Wilber ultimately asks his readers to trust the immediacy of NDC as a self-

evident fact and definition of the *All*, but fails to establish his case on the bases of his *Three Step Exemplar* (2000:177-208).

Of far more significance than Wilber's supporters and critics mentioned above are the great theoreticians whom Wilber attempts to assimilate into his Integral scheme. It is rather the following masters who engage more vitally with Wilber's proposals. The journey embraces the great classical philosophers from the time of Socrates through Aristotle, Plato, and the Neo-Platonists to modern analytical and continental philosophers. Among others, René Descartes, Jean-Paul Sartre, Edmund Husserl, Friedrich Hegel, Auguste Comte, Jürgen Habermas, William James, Emmanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, Gottfried Leibniz, John Locke, Baruch Spinoza, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Friedrich Nietzsche all have occasion to contribute to this thesis. The philosophical compass of such diverse inclusions requires selected foci for consistency to be secured. Whilst general explanations often accompany the introduction of these philosophers, emphasis is typically placed on issues pertaining to epistemology, ontology, consciousness, and particularly spiritual or mystical consciousness. It thereby becomes apparent that the possibility of constructing a true integralism is far more complex than at first seems the case. The extraordinary variance and persuasiveness of these great thinkers cannot easily be synthesised without dilution and the importance of their theories warrant individual recognition.

A number of significant scientists are also incorporated in this study; Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, Thomas Huxley, Thomas Kuhn, Max Planck, Francis Crick, and Werner Heisenberg among others. Interestingly, popular efforts to collaborate science and spirituality are censured by Wilber on the basis of epistemological and phenomenological fallacies. Wilber is critical, for example, of Fritjof Capra's (1976; 1982; 1997) efforts to synthesise science and religion without adequately recognising their spectrum and quadrant-specific differences. More to the point, the differences between pre-enlightenment Copernican and Newtonian science illustrate the evolutionary character of the ways in which science interprets the nature of existence. Post-Newtonian science is particularly pertinent as particle physics begins to reach into the finer operational structure of the brain. The relationship of physics to consciousness thus became a new frontier in science and some of its proposals speak into the problem under investigation in this study. Additionally, the exponential rate at which evolutionary theory has developed discloses ontological problems pertaining to the possibility of consciousness realising ultimacy. How, in other words, can evolution and absolutism be simultaneously validated in Integralism? The Croatian philosopher Arvan Harvat (1999) has

similarly observed that a co-equation of spiritual absolutes with evolutionary changeability is epistemologically inconsistent. In defence, Wilber explains that his theory is a rational-linguistic reconstruction of a trans-rational Reality, but is this reasonably possible?

Despite his Integral intention, Wilber does not extend research significantly into linguistics, but the fundamental potency of language in the context of this debate is of particular interest. Consequently, I have chosen to incorporate the views of Ferdinand de Saussure (2006; Sanders 2004), Gottlob Frege (1952; Kenny 2000), Saul Kripke (1980; 1982; Huen), Noam Chomsky (1966; Gross and Navega 2000; McGilvray 2005; Searle 1972), Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001a; 2001b; Kripke 1982), Jacques Derrida (1973; 1976; 1978; Caputo 1997), and Bertrand Russell (1910; 1912; 1913 with Alfred North Whitehead; 1957) as relevant sources. Language as the agency of all information determines theoretical efficacy and the viability of Wilber's philosophy is therefore necessarily retained within linguistic limits. To this extent the structure, usage, and symbolism of language must be interpreted according to any number of variables determining its mediating purpose and environment. Whilst the aforementioned linguists are deliberately chosen to represent alternative, and in some cases opposing views, the purpose is revealed in the extent to which the language of mysticism breaches the protocols of reason, and it therefore challenges the epistemological coherence of Wilber's integral supposition. It is in linguistic analyses that the transcendental character of NDC in Integralism becomes potentially anomalous.

Mathematicians such as Kurt Gödel (1931), Paul Davies (1983; 1992), Rudy Rucker (1997), and John Barrow (1992; 1997; 1999; 2000; 2008) also make valuable observations about the plausibility of the rational justification of esoteric absolutes in Integral theory. Whilst the possibility of conceptual absolutes is permitted, they are ordinarily predefined by axiomatically assigned operational boundaries. There are, in other words, formulaic conditions that permit the conception of absolutes whereas NDC in the Wilberian sense submits to no such conditions. In mystagogy this is plausible, but when validating criteria from science are superimposed, the epistemological consistency of either science or mysticism will be contravened. Nonetheless, the laws of mathematical processes must, by definition, have their place in Wilber's Integral paradigm, but to splice them with transcendental absolutes may confuse ontological definitions.

Obviously, spiritual and mystical literature has particular prominence in this study. Themes and aspects of religious consciousness are accented throughout the argument thus identifying and demarcating the principle area of research. In terms of Wilber's usage, reference to all spiritual contributors would again stretch the scope of this research beyond reasonable limits and priority has consequently been afforded mainly, though not exclusively, to Christian writers. This naturally includes the sayings of Jesus and other New Testament texts, particularly the Gospel of John and Paul's letters. The most distinguished traditions and writers since the time of Jesus include the Desert traditions, especially Antony and Pachomius, and from the early church onwards; Athanasius of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, John Cassian, Augustine of Hippo, and Pseudo-Dionysius (The Areopagite). From the medieval period onwards Thomas Aquinas' formidable *Summa Theologica*, Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, Francis of Assisi, Jan van Ruysbroek, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Teresa of Ávila, John of the Cross, and Ignatius of Loyola are most frequently mentioned. In modern times Teilhard de Chardin, Evelyn Underhill, Thomas Merton, and Bede Griffiths have occasion to make contributions. Whilst variations in conceptual and descriptive techniques also reveal an evolutionary character in writing styles, the great Christian mystics nevertheless share phenomenological themes which seem perennial. Wilber's interpretations are measured against these motifs to draw out a definition of NDC which resembles the idea of union in Christian mysticism most closely. This requires some distinction in order to retain the necessary transcendence of God in Christian mysticism.

Integral, philosophical, scientific, linguistic, mathematical, and mystical contexts have now all been aligned to measure the possibility of epistemological, ontological, and phenomenological coherence and consistency in Wilber's definition of NDC. The critical challenges raised through these systems pose a number of vexing problems to Wilber's philosophy, but the most significant challenge has yet to be presented - the fundamental problem of consciousness. In Chapter Seven an alternative Physicalist view of NDC is considered. The literary genres of six scientists of consciousness are selected for the rational acuity of their scientific premises. The risk of phenomenological fallacies implicit in Essentialist philosophies are thereby reduced by applying a specifically non-dual Physicalist mandate to the study of NDC. It has been indicated that questions extracted from Daniel Dennett's (1993, 2004) Multiple Drafts Model and theory of Hetero-phenomenology are sufficiently compelling to destabilise some of Wilber's Integral proposals. Dennett is certainly among the best known advocates of Physicalist approaches to consciousness, but his



scientific unconventionality and aggressive anti-Essentialism also renders him one of the most controversial. He is currently co-director of the *Center for Cognitive Studies*, a professor of philosophy at Tufts University, and the author of a multitude of influential publications of which *Brainstorms* (1978), *Elbow Room; The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (1984), *The Intentional Stance* (1987), *Consciousness Explained* (1993), *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1995), and *Kinds of Minds* (1996b) are best known. More recently the publication of *Freedom Evolves* (2004) and *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (2006) added innovative rigour and celebrity to his materialist explanation of consciousness. In this sense he bears a mild resemblance to Wilber's public reception. Whilst Dennett enjoys significantly more academic recognition, his acclaim as a writer, like Wilber, seems largely due to the allegiance of less critical lay readers.

A brief, but important set of challenges is posed by Tor Nørretranders' (1999) views on the 'existence' of consciousness and these provocations necessarily qualify NDC rhetorically. Passionate, lyrical, and rhapsodic espousals of NDC as a subject do not, in other words, verify its actual existence. Nørretranders' is a Danish journalist, mathematician, and popular science writer, but his publication of *The User Illusion: Cutting Consciousness Down to Size* (1999) gained him international recognition. The book is dedicated to redefining the nature and scope of consciousness. Despite its popular appeal, *The User Illusion* is an uncommonly sophisticated and cogent composition of academically recognised scientific theories of consciousness, but its readers are divided in their opinion of Nørretranders' suggestion that the brain is a kind of computer.

Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi's (Edelman 1989, 1992, 2004; Edelman and Tononi 2000a, 2000b) Dynamic Core Hypothesis similarly challenges assumptions about the operational systems of the brain which, in turn, question ontological definitions of mystical experiences. Gerald Edelman is presently an Associate of the Neurosciences Research Program at MIT and a member of the Board of Governors of the Weizmann Institute of Science. He is best known for his work on immunology and neuro-biology and is co-recipient with Rodney Porter of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for groundbreaking research in the chemical structure of antibodies. Edelman's main interest has now shifted to the physical basis of consciousness. Among innumerable other publications his foundational work appears in a trilogy of technical books. The publication of *Neural Darwinism: The Theory of Neural Group Selection* (1987) explains Edelman's evolutionary

theory, the notion of plasticity, and the role of environmental variables in the construction of consciousness. *Topobiology: An Introduction to Molecular Embryology* (1988) challenges the belief that information about genetic codes and cell differentiation is sufficient to explain morphology. Edelman then expands on three more important issues; the development of form, the evolution of form, and the morphological and functional basis of behaviour. *The Remembered Present* (1989) explains the fundamentals of the biological foundations of memory and distils the main ingredients of his hypotheses of consciousness. Edelman's academic work is redrafted for lay readers in *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire* (1992) and *Wider than the Sky* (2004). He also co-authored a few significant publications with Giulio Tononi which are more relevant to the field of research in this thesis. Tononi is professor of psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin where his expertise focuses primarily on brain function and sleep. Edelman and Tononi's *Consciousness: How Matter Becomes Imagination* (2000a) is a popular condensation of their theory of consciousness and informs the present debate regarding the nature of NDC.

As an additional point, Dennett, Edelman, Tononi, and Nørretranders all refer to the speed at which information is processed by the brain thus challenging traditional notions of free will which naturally raises further questions about intentionality. If our brains make decisions before we become consciously aware of them, does that make NDC the product of physiological determinism? Where, in other words, is the 'I' that experiences or becomes NDC? The question is a simple rephrasing of the *Hard Problem* and Physicalist renderings are proposing increasingly sensible and coherent solutions.

The neurotheological proposals of Andrew Newberg and Eugene D'Aquili seek some solace in physiological predispositions to mystical-type experiences, but the neurological architecture of these impulses still appears to be physically driven and consciousness may remain safely unexplained. Andrew Newberg is the Director of Clinical Nuclear Medicine and NPET Research (Neuro Positron Emission Tomography) in the Department of Radiology at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital. His clinical expertise focuses on neuro-imaging research of various psychiatric and neurological disorders. He also conducts neuro-physiological research of spiritual and mystical phenomena. These findings motivated further interest in the association of brain function with various states of consciousness which resulted in the publication, with the late Eugene D'Aquili, of *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Belief* (1999) and *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of*

*Belief* (2002). D'Aquili (1940-1998) was Clinical Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania for twenty years and he also ran his own psychiatric practice. During this time he authored or co-authored five books and a multitude of articles ranging from biogenetic structuralism to the philosophy of science, religious experience, and neuro-epistemology. He is the founder of a neurophysiological research methodology called Biogenetic Structuralism which seeks to correlate brain function with various states of consciousness. The significance of D'Aquili's contribution is indicated by his disciplined adherence to scientific standards which present a non-reductionistic approach to the subject of mystical experience.

Do the challenges from these Physicalist scientists of consciousness necessarily negate the real experience of NDC? On the contrary, it may be possible to substantiate an argument in favour of mystical experience, but the conditions are incompatible with those established by Wilber. At this early stage it must be admitted that the Physicalist counter-proposal tendered in this study may be no more successful at proving NDC as the zenith of consciousness than Wilber's argument. Physicalism, after all, does not intend to reach into phenomenology of personal inner experience, but at least the possibility of a non-contradictory epistemology is more easily substantiated. In this way the merits of coherent and consistent argument adds scientific authority and cogency to the debate.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

The purpose and contextual terrain of this study has now been set out. The Integral Philosophy of Ken Wilber has been introduced as a locus for debate and his Essentialist bias has been identified and distinguished from Physicalism. The central problem has been elucidated and an appropriate multi-methodology constructed to tackle the project. Within this context the peculiar ontology of phenomena like NDC has been explained and the emergent complexity of duality, particularly as it appears in the *Hard Problem*, is appointed as a recurrent theme in this thesis. A survey of the literature incorporated in this study braces philosophy, science, linguistics, mathematics, mysticism, and the science of consciousness. The serpentine complexity of phenomenology, epistemology, and ontology as they intertwine through Integral Philosophy is presented as a heuristic opportunity to secure epistemological congruence and cogency. The intention is to achieve this by using a foundational maxim or 'threshold of noetic viability' as a lens through which unsubstantiated epistemological and ontological connotations may be identified and challenged. If Wilber's purpose is to validate

NDC scientifically, then my hypothesis is that coherence and consistency is more likely to be secured through a non-dual Physicalist approach than by Wilber's veiled Essentialism.



## CHAPTER TWO THE FOUNDATIONS OF WILBER'S INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY

### 2.1 Introduction

Wilber's early reading of science, philosophy, mysticism, and psychology suggested synergistic nuances between Eastern and Western traditions.<sup>27</sup> These developmental synchronicities are disclosed through the Perennial Philosophy and Wilber distills the ingredients of his Integral Philosophy from the shared wisdom of these disciplines. Common definitions of the Perennial Philosophy motivated Wilber to assume an Aristotelian approach to distinguish that which is *Real* or Absolute from that which is in process and therefore *real in becoming*. This bi-synchronous character of consciousness, manifest in reflective dualities and yet essentially undivided, inspired Wilber's idea to grade levels of awareness from the least integrated to the most integrated. The most integrated category of awareness is realised in NDC as it is expressed in the mysticisms of the world's religious and wisdom traditions.

Wilber disclaims the assumptions of critics who accuse him of animism or panpsychism and prefers to describe his theory of consciousness as a varicoloured spectrum of non-dual light fractured into hues of gradual awakening to Spirit. As Wilber's theory develops, he refines his sense of Spirit as a non-reductive *Suchness* manifest *in* and *as* matter. Consequently he disassociates from prevailing definitions of the Perennial Philosophy in order to distinguish his more qualified approach to non-duality. He finds the calibrations of consciousness in Transpersonal Psychology useful as a conceptual framework to include and validate NDC as its ideal realisation. A qualified definition of Transpersonal Psychology is designed to fit Wilber's usage which focuses on spiritual potential. Wilber's habitual use of religious-type language is however, problematic for his scientific epistemology, and ontological vagaries prompt Wilber to amplify definitions of Transpersonal Psychology which allow him to incorporate the principles of his Integral Theory.

Wilber distinguishes between *Involution* as the process of Mind's dissolution into fractured consciousness, and *Evolution* as a *Kosmological* instinct to generate unifying complexes returning ultimately to Oneness. Within this ebb and flow, Wilber modifies the linearity of hierarchical structures into a holarchical system of sublation called *The Great Nest of*

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<sup>27</sup> Synergy as a general term describes the working together of seemingly independent agencies whose combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual parts. Wilber prefers not to use the term for its dualistic implications, but it is not an inappropriate descriptor at this early stage of Wilber's thinking.

*Being*.<sup>28</sup> He imbues qualities of Spirit or Mind into this evolutionary process as the irreducible agency and purpose of all developmental spectra.

In this way Mind (Spirit, *Suchness*, *Absolute Subjectivity*) is both the substance and animating essence of the evolutionary process unfolding and self-realising as One. Each unfolding level through the stratified gradations of duality in the *matter-Mind* continuum are level specific, but when viewed integrally, the dualities, confluences, and paradoxes are seen for what they are – the Descending and Ascending instincts of a single array of Consciousness. These Descending and Ascending movements appear to have a form of being-ness that is sentient and intentional and this may give the impression that Wilber proposes a co-substantiation of matter and Mind, but the reality is a transcendental realisation that matter and Mind are, in paradoxical form, transubstantiated as *non-dual being*, but not of the type that permits the reduction of Mind to matter, or the elevation of matter to Mind.

Wilber's fugal layering and dimensional inclusion of all aspects of inner personal, outer physical, and socio-cultural consciousness is a critical advance on the *Great Chain of Being* and discloses the dualities implicit in *Great Chain* epistemologies (Wilber 1999e:500).<sup>29</sup> These distinctions qualify Wilber's Integral Philosophy and warrant examination, particularly in the spectrum of consciousness since Wilber's methodological and epistemological approaches appear to breach the natural conventions of science.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond the scope of Great Chain philosophies, Wilber's Integral purpose is now to include and correctly position every legitimate aspect of human experience (1999e:434). Wilber therefore embraces physics which deals with matter; biology which deals with the living

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<sup>28</sup> *Sublation* is the English translation of the German term *Aufhebung* and is used by Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) to describe the paradoxical implications of simultaneously preserving and changing a quality (the German verb *Aufhebung* means both 'to cancel and to keep'). The tension between these transforming and transcending propensities forms the catalyst of Hegel's dialectics. Wilber extends the metaphor by imbuing the process with a form of 'spiritual' intentionality which he equates with the *evolutionary* principles of *Kosmology* (Froeb ND).

<sup>29</sup> Wilber substantiates this claim throughout *Up From Eden* (1996), but states it concisely by suggesting that many, '... grand theorists from Teilhard de Chardin to Aurobindo and Hegel had already advanced the idea that evolution itself was actually a spiritual unfolding, with each stage transcending but including its predecessor. But none of them had combined that philosophical notion with an actual hard look at anthropological data, and none of them had advanced any of the specific stages of this evolution based on any sort of extensive empirical and anthropological evidence. In this regard, *Eden* was, I believe, a major advance' (1997c:76-77).

<sup>30</sup> The delay in producing his first complete expression of Integral Theory, first suggested in the mid-eighties, but only published in 1995, was due to Wilber's period of repose while tending his wife, Treya, during the course of her long illness. The philosophy and detail of Wilber's Integral Model is expounded most precisely in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995a). It is also worth remembering that Wilber (2001c:1) disclaimed his title as a Transpersonal Psychologist in 1983, but that Transpersonal Psychology nonetheless remains a foundational stimulus for his Integral Theory.

body; psychology which deals with the mind; theology which deals with the soul; and finally mysticism which deals with the direct experience of Spirit. Wilber qualifies his Integral Philosophy further as a form of dynamic, dialectical, spiritual humanism (1997a:xvii).<sup>31</sup> This may be interpreted to mean that all phenomena are in perpetual, dynamic, and transformative interaction and tension, all aspiring in evolutionary fashion through gradually ascending cycles of dying and rising, to self-realisation as a fully integrated and self-sustaining complexity in Mind (Wilber 1999e:2-3). Wilber's approach to reality would therefore include all these dimensions in, '... a holistic and holonically graded spectrum to Oneness' (1999a:62-63).<sup>32</sup> It is not clear what Wilber means by soul and Spirit, but he appears to use the terms purely for their semantic familiarity and metaphorical usefulness. Wilber's terms are not contested at this early stage, but his constant allusion to religious type language in his scientifically-based epistemology will be frequently encountered and regularly challenged.

### **2.1.1 Ken Wilber: A Biographical Literature Survey**

Wilber's intention in his Integral Philosophy is designed to synchronise all knowledge quests within a matrix of functionally appropriate relationships. This is not an evolutionary process of mere coincidence, but a distillation of emergent connectivity beneath conceptual and idiomatic variance. For Wilber the implicit essence which gives ultimate meaning and unity to this multivalent matrix is non-duality, and its most fundamental expression is therefore mystical. Wilber's own experience is fundamental to these realisations and his emergence as an Integral theorist is therefore intensely personal, and a brief biography provides an appropriate context for appraising his argument.

Kenneth Earl Wilber Jr was born in 1949 in Oklahoma City in the United States of America. He is the only child of an Air Force officer and 'housewife', and Wilber describes his family as Christian by dint of cultural circumstance.<sup>33</sup> He graduated from high school in Lincoln, Nebraska, and went to Duke University to study medicine. During this time he developed an interest in Eastern and Western approaches to psychology and religion. These explorations were initially intellectual, but soon inspired Wilber's spiritual journey. He testifies to a

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<sup>31</sup> Wilber defines his understanding of dynamic dialecticism through, '... multiple contexts ... [which are] mutually interactive over both space and time, constituting an organic order that emerges from the non-predictable play of its parts. Each whole is a part of other wholes indefinitely, related by tension, resolution, and recurrence' (1999b:2-3).

<sup>32</sup> Whilst they are not specified here, a host of other disciplines are also included: sociology, anthropology, philosophy, culture studies, gender studies, politics, and economics among others.

<sup>33</sup> The term 'housewife' may be derogatory in contemporary usage, but in this case it is Wilber's own choice of words (1998c:52).



period of inner turmoil caused by his inability to synthesise the contradictory truth-claims emerging from philosophy, psychology, mysticism, and science. This period of intellectual and spiritual tension motivated him to consider the possibility that noetic variations need not necessarily indicate contradiction, but partiality in so far as they reveal different degrees of complexity and integration on a spectrum of consciousness (Wilber 1997a:x).<sup>34</sup>

In the mean time Wilber abandoned medical school in favour of the University of Nebraska where he took up biochemistry, mainly to please his parents, and there he met and married his college friend Amy Wagner in 1973.<sup>35</sup> Wilber's penchant for science was then subsumed by his interest in metaphysics - not because he deemed science in any way inferior, but because it appeared too truncated to permit the inclusion of spiritual experience (1998c:26-58).<sup>36</sup> During this time, Wilber also started practising Zen and entered therapy to complement his spiritual pilgrimage.<sup>37</sup> Wilber's intellectual conflict began to resolve itself at the age of twenty three when he again decided to leave university and devote himself fully to the writing of his first book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, and he did so in just three months, succeeding in publication in 1977.<sup>38</sup> 'Two paragraphs into the writing [of *Spectrum*]', he says, '... I knew I had come home, found myself, found my purpose, found my God. I have since never doubted it once' (1998b:52). This first book not only established the foundation for Wilber's Integral Model, but fashioned an intensely personal heuristic for his own spirituality (1993b:xi). Fortuitously, *The Spectrum of Consciousness* was acclaimed by publishers and readers, and its success set the stage for Wilber's prodigious writing career. During the thirty years that followed, initially supporting himself by working as a petrol station attendant, dish washer, and grocery clerk, Wilber produced another eighteen books and a multitude of articles, prefaces, and internet resources (1982b:67). Since his fiftieth

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<sup>34</sup> Revealing his demeanour at this time, Wilber says, '... this period of intense intellectual absorption was beginning to pay off, certainly in restoring some sort of meaning to my life, but also in helping me to fashion a rudimentary conceptual synthesis of the various schools of psychology, therapy, and religion, East and West, that I had so obsessively been pursuing. Both of these results, the moral resolution of *meaning* and the intellectual resolution of *synthesis*, were necessary for my own personal pilgrimage; they were no mere side issues or intellectual curiosities' (1982b:59).

<sup>35</sup> Little mention is made about Amy in Wilber's subsequent writings, but the couple divorced in 1982.

<sup>36</sup> Despite Wilber's turn to metaphysics, he still claimed a strong and enduring association with science and his preference for the scientific idiom is evident throughout his writing. He says, '... my true passion, my inner daemon, was for science. I fashioned a self that was built on logic, structured by physics, and moved by chemistry ... My mental youth was an idyll of precision and accuracy, a fortress of the clear and evident' (1982b:58).

<sup>37</sup> It is not always clear exactly what kind of Zen Wilber practised, but subsequent allusions suggest that he experimented with various forms as his experience deepened.

<sup>38</sup> Wilber estimates that *The Spectrum of Consciousness* was submitted to twenty publishers before it was accepted, but John White, in the forward to the second edition recalls thirty three submissions (Wilber 1993b, 1993c).

birthday, *The Collected Works of Ken Wilber* (1999-2000 Random House) have been published and now comprise eight voluminous tomes.

In 1979 Wilber completed a popularised version of *The Spectrum of Consciousness* entitled *No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth* and immediately started writing his ontological treatise on the development of consciousness from body, through mind, to Spirit in *The Atman Project* ([1980]/1996d). He then expanded the core principles of *Atman* to its broader phylogenic manifestations in *Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution* ([1981]/1986), but in so doing Wilber alienated himself from his prior affiliation with romanticism, which he now refers to as Wilber Phase 1 (1977-1979) (1997a:51-52).<sup>39</sup> Wilber acknowledges his debt to German idealism at this stage of his philosophical development.

In *Up from Eden* he applied his evolutionary model of individual consciousness to the historical development of collective human consciousness. Friedrich Hegel's (1770-1831) philosophy was foundational to this process and though Wilber seldom mentions Hegel, he does acknowledge that, '... his [Hegel's] shadow falls on every page' (Hanegraaff 2002:29). Wilber also expanded his integral paradigm to embrace the incremental character of the Great Chain of Being (later referred to as the *Great Nest of Being* to avoid overtones of linearity) through various developmental stages to include mystical or non-dual consciousness in Phase 2 (1999a:284).<sup>40</sup> In this phase he also adapted the Tibetan Buddhist *Bardo Todrol* to develop his dynamic and dialectical Involutionary and Evolutionary processes of conscious fragmentation and unification.<sup>41</sup> During this period he and Jack Crittenden co-founded *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation*, a journal dedicated to a dynamic dialecticism within the Perennial Philosophy and Transpersonal Psychology, and according to

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<sup>39</sup> Wilber refers to this as his 'romantic-Jungian' model. He interpreted the gradations of ascent in Jungian psychology as a unified spectrum, and spiritual growth as the gradual realisation of the true condition of non-duality that subsists as the essential nature of all things.

<sup>40</sup> Wilber's movement away from romanticism, and especially, in his words, 'retro-romanticism' also alienated him from Jungian psychology which he believes excluded too many categories needed for a truly Integral Philosophy (1997a:204).

<sup>41</sup> The *Bardo Todrol* is the proper name given to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and refers to after-death and pre-rebirth states of intermediate consciousness as the soul assesses its previous life in preparation for enlightenment in the next. There are, however, distinctions in the number and cyclicity of these states in *Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya* traditions. Arvan Harvat (Kazlev:2004a) criticises Wilber's attempt to synthesise these disparate systems of thought, which he attributes to Wilber's misreading of Mahayana Buddhism.

Wilber, *ReVision* was a cross between two journals: *Main Currents: Studies in Comparative Religion*, and the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (1982b:68; 1999e:19).<sup>42</sup>

During the course of his early work, Wilber's development in meditation led him to his, '... first strong *ken-sho* (small *Satori*) ... Tears of gratitude, of compassion, of unworthiness, and finally, of infinite wonder ...' encompassed him and he was only later to discover the joy of deeper enlightenment (1982b:80).<sup>43</sup> Lao Tzu (6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE) and Kirpal Singh (1894-1974) impacted profoundly on Wilber's spiritual journey at this time.<sup>44</sup> The increasing clarity with which Wilber delineated the incremental character of conscious evolution subsequently extended into sociological and political perspectives. Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) also features prominently in Wilber's thinking during this stage and under-tones of Aurobindo's philosophy are evident in Wilber's subsequent writings.<sup>45</sup> As Wilber's

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<sup>42</sup> In Wilber's opinion *ReVision* eventually became a, '... bastion of dynamic relativism ...' and for this reason both he and Jack Crittenden latterly disassociated themselves from the journal' (1999e:19).

<sup>43</sup> *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions* (Bowker 2000:312) describes *Kensho* as an initial encounter of *Satori* (enlightenment) of those whose experience still needs to be deepened.

<sup>44</sup> Although ascetics and hermits such as Shen Tao advocated disciplines of detachment, it is generally believed that Lao Tzu, the sixth century BCE legendary philosopher, was responsible for the cornerstones of Taoism. Some scholars believe he was a slightly older contemporary of Confucius (*Kung-Fu Tzu*, born *Chiu Chung-Ni*) whereas others surmise that the *Tao Te Ching* is really a compilation of paradoxical poems written by several Taoists using the pen-name, Lao Tzu. There may also be a close association between Lao Tzu and the legendary Yellow Emperor, Huang-ti, but this is uncertain. Whatever the truth, Taoism and Confucianism should be viewed concurrently as two distinct responses to the social, political and philosophical conditions of ancient China (Majka:ND. ). Almost two and a half millennia later, in 1894, Sayyad Kasran was born in Punjab which now belongs to Pakistan. Later to be known as Sant Kirpal Singh, he devoted himself to confronting political and religious intolerance and bigotry. In view of the suffering he observed, Kirpal Singh sought solutions to the violent conflict that defined his time. In pursuit of answers, he explored the scriptures of the Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Zoroastrians, and several other significant religions. He discovered a perennial wisdom that suffused all traditions which indicated a quest for a co-substantiating self-knowledge with awareness of the divine. His teachings and influence subsequently impacted deeply on political transformation in India and his spiritual writings transported with great effect to the Western world (Ruhani Satsang:ND).

<sup>45</sup> Sri Aurobindo was born in 1872 in Calcutta. He studied languages in England, but like Kirpal Singh, developed strong convictions about the injustices of British occupation in India. He was consequently detained for his political efforts and during his year of incarceration experienced a spiritual transformation which would determine the future course of his life. After this experience he understood his spiritual mission and 'knew' that India's freedom was certain. This mission was further translated into a global mission for inner awakening without which, Sri Aurobindo believed there could be no lasting solutions to the plight of humanity. Sri Aurobindo affirms that, '... all life is Yoga - that [humanity] has a greater destiny ... to evolve into higher being and open ... to a new consciousness ... called the Supramental' (Sri Aurobindo Society: 1998). According to Wilber, Aurobindo was India's greatest modern philosopher-sage, and his so-called integral yoga, to use Wilber's own ascription, '... is a concerted effort to unite and integrate the ascending (evolutionary) and descending (involutionary) currents in human beings, thus uniting otherworldly and this-worldly, transcendent and immanent, spirit and matter (1999e:515-516). A further quote establishes the extent to which, as will later be shown, Wilber employs Aurobindo's thinking, 'He covered much of the scope of India's vast spiritual heritage and lineages, and brought many of them together into a powerful synthesis. He was also one of the first truly great sages to have access to the evolutionary record (disclosed by the differentiations of modernity), which allowed him to expand his system from a dynamic developmentalism of ontogeny (which all great perennial philosophers possessed) to one of phylogeny as well ... [Aurobindo's] integral yoga, we might say, was India's first great synthesis of the truths of the pre-modern Great Nest with the truths brought by the differentiations of modernity. Aurobindo's overall model of consciousness consists basically of three systems: (1) the surface/outer/frontal consciousness (typically gross state), consisting of physical, vital, and mental levels of consciousness; (2) a deeper/psychic/soul system "behind" the frontal in each of its levels (inner physical, inner vital, inner mental, and innermost psychic or soul; typically subtle state); and (3) the vertical ascending/descending systems stretching both above the mind (higher

philosophy crystallised, his personal spiritual pursuit intensified, and he decided to live as privately as possible. The reason he declared, was to avoid being perceived as a ‘guru’ since he claimed no higher status than that of a pundit.<sup>46</sup> Latterly, Wilber was reluctant to position himself within a specific spiritual discipline since he draws inspiration from so many, but his vehicle of practice, without particular subscription to its religious milieu, remains Buddhist.<sup>47</sup>

Wilber, having devoted extensive writing to the spiritual disciplines, returned to his interest in science to produce *The Holographic Paradigm and Other Paradoxes: Exploring the Leading Edge of Science* (1982d), and then researched new territories in the gradations of psychology and sociology of religion in *A Sociable God: Toward a New Understanding of Religion* (1983b). In *Eye to Eye: The Quest for a New Paradigm*, ([1983]/1996e), Wilber put forward his controversial epistemological framework for establishing scientific formulae for acquiring experiential knowledge at the level of Mind – the non-dual and ineffable realisation of enlightenment. The resolution of duality in Mind, the *Absolute Subjectivity* of non-dual consciousness, occupies the highest degree of ascent in Wilber’s rendition of conscious evolution.

Scarcely a year later, *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World’s Great Physicists* (1985) was released and the publication of *Transformations of Consciousness: Conventional and Contemplative Perspectives on Development* ([1986]/1999e), which he co-authored with Jack Engler and Daniel Brown, heralded Wilber’s Phase 3 (1983-1987). In this phase he includes the detail of developmental lines that progress relatively independently through the various levels or waves of the *Great Nest of Being* (1999a:284).<sup>48</sup> He then shared a publication with Dick Anthony and Bruce Ecker in *Spiritual Choices: The Problems of Recognizing Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation* (1987). At the beginning of Phase 3 in 1983, Wilber’s prolific writing was interrupted when his second wife, Treya Killam Wilber,

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mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind, overmind, supermind; including causal/non-dual) and below the mind (the sub-conscious and in-conscious) - all nested in *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, or pure non-dual Spirit’ (1999e:515-6).

<sup>46</sup> Wilber testifies to nervousness in public, but more importantly justified his segregation from society as the result of indications that he would be treated in public as a spiritual master and guide (1991:156-157). This disposition has since changed and Wilber now has an almost celebrity status.

<sup>47</sup> Wilber expresses his musing about his own spiritual path thus, ‘Although I was sympathetic to virtually any school of mysticism, East or West, I found the most powerful and profound form of mysticism to be Buddhist, and so my own practice had been, for fifteen years, Zen, the quintessential Buddhist path’ (1991:168). And later, ‘...I do not think that Buddhism is the best way or the only way. And I would not especially call myself a Buddhist; I have too many affinities with Vedanta Hinduism and Christian mysticism, among many others’ (1991:246).

<sup>48</sup> The essence of this book, says Wilber, ‘... was that if we take the various psychological models offered by the West (Freudian, cognitive, linguistic, object relational, etc.) and combine them with the spiritual models of the East (and Western mystics), then we arrive at a full-spectrum model of human growth and development, a model that traces human growth from body to mind to soul to spirit’ (1991:65).

was diagnosed with breast cancer just ten days after their marriage. For the next six years he scaled down his routine of writing and meditation to nurse her, and when she died in 1989 he told her story in an intimate memoir, *Grace and Grit: Spirituality and Healing in the Life and Death of Treya Killam Wilber* (1991).

Wilber attributes the discovery of his true spirituality to Treya in this intimate journal entry:

In the traditions, Spirit is found neither in Heaven nor in Earth, but in the Heart. The Heart has always been seen as the integration or the union point of Heaven and Earth, the point that Earth grounded Heaven and Heaven exalted the Earth. Neither Heaven nor Earth alone could capture Spirit; only the balance of the two found in the Heart could lead to the secret door beyond death and mortality and pain. And that is what Treya had done for me; that is what we had done for each other: pointed the way to the Heart. When we put our arms around each other, Heaven and Earth united, Bach and the birds both started singing, happiness opened up before us as far as the eye could see (1991:307).

After two years of mourning, Wilber embarked on his most ambitious project. A massive tome entitled *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (1995a) wherein he surveys virtually all major fields of human knowledge marked the advent of Wilber Phase 4 (1995-2001). This phase initiated Wilber's intellectual evolution through Modernism and Post-modernism in which he develops an incisive analysis of Western Post-modern mindsets. It furthermore set Wilber's spectrum theory with its levels and lines in the context of his Four Quadrant Model which include physiological (Upper Right), cultural (Lower Right), interior social (Lower Left), and the psychological components of personal inner and spiritual development (Upper Left).<sup>49</sup> This is the first of three volumes that Wilber called *The Kosmos Trilogy* and it represents his vision for a truly Integral Philosophy which he calls, '... a believable, if initial, world philosophy ...' (2000a:xxiii).

During the three years that Wilber wrote *Sex Ecology, Spirituality*, he continued living a hermit's life and *One Taste: The Journals of Ken Wilber* (1999a) recounts portions of this period that, according to Matousek (in Wilber 1998c:53), dispelled any notions of Wilber's philosophy as purely intellectual without experiential foundation. Matousek supposes that Wilber's integrity as a scholar and practitioner of spiritual discipline is now established in

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<sup>49</sup> This has been a point of confusion among Wilber's critics because he continued to speak of his last phase of development as Phase 3 since it remained essentially the same in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* and applied mainly to the Upper Left Quadrant of his spectrum model (Wilber 1999a:284).

academic and religious contexts. Matousek's view is a matter of opinion and may be exaggerated since evidence of Wilber's influence, certainly in universities and Christian churches, is still quite limited. According to Hanegraaff (2002:29), the reason for this is not hard to find:

Wilber approaches the psychology of religion and the analysis of religion and culture from a decidedly "spiritual" perspective, based on specific mystical beliefs; and his books are not published by prestigious University Presses but by theosophical or otherwise esoterically-oriented publishing houses. For an author with academic ambitions this is fatal.

Hanegraaff hypothesises that Wilber's attempt to validate spiritual-mystical axioms through scientific epistemologies forestalls his academic credibility because universities tend to view him as a *New Age* author.<sup>50</sup> Despite this impediment, Hanegraaff nonetheless believes that Wilber's work exhibits sound scholarly debate.

Following *One Taste*, Wilber produced popular versions of *SES* (an acronym which Wilber often uses in reference to *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*) in *A Brief History of Everything* (1996f), and *The Eye of Spirit: An Integral Vision of a World Gone Slightly Mad* (1997a). Wilber then turned again to his affinity for science and wrote *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion* (1998a).<sup>51</sup>

Finally, in Phase 5 (2001- present) Wilber develops the precision of his Phase 4 All-Quadrant, All-Level (henceforth AQAL) Model through more circumspect analyses of metaphysics and he also tempers his quest for ultimate answers. Consequently, he shifts emphasis from scientific approaches to epistemology and places new value on metaphors associated with pure emptiness reminiscent of the void (*sunyata*) in Buddhist philosophy. In

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<sup>50</sup> Hanegraaff does not explain what he means by *New Age*, so it may be assumed that he is referring to the trend in very general terms. Many writers have attempted definitions of so-called *New Age* movements and resulting interpretations are usually determined through the doctrinal foreground of the critics. *New Age* thinking is more accurately a diffuse orientation than a definitive movement, but some conventions may be discerned. People with *New Age* orientations often blend or include various religious and spiritual traditions. They encourage the deconstruction of political, religious, or economic regimes that qualify or conceal prejudice or discrimination. These perceived inequalities usually lead to strong convictions about human rights, and peace and justice issues. Mystical approaches to religion are preferred over doctrinaire institutionalism, and metaphysical interpretations of natural or physiological phenomena are not excluded. They also stress the re-orientation of inequitable monetary policies; a more willing embrace of *soft science* (homeopathic or naturalistic approaches to science and healthcare); and the preservation of the world's natural resources. Esoteric or ethereal philosophies therefore take precedence over rationalist or exoteric world-views. None of these *New Age* trends implicitly contradict Christian values, but suspicion among many Christians is still high.

<sup>51</sup> With reference to his self-labelled developmental Phases 1 through 5, Wilber is careful to point out that, in keeping with his all-embracing syncretism, his later phases do not negate earlier phases, but transcend and include them into deeper and more integrated wholes. The only phase he rejects outright is Wilber Phase 1.

2000 Wilber established the *Integral Institute* which functions primarily as a research facility, but also addresses current issues in science, culture, psychology, business, and politics. Wilber has now adopted a more public lifestyle which he believes is more helpful to the *Integral Institute*.

In summary, Wilber's perpetual concern is with the resolution of gradations of dualism through processes of conscious evolution in all domains of life to its apex in non-duality. Whilst Wilber gives various names to this non-duality as the pre-fragmented and fundamental nature of all things, the most generic version is *The Non-dual* or simply Non-dual Consciousness (NDC) (1997a:84).<sup>52</sup> Wilber addresses the subject most precisely in *SES*, but the entire orientation of his vast and complex work is designed to develop a model that correctly positions, integrates, and thus appreciates all levels and dimensions of knowing and experience in a holarchy to Oneness which reveals Spirit as the Ground of the All. Initially he aimed only to synchronise Western psychologies and therapies with the Perennial Philosophy and thereby embrace the great Eastern and Western wisdom traditions, but he then broadened his model to integrate the so-called monological (physical-empirical), dialogical (subjective-conceptual), and *mandalic* (holistic) sciences with the contemplative (spiritual) sciences (1993b:xix).<sup>53</sup> By the end of his fourth phase, Wilber had developed a prolegometric theoretical system to include the epistemological modalities of evolutionary theory, physics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, religion, aesthetics, ethics, and mysticism into an Integral Philosophy of orienting generalisations (1997a:ix-x, xvi; 1998b:vii; 1999e:21; 2000:x; Washburn 1990:85; Fisher 1997:32).

In the fifth phase of his writing, particularly in *Boomeritis: A Novel That Will Set You Free* (2002b), Wilber's tentative turn away from metaphysical absolutes to more typically mystical associations finds expression in the Non-dual Vision as a paradoxical emptiness which is simultaneously the All. The indicators in this phase are not as distinctive as those in Phases 1 through 4, but Wilber remains insistent that his approach is not merely eclectic, and certainly not a form of pluralistic relativism, but rather a systematic, constructivist, and integral vision

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<sup>52</sup> Wilber is careful in his later writing to point out that, '... a person's overall development follows no linear sequence whatsoever. Development is far from a sequential, ladder-like, clunk-and-grind series of steps, but rather involves a fluid flowing of many waves and streams in the great River of Life' (2000a:xvi-xvii).

<sup>53</sup> In simpler terms, Wilber refers to monological, dialogical, and *mandalic* sciences to respectively mean uni-modal or empirical science, rational or conceptual science, and finally integral science respectively.

which finds its fulfilment in non-dual awakening (1999e:3).<sup>54</sup> For Wilber this is an acutely discerned and fully inclusive developmental impulse towards complete and unbounded self-realisation.

Given the massive corpus of literature produced by Wilber, Fisher (1997:31) claims that no one has ever attempted a substantial and complete interpretation of all Wilber's work.<sup>55</sup> More recently however, Visser published *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion* (2003) which provides a subjective overview of major themes in Wilber's philosophy, but Wilber did not view Visser's rendition positively.<sup>56</sup> Hanegraaff views Visser's book as a popular promotion of Wilber's philosophy rather than an objective survey, and Visser also seems to have misunderstood some of Wilber's concepts.<sup>57</sup> Another recent publication by Reynolds (*Embracing Reality: The Integral Vision of Ken Wilber*: 2004) now seems to be the only adequate survey of Wilber's work, but it provides unbiased overviews and summaries rather than comment or interpretation. Despite these vacillations in opinion, Tony Swartz, former *New York Times* reporter, has called Wilber, '... the most comprehensive philosophical thinker of our times' (Crittenden 1997a:vii). Wilber's work is certainly comprehensive, and in many respects innovative, but his epistemological system has presented difficulties which consistently challenge the legitimacy of his postulations. Whilst Wilber's overall purpose is to include all possible knowledge structures from all major domains of human experience, his clear priority is situated at the apex of conscious integration in non-duality, and it is from that lofty vantage point that all else is interpreted and categorised.

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<sup>54</sup> Wilber's refusal to be labelled a pluralist is not always convincing. In *The Collected Works of Ken Wilber, Vol. VIII. A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality* (2001a:3), he says, 'I have one major rule: everybody is right. More specifically, everybody - including me - has some important pieces of the truth, and all of those pieces need to be honoured, cherished, and included in a more gracious, spacious, and compassionate embrace.' Despite his disclaimer, this and other similar statements do give the impression of pluralism.

<sup>55</sup> Walsh and Vaughan (1994) and Rothberg (1996), among only a few others, have produced broad and insightful surveys. Most critics target only one area of argument in Wilber's Integral Philosophy and according to Crittenden (in Wilber 1997a:x-xi), '... the entire corpus of Wilber's work has never been believably criticised as a whole ... [and he has never] been believably criticised for misunderstanding or misrepresenting any of the fields of knowledge ...' Since Crittenden's assumption, criticism has indeed been levelled at Wilber's interpretation of some disciplines and philosophies. Harvat, for example, accuses Wilber of misunderstanding Mahayana Buddhism (Kazlev: 2004b).

<sup>56</sup> Wilber says, '... I have strong disagreements with Frank Visser's book about my work (*Thought as Passion*). Frank has monologically studied my work a great deal, but dialogically very little (and with regard to Wilber 5, there has been zero dialogical study or understanding)' (Wilber: 2004).

<sup>57</sup> Hanegraaff's review of Visser's *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion* first appeared as an article in the Dutch magazine *Hervormd Nederland* (2002:1(2):28-30). Hanegraaff is professor in the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents at the University of Amsterdam.



## 2.2 The Perennial Philosophy

The principles of Wilber's Integral Theory are rooted in the Perennial Philosophy and it is therefore important to establish his interpretation of the terms as a prelude to understanding the evolution of his thinking from Transpersonal Psychology into Integral Philosophy.

The term, Perennial Philosophy, appears to have been coined by Leibniz (1646-1716), but according to Wilber was made famous by Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) in *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944) (1996e:153). The central claim of the Perennial Philosophy, says Wilber, '... is that men and women can grow and develop (or evolve) all the way up the hierarchy to Spirit itself, therein to realise a "supreme identity" with Godhead – the *ens perfectissimum* toward which all growth and evolution yearns' (1997a:39-40). The word perennial, in this context, naturally refers to foundational principles evident throughout the history of the world's great wisdom traditions and also because it perpetually occupies philosophical and scientific enquiry into the nature of consciousness.<sup>58</sup> At this early stage, Wilber nonetheless identifies an important distinction:

The "perennial" or "primordial" or "ancient" wisdom can have two different meanings. One, it can mean radically timeless, spaceless, formless Truth, the Ground of all Being. The particular outward forms and symbols used by past wisdom cultures has led to the second widespread meaning of "ancient wisdom" – namely, the actual doctrines, words, theories, metaphors, symbols, and models used by ancient or past cultures to express and embody their own realisation of that Radical Truth ... The neo-perennial philosophy, with its adaptability to modern needs and desires, is and must now be God's witness to the new and rising wisdom culture (1997a:64-65).

At the heart of the Perennial Philosophy is the *Great Chain of Being* which delineates the ontology of consciousness from the lowest and least conscious stages, to the highest, most integrated, or unified, states of awareness.<sup>59</sup> These highest states of consciousness are almost unanimously, hence perennially, distinguished in terms of the numinous (Wilber 1996e:124;

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<sup>58</sup> In an interview with his late wife, Treya Killam Wilber, Wilber describes the essentials of the Perennial Philosophy as follows, 'I'll give seven of what I think are the most important [truths of the Perennial Philosophy]. One, Spirit exists. Two, Spirit is found within. Three, most of us don't realise this Spirit within, however, because we are living in a world of sin, separation, and duality – that is, we are living in a fallen or illusory state. Four, there is a way out of this fallen state of sin and illusion, there is a Path to our liberation. Five, if we follow this Path to its conclusion, the result is a Rebirth or Enlightenment, a *direct experience* of Spirit within, a Supreme Liberation, which – six – marks the end of sin and suffering, and which – seven – issues in social actions of mercy and compassion on behalf of all sentient beings' (1991:79).

<sup>59</sup> Some traditions, says Wilber, '... have identified three basic levels or realms: body, mind and Spirit, or gross, subtle and causal. Other traditions have five stages: matter, body, mind, soul, Spirit and yet others have seven, such as the Kundalini chakras' (1991:100; 1999f:1).

1997a:39-40; 1999e:437). Wilber therefore interprets consciousness in dimensional levels of evolution from the most simple and diffuse to the most complex and unitary. These levels are differentiated in developmental hierarchies, but are ideally holarchical, transcending and integrative, and therefore sublatory rather than linear and dominating in nature.<sup>60</sup> In his earlier writing Wilber identified twelve levels of evolution, but frequently varies the number depending on his intention.<sup>61</sup>

Definitions of the Perennial Philosophy are understandably broad, but some of the more common features should be identified with reference to Wilber's usage. For him, it pertains to a timeless, radical Truth which broadly connotes the spiritual since it is deemed to be absolute. It is not therefore indicated merely in the language of socio-religious contexts and their commensurate belief systems. In this way Wilber's admission to the inadequacy of language is submitted insofar as religious language is only a part of *reality*, and can therefore never express the whole of *Reality* (1997a:59). These themes will be argued further in Chapter 6.5.

Wilber means the capitalised term *Reality* to refer to the timeless, spaceless Ground, the All, the Absolute Truth, the Non-dual, or God, whereas the lower-case *reality* reflects only partial dimensions or parts of *Reality* (1997a:60). It may justifiably be asked why less conscious matter should be less real than more conscious matter – how are the criteria for this distinction assumed? For Wilber this appears to be given as a central tenet of the Perennial Philosophy and he does not question it. This raises a further troublesome point since it implies the existence of a Divine Other and Wilber can be read to imply this if his theory is understood to support forms of animism or panpsychism. Wilber's defence is based on his claim to empirically and scientifically justify the resolution of duality in his rendition of

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<sup>60</sup> 'The core of the Perennial Philosophy', says Wilber, explains that, 'Each senior dimension transcends but includes its juniors, so that this is a conception of wholes within wholes within wholes indefinitely, reaching from dirt to Divinity' (1999e:437).

<sup>61</sup> In *Eye to Eye* (1999e) for example, Wilber mentions the following six stages of ascent, '... level-1 is basically that of physics and chemistry, the study of nonliving things. Level-2 is the realm of biology, the study of life processes. Level-3 is the level of both psychology ... and philosophy. Level-4, the subtle, is the realm of saintly religion; that is, religion which aims for visionary ... or archetypal intuition. Level-5, the causal, is the realm of sagely religion, which aims not so much for higher experiences as for the dissolution and transcendence of the experiencer. This sagely path involves the transcendence of all subject-object duality in formless consciousness. Level-6, the ultimate, awaits any who push through the final barriers of levels 4 and 5 so as to radically awaken as ultimate consciousness' (1996e:126). Elsewhere, he identifies these stages by acknowledging some of their champions according to their relative degrees of identification; reality (Plato), actuality (Aristotle), inclusiveness (Hegel), consciousness (Aurobindo), clarity (Leibniz), value (Whitehead) and knowingness (Garab Dorjee) (1993d:53).

NDC. In due course, I will examine whether Wilber convincingly succeeds in this argument without necessary recourse to Essentialism.

Helminiak (1998:223) also criticises Wilber at this juncture and discerns animistic tendencies in Wilber's writing, but he assumes too much by asserting that Wilber claims that physical matter is consciousness in gross, dense form. On the contrary, Wilber is careful to qualify his consciousness-matter metaphors and professes instead to develop a strong form of pantheism or immanentism that expresses the emergence of consciousness through matter, to body, to mind, to Spirit as holarchical strata in the evolutionary process. These strata are thus inextricable and continuous expressions of Spirit unfolding through, and as matter, but not in fully enlightened awareness in any spatial component of matter, and therefore not wholly emergent at every level as Helminiak's criticism maintains. Wilber thus rejects Helminiak's observation on the grounds that pantheism permits a conceptual grasp of Spirit that obviates the need for real transformation. More simply, if Spirit is viewed as the sum of the empirical universe, there is no need for spiritual awakening since Spirit should then be fully evident in the stuff of the universe (Wilber 1996e:154).<sup>62</sup> Wilber seems to propose a form of irreducible 'differentiated unity' which is the *Suchness (isness, thatness)* of all phenomena in all forms through the holarchical strata of his spectrum model, only to be ultimately subsumed and transcended in Absolute Oneness in NDC (1997a:60). Helminiak (1998:225) misunderstands this point and accuses Wilber of a pantheistic reduction of God to matter.

This kind of confusion is not uncommon among Wilber's critics and it would be useful to clarify Wilber's understanding of the Perennial Philosophy since his adaptations particularise certain components in order to fit them more exactly with his own view. Rothberg (1986:203) offers this more precise definition of the Perennial Philosophy:

There are different 'levels' of both world and self, and these exemplify different grades of being, power and value ... the etymological meaning of 'hierarchy' is 'sacred' [hieros] order ... Higher levels of the hierarchy are more 'real,' more causally effective, and reveal more 'good' than lower levels ... According to this principle, a higher level somehow 'integrates' the achievements of lower levels, overcomes its systematic structural problems and differentiates a new structure which shifts identity to the

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<sup>62</sup> Wilber, in an interview with *ReVision* says that, 'Brahman is in the world as the whole world, it is true, but the whole world in and by itself is not exclusively Brahman' (1996e:155).

higher level ... At the highest levels, world and self, outer reality and inner reality, coincide as the 'ground' of all that is. It is the fundamental human existential project to realise this truth ... Such a project ... is universal, as is the hierarchical ontology, and hence beyond any given or particularly spiritual tradition [or social conditioning].

Rothberg (1996:2) nevertheless also incorrectly maintains that Wilber's Integral Theory is paradigmatically consistent with this version of the Perennial Philosophy, but he does admit that Wilber has since contemporised his model. By 1983 Wilber had already referred to himself as a neo-perennial philosopher (1999d:441) and has disassociated himself from his former perennialist roots as a result of later modern and post-modern *new-age* additions. Wilber now objects strongly to the notion, still prevalent in the Perennial Philosophy today, that levels of reality are separate ontological existents. In this regard Wilber is now only willing to support investigation in Perennial Philosophy that has sound phenomenological and reconstructive science as its validating criteria, but challenges have been issued against Wilber's conceptual and methodological approach to epistemology. Wilber's intention is nonetheless to preserve and integrate abiding truths in the Perennial Philosophy as they evolved through pre-modernity, and modernity, into the post-modern age.

These perennial truths are thus integrated with newly emerging truths. The static systems view of the *Great Chain of Being* in pre-modernity is thus transformed by modern dynamic relativism and becomes an integral model of dynamic dialecticism in Wilber's post-modern Integral Theory. This evolution is presented in Wilber's Phases 3 and 4 and shift from a metaphysical to a post-metaphysical model. Helminiak again objects to Wilber's interpretation since the *Great Chain of Being* still lies at its root and thus appears to challenge the immutability of the Divine. But Helminiak has again misconstrued Wilber's intention (Helminiak 1998:292). Metaphysics is a noetic abstraction from the physical, whereas Wilber's post-metaphysical approach includes and integrates the physical as continuous with Spirit. This approach is a step towards the resolution of the Primary Dualism between matter and Spirit, but Wilber still does not claim that all matter is equivalently Spirit. If anything, his post-metaphysical paradigm makes Spirit more immanent, but it is not as reductionistic as Helminiak seems to think it is. Furthermore, Helminiak, writing in 1998, seems unaware that Wilber stopped referring to himself as a perennial philosopher in 1983. It is clear that Wilber's interpretation and appreciation of the Perennial Philosophy has adjusted as his Integral Model has developed, and within this developmental scheme he allied himself most

closely with Transpersonal Psychology. It is to this discipline which we now turn for further clarification of Wilber's developing philosophy.

### 2.3 Transpersonal Psychology

Wilber is still often described as a Transpersonal theorist and his spectrum model indeed evolved through Transpersonal Psychology, but he has since distanced himself from this categorisation as well. It is nonetheless important to position him within the development of the discipline since he, together with Michael Washburn (1990, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 2003) are still considered among the world's leading Transpersonal theorists (Bynum 1992:304).<sup>63</sup>

Transpersonalism, whilst implicit in the psycho-spiritual metaphors of the Perennial Philosophy, only appeared in formal Western academia with the advent of 19th century representationalism.<sup>64</sup> According to Hood (1992b), William James was the first to use the term in a 1905-1906 lecture series wherein he criticised a purely naturalistic study of psychology and religious experience insofar as it denied the objective import of these experiences of consciousness. In so doing, James claimed that mind apprehended objects through ideas which 'represented' those objects – even if the objects themselves were other ideas. Representationalism thus went some way towards transcending the Cartesian subject-object split and established a climate within which the four major forces of psychology were able to develop: (1) behaviourism, or objective-empirical (and therefore Physicalist) approaches; (2) psychoanalysis, or psychodynamic and psychosexual approaches; (3) humanistic, or existential and mental-intentional approaches; and (4) transpersonal, or spiritual and transcendental approaches (Wilber 1997a:31; 1999e:215, 365; Alexander 1996:107). Transpersonal psychologists doing research in mystical traditions were then able

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<sup>63</sup> Whilst his work is acknowledged, it is surprising to notice that the work of Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974) in *Psychosynthesis* (first published in 1965) does not play a more significant role in the development of Wilber's thinking. Assagioli founded *Psychosynthesis* in 1910. He was a contemporary of both Freud and Jung, and the discipline continues to evolve today, particularly in South America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States of America, and some parts of Europe (Ferrucci 1979). Like Wilber, Assagioli's intention is to integrate all faculties of personhood in order to achieve wholeness and health. For Assagioli this is a trans-egoic realisation. *Psychosynthesis* therefore aims to eliminate conflicts and hurdles, conscious and unconscious, that inhibit the complete and harmonious development of the human personality. It describes a process of growth as integration of previously separate elements into a more comprehensive unification or synthesis. It is within a person's capacity to be intentional in the undertaking of this process and *Psychosynthesis* therefore offers a framework that facilitates this full realisation of the self. An advantage of *Psychosynthesis* is the practical method it utilises as a means of accessing higher wisdom.

<sup>64</sup> Wilber points out that contemporary Transpersonal studies have reconnected with the world's great wisdom traditions by integrating many of their essential ingredients and simultaneously developing new methodologies and techniques. For Wilber, '... this is multiculturalism in its best and deepest sense, cherishing cultural differences, but set in a truly universal context' (1995c:129). Walsh and Vaughan identify several other levels at which Transpersonal theory now functions, but these are not particular to Wilber's treatment (Walsh and Vaughan 1993:203).

to forge and synthesise psychological exemplars that included spiritual or mystical consciousness.<sup>65</sup>

With these foundations in place, Transpersonal Psychology emerged as a distinct discipline in the 1960's and Huxley, Maslow, Watts, Sutich, and *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* are credited with its early formation (Marcandonatou 1998:310; Wilber 1999e:365).<sup>66</sup> Based on a variety of available definitions, I offer the following working definition of Transpersonal Psychology as it best fits Wilber's usage:

*Transpersonal Psychology* is primarily a philosophical interpretation of human consciousness as an evolutionary and organising principle that reaches its apex in transcendent and integrated states of non-dual awareness. The discipline includes and builds on established psychologies and draws on multicultural psycho-spiritual lineages to inform and transform conscious development in graded levels from lower ego oriented stages to higher unitive stages through dialectical processes.

Bynum (1992:301-302) adds some qualifications and suggests that Transpersonal Psychology today incorporates the study of the psycho-physiological techniques and introspective disciplines associated with transcendent states of consciousness. The field also endeavours to include the metaphysical and philosophical paradigms of theoretical physics, cosmology, neuroscience, sociology, and anthropology. The 'transpersonally' oriented therapist's approach is therefore often inclusive of anomalous experiences and does not reflexively reduce spiritual experiences to organic, psycho-pathological, or unconscious causes.

It is at this juncture that Transpersonal studies are most vulnerable to criticism. The appeal to higher or altered states of consciousness has implicit correlations with religious experience and its corresponding belief systems. A frequent assumption is that Transpersonalism is therefore un-scientific and rationally incoherent. Fisher (1997:47) points out that when

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<sup>65</sup> According to Taylor (1992:286) the, '... transpersonal orientation toward inner experience can be identified as a major component of indigenous psychologies, particularly from the classical traditions of Asia. The Transpersonal attitude also has affinities with the mystical traditions of Judeo-Christian traditions and has drawn some of its inspiration ... from sources as diverse as the shamanism of primitive, non-technological cultures to the Sufi rituals and poetry of Islam.'

<sup>66</sup> Wilber identifies three distinct developmental phases in the emergence of a new theoretical discipline, '... the first phase is one of innovation and extreme enthusiasm; the second, one of hard work and conceptual labour; the third, one of general acceptance and assimilation by mainstream schools (assuming it achieves any sort of acceptance at all). The first phase tends to be more enjoyable; the second phase, more productive; and the third, more rewarding' (1999e:365). At the time of writing, Wilber believed Transpersonal Psychology to be in its second developmental phase. For a more comprehensive developmental history of Transpersonal Psychology see Taylor 1992.

psychology moves beyond physiology, behaviour, or other phenomenal conditions into the realm of the transcendental conceptions of consciousness, there is bound to be substantial conflict and misunderstanding of the field.<sup>67</sup> For Wilber this need not be the case since the alleged scientific verifiability of NDC through the injunctions of *Transcendelia* are deemed epistemologically adequate, but his validity claims are vulnerable to charges of inconsistency and Wilber's postulations must be carefully measured.

Wilber's early view of the field grafted his *Perennial Psychology* into his understanding of the Perennial Philosophy (1975a:105). He based this model on his understanding of the alternate East-West perceptions of consciousness. He identified the Eastern perspective of consciousness in terms of subjectivity, inwardness, and the resolution of duality in the One. The Western approach to consciousness studies is objectivist, rational-phenomenal, and outward (Wilber 1974:57). The Eastern approach is esoteric, the Western approach exoteric (1995c:109). Wilber's intention in the development of his Transpersonal theory is to honour both perspectives in his Integral Philosophy. Within this system Wilber is always careful to point out in his hierarchical spectrum model that Transpersonal means transcendence with the basic structures of former levels of consciousness intact – hence the inclusion of *sublation* as a primary descriptor. It is an ontological process that transforms and includes prior structures of consciousness in the process of transcendence (1995a:279; 2000a:287-288).

According to Wilber there are five major approaches in Transpersonal Psychology that are particularly influential. These are systems theory, altered states of consciousness, Stanislov Grof's holotropic model, various forms of Jungian psychology (including Michael Washburn's neo-Jungian view), and his own integral approach (1997a:139). Lajoie and Shapiro in Alexander (1996:109) supplement my definition of Transpersonal Psychology by adding that it is concerned with the widest embrace of humanity's highest potential.<sup>68</sup> This is

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<sup>67</sup> Shapiro (1983:103) itemises some of the other common or exaggerated misconceptions of the Transpersonal movement. Some of these include notions suggesting that;

- The planet is undergoing a transformation in consciousness.
- Transpersonal Psychology is necessary for Transpersonal realisation.
- Transpersonal paths can do no harm.
- The movement cannot serve as a refuge for scoundrels or the mentally imbalanced.
- The movement has escaped psychobabble.
- Transpersonal Psychology is immune to faddism.
- Transpersonal Psychology will save the world.

<sup>68</sup> Alexander (1996:109) points out that it is impossible to present all the different definitions of Transpersonal Psychology that have been attempted so far. He does however, suggest that we can delineate, '... the most frequently occurring themes in these definitions which in fact provide a comprehensive overview of the field of

true, but they restrict their definition to the discipline's preoccupation with transcendent states of consciousness and it is thus incomplete according to Wilber's integral approach since it fails to integrate other established psychological and therapeutic disciplines.

Walsh and Vaughan (1980:9; 1993:200) are also critical because many definitions of Transpersonal Psychology remain heavily theory-laden and fail to emphasise the newly emerging praxis of the discipline. Wilber likewise qualifies a theoretical ascription to Transpersonal Psychology because he does not believe it has yet established a credible praxis. He says, 'Transpersonal Psychology is ... not a way of life or a complete psycho-spiritual discipline – it is not, that is, a genuinely transformative path leading individuals to the Radiant Ground and Goal of all development' (1999e:216).<sup>69</sup> Wilber prefers an integral paradigm that makes adequate and accurate use of all existing modes in contemporary psychology whilst holding open the notion that people have spiritual experiences that can be legitimately situated at the higher reaches of his spectrum model. The role of the Transpersonal therapist is therefore to facilitate a meaningful integration of those experiences within the continuum of the person's ascent through the levels of the Spectrum of Consciousness (Wilber 1999e:216).

Time has since refined the discipline and more recent researchers, with Wilber among them, have sought integration with the mainstream disciplines of psychology, psychotherapy, physics, cosmology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, ecology, and politics (Rothberg 1996a:2).<sup>70</sup> Transpersonal Psychology therefore seems to be earning its place, if only theoretically and tentatively, among rational and objectivist disciplines despite its implicit subscription to the numinous.<sup>71</sup> Transpersonalists are however, careful to point out that their discipline is not about theistic proofs deduced from religious or higher mystical experiences.

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Transpersonal Psychology. They are: (1) States of Consciousness, (2) Highest ultimate potential, (3) Beyond ego or personal self, (4) Transcendence, and (5) Spiritual.'

<sup>69</sup> Since 1999 when Wilber made this observation, some advances in the application of Transpersonalism have come to the fore, but more particularly Wilber's Integral models have been very successfully applied in political, business, educational, and medical fields through the work of the Integral Institute. See <http://www.integralinstitute.org> for more information. Justify margin

<sup>70</sup> For Wilber, Transpersonal Psychology must, if it aims to be truly inclusive, be able to integrate and synthesise behaviourism, neuro-physiological psychology, psychiatry, and cognitive developmentalism. In this way Transpersonal Psychology demonstrates its claim to integration by, '... showing that each school is a correct but partial aspect of a larger truth; and it must then use this integration as the foundation upon which a more properly transcendental, spiritual, or Transpersonal model can profitably be built' (1999e:368).

<sup>71</sup> Boucouvalas (1980:39) correctly pointed out that Transpersonal Psychology, as a relatively new discipline, is still in stages of developmental flux. Opinion is varied and possibly biased, but Transpersonal therapists and theorists have not become as popular as early suggestions predicted. There is expanded interest in the advance of consciousness to more complex and integral modes of apperception and experience, but these are not necessarily couched in Transpersonal contexts.



They are primarily concerned with the nature, ontology, and more broadly with the phylogeny of the phenomena of non-ordinary states of consciousness, not with the existence of a divine being by which these phenomena are sometimes symbolically represented. Levy (1983:46) clarifies this point, ‘Transpersonal Psychology is fundamentally concerned with the nature and structure of consciousness in its varied forms, and less so with its contents.’<sup>72</sup> Wilber’s etymology has frequently made him the target of just such criticism. He says for example that, ‘Transpersonal Psychologists are apologists for the soul, gnostic intermediaries whose function is made necessary by the fact that, incredibly enough, modern psychology has forgotten its own soul, its own psyche...’ (1999e:217). Whilst the idea of soul is plausible enough within the ambit of Transpersonal discourse, it is still anathematised within the prevailing scientific community, and Wilber does not aid his argument by making such frequent use of religious language in the development of his Integral Theory.

Wilber nonetheless rightly points out that there is renewed interest in the development of the science of consciousness and that there are now many competing schools of consciousness theory and research (1997b:71). His own more recent approach is based on the assumption that each of these schools has something important to contribute to the field. Thus stated, the construction of his Integral Philosophy (Wilber Phases 3 and 4) has developed beyond the parameters of conventional Transpersonal Psychology and thereby embraces a wider epistemological framework which is more sophisticated in its capacity to integrate multidisciplinary approaches.

Wilber’s expanded model is nonetheless motivated by his earlier development through Transpersonal Psychology because of its ability to synthesise and integrate the various fields in humanity’s knowledge-quest. This is so because Transpersonalism, in principle, has open heuristic qualities dedicated to exploring, honouring, and acknowledging the full spectrum of human consciousness and experience. With the formation of his new Integral Philosophy already in mind, Wilber goes on to say that the four major forces of psychology previously mentioned (behaviourism, humanism, existentialism, and transpersonalism) are gradually giving way to a fifth force – Integralism. Based on this assertion, Wilber says, ‘Psychology as we have known it is basically dead’ (2000d:8). Such sweeping dismissals of well established disciplines does not endear the academy to Wilber’s integral proposal, but the intellectual integrity and ingenuity with

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<sup>72</sup> In addition to this, Levy (1983:46) also maintains that Transpersonal Psychology tends to emphasise the various states of consciousness with inadequate cognisance of the wider scope of consciousness brought to the experience by the subject.

which he integrates his encyclopaedic knowledge has earned him tenuous respect in some fields of psychology and consciousness research.

In Wilber's opinion it is therefore natural that Transpersonal studies should evolve into Integral studies (1999e:420-421). He nonetheless maintains that Transpersonalism is a necessary step along the way. He claims that, 'If we meet the challenges ahead with intellectual integrity and rigor, I believe Transpersonal Psychology will take its rightful place as the sanest, the most basic, and the most comprehensive psychology yet to appear. If there is only one Self [the non-dualised witness] ... there is only one psychology. That Self is Transpersonal; and so, therefore, is that psychology' (Wilber 1999e:370). Wilber's belief in a transcendent *Self* is based on the metaphysical assumption that the lower-case *self* represents an un-enlightened being in the process of realising that which she already is, but remains unaware of - the capitalised *Self*. This requires another *a priori* supposition that *Self*, both in and as Mind, actually exists; that NDC is an *Absolute Subjectivity* that is indivisibly and irreducibly the *Suchness*, the Ground, of the All.<sup>73</sup> This paradox in Wilber's thinking hints at a form of Essentialism which is necessarily preserved in his philosophy if claims to ultimacy are to be sustained. This observation raises a challenge to Wilber's non-dual premise and the background to this problem warrants closer scrutiny.

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<sup>73</sup> Assagioli's (1994) rendition of the *Self* is highly reminiscent of Wilber's at this point, although Wilber does not acknowledge it as such. The concurrence may be coincidental. In either case, *Psychosynthesis* also distinguishes the lower case *self* from the upper case *Self*. For Assagioli the *Self* is bimodal and abides in the personal and the transpersonal. Synthesis happens in two stages: first the personal, then the transpersonal. The recognition of the *Self* as the truer and higher nature of the *self* determines the possibility of wholeness. A unity that is achieved through uniformity is by nature fragile, and is threatened by uniqueness and difference. A unity based on the self, on the other hand, is stable, for it is able to balance the interests of the whole with those of each of the parts (University of East London 2006.Np).

## 2.4 Emergent Principles of Wilber's Integral Philosophy

For Wilber, Integral Theory is a science of dynamic interrelationships that not only represent the evolutionary process, but is itself the performance of that evolution (1999e:600).<sup>74</sup> He subsequently refers to this process as *Kosmology* and maintains that the Pythagoreans introduced the term which we latterly translated as cosmos, but in its original form embraced all domains of existence and not merely the physical realms of trans-terrestrial space (1997a:139). Wilber's Integral Philosophy is therefore a *Kosmology* including, and enfolding referents for all objective and subjective domains of existence: hardware, software, and transcendental-ware (1996b:1; 1999a:62); physiosphere, biosphere, and noosphere (1996f:19; 2000a:45, 520); the True (physical sciences), the Good (Humanities), and the Beautiful (spiritual sciences); and It, We, and I (1999a:63-65).<sup>75</sup>

Wilber's Integral *Kosmology* recognises the strengths and weakness of the ancient wisdom traditions (identified in the precepts of the Perennial Philosophy), and their pre-modern, modern, and post-modern heritages (1997a:58; 1999e:437).<sup>76</sup> He explains that he has taken the results of this research (together with that of many other philosophers and theorists), '... and attempted to integrate it ... to arrive at a master template of a full-spectrum developmental space, reaching from matter to body to mind to soul to Spirit' (1999e:522). For Wilber, this process embraces and holonically transcends the most generative and constructive advances of evolution in all its forms, and excludes and transcends its most destructive and entropic manifestations. He states that, 'The integral claim is ... more adequate to reality [and that the movement of] ... evolution ... has inherent survival value.

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<sup>74</sup> Wilber makes the same point in an earlier publication where he says that these are not merely different perceptual modalities, but the ways in which, '... the *Kosmos* comes to know and create itself' (1996f:57).

<sup>75</sup> These classifications are not merely referents for cosmology, but also constitute the scope of individuated consciousness. It is, says Wilber, '...a *central identity in consciousness* (just as the ego or person is the central identity institutionalised in rational cultures of today)' (2000a:520-521).

<sup>76</sup> Wilber differentiates the general insights derived from each period. Firstly, speaking of Integral Psychology, Wilber says, 'A truly integral psychology ... would involve the very best of pre-modernity (the *Great Nest*), modernity (the differentiation of the value spheres), and post-modernity (their integration across all levels in the *Great Nest*)' (1999e:519). And in more contextualised detail, 'From the pre-modern heritage, we have learned of the *Great Nest of Being* and Knowing, and found that it is a roadmap to Spirit, not in a pre-given way, but as a morphogenetic field of gentle persuasion. From the modern heritage, we have learned of the need to recognise and honour art, morals, and science, and let each pursue its own truths without violence from the others (a respect that contributed to the rise of the modern democracies, feminism, ecology, and the post-conventional ideals of liberty, freedom, and equality). We also learned of the modern discoveries of *evolution* in the Quadrants (a notion that is at least compatible with the Great Chain tipped on its side and set loose across geological, biological, and cultural time). And we have mentioned the "bright promise" of a constructive post-modernity, which involves the integration the best of pre-modernity (the *Great Nest*) and modernity (the differentiation and evolution of the Big Three), resulting in a more integral approach.' (1999e:590). (Sheldrake's Morphogenetic Fields are explained by Wilber 1984a).

Correlatively, less adequate and comprehensive approaches will face extinction pressures' (2000d:8).

Wilber's implication of value-based *Kosmic* impulses is problematic for his Integral Philosophy. Except for dimensions of physicality, he claims that all other qualities of experience ascend in levels of increasing value-based subjectivity. The manner in which the evolving *Kosmos* appears to discriminate between constructive and destructive impulses is a fabrication of consciousness, whereas natural or biological selection normally discriminates on the basis of survivability or utility. The phenomenon of human consciousness demonstrates seemingly equal capacities for construction and destruction, whereas Wilber assumes that Mind, as a supra-Conscious evolutionary impetus, is always inclined to construction. This cannot be shown to be true and appears rather as a statement of faith. Granted, for the purposes of Wilber's theory, it is understood that individuated minds, as a result of dualised depletion, are awakened to Mind in lesser degrees and therefore also exhibit destructive propensities, but from a Physicalist viewpoint the suggestion is unconvincing in its supposition that Mind, as the timeless, spaceless *Suchness* of the universe, is always constructive. *Kosmological* evolution does not appear to reveal any such intentions, in fact it reveals no clearly discernable intentionality at all, but it is unclear whether Wilber means to make this distinction only as an explanatory device, or if he believes it to be an actual *Kosmological* principle. Building on the principles distilled from the Perennial Philosophy and Transpersonal Psychology, Wilber is now able to formulate his holarchical strategy with more precision.

#### **2.4.1 Hierarchy and Holarchy in *The Great Nest of Being***

Wilber's Integral Philosophy is firmly embedded in evolutionary theory and it has been shown that he perceives the evolutionary impetus to be driven from matter, through life, to mind in perpetual impulses of transcendence.<sup>77</sup> Wilber's view that *physiospheric*, *biospheric*, and *noospheric* domains co-exist in integral dialectical relationships was examined above; now it will be shown that they also selectively intra-evolve in continuous evolutionary

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<sup>77</sup> Wilber frequently mentions the overall sequence of this development. In one example he says, 'It moves from nature to humanity to divinity, from subconscious to self-conscious to super-conscious, from pre-personal to personal to transpersonal. Precisely the same three major stages can be found in Berdyaev (1960), Aurobindo, and Baldwin (1915) comes very close to it with his notions of pre-logical, logical, and hyper-logical. In any case, the conception has an extremely broad grounding' (1982c:7).

fashion from diffuse matter to complex matter and ultimately to self-aware non-dual *Suchness* (Wilber 2000a:15).<sup>78</sup>

Does this mean that the end of evolution will ultimately see the universe as pure Mind? This is a highly conjectural advance on dialectics, and scientists of any kind will be hard pressed to prove such an evolutionary intention. It is arguable that forms of organising principles as bio-physiological propensities are at work in evolution, but it is by no means evident that these principles are conscious in a way that resembles the volitional qualities of human consciousness. If the universe is pre-eminently moved and wholly interpenetrated as conscious matter in a way that strives for its apex in pure Mind, then Wilber would have to admit Mindfulness to material evolution and his philosophy must be defined as a form of Essentialism.

The point of departure in exploring Wilber's adaptation of the *Great Chain of Being* must therefore be presaged by this Essentialist assumption. Evolution and complexity will be examined further in Chapter Seven, but it is necessary to introduce the concepts here since they inform the development of Wilber's *Great Nest* theory. For Wilber it is apparent that *physiosphere*, *biosphere*, and *noosphere* together create structures of increasing complexity, organisation, and integration whilst, in apparent contradiction to their cause, use up limited energy in the process (1982c:6-7; 2000a:15-22).<sup>79</sup> The physical universe appears to be on a slow entropic course, continually expanding and cooling, running out of heat and constructive energy, whilst the evolution of matter into mind appears to be gaining momentum in the development of higher forms of consciousness (Wilber 2000a:19). Wilber indicates that *Reality* is therefore not merely composed of objects and randomly interacting processes, but of orientated generalisations that evolve hierarchically and intentionally (1996a:1). *Reality*, in other words, contrives to evolve from diffusing entropic orientations to organising and integrating complexes (Wilber 2000a:43). These broad observations form the foundations

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<sup>78</sup> Wilber's constructed terminology is assumed to be borrowed from Teilhard de Chardin.

<sup>79</sup> This divides the orientation of science into two seemingly incompatible halves where, says Wilber, '... biology describes the world winding up, and physics describes the world winding down. The "two arrows" of time' (2000a:538). Entropy is explained as the 'apparent' loss of energy when it is converted from one form to another. We know from the laws of thermodynamics that this is not a 'real' loss, but rather a "dissipation of energy" from more, to less useful forms (Macrone 2002:131). Nørretranders (1999:11) describes the first law of thermodynamics as the constant of energy in the universe, 'Energy neither appears nor disappears when we "consume" it. The second law of Thermodynamics explains that entropy grows as time passes ... Fundamentally the world is wearing out. Time is passing and everything is constantly deteriorating (Nørretranders 1999:72). Barrow (2000:316) cites an example from information processing where he points out that, 'Information processing cannot continue for ever: it must die out. There will be less and less utilisable energy available as the material Universe is driven closer and closer to a state of uniformity.'

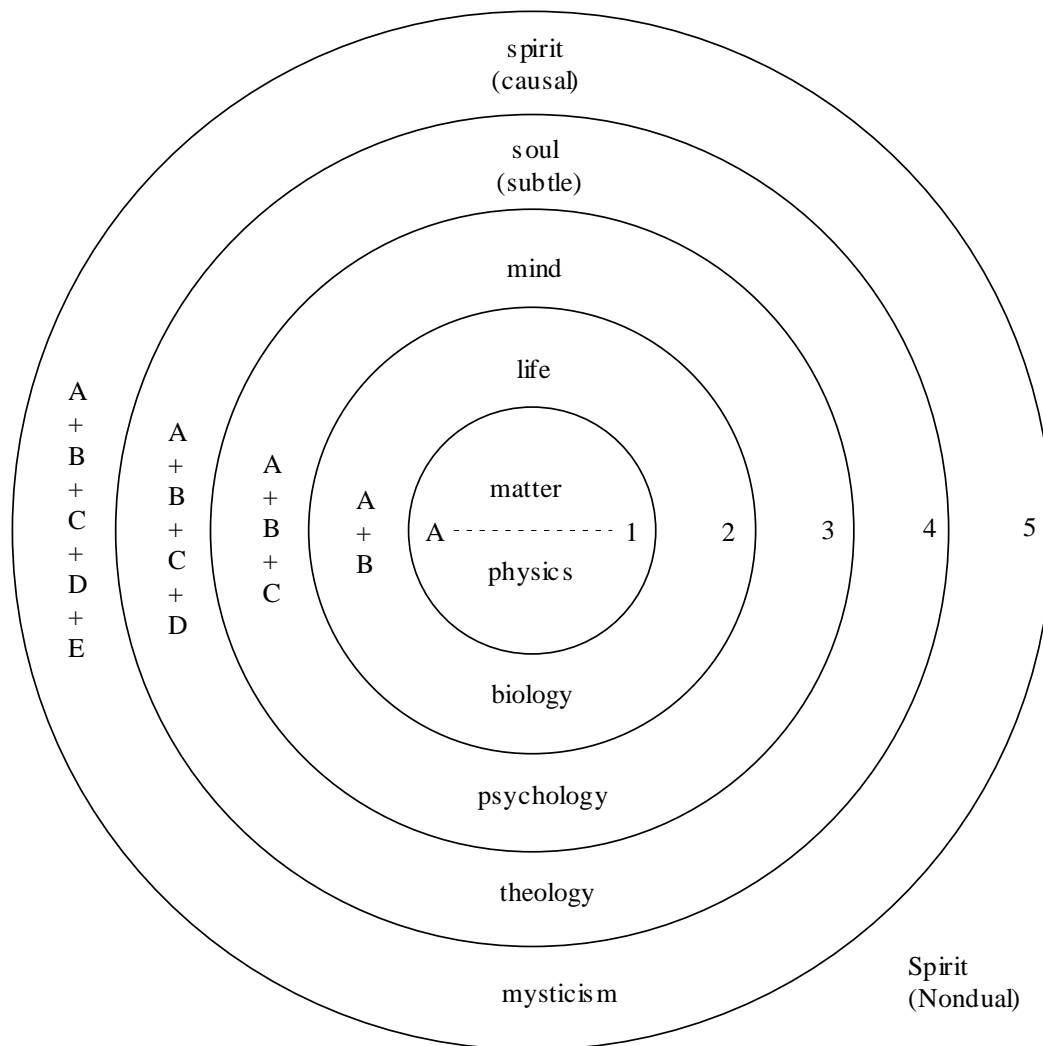
upon which Wilber builds his integral paradigm and it is best illustrated in the metaphors of his adapted version of the *Great Chain of Being*.

Clearly then, Wilber presumes the principle of hierarchy in evolutionary processes. The term 'hierarchy' is loaded and Wilber goes to some length to deconstruct its inherited meanings. *Hiero* means sacred or holy and *arch* refers to governance or rule. The term was allegedly introduced by Dionysius the Areopagite (approx 500 CE) in order to rank celestial orders, but is used in modern psychology, evolutionary theory, and systems theory to refer to the ranking of structures according to their holistic capacity (Wilber 1993d:54; 1997a:39-40; 2000a:25).<sup>80</sup> In the Perennial Philosophy, hierarchy describes the inclusive and integrating developmental patterns revealed in the *Great Chain of Being* as more spherical than linear in nature. Each expanding dimension of the Great Chain represents wider and more unified identities that transcend and include their predecessors and it is for this reason that the Great Chain is better described, according to Wilber, as the process of sublation in the *Great Nest of Being* (1998a:7; 1999e:437). The following diagram illustrates a traditional form of the Great Chain of Being (over the page):

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<sup>80</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite was supposedly a judge of the Areopagus who, according to Acts 17:34, was converted to Christianity by Paul. According to Dionysius of Corinth, quoted by Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiae* III: iv, this Dionysius then became a bishop of Athens. In the 5<sup>th</sup> Century a series of mystical writings of a Neoplatonic character were mistakenly ascribed to the Areopagite. These writings are now attributed to 'Pseudo-Dionysius' and recent speculations suggest that the writer may have been Peter the Iberian, a Georgian Bishop of Majum (452-491), but this is uncertain.

Diagram 1



(Wilber: Excerpt G)

Inasmuch as Wilber prefers the terms ‘Nest’ to ‘Chain’, he also prefers ‘holarchy’ to ‘hierarchy’ and this is evident in Phase 3 of his development. Holarchical evolution is nonetheless hierarchical in nature and clarification of meanings is necessary. According to the statesman and philosopher Jan Smuts (1926) (Wilber 1979a:1), nature is composed of hierarchical wholes, each whole integrated within a larger whole, and these wholes are energetically dynamic and creative. This process of escalating levels of organisation and unity is, as it unfolds in time, the process of evolution. According to Wilber (1995a:26; 1997a:32; 1999e:439; 2000a:26, 41), Arthur Koestler coined the term ‘holon’ which refers to that which is whole in one context, and simultaneously a part of another. The whole, in the sense of sublation, is more than the sum of its parts and it can influence or determine the

function of its parts.<sup>81</sup> Wilber applies this process to all categories of existence and claims that holons, ‘... can be understood neither as things nor processes, neither as wholes nor parts, but only as simultaneous *whole-parts*, so that standard ‘atomistic’ and ‘holistic’ attempts are both off the mark. There is nothing that is not a holon (upwardly and downwardly forever)’ (Wilber 2000a:41).

As each new and more encompassing stage or holon emerges, it includes the capacities and functions of the previous stage and then superimposes its own unique and more encompassing capacities (Wilber 2000a:28). In this sense holons exercise selective organising capabilities which do not merely correspond to phenomena, but respond coherently to these structural agencies (Wilber 2000a:67). This process is not therefore a mere sequence in linear hierarchy, but heterarchical in its constructive and integral embrace of previous holons (Wilber 1995a:21; 1996e:131; 1999e:464).<sup>82</sup> This form of holarchical ascent weaves isolated developmental threads into networks or webs of constructively integrated data fields and therefore transcends the oppressive tendencies so often associated with the word hierarchy.<sup>83</sup> Even those who claim exclusive heterarchical philosophies are

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<sup>81</sup> Barrow (2000:136) identifies an interesting comparison from the late nineteenth century. Amongst notable scientists, he says, ‘... the most speculative views on the ether are to be found in the works of the Scottish physicist Peter Guthrie Tait, who is famous for his joint work with Lord Kelvin and his pioneering ideas in the mathematical theory of knots. In 1875, Tait co-authored a popular science book with Balfour Stewart which bore the title *The Unseen Universe; or, Physical Speculations on a Future State* ([1875]/1882). Its purpose was to demonstrate the harmony of religion and science and, in seeking to do this, it has some remarkable things to say about the ether. Stewart and Tait suggested that all matter was composed of particles of ether, but these ether particles were composed of an even subtler collection of ether particles, and so on, ad infinitum. This hierarchy of ethers was arranged in an ascending one-way street of energies, so that lower-order ethers could always form from a higher, but not vice versa. Stewart and Tait imagined their staircase of ethers rising, like Jacob’s ladder, to attain infinite energy and ultimately becoming eternal and co-equal with God. The creation of the world was simply the cascade of energy down the spectrum of ethers so that it became localised in matter at the lowest levels, those we see around us and in which we have our being.’

<sup>82</sup> Thus holarchy, as Wilber uses the term, ‘... includes a balance of both hierarchy (qualitatively ranked levels) and heterarchy (mutually linked dimensions). Theorists who attempt to use only one or the other of those types of relations have consistently failed to explain development at all’ (1999e:464).

<sup>83</sup> Wilber identifies several opponents to hierarchy who, ‘... maintain that all hierarchies involve a *ranking* or dominating judgment that oppresses other values and the individuals who hold them (hierarchies are a “hegemonic domination that marginalises differential values, and that a linking or *non-ranking* model of reality is not only more accurate but, we might say, kinder and gentler and more just)’ (2000a:23). Wilber clarifies this point, ‘Whereas pathological hierarchy is a type of ontological fascism (with the one dominating the many), pathological heterarchy is a type of ontological totalitarianism ...’ (2000a:32). According to Fisher (1997:67), ‘The explication Wilber gives of natural hierarchy (holarchy) and pathological hierarchy is a critical distinction if one is to understand why he uses such models. Strong philosophical, theoretical, and politically correct trends in the 1990s create a great resistance to Wilber’s work. The purpose of hierarchical models is not political for Wilber but clarifying of evolutionary development (*telos*) and sorting our values of better, more embracing structures and ways of thinking that may practically reduce human suffering.’ Rothberg adds an additional and noteworthy observation, ‘Metaphysics sanctimoniously, either directly or indirectly, justifies domination and the suppression of human and non-human potential to live the fullest lives possible. We might say polemically that metaphysics describes and justifies the quickened (pseudo-) development of a few, at the cost of the forced regression of the many. The commonly recognised elitism of metaphysics, philosophy, and hierarchical ontologies is neither generally beneficial nor necessary; it is rather (at least in our time) pernicious and avoidable’ (Rothberg 1986:14).



thus guilty of hierarchical value judgements when they claim that their views are superior to hierarchical views (Wilber 1997c:84).<sup>84</sup>

Wilber's *Great Nest* theory therefore views all developmental and evolutionary sequences in terms of integrating and transcending spherical inclusions.<sup>85</sup> Despite his best efforts Wilber is unable to escape supremacist implications in his own theory. Rothberg makes a similar observation:

Like Huston Smith and many other perennialists, Wilber also claims that reality and the psyche have a clearly hierarchical structure. There are 'levels' of reality and development, and the 'higher' levels are 'superior' to the 'lower' levels in the logical and theoretical sense that Wilber finds clearly articulated in the work of Hegel, Piaget, and Habermas, among others, as well as in biology and systems theory (Rothberg 1996a:2; 1986:1; cf Fisher 1997:67).

Wilber (1997c:84) defends his position by proposing nature's preference for natural rather than dominator hierarchies, but 'natural' is too vague a term for a satisfactory rebuttal since natural evolution generally prioritises genetic dominance. Wilber's better defence is drawn from the vast array of developmental theorists he incorporates in his holonic theory which he balances with psychological and spiritual developmental schemes from Eastern religious and philosophical schools.<sup>86</sup>

There are other evolutionary principles and tendencies (laws of form, and propensities of manifestation) to consider in Wilber's holarchical spectrum and he delineates these most clearly in his so-called *Twenty Tenets* (2000a:43-84). These tenets are categorised and

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<sup>84</sup> Wilber is careful to guard against conflation or confusion of ideas in this regard. He clarifies distinctions by asserting that, '... heterarchists, who claim that "heterarchy" and "holism" are the same thing (and that both are contrasted to the divisive and nasty "hierarchy"), have got it exactly backward: The only way to get a holism is via a holarchy. Heterarchy, in and by itself, is merely differentiation without integration, disjointed parts recognising no common and deeper purpose or organisation: heaps, not wholes' (1995a:29). A further distinction also needs to be made between holography and other holonic definitions. In this regard Wilber says, 'Holographic' is simply the strong version of heterarchy, where each part is so equivalent that they actually contain each other. For our simpler and general purposes, we will use "holography" and "heterarchy" interchangeably, since the important point is that both are non-hierarchical. Thus, the simplest way to summarise the mystic's world view would be: Heterarchy within each level, and Hierarchy between each level' (1996e:131).

<sup>85</sup> By way of example Wilber says that, '... molecules become parts of cells, which become parts of organs, which become parts of organ systems, which become parts of organisms, which become parts of societies of organisms and so on' (2000a:27).

<sup>86</sup> Wilber frequently makes reference to developmental sequences in a variety of epistemologies and disciplines. Here, for example, he says, '... in the widely regarded text *Higher Stages of Human Development* (Alexander & Langer 1990), the works of thirteen top developmental psychologists - including Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, Kurt Fischer, Howard Gardner, Karl Pribram, and Robert Kegan - are presented, and of those thirteen, all of them, except one or two, present models that are hierarchical in part, including Gilligan for female development. These conclusions are based on massive amounts of experimental data, not merely on theoretical speculations' (Wilber 1999f:2-3).

subdivided to suit Wilber's unique purpose and also have significant bearing on his more recent views on consciousness. To this end, as Rothberg (1986:26) reminds us, it is important to explore the merits and limits of Wilber's hierarchical ontology. For the purpose of relevance, only the most salient points will be condensed. Wilber begins by pointing out that, '... hierarchy is asymmetrical, that the process can come undone, but it cannot reverse (atoms can gather to form genes, but not vice versa)' (1995a:19; 2000a:27). The holonic unfolding of matter and mind in evolution thus appears to be directional and, as it were, obedient to the arrow of time. The process therefore displays increasing organisation over time which is the result of tensions between differentiating and integrating impulses. Wilber's identification of these impulses is tenuous at this point and seems to depend more on metaphorical discriminations than facts evidenced by evolutionary science. Wilber nonetheless maintains that these processes indicate increases in structural ability and complexity and in so doing bestow relative autonomy to their constituent parts. Significantly for Wilber, this also means that there is a degree of indeterminacy built into the emergence of holons (2000a:54). The evolution of the Mindful universe, it would seem, does not possess predictive indices.

The evolutionary result in human consciousness' capacity for error and uncertainty indicates reasonable evidence for such a suggestion, and it likewise reveals the capacity for creativity and inventiveness. This idea is not totally incongruent with the theology of free will in Christianity though the association remains strictly allegorical, and it also raises a number of difficulties. A common defence to the apparent failure of creation in Christianity is attributed to the fall of humanity in the wake of original sin (Genesis 3:1-24). This fall, according to Wilber, is a falling away from the Perfect One into two-ness – *Involution* into duality. Mythically, the post-apocalyptic reconciliation of cosmos with Creator through the grace of the cross will reveal a new order of perfection or ultimacy through *Evolution*, but this reveals a problem.

By definition, such ultimacy may put an end to conscious thought since the very nature and process of thought subsists in self-awareness which is by definition reflective and therefore dualistic. Consciousness can therefore never claim ultimacy and consciousness at the same time. Absolute perfection, in other words, cannot admit questions if it is to remain true to its claim to ultimacy since any answers to more questions cannot make ultimacy any more ultimate than it already is. This is theologically and epistemologically problematic since the

realisation of perfection would then obliterate the process of consciousness altogether – the very mechanism by which it alleges to imagine and attain its ultimate goal. Imagining perfection does not necessarily incarnate perfection and the dilemma is reminiscent of the Ontological Arguments so fiercely resisted by Hume (1711-1776), Kant (1724–1804), and Frege (1848-1925) among others. The idea of perfection therefore fails on the grounds of self-referential contradiction. Moreover, this conundrum implies that the ultimate goal of consciousness in mystical absolutes is not, in fact, consciousness at all. If it can therefore be shown that evolution, as a form of intentional consciousness (or *Mind/Suchness* in Wilber’s case), is experimental, it poses an enormous challenge to Christian theology in its maintenance of the infallibility, omnipotence, omniscience, and infinity of God. Wilber (2000a:85) illustrates this poignantly:

And a final Omega Point? That would imply a final Whole, and there is no such holon anywhere in manifest existence.<sup>87</sup> But perhaps we can interpret it differently. Who knows, perhaps Telos, perhaps Eros, moves the entire Kosmos, and God may indeed be an all-embracing chaotic Attractor, acting, as Whitehead said, throughout the world by gentle persuasion toward love.

Wilber goes on to offer alternative evidence to motivate further debate. One of the prominent themes in scientific and behavioural inquiry today concerns self-organising systems, based originally on Aristotle’s *entelechy*, but more recently renamed and developed in Rupert Sheldrake’s theory of morphogenesis (1993d:62; 1999e:231-238). The theory is controversial, but intriguing in its suggestion that there are universal laws of formative causation that are manifest as cosmic habits or, in a manner of speaking, blueprints which orientate the intentionality and directionality of evolution.

The argument for morphogenesis is metaphorically sensible as an explanation for laws of form, but it has yet to convince the scientific fraternity. Furthermore, it accentuates the Essentialist position by implying an Architect - whom Wilber in the previous quote referred to as the chaotic Attractor. Again this would challenge the theistic notion of divine omniscience since morphic blueprints appear to submit to failure, adaptation, and change rather than a pre-designed perfect plan. Wilber’s position is however, more qualified in its

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<sup>87</sup> Nørretranders (1999:359), though from a strictly Physicalist perspective, supports Wilber on this point. He says, ‘Holism is an attempt to say that there is a whole we can apprehend. Non-constructionist reductionism is an attempt to appreciate that we can never describe the world exhaustively, either in its parts or as a whole. At each new layer of description, new forms of behaviour will emerge with the addition of nothing but a few of the particles from the level below – but now enough to form a flock.’

suggestion that morphic fields are less cosmic blueprints than fields of nested potentials and developmental spaces within which evolution unfolds (1999e:459).<sup>88</sup> Wilber does not articulate it as such, but this may be construed as an attempt to sustain an experimental dimension to evolution whilst simultaneously maintaining Ground or Spirit as its evolutionary means, substance, and end. This must also imply that Ground or Spirit is evolving, but if so how can it simultaneously be postulated as an absolute in NDC?

These internal inconsistencies, which Wilber prefers to view as paradoxes, will be repeatedly encountered, but in the mean time Wilber offers his *Great Nest of Being* as a vast morphic field without needing to submit to the necessity of a First Mover. It nonetheless remains implausible to propose Spirit as both evolving and Absolute, but this dialectic may be better understood within the context of the processes of consciousness itself. In this way it may also be possible to sustain the vitality of Christian myths as animating metaphors for human existence, but traditional theologies will need to be applied in adapted forms. The challenge levelled at Christian theology would be to reconstitute the priority of dogma and interpret the life of Christ as a sacramental *re-member-ance* of an evolving *Kosmos*.<sup>89</sup> Historico-literal renditions which distance Jesus in space and time need to be subsumed by qualified approaches to mystical deification wherein humanity is rather animated through sacramental forms of 'Christ Consciousness' to the extent that Christians view themselves as 'Christ in the world'. Such a reconstruction may ultimately serve to liberate, rather than compromise the integrity of the Christian mysticism.

If Wilber's holonic theory admits relative autonomy to the rise of more integrated and complex structures as nested potentials, it follows that holons reveal the capacity for change. Wilber (2000a:48) believes the principles of self-preservation, self-adaptation, self-transcendence, and self-dissolution express these holonic capacities, and Christian mechanisms of ascent to mystical union generally follow similar strata. For this reason it

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<sup>88</sup> Nested potentials thus replace the stronger suggestion of pre-given design in cosmic blueprints (Wilber 1999e:444). Holons therefore appear to select, organise and give form to the multitude of stimuli cascading around them and therefore cohere to the deep structures of these holons (Wilber 2000a:67). Lower holons seemingly cultivate the possibilities for higher holons to emerge, whilst the higher holons integrate the probabilities of behavioural forms in lower holons.

<sup>89</sup> The philosophical and theological schools of thought that may define such an approach are too diffuse and convoluted to pursue here, but my suggestion is broadly in keeping with Wilber's understanding. Kevin Snyman completed doctoral research on Wilber's hermeneutic process of *re-member-ance* in a thesis entitled *Myth, Mind, Messiah: Exploring the Development of the Christian Responsibility Towards Interfaith Dialogue From Within Ken Wilber's Integral Hermeneutics* (2002: UNISA). Snyman's thesis is mentioned only as a suggestion for further reading, but is not a source consulted in this thesis and therefore does not appear in my bibliography.

must also be assumed that these potentials are dialectical; revealing the capacity to add new integrative dimensions to prior levels, but also creating the possibility of new problems since no holon can, in and of itself, claim completeness (Wilber 1997a:73).<sup>90</sup>

Rothberg (1986:18) adds that the possibility of distortion is most likely to occur when transcendence takes place at the expense of integration. If emergent holons are more integral than their predecessors, then they should also display the capacity to confer deeper meaning to previously integrated holons.<sup>91</sup> Any holon is thus unable to establish its own meaning apart from its embracing holon. By way of example, the brain, says Wilber, ‘... knows no meaning apart from its body, a mind knows no meaning apart from its brain, and so on ...’ (2000a:27). It is not clear however, how this principle may apply universally. It may apply generally to more obvious life structures, but it would be incorrect, for instance, to suggest that an electron has no meaning apart from its greater holon, the atom. It depends on what meaning is ascribed to the word meaning since meaning implies value judgements or functions and not all known phenomena display such consistent or value-based properties. Particle physicists, for example, may describe neutrinos by inference, but to ascribe meaning to these levels requires different referential frameworks which influence the process or result of what is being observed.<sup>92</sup>

Notwithstanding the gradations at which meaning can appropriately be applied, Wilber continues by proposing that holons with less depth are more fundamental to the universe than holons with greater depth. Simply illustrated, Wilber believes that primates are not

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<sup>90</sup> Put more simply, Wilber says, ‘... every holon is incomplete or inconsistent, every holon issues a promissory note to the universe, which says, in effect: I can’t pay you now, I can’t achieve certainty and stability and completeness and consistency today, but I will gladly pay you tomorrow. And no holon ever delivers, or can deliver, on that promise’ (2000a:529).

<sup>91</sup> Wilber illustrates this by pointing out that, ‘... the ego does exist in the context of the total organism and its drives which does exist in the context of its linguistically disclosed world, which does exist in terms of overall networks of social practices, which themselves subsist in Spirit. That is the very nature of *holon*, contexts within contexts within contexts. And each time we spot one of these larger (deeper) contexts, we find a new *meaning* conferred on a given holon, because, as we earlier noted, the larger context confers a meaning on its holons that the holons themselves, alone and isolated, do not and cannot possess’ (2000a:80).

<sup>92</sup> The *Uncertainty Principle* was an important step in the development of quantum mechanics when it was discovered by Werner Heisenberg in 1927. It is often confused with the observer effect indicated in this paragraph and therefore important as a point of clarification. *Wikipedia: Uncertainty Principle* (2007) explains that, ‘In quantum physics, the outcome of even an ideal measurement of a system is not deterministic, but instead is characterised by a probability distribution, and the larger the associated standard deviation is, the more “uncertain” we might say that that characteristic is for the system. The Heisenberg uncertainty principle gives a lower bound on the product of the standard deviations of position and momentum for a system, implying that it is impossible to have a particle that has an arbitrarily well-defined position and momentum simultaneously. More precisely, the product of the standard deviations, where is the reduced Planck constant. The principle generalises to many other pairs of quantities besides position and momentum (for example, angular momentum about two different axes), and can be derived directly from the axioms of quantum mechanics’.

fundamental holons because, ‘... neither cells, nor molecules, nor atoms, nor protons or electrons depend on them for their existence’ (2000a:70-71). Sub-nuclear particles are therefore most fundamental because nothing could exist without them, but holons with greater depth are more significant because they embrace more holons. A primate is therefore a less fundamental, but more significant holon because it signifies more of the *Kosmos*. This also means that any hierarchical level can be measured according to its relative depth and span. The higher the evolutionary level, the more significant a holon becomes, and with more significance comes more consciousness, and therefore more depth. The lower an evolutionary level, the less integrated its parts or differentials will be, and therefore the greater or more diffuse its span.<sup>93</sup>

Presumably, and perhaps arrogantly, this means that humans contain the greatest depth since we, of all living things, are most conscious, that is, conscious of our consciousness and thus able to question and influence the nature and purpose of our existence. As human history clearly reveals, this is not the evolutionary success story Wilber’s nested holonic scheme would like it to be, but it does substantiate the indeterminate and experimental quality ascribed to the evolutionary process suggested earlier in this section. Therefore, with greater depth, greater integration and complexity, also comes greater risk for aberration. Ideally, the micro-manifestation of human consciousness should co-operate and co-construct with the macro principles of *Kosmic* evolution, but according to Wilber human beings currently residing at strongly egoic levels have yet to appreciate the virtues of this co-creative dynamic.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, Wilber’s holonically nested universe indicates a teleological organising principle where the codes or deep structures of every holon act as actualising forces in the emergence

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<sup>93</sup> It is confusing, says Wilber, ‘... [that] in some of these holarchical maps, the holons got bigger as development progressed, and in others, they became smaller ... It was a real mess, and at several points I decided to just chuck it, forget it, because nothing was coming of this research. In researching this problem, I did an extensive data search of several hundred hierarchies, taken from systems theory, ecological science, Kabbalah, developmental psychology, Yogachara Buddhism, moral development, biological evolution, Vedanta Hinduism, Neo-Confucianism, cosmic and stellar evolution, Hwa Yen, the Neo-platonic corpus - an entire spectrum of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern nests. After I had collected several hundred hierarchies, I tried grouping them in various ways, and I eventually noticed that, without exception, they all fell into one of four major types’ (1998a:63).

<sup>94</sup> Wilber’s tentative hypothesis to account for this, ‘... is that mankind on the whole has, up to this point in history, collectively evolved to the level of [Piaget’s] formop thinking, and therefore each individual born today is more-or-less assured of developing to that level. Beyond that level, however, development is more as individual matter. Conceivably, as more individuals strive for and reach the higher levels, as our ancestors fought for the capacity to reason, then these higher levels will be collectively bequeathed to subsequent progeny, and so on’ (1981:39).

of those holons (2000a:81). In this sense the *Great Nest of Being* may simply be viewed as a great holarchy of knowing - levels of reality, and levels of knowing those levels, to the extent that they display the capacity for the emergence of more complex and integrated holons. In this way emergence ascribes ontological self-awareness to the dynamics of evolution (Wilber 1999e:451).

This proposal must be challenged on three fronts: firstly, it has already been indicated that the assignment of conscious intention, albeit experimental, to evolutionary processes is too speculative to be scientifically qualified. Secondly, it has also previously been noted that Wilber's proposal admits an Essentialist inclusion to his espousal of scientific theory by suggesting that the realisation of NDC reveals Spirit as both the Ground and goal of the entire Spirit-matter quest.<sup>95</sup> The unfolding of matter, through mindful matter, to Spirit, thus proceeds in paradoxical patterns since NDC must transcend its lower holons in order to be self-realised as an *Absolute Subjectivity* which, all the while, subsists as the true nature of the entire evolutionary process. It is thus, thirdly, both Absolute and not absolute at the same time. Thus stated, non-dual Ground must be construed as an ultimate or Omega Holon in apparent contradiction to Wilber's claim that there is no ultimate holon (Wilber 2000a:85). Wilber (1985:16) indeed makes this admission:

Thus, life transcends but includes matter; mind transcends but includes life; soul transcends but includes mind; and Spirit transcends but includes soul. At that point, however, asymptotic at infinity, we have reached a paradoxical limit: Spirit is that which transcends everything and includes everything. Or, in traditional terms, Spirit is both completely transcendent to the world and completely immanent in the world – and there is the most notorious (and unavoidable) paradox of Spirit.

Wilber's candour validates my criticism and therefore fails to answer the challenge in the scientific terms he claims for it. In summary, Wilber's *Great Nest* theory forms the basis upon which he builds his model in Phase 3 of his philosophical development. One of his intentions in the development of his nested holarchical model is to dispel many of the misconceptions previously held by Great Chain theorists. Wilber criticises them for not including the intricacies of cultural contexts and for not understanding that the *Great Nest* evolves over time. He further points out that Great Chain theorists failed to correlate brain

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<sup>95</sup> It should be noted at this point that Wilber prefers to refer to the sum total of events in the universe as the 'All', rather than the 'whole' (2000a:45; see also Wilber 1981).

physiology with consciousness and for not appreciating and integrating the production of interdependent epistemologies of consciousness (1999e:11-12).

The *Great Nest* is thus composed of differentiated, but continuous dimensions of intra-evolutionary principles that unfold from the most dense and least conscious levels to higher, subtler, and more conscious levels (Wilber 1997a:39).<sup>96</sup> The universe is thus an endless series of holons within holons which means that existence is without foundation in wholes or in parts, neither one, nor many and therefore pure emptiness or non-dual Ground (Wilber 1995a:45). For Wilber (1999e:11), the *Great Nest of Being* represents:

... five thousand years of codifications of direct phenomenological experiences of the higher dimensions of human consciousness disclosed by consensually validated means. Put simply, the Great Nest is ... not an abstract metaphysics or ungrounded philosophy, and if we are looking for clues to unlocking the human potential, it would be most unwise to ignore the Perennial Philosophy, the world's first great psycho-technology for entering higher states of consciousness.

In brief, the metaphorical usefulness of Wilber's holarchical evolutionary theory in the *Great Nest of Being* is admitted, but scrutiny of the finer details should be more exact and it is at these junctures that questions of epistemological accuracy and consistency arise. By way of example, Nørretranders (1999:338) reminds us that there is a constant ebb and flow of energy through and as the substance of our bodies and this means that we are really patterns of a greater flow. As a Physicalist, he then questions the bases upon which we distinguish self from other, and how we discriminate between the inner subjective self and the outer physical self. Would there not be more sense, he asks, '... in seeing the whole as an intricate system of endosymbioses within endosymbioses within endosymbioses?' At this point Nørretranders' scheme seems to resemble Wilber's holarchical proposal, but it also raises a challenge. Both Wilber and Nørretranders would agree that holonomy does not exclude the sensibility of epistemologically appropriate distinctions between qualities and quantities at any level of emergence, but Nørretranders maintains the importance of recognising that this is only one mode of interpretation. This kind of holism, suggests Nørretranders, '... is an attempt to say that there is a whole we can apprehend', whereas no evidence exists to suggest that any noetic system can accurately and comprehensively define all qualities of a whole

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<sup>96</sup> Wilber implies that as each evolutionary level unfolds, it creates more complex inter-relating patterns of existence, and through this expanded organisation it therefore has to enfold more of itself, within itself, and as itself, in order to remain itself – *Kosmos* (2000a:535).



(1999:339).<sup>97</sup> On what foundation then can Wilber's claim to *Absolute Subjectivity* as both Ground and goal of the entire holonic *Kosmic* process be constructed? As Rothberg reminds us, 'A complete transpersonal theory, appropriate to our time, must integrate ... [and] *explore both the truth and the limits of the claims of a hierarchical ontology*' [my italics] (Rothberg 1986:26).

In this overview of Wilber's holarchical nested theory several epistemological problems are revealed. Wilber however, appears reluctant to acknowledge these limitations, but they will become more evident as we consider his espousal of the *Involuntary* and *Evolutionary* movements of Spirit.

#### **2.4.2 The Two Movements of Spirit: *Involution* and *Evolution***

Wilber maintains that Spirit is manifest in, through, and as two movements; the descending movement in the manyness strategy, and the ascending movement in the oneness strategy. Here Wilber qualifies his reasoning for this proposal and refers respectively to *Involution* and *Evolution* as the moment by moment charisma of Spirit as it:

... throws itself outward to get lost in the manifest world of *maya* (Hegel called it "Spirit in the otherness" or "alienated Spirit").<sup>98</sup> Spirit then begins the slow and tortuous return to Itself, finally to awaken as Itself. Spirit is never actually lost, it is all a grand play (*lila*).<sup>99</sup> Whatever we call them, notice that we have two (illusory) movements of Spirit in the world: one is the getting lost, the other is the getting found; the first moves from oneness to manyness, the second from manyness to oneness.<sup>100</sup> And this is where the terms *Involution* and *Evolution* come in (Wilber 1993b:xviii).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> This claim refers to Kurt Gödel's self referential fallacies and will be explored in Chapter Six.

<sup>98</sup> Helminiak (1998:223) explains Wilber's notion of *Involution* as, '... the emergence of reality in declining stages from the one absolute, ultimate consciousness.' As one of Wilber's regular critics, Helminiak views Wilber's theses among others postulated by *new age*, Neo-Platonic, and Gnostic traditions.

<sup>99</sup> Wilber substantiates this view more fully in *The Atman Project* (1996d), but here says, 'Not only did the whole *Involuntary* series occur prior to one's birth, one re-enacts the entire series moment to moment. In this moment and this moment and this, an individual *is* Buddha, *is* Atman, *is* the Dharmakaya – *but*, in this moment and this moment and this, he ends up as John Doe, as a separate self, as an isolated body apparently bounded by other isolated bodies. At the beginning of this and every moment, each individual *is* God as the Clear Light; but by the end of this same moment – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye – he winds up as an isolated ego' (1997a:206).

<sup>100</sup> Schneider suggests that the bifurcation of these two movements lies at the heart of Western dualism (1987:14).

<sup>101</sup> Elsewhere Wilber adds substance to these movements in rather sweeping allusions to cosmology. He says, 'If the movement from the lower to the higher is *Evolution*, then the reverse, the movement from the higher to the lower, is *Involution*. Nature became a "fall," or "slumbering God," or "self-alienated *Spirit*," through the prior process of *Involution*, or the descent and "loss" of the higher in the lower. Call it the "big bang," when matter, the lowest realm, was flung into existence out of the Void (*sunyata*). *Evolution* is the subsequent reversal of the *Abfall*, the return of *Spirit* to *Spirit* via development' (1982c:7-8).

Heron's summation of this process is most exact. He describes Wilber's model as a:

... radical complementarity ... The One is enfolded, not dissolved, in the Many; the Many progressively manifest, and does not disappear into, the One. The metaphor of descent, the process of *Involution*, is further elaborated by the metaphor of a down-hierarchy. From the One consciousness-as-such emanate the formative imaginal powers, the archetypes of creation, which radiate a manifold of energies and spaces. In these are the infinitudes within, the Many, in each of which an archetype is reflected as an entelechy, the ground of an up-hierarchy. The up-hierarchy metaphor expands the metaphor of ascent. For the entelechy emerging from the infinitude immanent within each of the Many is a godseed, a formative potential. It upthrusts this potential in successive steps of the unfolding up-hierarchy, all of whose higher levels are latent in its lowest (1992:181-182).

The potential for semantic confusion must be allayed from the outset. Wilber cautions similarly that, '... *Evolution* and *Involution* have been used differently by different authors, sometimes with diametrically opposite meanings' (1993b:xviii). Thus cautioned, Wilber himself is no less a source of confusion.<sup>102</sup> In *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision* (Wilber, Walsh, Vaughan 1993a:xix) Wilber refers to *Evolution* as the movement away from Spirit, and *Involution* to explain its return, but in all other references he inverts this process. Correctly then, the graded manifestations of consciousness in *Involution* are revealed in the extent to which matter appears to fall away from Spirit, and the return journey through *Evolution* is the remembering or realisation of that which matter always has been – pure Spirit (Wilber 1997a:55).<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> To some extent Wilber qualifies the confusion by determining the argument from one of two perspectives. He says, 'These terms take on opposite meanings depending on whether we describe the process from the view of *Spirit* or from the view of the individual soul returning to *Spirit*. For example, *Evolution* simply means "to unfold, unroll, or open out." From the view of *Spirit*, then, *Evolution* can be used to refer to the unfolding *Spirit* into the manifest world, into maya. The entire manifest world "unfolds" out of *Spirit*, and thus the appearance of a manifest world - and *Spirit* getting "lost" in that world - can be called an *Evolution* of *Spirit*, a rolling-out of *Spirit*. *Spirit* returning to itself would then be called an *Involution*, an in-turning or re-turning to *Spirit* as *Spirit*. But we can just as easily reverse those terms without in the least changing the actual meaning of the events (and that is the issue I want to point out). *Involution* also means "to get involved, entangled, enmeshed." And using the term this way, it is best to speak of *Involution* as *Spirit's* "descending into" and getting "lost" in or "entangled" in the manifest world. In *Involution*, *Spirit* goes out of Itself, alienates Itself, creates a manifest world of otherness and manyness, and becomes (illusorily) entangled and enmeshed in that illusory world. Then, in the second movement, *Spirit* begins the return to *Spirit*, as *Spirit*; it grows and evolves and develops, from matter to body to mind to soul to Itself. And this movement is then properly called *Evolution*: *Spirit* is rolling out or turning out from its illusory involvement with Otherness' (1993b:xviii).

<sup>103</sup> Here Wilber indirectly acknowledges Hindu wisdom, and most likely his friendship with Bede Griffiths as the source of this theory. He maintains *Evolution* as the movement of the world towards *Brahman-Atman*, whereas *Involution* is maintained as, '... the movement whereby Brahman throws itself outward to create the manifest worlds, a process of *kenosis* or self-emptying which, at the same time, is a process of pure act and pure creativity. As *Evolution* is a movement from the lower to the higher, *Involution* is a movement from the higher to the lower – a movement which "enfolds" and "involves" the higher levels of being with the lower' (1996d:185).

For Wilber, this *Kosmology* is a circular process of Spirit unfolding from the Big Bang, to cosmic matter, to organic matter, then back through self-aware organic matter, to self-realised spiritual matter. In individuated consciousness, *Involution* appears as a calibrated suspension of unitive awareness wherein humans perceive themselves in increasing degrees of isolation and disintegration towards the lower levels of the Spectrum of Consciousness.<sup>104</sup> Thus, in the prenatal and neonatal stages of development, the human being resides at the lowest bands of conscious integration (Wilber 1982c:8).<sup>105</sup> This is not, according to Wilber, a state of denigration and the qualification is not pejorative, but rather a condition of vast potentials for creativity and integration. *Evolution* is the journey of ascent from this illusory sense of material isolation through body, to mind, to soul, to Spirit as awareness engages deeper holonic embrace and the result is the *Great Nest of Being* (Wilber 1999e:33-34; 2000:xx). Wilber represents these two movements of Spirit in *Involution*, the enfolding of the higher in the lower, as the Descending or Outward Arc. The Ascending or Inward Arc represents the unfolding of the higher as the lower ascends the spectrum in *Evolution*. According to Wilber the movement of *Involution* must precede the movement of *Evolution* since higher stages cannot unfold from the lower unless they are first enfolded as potentials within the lower. In other words, says Wilber, ‘Before there can be ascent, there must be descent.’ (1999e:33-34).<sup>106</sup>

At this early stage the metaphor becomes problematic. If Spirit, as Wilber so often claims, is the spaceless, timeless *Suchness* of the All without simultaneous reduction to space and time, than how can Spirit precede or proceed, indeed how can it move at all? The metaphor thus situates the ‘movement’ of Spirit spatio-temporally and locates the principle pantheistically. In obvious recognition of this contradiction Wilber admits to the illusory nature of these

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<sup>104</sup> Questions arise as to how individuals ‘know’ that they are not integrally aware of their oneness with Spirit, and Wilber, quoting William Wordsworth, says that the process of *Involution*, ‘... comes “trailing clouds of glory” (1999e:33-34). In other words, whilst *Involution* is the process of the increased forgetting of oneness, the process nonetheless retains sufficient residual awareness to motivate the *Evolutionary* yearning for return to oneness.

<sup>105</sup> Strong objections are levelled at Wilber on this point. Some post-modern *new age* trends view prenatal awareness as pure or fully integrated consciousness, but Wilber describes this as confusion between personal and transpersonal consciousness. He nonetheless defends the view that we do remember our source, ‘... perhaps vaguely, perhaps intensely, that we were once consciously one with the very Divine itself. It is there, this memory trace, in the back of our awareness, pulling and pushing us to realise, to awaken, to remember who and what we always already are’ (1997c:90).

<sup>106</sup> From moment to moment, says Wilber, ‘... we move away from *Spirit*, we Involve, we descend; and thus we must *return* to Source and Self – we must grow and Evolve to reverse this Fall. Thus, in Buddhism, the eight vijñanas (or levels of consciousness) involve out of the amala (*Spirit*), and simultaneously evolve back to the amala. The technique for “speeding up” this *Evolution*, or the return to amala (Source), is simply meditation, which is said to proceed, of course, in a stage or hierarchical-developmental (or ascending spiral) sequence – since *Involution* was a descending spiral’ (Wilber 1999e:35).

movements, but how then are we to understand them? The only alternative is to interpret the ‘movement’ of Spirit as a faculty of consciousness rather than Spirit, but then *Involution* and *Evolution* become mere constructions of the mind. Wilber is not able to escape this limitation unless he installs his *Transcendelic Three Step Exemplar* as a pre-condition to the realisation of NDC, but his methodology may be challenged. By way of cursory introduction, Wilber’s epistemology is categorised into three basic types or phases. The first is sensory knowledge which utilises the *Eye of Flesh* or *Sensibilia* to garner information through the physical senses of the body. The second is rational knowledge which operates through the *Eye of Reason* or *Intelligibilia* utilising the mind’s capacity to self-reflect, analyse, and reason; and the third is spiritual knowledge which Wilber calls the *Eye of Contemplation* or *Transcendelia* by which the realisation of transpersonal and transcendent non-dual or mystical awareness is effected (1996e:6). A thorough appraisal of Wilber’s epistemological scheme will be conducted in Chapter 3.3.1, but its introduction here serves to illustrate a problem with Wilber’s ontology of *Involution* and *Evolution*.

The precedence of *Involution* requires *Evolution* to mirror the steps of a stratified *Kosmos*, which suggests a metaphysical rather than scientific view. Wilber again defends his position by claiming that his theory would be metaphysical only as concept, but since it can be directly apprehended in NDC, it becomes scientifically verifiable through *Transcendelia*. *Involution* in these terms is interpreted as a post-metaphysical conclusion based on direct experience, not a metaphysical postulate based on mental speculation. The difficulty with Wilber’s defence is that NDC claims veracity through ineffable inner subjective experience based on its own recognisance. It has no rational, linguistic, objective, or third party means of verification. These criteria, in any scientific epistemology, would be inadequate grounds for claiming true knowledge, let alone Absolute *Gnosis*. Wilber’s further qualification of the Descending and Ascending Arcs may therefore be more tenable in mystagogy than science.

In the metaphysical option, consciousness attempts to discover greater depths of pre-existent imminent Spirit as it ascends from isolation to union, but this requires *a priori* submission to the actual existence of Spirit as the essential *Suchness* of the All, and this view coheres with Wilber’s overall thesis. However, the post-metaphysical option, which Wilber favours from his Phase 3 onwards, discovers and co-creates Spirit in the course of its own evolution, thus both encountering and simultaneously generating greater depths of *Reality* from *reality*. It is not so much a matter then of ‘finding God’, but rather discovering the potential for ‘God-

ness' as the realisation of spaceless, timeless oneness *in* and *as* the All. This latter view goes some way towards resolving the epistemological conflict between Physicalism and Wilber's argument insofar as it appears to suspend allusions to the irreducibility of Spirit, but Wilber's argument is still contingent on Spirit as the fundamental descriptive quality of the *Kosmos*.

Fisher (1997:49), similarly identifying the paradoxical character of Wilber's cartography, also emphasises potentiality as the luring line or stream of ascent:

... [Wilber] claims that ultimate consciousness or the ground of all Being is the end (*telos*) of Evolution and the beginning (*telos*) of Involution. Therefore, human nature is our human potential and our human potential is our human nature, which is ultimate consciousness/Spirit. Simply put, human nature is a universal ultimate (mystic) consciousness/Spirit in Wilber's major developmental theses.

Fisher's last sentence is too sweeping and overstates Wilber's position, but a similar perception is also the source of Schneider's objection to Wilber's proposal (Schneider 1989:472). Both Fisher and Schneider must qualify their observations with reference to Wilber's holonic model. Rothberg (1996a:2) summarises a comparable conclusion:

For Wilber, there is a profound drive in humans, as well as in all life and even matter, to Evolve toward what he usually calls Spirit. He believes that all Evolution at any time, whether physical, biological, or cultural, individual or collective, follows such a movement. The final terminus, as it were, of all Evolution is the self-realisation of Spirit in non-dual mystical experience.

Rothberg's summary of Wilber's oneness strategy, the evolutionary arc of ascent, also warrants qualification. Whilst Wilber does claim NDC as an *Absolute Subjectivity* he does not, as we have previously seen, co-equate it with an ultimate holon, the end of evolution. Cosmologically, reference to an end holon would be inconsistent with evolutionary theory and Rothberg is mistaken to superimpose Wilber's notion of Spirit on evolutionary time. Wilber's understanding of *Absolute Subjectivity* is radically spaceless and timeless within the fullness of space and time. Ultimately however, these misunderstandings may simply be the result of Wilber's nomenclature of Spirit. His frequent use of the word 'Spirit' may be too loaded to excise itself from meta-religious associations and it will be shown in Chapter Six that this impasse conceals further epistemological and linguistic complexes.

Thus argued, Wilber's concern in the modular construction of the figurative movements of Spirit is based on a perception that we have, '... lost the Light and the Height; but more frightening, we have lost the Mystery and the Deep, the Emptiness and the Abyss, and lost it in a world dedicated to surfaces and shadows, exteriors and shells ...' (2000a:7). Wilber's intention is to develop practical models through which humanity can envision and motivate the *Evolutionary* return to Spirit from the lower opaque levels of apperception, not to describe Spirit as a 'real' mutability. In support of this intention, other notable poets and mystics have constructed similar renditions to explain humanity's graded experience of the divine. Happold (1970:29), speaking of W. H. Auden's Inaugural Lecture at the University of Oxford in 1956, *Making, Knowing, and Judging*, says that Auden:

... distinguished between what he called Primary and Secondary Imagination. The Primary Imagination, according to Professor Auden, has contact with the sacred, in the widest possible sense of the word. This contact arouses a sense of awe, to which there is an impulse to respond. The response is, however, passive and there is no differentiation. What is met with at this level of awareness is simply that which is; it has no form. The function of the Secondary Imagination is to give form to this undifferentiated awareness, to allow it, as it were, to become incarnate. It is an active faculty; it differentiates, interprets, assesses, and transforms into words concepts and images.

Whilst Auden's Secondary Imagination implies the *Evolutionary* thrust of the Inward Arc, in Wilber's terms it can only be fully realised once it attains to Primary Imagination, that is, it realises the illusory split between the two imaginations and sees itself as One in NDC. From a Christian point of view, Bede Griffiths offers the most precise rendition of the *Involuntary* and *Evolutionary* movements and its lyrical precision warrants quoting at length:

The Father, who is the Ground and Source of Being, the ultimate Reality, expresses himself, differentiates himself in the person of the Logos, his Word. In this Word, all the forms of nature, all the "ideas" and essences of created being are contained, "implicated" or folded up in their original unity. Thus the Godhead reveals itself, reflects itself in all the multiple forms of creation. But these forms are not different from the absolute Being of the Godhead. They are all contained in the unitive vision of the Word, who is the "express Image," the exact reflection of the eternal Godhead. As the Father expresses himself, goes out of himself, as it were, in his eternal Word, so he returns to himself in his Spirit (the Shakti in Hindu terms), the divine Power which comes forth from the Father, the eternal Ground of Being, and unites the Father with the Son and the whole

creation with its eternal Source in the Logos. There is therefore a dynamism, a principle of differentiation in the Godhead, revealed first in the procession, the coming forth of the Son from the Father, and then in the manifestation of the forms of nature contained in the Word in creation, which is a reflection as in a mirror, a symbol of the Godhead. There is again a return of the Son to the Father in the Spirit, a movement of non-differentiation, a return to unity, which is reflected in creation in the movement of the Spirit, the divine Shakti, drawing all things back to their Source from the world of multiplicity (Griffiths 1987:250).<sup>107</sup>

The mystagogical context of Griffiths' writing justifies his postulates. There are no pretences about the existence or non-existence of God, and the reader is left in no doubt. A reading of Wilber's work, on the other hand, frequently conveys a sense of vacillation between subtle theism and variously defined versions of spiritualised material monism. Wilber's thoughts on *Involution* and *Evolution*, though metaphorically intriguing, are too enigmatic to stand up to his test of science.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Having established the formative contexts of Wilber's emergence through Perennial Philosophy and Transpersonal Psychology, we have seen how Wilber qualifies and extends the scope of the *Great Chain of Being* in the Perennial Philosophy into a Holarchy to Oneness. The foundational principles of the Perennial Philosophy and Transpersonal Psychology thus establish only probative foundations to the construction of Wilber's Integral Philosophy.

The problem of duality remains a constant refrain in Wilber's argument and the detail of his modular presentation of the Spectrum of Consciousness is primarily constructed to illustrate and illuminate the path to non-duality. The role of representationalism is acknowledged as a medium through which subjectivity is legitimised in Wilber's epistemology, but it will be argued in due course that the viability of such coincidence is asymptotic rather than authentically integrated.

Wilber's preference for *nesting* allegories over linear models is attractive and better suited to post-modern contexts. However, in the extent to which Wilber imbues these metaphors with

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<sup>107</sup> The clear descriptive correlation between Wilber and Griffiths is not accidental. The concept is Hindu in origin and, whilst no evidence was found in support of this suggestion, it is likely that Wilber ascertained this hypothesis from Griffiths during the course of their friendship.

supra-natural ontologies, he complicates the application of appropriate epistemologies which are not generally accepted in the scientific fraternity. Moreover, Wilber's aperspectival criterion permits the inclusion of all ontologies and their respective (and sometimes various) epistemologies. This seems to be a way of saying that *everything belongs*, but Wilber is careful to qualify this form of inclusivity. Rather than indiscriminate pluralism, Wilber's aperspectival approach grades and locates all noetic structures according to their respective degrees of wholeness, depth, and span on the Spectrum of Consciousness. This is indeed a way of saying that *everything belongs*, but not at the same time, nor in the same places, nor for the same reasons. Wilber's proposal of a *Kosmologically* inclusive or integrating process of holarchical sublation over the hierarchical structures of pluralistic cosmologies is therefore a valuable contribution to theories of holism.

The *Involuntary* movement of falling away from *one-ness* into *many-ness*, and the *Evolutionary* return from disintegration to the non-dual vision of Spirit, also serve as helpful metaphors. This form of discretionary inclusion adds credence to Wilber's theory, but it also provides him with a useful loophole. Any criticism levelled at Wilber's spectrum theory will always be met with rebuttal because Wilber rightly categorises reason at levels below the *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC. Since any form of criticism is necessarily reason-based, all criticism therefore appears as attempts at reductionism, and critics are thereby easily dismissed on the basis of truncation.

Wilber's Integral Philosophy has nevertheless made a significant contribution to contemporary synthesis of Western psychologies and spiritual traditions, but he is also therefore vulnerable to criticism from both camps (Rothberg 1996a:4). The defining character of Wilber's integralism is centred on the prudent interweaving and layering of any number of disciplines in an attempt to discern a composite theory of all theories without diluting or betraying their respective epistemologies or conflating their ontologies. Wilber's integral paradigm therefore affords credit and relevance to all forms of knowledge at their respective levels by distilling and co-ordinating their contributions in a way that metaphorically represents the whole spectrum of human knowledge. This is indeed an ambitious project and Wilber is the first to admit that Integral Philosophy will be more severely criticised before it earns its place as a credible discipline (1999e:179).<sup>108</sup> It is

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<sup>108</sup> Despite the prevailing prominence of science, Wilber believes that a gradual shift is taking place in the willingness of the sciences to embrace more subjective disciplines. Alexander (2001:7) similarly observes that,



already clear that at least three problems have already emerged. Firstly, whilst Wilber correctly admits that his model is not ultimate, the primary precept of his model does claim ultimacy – the *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC. This difficulty secondly reveals that Wilber’s philosophy must be classified as a form of Essentialism. One of the reasons for this judgement is based on the observation that Wilber’s proposal depends too much on *a priori* assent to un-provable axioms – *Absolute Subjectivity*, *Suchness*, Ground, and Spirit. Finally, Wilber’s frequent recourse to mystical type language makes academically precise criticism of his scientific claims difficult to address within scientific discourse. Consequently, methodological precision is compromised in his epistemology which delimits his ability to establish the veracity of his truth-claims. Wilber cedes authority to a stylised form of empirical mysticism which permits these category errors, but as we continue, these inconsistencies will become increasingly evident.

Despite this velitation, Wilber is motivated by hope:

Integral studies appear to be the only truly global studies now in existence, studies that span the entire spectrum of human growth and aspiration. The coming decade, I have no doubt, will witness the emergence of integral studies as a truly comprehensive field of human endeavour. And although I do not think that the world is entering anything resembling a “new age” or “transpersonal transformation,” I do believe that integral studies will always be that one beacon to men and women who see Spirit in the world and the world in Spirit (1999e:420-1).

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‘We will need to draw on all the resources we can lay our hands on if we are to maintain human justice, dignity and worth in the face of scientific disciplines, such as neuroscience and the new genetics, which increasingly lay bare our own biological constitutions. It is for this reason that a significant proportion of science funding is now routinely being made available to ethicists, philosophers and theologians - in order to tackle the ever more pressing moral and ethical questions raised by scientific advances. Without serious public understanding, discussion and debate there is a real danger that science will continue to appear threatening and dehumanising to many people.’

## CHAPTER THREE

### WILBER'S FOUR QUADRANT MODEL: STRUCTURE, METHODOLOGY, AND EPISTEMOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The previous survey of Wilber's interpretation of holonomy, discerned in variegated forms and contexts as consciousness ascends from disintegration to non-duality, now provides sufficient background to appraise his Integral Model. Wilber's inclusion of multidisciplinary approaches to physical, intellectual, socio-cultural, and spiritual development form the rudiments of his Model and he distinguishes them into four basic Quadrants - each of which unfold in coaxial Levels or Waves of increasing holistic capacity. These Waves contain Lines or Streams which facilitate the Translation and Transformation of Structural phenomena which, in turn, are navigated by a quasi-independent Self-System as a mechanism of identification. Each Quadrant also submits to the jurisdiction of appropriate measures of validation.

These quadrant-specific validity claims are the product of Wilber's underlying epistemological architecture. Wilber abstracts methodologies from reconstructive science into all four Quadrants of his Model. He claims to achieve this by identifying three noetic domains which are respectively addressed by *Three Eyes of Knowledge*. Each of these *Eyes* are authenticated by the application of appropriate epistemological standards. The subjectivity of inner personal experience requires unique epistemological qualifications which nonetheless submit to a *Three Step Exemplar* in the same way that reconstructive science justifies truth-claims in the domain of physicality. The methodology of these approaches to epistemology is pragmatic, and for Wilber its application to the subjectivity of inner personal consciousness, right up to NDC, legitimises a form of empirical mysticism. An important question must however be asked: can validity claims addressed to physicality be transported into highly subjective meta-physical absolutes without compromising the coherence of the epistemology? In other words, to what extent is a scientific epistemology delimited in its application to trans-rational ontologies and *vice versa*? Moreover, if there are such limitations, how can claims to ultimacy be veridical?

Wilber's theoretical strategy is designed to transcend both the amorphous constellations prevalent in pluralism, and the undifferentiated co-substantiations more typical of monism.<sup>109</sup> His Integral Philosophy therefore admits appropriate contexts within which all epistemic and experiential domains are claimed to be functionally viable and he thereby animates differentiation as graded levels of awakening to an essential *Kosmological* non-duality. Only in NDC is the *Kosmos* truly *seen* as the *Seer*, a mystical Oneness that is entirely the *Kosmos* and yet never reduced to any aspect of it. Can Wilber's underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions justify his truth-claims?

### 3.2 The Construction of the Four Quadrant Model

It has been shown that Wilber's progress as an Integral theorist was inspired by his observation that conscious apperception functions according to three primary domains of relational experience. His early model was based on Plato's categorisations of the Good (inter-relational morality), the True (propositional and objective truth), and the Beautiful (the intra-relational and aesthetic dimensions of personal experience) (Wilber 1995c:120). Wilber then equated these three provinces of interpretation with those identified by other eminent philosophers. Kant's landmark trilogy in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781 Concerning objective science), *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788 Dealing with morality), and *The Critique of Judgement* (1790 Referring to aesthetic judgement and art) was found to correspond in broad principle to Popper's distinction of the cultural, objective, and subjective worlds.<sup>110</sup> From a philosophical vantage point, Wilber reveres Habermas (1929 -) and Gebser (1905 - 1973) as the world's greatest recent philosophers, but he also criticises Gebser for limiting his integral-aperspectival level of consciousness to reason as the highest level

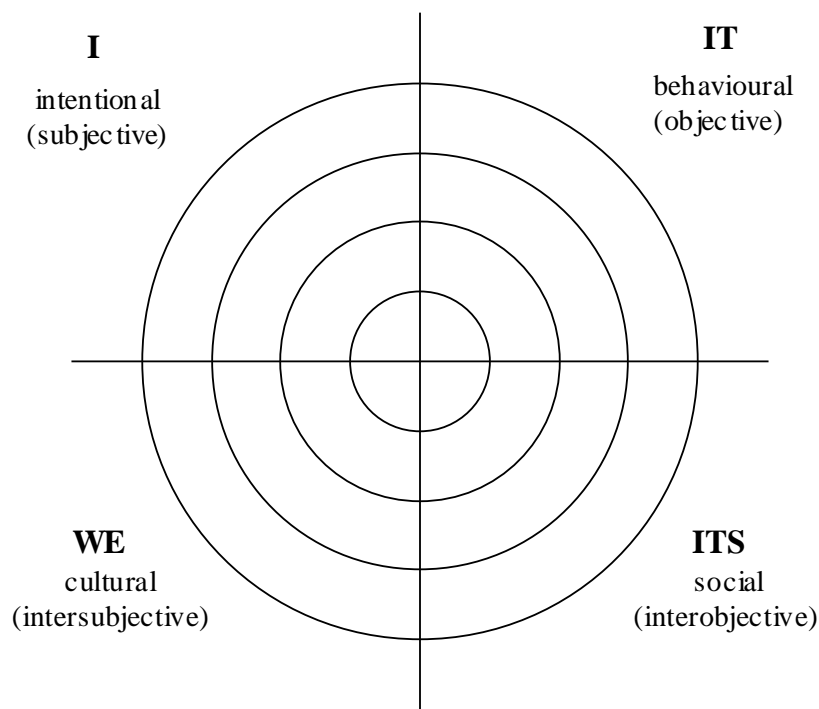
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<sup>109</sup> Wilber intentionally accommodates both hierarchical ontologies and heterarchies which certainly appear pluralistic by nature. Furthermore, the oneness and manyness strategies in *Involution* and *Evolution* make it clear that Wilber's model includes all experiential and noetic strategies (1997b:73). Such broad categories of inclusivity easily create pluralistic impressions and it is understandable that some readers would be puzzled by Wilber's denial of pluralism.

<sup>110</sup> Wilber's appeal to Plato and Kant in this context is curiously similar to theories postulated by the Swiss Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988). No evidence was found suggesting that Wilber ever read von Balthasar's work, but Nichols (2000) sheds light on the coincidence of Balthasar's trilogy with Wilber's inclusion of Plato and Kant. Nichols says, '... [von Balthazar] joined the Jesuits and saturated himself in the writings of the Church Fathers while studying theology near Lyons before being ordained priest in 1936. But first of all, why a trilogy? In effect, Balthasar's intent is to transpose all of Christian theology into the categories of the Platonic "transcendentals": the Beautiful, the Good, and the True (called "transcendental" because they belong to all existing things by the sheer fact of their existing at all, and thus "transcend" any other particular property that the individual existent might have). Trilogies composed under this rubric have an honoured tradition in Western letters, perhaps the most famous being Kant's three Critiques, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, and *The Critique of Judgement*. But where Kant first took up the issue of epistemology, then proceeded to questions of ethics, and only at the end treated questions of aesthetics, von Balthasar tellingly reverses direction.' Wilber prefers Kant's sequence, but similarly posits his rendition of the *Big Three* in keeping with von Balthasar's approach.

attainable (Wilber 1997c:77). Wilber nonetheless annexed Gebser's terminology and then superimposed his own 'subtle', 'causal', and 'non-dual' dimensions to create his spectrum model. Wilber's inclusion of Habermas' (1979) three validity claims, inter-subjective justness, objective truth, and subjective sincerity, is then correlated with his own notion of the so-called *Big Three*.<sup>111</sup> He then translated these three categories into his own simpler titles; the inter-relational and socio-cultural dynamics in the dimensions of 'we'; the objective and empirico-rational dimensions of physical 'its'; and the interior dimensions of personal consciousness within the 'I' (1995c:120; 1997a:20, 227; 1998a:74-75). Wilber later distinguishes the socio-cultural dynamics in the domain of 'we' that function in the collective of society, and the variables of inner personal integration of those outer dynamics. He thus split the dimension of 'we' into two parts: the behaviourist exteriors of socio-cultural patterns, and the interior subjective dimensions of those learned and shared world views, both of which give rise to, and enable social interaction. The result of the separation of inner and outer variables in the *we*, says Wilber, '... gives us a grid of exterior-individual (or behavioural), interior-individual (or intentional), exterior-collective (or social), and interior-collective (or cultural) - a grid of subjective, objective inter-subjective, and inter-objective realities' (1997b:71-92). These four basic categories may be illustrated as follows:

Diagram 2



(Kegan Nd)

<sup>111</sup> Wilber's interpretation of Habermas' validity claims are explained in Wilber (1997b).

The Upper Left Quadrant (ULQ) of subjective first person definition is experienced and expressed from the inner self where truthfulness conveys its validity claims through holarchical gradations of awakening to its climax in NDC. The ULQ, says Wilber, ‘... is your presence, your consciousness, your subjective awareness’ (1996f:120-121). The Lower Left Quadrant (LLQ) incorporates abilities to procure and integrate cultural and behavioural Structures recursively shared with the social groupings within which a person defines and communicates her social character. Here the focus is on inter-subjective meaning and the expression of appropriated social traits is measured by justness. The LLQ furthermore contains commonly shared background contexts and worldviews without which our individual subjective identities could not function and without which objective realities could not be interpreted. Importantly, Wilber maintains that postmodernists and constructivists have demonstrated the important function of cultural contexts in fashioning individual consciousness [in the ULQ].

The Upper Right Quadrant (URQ), most familiar in its empirical sensory access to scientific epistemologies, constitutes the domain of measurable objectivity in nature. Its validity claims are propositionally established and its manifestations subsist in the physical dimensions represented in the model. It is, says Wilber, ‘... the standard hierarchy presented by modern evolutionary science: atoms to molecules to cells to organisms, each of which transcends but includes its predecessor in an irreversible fashion’ (1997b:72). Wilber describes the variables of the URQ as neutral and value-free in their submission to the standard languages of the empirical, analytic, and systems sciences and they are thus definitively monological. Wilber elsewhere qualifies this assessment, but it cannot reasonably be claimed that quantum science and cosmology are exclusively monological and neither are they value free. Quantum theory frequently addresses dimensionality by inference and whilst the expression of value may flow from the left Quadrants, it does not follow that Physicalism ascribes no value to the processes or substance of its objects.<sup>112</sup> This objection will be developed further shortly.

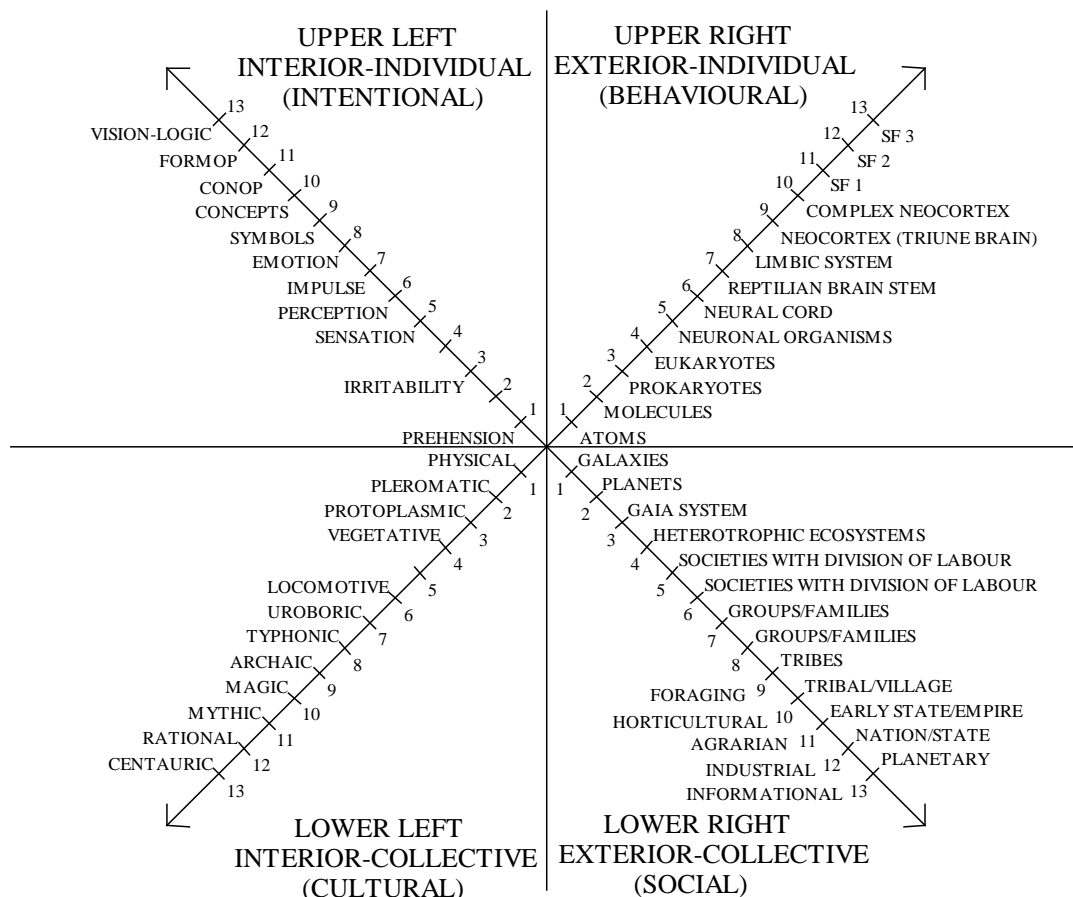
The Lower Right Quadrant (LRQ) is the domain of exterior collective systems which are manifest, for example, in cultural patterns, social norms, and politico-economic traditions. These objective social systems consist in the nurture (be they constructive or dysfunctional)

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<sup>112</sup> Wilber means, for example, that because an atom does not self reflect, it cannot ascribe value to itself – it is simply an atom. In this case it is agreed, but scientific investigation of the human brain will certainly find physiological structures that permit value in experience, and the physiological brain structures which give rise to or mediate value related experiences cannot sensibly be separated.

of individuals in groups and the validity of these systems are discerned through their relative functional fit. The diagram below represents one among many versions of Wilber's Model and indicates the Quadrants and Waves in each Quadrant:

Diagram 3



(Wilber 2005:5)

Some general principles pertaining to Wilber's Four Quadrant Model should be noted. Firstly, for Wilber the four Quadrants are not representative of conflicting truths, but dimensionally different views from the various Waves of their respective emergence in the Spectrum of Consciousness. There are according to Wilber, exterior and interior dimensions, and collective and individual dimensions. Thus, the upper half of the model refers to individual holons, and the lower half to their collective forms. The left Quadrants refer to interiorised consciousness, whereas the right Quadrants contain exteriorised physical appearances (1997b:75). Secondly, the unfolding Waves and Structures of consciousness in each Quadrant also exhibit Lines or Streams of development which trace the *Involuntary* and *Evolutionary* arcs of holarchical unfolding. Thirdly, all four Quadrants reveal phase-specific states such as brain states in the URQ, states of

material affairs in the LRQ, conscious states in the ULQ, and personal social value states in the LLQ. Fourthly, the Quadrants ‘tetra-evolve’ in the sense, explains Wilber, ‘... that an objective organism in the URQ, with its DNA, its neuronal pathways, its brain systems, and its behavioural patterns, mutually interacts with the objective environment, ecosystems, and social realities [in the LRQ] and individual consciousness [in the ULQ], with its intentionality, structures, and states, arises within, and mutually interacts with inter-subjective social mores and cultural symbols [in the LLQ].<sup>113</sup> For this reason every Quadrant has correlates in all the others.<sup>114</sup> In other words, every holon in every Quadrant appears to have four facets (intentional, behavioural, cultural, and social), and each of these facets, claims Wilber, has specific correlations in all other Quadrants. There is therefore an intimation of causality in Wilber’s model and human consciousness cannot then be reasonably claimed in the absence of any Quadrant (Wilber 1997b:80).<sup>115</sup> Consciousness, by definition for Wilber, therefore prevails in all four Quadrants without reduction or exclusion.<sup>116</sup> It is for this reason that Wilber claims, ‘... an ‘all-quadrant, all-level’ [AQAL] approach [as] the minimum degree of sophistication that we need in order to secure anything resembling a genuinely integral theory of consciousness’ (1997b:82).

The problem of causal mutuality is not however, this straightforward. With reference to the *Hard Problem*, Wilber’s model still does not show how consciousness arises in the brain. For Wilber, consciousness is neither caused by, nor reducible to the brain, but is rather an expression of the holistic intra-dynamic tensions of holonic emergences *in* and *as* all four Quadrants. Wilber’s modular inclusivity is not contested, but his particular notion of

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<sup>113</sup> Happold (1970:27), in a different context, makes the same observation in support of Wilber’s thesis, ‘To arrive at the fullest knowledge and the deepest understanding it is necessary to take into account not our own personal experience only, not merely the experience of our own Western culture, but the total experience of the human race, past and present, not only the experience of the scientist, but also of the poet and the mystic, not only the experience of the world outside, but also of the world within us, the inner as well as the outer experiences of the race.’

<sup>114</sup> Wilber here explains that, ‘We can now, for example, begin to correlate states of meditative awareness with types of brain-wave patterns (without attempting to reduce one to the other). We can monitor physiological shifts that occur with spiritual experience. We can follow the levels of neurotransmitters during psychotherapeutic interventions ... We can trace the social modes of production and see the corresponding changes in cultural worldviews. We can follow the historical unfolding of cultural worldviews and plot the status of men and women in each period. We can trace the modes of self that correlate with different modes of techno-economic infrastructure. And so on around the quadrants’ (1995c:128).

<sup>115</sup> Wilber makes it clear that, ‘... each quadrant causes, and is caused by, the others, in a circular and non-reducible fashion, which is precisely why all four types of truth (and all four validity claims) are necessary to assess the various dimensions of any holon’ (1997b:79).

<sup>116</sup> Wilber makes his claim to the irreducibility of the Quadrants assertively, ‘And none can be reduced to the others without aggressive and violent rupture, distortion, dismissal’ (1995c:114). Wilber similarly refers to Gregory Bateson, creator of the double-bind theory of schizophrenia, who claims that, ‘... man’s only real self is the total cybernetic network of man plus society plus environment, and further suggests that we experience it as such’ (1993b:13). Kriel (Craffert 2001:18) also makes this claim, ‘The human person is not a body, and a mind which is an epiphenomenon of brain processes. The human person is an immensely complex, self-conscious, biological system in which all the systems function together. Persons cannot be understood in isolation from their bodies, or from the linguistic and social system in which person-hood is established.’

causality should be challenged since it assigns a trans-elemental ontology to consciousness as a pre-existent, transcendent, and yet wholly immanent essence. The *Hard Problem* cannot in this sense be solved by Wilber's Four Quadrant Model because his theory of consciousness is extrapolated from paradoxical tenets: absolute claims in an axiomatic model; locality in spaceless-ness; progression and evolution in timelessness; and ineffability in representation. Moreover, the very process of theorising is implicitly dualistic because theory is always *about* something. Wilber's theoretical process is therefore necessarily relational and it cannot therefore resolve the *Hard Problem* on the pretext of non-dual claims that do not have correlates in all four Quadrants. It is, in other words, not rational to claim the resolution of dualism by positionally integrating all duality from an absolutist premise. Davies (1992:74) makes a similar observation:

The raw data gathered by our senses are not directly intelligible as they stand. To link them, to weave them into a framework of understanding, requires an intermediary step, a step we call theory. The fact that such theory is subtle and mathematical can be suggestively expressed by saying that the laws of nature are in code. The job of the scientist is to 'crack' the cosmic code, and thereby reveal the secrets of the universe.

Admittedly Wilber ascribes only metaphorical status to his Four Quadrant Model, and yet, as has already been shown, he attributes absolute qualities to its realisation in NDC.<sup>117</sup> Within the epistemologies of the mystical traditions Wilber's notion would be viable and he admits as much in his claimed solution in *Satori*, but its postulation that the model is scientific is inconsistent in several ways.

Jacobs (2001:4), also questions the concept of causality in Wilber's model. For him, Wilber's approach:

... appears more additive than integrative. He does not explain the precise relationship between the quadrants or the process by which they mutually interact and develop in parallel with one another. For example, in discussing the rise of modernity he does not specifically correlate it with an evolutionary stage in individual consciousness or biology. He indicates correlations at some points, but not causal relationships.

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<sup>117</sup> Wilber clearly admits that his model is, '... not intended to be cast in stone' (1997b:73).



In defence of Wilber, Jacobs seems unfamiliar with Wilber's research on the differentiations, dissociations, and integrations of modernity as it appears in the Quadrants. Helminiak (1998:285) raises more credible criticisms from Grof (1996), Kelly (1996b), Rothberg (1996a), and Washburn (1996b), all of whom in varying ways, says Helminiak (1998:286), question, '... whether or not real-life issues match the sequencing that [Wilber's] schema proposes ... and have begun to chip away at the credibility of his supposed synthesis.' Helminiak similarly believes that Wilber's suggestion that matching correlations occur in all four Quadrants is misguided and therefore maintains that Wilber's Four Quadrant Model rests on, '... the mistaken assumption that levels of reality are parallels and expressions of levels of consciousness.'

Visser defends Wilber on this point by referring Helminiak to the preface of Wilber's *One Taste: The Journals of Ken Wilber* (1999a:viii) wherein he states that, '... body, mind, and soul are not mutually exclusive ... [but rather] expressions of the radiant Spirit that alone inhabits the universe, sublime gestures of that Great Perfection that alone outshines the world. There is only One Taste in the entire *Kosmos*, and that taste is Divine, whether it appears in the flesh, in the mind, in the soul.' Wilber's mystical lyricism is persuasive, but it does not directly address Helminiak's concern. Helminiak's criticism implies that, according to Wilber, Reality is an expression of Consciousness or Mind. As such, Helminiak is correct, Wilber does make this claim quite clearly in the extract from *One Taste*, but if so, it evokes a Kantian notion that that which appears in consciousness is real in the sense that it is a reflection of the Real. Wilber would indeed claim that Mind is the Reality or Suchness of the All, but he would not permit this Consciousness to be delimited by any aspect of his Four Quadrant Model. Nonetheless, the graded Levels of awakening to Reality in consciousness appear only as partial realities and it would not therefore be principally incorrect for Wilber to suggest that partial realities are expressions of partial consciousness (partial awakening). This is only plausible however, if we agree with Wilber that there is, firstly, an ultimate state of consciousness and, secondly, that it can be attained. This view is again a consequence of Wilber's increasingly evident Essentialist supposition.

It will be indicated in the chapters that follow that a number of discrepancies appear when the specifics of Wilber's model are examined, but as a theory of orienting generalisations, which is admittedly the only status Wilber claims, his model stands out as a well integrated and fully synthesised framework. Walsh, one of Wilber's more serious critics, similarly acclaim

Wilber's Integral Philosophy, 'Though it will doubtless be amended and refined, Wilber's vision seems to be a major contribution to this process' (1995:Np).

### 3.2.1 Holarchical Typology: Basic, Transitional, Surface, and Deep Structures

Having obtained an impression of Wilber's reconstruction of the *Great Chain of Being*, it is also necessary to consider the developmental instruments that his *Great Nest* theory employs as a means of explaining the holarchical process. In order to maintain focus that will ultimately serve the second purpose of this thesis, that being to examine Wilber's understanding of NDC in alternative Physicalist terms, concentration will focus on the spectrum of individual inner consciousness in the ULQ of Wilber's Integral Model (Wilber 1995c:127).<sup>118</sup>

In addition to the evolutionary principles delineated in Wilber's theory, he also applies categorisations of Structure to Levels or Waves of emergence and then applies several types of developmental Lines or Streams that run through these Structures which in turn give rise to various gradations of conscious States. Each Level of advance in the holarchical unfolding of consciousness is called a fulcrum and undergoes a three-step process [not to be confused with the *Three Step Exemplar*] of fusion, differentiation/transcendence, and inclusion/integration to complete its emergence and prepare the ground for the next and more embracing holon (Wilber 1999e:13-14).<sup>119</sup> The navigating regulator between Structures, Lines, and States is the Self System. Wilber briefly defines the Self System as the locus of identification, volition, defence, organisation, and metabolism which he simply views as the mechanism of 'digestion' at each Level of Structural growth and development (1999e:82). The ontological intricacy of such a freely mobile agency in consciousness is highly speculative and warrants closer scrutiny. Whilst the Self System may be metaphorically viable and epistemologically necessary for Wilber's developmental schemes to cohere, it will ultimately be shown that no such independently portable variable can exist in consciousness from a scientific point of view. Its very suggestion seems reminiscent of Descartes' *Ghost in the Machine* – the paragon of dualism and a puzzling antithesis of Wilber's intention.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> In reminder of the preliminary survey of Wilber's emergence through the Perennial Philosophy, it was noted that he attributes the development of the ULQ of his Integral Model to *Great Chain* philosophies.

<sup>119</sup> This three-step process, whilst not directly acknowledged as such by Wilber, is reminiscent of the three phases of dialectical development often attributed to Hegel. In Hegel's view the progression moves from thesis, through antithesis, to synthesis, where after the process may begin again (Macrone 2002:51).

<sup>120</sup> Wilber admits that the Self System is *ultimately* illusory, but insists that it, '... nonetheless serves an absolutely necessary *intermediate* function. Namely, it is the vehicle of development, growth, and transcendence - or, to return to our simplistic metaphor, the self is the climber of the rungs in the ladder of structural organisation, a

The untangling and interpretation of these fulcra, Stages, Levels, or Waves, with their implicit Structures, all situated on Lines or Streams, and each with their respective States, is potentially very confusing – particularly since Wilber appears to vary the names of these mechanisms and implicates them as intra-dynamic variables which often makes discrimination difficult. It is therefore important to read Wilber sequentially in order to appreciate the evolution of his thinking.<sup>121</sup> Wilber's more developed holarchical schemes may encompass five, nine, twelve, or seventeen Levels, stages, Waves, Structures, or holons of emergence (Wilber 1999e:15).<sup>122</sup> Any attempt to posit coherent and clearly demarcated definitions for each of these variables is fraught with difficulties and vulnerable to error.

Some preliminary observations may serve as a useful foundation upon which to build general definitions of these variables. Firstly, Wilber's developmental models are based almost entirely on existing and broadly accepted research through which it is apparent that Levels of consciousness generally emerge in sequential and distinguishable, if overlapping, degrees.<sup>123</sup> These Levels are clearly demarcated in *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977; cf 1993c), but amended by Wilber in *The Atman Project* (1980; cf 1996d) and *Up From Eden* (1981; cf 1999c). These amendments mark the advent of Wilber's Phase 2 and are distinguished by the introduction of the developmental Lines or Streams that run through the Stages or Levels of the original spectrum model (Wilber 1997a:212; 1999e:82). The Levels of emergence are also sub-categorised into structural types: Basic, Transitional, Surface, and Deep, and they are presented as both stable and mutable patterns of events (Wilber 1999e:445). A person at any Stage or Level of emergence can, for example, manifest integration at a variety of positions on the developmental Lines and also have peak experiences that transcend their developmental capacity at any given point.<sup>124</sup> The interpretation of an altered state or peak

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climb destined to release the self from itself, "lest the last judgement come and find me un-annihilate," said Blake' (1996e:274).

<sup>121</sup> It has previously been noted that criticism levelled at Wilber often skews or misapprehends the strata in his spectrum models. Many of Wilber's responses to these criticisms are based on his observation that critics have not read adequate portions of his work.

<sup>122</sup> From the writing of *The Atman Project* (1980; cf 1996d) onwards, Wilber usually simplified these seventeen Stages to nine, although he says, '... the seventeen are still necessary for the overall and comprehensive model, and even those can be further sub-divided' (1997a:208).

<sup>123</sup> In all Wilber's charts and models, he identifies correlations between the strata of various developmental theories and thus constructs his own strata which he believes accurately match the original source materials to within one Stage above or below the source Structures (1999e:442).

<sup>124</sup> As a point of interest, Wilber notes that, 'Higher Structures can be hijacked by lower impulses. Tribalism, when left to its own devices, is relatively benign, simply because its means and its technologies are relatively harmless. You can only inflict so much damage on the biosphere, and on other humans, with a bow and arrow (and this lack of means does not mean presence of wisdom). The problem is that the advanced technologies of rationalisation, when hijacked by tribalism and its ethnocentric drives, can be devastating' (1997a:75). This is a

experience will therefore depend on both the developmental Level and the point at which a person is integrated on a particular developmental Line.

There are four structural types in Wilber's scheme: Basic Structures conceptually match the Levels of emergence in the *Great Nest of Being* and are set out in Wilber's spectrum model. They emerge as new Levels of consciousness and are so called because they tend to remain in existence as relatively autonomous sub-units in the course of subsequent development. Basic Structures are therefore foundational principles that tend to be subsumed or enfolded, hence *sublated*, as holons unfold in succeeding Stages of development, but they also serve a mediating function. Basic Structures can therefore not be skipped if true holonic emergence is to take place (Wilber 1997a:140; 1981:35). Since Phase 3 and the writing of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995; cf 2000a), Wilber softened the distinctions he previously ascribed to Basic Structures and preferred to call them Waves because of their interpenetrating and overlapping capabilities (2000a:214-215). They therefore indicate intra-level aptitudes and function as organising principles of personal growth that form the backbone of all other variables in the Spectrum of Consciousness and these include Transitional Structures, States, and Lines (1996e:267; 1999e:295, 453).<sup>125</sup>

Wilber frequently refers to Basic Structures, Stages, Levels, or Waves coterminously, but as noted in other categorisations, he also distinguishes between them when more detailed explanation requires it. In *Integral Psychology* (1999e:445) Wilber clearly indicates that Basic Structures are holistic patterns found 'in' Levels of development, thus implying that Levels and Structures are unequal. In other extracts he indicates that both Basic and

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moot point, the savagery of the crusades, using mostly hand weapons, for example, cannot be said to have been harmless or benign.

<sup>125</sup> Piaget's sensorimotor proficiencies in early development, for example, are refined and developed in subsequent Levels of emergence, but remain in existence as essential functional capacities (Walsh and Vaughan 1994:8). The same would go for linguistic competence, cognitive capacities, and spatial co-ordination. Elsewhere Wilber itemises some of these Basic Structures and he uses Aurobindo's hierarchy as referential levels for other correlates:

- Matter – insentient (non-biologically reproducing) physical substratum
- Sensation – protoplasmic "irritability" or biological "reactivity"
- Perception – zoological registration of sensations
- Emotion – emotional-sexual (libidinal) impulse and instinct
- Image – pictorial representation
- Symbol – non-pictorial denotation
- Concept – non-pictorial connotation
- Rule – concrete-operation
- Meta-rule – formal-operation
- Vision – "higher mind" (Aurobindo)
- Psychic – "illuminated mind"
- Subtle – "intuitive mind"
- Causal – "overmind" (Wilber 1999e:442).

Transitional Structures display stage like attributes and have phase-specific phenomena associated with them thus implying a close resemblance to Levels (1981:37; 1996e:272). Having just established that Structures exist *in* Levels, we now read in contradiction that, ‘... Basic Structures themselves are like a ladder, each rung of which *is* a Level in the *Great Chain of Being*’ (Wilber 1999e:90). These conflations are confusing and some of the distinctions are unclear, but the assumption is that Structures pertain mainly to dimensional aspects within a given Level. In other words, a component of development such as cognition is a Basic Structure within a Level that refers primarily to that component whilst simultaneously co-evolving and interacting recursively with other variables operating at other Levels.

Wilber admits that he uses these terms interchangeably, but also distinguishes them on the basis of their function or orientation rather than their form. In the interests of coherence, all four terms (Stages, Structures, Levels, and Waves) will be used to describe these developmental phases. Structures indicate that each Stage has a holarchical pattern that blends all of its elements into holistic arrangements. Levels mean that these patterns tend to unfold in a relational sequence, with each successive Level transcending but including its predecessor. Waves indicate that these levels are fluid and flowing dynamics; that junior dimensions are not superimposed by senior dimensions, but embrace and enfold them. These developmental Waves are therefore concentric spheres of increasing embrace, inclusion, and holistic capacity.

Finally, all Basic Structures are devoid of self, that is, there are no loci in Waves, Levels, or Structures where the sense of self is felt to be at any given time (Wilber 1996e:273). The sense of self is localised in the Self System and is informed and motivated by Structures, and has the capacity to react dynamically and dialectically to Structures, but is not itself a Structure. In summary, Basic Structures consist of integrating and mediating propensities that establish contexts wherein the self utilises the skills in those Structures to navigate transcendence to higher Levels.

Unlike Basic Structures, Transitional Structures tend to be more or less entirely replaced by subsequent phases of development and are thus either negated or dissolved in higher sequences (Wilber 1999e:89). Like Basic Structures, Transitional Structures also unfold in Stages, but are phase-specific and phase-temporary insofar as they only serve transformative

purposes for a period. They may also inhibit rather than facilitate the emergence of higher holons (Wilber 1981:37; 1997a:141). Transitional Structures are thus preliminary and manifestly deconstructed in order to facilitate the emergence of higher holons (Wilber 1981:35).<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, whilst Basic Structures are enduring, they nevertheless emerge holonically and thus function intra-dependently with Transitional Structures and must therefore also display temporary or phase-specific phenomena (Wilber 1996e:272). Clearly then, Basic and Transitional Structures are not functionally independent.<sup>127</sup> Wilber points out that Kohlberg's stages of moral development fall into this category since higher moral Structures differ substantively from their predecessors, but this discrimination may be too sharp since morality, particularly at higher Levels, appears to emerge as a dialectical stream of socio-cultural and personal adaptations that may manifest situational variance. In my view the evolution of morality may indeed be phenomenally different at different Levels, but it would be unlikely that a highly developed moral sense would appear in higher Levels of consciousness unless some prior moral development had not remained substantially in place. There is therefore a transformative current of moral awareness that informs the entire *Spectrum of Consciousness* and it cannot therefore be interpreted in exclusively transitory terms.

Wilber offers this concise synthesis demarcating further grades of differentiation in the nature and function of Structures:

Modifying the terms of linguistics, we can say that each Level of consciousness consists of a Deep Structure and a Surface Structure. The Deep Structure consists of all the basic limiting principles embedded as that Level. The Deep Structure is the defining form of a Level, which embodies all of the potentials and limitations of that Level. Surface Structure is simply a particular manifestation of the Deep Structure. The Surface Structure is constrained by the form of the Deep Structure, but within that form it is free to select various contents (1996d:46-47).

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<sup>126</sup> Wilber adds credence to his postulation of phase-specific Transitional Structures by citing some of the developmental theorists from whom he sources his theory. 'Some of the more important *Transitional Structures* include worldviews (e.g., archaic, magic, mythic, mental, existential, psychic, and so on; cf. Gebser); *self-needs* (e.g. safety, belongingness, self-esteem, self-actualisation, self-transcendence; cf. Maslow); *self-identity* (e.g. uroboros, typhon, persona, ego, centaur, soul; cf. Loevinger); and *moral Stages* (e.g. pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional, post-post-conventional; cf. Nucci, Kohlberg, Gilligan). Of course, once a particular Transitional Structure is present, it is as important and as real as any enduring Structure; it's just that Transitional Structures are destined mostly to pass, enduring Structures mostly to remain' (1997a:141).

<sup>127</sup> Wilber attends at some length in *The Atman Project* (1996d), and *Eye to Eye* (1996e), to the evolution of these (and other) Basic and Transitional Structures in present-day psychological development. In *Up from Eden* (1986) and *A Sociable God* (1983b) he traced similar (deep structural) developments in anthropological and social formations (Wilber 1999e:300-1).

Some Basic Structures therefore have Deep Structures implicit in their emergence as trans-individual inclinations or probabilities of conscious evolution. They appear, according to Washburn's deciphering of Wilber's intent, as morphogenic impulses or habits of conscious emergence that are usually culturally invariant (Washburn 1990:96; Wilber 1999e:17). These capacities thus manifest differently in different cultures, but refer to universal human inclinations to communicate, to socialise, to organise, and so on.<sup>128</sup> Reference to Deep Structures is vague in Wilber's writing, but suggests that beneath an individual's capacity to communicate, for example, is a vast evolutionary history of increasing organisation and complexity that motivates the emergence of more developed communication skills in social groupings. There is therefore an archetypal quality to Deep Structures that, to uncertain degrees, predefines the ontological context of Basic Structures. In this sense Wilber says that, '... Deep Structures are remembered, in the precise Platonic sense of *anamnesis*, whereas all Surface Structures are learned ...' (1996d:49). Illustratively Wilber claims that, '... one does not learn to become a Buddha, one simply discovers or remembers that one is already Buddha' (1979b:Np). Wilber variously describes this as a phylogenetic principle which, beyond mere basic instincts, imbues qualities of supra-natural awareness which, in turn, motivates intrinsic capacities for deeper awareness.<sup>129</sup> Philology, to illustrate the point crudely, suggests that we have evolved from grunts and groans, to highly sophisticated linguistic systems. The evolutionary impulse beneath these capacities is a Deep Structure and its etymological form in a given culture is a Basic Structure and its transitory type in popular usage is a Surface Structure.

Wilber therefore maintains that not all Structures have commensurate Deep Structures and not all Structures are universal. So whereas Deep Structures are vertical and universal, seemingly inherited, imbedded, and morphogenically transmitted, Surface Structures are culture specific and horizontal, or temporary and mutable. Fisher (1997:56) rightly points out that Wilber's critics should be careful to distinguish between his more theoretical Deep Structures, like soul and Spirit, and Surface Structures which often manifest in the ego. The language and way of experiencing these two realms is not the same nor do their methods yield comparable results from Wave to Wave within the hierarchy of consciousness. Wilber

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<sup>128</sup> In Wilber's view both Basic and Deep Structures, '... are largely cross-cultural invariants or "quasi-universals," by which I mean relatively enduring and relatively unchanging structures or patterns, essentially similar wherever they appear' (1999e:297).

<sup>129</sup> Reference to archetypal similarities allude to the work of Freud and Jung, but it is important to remember that Freud differed profoundly from Jung on the nature of this archetypal heritage. Whilst they agreed on the existence of this phylogenetic heritage, they did not interpret and define it in the same way (Wilber 1979b:13).

uses phenomenological developmental psychology and structuralism to identify Deep Structures, but uses systems theory, functionalism, and historical hermeneutics to elucidate Surface Structures (Wilber 1982b:88).<sup>130</sup> The following diagram illustrates some of these categorisations (over the page):

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<sup>130</sup> Fisher rightly identifies potential problems with Wilber's view, although an adequate reading of Wilber should allay Fisher's concern. Fisher notes that, 'Wilber and the mystics claim that there are two distinct types of human suffering. Unfortunately, Wilber does not make this as clear as he could. Suffering exists at the surface Structure and Deep Structures of Reality. Surface Structure suffering (e.g. famine, social and environmental injustice) occurs because of the behaviours/actions and the thinking (consciousness) going on in the world at any point in time. Wilber often argues (along with the authentic mystics) that there is a very human experience in the higher transpersonal states, whereby the nature and experience of suffering disappear as usually understood from a conventional-egoic (or existential) point of view' (Fisher 1997:58). Wilber is aware of these discriminations and is careful, particularly in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995) not to submit to sweeping generalisations.



Diagram 4

	<b>INTERIOR</b>	<b>EXTERIOR</b>
I N D I V I D U A L	<p>Content: Subjective Experience</p> <p>First-Person Descriptions of Consciousness</p> <p>How is consciousness experienced?</p> <p>Some Disciplines: Psychology, Art, Poetry, Music</p> <p>Some Methods: James' Introspection Husserl's Phenomenology Gebser's structures of consciousness Contemplative inquiry Meditation practices Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga Psychotherapy Gendien's Focusing Dream journaling Creative Expression Self-Reflection</p>	<p>Content: Objective Behaviour</p> <p>Third-Person (singular) Descriptions of Consciousness</p> <p>How is consciousness anchored in physicality?</p> <p>Some Disciplines: Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Cognitive Science, Psychiatry, Bodywork</p> <p>Some Methods: Laboratory experiments and observation Chemical analysis Medical imaging (PET, MRI and MEG) Brain wave analysis (EEG records) Depiction of perceptual processes Analysis of neurotransmitters Prescription of drug administration Massage, Rolfing, Yoga Chiropractic adjustments Acupuncture and acupressure</p>
C O L L E C T I V E	<p>Content: Intersubjective Culture</p> <p>Second-Person Descriptions of Consciousness</p> <p>How is consciousness shared between individuals?</p> <p>Some Disciplines: Ethics, Philosophy, Anthropology, Literature, Religious Studies</p> <p>Some Methods: Spiral Dynamics value memes analysis Empathic resonance Cultivating spiritual compassion Buber's I-Thou exposition Socratic Dialogue Heidegger's hermeneutics Participant-observer techniques Foucault's Neo-structuralism</p>	<p>Content: Interobjective Systems</p> <p>Third-Person (plural) Descriptions of Consciousness</p> <p>How is consciousness distributed across systems?</p> <p>Some Disciplines: Ecology, Economics, Sociology, Artificial Intelligence, Systems Theory</p> <p>Some Methods: Computer simulations Network mapping Statistical analysis Mathematical models Historical analysis Marxist analysis Turning test</p>

In summary, as far as it is possible to identify clear distinctions when boundaries are necessarily blended, Wilber proposes mechanisms which offer metaphorical explanations for modulations in the process of holarchical emergence. These Structures perform varying degrees of facilitation and, in the case of some Transitional Structures, disintegration as holons of greater embrace unfold. Washburn maintains that Wilber's theory is an example of the emergence-of-immanence view. Thus for Washburn (1990:96), '... Wilber's theory of development is one that sees development as the disclosure to consciousness of higher structures that exist prior to their manifestation.' These are the Deep Structures of the psychic apparatus and are embedded as timeless variables in the holonic process.

### **3.2.2 The Means of Development: Lines, Streams, and States of Consciousness**

Wilber's gradation of the elemental Stages, Levels, or Waves in the holonic emergence of consciousness was refined during Phase 2 to include the intra-dynamic categories of Basic, Transitional, Surface, and Deep Structures. Now in Phase 3 further refinement is shown in the differentiation of various developmental Lines which unfold quasi-independently through the general Waves of consciousness (Wilber 1997a:212-213).<sup>131</sup> Wilber refers to the Waves of Phase 2 as the 'skeletal frame' through which the Phase 3 developmental Lines supply dialectical and inter-phases mobility.<sup>132</sup> These Waves, with their Structures and Lines are dynamically integrated by the Self System, but we are reminded that the Self System is permitted here only as an explanatory metaphor for Wilber's overall model (Wilber 1997a:215).

The concept of developmental Lines was originally proposed by Anna Freud and whilst Wilber criticises her narrow view, he nonetheless acknowledges her as a source of his theory

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<sup>131</sup> Here it is evident that Wilber equates or, in a manner of speaking, co-substantiates Levels and Structures whereas it was noted previously that he distinguishes them on the basis of their ontology. The variable conflation, then discrimination of concepts appears to be functionally adaptive according to Wilber's specific intention at the time of writing.

<sup>132</sup> Wilber lists examples of these developmental Lines which include, '... affective, moral, interpersonal, spatiotemporal, death-seizure, object-relations, cognition, self-identity, self-needs, worldview, psychosexual, conative, aesthetic, intimacy, creativity, altruism, various specific talents (musical, sports, dance, artistic) ... affects, ideas of the good, role-taking, socio-emotional capacity ... and several Lines that can be called 'spiritual' (care, openness, concern, religious faith, meditative stages), joy, communicative competence, modes of space and time, logico-mathematical competence, kinesthetic skills, gender identity, and empathy.' (1997a:215; 1999e:460). Individual assessment of these many Lines is unnecessarily detailed and an example in the text provides adequate illustration of the principle.

(1997a:216-217).<sup>133</sup> Like Structures, developmental Lines follow the holonic emergence of Waves in the *Great Nest of Being* and tend to unfold sequentially and holarchically as relatively independent patterns of increasing integration, but not in the sense that there is a, ‘... single, monolithic Line that governs all of these developments’ (1999e:460-462; 2000:214-215). These patterns are necessary, but not sufficiently complex for full emergence to take place. There is therefore an element of causation implicit in the developmental Lines, but not to the extent that they are wholly responsible for the embodiment of new Waves or Structures in consciousness. Wilber provides this example, ‘... empirical research demonstrates that physiological development is necessary but not sufficient for cognitive development, which is necessary but not sufficient for interpersonal development, which is necessary but not sufficient for moral development, which is necessary but not sufficient for ideas of the good’ (2000b).<sup>134</sup>

It must however, be asked why physiological development is not sufficient for the emergence of cognitive development? Wilber’s implication is twofold: firstly and rightly, cognition develops as an associative response to environmental variables of nurture, but he also infers that consciousness is not merely the product of physiological evolution – that it is somehow a given principle *in* or *as* the universal Mind or *Kosmic* Suchness. The suggestion is that brain and consciousness are not equal; that brain is local and has consciousness in it, but that Consciousness is a trans-elemental and omnipresent Quality.<sup>135</sup> In this case the Essentialist underpinning of Wilber’s developmental scheme is clearly evident. It is important to bear this supposition in mind as Wilber’s developmental stratifications are considered since they ultimately aim to transcend all bifurcations in Waves, Structures, and Lines to liberation in NDC. There is, in other words, an implicit quality of Spirit in Wilber’s Integral Philosophy which pervades and inter-fuses the entire holonic process.

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<sup>133</sup> Anna Freud is the sixth of Sigmund Freud’s children and the only member of the family to follow in her father’s footsteps. She, together with her contemporary, Melanie Klein, made significant advances on Freud’s views on child development, but Anna’s research is based on direct observation of children rather than extrapolation from adult experience. It is on the basis of this research that she developed the idea of Lines of development, some of which are demonstrated in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1937) based on her father’s earlier work *The Ego and the Id* (1923) (Gregory 1987:268).

<sup>134</sup> The second edition of *The Eye of Spirit* (1998) and *Integral Psychology* (1999d) provide detailed discussion of these themes.

<sup>135</sup> It has been shown that Wilber’s Four Quadrant Model distributes consciousness as an essential and variable quality of depth in all Waves, lines, and states in all four Quadrants. In this way Wilber’s meaning is viewed with reference to the non-local qualities of consciousness that extend beyond the individuated brain, but in the broader sense of Wilber’s overall understanding, he appears to apprehend consciousness more as an essence of no substance, and yet *in* and *as* all substance.

The difference between Lines and Streams is not immediately clear and it is easy to misconstrue the hierarchical architecture of Wilber's model. Wilber defends his position from Wade's criticism where he admits his surprise to see, '... Wade follow a Wilber 2 model instead of a Wilber 3. Among other things (and despite her protests to the contrary), the Wade/Wilber-II model does tend toward a uni-linear development, which is exactly why I abandoned it (or rather, refined it into Wilber 3)' (Wilber 1997a:213). Wilber identifies at least two dozen different developmental Lines in his Four Quadrant Model and these are understood to function as necessary and dynamically adaptive cohesions that informationally link, as it were, the Waves within which Structures recursively develop and various States arise.<sup>136</sup>

It is now necessary to consider the place of conscious States in Wilber's holonic theory. Ultimately the ULQ of Wilber's model is concerned with transpersonal States of consciousness or peak experiences, but he also discriminates between natural and altered States. Natural States refer to ordinary conditions of consciousness such as waking or gross states, dreaming or subtle states, and causal or deep states. Altered States pertain to non-ordinary and induced conditions such as trans-rational or drug induced States. Wilber clearly indicates that States of consciousness contain Structures, but are not themselves Structures.<sup>137</sup> In apparent contradiction to this assertion, he also claims that, '... within the major Structures of consciousness, there are various phenomenal States ...' (Wilber 2000b). This is confusing, are States in Structures, or Structures in States, or is this a case of *both and* rather than *either or*? Wilber's definitions and conflations can become frustratingly convoluted. Wilber illustrates that the state of REM (Rapid Eye Movement) dreaming, for example, can manifest the Basic Structure of concrete operational thinking in dream images, and dream States can also contain purely phenomenal, or emotive States like joy and sadness. Wilber does not expand much further on these States, but focuses rather on the importance of ascent to higher levels or Structures of consciousness through disciplined meditative practice. He proposes that such practice may give rise to altered States of consciousness and these should then become permanent traits (Wilber 1999e:447; 2000a:214-215). In the ULQ temporary States are thus converted into permanent Structures through sustained spiritual practice.

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<sup>136</sup> In Wilber (1997a:215) we read that a dozen Lines have been identified, whereas in (1999e:460) Wilber refers to, '... at least two dozen ...'

<sup>137</sup> Now, says Wilber, '... States of consciousness (with their correlative bodies or realms) contain various Structures of consciousness. States contain Structures ...' [my italics] (Wilber 2000b).

These conversions may be necessary and useful for Structures that pertain to the deeper awakening ultimately realised in NDC, but in the lower Transpersonal realms, altered states may, according to Wilber, be associated with *psi* phenomena. Most practising mystics would suggest recognition of the transitory and potentially distracting nature of these alleged phenomena and urge practitioners of mystical disciplines to release any attraction or attachment to them. In other words, contra Wilber's view, not all States should, or need to be usefully transformed into Structures. Conversely, Wilber may view *psi* phenomena as Transitional Structures in which case they are naturally transcended, but the distinction in this case is not always clear.<sup>138</sup>

Charles Tart's systems approach is expounded in his book *States of Consciousness* (1975) and is not entirely dissimilar from Wilber's. According to Tart, consciousness consists of structures or systems of the mind that interact with the data content of mind in order to continually transform its capabilities. He describes a discrete state of consciousness as a dynamic pattern or configuration of psychological structures, and altered states as patterns that differ experientially from the ordinary waking or gross states. Tart also discriminates between states and structures, but he does not distinguish the nature of altered states as precisely as Wilber does. By way of illustration, it is suggested that Wilber's interpretation of phenomenal States of exultant joy or profound sorrow may not be easy to distinguish from altered States. This depends of course on the criteria established for distinguishing altered from normal States, but there are those who would argue, for example, that States of consciousness associated with highly aroused sexual intimacy are exaggerated normal States, whereas others may describe them as altered States.

The subtle boundaries between States and Structures should be recognised, but they are clearly not as discrete as Wilber's model may imply them to be and it is surely for this reason that Wilber latterly preferred the softer boundaries of Waves to Structures, and Streams to Lines (Wilber 1999e:439, 461). Tart's suggestion of perforated boundaries between Structures and States is more tenable and Wilber would not, in his later writings, disagree.

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<sup>138</sup> It is important to bear in mind, cautions Wilber, that, '... because these three great realms and States (waking/gross, dream/subtle, and formless/causal) are constantly available to human beings, and because as States they can be practised to some degree independently of each other (and might even develop independently to some degree), many individuals can and do evidence a great deal of competence in some of these States/realms (such as meditative formlessness in the causal realm), yet are poorly or even pathologically developed in others (such as the frontal or gross personality, interpersonal development, psychosexual development, moral development, and so on' (Wilber 2000b).

Moreover, the tenuous demarcations between Waves, Streams, and States appear only as subjective phenomena from the vantage point of inner self observation or third party narration of inner development. Interpretation of these gradations as manifest in the evolution of culture in Wilber's LRQ may also be tenable, but no discrete gradations in conscious development are physiologically evident and submission to the 'reality' of such gradations must remain existentially metaphorical.

### **3.2.2.1 Is There a Spiritual Line?**

An interesting and necessary question to ask in view of the Physicalist challenge tendered in the latter part of this thesis is whether there is a spiritual Line? In Wilber's scheme of Waves, Structures, Streams, and States he answers the question in terms of any number of definitions ascribed to spirituality. For Wilber, there are several options. The first is that spiritual consciousness could constitute the post-conventional Level of all Streams of consciousness, or stated inversely, that in the non-dual causal Levels of Mind all Waves and Streams of consciousness are spiritualised. There is also the option of viewing spirituality as a separate developmental Stream of ultimate concern - an idea Wilber borrowed from Tillich (Rothberg, Kelly 1998:331).<sup>139</sup> Thirdly, spirituality may be the synthesising, rather than conglomerating force of all development that reaches its fulfilment in the causal realms of all Waves and Streams. Finally, spirituality may be an attitude or condition of mind that is concerned mainly with peak experiences or heightened States of consciousness that can occur at any point in any Wave or Stream of consciousness (Wilber 1999f:4-8). For Wilber all options indicate truths about the nature of spiritual experience and development, but none are adequate in isolation.

It may be deduced that these interpretations could be viewed as Transitional, or Surface Structures if viewed separately and Wilber would agree (1997a:225). If, on the other hand, they are viewed as intra-active holonic propensities, then spirituality becomes a Basic Structure as it unfolds at each successive Wave of ascent, and as a Deep Structure if viewed as the implicit and animating force of all development. Spiritual awareness thus unfolds as a distinguishable, yet dialectically interactive Stream in all developmental Waves and is simultaneously the coagulating essence of all these variables as it develops into transpersonal

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<sup>139</sup> Wilber makes this admission thus, 'So I will simply state my own preference. I will follow Paul Tillich in defining the Spiritual Line as that Line of development in which the subject holds its *ultimate concern*' (Rothberg, Kelly 1998:331).

awareness. This description of the spiritual Stream sounds remarkably similar to Wilber's definition of the Self System. Whilst it is not stated as such by Wilber, this similarity may allude to the nature of the Self System as the indwelling *Self* within the *self* – the indwelling 'image and likeness of God' (Genesis 1:26-27). In Wilber's view the spiritual Line might be an expression of the profound emptiness associated with the *original face* which, by definition, has the capacity for all fullness.<sup>140</sup> This coheres with Wilber's view that Spirit or Ground is the implicit essence that is none other than the paradoxical emptiness and simultaneous substance of all consciousness or Mind. At times in the process of ascent, this Stream can manifest in States of higher awareness at any Wave in accordance with the conceptual and linguistic metaphors of that Wave. Wilber subscribes to various developmental metaphors for the spiritual Stream, but most often stratifies them as follows:

Thus, I have often referred to magical religion, mythic religion, rational religion, psychic religion (shamans/yogis), subtle religion (saints), causal religion (sages), and non-dual religion (siddhas), each of which is a Level of the spiritual Line or Stream – in other words, the developmental Line of spirituality as it spans the entire Spectrum of Consciousness (1997a:221).<sup>141</sup>

Whilst the flexible application of all these spiritual options, both in the variable interpretation of the spiritual Stream, and in its stratification from magical to non-dual Waves, is metaphorically viable in Wilber's general model, its eclectic appeal conceals epistemological complexities. Kelly (1996b:37-38) also criticises Wilber's intricate epistemology and is unable to see how the notion of a distinct spiritual Stream or axis can be compatible with the view of spirituality as the highest and most unified realisation of all development. Kelly therefore disagrees that a spiritual Stream evolving through the basic Waves of the *Great Nest of Being* can simultaneously be the final term in the holarchical chain. In other words, the imperfections of spiritual development cannot simultaneously be the perfection of a timeless spiritual Ground.

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<sup>140</sup> Wilber qualifies his understanding of this idea as the reason, '... why your Original Face is not *in here*. It is the sheerest Emptiness or transparency of this shimmering display. If the Kosmos is arising, you are that. If nothing arises, you are that. In either case, you are that. In either case, you are not in here. The window has shattered. The gap between the subject and object is gone. There is no twiceness, no twoness, to be found anywhere - the world is *never* given to you *twice*, but always only *once* - and you are that. You are that One Taste. This state is not something you can *bring about* ...' (1996f:230-231).

<sup>141</sup> This process of unfolding consciousness is expanded in alternative terms by Wilber based on the work of Beck and Cowan (1996), which in turn, is based on the pioneering work on *Memes* in *Spiral Dynamics* by Graves (1970).

With credit to Wilber, Kelly appears to misunderstand Wilber's definition of Spirit or Ground. Assuming Wilber's definition is correctly understood, it is not Spirit that is imperfect, but the graded awakening of consciousness *to* Spirit that present partial apperceptions until (and if) *Absolute Suchness* is realised in NDC. The imperfections lie in consciousness rather than in Spirit. It must however, be asked whether there is a difference? How can consciousness and Spirit be ontologically, or for that matter in any other way distinguished in rational epistemologies without the necessary *a priori* belief that Spirit actually exists given that belief is itself a faculty of consciousness? Wilber therefore has no choice but to submit to such a belief in order to claim Spirit as the *Absolute Suchness* of the All. Since any notion of Spirit subsists as a conscious concept, it may be argued that concepts which seem to appear in consciousness cannot be shown to be ontologically distinct from consciousness in any provable way. In other words, it must be assumed that concepts and consciousness are, at the very least, co-equal, but more likely co-substantial.

It must therefore be understood that any apparent relationship between consciousness and its spiritual concepts must be illusory. It may therefore be more accurate to maintain that both the concept and the experience of Spirit *is* consciousness. This argument is not inconsistent with Wilber's rendition of NDC as the resolution of the Primary Dualism between the *seer* and the *seen*, but Wilber's unifying catalyst is the Essentialist assumption that Spirit is the *actual* Suchness of the All. Wilber is nonetheless unlikely to submit to belief in the existence of Spirit as ontologically distinct from the *Kosmos*, but he will also not permit the reduction of Spirit to just *Kosmos*. This conflation of transcendence and imminence is neither pantheistic nor panentheistic and the paradox may be too incoherent to be admissible as a credible epistemology.

In conclusion, few of Wilber's usual critics, save Washburn and Kelly (1996a; 1996b), comment at any length on Wilber's delineation of Waves/Levels/Stages, Structures, Lines/Streams, and States. This may be due to the technicality of Wilber's thinking on these issues and the implicit difficulties encountered in attempting to disentangle the alleged differences between and within Waves, Structures, Streams, and States. Fisher, only referring to Structures in consciousness, raises the same point and observes that unless, '...



Wilber's critics are able to make the distinction between [his] theorising/describing of ... Structures ... the misunderstandings will continue' (Fisher 1997:56).<sup>142</sup>

### **3.2.3 The Means of Transcendence: Translation, Transformation, and Transcription**

Hitherto a systematic attempt has been made to define and appraise the instruments Wilber designs to augment the construction of his integral Four Quadrant Model. In so doing the metaphorical usefulness of many aspects are supported, whilst questions have been raised against some details and applications concerning the epistemological consistency and coherence of his overall scheme. In this brief section an examination of a simple stratification of processes which seek to differentiate two modes of conscious operation and the nature of their association will be conducted. Wilber's own preference is to illustrate these operations figuratively and he does so as follows:

... think of the various levels of structural organisation as so many floors in a tall building (in this case, ten stories, with the tenth being Brahman as the highest level and asymptotic limit of growth, and the building itself being Brahman as the ground of all levels of growth) then (1) each floor itself is a Deep Structure, while (2) the variable components on each floor - its actual furniture, so to speak - are Surface Structures; (3) the movement of Surface Structures we call Translation; (4) the movement of Deep Structures we call Transformation; and (5) the relation between a Deep Structure and its Surface Structures we call Transcription. Translation is moving furniture around on one floor; Transformation is moving to a different floor; Transcription is the relation of the furniture to each floor (1983b:45).

Wilber developed this scheme early in his writing, but sustains it as a foundation upon which the comprehensibility of Waves, Structures, Streams, and States may be better understood. In this instance it is not totally clear how Deep Structures interface or even differ from Transformation, nor how Surface Structures are differentiated from Translation. It may be that Transformation and Translation speak more intentionally into the actual processes of change, whereas Structures pertain more specifically to the nature and function of particular Waves of consciousness. The distinction is by no means clear and these vagaries have been previously identified.

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<sup>142</sup> In support of Fisher's observation, the following confusing quote from Wilber (1997a:225) illustrates the point. 'In short, the spiritual Stream runs through subconscious to conscious to super-conscious Waves, by whatever name. These spiritual Stages, I believe, are Transitional Stages (stages in the "soft" sense); and, of course, the Self System can still be "all over the place" ... with developments in the spiritual Stream depending upon previously established competences in that Stream itself.'

Transformation refers to the movement of transcendence to higher Waves, greater depth, and more significant holonic embrace. In this process the individual must necessarily 'die' to attachments or elements exclusively associated with previous Waves (Wilber 1983b:53). Transformation thus permits new forms of agency to emerge through which, says Wilber, '... a whole new world of available stimuli become accessible to the new and emergent holon' (2000a:67). These stimuli thus constitute components of Transformation implicit at the new Wave. It has previously been noted that Deep and Basic Structures have transforming capacities imbedded and that these propensities operate as relatively independent intra-phases Streams motivating the emergence of higher Waves or deeper holons. Transformation then appears to be a descriptive term for the overall process of growth in all four Quadrants.

Translation, on the other hand, is presented as the process through which aspects within a given Wave are navigated and employed to maintain the power and integrity of that same Wave. Translation thus assumes defensive and territorial strategies typically associated with various grades of ego consciousness. The aim of Translation, says Wilber, '... is to ensure that Eros outweighs Thanatos, that Life wins out over Death, that the boundaries of the self do not collapse in the face of the Void. Translation succeeds, so to speak, as long as the death of its present level or floor is not imminent, and its job is precisely to deny the death of that given level' (1986:72). Having said that, Wilber nonetheless claims the necessary efficacy of Translation in the evolution of consciousness (1999a:28-29). It is not clear however, how the apparent conflict between Transformatory and Translatory urges are negotiated, but a form of dynamic tension appears to exist wherein, as it were, checks and balances ensure the stability of the psyche in the process of growth. The Self System may be correlated as the mediating agent between the higher yearnings of Transformation and the protectionist inclinations of Translation. An additional and more useful explanation is conveyed in the media that Transformation and Translation respectively respond to and administer. Wilber says, '... a "sign" is that which points to, or represents, any element within a given level; whereas a "symbol" points to, or represents, an element of a different level ... Therefore, it follows that Translation operates with signs ... whereas Transformation operates with symbols' (1979b:Np).

Translation thus operates as a process facilitated by signs that enable uni-level mobility, whereas symbols facilitate awareness of higher realisations which are implicit, but not yet manifestly integrated. Wilber does not articulate it as such at this point, but subliminal

intuitions must reside in lower Waves which recognise the appeal of symbols indicating deeper holons and, if the interpretation is correct, this awareness is also conveyed by Streams and mediated by the Self System (Wilber 1996d:48-49).

Transcription is most difficult to identify. In Wilber's most comprehensive and massive work, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (2000a) there is only one indexed reference to Transcription and it occurs in an end note. Wilber says, 'The relation between Deep Structures and Surface Structures I call Transcription, which we will discuss later, and for now, in a note' (Wilber 2000a:68, 559 [45]). Despite Wilber's promise, no further reference to Transcription was found in the book, but inferences designate Transcription as a faculty of the Self System. It thus has a mediating, or negotiating function between Structures, but no clarity was found describing how Transcription subsists as a communicative element in the Self System and neither is there any scientific foundation for such a postulation.

These three operative mechanisms are significantly less developed in Wilber's earlier work than those posited in his later writing. The impression is that Transformation, Translation, and Transcription add aptitudes to the unfolding of higher Waves of consciousness through Structures, Streams, and States, but it is clearly these latter categories which best explain the processes of emergence. Once again the metaphor is intriguing and useful as an instrument to encourage the realisation of deeper awareness, but a multi-levelled building with Brahman as the asymptotic limit has no correlate in any scientific theories of consciousness. The probability of misinterpretation or misrepresentation of any of these intertwined variables in consciousness is very high and a simple example may provide the clearest indication of the inter- and intra-dynamic roles of Waves, Structures, Streams, States, the Self System, and Transformation, Translation, and Transcription. Illustrations from any aspect in any Quadrant of consciousness may apply, but the role of language is primary in all Quadrants and therefore provides an appropriate example. A full explanation that includes all implications and possibilities would extend this example beyond its necessary purpose, but the following simple description may suffice to illustrate the point (over the page):

Example	<i>Language in Wilber's AQAL Model</i>
In the URQ	In evolutionary terms, language has developed from Neanderthal 'grunts and groans' to highly complex, integrated, and abstracted symbolic systems. The same process is reflected in the microcosm of an individual person's development – from the incomprehensible babble of a baby to the sophistication of adult communication. <sup>143</sup> Whatever the physiology, Wilber would admit that linguistic ability is physiologically located, but not materially defined.
In the LRQ	Language functions as a means of relational cohesion and shared codes of signification in social systems.
In the LLQ	The processes of these associations in language are interiorised to mediate personal understanding and meaning, and establish identity within social groupings.
In the ULQ	Language is the agency of inner experience which narrates, processes, and assimilates information into consciousness. It is the medium of the 'inner witness' in the mechanisms of ascent to the ineffability of NDC.
Deep Structures	Refer to the human capacity for language – possibly as a physiological, social, and conscious evolutionary predisposition.
Basic Structures	Refer to the etymological forms of language in a given culture. The structures and capacities of the language therefore remain as more or less permanent traits.
Surface Structures	May refer to transitory or popular dialects at a given time in personal development and social evolution.
Waves	Describe the degrees or strata of linguistic competence from the early potential for language to highly integrated and complex expressions. Each new level of competence incorporates and builds on the competencies of the previous level and is therefore holonic.
Streams	Mediate and facilitate the dynamic linkages of emergence to more significant or technically advanced linguistic agencies.
States	May determine different usages of language in varying dimensions of consciousness - shouting at a protest rally or whispering a prayer. In altered States the apparent incoherence or sensory confusion of language may nonetheless convey meaning – 'touching' the words or 'tasting' sound.
The Self System	Is the 'more or less' free roaming variable that utilises language as a means of expressing, accruing or communicating identity and its meaning in any Wave on any Stream. In a manner, the Self System may be described as the locus of identification where consciousness is contextually engaged and active at any given time, at the same time possessing the ability to dynamically interact with the qualities of any other Wave or Stream.
Transformation	Describes the process of ascending to a new Wave of linguistic complexity and competence.
Translation	Describes idiomatic variance or fashionable mutability without increasing linguistic ability to a higher level.
Transcription	Describes the dynamic tension between the desire for continuing association at the present level of communication and the yearning for transcendence to a higher level.

<sup>143</sup> Physiologically, language seems to develop in either, or both the left and right hemispheres of the brain, but vocal competence focuses on the Broca Area in the Inferior Frontal Gyrus whereas Wernicke's Area in the Superior Temporal Gyrus navigates language comprehension.

### 3.3 Wilber's Epistemological Method

The hybridised and inter-braided dynamics Wilber designs for his AQAL Model are useful and informative as figurative instruments. Wilber's integral approach is, in his own view, a constructive post-modernity that justifies the inclusion of all developmental qualities in his Integral Model: physiological, intentional, social, and cultural (1997a:31). A more rigorous evaluation of Wilber's epistemological inferences will be conducted in the next section, but an introductory debate around the theoretical pretexts of the *Three Eyes of Knowledge*, the *Three Step Exemplar*, and the *Four Validity Claims* will provide initial insights into potential conceptual and methodological hurdles.

#### 3.3.1 The *Three Eyes of Knowledge: Sensibilia, Intelligibilia, and Transcendelia*

Wilber's epistemological inspiration is based on the work of Bonaventure (1221-1274). Wilber (1997a:35; 1997b:91) argues that the legitimacy of this model requires a judicious and balanced investigation of sensory experience, mental experience, and spiritual experience and therefore proposes that humans have at least three ways of attaining knowledge: the *Eye of Flesh* which employs the physical senses of the body; the *Eye of Reason* which utilises the mind's capacity to self-reflect, analyse, and reason; and the *Eye of Contemplation* by which the realisation of transpersonal and transcendent non-dual awareness is effected. Each *Eye* submits to different criteria for gathering information and each provides appropriate qualities and degrees of information to the different Waves and Streams in Wilber's AQAL Model (1996e:xii). In the Perennial Philosophy these three modes are sometimes referred to as gross, subtle, and causal, whilst Wilber has invented his own terms: *Sensibilia, Intelligibilia, and Transcendelia* (1996e:6). By way of explanation, Wilber describes his *Three Eyes of Knowledge* as, '... the science of *Sensibilia* - physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, geology ... the science of *Intelligibilia* - linguistics, mathematics, experimental phenomenology, introspective and interpersonal psychology, historic-hermeneutics, logic, interpretive sociology, communicative philosophy ... [and] the science of *Transcendelia* - openly experimental and contemplative disciplines, such as Zen, Vedanta, Vajrayana, and so on' (1996e:72). Wilber goes on to explain that just as reason cannot be reduced to, nor derived solely from fleshly knowledge, so contemplation cannot be reduced to, nor exclusively derived from reason. Mystical *gnosis* thus transcends reason which *a fortiori* transcends the sensory realm.

Welwood (1979:28-29) refers to these conscious dimensions respectively as: scientific truths, experiential truths, and transformative truths, but whether such clear distinctions can be drawn in the process of consciousness as such is speculative. Welwood argues that these three levels of mind reveal three kinds of truth which may add credence to Wilber's overall scheme. Welwood (1979:28-29) goes on to explain that:

Thinking mind, left to its own devices, produces *conceptual*, logical, and natural-scientific truths. The interaction between thinking and concrete felt experiencing gives birth to *experiential* truths, new meanings which serve to integrate body/mind into awareness. Finally, the truth arrived at through realisation of the deep nature of mind is a lived truth, which cannot be named, pinpointed, or readily articulated in a discursive way. It is a *transformative* truth whose effect is the alignment of both thinking mind and felt experience (which together make up the whole personality structure) with a deeper order of existence.

At this point a challenge must be raised. Clearly, there is no evidence to suggest there are three independent categories of receptivity in the human brain. Rather, as Helminiak (1998:230) points out, '... there is only one, human consciousness itself, by which humans are aware and self-aware and thus are confronted with data. The human being is not equipped with three separate knowing systems...' Helminiak interprets the process of integrating knowledge differently by beginning with Lonergan's (1997) notion of cognition, epistemology, and metaphysics. In this case Helminiak maintains that, '... the human spirit, as it functions in the process of knowing, entails both logical reasoning and insightful creativity but also that human spirit is different from psyche on the one hand and from divinity on the other ... [that] spirit or consciousness entails both the creative and the propositional dimensions of human understanding and knowing. Insight and logic are two sides of the same coin' (Helminiak 1998:233).

It may be more accurate to describe consciousness as a highly integrated and complex matrix which is defined by response and feedback agencies distributed throughout the brain and similar ideas will be considered in more detail in Chapter Seven. Whilst certain areas of the brain clearly mediate the priority of certain functions, sensory and mental responses are not discrete in the way that Wilber's *Three Eyes* describe them, and there is no functional evidence of any process resembling *Transcendelia*. The difference between the first two modes of knowing (*Sensibilia* and *Intelligibilia*), and *Transcendelia* is that the fully realised goal of *Transcendelia* in NDC has no basis of verification outside of its own truth-claims –

though Wilber will argue the case for his *Three Step Exemplar*, and this will be considered shortly. If a scientific description of consciousness is contained within such a recursive definition, it will only avoid the danger of infinite regress or circular postulations if it is authenticated by base cases which satisfy the definition without recursion, that is, without claiming to prove itself only in terms of itself. This rather convoluted argument also means that any postulates contingent upon a recursive definition of ontology must not extend beyond the epistemological domain of the definition. For this reason it cannot verify premises which claim absolutes. It therefore recognises its noetic limitations whereas Wilber's postulation of *Absolute Subjectivity* in NDC through *Transcendelia* claims to validate itself without such bases because of its trans-rational and ineffable character. In order for a recursive or inductive epistemology of consciousness to be legitimate, it must define experience in terms of itself without succumbing to self-referential contradiction. The research of Newberg and D'Aquili (2002), for example, concedes the existential and physiological reality of mystical type experience, but the research is therefore phenomenologically defined and the authors admit as much, whereas Wilber's *Transcendelia* recognises no such constraints. The technology required to substantiate Newberg and D'Aquili's neuro-theological approach is not yet adequately developed, but the pursuit of such an approach may yield meaningful results in time and this possibility will also be considered in more detail in Chapter Seven.

### **3.3.2 The *Three Step Exemplar***

Wilber's attempt to allay concerns about his *Three Eyes* theory, particularly regarding the arcane epistemology of *Transcendelia*, is addressed by his *Three Step Exemplar*. It has already been established that Wilber bases his epistemology on the premises of reconstructive science, but the question remains: can the axiomatic delimitations of objectivity be transported into subjective absolutes without breaching either consistency or coherence? Alternatively, it may be possible to view Wilber's *Three Eyes of Knowledge* purely metaphorically, but if so, why would he claim the injunctive precision of reconstructive science as its authenticating medium?

Wilber's notion of the *Three Step Exemplar* or paradigm, to use Thomas Kuhn's term (1970 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), is applied with appropriate methodologies to each

*Eye of Knowledge*.<sup>144</sup> The first step of the *Exemplar* requires willingness and the ability to engage an injunction, a performative instruction according to the established principles of knowledge acquisition at a given Wave in the Spectrum of consciousness (Wilber 1996e:xiii). If correctly applied, the injunction then leads to apprehension or a direct disclosure of the data or referents indicated by the injunctive strand. Finally, the disclosed results are corroborated by others who have similarly and adequately performed the injunction and gathered the data, that is, checked and confirmed the information by a community of others who have similarly and adequately engaged the injunctions and gathered the data.

Wilber is careful to point out that this is not a pluralistic, relativistic, or contextually dialectical system, but an integral aperspectival constructivist thrust towards non-dual awakening (1999e:3). By aperspectival Wilber means that no single perspective takes undue precedence over any other, but consists in a rightfully appointed place where its epistemology and truth-claims are functionally appropriate (1999e:599). Clearly Wilber is not a relativist since his notion of NDC claims ultimacy in *Absolute Subjectivity*, and anything that is absolute cannot simultaneously be relative. Whether his aperspectival view is easily distinguishable from pluralism is debatable since inclusion of variable opinion is still seems broadly pluralistic, albeit delineated in the discrete Waves of Wilber's spectrum of functional viability.

Despite Wilber's careful categorisation of Wave-specific epistemologies, Helminiak (1998:240, 243) is right to challenge Wilber's third *Eye*. Wilber claims that if all three strands of the *Exemplar* are successfully performed, the experience must be considered real, valid, and true according to the formulation and definition of scientific inquiry. However, Wilber's acceptance of communal corroboration as an instrument of scientific validation is peculiar since it is patently obvious that large groups of people can attain consensus on a subject and nonetheless be blatantly wrong. On what basis then can Wilber claim that group consensus accurately represents reality? It may perhaps be argued that such a claim represents reality 'at the present moment', perhaps in the sense that pre-Copernican society believed that the earth was the centre of the universe, but clearly new discoveries change our sense of reality. Moreover, this dilemma also reveals that there is no way of knowing

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<sup>144</sup> Thomas Kuhn, says Wilber, '... in one of the greatly misunderstood ideas of our time, pointed out that normal science proceeds most fundamentally by way of what he called paradigms or exemplars. A paradigm is not merely a concept, it is an actual practice, an injunction, a technique taken as an exemplar for generating data' (1997a:86).



whether somebody has truly experienced NDC, and if they have, whether their report of it actually resembles the experience of others making the same claim, that is, whether reports of absolute experience actually are absolute or not. Who, in other words, establishes the canon and how can it measure a Reality that is ineffable?

In the light of these potential epistemological pitfalls, Wilber's claims to truth realised through the *Three Eyes of Knowledge* and the *Three Step Exemplar* should rather be considered only for their descriptive usefulness. It must also be remembered therefore that such approaches, graded though they are through all Waves and Streams of consciousness, nonetheless qualify only for conditional validity. In other words, whilst Wilber's integral apperception fittingly positions any variety of truths in contexts which appropriately distil meaningfulness at a given time and place, it does not mean that the corresponding claims are, in the end, right and true. Wilber is aware of the potential vagaries implicit in such approaches and goes to some length to qualify and clarify the application of these epistemological instruments in the *Four Validity Claims* of his Integral Model.

### **3.3.3 The *Four Validity Claims*: Truth, Truthfulness, Functional Fit, and Justness**

Wilber explains that each Quadrant of his model has its own epistemological architecture: propositional or post-positional Truth for the URQ of exterior or physical phenomena; subjective Truthfulness for the ULQ of inner or subjective personal experience; Justness for the LRQ of social and collective variables in community; and Functional Fit for the LLQ of interiorised cultural norms and values (1995c:115-116).<sup>145</sup> These quadrilateral validity claims are diagrammatically presented as follows (over the page):

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<sup>145</sup> With respect to the primary domains: I, we, and it, Wilber extends and adapts his renditions at various stages of his writing, but in broadest summary he categorises them as follows: 'I' (in the ULQ) comprises personal consciousness, subjectivity, self-expression (including art and aesthetics), Truthfulness, and sincerity. In the personal integration of the collective 'we' in the LLQ he places ethics and morals, worldviews, common context, culture, inter-subjective meaning, mutual understanding, appropriateness, and Justness. Within the categories of 'its' in the URQ and LRQ he identifies science and technology, objective nature, empirical forms (including the brain), social systems, propositional Truths, and Functional Fit (Wilber 1997a:19-20).

Diagram 5

<p>Interior-Individual <i>Subjective Intentional Dimension</i></p> <p><i>Truthfulness:</i> sincerity integrity trustworthiness</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>I</b></p>	<p>Exterior-Individual <i>Objective Behavioural Dimension</i></p> <p><i>Truth:</i> correspondence representation propositional</p> <p style="text-align: left;"><b>IT</b></p>
<p style="text-align: right;"><b>WE</b></p> <p><i>Justness:</i> cultural fit mutual understanding rightness</p> <p><i>Inter-subjective Cultural Dimension</i> Interior-Collective</p>	<p style="text-align: left;"><b>ITS</b></p> <p><i>Functional Fit:</i> systems theory web structural-functionalism social systems mesh</p> <p><i>Inter-objective Social Dimension</i> Exterior-Collective</p>

(Stewart 2003:4)

Whilst Wilber’s model is alluring, its figurative complexity demands extended systems of verification if it intends to be epistemologically convincing. Truth associated with the perception and interpretation of physical qualities in the URQ is usually established within the ambit of physical science. To this end the physical world is deemed to correspond with criteria established for describing its nature and behaviour within a given epistemological framework. Truth is therefore established when an observation matches an objective fact (Wilber 1997a:13). This is the mode by which most of life is judged and so pervasive is its definition says Wilber, ‘... that it is often just called “truth” for short’ (1995c:115). This is a generalisation, but Wilber is aware of implicit variance in this approach to science. For a start, the sub-nuclear province of particle physics is less established by observational empiricism than mathematical inference. The vast content of the universe, in both the macrocosmic scope of cosmology, and the microcosmic abstractions of quantum theory, suggest a more ‘allegorical’ than objective character, but it nonetheless remains definitionally scientific in its methods and postulations. It has been shown that Wilber distinguishes these epistemic variances as dimensional qualities of depth and span, each of which require their own unique sets of validating criteria for truth to be propositionally established. The

apparent 'obvious' epistemological character of the URQ actually braces a spectrum of epistemological possibilities and Wilber's more definite demarcations therefore become spurious.

Empiricism and Newtonian science, for instance, constitute only one portion of that which Wilber describes in the URQ of 'its'. There are, in other words, a variety of epistemological exemplars appropriate to different Waves of the URQ, but there comes a point at which the instruments of measurement are simultaneously that which is being measured; science measuring consciousness, or consciousness measuring science, and at this point science and consciousness are awkwardly realised as one in the epistemological process. The differentiation then depends solely on chosen epistemologies; either those ascribed to the left Quadrants or those supposedly unique to the right. The results, with their respective truth-claims, will depend on the route of choice. Truth is therefore only worth pursuing if the pursuant submits to the qualifications which determine truth at a given Wave in a particular Quadrant, but the criteria for establishing such conditional truths can never be shown to be generic.<sup>146</sup> Truth, generally speaking, then becomes content and context specific. Not dissimilarly Wilber (2000b:7) describes this as a:

... Russellian picture on which (proto) experiential properties constitute the intrinsic nature of physical reality. Such a picture is most naturally associated with some forms of panpsychism ... As I would put it, the general idea is simply that physics (and natural science) discloses only the objective, exterior, or extrinsic features of holons, whose interior or intrinsic features are subjective and experiential (or proto-experiential). In other words, all holons have a left and right hand dimension.

By way of illustration, it must be asked whether ideas and their validating epistemologies are discovered or generated by consciousness? It may be tempting to argue in favour of both possibilities, but then it must be asked whether the mechanisms arguing for either type of truth are discovered or generated? The process is clearly circular and truth becomes an illusive treasure at the end of the noetic rainbow. If so, on what basis can Wilber claim NDC as the realisation of the Absolute Ground? At this point Wilber asks his readers to yield to inter-subjective Truthfulness particular to the ULQ. It is uniquely in this Quadrant that NDC

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<sup>146</sup> Wilber may argue here that the criteria vary, but that the process does not. We are reminded then of Wilber's *Three Step Exemplar*, perform the injunction, gather the data, and corroborate the findings with an established body of evidence. According to Wilber this process is validly applied at any Level and in any Quadrant on condition that it submits to the injunctive strands appropriate to its contingent truth-claims.

is realised as the *Absolute Suchness* that ultimately defines the true nature of all Quadrants in Wilber's Model. It has already become evident that this is Wilber's most fragile and vulnerable argument. If, as Wilber proclaims, truth is variably discerned in different aspects and Waves of his Model, then why should just one Wave in one Quadrant claim the ability to realise ultimacy – particularly since it hangs on the tenuous threads of a subject's personal account of inner, ineffable, and immeasurable experience? Wilber admits this, '... when you report to me your inner status, you might be lying to me. Moreover, you might be lying to yourself' (1995c:115-116). Indeed, it is possible for entire communities to be deluded or misled. Any claims to truth, and especially claims to ultimate truth in the highest reaches of the ULQ, should therefore be carefully inspected.

For example, substantiation of claims associated with NDC is embedded in the histories and narratives of any number of cultures and religions. This domain submits to verification in the LRQ and applies Functional Fit as its discerning apparatus. Here humanity is situated in an objective network that infuses functional coherence to its constituent parts. Functional Fit thus defines truth according to the tenets of the social system so that all validity claims in any other Quadrant are judged in terms of their capacity to serve the holistic functioning of the social system (Wilber 1997a:26). It is, according to Wilber, '... the objective behaviour of the overall social action system, considered from an empirical stance, that forms the yardstick by which truths in this domain are judged' (1995c:117). If, by way of further illustration, the mystical notion of NDC is at variance with the belief systems associated with a particular socio-cultural context, the non-dual notion will simply be dismissed as untrue. It must however, be questioned whether empirical methods can be reliably applied in this way? In other words, it is entirely possible that two contestants may claim empirical validity for two different social systems at the same Level in the LRQ. How does a third party know whom to believe? Most obviously, the third party simply has to make a decision based on any variety of variables which he or she thinks most satisfying as a means of addressing the quandary, but such decisions can only be personally and situationally true. Functional Fit is therefore highly malleable and truth equally elusive.

The same would apply to the LLQ where the faculties of Justness attempt to understand how subjects fit together in acts of mutual understanding through virtuous intentions associated, for example, with rightness, goodness, and fairness (Wilber 1995c:117-118). Can Functional Fit and Justness thus be trusted as reliable systems for distilling truth? Admittedly, in this

regard Wilber's intention is not to identify that which is true as a counterpoint to that which is false, but rather to view truth as a measure by which behaviour can be synchronised within a defined behavioural system. If however, a subject chooses not to fit into a behavioural system for reasons of personal conviction based on different values, it does not mean the subject is therefore a functional *misfit*. On the contrary, the counterpoint may be truer – as was the case for the liberation movement in Apartheid South Africa despite the government's claims to the contrary. The objection to Wilber's four validity claims is not therefore aimed at the incorrectness of his postulations, but at their generalised simplicity. Validity and truth seem to be too complex and diffuse for Wilber's scheme to adequately address the intricate and subtle nuances implicit in all Waves of the Spectrum – particularly as they are variously navigated by Streams and subjectively integrated by the Self System.

Despite this objection, Wilber's Four Quadrant system of validation does identify important differentiations. The most striking is that no validity claims in any Quadrant can be reduced to those in another Quadrant (Wilber 1995c:114). The point, says Wilber (1995c:125):

... is that every human being has a subjective aspect (sincerity, truthfulness), an objective aspect (truth, correspondence), an inter-subjective aspect (culturally constructed meaning, justness, appropriateness), and an inter-objective aspect (systems and functional fit), and our different knowledge claims are grounded in these very real domains. And thus, whenever we attempt to deny any of these insistent domains, we simply end up, sooner or later, smuggling them into our philosophy in a hidden and unacknowledged fashion: the empiricists use interpretation in the very act of denying its importance; the extreme constructivists and relativists use universal truth in order to universally deny its existence; extreme aestheticians use beauty alone to claim moral goodness – and on and on and on. To deny any of these domains is, as it were, to be hoisted by our own petard and end up in a severe self-contradiction .<sup>147</sup>

In summary, it is agreed that the validity claims Wilber ascribes to each of the four Quadrants are legitimate and useful, but caution against their unequivocal application as reliable

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<sup>147</sup> Wilber claims that, '... all three strands of all genuine knowledge accumulation (injunction, data, confirmation) are present in all of the validity claims, which themselves are *anchored* in the very real intentional, behavioural, cultural, and social domains of human beings. In other words, these very real domains ground our quests for Truthfulness, Truth, Justness, and Functional Fit, each of which proceeds by the checks and balances of injunction, data, and confirmation. Thus, the epistemological claims of transpersonal studies are, like any other valid knowledge claims, thoroughly grounded in experiment, data accumulation, and consensual justification ... The significant point is that each of these four validity claims has its own type of evidence and data, and thus particular assertions within each claim can be *adjudicated* – that is, can be confirmed or denied, justified or rebuffed, validated or rejected. Accordingly, each of these claims is open to the all-important *fallibilist criterion* of genuine knowledge' (1995c:118-119).

instruments of truth should be applied. For example, the alleged existence of so-called dark matter in the URQ may be cosmologically consistent within a specified epistemological architecture, but dark matter may not exist at all, and if it does, there seems to be no adequate agreement on what it is. Likewise, the subjective report of a person claiming NDC in the ULQ as the realisation of ultimate consciousness may be lying or deluded. Similarly, the treacherous co-existence of various expressions of capitalism, socialism, autocracy, and communism in the LRQ will have vociferous support from any number of systems claiming legitimacy, as will the adherents of any of the world's religions to their respective truth-claims. The communitarian virtues associated with Justness in the LLQ may support personal Truthfulness in the ULQ, but they do not guarantee it? Ideology too often degenerates into the fabric of fear, and the result is too often destruction. At best, Wilber's *Four Validity Claims* offer generalised indicators of probability based on retrospective methods, but they do not serve to identify validity in an unimpeachable way. Particularly, Truthfulness in the ULQ cannot be used to establish any capitalised Truth in the *Absolute Subjectivity* of Mind.

A conditional acceptance of Wilber's *Four Validity Claims* is therefore admitted, but fundamental questions, based on a simple and commonly acknowledged principle identified by Rucker (1997:275-276) remains intact:

It would greatly simplify things if human discourse could be regarded as the working out of some formal system. One would no longer have to wonder about the meanings of words, but could instead judge the validity of people's arguments by checking them against a fixed, finitely describable set of rules and axioms. Leibniz dreamed of finding such a universal system, the *Characteristica Universalis*, and envisioned a day when disagreeing parties would simply get out the rules, saying, "Let us calculate."

To date however, the adherents of all disciplines would have to agree that there can be no finite description of how to generate all truth, and this is so for the simple reason that time and space (in other words change) defines the nature of the cosmos. As long as change defines the nature of our existence, there can be no claim to a final or absolute truth, except of course that this statement has just deigned to do so, which is clearly self-contradictory and it is thus, paradoxically, simultaneously true and untrue. This conundrum simply reminds us that the pursuit of truth in a particular domain can only deliver partial results with reference

to the whole. Consequently, the pursuit of ultimate or absolute Truth is prone, in any system, to incoherence or inconsistency.

Clearly a more incisive consideration of Wilber's AQAL epistemology, substantiated as it is through the *Three Eyes of Knowledge*, tested by the *Three Step Exemplar*, and validated by the *Four Validity Claims*, is justified. Despite potential criticism, Wilber maintains that if all his epistemological media are correctly applied and successfully executed, the experience of NDC must be accepted as empirically authenticated (1985:13; 1996e:3, 31-32; 1997a:18, 84-85; 1998a:36; 2000a:282). 'Any attempt at a comprehensive and graceful understanding of the Kosmos...' says Wilber, will certainly apply to all three mechanisms and, '... anything less comprehensive than that is gravely, gravely suspect on its own merits' (1996b:xii-xiii).<sup>148</sup>

### **3.4 A More Considered Appraisal of Wilber's Epistemology**

The intricacy of Wilber's Integral Model has now been fully appraised. Wilber's *Three Eyes of Knowledge* (*Sensibilia*, *Intelligibilia*, and *Transcendelia*); *Four Validity Claims* for each of the Quadrants; and *Three Step Exemplar*, particularly as it applies to NDC in the ULQ, have been surveyed and evaluated. The epistemological legitimacy of these systems has been debated and only conditionally ratified, whereas the metaphorical utility and pragmatism of Wilber's epistemology is worthy of credit. Despite Wilber's claims to an unbiased and comprehensively balanced Integral Philosophy, there nonetheless appears to be a particular philosophical bias suffusing Wilber's theory and its subtle refrain reveals his truer philosophical identity. This implicit rationale must now be measured against more rigorous debate to identify the advantages of Wilber's approach, but it also reveals additional problems.

#### **3.4.1 What is Epistemology?**

By way of contextual introduction, the most basic definitions describe epistemology as the study of the possibility and nature of human knowledge by seeking to identify the processes by which knowledge is acquired and validated. The theoretical particularities of these processes are largely determined by their philosophical underpinnings. As a means of illustrating this point, the rationalist approach, usually associated with Plato (428-348 BCE),

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<sup>148</sup> Fisher is right to question the integrity and coherence of Wilber's epistemological presumption in this case. Wilber's retort to all his critics, says Fisher (1997:56), '... [is that] if the heart of science is based on experiential evidence verifiable by others practising science or a disciplined time-tested meditative practice, then mystical claims are scientific too. Wilber stretches the conventional Western definition of science by equating injunctive meditation techniques ... with experiential evidence about reality.'

and latterly Descartes (1596-1650), argues that reasonable relational concepts intrinsic to consciousness are the only reliable source of knowledge, whereas empiricists such as Locke (1632-1704) and Hume (1711-1776) prioritise the primacy of sensory experience as the true source of ideas.<sup>149</sup> Kant's (1724-1804) Idealism re-orientates these extremities and proposes the viability of synthetic or *a priori* knowledge which is comprehensibly derived from experience, but not directly referred to sensory experience for its veracity. In this sense Kant's view supports the empiricist argument that knowledge is confined to the general domain of experience, but resists the notion that only sensory experience can be veridical (Wilson 2000:36-37).<sup>150</sup> It may be argued therefore, that experience of God may be *real* experience, but it does not thereby claim to prove the existence of God.

William James' (1842-1910) form of pragmatism advances a view that includes methodological variability which accommodates an assortment of relativistic approaches which result in higher degrees of usefulness in epistemology. As James' view gained currency, various forms of monism, particularly absolute idealism (the metaphysical view that all aspects of reality are ultimately unified in the thought of a single all-encompassing consciousness), fell out of favour. It is interesting to note that Josiah Royce (1855-1916), a leading American proponent of absolute idealism, pointed out in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy* (1885), the mistaken belief among relativists that everything is relative except the generalisation that everything is relative (Wilson 2000:426). This teasing barb nonetheless poses a significant challenge to James' version of relativist epistemology and likewise draws out a flaw in Wilber's approach since it is not consistent to maintain the usefulness of theoretical variability and simultaneously maintain an absolute as its definitive essence. This also meant that absolutists needed to abandon attempts at *a priori* proofs for the existence of God, or godhead in Wilber's case, and recognise the experiential limits of human consciousness as the simultaneous limit of epistemology (Wilson 2000:434). James therefore

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<sup>149</sup> Plato's notion of ideal or original reality as a perfect pre-form to its partial representations in this world is also foundational to the Cognitivist approach which argues that consciousness consists of collections of representations that constitute symbols and images. For them the purpose of conscious reflection is therefore to aspire to the ideal form by contemplating its shadows in perceived reality, and Descartes elaborated this view by adding the notion of the primacy of thought by proving his own existence in the world.

<sup>150</sup> According to Kant, ideal forms of intuition are innate to the mind rather than the world and he thereby posits the primacy of consciousness (Freeman 2000:32-33). Whilst Kant's early writings are transcendentalist, his later work suggests a more panentheic approach which, sharing Hume's view, disregarded the validity of theistic proofs, particularly the, '... Ontological Proof, that is, the idea that God is a 'necessary' truth; the Cosmological Proof, the idea that facts that are contingent, must have causes; and of the related Arguments from Design' (Wilson 2000:42-43). Wilson goes on to point out that in *Religion Within the Limits of Bare Reason* (1960), Kant distinguishes between things which can be, '... known empirically and things which can be posited by Reason but which are not subject to proof. He *allows* such concepts as God, Soul, Immortality, but demonstrates that such concepts can never be proved: they belong to the realm of the unknowable' (2000:43).



maintained that, ‘The true is the name of whatever proves itself to be good in the way of belief’ (Macrone 2002:62).<sup>151</sup> More recently, the philosophies of Moore (1873-1958) and Wittgenstein (1889-1951) shifted focus to the analyses of meanings associated with knowledge rather than the provability of the knowledge *per se*.<sup>152</sup>

### 3.4.2 Wilber’s Approach to Epistemology

The above-mentioned cursory survey shows that epistemology is variously deciphered in different disciplinary contexts, and it has become evident that Wilber capitalises on this mutability in his Integral Philosophy.<sup>153</sup> Given that Wilber prioritises science as his epistemological medium, is he not compromising precision in his integral method by incorporating the highly subjective domains of mystical consciousness?

Similar questions will now challenge Wilber’s epistemology and these are particularly pertinent because, as he rightly observes, reductionist and positivist epistemologies which view consciousness as epiphenomenal tend to dominate scientific definitions. Wilber’s unique version of Essentialism, on the other hand, maintains the ontological pre-eminence of Consciousness (1996b:24; cf Lorimer 2001:24). Clearly epistemological issues are foundational to the character of consciousness research, but the ambivalence between Essentialism and Physicalism continues to frustrate resolution. Is intentionality, for example, caused or causal; is subjectivity epiphenomenal or revelatory; is consciousness in the brain, or the brain in consciousness? More significantly for the purpose of this argument, is experience of God a purely functional fabrication of physicality, or is it an ontologically independent *pre-form* to physicality? This question constitutes a ‘spiritualised’ form of the *Hard Problem* and it simply asks which comes first; God or matter? To answer in favour of God requires an Essentialist interpretation, whereas an answer in favour of matter requires a Physicalist interpretation. To conflate or integrate them necessarily requires an Essentialist

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<sup>151</sup> According to Wilson (2000:435), James was, ‘... trying to rescue, and assert the legitimacy of, an all-but-universal though infinitely varied set of human experiences.’ The legitimacy of such heterodoxy is creditworthy, but not provable if it simultaneously subscribes to absolute injunctions based on scientific epistemologies.

<sup>152</sup> George Edward Moore was one of the three of philosophers at Trinity College Cambridge; the others were Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) who made Cambridge one of centres of what is now called analytical philosophy.

<sup>153</sup> Wilber recognises that many theories based on different epistemologies are equally viable if properly graded within the Spectrum of Consciousness and admits consciousness as its primary interpretive locale. There is, in other words, ‘... no reason why those explanations should be viewed as rivals unless more than one explanation is proffered at precisely the same level of explanation, in which case the criteria for choice will, as always, be based on coherence, elegance and the evidence presented for the rival explanation’ (Alexander 2001:409). It must then be asked how the criteria for establishing the criteria are discerned and self-referential circularity is too often the result.

approach because the qualities attributed to God – absolutism, infinity, omnipotence, omniscience, ineffability and so on, are qualities which cannot be retained within Physicalist approaches. In other words, says Lorimer (2001:28), ‘... selection of an appropriate epistemology is complicated by the extent to which epistemology implies ontology.’ The core of the problem, as Wilber rightly points out, ‘... is that there is a great ambiguity in the meaning of the word experience’ (1996b:41). It is peculiar that Wilber should admit such ambiguity, but then claim absolute *gnosis* in NDC – the most ambiguous experience of all.

With these significant conundrums in mind, it is clear that the non-dual ontology that defines the heart of Wilber’s Integral Philosophy refers his epistemology to the highest category of subjectivity by utilising the common criteria of reconstructive science – translated by Wilber into the *Three Step Exemplar*. Wilber’s epistemology therefore claims to span the entire spectrum of human knowledge. Is this possible? Having noted that empirical views establish truth-claims based on rational extrapolations from sensory or *a priori* data-fields, it is reasonable to expect that most scientists will be set irreconcilably apart from metaphysicians who claim truth from scientifically unverifiable data-fields (Wilson 2000:420-421). The latter is after-all the necessary domain of faith – the evidence of things ‘not seen’ (Hebrews 11:1). Wilber believes his epistemology can assuage this impasse by employing the criteria of the empiricists from an Essentialist position, but this raises a number of significant problems.

Given that Wilber’s epistemological ultimatum hinges on the ineffability of Mind realised in NDC, why should such a notion of Mind be accepted as the anthropomorphic model for looking at the universe? Subsidiary to this line of inquiry, asks Wilson (2000:27), ‘... is the disturbing question why we should suppose, if such a mind there be, that it is *one* mind?’ Wilber’s notion of *Absolute Subjectivity* indeed supposes a non-dual Mind, *Suchness*, or Ground of Being as the essential definition of the All – an obfuscated version of panpsychism which he repeatedly denies. This form of inductive reasoning is however hazardous to Wilber’s epistemological credibility because it presumes the viability of starting with an unprovable axiom in order to arrive at a supposedly provable one. Since his foundational premise, Mind, cannot be scientifically verified, Wilber’s point of departure may preclude the validity of his conclusions and such licence invites criticism. Like Wilber, Happold (1970:35) makes the point that Physicalists must, by definition, dismiss any notion of the mystical encounter of God as nonsense. With deference to Happold and Wilber, the

methodological and epistemological scope of scientific language would generally exclude the validity of this kind of reasoning. Inductive epistemologies of spiritual experience presenting as science are now commonly considered naïve, mainly because of the problem of the absolute. In partial agreement with Snoke (1995:2), it may therefore be more useful to discontinue any reference to the absolute altogether, but that does not mean to say that experience of something that *feels* absolute cannot be considered veridical.<sup>154</sup>

In the first place, there is a difference between scientifically verifiable data and theory. This is the basic distinction between the empiricists and the rationalists, and secondly no theory can claim absolute certainty (Snoke 1995:4).<sup>155</sup> To this extent Wilber would agree, but the matter is not that simple. What kind of epistemology would apply to the acutely personal, ineffable, inner subjectivity of NDC? Epistemologies appropriate to the humanities, for example, accommodate degrees of subjective ambiguity associated with social, cultural, and other behavioural phenomena. The human sciences, in other words, require adaptations in epistemological scope and method, and even further adaptations into subjectivity will be required for research in inner personal encounters typical of religious experience. How far can the inclusion of subjectivity be pushed before it breaches the limit of scientific inquiry?<sup>156</sup>

Within the seemingly sensible and systematic approach of Wilber's epistemology, further anomalies come to the fore. In the first place, Wilber (1997a:87) emphasises the importance of falsifiability as proposed by Karl Popper (1971), but how does an epistemology that seeks to justify mystical consciousness through scientific exemplars falsify ineffability? Popper

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<sup>154</sup> Snoke (1995:2) is critical of presumptuous reasoning which claims to deduce God from experience, but nonetheless supports the validity of induction by suggesting that evidential epistemologies can cohere in both scientific and faith-based patterns of reasoning.

<sup>155</sup> Because Snoke (1995:7-8) affirms that, '... perfect certainty is impossible', he maintains that epistemologies of any kind must admit forms of relative sureness, but this also means that epistemology must permit degrees of variability. This is a particularly strange thesis in the light of Snoke's strong belief that the, '... Bible in no way endorses mysticism ... The Bible is a book that talks of truth and falsehood, light and darkness – "Mystery" is the name of the harlot of Babylon. Being convinced is essentially passive, requiring neither mystical nor existential choice ... The stories in the Bible of Adam and Eve, Moses and Joshua, and Jesus and the Cross occurred in real, space-time points in our universe. The Bible does not present its foundational stories as myth and allegory' (1995:9, 13, 18).

<sup>156</sup> Rothberg (1996a:4) points out that Wilber cautions such scientists to be aware of 'category errors' in using, '... one mode to attempt to explore a domain best investigated by another mode, for instance, by using empirical science to interpret Hamlet, or giving philosophical arguments in order to evaluate spiritual claims.' According to Helminiak (1998:218-219) the word, '*Transcendelia* appears to be a combination of the Latin stem, *transcendere*, to climb over or step beyond, and the Greek stem, *delein*, to make manifest, familiar in the word *psychedelic* ... *Transcendelia* may be deliberately coined to suggest indicators of the transcendent rather than transcendent things themselves ... [but] Wilber never makes this point, and his usage and overall argument do not support such an interpretation.'

(1971, 1995) sought to eliminate such extrapolations into subjectivity by eliminating induction altogether, and Wilber interprets this as reductionism. More accurately according to Popper, ‘... we observe and experiment to test rather than create theories’ (Macrone 2002:35), but Wilber’s alleged verifiability of NDC cannot be tested according to Popper’s epistemology, and it cannot therefore be falsified, and neither can it then be corroborated. Wilber derives his argument from the premise that spiritual experience cannot form theories because, in their highest non-dual expression, mystical encounters are trans-theoretical.<sup>157</sup> This is reasonable enough within the mystagogical idiom since theories obviously comprise symbolic constructs, but then how can Wilber’s epistemology explain that which is deemed to be trans-symbolic through the symbols of science?

Further to the problem of ineffability and legitimacy, how can Wilber claim to validate NDC scientifically since NDC is deemed to be the realisation of Absolute Reality?<sup>158</sup> Wilber replies vicariously through reference to the *Madhyamaka* which, he says, ‘... is most emphatically not maintaining that there is no Absolute Reality; it is simply pointing out that no idea is applicable to Reality itself. The rejection by the *Madhyamika* of all the logical alternatives ... is simultaneously the rejection of the competence of dualistic reason to comprehend Reality. Reason generates illusion, never Reality. Reality is thus *Void* of reason’ (1993:55).<sup>159</sup> Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), in the Christian mystical tradition, echoes the sentiment, ‘Thou shalt know God without image, without semblance, and without means. So long as this he and this I, to wit, God and the soul, are not one single here, one single now, the I cannot work with nor be one with that he’ (Pfeiffer 1924:247; cf Wilber 1993c:184).

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<sup>157</sup> Wilber surmises that theory can, in varying degrees of accuracy, say, ‘... what reality is like, what it is not, and what one can do to reach it. None say what it is, however, for a direct and positive statement about reality as a whole must either be meaningless or self-contradictory. Meaningless, because to predicate something about everything is to predicate it about nothing. Self-contradictory, because the statement itself is part of reality, and thus it would be referring to itself as well, and any statement that tries to say something about itself will usually contradict itself’ (1993c:46).

<sup>158</sup> Helminiak (1998:220) likewise complains that, ‘If knowledge of *Transcendentalia* can only be expressed in paradoxes, how can one claim science in this realm?’ Science and paradox cannot be coherently synthesised within a purely scientific epistemology.

<sup>159</sup> The *Madyamahika* is an adherent of the *Madhyamaka* system of Buddhist teaching started by *Nagarjuna* in the first century CE. It is most influential in the *Mahayana* tradition which proposes a ‘middle way’ or system of balance between extreme practices. The truth in the *Madhyamaka* view thus lies within a dialectical process between the claim that things exist, and things do not exist. Reality is therefore, neither truth nor illusion. The total negation of thought is not nihilism, says Wilber, ‘... but the opening of *prajna*, a non-dual insight. Negation is thus the despair of thought; but it is at once the opening of a new avenue - the path of intuition. Negation is the threshold of intellectual intuition’ (1993c:57).

As has been shown, Wilber claims that personal subscription to spiritual practice is the only way of validating NDC and it must educe a change in consciousness on the part of the researchers themselves in order for the research to be legitimate (1997:16).<sup>160</sup> This claim raises a significant epistemological problem and it will be explained further below, but it also raises issues from Existentialism. According to Snoke (1995:6), the particular forms of Existentialism espoused by Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Heidegger (1889-1976), ‘... overcomes the hypocrisy of “self evident” rationalism by directly affirming that ... absolutes must be supplemented by un-provable axioms.’ Further to Snoke’s observation, the experiential variability of ‘ultimacy’ also means that the nature of the experience cannot be shown to be universally homogenous. In keeping with Kant’s view, Snoke (1995:7) goes on to mention that whilst such Existentialist approaches affirm the veracity of personal subjective experiences that ‘feel’ absolute, it cannot project such felt truths onto objective reality to the extent that they have an ontology independent of the consciousness that generates them. Wilber, in defence, supposes an *Absolute Subjectivity* which is indivisible from objectivity as the true nature of Reality. His simultaneous belief that Reality is trans-symbolic cannot however be reconciled with modes of perception in objectivity and it cannot therefore be verified through objects of scientific enquiry. To this extent Wilber would agree, but since NDC is trans-symbolic, ineffable, and absolute, can it legitimately fall within the purview of scientific methodology at all?

With these anomalies in mind, synthesis nonetheless remains the single most repeated theme in Wilber’s work. Despite judgement from critics, Wilber does not aspire to supremacist or exclusivist claims for his Integral Philosophy, but offers his theory only as a proposition for orienting generalisations (Fisher 1997:40). He thus supports the dialectics of consciousness in various epistemic disciplines, and positions them synchronously. In so doing he tries to avoid creating the impression that his Integral Philosophy is meant to replace other functions or modes of knowing. He therefore assembles the variables of many noetic structures into networks of dynamically and constructively interacting spectra.<sup>161</sup> He calls this a

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<sup>160</sup> Fenwick points out in Lorimer’s anthology (2001:11) that, ‘... [NDC] shades into deep mystical experience in which the experiencer ... [reports] that the experience is more - not less- real than ordinary reality. They do not subsequently need to be convinced of the independent existence of a spiritual dimension ... they know it first-hand ... The third-person researcher ... must undergo a spiritual transformation whereby he acquires the kind of knowledge that can only be derived from inner experience.’ Such an exacting epistemological condition to knowledge cannot fall within the parameters of reconstructive science and Wilber is mistaken to suppose that it can.

<sup>161</sup> Wilber does not believe that dynamic dialectical systems are the highest forms of integral expression. In his system the level of vision logic generates dialectical systems which, in turn, serve only to facilitate the emergence of transpersonal development. In other words, says Wilber, ‘... dynamic dialecticism (or mature vision-logic)

‘comprehensive knowledge quest’ that does not presume any ultimate status, but simply pleads for inclusivity and balance (1996e:xxi).

This may appear contradictory because Wilber’s model does claim ultimacy in non-duality, but his claims to ultimacy do not apply to his model. Some may argue that a model and its truth-claims are inextricable and Wilber’s assertion must therefore be contradictory. It is not necessarily correct however, to argue that truth-claims are invalidated by theoretical or epistemological limitation or variance. We do not, for example, believe that variety in theological approaches necessarily invalidates truth-claims about the ultimacy of God. There is however, and important difference. Assent to the ultimacy of God in theology remains an exercise in faith, whereas Wilber claims scientific verifiability for his absolutist claims in NDC. We shall encounter this problem repeatedly and Happold (1970:26) is right to contest such forms of argument by pointing out that, ‘The validity of [such] a choice ... cannot be rationally proved. It is inevitably based on faith.’ Happold nonetheless goes on to qualify a form of validity to faith-based decisions. He maintains that in order to know at all we must make, ‘... a *primary act of intellectual faith*’ which he suggests remains, ‘... a rational decision, a choice made, consciously or unconsciously, by the mind between several possibilities’ (1970:26-27). Happold’s meaning of ‘intellectual faith’ is not totally clear, but the ‘rationality’ of faith-based decisions will depend on their validating criteria. If the validity of a faith-system is accepted as an adequate criterion for assent to its propositions, then the system will be coherent to others who subscribe to the same criteria, but not to those who do not. In other words, a faith-system’s truth-claims are only justified through an adherent’s *a priori* assent, whereas scientific provability generally has credence even to those who are not scientifically qualified to establish veracity for themselves.

Wilber falls into a form of category error by importing validating criteria from science in an attempt to justify the substance of faith, and he is not thereby able to establish the provability of his truth-claims and his assent to absolutism must remain conjectural. Moreover, whilst Wilber maintains that his entire Integral Model is based on sound scientific principles, he refers to it only as a modular metaphor for Reality. This is peculiar to science since science

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might be thought of as the highest of the *mental* realms, or the highest philosophy capable of being grasped by the ordinary mind, beyond which lie *trans-mental* or *supra-mental* developments (psychic, subtle, causal, and non-dual)’ (1999e:4).

seeks experimental certainty over metaphorical utility.<sup>162</sup> If Wilber does not mean to suggest that his theory reveals ultimate answers, then his inclusion of absolutism in NDC belies his claim. As has now been shown, it is not sensible to propose an argument which is acknowledged as partial, and claim that its results are absolute.

Clearly Wilber's Integral Philosophy warrants closer scrutiny, but it is not a 'unity fantasy' as alleged by Odajnyk (in Fisher 1997:42), and neither is it a 'monopolar reductionism' of the 'Many to the One' as Heron claims (1992:198). It is obvious from the start that Wilber's model is based on the holarchical principles of inclusion and transcendence. Not unlike Hegel's notion of *Aufhebung*, Wilber's model incorporates and integrates the properties of each level, and then transcends their limitations (Rothberg 1996a:3).<sup>163</sup> This, for Wilber, is a dialectical process rather than a monopolar reductionism. Schneider accuses Wilber of aspiring to an idealised 'transcendental perfectionism', but it is clear that Wilber is under no illusions about the imperfections of this world (Fisher 1997:43).<sup>164</sup>

The most viable and convincing alternative to Wilber's Integral Model is provided by Washburn (1995; 2003). Washburn refers to Wilber's model as a holarchical 'ladder to oneness'. The allegation is unflattering because it creates the impression of undue linearity in Wilber's model. Washburn's *Spiral to Integration* emphasises that the aspiration of consciousness to transpersonal levels is in constant dialectical tension with the ego. Washburn's is thus a bi-polar 'U-turn' model that indicates the necessity for ego to reconnect its lost association with Ground, whereas Wilber suggests holonic processes of transcendence in order to realise oneness with the ever-present Ground. Both models are metaphorically viable and Wilber's criticism of Washburn is possibly overstated. Wilber claims that pre-egoic and trans-egoic states of consciousness have only surface resemblances and to confuse them, as he says Washburn does in his 'spiral' model, is to fall into the trap of category error which Wilber calls the *pre-trans fallacy*. Perhaps a more critical and potentially serious error is Wilber's misinterpretation or misunderstanding of some original sources. We have seen,

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<sup>162</sup> There have, of course, been arguments suggesting that the existence of sub-nuclear particles in quantum physics is inferred rather than empirically proven, but the rationality of mathematical formulae espousing the existence of such particles is based on deduction, not induction. The existence of Spirit, in other words, cannot be deduced on the same basis.

<sup>163</sup> Or *Aufhebung* in Hegel's philosophy refers to an object or thesis' capacity to supersede or sublimate its lower categories without rejecting their formative initiatives. In this way the notion of sublation coheres with Wilber's understanding in Holarchy. (Froeb).

<sup>164</sup> Fisher (1997:35) also identifies these criticisms and delineates them at length, but they do not warrant repetition here.

says Kazlev (2005:Np), ‘... that Wilber seriously misinterprets both Mahayana Buddhism and the teachings of Sri Aurobindo; two wisdom teachings that he often speaks of highly. And these sort of errors are not just limited to esotericism, as scientist and esoterisict Arvan Harvat (1999) observes in *A Glance at Ken Wilber’s: A Brief History of Everything* that Wilber’s references to Pythagoras’ theorem and Quantum Mechanics are so amateurish as to put off a professional physicist or a mathematician who might otherwise be interested in his work.’ Furthermore, Kazlev mentions some errors in Wilber’s rendition of biological evolution. If Kazlev and Harvat are right that Wilber’s information is flawed in its initial survey of religious, scientific, and biological principles, then it follows that Wilber’s orientating generalisations based on that data may likewise be defective.<sup>165</sup>

Having reviewed some of the most common criticisms of Wilber’s work, it also becomes apparent that several other problems seem endemic. The first is Wilber’s literary inventiveness. By now it is apparent that Wilber tends to invent his own words to describe certain faculties of consciousness. Fisher also identifies this problem, ‘Wilber’s work literally requires its own encyclopaedia of terms – and the lack of such an encyclopaedia is a source of much confusion and misunderstanding’ (1997:66). Secondly, Wilber’s most common defence and counter argument is either that his critics have not understood his intentions, or that they have not read sufficient portions of his work. This has already become evident, particularly in the assessments of Helminiak (1998), Schneider (1987, 1989), and Heron (1992, 1996, 2002).<sup>166</sup> The breadth of Wilber’s research and writing is, admittedly, beyond the scope of many specialist philosophers and for this reason the scholarly adequacy and accuracy of some of his research has been called into question (Wittine 1995).

It is evident by now that Wilber’s approach interweaves scientific and meta-physical epistemologies so densely, and with such lyrical, almost poetic precision, as to make rigorous analysis seem inordinately complicated and even rude. Clearly Wilber’s epistemology is not

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<sup>165</sup> Wilber (1999a:122) candidly admits that, ‘I usually try to go through two to four books a day, which means I skim through them very quickly, making a few notes where necessary. If I find a really important book, then I’ll slow down and spend a week or more with it, taking extensive notes. Really good books I’ll read three or four times.’ Meyerhoff (2003:Np) surmises that, ‘... Wilber skims a lot of books looking for the ones that agree with his intellectual preferences. He then studies those books carefully and fits what they say together to create a picture of the world to his liking.’

<sup>166</sup> A prevalent theme in Wilber’s response to his critics is that the critics tend to be more or less uninformed, misinformed, misunderstanding (1990:114), or misrepresenting of his theses, his intentions, and his claims for transpersonal states of consciousness - especially the non-dual or Absolute (Fisher 1997:34).



only an academic pursuit, but a personal expression of spiritual experience. An adequate appraisal of Wilber's work must nevertheless focus on academic cogency. For this reason it may be easier to evaluate particular aspects of Wilber's epistemology through an established set of criteria. Willis Harman (1994; 2001:29-31) proposes nine criteria that would be necessary for validating epistemologies that address such high degrees of subjectivity and these provide appropriate measures for surveying Wilber's unique approach.

### 3.4.2.1 Harman's Nine Criteria

The following nine criteria emerged from a retreat in Tomales Bay, California where fifteen scientists and philosophers, facilitated by Harman, explored epistemologies appropriate to consciousness research (Harman 1994; 2001:29).<sup>167</sup> Such an epistemology, they concluded, must firstly be 'radically empirical' as a phenomenology of the totality of human experience which includes highly subjective experiences as primary data. On this first point Wilber would remind us that consciousness studies, by whatever means, is 'consciousness observing consciousness', and therefore cautions against dualistic modes of apperception, but he would support the inclusion of subjectivity. This criterion should rather than be understood as the '*experience* of observing' as a single process, and such a foundation would support both Wilber's and my approach, but there is a critical difference. Helminiak (1998:235-238) notes that Wilber emphasises the immediacy of knowledge as moments of 'direct apprehension', but that he falls short of any detailed analysis of the actual process by which such knowledge is processed into consciousness. Wilber's unelaborated claim in this regard naturally allows him to include spiritual experience without sufficient justification, but such a leap is unpersuasive because it fails to appreciate the difference between what is immediately given as experience and the processed integration of such data into knowledge. If NDC really is unmediated experience then Wilber is right to classify its ineffability, but it cannot then submit to the epistemological constraints of reconstructive science without being processed into consciousness as 'knowledge about' and such knowledge, albeit a special kind of knowledge, must imply subtle dualisms. This is often evident in Christian mystical narratives since most writers claim to be in some way conscious 'of' it. If this were not so, how would anybody ever know whether they have had a non-dual experience? Whilst the nature of NDC

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<sup>167</sup> Harman (1994:140) describes in the abstract of his article that the retreat at Tomales Bay (December 3-6 1992) was intended to, '... stimulate dialogue about a long-standing question, and to foster interest in an ever-deepening scientific study of human consciousness. Basically, the question is: How does it happen that our powerful methods of scientific enquiry appear so ill-suited to the study of consciousness? If understanding our own consciousness is so central to understanding anything else, will we not have to take this question more seriously than has been the case so far?'

in mystical traditions purports direct, unmediated encounter with an Absolute Reality, such encounter still involves interaction between two categories; the temporal and the Absolute. Wilber is well aware of this dichotomy and calls it the *primary dualism*, but his non-dual alternative does not necessarily solve the problem. For instance, how can NDC be called ‘an’ experience since experience is most often deemed to be ‘in’, or ‘of’ consciousness? To make the point plainly, Helminiak (1998:239), prompts us to remember that it is simply not possible to, ‘... experience truth.’ Whatever is deemed true can only be a construct of consciously mediated experience. The moment thinking takes place, the experience cannot be said to be unmediated or direct. On the surface this statement would seem to validate the non-dual experience as Wilber explains it, and indeed it may, but it only validates the experience, not the *Kosmological Reality* by which Wilber defines it and his rendition cannot therefore have an authentically empirical foundation.

The next criterion demands that the epistemology must be objective and therefore free from bias. It has already been shown that Wilber’s claim to methodological objectivity falters on the basis corroboration, but he is also clearly biased. Wilber’s intention is to prove the scientific validity of NDC as a replicable experiment which proves that an *Absolute Subjectivity* pervades and defines the true nature of the All. Such an extrapolation is neither objective, nor unbiased.

The third criterion instructs that the epistemological process must be open to public inquiry and inter-subjective validation on the understanding that the qualities of subjectivity may limit the scope of knowledge. It furthermore recognises that these goals may, at any given time, be met only incompletely, particularly when seeking knowledge that includes deeper understanding of inner experience. The problem of corroboration again comes to the fore since the third validity claim in Wilber’s *Three Step Exemplar* can only be verified by those who have adequately engaged the injunctions of the *Three Eyes of Knowledge*. For Wilber, any other mechanisms of validation are precluded based on epistemological inadequacy. NDC according to Wilber’s scheme is therefore not open to public inquiry in the usual sense because only those who have experienced can know whether it is true.<sup>168</sup> Furthermore, Wilber’s epistemology permits no partiality in NDC since it claims to be absolute, but it does

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<sup>168</sup> In Wilber’s words, ‘... direct apprehension of *Transcendelia* ... disclosed only by the *Eye of Contemplation* [is] most definitely verifiable or falsifiable in that domain, using what are in fact quite *public* procedures – public, that is, to all who have completed the injunction and disclosed the illumination’ (1997a:89).

acknowledge that any form of knowledge prior to the realisation of NDC is partial. In this instance it is again the problem of the absolute that infringes Wilber's epistemological coherence.

The fourth criterion proposes the inclusion of more holistic views which place emphasis on the unity of experience wherein the parts are understood through the whole whilst not excluding deductive or reductionistic epistemologies which seek to interpret the whole through the parts. This criterion extends into the significance of subjective meaningfulness in all human experience even when the experience seems ineffable. Explanation through purely physiological or biochemical evidence is therefore too limited to explain the full spectrum of conscious experience. This criterion fits Wilber's epistemology more precisely and adds credence to his Four Quadrant Model because it addresses all aspects and levels of experience. It also supports the alternative approach from a Physicalist perspective on condition that it includes subjective meaningfulness. The difference here is that these nine criteria do not claim reconstructive science as their primary epistemological agency, whereas Wilber's epistemology does. In brief reiteration, Wilber's version of science declares non-duality as fundamental to Reality and therefore prior to the bifurcations of consciousness as a purely physical phenomenon. Wilber's absolutist conclusions are not supported by standard scientific epistemologies whereas a purely Physicalist rendition that includes, but recognises the epistemological limitations of authenticating NDC, stands a significantly better chance of recognition by the scientific fraternity.

The fifth criterion recognises the vitality of models and metaphors as feasible means of expressing personal subjective experience and urges their submission to scientific scrutiny on condition of their coherence and usefulness to epistemology. This criterion is akin to William James' pragmatism, but emphasises its allegorical quality. In some respects Wilber would agree since he views all knowledge structures as metaphors of varying degrees of depth pointing to Reality. Having said that, Wilber maintains that no epistemological process of intellection, no matter how advanced or subtle, can ever be adequate to a full apprehension of the Absolute save the correctly and legitimately engaged injunctions of *Transcendelia* realised in NDC. The rationale for this argument subsists in the dualistic, and therefore limited modes of apperception that define the processes of reason. This assertion coheres with the classical claim of mystical *gnosis* given its trans-rational and ineffable qualities, but most mystics would not be concerned with its scientific provability, whereas Wilber is. This

means that Wilber's epistemology coheres with this criterion to the point of *Transcendelia*, but it then breaches the boundary because, for him, NDC is not metaphorical – it is scientifically provable, direct, unmediated apprehension of *Absolute Suchness*.

An aspect of the sixth criterion has already been addressed in the third criterion, but now it extends the recognition of incompleteness and partiality to all scientific concepts of causality. By way of example, says Harman (2001:29-30), '... the upward causation of physio-motor action resulting from a brain state does not necessarily invalidate the downward causation implied in the subjective feeling of volition.' This simply means that the regimen of nomothetic science is inadequate to the experience of causality in subjectivity. Again, a cursory reading of Wilber's epistemology appears to correspond wholly with this criterion given Wilber's embrace of *Absolute Subjectivity* as the definitive quality of the Reality experienced by mystics in NDC. In all the Waves preceding the realisation of NDC through *Transcendelia*, bifurcated processes of this upward and downward causality is recognised by Wilber and, in fact, very well developed (See Chapter 2.4.2). The difference for Wilber is that conscious apperception of these two causal movements is ultimately realised as illusory in NDC. Non-duality therefore pervades *Reality* as the timeless and definitive nature of the All, but *reality* perceives it only in antipodal parts. Causality, in other words, is only a functional and valid criterion in *reality*, not *Reality*. Thus observed, Wilber's notion of *Absolute Subjectivity* in NDC again projects its substance beyond the reach of epistemology thereby invalidating causality as a criterion. On the one hand the relinquishment of causality in the realisation of NDC corroborates Wilber's belief that it is a timeless, spaceless, ever-present Reality. NDC, particularly in Christian traditions, is discovered or given rather than generated or achieved, but even so, such discovery, on the other hand, must at some level be the product of intentionality since those who are not aware of, or desirous of NDC probably will not experience it. There must, in other words, be a causal element in the realisation of NDC if intentionality is implied.

The seventh criterion instructs that research in inner subjective experience must be participatory. In this sense a purely analytical or objectively exteriorised approach is too limited to detect and report substantially or meaningfully on the scope of inner personal experience. This implies an integrated partnership between the researcher and the phenomenon under scrutiny – in this case mystical consciousness. Once again, this criterion validates Wilber's epistemology to a point, but it also reveals a problem. In apparent

correspondence with this criterion, we have seen that Wilber's alleged scientific proof for the revelations of NDC can only be verified by those who have participated in the injunctions of *Transcendelia*. There is, in other words, no extrinsic evidence for it, whereas ordinary scientific proofs are self evident and rationally comprehensible without the need for the experiment to be re-conducted by every person who wishes to establish its truth-claims. An explanation of this distinction may be quite complex. Certainly, a person may choose to believe that NDC as described by Wilber is the result of a legitimate and replicable experiment that complies with general scientific epistemologies even when the person has not experienced NDC. The same may be said of any laboratory experiment based on Physicalist rather than Essentialist epistemologies. In both cases adherents can choose to believe whether the results of the experiments are legitimate or not. What is the difference? The answer is twofold. In the first place physical experiments do not require prior belief or faith for the results to be considered veridical, whereas Wilber's scheme requires the researcher to believe the truth-claims and demonstrate compliance as a necessary pre-condition to knowledge of the results. Secondly, a scientific researcher need not suspend reason nor language in order to validate the results, whereas Wilber's epistemology is contingent upon it. So how can the evidentially based scientific epistemology advocated by Wilber be legitimised by others who have not engaged the injunctions of *Transcendelia*? Wilber is right to proclaim that even the most comprehensive and exact science cannot fully represent Absolute Reality and yet his own epistemology claims to do precisely that (1993b:44; 1996b:68). Here Wilber quotes William James who says that, 'To know immediately ... is for mental content and object to be identical' (1993b:33). In isolation this coheres with a Physicalist non-duality of matter and Wilber (1993b:24) substantiates it by claiming that, '... the measured object could never be completely separated from the measuring subject ...', but in order for the subject to claim experience of NDC some form of 'observation', even if it is extremely subtle or passive, must remain. Logically, if Wilber's criterion is taken as writ, NDC can never be a conscious experience because consciousness is by definition binary – its existence is functionally defined by its inter-relational capacities. With this condition as an epistemological fundamental, how can NDC ever claim to be Absolute if it cannot even be proven to exist? There is therefore an important difference between the criterion of participation, and Wilber's insistence on total prior acquiescence for the research to be considered veridical.

This complex dilemma is extended in consideration of the eighth criterion. Here the conscious nature of the researcher is understood to be inextricable from the research. The corollary follows, says Harman (2001:31), ‘... that to be a competent investigator, the researcher must be willing to risk being profoundly changed through the process of exploration.’ In this instance Wilber’s epistemology does cohere with the parameters of the criterion. Again, this is inductively comprehensible once the researcher has submitted to the faith system’s inherent truth-claims, that is, once the researcher ‘believes’ that NDC is possible and that it is like other researchers say it is, but it can only be so proven from within, never from the outside. This is tantamount to saying that we can prove God exists because we can experience God, but only once we have chosen to believe that God exists. This reveals the critical difference between Wilber’s epistemological suppositions and that of true science. Helminiak (1998:222) highlights this problem by pointing out that:

... Wilber goes so far as to insist that there is proof for the existence of God. The knowledge of God is as public to the contemplative eye as is geometry to the mental eye and rainfall to the physical eye. And a trained/contemplative eye can *prove* the existence of God with exactly the same certainty and the same public nature as the eye of flesh can prove the existence of rocks ... [it is] an experimental, verifiable, repeatable proof for the existence of Godhead, *as a fact*, as a penultimate Datum, but that proof is not - indeed, could not be - merely rational or logical (let alone empirical).<sup>169</sup>

Wilber’s bold assertion is simply untenable within the scientific epistemology he claims for it. There is no evidence to suggest that a researcher will necessarily attain to NDC as described by Wilber by engaging the injunctions of *Transcendelia*, and even if such a claim is made, the results can never be convincingly tested. It may be true that a researcher is

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<sup>169</sup> Such strong asseverations invite criticism – or at least consideration of alternative approaches. Blaise Pascal, for example, in *Pensées* (1657-1658; cf Macrone 2002:14) posed the following argument to show that belief in the Christian religion is rational, ‘If the Christian God does not exist, the agnostic loses little by believing in him and gains correspondingly little by not believing. If the Christian God does exist, the agnostic gains eternal life by believing in him and loses an infinite good by not believing. William James objected to the argument that it supported belief in any religion that promised an eternal afterlife. Others have objected that though the argument does give one a reason for believing in the Christian God, it does not make that belief rational in the proper sense.’ Nietzsche (1844-1900) in *The Gay Science* (1974) fiercely criticised metaphysical speculations on the intelligibility, nature, and existence (or non-existence) of God (Macrone 2002:17). David Hume (1711-1776) on the other hand, ‘... showed that the statement “God exists” is neither necessarily true (since its denial is not necessarily false) nor empirical (since we cannot experience God with our senses). ‘Hume’s fork’ (an expression devised by Antony Flew in *Hume’s Theory of Belief* (1961) determines that such statements are nonsensical since they are beyond the bounds of knowledge’ (Macrone 2002:31). Hume distinguishes between two different areas of human study, relations of ideas, and matters of fact.’ In modern terminology, members of the first group are known as analytic propositions and members of the latter as synthetic propositions. This terminology comes from Kant (Introduction to *Critique of Pure Reason*, Section IV. 1922). In all cases, from a philosophical or scientific viewpoint, absolute claims about God’s existence are dismissed.

personally transformed in the process of conducting the experiment, but it is not possible to establish exactly whether the change replicates the experiment as Wilber testifies to it. Perhaps exact replication of the non-dual experience is not the point for Wilber, or perhaps the sense of *Absolute Subjectivity* realised in NDC is indeed variable or even completely formless, but even so, there is no way of knowing whether it is or not and it cannot therefore be truly representative of reconstructive science.

Finally, the ninth criterion wisely maintains that any epistemology of consciousness must accept that it may in time be replaced by another, more satisfactory set of criteria. Wilber is indeed amenable to adaptations which may refine his epistemology, but once an Absolute injunction has been established, no refinements in epistemology can make the first absolute any more absolute than it already is. Wilber thus indicates a willingness to accept corrections to his epistemology, but not his results, and this insistence alone forecloses the usefulness or necessity of subsequent or alternative mechanisms of research. More to the point, as Barrow (1998:219) rightly points out, ‘... you can never know whether your ultimate theory is the ultimate theory or not. There might always exist some deeper version of it: it might just be part of a larger theory.’

Having surveyed the nine criteria, it is evident in most cases that Wilber’s epistemology either breaches the recognised limits of exploration, or complies only partially. Nonetheless, Lorimer (2001:29-31), in whose anthology the nine criteria appear, rather sweepingly presumes that Wilber’s epistemology generally coheres with the criteria, but at least admits that ontological implications complicate the process.

In conclusion, it appears that Thomas Nagel (1974, 1986) may be right to claim that it is simply not possible to substantiate subjective levels of phenomenology from objective levels of physiology (Dennett 1993:433). If so, Wilber’s epistemology falls short of unconditional validation, but might there be an alternative? If the epistemological domain of subjective experience is re-translated, or possibly deconstructed to synthesise with the subtle complexes of the physiology of consciousness, the problem of duality may likewise be resolved. Reference to deconstruction is used conditionally here. The aim of deconstruction, particularly as it is espoused in the convoluted writings of Jacques Derrida (*Speech and Phenomena* 1973; *Of Grammatology* 1976; *Writing and Difference* 1978), is not specifically to resolve duality, but to show that idiomatic variability can mask mutual dependence or

sameness. Whilst Derrida is not directly concerned with the Essentialist-Physicalist argument, his investigation into the genesis of structures imbues complexity with meaningfulness that can be distilled only by 'stripping' concepts (particularly linguistic constructs) of their presumed extra-linguistic meanings.<sup>170</sup> In this case Wilber's epistemology would come under severe criticism from Derrida for its Essentialist suppositions beyond the reasonable limits of symbolic representation. By inference, this also means that Wilber conceals too much Essentialist innuendo in his claim to reconstructive science by assigning an independent ontology to ideas that fall beyond the domain of language. This also means, contrary to Wilber's ultimate proposition, that no absolute truth can ever be established to any degree of certainty, and Derrida's criticism, at least on this point, substantiates the argument of this thesis.

In Wilber's view mystics must forego, or more accurately 'transcend' language and reason in order to accommodate the paradoxes of ultimacy in NDC. As such, any claims the mystics choose as fundamental to the unitive experience may then be used as a basis for induction and there is no way of proving scientifically whether they are right or wrong despite Wilber's claims to the contrary.<sup>171</sup> With apology to Derrida, the adapted form of deconstruction tendered in the previous paragraph constitutes a brand of soft monism which equals Wilber's non-dual premise, but bases its argument on the unity of matter as the exclusive substance of the universe. The difference, of course, is that the continuum of matter does not subsist in any absolute form – it is as entropically fraught and chaotic as it is complex and evolutionary. Even so, there is no reason to suppose that the absence of absolute equanimity is any less capable of an experience like NDC - in fact its unitive and evolutionary complexity may make NDC more sensibly explicable because science remains definitively heuristic, whereas Essentialist claims to ineffable Absolute Spirit foreclose the possibility of heuristic discovery because, as has already been pointed out, once the Absolute is experienced, it cannot be reasonably claimed that any subsequent experience can be *more* absolute. Clearly, the core of the philosophical pursuit throughout history is designed to establish coherent knowledge of both physical and metaphysical aspects such as truth, being, reality, and so forth. All too often however, attempts to justify metaphysical arguments through Physicalist epistemologies

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<sup>170</sup> Derrida does however focus on the importance of opposites. He explains that deconstruction is an attempt to open texts to the possibility of various meanings and that its methodology is usually based on the perception of binaries or opposites to the extent that given contexts blend or obfuscate meanings (Caputo 1997).

<sup>171</sup> This is so, says Snoke (1995:7), because, 'Comparison of claims of truth is impossible; each person remains sealed off in a subjective world alone.'



reveal tautologies and self-contradictions (Macrone 2002:192). Physicalist arguments conversely tend to fall short when addressing issues of ultimacy or highly subjective experiences reminiscent of NDC, but at least they are comprehensibly able to substantiate their truth-claims.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Wilber's Integral Model hinges on the evolutionary unfolding of consciousness in Stages or Waves which are distinguished on the bases of their transformative functions, and refer in general to the ontological strata of the *Great Nest of Being*. Basic, Transitional, Surface, and Deep Structures represent phase-specific competencies which either endure or are transcended through Translation and Transformation, and developmental Lines or Streams run through these Waves and Structures as necessary, if inadequate propensities to higher development. Within all four Quadrants of Wilber's Model, the operational categorisation of Wave types through which Streams function as intra-dynamic aptitudes, also facilitate various phase-specific States. All these operational mechanisms reveal the nascent framework of Wilber's Integral intention. Thus viewed, Wilber's model assumes an organismic and metabolic character since transformations are effected by the extent to which all variables dynamically interact as an integrated and complex unity, the formulation of which constitutes Wilber's wider definition of consciousness, and this will be articulated with more contextual precision when Wilber's understanding on NDC is considered in Chapter 6.4.<sup>172</sup>

Whilst the metaphorical usefulness of such mechanisms is accepted, it will not be possible to argue either scientifically, nor biologically that human consciousness grades or classifies experience according to Wilber's spectra. If Wilber is right to validate the calibrations in the Spectrum of Consciousness from an existential and scientific vantage point, he cannot simultaneously claim its definitive and pre-eminent absolute non-duality through the same epistemology. In short, Wilber's entire model is structured on graded levels of duality – it is only in ULQ that the non-dual Reality of the All is realised in NDC, but on what bases can one highly abstracted and un-provable state of consciousness, experienced by very few people, claim the definitive description of *Kosmos*? Wilber admits more than once to metaphorical qualities in all developmental Waves, Structures, Streams, and States in his Four Quadrant Model, but within the

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<sup>172</sup> Wilber makes it clear that his model is a multivalent meshwork of interconnecting wholes and, he says, '... there is precious little about it that is linear' (2000:xvii).

qualified embrace of all possibilities, it becomes extremely difficult to criticise him on any point since his model would already have allocated a place on the spectrum to accommodate the counterpoint. Wilber, to make the statement unambiguously, assimilates all seemingly contradictory possibilities by ultimately resolving paradox in his non-dual premise. This is an artful and sophisticated strategy and the alluring complexity of Wilber's noetic demography as it interweaves Physicalist and scientific exemplars with Essentialist and metaphysical epistemologies as an explanation of the All can easily beguile readers into compliance. Wilber's epistemology therefore warrants closer scrutiny.

Philosophical variability in approaches to epistemology are complicated in the extent to which epistemology implies ontology, and Wilber's claims to the ultimacy of Mind realised in NDC retracts the precepts of evolutionary science and his system fails on the basis of self-referential contradiction. Measured against validating criteria established by other scientists and philosophers for ascertaining the epistemological legitimacy of consciousness research, Wilber's epistemology falters on too many fronts for it to retain unqualified academic credibility. Whilst the *Three Eyes of Knowledge* and the *Three Step Exemplar* are ingenious constructs to metaphorically explain the phenomenology of experience as it ascends to non-dual awareness, the existential processes of consciousness evince no such categorisations. The *Four Validity Claims* distinguish criteria for different types of knowing more persuasively, but likewise succumb to contextual variability which obscures clear distinction.

Beneath the well structured and sensible methodology of Wilber's epistemological constructs lies a philosophical bias which identifies his Essentialist status. Despite Wilber's unequivocal rejection of such a label, there is no other way in which he can include absolutist qualities which claim ultimate explanations for the All. In other words, Wilber uses God-like qualities (*Absolute Suchness*, Mind, Ground, trans-rationality, ineffability, *Geist*, and the ontological pre-eminence of Consciousness) as a pre-script to all manifest disintegrations of this non-duality into the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual features of existence. Moreover, he claims to achieve this by importing the instruments of reconstructive science, but scientific epistemologies focus on clearly defined categories of objectivity, not on an absolutely subjective experience of ineffable, timeless, spaceless All-ness. The nine criteria emerging from the Tomales Bay conference facilitated by Harman reveal further anomalies in Wilber's epistemology and the combined results indicate a variety of functional flaws in Wilber's approach. Consequently, Wilber's epistemology may hold appeal for

fellow Essentialists who are implicitly predisposed to a spiritualised interpretation of the *Kosmos*, but Wilber's epistemological methodology and the premises which he imports to pre-define it, will fail in the science by which he claims to authenticate it.

## CHAPTER FOUR THE CONTEXTUAL IMPLICATIONS OF WILBER'S INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY

### 4.1 Introduction

The developing framework of Wilber's Integral Philosophy has been surveyed and it is now necessary to establish the context of his argument within the mainstream of scholarly opinion. Inasmuch as Wilber's Integral Philosophy claims a balanced synthesis of all possible approaches to knowledge, there is nonetheless an orientational bias which is designed to serve his ultimate purpose. In other words, Wilber's intention is not only context dependent, but also advocates a certain emphasis in his integral *Theory of Everything* (2001a). Wilber's overall purpose is to establish that the ultimacy realised in NDC is the definitive nature of the *All* as non-dual Reality. He chooses to use scientific epistemology and methodology as his theoretical medium, but does the incorporation of such wide varieties of disciplines in his Integral Philosophy not complicate his ability to preserve coherence and consistency in keeping with scientific protocols? A brief survey of some variations in epistemological conventions in the evolution of scientific thinking illustrates the complexity of this problem. Wilber recognises the dangers of unsubstantiated inter-disciplinary connotations, but does his inclusion of an irreducible pre- or trans-material Consciousness not impair the cogency of his argument? In the ensuing debate further critical consideration is therefore applied to Wilber's *Three Eyes of Knowledge* and the *Three Step Exemplar*. In the wake of these inconsistencies it may be legitimately asked whether Wilber should not be classified as a metaphysician or esoteric philosopher rather than a scientist.

The answer to this question is informed by Wilber's views of the transformations effected in evolutions from Modernism to Post-modernism. Wilber identifies physiological, socio-cultural, psychological and spiritual advances in terms of his overall holonic scheme. The focus is particularly on the impact this incremental process has on religious consciousness. In so doing Wilber centres increasingly on NDC as its end-purpose and reduces the efficacy of all other disciplines to categories of mere interpretation in varying degrees of noetic disintegration. Consequently any Physicalist theory is relegated to modernist contractions, but is Wilber's dismissal of Physicalism justified – moreover does it not betray his integral claims? The problem is considered within the context of the Christian Church's status in the world today and inquires into the possibility that, contra Wilber's view, Physicalism may enhance or at least informatively supplement the mystical character of the emerging Church.

This proposal necessarily raises questions about the legitimacy, authority, and authenticity of current religious expressions. A sample of contemporary challenges to religious world-views motivates the hypothesis that religious belief and practice is a dynamic or adaptive process. This indicates that spiritual consciousness may be more constructed than revealed and it raises questions about the implicit purpose of religion. Wilber answers that there are phase-specific levels of subscription to religion which distinguish between mere belief, life transforming faith, direct mystical apprehension, and permanent adaptation through non-dual awareness. Legitimacy is thereby established in the extent to which the constituents of religion are coherently and meaningfully integrated to the full effect of its purpose. More important than the preservation of the coherent integrity of a faith system is its ability to facilitate Transformation in its adherents. Such Transformation necessarily allows devotees to transcend the implicit conceptual and linguistic confines which demarcate the parameters of the religion. The process is coherent in mystagogy, but does it comply with the procedural and ontological limitations of Wilber's reconstructive science and can he legitimise it on these empirical grounds? Is there perhaps a defensible argument for a non-reductive Physicalist rendering which is definitively non-dual?

#### **4.2 The Science-Religion Debate**

By now Wilber's intention to couch his Integral Philosophy within the epistemological exactitudes of the scientific idiom is clear.<sup>173</sup> It is not clear however, that scientific language consistently obeys Wilber's purpose. Wilber is aware of this ambiguity and advises from the outset that meanings assigned to science, scientific method, religion, and non-dual or mystical consciousness warrant clarification. It should be noted therefore that this section is not intended to assess Wilber's full survey of scientific evolution since this would extend beyond this argument's necessary purpose, but rather to evaluate the epistemological instruments Wilber fashions to serve his scientific-integral endeavour.

Through adaptive processes of elaboration, Wilber aims to reconcile and integrate science and religion without betraying the integrity of their respective epistemological structures.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Habermas similarly observes that Wilber's attempt to integrate science and religion could be seen as a, '... motto for [his] *oeuvre* as a whole' (Wilber 2001b).

<sup>174</sup> Wilber explains that, 'If science and religion are to be integrated, each must give at least a little, without, however, deforming themselves beyond recognition. We have asked science to do nothing more than expand from narrow empiricism (sensory experience only) to broad empiricism (direct experience in general), which it already does anyway with its own conceptual operations, from logic to mathematics. But religion, too, must give a little. And in this case, religion must open its truth-claims to direct verification - or rejection - by experiential

He claims to achieve this by appealing to the experiential, and therefore ‘scientific’ veracity of mystical-type experience corroborated by its perennial, albeit metaphorically variable occurrence in the wisdom traditions (1998a:5-6). In Flier’s anthology (1995:132), Mitchell raises the first and most obvious concern by questioning whether NDC, as the mystically ineffable and transcendent Suchness of all consciousness, can be reconciled and integrated with reason-based epistemologies. Bearing in mind that Wilber defines science as, ‘... any discipline that openly, honestly, and conscientiously opens its knowledge claims to three strands of valid data accumulation and verification’ (1996e:72), it is rightly assumed that Wilber offers a qualified affirmation. Presumptuously perhaps, he suggests that if science is defined simply as ‘knowledge’, then contemplation resulting in NDC becomes a form of science; in fact, says Wilber, ‘... the highest science’ (1985:11).<sup>175</sup> We have seen that Wilber establishes this argument on the premise of his *Three Step Exemplar* which he claims as intrinsic to all forms of science. It must be pointed out however, that the theory and process of the scientific enterprise has evolved into highly complex a-synonymous dialects. Macrone (2002:89) points out, for example, that as Einstein’s field theory emerged, ‘... the Newtonian universe crumbled.’<sup>176</sup> Newtonian physics is not thereby invalidated, but its conceptual scope delimited by the analytical criteria necessary for research in quantum physics. For the moment, the evolution of science seems to endorse Wilber’s extrapolation of scientific methodologies into the higher reaches of consciousness typical of religious experience, but can such a leap be sanctioned by general scientific definition? At this point, we are also reminded of the mistaken assumption that scientific progress, particularly as an inter-disciplinary method, is a smooth evolution towards increasing depth and precision, whereas Thomas Kuhn (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 1962), upon whom Wilber basis his rendition of exemplars, points out that scientific progress is rather, ‘... a series of crises or revolutions, expressed as ‘paradigm shifts’ (Macrone 2002:90).<sup>177</sup> Further to the

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evidence. Religion, like science, will have to engage the three strands of all valid knowledge and anchor its claims in direct experience (1998a:160-161).

<sup>175</sup> Lorimer (2001:168) would support Wilber on this point. He says, ‘It is my firm belief that we are rapidly approaching a point when transpersonal psychology and the work with non-ordinary states of consciousness will become integral parts of a new scientific paradigm of the future.’ Wilber, however, cautions against unsubstantiated comparisons between the mysteries associated with NDC and vagaries in quantum science. In Wilber’s own words, ‘... as any epistemologist will tell us, in no case could an interpretation validate the mystic world view. If there is no conceivable physical test that would disprove the mystic view, and there isn’t, then there is no conceivable one which could corroborate it either. Beyond that point, however, take Bernstein’s warning with you: “thank the new physics for agreeing with you, but resist the temptation to build your transpersonal models upon [its] shifting sands ...” (1996e:145).

<sup>176</sup> The distinctions between the various evolutions in scientific domains and methods are well summarised by Macrone (2002:89, 97-98, 106-107).

<sup>177</sup> It should be noted that Wilber is weary of references to ‘paradigms’ in scientific contexts. He says, ‘It is not through any sort of “new paradigm” in science that spirituality and modern science will finally find mutual accord ... As such, it can profoundly detract from the awakening of a genuine spiritual awareness’ (1998a:39-40).

previous question then, is Wilber's 'paradigm shift' extending science beyond its rightful epistemological terrain?

On the basis of these preliminary questions and observations, further discussion must be prefaced by the understanding that scientific disciplines are not definitively homogenous. By way of a more pertinent example to this investigation, it is understood that the field, theoretical framework, and methodology of definitions befitting Newtonian empiricism as to recent hypotheses in the science of consciousness are quite different despite their mutual claim to science. Thus, conventional scientific demarcations become malleable in order to extend their exploratory scope. Even Dennett, an arch Physicalist, in *Freedom Evolves* (2004) has extended scientific research into the domain of free will and determinism in ways that necessarily stretch the empirical frontier into varieties of subjectivity.<sup>178</sup> Alexander, among many other scientists, is suspicious of such licence. He sceptically cautions that it is, '... possible to attach either religious, secular, or overtly political overtones to science ... until the science itself becomes transformed as a carrier of a particular message that is not necessarily intrinsic to the science itself, but imposed from outside by the personal agenda of the communicator' (Alexander 2001:57). Habermas is therefore right to identify the misgiving with which Wilber's integration of scientific and meta-physical knowledge structures will be viewed.<sup>179</sup> Weis (Wilber 2001b) is one such critic and denounces Wilber's attempt to, '... prove in a "scientific" way the metaphysical statements of the spiritual traditions ... Metaphysics and science can never meet ... A scientific proof of the existence of God is a contradiction in terms.'

In defence of Wilber, both Habermas and Weiss misconstrue Wilber's intention. Wilber rejects the possibility that mythological constructs, contingent belief systems, and emotive experiences traditionally associated with religious definitions can be integrated with scientific epistemologies unless the approach is sociological or anthropological where phenomenological verification is possible.<sup>180</sup> Instead, Wilber postulates a post-metaphysical

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<sup>178</sup> By subjectivity Dennett does not mean non-physical, and an opportunity to consider Dennett's view will be presented in more detail in Chapter Seven.

<sup>179</sup> The term 'metaphysics', says Davies (1992:19), '... came to mean *theories about theories* of physics. Suddenly it was respectable to discuss 'classes of laws' instead of the actual laws of our universe.' The implication here is that metaphysics does not qualify for the same type or degree of scientific veracity as pure physics. The question of provability therefore raises the primary difference between the purely physical and metaphysical disciplines.

<sup>180</sup> In *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists* (1985:Preface) Wilber notes that, '... modern physics offers no positive support (let alone proof) for a mystical worldview ... [and yet] mysticism, precisely to the extent that it is genuine, is perfectly capable of offering its own defence...'

and reconstructive science based on the veracity of direct experiential evidence which, in turn, must be corroborated by others who have similarly engaged the experimental injunctions.<sup>181</sup> Wilber, referring to the ascent of consciousness to non-duality, describes this as a:

... rational reconstruction of the essential elements or deep features of higher stages and a call to develop these higher stages in oneself by taking up ... transformative practice[s] that have been *empirically demonstrated* to accelerate the unfolding of these higher waves. These direct spiritual experiences are entirely compatible with a general *scientific attitude that demands evidence, carried out through research, and grounded at every point in experiment and experience* [my italics] (2001b).<sup>182</sup>

Wilber's purpose is not therefore to 'prove' the existence of God, but to endorse the scientific verifiability of NDC. Qualified in this way it may nonetheless be asked whether there is an epistemologically discernable difference between proving the *Absolute Subjectivity* realised in NDC and God. Wilber's claim to ultimacy and ineffability in NDC therefore remains problematic in scientific terms and he will be tackled repeatedly on these issues, but his approach does not resemble the many attempts to conflate scientific and spiritual heuristics as Weiss supposes. Thus defended, it is easy to ascertain the reasons for Weiss' misperceptions. In just one example Wilber says:

One would hardly imagine that in picking up a college physics textbook, one is actually handling a "religious" document that has carefully been scrubbed clean of all dirty words such as intuition, eternity, and Godhead. But the central concern of physical science revolves around the concept of energy and its transformations, whether these transformations occur in molecules, biological systems, or computers. And how is this Energy described? It can neither be created nor destroyed, put together nor taken apart, and on the whole it is neither increasing nor decreasing, remaining always constant. This, in fact, is the First Law of Thermodynamics. Further, the Energy of the universe, which remains forever constant, nevertheless undergoes "transformations" or "manifestations" for all types of energy and matter, whether kinetic, thermal, or molecular, are spoken of as "Forms of Energy." As a matter of fact, all phenomena in the universe are ultimately nothing but forms of Energy, so that this Energy more or less "underlies" all material things. This is pure physics, but it sounds strangely familiar, and one begins to wonder whether we are discussing physics or

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<sup>181</sup> Wilber mentions Zen, Yoga, Gnostic Christianity, Vajrayana Buddhism, and Vedanta as examples wherein he maintains that, in varied forms, his *Three Step Exemplar* of verification: experiment, experience, and consensus, do qualify as legitimate spiritual sciences' (1996e:63).

<sup>182</sup> Again, Wilber is convinced in this case that, '... we can speak of the science of religion just as legitimately as we speak of the science of psychology, biology, or physics' (1985:20).



Hinduism. Ultimately, it matters not one whit whether we say that all things are forms of Energy or forms of Brahman. (1993b:173).

In isolation, this extract easily lends credence to Weiss' judgement, but within the larger context of his Integral Philosophy, Wilber makes it clear that, '... physics and mysticism are not two different approaches to the same reality. They are different approaches to two quite different levels of reality ...' (1996e:133). It has previously been shown that these Levels or Waves interweave and together constitute one Reality, but viewed in this way they do not combine into a form of universalism. More precisely, Wilber argues that mysticism transcends, but includes physics and he therein grants *a priori* ascendancy to mysticism which most scientists would not condone, but he qualifies this as an intra-dependant dynamic in his Involution-Evolution argument. It is rather scientists such as Schroeder (2002:1-2) who risk possible damage to advances in the science/religion debate in sweeping declarations claiming that, 'Atheist, agnostic, sceptic, and believer all share the understanding that some metaphysical non-thing ... must have preceded our universe or have our universe imbedded in it. That much is a certainty.'<sup>183</sup> On the contrary, there is no such certainty in the scientific fraternity and Wilber is particularly critical of such ventures and singles out scientists such as David Bohm (1980), Karl Pribram (1971), Gary Zukav (1979), Rupert Sheldrake (1981, 1988), and Fritjof Capra (1975) whose scientific work, he says, '... is too important to be weighed down with wild speculations on mysticism' (1996b:152).<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> The views espoused by Essentialist scientists like Schroeder invite criticism. Schroeder observes that science is gradually mutating into a wide variety of disciplines; complexity theory, artificial intelligence, network dynamics, cognitive science, and notably the science of consciousness. In search of an umbrella term, Schroeder (2002:xi) says many have opted for 'systems theory' which, '... attempts to complement or even supplant the reductionist orientation of classical science with a perspective based on fluxes, emergent behaviours, feedback loops, and unified but dynamic wholes.' This description sounds remarkably similar to that proposed by Wilber's Integral Philosophy and the conjunction of disciplines easily seduces its proponents to pursue the possibility of a grand unification theory. In rather sweeping phrase, Schroeder (2002:xi) believes that the result of such an endeavour will reveal that, 'A single consciousness, an all-encompassing wisdom, pervades the universe. The discoveries of science, those that search the quantum nature of subatomic matter, those that explore the molecular complexity of biology, and those that probe the brain/mind interface, have moved us to the brink of a startling realisation: all existence is the expression of this wisdom'. Wilber's Integral Philosophy is not principally in conflict with Schroeder's bold claim, and in both cases they contain obvious *a priori* assumptions that there is a prevailing Consciousness (Wisdom, *Suchness*, *Geist*, Ground, Mind) which is somehow creating and sustaining the universe.

<sup>184</sup> Wilber expresses strong reservation about initiatives such as Capra's *Tao of Physics* (1976) and Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (1979), which claim that modern physics supports or proves mysticism. Physics, says Wilber, '... is a limited, finite, relative, and partial endeavour, dealing with a very limited aspect of reality. It does not, for example, deal with biological, psychological, economic, literary, or historical truths; whereas mysticism deals with all of that, with the Whole. To say physics proves mysticism is like saying the tail proves the dog' (1991:19). Davies (1992:73) agrees, 'The popularity of *holistic science* in recent years has prompted a string of books, most notably Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics*, that stress the similarities between ancient Eastern philosophy, with its emphasis on the holistic interconnectedness of physical things, and modern nonlinear physics. Can we conclude that Oriental philosophy and theology were, after all, superior to their Western counterparts? Surely not.' A response to Capra's critique of Wilber's views on physics can be found in Wilber (1982d) (Rothberg 1996a:7 cf Wilber 1985:5; 1996b:23, 137, 145-149).

Wilber formulates the distinction between mystical consciousness and physics more carefully. He describes the mystical experience as a Reality that is, ‘... apprehended directly and immediately; meaning without any mediation, any symbolic elaboration, any conceptualisation, or any abstractions; subject and object become one in a timeless and spaceless act that is beyond any and all forms of mediation’ (1985:7-8). Physicists, on the other hand, observe quantum reality relatively - as mediated by the definitive strictures and instruments of scientific percipience, and it is most often expressed in mathematical formulae.<sup>185</sup> Thus distinguished, and with no disrespect to his friendship with the late Bede Griffiths, Wilber would not agree with Griffiths’ view that Capra’s rendition of advances in the so-called ‘new physics’ justifies quantum concurrences with mystical consciousness (Griffiths 1987:76-87).<sup>186</sup> The reason for this, maintains Wilber, is that spirituality must establish scientific integrity on the basis of its own provability rather than mimicking monological processes necessary for establishing scientific truth appropriate to materialistic or rational domains of scientific research (Wilber 1998a:139-140). In this way we must appreciate, suggests Davies (1992:73), that scientific progress, ‘... requires both reductionistic and holistic approaches. It is not a question of one being right and the other wrong, as some people like to assert, but the need for two complementary ways of studying physical phenomena.’

Having noted Wilber’s criticism of popular attempts to merge spiritual and scientific notions of reality, we are now poised to consider his more measured views of ‘genuine science and authentic religion’ (Wilber 1985:21).<sup>187</sup> By ‘genuine’ Wilber means experientially verifiable or refutable data based on substantiated evidence, and by ‘authentic’ he refers specifically to

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<sup>185</sup> Wilber cites Niels Bohr and James Jeans as examples and he quotes them thus. “It must be recognised that we are here dealing with a purely symbolic procedure ... Hence our whole space-time view of physical phenomena depends ultimately on these abstractions.” Sir James Jeans was specific: in the study of modern physics, he says, “we can never understand what events are, but must limit ourselves to describing the patterns of events in mathematical terms; no other aim is possible. Physicists who are trying to understand nature may work in many different fields and by many different methods; one may dig, one may sow, one may reap. But the final harvest will always be a sheaf of mathematical formulae. These will never describe nature itself ... [Thus] our studies can never put us into contact with reality” (1985:7-8).

<sup>186</sup> It is intriguing to follow the writings of Paul Davies in this context. Davies reflects, ‘The very fact that the universe is creative, and that the laws have permitted complex structures to emerge and develop to the point of consciousness – in other words that the universe has organised its own self-awareness – is for me powerful evidence that there is ‘something going on’ behind it all. The impression of design is overwhelming’ (Alexander 2001:424). Thus quoted, Davies does not, as may be construed from Alexander’s reference, postulate the existence of Spirit from an argument of design. In *God and the New Physics* (1983) Davies made a first effort to grapple with this clash of ideologies. *The Mind of God* (1992) is a more considered attempt and he says, ‘As a professional scientist I am fully committed to the scientific method of investigating the world’ (1992:xiv). Some of Griffiths’ observations in this regard may be found in Griffiths (1987a:247) and *The Emerging Universal Consciousness and the Mystical Traditions of Asia (Cistercian Studies)*. 1987. 22 (1):76-87).

<sup>187</sup> In the course of this research, Wilber consulted the writings of Einstein, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, de Broglie, Planck, Bohr, Pauli, and Eddington among others (Wilber 1991:17).

the experientially transformative character of mystical practice in the Perennial Philosophy. Lorimer (2001:166) quotes Wilber's discrimination candidly, '... there cannot possibly be a conflict between genuine science and authentic religion. If there seems to be a conflict, we are very likely dealing with 'bogus science' and 'bogus religion', where either side has a serious misunderstanding of the other's position and very likely represents a false or fake version of its own discipline.'<sup>188</sup> The consequence of such 'bogus' attempts have resulted, among other misfortunes, in numerous 'god-of-the-gaps' presumptions which variously use idiomatic anomalies in science to motivate unsubstantiated theistic inclusions (Barrow 1998:23).<sup>189</sup> This judgement is not to deny, as Davies (1992:214) believes, that the universe is, '... nothing short of astonishing.'<sup>190</sup> Nonetheless, the implication is that both science and religion describe reality (or Reality) legitimately, albeit in variant prose, and Wilber would agree in principle, but he is cautious to qualify the nature of apparent synchronicities.

If, as we have seen, Reality means Spirit, then for Wilber, physics and mysticism are not dialectal variants of the same Reality, but rather 'realities' as different dimensions in the Hierarchy of Being. There are however other possible interpretations. For instance, when Reality is used with reference to Spirit as Ground, then Wilber maintains that no valid comparisons can be made since Ground (or Suchness or Mind) is an indivisibility which, by definition, must be unaccommodating of comparative reasoning. Alternatively, Reality may be used with reference to the Totality of the All, in which case it must include physics and mysticism. On closer inspection these possible representations contain tautologies which, says Wilber, may result in, '... bogus scientific claims supporting allegedly mystical claims, which, in the long run, helps neither genuine science nor genuine mysticism' (1985:24-25).

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<sup>188</sup> Several other scientists and metaphysicians are similarly critical of such conflations. Alexander (2001:356) quotes Gould who is especially wary of arguments, '... that find kindness, mutuality, synergism, harmony – the very elements that we strive mightily, and so often unsuccessfully, to put into our own lives – intrinsically in nature.' Wilber's qualified approach to the mutuality of science and religion suggests that, '... if science can surrender its narrow empiricism for a broader empiricism, and if religion can surrender its bogus mythic claims in favour of authentic spiritual experience ... then suddenly, very suddenly, science and religion begin to look more like fraternal twins than centuries-old enemies' (Wilber 1998a:169).

<sup>189</sup> Among others, Bohr's *Principle of Complementarity* and Heisenberg's *Principle of Uncertainty*, respectively indicated that sub-atomic particles do not behave in predictable patterns according to the established laws of science, and appear to exhibit different properties simultaneously. Both postulations had a widespread impact on human thinking about certainty and knowledge. In general, says Barrow (1998:23), '... the tenor of this discussion welcomes rather than despairs of the ignorance that [Bohr and] Heisenberg guarantee.'

<sup>190</sup> Wilber adds further quotes from some of the great scientists whom, he claims, are mystics at heart. In *Quantum Questions* (1985) he says that he wanted, '... them to be able to speak eloquently for themselves about why "the most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical" (Einstein), about how "the mechanism demands a mysticism" (de Broglie), about existing "in the mind of some eternal Spirit" (Jeans), about why "a synthesis embracing both rational understanding and the mystical experience of unity is the mythos, spoken or unspoken, of our present day and age" (Wolfgang Pauli), and about the most important relationship of all, "that of a human soul to a divine spirit" (Eddington)' (Wilber 1991:19). Such general ascriptions to eminent scientists may not be justified. Certainly Einstein would not have described himself as a theist as Wilber implies him to be.

Thus clarified, Wilber offers his own differentiations to the debate. If science is defined exclusively on the basis of instrumentally validated empirico-sensory knowledge, then Wilber rightly claims that, ‘... every conceivable form of religion becomes non-scientific’ (1985:11). We may then either submit to faith which validates religious-type experience within the tenets of a belief system based on inherent truth-claims, or we may view religious experience as unscientific and principally superstitious. The former option exempts religious experience from the necessity of scientific validation and, according to Wilber, is generally a Kantian view maintained by the likes of Planck, Einstein, and Eddington.<sup>191</sup> Wilber suggests that the latter options regard religion as forms of, ‘... primitive thinking (Comte), or a defence mechanisms expiating guilt and anxiety (Freud), or opaque ideologies institutionalising alienation (Marx), or a debilitating projections of [humanity’s] inward yearnings (Feuerbach), or purely private emotional affairs, harmless in themselves but not deserving the title “knowledge” (Quine, Ayer, and the positivists)’ (Wilber 1985:12). Wilber’s cavalier assessment of these eminent philosophers is probably unfair and his burlesque approach invites its own labelling. If Wilber were to be caricatured, he could justifiably be described as a ‘scientist of spirit’, but in my view the title is too loaded and the full embrace of Wilber’s integral undertaking should more accurately be described as a philosophy. Wilson’s opinion of the science/religion debate would also support Wilber’s scientific-spiritual cosmography as a philosophy rather than a science. He says, ‘... the Science versus Religion match is usually conducted most loudly by people who would benefit from a few months spent reading a third discipline - philosophy’ (Wilson 2000:260).<sup>192</sup> Given the convoluted cartography of scientific definition, and Wilber’s subscription to *Absolute Subjectivity*, it may be more accurate to view Wilber’s theory as a

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<sup>191</sup> Davies (1992:17) explains the Kantian view succinctly, ‘Kant accepted the empiricist’s premise that all knowledge begins with our experiences of the world, but he also believed ... that human beings possess certain innate knowledge that is necessary for any thought to take place at all. There are thus two components that come together in the process of thinking: sense data and *a priori* knowledge. Kant used his theory to explore the limits of what human beings, by the very nature of their powers of observation and reasoning, could ever hope to know. His criticism of metaphysics was that our reasoning can apply only to the realm of experience, to the phenomenal world we actually observe. We have no reason to suppose it can be applied to any hypothetical realm that might lie beyond the world of actual phenomena. In other words, we can apply our reasoning to things-as-we-see-them, but this can tell us nothing about the things-in-themselves. Any attempt to theorise about a *reality* that lies behind the objects of experience is doomed to failure.’

<sup>192</sup> Alexander qualifies the status of philosophy of physical and meta-physical enterprises more carefully, ‘... every human being is a philosopher ... These philosophical assumptions are invariably metaphysical in character, that is, they go well beyond anything that could be supported, even in principle, by scientific data. We have therefore expressed scepticism at the claim, to which a certain kind of scientist appears to be particularly prone, that their Paradigm occupies some lofty high-ground free of such metaphysical assumptions. In reality all worldviews are metaphysical rivals and can be assessed by the normal process of rational argument. Science itself does not represent a metaphysical worldview but is rather a series of procedures and techniques for obtaining reliable knowledge about the physical world’ (2002:460).

philosophical foundation to the science/religion debate and his argument will henceforth be treated as such.

Essential as Wilber's distinction between science and religion may be, it also identifies his greater priority in mysticism. He maintains a primary rule, that science may be variously and validly defined on the condition of consistency, and he therein prefers to emphasise the distinction between the methodology of scientific epistemologies and the ontological domain of science rather than the distinction between science and religion *per se* (Wilber 1985:12).<sup>193</sup> We are familiar by now with Wilber's theory of scientific epistemology, but his claim to 'consistency' is spurious. In reminder, he views science as a, '... method of gaining knowledge whereby hypotheses are tested (instrumentally or experimentally) by reference to experience (data) that is potentially public, or open to repetition (confirmation or refutation) by peers' (1985:13). Rothberg, in support of Wilber's methodology, reminds us that Wilber's approach intends to broaden scientific concepts to, '... make sense of the ways of knowing connected with transpersonal stages of development ...' and that such 'knowing' is akin to the basic logic of all modes of science (Rothberg 1996a:4).<sup>194</sup> Nonetheless, Wilber cautions that the conceptual instruments of empirical-analytical, or monological science cannot be adequately applied to phenomenological or transcendental concerns (1996e:67). This rendering admits subjectivity into the domain of scientific epistemology to the extent that it transcends purely rational and materialistic ontologies to include personal inner experience, but Wilber goes even further than this. If physicality is not thus transcended by science, he says that, '... mathematics, logic, psychology, and sociology could not be called "scientific," in that the central aspects of those domains are non-sensory, non-empirical, non-physical, or meta-physical occasions' (1985:13).<sup>195</sup> This argument is superficially sensible, but the spectra of scientific epistemologies applied in these disciplines are dissimilar since the conceptual architecture of scientific assessments necessarily adapt to their respective fields of

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<sup>193</sup> In his own words, Wilber claims that, '... the battle between pre-modern and modern is a battle between interior and exterior. It is my main contention that unless we can find a way for both of those claims to be true - the transcendental and the empirical, the interior and the exterior - we will never genuinely integrate science and religion' (1998a:62).

<sup>194</sup> Wilber's spectrum model of consciousness also gives him a clear framework with which to approach epistemological questions. In the first two essays in *Eye to Eye* (1996e), and later in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (2000), he argues for broadening our concept of science so as to make sense of the ways of knowing connected with transpersonal stages of development. Rothberg (1996a:4) contends that, for Wilber, '... there is a logic to such knowing (which he labels "contemplative") akin to the basic logic of all modes of science.'

<sup>195</sup> In this way Wilber maintains that, '... if empirical science rejects the validity of any and all forms of interior apprehension and knowledge, then it rejects its own validity as well, a great deal of which rests on interior structures and apprehensions that are not delivered by the senses or confirmable by the senses (such as logic and mathematics, to name only two). If science acknowledges these interior apprehensions, upon which its own operations depend, then it cannot object to interior knowledge *per se*' (1998a:144).

research. Primarily however, all these disciplines would argue that coherence and consistency are preserved on the basis of epistemologically verifiable premises. There is, in other words, no confusion of ontologies, whereas Wilber's integralism embraces all possible ontologies, but can consistency be retained in such a scheme?

In answer to this question, Jacobs (2001:4) applauds Wilber's attempt to extend the notion of science to include spiritual or subjective experience, but Visser (2001:5) claims that Wilber succeeds in more than this by, '... correlating the various types of science with the four quadrants and the levels of science with the three main levels of human existence: body, mind, and spirit, offering the first truly integral approach to science and spirituality.' Visser's interpretation thus permits the application of quadrant and level-specific sciences to Wilber's Four Quadrant Model, in which case it cannot simultaneously be consistent, unless Visser builds generic variability into his definition of science, but is the definition then integral, or just loose? Visser's interpretation of Wilber's approach is reminiscent of forms of pluralism, whereas a more accurate approach to Wilber's integral intention should accommodate at least some degree of generic applicability to the model as a whole, but the odds of defining such a global formula are extremely remote.

Wilber's attempt at circumventing this dilemma is based on his harmonisation of levels of ascent in the *Great Nest of Being* identified in pre-modern religious contexts with the differentiations of modernity (1998a:210). In so doing Wilber also distinguishes between differentiation and disassociation (1998a:47). Differentiated unities are a quality of Wilber's integral aperspectival premise wherein vision logic collates multiple perspectives that, '... grasp the whole, the multiple contexts within contexts that endlessly disclose the *Kosmos*, not in a rigid or absolutist fashion, but in a fluidly holonic and multidimensional tapestry' (1998a:131). Wilber's integral vision therefore claims to discern an implicit connectivity which is perceived as the Suchness of the All in transcendent consciousness. In this way the superficial constellations typical of level-specific approaches are seen for what they really are - pluralised gradations of disintegrated dualisms, whereas the integral realisation apprehends non-duality as the true nature of the entire spectrum in all four quadrants, but this realisation only occurs fully in NDC. Profound as the postulation may seem, it raises methodological concerns which must be addressed.

For Wilber, all levels of matter and being preceding the realisation of non-duality utilise monological methodologies. In the process of holarchical ascent, these methodologies gradually deepen to include legitimately expanded definitions of science which accommodate increasing degrees of subjectivity to include NDC, but NDC definitively collapses the possibility of scientific observation since observer and observed realise non-dual awareness in which case there is no-thing to observe. How then can the complete integral embrace in NDC be scientifically verified?

Schneider similarly challenges Wilber's methodology and concludes that, '... his pragmatic side cannot aid his mystical side, and this is precisely why his system breaks down ... It cannot sustain ... both culturally relative and universal truths ... In short, Wilber's model cannot be scientific' (Fisher 1997:53). Alexander (2002:63) likewise argues that, '... the use of the various transformations of science as ideological tools for either secularising or religious purposes represents an abuse of science.' The general conclusion at this point seems to be that Wilber's rule of science tends towards syncretism rather integral consistency, but this may be overstated. A more thorough investigation into the meaning of the word 'integral' may therefore be of use at this point. It has been established from Wilber's former defences that integral theory is not synonymous with varieties of Pluralism, Relativism, Interactionism, Occasionalism, Epiphenomenalism, or any forms of Identity Theses espousing doctrines of contingency. Is Wilber's integral intent therefore to establish a definitive formula by which the entire *Kosmos* may be wholly understood?<sup>196</sup> Again, Wilber offers a qualified affirmation. Mathematician Paul Davies metaphorically construes the cosmos as a computation wherein he wonders whether its immense complexity can be algorithmically compressible. Is there a compact programme, he asks, '... that can 'generate' the universe in all its intricate detail?' (1992:142). Davies' question does not however, quite resemble Wilber's integral purpose. For Wilber, the definitive answer is *Satori*, but it is not thereby a formulaic synthesis of all cosmological particularities compounded into one mathematical précis. Wilber illustrates that some astro-physicists today view the universe as a type of *Mobius Strip* in so far as it, '... has no outside, and having no outside neither does it have an inside ... [it is] the coincidence of opposites, the universe as non-dual' (1993b:55).<sup>197</sup> For Wilber this impetus tends towards a scientific *Dharmadhatu* view of the cosmos, but it is

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<sup>196</sup> This certainly seems to be the implication in the publication of *A Brief History of Everything* (1996f), and *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality* (2001a).

<sup>197</sup> There is however, no agreement among astro-physicists that the universe is thus structured, and many other possibilities exist.

not thereby an unqualified ‘theory of everything.’<sup>198</sup> He quotes biophysicist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968) who says, ‘We may state as a characteristic of modern science that [the] scheme of isolable units acting in *one-way-causality* has proved to be insufficient. Hence the appearance, in all fields of science, of notions like wholeness, holistic, organismic, gestalt ... which all signify that in the last resort, we must think in terms of systems of elements in mutual interaction’ (Wilber 1993d:61). In order to satisfy Wilber’s integral definition, this interaction must not only transcend mere systemic correlations to embrace intra-dynamic unity, but it must ultimately realise an absolute one-ness wherein differentiated unities form a radical non-duality that is no more a cosmological mush than a differentiated clustering of everything that constitutes the universe. For Wilber the integral nature of the *Kosmos* is therefore the pervasive condition, or Suchness, of all existence both in, and as its complex variety. Thus summarised, it is again apparent that an Essentialist bias underpins Wilber’s epistemology and it must be concluded that his scientific claims are contingent upon the reader’s willingness to stretch scientific definition beyond all possible knowledge to include the ineffable *Absolute Subjectivity* elemental to mystical *gnosis*.

This brings us to the second question and further discussion around the peculiar ontology of mystical *gnosis* in NDC. By Wilber’s own admission, his particular version of science also requires us to, ‘... acknowledge the necessary *paradoxicality* of verbal formulations of spirit ...’ [my italics] (1985:17-18).<sup>199</sup> A fundamental criterion in any science is however, measurable, or at least a theoretically demonstrable corroboration by external participants - even if the field of research is purely ideational. In mathematics, for example, a hypothesis can be proved, or disproved by any number of sufficiently qualified mathematicians capable of applying the necessary analytical skills.<sup>200</sup> Thus far Wilber’s *Three Step Exemplar* would apply, but no one can observe in the same way whether someone is enlightened or not - even if they are themselves enlightened. The absolute *gnosis* allegedly unique to NDC is therefore subjective to the extent that it transcends even the mystic’s capacity to observe it since the ability to do so would make the experience dual rather than non-dual, and logically then, it cannot be corroborated by external observers. In brief, this would mean that nobody can ever

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<sup>198</sup> *Dharmadhatu* in this context refers to the, ‘... absolute reality experienced in enlightenment ... the suchness in which emptiness and dependent origination are inseparable and [the] nature of mind and phenomena which lies beyond arising, dwelling and ceasing’ (Yeshe Tsogyal 2006:Np).

<sup>199</sup> Wilber explains that, ‘Even the term “Being” is dualistic, taking as its opposite “Nothingness”, and so on’ (1996e:76).

<sup>200</sup> On this point, Wilber would agree. He similarly maintains that, ‘In mathematical proofs, we follow a mental empiricism, a mental experience, a mental phenomenology, and we see if the patterns connect correctly’ (1998a:154).



know whether anybody is enlightened, how then can the suggestion of scientific verification be entertained? Wilber would argue that peers who have similarly engaged the injunctions of spiritual practice and gathered the data (in other words experienced NDC) are in general agreement as to the nature of the experience to the extent that it does qualify for scientific corroboration.<sup>201</sup>

Thus defended, three problems nonetheless remain: firstly, there is no reliable way of knowing whether mystics claiming NDC are actually having the same experience or not because they can neither 'see' nor 'speak' the nature of the non-dual experience directly, they can only do so in the allegorical contexts of meta-narratives. Secondly, how can 'absolute-ness' be established scientifically in the context of ineffability? And finally, since the data depends exclusively on the subjective report of the mystic, is it possible to know that the mystic is not lying or deluded? An answer to these questions is proposed by Davies (1992:223) who maintains that we cannot perceive the minds of others directly, 'Certainly other people behave as if they share our own mental experiences, but we can never know that. The conclusion that other minds exist is based entirely on analogy with our own ... experiences.' Fisher rightly concludes that scientific verification of NDC is therefore rejected by most of Wilber's critics (except Heron and Washburn) (1997:53).<sup>202</sup> However, Fisher also suggests that this rejection is theoretical rather than experiential, and for this reason the experience of NDC is at least theoretically possible, and of course there is no obvious reason to suppose that history's many mystics should be deluded or dishonest. This is accepted, but the argument of this thesis requires an epistemology that transfigures common approaches to phenomenology through heuristic extrapolations that include inner or first-person experience within the domain of scientific enquiry.

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<sup>201</sup> Wilber states this position unequivocally, '... the Absolute is both the highest state of being and the ground of all being; it is both the goal of evolution and the ground of evolution; the highest stage of development and the reality or Suchness of all stages of development; the highest of all conditions and the Condition of all conditions; the highest rung in the ladder and the wood out of which the entire ladder is made. Anything less than that paradox generates either pantheistic reductionism, on the one hand, or wild and radical transcendentalism, on the other. Failure to grasp this paradox of instruction has led more than one modern theorist - in search of the new paradigm - to collapse and equate Spirit with any merely "holistic" findings in physics, biology, or psychology - a confusion of the sum total of the shadows in the cave with the Light beyond the cave. Accordingly, as a counterbalance to this modern and widespread pantheistic reductionism, I have throughout this book largely emphasised the developmental, transcendental, "highest rung" aspect of Spirit' (1996b:289).

<sup>202</sup> In Fisher's view, '... Wilber's model cannot be scientific - phenomenologically, hermeneutically, or otherwise - and still insist on ultimate' (Fisher 1997:38).

#### 4.2.1 Preliminary Challenges from a Physicalist Perspective

Wilber's clear implication is that his approach to science in the *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC has *de facto* access to ultimate Truth which transcends the capacity of physical science. However, Wilber is only able to retain such an absolutist claim on the basis of an Essentialist supposition, whereas a more circumspect Physicalist approach claims no such certainty. At this point a clearer interpretation of empiricism may assist our progress. For Wilber, empiricism refers to experience in the broadest sense. With such latitude, says Wilber, empiricism is a simple demand for evidence of assertions that do not merely, '... rely on dogma, faith, or non-verifiable conjectures' (1998a:152). Thus defined, Wilber considers himself an empiricist, but more commonly empiricism is confined to parameters which direct that only propositions that can be empirically verified can be true. If pushed too far, this delimitation can transform empiricism into scientism.<sup>203</sup> For Wilber, scientism embraces the assumption that, '... all subjective and inter-subjective spaces can be reduced, without remainder, to the behaviour of objective processes, that human and non-human interiors alike can be thoroughly accounted for as holistic systems of dynamically interwoven *its*' (1995c:121). Wilber's uncomplimentary definition is not however, an accurate assessment of the Physicalist approach tendered in this thesis.

Firstly, Physicalist renditions can permit the occurrence of highly subjective phenomena - even to the point of NDC, but not as an ineffable Absolute since this would contradict the basic principles of physics, evolutionary theory, and epistemology in general. A definitive characteristic of evolution is change, and since mind is both substantially and subjectively an element of evolutionary change, it cannot claim to be absolute since that would imply that evolution has attained its zenith. Secondly, there is no reason why a Physicalist view should be reductionistic any more than an Essentialist view should be transcendently superior. For a Physicalist, the manifestation of matter as consciousness to the point of an enlightenment experience is no less wondrous than it would be for an Essentialist - why then should it be considered reductionistic? The Essentialist assumption is based on the *a priori* conviction that materiality is not all that there is, and since Wilber judges Physicalist epistemologies as reductionistic, it must be assumed that he submits to a higher trans-physical definition of existence even if this Reality is inextricably manifest *in* and *as* reality.

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<sup>203</sup> Scientific naturalism, or scientism, refers to the view that only scientific knowledge is reliable and that science can, in principle, explain everything (Alexander 2002:273).

Wilber's thesis therefore appears to propose an Idealist alternative since his reply to the evolutionary problem is that, '... evolution is simply Spirit-in-action, or God-in-the-making' (1998a:110). If however, NDC is a mystical *gnosis* of God, or even a deified *gnosis* of the self *as* god (or god-consciousness), and assuming that God must be Absolute, then how can God be 'in-the-making'? In other words, that which is timelessly Absolute Being cannot simultaneously be in the process of becoming Absolute Being. Admittedly, the mystagogical context within which Wilber makes such incongruous assertions is understood, but it is precisely these idiomatic anomalies that cause confusion in the science/religion debate. In this way, Wilber maintains that Idealism convincingly integrates Spirit and evolution by recognising that Physicalism alone cannot account for all physical phenomena. Is Wilber therefore implying that Spirit can account for what Physicalism cannot? In light of all this, says Walsh (1995:Np), '... it is not surprising that Wilber regards the creation of an adequate Idealism as one of the essential challenges for the contemporary West.' Bearing in mind that Wilber broke allegiance with Romanticism and Idealism in his Phase-2, his latter reference to Idealism is qualified by an interpretive imperative based on his claim to reconstructive science.<sup>204</sup>

It is obvious by now that Wilber favours scientific methodologies in his approach to metaphysical experience. He firmly believes that, 'Any attempt to understand the nature of reality and the place of human beings in the universe must proceed from a sound scientific base' (1997a:2). Notwithstanding this affirmation, one final matter concerning Wilber's association of meaning and value in his integral science must be considered. By way of introduction, Wilber illustrates that, 'Love is intrinsically better than hate, but three is not intrinsically better than five ... once you have translated the world into empiric measurement and numbers, you have a world without quality ... without value or meaning' (1996b:27; cf 1998a:3-4). Wilber is therefore quick to reduce all Physicalist theories to categories incapable of revealing meaning and value, but this is an unnecessarily skewed view. The difference appears in Wilber's definition of consciousness. For all the advances in scientific precision, Wilber maintains that, '... the universe simply does not make sense – and cannot satisfactorily be explained – without the inclusion, in some profound way, of consciousness

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<sup>204</sup> The inadequacy of idealism, says Wilber, '... was that it possessed no yoga - that is, no tried and tested practice for reliably reproducing the transpersonal and super-conscious insights that formed the very core of the great Idealist vision' (1998a:112).

itself' (1997a:3). Davies (1992:xvi-xvii) would agree with Wilber on this point. He testifies that:

Through my scientific work I have come to believe more and more strongly that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact. There must, it seems to me, be a deeper level of explanation. Whether one wishes to call that deeper level 'God' is a matter of taste and definition. Furthermore, I have come to the point of view that mind - i.e. conscious awareness of the world - is not a meaningless and incidental quirk of nature, but an absolutely fundamental facet of reality.

Wilber, who retains an ontology of Spirit as the irreducible 'Suchness of the All', and Davies, who retains a purely Physicalist rendition of the cosmos, both intuit transcendence and mystery in physicality that centralises the role of consciousness. This distinction surely implies different definitions of consciousness, and yet they both recognise the veracity of transcendence in conscious experience. Kourie (1998b:436-437) raises an important question, '... is [it] possible to address the concerns of both the scientifically and the spiritually oriented without violating the sensibilities of either, or surrendering critical enquiry and legitimate scepticism?' This is a crucial differentiation in this thesis. The referential framework of my argument centres on a scientific and physical view of consciousness that requires no Essentialist validation for religious type experience, whereas Wilber's argument does. The core of Wilber's scientific premise arrives from all vantage points at the centrality of consciousness through his claim to the purest and fullest realisation of consciousness in non-duality, and this makes NDC the defining zenith of all conscious possibility, but is this provable?

Nørretranders (1999:46) reminds us that, 'Only the world is big enough to understand the whole world. No map of the whole world can ever be made that includes everything, unless the map is the terrain itself; in which case, of course, it is not a map.' Nørretranders' assertion may legitimately apply to Wilber's version of NDC in which case Wilber's claim to validate NDC through scientific exemplars is contradictory to mystical definitions since the very essence of mystery implies its irreducibility to 'maps'. As has been shown, Wilber tries to retain the simultaneity of scientific validation within the experience of mystical ineffability. Wilber's Essentialist epistemology may permit such paradox, whereas Physicalist renditions do not, and this distinction may account for Wilber's dim view of the

Physicalist's ability to generate or reveal meaning and value. In this case, Wilber claims that, '... purely empirical data, far from proving a transcendental, trans-individual, transpersonal occasion, simply prove - taken in and by themselves - that the mystic is perceiving not Spirit but merely his or her own brain structure' (1996e:65-66). Wilber does not explain how the experience of NDC as Spirit would differ from the experience of NDC as the brain, but it is presumed that his answer would be anomalous since NDC is essentially the experience of 'no-thing'. NDC cannot therefore be experienced as either Spirit or brain. How would he tell the difference, and how would he be able to prove it through his use of reconstructive science?

Furthermore, it has already been argued that there is no reason to suppose that the experience of NDC is any less valuable or meaningful for a Physicalist than for an Essentialist. At best, the philosophical foundation of NDC for the Essentialist may provide a conceptual vehicle or context for the experience, but there is no reason that alternative materialist metaphors should deprive the Physicalist of an equally meaningful experience. In other words, the Essentialist's claim to the exclusivity of meaning and value is unsubstantiated – and arrogant! Secondly, the Physicalist argument need not limit conscious experience to the language of physiology, although physicality as the exclusive ontology does remain primary. More accurately, the Physicalist interpretation permits the full ambit of experience as surveyed in all four quadrants of Wilber's Integral Model and it thereby recognises that consciousness is experientially extended, but not into trans-physical ethers. In other words, conscious experience extended into sociological and culturally shared and interactive dimensions is still recognised as consciousness, but not as 'something other' than the physicality that mediates it as experience. In this way consciousness is experientially extended, but always physiologically located. Nørretranders (1999:326-327) makes the point clearly:

The body is in a state of interaction with the world: We eat, drink, and dispatch matter back into the cycle of nature. In no more than five years, practically every atom in the organism gets replaced. The vast majority of atoms are replaced far more often. Identity, body structure, appearance, and consciousness are preserved – but the atoms have gone. The feeling of individual continuity is real enough, but it has no material foundation. Material continuity is to be found only in a greater cycle.

The 'science-religion' and 'mind-brain' debates encounter their asymptotic limits as they approach definitions of consciousness. On one hand they realise their interdependent and

intra-substantial existence, but the epistemologies applied to their respective ontologies forestall ontological agreement. It appears as Essentialist-Physicalist impasse, a version of the *Hard Problem*, but it need not be so. Wilber's entire science-religion argument strains towards a paradoxical version of differentiation within, and as, the 'non-dual', but even so, he always retains the irreducibility of Spirit. It is this irreducibility that traps Wilber in Essentialism. Essentialists most often claim a bifurcation of matter and mind and therein maintain that consciousness is a meta-physical quality that mediates experience. Wilber's Integral Philosophy transcends this simple Essentialist view and rightly disclaims these bifurcations in NDC where the true non-dual essence of the entire Spectrum of Consciousness is realised. Even so, Wilber still cannot concede that Spirit is just matter. In the Physicalist view, consciousness simply *is* physicality experiencing and it requires no recourse to Essentialism to endorse it as such.

Despite this impasse, there is a primary agreement between Wilber's Essentialist supposition and my 'open' or 'inclusive' Physicalism regarding the phenomenon itself: in NDC the science-religion dichotomy is experientially collapsed and the immediacy of spaceless, timeless awareness in space and time becomes the fundamental ordinariness of all experience and all consciousness. The possibility of examining meaningful non-dual experience within a scientific epistemology of consciousness is therefore both plausible and useful, but to claim its veracity as contingent upon the ontology of an *Absolute Suchness* is to extract it from the ambit of all but faith-based epistemologies. Wilber's integral intention permits such latitude, but his submission to ultimacy delimits the reach of his integral intention. A Physicalist approach presents the possibility of a more consistent intellectual exploration and therefore moderates multi-disciplinary integration. An authentic scientific approach must satisfy exploration in both directions since its validating criteria are axiomatically predetermined. A Physicalist approach can maintain, without prejudice to either the objective or subjective components in Wilber's theory, that an enlightenment experience can be legitimate and life-changing. It may even admit the metaphorical viability of religious narratives as its idiom, but it does not thereby confer any absolute status to pre-existent Mind. This delimitation allows a Physicalist rendering to propose an authentically non-dual option, whereas Wilber's thesis must preserve a subtle ontological duality in its subscription to trans-elemental absolutes.

### 4.3 From Modernism to Post-Modernism and Beyond

In Wilber's opinion, pre-modernity is defined by the core values of the *Great Chain of Being* whereas modernity differentiated perceived value spheres from their material functionality (1998a:41). In this way objects of reason are separated from their subjective meaningfulness. Walsh (1995) correctly summarises Wilber's divided views on the virtues of modernity and notes that whilst modernism correctly demythologised the physical operations of matter, it went too far in its elevation of reason and reduced spirituality to fable in the process.<sup>205</sup> In the wake of this estrangement, Wilber maintains that science denied validity to religion to the extent that the, '... standard empirical and positivist approach became, in numerous guises, the dominant mood of modernity ...' (1998a:15).<sup>206</sup> It thereby also impeded the progress of epistemological pluralism necessary for the emergence of more integral views of human consciousness. Whilst Wilber's Integral Philosophy transcends the disintegrations of pluralism, he nonetheless maintains that meaning is context-dependent. For him it implies a multi-perspective approach is both viable and necessary. Any single perspective, he says, '... is likely to be partial, limited, perhaps even distorted, and only by honouring multiple perspectives and multiple contexts can the knowledge quest be fruitfully advanced' (1999d:599).

This trend is gradually changing, but in so-called Western or 'developed' economies, Wilber believes the broader social principles of modernity still hold sway and have yet to fully embrace the virtues of righteousness, justice, and equality more typical of the post-modern ethic (1998a:44). Similarly, the emergence of post-modern science as a less doctrinaire empiricism is also, in Wilber's opinion, reluctant to accept the 'reality' of transpersonal levels of consciousness (1998a:19).<sup>207</sup> This 'reality' is in line with the parameters of Transpersonal Psychology, but adds Wilber's Essentialist supposition that Spirit actually

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<sup>205</sup> The disaster of modernity, says Wilber, '... was that it reduced all introspective and interpretive knowledge to exterior and empirical flatland: it attempted to erase the richness of interpretation from the script of the world' (1998a:119; cf 1999d:594).

<sup>206</sup> Wilber (1998a:49) supports modernity's processes of differentiation, but disclaims its exaggeration into dissociation. He maintains that this, '... dissociation allowed an explosive empirical science, coupled with rampant modes of industrial production - both of which emphasised solely *it-knowledge* and *it-technology* - to dominate and colonise the other value spheres, effectively destroying them in their own terms' (1998a:75).

<sup>207</sup> Alexander (2002:239-240) describes modernist science as a self-proclaimed and exclusive arbiter of rational knowledge, whereas post-modernity views positivist science as only, '... one (among many) culture-bound ways of looking at the world. Science may thus be treated as one option on the worldview shelf displayed by multicultural societies in which occult or mystical worldviews may be looked on as equally valid.' Post-modern science employs a more circumspect approach to modernist science and may, in a manner of speaking, be viewed as post-scientific. By post-scientific Wilber means post 'clunk and grind' mechanism designed only for efficiency. Post-modern science therefore ventures into new territories of possibility with unpredictable or variable outcomes.

exists. For Wilber, Spirit is revealed in, and as the Kosmos as non-dual, but in his view Spirit nonetheless retains a ‘type’ of ontological independence in its irreducibility even if its form is interpreted through the paradoxes of ‘no-thingness’ or *neti neti*.<sup>208</sup> Wilber’s cession to paradox juxtaposes my qualified Physicalism which circumvents the necessity of scientific validation for the experience of Spirit as an ontologically independent *ding an sich*.<sup>209</sup> Wilber would resist reference to Spirit as ‘thing’, but ‘thing’ in representationalism may legitimately refer to a conceptual possibility which has no defined substance. In this way epistemological processes in the scientific idiom remain valid because they are not transgressed by Essentialist presuppositions. This is not merely a guise for bald pantheism, but a materialist view that maintains the vitality of conscious states which may be termed ‘spiritual’ with reference to their representational content. In this sense, for example, the experience of union or non-duality in deep meditation is accepted as a real, meaningful, and transformative experience, but the graphic or conceptual vehicle, if it is presented as union *with* God, cannot be real in the same way. On this point Wilber would agree. Aside from the various levels at which ‘reality’ is differently apprehended, there is also no way of showing a causal link between NDC and God. Wilber also hints at the dangers of these category errors, but his own epistemology risks confusion by suggesting that the experience of Spirit can be scientifically verified through the injunctions of his *Three Step Exemplar*. The basic premise should rather hinge on the understanding that since God cannot be shown to exist or not to exist, then any notion of union *with* God must also transcend the reach of rational enquiry. Again Wilber would agree, but by retaining the irreducibility of Spirit he must concede that it has a nature by definition of what it is not – even if such a nature eludes particular definitive boundaries. As such, Wilber deposes reason to ineffable mystery and within mystagogical language he is entitled to do so, but he then attempts to verify it scientifically and therein succumbs to the same category error he previously denounced. The polemical distinction here is subtle but important, and the finer details will be argued in Chapter 6.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> *Neti neti* is a Hindu phrase in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.2.4 denouncing the reality of appearances. In this way the *Atman*, the Self as *Brahman*, is not reduced to the dual nature of that which is manifest phenomenologically. And in particular notice that Spirit is *not* One, not Wholeness, not Unity – *neti, neti* – for all of those are dualistic concepts, possessing meaning only in contrast to their opposites (Wilber 1985:19).

<sup>209</sup> With reference to Kant’s critical philosophy, *noumenon* describes a manner of awareness not produced by sensory experience. *Dinge an sich* (*Prolegomena* section 33) in this sense connotes rational intuitions underlying *phenomena*. For Sartre, in *Être et le neant* (1943) the nature of being is transphenomenal meaning that the totality of its character cannot be fully conveyed by the sum of its parts. This does not mean that there is a concealed *noumenon*, but rather that everything that has being transcends the descriptions or categorisations ascribed to it.

<sup>210</sup> Wilber has elsewhere been criticised on the same point. In defence, Wilber (1997a:277) says that, ‘Robert McDermott, in his essay *The Need for Dialogue in the Wake of Ken Wilber’s Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, raises the issue of whether polemical discourse is ever appropriate for academic and especially spiritual dialogue. He ends



The foregoing discussion is significant as Wilber's views on post-modernism are considered. Whilst the boundaries and expressions are mutable, Wilber believes that post-modernism defines, '... the leading edge of today's cultural evolution ...' (1999d:590). He therefore emphasises the importance of understanding these patterns of emergence as a prerequisite for their inclusion in his AQAL Integral Model.<sup>211</sup> For Wilber, inclusivity is therefore the benchmark of the post-modern intention and its methodology is defined through synthesising processes of interpretation (1999d:591; 1998a:116-117; 1999d:592).<sup>212</sup> This definition may account for Wilber's attempt to integrate scientific and mystagogical epistemologies, but its noetic consistency is questionable. In defence, Wilber says that science itself, '... is not knowledge of the world but merely an interpretation of the world, and therefore it has the same validity - no more, no less - as poetry and the arts ...' (1998a:22). This is not contested if consciousness is viewed purely as a simulation, but it is therefore strange that Wilber's primary resistance to post-modernism concerns the apparent conflation of spiritual *gnosis* with rational or objectivist knowledge systems since he claims to validate mystical experience through scientific exemplars. Evidently, for Wilber, it is not the integral purpose that compromises the epistemological integrity of opposing disciplines, but, '... the confusion of depth with span' (2000:96). Wilber goes on to justify his premise by pointing out that so-called holistic theorists now construct holarchies in terms of increasing span that, '... [have] no within, no deep ... And it is into this modern and post-modern wasteland - and against its dominant and domineering mood - that we wish to introduce the within, the deep, the interiors of the *Kosmos*, the contours of the Divine' (1998a:136; 2000:101).<sup>213</sup> In apparent contradiction of this judgement, Wilber states in an earlier book (*The Eye of Spirit* 1997) that, '... both the *quality* of humanity's spiritual understanding, and the *form* of its presentation, are deepening and becoming *more* adequate in modern times, not less' (1997a:62). Clearly Wilber altered his opinion in subsequent phases of his writing and in so doing recognised the failure of Idealism and post-modern Romanticism. The Idealists, says Wilber, '... avoided

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up rather strongly condemning polemic, his major point being that it isn't "spiritual." But I believe that this, too, reflects an impoverished and narrow view of spirit - what it is, and where it is located.'

<sup>211</sup> Rothberg (1996a:4) notes that Wilber, '... engaged much of the contemporary philosophical and historical work on modernity and post-modernity ... at a time when few of his transpersonal and spiritually minded colleagues have even begun to absorb such work.'

<sup>212</sup> By way of explanation, Wilber says, '... exterior surfaces can be *seen*, but interior depth must be *interpreted*' (1998a:118), but it is equally true that manifest surfaces must be interpreted.

<sup>213</sup> For Wilber, the confusion of depth with span results in broader, but more diffuse and shallower renditions of Spirit (2000:96). This also means that whilst physics is the most fundamental of the disciplines, it remains the least significant of the sciences since physics cannot explain biology insofar as, '... the bios is not in the cosmos' (2000:99). This may sound bewildering, but Wilber justifies it within his holarchical theory.

regression but had no yoga ... and the post-modernists, unanchored in any conception of truth, had nothing left but their own dispositions ...' which resulted in impotent 'theoreticism' (1997a:268; cf 1998a:139-140).<sup>214</sup>

For these epistemological variances to be successfully re-integrated, the core insights of the *Great Chain of Being* must, according to Wilber, be accepted as valid knowledge (1998a:24). We have seen that Wilber latterly prefers *Holarchy* to *Chain*, but either way, his subtle imperative remains in place: that the ontology of Spirit transcends the limitations of matter. Part of his objection to post-modernism is therefore aimed at the deconstruction typical of positivist approaches to truth which leave, '... nothing but one's own ego – one's own narcissism - to impose its will on reality, and this nihilistic narcissism is boldly offered to the world as a revolutionary transformation' (1998a:46).<sup>215</sup> Clearly, strong individualistic orientations pervade post-modern thinking, particularly in the West, but neither nihilism nor narcissism are necessarily definitive. It may be argued that a critical self-honesty establishes stronger foundations for the pursuit of transforming spiritualities, and the inclusive character of post-modernity may mitigate overly zealous egos. In either case, the matter is too subjective to warrant further investigation here, but it is agreed that post-modern motivations are partly designed to, '... resurrect the gutted interiors and interpretive modes of knowing ...' which were compromised in modernist world views (Wilber 1999d:594).

For Wilber, the most common manifestations of these post-modern emphases on interpretation are revealed in perceptions of reality as constructions rather than *a priori* truths (constructivism); that meaning is context dependant (contextualism); and that no single interpretation should be unduly privileged over any other (integral aperspectivism) (Wilber 1998a:121; 1999d:595).<sup>216</sup> Katz's particular approach to Constructivism was introduced in Chapter One and is relevant at this point. In essence Katz (1978:59) argues that NDC is not

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<sup>214</sup> Yoga has become a generic term describing the Hindu discipline of overcoming individual imperfections in the process of developing personal mastery in spiritual practice to attain union with the Absolute. However, in this instance, Wilber's usage seems to refer simply to spiritual depth.

<sup>215</sup> This is a criticism that Wilber reiterates. He maintains that the, '... so-called *performative contradiction* in extreme post-modernism has now been pointed out by numerous scholars, including Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, Karl-Otto Apel, Ernest Gellner, among others. Indeed, there is now something of a consensus among serious scholars that extreme post-modernism is a dead end. It either nihilistically denies truth, including therefore its own; or, attempting to avoid that, it retreats into narcissism, exempting itself from its own claims' (1998a:35).

<sup>216</sup> Wilber explains that extreme constructivists deny the existence of objective truth since all phenomena are mentally constructed, but in so doing fall into self-referential contradiction by claiming their own premise as true. He goes on to explain in his Integral Model that, '... cultural constructivists attempt to reduce all reality to the Lower Left, systems theory attempts to reduce all reality to the Lower Right. That is, social reductionism attempts to reduce all truth to functional fit, to the dynamic interplay of holistic 'its' (1997a:25-26).

possible. For Katz consciousness must be content specific to qualify as consciousness and since NDC is, in Wilber's scheme, formless or void, it cannot be consciousness. This also means that the perennialism which underscores mystical phenomena according to Wilber's definition of NDC must be untenable. Katz prefers a contextual approach which allows only for a personal sense of realness associated with an individual's experience, but such experience is imposed as an interpretation after the alleged non-dual event and cannot therefore verify the event itself. Katz is also concerned to show that NDC is too prescribed by prior learning and experience to have ontological uniqueness, and that these predeterminations conserve rather than transcend doctrinaire religious precepts. A counter argument is presented by Eugene D'Aquili and Andrew Newberg (2001) who endorse the physiological possibility of something like NDC on the basis of occurrences in the brain that cut off ordinary brain activity from consciousness. This proposal will be considered in more detail in Chapter Seven, but if upheld, it would provide physiological support for the experiential realness of NDC – though not for the ontology Wilber ascribes to it.

We have seen that Wilber favours the integral aperspectival view and his position has been defended against accusations of relativism, but it must nonetheless be questioned whether Wilber's integral aperspectival claim is heuristically viable.<sup>217</sup> As a case in point, Wilber identifies the partiality of sensory based and rational-empirical sciences under-girding the principles of Systems Theory. He draws particular attention to uni-modal epistemologies that limit the possibility of integral inclusion and claims that the major drawback of Systems Theory (and Lower-Right theories in general):

... is their subtle reductionism: the attempt to reduce all interior domains (of the I and we) to objective it-domains - to information processing circuits, neuronal systems, social behaviour, auto-poietic self-maintenance systems ... Systems theory claims to offer a unified theory of everything, but in reducing all quadrants to the Lower Right, it actually leaves out half of the world, namely, the Left-Hand domains (1999d:579).<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Wilber (1995a:526-528, 573-576) has responded in considerable depth and sharpness to Winkelman's critique, particularly to his advocacy of cultural relativism (Rothberg 1996a:7). Wilber is also careful to distinguish aperspectivism from its integral context. When the integral initiative is excluded, aperspectivism claims that no perspective has any superiority over any other, at which point, says Wilber, '... they careen uncontrollably in their own labyrinth of ever-receding holons, lost in aperspectival space' (2000:193).

<sup>218</sup> Wilber criticises the partiality, rather than the accuracy of Systems Theory. In characteristically exaggerated phrase, he says, '... systems theory (in all its many variants) is part of the flatland paradigm that is still contributing to the despoliation and devastation of Gaia' (2000a:87, 101). It is unlikely that the bias of Systems Theory will devastate the earth, but more accurately, Wilber's intention is to point out that systems orientations tend towards monological epistemologies which deny the scientific validity of spiritual experience (Wilber 1998a:38; 2000a:113-114).

Systems Theory has latterly come to integrate a wider spectrum of influences and is now more popular in personal development and coaching techniques which do include inner and spiritual dimensions, in which case Wilber's criticism may be out-dated, but he is right in its classification as a predominantly phenomenological discipline.

Inasmuch as Wilber observes merits and vices in modernity, he sees similar polarities in the aforementioned post-modern orientations. Whilst he celebrates the great quest of post-modernity as the body-mind integration in world-centric vision-logic, he decries pervasive tendencies to interpret Spirit through monological ideologies (2000a:548).<sup>219</sup> This bifurcation is manifest in incommensurate pluralistic contexts and results in disorder because, '... order is thought to be imposed by structures of power or ideology (patriarchy, logocentrism, anthropocentrism, androcentrism, speciesism, [and] phallocentrism ...' (Wilber 1999b:2-3).<sup>220</sup> It has been noted that the solution, for Wilber, is to be found in an AQUAL approach which, '... has a subjective aspect (sincerity, truthfulness), an objective aspect (truth, correspondence), an inter-subjective aspect (culturally constructed meaning, justness, appropriateness), and an inter-objective aspect (systems and functional fit)...' (Wilber 1997a:29). This initiative is potentially useful and this may therefore be an appropriate place to consider the current status of the Christian church in post-modern thinking.

In rather sweeping phrase, post-modernism appears lately to have become a philosophical repository for almost any fashionable political, social, aesthetic, cultural, religious, or scientific transcendence of modernism. Everything in the nature of post-modern consciousness appears multi-layered and variable; nothing is certain and possibility has become the hallmark of the post-modern hope. How can the proclaimed certainties of a faith system succeed in this environment? The church's response has generally been twofold: some communities have regressed into the apparent safety of religious absolutism and fundamentalism, whilst others, particularly in

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<sup>219</sup> The centaur is the great mythological being, half human and half animal body, that Wilber has taken as a symbol of the harmonious integration of body and mind (Wilber 1998b:73).

<sup>220</sup> Wilber is fierce in his criticism of adherents claiming holistic worldviews which he maintains are actually regressive. Among these he lists, '... eco-feminists; deep ecologists (labelled "eco-masculinists"); eco-psychologists; "eco-romantics" and "retro-romantics"; students of ancient matrifocal cultures; enthusiasts of tribal cultures; presumably one-sided critics of modernity; champions of the body, senses, and/or unconscious...' (1996d:151; 1995a:105, 664). By way of clarification however, Rothberg (1996a:6) notes that Wilber admits the place and value of 'regression in the service of the ego', but cautions continually against, '... any regression that abandons the framework of past achievements and the current level of development.'

communities defined by Western values, are gradually abandoning traditional Christian beliefs and practices.<sup>221</sup>

For the purpose of considering Wilber's views, post-modernism pertains more particularly to the demise of conceptual absolutism and the religious ideological systems constructed on such foundations. Most significantly, the Western Christian Church is losing its primacy as the source of access to ultimate meaning and authentic spiritual experience. Christianity as a constellation of faith systems subscribing to truth-claims around a personified historico-literal deity is falling into the shadows of more metaphorical and philosophical approaches to spirituality.<sup>222</sup> In view of this trend, diminishing patterns of church attendance may indicate the end of the Christian church as an organisation defined by strictly demarcated beliefs and practices. What recourse does the church have? In Wilber's view, it may be possible to subdue this attrition if the church is willing to deepen its current interpretation of Christ, that is, to transcend historical-literal renditions in favour of deeper and more embracing holons. The very idea of exploring a deeper revelation of God may, however, be construed as heresy since God and inherited truth-claims are often viewed synonymously, but such superstitious fear is unfounded. The appropriate response to the cry for a deeper experience of God in less territorial dogmas is mysticism. This orientation clearly falls within post-modern evolutions of conscious apperception since the mystical intent facilitates awareness and experiential intimacy of a degree that objective faith cannot normally engage.

In further qualification, emergent global consciousness is beginning to reveal a post-ideological society, and since religious institutionalism is ideological by nature, it follows that its social and conceptual credibility will be degraded. One of the key variables defining the emerging shape of the *Emperor's New Clothes* – the critical ways in which humans are assessing the validity of faith-based truth-claims, therefore clearly relates to the meaning and value of truth.<sup>223</sup> Varieties

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<sup>221</sup> Parts of the USA being a notable exception.

<sup>222</sup> This Western post-modern trend is not however, globally reflected. There are isolated occasions that are now seeing a massive rise in fundamentalist and military forms of religion. In Christianity this is particularly evident in some central African countries and South America.

<sup>223</sup> *The Emperor's New Clothes* is a Danish fairy tale written by Hans Christian Andersen and first published in 1837 as part of *Eventyr, Fortalte for Born (Fairy Tales, Told for Children)*. It was originally known as *Keiserens Nye Klæder*. Many years ago there lived an emperor who cared only about his clothes and about showing them off. One day he heard from two swindlers that they could make the finest suit of clothes from the most beautiful cloth. This cloth, they said, also had the special capability that it was invisible to anyone who was either stupid or not fit for his position. Being a bit nervous about whether he himself would be able to see the cloth, the emperor first sent two of his trusted men to see it. Of course, neither would admit that they could not see the cloth and so praised it. All the townspeople had also heard of the cloth and were interested to learn how stupid their neighbours were. The emperor then allowed himself to be dressed in the clothes for a procession through town, never admitting that he was too unfit and stupid to see what he was wearing for he was afraid that the other people would think that he was stupid. Of course, all the townspeople wildly praised the magnificent clothes of the emperor, afraid to admit that they could not see them, until a small child said: "*But he has nothing on!*" This was whispered from person to person until everyone in the crowd was shouting that the emperor had nothing on.

of relativism and pluralism are endemic to post-ideological society, and post-modern vogues have made too many versions of truth synonymously available. Wilber is equally critical of this trend since it results in multiple contradictions which seem to discredit all truth. Consequently, the rising tide of interest in spirituality appears to be increasingly disassociated from truth-claims, and doctrine is gradually being replaced by the narrative vitality of more functionally viable metaphors. It is at this juncture that the pertinence of mysticism comes to the fore and these themes will be considered more critically in Chapter 6.<sup>224</sup>

The majority of Christian mystical writings describe the non-dual experience in God through allegorical or parabolic instruments. Whilst Katz may be right to suppose that faith-based subscription to dogma and doctrine usually functions as a necessary formative precursor to the process of mystical awakening, embedded theologies are seldom operable and quite often inhibiting to the realisation of NDC. It is questioned then, whether the qualities of transcendence in mysticism retain the functionality of their doctrinal premises, or if it compromises them in the type of post-modern confluences formerly described. Moreover, does Wilber's integral initiative dignify distinctions within the non-dual process, or does it simply blend and dilute them? Both Schneider (1987:199, 205-207, 210), and Fisher (1997:53) criticise Wilber's alternative approach to the idea of unity in diversity.<sup>225</sup> Neither is convinced that Wilber's integral view is distinguishable from pluralism and Wilber's defence is not always persuasive. Jacobs (2001:3) expresses particular concern about the equal treatment and status Wilber affords to all four quadrants of his model. For Jacobs this equality does not represent 'reality' in any meaningful way, but rather the ideal of equanimity. It seems however, that Jacobs has not understood Wilber correctly on this point. Whilst Wilber claims the necessity of integration between the quadrants, he does not establish this integration with axiomatic precision, but rather as synthesis within the process of holonic advance. Most often, it is these correlative qualities which lead critics to label Wilber's philosophy as a form of pluralism. For Wilber correlation is not necessarily integral. Correlation, in other words, does not embrace the 'inter' and 'intra'-dynamic causalities of Wilber's holonic view. Wilber is always careful to qualify and distinguish holons within

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The emperor heard it and felt that they were correct, but held his head high and finished the procession (Wikipedia: The Emperor's New Clothes, cf Penrose 1989).

<sup>224</sup> In support of the re-emergence of mystical spirituality, David Tacey (2002) says, 'I am convinced that this is the way forward for religion: a movement from creed and proposition to receptivity and listening. It is a move away from moralism to mysticism, away from religious instruction to the encouragement of spirituality ... Recognising the potential sacredness of the modern experience of emptiness is perhaps the first step toward the genuine religious revival of our civilisation.' From a Christian vantage point, this mysticism is understood as wisdom beyond absolutist theological constraints that moves its adherents into a timeless reality whilst still possessing a distinctive and passionate devotion to Christ. Religion's task is not to point to, or explain itself, but to reach beyond itself to that which it cannot contain. The mysticism I will propose is not, therefore, an extractionist and supine abstraction, but a dynamic life of wakefulness in, and as, Christ in the world.

<sup>225</sup> Fisher is particularly concerned with the degree to which Wilber's integral view of consciousness falls prey to mistaken judgements of reductionism (1997:55).

appropriate epistemological frameworks, whereas forms of pluralism typical of post-modernity resemble a clustering or bunching of views claiming equal status which require no particular form of validation to qualify for inclusion.

What, in conclusion, are the subliminal currents which define and distinguish modernity from post-modernity, and how does Wilber interpret these trends? Wilber's holonic philosophy critically interprets these evolutions as phases of increasing complexity and unity in the process of integration. In order to understand his integral view correctly, it is important to reiterate that synthesis is not conflation, but a multidimensional network of evolutionary dynamics within specified degrees of holonic embrace. Wilber's philosophy is therefore highly inclusive and carefully qualified, but even so, questions remain. How can we know, for example, that Wilber's integral language mirrors reality since the criteria for its validity require prior assent to Wilber's unique epistemology? Furthermore, asks Alexander (2002:239-240), can there be a 'grand narrative', a theory of everything, beneath the nuances of meta-narratives that truly reflects the totality of global consciousness?<sup>226</sup> Generally, post-modernism excludes the possibility of such a grand narrative since we have no universal means of communicating it. On the other hand, notes Alexander (2002:241), '... the claim that there is no 'grand narrative' is itself a 'grand narrative' on a majestic scale which itself lacks validation.'

Summarised in this way, Wilber's integral intention cannot be shown to be true; it can only be accepted as metaphorically viable, or perhaps epistemologically useful within mystagogy. As with all archetypes, notes Davis (1998:101), '... the mythic patterns associated with *gnosis* are ambiguous, multivalent, and contradictory.' Nonetheless, the veracity of religious experience need not be rationally anomalous on condition that the subject of experience, God, is afforded symbolic rather than literal status. If it is understood that myth functions as an allegorical purveyor of that which pure analysis cannot describe, then there is no reason for rationality to exclude the usefulness of myth.<sup>227</sup> Indeed such reciprocity easily apprehends a

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<sup>226</sup> Davies also examines the limitations that Gödel's theorem implies for a Theory of Everything, and concludes that such a theory would be 'far from sufficient to unravel the subtleties of a Universe like ours... There is no formula that can deliver all truth, all harmony, all simplicity. No Theory of Everything can ever provide total insight. For, to see through everything would leave us seeing nothing at all. So the search for a genuinely unique Theory of Everything that would eliminate all contingency and demonstrate that the physical world must necessarily be as it is, seems to be doomed to failure on grounds of logical consistency. No rational system can be proved both consistent and complete. There will always remain some openness, some element of mystery, something unexplained' (Davies 1992:180-181).

<sup>227</sup> Newberg and D'Aquili (2001:62) explain that, '... all myths can be reduced to a simple framework. First, they focus upon a crucial existential concern - the creation of the world, for example, or how evil came to be. Next, they frame that concern as a pair of apparently irreconcilable opposites - heroes and monsters, gods and humans, life and death, heaven and hell. Finally, and most important, myths reconcile those opposites often through the actions of gods or other spiritual powers, in a way that relieves our existential concerns.' Wilber

wider spectrum of conscious possibilities within the integral intention. Moreover, the nature of this interaction constitutes the evolutionary process of conscious experience, and the resolution of its dualities in NDC need not be supported by Essentialist suppositions. Wilber's vision of the future still includes an Essentialist thread, but aside from that, it is agreed that integralism defines the next phase of humanity's evolution. Reversion to modernist certainties or unqualified acceptance of post-modern individualism and pluralism are no longer viable.

Post-post-modernism may well be a synonym for integralism. The integral impetus as viewed by Wilber is an appreciation of the value and synthesis of all knowledge structures within a spectrum of viability at given levels of emergence, but it is also in constant pursuit of transcendence. In colloquial terms, it is a way of saying that 'all things belong', but not all at the same place, nor for the same reasons. In other words, it is not a guise for pluralistic compromises or for versions of universality, but a serious and critical synthesis of developmental precision. It is participation in the evolution of humanity within an intentional and experiential en-depting of a non-defensive and emerging spirituality. In Christian terms, it is a passionate life of faith that does not defer to historical or dogmatic reliability for its validity, but realises the transforming embrace of the Spirit of Christ simultaneously in, and as, his crucifixion fallibility, and the perfection of his resurrection. It is the bliss of the spaceless, timeless illumination of spiritual awakening within the ravages of space and time. The imperative of life experience transcending into non-duality therefore takes precedence over subscription to dogma, and the same mystical principle may, in time, come to define the character of the emerging Christian church.

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similarly notes that, 'Mythology is true enough in its own worldspace; it's just that perspectival reason is "more true": more developed, more differentiated-and-integrated, and more sophisticated in its capacity to disclose verifiable knowledge' (1998a:164).



#### 4.4 Legitimacy, Authority, and Authenticity in Religion

Erik Davis, popular philosopher and commentator on the interface between cyber-technology and spirituality, offers a perception of Western faith that justifies Wilber's argument for establishing instruments by which religion's authenticity and legitimacy may be assessed. Davis (1998:7) caustically suggests that the relentless search for spiritual connection in post-modernity has conjured the, '... tattered carnival of contemporary religion ...' Ralph Waldo Emerson is reputed to have said that, 'The religion of one age is the literary entertainment of the next.'<sup>228</sup> Andrew Wilson, controversial English writer and columnist, asks in *God's Funeral: The Decline of Faith in Western Civilisation* (2000:160), whether, '... our religion [is] that which links us to the ultimate reality, or whether it is the final human fantasy, the most pathetic demonstration, in a spiritually empty, spatially limitless universe, of human aloneness?'<sup>229</sup> How should the functional viability of religious consciousness be contextually measured, and according to what criteria are such measures established?

The vast majority of the world's populations admit to the existence of divine or spiritual influences. Submission or devotion to divinity is usually mediated through subscription to culturally inherited faith-systems, but it must be important that such efforts in faith are sufficiently compensated. Such compensation is usually obtained through faith-based validation of divine intervention and the psycho-social rewards of belonging to the religious group, but are the world's formal religious traditions being eroded as more critically incisive measures become normative?<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, the ways in which humanity conceives of, and relates to the divine appears to evolve as cultural identity, social conventions, political persuasions, economic definitions, scientific and technological advances, and self-understanding unfolds through time. The exponential rate at which human consciousness is expanding has made the ways in which humanity interprets divinity highly mutable in much shorter time-frames, and the protean nature of the post-modern mind has dislodged the

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<sup>228</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson: *The Cassell Dictionary of Cynical Quotations*.

<sup>229</sup> In humanity's desire for a sense of ultimacy beyond the immediacy of current sufferings, Feyodor Dostoyevsky suggests in *The Diary of a Writer* that the urgency with which humanity seeks out favour with the divine is a primary cause of suicide when the quest fails. This certainly is not the case today, and it may not even have been so in nineteenth century Russia, but it does indicate the profound impact that religion can have on the human psyche (Dostoyevsky 1993, cf Wilson 2000:13).

<sup>230</sup> Wilber acknowledges society's increasing preference for rational over mythological worldviews, but stresses that reason must reach beyond reductionist imperatives to include subtle and causal apprehensions in a way that, '... contributes to the resurrection of Spirit-Geist ...' (1983b:76, 79). It is not clear however that Wilber's epistemology can legitimately enable such insights, and his religious-type language excludes his postulations from serious scientific consideration.

assumed authority of traditional religious conventions and institutions.<sup>231</sup> It is therefore reasonable to assume that these evolutionary variables and God-concepts are consciously integrated and mutually causal.<sup>232</sup>

Confronted with such bleak portents, Wilber is right to urge a more critical approach to the truth-claims and transforming capacities of religion. More specific to the purpose of this thesis, is the question of whether the pursuit of mystical awakening in NDC is indeed the truest realisation of divinity, or whether it is a paradisiacal chimera? Moreover, how should criteria be established for measuring religious traditions which teach liberation in mystical union as their ultimate goal? These questions must now be weighed against Wilber's criteria for measuring the authenticity and legitimacy of religious systems.

Wilber's reply is referred through the jurisdiction of his epistemology and its inherent weaknesses necessarily degrade his validity claims in the present argument.<sup>233</sup> Despite these hurdles, Wilber does identify some of the issues now challenging the credibility of religion. In an attempt to discern the underlying causes of the erosion of traditional religious consciousness he refers, by way of example, to Ludwig Feuerbach (*The Essence of Christianity* 1841) who claims that the projection of human potential onto the divine immobilises humanity and causes self-alienation (Wilber 2000:539).<sup>234</sup> More precisely,

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<sup>231</sup> By way of example, Alexander (2002:52), notes that, 'After 1905 church adherence [in the United Kingdom] went into gentle decline for the first half of the Twentieth century, a decline that became steep only after the 1950s, reaching a level of about 14 per cent of the adult population, together with a further 2.5 per cent attached to other major world religions, by the end of the century.' There is, however, a noteworthy counterpoint to this global trend. Alexander goes on to say, 'In stark contrast to this pattern, church adherence in the USA rose steadily from about 33 per cent of the population in 1890 to more than 60 per cent by 1970, thereafter remaining at a level of 50 per cent or higher for the remainder of the century. Therefore the country that is currently the world leader in terms of its contribution to the scientific enterprise, possessing a culture which is most 'modern' in terms of its production and use of technology, also has one of the highest levels of (voluntary) religious commitment of any country of the world.' Economic and foreign policy in the United States of America is significantly influenced by imperialist Christian ideologies and its manifestations pose a significant threat to global security.

<sup>232</sup> Wilber makes a similar point, '... sociologists since Weber have been interested in the increasing trend towards secularisation, individualism, and rationalism. In the face of the increasingly purposive-rational world view, the older mythological world views, based primarily on exoteric mythic-membership and traditional conformity, began slowly but inevitably to lose their cogency, and the very process of legitimisation began to shift, in every sector, to rational adjudication and humanistic-secular appropriation ... I am convinced that the mythic-membership structure has reached the inherent limit of its integrative and truth-disclosing capacities' (1983b:75).

<sup>233</sup> In reminder, Wilber claims that any form of valid knowledge must be subject to experimental, repeatable, and publicly verifiable instruments through the injunctions of direct experience, cognitive apprehension, and communal corroboration. In the context of this argument he suggests that the methodology of direct *Gnostic* verification is based on mystical practice and experience (*gnosis-jnana*) for direct apprehension, and trans-propositional reason (*mandalic-logic*) to communicate it, '... however paradoxically, in linguistic symbols' (1983b:133).

<sup>234</sup> As an adjunct to Wilber's reference to Feuerbach, it is worth noting that Feuerbach (1804-72) has been differently labelled depending on the interpretation of his book; *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). Despite his dismissal of supernatural phenomena, Feuerbach nonetheless maintains that religion plays a significant and necessary role in human consciousness. Feuerbach's deeper intention is to liberate humanity from the ontology

Feuerbach pointed out that the inadequacy of attempts to describe God as an object or a class of objects is the result of humanity's capacity to describe only the limit of its own experience. For Feuerbach, predicates which therefore attempt to assign meaning to transcendence inevitably succumb to paradox and the predicates are thereby rendered meaningless. This, of course, depends on the measures assigned to meaningfulness, but permitting Feuerbach's assumption, there does appear to be increasing post-superstitious consensus that religion is a purely human construct. If so, the dilemma of religion's credibility must be referred back to the domain of human consciousness rather than divine revelation for authentication.<sup>235</sup> In either case, Wilber conditionally agrees that religion is largely constructed, but suggests that it retains an essential and perennial purpose to draw adherents to the realisation of non-dual awareness.<sup>236</sup>

For Wilber, the pre-text to this essential purpose is the result of the perceived inadequacies of duality. It is understood that duality, in the Christian idiom, is tantamount to original sin.<sup>237</sup> According to Wilber, the Primary Dualism; that which dislocates consciousness from mystical oneness in God through the Involutionary movement of matter falling away from Spirit, is the territory to be reclaimed by the Evolutionary movement back towards non-

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of invisibilities which lose their meaning and usefulness in abstractionist subjectivity. Feuerbach admits that his intention is to disempower dogmatic Christianity by emphasising virtue and spiritual principle to the extent that humanity becomes the 'substance' of God. This appears as an oblique form of a doctrine of deification which prompts some critics to accuse Feuerbach of projection. Wilber is of the opinion that the majority of people in the post-modern world are guilty of this projection and he refers to them as, '... followers of Feuerbach', but at least in this respect, Wilber has misconstrued Feuerbach's intention (2000a:540).

<sup>235</sup> For Wilber, the construction of religion is based to some extent of humanity's deep seated psychological insecurities. Wilber's remark in this regard is reminiscent of the barbs quoted in the opening paragraph of this argument. 'God, if not dead, is at least moribund, surviving only through the unrequited longings of the psychologically immature' (1983b:vii).

<sup>236</sup> Wilber (1991:177) suggests that humanity should be free to interpret exoteric religious myths in any way that is Legitimately viable, but emphasises that beneath such myths lie principles pointing to a transcendent unity in all religions which, if they are Authentic, teach, '...the unanimity of primordial truth.' This 'primordial truth' refers to Wilber's notion of NDC, but it is simultaneously most problematic for his non-dual argument because it so clearly implies an absolute essence which transcends definitions of materiality thereby imbuing his philosophy with subtle dualism.

<sup>237</sup> The theology of original sin is not thoroughly treated by Wilber, but serves a metaphorical purpose to illustrate the loss of oneness in God through the Eden narrative in Genesis 2 and 3. Christian theology generally sustains both a transcendent and imminent sense of God wherein God is both fully indwelling and omnipresent, and simultaneously transcendent as 'other'. Helminiak (1998:280) accepts that Wilber's reference to, '... all the world [as] Brahman' is an interpretation of omnipresence, but is offended by Wilber's reference to Jesus in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. Consequently, Helminiak urges that, '... Wilber's gross misrepresentation of Christianity needs to be flagged' (Helminiak 1998:280). McDermott (1996:8) likewise believes that, 'Wilber shows profound ignorance regarding these matters. He, a defender of spirituality, does not recognise the spiritual issues that are at stake in the Christian doctrines of Incarnation, Resurrection, Trinity, and Grace. Worse than ignorant, he is also unmannered, rude, and offensive.' Both Helminiak and Mc Dermott appear personally affronted by Wilber's approach to Christianity, but this may indicate a faith-based apologetic rather than an objective understanding of Wilber's metaphorical purpose. In defence of Wilber, he never claims to be Christian and therefore has no obligation to Christian apologetics, but he has developed a sophisticated paradigm to explain the Involutionary movement of separating from 'God', and the Evolutionary movement of 'realising oneness in God' (2000:360).

duality (1997a:55).<sup>238</sup> It is therefore the Christian purpose to realise this non-dual consciousness in God.<sup>239</sup> If Wilber is right to identify this as the primary intention of religion, Christianity included, then the challenges posed to it by alternative views serve to measure the sufficiency of its validating criteria. Clearly religion accrues a great deal of additional scripting which can obscure this central purpose, but for Wilber religion nonetheless preserves inherent value if it is shown to facilitate authentic transformation to higher consciousness, and if it legitimately integrates the psycho-social variables of its community.<sup>240</sup>

What then are the key challenges now facing religious credibility? By way of introduction, Wilber surmises that the growing priority of exoteric rationalism over myth rightly discarded the, ‘... pre-rational, anthropomorphic, mythic God figure ...’, but an unforeseen consequence was that it likewise discarded trans-rational or mystical associations (1993:247).<sup>241</sup> This assumption may be too generalised in view of the rising tide of interest in mystical spirituality today, but Wilber traces the origins of more significant challenges further back to more significant writers such as Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) (Wilber 2000a:405). Marx’s particular intention was to react against bourgeois capitalism enacted through religion rather than criticise spirituality *per se*. For Marx, religion was a social construct designed to mollify the afflictions of an oppressed people by cultivating psycho-social lethargy and skewed perceptions of reality.<sup>242</sup> Nietzsche

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<sup>238</sup> Wilber elsewhere describes the Primary Duality as the, ‘... *dividing line between esotericism and exotericism ...*’ (1993b:248, 324).

<sup>239</sup> Wilber believes that religion is now largely pre-occupied with the maintenance of instruments that ‘fortify’ the ‘self’ whereas the truer purpose of religion is to, ‘... utterly shatter [the self] – not consolation but devastation, not entrenchment but emptiness, not complacency but explosion, not comfort but revolution – in short, not a conventional bolstering of consciousness but a radical transmutation and transformation at the deepest seat of consciousness itself’ (1999a:27). Wilber’s descriptive medium is Buddhist, but the intention is likewise shared in the teaching of Jesus: Matt 16:24 and Luke 9:23-25, ‘... deny self, take up your cross ...,’ and Paul in the letter to the Galatians 2:20, ‘I have been Crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ in me.’ The nature of non-duality is also implied in the Gospel according to John 17:9-11 and 21-26, but an exegesis of the passages reveal different opinions regarding the nature of the oneness of which Jesus speaks. Typically however, in keeping with Christianity’s panentheistic underpinnings, these passages may be interpreted to imply divine union rather than complete non-duality. In other words, for most Christian interpreters, the substance of God and humanity are not qualitatively the same, but indivisibly merged in divine love.

<sup>240</sup> Such additional scripting too often becomes the prominence of the religious purpose and the result, as Goleman, Smith, and Ram Dass (1985:213) point out, ‘... is that in church and in synagogue there’s no place for spiritual life. There’s a place for religiosity, for the exoteric, but not the esoteric.’ In other words, says Wilber, ‘... we are seeking for Spirit in ways that prevent its realisation’ (1999b:60).

<sup>241</sup> Alexander (2001:32) maintains that Biblical images definitely claim an anthropomorphic God figure who is both over and above creation, and intimately involved in it. Beneath that image, argues Wilber, the world’s great mystics, ‘... all experienced Mind ... reflecting not a difference in Mind but a difference in symbolic elaborations of Mind ... yet this Reality remains one and the same’ (1993b:248).

<sup>242</sup> Wilson (2000:106) elaborates further by suggesting that Marx succeeded in a form of revolutionary scientific discovery about the nature of history, and therefore about reality itself; ‘It was a discovery which dethroned God ... certainly and effectively ... It was the discovery that human societies, their culture, their methods of governing themselves - whether as kingdoms or as republics - their rituals of crownings or inaugurations, their laws, their

likewise unmasked abuses of religious authority structures which he believed diluted spiritual authenticity as a result of the vitiated versions of the Christian formulae of the day. Nietzsche revealed an apparent divine incapacity reflected in growing moral degradation in society and thereby exposed the causal link between social mores and faith in God as an illusion. For Nietzsche the idea of God therefore became functionally impotent and nihilistic to the point of social disintegration because society refused to acknowledge the 'death' of invalid God-concepts for fear losing personal and social definition.<sup>243</sup>

For Wilber, the profound influence of thinkers such as Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche, among innumerable others underpin a growing body of opinion challenging religious conventions. Recent resurgences of religious fundamentalism add to this attrition by demoting spirituality to ideology and such territorialism too often leads to exclusionism, prejudice, and violence.<sup>244</sup> Moreover, ideologically defined religion typically dismisses the necessity for self-criticism and consequently forecloses the possibility of deeper spiritual apprehension (Wilber 1993a:21). Frohlich (1997:80), referring to the renewed interest in spirituality and mysticism, also points out inherent dangers in mystical pursuits if they remain uninformed or undirected, leading to pluralistic compromises or dilutions of well established faith-systems. In both cases the credibility of religion can be eroded.

How does Wilber address these issues? He begins by explaining that there are four major stages of spiritual unfolding: belief, faith, direct experience, and permanent adaptation (1999a:312-313). Belief ordinarily functions to preserve the mythical, magical, or literalist translations of religious narrative, whereas faith transcends the necessity of protectionist strategies in favour of intuitive senses of divine presence or spiritual awakening.<sup>245</sup> Direct or

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music, their recreations, their art, the stories they tell one another, their domestic patterns and routines, their very gods - are all the product of economic forces' (Wilson 2000:106). This is a somewhat opinionated interpretation, but it does reflect the strong relationship between matters of state and religion which Marx criticised so vociferously (Marx 1844).

<sup>243</sup> Kaufmann believes that Nietzsche latterly dismissed and vilified religious belief in any form (Kaufmann: 1950).

<sup>244</sup> Kourie (1998b:437) adds substance to this observation by pointing out, '... a fanatical intolerance among certain church groups who espouse and are committed to an ideology, with such remorseless zeal that its absoluteness is maintained at any cost, even to the detriment of purely humanitarian feeling and ethical behaviour.' Wilber similarly charges that, 'Many fundamentalist Christians gag in horror when any mention is made of the fact that all religions are identical in esoteric essence, for it implies that Christianity is not THE ONLY WAY, and hence the fuel for their "proselytizing fury" evaporates ...' (1993b:249). For Wilber this ultimately means that, 'If the Nazarene had in fact realised a Godhead that belongs to all, equally and fully, then there was no way he could be made the sole property of an exclusive mythology ... So Jesus was ... tucked downward and seamlessly into the prevailing mythology, and seen as yet another (but much greater) instance of a miraculous and supernatural *intervention in history* to save a new group of *chosen* peoples ...' (Wilber 2000:362-363).

<sup>245</sup> Wilber describes these levels of spiritual understanding in slightly more detail. Magical apperception is, '... the beginning of the mental realms; this includes simple images, symbols, and the first rudimentary concepts, or the first and lowest mental productions, which are "magical" in the sense that they display condensation,

peak experiences reveal transpersonal encounters of psychic or non-dual illuminations which are usually temporary or phase-specific, whereas permanent adaptation implies a pervasive and transforming sense of non-dual consciousness as definitive of the whole life experience (Wilber 1999a:319). At the levels of belief, faith, and sometimes direct apprehension, Wilber claims the possibility of aberration or mistranslation of the religious purpose. Permanent adaptation, on the other hand, '... [is] based, *not* on belief, faith, or transitory experience, but on actual Levels of structuralisation, cognition, and development, [wherein] the deep Structures of their truth-claims assume a perfectly appropriate, verifiable, and replicable status' (1983b:73). At this point we are referred back to the injunctions of Wilber's epistemology where he claims that NDC is scientifically provable, but the evidence Wilber claims is self-referential since it cannot be simultaneously coherent and consistent. Provability is thus contingent upon inductive assent to un-provable axioms which means that the foundational structure of Wilber's epistemology is not able to support his subsequent deductions about NDC.

Wilber responds by explaining that the language of symbol and myth is sufficient explanation for those who have direct or experiential knowledge of NDC because the extent of their trans-rational realisation is sufficient to enable such understanding. This is fair and well for those who claim such expertise, but their claims cannot be otherwise proven, and whilst symbol and myth serve a useful metaphorical purpose, they do not provide sufficient authentication of such experiences. This is a contradictory defence since Wilber latterly claimed the necessity of transcending mythical associations as a means of legitimising NDC (1993e:247, 1998a:166-167). How then can Wilber's criteria of authentication be authenticated? The circularity of Wilber's argument again becomes evident and it therefore fails on the basis of self-referentiality.

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displacement, confusion of image and object ... animism, and so forth. There is also a lack of perspectivism, or an inability to clearly take the role of other ... [mythical consciousness is] more advanced than magic, with a beginning of concrete operational thinking (Piaget) and a beginning of perspectivism (or communal role-taking), but still incapable of the simplest hypothetico-deductive reasoning, consequently "mythic" in its operation ... [whereas rational consciousness pertains to] Piaget's formal operational thinking (the fifth chakra, the culmination of *manomayakosa* and *manovijnana*). It is the first structure that can not only think about the world but think about thinking; hence, it is the first structure that is clearly self-reflexive and introspective, and it displays an advanced capacity for perspectivism. It is also the first structure capable of hypothetico-deductive or propositional reasoning which allows it to apprehend higher or purely noetic *relationships*' (1983b:18-20). Craffert (2001:3) notes that once, '... a religion has been institutionalised and been expressed in myth, it has the tendency of maintaining itself via socialisation and custom.' The preoccupation with maintenance can therefore shift focus away from the central purpose of Transformation as Wilber describes it.

In broader context Wilber situates levels of holonic assent in religious understanding and experience within the spectra of his AQAL model which he says, ‘... will give us a critical-normative sociology of religion, one that is capable of *structurally analyzing* various religious expressions, assigning them a spot in the hierarchy, consequently adjudicating their degree of authenticity’ (1983b:18, cf 1996e:245). Wilber describes Authenticity as the measure of a faith-system’s capacity to self-transcend, and Legitimacy as the measure of its capacity to fulfil the psychological and social needs of a religious group at its current developmental Level (1983b:xii).<sup>246</sup> Recalling Wilber’s distinction between the processes of Translation and Transformation, he goes on to describe legitimacy as the ability of a religious system to Translate. This means that Legitimacy exhibits religion’s aptitude to situate its full narrative appropriately within the proficiencies of its present developmental Level. Legitimacy is thus horizontally functional in the extent to which it integrates, organises, coheres, and affords meaning to its own constituents (Wilber 1996b:249). The measure of Legitimacy also operates in two dimensions. The point, says Wilber, ‘... is simply to determine how well the particular religious engagement is serving stability and integration *within* the group itself (content legitimacy) and *between* the group and its broader societal background (context legitimacy)’ (1983b:126-127).

Authenticity, on the other hand, validates a faith-system’s vertical capacity to sublimate and transcend particular psycho-social and religious institutions (Wilber 1983b:60-61, 1996b:249). A measure of a religion’s Authenticity is therefore indicated in the extent to which it has transcended, ‘... imaginal, mythological, or mytho-poetic ... definitions ... In other words, it must be, at its core, a series of direct mystical, transcendental, meditative, contemplative, or yogic experiences - *not sensory* and *not mental*, but trans-sensual, trans-mental, transpersonal, transcendental, consciousness ...’ (1998a:166-167).<sup>247</sup> For Wilber, this trans-rational Transformation is not a denial of the value and necessity of phase-specific renditions of reason-based faith, but a simultaneous embrace and transcendence of such reason through, ‘... intensive *yogic-gnostic* practice’ (1983b:xii). Wilber invents such conceptual neologisms which may communicate symbolic relevance, but the parameters

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<sup>246</sup> Walsh (1992:29) describes Wilber’s interpretation similarly by suggesting that Authenticity is the, ‘...index of the developmental level for which the discipline aims ... [whereas Legitimacy] defines a measure of the extent to which the practices meet the psychological needs of their practitioners at the practitioner’s current level.’

<sup>247</sup> Wilber refers to, ‘... the founders of the great traditions, [who] almost without exception, underwent a series of profound *spiritual experiences*. Their revelations, *their direct spiritual experiences*, were *not* mythological proclamations ... but rather direct apprehensions of the Divine ... a union that is the ground, the goal, the source, and the salvation of the entire world’ (1998a:168). The nature of this ‘union’ defines a trans-elemental condition of being so profound that, ‘... [these] highest spiritual states are not even *experiences*’ (1999a:192).

remain too imprecise for incisive academic engagement. The ineffability of mystical *gnosis*, by definition, situates the subject of research beyond the limit of rational enquiry, and Wilber's epistemological attempt at circumventing this dilemma does not ultimately bridge the reason-ineffability gap.

Wilber nonetheless claims that the entire process is 'reasonable' subject to the understanding that reason transforms into higher degrees of holistic embrace as it ascends to its ultimate realisation in NDC. This means, firstly, that, '... the perspectives of all sentient beings [must] be taken into account and fully honoured ...' which, secondly, implies the inclusion of the sustained introspection of the possibility of higher apprehensions. For Wilber (1997a:229-231) this is a form of 'cognitive *pluralism* and *perspectivism*', and the methodology of assessing the transformatory Authenticity and translatory Legitimacy of religion is simple:

... we take the particular socio-religious movement, examine its statements, actions, and belief systems, and subject these to [firstly] a *developmental-structural analysis* in order to determine its degree of authenticity or vertical maturity; and [secondly] a *surface-functional analysis* in order to determine its type and degree of legitimacy or horizontal integration and stability (1996b:251).<sup>248</sup>

The transposition of Authenticity and Legitimacy has led to a great deal of confusion and conflict in the authority of religious systems (Wilber 1996e:251). This ambiguity is usually idiomatic, but it can also occur, as Kourie (1992:98) points out, '... where contextuality is not taken into consideration [and it can] cause ontological confusion with respect to the object of mystical experience.'<sup>249</sup> For this reason Wilber proposes more exact criteria. The analyst must firstly be able to discern the Authenticity of a faith-system's true transcendental aspirations, '... defined not by pre-rational dogmatism but by [its] trans-rational injunctions' (1996e:250). Legitimacy must secondly be anchored in a credible religious tradition which

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<sup>248</sup> Wilber qualifies and refines this simple methodology by acknowledging that whilst, '... structural and functional analyses form the methodological backbone of this approach, they by no means exhaust the necessary approaches. Deep structural analysis *cannot* determine specific surface structure contents and values ... Nor is overall functionalism helpful here ... So, for specific understandings of specific individual values, meanings, and expressions, we always rely on phenomenological-hermeneutics' (1983b:129).

<sup>249</sup> The provision of a clear and functionally viable spiritual system is therefore important. Wilber believes that, '... Spirit manifests itself only in and as the world of form of apparently separate things and apparently different events ... [and it is for this reason] that we need a vehicle, a *yana*, to take us to the formless shore beyond, even if the final realisation is only that no vehicle was necessary or even possible ... the world's great mystical paths ... are not beliefs, not theories, not ideas, not theologies, and not doctrines. Rather, they are vehicles; they are experiential *practices*' (1999b:397).



has been developed and refined over time by many competent contributors (Wilber 1996e:261). Consensus and competence do not, however, guarantee Legitimacy. We need only recall the brutal efficiency and agreement of purpose within the Third Reich to make the point. Thirdly, religious masters must have temporal authority so that the ‘guru’, ‘sage’, or ‘master’ is appreciated as, ‘... guide, teacher, or physician, not king, president, or totem master’ (1996e:261). For this reason it must, fourthly, be understood that the ideal or perfect realisation of the religious purpose resides in ‘transcendental essence’, and not in manifest existence (1996e:262).<sup>250</sup> This point is dubious because it presumes the existence of a transcendental or spiritual order – again situating Wilber’s philosophy within the dualisms of Essentialism – albeit in subtle form. Materialists are therefore, by Wilber’s definition, unequivocally excluded from the possibility of such realisation. Fifthly, the religion must not be, ‘... *out to save the world*’ (1996e:263). This point is also problematic since many religions have implicit, and sometimes direct mandates to evangelise and recruit adherents. Are Christians and Muslims, for example, therefore devotees of illegitimate and inauthentic religions? On the contrary, Wilber does not exclude religions based on such intentions specifically, but as usual places religious imperatives to recruit within the expansionist or imperialist categories of magical-mythical levels of belief. He does however claim that the transformative impetus into higher non-dual consciousness relinquishes its attachment to such acquisitional intentions. Through these stages of ascent in the Hierarchy of the *Great Nest of Being* to NDC, Wilber recognises the potential for crises in Authenticity. These most often occur when prevailing world views are challenged by transformed apprehensions of older conventions.

In conclusion, it may appear that the instruments of Authentication and Legitimation Wilber applies to religion are too recondite, but his approach does recognise the important evolutionary character of spiritual learning and experience. Kourie (1998b:439) likewise encourages, ‘... a heuristic faith that is open and eager and allows the transcendent experience of the divine to become imbedded in daily life.’ With the introductory observations of this argument in mind, Kourie (1998:441) is right to encourage the post-modern church to review pedagogical methodologies that prioritise religious propositions at the expense of mystical and experiential possibilities. This intention is primary for the viability of the future church, but Wilber’s validating processes need to be supplemented.

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<sup>250</sup> It is for this reason that Wilber claims that, ‘...neither the scholarly study nor the practice of mystical religion can be fruitfully pursued through discursive rationality alone’ (Anthony, Ecker, Wilber 1987:344).

Flier (1995:143) points out three fundamental qualities of religion which usually and rightly indicate legitimate religious systems, and these should adjudicate Wilber's rather opaque measures. Notwithstanding contextual variances, these qualities are moral integrity, transparency, and love. This is not mere affective love, but 'compassion in action' as a consequence of mystical awareness cultivated through rigorous inner and contemplative embrace taught, for example, in the writings of Jan Van Ruysbroeck's (1293/4-1381) *Spiritual Espousals* and *The Seven Steps of the Ladder of Spiritual Love* (Taylor 1944, Wiseman 1985). As humanity gradually transcends post-modernism, it may be worth adding that religion must develop more coherent and unified narratives that are sensible enough to integrate meaningfully with the wider matrix of human consciousness in all disciplines. If mystical *gnosis* is the conceptual and experiential key to non-dual being in, and with the entire cosmos as infinite possibility in multiplicity, then despite the epistemological hurdles, Wilber may be right to motivate NDC as 'the' answer. How the actual 'existence' and value of NDC as perennial wisdom can be validated in such diverse contexts is another matter, but it is unlikely to succeed if it is retained within Essentialist philosophies.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

It was previously indicated that Wilber's philosophy is received with ambivalence in academic contexts. Whilst Wilber's integral intention is sound, his foundational premise skews true integralism because it ultimately discriminates against all types and processes of knowledge as quantitatively and qualitatively subordinate to NDC. Wilber counter argues that NDC sublates all knowledge, but surely it can only do so if it has a capacity advantage over all other knowledge types. There is, in other words, no way in which Wilber can posit NDC as the agency of absolute transcendental realisation without circumscribing all other possible approaches to true knowledge. Equally as important is the realisation that no science can validate such absolutist claims in its own terms. Inasmuch as Wilber cautions against popular attempts to integrate scientific and mystical paradigms by advising level specific distinctions on the basis of their respective integral embrace, his inclusion of un-provable premises forestalls his ability to validate his own argument in scientific terms. Wilber's obvious emphasis on mystical or metaphysical pre-eminence distinguishes him as a spiritual philosopher rather than a scientist and this identity confusion may prevent many of his other useful insights from gaining academic credence.

Wilber's esoteric predilection is equally present in his consideration of Modern and Post-modern trends still prevalent in much of society today. This is reflected in the extent to which Wilber, in different terms, proposes a post-metaphysical awareness which also denigrates all other mind-sets to categories of inferiority. Wilber's uncompromising repudiation of Physicalist capacities to address transcendental phenomena inhibits heuristic possibilities. In Christian terms the philosophical implications of incarnation imply the embodiment of spirit without prejudice. Whilst Christian panentheism preserves ontological distinction on the basis of the irreducibility of the Absolute, it is precisely the role of the 'Body of Christ' which enables liberation and resurrection. Ontological delimitations in theology are understood as imbedded traditions, but if religious consciousness is indeed an evolutionary and contextually adaptive process, then is it not time to amend theologically prescribed bifurcations of matter and spirit in order to accommodate an authentic non-dual perspective? A Physicalist interpretation can do this to a point, and it must do so without reduction of the mystical phenomenon as such. This is not an argument in favour of pantheism since scientific epistemologies have no recourse to proving the existence of God. It merely suggests that creatively conceptualised Physicalist renderings can accommodate the 'narratives about' if not the 'ontology of' a Divine Other and it must do so by adhering to methodological and ontological protocols inherent to scientific epistemologies. In colloquial terms, if Wilber chooses science as the primary epistemological medium then he should stick to the rules.

This proposal indeed raises questions about the Legitimacy, Authority, and Authenticity of religion. In short, at the tail end of the Post-modern age, religion needs a new face and change is fundamental to its functional survival. In agreement with Wilber and a multitude of other recent writers, a mystical approach to personal and social transformation is the most vitally engaging option. The suggestion is potentially inflammatory, but if it is carefully navigated it may re-legitimise and revitalise fatigued religious definitions. Contemporary evidence suggests that it is less the structure and expression of religion that is losing currency since the power of symbolism is well recognised, but rather outmoded or vapid ideas of God. In today's global environment it may be more useful to ask what the word 'God' conjures in the minds of its hearers, and then measure the response against the Church's ability to equal their needs and expectations. If inherited dogmatic mind-sets foreclose the ability to vigorously engage new learning – even learning that may fundamentally change the nature of primary beliefs, then the 'Death of God' may indeed be imminent. Spirituality as it finds its

expression in mysticism is not designed around informational protectionism, but loving liberation into the creative possibilities realised in humanity's ability to continually transcend itself into deeper and more integrated awareness. Surely the astonishing advances in science and consciousness studies can add value and intellectual credibility to the emergence of new paradigms of spirituality?



## CHAPTER FIVE THE ROLE OF DUALITY IN WILBER'S PHILOSOPHY

### 5.1 Introduction

Philosophical and scientific equivocation around the nature of the apparent ontological gap between matter and mind is braided through the history of humanity's quest to discern and describe a unified nature of being. Religion typically explains this relationship through forms of super or supra-natural pre-eminent Essence which is prior or transcendent to the spatial and temporal fluxes between matter and mind. However, the nature of the matter-mind relationship to God or Mind reveals further mysteries which largely remain the preserve of theological pursuits in the world's religions. At the heart of the search for a definitive *grand-narrative*, be it philosophical, scientific, or theological, lies the problem of duality - an explanatory gap or *Hard Problem*.<sup>251</sup>

A brief survey of some major philosophical evolutions in the quest to understand, describe, and resolve duality establishes a context for debate with Wilber, and the complexity of the terrain soon becomes evident. The puzzles distilled from this background are then reflected through Wilber's understanding of the problem. Wilber's comparison of the split between subjectivity and objectivity begins to reveal inconsistencies in the scientific epistemology he constructs in an attempt to justify the inclusion of metaphysical absolutes as a means of solving the *Hard Problem*. The self-referentiality of Wilber's argument becomes more apparent as the survey extends through explorations of the split between the absolute and the relative into the One-many problem. Wilber's claim to validate the ineffability of non-dual or mystical awakening through scientific instruments is also challenged in the mind-brain debate and the ensuing problems anticipate the counterpoint proposed as the closing argument of this thesis.

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<sup>251</sup> *Grand Narratives* have accrued vague definitions and tenuous credibility, but usually claim to appropriate general standards of ordering knowledge and experience. It is more common in post-modern contexts to refer to *meta-narratives* which simply attempt to describe the totalising story of all stories pertaining to universal principles. The concept of *grand* or *meta-narratives* is most famously criticised by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). In this book Lyotard supports the growing suspicion around *meta-narratives* because they too often submit to claims of ultimacy. Lyotard argues that claims to totalising theories are inadequate in their representation of all possibilities and suggests the viability of *micro-narratives* as a reasonable alternative.

## 5.2 The Dualistic Idiom: Background Perspectives

The bifurcation of matter and mind lies at the heart of Western philosophy - the annals of which produce unremitting speculations regarding the nature of consciousness and its relationship to form. Moreover, multiple views on the nature of matter and the One-Many problem presage suppositions about time and space that create contexts within which further complexes of hypotheses emerge.<sup>252</sup> Wilber recognises and positions many of these arguments in his Integral Philosophy, but the most basic is unqualified dualism which simply asserts that matter and spirit, brain and mind, or substance and consciousness are two different things.<sup>253</sup> This simplification warrants elucidation in order to do justice to the conceptual sophistication of the great dualists.

The earliest renditions of the Milesians from Thales (624-545 BCE) to Anaximander (610-545 BCE) sought monistic translations of reality as a necessary pre-form to multiplicity, but Anaximander's *Apeiron* established a trans-elemental dimension that he believed gave rise to the manifold manifestations and forms of matter.<sup>254</sup> The Pythagoreans (6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE), particularly in the Akousmatic tradition, maintained versions of metempsychosis which presupposes an endless cyclicity through human form which ultimately finds liberation in the study of philosophy. Here the body is often construed as an entrapping temporality which the soul intends to direct, harmonise, and ultimately escape.<sup>255</sup> Heraclitus (540-480 BCE) in turn, argued that the reason of *Logos* revealed a dynamic flux in opposites that, paradoxically, maintained a monistic unity, but Parmenides (515-430 BCE) preferred to co-substantiate this dialectic into a timeless and homogenous process. Conversely, Socrates (469-399 BCE), in sympathy with the Sophist concern with human nature, personalised the trans-material spiritual quality as both source and substance of the true self thus maintaining physicality as qualitatively distinct and contingent to spirit. Plato (427/8-347 BCE) likewise postulated a dualism of immaterial substance and physical body. The unfolding of Plato's philosophy

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<sup>252</sup> Among innumerable other problems facing dualists, particularly those maintaining Spirit as the Absolute Good, is the problem of evil. Macrone, referring to Augustine of Hippo (354-430), asks why an all-loving, absolute, omnipotent, and omniscient God would create the possibility for evil to exist? This kind of speculation frequently occupies Christian theology and, to a significant extent, makes the sense of *one-ness* typical in mystical spirituality difficult to justify theologically because the theology of good and evil is necessarily dualistic (Macrone 2002:2-4).

<sup>253</sup> Wilber explains through Buddhist koans that, '... just as a knife cannot cut itself, the universe cannot totally see itself as an object without totally mutilating itself ... this type of dualistic knowledge, wherein the universe is severed into subject vs. object (as well as truth vs. falsity, good vs. evil, etc.) is the very cornerstone of Western philosophy, theology, and science. For Western philosophy is, by and large, Greek philosophy, and Greek philosophy is the philosophy of dualisms' (1993b:18).

<sup>254</sup> Anaximander's speculations about nature suggest that the first principle, the *Apeiron*, must transcend the four basic elements of earth, air, water and fire, and must therefore be an indeterminate quality subsisting in and through all other elements (Flew 1961:13).

<sup>255</sup> Whilst philosophically and culturally distinct, the Akousmatic tradition is not in principle dissimilar from the Hindu understandings of the cycles of *Samsara* through good *Karma* to *Nirvana*, but the illustration is purely metaphorical since the disciplines are clearly different.

through *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* to *The Republic* espoused a more complex view of *psyche* that embraced emotional, volitional, and conceptual thought. This view aspires to transcendence from the limitations of reason to the Ideal.<sup>256</sup> Aristotle (384-322 BCE) later distinguished *nous* from *psyche* and rejected Plato's idea of the *psyche* as an immaterial substance by distinguishing soul in terms of its form.<sup>257</sup> For Aristotle, this form, though not substantiated as the elements of the body, nonetheless constitutes the essence of the body thereby establishing a more immanent approach to the body-soul problem. Later, Epicurus (341-271 BCE), like Democritus before him, assumed an atomistic view of conscious matter by believing all reality to consist of atoms in a void, and since the soul could not therefore be void, it could only be physically defined. This notion confronted the *Hard Problem* without adequate explanation of how mind interacts with matter.

Subsequently, Plotinus (205-270) and other neo-Platonists after him, sustained the partition of matter and spirit. Whilst the neo-Platonists attempted a redefinition of Platonic views, they integrated elements of Aristotelian thought by imbuing all corporeality with self and form without at the same time reducing the concept of self to corporeal form. Plotinus also established the hypostatic unity of *Soul* (discursive thought), *Nous* (the intuitive Mind), and the *One* which, following Plato, resembles the mystical realisation of the self as one with the Absolute, and many subsequent mystical philosophies owe their conceptual frameworks to this neo-Platonic idea. Whilst Porphyry (232-305), one of the great early neo-Platonists, spoke out against Christianity, others such as Proclus (410-485), though not Christian, developed schemes exemplifying unifying processes underlying the fabric of the cosmos as the soul ascends from disintegration to the One. These gradations, though not particularised in the same way, are reminiscent of the degrees of ascent to spiritual union narrated by many Christian mystics. Among others, Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), a Spanish Carmelite mystic, describes stages of interiorisation from the 'outer courtyard' of a castle to the innermost of its seven mansions where the soul is married to God in the manner of 'as one' with God.

The point of the foregoing examples is not to conduct an exhaustive survey of philosophical discourse pertaining to dualism, but simply to identify the scope and complexity of the problem

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<sup>256</sup> Socrates' rare agreement with the Sophist view on human nature does not extend to an acceptance of Sophist nihilism.

<sup>257</sup> Plato envisaged a benevolent craftsman, a *Demiurge*, who constructed the universe using mathematical principles based on symmetric geometrical forms. This abstract realm of Platonic Forms was connected with the everyday world of sense experiences by a subtle entity Plato called the *World Soul* (Davies 1992:74-75).



in the history of thought. Not long after the death of Teresa of Avila, and with a massive and intricate wealth of philosophy to digest, Descartes (1596-1650) challenged the reliability of sensory and mental experience as sources of knowledge that would be consistently true and valid. To this end he believed that the only thing he could not doubt was his own thinking since doubt itself comprises thought. The nature of this thinking-self defined much of Descartes' work, but his essential resolve remained in place: that matter is extended into space whereas mind remains un-extended.<sup>258</sup> Modern post-Cartesian thought is still generally occupied with the relationship of matter to mind and a series of perplexing questions continue unanswered, the most fundamental of which remains the *Hard Problem*.<sup>259</sup>

These and contingent questions produce multifarious hypotheses which either attempt to justify dualistic philosophies, or to resolve them. Malebranche's (1638-1715) *Occasionalism*, for example, rejects the notion that any causal interaction between mind and body is naturally possible since only divine initiative is capable of animating nature.<sup>260</sup> The *Identity Thesis* suggests that brain and mind are two different aspects of the same thing, whereas *Interactionism* maintains that brain and mind are different but mutually causal.<sup>261</sup> Some forms of *Epiphenomenalism* propose that mind and brain either run in a-causal parallel, or that one is the

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<sup>258</sup> Dennett reminds us of the standard objections to Descartes' version of dualism and it may be fair to say that these objections, which revolve essentially around the *Hard Problem*, have still not been adequately resolved by dualists. Dennett (1993:33-34) says, 'If mind and body are distinct things or substances, they nevertheless must interact; the bodily sense organs, via the brain, must *inform* the mind, must send to it or present it with perceptions or ideas or data of some sort, and then the mind, having thought things over, must *direct* the body in appropriate action (including speech). Hence the view is often called *Cartesian interactionism* or *interactionist dualism*. In Descartes' formulation, the locus of interaction in the brain is the pineal gland, or *epiphysis*. It appears in Descartes' own schematic diagram as the much-enlarged pointed oval in the middle of the head.' Edelman and Tononi (2000a) are equally critical. They recall Gilbert Ryles' famous book *The Concept of Mind* (1949), which is most critical of Descartes' view and caricatured Descartes' understanding of mind as *The Ghost in the Machine*. If taken too seriously, say Edelman and Tononi (2000a:4), '... the famous phrase: "I am conscious, therefore I exist" can lead to solipsism - the view that nothing exists but one's individual consciousness ... [a starting point that] leads to idealistic positions that emphasise mind over matter - ideas; perception; thought; or, in one word, consciousness. By taking mind as a starting point, however, idealistic philosophies must take pains to explain matter - which is not necessarily a better predicament than starting from mere matter to derive mind.'

<sup>259</sup> Fenwick (2001:35), attempts a now defunct solution to the *Hard Problem* since findings in brain studies have dismissed exclusive locality as a functional constraint in the operation of consciousness. Nonetheless, he claims that, '... the brain appears to work as a set of interlocking modules, each one with a defined location on the cortex, and each with a specific function, all joined together in a magical way (the *Binding Problem*) to produce the unified world view of conscious experience.'

<sup>260</sup> The fullest account of Malebranche's philosophy is contained in Robinet (1958-1984).

<sup>261</sup> The *Identity Thesis* is often quite specific. It asserts that there can be no experience that is not underpinned by a relevant brain state, that brain and mind are distinct, but that they interact. That still does not escape the *Hard Problem*: how can two fundamentally different things influence each other? Wilber's wit illustrates the point, 'As everybody knows, ghosts walk through walls, they do not push walls around, so how can the ghostly mind actually have any real effect on the material body? The very move to show that mind cannot be reduced to matter leaves the dualist incapable of showing how mind can act on matter at all' (1999e:608). Karl Popper (1902-1994), an eminent scientist and philosopher, is among the more recent supporters of *Interactionism* and his work is well surveyed by Notturmo (1994).

by-product of the other.<sup>262</sup> In the case of the latter, *Epiphenomenalism* assumes Mind as a supra-natural and *a priori* necessity which finds expression in many theistic philosophies.<sup>263</sup> If, on the other hand, mind is the product of matter, then approaches which reduce consciousness to physiological causes evolve into a variety of Physicalist methodologies and some of these arguments will be considered in greater detail in Chapter Seven.<sup>264</sup> There are, however, more recent and scientifically exact Physicalist approaches to consciousness studies which include subjectivity within Physicalist epistemologies.<sup>265</sup>

### 5.3 Wilber's Interpretation of Duality

For Wilber, all the philosophies hitherto identified are, '... deeply flawed in one way or another' (1996e:xv). This is a bold claim, but Wilber qualifies his judgement by assigning degrees of inclusivity to these philosophies at various levels of his spectrum model. Even so, Wilber claims that all these views maintain tacit dualities which can ultimately only be transcended in the *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC.<sup>266</sup> It will be argued in Chapter Seven that not all Physicalist approaches are reductionistic, and they furthermore need not preclude the transforming meaningfulness of non-dual experience typical of mystical experience.

Thus far it has been shown that the early philosophers through to Descartes (save the monists) refer variously to the self or the mind as the *psyche*. For them the *psyche* consists of trans-

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<sup>262</sup> Woodhouse maintains that there is no inherent clarity about how consciousness could give rise to matter anymore than matter could give rise to consciousness, but this comparison is unpersuasive (Lorimer 2001:234). Recent advances offer more plausible explanations of how the body-brain can produce consciousness. A major difficulty, however, still exists within Western brain/mind identity theory which states that all qualities which flow from the brain are created by it. In this case inadequate explanation is provided for subjectivity and consciousness is too frequently reduced to physiology (Woodhouse 2001:37).

<sup>263</sup> If matter is the product of Mind in the theistic sense of God as *Mind*, then Wilber is right to point out that the difficulties confronting the spiritual disciplines are greater in this area because the experiential gap between outer matter, and interior awareness is accentuated. Once again, the *Hard Problem* remains intact and Wilber asks how, '... "unbounded consciousness" [God] can relate to a purely finite, bounded, temporal brain?' (1999e:415).

<sup>264</sup> Edelman and Tononi (2000a) identify several of these and other branches of post-Cartesian attempts at Physicalist resolutions of the *Binding Problem*. The philosophical debate on the mind-body problem, they say, '... is by now extremely sophisticated and, in their variety, some current disputes rival those that flourished among post-Cartesian philosophers ... We now have the central state theory, neutral monism, logical behaviourism, token Physicalism and type Physicalism ... anomalous monism, emergent materialism, eliminative materialism, various brands of functionalism, and many others' (2000a:5-6). It is not necessary to survey all these fractured options since they have no direct bearing on the central argument of this thesis. Nonetheless, Wilber's response to Physicalism remains the same, though he has lately softened his previous hard-line approach. In 1999 he said, 'And why don't we simply go all the way and say that consciousness is therefore nothing but a by-product of complex brain structures, connectionist systems, digital processes, computational bio-circuits, or some such? Because none of those Right-Hand correlates have any value gradations, which are the essence of the Left-Hand domains themselves' (1999e:508).

<sup>265</sup> Another recent attempt to explain the mind-brain problem is proffered by information and computer technologists. Some proponents metaphorically associate the brain to hardware and the mind to software, but the complexities and subtleties of consciousness make this analogy unconvincing.

<sup>266</sup> Wilber's criticism extends especially to religious associations between the divine and human which are highly dualistic. Most often this relationship is viewed paradoxically, but Wilber claims that NDC, at its purest, does not accommodate paradox at all. Paradox, he says, '... is not the Ground of Being and therefore is nonexistent in Ultimate or unified non-dual states of consciousness' (Fisher 1997:57).

material and eternal qualities, whereas physicality persists only in gradations of ephemeral space-time dimensions. *Psyche* however, generally embraces a wider referential ambit than mind insofar as mind often refers only to mental states peculiar to human consciousness. Generally, matter refers to the physical and mortal context of either or both *psyche* and the forms of consciousness which assume varying degrees of association with these ethereal qualities through an assortment of either Physicalist or Essentialist interpretations.

With these qualifications in place, Wilber constructs his own theory by extending Locke's view that matter exudes from a vital though ineffable essence which causally explains the objective or nominal properties of matter and form. For Wilber, Suchness cannot be ontologically distinct from matter, thus implying a form of panpsychism or Essentialist pantheism, whilst simultaneously, and paradoxically, maintaining panentheistic irreducibility. In other words, this essential Suchness, whilst both in and as all form, is nonetheless irreducible to form. At the same time this Suchness can be trans-rationally known as Absolute by the body-mind thus implying a version of Gnosticism. It is difficult to draw precise conclusions from such perplexing mystagogical and theoretical confluences, but Wilber's peculiar variety of Essentialism seems to reveal his belief that there is an *Absolute Suchness* which is the manifestation of all form, but not therefore reducible to manifestation in form. Confusingly, this implies the co-existence, or perhaps the co-equality of both dualism and monism. The amalgamation of these subjects in Wilber's Integral Philosophy appears contradictory and can be bewildering, and Wilber's claim that the conundrum can only be solved in the realisation of the ineffable *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC presents epistemological challenges which will soon become apparent.

With these many philosophical possibilities in mind, Wilber's tendency to his unique version of Essentialism leads him to the view that the vast majority of the world's philosophers, both Western and Eastern, albeit in metaphorically varied forms, have maintained the existence of Geist, Divinity, Consciousness, Energy, or an organising principle that is either the animating Essence of the universe, or the Essentialness of Universe itself (1997a:80-81). For Wilber this essential Suchness, which he often refers to as Mind or Ground, is an absolutely conscious quality. Wilber defends this paradox by subscribing to the experiential veracity of NDC and to ineffability typical of mystical type language and symbology.<sup>267</sup> For him, the experience of NDC as an *Absolute Subjectivity* which transcends the conceptual viability of paradox constitutes its own validation since its transcendent nature will not permit validation by means of rational or

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<sup>267</sup> For Wilber, *gnosis* expressed in the form of language or symbol must, by definition, be dualistic. This is usual for writers in mysticism and Wilber shares the same dilemma, '... since the separation of the subject from the object is illusory, the symbolic knowledge that follows from it is, in a certain sense, just as illusory' (1993b:29).

linguistic instruments.<sup>268</sup> More exactly, the issue now concerns the relational associations conscious matter conjures in the process of realising its most fundamental non-dual nature – assuming of course that consciousness is, firstly, the highest manifestation of creation, and secondly, that NDC does indeed constitute the most advanced expression of consciousness. These are *a priori* assumptions for Wilber and in addition to challenging them, it must also be asked whether these higher reaches of conscious organisation and integration are given, discovered, or manufactured by consciousness?

The scope of philosophical and theological interpretations of the universal Mind or Suchness to which Wilber so often refers is vast. For Wilber, it has been noted, most answers lead to a series of dualisms, paradoxes, and not infrequent contradictions because consciousness seems unable to recognise itself as its own experience since it perpetually refers to consciousness, and even to itself, as something *within* itself.<sup>269</sup> This dualised consciousness is reminiscent of the Cartesian Theatre which, in a manner of speaking, views itself as simultaneous audience and actor on the stage of its own experience. The awareness of something then seems to imply the existence of at least two things – that which is perceiving and interpreting, and that which is being perceived and interpreted in consciousness as experience. For most sentient beings, the process of consciousness thus appears to be definitively dualised: the conscientising and the conscientised.

Wilber correctly identifies the nature of this bifurcated dialectic within the evolution of consciousness and he refers to the advent of self-reflective consciousness, the subject/object split, as the Primary Dualism (1975a:125; 1993b:292).<sup>270</sup> This Primary Dualism is revealed in the existential awareness of the self as a Centauric body/mind wherein body and mind are continuous and inter-penetrating, but not fully co-substantial. Alexander (1996:110), defining the same principle slightly differently, suggests that these dualistic modes of knowing establish outer chains of physical or mental intermediaries that connect subjects and objects and that consciousness does this through the mechanisms of bifurcation and

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<sup>268</sup> Wilber compares his *Absolute Subjectivity* to Aurobindo's *Gnostic Being*. Coan (1989:186) refers to this experience as the, '... stage in which there is a full realisation of the formlessness, voidness, or non-separateness of all being, a full recognition of one's essential unity with the oneness of all being.'

<sup>269</sup> The dualist position, says Wilber, '... was the most influential in the early part of the modern era (from Descartes to Leibniz), but the Physicalist has been in the ascendancy ever since, and is now by far the dominant position' (1999e:607).

<sup>270</sup> The Primary Dualism has, according to Wilber, revealed itself in a vast array of deconstructed forms and it is worth listing a few to illustrate the point: the absolute and the relative; the One and the Many; noumenon and phenomena; mind and brain; free will and fate; subjectivity and objectivity; transcendence and immanence; heaven and hell; nothingness and somethingness; and most fundamentally, life and death (1996e:ix; 1997a:81; 2000a:331).

abstraction. Bifurcated abstractions thus divide subject and object in to *seer* and *seen* and thereby establish two realities – the Primary Dualism.

Wilber's Integral Philosophy, embracing the mystical traditions of many religious and wisdom traditions, aims to resolve this Primary Dualism in NDC. For Wilber this non-duality is, and always has been, the Suchness of the Universe, but is unrealised in the domains of dualised consciousness. Before analysing of Wilber's solution to this problem, it is important to expand briefly on its history. According to general archaeological and anthropological opinion, self awareness in humans was first indicated by ritualistic behaviour, particularly in burial rites, approximately fifty to eighty thousand years ago (The Upper Palaeolithic Revolution). To trace this evolutionary history is beyond the scope and purpose of this thesis, but Wilber relates his investigation to Plato where we are introduced to two movements of Spirit or the One – that which Wilber calls Mind or Ground. The first movement is the descent of the One to the Many, Involution, a movement that, '... creates the world of the Many, blesses the Many and confers goodness on all of it: Spirit immanent in the world. The other is the movement of return or ascent from the Many to the One, Evolution, a process of remembering or recollecting the Good: Spirit transcendent to the world' (Wilber 2000:330). Wilber refers to the subscribers of these two movements respectively as Descenders and Ascenders.<sup>271</sup> His idea was inspired by Arthur Lovejoy's book, *The Great Chain of Being* (1953), who Wilber says, '... brilliantly traced out these two opposite and conflicting legacies of Plato - the Descending and the Ascending - which we may also call the *manyness* strategy and the *oneness* strategy. The former emphasises the created world of *manyness*, the latter the uncreated source or origin - and both, taken in and by themselves, are dualistic through and through, no matter how much they might call themselves monistic, non-dual, all-encompassing, holistic ...' (2000:330-331).

Wilber goes on to perceive this bi-dimensional ebbing and flowing pattern of consciousness as the creative movement of Love. The expression of Spirit in matter he calls the movement

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<sup>271</sup> Wilber speaks fiercely to this point, 'These two strategies - denying creation, [or] seeing only creation, the Ascenders and the Descenders - have been the two main forms of fractured footnotes to Plato that have plagued Western civilisation for two thousand years, and it is with these fractured footnotes that the West (and not it alone) has deeply and cruelly carved its initials on the innocent face of Heaven and of Earth' (2000a:331). And in an earlier comment, he says that this dualism, '... would split the entire tradition of Western philosophy and theology into two warring and utterly irreconcilable camps: those who saw God strongly (or even totally) in this world versus those who saw God strongly (or even totally) out of this world; this-worldly versus otherworldly, the Descenders versus the Ascenders, the immanentists versus the transcendentalists, empiricists versus rationalists ...' (1996e:xi).

of *Agape*, and the craving of matter for Spirit he calls the ascent to *Eros* (2000:349).<sup>272</sup> Wilber's appeal to Greco-Christian metaphors is intriguing, if epistemologically limited, but it does disclose something about the bifurcated tension apparent in normal operative modes of consciousness.<sup>273</sup> For Wilber neither movement of Love fully expresses the Truth and neither path fully imbibes Reality. Reality is not, therefore, exclusively Source (*Alpha/Agape*), nor is it only Summit (*Omega/Eros*), but the timeless, ever present Ground, the Suchness, of both Descending and Ascending movements of Spirit and matter (2000:357).<sup>274</sup> This is a peculiar abstraction for Wilber to make since it places him firmly among the philosophers of duality he so urgently seeks to transcend. He is in essence admitting that he has no choice but to believe that Spirit exists by asserting that the relational nature of matter and Spirit is not 'either-or', but 'both-and', but this notion is still clearly dualistic.<sup>275</sup> In an extremely rare statement, Wilber admits that he has no choice but to believe in Spirit, 'I will simply say that, *as one who does believe Spirit exists, as one already predisposed*, I find the rational proofs [for God's existence] ... to be anaemic in the extreme ...' (1996e:62-63).

Despite Wilber's necessary ascent to belief, he will nonetheless repudiate any belief in Spirit as an ontological 'Other'. For Wilber, Spirit is descriptive of the Suchness of the All, but for him this does not imply the necessity of an immaterial deity. This again indicates forms of animism or panpsychism, but Wilber disclaims such labels in favour of his Integral approach. Whether Wilber successfully escapes such ascriptions is a source of debate among his critics, particularly since he hails Leibniz, a leading exponent of cosmic order and mindful purpose typical of panpsychist views, as a significant influence in the development of his Integral Philosophy.

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<sup>272</sup> Wilber expands his foundational dependence on Lovejoy's thesis by suggesting that the, '... general notion - of a multidimensional Kosmos interwoven by Ascending and Descending patterns of Love (*Eros* and *Agape*) - would become a dominant theme of all Neo-Platonic schools, and exert a profound influence on virtually all currents of subsequent thought, up to (and beyond) the Enlightenment.' (1997a:82; cf 1996e:2-3, 11; 2000a:348-349).

<sup>273</sup> This particular manifestation of dualistic thinking in the Christian tradition is explored by Wilber in *SES* (2000a).

<sup>274</sup> Marion interprets Wilber's intention here to mean that we, like Jesus, '... are not *mere* human beings after all, but are now, and have always been, nothing less than immortal, unlimited, divine Spirit' (Marion 2000a:14). Wilber would agree in principle, but probably resist Marion's allusion to deification since it implies a transformation from the 'merely human' to the 'divine' which is clearly dualistic. Nonetheless, Wilber's own language does not always make the intention any clearer.

<sup>275</sup> Wilber admits the same in his dependence on perennial wisdom, '... that *men and women can grow and develop (or evolve) all the way up the hierarchy to Spirit itself*, therein to realise a "supreme identity" with Godhead - the *ens perfectissimum* toward which all growth and evolution yearns' (1997a:39-40). This clearly implies that the apex of spiritual achievement is union with God and that a god-concept of sorts pervades Wilber's philosophy - albeit not as an ontologically distinct being.

Wilber would protest that his proposed solution has not been admitted into the debate and point out that his philosophy is not concerned with theistic proofs, but with Mind as the Ground of all that is. Whether proof of Mind as Ground is necessarily different from theistic proof is complex since neither has any conclusive foundation in scientific epistemologies. At this point it should be noted that reference to ‘science’ does not only refer to empirical or rational science, but also to subjective science associated with states of consciousness.<sup>276</sup> Wilber nonetheless believes himself to be vindicated in his claim that NDC is scientifically verifiable, but in order to do so he has to make another admission about his proposed solution. He says that the solution, ‘... has an unbelievably awkward characteristic: namely, its utterly compelling answer cannot be captured in words, a type of metaphysical catch-22 that absolutely guarantees to solve all your problems as long as you don’t ask it to’ (1996e:xii). The appeal to ineffability as a variable in scientific discourse makes Wilber’s point of departure unconvincing, but he justifies it in terms of an epistemology which he refers to as the *Three Eyes of Knowledge*.

The first two realms of experience, the sensory-empirical and the mental-rational, are de-prioritised in Wilber’s investigation since they are more obviously available for sensory and mental investigation. Wilber’s *Transcendelia*, however, appears to require a unique set of validating criteria which would normally be contiguous with religious belief, but Wilber insists that it is scientifically verifiable, repeatable, and confirmed among a community of the similarly adequate (1996e:62; 1997c:96; 1999e:613). Wilber justifies his scientific premise on those established, among others, by Heisenberg (1901-1976), Schrödinger (1887-1961), and Einstein (1879-1955). Heisenberg’s *Principle of Uncertainty*, for example, suggests that the nature of reality at sub-atomic levels indicates no divisibility between observer and observed, that is, between subject and object. Wilber goes on to say that in order to, ‘... comprehend this therefore requires a comparable mode of knowing, a mode of knowing whose nature it is to be undivided from what it knows. It is this non-dual mode of knowing that Schrödinger had in mind when he stated, “The world is given but once. Nothing is reflected. The original and the mirror-image are identical ...” (Wilber 1993b:30-31).<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> These are the categories of science which Wilber previously referred to as dialogical and mandalic (Wilber 1993b:xix).

<sup>277</sup> Wilber’s heuristic extrapolation from the epistemologies of particle physics into epistemologies relating to NDC is not generally accepted within the scientific academy.

Despite the apparent contradiction between claiming the inexpressibility of NDC and then claiming its scientific verifiability, Wilber asserts that the realisation of NDC is attained by employing the same epistemic tools that would be used for acquiring knowledge at the previous two levels - the sensory-empirical and mental-rational levels. Ordinarily these modes of knowledge acquisition would not be in conflict, but when they are transported into the post-rational domains of mystical consciousness, the dualisms appear and become pernicious. Since Wilber believes that dualism lies at the root of intellection, he concludes that dualism cannot be resolved by means of such mental abstractions.<sup>278</sup> For Wilber, empirical-rational mind structures are necessarily dualistic since they employ the symbols of language and when such attempts are made they result in contradiction (1996f:232).

Whilst Wilber's *Three Step Exemplar* serves as an appropriate and useful mechanism for his end purpose – to show that NDC can be scientifically validated as the zenith and essential nature of the entire Spectrum of Consciousness, his argument oversimplifies the complexities of both scientific epistemologies and the processes of consciousness. There are numerous operative modes and dimensions in consciousness that do not function according to Wilber's three-step process, and neither are they necessarily accessible through his *Three Eyes of Knowledge*. These issues will shortly be addressed, but it is necessary to briefly introduce Wilber's epistemology here because he claims that duality can only be resolved in the true Ground of non-duality through the *Eye of Contemplation* - through the valid practice of *Transcendentalia* (1996e:xiv).

Based on the dualistic inadequacies endemic to sensory-empirical and mental-rational epistemologies, Wilber stylises his own *via negativa* which for him proposes a more credible, if cryptic, solution to the problem of duality:

The answer to the relation of the Absolute and the relative, Spirit and form, consciousness and body, God and the world, is therefore most definitely not God created the world. It most definitely is not God did not create the world. It is not the world is illusory and God has nothing to do with it. It is not we perceive only the phenomenal reflection of a noumenal reality. It is not fate and free will are two aspects of one and the same reality. It is not all things and events are different aspects of a single Tao. It is not the relative world is illusory and the One alone exists. It is not the body alone is real and the mind is a reflection of that only reality. It is not mind and

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<sup>278</sup> In order to detect this dualism, says Wilber, the science of NDC, '... demands a rigorous, consistent, and persistent methodology capable of pursuing dualism to its limits, there to discover the contradiction' (1993b:19).



body are parallel processes. In fact, it is not even the Absolute and the relative are not-two and non-dual. Those are all merely intellectual symbols that purport to give the answer, but the real answer does not lie in Intelligibilia, it lies in Transcendelia, and that domain only discloses itself after the meditative exemplar is engaged, whereupon every single one of those intellectual answers is seen to be utterly inadequate and totally off the mark; each generates nothing but more insolvable and insuperable difficulties and absurd dilemmas and outrageous contradictions. The answer is not more talk; the answer is *Satori*, by whatever name we wish to use to convey valid contemplative awareness (1996e:xvii; cf 1997c:95; 1999e:613; 2001:2).

In order to proclaim NDC through any mechanism other than *Transcendelia*, says Wilber, is, ‘... allegorical at best and reductionistic at worst’ (1975:106).<sup>279</sup> In this he rightly identifies Physicalism as the dominant epistemological trend since it tends to co-substantiate consciousness and matter (1999e:509). For Wilber this form of Physicalism nonetheless remains inadequate in its ability to ascribe value or meaning to consciousness, but it will be argued that this need not be true. In Wilber’s own words, ‘If we reduce joy to serotonin and morals to dopamine, if we reduce consciousness to neural pathways and awareness to connectionist systems, we completely erase value, meaning, depth, and Divinity from the face of the Kosmos itself: we fall into flatland ...’ (1999e:509).

For Wilber the assignment of meaning is the distinguishing characteristic between empirical-rational and mystical epistemologies. He would agree with Flier (1995:133) who believes that reason assigns meaning only to those ideas and observations that can be expressed in pairs of opposites whereas mysticism assigns meaning to that which transcends reason and it thus holds dualistic distinctions to be ultimately meaningless at the level of NDC. The concept of meaning, however, must include *a priori* metaphysical assumptions or criteria that distinguish it from meaninglessness. By definition then, neither Wilber nor Flier escape dualism if they ascribe meaning to trans-rational consciousness since the ascription of meaning requires distinction from that which is meaningless. The application of meaning to NDC therefore remains dualistic and Wilber’s argument falters on this point. Nonetheless, Wilber refuses to believe that there is anything in Physicalist interpretations of consciousness

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<sup>279</sup> Wilber is also critical of phenomenology since it can only observe patterns of behaviour from which it then abstracts information into concepts, and phenomenology is further limited since people, the experiencing subjects, are often unaware of their own subscription to these patterns of consciousness. By way of example, Wilber says, ‘... if the phenomenal states of body and mind are introspected, we will not observe something that announces itself as Kohlberg’s Stage-4 Moral Thought, nor will we see Piaget’s Concrete Operational stage of cognitive development. The only way to identify inter-subjective structures of consciousness is to observe interacting populations of subjects and deduce patterns of behaviour that suggest the existence of inter-subjective developmental rules’ (2001a:1).

that correspond to the subjective meaningfulness of personal experience (1999e:611). For him no amount of empirical research in electro-chemical neuro-physiology will reveal what it feels like to be in love. This belief will be permitted for the moment, but recent developments in neuro-science and particularly in neuro-theology according to the research of Newberg and D'Aquili (2001) have intruded upon Wilber's claims and invite closer scrutiny of the consistency of Wilber's epistemology.

Wilber ultimately concludes that the problem of duality is resolved when consciousness no longer sees itself as subject experiencing objects, but as an *Absolute Subjectivity* that transcends subject-object duality and that this *Absolute Subjectivity* cannot be seen since it is itself the seer (1993b:70, 264-265; 1997a:4). Wilber's intention is clear enough, but his statement still falls prey to dualism since subjectivity can only be deemed to have meaning insofar as it stands opposite objectivity. Wilber admits this inescapable conundrum and frequently, if inadvertently, falls back into dualistic metaphors. There appears to be no way of addressing the issue without succumbing to paradox and in so doing Wilber admits that duality cannot be totally rejected in the language of NDC. The implications of this hurdle will be fully explored in Chapter 7, but warrant introduction here with reference to the problem of duality. Spirit must therefore be manifest as the Suchness of Reality in, through, and as subjectivity and objectivity, and in this way the apparent duality of form arising in consciousness is rather a radiant manifestation of Spirit as 'One' and as 'Many', as Ascent and Descent, as Absolute and Relative, as transcendence and immanence. Paradoxical symbologies therefore vicariously represent NDC, but Wilber is always careful to point out that paradox is not an adequate description of Ground or *Absolute Subjectivity* (Fisher 1997:57).

Clearly Wilber will have many critics on these issues. Heron (1992) agrees with Wilber to the extent that Reality is fully represented in immanence and transcendence, but he believes that Wilber goes too far. For Wilber, Reality is not just represented 'in' immanence and transcendence, it 'is' both immanent and transcendent. For Heron the nature of physical-spiritual existence is a differentiated unity, a 'non-separate bi-polarity' and for him this duality need not necessarily be epistemologically incongruent (1992:186).<sup>280</sup> For Wilber this

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<sup>280</sup> Heron (1992:181) explains his point further. 'It is a central tenet ... that Reality is both One and Many, both being and becoming, both transcendent and immanent. There are some simple metaphors for the One-Many notion. There is the polarity of plane and point: a single plane is an infinitude of points. Another is the infinite sphere whose centre is anywhere and everywhere... The basic spatial metaphor is that there is the infinitely large

would constitute a form of interactionist identity thesis and thus not fully indicative of Ground as Absolute Oneness. Heron accuses Wilber of reducing the distinctive multiplicity of personhood to subjectivist illusion, but it has already been indicated that Wilber celebrates multiplicity from the level of NDC, but not as anything other than itself (Wilber 1996e:xv; 1999e:614; Heron 1992:184-185; Fisher 1997:57).<sup>281</sup> Heron fails to understand this, but it is no surprise since, writing in 1992, he is basing his critique on Wilber's writings in the 1970's. Wilber has developed his thinking since then and Heron might have offered a better critique had he referred to Wilber's more recent material. Helminiak's protest is more current and even stronger than Heron's:

To reject the validity of the distinction between Yes and No, between is and is not, is to reject the principle of contradiction and perforce to reject the validity of human knowledge. It is to suggest that human knowing does not attain to the real, that the process of human knowing has no ultimate validity, that human knowing pertains only to some ultimately deluded subjectivity, that human knowledge moves in some intermediate and ultimately illusory realm (Helminiak 1998:255).

In the first instance, Wilber does not 'reject' duality without qualification, he rejects its relative usefulness as stages are transcended in the ascent to NDC and only there sees duality as an illusion that permeates the Spectrum of Consciousness. Secondly, Wilber's explanation of NDC need not be a delusion since mounting scientific evidence shows that non-dual experience is physiologically possible and, within limited contexts, measurable, and that it can give rise to the experiences that mystics describe. Whether NDC can be called Absolute or constitute some type of metaphysical Ground is another matter and these issues will be tackled in the following chapters. Wilber believes that NDC is the highest and most integrated vision of consciousness as the All, but he does not thereby imply that NDC is an amorphous mass devoid of distinction, but rather the awakening to union in, and as differentiation. This is a complex and paradoxical distinction, but Helminiak misconstrues Wilber's intention or has perhaps not read the portions of Wilber's work pertaining to his epistemological method and his detailed descriptions of NDC.

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- the infinitude without; and the infinitely small - the infinitude within. There is only one infinitude without; there are innumerable infinitudes within. Whatever the metaphor, you can't reduce one pole to the other, for the poles are fundamental, complementary, interdependent and inter-definable'.

<sup>281</sup> Wilber states this point clearly, 'Consciousness and form, subjective and objective, interior and exterior ... are the warp and woof of a wondrous universe that makes precisely no sense whatsoever of either is dismissed' (1997a:23)

In summary, the two most significant areas of interest in philosophy, say Edelman and Tononi (2000:208), are, ‘... metaphysics, which is concerned with the ultimate nature of reality, and epistemology, which is concerned with the basis and justification of knowledge and belief.’ In such philosophical pursuits the problem of duality is immediately presented and Wilber is right to identify it as such. Humans believe from their own experience that consciousness is uniquely and privately manifest and therefore no objective description can be equivalent to its personal character.<sup>282</sup> Any attempt to do so must invariably lead to descriptive inadequacy or paradox. Much of Wilber’s motivation in the development of his Integral Philosophy is rooted in his intention to correctly understand and position the role of these dualistic modes of apperception. It is for this reason that the problem needs to be identified at this early stage. Furthermore, the particular difficulties associated with subjectivity, absolutism, and the mind-brain debate need special attention in so far as they speak directly to Wilber’s understanding of NDC. For Wilber, objectivist techniques are too limited in their capacity to communicate the depth and scope of subjective experience, but it will be argued that this depends on the extent to which the science of consciousness is able to integrate the veracity of subjective, and even highly complex and integrated structures typical of mystical consciousness.

### **5.3.1 Subjectivity and Objectivity**

Having introduced and surveyed the general milieu of Wilber’s struggle with dualism, attention needs to be paid to the Wilber’s particular concerns with subjectivity/objectivity, and one/many debates since these comprise the ultimate hurdles to the full realisation of NDC. The first rift, we have seen, is manifest in the Primary Dualism and, for Wilber, can only find resolution in transcendent NDC.

Heron (1992:184) again finds Wilber’s proposal problematic. For him the transcendence of the subject-object split in NDC implies the end of the distinct psyche. He interprets Wilber’s first book, *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977), to mean that the experiencer is subsumed in Mind (*Absolute Subjectivity*) to the extent that the observer is the universe she knows, but

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<sup>282</sup> Edelman and Tononi (2000a:6, 11) state the matter clearly, ‘No matter what scientists do, the first-person and third-person perspectives of conscious individuals will not be reconciled, the explanatory gap will not be bridged, and the *Hard Problem* – the generation of sensations, of phenomenal or experiential states out of the buzzing of neurons – will not be solved .... No amount of description will ever be able to account fully for a subjective experience, no matter how accurate that description may be.’

Wilber is careful to qualify this assertion.<sup>283</sup> Heron thus claims a metaphysical rigidity in Wilber's position since it only permits diversity in unity to the universe, but not to the person experiencing the universe. Heron prefers a stance that preserves a subtle dualism wherein the sublimation of separate subject and separate object in NDC is revealed as a unitive field which is defined by mutual interpenetration between person and world thereby maintaining a distinct, if inseparable experiencer.<sup>284</sup> Heron bases his philosophy on the belief that, '... if the end of the search does put an end to the distinct experiencer, then Mind is only One and not Many. If Mind is also Many, then its Oneness will include Many distinct experiencers' (Heron 1992:185). Heron's view coheres with 'Type 2' monism proposed by William James (*The Varieties of Religious Experience* 1958) where a neutral material as one, nonetheless manifests as multiplicity.

Reference has already been made to Wilber's inclusion of multiplicity and variability at all levels of consciousness as a dynamic and dialectical process that, in NDC, is not eliminated, but simply seen as such non-dually.<sup>285</sup> Heron attempts a logical extrapolation of the One and Many problem whereas Wilber claims resolution of the problem in the veracity of the non-dual experience and its necessary ineffability.<sup>286</sup> For Wilber then, dualism only maintains its vitality insofar as it constitutes the mechanisms of manifestation, but is ultimately subsumed, included, and transcended in Spirit. Spirit is then synonymous with the Suchness of Reality

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<sup>283</sup> Wilber, we recall, identified Mind as identical with *Absolute Subjectivity* early in his writings and extracted the idea from his understanding of the Perennial Philosophy. He, perhaps too generally, associated Mind with concepts such as *Brahman*, *Tao*, *Dharmakaya*, *Allah*, and *the Godhead*. Wilber says, 'According to this universal tradition, *Mind* is what there is and all there is, spaceless and therefore infinite, timeless and therefore eternal, outside of which nothing exists' (1975:106). Much later, Wilber would add substantial qualifications to this assertion. With reference to the *Yogacara*, for example, Wilber identifies it as a profound and insightful psychology dealing with the subject-object split wherein he observes all objectification as illusory and that all objects are mental objects (1993b:62). We are reminded here of the role of representationalism in the development of Wilber's thinking. William James (Lambert 1999) indicates that the mind apprehends objects through ideas which 'represent' those objects – even if the objects themselves are other ideas. Representationalism thus went some way towards transcending the Cartesian subject-object split and Wilber utilised this process in his research into Transpersonalism.

<sup>284</sup> Heron thus disclaims the notion that NDC expunges the distinct experiencer. It rather allays only the sense of the separate experiencer - the disconnected differentiation of the ego.

<sup>285</sup> Dialectics comprises a field of philosophy which is varied and complex, such as that proposed by Hegel's view in the progress of knowledge from thesis, through antithesis, to synthesis, but the purpose here is simply in reference to a method of logical discourse which emphasises that entities are defined through a conflict of opposites. In brief, it is necessary to think in opposites in order to understand things, but Nørretranders (1999:396) points out, for example, that, '... where classical Aristotelian logic is based on black and white opposites, dialectic stresses that one always loses knowledge when one thinks in abstract concepts. One must necessarily discard information when one creates a concept.'

<sup>286</sup> Wilber includes another rather sweeping correlation between quantum physics and philosophy to justify the disintegration of the subject-object duality. He cites Heisenberg's *Principle of Uncertainty* and claims that, '... it marked the end of the classical and purely dualistic approach to reality ... In short, quantum physics had taken another dualism, that of mental vs. material, to the annihilating edge, and there it had vanished. But the crucial issue was that the core dualism of subject vs. object, of observer vs. event, was found untenable, and found untenable not because of the arbitrary opinion of a particular group of philosophers, but by no less than the authority of physics' (1993b:23-26).

that is revealed in both objective and subjective forms, and is therefore co-equally and co-substantially the essence and animation of all levels in the Spectrum of Consciousness (Wilber 1996f:236).<sup>287</sup> Put in this way Heron may be content with Wilber's view since it celebrates personhood as a dramatic multiplicity within a distinctive presence of unity. For Heron, '... the paradox is that we find the uniqueness of that presence not by trying to restrict the multiplicity, but by celebrating its multifarious presentations' (1992:84). Nonetheless, Wilber extends his thesis beyond Heron's in his assent to *Absolute Subjectivity* (1993b:70).<sup>288</sup> Wilber equates the Hindu concept of *Brahman* to his own understanding of the Absolute, and in typically mystical language, again appears to settle vaguely between pantheism and panentheism. He says that, '... *Brahman* is in the world [and] as the whole world ... but the whole world in and by itself is not exclusively *Brahman*' (1996e:155).<sup>289</sup> Wilber's etymology makes it extremely difficult to establish his precise understanding of NDC and it behoves us to consider his meanings more circumspectly.

In the main, objectivism refers to tenets that validate external and quantitative elements or phenomena that, in the human sciences, present data behaviouristically. The parameters of subjectivism are by definition less distinct, but concede that inner, intuitive, and felt bases of experience also constitute true and valid knowledge. Subjectivity and objectivity are thus interdependent and mutually causal, and both comprise the wider ambit of Wilber's definition of consciousness. Despite Wilber's apparent modular equilibrium, it has already been shown that he ultimately concedes priority to *Absolute Subjectivity* which subsumes and transcends the

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<sup>287</sup> The solution, suggests Wilber (1999e:615), '... involves an all-level, all-quadrant view, which plugs the mind back into its own body and intimately relates the mind to its own Body. And it does so, in the final analysis, through the disclosures of the post-rational, non-dual stages of consciousness development.'

<sup>288</sup> Wilber thus transgresses Heron's 'soft' boundary by stressing the necessity of 'seeing through' multiplicity to its Source, its Suchness, which thereby collapses the Primary Dualism between 'seer' and 'seen'. For Wilber the dissolution of the primary boundary requires an, '... effortless effort [that] requires great perseverance, great practice, great sincerity, [and] great truthfulness. It has to be pursued through the waking state, and the dream state, and the dreamless state. And this is where we pick up the practices of the Non-dual-schools' (1996f:236). This is the characteristically cryptic language that Heron, among many others, find confusing.

<sup>289</sup> Hinduism, as Wilber quotes it, '... states in the *Mundaka Upanishad* (1.1.4), that "there are two modes of knowing to be attained - as the knowers of Brahman say: a higher and a lower." The lower mode, termed *aparavidya*, corresponds to what we have called symbolic-map edge, and is based on the distinction between the knower (*pramatr*) and the known (*visaya*). The higher mode, called *paravidya*, "is reached not through a progressive movement through the lower orders of knowledge, as if it were the final term of a series, but all at once, as it were, intuitively, immediately." This corresponds to our second or non-dual mode of knowing, for it is a "unique, self-certifying *intuitive vision of non-duality*" (1993b:32). Lorimer (2001:78), speaking of Buddhism, observes a similar concept, '... when the opposites arise, the Buddha-mind is lost. When we become caught up in concepts of this or that - *either* this or *that* - we are no longer grounded in our self-realised nature.' These concepts are familiar enough in Hindu and Buddhist mysticism, but Wilber's qualifications of Mind both *in* and as the world, though *not just* the world, are more difficult to identify in Eastern scriptures.

limitations of objectivism. His position as an Essentialist makes this a definitional necessity and he states his own reasons thus:

But say what we will, these empirical and objectivist accounts ... are not how we actually experience our own interior consciousness. For when you and I introspect, we find a different world, a world not of bites and bits and digital specs, but a world of images and desires ... And we know these interior data in an immediate and direct fashion: they are simply given to us ... In short, my interior and subjective experience is given to me in terms that simply do not match the objectivistic and empirical terms of functionalism or cognitivism or neuronal connectionism. My subjective and interior world ... definitely appears to be at odds with my objective and exterior description of the world ... The objectivist approach to experience and consciousness, in other words, cannot even account for its own experience and consciousness: cannot account for the fact that digital bits are experienced, not as digital bits, but as hopes and fears (1997a:4-5).

Three important questions must now be asked. If subjective consciousness is 'given' then who or what is doing the giving and how is this realised in consciousness? Secondly, if Wilber ultimately assents to the primacy of transcendent subjectivity as absolute, can it be argued that he succeeds in solving the *Hard Problem*; and finally, on what basis is it construed as absolute? Wilber's defence against the first challenge would be that given-ness does not imply a giver outside of that which is already present and the issue becomes purely semantic, unless the *Absolute Suchness* of Mind is an *a priori* assumption and Wilber certainly gives this impression. In this way Wilber construes the boundaries between body, brain, and Mind to be artificial and the experience of NDC certainly seems to validate this, but it still does not justify an absolute qualification. How could it be known, for instance, that there is not in fact a higher state than NDC? Furthermore, it still does not answer the question of how consciousness arises in the brain and the *Hard Problem* remains intact.<sup>290</sup> The answer to the final question is philosophically mischievous and ultimately circular insofar as its resolution is determined by any number of epistemological systems which either do, or do not assent to absolutism as veridical. It encounters the same problems associated

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<sup>290</sup> Schroeder, a theist and scientist, describes the situation poignantly, 'The brain is a wonder machine of intelligence based on biochemical reactions, each expressing wisdom that in no way is presaged by the components from which it is built. At every level of life, from the isolated cell to the interaction of nerve and muscle, through to the 10<sup>15</sup> neural connections within a brain, a depth of information surfaces that annoyingly has *not an iota of justification being there* [my italics]. Nature, left to itself, favours disintegration, homogeneity. But the saga of life is a puzzling story of increasing complexity, of uniqueness, of order being locked in place defying nature's degrading pull. And the brain is the top-of-the-line example of this successful struggle against oblivion' (Schroeder 2002:133).

with theistic proofs and it would be disingenuous to pursue the issue on these grounds.<sup>291</sup> The reason for this circularity is clearly stated by Edelman and Tononi (2000a:14), 'Unlike any other entity, which we can describe ... scientifically as an outside object, with consciousness we are what we describe scientifically. This statement recognises the special epistemic status of consciousness.' Nonetheless, since the inner conscious self seems to consist of subjective experience, it appears incongruent for Wilber to assess its fundamental nature and constitutive elements through his three-step objectivist exemplar.<sup>292</sup>

This appraisal of Wilber's views on subjectivity and objectivity has revealed another problem. His subscription to absolutism as a definitive quality of NDC cannot be reconciled with the epistemological processes of reconstructive science by which he claims to establish its veracity.

### 5.3.2 The Absolute and the Relative

It is evident that Wilber has a tendency to address partitions in consciousness interchangeably under the broad banner of dualism, but for the purposes of more exact appraisal, it is useful to focus on the issues separately. In this section the relationship between absolutism and relativism is considered, but Wilber frequently does so within the context of the One/Many problem. This combination makes it difficult to distinguish Wilber's meaning, but in either case the categories of duality are again distilled from the Primary Dualism. Regardless of the type, all the classifications of dualism, says Wilber, '... are precisely the same problem. And they all have precisely the same answer' (1996e:ix; 1997a:80-81). By now Wilber's answer is easily predicted:

... we cannot solve the absolute/relative problem empirically, using the *Eye of Flesh* and its *Sensibilia*; nor can we solve it rationally, using the *Eye of Mind* and its *Intelligibilia*. The solution, rather, involves the direct apprehension of Transcendelia, which are disclosed only by the *Eye of Contemplation* and are most definitely verifiable or falsifiable in that domain, using what are in fact quite public procedures - public, that is, to

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<sup>291</sup> Wilber similarly identifies this problem, 'The problem with all these rational "proofs" of God's existence, the cosmological, the teleological, the ontological, the moral, and so on - is that the circle is trying to prove the sphere ... as philosophers from Russell to Mackie (not to mention Nagarjuna et al.) have amply demonstrated ... The basic problem with them all is simply that they are based on a profound category error - an attempt to prove the trans-rational realm with merely rational operations' (1996e:62-63). It is peculiar that Wilber does not permit his notion of Mind as *Absolute Suchness* to succumb to the same difficulty.

<sup>292</sup> In Wilber's words, 'Spirit is *both* the highest *goal* of all development and evolution, and the *ground* of the entire sequence, as present fully at the beginning as at the end. Spirit is prior to this world, but not other to this world' (1997a:44).



all who have completed the injunction and disclosed the illumination (1996e:xiv-xv; 1997c:96).<sup>293</sup>

Wilber's assent to ultimacy in *Absolute Subjectivity*, Mind, or the One, as a scientifically verifiable quality in NDC may be challenged. Novak (1984:65) identifies the first implication of the relationship between the Absolute One and the relative many, 'When we use the phrase "ultimate reality", we implicitly confess our sense that we live in a diminished one. But authentic spiritual life is born precisely when that unsettling and unshakable feeling of distance between our actual state and that which is ultimately possible penetrates our awareness.' The purpose here is not to question the felt sense of contraction or separation in ordinary states of consciousness, nor to diminish the sense of ultimacy in NDC since this is already plausible for Essentialists. The issue at this point is rather to assess the epistemological credibility of such claims to absolutism.

Wilber's belief is that neither subjective, nor objective epistemologies are adequate to the resolution of the One/Many problem. They are, says Wilber, 'The Ego and the Eco: the flatland twins locked in the dance of ironic self-destruction, both contributing equally to the failure of integration. The one absolutises the noosphere, the other absolutises the biosphere, neither of which alone can integrate the other.'<sup>294</sup> And that which does not contribute to the integration of both contributes directly to the destruction of each' (2000:477).<sup>295</sup> It has already been suggested that the injunctions of *Transcendelia* cannot be verified through scientific epistemologies, and contingent anomalies now arise. Without excluding the phenomenon of the non-dual experience, claims to absolutism or ultimacy are notoriously difficult to operate epistemologically unless they are indicated metaphorically.

Without submitting to particular varieties in specialised mathematics, it is generally agreed that infinities imply absolutes. It is not usually sensible, in other words, to claim the existence of partial infinities. This is also theologically congruent; if God is Absolute, then God must be Infinite. It would not be consistent, therefore, to claim an Absolute if it was

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<sup>293</sup> Wilber believes that all the manifestations of dualism are principally the same, but explores these in the most detail in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (and its popular version, *A Brief History of Everything*) (1996e:xii).

<sup>294</sup> Wilber's terminology here seems to be borrowed from Teilhard de Chardin's *Le Milieu Divin* [The Divine Milieu] (1965).

<sup>295</sup> Wilber is unflattering in his assessment of the ways in which people look to solve these dualistic puzzles, 'In our own lives, to whom do we turn for answers? Do we look to Adam's supercomputer for ultimate answers? Do we look to religion? politics? science? psychologists? gurus? your psychic friend? *Where* do we finally place our ultimate trust for the really important questions? Does this tell us something? Is there a way to tie these various sources together to have them each speak their own truths in ways that balance and harmonise? Is this even possible in today's splintered world?' (1996f:xvi).

known that there was something that transcended it. It would then have to be said that something was absolute except for that which it excludes thus delimiting the scope of meaning ascribed to absolute, unless this sort of exclusion included a qualifying criterion within its own theoretical context. For example, in the simple sequence ‘-2, -1, 0, 1, 2’ the zero is contentless and therefore absolutely and infinitely empty. It is not, mathematically speaking, sensible to speak of a partial zero since that would imply at least some content and the claim becomes self-negating. It must therefore be said that the zero in this sequence is absolute and infinite even though it excludes the negative and positive numbers on either side of it. This is a conceptually rational claim, but it only exists as such within the premises of its own mathematical axioms. Wilber’s claim to *Absolute Subjectivity*, on the other hand, claims no such conditional axioms or exclusions: it is an all-embracing cosmological totality; it is Absolute fullness of all actual and potential existence, and simultaneously Absolute emptiness, the void, in a fully spatial, yet spaceless, timeless now. Heron (1992:181) would accept Wilber’s description to a point. He maintains that, ‘Reality is both One and Many, both being and becoming, both transcendent and immanent ... [but] whatever the metaphor, you can’t reduce one pole to the other, for the poles are fundamental ...’ Heron therefore argues that Wilber is mistaken in his conflation of all-ness and nothingness in *Absolute Subjectivity* - a differentiated unity must subsist, whereas Wilber would claim that the concept of unity still implies at least two entities and thus falls short of authentic non-duality. It has already been noted however, that Wilber accommodates the One/Many polarity in, and as, *Absolute Subjectivity*. The nature of this polarity as One is paradoxical and explains Wilber’s appeal to ineffability.

Rucker, a noted mathematician and philosopher, clarifies the dilemma. He argues that both idealists and materialists subscribe in varying degrees to monistic epistemologies to authenticate their respective philosophies. There is, he says, ‘... a perennial desire to reduce the world’s diverse phenomena to a single basic kind, to believe that ultimately all things are built of the same stuff. Matter, sensation, thought, and form have all been candidates for *Urstoff*’ (Rucker 1997:190). This *Urstoff* is implicit in Essentialist orientations, but not all Essentialists are monists. It is easy to see how Wilber’s description of *Absolute Subjectivity* can be mistaken for a version of monistic idealism, and this may be Heron’s mistake. An important question to ask according to Rucker is whether all that exists is indeed ‘one’ in some organic or quantum sense, or whether oneness is a purely conceptual extrapolation in an attempt to make sense of our place in multiplicity? Rucker surmises that, ‘... the principal

reason for believing that the world is an organic One is the sort of mystical insight that Lovejoy somewhat slightly refers to as “monistic or pantheistic pathos” (Rucker 1997:190-191; Lovejoy 1953:12). This is not a fair description of Wilber’s Integral approach, but more usefully, Rucker suggests that the felt experience of an absolute oneness in the midst of manyness may be constituted by the infinite relational possibilities between oneness and manyness. In this way, says Rucker, ‘... the Absolute serves as a sort of connective tissue that fixes the individuals of the world into their perceived relational structure.’ The quietening of the mind in mystical practice may enhance awareness of the integrated unity of these relational qualities which could elicit a sense of simultaneity and may result in the oceanic sensations described in NDC. Alternatively, Rucker also suggests that all things may, after all, actually be made of the same stuff, presumably in a quantum sense, and that the Absolute, and our deep sense of it, is just the one endlessly diversifying thing that exists (1997:191).<sup>296</sup>

As a mathematician, Rucker nonetheless doubts the existence of an Absolute, whether it be the Essentialist ‘stuff’ transcendent to the cosmos, or the realisation of enlightenment in NDC, but he is accommodating, as are most Essentialists and an increasing number of Physicalists, of an experiential phenomenon that is ‘perceived’ as absolute. The phenomenology of NDC will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 6.3, but for the moment the felt sense of realness is accepted. The interpretation of the ‘realness’ of the non-dual experience depends, of course, on the application of a suitable epistemology, but despite Rucker’s doubts, he nevertheless believes that, ‘... the simple predicate, “exists” does tie everything together into a unity that is, in principle, possible to experience directly. Rationally the universe is a Many, but mystically it is a One. The question that really interests me is this: How do we reconcile the Absolute as One with the Absolute as Many?’ (Rucker 1997:190-191).<sup>297</sup> A more detailed survey of the Mind/Brain problem must finally be offered before conducting an appraisal of the principles of Wilber’s Integral Philosophy.

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<sup>296</sup> This latter definition is again reminiscent of William James’ neutral monism which permits multiplicity as expressions of the same fundamental kind (James 1897, 1902, 1907).

<sup>297</sup> Rucker (1997:190-191) quotes Plato’s last dialogue from section 15 of *Philebus*, ‘... the aging Socrates delivered this wry, weary, wise summary of what he knows about the One and the Many: “We say that the one and many become identified by thought, and that now, as in time past, they run about together, in and out of every word which is uttered, and that this union of them will never cease, and is not now beginning, but is, as I believe, an everlasting quality of thought itself, which never grows old.”

### 5.3.3 The Mind-Brain Debate

The final and perhaps most important question to address in Wilber's problem with duality is posed most succinctly by Forman (2000:7), 'Who is really in charge: you or your brain? And if it isn't your brain, who or what are you that you should have this power?' Wilber's identification of these apparently absolute, but contradictory truths (the truth of immediate personal, subjective experience, and the truth of objectivist science), is both the product and ambit of the Mind-Brain debate. By now it is clear that Wilber prioritises truth realised in NDC as an *Absolute Subjectivity*, which for him means that any Physicalist attempt to define ultimacy in consciousness is doomed to failure. Wilber's view is clear, '... the truth of science ... tells me unmistakably that the world consists only of arrangements of fundamental units (quarks, atoms, strings, etc.) that possess no consciousness whatsoever, and no amount of rearranging those mindless units will result in Mind' (1999e:606).<sup>298</sup>

Wilber will ultimately be challenged on this point, but he does identify a common and flawed trend. The issue is partly semantic. The language of inner subjective experience in consciousness is immediate and private and thus expressed in the first person, the 'I', whereas outer measurable quantities submit only to the objectivist language of 'its' (Wilber 1999e:607). This bias tends to identify objects as 'really real' whereas subjective features are afforded only ethereal qualities which may be existentially real, but in a way that is often deemed inferior to the tangibility of objectivist epistemologies. Admittedly, the language of the mystics frequently invite this prejudice as the following quote by Tarthang Tulku illustrates:

Mind itself has no substance. It has no colour and no shape. It has no form, no position, no characteristics, no beginning, no end. It is neither within nor without; it cannot be discovered as this or that thing: it is not mixed together with other things, yet it is not apart from them. This mind cannot be discovered, invented, destroyed, rejected, or accepted. It is beyond

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<sup>298</sup> Wilber makes this point repeatedly in his writing, but perhaps most forcibly in his assertion that any Physicalist approach must, by definition, be valueless. He says, 'None of those value gradations show up, or can show up, on the machine registering the Right-Hand correlates, because in the Right-Hand world you only have gradations of size and simple location, not gradations of value, depth, and meaning' (1999e:508). And later, 'With the collapse of the Kosmos into flatland (naturalism, Physicalism, scientific materialism), the interior *realities* of the I-domain *are still felt and strongly intuited* (mind can control the body, a degree of free will is real, consciousness exists, there is a unity of experience), but these realities are faced with a world, thought to be ultimately real, in which there are only it-realities described by science. And in that world, the brain is simply part of the Body, part of the natural biological organism, and thus consciousness must somehow be a function of that brain. But there is absolutely nothing in that brain ... that even vaguely corresponds to the *qualia* or experiences or realities of the mind and consciousness' (1999e:611).

reasoning and so-called logical processes, beyond time and beyond all existence (1976a:42-43).

Essentialist philosophers versed in the spiritual traditions will have no particular difficulty with this definition of mind since its language is naturalised in mystagogy. Epistemologically however, the definition is almost meaningless since it conveys no information about the relationship between mind and brain and it furthermore alludes not only to the individuated mind, but to Mind as supra-natural. Notwithstanding Wilber's claim to scientific validation of the resolution of dualism in ineffable NDC, he would also defend Tarthang Tulku's position. In so doing he takes a principle position against the capacity of materialism to explain consciousness and its relationship to the brain. Wilber says:

The materialist reduces the mind to the brain, and since the brain is indeed part of the organism, there is no dualism: the mind/body problem is solved! And that is correct – the brain is part of the organism, part of the physical world, so there is no dualism; nor are there any values, consciousness, depth, or divinity anywhere in the resultant universe. And that reductionism is exactly the “solution” that the Physicalist imposes on reality, a solution still rampant in most forms of cognitive science, neuroscience, systems theory, and so on: reduce the Left to the Right and then claim you have solved the problem (1999e:612).<sup>299</sup>

Wilber's argument that materialist approaches exclude the subjective appreciation of value and aesthetics is unfounded since the phenomenology of subjective qualities is clearly indicated in some Physicalist theories of consciousness, and this will be demonstrated later in the work of Dennett (2004). An individual's physicality can be examined using the tools of medical and neuroscience.<sup>300</sup> The physiological effects of so-called non-ordinary states of consciousness, the general term within which mystical experiences are categorised, can be partially observed using *EEG*, *PET*, *CT*, *MRI*, and *NMRI* scans of the brain and have natural correlates to the inner subjective experience of these states.<sup>301</sup> Fenwick (2001:41-42) refers to recent research conducted in Zurich by Vollenweider (1992-1993). He notes that

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<sup>299</sup> The Physicalist (or materialist), says Wilber, ‘... claims that there is only the physical universe described best by physics and other natural sciences, and nowhere in that physical universe do we find consciousness, mind, experience, or awareness, and therefore those “interiors” are simply illusions (or, at best, by-products without any genuine reality). Some versions of the Physicalist approach allow for higher-level emergence of various complex systems’ (1999e:607). On this point Wilber has excluded the Physicalist approaches which do permit subjective experience.

<sup>300</sup> Wilber is careful on this point to distinguish his meaning. He maintains that many scientific researchers simply identify mind with brain insofar as they manifest activity neuro-physiologically. He points out however, that reference to the body can also mean, and for the average person does mean, the inclusion of subjective feelings, emotions, and sensations (1999e:610).

<sup>301</sup> These acronyms respectively refer to *Electron Encephalography*, *Positron Emission Tomography*, *Computerised Tomography*, *Magnetic Resonance Imaging*, and *Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Imaging*.

Vollenweider and his fellow researchers, ‘... have been looking at mystical states induced by drugs, and they have been able to show that there is an increase in cerebral blood flow and function in different areas of the frontal lobe, sensory cortex or thalamus, according to the nature of the mystical state that is being experienced.’ This work is important because it indicates an underlying brain pattern associated with mystical consciousness.<sup>302</sup> Wilber is right however, to point out that the results of these tests do not reveal what NDC ‘feels like’ to the mystic, but he is at least willing to consider the usefulness of the research.<sup>303</sup> So whilst Wilber recognises the value of linking the complex systems of brain physiology to consciousness, he nonetheless maintains that, ‘Nobody ... has successfully demonstrated that consciousness can be reduced without remainder to those objective systems; and it is patently obvious that phenomenologically it cannot’ (2000b).<sup>304</sup> From a Physicalist stance, it is recognised that objectivist language is not always adequate for descriptions of subjective phenomena, but this idiomatic incompatibility does not necessarily indicate an epistemological inadequacy in Physicalist definitions of consciousness. Furthermore, no reduction is necessary in Physicalism since the full import of NDC need not depend on the ontological independence of supra-natural Mind for validation. Wilber’s defence is aggressive and short-sighted; he says, ‘It is necessary for you to start from consciousness and explain how you arrive at the ridiculous notion that it isn’t there’ (1999e:608). Wilber’s retort assumes an *a priori* view that subjective phenomena in consciousness preclude Physicalist explanations, but this is not true of all methods in the science of consciousness. The point is that consciousness, with all its subjective content, can submit to Physicalist theory without reduction or Essentialist endorsement. It will be argued that the issue is not

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<sup>302</sup> Wilber and many other Essentialist thinkers will not permit drug research as legitimately representative of true or ‘real’ NDC. They are unable to prove this physiologically, but nonetheless maintain their position based on a *priori* assent to Mind as supra-natural.

<sup>303</sup> Wilber rightly asks the same question posed at the beginning of this section, ‘How do any conscious states relate to material-physiological brain states? On a more specific level, how do actual states and structures of consciousness relate to specific brain states? Initial studies in this field have centred on major states of consciousness and their correlation with gross brain waves patterns, PET scans, and so forth, usually showing that some meditative states show an increase in alpha/theta activity or deep delta patterns, and so on. I believe that major breakthroughs will occur in electronically inducing brain-wave patterns that are in some ways similar to meditation (such as deep theta/delta), and that the machines to do this will become widely available commercially – and I believe nobody will become enlightened from this, precisely because brain and mind are not merely identical, and enlightenment occurs in the mind (consciousness), not just in the brain (although changes occur there also). What this research will show us, I believe, is that certain brain states more easily allow certain consciousness states, but do not determine them. Exactly what this relationship is will be a major field of research, and will become a profound tool for exploring the mind/body problem’ (1999e:416).

<sup>304</sup> Wilber sets this out clearly by suggesting that we can investigate meditative states by using, ‘... first-person or phenomenal accounts (the accounts of those actually doing the meditating), while also investigating any effects meditation has on brainwave activity, blood chemistry, immune functions, and neurophysiology. We can examine the ways in which various cultural backgrounds, linguistic practices, and ethical systems affect meditative states; and the types of social institutions and practices that are most conducive to those states’ (Wilber 1999e:509).

resolved in epiphenomenal protractions, but in the epistemologies related to the substance of consciousness itself.

It is agreed that mind and brain are inseparable, but it is not agreed that it can be shown that Mind is the necessary and fundamental quality of individuated minds which ultimately permits transcendence of the matter and function of consciousness in NDC as an *Absolute Subjectivity*.<sup>305</sup> For Wilber, ‘... the “proof” for this non-dual solution can only be found in the further development of the consciousness of those who seek to know the solution’ (1999e:613). Wilber goes even further by suggesting that, ‘It does not matter how this happens ... it is only necessary to acknowledge that this interaction seems phenomenologically undeniable’ (1999e:616). We are thus reminded of Wilber’s three-step exemplar as a means of validating the perspicuity of NDC on its own terms, and he is right to admit that the apparent self-referentiality of this noetic structure will be unacceptable to rationalists – be they dualists or monists.<sup>306</sup> Moreover, it does matter ‘how’ this happens because its exclusion delimits heuristic potential whereas it is reasonable to expect on-going research to reveal more about the nature of consciousness and the brain right up to its alleged summit in NDC. Wilber, on the other hand, believes that Physicalist science, no matter how subtle, will never contain NDC in a fully integrated philosophy. Conversely, and in defence of my criticism of Wilber, Edelman and Tononi (2000:35) are right to say that, ‘It is a reflection of human arrogance that entire philosophical systems have been constructed on the basis of subjective phenomenology ...’,<sup>307</sup>

Keeping these challenges in mind for later debate, Wilber’s philosophy nonetheless remains among the first significant and convincing attempts to afford full inclusion of all experiential and epistemological domains. He also encourages ongoing critical research, but in the end

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<sup>305</sup> Wilber explains his reason for dismissing Physicalist, or even philosophical explanations thus, ‘... the dilemmas *inherent* in dualisms - between mind and body, mind and brain, consciousness and form, mind and nature, subject and object, Left and Right - *cannot* be solved on the relative plane - which is why that problem has *never* been solved by conventional philosophy. The problem is not solved, but rather dissolved, in the primordial state, which otherwise *leaves the dualisms just as they are*, possessing a certain conventional or relative reality, real enough in their own domains, not but absolute’ (1996f:232).

<sup>306</sup> Again, Wilber’s generic brush sweeps over all Physicalist attempts on his Essentialist canvas, ‘As we saw, the Physicalist reduces the mind to the brain or Body, and thus cannot account for the reality of the mind in its own terms, and the dualist leaves the mind dangling in midair, cut off from its own roots (in the body) and from the exterior world (of the Body) – hence the unacceptable dualism’ (1999e:614).

<sup>307</sup> Edelman and Tononi (2000a:35) point out however, that Descartes, ‘... recognised and took as his point of departure, [that] such arrogance is partly justified, since our conscious experience is the only ontology of which we have direct evidence. As Schopenhauer noted, this statement generates a curious paradox. The immense richness of the phenomenological world that we experience – conscious experience as such – appears to be dependent on what seems a mere trifle in the furniture of that world, a gelatinous piece of tissue contained in the skull.’

his assent to ultimacy can only spring from subjective interior phenomena and there is no plausible scientific epistemology which will permit the inclusion of Wilber's absolutist and ineffable tenets. As a result, the success of Wilber's entire argument ultimately depends on meta-physical rather than scientific validation, and his claim to integral and scientific authentication of NDC becomes dubious, particularly since he disclaims any philosophical ability to describe NDC accurately. For the transpersonalist, says Wilber, '... the seemingly innocuous question of the relation of mind (consciousness) and body (matter) [the *Hard Problem*] is in fact the ultimate question of the relation of Emptiness and Form, Infinite and finite, Spirit and world' (1999e:415). Submission to these dichotomies in metaphysical terms can, at best, be metaphorically indicated. Whilst Wilber supports the notion that each conscious state must be supported by a corresponding body state, and rightly maintains that the personal realisation of a body-mind unity in NDC can only be subjectively established, he need not defer to Essentialism in order to do so.<sup>308</sup>

The challenge is now to suggest a more plausible alternative in terms of Wilber's claim to scientific legitimacy. On the one hand dualism of any sort seems increasingly untenable to both Essentialists and Physicalists, but it has also been established that reductionist or elevationist epistemologies are inadequate to the cause. Dualists like Happold (1970) and Lorimer (2001) agree that we experience life both objectively and subjectively thereby indicating the necessary maintenance of some conceptual polarity even if it is variously interpreted as a differentiated unity.<sup>309</sup> Monists, on the other hand, believe there is only one

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<sup>308</sup> Frohlich and Wilber, among others, recognise an increasing bodily awareness in the mystical idiom. By way of one example, Frohlich (1997:81) points out that, 'This is occurring in the context of a strong cultural movement to reject body/soul dualism and to claim and celebrate the body and its experiences. Although at the popular level there is often a great deal of *naïveté* about both the evils of dualism and the goodness of bodily experience, this is a serious movement with deep philosophical and spiritual roots. Insight into how the fullness of human authenticity requires radical acceptance of our immersion in bodiliness - rather than an attempt to escape from it - is developing on many fronts. Many Christian theologians, especially those with feminist and/or ecological concerns, are part of this movement. In this context, the question of the relationship between the goal of *Christian* life and psycho-physiological 'altered states of consciousness' is not trivial.'

<sup>309</sup> Lorimer (2001:233) argues that the bifurcation of matter and Spirit (or brain and mind) is not only epistemologically and ontologically viable, but a necessary dualism. He argues his case thus, 'For what appear as two things to be numerically one and the same, they must have qualitatively identical properties. Mental states and brain states (or mind and body, etc.) do not have identical essential properties. Therefore, mind and brain are not numerically the same, and some form of dualism is true.' Lorimer, in less convoluted language than Wilber, claims his choice to, '... accept this dualistic hypothesis, and go on from there ...' (2001:71). Lorimer thus assumes that mind and brain are not the same, and he thus has no choice but to assent to dualism, but this is neither an epistemological nor ontological necessity. Happold (1970:24) is more humble in his submission and admits to uncertainty based on the limitations of intellection. He says that, '... each of us is conscious of two worlds, an *outer* world of material phenomena and sense perception and an *inner* world of thoughts, emotions, and feelings. Within our experience we are conscious of what we name 'matter' and 'Spirit'. But when we ask what 'matter' and 'Spirit' are in their essential nature, or how they are interconnected, we have ultimately to confess that we do not know.'



kind of stuff in the universe that is either exclusively conscious stuff which may be materially manifest, or that the purely material universe is all there is. Is there another mode of interpretation that lends full credence to both persuasions without simultaneously compromising the epistemological integrity of either? Even the most accomplished philosophers doubt the possibility of such an agreement. Physicalists like Edelman and Tononi (2000a:6) say that, ‘The mystery persists ... the time has come to admit candidly that we [still have no idea of how] the water of the physical brain is turned into the wine of consciousness.’ Schroeder, a physicist and Essentialist, asks, ‘Where’s the consciousness? Just which of those formerly inert atoms of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen in my head have become so clever that they can produce a thought or reconstitute an image? How those stored biochemical data points are recalled and replayed into sentience remains an enigmatic mystery’ (2002:6). Dennett (1993:41-42), the arch-Physicalist, expresses the same concern, ‘Somehow the brain must be the mind, but unless we can come to see in some detail how this is possible, our materialism will not explain consciousness, but only promise to explain it, some sweet day.’

Such ominous portents of likely failure make it difficult to conceive of a solution and Wilber’s Integral Philosophy may well be a viable attempt, but his subscription to *Absolute Subjectivity* still positions him among the adherents of Essentialism even though his ontology of NDC includes all physicality. If there is an *Absolute Subjectivity*, can there be an Absolute Objectivity, and can they be conceptually co-substantiated without diluting their respective epistemological criteria? No convincing solution has been found to this quandary, but the supplementation of Wilber’s theory with recent advances in the science of consciousness may point us in the right direction.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The foundational premises of Wilber’s solution to the problem of duality have been introduced as a central theme motivating the construction of his Integral Philosophy. Through this appraisal, methodological and conceptual irregularities in Wilber’s assent to ineffability, absolutism, subjectivity, and self-referentiality have been identified. And yet, the vitality of NDC as a real and transforming experience must be conceded. A central problem is thereby identified. Wilber’s attempt to legitimise spiritual axioms through objectivist epistemologies is problematic because the purported ‘domain’ of research lies beyond the reach of objectivity. The injunctions of scientific instruments cannot therefore be coherent in

an epistemology that claims ineffability as a key criterion. Materialist epistemologies, in other words, have no means of discerning the truth or un-truth of trans-material properties and the veracity of *Absolute Subjectivity* in NDC cannot be established on that basis.

Summarised in this way, science must remain, as it were, agnostic if it reaches into mystagogy and Wilber is mistaken to claim that science can corroborate truth-claims associated with mystical *gnosis*. Metaphorical allusions to the phenomenon of non-dual experience may however, submit to Physicalist renditions if they are retained within temporal and evolutionary world-views. On this point Wilber may agree, but then the resolution of duality must originate and subsist within a single ontology, albeit variously expressed and experienced if it hopes to be authenticated as non-dual within the limits of human cognition. Here too, Wilber may agree, but there is a fundamental difference; for him this ontology would have to be both *in* and *as* time and space, and yet irreducible to *just* time and space. However, the importation of absolutism and irreducibility splits this ontology into imminence and transcendence, and it is this paradox that, by definition, classifies Wilber's philosophy as a form of Essentialism.



## CHAPTER SIX

### NON-DUALITY IN MYSTICISM: METHODOLOGICAL AND LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS

#### 6.1 Introduction

Renewed interest in mystical spirituality gained impetus in the latter half of the last century and is indicative of post-modern predilections for more contextually meaningful, liberating, and transforming approaches to life and religion. Further reasons for this resurgence of interest are multifarious and complex, but broadly hinge on depersonalising trends in modernism and loss of definition in the wake of post-modern pluralism and relativism. The institutions of religion adapt or react to these trends in various ways, but evidence suggests that the functional efficacy of formal religions is losing currency to more esoteric approaches to spirituality. Socio-political and economic variables indicate causal parallels with religious expressions in the extent to which citizens of relatively un-conflicted developing or developed economies are more likely to resist the religious hegemony whereas citizens of politically and economically stressed situations are more likely to adhere to prevailing religious orders which are quite often of a conservative nature. Notwithstanding certain fundamentalist counteractions, the broader spiritual initiative of Christianity now favours inclusivity and deeper experiential engagement over the structural and conceptual constraints of politicised Christendom.<sup>310</sup>

Referents to spirituality and mysticism have accrued broad and indistinct ranges of opinion and therefore need clarification. Whilst spirituality as a general term may refer to the spectrum of attitudes, beliefs, and practices which invigorate humanity's relational quality with the divine through a chosen faith-system, mysticism transcends such conceptual demarcations by seeking illuminated participation *in* transcendence. These tendencies galvanised my intention to focus on the nature and value of the non-dual experience in Christian mysticism, and a critical appraisal of Ken Wilber's Integral Philosophy provides a schema through which new insights may be gleaned. Having distilled and criticised Wilber's attempt to substantiate NDC through the instruments of reconstructive science, it now becomes necessary to consider further methodological and linguistic problems besetting the epistemology he applies to mysticism and its non-dual phenomena. Linguistic problems were introduced in discussions around post-modernism in Chapter 4.3 and may now be examined

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<sup>310</sup> A vast body of research literature is now being generated in support of these trends and whilst these sources do not constitute any substance in this thesis, they do lend credence to the motivation for this research project.

in more relevant detail. A prerequisite for such an undertaking must briefly ascertain the terrain of mysticism and survey its emergence in Christianity. Thereafter the essential ingredients of Christian mysticism will be distinguished from mystagogy in general. The theoretical and religious contexts of mystagogy are implicit in the phenomenology of non-duality in mysticism, but will be more closely scrutinised through the phenomenological views of Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger.<sup>311</sup> These phenomenological obfuscations supply the context within which Wilber's definition of consciousness and non-duality may be surveyed. Further challenges are revealed in the language of mysticism and these are measured against the rigours of some nineteenth and twentieth century linguists and philosophers such as Saussure, Frege, Kripke, Chomsky, Wittgenstein, and Russell. The critical application of prominent phenomenologists and linguistics to Wilber's Integral Philosophy is intended to reveal the highly subjective variability and complexity of such interdisciplinary approaches, and the results pose both challenges and opportunities to the development of Wilber's theory.

## 6.2 Christian Mysticism

In the light of Wilber's more general approach, it is important for this argument only to condense the essential elements of Christian mysticism as it has evolved into present renditions, and detailed analyses of specific traditions are therefore unnecessary. Cousins (1984:11) believes that the history of the term mysticism is rooted in the Greek *mus* contained in the verb *muein*. The word was allegedly employed in ancient rites practised in Greece, particularly in Eliusis, and refers to the closing of the lips or eyes. The recession of these ordinary sensory mechanisms imply alterations in conscious processes as a precondition to mystical awakening.<sup>312</sup> Cousins (1984:13) goes on to suggest that the Latin derivative *mysticus* was used in the middle ages to refer to the arcane or heightened acuity of this deep spirituality, and its manifestation in Christianity finds theological and spiritual expression in various modalities of union with God. Mystical theology (*theologia mystica*), in other words, goes beyond natural theology (*theologia naturalis*) in the extent to which it is, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, an 'experiential knowledge of God' (*cognitio dei experimentalis*) (Scholem

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<sup>311</sup> German philosophers were conversant in phenomenology at the time of Edmund Husserl's writing and interpreted a *phenomenon* as an occurrence of experience as it appears in human consciousness (as opposed to what it is essentially, apart from perception) (Macrone 2002:66). Despite the dense obfuscations in Husserl's writing, his phenomenology nonetheless played a major role in twentieth-century philosophy and influenced Heidegger (1889-1976), Sartre (1905-1980), and Derrida (1930-2004).

<sup>312</sup> Cousins (1984:19) explains more precisely that in such mystical states, '... we leave behind all sense impressions, all intellectual activities, and pass over into the furnace of divine love.'

1974:4). Whereas natural theology is generally concerned with the nature and activity of God in history, it is the mystical dimension that aspires to experientially apprehend spiritual truths ordinarily inaccessible through mere intellection. How did these unique attributes of apperception develop in early Christianity and how are they to be articulated in contemporary spirituality?

It may be argued that the symbology of the desert as a place of redemptive encounter with God in the Old Testament laid foundations for the traditions of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. John the Baptist and Jesus' own sojourns in the desert are indicative of this heritage and may have paved the way for the mystical imperative in Christianity. Such interpretations of Scripture are sometimes cited in Christian mystography, but are inferred rather than self-evident. The Desert Fathers and Mothers probably provide clearer descriptions of early Christian mystical forms in their various eremitic and coenobitic styles (Merton 1974, Burton-Christie 1993). A sample selection of some significant figures in the evolution of Christian mystical thought establishes a foundation for further debate. In approximately 269 when Antony received his call to the desert there were already some recluses from whom he gained instruction, but it was his turn into the *desert within* that established new conventions for spiritual reflection.<sup>313</sup> The popularity of desert spirituality may be attributed to early persecution of Christians under Diocletian and the subsequent doctrinaire legislations of the 'Christian' Emperor Constantine's attempt to equate too much of state with the fledgling church. It may be equally true however to suggest that the Desert tradition was motivated by the desire to surmount temporal and ephemeral attractions as a means of attaining purity of spirit.<sup>314</sup> The early desert traditions are noted for their influence on the later development of Christian mysticism.

Many individuals who spent part of their lives in the Egyptian desert went on to become important figures in the church of the fourth and fifth centuries, among them Athanasius of Alexandria (293-373), John Chrysostom (349-407), John Cassian (360-435), and Augustine

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<sup>313</sup> Among other significant desert fathers, Pachomius and Shenouda the Archimandrite introduced more systematic approaches to desert spirituality. They also fashioned coenobitic regulations which later formed the cornerstones of much Christian monasticism (Larkin 2002).

<sup>314</sup> Rowan Williams claims that other significant characters of the fourth century desert tradition, notably Macarius, Poemen, Moses, and, '... the more intellectual Evagrius', were united in their refusal, 'to judge the brethren' (Wakefield 1983:110). If so, the tradition implies relative flexibility and open-mindedness in their approach to spirituality – a trend which stood in contrast to the more dogmatic formulations of the church after the Council of Nicaea in 325.

of Hippo (354-430).<sup>315</sup> Equivocation around the mystical status of Augustine's *Confessions* (397-398) is probably resolved if it is agreed that mystical illuminations expressed in parable and metaphor may also be intellectually or theologically rendered, but the idiomatic and methodological terrain between theological and spiritual discourses is only now gaining clarity and will be discussed further shortly. In either case, it is reasonable to assume that all these variables played a significant role in the formation of early Christian mysticism. The various editions of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and John Cassian's *Institutes* and *Conferences* provided the main constituents for early Benedictine monasticism, but the delineation of spiritual intentionality in Augustine's neo-platonic process from purgation through illumination to union contributed a pivotal definition to the notion of oneness with God as the purpose of the spiritual life (Cousins 1984:14).<sup>316</sup> Augustine discovered his soul as the Image of God and this same Divine presence as, '... Eternity in his memory, as Truth in his intellect, and as Goodness in his will' (Cousins 1984:16-17). Augustine's explication of Divine immanence therefore provides the ontological and theological basis for the spiritual life and it deeply affected the spirituality of the emerging church.

At this early stage it is apparent that the rudiments of Christian mysticism were already in place. The late fifth century contribution of Pseudo-Dionysius (The Areopagite) also evinced strong neo-platonic influences through theistic idealism which are characterised by hierarchical gradations of ascent to the Absolute through progressive stages of release from attachment.<sup>317</sup> Wilber's preferred versions of Christian mysticism clearly favour these neo-platonic renditions – particularly those who bear similarities to Buddhist philosophy, and Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) stands out as a case in point. This orientation somewhat contrasts Thomistic interpretations. Thomas Aquinas' (1224/5-1274) incomparable and formidable *Summa Theologica* became the *sine qua non* to Western theology, but his Aristotelian foundation provides an alternative perspective in mysticism. He advocates a

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<sup>315</sup> Augustine in particular became a significant force in later developments of mediaeval mysticism. Platonic and Neo-platonic strains influenced Augustine's mysticism to the extent that, as Wilber (1993b:101-102) points out, '... Augustine himself noted: "If any one in seeing God conceives something in his mind, *this is not God*, but one of God's effects." The necessity of not delimiting the majesty of God through intellection indicates the importance of divine transcendence which is so key to Christian mysticism.

<sup>316</sup> Total dependence on the providence of God is central to desert spirituality. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* is an anthology of aphorisms and anecdotes which describe the spiritual life, the ascetic and monastic principles, and features of Christian ethics. 'The sayings are attributed to the more prominent hermits and monks who peopled the Egyptian deserts in the fourth century. Three or four such collections in Latin were edited by Rosweyde (*Vitæ Patrum*, Bks. III, V, VI, VII; P. L., XXIII), and one in Greek by Cotelier (*Ecclesiæ Græcæ Monumenta*, I; P. G., XV).

<sup>317</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius is said to have written in about 500 CE and *The Celestial Hierarchy, Mystical Theology*, and *The Divine Names* are attributed to his name. He is also possibly the first mystical writer to draw distinction between *kataphatic* and *apophatic* approaches to spirituality.

more intellectual view which describes mysticism as the union of mind with the First Truth in love.<sup>318</sup> For Aquinas it is this love that motivates the mind's intellectual activity to know God which must be substantiated by charitable action. Distinction between the *kataphatic* and *apophatic* approaches will be drawn in the following section, but for Aquinas perfection is effectively realised through faith in action rather than abstracted reflection, and it is for this reason that he also emphasises petitionary prayer over contemplation. Interestingly, both Aquinas and Eckhart were Dominicans, but Eckhart's creation-centred vision of God's 'fertility' in the human soul requires total emptiness rather than intellectual substance in order for the aristocracy of God's goodness to germinate and flourish.<sup>319</sup> Despite this distinction, Aquinas likewise realised the limits of theological discourse in mysticism when he stopped writing shortly before his death in 1274. Alternative traditions also played a role. The Rhineland Celtic traditions for instance, influenced Eckhart's distinction between God and Godhead wherein he provides novel metaphorical form to the coincidence between the Unmanifest and Manifest Absolute.<sup>320</sup> This transcendentalist and immanentist dichotomy is cogently synchronised and balanced in Eckhart's spirituality. Eckhart therefore advocates a more holistic spirituality in his adaptation of the three-stage neo-platonic process suggested by Augustine in favour of a four-fold path: the *Via Positiva*, the *Via Negativa*, the *Via Creativa*, and the *Via Transformativa* (Wakefield 1983:124).

By now it is evident that conceptual and metaphorical mutability became rich sources of creativity in mystical expression. At the same time, the resonant themes of a common heritage indicate ubiquitous similarities in intention - a current which Wilber refers to as the Perennial Philosophy (Huxley 1944, cf Wilber 1983a) and Bede Griffiths calls *The Golden String* (1979). This intention to realise loving union with God in Christ is intimately portrayed by Julian of Norwich (1342–1416/20). Writing in the English tradition, Julian

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<sup>318</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopedia* distils the mystical essence from Aquinas' writings and aptly describes his interpretation as the soul's capacity, '... for more truth and perfection than we can ever acquire through the knowledge of created things. We realise that God alone is the end of man, that in the possession of God alone we can reach the satisfaction of our aspirations. [Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* I:2:1; I:12:1; I:44:4; I-II:3:8; *Contra Gentes* III, cc. i, xxv, I; *De Veritate*, Q. xxii, a. 2; *Compend. Theologiae*, 104] (*Catholic Encyclopedia* 1913.).

<sup>319</sup> An apophatic current pervades Eckhart's writing and this is well illustrated in a quote from one of his German sermons (Sermon 4: DW 30, W8), 'The more God is in all things, the more he is outside them; the more he is within, the more without. Only the transcendent, the complete other, can be immanent without being changed by the becoming of that in which it dwells' and from Sermon 22: DW 52, W 87, 'God is nameless for no one can either speak of him or know him. Therefore a pagan master says that what we can know or say of the First Cause reflects ourselves more than it does the First Cause, for this transcends all speech and all understanding' (Davis 1994:123, 236).

<sup>320</sup> Wilber (1995a:308) explains that, 'In awareness, there is perfect clarity, perfect consciousness, but the entire manifest world ... simply ceases to arise, and one is directly introduced to what Meister Eckhart called "the naked existence of Godhead."'



utilised rich imagery to illuminate a unique form of deep, feminist spirituality. Her hospitality to wider conceptual embrace hinted at universalistic mysticism which subsequently opened doors to less exclusivist approaches in Christian spirituality. Later, Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591), both of the Spanish Carmelite tradition, were major influences in the Catholic Reformation. Both Teresa's *Interior Castle* (Allison Peers 1989) and John's *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Carrigan 2002) narrate the now familiar stage-like progressions of ascetical endeavour wherein the soul seeks perfect union in God. Their style is perhaps more rigorous and disciplined than Julian's, but no less passionate. Of wider significance is their shared quest for union with God inspired by desire or longing rather than obligation to ecclesial legislation.

A somewhat different orientation in the Spanish tradition is presented by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) - the principal founder and first Superior General of the Society of Jesus. Whilst Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross professed allegiance to Rome, the courtesy was not always returned in their time, whereas the Jesuits prioritised direct service to the Pope as a missionary community. Whilst Ignatius insists on a degree of adaptability, it is no surprise that the compilation of his *Spiritual Exercises* (1548) were presented as a series of systematic and methodical injunctions in careful observance of Roman Catholic doctrine. Whilst Ignatian spirituality is suffused with mystical qualities, it is the mandate to self-examine and submit to God's will that takes precedence over ponderous or esoteric contemplation. In this sense it may be suggested that Ignatian spirituality comprises stronger exoteric aptitudes and may therefore appeal to exercitants who prefer more pragmatic approaches to spirituality.

Recently, the popularity of personality profiling instruments such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers 1995), the Keirsey-Bates Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates 1984), and the Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator (Riso and Hudson 1999) attempt to align personality types with different approaches to spirituality. The relative usefulness of such matching instruments implies diversity in spiritual genres and this variability in expression and emphasis should not be overlooked when definitions of mystical spirituality are considered. Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941), in *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* ([1911]/1993) and *Practical Mysticism* (2000) is among the first twentieth century writers to recognise and include modern advances in the philosophy of consciousness. Consequently, she considers the attainment of union with God as the answer

to the science of ultimates, and it is so attained as a matter of *being* rather than mere believing and thinking (Happold 1970:38).

Akin to John of the Cross' preference for *apophatic* spirituality, Underhill maintains mysticism as the expression of the innate yearning of the human spirit towards non-dual harmony with the Absolute as antecedent to the theological formulae which seek to describe it. This union transcends subject-object dualities in consciousness – a theme so central to Wilber's argument, but nonetheless recognises the significance of sound informational agencies through which trans-informational awareness is realised. Underhill therefore maintains that most mystics employ philosophies or theologies which animate and motivate the intellect on the proceedings of spiritual intuition, '... running side by side with true or empirical mysticism: classifying its data, criticising it, explaining it, and translating its vision of the super-sensible into symbols which are amenable to dialectic' (1990:72-73).<sup>321</sup> Placa (1980:237-238) qualifies the suggestion by noting that, '... it is at the point when the presence of mystery is acknowledged that meaningful inquiry begins ... when we have completed all possible intellectual inquiry.'<sup>322</sup> In this sense, Underhill's encouragement is closer to Aquinas' cognitive approach, but incorporates a broader experiential spectrum of possibility through the long heritage of mystical traditions in Christianity. She recognises, in other words, that unique ontologies require unique epistemologies, but its accreditation in mystagogy does not, as we have seen, necessarily satisfy the rigours of reconstructive science which Wilber proposes.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) is among the most prolific and astute mystical writers at the cusp of post-modernism. The power and acuity of his literature through poetry, devotional writings, theological essays, biblical studies, social commentary, and inter-religious dialogue are noted for their clarity and philosophical insight (1973, 1974, 1976). For Merton, the spiritual search is geared inwards to find the true self as true Christ. Merton's suggestion may seem reminiscent of doctrines of deification, but it is important not to misconstrue his meaning. Underhill (2002:418) cautions that, '... it needs to be borne in mind that the word

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<sup>321</sup> The utility of a di-synchronous, intellectual and experiential, approach to mysticism is reiterated by Happold's (1970:37) suggestion that, 'It will be useful ... to set out a number of definitions taken from medieval and modern sources. Medieval theologians described what they termed 'mystical theology' as 'experimental wisdom', or as 'stretching out of the soul into God through the urge of love', or as 'an experimental knowledge of God through unifying love'. These definitions all approach mysticism from the theological standpoint.'

<sup>322</sup> Kourie (1992:86) concurs that, 'The mystical experience is characterised by *awareness*, although the sensory-conceptual apparatus of the mind remains in abeyance. Such a consciousness, characterised as it is by non-intellectual, non-sensory perception, has been considered different from everyday experience.'

“deification” is not a scientific term, but a metaphor, an artistic expression ... which tries to hint at a transcendent fact utterly beyond the powers of human understanding and therefore without equivalent in human speech...’ Kourie (1998b:452) cogently explains the importance of a correct understanding of deification and it is worth quoting at length:

A re-examination of the doctrine of deification helps redress the balance with respect to the idea of a totally transcendent and totally other God. God is not an object, but an indwelling Reality. It is time that the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy is seen for what it is, namely an approach which has cramped the intuitive faculties of the Western mind and has left Western thought and education spiritually impoverished. The result of this unfortunate state of affairs is that much of Christian teaching is still in a state of spiritual infancy. Deification and transformation is no ethereum of the privileged “illuminate”, but rather the prerogative of the ordinary Christian. The evolution of the individual, and indeed of humanity, is characterised by an ever deepening unfolding of awareness of the infinite. The perduring and efficacious reality of the action of God effects divinisation and leads to ever more exalted levels of consciousness, which find fruition in eternal life.

Most significantly for Merton, as it is for Kourie, this divine intimacy is no longer the preserve of the religious, but is within reach of all Christians in search of deeper union with God. Among many other more recent writers, it was Merton who, in a manner of paradoxical wit, demystified mysticism by implicating it as the true heart of the whole life experience for all people (1974). The sagacity of Christian mysticism need not thereby be diluted or compromised (although it too often is), but conceptually and idiomatically framed to enable people to realise and live their union with God in Christ. How is the process into such realisation and transformation effected?

### **6.2.1 *Kataphatic and Apophatic Approaches to Mystical Spirituality***

The answer to the foregoing is determined to some extent by the intellectual and experiential balance effected between *kataphatic* and *apophatic* approaches to mysticism. Egan (1978:403) describes the *via affirmativa*, the *kataphatic* way, as positive, perceptive, and participative - it is, ‘... finding God in all things ... It emphasises ... that God can be reached by creatures, images, and symbols because He has manifested Himself in creation and salvation history.’ Egan explains that the *via negativa*, the *apophatic* way, ‘... stresses negation, self-emptying, elimination, and ecstasy, a mysticism of radical self-dissolution in a One without difference ...’ (1978:400). It will shortly be argued that such undifferentiated

dissolution is qualified in Christian *apophatic* mysticism as true union, but not undifferentiated union. In slightly different phrase, Forman (1998b:185) describes *kataphatic* mysticism as the orientation to ‘imagistically fill’ the experience with linguistic and associative content, and *apophatic* mysticism as the orientation to empty the mind of linguistic and potentially intrusive activity. Edelman and Tononi (2000a) discover a corresponding typology in mystical states. The first they call *ergotropic* which is active in terms of its intentional engagement with the objects of consciousness, and the second is *trophotropic* which is manifest in the recession of the senses into passivity and receptivity. Kourie (1992:85) explains that, ‘... *introvertive* mysticism can be distinguished from *extrovertive* mysticism, as for example, nature-mysticism in which nature is seen with unusual vividness and clarity, and a rapport with the world or panenhenic feeling is experienced.’ Novak (1984:71) refers to these polarities as *concentrative* and *receptive* consciousness, but these meanings may not resemble general definitions of the *kataphatic* and *apophatic* approaches in quite the same way. In other words, the polarities identified by mystical writers usually admit to either an inwardly receptive or outwardly active approach to mystical encounters, but there are seldom precise correlations between theorists when it comes to more exact descriptions. Wilber (1999b:356) explains his understanding by differentiating *concentration* (closed) from *awareness* (open) and provides this example, ‘... let’s say you are looking at a wall that has hundreds of dots painted on it. In concentration meditation, you look at just one dot, and you look at it so fiercely that you don’t even see the other dots. This develops your powers of concentration. In awareness training, or insight meditation, you try to be as aware of all the dots as you can be. This increases your sensitivity, awareness, and wisdom ...’

There is clearly a general homogeneity in the interpretation of these two aptitudes, but the descriptors are rather heterogeneous. Wilber draws another distinction between *exoteric* and *esoteric* religion which describes the phenomenology of mystical experience in religion more clearly (1991:175). The former includes the conceptual and ostensive constituents of religion in terms of its faith-based truth-claims, attitudes, and practices. It could also include the formulaic nature of an exercitant’s means of relationship with these objects which may be called his or her spirituality. Religion thus comprises the objective tenets of a faith-system, and spirituality the inner identification with those tenets in ways that are personally and transformationally meaningful. Religion is therefore definitionally *exoteric*, but an applied spirituality may be either *exoteric* or *esoteric*. Whilst the boundaries remain obscure,

spiritual disciplines are invariably formulaic and therefore *kataphatic* in terms of their conceptual and linguistic axioms, but these counsels may employ analogical negations which espouse *apophatic* definitions. Such linguistic conundrums are implicit in mysticism and their epistemological complexities, particularly in the *apophatic* way, will shortly be examined.

Wilber, in observance of the Greek definitions cited in the introduction of this chapter, describes *esoteric* religion as ‘hidden’ in the sense that it requires us, ‘... to believe nothing on faith or obediently swallow any dogma. Rather, *esoteric* religion is a set of personal experiments that you conduct scientifically in the laboratory of your own awareness’ (1991:176). Wilber’s scientific premise has already been challenged, but the inner subjective nature of his *apophatic* approach is more comfortably aligned with the character of his postulation of the ineffable, *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC than *kataphatic* spirituality. Wilber’s personal approach to NDC therefore clearly favours *apophatic* orientations, but constructive balance and appropriately stylised integration of both paths is most sensible for the holistic approaches now cultivated in post-modern spirituality, and Wilber’s Integral Model presents such balance most aptly.

In further elaboration of the problematic between theological and spiritual discourses, Kourie (1992:84) rightly notes that, ‘... any attempt to find a definition of [mysticism] is fraught with difficulties, given the equivocal meanings attributed to the word ‘mysticism’, both in ordinary speech and in scholarly analysis.’ Ellwood (1980:34-35) claims that a mystical experience has occurred when, ‘... the experiencer [has had an] encounter with ultimate divine reality in a direct non-rational way that engenders a deep sense of unity and of living during the experience on a level of being other than the ordinary.’ Attempts at more precise articulation and explication yield a variety of complex and potentially confusing answers, but such is the nature of mysticism and its obfuscations partially explain the academy’s reticence to recognise its scholarly legitimacy. In an attempt to clarify the matter in different terms, Hollenbeck (1996:1-2) identifies the subtle internal dialogue that occupies most of our waking consciousness and suggests that mystics are those individuals who have developed the skill to silence these interior deliberations through focussed and disciplined meditative practise. She goes on to distinguish two important elements in mysticism, ‘... a distinctive mode of experience or consciousness, and the individual’s responses to that unusual modality of experience.’ Both ingredients are fundamental to Christian mysticism, but their

articulation in the academy remains disparate – at least for moment, but mystagogy will hopefully find its rightful place in the academy with ongoing research.

As a point of clarification, it is important to distinguish the ontology of Christian mysticism from common understandings in the Eastern traditions. Ordinarily Christian mysticism is not presented as a consummate dissolution of the self in the totality of emptiness or the *All* through detachment, virtue, and enlightenment only, but rather as union *with* God in Christ of such loving intimacy as to dissolve all *perceptual* boundaries which separate. In concurrence, Kourie (1992:86-87) distinguishes between theistic and monistic mysticism. The former may be defined as, ‘... *consciousness of union with the Divine, or the Ground of Being, or Ultimate Reality*’, whereas the latter propagates, ‘... an elimination of the subject/object polarity.’ Washburn (1990:107) similarly explains that, ‘Western [Christian] soteriology stresses the mending of this broken essential relationship; self-transcendence or salvation is achieved by a reunion of the self with its ground.’ There are however alternative perspectives. Bernadette Roberts (1984) suggests that the experience of union in Christian mysticism is penultimate rather than ultimate since the zenith of the mystical quest in NDC, in order to remain true to its definition, must be an experience of total non-duality wherein there is only God and not self (Washburn 1990:109). This definition is indeed more accurately descriptive of NDC as it is espoused by Wilber, and it is therefore the definition investigated in this thesis. The ontology of Christian mysticism nonetheless preserves relational qualities which distinguish humanity from God whilst paradoxically claiming an indivisible oneness in the mystical apprehension of God as the true image and likeness of the self. The difference is subtle, but important. The ontological nature of such distinctions between Creator and creature spans an imprecise spectrum of opinion, but is founded, among other similar texts, on Jesus’ sayings in John 17:11b, 21-22, and 26:

... that they may be one, as we are one ... so that they may have my joy within them in full measure ... May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. The glory which you gave me, I have given them, that they may be one as we are one; I in them and you in me, may they be perfectly one.

The sentiment is reflected in 1 John 4:12-16:

God has never been seen by anyone, but if we love one another, he himself dwells in us; his love is brought to perfection in us. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is God's Son, God dwells in him and he in God ... God is love; he who dwells in God in love is dwelling in God, and God in him.

If God is therefore to be *seen* in the sense of this trans-elemental *gnosis*, the pre-condition for such illumination is the indwelling, and out-living of divine love.<sup>323</sup> Instruction on how this is to be attained is explained nowhere better than in Jesus' own Gospel injunctions to, '... renounce self ... take up the cross, and follow ...' (Luke 9:23, Matthew 10:37-39, 16:24). It is, in other words, an invitation to death by way of self-renunciation and detachment which paves the way to the illuminated realisation of resurrection union, and the catalysing agent for this transformation is divine love.

In reminder of the previous distinctions between spirituality and mysticism, it may be argued that belief in the gracious vitality of Jesus' saving promise falls within descriptions of spirituality – it is, in other words, an aspect of faith and its contingent virtues, whereas obedience to imitative participation in the dying and rising Christ *in* and *as* the self embraces a further step which may educe mystical awakening and the experience of union. Paul's well known hymn of love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 articulates this most clearly. In this passage Paul explains the temporality and transience of all things earthly – be they material or mental, except for this particular kind of Godly love and our abiding trust in its absolute efficacy. The charge is to relinquish attachment to all that is ephemeral by acknowledging that all human knowledge is partial and reflective (vs: 9-12), whereas hope is retained in the possibility of absolute *gnosis* which is initiated and sustained by Godly love (vs: 12b-13).<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Wilber explains that the nature and purpose of this divine love is, '... to taste the dawn, and find that love alone will shine today. And the Shining says: to love it all, and love it madly, and always endlessly, and ever fiercely, to love without choice and thus enter the All, embracing the only and radiant Divine: now as Emptiness, now as Form, together and forever, the Godless search undone, and love alone will shine today' (1995a:523). This quote is similar to an extract from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880/1981), 'Love all God's creation – the whole of it ... Love every leaf, every ray of light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the mystery of God in all ... You will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.'

<sup>324</sup> Marion (2000:xiii) adds further texts which may indicate the same spiritual impetus, 'For the Christian, the follower of Jesus, the Way to the Kingdom of Heaven (higher consciousness) is Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6). More specifically, it is "to allow God to transform us inwardly by the complete renewing of our minds" (Romans 12:2), so that, with St. Paul, we can honestly say, "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). This "putting on of the mind which was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5), that is, the Christ Consciousness, is the goal of the Christian spiritual.' Marion's renderings may or may not be exegetically legitimate in Biblical studies, but they do have appeal for mystagogical interpretations. Kourie (1992:97) therefore rightly maintains that the, '...

The Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan calls this mysticism ‘integrated thought’ which implies a form of differentiated union which usefully serves the di-synchronous character of the Christian approach; God in humanity and humanity in God (Happold 1970:37). It is in this sense that Vaughan describes the nature of divine union as sublation insofar as transcendence is realised in its capacity to integrate and synthesise all prior categories of what it means to be fully human in God (Welwood, Pribram, Capra et al 1978:110).

Further to Von Balthasar and Kourie’s clarification of differentiated union in Christian mysticism, there may be ways of bringing Wilber’s non-dual claims into closer alignment with Christian perspectives. The language of Teilhard de Chardin in *Le Milieu Divin* (1960) may provide a useful interpretive vehicle at this point. If Wilber’s *Kosmic* purpose is defined in terms of de Chardin’s *Christification* of the Universe, then by extension it may be possible to argue that the *Kosmos* is at once already fully Christ, suffering on the cross in the struggling tensions of evolution, and simultaneously awakening to fully realised, resurrected Christ consciousness, the *Omega Point*. This form of nature mysticism sees the evolutionary purpose not merely as the uniting of Christ with fallen creation since this is still fundamentally dualistic, but the process itself is integrated as the timeless act of Christ in perpetual crucifixion and resurrection *for, in and as* creation.<sup>325</sup> Wilber similarly draws on de Chardin and points out that for him the *Omega Point* is not only the realisation of Spirit or Ground as the ultimate point of awakening in manifest time, but is itself *Cosmogensis* in process. Thus, in Wilber’s words, ‘... primordial awareness is not the *Omega Point* of the show, but the Emptiness of the show, radiant in all directions, full beyond what time and space could ever do for it, yet embracing all time and all space ...’ (1997a:280).

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*transformative* power of the scriptures is central in mystical interpretation, effecting dynamic change and transmutation of character and daily life and thus witnessing to the inherent life-giving power of the texts. Scriptural contextualisation of a given mystic is thus closely linked with the logico-conceptual nature of his or her religious beliefs.’

<sup>325</sup> Mathematician, Paul Davis (1998:289-290) explains Teilhard most precisely on this point, ‘Critics of Christianity often accuse the religion of institutionalising a dangerous rupture between humanity and nature. But Teilhard argued the opposite, “Humanity, including its art, gadgets, and religions, was part and parcel of the planet’s evolutionary game plan. Though maintaining a measure of dualism between mind and body, Teilhard rejected the bitterness of Manichean myth and proclaimed “the spiritual value of matter.” He saw evolution as the progressive unfolding of biochemical complexity, a process that, in turn, generated ever-greater organisations of consciousness. As evolution creaked forward from rocks to plants to the beasts of land and sea, consciousness simultaneously grew into ever more novel and complex architectures of mind, architectures that he believed were intrinsic and internal to material forms. Eventually, this twofold process resulted in the subjective dimension of the human brain that allows you to understand these words. Thus for Teilhard, the emergence of the human psyche and its collective networks of culture and civilisation were more than serendipitous froth on the surface of Darwin’s random soup. These structures of consciousness constituted the leading edge of the evolutionary wave of Earth itself, a planet that Teilhard saw, in a prescient intuition of James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis, as a “super-organism.” This version is rather more pantheistic than Teilhard might have intended, but it fits well with Wilber’s understanding.’



Interpreted in this way, traditional Christological and Soteriological interpretations need adjustment in order to release Christ from historico-literal personifications that restrict Jesus exclusively to expiatory and salvific functions. The concepts of omniscience and omnipotence also become problematic since the Christ of evolution seems also to be evolving rather than pre-existently perfect, but we have seen that Wilber argues the case as a paradox of simultaneity.<sup>326</sup> These adaptations are less problematic for mystics than they are for doctrinal theologians, but the idea nonetheless remains speculative and serves only as a metaphor for the felt sense of cosmic simultaneity associated with NDC, or in the Christian tradition, Divine Union. The variously termed concepts of union in Christian mystagogy, albeit in scaled degrees of intimacy, describe the exercitant's ultimate sense of union as reminiscent or at least symbolic of the homeostatic union within the Trinity. The supposed nature and extent of this human-divine union depends largely on theological and phenomenological interpretations, but in either case there is a strong scriptural and historical mandate in the history of Christianity for mysticism to be endorsed and promoted.

### 6.3 The Phenomenology of Mystical Consciousness

Whilst descriptions of NDC are naturalised in mystagogy, the actual phenomena, isolated as it were from their spiritual pretexts, are more complex to articulate. Attempts at intellectual syntheses of phenomenological definitions of NDC have typically failed, particularly in Western philosophy, but whether a division of phenomena from their theoretical contexts is possible without conceptual disintegration is arguable.<sup>327</sup> The problem is compounded further when it is realised that the phenomenology of non-duality enjoys no consistent definitions. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) for example, distinguished phenomena as the appearance of objects in consciousness from the intrinsic independence of *noumena* – the things as they are in themselves (Kant 1960: Section 33). Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) challenges Kant's doctrine of the unknowable *thing-in-itself* (*Ding an sich*) by arguing that

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<sup>326</sup> Wilber makes the same admission in his understanding of the dialectic of progress. He says, 'As consciousness evolves and unfolds, each stage solves or diffuses certain problems of the previous stage, but then adds new and recalcitrant – and sometimes more complex and more difficult – problems of its own. Precisely because evolution in all domains (human and otherwise) operates by a process of differentiation and integration, then each new and more complex level necessarily face problems not present in its predecessors. Dogs get cancer; atoms don't. But this doesn't damn evolution altogether! It means evolution is good news, bad news, this is a dialectic of progress. And the more stages of evolution there are – the greater the depth of the *Kosmos* – the more things that *can* go wrong!' (1997a:73).

<sup>327</sup> The distinction between Western and Eastern perceptions of mysticism is significant because non-dual phenomenon in Eastern spirituality is more purposively central to the religious psyche of the people. The possibility of a more cohesive phenomenology of non-duality in Hinduism and Buddhism will therefore probably be less constrained by the rationalist bifurcations typical of the classical and analytical philosophies of the West.

consciousness is able to apprehend the spiritual truth of divinity through its phenomenological manifestations. Hegel explains that the dialectic of phenomenology articulates manifestations in conscious experience which may enable humans to apprehend the nature of an absolute which precedes the appearance of phenomena (Hegel [ 1967; Kainz 1994). Hegel's open approach suits Wilber's integral intention, whereas Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) more precise distinctions raise potential challenges to the fluidity of Wilber's argument. For instance, whilst Husserl initially utilised psychological descriptors, he later employed an eidetic approach whereby he distinguishes between an act of consciousness and the independent or trans-conscious objects at which consciousness is directed (Ricoeur 1967).<sup>328</sup> In this way Husserl's phenomenology assumes that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something and it thereby retains implicit dualities. In Wilber's thinking this may comprise the simple distinction between the *seer* and the *seen*, but it is the manner of this relational manifestation *in* consciousness that embodies the phenomenon and an explanation of how this happens recedes into the *hard problem*. Husserl therefore maintains that internal conscious knowledge of the nature of things which are ostensibly beyond consciousness is only possible by 'bracketing' all assumptions about the existence of an external world (Husserl 1931). This raises the question of whether it is ever possible to know whether we know things as they truly are, or whether all phenomena are mediations? Alternatively, even if phenomena are definitionally experiential interpretations, are they necessarily untrue? Answers will be largely determined by the epistemologies applied to the ontology of consciousness, and phenomena necessarily succumb to these interpretive vagaries.

Within such uncertain philosophical environments, Hegel and Wilber's supposition that the absolute can be known becomes epistemologically tenuous, or at least contingent upon the precepts of a particular epistemology and it must be recognised that absolutist claims cannot be verified beyond their own epistemological reach. This explanatory problem aside, Husserl's phenomenology coheres with Wilber's argument to the extent that mystical phenomena subsist in categories independent of their physical bases. Husserl therefore contends that an, '... intentional phenomenology has for the first time made *spirit as spirit* the field of systematic scientific experience (*Geisteswissenschaft*), thus effecting a total

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<sup>328</sup> *Eidetic*, in this context, refers to the ability of consciousness to project images as foundations or fundamental types of knowledge. The concept is translated from the German *eidetisch* – a descriptive term coined by psychologist Erich Jaensch (1883-1940) in 1924 (*Online Etymology Dictionary*).

transformation of the task of knowledge' (Husserl 1936: Pt. II). Theoretical approaches to phenomenology are therefore inextricable from their epistemological agencies and subjective variability is thus inherent to phenomenology. Martin Heidegger's (1889–1976) thought illustrates the extent of this variability. He criticised Husserl for not identifying Being as the foundation of structural facets of subjective and objective consciousness. For Heidegger phenomenological techniques thereby become the methodology for ascertaining the ontology of being as Being (*Dasein*) which is non-dual and the true definition of what it means to be human (Heidegger 1962).<sup>329</sup> In this way Hegel's 'absolute', Husserl's 'science of spirit', and Heidegger's 'Being' suit Wilber's integralism, but thereafter these philosophers part ways with Wilber.

Given these disputations, Dennett rightly maintains that, 'Phenomenology has failed to find a single, settled method that everyone could agree upon' (1993:44). Dennett attempts a simple categorisation of the basic characteristics of phenomenology in contemporary or popular usage. He notes that phenomenology has come to, '... refer to the merely descriptive study of any subject matter, neutrally or pre-theoretically ... [that] inhabit our conscious experience...' For ease of reference in the present discussion, Dennett's general definition of phenomenology can be divided into three aspects:

The first constitutes our, '... *experiences of the "external" world*, such as sights, sounds, and smells ... [the second are our] *experiences of the purely "internal" world*, such as fantasy images, the inner sights and sounds of daydreaming and talking to yourself, recollections, bright ideas, and sudden hunches; and [the third are our] *experiences of emotion or "affect"* ranging from ... intermediate emotional storms of anger, joy, hatred, embarrassment, lust, astonishment, to the least corporeal visitations of pride, anxiety, regret, ironic detachment, rue, awe, icy calm.

Within these broader categories, can some general phenomenological features of mystical consciousness be discerned? Waldron (1999:105-106) lists some of the common attributes. The first and most distinctive descriptor is *noesis* - a feeling of direct knowledge of the Absolute unmediated by the translatory faculties of interpretive consciousness.<sup>330</sup> This aspect

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<sup>329</sup> Heidegger's use of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* (1962) loosely refers to the meaning of presence or existence, but his more specific intention is closer to the immanentist philosophy of Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944) which explains that *being* subsists in temporality only to illuminate and interpret the meaning of *Being*. In this way the essential *Being* is neither object nor subject, but the coherence of meaning implicit in Being-in-the-world.

<sup>330</sup> *Noesis*, explains Shanon (2001:91-96), has not been received serious or sufficient philosophical consideration because it embraces too wide a spectrum of possibility in ontology, metaphysics, epistemology, and theories of

touches the core argument of this thesis and the problematic of applying a credible epistemology in current language to mysticism's peculiar ontology will be critically evaluated and re-framed in the next Chapter.

Wilber, we have seen, describes levels of propinquity through the transpersonal bands to the non-dual vision which finds its maximum in the *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC, and only then can it claim the full import of *noesis*, but Waldron does not make this distinction. The gradual closing of the perceptual gap between the *seer* and the *seen* increases *noesis*, but requires a concomitant decrease in the priority of the *ego*. The suppression or renunciation of ego-orientations is a common instruction in popular spirituality since it is deemed to refer mainly to an exaggerated sense of self-importance, but this is a somewhat truncated defence and it is seldom persuasively substantiated.<sup>331</sup> More accurately, *ego* simply identifies the self as distinct from the world and other selves, or in psychoanalysis as that division of the psyche which consciously mediates experience. It may be equally valid therefore to argue that human *egos* are enervated reflections of the *Ego* (Self) of God, and that the purpose of the spiritual journey is therefore to cultivate and endorse the fullness of the *ego* in *Ego*, but this idea is semantically loaded and depends on mechanisms of interpretation and expression.

Further qualities of the experience of union are reflected not only in the sense of oneness in God, but also as oneness with the cosmos in the *timeless, spaceless* immediacy of the present moment. Helminiak (1998:271) makes the point that the phenomenon of *timelessness* does not mean that the experience actually *is* timeless – it clearly has a beginning and an end which means that minds are not eternal. The sense of transcending space-time boundaries in NDC is therefore a fabrication of consciousness – albeit of a peculiar kind. Wilber assumes a less cynical view by suggesting that this 'universal consciousness' is, '... recognised as a play of one's own awareness, empty, luminous, clear, radiant, unobstructed, spontaneous' (1991:249; 1996e:296) and that, '... the wind will be your breath, the stars the neurons in your brain, the sun the taste of the morning...' (1999a:276). The suspended awareness of diachronic location crystallises a sense of cosmic simultaneity extending the boundaries of

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meaning. Its inclusion as a primary description of NDC is therefore representative of the suspicion with which mystical states are treated by science and some categories of philosophy.

<sup>331</sup> Wilber is a proponent of this view and explains that, '... every form of meditation is basically a way to transcend the ego, or die to the ego ... the sense of being a separate self dies, or is dissolved, and one finds a prior and higher identity in and as universal spirit' (1999b:352).

self-experience seemingly indefinitely.<sup>332</sup> This experience of unanimity frequently translates into a super-essential definition of the self and this encounter lies at the heart of doctrines of deification.

The sense of self as a unity with the *All* in God also leads to awareness of *paradoxicality* – a feeling of continuity and simultaneity in multiplicity. However, says Waldron (1999:105), the encounter is usually *transient* and animates non-dual awareness only for as long as an exercitant is in this particular state of consciousness. Wilber would agree that transience applies to the lower transpersonal bands of the Spectrum of Consciousness, but claims that the ultimate transformation into NDC has pervasive rather than transient properties.<sup>333</sup> The means of ascertaining or measuring such a definitive condition of union has not, however, been convincingly assessed. Additionally, Wilber and Waldron agree that a sense of the *numinous* can occur in the early stages of transpersonal consciousness wherein, ‘... feelings of mystery, awe, and ... sacredness ...’ transfuse the experience (Waldron 1999:106). At its height, Wilber, in disagreement with Husserl, would disclaim NDC as experience *of* anything since this would imply duality thereby negating the non-dual nature of the mystical condition. In substantiation, Wilber quotes William James who says that, ‘To know immediately, then, or intuitively, is for mental content and object to be identical’ (1993b:33). In isolation this appears to cohere with a Physicalist view of the non-duality of matter, and Wilber (1993b:43-44), to a limited extent, corroborates this by claiming that, ‘... the measured object could never be completely separated from the measuring subject ...’, but in order for the subject to claim experience of NDC some form of ‘awareness’, even if it is extremely subtle or passive, must remain.

Logically, if Wilber’s scientific criterion is taken as writ, NDC can never be a conscious experience because consciousness is by scientific definition binary – its existence is functionally defined by its inter-relational capacities. With this condition as an epistemological fundamental, how can NDC ever claim to be *numinous* if it cannot even be proven to exist? The disjunctions between the ontology of phenomena and epistemology

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<sup>332</sup> Wilber argues that Spirit, ‘... cannot be something that pops into consciousness and then pops out. It must be something that is constant, permanent, or, more technically, something that, being *timeless*, is *fully present* at every point in time’ (1999a:68). The postulation, whilst valid in mystagogy, is a matter of belief based on the phenomenon of *timelessness*, but it cannot be otherwise authenticated.

<sup>333</sup> Wilber here explains that, ‘... prolonged contemplative practice ... can convert these *temporary* states into *permanent* traits or structures, which means that they have access to these great realms on a more-or-less *continuous* and *conscious* basis’ (2001b:Np).

again emerge and Dennett's suggestion that phenomenology must remain pre-theoretical is reiterated. Despite scholarly vacillation around the subject, the phenomenon of *numinosity* is also frequently accompanied by *perceptual changes* wherein ordinary modes of awareness may be perforated by transcendental incidents of transport or divine presence. This sense of God's imminence may furthermore induce *affective* propensities of joy or peace and a general disposition of altruism towards all creation.<sup>334</sup> The accumulation of these effects in Christianity only accrue spiritual value in the extent to which they actuate personal *transformation* into Christ-likeness, but the ambiguity of the phenomenon forestalls attempts at clear definition.

Another common aspect which should be added to Waldron's list is the centrality of meditative or contemplative quietude as the principle means of attaining the grace of mystical consciousness. Whilst there are exceptions to this standard, the practice of silence is the common medium in both Western and Eastern disciplines. Wilson (2000:18) asserts the centrality of silence by quoting Goethe (1749-1832), 'Let us seek to fathom those things that are fathomable, and reserve those things which are unfathomable for reverence in quietude.' This, says Wilson, '... is the silence of God Himself' and it is not merely the absence of sensory disturbance, but a disposition of equanimity as the inner discourse between possibilities recedes into attentive receptivity. It is at this point, says Wilber (1993:71) that, '... silence reigns ... for no human language or concept can express this experience.' The profundity of this inner silence according to William James' explanation in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1958) is the consequence of mysticism's most inviolable definition – *ineffability*, and this is so because it identifies the paucity of linguistic constructs.<sup>335</sup> Wilber (1993a:70) says that because mysticism, '... is free from conceptual elaboration, it can be partially described in any number of analogical or negative ways, but fully described in no way whatsoever.' It is this inscrutable trait, more than any other that complicates the study of mysticism.

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<sup>334</sup> Wilber expands that such a sense of affection is often accompanied by, '... profound compassion for literally all of the world' (1989:464-5).

<sup>335</sup> Ferrari (2002:6) notes that William Barnard (in *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* 1997) accuses William James of employing a form of 'incomplete constructivism' by, '... explaining mysticism through a dialectic between two kinds of knowledge - knowledge of acquaintance and knowledge about ... This dialectic allows James to maintain both that mystics worldwide share certain aspects of their experience, but also to remain a pluralist about the specific experiences and interpretations of mystical experience of mystics from different traditions such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism.' Ferrari therefore mentions that scientists today may question the credibility of James' position since consciousness is deemed to be generated by the brain rather than transmitted by the brain from a deeper realm of trans-material being.

How then is the phenomenon of NDC to be approached as a subject of study? Clearly, the conceptual and linguistic elusions of mysticism frustrate rational articulation in academic discourse. As Wilber rightly explains, ‘First-person phenomenological investigations of consciousness can easily spot phenomenal states ... [but] phenomenological method cannot easily spot subjective structures ...’ (Wilber 2001b:np). Rephrased, Wilber means that the first-person phenomenon of NDC is validated by its experiential immediacy, but that its phenomenological descriptors neither satisfy the profundity of the experience for the individual claiming NDC, nor the investigations of third party observers. This investigative inadequacy prompts Wilber to suggest that the only way to describe the nature of the phenomenon, ‘... is to watch populations of subjects interact, and then look for regularities in behaviour that suggest they are following inter-subjective patterns, rules, or structures (2001b:Np).’ This proposition, as we have seen, is extended into the third injunctive strand of Wilber’s epistemology which claims that corroboration establishes veracity, but this assumption has already been challenged. The problem settles squarely on the conceptual formation and linguistic expression of mystical experience and its complexes. In pursuance of the phenomenological problem, Wilber draws attention to American philosopher Drew Leder’s book *The Absent Body* (1990). Leder explores the phenomenology of bodily experience and asks why we are so often oblivious of our bodily processes? Leder finds that consciousness abstracts experience from its physiological bases and projects the phenomena of experience into ideational ontologies. We do not, for example, experience *seeing*, but that which is *seen*. Wilber and Leder would concur that objects in consciousness need not have a material basis in experience - that hopes and beliefs, for example, are real expressions of consciousness. The suggestion is reminiscent of representationalism in William James’ theory which we touched on previously, and its usefulness has already been conceded, but Leder’s work is clearly inspired by Husserl’s phenomenology. In more detail, Husserl (1913) describes the intentional contents of consciousness in terms of the transcendental ‘I’ (Kockelmans 1994). Transcendence, in this case, indicates a form of awareness which precedes experience. Consequently Husserl, as we have seen, argues that it is possible to analyse the phenomena we immediately experience without abstracting the experience into concepts (Nørretranders 1999:323). This approach to phenomenology only succeeds if *a priori* existence of an indwelling ‘I’ is admitted into the theory and this explains Leder’s consideration of Cartesian dualism. It is within this dualistic context that Forman claims that, ‘... phenomenology is not science [because] when we describe these experiences, we do not gain hard scientific proof...’ For Forman, phenomenology may only be taken, ‘... as a

finger, *pointing* in some direction, rather than *conclusive evidence* [in which case Forman claims that we can at best only] ... coax metaphysical hypotheses out of ... phenomenological descriptions' (1998b:185-201). Wilber (1996c:258) similarly maintains that phenomenology cannot convey, '... anything higher or transcendental...' and goes on to argue that only an AQAL approach is sufficient for a consummate description of consciousness (2001b:np).

#### 6.4 The Nature of Consciousness According to Wilber

Wilber's understanding of NDC can only be properly discerned within the broader context of his Four Quadrant Integral model of consciousness. A thorough appraisal of his theory was conducted in Chapters Three and Four and only a brief reiteration is necessary to distil salient points for the purpose of the present debate. In Wilber's own summary:

An extensive data search among various types of developmental and evolutionary sequences yielded a Four Quadrant model of consciousness and its development (the four quadrants being intentional, behavioural, cultural, and social). Each of these dimensions was found to unfold in a sequence of at least a dozen major stages or levels. Combining the four quadrants with the dozen or so major levels in each quadrant yields in integral theory of consciousness that is quite comprehensive in its nature and scope... The conclusion is that an AQAL [all-quadrant, all-level] approach is the minimum degree of sophistication that we need into order to secure anything resembling a genuinely integral theory of consciousness (1997b: 71-92).

The analogical usefulness of Wilber's model is acknowledged as an interpretation of human consciousness: inwardly in the full developmental spectrum of personal competencies, thoughts, and feelings (the Left Quadrants); and outwardly in physical and socio-cultural associations and adaptations (the Right Quadrants) (1995a). In this way Wilber puts forward the view that every possible experience is a dimension of consciousness made manifest. Such manifestations remain irreducible to any particular quadrant, wave, structure, or stream of his Integral Model.<sup>336</sup> Wilber therefore explains that, '... there is no individual consciousness. You cannot generate meaning in a vacuum, nor can you generate it with a

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<sup>336</sup> Wilber explains that in *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1999b:13-14) the, '... enduring truth of the *Great Nest of Being*: the unfolding of ever-richer realms of consciousness, from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit.' In this book he outlined the full spectrum of consciousness which consists of three significant categories: the first are the, '... *basic structures* or levels or waves of consciousness – *matter*, vital *body* (sensation, perception, impulse), *mind* (image, symbol, concept, rule/role, formal-reflexive, vision-logic), *soul* (psychic, subtle), and *spirit* (causal, non-dual); [the second] the numerous different *developmental lines or stream* (such as self-identity, self-needs, and morals) that proceed through those major waves; and [thirdly] the *self* (or self-system), which has to integrate all of the various waves and streams.'



physical brain alone, but only in an inter-subjective circle of mutual recognition' (1997b:83). Tulku (1976:175) similarly explains that, 'What a human being is inside is the same as what he or she is outside in the physical realm. A human being *is* the embodiment of his consciousness.' This is reasonable within Wilber's integral intention, but in perplexing contrast Wilber later claims that, '... the *within* of things is consciousness, the *without* of things is form' [my italics] (2000a:117). Notwithstanding the Aristotelian tone, this is a peculiar distinction to draw for at least two reasons: firstly, Wilber's entire philosophy of consciousness, as has been shown, is manifest as a process which *involves* from, and *evolves* back to Mind or Absolute Consciousness which arises *in* and *as* the Kosmos. Wilber describes this process as, '... the final differentiation of Consciousness from all forms in consciousness, whereupon Consciousness as Such is released in Perfect Transcendence, which is not a transcendence from the world but a final transcendence as the World ... [operating] as the entire World Process, integrating and interpenetrating all levels, realms, and planes, high or low, sacred or profane' (1996e:99). Visser (2001:2) explains that for Wilber the dimensions of form in consciousness manifest as AQAL, but in the un-manifest realm, '... consciousness is pure formlessness ... ultimate or non-dual consciousness is known, not conceptually or mentally, but only supra-mentally.' How consciousness can be so transcendent and simultaneously the non-dual imminence of Suchness admits mystical paradox into the ontology of consciousness that cannot submit to the rigours of the scientific bases Wilber claims for his model. So if Consciousness transcends form and yet arises as the entire process of form, how can it be either inside or outside? Secondly, apart from its strong Essentialist nuances, if consciousness is not located in the brain as Wilber so frequently claims (1997a: 270, 1997b:82, 1999b:17), how can it be personally experienced? It is obvious enough that damage to the brain is likely to impede or alter consciousness, whereas damage to another part of the body or some aspect of the world beyond the body need not impede or alter consciousness.

In a further complication, Wilber also claims that inasmuch as consciousness is not in the brain, it is not, '... outside the brain either, because both of these are physical boundaries with simple location...' (1997b:83), and yet Wilber claims that consciousness is *within* (2000a:117). If consciousness is not therefore located, it is again not sensible to claim that consciousness is *within*. Even if consciousness is *within*, what is the nature of this *within-ness* – if it is not the brain, is it nonetheless *in* the brain, and if so, how is it *in* the brain? Despite Wilber's claims to the contrary, such descriptions approximate versions of

Occasionalism or Epiphenomenalism. Wilber's inconsistent ascriptions imply that consciousness has unique immanent and transcendental qualities which subsist in a paradoxical and mutually irreducible simultaneity, and the suggestion is clearly dualistic. It is not surprising therefore that Wilber is so often accused of cloaked panpsychism.

Visser (2001:2) nonetheless attempts a defence of Wilber's postulations by referring to Wilber's definition of consciousness as depth which is, '... literally *unqualifiable*' (Wilber 2000a:538). Such evasions gain no ground in answering the questions which introduced the problem of this thesis: the resolution of duality as it is manifest in the *hard problem* – the bifurcation between material brain and subjective consciousness. Is intentionality, for example, a kind of dislocated *élan vital* which subsists in the transcendental aspect of Wilber's definition of consciousness? Wilber would reject the notion and say that researchers will only understand his definition of consciousness once they accede to the transcendental and immanent paradoxicality of consciousness and are personally transformed through the process of their practice (1997b:85-86, 88). Wilber states that such understanding requires a, '... a shift in one's sense of identity' (1993c:40). The imposition of such criteria will not easily carry credence in academic discourses in science through which Wilber strives to validate his epistemology.

Wilber offers a justification of his definition of consciousness as depth by deferring to Teilhard de Chardin's law of complexity (Teilhard de Chardin. 2004:209).<sup>337</sup> Recalling Wilber's proposal of evolutionary holarchies, the familiarity of Teilhard's Cosmogonic theories immediately come to the fore. Wilber explains that, '... whatever we take at present as the lowest or most primitive holons, I will simply say that *they* have the least depth, the least consciousness ... [and since] evolution tends in the direction of greater complexity, it amounts to the same thing to say that it tends in the direction of greater consciousness' (2000a:118). Wilber adds that, '... each new growth in consciousness is not just the discovery of more of a pre-given world, but the co-creation of new worlds themselves ...' (2000a:119). Wilber previously differentiated fundamental and significant holons wherein he ascribes complexity to depth and primacy to span. These divisions of description relay phenomenological qualities of complexity in consciousness which may parallel the

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<sup>337</sup> Teilhard's explanation of the Cosmic Law of Complexity-Consciousness suggests that the universe as macrocosm is in the process of spatial expansion (from the infinitesimal to the immense) whilst physiological and chemical process as microcosm involve to higher degrees of complexity and sophistication in consciousness (Murrell: ND.Np).

physiological complexity of the human brain, but they do not thereby define consciousness, nor do they offer a solution to the *hard problem*. Moreover, whilst the Darwinian principles of natural selection in evolution do indicate propensities to complexity, this is not always the case and complexity *as* human consciousness cannot thereby assume co-creative capacities in quite the same way.

The extraordinary comprehensiveness and syntheses of Wilber's model engenders confidence in his postulations, but by Wilber's own admission, the Model still only shows what consciousness is like, not what it is. Despite the vast corpus of literature and research supporting his Model, Wilber never reaches a definition of consciousness beyond the preternatural transmogrifications of a quality which is, at its zenith, *Absolute Subjectivity*, and in its pre-enlightened differentiations, a paradoxical immanence and transcendence *in* and *as* matter, yet never reduced to just matter. Kriel (2000:113) offers a definition which may come closer to Wilber's basic intention by explaining that, '... consciousness is neither a property of the mind nor a separate phenomenon, but a manner of existence in the world.'<sup>338</sup> Whilst such an ontology of consciousness may suit Wilber's intention, for Wilber it will not only be a 'manner of existence *in* the world', it would substantially include the entire world process.

It is clear that any attempt to entice a precise definition of consciousness out of Wilber's Integral Philosophy will be met with paradoxical syntheses of ontologies whose respective epistemologies will not consistently cohere without deferring qualification to the permissiveness of mystery. More simply, Wilber veils inconsistencies in his theory of consciousness in mysticism, and such legerdemain will not ordinarily qualify as an empirical form of academic discourse. Had Wilber submitted his ontology of consciousness to Essentialist definitions there would be no conflict or confusion, but his insistence on empirical verification renders his epistemology inadmissible to natural science. This disequilibrium destabilises the foundation of Wilber's theory and his contingent arguments are weakened as a result. Nonetheless, Wilber's description of NDC entirely resembles literature in mystical genres and within that context Wilber explains the nature and manifestation of NDC with persuasive and passionate clarity.

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<sup>338</sup> Kriel explains that evolution generated a new ontological level of complex systems with the advent of consciousness (2000:116).

#### 6.4.1 Wilber's Definition of Non-dual Consciousness

The substance of Wilber's entire philosophy is inter-fused with the intention of realising non-duality as the true nature of the All. Themes around non-duality are therefore densely braided throughout his work and minute evaluations would extend beyond the purpose of the present argument. For this reason the motifs most often repeated in Wilber's writing have been culled and compacted. These summations find their most legitimate expression in the narration of Wilber's own experience and it is therefore worth quoting at length:

At that point, the whole stance of the witness absolutely disappeared. There was no subject anywhere in the universe; there was no object anywhere in the universe; there was only the universe. Everything was arising moment to moment, and it was arising in me and as me; yet there was no me. It is very important to realise that this state was not a loss of faculties but a peak-enhancement of them; it was no blank trance but perfect clarity; not depersonalised but transpersonalised. No personal faculties - language, logic, concepts, motor skills - were lost or impaired. Rather, they all functioned, for the first time it seemed to me, in radical openness, free of the defences thrown up by a separate self sense. This radically open, undefended, and perfectly non-dual state was both incredible and profoundly ordinary, so extraordinarily ordinary that it did not even register. There was nobody there to comprehend it, until I fell *out* of it. (I guess about three hours later.) In other words, while in that state, which was no experience whatsoever, there was *only* that state, which was the totality of everything arising moment to moment. I did not watch all that, I simply *was* all that. I could not see it because it was everything seen; I could not hear it because it was everything heard; I could not know it because it was everything known. That is why it is both the great mystery and the perfectly obvious. But it was only when I realised that I was in that state that I was actually no longer in it. That is, the recognition or experience of that state was much, much less than the state itself. To experience that state I had to separate myself from it (that is, destroy it) (1982a:84).<sup>339</sup>

Despite, or perhaps because of this lucidly transforming experience, Wilber later writes that, '... I'm no longer sure exactly what "enlightenment" means ... [and now prefers to refer to it as] "enlightened understanding" or "enlightened presence" or "enlightened awareness"' (1991:406). These ascriptions are confusing: 'understanding' implies a form of cognitive

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<sup>339</sup> Wilber qualifies this personal experience in more theoretical terms by explaining that as the, 'Ultimate or Non-dual [passes] fully through the state of cessation or un-manifest causal absorption, consciousness is said finally to reawaken to its prior and eternal abode as non-dual Spirit, radiant and all-pervading, one and many, only and all - the complete integration and identity of manifest Form with the un-manifest Formless ... Strictly speaking, the ultimate is not one level among others, but the reality, condition, or Suchness of all levels' (1999c:88).

engagement; ‘presence’ implies the sense of another; and ‘awareness’ implies a mode of perception – all of which utilise dualistic modes of cognitive interaction. These anomalies impair Wilber’s more precise portrayal of NDC which permits no such particularised attributes in the formless and ineffable *Absolute Subjectivity* of non-dual Mind. Nevertheless, when a distillation of Wilber’s descriptions of NDC is condensed, the précis closely resembles the common features of religious mystical consciousness delineated in Christian mysticism.

Whilst the ontological ‘gap’ between creature and Creator in Christian mysticism has already been distinguished from the sense of homogeneity more typical in Eastern renditions, the experiential phenomena in NDC remain sufficiently similar to import Wilber’s rendition. Thus qualified, Wilber is nonetheless right to insist on the necessity of contextual instruments of interpretation. He advises that the situation of the non-dual experience within all four quadrants of his Integral Model not only establishes contextual meaningfulness, but that such interpretation, ‘... will govern how you approach others with this illumination...’ (1996c:Np). Wilber’s explanation of NDC fits with Eastern *apophatic* renditions wherein Reality is equated with *Absolute Subjectivity* or Mind as emptiness or the void (1993a:264).<sup>340</sup> This is not only so in the sense that NDC is the realisation of Reality, it is Reality (1993b:37). This Reality is ineffable since, ‘... all propositions about Reality are void and invalid ... [because] to predicate something of everything is to predicate it of nothing’ (1976a:233, 1993b:40). This Reality is not therefore a, ‘... uniform, all-pervading, featureless ... divine goo ... an amorphous All-knowing, All-merciful, celestial Vacuum ... [but the Absolute, which is] utterly beyond words, symbols, and logic. And not because it is too mysterious or too sublime or too complex ..., but rather because it is too simple, too obvious, too close to be caught in the net of symbols and signs ...’ (1976a:232-233). Wilber quotes St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) (*Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*) who describes Reality as, “A sphere, whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere” ... [and] Plotinus (*First Tractate: The Three Initial Hypostases* 5<sup>th</sup> Ennead) who says that “while [Reality] is nowhere, nowhere is it not” (1976a:234).

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<sup>340</sup> Ring (1974:147) comments on Grof’s (1972) perspective of the void and it closely resembles Wilber’s view. Grof explains that the void is a condition of contentlessness whereas Goleman (1975, 1978) prefers to explain Nirvana, in the Hindu sense, as the cessation of consciousness.

Wilber's alignment with the Eastern mystical idiom asserts that whilst NDC is *Absolute Subjectivity*, Mind, and Reality, it is also perfectly void and cannot be attained because, '... there is no point where It is not' (1976a:235) since, '... the seeker [and] the object are actually one and the same' (1993b:290). Wilber (1981:55) therefore asserts the, '... difficulties the mystic faces in trying to describe the ineffable experience of unity consciousness...' because descriptions necessarily submit to recursive consciousness and therefore succumb to dualism. For enlightenment to be authentic, says Wilber, it must be a, '... traceless enlightenment ...' (1982a:89), but an important question must then be asked: if enlightenment is 'traceless', how can its existence ever be recognised and legitimised? Chaudhuri (1975:13), for example, claims that, '... it is impossible for a person to attain absolute knowledge of the total reality,' but Wilber later qualifies this limitation by arguing that whilst, '... union with God cannot be attained, *knowledge* of that union can be attained; that whereas we cannot manufacture the Supreme Identity, we can *realise* it' [my italics] (1976:235).

To claim that absolute *gnosis* of the 'traceless' Absolute can be attained or realised seems contradictory since Wilber so frequently claims that, '... seeking of any sort, movement of any sort, attainment of any sort: [is] all profoundly useless' [since], '... the Great Search reinforces the mistaken belief that God is not present, and thus totally obscures the reality of God's ever-present Presence' (1997a:282). Schneider (1987:201) interprets Wilber to mean that the realisation of such *gnosis* implies an absolute knowledge, '... of all things to be known ..,' but this is not Wilber's intention. Wilber does not imply omniscience, but de-particularised awareness in the mystical sense.<sup>341</sup> Wilber describes this as a pure *gnosis* (spirit knowing itself as Spirit) which appears in consciousness as the Void. Kelly (1996a:23) believes the sense of emptiness is, '... "superior" or "higher" only from the point of view of a mental ego identified with its own process of abstraction which it thereby mistakes for the Whole.' Apparently the attainment of such realisation needs to be initially 'informed' from the lower levels of the Spectrum of Consciousness in order for 'seekers' to be enticed and trained to embark on the spiritual/mystical journey, but paradoxically, such 'seeking' cannot yield enlightenment. Christian mysticism compensates for this anomaly by deferring the initiative to gifts of God's grace, but Wilber's amorphous mystical philosophy does not explain this. Such realisation, says Wilber, is nonetheless the, '... attainment of the

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<sup>341</sup> Fisher (1997:54) also remarked on Schneider's mistaken assumption that Wilber's notion implies omniscience and says that Schneider, '... could make striving for such a form of consciousness appear presumptuous.'

knowledge of our Supreme Identity, [and it] is everywhere said to be the very ultimate state of consciousness, enlightenment, satori, moksha, wu, release, liberation' (1976:236; cf 1993b:287).

Wilber's gnosticism is therefore paradoxically qualified as a knowledge of *no-thing*, a form of de-particularised simultaneity which he sometimes calls the 'All', but this All is not the conflated sum of all cosmic objective and subjective parts, it is the realisation and becoming of the true non-dual nature which *is* the All. For this reason, the All and the Void, which are equally the *Absolute Subjectivity* of NDC, do not indicate proportionality, but describe the true nature of Reality as, '... no-opposites or not-two-ness' (1981:33). Mind is therefore, '... the all-inclusive yet dimensionless reality of which each level represents an illusory deviation' (1993b:286) since non-duality is the, '... condition and true nature of *all* states' (1996e:297). It is, '...unknowable, unobstructed, unqualified Consciousness...' (1996d:173-174).<sup>342</sup> In rather florid phrase, Wilber describes this 'Condition of all conditions' as, '... your own Buddha-mind, your own Godhead, your own formless, spaceless, timeless, infinite Emptiness, your own Atman that is Brahman, your *Keter*, Christ consciousness, radiant Shekhinah...' (1993b:xvi; cf 1999a:70). It is not, therefore, '... a state apart from other states; it is not an altered state; it is not a special state - it is rather the Suchness of all states...' (1996d:86-87). In sum, 'Spirit simply IS' (1993b:xvii) and it is so in the extent to which we realise that, 'my *me* is God' (1995a:522; cf 1997a: 283-4) and it is, '... bliss beyond bliss beyond bliss...' (1996d:173-174).

#### 6.4.2 Questions and Challenges

The foregoing synopsis conveys the tenor of Wilber's theory of NDC and a number of additional questions may be raised against it. The first concerns Wilber's assumption that NDC is Reality (1993b:36). For Wilber this Reality is not merely a descriptive or reflective term, it is realised in NDC as *Absolute Subjectivity* which *is* the All. It is therefore the exercitant's complete consciousness as Kosmic, timeless, spaceless simultaneity in ordinariness. Schneider is suspicious of Wilber's suggestion that the realisation of an absolute cosmic unanimity subsumes all differentiations in consciousness since existential phenomenological approaches to consciousness do not intend, nor imply a '... total fusion

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<sup>342</sup> Wilber elsewhere describes it as, '... infinite, all-pervading and all-embracing Consciousness, it is both One and Many, Only and All, Source and Suchness, Cause and Condition, such that all things are only a gesture of this One, and all forms a play upon it. As Infinity, it demands wonder; as God, it demands worship; as Truth, it demands wisdom; and as one's true Self, it demands identity' (1996a:173-174).

with the universe' (1987:198). In slightly different phrase, Washburn also questions why such heightened conditions of awareness necessarily imply, '... oneness with the whole world' (1996c:Np). It has previously been argued that there is no way of knowing whether or not such an experience is possible, and even if it is, how the experience could be known since it claims to transcend all noetic possibilities. Schneider (1987:212) therefore correctly notes that, '... no one can prove or disprove ultimate consciousness...' Moreover, if the *gnosis* in NDC is a contentless *mysterium*, how does it qualify for the title 'Reality' since reality is a definitional term consisting of ascriptions designed to convey some aspect of meaning against that which is deemed to be un-real or non-existent? Admitting that my question bifurcates the description, Wilber is nevertheless unable to explain what Reality is, and it cannot therefore be the realised product of his three step empirical experiment through *Transcendelia*. Reality, in other words, is a cosmic ultimatum which Wilber superimposes on NDC and its descriptive inclusion is idiosyncratic.

This leads to the next problem which again raises the issue of ineffability (Wilber 1976a:232-233). The methodological problems in the language of mysticism will shortly be addressed, but in this context it forestalls the possibility of phenomenological investigation which is contrary to Wilber's claim that knowledge of union with God is possible (1976:235). Since phenomena are the inextricable pre-forms of language to the extent that they remain unidentifiable without language, how can NDC be investigated if it is trans-phenomenal? In keeping with Dennett's general definitions above, phenomena must comprise some existential form in concepts, affects, or imagination, but their realisation in consciousness can only be recognised through devices of symbolic representation. Perplexingly, this means that it is not sensible to claim the ability to survey NDC phenomenologically if it is ineffable. To this end Wilber would agree, but such agreement contradicts the unmediated veracity of NDC which Wilber claims to establish through the language of science. In this regard, Schneider slights Wilber's argument by claiming that Wilber's, '... pragmatic side cannot aid his mystical side, and this is precisely why his system breaks down ... This is precisely why the Wilber model self-destructs' (1989:472).

Thirdly, if Wilber's experience of NDC is void of interactive content and form, in what sense is it Supreme Identity (Wilber 1995a:522; 1997a: 283-4)? Surely such a consummate experience of 'nothingness' as the highest realisation of self obliterates humanity's purposive *raison d'être*? Wilber's explanation is referred through the annihilation of the self in the



Buddhistic sense, but this should be carefully qualified. The concept of no-self or *anatta* in Buddhism extends from the belief that there is no subsistent reality pervading senses of appearances (*samsara*) and that any permanent sense of self must therefore be illusory. The principle of *sunyata* (emptiness) in Mahayana Buddhism, for example, refers to the Five Aggregates (*skandhas*) which are likewise empty of a *permanent* self. This emptiness is not however, a boundless vacuity, but refers only to specific assertions of emptiness and it is not therefore a pervasive mystical nihilism. Wilber would be in agreement so far, but it is not clear that he draws these distinctions with sufficient clarity. Thanissaro (1996) points out that the Buddha refused to answer when questioned about the existence or non-existence of the self and cautions against drawing inferences from statements which have no inferential intentions (*Samyutta Nikaya XLIV.10*; Thanissaro 1996).<sup>343</sup> For this reason, explains Bhikku, the existence of self is not either real or un-real, or defined or empty, it is unanswerable, and Wilber is therefore mistaken to equate *sunyata* with Supreme Identity.<sup>344</sup> The distinction is fine, but pivotal. Thanissaro contends that the ‘relationship’ between the self and the other does not define the self, and that the question of an un-relational self is unanswerable, but nowhere in Buddhism is there any suggestion that this un-relational, or empty self, is Supreme Identity (Thanissaro 1996). The experience of ‘no-thingness’ is nonetheless frequently attested to by those claiming NDC, but it is usually addressed

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<sup>343</sup> According to Samyutta Nikaya (XLIV.10. Ananda Sutta: To Ananda [On Self, No Self, and Not-self]), the story goes as follows: Then the wanderer Vacchagotta went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, exchanged courteous greetings with him. After an exchange of friendly greetings and courtesies, he sat down to one side. As he was sitting there he asked the Blessed One: “Now then, Venerable Gotama, is there a self?” When this was said, the Blessed One was silent. “Then is there no self?” A second time, the Blessed One was silent. Then Vacchagotta the wanderer got up from his seat and left. Then, not long after Vacchagotta the wanderer had left, Venerable Ananda said to the Blessed One, “Why, lord, did the Blessed One not answer when asked a question by Vacchagotta the wanderer?” “Ananda, if I - being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self - were to answer that there is a self, that would be conforming with those priests and contemplatives who are exponents of eternalism [the view that there is an eternal, unchanging soul]. If I - being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self - were to answer that there is no self, that would be conforming with those priests and contemplatives who are exponents of annihilationism [the view that death is the annihilation of consciousness]. If I - being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self - were to answer that there is a self, would that be in keeping with the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self?” “No, Lord.” “And if I - being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self - were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: “Does the self I used to have now not exist?” (Buddhism Today).

<sup>344</sup> In order to explain this, Thanissaro points out that the question should be put aside. He explains that to ‘... understand what his [the Buddha’s] silence on this question says about the meaning of *Anatta*, we first have to look at his teachings on how questions should be asked and answered, and how to interpret his answers. The Buddha divided all questions into four classes:

- Those that deserve a categorical (straight yes or no) answer.
- Those that deserve an analytical answer, defining and qualifying the terms of the question.
- Those that deserve a counter-question, putting the ball back in the questioner’s court.
- Those that deserve to be put aside.’

Bhikku therefore advises against, ‘... such questions as “Do I exist?” or “Don’t I exist?” for however you answer them, they lead to suffering and stress... [the question should rather be] “Am I suffering stress because I’m holding onto this particular phenomenon?” ... In this sense, the *Anatta* teaching is not a doctrine of no-self, but a not-self strategy for shedding suffering by letting go of its cause, leading to the highest, undying happiness. At that point, questions of self, no-self, and not-self fall aside. Once there’s the experience of such total freedom, where would there be any concern about what’s experiencing it, or whether or not it’s a self?’ (Thanissaro 1996).

differently in Christian mysticism. The unitive experience in Christian mysticism sustains forms of ideational substance by promising the reward of the 'Kingdom of Heaven' as one with God, or one in God. These terms imbue the ontology of union with ultimate value even though its experiential content, the phenomenon, may be void of specific features or images. Marion (2000:xiii) points out that for a Christian:

... the Way to the Kingdom of Heaven (higher consciousness) is Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6). More specifically, it is to allow God to transform us inwardly by the complete "renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:2), so that, with St. Paul, we can honestly say, "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16). This "putting on of the mind which is in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5), that is, Christ Consciousness, is the goal of the Christian spiritual path.

Marion adds further scriptural evidence in support of his argument, 'By the "Kingdom of Heaven" Jesus meant a particular level of human consciousness, not a place to which Christians are destined after death ... [and] the two chief characteristics of the non-dual consciousness of the Kingdom of Heaven are a lack of separation between God and humans and a lack of separation between human beings.' The kingdom is furthermore, "at hand" (Mark 1:15) and we should therefore, "seek first the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 6:33). Most importantly for Marion's argument, "The Kingdom of God is within" (Luke 17:21) (2000:1-3). Wilber would endorse Marion's mystical interpretation of Scripture, but generally prefers references to gnostic texts. Wilber does, however, suggest that Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20, '... it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me ...' means that the, '... I *is* Christ' (1996c:Np), but in Christian theology Wilber's argument for radical deification may impose too much on Paul's meaning. Wilber rather quotes the apocryphal Acts of Peter, "Thou art perceived of the spirit only, thou art unto me father, thou my mother, thou my brother, thou my friend, thou my bondsman, thou my steward: thou art All and All is in thee: and thou art, and there is nought else that is save thee only," and the Gospel of Thomas, "I am the Light that is above them all, I am the All, the All came forth from Me and the All attained to Me. Cleave a piece of wood, I am there; lift up the stone and you will find Me there" (Wilber 1993b:50).

Whether Marion and Wilber's mystical interpretations of New Testament texts are legitimate is a matter of exegetical opinion – particularly since Wilber proffers a gnostic mysticism. In either case, the actual phenomenon of NDC in Christian mysticism cannot be precisely

discerned by these translatory mechanisms alone, but their benefit is nonetheless realised in the promise of a reward that can at least be imaginatively conceptualised – the recovery of true being in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). Wilber’s notion of NDC, on the other hand, contains no such promissory rewards. His description of NDC as ‘bliss’ has no conceptual or sensorial content and the use of the word ‘bliss’ must therefore be void of meaning. Schneider (1987:198) likewise questions Wilber’s, ‘...tacit idealisation of the condition...’ that, in order for it to remain true to its transcendental definition, can have no discernable value. Wilber may be content with a paradoxical meaningless bliss in NDC, but the notion can be challenged: if the true nature of the All is non-dual, and supposing a person realises this true nature in NDC as nothingness – what is the point? Fisher (1997:39) summarises Schneider’s (1987:196-197, 1989) terse summation of Wilber’s argument by suggesting that if NDC exists, it would not be, ‘... practically achievable, [nor] useful to solve human problems, and ... so “boring” and likely “terrifying” as to not be desirable anyway.’ Moreover, if this bliss is absolute emptiness, how is it substantiated as experience at all? Wilber might qualify that it is an emptiness that is devoid of dualistic illusions *in* the Kosmos rather than an emptiness which excludes the Kosmos. However, in order for Wilber’s notion of NDC to be non-dual in an absolute sense it must nonetheless explain the subsistence of differentiation, but these paradoxes cannot be decoded in Wilber’s mysticism.

Heron (1992) raises the fourth concern which is contingent on anomalies implicit in differentiated unities. Wilber explains that all levels of the Spectrum of Consciousness prior to NDC are dualised depletions of the true, non-dual nature of the All, but in NDC all these levels are realised as partial integrations of the *All* which has always been essentially non-dual. Heron (1992:201) interprets this apparent contradiction to mean that, ‘... what had been denied as a possibility throughout the play [the Spectrum] appears as a reality in the final act [NDC]. All the levels are *only* substitutes for Atman until the last - when they suddenly become expressions of Atman.’ Heron goes on to explain that, ‘Something that is distinct may get construed as being separate, but that is to do with an error of construing, nothing to do with the distinctness that is so construed. Multiple distinctness and oneness, diversity-in-unity, is the delightful paradox of the Real: there is no primary noxious dualism to do with there being distinctions’ (1992:203).<sup>345</sup> This kind of paradoxicality is not unusual

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<sup>345</sup> Heron (1992:202) elaborates by claiming that, ‘Wilber’s account of his levels is incoherent: none of them involves any genuine expression of spirituality until they are all over, when suddenly all of them do,’ but Heron’s perception is invalid – Wilber’s entire Holarchical purpose is infused as a spiritual pilgrimage in stages of realisation to NDC. Schneider (1989:470-471) adds further criticism by claiming that, ‘... Wilber’s increasing use

in Wilber's philosophy and Heron's concern with semantic clarity may simply be a case of misinterpreting Wilber's meaning. For Wilber, the non-dual *All* cannot be differentiated in actuality, but it can be mistakenly perceived as such. The difference arises only in perspective from either the pre-non-dual or post-non-dual vantage points, not the 'actual' nature of the *All*. From a Christian viewpoint, Wilber's thinking nevertheless implies that divine union in mysticism falls short of true NDC since it retains panentheistic distinction between God and creation. For Christians this is a real, but differentiated unity and the means of distinguishing divine union from Wilber's rendition of NDC may however, be more a matter of religious description than phenomenology.

The fifth challenge emerges in Wilber's description of NDC as the 'Condition of all conditions' (1993b:xvi; cf 1999a:70). Wilber frequently describes the realisation of NDC as the Suchness of all states of consciousness and the suggestion implies an essential Conscious permanence which pervades and transcends temporal consciousness. If there is however, this 'Suchness', what is it? It has already been noted that Wilber eschews any attempts to imbue Suchness with ontologically transcendent otherness, but he similarly claims that Suchness remains irreducible to ephemeral form. Wilber substantiates this paradoxicality as the ordinariness of Consciousness seen as such – the purity of undifferentiated consciousness which appears when the primary dualism between the *seer* and the *seen* is collapsed.<sup>346</sup> In this sense it may be understood that Suchness, as a spaceless, timeless simultaneity, describes the pre-differentiated essence of all particularised modalities of consciousness, but even so, Suchness remains anomalous because it has no means of verification. The problem is reminiscent of Wilber's ascriptions of Reality and Supreme Identity to the emptiness realised in NDC and the same objections apply.

The next problem is again presented in Wilber's inclusion of the Absolute – specifically Absolute Truth. Wilber describes Spirit as Absolute and he sometimes uses the terms

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of pragmatism to justify his metaphysical claims, in particular, "ultimate" claims...' is inconsistent. Wilber's inclination, says Schneider, '... is misguided on several grounds: (a) "Ultimate" claims cannot be defined in terms that transcend the existential level; (b) "ultimate" functioning cannot be reconciled with concrete (fallible) functioning; (c) "ultimate" awareness cannot be validated scientifically (e.g. phenomenologically or hermeneutically), despite Wilber's efforts to show otherwise; (d) historical stages cannot be clearly differentiated from the psychologically dysfunctional; and (e) motivation still cannot be reconciled with *consummate* functioning.' Schneider's claims are not in principle dissimilar from mine, but they may be overstated. Particularly point (d)'s implication of NDC with mental instability is unwarranted.

<sup>346</sup> Wilber explains in more detail that, 'This original act of severance we will call the *Primary Dualism*; epistemologically, it is the severance of the knower from the known; ontologically, the severance of the Infinite from the finite; theologically, it is original sin; generally, we may speak of it as the illusory split between subject and object' (1981:48).

interchangeably and it follows that NDC is somehow a realisation of Absolute Truth since Spirit cannot be false. Schneider (1987:198) cautions that, '... the burden of proof regarding value-free claims rests with the claimants. They must show that theirs is the absolute true reality - which is, of course, a perilous as well as improbable task.' Wilber however, qualifies that this Truth, '... is not meant in the same grammatical sense that modern science or philosophy means it. "Truth," for modern science and philosophy applies only to propositions *about* things, not to facts or experiences *of* things. The mystical event is not a proposition, but an experience' [my italics] (1989a:464). Nonetheless, Wilber's insistence on ultimacy in the phenomenon of inner, unmediated NDC is itself a proposition and no matter the means of its narration, it ratifies rather than solves the *hard problem*. Wilber's ontology of non-duality as the True nature of the All as it is realised in NDC, and the epistemology by which he endeavours to authenticate it, either elevates science to the Absolute, or reduces the Absolute to science. Heron (1992:192) similarly describes Wilber's supposition as, '... a classical version of transcendental reductionism carried through with great contemporary brilliance. But, like all such reductionism, I think it is deeply flawed...' Wilber's only recourse is to admit his mystical philosophy to Essentialism, but his obdurate refusal to do so dilutes the academic credibility of his argument. Mind as a trans-substantial Absolute Truth is not able to explain itself materially, and scientists (presuming they are materialists) will not accept the explanation of matter as an emergent product of supra-natural Mind. Consequently, the *hard problem* remains unresolved.

The final problem with absolutist interpolations is revealed in evolutionary theory. If, as Wilber (2000:18) claims, evolution implies increasing complexity as synonymous with increasing consciousness, how can it be definitionally Absolute? Consciousness, in other words, cannot be Absolute and evolving towards the Absolute at the same time. Wilber indeed claims that NDC is, '... the ultimate state, the final end point of all development and evolution...' (1997c:93) and he tries to explain that, '... Mind does not itself actually evolve - being timeless and spaceless - nevertheless the ways in which it seems to manifest in the other levels of the spectrum do indeed appear to be evolving' (1993b:140). This is clearly an Essentialist premise and Wilber's argument on this point is perplexing. Had Wilber rendered this postulation theologically, it would be permitted as a paradox of the infinite and temporal interface between Creator and creation, but Wilber proffers his argument scientifically and it fails on the basis of self-referential contradiction. Chaudhuri (1975:12) candidly points out that the, '... only ultimate or final state in the life of an individual is death .., but death is

essentially different from genuine enlightenment ...'<sup>347</sup> Since evolution is synonymously change and change is either creatively or entropically directional, it may only be qualified as absolute once it has stopped evolving – in other words, when it has reached absolute stasis or equanimity, but such stasis has a different meaning to that which Wilber espouses in the Absolute Spirit of NDC, and Chaudhuri is right to draw the distinction. If, on the other hand, the end of evolution is more like the Omega Point or Christ Point of Teilhard de Chardin's *Cosmogogenesis* (1965, *The Divine Milieu*), then Wilber is vindicated, but again, it can only be so if he submits his postulations to an Essentialist philosophy.

Such conundrums permeate Wilber's entire description of NDC, but they find no resolution in his empirical suppositions and he would admit as much, but how can it then be defined as Reality, Truth, Suchness, Void, Supreme Identity, and the Absolute? Schneider echoes that, "Ultimate Consciousness" lacks a scientific basis because, by definition, it exceeds the conditions necessary to test it. For example, how can a person verify or falsify "the Ground of all being", "radical absorption", "the void-godhead", or "unbounded end-states"? How can *limited* scientific methodologies (interviews, assessment devices, literary interpretations) ever hope to validate *ultimate* claims? Wilber blithely sidesteps these points' (1989a:474). Criticism of Wilber's rendering of NDC has punctuated this thesis at regular intervals - not because his experience is invalid or valueless, on the contrary, but because the descriptors by which he identifies it, and the empiricist idiom through which he seeks to justify it, are untenable in the methodologies of science by which he seeks to authenticate it. Wilber's interpretation of NDC would be legitimate and invigorating in mystagogical and theological discourses since Christian premises embracing notions of ultimacy, particularly those pertaining to the Being of God, are normative, but different norms apply in science. Despite the procedural sensibility of Wilber's epistemology, his inclusion of transcendental ontologies falls beyond the purview of scientific discourse.

## **6.5 Linguistic Problems in the Study and Expression of Mysticism**

Having surveyed the common phenomenological features of Christian mysticism and contrasted this against Wilber's perspective of NDC, it is now necessary to consider its manner of expression in language more carefully. Notwithstanding the Christian context of

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<sup>347</sup> Chaudhuri (1975:13-14) qualifies that, 'When the true light of enlightenment is kindled in the depth of consciousness, all immature ego desires are consumed without residuum. That is when the true yogi begins to experience the death dance of Shiva in his heart.'

this thesis and the theological criteria which distinguish it from other mystical forms, the study of the non-dual phenomenon will henceforth be scrutinised in its more general sense so as to cohere more accurately with Wilber's perennialist rendition.<sup>348</sup>

Linguistics lies at the very heart of the philosophy of meaning. Stated simply, the communication of meaning is the purpose and function of language. The formulae describing the mechanisms of apprehension which communicate meaning in language comprise a vast and varied matrix of opinion. It is beyond the scope and necessity of the present argument to survey the rarefied details of all these disciplines, but some issues in linguistics reflected against the language of NDC will persuasively illustrate the difficulties of scholarly discourse in mysticism. How, for example, do intentionality and structure in linguistic and symbolic systems transmit meaning in a language whose subject reference is ineffable? Answers to this, and a range of similar questions are crucial to theories of language. Moreover, such understandings are now stylistically crafted to convey specific meanings in different disciplines, and the rising current of inter-disciplinary research has evolved the frontiers of language into wholly new sub-species.

Popular journalist Russ Rymer (1992) candidly describes linguistics as, '... the most hotly contested property in the academic realm. It is soaked with the blood of poets, theologians, philosophers, philologists, psychologists, biologists, anthropologists, and neurologists, along with whatever blood can be got out of grammarians'. British linguist Roger Fowler (1996) describes linguistic codes as instruments of interpretation, organisation, and classification of themes in discourse as the attempt to unravel their meanings. Fowler challenges the legitimacy of ideological customs attached to linguistic familiarities thereby motivating a more incisive and critical approach to conceptual assumptions 'free-loading' on language.

Early theories of language, based on the so-called *AAA Framework* (Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas) suggest that meaning emerges in the relationship between two categories of objects: signs and their significations. Such relationships are normally symbiotically causal,

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<sup>348</sup> In Wilber's own terms, meditation, '... is not so much a part of this or that particular religion, but rather part of the universal spiritual culture of all humankind ... It is, in other words, part of what has been called the perennial philosophy' (1991:76). Thus acknowledged for the purposes of this thesis, Kourie (1992:99) urges a careful qualification of such perennialism by arguing for, '... a wider ecumenism of mysticism which avoids both the claims of mystical autonomy or mystical sameness. Such a model would enable mystical traditions to acknowledge their complementarity and articulate their plurality and thus contribute to a variegated yet global mystical consciousness which is vitally important in this pluralist era.'

contextually adaptive, and theoretically inter-dependant, but not necessarily substantially equal. This definition could fairly apply to the present argument: the mystical phenomenon is symbiotically related to its expressions in mystagogy and mystography; contextually adaptive according to demographic, religious, and cultural variables; and theoretically inter-dependant with mystical theology, but the experience and its expression are not therefore necessarily the same.<sup>349</sup> The clear implication is that the existence of conscious experience can only be verified once it can be linguistically expressed. This argument may be contracted to a definition claiming that consciousness *is* language. Perfunctorily translated for the purpose of this debate, mystical consciousness can then only be said to *exist* when it can be *said* to exist, but since NDC is ineffable it cannot be *said* to exist and therefore cannot *exist*.

How, in view of such paradoxical absurdities, can mysticism qualify as a field of analytical or critical research in academic discourse? The contributions of Wittgenstein and Derrida will shortly shed more light on these vexing enigmas, but a cursory survey of some preliminary issues in the development of linguistics will focus the ensuing discussion. Linguistics established its scientific place in the academy in the nineteenth century with the advent of structuralism, mainly due to the contributions of Ferdinand de Saussure (1815-1913), but the territory of linguistics has broader foundations.<sup>350</sup> Linguistics comprises a growing variety of sub-systems, but at its simplest consists of semantics, which studies the assembly of conventional meanings by dividing words into *senses* and *references*; semiotics which comprises the theory and study of *signs* and *symbols*; syntactics which deals with the *structures* of language; and pragmatics which studies the ways in which linguistic and situational contexts affect meaning which, like the principles of the *AAA Framework*, reveals that meaning and language are mutually causal and contextually sensitive.<sup>351</sup> Wilber (1998a:128-129; cf 1999d:596) rightly adds the further realisation that, ‘... language is not

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<sup>349</sup> Ashley (1995:14) explains similar relationships in Christian contexts, ‘First, whatever else it is or does, ultimately a spirituality is instrumental to an encounter with God, an encounter which is consummated to the degree that it becomes incarnate as a life of discipleship. Second, a spirituality should incorporate one more deeply into the body of Christ. A spirituality is, or should be, a communal, indeed an ecclesial reality.’

<sup>350</sup> For example, phonetics refers to the physical sounds expressed in language; phonology applies to pre-vocalised sounds in consciousness as a means of discerning meaning; morphology studies the internal structure of words; syntax describes the ways in which words combine to form grammatical sentences; and pragmatics considers the ways in which expressions are utilised in language.

<sup>351</sup> The Vienna Circle of philosophers (among them Otto Neurath, John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Rudolph Carnap, Charles Morris, and tenuously Kurt Gödel) played a significant role in the formalisation of semiotics as a field of academic study in their *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*. More recently, Umberto Eco (1932- ), in his *Semiotics and Philosophy of Language* (1984), argues that semiotics is foundational to all academic discourse insofar as it is integral to any research methodology.



[merely] a representation of a pre-given world, but has a hand in the creation and construction of that world.’

Saussure’s structuralist approach to linguistics focuses less on the use of language and more on the underlying systems which determine its semiology. Following the precepts of the AAA *Framework*, Saussure describes language in terms of *signs* which he divides into *signifiers* and *signifieds* (2006). The *signifier* represents the actual expression of a word, and the *signified* its object or image in consciousness. A *sign* denotes the relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified* and therefore closely resembles Dennett’s general definition of phenomena. *Signs* only assume meaning in relation to other *signs* and can not therefore transmit meaning in isolation (Macrone 2002:184). Wilber similarly explains of Saussure that, ‘... *signifiers* and the *signifieds* exist as a structure of contexts within contexts within contexts, and meaning itself is context-bound’ (2000:277). Bifurcation, in other words, is a definitive necessity for meaning to be discerned. *Signs* remain independently arbitrary and their relation to that which they *signify* in personal inner experience can only be conditionally corroborated through consensus in communal language (Sanders 2004). There is therefore no way of knowing for certain whether the *signifier* used by one individual to represent a personal experience, a *signified*, is exactly the same as the experience of another individual’s experience of the same name. Consequently, *signs* are not consistently and completely reliable, but in the extent to which they cohere within the parameters of given contexts, it may be said that they represent reality. Coherence, with its implicit mutability and subjectivity, therefore assumes precedence over direct correspondence when the meaning of *signs* is determined in natural language.

In mystagogy, the priority of such linguistic coherence would at first appear to endorse Wilber’s epistemology. After all, the third injunctive strand of Wilber’s reconstructive science promotes communal corroboration as one of the criteria for authenticating NDC. There is however a difference. The observation that communal coherence is unreliable in linguistics weakens Wilber’s argument. Coherence, in Saussure’s thinking, at best suggests the ‘probability’ that the meaning of *signs* will be uniformly apprehended within a community who share similar linguistic contexts, but Wilber’s argument for correspondence cannot be uniformly authenticated. Furthermore, if the meaning of *signs* can only be distilled in relationship, and bearing in mind that NDC has no comparative, it must be deduced that NDC has no meaning. Wilber may agree with this argument since the *Absolute Subjectivity*

of NDC can never reduce to the dualities implicit in the language of meaning, and yet non-duality claims to be the agency of Ultimate Meaning. This paradox establishes the essence of mysticism and it properly forecloses the possibility of linguistic adequacy. The *signified*, the non-dual mystical phenomenon, is therefore excluded from linguistic investigation leaving only its *signifiers* in allegory and metaphor, but since no verifiable relationship in *signs* can thereby be established, it begs the question of how meaning can be ascertained at all? By Saussure's standards, mystagogy must therefore fall beyond the measures of analytical linguistics.

Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) noted a further complication in the quest for meaning. In *On Sense and Reference* (1892) Frege, like Saussure to a point, argued that the meaning attached to a descriptor cannot be shown with any certainty to represent its object of reference (Kenny 2000). In order to establish meaning, Frege argued that meaning must subsist in some other form, a *sense*, which remains true even when *references* vary (The sense of a 'tree' for example, retains its perceptual and conceptual 'tree-ness' whether it is called a 'tree' or not). Frege's idea of a Concept Script (*Begriffsschrift*) introduced in an earlier paper (1879, Baker and Hacker 1980) proposes a formalised language of 'pure thought' which dispels conjecture implicit in the relationship between the subjects and predicates of truth-claims (Frege 1952). In Frege's scheme, as it applies to the present debate, mystical experience need not be reduced as a result of its descriptive paucity, but Frege's postulation only submits to formal systems and cannot therefore be applied to mysticism. Formalism would validly apply to the exactitudes of syllogistic logic or pure mathematics, but such intransient precision cannot apply to the parabolic vagaries of mysticism. At least in this regard, the phenomenon of mystical experience may retain some legitimacy as a *sense*, but according to Frege's precepts it also remains linguistically anomalous.

The innovative work of Saul Kripke raises another interesting question. Kripke (1980) challenges Frege's view that names can have definite descriptions and argues that whilst *references* are necessarily related to their *referents*, the *senses* need not be. Kripke thus distinguishes between what is referentially necessary and what is knowable *a priori*. Like Frege, Kripke applies his theory to modal logic thus placing mysticism beyond the pale of deductive inquiry, but the principle behind the theory may still apply. Notionally, the word mysticism necessarily pertains to the set of anything that the word mysticism connotes, but Kripke claims that any such knowledge is contingent and cannot therefore be determined *a*

*priori*. Consequently, the meaning of the word mysticism is a necessary fact about the word mysticism, but its interpretation, application, and use is not. The spectrum of ideational possibilities, despite their lyrical beauty in, for example, the prose of John of the Cross, or the mystagogical precision of Evelyn Underhill's writings, remains contingent and mysticism remains, to wit, mysterious.

Avram Noam Chomsky's (1996) contribution should be included for its alternative perspective. In the 1950's Chomsky challenged Saussure's structuralism by theorising that humans possess an unconscious innate form of sub- or pre-structural linguistic aptitude. This intrinsic competence, which is not necessarily the same as its performance in spoken language, is often termed *Universal Grammar*. This innate capacity is metaphorically comparable to Carl Jung's notion of the *Collective Unconscious* which Jensen, Mrazek, and Knapp *et al* (2007:1672) define as, '... a reservoir of the experiences of our species.' Whilst Chomsky's *Universal Grammar* does not endure in archetypal forms, it is a form of consciousness which pervades the pre-expressive potentials for knowledge in human consciousness. Significantly, Chomsky's hypothesis closely resembles Wilber's theory of Surface and Deep Structures. Macrone (2002:190) describes Chomsky's belief that, '... these deep innate structures beneath the surface of acquired language must have some essential connection to the makeup of the brain ... In a very basic way, what we can think is connected to what we can say, not necessarily because thoughts and concepts are essentially linguistic (though some would say so), but because the brain is built to acquire speech, and the way it is built must determine the way we think.'

This theoretical coincidence is however, as problematic for Chomsky as it is for Wilber, and both writers have been strongly criticised. Gross and Navega (2000) for example, note that, '... language-based, historical, and cross-cultural examples [indicate that] *Universal Grammar* can quite easily be revealed as nothing more than an oxymoron. To the extent that it is universal, it is not a grammar. And to the extent that it is a grammar, it is not universal.' The fundamental objection aims at the provability or empirical value of *Universal Grammar* insofar as it requires *a priori* assent – the very principle which Kripke denounced. In defence, Chomsky argues that the linguist's task is not necessarily to prove certainty, but rather to offer a most viable theory which must include evidence concerning a person's history, linguistic competence, and various other psychological and physiological faculties and dispositions. Based on these variables, Chomsky admits his theory to inductive

uncertainty, but nonetheless maintains that its failure to establish absolute proof does not necessarily mean that it is untrue or profitless (Huen). Kourie (1992:88) similarly maintains that, ‘... the non-discursive, intuitive nature of mystical experience does not of necessity imply that mystical experience is irrational or that it entails an abandonment of intellect.’ How does Wilber address this apparent disjunction? Whilst Wilber’s description of basic structures broadly coheres with Chomsky’s theory, Wilber does not go so far as to establish a causal link with the brain, but for both philosophers the capacity for language as basic to human consciousness is implicit. For Wilber, NDC is the most basic of all structures since it subsists as the essence out of which all diversity emerges through Involution, and to which all multiplicity returns through Evolution.

The aforementioned linguists have argued that the conscious realisation and expression of the processes Wilber calls Involution and Evolution must be linguistically expressed if meaning is to be derived, but the deepest quality of NDC in mysticism delimits the reach of language and therefore forgoes the possibility of establishing meaning from language. Consequently, whilst meaning can be derived from the language of mystagogy and mystography, the actual experience of NDC must extract meaning through trans-linguistic agencies. Edelman and Tononi (2000a:15) endorse the point by claiming that, ‘No description can take the place of the individual subjective experience of conscious qualia.’<sup>352</sup> Mysticism, in other words, must appeal to alternative or supplementary agencies to determine meaning, but can such meaning be discerned without language, and if so, how is it to be communicated?

The unmediated, unbounded, trans-rational, and ineffable qualities of the Absolute experienced in NDC are definitive in mysticism, and yet it is precisely these obfuscations that contravene linguistic and methodological conventions in academia. This conundrum is reminiscent of a paradox discovered in Russell and Whitehead’s formidable *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913) by Kurt Gödel ([1931]/1962). In brief, Gödel’s theorem cautions that the use of axiomatic methods for deducing logical propositions from a closed system cannot ordinarily provide sufficient proof of both completeness and consistency. Nørretranders (1999:51) explains that, ‘... Gödel’s ingenious idea was to take the assertion “I cannot be proved.” If this is true, we cannot prove it. If it is false, then we can prove it, that

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<sup>352</sup> A *quale* is a general term used to describe the ways things seem in experience. *Qualia* are thus distinguished from phenomena as the *qualities* of things as aspects of phenomena rather than the effect they have on experience or behaviour.

is, we have proved something that is false. The assertion is true if and only if it cannot be proved... The problem rather is that the assertion “I am unprovable” is *true*. It means that truths exist which we cannot prove.’ There will always be truth that lies beyond, says Davies (1992:252), ‘... that cannot be reached from a finite collection of axioms. The search for a closed logical scheme that provides a complete and self-consistent explanation for everything is doomed to failure.’ This rupture in Russell’s argument raises an important question for the present discussion: is it possible to avoid self-referential or circular, and therefore contradictory argument in a linguistic system whose axioms refer to themselves as trans-linguistic concepts?

Russell’s Paradox (*Principles of Mathematics* 1903) is rooted in set-theory where he argues that classes or sets are not equal to the objects they contain. The paradox emerges in one way when the possibility of a ‘Set of all sets’ is considered. Since such an ultimate or ‘Absolute Set of all sets’ is itself a set, it must contain itself thereby negating the difference between what it is and what it contains, and in so doing it breaks its own primary rule.<sup>353</sup> Russell seems to have anticipated these anomalies and extends the possibility of similar paradoxes (such as the Cretan-liar paradox) through linguistics into religious paradigms and reveals the inconsistency of subjects deigning to describe the subjectivity of their own subjectivity. The argument is clearly circular and implies a self-validating meta-language - in this case, mysticism. Whilst it is not a term used by Russell, his theory of sets in linguistics infers this form of meta-language, but such a language is inevitably prone to incoherence – how much more so for a language whose subject reference is ineffable?

If mysticism is the language of the ineffable experience of the Absolute in NDC, then mysticism becomes a meta-language of NDC. There seems to be no way out of the ever-regressing puzzle, and researchers in mysticism would agree, ‘God is by his nature unknowable’ (Newberg and D’Aquili 2001:159). Kourie (1992:93-94) incisively identifies emergent problematic questions:

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<sup>353</sup> In March 1927 Russell presented a lecture to the *National Secular Society* entitled *Why I Am Not a Christian* (Accessible on-line at <http://jeromekahn123.tripod.com/thinkersonreligion/id7.html>). In this lecture, published as a pamphlet later that same year, Russell concludes that, ‘The whole conception of God is ... quite unworthy of free men ... A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage ... not looking back all the time toward a past that is dead ...’ This lecture became famous in Paul Edwards’ edition of Russell’s book, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (1957). In his unpublished article ‘*Is There a God?*’ (originally commissioned by *Illustrated Magazine* in 1952), Russell presented his famous analogy for disproving the existence of a celestial teapot whose very existence is an absurdity to the faculties of reason based on the logical analysis of propositions.

... is the mystical experience veridical, and therefore does it provide insight into the nature of God ... [and] since the mystical experience is embedded in enculturated human construction, does this mean that any postulate is purely relativistic? Clearly, mystical claims regarding the cognitive status and epistemological validity of mystical experiences are not self-authenticating in the sense generally understood by this term.

Wilber similarly subscribes to the transcendence of NDC and describes its language as, ‘... the transmission of word-patterns, [which] is ultimately nothing more than the reflection of reality in the mirror of illusion’ (1993b:42).<sup>354</sup> Wilber is not however, able to reconcile the meta-language of mysticism with the language of science without betraying consistency or coherence. Hans Albert, in *Treatise on Critical Reason* (1985: Chapt 1, Sect 2) notes a similar objection based on a fable told by Baron Münchhausen (1720-1797). The argument, sometimes also known as Agrippa’s Trilemma (based on an anti-foundationalist argument proposed by Jakob Freidrich Fries 1773–1846) runs as follows: All of the only three axioms seeking absolute certainty must fail because, firstly, all justifications in pursuit of certain knowledge have also to justify the means of their justification and in so doing succumb to infinite regression. Secondly, even if it is possible to justify an argument through such regressive circularities, validity is sacrificed in consequence. Finally, whilst it is possible to satisfy an argument by claiming self-evidence (as Wilber does), in so doing the possibility of asserting general provability is relinquished because the same evidence may be perceived and interpreted differently by others. The peculiar ontology of mysticism claims transcendence over such conceptual limitations through vicarious co-definition with the ineffable Absolute, but are such mystifactory ‘loop-holes’ legitimate in linguistics and science? If mystagogy, the study of mysticism, and mystical theology are afforded credible status as a field of critical research, then the answer is affirmative, and such status is now gradually being established in the wider inter-disciplinary contexts of scholarship. However, in Wilber’s scheme the premises of his epistemology conflate ontologies and this denudes the academic credibility of his efforts. Clearly, despite numerous attempts, agreement on the definition of a new epistemological terrain which will accommodate both mystical and scientific discourses has yet to be demarcated. The anomalous character of mystical language is thus established and exaggerated in the general field of linguistics. The sharp analytical instruments of the

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<sup>354</sup> Wilber (1999d:542) makes a point of emphasising the value, yet limitation of metaphor, ‘The fact is, all of these metaphors are useful, because they all emphasise different aspects of a consciousness that is greater than any conceptualisations.’

linguists may prove fatal to truth-claims in mystagogy and mystography for the moment, particularly if language represents the limit of philosophical investigations into truth. This is indeed the view espoused by the early beliefs of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* ([1921]/2001b) and Derrida (1930-2004) in *Of Grammatology* ([1967]/1976), *Writing and Difference* ([1959-1967]/1978), and *Speech and Phenomena* ([1967-8]/1973).<sup>355</sup>

Wittgenstein, following the influence of Russell, Frege, and the Vienna Circle, originally focussed his attention on artificial language. In *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* ([1921]/2001b) he supported the notion of ideal language using logical connectives, but later departed from this view and emphasised the ways in which intention is conveyed through its modes of expression. His approach is sometimes summarised by the aphorism: “the meaning of a word is its use in a language”. In *Philosophical Investigations* ([1953]/2001a) Wittgenstein proffers these linguistic conventions as the means by which the operations of speech function. This motivated Wittgenstein to view concepts referred to through language such as ‘being’ and ‘truth’ as misapprehensions of the relationship between *references* and *referents* - the ‘realities’ which language *supposedly* embodies, but cannot prove (Macrone 2002:65). For the early Wittgenstein, the limit of language represents the limit of conscious comprehension and therefore any attempt to translate metaphysical propositions into rational explanations results in a distortion of both the language and its subject. In this case, both the language and experience of mystical consciousness forfeit the right to verification, but not necessarily utility. If mystical language only claims metaphorical status in its representation of NDC then its discourse remains descriptively legitimate, but if the description pretends knowledge beyond its symbolic status, its truth-claims become inadmissible.<sup>356</sup> Wilber (1993b:14) indeed asserts that metaphorical descriptions, ‘... tell what consciousness is *like*, but not at all what it *is* ... which cannot be analysed intellectually without somehow involving logical contradictions.’ In a particularly flamboyant example Wilber demonstrates the utility of metaphor:

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<sup>355</sup> Wittgenstein and Russell are among the significant philosophers responsible for the formation of British analytic philosophy which frequently tended towards the kinds of empiricism latterly espoused by Hume and Locke. Analytic philosophy typically stands against the more metaphysical tendencies in continental philosophies expressed in existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, and post-structuralism. It is no accident therefore that Wilber refers so frequently to Europe when he refers to philosophy.

<sup>356</sup> Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause (2001:170-171) make the interesting point that science is no less metaphorical than any other form of discourse. In this case, they say, ‘...science is a type of mythology, a collection of explanatory stories that resolve the mysteries of existence and help us cope with the challenges of life... All knowledge, then, is metaphorical; even our most basic sensory perceptions of the world around us can be thought of as an explanatory story created by the brain.’

Indeed, indeed: let the self-contraction relax into the empty ground of its own awareness, and let it there quietly die. See the Kosmos arise in its place, dancing madly and divine, self-luminous and self-liberating, intoxicated by a Light that never dawns or ceases. See the worlds arise and fall, never caught in time or turmoil, transparent images shimmering in the radiant Abyss. Watch the mountain walk on water, drink the Pacific in a single gulp, blink and a billion universes rise and fall, breathe out and create a Kosmos, breathe in and watch it dissolve (1995a:522).<sup>357</sup>

Notwithstanding the possible usefulness of such figurative allusions in the linguistic contexts of mysticism, Wilber's importation of logico-deductive axioms in reconstructive science nonetheless succumbs to the distortions identified by Wittgenstein.<sup>358</sup> This linguistic failure in Wilber's epistemology is highlighted in the post-structuralist argument of Jacques Derrida who likewise rejects definitions which claim absolute truths.<sup>359</sup> In Chapter 3.4.2.1 argument around Wilber's epistemology identified Derrida's belief that meaningfulness can only be distilled by 'stripping' concepts of their extra-linguistic presumptions. In this sense deconstruction reveals the motivational agencies beneath linguistic structures. Whilst Derrida remained ambivalent about his allegiance to deconstruction, he maintained that bifurcations in language, the dualities which Wilber wrestles with so vigorously, necessarily imply interpretive variability or fluidity in meaning. Wilber rightly echoes that it is, '...extremely difficult to adequately discuss no-boundary awareness [NDC] ... because our language - the medium in which all verbal discussion must float - is a language of boundaries' (1981:45). This fluidity unavoidably vitiates the structural stability of language which, in turn, destabilises the security of meaning. Derrida's conclusion therefore also

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<sup>357</sup> Wilber earlier conflates rather disparate concepts in his attempt to explain NDC and he uses a variety of metaphors to do so. He says that NDC, '... is the venture of all ventures, the quest for the Holy Grail, the search for the Philosopher's Stone, the Elixir of Immortality, the Master Game itself' (1993b:284). In justification of NDC's ineffability Wilber later explains that, 'If a Zen master says "Emptiness," and you've had that experience, you will know exactly what is meant. If you haven't had the experience "dog" or the experience "Emptiness", merely adding more and more words will never, under any circumstances, convey it' (2000a:279).

<sup>358</sup> Fisher (1997:67) rightly observes that metaphor is essential to an understanding of Wilber's theory. 'If Wilber and his theses are translated literally, concretely, and behaviourally and are reduced to a level of physical or ego-reality, then they will create more confusion than clarity.' On the other hand, suggests Newberg and D'Aquili (2001:177), 'The ability to explore theology from a neurological perspective can help us to understand, in very powerful ways, the human urge for religion and religious myth.' The apparent disjunction between metaphorical and material descriptions of NDC clearly falls prey to linguistic convolutions based on equivocation between Essentialist and Physicalist interpretations of consciousness.

<sup>359</sup> Structuralism and post-structuralism developed as a result of the contributions of, among others, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Louis Hjelmslev, Roman Jakobson, Jacques Lacan, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Structuralism in linguistics includes the theory that analyses of formal organisations or 'structures' in discourse reveal features of intention and meaning. Structuralism in religion and theology approaches the inner or subjective senses of divinity through the ritual practices or outward manifestations of these implicit beliefs by which societies define themselves.



reveals the inconsistency of Wilber's attempt to employ the rational instruments of scientific language as a means of validating that which can only be metaphorically illustrated.

Wilber is fully cognisant of all these challenges and, using the language of mysticism, wisely quotes the *Lankavatara Sutra* which explains that, '... language, *Mahamati*, is not the Ultimate Truth; what is attainable by language is not the ultimate truth. Why? By means of speech one can enter into the truth, but words themselves are not the truth. Truth is the self-realisation inwardly experienced by the wise through their non-dual insight, and does not belong to the domain of words, duality, or intellect ... The world is nothing but Mind ... All is Mind' (1993b:48).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

A brief survey of the evolution of mystical spirituality from the time of Jesus through the desert traditions, mediaeval spirituality, and into modern and post-modern contexts discloses both perennial and mutable features in the theory and practice of Christian mysticism. The common thread in this history reveals various forms and degrees of transcendent and ineffable non-dual awareness as definitive of mystical consciousness. Questions concerning the ways in which this realisation is effected reveal two broad categories of apprehension and application - the *apophatic* and the *kataphatic* ways. Wilber's integral approach correctly indicates subjective inter-lacing between these preferences, but it simultaneously reveals existential ambiguity in the phenomenology of NDC. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a loose cartography of the qualities which generally seem to manifest in the phenomena of NDC. In NDC these experiences or senses are deemed trans-conceptual and therefore trans-linguistic. This consummate embrace of *otherness* in *ordinariness* in the *Absolute Subjectivity* of Wilber's rendition of NDC creates an explanatory gap as a result of its claim to an unassailable and self-validating epistemology which professes transcendence over all other noetic possibilities. The 'rules' of all forms of academic discourse are thereby broken and researchers in mysticism are now trying to establish new frontiers with intra-disciplinarily legitimate criteria for studying mystical phenomena.

This initiative presents challenges to the scholarly debate between theology and the newly emerging academic study of mystical spirituality. Consequently, equivocation around conceptual, methodological, epistemological, and linguistic approaches to mystical spirituality invariably and necessarily succumbs to incoherence or inconsistency. Smart

(1979:10) is therefore right to point out that the, ‘... difference [the gap] between the two approaches can be encapsulated in the distinction between *existential* and *theoretical* understanding.’ Wilber claims to secure the academic credibility of this mystical frontier in his integral AQAL Model of consciousness, but his prioritised inclusion of the *Absolute Subjectivity* of Suchness, an all-pervading and definitive *Kosmic* Consciousness, extends scientific paradigms beyond their legitimate capacity. As a result, Wilber’s scientific explanation of ordinary consciousness as disintegrated manifestations of supra-natural Consciousness (or Mind) means that the phenomenology of NDC can never be ontologically represented. It is, in other words, a conceptual absurdity to *talk* about the nature of ineffable being. Moreover, even if the *ontos* of this trans-conceptual, ineffable, and absolute quality could be discerned, it could not be authenticated through any ‘known’ epistemology. A form of ‘alter-knowing’ or perhaps even ‘ultra-knowing’ is thus necessary for NDC to be, insofar as it is possible, understood. The anonymous fourteenth century English author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Johnston 1973) emphasised this dilemma and clearly indicates the paucity of reason in mysticism. The reason for this foreclosure is revealed most obviously in language. Analytical linguistic instruments applied to NDC, no matter their theoretical persuasion, are unanimous in their incapacity to properly describe NDC – particularly if it is accepted, as it generally is, that consciousness and language are inextricable.<sup>360</sup> Edelman and Tononi (2000a:212) make the same claim by asserting that, ‘... the sophisticated forms of information exchange developed by humans would not be conceivable in the absence of consciousness.’ How can this assertion possibly be reconciled with a form of consciousness that claims its fullest realisation in ineffable NDC?

Wilson (2000:439) presumes that, ‘... it has always been, and will always be the theologians’ greatest challenge to find some ‘realist’ way out of this conundrum’, and suggests that on-going research in mysticism may eventually present meaningful solutions. If, as Kourie (1992:92) rightly points out, the philosophers of religion can accept that, ‘... the epistemological value of *theoretical* knowledge of mysticism is not dependent on *existential* and experiential knowledge’ [my italics], then an enthusiastic study of mysticism must be encouraged. The necessity of this quest is well stated in Karl Rahner’s famous dictum, ‘... the Christian of the future will be a mystic or he or she will not exist at all’ (1974, [1983]:22).

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<sup>360</sup> At best, language utilises the richness of metaphor, parable, and allegory to point to the nature of NDC, and it often does so with extraordinary poignancy and beauty.

Schneiders (1989:677) similarly affirms that, ‘... only a theology that is rooted in the spiritual commitment of the theologian and oriented toward praxis will be meaningful in the Church of the future.’

The poverty of noetics as it is measured against the existential import of those who claim NDC seems ineluctable. The real and profoundly transforming experience of NDC must be acknowledged, but it is ostensibly unaffected by the extent to which epistemology implies ontology, and this intellectual bewilderment is exacerbated by the poverty of language. This may appear as an insurmountable hurdle to the scholarly pursuit of mystical consciousness and the *Hard Problem* lies at its heart, but the possibility of viable alternatives must nonetheless be explored.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A PHYSICALIST ALTERNATIVE TO WILBER'S PHILOSOPHY OF NON-DUALITY

#### 7.1 Introduction

The foregoing critical appraisal of Wilber's Integral Philosophy acknowledges his model of consciousness as an insightful and comprehensive metaphor within an Essentialist worldview, but Wilber flounders in his capacity to maintain verifiable epistemological protocols in keeping with the scientific idiom by which he claims to authenticate it. These hurdles have been variously and consistently encountered as Wilber's epistemology has been measured against the 'threshold of noetic viability' proffered in the introduction of this thesis. This guiding maxim claims that the intellectual integrity of ontological definitions is dependent on the consistency and coherence of its epistemological standards. It is now persuasively evident that it is incoherent for Wilber to claim a veridical self-evidence of an ineffable, timeless, spaceless Reality realised in NDC through the spatiotemporal agencies of provable science. It is also specious to co-validate the integration of transcendental absolutes with earthly ephemera in an integral model without breaching epistemological standards. Science, or indeed any reason-based discipline is, after all, knowledge in evolutionary process and no theory can therefore corroborate cosmological absolutes absolutely without falling prey to self-referential fallacies. The only recourse is to assign the paradox of NDC to mystery where it enjoys unchallenged experiential and theoretical legitimacy within its own noetic domain without obligatory recourse to rational verification. Wilber's attempt to legitimise NDC through the instrument of reconstructive science settles his argument clumsily alongside the other casualties of the *Hard Problem's* hubris. It is precisely this conundrum that enervates both Wilber's Essentialism and my Physicalist attempt to tumble the *Hard Problem* from its despotic throne. Why, asks the *Hard Problem*, are we conscious at all; how does the brain give rise to, generate, process, or contain consciousness; when is consciousness conscious; is there indeed an ultimate realisation or condition of consciousness and if so, how do we know it since its ontology transcends the capacity of all other faculties of consciousness (Chalmers 1996:5)?

Wilber (1997a:270) acknowledges that there has recently been something of an, '... explosion of interest in the development of a science of consciousness' and yet, says Chalmers (1995b:200), 'Consciousness poses the most baffling problems in the science of the mind. There is nothing that we know more intimately than conscious experience, but there is

nothing that is harder to explain.’ Nørretranders likewise contends that consciousness, ‘... is at once the most immediately present and the most inscrutably intangible entity in human existence’ (1999:iv). Hoffman (2007), also arguing from a Physicalist position, similarly admits that, ‘Despite substantial efforts by many researchers, we still have no scientific theory of how brain activity can create, or be, conscious experience.’ Evidence of this irksome predicament has nuanced every page of this thesis and its resilience to coherent and consistent answers is secreted within *Hard Problem*. This conundrum will now be tackled directly and the tenacity of the explanatory gap between brain and consciousness will become more obvious as a result. The challenge of proposing a cogent explanation of transcendent mystical consciousness within a Physicalist framework is even more difficult and it may currently lie beyond the reach of science. Thus qualified, consideration of a series of Physicalist hypotheses of consciousness may raise the right kinds of questions to yield potentially new insights into the nature of personal inner experience. Moreover, these questions may motivate new thought in scientific considerations of NDC.

## **7.2 Wilber’s Rejoinder: Reductionism and God’s Existence**

Wilber (1999e:415) similarly asks how this, ‘... unbounded consciousness relate[s] to a purely finite, bounded, temporal brain?’ His answer, we have repeatedly seen, finds resolution, ‘... not with the *Eye of Flesh* or with the *Eye of Mind* - but only with the *Eye of Contemplation*’ (1999e:416) which, he says remains, ‘... hidden in the heart of *samsara*, a mystery that absolutely refuses to yield its secrets to anything less than post-formal and non-dual conscious development (1997b:84-85).’ It has also been shown that Wilber (1996e:72) maintains that this post-formal awareness can be empirically legitimised through a *Three Step Exemplar* which qualifies the realisation of NDC as, ‘... the highest science’ (1985:11).

Wilber’s appeal to mystical *gnosis* is creative and credible in spirituality, mystical theology, and indeed aspects of anthropology, sociology, psychology, or indeed any Essentialist philosophy which maintains a bifurcation of matter and Spirit, but is it possible for the science of consciousness to accommodate post-formal phenomena of the kind described in the *Eye of Contemplation*? Wilber thinks not, but there might be alternative ways of conditionally doing so within certain epistemological limits. Wilber does not acknowledge these possibilities, or perhaps he is not adequately versed in recent developments in the science of consciousness. By his own admission, Wilber indicates that he has researched and written the least about Physicalist approaches to consciousness since, in his opinion, it has

already received so much attention (2000b).<sup>361</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of this admission, Wilber is uncompromising in his judgement of Physicalism - describing it without exception as reductionistic and he often does so with caustic derision. In typical prose Wilber says, 'The plaintive call of the dead and ghostly mind echoes down the imposing corridors of today's scientific research' (1995c:108) [where we have become] '... flatlanders ... worshipping at the altar of the merely Descended God ... [where there is] nothing higher or deeper for us than the God that is clunking around in our visual field' (1996c:Np). For Wilber this is 'gross reductionism' which is:

... gross indeed [because] ... mind is reduced to brain; praxis is reduced to *techne*; interiors are reduced to bits of digital its; depth is reduced to endless surfaces roaming a flat and faded system; levels of quality are reduced to levels of quantity; dialogical interpretation is reduced to monological gaze - in short, the multidimensional universe is rudely reduced to flatland ... [where] you have turned all depth into shiny surfaces, then you have perfectly gutted an entire *Kosmos*. You have completely stripped the universe of all value, meaning, consciousness, depth, and discourse - and delivered it up dried and desiccated, laid out on a marble slab of the monological gaze (1995c:121; cf 1999d:502-3; 2000:524-525).

Wilber's reasons for such emphatic prejudgments are based on a number of epistemologically dubious assumptions. Whilst Wilber acknowledges that, '... both of these approaches - the exterior and the interior, the objectivist and the subjectivist ... are profoundly significant' (1995c:112), he remains resolute in his Essentialist bias. In the first instance he assumes that if all, '... human experience is ultimately reducible to patterns of electrical and chemical activity within the nervous system and body ... then there cannot be true thoughts and false thoughts for the simple reason that there are no true electrons versus false electrons' (1996e:30). This is a surprising and flagrant misrepresentation of quantum theory and evolutionary complexity in the science of consciousness, and this will become evident in the following consideration of Dennett, Edelman, Tononi, and Nørretranders' arguments.

Secondly, Wilber (1995c:122), almost naively, challenges us to open any textbook on scientific paradigms where he assures us that all we will find is:

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<sup>361</sup> Wilber explains that his motivation for de-prioritising research in Physicalist approaches is based on, '... (1) [it] is fairly straightforward in its operation and interpretation; (2) there is an enormous amount of work already being done in this quadrant; (3) the data collected in this quadrant, once repeated, tends to be very stable and trustworthy, requiring only modest amounts of interpretation (unlike the interior quadrants, which are made of interpretations). In short, I have written the least about this quadrant not because it is the least important but because it needs the least attention' (2000b).

... an endless discussion of chaos theory, cybernetic feedback mechanisms, dissipative structures, complexity theory, global networks, systems interactions - all described in process it-language. You will find nothing substantial on aesthetics, poetry, beauty, goodness, ethical dispositions, inter-subjective development, interior illumination, transcendental intuition, ethical impulses, mutual understanding, justness, or meditative phenomenology.

This is simply not true. It will also be apparent in the writings of all the Physicalists explored in the following sections that they are determined in their efforts to endorse the experiential vitality of all human senses and values. The fact that their discourse is rooted in science does not intend to strip humanity of the phenomena of subjective interiority, but it does assign the properties of consciousness very differently. Chalmers (1995b:200-219) elaborates that confusion between theorists regarding meanings ascribed to the words 'human' and 'consciousness' exacerbate the problem. He therefore suggests that it would be helpful to use the word 'consciousness' only as a referent for the phenomena of personal inner experience. The advice is well taken and I will subscribe to this definition in the following debate.

For Wilber the human experience cannot be merely physical, it must be extended. The following Physicalists would agree, human consciousness is indeed extended – further into physicality, wherein social, cultural, and even spiritual experience continues to be the complex processes of physicality interacting. Wilber classifies this view as 'Right-Hand Imperialism' (referring to his AQAL Model), and he maintains that it has, '... been the hallmark of Western modernity ... [which] is the belief that the entire world can be fully explained in it-language. It is the assumption that all subjective and inter-subjective spaces can be reduced, without remainder, to the behaviour of objective processes...' (1995c:121).<sup>362</sup> From a Christian vantage-point, Kourie (1998b:433, 438) tenders qualified support for this view, but is more careful to balance and contextualise the reasons for her argument:

Objectivistic philosophy and reductionist theories have contributed to a malaise in society and the church. On the one hand, the fruits of Modernity

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<sup>362</sup> This multivalent approach is reflected in Wilber's AQAL Integral Model of consciousness, but his attempt at a holistic epistemology nonetheless reveals only a metaphor rather than a replication of reality, and Wilber would agree. Nørretranders (1999:46) also reminds us that, 'Only the world is big enough to understand the whole world. No map of the whole world can ever be made that includes everything, unless the map is the terrain itself; in which case, of course, it is not a map.'

and deconstructive Postmodernism have led to a situation where the observable and the empirical are considered the true index of reality. There is a loss of purpose and meaning in life ... the crisis in society and its ramifications in the church is perhaps due to the legacy of modernity and also deconstructive post-modern thought, both of which rely on socially produced discourse comprising self-referential concepts. According to this paradigm, language systems determine our only possible mode of existence and thought, consequently there is no ground of meaning outside our language inventions. Kantian strictures on epistemology, foreclosing veridical religious experience, together with a rationalist appraisal of spiritual perceptions as anomalous quirks have contributed to a rejection of meta-narratives and universal representations of reality (1998: 443,438).

Wilber and Kourie are not the only writers to lament the malaise of post-modern deconstruction. Davis (1998:130) claims in similar style that:

... the flimsy wall that Descartes erected to protect the thinking subject has broken down. Neuroscientists, psychopharmacologists, and geneticists are now off-roading into the wilderness of the human mind, mapping every step of the way. The most cherished images and experiences of the self are being colonized by authoritative scientific languages that threaten to reduce our minds and personalities to complex mechanisms - Rube Goldberg assemblages of genetic codes, mammalian habits, and bubbling vats of neuro-chemicals. Modern psychology can barely keep its hoary old tales alive...<sup>363</sup>

Wilber, Kourie, and Davis are right in their observations, but perhaps the causes behind these trends have supplementary qualifications. There has indeed been a strong orientation towards Physicalistic epistemological and ontological explanations for all human experience since Modern and Post-modern mindsets assumed intellectual primacy. The resultant loss of personal and socio-cultural definition may also coincide with the apparent dilution of clear spiritual identity. The discontent of the alienated and disempowered human 'spirit' has effected subscription to all the world's major faith movements with the notable exception of more extreme fundamentalist responses to globalisation, secularism, and politico-economic and ethnic transformations. In some instances fundamentalism has also reacted to the rising tide of inter-faith cooperation. Thus acknowledged, it is by no means clear that Modern and

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<sup>363</sup> Davis (1998:131) expands his argument with almost evangelical zeal, 'With the continued ideological dominance of reductionist science and the socio-cultural dominance of its technological spawn, the once glorious isle of humanism is melting into a silicon sea. We find ourselves trapped on a cyborg sandbank, caught between the old, smouldering campfire stories and the new networks of programming and control. As we lose our faith in free will or the coherence of personality, we glimpse androids in the bathroom mirror, their eyes black with nihilism - the meaningless void that Nietzsche pegged over a century ago as the Achilles' heel of modern civilization.'



Post-modern Physicalism is directly responsible for the shallow spirituality of the church or the excoriation of the sense of personal meaning and purpose in the world. That does not mean to say of course that modern scientific method and the consequent rise of industrialism, materialism, and exponential advances in technology do not have a significant hand in the shift of human consciousness. No doubt these evolutions influenced or perhaps even supplanted pre-enlightenment worldviews and value systems and therefore vicariously contribute to the present sense of spiritual vacuity, but there are other variables to consider.

In the first instance it has already been argued that there is now a general resurgence of interest in more rigorous and inclusive forms of spiritual learning and experience, and Kourie (1998b, 2006) endorses this view. Moreover, advances in cosmology, astrophysics, physics, genetics, neuroscience, evolutionary theory and a multitude of other scientific disciplines have contributed immensely to the spiritual substance of theologies of creation, providence, and divine immanence. The advances of science have also, possibly for the first time, made theology more ecologically aware. It may in other words be argued that embedded doctrinaire legislations and the consequent intellectual inertia of religious institutions are more directly responsible for the denudation of spiritual value and meaning in the world. It may therefore be interesting to ask how different the world would be if the advances of science were more intentionally and timeously integrated with dynamic rather than static approaches to religious faith and spiritual life.

It is also true that the discourse of Physicalism, in all of its disciplines, subsists in ontologically and linguistically closed systems. Davies (1992:252) uses Kurt Gödel's famous *Incompleteness Theorem* (1931) to demonstrate the point wherein he reminds us that, '... the axiomatic method of making logical deductions from given assumptions cannot in general provide a system which is both provably complete and consistent... The search for a closed logical scheme that provides a complete and self-consistent explanation for everything is doomed to failure.' Whilst Gödel's inconvenient discovery forestalls Physicalist attempts to fully validate self-referencing systems, it unfortunately relegates Essentialist attempts to the same fate because Essentialists are no more able to prove their foundational premises (God, consciousness, Mind, *Absolute Subjectivity*). On the basis of this observation, self-referentiality becomes a pitfall for both Physicalist *and* Essentialist discourses since language mediates the agency of both approaches. It is for this reason that the guiding maxim proffered as a measure of coherence and consistency in this thesis acknowledges, from the

outset, that it can explore and legitimise the ‘experience’ of something *like* NDC physiologically and re-categorise it without reduction in a Physicalist understanding of consciousness, but it cannot entertain the transcendental ontology that Wilber assigns to its nature and cause.

Finally, it is also true that Kantian strictures on epistemology do consign religious experiences to fabrications of consciousness, as do the Physicalist renderings tendered in this thesis, but there is a difference. Rather than NDC being an anomalous quirk, my hypothesis attempts an interpretation which includes the transforming vitality of NDC without reduction of the phenomenon as such. NDC is not that difficult to explain neurologically, but consciousness or NDC as something *other* than just the brain is nigh impossible to explain – and this is the *Hard Problem*.<sup>364</sup> In simple terms Physicalism is unconcerned with the *Hard Problem* because it maintains that consciousness is simply the brain doing what the brain does within its immediate and extended environments (Kosslyn 2005:154). How this happens is another and far more complex matter, but that it ‘is’ so means that there is no duality for Physicalists to resolve since they are, in principle, monists. This is the critical difference; for Essentialists something is lost when Physicalists explain a conscious phenomenon physiologically – even when the phenomenon itself is identically acknowledged. The Essentialist’s meta-narrative imbues the ontology behind the narrative with a causal Reality or intentionality. Physicalists criticise the notion because meta-narratives cannot construct epistemologies to authenticate the ontology of that which is being narrated without the risk of circular redundancy or incoherence, but there might be a ‘back door’ and this will become evident during the course of this discussion.

In brief, recent advances in Physicalism attempt descriptions of consciousness in terms of interactive material processes acknowledging that some of these can be extremely complex and subtle to the point of permitting experiences like NDC, so why should it be reductionistic if all subjective phenomena can be included in the explanation? The issue for these Physicalist interpretations is not therefore to reduce subjectivity to all known information about the efficacy of the brain, but simply to suggest that all inner experience can be accounted for *by* the brain within its extended contexts. The fact that we do not yet fully

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<sup>364</sup> Pickover (2005:111-112) explains that this, ‘... seemingly materialistic approach to mind does not diminish the hope of an afterlife, of transcendence, of communion with entities from parallel universes, or of God Himself. Even Tinkertoy minds can dream, seek salvation and bliss – and pray.’

know how this happens should not foreclose its theoretical viability. More importantly, such arguments comply with my guiding maxim because they remain scientific in the strict sense of the epistemological protocols which empiricism permits. Arguments of this nature have recently gained impetus and significant, albeit hypothetical, research has increased exponentially in the last decade. Wilber nevertheless remains adamant that Physicalism is unconditionally reductionistic because for him consciousness is, by definition, trans-physical. Does this not mean that Wilber remains, at heart, a dualist?

By way of illustration, Wilber claims that the empirical self-evidence of first-person experience is a primary quality which necessarily relegates physicality to a derivation of consciousness. He explains that:

... digital bits scurrying through information networks, or neurotransmitters hustling between dendritic pathways - are not how we *actually experience* our own interior consciousness. For when you and I introspect, we find a different world ... a world of images and desires, hungers and pains, thoughts and ideas, wishes and wants, intentions and hesitations, hopes and fears (1995c:108-9).

This *primordial data*, says Wilber (1995a:110), ‘... is that of consciousness, of intentionality, of immediate lived awareness, and everything else, from the existence of electrons to the existence of neuronal pathways, are *deductions away from* immediate lived awareness [which are] ... and will always remain, *secondary and derivative* to the primary fact of immediate experience [my italics].’ How can Wilber’s integral or non-dual epistemology be consistent if physicality in all its aspects is ‘*secondary*’ to, or ‘*derived*’ from consciousness? The notion is clearly dualistic and Wilber almost appears to endorse it. He says, ‘Consciousness and form, subjective and objective, interior and exterior ... are the warp and woof of a wondrous universe that makes precisely no sense whatsoever if either is dismissed’ (1995c:122). According to Wilber’s description the discourse of opposites must therefore remain dynamic for consciousness, in the ordinary sense, to exist. For Wilber it is only in NDC that these dialectics are resolved, but if NDC is formless or void, is it consciousness at all? Moreover, how does it resolve duality if it is imagistically contentless and noetically inert? Could this not just as easily be interpreted as an act of denial or unconsciousness? The final answer to the *Hard Problem* is revealed most precisely for Wilber (1997c:96-97) in koan-like mysteries of which the following (unreferenced) Buddhist poem is a good example:

This slowly drifting cloud is pitiful!  
What dream-walkers we all are!  
Awakened, the one great truth:  
Black rain on the temple roof.

For a scientist this poem may indeed sound like a disconsolate abdication of responsibility and a feckless resignation to fate, but in Buddhist and indeed Christian mystical terms, this is a misunderstanding of the poem's spiritual profundity. Wilber would therefore be right in his judgement of the scientist's reductionism, but the purpose of the science of consciousness in this argument is not to measure the philosophy beneath the poem directly since it is already clear that such an attempt would result in circular or self-referential redundancy. The purpose is rather to assess the epistemological viability of Wilber's claim to breach the ontological 'gap' between science and the mystical ontology which the poem narrates. The difference is subtle, but important. If both the science of consciousness and mysticism recognise and authenticate NDC as 'real' experience, then the only difference between the two views is the ontology ascribed to its origin and nature. Neither Physicalists nor Essentialists can prove each other right or wrong because their foundational premises imply ontologies which cannot be coherently addressed by each other's epistemologies. Ordinarily Essentialists would in any event not care to do so since their recourse is to faith rather than reason, but Wilber inserts his *Three Step Exemplar* in the *Eye of Contemplation* as a means of establishing its veracity, but having done so he then places NDC beyond the reach of science by making it ineffable. The idea is appealing, but it smacks of chicanery and it must be epistemologically spurious.

Whilst Wilber's reminder of the immediacy of personal inner experience is obvious, it is not obvious why he grants veridical precedence to phenomenology. On what grounds is such priority substantiated? Besides, why should personal experience 'feel' reduced simply because it is physiologically described? Can it be proven that there is a psychological-physiological necessity for belief in *nomena* beyond *ephemera*? If so, does it explain the existence of the world's religions? It will later be shown that Newberg and D'Aquili have developed an argument to explain why human biology projects itself into transcendence. The idea that belief in a Divine Other is necessary is not yet fully substantiated by scientific evidence. The existence of humanity's ability to abstract into highly subjective states of consciousness seems to have stronger grounds for support in the evolution of the nervous system as it developed self-aware responses to the relationship between interior and exterior

domains of consciousness. Dennett's (1987) notion of the *Intentional Stance* explains this hypothesis in more detail and its implications for explanations of NDC will presently be considered. Tracing the evolution of religious consciousness from the earliest evidence of shamanic fertility cults into highly organised faith-systems will also substantiate an evolutionary explanation for the existence of religion as we know it today. As Wilber rightly challenges, we are now evolving beyond mythical-magical mindsets which must transcend the stasis encouraged by dogmatic approaches to religion. Wilber may disagree with the following comment, but is it not also time to realise that Physicalist descriptions of consciousness do not necessarily deprive us in any way of the full spectrum of what it feels like to be human. Again, this argument will be developed in the following sections, but Wilber's inability to see such possibility appears to be hindered by a more fundamental premise, and it is mainly this principle that qualifies Wilber's Essentialism and disables the coherence of his epistemology.

Wilber's essential premise is this: at its summit, '... transcendental methodology constitutes an experimental, verifiable, repeatable proof for the existence of Godhead, *as a fact* ... a truth persistently overlooked by most theologians and religious philosophers ... although *never* overlooked by mystics and sages...' (2000a:284). In *The Eye of Spirit* (1997a:xix) Wilber asserts that this mystical experiment, verified through the *Three Step Exemplar*, '... is one of the simplest *proofs, no doubt, of God's insistent existence*'[my italics]. This is an extraordinary claim to make on the basis of the reconstructive science through which Wilber claims authentication. There is surely no scientific faculty in the academy that would support such a view. As a means of clarifying the point, Davies (1992:101) recounts a story about the mathematician John Barrow who wryly explains that, '... if a religion is defined to be a system of thought which requires belief in un-provable truths, then mathematics is the only religion that can prove it is a religion.' In other words, thanks mainly to Gödel, mathematics is the only coherent knowledge system that can prove that it cannot prove all its truth-claims. Surely this delimitation must also apply to Wilber's epistemology? His narration of NDC may be a true narration, but he is mistaken to suppose that his epistemology can prove it to be so.

Clearly, neither the argument of this thesis nor Wilber's Integralism accommodate dualistic views of mind, but just as clearly the reasons for this agreement are diametrically opposed. The argument of this thesis permits only ideational and idiomatic discriminations between

matter and mind by which it submits that the stuff which is the universe is the only stuff which there is. Consequently the *ontos* of consciousness is purely physical and the various narratives about conscious experience, since they are also operational properties of the brain, are likewise physical.<sup>365</sup> With the exception of ontologies subscribed to through religious faith, it must surely be universally accepted that consciousness would not exist without the brain. No doubt the human brain is capable of extraordinary accomplishments, but we also know that it has operational limitations and is prone to malfunction. We have all encountered moments of confusion, misunderstanding, misperception, forgetfulness, and the simple inability to master skills. In other words, there is no such thing as a perfectly competent and omniscient brain. This means that neither Essentialists nor Physicalists, no matter their philosophical or epistemological expertise, can verify their truth-claims absolutely since they share the same limited brains. The difference is that Physicalists admit this limitation and build it into their narratives, whereas Wilber claims provable *gnosis* of the Absolute.

With these qualifications in mind, the version of Physicalism tendered in this thesis nonetheless admits the metaphorical utility and propriety of mystical language, and it also recognises NDC as a real experience as it is narrated by mystics. It furthermore includes the metaphorical value of all the holonic Waves, Streams, Lines, and States of consciousness delineated in Wilber's Four Quadrant Model. All the while, the version of Physicalism tendered here utilises only scientific conventions in keeping with the guiding maxim of this thesis to measure epistemological coherence and consistency. This not only means that NDC must be a particular manifestation of brain activity under special conditions, but that the meta-narratives of such mystical experiences are likewise operational properties of certain brain processes. In this way the substance of NDC truly is non-dual because it is, to use the loaded term, monistic, but it subsists in what might be more benignly called 'open' or perhaps 'inclusive' monism. 'Open' because it does not delimit the extraordinary capacity of matter to evolve into sufficiently complex structures to enable self-awareness, and 'inclusive' because within such complexity it can create symbolic associations in reason and language. It may therefore be possible, within the closed epistemological systems of Physicalism, to embrace subjective properties and since Physicalism claims that the matter which is the

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<sup>365</sup> Issues concerning ontology and language with reference to the *Hard Problem* were clarified in Chapters One (1.2.1.3.1) and Six (6.5) and do not need repeating here. It is however important to acknowledge that language can have an ontology within the structural, symbolic, and operational processes of linguistics, but the definition of ontology in this sense does not extend to the subjects addressed by language – least of all NDC. It was also noted that theoretical disparities in the modes and capacities ascribed to concepts of being necessarily define and direct the process of ontology.

universe is all that there is, it also adheres to strict epistemological protocols and this means that consistency and coherence are preserved.

### **7.3 Reconsidering Existing Hypotheses: Is it Time for a New Approach?**

Before this argument is developed further it is worth briefly recalling the many other attempts raised against the *Hard Problem* that have hitherto been considered – particularly those mentioned in Chapters One and Five. This distillation is important because it allows us to sift out the many hypotheses that have been proposed over the years that do not fit with the Physicalist rendering suggested here. The most common and seemingly sensible description of consciousness tendered by Naïve Realists supposes that our inner experience of objective ‘reality’ is an accurate projection of that ‘reality’. However, since NDC in Wilber’s terms is formless or void, Naïve or Direct Realism is unable to account for its ontology because there is nothing to project. NDC cannot therefore be considered an experience at all since there is nothing to relate to consciousness. In Physicalism it is now generally accepted that the images the eye ‘sees’ are not projected as ‘those’ images to the brain. All experiences, objective or subjective, exist as responses, processes, or simulations in generally distributed patterns of high density and complexity in the brain, the vast majority of which are filtered out of conscious awareness. This will be explained in due course, but it indicates that the phenomenal ingredients which make up experiences like NDC can be largely accounted for neurologically.

Idealism, in contrast to Realism, proposes that experience is mind-dependant or in some way a representation, construction, or hypothesis of that which we call ‘reality’. There are innumerable extensions of Idealism, but Constructivism and its contingent forms are currently a popular progeny. In this context Constructivism has also not proven passable because NDC would then have to be ‘generated’ by consciousness from an assemblage of accrued experience. This may be contextually valid to a point, but since Wilber’s rendition of NDC sublates and transcends all previous experience, NDC cannot be constructed without adding an ‘additional’ or qualifying ingredient that cannot be constructed – the ineffable absolute, and any constructivist attempt to do so inevitably results in contradiction or linguistic aggrandisement of an experience which is not, or at least cannot be shown to be either real or absolute. The Physicalist usually resolves this dilemma by denying that experience is mind-dependant and it thereby closes the causal gap between mind and

experience. In this way there is no relational dynamic to explain since the mind is simply a synonym for the brain experiencing.

Davies (1992:192) poignantly reminds us that Idealism (particularly in the Platonic and Kantian sense) as the, ‘... relationship between the eternal world of Forms and the changing world of matter is then deeply problematical... [the] naïve attempt to reconcile the changing and the Changeless, the imperfect and the Perfect, only serves to underline the seriousness of the conceptual paradox which dogs all explanations of contingency.’ Doctrines of contingency, from philosophical vantage points, may be either true or not true, but they cannot be coherently argued deductively or inductively (Place 1956:44-45). By way of illustration, it may be deduced from general observation of a group of contemplative nuns reporting non-dual states of mystical consciousness that a postulant or novice in the community will, in due course, have similar mystical experiences. However, since it is not possible to ‘see into’ the novice’s head, her report must remain contingent. The novice may be telling the truth, and there may be no reason to doubt her, and she may even believe that her experience is indeed the same as that of her senior sisters, but neither she nor any one else can know that for certain. Conversely, even if a specific and detailed account of this group of contemplatives’ mystical encounters is incisively investigated and narrated with all the quantitative and qualitative methodologies available, it is still not possible to draw general inductive conclusions because the conclusion has to extrapolate general truths from unprovable premises. The advantage of Physicalism is that it recognises this limitation within the confines of its formulae as a necessary cornerstone to the legitimacy of its epistemology. It does not therefore pretend knowledge beyond that which can be empirically observed and tested in the public domain, but it must admit that its hypotheses are deductively assumed – at least until they are sufficiently tested to legitimise their status as theory. In this sense Physicalism can delineate and group the phenomenal properties of states resembling NDC and compare them with a number of measurable variables based, for instance, on the findings of neuro-chemical or neuro-pharmacological analyses, Electron Encephalography, Positron Emission Tomography, Computerised Tomography, Magnetic Resonance Imaging, Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Imaging, and a variety of quantitative approaches to socio-cultural and religious studies. It will not however, claim ‘knowledge’ of ontologies inferred from the experience, like God or *Absolute Subjectivity*.



The problem of contingency, which seems endemic to Essentialism, has propagated a wide and often convoluted variety of sub-theories. Versions of Epiphenomenalism, for example, argue that consciousness is the product or by-product of advanced nervous systems which means that consciousness is causally dependant on the brain whilst remaining in some way 'independent' of the physiology which mediates it. Every conscious event thus has a physical basis, but consciousness is not therefore ontologically equal to the physicality of the brain. There are, in other words, properties of consciousness which physicality cannot explain and since NDC is deemed to be the highest expression of consciousness, Epiphenomenalism is unable to fully decipher it. Physicalists, on the other hand, simply deny that consciousness is anything other than the functioning brain and would not therefore assign the same 'kind' of existence to that which appears in the brain as consciousness. As was qualified in Chapter One, it depends on definitions ascribed to ontology, but in the strict sense there really is only 'one' ontology for Physicalists – matter itself. Despite this apparent limitation, recent advances in the science of consciousness are increasingly able to sanction highly subjective states of consciousness as physical states, and their explanations need not denude the quality of the experience itself.

In similar vein to Epiphenomenalism, theories of Emergence subsist in dualistic metaphors which also struggle with explanations of causality. John Searle is among the best known exponents of this view. Searle (1983, 1992, 1997) proposes a non-dual causal approach to consciousness as an irreducible physical phenomenon, but qualifies that consciousness is 'caused' by brain states. He argues that consciousness is essentially a first-person subjective phenomenon which cannot be reduced to third-person or neural correlates. Despite Searle's disclaimer, the idea that objectivity *causes* subjectivity is clearly bifurcated. Theories of Emergence therefore imply synergistic overtones in the sense that the whole cannot be explained only in terms of reduction to its accumulated parts. It is understood that a single brain cell cannot cause complex consciousness, but that the whole brain can. In terms of the present argument, that which 'emerges' from the brain as NDC thus requires a kind of meta-explanation, but meta-theories require meta-meta-theories to explain antecedents and the process again ends in circular redundancy. Theories of Emergence, in other words, are unlikely to causally explain the phenomenon of NDC without falling into reductionism or solipsism.

Stronger monistic orientations find solace in Identity Theses which simply argue that brain and mind are two conceptually or linguistically different expressions of one substance since conscious states are explained in terms of brain states. Physicalism is more accommodating of Identity Theses and its general terrain is not far removed from the argument tendered in this thesis, but care must be taken to note differences in important details. Spinoza's Double Aspect theory (Della Rocca 1996), for example, is an alternative extension of the Identity Thesis and proposes a form of Panpsychism which co-substantiates God and nature wherein the apparent differences between matter and Mind are simply alternate perspectives of one Reality.<sup>366</sup> It has become evident that Wilber's thesis is very closely aligned to this view and differs only in the properties he assigns to NDC. Property Dualists submit a tangential and idiomatically dualistic version of the Identity Thesis by supposing that consciousness *as* experience has a distinct phenomenal property, but that such properties do not imply consciousness as ontologically separate from matter. Inasmuch as supporters of Identity Theses and Property Dualism account for the differences between conscious and material phenomena on the basis of idiomatic variance of a single substance, they still have difficulty explaining what consciousness is if it is phenomenally different from the brain. They are pressed, in other words, to explain what a property is if it is not the brain. The *Hard Problem* therefore conserves a subtle presence in Identity Theses whereas the Physicalism proposed in this thesis includes narratives of mystical phenomena as physiological processes. The suggestion may sound intuitively wrong, but it has already been argued that subjective experience need not be diluted as a result. Epistemology and ontology are therefore inextricable if meaning is to be established and it can only do so if its methodology coherently and consistently bonds its epistemology to its ontology. The Physicalist will therefore question whether the relational dynamic between the brain, properties, and consciousness in Property Dualism can be coherently verified?

On the more dualistic end of the spectrum Interactionists maintain that brain and mind are indeed ontologically different, but mutually and causally engaging. An unpersuasive derivative of Interactionism is Occasionalism which contends that the ontological and causal gap between matter and mind is synchronised by divine intervention. Leibniz's (1646-1716) concept of pre-established harmony is an advance on Occasionalism in its proposal that

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<sup>366</sup> Chalmers (1995b:200) is another adherent of this view, 'I put forward my own candidate for such an account: a non-reductive theory based on principles of structural coherence and organizational invariance and a double-aspect view of information.'

divine design set the interactive programme between matter and mind in place with creation, but it then begs the question of how the Mind of God causes the human mind to operate within the closed system of physicality, and if God did so, why God would impose such a limitations (Jolley 1995)? Again, unless recourse to mystery is conceded, the *Hard Problem* remains intact. This hypothesis is akin to the postulates of Supervenience which sustain beliefs in parallel with theories of Emergence in the sense that consciousness remains ontologically inextricable from the brain, but retains an ontology which eclipses the capacities of physiology. The ontological implications of these ideologies are clearly beyond the grasp of scientific conventions and it is for this reason that Wilber's epistemology should also be challenged.

### **7.3.1 An Elaboration: More Reasons Why a New Approach is Necessary**

If all of these hypotheses and their variously dependant off-spring fail to adequately address the *Hard Problem's* challenge, then it may be assumed that this thesis favours a form of non-dual eliminative materialism, but this is mistaken. Contra the claims of eliminative materialists who generally assert that consciousness does not actually exist, the argument here firstly encourages the necessity of asking the right categories of questions. As a result it should be able to challenge and stretch Essentialist assumptions so that discoveries in the science of consciousness can contribute to the discovery of more productive answers to the *Hard Problem*. Secondly, recent proposals from 'open' or 'inclusive' monists are tendering increasingly sensible and perhaps even provable alternatives to Essentialist presuppositions. Whilst such alternatives may require radical revision of some Essentialist premises, the sacrifice may add rather than detract from the fecundity of subjectivity in consciousness research. These possibilities are therefore explored most effectively from a somewhat sceptical and terse Physicalist vantage-point, but it is inordinately difficult to do so if one's own spiritual instinct, intuition, and personal experience is so naturally inclined to Essentialist dispositions. Clearly a compromise is equally untenable, but perhaps a re-thinking of consciousness as that which the brain is may provide sufficient grounds for at least entertaining the possibility that NDC and experience of God could also be something that the brain does.

By way of metaphorical example, let us assume, from our knowledge of quantum physics that an electron finds itself in the vicinity of other particles in the brain, which in turn have atomic associations, which in turn form part of a molecule, which in turn make up cells which

constitute the entire brain. The brain is inter-dependant with the body, who is thus constituted as a person, who is a member of a family, community, race, and species; all of whom are intimately connected with and dependant on all the other planetary systems like atmosphere, gravity, and bio-systems. The earth, in turn, forms part of our solar system, which in turn forms part of our galaxy, which in turn forms part of the universe – and there, insofar as we can tell, it ends – unless we subscribe to ‘multiverse’ or any number of other more recent hypothetical developments from earlier Big Bang theories. This inter-folding scheme is entirely in keeping with Wilber’s holonomy. The combined wisdom of cosmology, physics, biology and a variety of other disciplines will therefore tell us that the brain could not exist and do what it does without all these universal variables in place and in the correct balance. The odds of that happening by evolutionary accident are so remote as to be almost incalculable. It is at this point that arguments for ‘creation by design’ fill the ‘gap’ and claim resolution of the *Hard Problem*, but the argument continually fails because the advances of science keep filling the gaps. Without qualifying the idea with the appropriate complicated mathematical formulae, statistically, it may be argued that even though the ratio of probability that the universe may produce a human brain is so extremely low, the sheer numbers involved in cosmic possibility still ensure that there will be several billion chances that it could happen. Richard Dawkins’ now infamous and controversial bestseller, *The God Delusion* (2006:137) endorses that:

It has been estimated that there between 1 billion and 30 billion planets in our galaxy, and about 100 billion galaxies in the universe. Knocking a few noughts off for reasons of ordinary prudence, a billion billion is a conservative estimate of the number of available planets in the universe. Now, suppose the origin of life, the spontaneous arising of something equivalent to DNA, really was a quite staggeringly improbable event. Suppose it was so improbable as to occur on only one in a billion planets... even with such absurdly long odds, life would still have arisen on a billion planets.

Clearly a great deal of guesswork is implicit to Dawkins’ conjecture, and to date there is insufficient evidence to corroborate his view, but the principle is at least mathematically reasonable. The odds of brains evolving, given the colossal amount of stuff in the universe and the astronomical number of ways in which that stuff can combine and interact in the universe, makes the existence of brains and consciousness less of a miracle than may at first

appear to be the case.<sup>367</sup> Davies (1992:210) explains more eloquently that the, ‘... intrinsically statistical character of atomic events and the instability of many physical systems to minute fluctuations, ensures that the future remains open and undetermined by the present. This makes possible the emergence of new forms and systems, so that the universe is endowed with a sort of freedom to explore genuine novelty’. Earlier in the same text Davies (1992:117) maintains that it is therefore possible for evolutionary systems to become, ‘... complex enough to engage in self-reference.’

These simple illustrations serve only to expose the importance of realising that within the astonishing interconnectedness and interdependence of everything in the universe, and given statistical and numerical probabilities, divine intervention seems less and less necessary to explain the existence of consciousness. Moreover, by evolutionary and mathematical inference, consciousness is surely not as accidentally implausible as creationists would have us believe. A similar, and possibly stronger, more provable argument may be constructed on the basis of evolutionary theory and natural selection, but the point has been made – a ‘Spiritual or Ideal Pre-form’ is no longer required to justify the existence of human consciousness, and Essentialist suppositions that dislocate consciousness from the brain are increasingly pressed to legitimise their truth-claims. The problem for science is that it has not yet fully developed the skills to prove that consciousness *is* the brain because, unlike almost everything else in the universe, consciousness subsists primarily in qualities rather than quantities. It is for this reason, suggests Newberg and D’Aquili (2002:152) that we have no choice as scientists but to turn to:

... the more subjective approach of the philosophers. After centuries of inquiry, philosophers have come to suggest that true reality possesses an unmistakable quality. The Stoics defined this quality as the *phantasia catalyptica*; certain modern German thinkers call it *Anwesenheit*, and phenomenologists describe it as intentionality.

Newberg and D’Aquili’s thesis will be examined in the following sections, but intentionality in this sense imbues the brain with a purposive quality. This approach to intentionality is also a significant substrate of Searle’s (1983) philosophy. Searle explains intentional states in terms of their directional functionality which can be either world-to-mind, mind-to-world, or

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<sup>367</sup> Dennett (2006:120) similarly explains that, ‘Evolution is all about processes that almost never happen. Every birth in every lineage is a potential speciation event, but speciation almost never happens, not once in a million births. Mutation in DNA almost never happens - not once in a trillion copyings - but evolution depends on it.’

null. There is, in other words, a differentially causal relationship between the brain and that which it responsorially experiences and acts upon. The brain must however, have a mechanism by which it mediates these relationships and Searle calls this capacity ‘The Background’. This ‘Background’ is described by Searle as sets of predispositions, abilities, and presuppositions which are not in themselves conscious agencies, but enable all the representational content of consciousness. The subtle presence of a pre-sentient ‘set of instructions’ is clearly implied and whilst these pre- or unconscious operational guidelines may be physiologically inherited, Searle is unable to prove them as such – hence his designation as an exponent of Emergence. Intentionality as a necessary pretext to definitions of consciousness may therefore not be required. Freeman (2000:24) says that, ‘The fact that consciousness need not enter into the description of intentionality opens a new vista. Consciousness is not a good place to start a theory of brain function, because there is no biological test to prove whether consciousness is present in a supine subject.’

How and why consciousness appears to have such a different kind of existence to almost everything else that exists (quality rather than mere quantity) is clearly more difficult to ascertain and explain. Humphrey (2005:113) similarly concedes that, ‘... it might seem - and even be - impossible to explain how a brain process could actually *have* the quality of consciousness [the *Hard Problem*]...’ but suggests that, ‘... it might not be at all impossible to explain how a brain process could be designed to give rise to the *impression* of having this quality.’ Humphrey is interested in the evolutionary emergence of consciousness, but it must be asked whether there can be a discernable difference between consciousness as a substantial *quality*, and the *impression* of such a qualitative substance? How could we make such a distinction since our consciousness is the subject of its own enquiry? The Buddhist asks whether an eye can see itself or a tooth bite itself? It is for this reason, says Lorimer (2001:233-234), that we, ‘... need to somehow get beyond or above [consciousness] and achieve what Husserl called “transcendental subjectivity”.’ This is a dualistic assertion, but it is because of all the anomalies hitherto discussed that Chalmers (1996:121-122) suggests the construction of a new kind of science and this possibility will now be explored.

#### **7.4 The Epistemological Context of a Physicalist Approach**

Preliminarily, Physicalism, as a conceptual refinement of older versions of Materialism, still maintains that the stuff which is the universe is the only stuff which there is, but as the former holonic illustration demonstrates, it also recognises that that stuff can do astoundingly

complex and innovative things. As the 100 billion (give or take) neurons within the electrochemical processes of the human brain interact within the highly complex matrix of its internal and external habitats, it has developed the remarkable, indeed fantastic ability to hypothesise, dream, believe, and cultivate the incredible minds of Epicurus, Thomas Aquinas, Teresa of Avila, Rumi, Vincent Van Gogh, Friedrich Nietzsche, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Albert Einstein into glorious existence. In many respects the remarkable achievements of matter in evolution reveals a story more wondrous than the myths and parables of religion, and yet we are still not sure how this happens.

There are a multitude of current hypotheses which show increasing degrees of promise, but whether any of these measures up to the quantitative precision ordinarily required by science remains to be seen. It is nonetheless generally (if heterogonously) conceded that consciousness as the brain has some kind of cognitive or information processing capability which allows self-representational qualities, but it is difficult to justify this in Physicalism (Brook and Raymont 2006). Brown (2006:729) surmises that whether we prefer theories of, ‘... correlation, supervenience, causation, or identity [or indeed any of the theories listed above] as an account of how the mind and brain relate, [we] will need to provide an account of what states of the brain this relation is to hold between.’ To date these hypotheses have not been sufficiently tested to validate complete Physicalist theories of consciousness and this failure gives rise to a series of additional problems – and opportunities.

Chalmers’ (1996:121-122) is therefore right to suggest that the problem of consciousness, ‘... goes beyond any problem about the explanation of structure and function, so a new sort of explanation is needed...’ This suggestion is clearly more difficult to address unless the ontological root of consciousness is redefined. One such proposal has attracted some interest because it attributes only virtual existence to consciousness and thereby denies it a ‘real’ ontology. In so doing it solves the *Hard Problem*, but does it conceal epistemological problems of its own?

#### **7.4.1 Excursus One: Could Consciousness be a Simulation?**

Deikman (1996:350-351) suggests that the feeling of ‘what it is like to be me’ is the cause of the scientist’s bewilderment when it comes to answering the *Hard Problem* because, in a manner of speaking, it dupes us into believing that there is a self inside the body as a thinking thing which is observed by an ‘I’ – a kind of watcher-self. Deikman’s Essentialist

submission to an existential 'I' claims that there is no other physical 'self' to observe since we are in our totality simply aware 'I's'. This proposal also resolves the problem of duality, but it does so in similar terms to Wilber and cannot explain its own ontology. What, after all, is this 'I'? This type of question often forms the locus of meditative techniques, particularly in Buddhism, but if Deikman's answer is 'awareness' then he still has not answered what this awareness is or how it is the brain. Deikman's idea is aligned with the Husserlian (1970) notion of the 'transcendental I' in the sense that this 'I' is something that precedes experience. Ross (2003 67-85) similarly notes that, 'Observing one's own behaviour creates the subjective sense that a self-directed cognitive system is in action', but rightly concludes from a Physicalist perspective that this cannot be shown to be so. Nørretranders (1999:191) describes a simulation as a, '... dynamic interpretation, a hypothesis, and thus a prediction. Our experience of reality is in a sense an experience of our simulation of what goes on *out there*.' Nørretranders (1999:323) therefore claims that this 'I' is not the same as the empirical 'I' but a, '... simulation behind the user illusion.' In an attempt to clarify the proposition that consciousness is a simulation Gamez (2007:34-35) explains that:

If everything that we experience around us is a virtual simulation, then there is no problem about how one part of the simulation - our bodies - can be separate from another part - the objects that the brain experiences. Both the virtual body and its virtual objects can be integrated into a single virtual reality - constructed by the real brain using data from the senses - without any need for mysterious physical properties.

The idea that consciousness describes the brain's ability to construct virtual realities or simulations as a means of hypothesising responses to inputs constitutes a form of Indirect Realism. The notion, says Gamez (2007:63), is quasi-Kantian and, on the basis of its hospitality to subjectivity, is able to account for phenomena like NDC, but can it prove it? Davis (1998:157) narrates Tart's (1975, 1986) rendition of consciousness which also proposes that consciousness is a simulation. Davis interprets this to mean that consciousness is, '... a determined product of essentially arbitrary perceptual filters, culturally conditioned reflexes, and habitual ways of reading the world rooted in our biological past (1998:157-158)' This may smack of post-modern relativism inasmuch as these simulations are too arbitrary and inclined to aberration to be consistently reliable. Whilst Husserl's hypothesis attempts to show that it is in some way possible to 'observe' and analyse the phenomena we immediately perceive, Tart recognises that the randomisation and imprecision of such phenomena makes the enterprise too abstruse to validate scientifically. Therefore, if



experiences that ‘feel’ timeless and spaceless of the kind described by Wilber’s *Absolute Subjectivity* are encountered, they must be assigned to categories of phenomenology, but is phenomenology science? Forman (1998b:188) maintains that there can be:

... many ways to explain an unusual experience: one might say it was the result of what one ate for dinner, a faulty memory, psycho-somatic processes, a quantum microtubule collapse, or an encounter with Ultimate Truth. Without further argumentation, phenomenology cannot serve as the sole basis for any theory of reality. It may be taken only as a finger, *pointing* in some direction, rather than *conclusive evidence* for or against a particular thesis.

Forman nonetheless tries to coax metaphysical hypotheses out of phenomenological descriptions, but he still has not addressed the *Hard Problem* as it relates to NDC. This may be phenomenologically true, but consciousness as the brain is nonetheless reliable enough to construct the extraordinary edifices of philosophy, science, and mathematics. The problem from a scientific point of view says Lloyd (2006) is rather that, ‘... consciousness is not an object that can be counted or related to some other object.’ To complicate matters further, says Davies (1992:192), ‘... in our search for the most secure form of knowledge we are inevitably led to timeless concepts ... because real truth, by definition, cannot change with time.’ At this early stage the problem has already assumed a philosophically enigmatic character and Davies (1992:xv, 90) continues to explain why:

However successful our scientific explanations may be, they always have certain starting assumptions built in. For example, an explanation of some phenomenon in terms of physics presupposes the validity of the laws of physics, which are taken as given. But one can ask where these laws come from in the first place. One could even question the origin of the logic upon which all scientific reasoning is founded... It is sometimes argued that the laws of physics came into being with the universe. If that was so, then those laws cannot explain the origin of the universe, because the laws would not exist until the universe existed.<sup>368</sup>

Davies’ lucid reminder, at least from a reason-based epistemological vantage point, shuts down any capacity of the brain to apprehend anything resembling Wilber’s timeless, spaceless, and formless *Absolute Subjectivity* because we already know that the brain is the product of matter evolving in time. According to Macrone (2002:69), Søren Kierkegaard, for different reasons, likewise criticises philosophical preoccupation with ‘essences’ since there

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<sup>368</sup> Davies (1992:80-81) clarifies that, ‘I have already indicated my belief that the laws of nature are real, objective truths about the universe, and that we discover them rather than invent them.’

is no way of ascertaining ultimate certainty through a supposed underlying reality or universal imperative. How would this conundrum change if it could be proven that consciousness is indeed a simulation? If, to state the supposition more crudely, the brain is simply a *hypothesis-making machine*, and we choose to call our personal experience of such hypotheses consciousness, then surely the rules of science can apply and legitimise NDC as a simulation?

Clearly part of the problem is presented in the lack of a precise functional definition of what experience is. Forman (1998b:197) maintains that it would be more useful to conceptually and linguistically distinguish between, ‘... *merely* being aware or awake from its functional activities.’ He proposes three categories of experience: firstly there is the immediacy of first-person self-awareness which may persist without intentional content (I am conscious of my consciousness); secondly there is ‘awareness of’ in the sense of directional associations with the objects of consciousness (I am thinking about or experiencing something); and finally there is ‘pure awareness’ which describes consciousness without intentional content (‘I am conscious’ in a sense which may be reminiscent of something like NDC). In either case, if consciousness in all three categories is indeed a simulation, then all three modes of consciousness definitively qualify for the same degree of legitimacy. There cannot, in other words, be more real or less real simulations since that which deigns to measure the simulation of realness must itself be a simulation. The idea is both confounding and intriguing, but the hypothesis does solve the *Hard Problem*. Unfortunately it raises a problem of its own. If consciousness is indeed a simulation then any Physicalist proposal is as much a simulation of possible realities as Essentialist hypotheses. Physicalism can therefore claim no verifiable advantage over any other hypothesis since any premises it sets in place to do so are themselves simulations and again the process ends in circular redundancy.

Despite the incisive intellectual effort invested in all the hypotheses and their innumerable offspring hitherto considered, it seems there is always a legitimate obstruction which thwarts attempts to establish an un-contestable theory. Invariably we are back in the un-consoling arms of the *Hard Problem* and the struggle continues. Williford (Nd) articulates the dilemma cogently by explaining that those intent on defeating dualism:

... have sometimes taken their critique so far that they have made it difficult to see what connection introspective data bear to the theory of

consciousness. An unattractive dilemma looms: either [1] pare down the pretensions of phenomenology to such an extent that introspective data play at most a minimal role in the theory of consciousness, and thereby salvage Physicalism, or [2] accept the traditional view of the powers of introspection, and forsake Physicalism. I argue that introspective data can and should play a heuristic and regulative role in the construction of a Physicalistically acceptable theory of consciousness.

In the hope that Williford may be right, it is now an opportune time to begin the process of clarifying what NDC can and cannot be in a Physicalist theory of consciousness.

### **7.5 Finding Criteria to Moderate a Physicalist Approach to NDC**

It was indicated in Chapter One that only a multi-methodological approach would adequately accommodate an appraisal of Integral Philosophy. However, since Wilber's primary agency of interpretation and validation for the ultimate definition of his entire scheme in NDC is based on reconstructive science, the principles inherent to scientific method must assume adjudicating priority. In other words, since the *Three Step Exemplar* applied to the *Eye of Contemplation* is NDC's validating criterion, and since NDC sublates and transcends all other possible ways of knowing, it must be assumed that the reconstructive science applied in Wilber's *Three Step Exemplar* must likewise sublate all previously enfolded epistemologies. In this way multiple perceptions of ontology should avoid confusion by adhering to this one consistent and coherent epistemological standard, but it has been repeatedly and variously shown that Wilber is unable to maintain such cogency. More importantly, it is now clear that Wilber's rendition of reconstructive science cannot validate the 'reality' of NDC and this epistemological failure at the very apex of his Integral Model seeps through the entire spectrum of consciousness. Is there a way in which this discrepancy can be scientifically solved without diluting the experience of NDC?

If the universe is indeed governed by natural laws, then the discovery, articulation, and verification of those laws is what defines science. It has already been argued in Chapter 4.2 that current varieties of science will go about discovering, articulating, and verifying those laws in different ways, but they share a common dictum which always submits to replicable and objectively testable verification. The linearity of the idea may sound dated, but the Baconian principle still holds true that hypotheses must be experimentally tested and observably authenticated to qualify as theory. This is the foremost criterion which classifies science as science and its implicit empiricism, no matter the ontological domain of its

inquiry, must be consistently observed. This restriction is a major hurdle for the science of consciousness because consciousness cannot be directly observed in the ‘ordinary’ sense – it can only be phenomenologically inferred. There is certainly a growing body of evidence correlating observable neurological functioning with particular states of consciousness, but the ‘explanatory gap’ between the brain and all the sentience which defines our inner worlds is a long way from being persuasively closed. For now the science of consciousness largely surveys descriptions of consciousness rather than consciousness itself and this apports much of its discourse to meta-narrative, but is it then still science? Moralés (ND) elucidates this intellectual dilemma clearly:

... recent explanations of consciousness are, at least, incomplete. Usually (but not always) these explanations are coherent with the rest of our current scientific paradigm: they demystify the mind-body problem, and remove its halo of insolubility. However, they tend to dismiss philosophy, giving up command to neurosciences. I will argue that science and philosophy do not oppose each other in the study of consciousness; on the contrary, both are necessary to solve different aspects of the problem. The fact that philosophy seems to be out of fashion in its attempts to solve the mind-body problem is due to the belief of many scientists (and philosophers) that the so-called *Hard Problem* does not exist at all.

The scientific approach is increasingly capable of showing how and even why the brain can process that which we experience as consciousness, but philosophy is still more adept at explaining our sense of it – at least in the extent to which its descriptive methods sound more ‘intuitively’ true because they resemble the ways in which we ‘experience experience’. These descriptions include, for example, volitional capacities like free will, intentionality, self-awareness, relational emotion, and reflective or analytical decision-making. Freeman (2000:171) attempts a validation of this descriptive bifurcation by arguing that consciousness, ‘... is both a mental process experienced phenomenologically and a neural process that *links* and embeds this sequence of brain states, so it is not just a state variable in the brain’ [my italics]. Freeman’s use of the word *link* opens the way for the opportunistic *Hard Problem* to re-enter the debate because it implies the existence, even if it is only a linguistic distinction, of two modes, categories, or qualities of existence. This is only true however, if epistemology is synonymous with that which it describes. In other words, are the proofs of science still proofs if they cannot be linguistically expressed - is proof contingent on its ability to be communicated? Our intuition may be inclined to answer in the negative because not being able to describe something does not mean that it is not true. And yet, if we cannot

say whether something is provably true or not, how can we know whether it is true or not – or indeed whether it even exists? Conversely, we would not want to say that something does not exist simply because we cannot say whether it does. Where does this leave NDC? This is principally the trap that Wilber's reconstructive science falls into and his entire epistemology falters as a result. Bi-focal descriptions of consciousness may therefore be conceptually useful, but they do not justify the co-substantiation of their respective epistemologies. If we accept this dual description then we have lapsed back into a version of Identity Thesis; if we do not then the language of science offers only pallid descriptions of what consciousness feels like. Chalmers is therefore right to argue that for, '... a satisfactory theory [of consciousness], we need to know more than *which* processes give rise to experience; we need to account of why and how. A full theory of consciousness must build an explanatory bridge.' The problem refers again to the qualitative rather than quantitative nature of consciousness. Is there a way in which science can address qualities of consciousness without breaking its quantitative rules? In an attempt to illustrate possible answers these questions, the views of six eminent scientists of consciousness will now be summarised with particular emphases culled from those portions of their work which are relevant to our understanding of NDC. Before these hypotheses are elucidated, a few preliminary points need to be summarised to serve as a foundation.

Thus far a number of important exclusions, distillations, and clarifications of various philosophical and scientific hypotheses have provided, as it were, the raw material for the construction of a legitimate Physicalist description of NDC. From the outset a guiding maxim was set in place to adjudicate the epistemological coherence of ontological truth-claims as a means of guarding against self-reference or contradiction. This is inordinately or perhaps impossibly difficult to do if consciousness is perceived as something other than the physiology which mediates it. This problem reveals the second important point: scientific epistemologies can only verify truth-claims within their own ontological domains. This point has three important sub-qualifiers: (A) Ontology can refer to anything which we think exists. Matter as the stuff which is the universe is the most obvious *ontos* because it is experienced immediately and sensorially, but the point is not that simple. Even though materiality applies as a consistent definition, the nature of matter in Newtonian science, quantum mechanics, and biology may not be perceived as ontologically identical. Moreover, ontology may refer to immaterial rationalities like mathematics; to immaterial subjectivity like emotion; to immaterial symbolic systems like language, to sociological, anthropological, or psychological

features of religious phenomena and so on – the possibilities are seemingly endless. In order to retain coherence in the midst of such multiplicity, epistemology must demarcate its ontological terrain and construct investigative rules which can reveal reliable information about those ontologies. (B) Some epistemologies can reach beyond their own ontological domains to validate other ontologies, and some cannot. Mathematics is a good example – virtually any kind of ontology can be mathematically represented, and language, of course, is effectively the presiding agency of all ontologies, but such epistemological mutability must be cautiously steered if it intends to preserve consistency. The ontology of science, in one way or another, even if it is only inferred, must have a physical base and this would naturally include energy and any kind of existence assigned to particle or quantum physics. Macro and micro physicists may, for example, be very closely related in their disciplines, but their epistemological instruments are not thereby interchangeable because their ontologies, at least in terms of scale, are as extreme as can be imagined. Mutable epistemologies must therefore supplement or qualify their investigative procedures to retain coherence if they venture into territories which are not typically their own. All the while the guiding maxim ensures epistemological consistency and coherence and this definition necessarily implies limitations. (C) A clear distinction was drawn between Essentialism and Physicalism in the Introduction of this thesis. On the basis of the principle of irreducibility, there is no way in which (A) and (B) above can remain true if epistemologies demarcated for Essentialist ontologies attempt judgements of Physicalism and vice versa. The only recourse is therefore to choose a fundamental truth and stay within its conceptual and idiomatic boundaries. Either Essentialism is true or Physicalism is true, but they cannot both be true - and neither can be subsumed by the other. Despite the many attempts to ‘bridge the gap’ it is now clear that a coherent synthesis of Essentialist and Physicalist worldviews, in essence the *Hard Problem*, inevitably leads to an epistemological *cu de sac*. They are, in other words, epistemologically asymptotic and an Integral Philosophy fails on the basis of incoherence if it claims the ability to synthesise them. Science is definitionally physical and it cannot therefore pretend knowledge, let alone transcendent *gnosis*, of an ineffable *Absolute Subjectivity*. Dennett (2006:259) clearly states that, ‘A religious phenomenon will only be recognised as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it – the element of the sacred.’

Secondly, recent evolutions in definitions ascribed to the multiple disciplines which now fall under the banner of science indicate that science is constantly increasing its ontological scope to embrace greater degrees of that which, for the moment, is still subjectively interpreted. Again, the guiding maxim must stay in place if it means to remain intellectually legitimate. The hope invested in these advances indicates that the present conundrums bedeviling the science of consciousness may soon be solved. It is, in other words, unequivocally expected that science will eventually explain consciousness without reduction of its experiential phenomena. Thirdly, many of these scientific advances persuasively debunk a wide range of Essentialist hypotheses. Advances in cosmology and evolutionary theory, for example, provide sufficient evidence to suggest that consciousness does not require anything trans-physical to explain its enigmatic existence. The problem of duality necessarily espoused by Essentialists is losing explanatory currency as forms of 'open' or 'inclusive' Physicalism learn to embrace subjectivity without deference to dualism. As Davies (1992:205) eloquently says, '... every knowable physical principle that forms part of the "secret of the Universe" must not forbid the possibility of our knowing it.'

Fourthly, Post-modern predilections seem increasingly disinclined to subscribe to traditional Essentialist metaphors and increasingly tend towards well informed, verifiable, practicable, liberal, and transformatively effective life paradigms. The legitimacy and authority of inherited religious paragons are consequently eroded as those in this 'new age' of enlightenment seek out more intellectually feasible ideals. Finally, advances in the science of consciousness are increasingly able to explain not only what consciousness is, but also how consciousness is the brain, why it evolved to do what it does, and why it uses simulation and abstraction as a means of self-propagation. This does not mean to suggest that consciousness 'is' a simulation as suggested in the former excursus, but that the brain has the ability *to* simulate scenarios as a means of assessing experience and hypothesising possible responses. Clark (1997:141) explains that:

... since 1970 there has been a move away from the metaphors of linear information processing, and the concept of self-organising systems has had a huge impact on the way neurobiologists and philosophers speak of consciousness. There has been a shift from symbols to connectivity, from local rules to global coherence, from information processing to emergent properties of a complex self-organising system of neural networks. Unlike a computer, the nervous system interacts with its environment by continually modulating its own structure... This combination of decentralisation,

recurrence, ecological sensitivity, and distributed multi-dimensional representation constitutes an image of the representing brain that is far removed from the old idea of a single, symbolic inner code...

This summary proposes that consciousness is not a differentiated unity of spirit and matter, but a multi-skilled, highly complex, integrated, adaptive, and non-dual physical process wherein consciousness *is* the brain experiencing. There is no physiological reason why that which is subjectively described as mystical experience, under certain conditions, cannot also be a brain process intended to instil all the phenomenal qualities associated with NDC – oneness with the universe, equanimity, inner peace, wisdom, and effective value-based life-transformation. A survey of recent theories postulated by six eminent scientists of consciousness will now inform the debate and lead to possible new insights.

### **7.5.1 The Multiple Drafts Model and Heterophenomenology: Daniel Dennett**

Physicalistic neuroscience, evolutionary game theory, acerbic anti-Cartesianism, and a scrupulous loyalty to the empirical protocols of scientific method define much of Dennett's approach, and yet he argues for the vitality of the 'sense' of *self* which embodies all remarkable features of personal inner consciousness (1993:39, 430).<sup>369</sup> Dennett recognises the implicit difficulties in trying to substantiate such a view and freely admits that, '... it is proving to be fiendishly difficult - but not impossible - to figure out how the brain works ... something systematically difficult to discern from the perspective of reverse engineering' (1993:273). This reverse engineering traces the origins of consciousness through Darwinian principles which enable Dennett to conclude that, 'Design can emerge from mere order via an algorithmic process that makes no use of pre-existing Mind' (1995:83).

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<sup>369</sup> Dennett (1993:40) elucidates in his usual flamboyant style that, 'The ground rules for my project are straightforward: No Wonder Tissue allowed. I will try to explain every puzzling feature of human consciousness within the framework of contemporary physical science; at no point will I make an appeal to inexplicable or unknown forces, substances, or organic powers. In other words, I intend to see what can be done within the conservative limits of standard science ... If I wish to deny the existence of some controversial feature of consciousness, the burden falls on me to show that it is somehow illusory.'



### 7.5.1.1 Prolegomenon: Evolution is Foundational

As with Dawkins (2006:137) and Davies (1992:210) above, Dennett argues that evolutionary evidence sufficiently dismisses the necessity for a 'First Mover' as a causal explanation for the existence of consciousness (Alexander 2001:351). He justifies this by explaining that the regular vigilance of accidental mutation in the processes of natural selection, '... gradually turned into regular exploration, and a new behavioural strategy began to evolve: the strategy of acquiring information "for its own sake" - just in case it might prove valuable someday' (1993:180-181, cf 2004:247, 305). The acquisition of information as a life sustaining and life propagating strategy is well substantiated by genetic and bio-archaeological evidence. However, information gathering 'for its own sake' may seem more conjectural, but is it? It is obvious that most people seem to acquire and 'store' vast amounts of information that is not directly or immediately useful, and often we will acquire information simply because it is interesting or entertaining. Why would neuro-physiological evolution cultivate a sense of curiosity or interest - the ability not only to ask 'what' and 'how' questions, but to ask 'what if' and 'why' questions? Could it be a way of projecting consciousness, as it were, backwards and forwards in time in order to discern longer-term survival strategies?<sup>370</sup> Has consciousness developed the ability to recognise the advantageous power of information and intelligence over mere instinct? Dennett's general thesis is that the brain has developed the complex ability to deliberate, anticipate, and prepare itself with information because it has discerned the pattern that the 'smartest' are almost always those who survive most successfully and most comfortably.

This raises another possibility which must not be ignored - the evolutionary pleasure-seeking impulse. It is clear that sentience as it has evolved in mammals is not only concerned with mere practicable survival, but ideally with pleasurable survival. The more advanced consciousness is the more pronounced the pleasure principle becomes. This predilection may be profoundly important for Physicalist understandings of mysticism, after all NDC is not called Bliss, Divine Union, *Nirvana*, *Satori*, or the Kingdom of Heaven for inconsequential reasons. All these acclamations refer to the highest degrees of transcendent 'Pleasure'. Could this mean that mystical consciousness is the fullest evolutionary realisation of pleasure – so consummate that it transcends the ordinary capacity of consciousness to apprehend and

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<sup>370</sup> Dennett (2006:120) explains that, 'Every time something puzzling happens, it triggers a sort of curiosity startle, a "Who's there?" response that starts churning out "hypotheses" of sorts: "Maybe it's Sam, maybe it's a wolf, maybe it's a falling branch, maybe it's . . . a tree that can walk – hey, maybe it's a tree that can walk!"

describe it? The hypothesis is sensibly alluring, but evidence may be too scant to argue in favour of it empirically.

In continuance of the previous point another question may be asked: is the brain now oriented not only to gather as much information as possible, but to generate information experimentally to increase the viability of its future survival as planetary resources are proportionately diminished? If this is so, where does it situate NDC? Is NDC indeed the purest realisation of consciousness ensuring optimum survival value? Do mystics really have the best quality of life in the sense that they are less constrained by dependence on transitory ephemera and are therefore freer from constraint? This may not seem consistent with the qualities often associated with mysticism – like detachment, resignation, self-denial, and the phenomenal qualities of formlessness or emptiness. Described in this way NDC sounds more like an abdication from the evolutionary competition, or maybe the emergent qualities of mystical experience like wisdom, equanimity, inner peace, lack of fear, and inner strength are even more fundamental to survival than the consumer-competitor mentality so prevalent in theories of genetic dominance. In other words, is intelligence and information beginning to assume evolutionary precedence over physical strength?

#### **7.5.1.2 Consciousness and the *Self***

The ingenuity and complexity of Dennett's overall thesis is difficult to summarise, but even a rudimentary survey provides sufficient substance to challenge and inspire fresh understandings of phenomena like NDC. Dennett is stirred to eliminate the dated notion of a trans or extra-material essence by proposing and proving, insofar as it is currently possible, that physiology can account for all that we experience as consciousness. The idea of the immaterial soul, says Dennett (2004:1), '... has outlived its credibility thanks to the advance of the natural sciences. Many people think the implications of this are dreadful: We don't really have "free will" and nothing really matters.' Dennett is intent on dispelling such mistaken assumptions. He achieves this by rescinding the 'common' ontology of consciousness and consigning it to an 'illusion' simulated by, '... a process that can thrive on multiple, superimposed functionality... (1993:274). Thus qualified, illusions can nevertheless be 'really' experienced and such definition necessarily also redefines the nature of the *self*. The *self* does not therefore exist as something *in* the brain – a notion which Dennett surely inherited from his great teacher Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976), but is rather the brain working as a

‘hypothesis-making’ or ‘choice machine’.<sup>371</sup> Despite this un-appealing mechanistically loaded label, the brain is nonetheless capable of, ‘... responsible, moral action...’ (2004:224).<sup>372</sup> Moreover, this *self* as the hypothesising brain is able to, ‘... review, to muse, to rehearse, to recollect, and in general to engage the contents of events in one’s nervous system that would otherwise leave no memories in their wake...’ (2005:126). The ability to engage in abstraction is however contingent on the brain’s capacity to acquire and synthesise language. Consciousness, in other words, is predefined by the brain’s capacity to interactively symbolise events and responses. In other words, says Dennett (2004:169), ‘... we are not just clever brutes ...’ The interactive resourcefulness of the human brain has developed the extraordinary capacity for:

... multi-layered phenomenon, replete with reverberant phenomena involving mutual recognition (of recognition of recognition...) and hence opportunities galore for such distinctively human activities as promise-making and promise-breaking, veneration and slander, punishment and honour, deception and self-deception. It is this environmental complexity that drives our control systems, our minds, into their own many layers of complexity, so that we can cope with the world around us effectively... (2004:169-170).

Clearly this complex system is not always ‘that’ effective, but more to the point of the present argument, if the efficacy of consciousness is determined by the presence of narrative processes, can NDC be defined as consciousness at all? Since NDC in its fullest sense, according to Wilber, is formless and void Dennett is likely to disqualify NDC as a form of consciousness, but what about the remarkable accounts of the great mystics? How would Dennett categorise these extraordinary events and their unique narratives – some of which embody the most poignant and profound literature in the world? Answers to these perplexing questions emerge as Dennett’s philosophy is examined further.

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<sup>371</sup> Ryle’s most significant contribution in terms of this debate, *The Concept of Mind* (1949), rejects Cartesian dualism as a logically incoherent system which espouses a “ghost in the machine” as an barbed paraphrase of the notion that consciousness exists ‘in’ the brain.

<sup>372</sup> Dennett (2004:307) validates his argument by asserting that, ‘... we can build all the way up to the best and deepest human thought on questions of morality and meaning, ethics and freedom. Far from being an enemy of these traditional explorations, the evolutionary perspective is an indispensable ally.’ Moreover, in matter of value and morality, he is clear in his claim that, ‘There is no reason at all why a disbelief in the immateriality or immortality of the soul should make a person less caring, less moral, less committed to the well-being of everybody on Earth than somebody who believes in the spirit ... A good scientific materialist can be just as concerned about whether there is plenty of justice, love, joy, beauty, political freedom, and, yes, even religious freedom as about whether there is plenty of food and clothing, for instance, since all of these are material benefits, and some are more important than others’ (2006:305).

Dennett contends that the phenomenology of the linguistically defined *self* as the brain experiencing also means that there is no locus of consciousness in the brain. He rather disconcertingly says, ‘... *there’s nobody home*. No part of the brain is the thinker that does the thinking or the feeler that does the feeling...’ (1993:29). Furthermore, consciousness is neither a unity, nor a continuity of informational flow. The *self* is rather a metaphor for a complex matrix of brain events which simulate the unity and flow of experience and it is also ‘spacious’ because it subsists as neurologically diffuse operations within its own and extended environments (2004:123). Dennett therefore criticises Functionalist definitions of the mind which limit faculties of consciousness to specific brain areas. Clearly, certain motor and other operational capacities like speech, sight, and hearing are contingent upon particular areas of the brain, but consciousness is distributed and mutable (1993:270). By way of pertinent example, Dennett (2006:316) says, ‘Yes, certainly, whenever you think of Jesus some parts of your brain are going to be more active than others, but whenever you think of anything this is going to be true. The metaphorical *self*, the abstract illusion of consciousness as pretended by an independent ‘me’, is simply a centre of narrative gravity whose functional processes are determined by diffuse and multi-layered neurological operations which operate in experimental competition for behavioural dominance.

### **7.5.1.3 The Multiple Drafts Model**

These neurological operations therefore function in parallel drafts and are triggered by experiential events. Multiple drafts operate simultaneously and ‘compete’, as it were, for dominance whereby the draft selected to narrate an event is that which appears as consciousness. Since drafts are neurological functions, they require no mediation by anything other than themselves and thereby eliminate the screen in the Cartesian Theatre. The *Hard Problem* is thereby resolved since this process is purely physiological and there is consequently no duality of substance. There are, in other words, no brain events that are not simultaneously conscious events – although a good deal of what goes on in the brain never enters conscious awareness (1993:17). The processing mechanisms of these drafts function as interactive editors by negotiating, ‘... additions, incorporations, emendations, and over-writings of content ... [which] yield, over the course of time, something *rather like* a narrative stream or sequence...’ The phenomenon appears continuous because of the multiplicity of drafts or narrative fragments in various stages of the editing process – some of which retain modulating functions for subsequent events whilst others decay (1993:135).

Some of these drafts or fragments utilise and modulate culturally or arbitrarily picked-up packets of information called memes.

#### 7.5.1.4 Memes

The purpose of the parallel drafts is therefore to manage or regulate the functional viability of memes. The word was invented by Dawkins (1976) and imported by Dennett to explain the heritability of ideas, beliefs, cultural practises, and standardised behaviour patterns. By way of example Dennett (2006:158) explains that our proclivity for participating in religious rituals has similar functions, ‘... the fact that our rituals are passed on through culture, not genes, doesn’t rule out this prospect at all.’ In other words, memes mimic the behaviour of genes in the manner in which they replicate and propagate themselves through linguistic and informational agencies. Memes are, ‘... ingeniously designed informational structures that unwittingly exploit thinkers, but they aren’t themselves thinkers’ (Dennett 2004:175-176). In this way the evolutionary advance of intellection is the product of memetic mutation which Dennett (2004:176) explains happens when, ‘... copies [of information] are made with variation, and some variations are in some tiny way “better” (just better enough so that more copies of them get made in the next batch), this will lead inexorably to the ratcheting process of design improvement.’

The usefulness of memes as a metaphor to explain the evolution of consciousness is acknowledged, but how is a meme in the brain if it is not the brain? It is not totally clear that Dennett does not unwittingly invite a subtle dualism back into his argument. He defends his position by postulating a brain capacity called the *Intentional Stance*. Before this is explained, some questions: is mysticism a meme, moreover is NDC the ultimate meme? Were the primitive rudiments of superstitious fertility cults ‘ratcheted’ up to their supreme capability in NDC? This may need careful qualification because early shamanic traditions expressed, for instance, in trans-dancing rituals of the San manifest altered states of consciousness, but that said, San evidence does not suggest experiences of repose resembling NDC as it is expressed in the Buddhist understanding of *sunyata*. The Hindu and Buddhist version of mystical experience is almost as old as the San traditions, but are phenomenologically different. In this debate we are speaking particularly of mysticism as the experience of complete disintegration of bifurcated consciousness into non-dual equanimity. Wilber, we have seen, espouses this view of NDC, but in Dennett’s terms, why would consciousness evolve do this – in fact how can we know that it does? Dennett is not too

concerned with such questions, but he makes a very interesting observation. Recalling William James' (1958) notion of the 'mystical germ', Dennett wonders whether it may in fact be, '... a mystical gene. Or it might be, just as he [James] said, a mystical germ, something that spread from person to person not "vertically" (by descent from parents), but "horizontally," by infection' (Dennett 2006:84).<sup>373</sup> If there is any substance to Dennett's question then the reliability of the Perennial Philosophy is to that extent eroded. Clearly Dennett associates mysticism with belief in the existence of God – hence his disparaging turn of phrase, but more to the point, NDC as the fullest realisation of consciousness cannot therefore be memetically heritable because it is ineffable. If, as Dennett contends, consciousness and language are co-substantial then the experience of NDC has no means of transmission because of its trans-linguistic 'ontology'. Are the meta-narratives *about* mystical experience therefore sufficiently engaging to motivate subsequent generations to pursue its enlightening promise? The answer is affirmatively self evident, but since the experience itself cannot be 'passed on' or spoken, how can anyone know whether they have had it or not since, in Dennett's definition, it is not a conscious experience at all? This kind of questioning raises further phenomenological problems.

#### **7.5.1.5 The Phenomenological Problem and Heterophenomenology**

As with ontology, phenomenology will be differently defined between Essentialists and Physicalists. Dennett accounts for all functional properties of experience physiologically and, as such, sees no further use for any other alleged subjective phenomena. He explains that, 'Like other attempts to strip away interpretation and reveal the basic facts of consciousness to rigorous observation ... phenomenology has failed to find a single, settled method that everyone could agree upon' (1993:44). For Dennett (1993:45) a *phenomenon* is expressed in three kinds: sensory or objective experience; subjective or inner personal experience; and experiences of emotion or affect, all of which can, hypothetically, be accounted for purely physically (1993:65). Dennett aims to achieve this by engaging what he calls Heterophenomenology. The term is more ominous than the method. Heterophenomenology is simply the process of:

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<sup>373</sup> Dennett (2006:10-11), speaking of William James, qualifies that, 'This concentration on individual, private religions experience was a tactical choice for James; he thought that the creeds, rituals, trappings, and political hierarchies of "organized" religion were a distraction from the root phenomenon, and his tactical path bore wonderful fruit, but he could hardly deny that those social and cultural factors hugely affect the content and structure of the individual's experience.'

... extracting and purifying texts from speaking *subjects*, and using those texts to generate a theorist's fiction, the subject's *Heterophenomenological* world. This fictional world is populated with all the images, events, sounds, smells, hunches, presentiments, and feelings that the subject (apparently) sincerely believes to exist in his or her stream of consciousness. Maximally extended, it is a neutral portrayal of exactly *what it is like to be* that subject - in the subject's own terms, given the best interpretation we can muster (Dennett 1993:98).

As a research methodology the process seems unreliable, but, claims Dennett (1993:72), if the subject is scrupulously honest and as descriptively accurate as possible, and if the researcher records the narrative precisely and without interpretive bias, then the process is sufficiently neutral, in principle, '... to do justice to the most private and ineffable subjective experiences, while never abandoning the methodological scruples of science'. Might it be possible, in Dennett's terms, to apply this technique to subjects reporting NDC and thereby admit the mystical *phenomenon* to proper scientific enquiry? Theoretically yes, but if the object of experience is 'no-thing' in terms of common descriptors of NDC does it not deteriorate into Dennett's definition of phenomenological non-existence? In this case the method is ineffective and NDC remains safely mysterious. If however Dennett's linguistic delimitation on definitions of consciousness is mistaken or overstated, then surely the Heterophenomenological method can apply to accounts of mystical experience and provide a useful interpretive idiom for scientific research? How could such a proposal be approached?<sup>374</sup>

### 7.5.1.6 The Intentional Stance

One of the key instruments employed in Dennett's epistemological strategy is again based on evolutionary rationales. The idea is premised by three variables: the first considers the *Physical Stance* which illuminates our understanding of the behaviour of physical objects and processes; the *Design Stance* informs us about the probable behaviour of biological subjects; and the *Intentional Stance* hypothesises or simulates scenarios based on the amount, efficacy, and priority of acquired information. The idea is too abstruse to expound and the first two

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<sup>374</sup> Dennett offers an affirmative, if qualified answer to this question. He asks, 'Is religion out-of-bounds to science? It all depends on what you mean. If you mean the religious experiences, beliefs, practices, texts, artifacts, institutions, conflicts, and history of *H. sapiens*, then this is a voluminous catalogue of unquestionably natural phenomena. Considered as psychological states, drug-induced hallucination and religious ecstasy are both amenable to study by neuroscientists and psychologists. Considered as the exercise of cognitive competence, memorising the periodic table of elements is the same sort of phenomenon as memorizing the Lord's Prayer. Considered as examples of engineering, suspension bridges and cathedrals both obey the law of gravity and are subject to the same sorts of forces and stresses. Considered as salable manufactured goods, both mystery novels and Bibles fall under the regularities of economics. [religion may be studied] in many disciplines, from anthropology and military history to nutrition and metallurgy' (2006:29-30).

variables are not sufficiently relevant to warrant explication, but stated differently the *Physical Stance* is a simple, perhaps instinctive reaction to an event (a spider flinching at the sound of an approaching foot); the *Design Stance* facilitates an understanding of an event (the obedient response of a reprimanded dog); and the *Intentional Stance* enables thoughtful manipulation of an event (the man chasing the dog out of the kitchen so that he can step on the spider because he knows the spider is poisonous and if it bites the dog, the dog will get sick). These Stances evolved in this order and are present in the same prioritised sequence in human consciousness. In Wilberian terms, the *Intentional Stance* sublates the *Design Stance* which sublates the *Physical Stance* and all three Stances are necessary and available in consciousness as evolutionarily heritable capabilities. Each stance is thus able to improve predictive power and therefore the power to control (Dennett 1987:17). On this point at least, Dennett and Wilber may agree. Wilber (1982c:6) says, ‘... a brief glance at the evolutionary record to date (matter to plant to lower animal to mammal to human) shows a pronounced growth toward increasing complexity and awareness.’

The crudeness of this example needs refinement to discern its pertinence for the current debate. The *Intentional Stance* embodies all our capacities and accumulated memes to understand, feel, relate, wonder, imagine, anticipate, understand, and intuit, and so on. When these many capacities as neurological *Multiple Drafts* are appropriately and dynamically selected and combined to simulate a ‘what’, ‘what if’, ‘how’, ‘when’, or ‘why’ scenario, then we have taken up the *Intentional Stance*. It is, in other words, the accrued aptitude of all conscious faculties to think, feel, and behave humanly. Central to the *Intentional Stance* - the qualifying definition of humanness - is the privilege and problem of free will (Dennett 2006:110-113). A number of questions come to the fore: can all these complex sophistications of illusory consciousness as neurological processes *intend* something like NDC – how would this happen? Assuming it does happen, is NDC the process of undifferentiating all the drafts in order to create a sense of being ‘one with all’, or is it the distillation of multiple drafts into One Draft which sublates and synthesises all other drafts, or is it simply the collapse of the modulating capacity of all drafts into a form of unconsciousness? Whilst Dennett’s three stance model explains behavioural instincts from an evolutionary vantage point, its abstraction into subjectivity is too speculative to draw precise conclusions about NDC. It does however reaffirm the realisation, iterated so frequently in this thesis, that NDC is disproportionately difficult to locate as experience from



both Essentialist and Physicalist stand points. The problem of free will and determinism is central to this dilemma.

#### **7.5.1.6.1 Excursus Two: The Millisecond Gap: Tor Nørretranders**

Nørretranders begins his argument by surveying theories of thermodynamics, information technology, and Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. He imports these ideas to inform and transform dated theories of consciousness. By observing the seemingly contrary movements between increasing evolutionary complexity and the simultaneous increase of cosmic entropy Nørretranders asserts that the maximum capacity of biological evolution is not revealed in its ability to accumulate and synthesise information, but in its ability discard information that does not aid the evolutionary process. The agents of this filtering process are cell membranes, skin, atmosphere – anything with naturally evolved boundaries that can screen out what is not safe, useful or interesting from that which aids or excites the evolutionary process. The brain as consciousness has mastered this art of discrimination and exclusion most precisely. It has already been shown that Dennett's *Multiple Drafts Model* employs a similar principle, and it will shortly become evident that Edelman and Tononi have their own version in their theory of *Differentiation and Informativeness*. Nørretranders explains:

... [because] the universe is expanding, differences can flood out through the membranes that differentiate it from the surroundings and can create order inside it... disorder [entropy] is growing, and for precisely that reason, order can arise locally through the export of disorder... [and therefore] consciousness can arise that is itself the result of an enormous discarding of information, a dramatic export of disorder. Because everything is constantly being diluted by nothing, we can experience it as everything (1999:345).

The last phrase of Nørretranders' quote reveals an extraordinary mystical quality – a paradoxical vindication of everything through the realisation of nothing. Physically translated this might read: biological evolution realised in neural matrices of highly integrated complexity has become self-aware through the human brain and it thereby 'knows' that the very fabric that *is* self-awareness succumbs to the inevitability of entropic stasis. Life and death, matter and mind are a thermodynamic non-duality. The sooner we realise and 'surrender' to this glorious mystery, the sooner fear and anxiety will be dispelled and replaced by un-conflicted peace.

This theme will be picked up again later, but Nørretranders (1999) continues his argument by using insights from evolutionary theory and thermodynamics to support a computational analogue of consciousness. Nørretranders rightly asserts that the brain is only able to process about 20 bits of information per second into consciousness whereas modern computers assimilate billions of bits in similar timeframes (1999:216). How do we account for this apparent weakness and yet know that the human brain's creative, hypothetical, and decision-making abilities far exceed the capacity of computers? Nørretranders postulates that most of the work is done at a sub or unconscious level in the extent to which subconscious processing is able to reduce and refine information to levels which can then be experienced as consciousness. The point is that sensorially, in ordinary waking consciousness, we take in approximately twelve to fifteen million bits of information per second, but most of this is de-prioritised into subliminal or peripheral fringes to enable us to focus on our object of attention. Again Dennett (1993), and Edelman and Tononi (2000a) endorse this view – and so does Wilber. He says, 'Take, for example, your own visual field. As your eye scans the territory of nature, does it ever see a *single* thing, a solitary thing, a separate thing? Has it ever seen *a tree? a wave? a bird?* Or does it instead see a kaleidoscopic flux of all sorts of interwoven patterns and textures, of tree plus sky plus grass plus ground, and waves plus sand plus rocks plus sky and clouds...' (Wilber 1981a:41). Dennett, Edelman, and Tononi also maintain that consciousness can only attend to one operational process at a time because it is limited by its bit flow rate. There are qualified exceptions to this rule and Edelman and Tononi will explain this when their theory of Focal States is considered, but the fact remains that consciousness is more directly the result of a great deal of *ex*formation than *in*formation.

This theory has a number of significant consequences. Firstly, as with Dennett, but unlike Wilber, Nørretranders argues that consciousness is not a self-possessed independent agency. Consciousness is an illusion generated by certain neurological processes which transform the stream of sense data into 'user-friendly' formats. It achieves this firstly by massively curtailing the efficacy of such data through neuro-physiological screening, and then by re-fabricating the selected data - as if through multiple parallel distributed processors – to create the senses and images we call consciousness. Dennett would disagree with Nørretranders' computational metaphors, but Nørretranders (1999:290-292) offers a persuasive illustration (paraphrased here by Johnson 1998):

Sitting at the computer dragging documents into folders or into the trash can, the operator is under a machine-induced hallucination. Inside the computer chips there are no documents, trash cans, words or letters - just voltages and charges representing the ones and zeros of binary code. Instead of overwhelming the user with a flood of useless information, the computer projects a simple array of metaphors: icons that can be manipulated to get things done. In a similar way, the brain, throwing away unneeded data, generates its own user illusion: the interpretation called consciousness.

The next important question must therefore address the existence of the *self*. If consciousness is indeed an illusion – a massively summarised and highly processed synthetic re-fabrication of billions of bits of sense data – then surely the *self* must be an illusion too? The idea has been central to mystical traditions for millennia – could there be a mutual wisdom? Epistemologically the answer must be no, but the consequences of this realisation appears to be a source of liberation and release from attachment for Nørretranders and the mystics. Nørretranders is of the mind that religions are mainly concerned with the human appetite for transcendence – either vicariously through anthropomorphic deities or through disciplines of *self*-transcendence. This religious *self* must therefore gain a sense of composure and inclination toward such transcendence if it is to discern and attain liberation from its own illusions. Religious media such as repetitious prayer, meditation, rhythmic movement, and chanting (rather than subscription to dogma) are the mechanisms by which such transformations are effected. A vital outcome of Nørretranders' profound insight is that mystery must remain mysterious for it to retain its transforming efficacy. No matter its methodological and epistemological exactitudes, science cannot and must not attempt rationalisations of mysticism. We can only transfigure into equanimity once we apprehend and accept that we are more than we ourselves can know. The assertion is fully in keeping with Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem that prefaced the argument of this thesis. Nørretranders (1999:319) poignantly observes that:

There are ... good reasons for taking the experiences of religion seriously; from an atheistic point of view, too, one must say that religions involve something real and genuine that is concerned not merely with a yearning for the simplicity and innocence of the bicameral mind but with a highly contemporary authentic drama: the relationship between consciousness and non-consciousness in a person. Atheists also have to live with the conflict described by the religions. Religion is far too important for atheists to leave to the religious.

Beyond the obvious formative importance of the aesthetic, architectural, literary, scholarly, poetic, cultural, political, and economic influences of religion, not all of which are positive, there is a foundational injunction to discover and experience meaningful life and occasions of ecstasy which transport us, as it were, *beyond* ourselves. Such an innate yearning implies volition – intentional acts of free will, but Nørretranders encumbers its appeal by recalling a problematic scientific discovery. Hermann Helmholtz (1821-1894), a German physicist and neural scientist, conducted a series of experiments on neuro-electrical brain activity. He naturally expected electrical impulses to travel at the speed of light but discovered that neural impulses are comparatively slow – travelling only at about ninety metres per second. This surprise encouraged him to examine the reaction time of consciousness to neural stimulation and discovered that this response was even slower. Helmholtz concluded that it was not neural conductivity that was slow, but that a great deal of unconscious processing in the brain delayed response time (Koenigsberger 1906). Much later in 1986 a series of more complex experiments conducted by Benjamin Libet (1916-2007) endorsed and amplified the findings of Hans Kornhuber’s research (Kandel 2006:264). When subjects were asked to perform a simple reflex action, Kornhuber and Libet detected electrical activity indicating the onset of an action before subjects willed it. The lead time between the neural initiation and awareness of the will-to-act is very small, perhaps 0.1 seconds and the actual reflex a further 0.5 seconds, but it is not the latter delay that causes the problem. The experiment reveals that brain activity precedes our awareness of willing an action. Consciousness, in other words, is a response to prior neural activity, not the cause of it (Kandel 2006:265).<sup>375</sup> A profoundly perplexing question arises as a result – where is the free will? Nørretranders (1999:216) surveys the same experiments and reflects that:

It is much more in keeping with our immediate experience to say that we consciously decide to act sometime just before we do so. Not a whole second, but perhaps 0.1 second before. That, however, implies other, apparently unfathomable problems: *If the brain started sometime before I decided to move my finger, do I possess free will?* The show starts before we decide it should! An act is initiated before we decide to perform it!

The idea is purely hypothetical, but phenomenologically we experience the *self* as the free agent which initiates action. If however, the ‘*self* is *itself*’ the consequence of prior neural

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<sup>375</sup> Nørretranders (1999:219-220) elsewhere explains that, ‘Our consciousness claims that it makes the decisions, that it is the cause of what we do. But our consciousness is not even there when the decision is made. It lags behind, but it does not tell us that. It dupes itself - but how can my consciousness dupe itself without duping me? Is the self-duplicity of consciousness not my own self-duplicity?’

activity then it follows that both free will and the *self* are products of the same neurological processes. The brain's 'simulation' of the world is clearly heavily edited and we may, as a result, never be in-the-moment consciously – everything always begins happening in the brain before we become aware of it. If free will is the product of pre-conscious neural activity then we may legitimately wonder why consciousness exists at all. It must be concluded that consciousness, the *self*, and free will are indeed illusions, but they are useful illusions – at which point we may return to Dennett for explication.

### **7.5.1.7 Free Will and Determinism**

It may be reasonably assumed that Dennett is a confirmed determinist, and indeed he is, and yet he endorses the reality of free will (2004:222). Is this not contradictory? Dennett explains that whilst evolutionary principles are indeed causally determined, the evolutionary capacity in the human brain to take up the *Intentional Stance* is not freedom *from* those causal chains, but the learnt capacity *of* those causal chains to choose between options. Nørretranders (1999:xi) similarly acknowledges that these findings, '... collide with time-honoured notions of man's free will, but ... the danger is not to our free will, but to the notion that it is the conscious *I* that exercises our free will.' Described in this way free will cannot be a pre-existing and independent faculty of consciousness which exempts us, '... from the causal fabric of the physical world. It is an evolved creation of human activity and beliefs, and it is just as real as such other human creations' (2004:13). Free will, in other words, '... is like the air we breathe, and it is present almost everywhere we want to go ... it evolved, and is still evolving' (2004:10). Dennett thus espouses a form of soft determinism which necessarily redefines our usual interpretations of determinism and freedom (2004:97-98). He therefore argues that, 'Naturalism is no enemy of free will; it provides a *positive* account of free will, one that handles the perplexities better, in fact, than those views that try to protect free will from the clutches of science with an "obscure and panicky metaphysics" (in P. F. Strawson's fine phrase)' (2004:15-16). Rather comically, if not politely, Dennett (2006:20) explains, 'Like the revivalist preacher, I say unto you, O religious folks who fear to break the taboo: Let go! Let go! You'll hardly notice the drop! The sooner we set about studying religion scientifically, the sooner your deepest fears will be allayed.'

The version of freedom which Dennett promulgates is therefore more than the simple capacity to derive practical value from a range of circumstances; he also maintains that altruistic freedom can be evolutionarily advantageous. Whilst determinism is commonly

defined by the premise that at any moment in time only one possible outcome exists, Dennett rightly argues in favour of uncertainty and incompleteness principles which determine that outcomes can be variable and unpredictable given the availability of *Multiple Drafts*. When such situations arise free will has been exercised (2004:83). Determinism in this sense does not imply inevitability, but supports that notion that evitability can be achieved in a deterministic world (Dennett 2004:25, 62, 95). ‘The compatibility of free will and science is not as inconceivable as it once seemed’ (Dennett 2004:306). Multiple drafts, intertwined with memes, all of which are negotiated by the *Intentional Stance* are therefore no mandate for certainty – they are the fabric of the complex brain’s ability to weigh up options and make choices. This ambivalence is due to the unfolding of genetic evolution, phenotypic plasticity, and memetic evolution and they do not operate in strict directional sequences - they are experimental and adaptive – the outcomes of which cannot be predicted with any real precision (Dennett 1993:208). For this reason Dennett cautions his readers to be suspicious of doctrines claiming proof of absolute truths, and Wilber’s *Absolute Subjectivity* would be a case in point (Wilber 2004:70-71). In summary, Dennett (2004:166) explains the peculiar notion of deterministic free will as the product of, ‘... free-floating rationales of the cooperative choices in non-zero sum games that have guided the evolutionary ‘research and development’ process to ever more sophisticated rational agents, expanding [their] capacity ... to recognise and act on opportunities...’ This is indeed a real freedom, but it is not the freedom of human agency as a capacity of a brain-independent consciousness.

Dennett’s rendition of free will is scientifically persuasive, but problematic for our understanding of NDC. Most obviously, since NDC has no narrative content, there are no choices to be made and Dennett’s ‘soft’ determinism is rendered inert. If the variable, experimental, and opportunistic hypotheses of deterministic brain activity are stalled in NDC, it cannot account for phenomena like NDC. It may of course be argued that such cessation of bifurcated consciousness is precisely what NDC is, but if so how can a person know whether or not she has had it since in Dennett’s terms it is the absence rather than the pinnacle of consciousness? Additionally, what would the post-NDC narrative be constructed from since there is no experience to discern? With reference to the previous observation, where is the Pleasure? Dennett proposes his own answer with such lyrical poignancy that it warrants quoting at length. He is describing himself as a scientist, a Physicalist who has discovered - made a free choice to realise and accept - that he is not or does not have a *self*:

What these people have realised is one of the best secrets of life: let your self go. If you can approach the world's complexities, both its glories and its horrors, with an attitude of humble curiosity, acknowledging that however deeply you have seen, you have only just scratched the surface, you will find worlds within worlds, beauties you could not heretofore imagine, and your own mundane preoccupations will shrink to proper size, not all that important in the greater scheme of things. Keeping that awestruck vision of the world ready to hand while dealing with the demands of daily living is no easy exercise, but it is definitely worth the effort, for if you can stay centred, and engaged, you will find the hard choices easier, the right words will come to you when you need them, and you will indeed be a better person. That, I propose, is the secret to spirituality, and it has nothing at all to do with believing in an immortal soul, or in anything supernatural (2006:303).<sup>376</sup>

If Dennett's account is de-contextualised it may easily read as mystical discourse. It resonates with the wisdom of an enlightened person and endorses the noblest virtues of human consciousness. Clearly it is not implied that Dennett is reflecting on an NDC-type event, but his meta-narrative of the realisation of liberation from the *self* is as close to typical mystical narratives as can be imagined. The general purview of Dennett's thesis clearly vouches for the viability of Physicalist renditions of spiritual experience, but for the moment there are too many epistemological anomalies in the details to support the notion fully.

Wilber makes no comment about Dennett's recent writings and refers only to his initial appraisal of Dennett which he seems satisfied to re-affirm. He says, '... Daniel Dennett's widely esteemed *Consciousness Explained*, which, others have less charitably pointed out, might better have been entitled *Consciousness Explained Away* is ... in the final analysis, an attempt by consciousness to deny the existence of consciousness, which is an extraordinary amount of causal activity for what after all is supposed to be an ineffectual vapour, a ghostly nothingness' (1997a:3-4). The superficiality of Wilber's understanding is reflected in his churlish choice of phrase, whereas less than a year earlier Dennett (1996a:5) reflected as follows about his own conscious experience:

What impresses *me* about my own consciousness, as I know it so intimately, is my delight in some features and dismay over others, my distraction and concentration, my unnameable sinking feelings of foreboding and my blithe disregard of some perceptual details, my obsessions and oversights, my ability to conjure up fantasies, my inability

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<sup>376</sup> Dennett (2006:251) even goes so far as to concur that, 'It is surely no accident that the language of romantic love and the language of religious devotion are all but indistinguishable.'

to hold more than a few items in consciousness at a time, my ability to be moved to tears by a vivid recollection of the death of a loved one, my inability to catch myself in the act of framing the words I sometimes say to myself, and so forth.

There is no sense whatsoever in which Dennett's description intimates a dilution of the phenomena which comprise consciousness, but he qualifies, '... [they] are *all* merely the performance of functions or the manifestation of various complex dispositions to perform functions' (1996:5-6). On the basis of this qualification Wilber (1997a:12) replies that, '... you do not have to transform to understand Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*; you merely translate.' Wilber intimates that Dennett's philosophy reduces consciousness to the extent that it must be devoid of transformative capacity, meaning, and value. Dennett (1993:25) would defend that in a Physicalist description of consciousness, 'We find no diminution of wonder; on the contrary we find deeper beauties and more dazzling visions of the complexity of the universe than the protectors of mystery ever conceived.' Even so, Dennett is under no illusions about the priority of religion and urges that:

... we subject religion as a global phenomenon to the most intensive multidisciplinary research we can muster, calling on the best minds on the planet. Why? Because religion is too important for us to remain ignorant about. It affects not just our social, political, and economic conflicts, but the very meanings we find in our lives. For many people, probably a majority of the people on Earth, nothing matters more than religion. For this very reason, it is imperative that we learn as much as we can about it (2006:14-15).

Dennett's overall intention is to encourage the Post-modern mind to mature beyond the necessity of Essentialist overlays for that which we do not yet understand physically (2004:306).

## **7.5.2 The Dynamic Core Hypothesis: Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi**

### **7.5.2.1 Foundational Precepts for a Theory of Consciousness**

Edelman and Tononi (Edelman 1987, 188, 1989, 1992, 2004, Edelman and Tononi 2000a, 2000b) share a number of fundamental beliefs with Dennett, but differ sufficiently in some ontological and conceptual details to warrant independent consideration. In the first instance, Edelman and Tononi, like Dennett, submit unequivocally to evolutionary theory and natural selection. They say consciousness, '... arose as a result of evolutionary innovations in the morphology of the brain and body. The mind arises from the body and its development; it is



embodied and therefore part of nature' (2000a:215). Edelman and Tononi's wording is more 'open-ended' than Dennett's in their inclusion of the words 'arise', 'mind', and 'part of'. For Dennett anything referred to in terms of 'mind' is synonymous with the brain, and consciousness does not therefore 'arise' from the brain and neither can it be a 'part of' nature - it simply *is* nature operating in a particular configuration *as* the brain. Edelman and Tononi qualify their seemingly 'softer' approach by explaining that personal or subjective inner experience must be included as a first-person phenomenon where the observer, '... must consider consciousness by viewing the brain from within...' (2000a:217, cf 2000a:127-128). A third-person analysis must therefore 'assume' that another person has inner personal or conscious processes and experiences similar to the observer's in order to discern meaning (Edelman 2004:140). The suggestion allows for degrees of ambiguity whereas Dennett's *Heterophenomenology* seems more methodologically exact. Be that as it may, Edelman's approach nonetheless supports the Darwinian belief that evolution is, '... enormously powerful. The power comes from natural selection acting in complex environments over eons of time... [wherein] functioning structures and whole organisms emerge as a result of selection among the diverse variant individuals in a population, which compete with one another for survival' (2004:32-33, cf Edelman and Tononi 2000a:110).

Edelman and Tononi's biological theory of consciousness therefore complies with the Physicalist premise of this thesis and it may be safely assumed that they also reject Essentialism. They identify their position by proclaiming that, '... we cannot accept the position taken by those who embrace a materialist metaphysics combined with a dualist, rationalist, or idealist, epistemology... we must [also] be sceptical about extreme reductionist accounts ... [and the] same scepticism holds for attempts to imbue the world at large with conscious properties - the view of panpsychism' (2000a:215-216). Subjectivism in isolation is therefore insufficient grounds for a scientific theory of consciousness. Consequently Edelman and Tononi also reject, '... phenomenology and introspectionism, along with philosophical behaviourism' (2000a:217). For this reason Edelman (2004:xiii) later clarifies that he intends to, '... disentrall those who believe the subject [consciousness] is exclusively metaphysical or necessarily mysterious.' Edelman would therefore support the Physicalist notion that the world is a causally closed system, but at the same time embrace the uncharted possibilities of evolutionary innovation (2004:81).

Consciousness is thus a wholly material process occurring as highly complex neurological interactions. This qualification necessarily places consciousness fully within the domain of scientific enquiry, but it is ‘subtle’ in the sense that the physiological bases of consciousness are not equal to their manifestation in subjective awareness, and this distinction demarcates the ontology of consciousness as both ‘material and meaningful’ (Edelman and Tononi 2000a:219). Edelman and Tononi caution that the inclusion of meaning does not sanction the inclusion of the ‘... mystical ... Our statements about the material order and immaterial meaning are not only mutually consistent within a scientific framework, but live in a useful symbiosis’ (2000a:220). Some theorists would argue that this qualification approximates versions contingency in Property Dualism or Epiphenomenalism, but Edelman defends his theory on the basis of ‘Neural Darwinism’. This theory, also known as the Theory of Neuronal Group Selection or TNGS, is biologically complex and not appropriate for debate here, but its purpose is to explain how biology selects neurological mapping structures in the brain based on genetic heritability and environmental or social variables.<sup>377</sup> On this point Edelman and Tononi differ from Dennett. Whereas Dennett describes the brain as a ‘hypothesis-making machine’, Edelman (2004:84) argues that the brain is not a machine because it can deliberate possibilities on the bases of its adaptive and selectionist capabilities. The principle is not directly contradictory to Dennett’s view since Dennett simply argues for the physiological determinism that enables these hypothetical processes. In this sense it is not the choices themselves which are determined, but the capacity *to* choose in which case Edelman and Dennett’s views are not that far removed after all. Moreover, Dennett’s notion of memes also harmonises to some extent with the informational heritability of Edelman’s environmental and social variables.

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<sup>377</sup> By way of brief explanation, Edelman and Tononi (2000a:209) summarise that, ‘... the selective events that led to the genetic code followed a different set of rules than the laws of chemistry and physics that govern the covalent bonding of nucleic acids. For a set of Darwinian rules to apply certainly required the existence of stable covalent chemical bonds to ensure the growth of nucleic acid polymers, that such polymers could be replicated, and that mutations could occur. But the ingredient that supervened over the laws of chemistry and physics was that selection for fitness in the phenotype could stabilise some DNA or RNA sequences over others. Such code sequences represent the historical residues of generally irreversible selection events that acted on whole organisms at a much higher level of organisation than DNA itself. So the actual nucleotide sequences of genes reflect historical events, as well as chemical laws, and both together ultimately constrained how processing of information eventually arose in nature... Why not, then, consider that information actually arose with the genetic code itself? The fact that the code, acting through complex protein-nucleic acid interactions, results in the formation of proteins with defined structures and functions makes it tempting to consider that the so-called open-reading frame of sequential triplet bases is information. Indeed, when as scientists we “read” the code, that is exactly what it is. Likewise when, at different stages of an organism’s development, different regions of the genetic code are transcribed and translated into different proteins, we may say that what is being “read out” is information. Nevertheless, calling any manifestation of biological order or memory “information” may not be as useful as requiring that some symbolic exchange or, at least, signification must be involved in actual informational transactions.’

On the basis of these qualifications Edelman and Tononi (2000a:215-216) proffer a, ‘... qualified realism and biologically based epistemology.’ This epistemology maintains that the neurological substructures of concepts enable language to mediate between symbols and experience (2000a:194). Explained in this way, objects of experience cannot be directly projected into the brain and Edelman and Tononi thus also reject forms of Naïve Realism. Experience is, as it were, metabolised by brain processes which then manifest consciousness, ‘... [as] a dynamic property of a special kind of morphology - the reentrant meshwork of the thalamocortical system - as it interacts with the environment’ (2000a:215-217). Nørretranders (1999:288) makes a very similar claim, ‘We experience sensation but do not experience that this sensation has been interpreted and processed... We experience sensation as an immediate, direct sensation of the surface of things, but sensation is really the result of a process that gives depth to the sensory data experienced.’ Despite previous disclaimers Edelman and Tononi’s phraseology does hint at nuances of Property Dualism. Whilst they maintain that there, ‘... are no completely separate domains of matter and mind and no grounds for dualism... [they nonetheless qualify that]... obviously, there is a realm created by the physical order of the brain ... and the social world in which meaning is consciously made’ (2000a:219). It certainly seems that Edelman and Tononi are defending two expressions of one substance which weakens their non-dual argument, and to some extent they admit to this epistemological limitation. With reference to the *Hard Problem* they instruct that we must recognise, ‘...what scientific explanations in general can and cannot do. Scientific explanations can provide the conditions that are necessary and sufficient for a phenomenon to take place, can explain the phenomenon’s properties, and can even explain why the phenomenon takes place only under those conditions. But no scientific description or explanation can substitute for the real thing’ (2000a:12).<sup>378</sup> An obvious question comes to mind - which is the more ‘real thing’ – physiology or subjective experience? If Edelman and Tononi answer that both are equally real then two modes of existence are classified and the implications must complicate their Physicalist interpretation of consciousness.

With this slightly vague ontology of the mind in place, Edelman and Tononi set about delineating their rendition of consciousness. Most importantly, their emphasis on the distinction of

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<sup>378</sup> Later Edelman and Tononi (2000a:220, cf 2004:138) reaffirm that, ‘... theory cannot replace experience: being is not describing.’ They also qualify their supposition by asserting that, ‘If we consider that most of our lives take on meaning in the rich soup of such exchanges, we need not fear exhaustion by scientific reduction. But neither need we call upon mystical explanations to account for such richness. It is enough to recognise that some scientifically founded objects are not appropriate scientific subjects. Rejoice in it. While we remain prisoners of description, our freedom is in the grammar’ (2000:222).

subjectivity encumbers them with the necessary inclusion of *Qualia*. The ontology of *Qualia* has no precise or mutually acceptable definition, but refers in general to the properties of our personal inner experience of things like senses, phenomenal qualities or the way certain aspects of experience appear to us. The *Hard Problem* therefore enjoys putative support with the introduction of *Qualia* because they are typically thought of as properties of subjective experience rather than descriptors of biological processes. How can the Physicalist ontology of Edelman and Tononi accommodate such a notion and remain consistent? Edelman acknowledges that the *Hard Problem*, ‘... arises from the remarkable differences between brain structure in the material world and the properties of Qualia-laden experience’ (2004:11). The problem is exacerbated by Edelman and Tononi’s suggestion that, ‘No description can take the place of the individual subjective experience of conscious *Qualia*’ (2000a:15). This may be phenomenologically true, but we have seen that Edelman and Tononi reject phenomenology as a verifiable description of consciousness (2000a:217). How then do they justify the inclusion of *Qualia*? They do so by adhering *Qualia* to brain functions which re-categorises *Qualia* as the felt senses of physical processes (2000a:157). *Qualia* are therefore, ‘... high-order discriminations that constitute consciousness’ (Edelman 2004:10). Dennett (1993:369) is vitriolic in his rejection of *Qualia* because there is no empirical or scientific way of explaining exactly what *Qualia* are or how they can be in the brain, and yet he agrees, ‘... wholeheartedly that there *seem* to be *Qualia* [my italics]’ (1993:372).<sup>379</sup>

Other fundamental features of consciousness for Edelman and Tononi include *privateness* insofar as there is no sensible way in which we can know what the consciousness of another feels like. Consciousness is also not able to process two mutually incoherent scenes or objects at the same time which substantiates their belief in the integration and unity of consciousness (2000a:6, 27, 147). It has been shown that Dennett, arguing on the basis of his *Multiple Drafts Model*, insists that the experience of unity is an illusory rather than real feature of consciousness. Again, Edelman and Tononi may not disagree in principle, but their emphasis on the ‘experience’ of unity assigns equal priority to the physiology which mediates it whereas Dennett speaks only to the operational structures of the brain. Another important feature distinguishes between primary or first-order consciousness and secondary or higher-order consciousness. These categories are repertoires which moderate connections

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<sup>379</sup> Dennett (1993:403) defends that, ‘If qualia are epiphenomenal in the standard philosophical sense, their occurrence can’t explain the way things happen (in the material world) since, by definition, things would happen exactly the same without them. There could not be an empirical reason, then, for believing in epiphenomena. Could there be another sort of reason for asserting their existence? What sort of reason? An a priori reason, presumably. But what? No one has ever offered one – good, bad, or indifferent – that I have seen.’

within and between neural maps. Primary-order consciousness is fundamental to the emergence of higher-order consciousness because it enables the formation of concepts whereas higher-order consciousness enables concepts-of-concepts (Edelman 2004:59). Higher-order consciousness is thus the agency of symbolic and linguistic capacity and it also facilitates the refinement of the concept of *self* (2000a:208). None of these operational mechanisms are located in any specific area of the brain, but function rather as distributed processes – a belief also shared by Dennett.

Thus far it has been shown that Edelman and Tononi argue that genetic evolution alone cannot explain the whole complex structure of the brain. Other formative experiential variables influence the structure and function of neurological maps. These maps are selectively strengthened or weakened by neural group connections which compete for dominance in similar fashion to Dennett's *Multiple Drafts*. Brain processes are therefore dynamic and determined by probabilities informed by the physiology of the brain and the experiential context of the subject. There are, in other words, synergistic overtones in Edelman and Tononi's thesis that prevent explanation of the whole only in terms of reduction to its parts. This does not necessarily mean that consciousness is infused with a special or supernatural quality in addition to its physiology, but it would not be too difficult to deduce such an inference from Edelman and Tononi's explanations. To summarise, Edelman (2004:113-114) explains that:

My first assumption has been that a biological theory of consciousness must rest on a global brain theory. This is the case because one must confront the enormous variability and individuality of higher brains and their dependence on value systems. The variability must be accounted for in terms of the principles of development and evolution. My second assumption is based on the recognition that principles of physics must be strictly obeyed and that the world defined by physics is causally closed. No spooky forces that contravene thermodynamics can be included. My argument, which does not contradict physics, has been that computer or machine models of the brain and mind do not work. Once we abandon logic and a clock, however, both of which are necessary for the operation of digital computers, we must provide an organising principle for spatiotemporal ordering and continuity in the brain. That principle is incorporated in the process of Re-entry.

This overview provides a sufficient foundation for particular aspects of Edelman and Tononi's theory to be distilled and measured against the problem considered in this

thesis. The notion of *Re-entry* is particularly pertinent, but before this is considered some additional explanatory devices need to be elucidated.

### **7.5.2.2 Methodology: The Formative Context of the Dynamic Core Hypothesis**

Most significantly Edelman and Tononi argue that the basis of consciousness can be fully explained by science as it arises in the material order, and that its subjective qualities are, ‘... unfit (except in the most trivial sense) to be scientific subjects, and they will not yield up their significance through scientific inquiry alone’ (2000a:222). Nevertheless, the naturalisation of epistemology, particularly since Darwinian theory superseded purely esoteric approaches to mind, permits authentically biological approaches to tackle the problem of consciousness (2000a:215-217). For Edelman and Tononi this epistemological transition establishes a three-fold methodological platform: the *Physics Assumption* which utilises only legitimate scientific protocols as agents of verification; the *Evolutionary Assumption* which maintains that natural selection explains consciousness as, ‘... a special kind of physical process that arises in the structure and dynamics of certain brains’; and the *Qualia Assumption* which states that, ‘... the subjective, qualitative aspects of consciousness, being private, cannot be communicated directly through a scientific theory that, by its nature, is public and inter-subjective’ (2000a:14-15). Whilst the first two assumptions are given in Physicalist renditions of consciousness there is divided opinion on the ontological legitimacy of *Qualia*. The suggestion that scientific reliability can be established on the basis of a system being its own observer is treacherous and vulnerable to self-referential fallacies, but Edelman and Tononi defend their position by supplementing their hypothesis with a number of modulating criteria (2000a:127-128).

#### **7.5.2.2.1 Unity and Integration**

The first of these criteria has already been introduced and describes the unity of conscious experience which, ‘...simultaneously includes sensory input, the consequences of motor activity, imagery, emotions, fleeting memories, bodily sensations, and a peripheral fringe’ (Edelman 2004:61). There is no sense, in other words, in which the stream of consciousness can be disintegrated into components (Edelman and Tononi 2000a:18). It is on this basis that Edelman and Tononi claim that conscious experience, ‘... is always more than the sum of its parts’ (2000a:24). This quality has already been recognised as a potential hurdle to ontological consistency, but for Edelman and Tononi the felt sense of seamlessness ensures meaningful experience (2000a:27). The brain may be a ‘teeming multiplicity’ of creative and responsorial

possibilities (2000a:168), but it has also developed cooperative abilities which enable it to hone in, as it were, on a dynamic consolidation of these multiple processes to educe synthesising power – hence the experience of integrated and unified consciousness (2000a:149). The idea is broadly in keeping with Dennett’s notion of the *Intentional Stance*, and it is no less conjectural, but Edelman and Tononi admit that its explication depends on the development of, ‘... a formal analysis of the behaviour of the neural system’ (2000a:120).

At this point a brief synopsis of the nature and role of memory should be considered. The importance of memory as the keystone to the coherent operation of consciousness in time cannot be overstated. Ordinarily memory is thought of as stored data, but what is stored and how would such ‘historical’ phenomena be recalled? The idea is reminiscent of forms of representationalism and it conceals shades of Naïve Realism. Edelman and Tononi, among a growing body of other researchers, now believe that memory is non-representational. Memory is rather a faculty of neural processes in an integrated system that, ‘... exhibits degeneracy to repeat or suppress a mental or physical act. This novel view of memory is illustrated with a geological comparison; memory is more like the melting and refreezing of a glacier than it is like an inscription on a rock’ (Edelman and Tononi 2000a:93). Edelman (2004:8) latterly referred to this process as the Remembered Present because memory is not in fact the retrieval of old stored information, but its regeneration in the present moment, and it is therefore prone to adaptation or aberration. Such analyses have yet to fully convince the scientific fraternity and Edelman and Tononi admit that the idea is a hypothetical first step, but they propose the next set of tenets as a means of justification.

#### **7.5.2.2.2 Differentiation, Complexity, Informativeness, and the Dynamic Core**

Edelman and Tononi describe *Differentiation* as the brain’s ability to apply inherited and environmentally learnt criteria to behavioural selection or choice-making and this is the key to integrated and coherent conscious experience (2000a:29). The brain’s ability to differentiate between possibilities therefore determines its degree of *Informativeness*. Nørretranders (1999:174) similarly endorses that, ‘Consciousness is ingenious because it knows what is important. But the sorting and interpretation required for it to know what is important is *not* conscious. Subliminal perception and sorting is the real secret behind consciousness...’ *Informativeness*, in turn, reflects the skilfulness of choice-making or selection rather than the amount or type of information available and its express purpose is to reduce uncertainty (2000a:30). The bulk of energy expended in the process of

*Informativeness* as therefore attributed not to the selections and connections that are made, but to the enormous number of possibilities which are de-selected or excluded (Edelman and Tononi 2000a:150). It has been noted that Nørretranders (1999:iv) prefers to think of the principle of de-selection as Exformation. In this context he maintains that, ‘... scientific investigations into the phenomenon of consciousness have demonstrated that people experience far more than their consciousness perceives; that they interact far more with the world and with each other than their consciousness thinks they do; that the control of actions that consciousness feels it exercises is an illusion.’ Later Nørretranders affirms that, ‘Consciousness is based on an enormous discarding of information, and the ingenuity of consciousness consists not of the information it contains but of the information it does not contain’ (1999:173). Edelman and Tononi (2000a:134) add that, ‘... the larger the number of activity patterns that make a difference to a neural system, the higher its complexity’ Complexity is a measure of the heterogeneity of interactions in a system of dispersed multiplicity. Nørretranders (1999:42) in similar vein believes that, ‘Information is something that is to be found in disorder. There is more information in disorder than in order. The more disorder the more information.’ Edelman and Tononi explain slightly differently that complexity is not an indication of quantity or randomness and neither is it a reflection of dense regularity, but, ‘... something that appears to be both orderly and disorderly, regular and irregular, variant and invariant, constant and changing, stable and unstable deserves to be called complex’ (2000a:135). Functional segregation is therefore an indication of complexity and the ‘sensibility’ with which these varieties of data are selected to interact is a measure of a system’s integration’ (Edelman 2004:65-66). The degree of integration, in turn, leads to consciousness. This rather convoluted sequence of interactive brain processes, says Edelman (2004:31), resolves the long-standing argument ‘... between localisationists and holists ... [because it shows] how the functionally segregated regions of the brain are connected as a complex system in an intricate but integrated fashion.’

The inter-braided-ness of all these functional variables in the neural systems of the brain are difficult to summarise in sensible sequence, but it is important to do so if an attempt to situate NDC within its processes is proposed. The human brain evolved through the methods of natural selection in evolution and operates as a complex arrangement of physical interactions – first in Primary Consciousness as the ability to think, and then in Secondary Consciousness as the ability to think about thinking. A long stream of genetic mutations and adaptations



over time, together with immediate contextual/environmental factors contribute to the nature and function of consciousness. Consciousness is not a machine and it does not generate hypotheses, but subsists as a plethora of simultaneously available neural maps which, through the process of *Differentiation* (the ability to distinguish between vast arrays of neural maps), exercises *Informativeness* by selecting appropriate integrations from complex structures. The result of this dynamism gives rise to consciousness as a unified experience. In this view, say Edelman and Tononi (2000a:209-210), ‘... the presence of heritability, variation, and selection are critical factors in the emergence of information’ and thus consciousness. If unity and integration are fundamental properties of consciousness, and *Informativeness* mediates the selection of conscious states from a repertoire of complex near infinite possibilities, then consciousness must depend on the efficacy of another moderating faculty – the Functional Cluster or *Dynamic Core* (2000a:18, 113).

Functional Clusters comprise the end-product of all the aforementioned processes. They are sets of skilfully selected interactive neural elements which are complex, unified, and highly integrated into *Dynamic Cores* (Edelman and Tononi 2000a:112, 146, cf Edelman 2004:69). Edelman and Tononi explain further that a *Dynamic Core*, ‘...emerges through rapid *Reentrant* interactions in less than a second and includes distributed portions of the thalamocortical system’ (2000a:164-165). Re-entry is the process of, ‘... ongoing parallel and recursive signalling between separate brain maps along massively parallel anatomical connections, most of which are reciprocal’ (Edelman and Tononi 2000a:105-106). *Re-entry* is therefore the key neural mechanism by which integration can be achieved and explains how such integration leads to unified streams of conscious experience (2000a:113). Simply stated, Reentry is the mechanism by which perceptual categorisation of experience is facilitated. The centrality of Reentry rests on the appropriate functioning of groups of neurons that must be constantly changing and sufficiently differentiated from one another because the absence of such dynamism prevents consciousness from arising. Edelman and Tononi (2000a:36) explain that when, ‘... large number[s] of neurons in the brain start firing in the same way, reducing the diversity of the brain’s neuronal repertoires, as is the case in deep sleep and epilepsy, consciousness disappears.’

### 7.5.2.3 Can NDC exist according to the Dynamic Core Hypothesis?

A number of significant challenges and potential new insights from Edelman and Tononi's thesis must now confront common Essentialist interpretations of NDC. Firstly, the evolutionary standard in Physicalist approaches to consciousness is now a given and the same question emerges from Edelman and Tononi's thesis as it does from Dennett's. An evolutionary explanation of consciousness necessarily delimits the capacity of physiology and the same limitations must therefore apply to consciousness. Thus established, any experience which is claimed to be absolute must be a phenomenological illusion. As is the case for Dennett, Edelman and Tononi also admit that it is possible to have *real* illusory experiences, but the idea must assign the ontology of such experiences to physiology rather than God. The difference arises in the 'reality' afforded to such experiences. Whilst Dennett would dismiss such phenomena out of hand, Edelman and Tononi grant it a veridical status on the basis of its meaningfulness.

Secondly, to suppose that consciousness can only be viewed from 'within' exposes Edelman and Tononi to similar epistemological inconsistencies which embattle Wilber's thesis. It has been repeatedly shown that the third injunctive strand of Wilber's *Three Step Exemplar* (communal corroboration) fails on the basis of self-referentiality and phenomenological fallacy. In other words, to 'assume' that the experience of another resembles mine may be reasonable enough on the basis of social familiarity and mutual understanding, but it falls short of the provability necessary to establish scientific certainty. All the more so for a phenomenon which is ineffable. Thirdly, Edelman and Tononi argue that the rich multiplicities of neural maps that function in parallel and distributed complexes define the nature of consciousness. Consciousness cannot therefore be perfectly still, void, or formless because according to these conditions NDC cannot exist. Edelman (2004:5) makes it clear that when, '... brain function is curtailed - in deep anaesthesia, after certain forms of brain trauma, after strokes, and in certain limited phases of sleep - consciousness is not present.' There is no epistemological agency in Edelman and Tononi's argument that properly enables analysis of phenomena like NDC. Thus stated, Edelman does consider the possibility of 'focal states' which may, with some degree of imagination, educe phenomena like NDC. When the Dynamic Core is modulated to an extremely high degree – to the extent that, '... all aspects of an image, scene, or thought but the one that is focally attended' are removed from conscious awareness, then it may be possible to *not be aware of being aware* [my italics] (2004:127-128). Edelman is referring more particularly to automated, highly habituated

unconscious operations like driving the same route to work everyday and not always being ‘conscious’ of having done so when you arrive safely at the office.<sup>380</sup> If the principle is imported into mysticism could it be possible that highly repetitive mental or mantric activity typical of some forms of meditation could educe this state of not being aware of awareness? If such a pure, unreflective or unmediated awareness is possible then Edelman and Tononi’s description of consciousness may endorse a physiological basis for NDC, but again it may be too speculative to prove. Besides, Edelman is arguing that we can do complex things without needing to focus intentional effort on such activities if they are sufficiently habituated or automated, but his argument does not mean that consciousness is therefore blank. Using the same example, we may be able to drive the familiar route to work without needing to focus on the activities of driving or the route to be followed, but that only happens when our minds are vigorously occupied in some other way. A focal state may not, in other words, resemble a phenomenon like NDC. It is possible however that Edelman and Tononi have not thought to take their notion of Focal States one step further.

Fourthly, if *Qualia* describe the subjectivity of inner personal experiences that neuro-physiological explanations cannot capture, then could NDC be a kind of consummate *Quale*? Edelman and Tononi answer their own question when they qualify the innate privateness of consciousness. The problem recalls our inability to empirically test the object of such narratives. It may therefore be suggested that NDC is a special kind of *Quale*, perhaps even a foundational *Quale*, but it remains an un-testable claim. This leads into the fifth problem. If consciousness can only retain attention on one subject at a time, can NDC be such a focus given that there is nothing in NDC to focus on? It is evident from Edelman and Tononi’s argument that neurological processes in *Dynamic Cores* must be active for consciousness to exist. If NDC transcends such focal activity, is NDC a special contentless focus, or is it the absence of consciousness – how would we be able to tell? It has been shown that certain technological measures (CT, EEG, MRI, FMRI) can illustrate these distinctions, but they still cannot describe the experience itself, in which case Edelman and Tononi’s recourse to subjective meaningfulness may indeed be the only option as a way of ‘attaching’ experience

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<sup>380</sup> Edelman (2004:127-128) explains in more detail that, ‘The exact mechanism by which such modulation occurs is not known. One possibility is that the inhibitory output of global mappings to the thalamus via the basal ganglia allows certain core responses to occur at the expense of others. The details remain to be worked out. In any event, it is likely that attention is effected through a variety of different routes and mechanisms. I have already discussed the interactive aspects of attentive learning and automaticity, which are connected to the question of how automatic routines previously learned by conscious attentive means are recalled and linked together consciously. The notion that this is achieved by interactions between the thalamocortical core and the basal ganglia (which may also engage the cerebellum) is one that still requires testing.’

to certain brain configurations. Even so, Dennett, and Edelman and Tononi have argued that these brain configurations change from subject to subject even when subjects narrate the same kind of experience. Edelman and Tononi would probably argue, if electrically measured, that NDC resembles a liminal sleep pattern, but to equate it with spiritual enlightenment is beyond the capacity of provable science.

The sixth hurdle is presented in Edelman and Tononi's theory of *Reentry*. If consciousness depends on the informed selection of constantly fluctuating and differentiating neural groups then NDC, if it exists, cannot be the spaceless, timeless condition of equanimity that Wilber claims it to be. Its subjective *appearance* in consciousness may indeed have the quality of formlessness, but in order for it to be consciousness according to Edelman and Tononi's hypothesis it must have highly active substrates. Thus qualified, Edelman and Tononi nonetheless make an admission, 'What goes on in your head when you have a thought? Despite the advances in neuroscience, there is no biding the fact that we still do not know the answer in sufficient detail. Some would even say the answer is: "We don't have the faintest idea." [All we know is] ... that an awful lot goes on in the brain every time we have a thought, most of it in parallel and of an awe-inspiring complexity and richness of association' (2000a:200). There is, in other words, still no precise way of discerning a causal relationship between neural activity and that which appears in consciousness. Edelman (2004:38) does however make another interesting point. He asserts that, '... the brain's capacity to generalise is astonishing.' Could NDC then be the maximum or ultimate generalisation, a sense of *Kosmic Consciousness* or a sensation of oneness with the *All*? The idea would be contradictory since it has just been argued that consciousness can only retain one subject in awareness at a time. Generalisation is therefore not about simultaneity, but about the wealth of choices which can be integrated in a *Dynamic Core* to realise complex concepts in consciousness.

The impediments to suitable Physicalist explanations of NDC in Edelman and Tononi's hypotheses may now be summarised. Whilst they accept the usefulness and meaningfulness of scientific recognition of the subjective domain, they do not believe that subjectivism can establish plausible and scientific interpretations of consciousness. Thus acknowledged, if Edelman and Tononi's theses are applied, it may be possible to circumvent Wilber's dependence on an ineffable *Absolute Subjectivity* as the only viable definition of NDC. Edelman and Tononi explain that:

The emergence of the *self* leads to a refinement of phenomenological experience, tying feelings to thoughts, to culture, and to beliefs. It liberates imagination and opens thought to the vast domains of metaphor. *It can even lead to a temporary escape, while still remaining conscious, from the temporal shackles of the remembered present.* Three mysteries – that of ongoing awareness; that of the *self*; and that of the construction of stories, plans, and fictions – can be clarified if not completely dispelled by considering a combined picture of primary and higher-order consciousness [my italics] (Edelman and Tononi 2000a:193).

If it is possible to enter a state of ‘temporary escape’ from the Remembered Present - the perpetual regeneration of memories - and all other stimulations to consciousness could be held in temporary abeyance, then there may yet be room in Edelman and Tononi’s theory for phenomena like NDC. This possibility is aided by Edelman and Tononi’s distinction between primary and higher order consciousness which takes cognisance of subjective domains of inner awareness. Wilber claims that inner subjective experience cannot be validated objectively, whereas Edelman and Tononi claim that it cannot be validated subjectively. The difference appears more in their respective epistemologies than in their truth-claims. Despite their diametric approaches, both the Edelman and Tononi’s Physicalism and Wilber’s Essentialism reveal surprisingly similar descriptions of the nature and function of consciousness – the most significant of which are complexity, integration, and unity. Thus encapsulated, Wilber’s Integral Philosophy need not necessarily contradict insights from recent advances in the Physicalist science of consciousness, and Wilber’s accusations of objectivist reductionism may be unfounded.

### **7.5.3 Andrew Newberg and Eugene D’Aquili: The Brain and Mystical Experience**

Newberg and D’Aquili’s foundational premise asserts that mystical, spiritual, and to a lesser extent religious impulses in consciousness are biologically capacitated. Their conclusions are based on extensive research of behavioural and neurological tests conducted primarily (though not exclusively) on two subject groups – Buddhists in passive *trophotropic* contemplation and Franciscan nuns in active or *ergotrophic* meditation. To avoid confusion it should be noted that there is a general tendency to define meditation and contemplation conversely between Eastern and Western traditions. Newberg and D’Aquili invert the definitions, but in this thesis I observe the Western classification referring to contemplation as the *Apophatic* or *trophotropic* practice of the *Via Negativa* which is directed at notions

resembling Wilber's narration of the formlessness or emptiness of NDC.<sup>381</sup> In other words, where Newberg and D'Aquili refer to contemplation I refer to meditation and vice versa. Newberg and D'Aquili classify both of these states within a general category they call Absolute Unitary Being or AUB. The phenomenology of *trophotropic* AUB is similar enough to Wilber's explanation of NDC for the acronyms to be interchanged, but for the sake of clarity and continuity I will simply use NDC.<sup>382</sup> Meditation, on the other hand, describes *Kataphatic* or *ergotropic* methods associated with the *Via Positiva*. In this case meditation refers to focussed attention on an object or theme as a means of dispersing distraction and honing spiritual concentration on the presence of God (See Chapter 6.2, 6.2.1).

None of the former theorists mentioned in this chapter distinguish between these types of consciousness in mystical experience, but Newberg and D'Aquili's distinction clarifies the argument considerably. They discovered that contemplation and meditation correlate with sequences of neurological events that coalesce to generate phenomenologically 'real' mystical events. A generic description of the Buddhist's experience approximates a sense of non-dual simultaneity, no-thing-ness or oneness with the *All*, whereas the nuns report a palpable and transcendent sense of God's intimate and loving presence. In the former case there is a quality of sublime disassociation from particularity into blissful equanimity, and in the latter an exclusive and adoring association with the One Particular – God. Newberg (1993:190) summarise these differences succinctly:

If the [*ergotropic*] situation occurs, AUB is not only experienced initially as ecstasy, but the ecstasy is maintained throughout the period of [meditation]. If the [*trophotropic*] situation occurs, then after the initial

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<sup>381</sup> To illustrate the source of possible confusion Newberg and D'Aquili (2001:118) write that, '... active meditation - which consists of intensely focused contemplation or prayer - triggers a slightly different pattern of brain activity which may account for Western conceptions of the transcendent absolute.' In more biological terms they explain '*The Passive Approach*' as a spirituality which begins, '... as an act of will. In our model, passive meditation, which is practiced in various forms by many Buddhist orders, begins with the wilful intention to clear all thoughts, emotions, and perceptions from the mind. This conscious intention is instated by the brain's right attention association area - the primary source of willed actions - as the need to shield the mind from the intrusion of sensory, as well as cognitive, input. To this end, the attention area, via the thalamus, causes the limbic structure known as the hippocampus, an important centre of information exchange between various parts of the brain, to dampen the flow of neural input. This neural blockage affects many brain structures, including the orientation association area, which becomes increasingly deprived of information (deafferented). The mystical traditions of the East have all described some version of this ineffable unity - Void Consciousness, Nirvana, Brahman-atman, the Tao - and all hold it up as the essence of what is inexpressibly real. On the neurological level, these states can be explained as a sequence of neural processes set in motion by the wilful intention to quiet the conscious mind, which is the age-old goal of passive meditation' (Newberg and D'Aquili 2001:41).

<sup>382</sup> Newberg and D'Aquili (2001:148) similarly explain that, '... the most extreme unitary state, what we have called Absolute Unitary Being (AUB) ... refers to the rare state in which there is a complete loss of the sense of self, loss of the sense of space and time, and everything becomes a infinite, undifferentiated oneness.'

moments of ecstasy, AUB is experienced as deep quiescent Void or Nirvana. We would suggest that the first situation tends to be interpreted personally (after the fact), as the immediate experience of or union with God. In the second case, the experience of AUB tends to be interpreted impersonally, as the peace and emptiness of the absolute ground of being.

It is not clear to Newberg and D'Aquili which contextual or neurological circumstances result in one or the other affective state becoming stabilised during the AUB experience. They assume, based on the most prevalent narratives, that exercitants, '... who practice the *Via Negativa* tend to end up in the quiescent experience of AUB [NDC], which in our model represents the *trophotropic* state... [whereas] those who practice the *Via Positiva* tend to end up with the ecstatic experience of AUB, which we would suggest is an *ergotropic* state' (1993:190). It is therefore not just the mode of practice, but the cultural context that informs the character of the mystical event. There are, in other words, contextual, phenomenological, and subtle neurological differences between *ergotropic* and *trophotropic* states of consciousness. The resourcefulness of Newberg and D'Aquili's neurophysiological expertise coupled with the technical ingenuity of brain imaging techniques enables them to draft a model for the neurological bases of mystical experience.

An important question must be asked. From a neurological perspective Newberg and D'Aquili consider the possibility that the human brain may be biologically designed or predisposed to construct myths and pursue ecstatic or mystical experiences. If this is true, then what purpose does it serve – why would evolution 'select' such highly abstracted states of consciousness? The answer to this question invites a number of contingent questions. How does the brain experience 'divine' mystery? If all things really are a non-dual oneness as the mystics would have us believe, is there a way of scientifically validating the phenomenon (if not its contents)? To what extent does ritual and religious heritage contrive or direct the emergence of these events? Is it sufficient to describe mystical consciousness as a certain array of electro-chemical impulses in the brain? And significantly, is there an evolutionary and neurological connection between spiritual ecstasy and sex? These are all questions which Newberg and D'Aquili address in their work and the results contribute significantly to the debate in this thesis.

### 7.5.3.1 The Nature of Consciousness

Before these questions are tackled a number of key definitions need to be elucidated in order to understand the premises of Newberg and D'Aquili's theory. As with Dennett, Edelman, Tononi, and Nørretranders, Newberg and D'Aquili naturally subscribe to an evolutionary explanation for the existence and nature of consciousness. D'Aquili (1982:381-382) claims that scientific protocols are substantiated by a 'baseline sense of reality' – a primary epistemic state which complies with the noetic contexts and constraints imposed on empirical observation. However, within this Physicalist demarcation Newberg and D'Aquili support a stronger phenomenological argument – a consideration of primary subjective states - a move quite contrary to Dennett's preference. This bias makes a substantial difference to the ontological scope of Newberg and D'Aquili's argument, but it also makes their theory vulnerable to unsubstantiated causal correlations between physiology and phenomenology. Their proposal, in other words, requires a degree of epistemological latitude which may perforate the threshold of noetic viability set as a standard in this thesis, but need this be so?

Newberg and D'Aquili, in similar vein to Dennett's *Multiple Drafts Model* and Edelman and Tononi's principles of *Differentiation* and *Informativeness*, contend that, '... consciousness is a term referring to the ongoing stream of experience that is mediated by a functional neural complex' (Laughlin, McManus, and D'Aquili 1990:90). Dennett and Nørretranders view this 'stream' of consciousness as illusory whereas Edelman and Tononi describe it phenomenologically in terms of *Unity* and *Integration*. Newberg and D'Aquili explain that neural networks function as multiple and parallel processes of entrainment and dis-entrainment. This description, whilst technically different, is not totally inconsistent with the variations offered by Dennett, Edelman, and Tononi whereas Nørretranders describes consciousness in terms of computational simulations. From here on however Newberg and D'Aquili part ways quite significantly from the former theorists and postulate premises more in keeping with the philosophical and phenomenological idiom – indeed they suggest this as an epistemological necessity: 'Since no empirical method can objectively test the realness [of conscious experiences], we have to turn instead to the more subjective approach of the philosophers' (2001:152). Whether phenomenological 'realness' can be legitimately included in scientific description has already been considered and criticised, but Newberg and D'Aquili may have a sound argument. Before their suggestion is considered other potential problems must first be addressed.



Whilst Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause (2001:15) also describe the aptitude of consciousness according to accretions in complexity, they maintain that these complex processes of entrainment and dis-entrainment generate models of the world. They also support the notion so well argued by Nørretranders that the brain screens out, '... superfluous sensory input [in order to] concentrate upon a goal' (2001:29-30). Whilst Nørretranders describes the process of *Exformation* as the major work of the brain, Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause call it *Redundancy* and prefer to focus on what the brain generates into consciousness. The distillation of information through *Redundancy* is refined further by two classes of neuropsychological mechanisms called *Operators*.<sup>383</sup> *Operators* describe clusters of nerve tissue within their extended operational contexts in the brain which prioritise certain types of function or experience. The *Causal Operator* was the first complex capacity to evolve and enables distinction between objects and the causal relationships which either connect or disassociate them. It therefore facilitates a sense of relational place and response within the experiential environment. The idea resembles Dennett's proposal of the *Physical Stance* as antecedent to the emergence of the *Design Stance* and the *Intentional Stance*. The *Holistic Operator* enables perception of wholeness in the midst of diversity. It seeks out meaningful connections or syntheses which permit the formation of ideational abstractions that loosely resembles Dennett's explanation of the *Intentional Stance* (Newberg and D'Aquili 1993:197). The difference arises in the extent to which Dennett explains consciousness as the result of neurologically *distributed* processes whereas Newberg and D'Aquili focus on the function of *particular areas* of the brain.<sup>384</sup>

The proposal that the coagulation and disintegration of functional clusters in the brain elicit certain kinds of experience is not theoretically contested, but the suggestion that the brain 'generates models' is more problematic. As with Dennett, Edelman, Tononi, and Nørretranders, Newberg and D'Aquili maintain that nothing enters consciousness whole. The fabric of phenomenal experience is the manifest product of complex electro-chemical fluxes in the brain (Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause 2001:36). If every experience is then a neurologically constructed product of input and response as a simulation then there is no

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<sup>383</sup> Newberg and D'Aquili actually describe eight such operators, but only these two are of relevance at the moment.

<sup>384</sup> Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause (2001:53), somewhat unlike Dennett, maintain that, '... every event that happens to us or any action that we take can be associated with activity in one or more specific regions of the brain. This includes, necessarily, all religious and spiritual experiences. The evidence further compels us to believe that if God does indeed exist, the only place he can manifest his existence would be in the tangled neural pathways and physiological structures of the brain.'

sense in which any one type of experience should be considered more real than any other type of experience. This has already been argued and it means that no distinction should be made between objective experience of the sensorial world and subjective experience of the spiritual world – the one is as phenomenologically ‘real’ as the other. The difference appears rather in the felt sense of priority that is afforded to different kinds of experience, and this will become apparent when AUB is considered in more detail. Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause (2001:178) thus maintain that spiritual experience, indeed any kind of experience can only be studied in the Kantian sense of a *ding-an-sich* or as realities, ‘... in and of themselves’ once we recognise that, ‘All perceptions exist in the mind’ (2001:146). Every experience thus comes to us only as, ‘... second-hand neurological perceptions, as blips and flashes racing along the neural pathways inside your skull’ (2001:147). On the basis of this idealist assumption Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause argue that, ‘... all religious and spiritual phenomena, including the concept and experience of God ... are generated by the brain and central nervous system’ (2001:37, cf 147, 165).

Whilst a Physicalist rendering concurs that the brain is the locus of experience, the belief that the brain ‘generates’ consciousness is epistemologically spurious. The idea is reminiscent of complications encountered with proposals that view consciousness as a simulation because it is tantamount to saying that conscious is a simulation simulating its own simulations. The self-reference or circularity of the argument is obvious, but more importantly it shows that any kind of knowledge is as true or as false as any other because all possibilities are mere simulations. There can be no empirically testable truth because both the test (the epistemology) and its alleged truth (the ontology) are mere virtual realities – fabrications of reality that it ‘thinks’ are real but cannot prove. Consequently the quest for knowledge becomes an unstable hermeneutic circle and collapses in its attempt to prove itself and this also means that there can be no real *self*. Moreover, it has been argued that when a quantity (the brain) generates a quality (consciousness), two ontologies are implied and ancillary problems attached to doctrines of Contingency consequently come to the fore. Thus challenged, Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause (2001:33) defend that, ‘... no sharp distinction is made between mind and brain; in fact, they can be considered *two different aspects of the same thing* ... the *brain* is a collection of physical structures that gather and process sensory, cognitive and emotional data; the *mind* is the phenomenon of thoughts, memories, and emotions that arise from the perceptual processes of the brain... [my italics]’ This explanation appears to support a form of Property Dualism or perhaps a ‘Spinozian’ Double

Aspect Theory – and its inclusion does not aid the scientific credibility of Newberg and D’Aquili’s hypothesis. Again, the problem is aptly expressed in Lorimer’s (2001:28) adage that, ‘... epistemology is complicated by the extent to which it implies ontology.’ If the ontology of consciousness *is* the brain, then how can a Double Aspect Theory be epistemologically consistent? Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause (2001:33) simply assert that, ‘Neurologically speaking ... the mind cannot exist without the brain, and the brain cannot exist without striving to create the mind.’ This bi-dimensional and causal co-substantiation sounds sensible as an attempt to justify the concurrence of scientific and phenomenological aspects of knowledge, but it does not coherently explain how they can be the same thing. As a result the opportunistic *Hard Problem* too easily finds a conceptual door ajar. Newberg and D’Aquili are well aware of this hiatus and justify their argument on the basis of that which evolved first. They explain that, ‘... either the objective external world or our subjective awareness of that world and the sense of *self* must be the real reality - the primary, ultimate reality. By definition, ultimate reality must be the source of everything that is real, so subjective and objective reality cannot both be true. One must be the source of the other’ (2001:144). Since consciousness and self-consciousness in particular emerged so recently in the evolutionary process, it follows that matter gives rise to consciousness. Matter, in other words, came before mind and thus assumes ontological primacy – an index which Newberg and D’Aquili maintain throughout their argument.

### **7.5.3.2 The Neurological Basis of *Self*-Transcendence**

The innovation of Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause’s answer to these epistemological hurdles is intriguing. At first their argument appears to submit to judgements of Contingency. They assert that, ‘... the *self* is not the same as the mind’ (2001:150). This comment clearly implies a bifurcated ontology, but as their reasoning is followed a more persuasive explanation emerges. They continue by arguing that the mind precedes the *self* insofar as the sense and concept of *self* is culled from a wealth of physiologically determined conscious sensations and experiences. The *self* is an assemblage of all these variables into a coherent agency of mediation.<sup>385</sup> To some extent this explanation resembles Wilber’s rendering of the *Self System* (Chapter 3.2). In reminder Wilber defines the *Self System* as the locus of

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<sup>385</sup> Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause (2001:32) explain in more detail that as the, ‘... human brain evolved something remarkable happened: The brain, with its great perceptual powers, began to perceive its own existence, and human beings gained the ability to reflect, as if from a distance, upon the perceptions produced by their own brains. There seems to be, within the human head, an inner, personal awareness, a free-standing, observant self. We have come to think of this self, with all its emotions, sensations, and cognitions, as the phenomenon of *mind*.’

identification, volition, defence, organisation, and metabolism which, as it were, navigates the Waves, Streams, and States of consciousness to provide us with a sense of place and meaning in the world (Wilber 1999e:82). I argued that the ontological intricacy of such a freely mobile agency *in* consciousness is too speculative to stand up to empirical verification, but Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause's rendering may conditionally qualify a neurological foundation for such a proposal. They submit, based on the observation of certain conditions of brain damage, psychiatric disorder, or mystical states that if these many components are disrupted, injured, or intentionally blocked through spiritual practice, '... the *self* would come unravelled' (2001:150). At this point Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause make a surprising claim. They describe this 'unravelling' of the *self* as the consequence of a neurological function called *Deafferentation*. It is the process of preventing sensory input from defining the parameters of the orientation association area of the *Causal* and *Holistic Operators* in the brain. They continue by explaining that:

... the attention area tries more intensely to keep the mind clear of thoughts, this area, in conjunction with the hippocampus, chokes off more and more neural flow. As this blockage continues, bursts of neural impulses begin to travel, with increasing energy, from the deafferented orientation area, down through the limbic system, to the ancient neural structure known as the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus links higher brain activity with the basic functions of the autonomic nervous system and controls the autonomic system's ability to create both calming and arousal sensations (2001:117-118).<sup>386</sup>

In other words, the 'unravelling' of neurological functions which define the existential sense of *self* is precisely the mechanism which induces mystical experience. Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause (2001:151) explain that in mystical states *Deafferentation*, '... does not deprive the mind of awareness, it simply frees that awareness of the usual subjective sense of *self*, and from all sense of the spatial world in which that *self* could be.' This also means that, '... the *self* and the world must be contained within, and perhaps *created by*, the reality of Absolute Unitary Being [my italics] (2001:155).<sup>387</sup> Gravity is added to this hypothesis since most

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<sup>386</sup> Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause (2001:29) believe that, '... the orientation association area is extremely important in the brain's sense of mystical and religious experiences, which often involve altered perceptions of space and time, self and ego. Since the orientation association area is instrumental in shaping these basic perceptions, it must somehow be an integral part of spiritual experience.'

<sup>387</sup> Bede Griffiths (1987:248) makes an interesting comment about this. He explains that, 'This breakthrough to a higher level of consciousness seems to have taken place simultaneously in different places in the first millennium before Christ. In China, India, Persia, Greece and Israel there was a simultaneous breakthrough in an experience of transcendent spiritual Reality, a transcendence beyond word and thought, a genuine experience of the Absolute. This has been called the "axial" period of human history. It was during this time that the foundations of all the great religions were laid, and it is to this experience of the transcendent Mystery of Being

mystics report that the experience of AUB is the most 'real' experience of all (2001:163). The sense of *self*, in other words, is a particularisation which emerges out of AUB. Newberg and D'Aquili explain that the, '... neurological and philosophical correlates of this conviction make it clear that [NDC is] ... a plane of existence in which all degrees of difference dissolve and comparisons become impossible... so individual beings and objects cannot be perceived. The egotistical *self* cannot exist, because it has no *non-self* against which to define itself' (2001:160-161, cf 163). Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause thereby maintain that AUB is the neurological pre-form of all individuated and bifurcated forms of consciousness. Moreover, mystical experience must therefore be the impetus behind the formation of all the world's religions (2001:41). Religion, in other words, exists first and foremost to facilitate experience of the non-dual root condition of consciousness – AUB. Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause's hypothesis coheres precisely with Wilber's claim that NDC is indeed the *Ground of Being* and it is therefore surprising that Wilber does not acknowledge their extraordinary intimation. It may be, knowing that Newberg and D'Aquili are Physicalists, that Wilber pre-emptively assumed that they must be *de facto* reductionists and, as is his wont, excluded them from any further consideration.

Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause's hypothesis is striking – particularly because they substantiate their claims with such precise neurological evidence. It must be noted again that evidence of neurological correlates with AUB is not simultaneous proof of the 'realness' of its representational contents.<sup>388</sup> The fabrication of 'graphics' (auditory, visual, or some palpable sense of a Divine Other) in experiences of AUB are rather the consequence of a process which Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause call *Reification* (2001:149). *Reification* describes the brain's ability to transform conscious abstractions into defined objects which are presented as independently 'real' of the experiencer. In its neurological definition, say Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause (2001:149), *Reification*, '... refers to the power of the mind to grant meaning and substance to its own perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs ...' The neurological substrates which mediate the experience of AUB in the non-duality of *trophotropic* contemplation comprise long and complex biological explanations. A full account of these substantiations is unnecessary and a summary will suffice to demonstrate the point. Newberg, D'Aquili and

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that we are being invited in our time. The Western world has almost lost this knowledge, while the Eastern world in contact with the West is fast losing it. In every religion there has to be a return to this source, an experience of That which transcends all differences and brings the human mind into contact with Absolute Reality.'

<sup>388</sup> Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause make it clear that the, '... neurological realness of Absolute Unitary Being is by no means proof of an absolute spiritual reality ...' (2001:126-127).

Rause condense their theory by explaining that the quiescent disposition of *trophotropic* AUB causes:

... a corresponding decrease in arousal function. Under certain conditions as we have described, however, a neurological “spill-over” can occur in which the maximal activation of the calming system triggers an instantaneous maximal arousal response. As the quiescent and arousal systems both surge, the mind is overwhelmed by simultaneous floods of calming and arousal responses. This results in an explosion of frantic neural activity, flashing up from the hypothalamus through the limbic system and back to the attention association area, which is forced, by the sudden surge, to operate at its own maximal rates. In response, the *Deafferenting* effect that the attention area is directing toward the orientation area becomes supercharged, and in milliseconds, the *Deafferentation* of the orientation area becomes complete. The transcendent state we call Absolute Unitary Being refers to states known by various names in different cultures - the Tao, Nirvana, the *Unio Mystica*, Brahman-atman - but which every persuasion describes in strikingly similar terms. It is a state of pure awareness, a clear and vivid consciousness of *no-thing*. Yet it is also a sudden, vivid consciousness of *everything* as an undifferentiated whole (2001:147).

With the *trophotropic* experience in AUB thus defined, Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause explain that *ergotropic* meditative states occur when, ‘... a mystic falls short of absolute unity - if, in neurological terms, the *Deafferentation* of the orientation area is not complete - then subjective awareness would survive, and the mystic would interpret the experience as an ineffable union between the *self* and some mystical other. We examined the neurobiology of just such a state - the *Unio Mystica* - in our discussion of active meditation’ (2001:165). Again, the authors go into great bio-technological detail to justify their claim, but the point is made. It may be problematic to imply greater and lesser degrees of AUB by neurologically distinguishing *trophotropic* AUB from *ergotropic* AUB, but there is some mandate for this distinction among mystics for whom NDC is a more consummate mystical experience than content-based forms of meditative prayer, but for ‘meditators’ this bias may be an unfair discrimination.

### **7.5.3.3 Do Newberg and D’Aquili Provide Adequate Substantiation for a Physical Explanation of NDC?**

With these explanatory foundations in place we may now return to the questions which introduced Newberg and D’Aquili’s hypotheses. The first question considered whether the brain, as a product of natural selection in evolution, is biologically predisposed to construct

myths and pursue ecstatic or mystical experiences. If it is so orientated, what is its purpose? The same question was put to Dennett and it was explained that evolution, through the brain, has recognised the longer term advantages of information over mere instinct. Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause initially contended that, 'Evolution is pragmatically short-sighted; it favours adaptations that provide effective survival advantages in the practical here and now. Those adaptations that increase an organism's chances of survival are genetically passed along; those that don't are ruthlessly winnowed out... evolution, after all, doesn't plan ahead' (2001:124). Thus defended, Newberg and D'Aquili's research nonetheless ultimately brought them to the same conclusion that Dennett espouses. Newberg narrates that, '... as Gene and I sifted through mountains of data on religious experience, ritual, and brain science, important pieces of the puzzle came together and meaningful patterns emerged. Gradually, we shaped a hypothesis that suggests that spiritual experience, at its very root, is intimately interwoven with human biology. That biology, in some way, compels the spiritual urge' (2001:8). Later they substantiate that, '... evolution has adopted this machinery ... because religious beliefs and behaviours turn out to be good for us in profound and pragmatic ways' (2001:129). They support this argument on the basis of two evolutionary purposes realised as a result of religious adherence. The first embraces the neuropsychological system of self-maintenance, and the second produces altered states of consciousness as a means of self-transcendence. Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause believe that they have sufficient documented evidence of neurological processes that have evolved to allow humans, '... to transcend material existence and acknowledge and connect with a deeper, more spiritual part of ourselves perceived of as an absolute, universal reality that connects us to all that is' (2001:10). The evolutionary impetus to self-maintain is understandable, but what is the purpose of self-transcendence? This brings us to the second question.

Why and how does the brain experience 'divine' mystery? Newberg and D'Aquili defer to their neuropsychological model which explains the functions of hemisphericity; primary, secondary, and tertiary sensory receptive areas and their motor analogues; pre-frontosensorial polarity; and the integration of limbic functioning into cortical activity. This complex biological foundation enables Newberg and D'Aquili to justify the origin and purpose of AUB in terms of, '...differential stimulation and *Deafferentation* of various tertiary sensory association areas, along with integration of various patterns of limbic stimulation' (1993:177). An understanding of these functional clusters, and an ability to instrumentally 'observe' them, motivate Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause to propose that mystical experiences,

‘... are based in observable functions of the brain. The neurological roots of these experiences would render them as convincingly real as any other of the brain’s perceptions... The mystics are ... reporting genuine, neurobiological events’ (2001:143).

The persuasiveness of such incisive scientific underpinnings may however, be misleading. With reference to a previous observation, Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause freely admit that every experience is the result of brain processes – nothing is experienced immediately and directly. They say that, ‘... one can never get at what is “really out there” without its being processed, one way or another, through the brain... If God does exist ... and if He appeared to you in some incarnation, you would have no way of experiencing His presence, except as part of a neurologically generated rendition of reality. Neurology makes it clear: There’s no other way for God to get into your head except through the brain’s neural pathways’ (2001:37). There is therefore a major difference between Newberg and D’Aquili’s view and Wilber’s. For Wilber, the *Ground of Being* as Mind precedes or super-cedes matter, for Newberg and D’Aquili matter precedes the advent of consciousness. Additionally, Wilber claims empirical corroboration of NDC as an *Absolute Subjectivity* whereas Newberg and D’Aquili submit that AUB is ‘generated’ by the brain and that its realities are simulations.

That said, we come to the third question: is it sufficient to describe mystical consciousness as a certain array of electro-chemical impulses in the brain? Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause make it clear that brain science cannot prove the objects that appear in or as AUB, they can only correlate the appearance of certain neuro-chemical and electrical configurations in the brain with certain states of consciousness reported by the subjects (2001:143). By this the authors do not mean to suggest that AUB can be directly reduced to baseline reality, but suggest that, ‘...beneath the mind’s perception of thoughts, memories, emotions, and objects, beneath the subjective awareness we think of as the *self*, there is a deeper *self*, a state of pure awareness that sees beyond the limits of subject and object, and rests in a universe where all things are one’ (2001:155). This phraseology would please Wilber, but it does not thereby endorse Wilber’s philosophy. The reason for this is addressed in answer to the fourth question.

If the fabric of religious experiences are mere extrapolations from AUB by means of the contextual metaphors which define it – given that AUB is primarily a neurological rather than a conscious state, then there is no way of telling the difference between Ultimate Reality as



real and a real simulation of it. Reality, in other words, is created in the mind-brain (Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause 2001:165). The question then is whether all things really are a non-dual oneness, or whether they simply appear as such in the brain's simulation of a state we call NDC? The same rule would apply - there is no way of knowing for certain. Newberg and D'Aquili's Neurotheology is principally and necessarily agnostic. The 'deeper *self*' which Newberg and D'Aquili describe in the lyrical prose of the mystics is not a real or true *self* scientifically, it just appears as such phenomenologically. Given that the locus of human consciousness is phenomenologically embedded, it follows that that which appears to us in and as consciousness will be deemed real. This is the essential problem of knowledge and it lies at the root of the *Hard Problem*. Knowledge subsists in two primary domains: the first concentrates on the nature of knowledge (epistemology) whereas the second concentrates in the nature of the knower (ontology) and to date, despite Wilber's best efforts, it does not appear that they can be coherently held together in one integrated system without contradiction.

The fifth question considers the role of religious and spiritual practice in the construction of AUB events. Newberg and D'Aquili rightly argue that the brain's biological predisposition to strive after AUB experiences will seek to activate itself by engaging practices which are most likely to produce it. Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause argue that, '... the neurological effects of ritual behaviours create those brain states associated with a range of transcendent experiences... [moreover] the mind's need to understand these experiences can provide a biological origin for specific religious beliefs' (2001:9-10). Among innumerable possible techniques, the authors maintain that, '... slow rhythmic behaviours stimulate the quiescent system, which, when pushed to very high levels, directly activates the inhibitory effects of the hippo-campus, with the eventual result of *Deafferenting* the orientation area and, ultimately, of blurring the edges of the brain's sense of *self*, opening the door to the unitary states that are the primary goal of religious ritual (2001:87, 113-114).'

Finally, Newberg, D'Aquili and Rause are interested to show that there is an evolutionary and neurological connection between spiritual ecstasy and sexual orgasm. This may seem like an aside, but it should be remembered that the evolutionary procreative urge is among the strongest and oldest instincts. They contend that it is no accident that the highest physical pleasure should be associated with the highest spiritual pleasure since the neural proximity of these processes are so closely aligned. Newberg and D'Aquili substantiate this further by

pointing out that the, ‘... language of mysticism hints at this connection: Mystics of all times and cultures have used the same expressive terms to describe their ineffable experiences: *bliss, rapture, ecstasy, and exaltation*. They speak of losing themselves in a sublime sense of union, of melting into elation, and of the total satisfaction of desires’ (2001:125-126).

The conclusions drawn from Newberg and D’Aquili’s hypotheses are significant for Physicalist renderings of NDC. They suggest that conscious phenomena, be they of objective base-line realities or subjective spiritual realities, are neurologically equal constructions. Any subsequent distinctions are therefore value-based and are themselves meta-simulations. The point is that some things ‘feel’ more real than other things, but as Wilber rightly claims, these value-based senses cannot be neurologically mapped using modern brain imaging techniques. The present limitations of technology permit possible descriptions of the ‘type’ of experience a subject may be having, but not the content by which it is narrated. On the basis of these limitations Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause also maintain that human beings do not consciously invent God as much as they discover God in experiences of AUB since these *Deafferented* states neurologically precede abstractions into the differentiations of the *self*. AUB encounters therefore make the possibility of control a phenomenological reality – control being a fundamental aspect of evolutionary theory (2001:133). For Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause these discoveries indicate that mysticism, ‘... is the source of the essential wisdom and truth upon which all religions are founded. But before religious interpretations can be contextually understood, mystical experiences must be interpreted in rational terms...’ (2001:135-136). The ‘rational terms’ of these experiences are presented by the authors as the epistemological terrain of Neurotheology (2001:175). Newberg and D’Aquili’s model has important implications for the study of religion, theology, and the science of consciousness, but the field, by their own admission, is still in its infancy. As the former debate shows, a number of epistemological problems have yet to be resolved and evolutionary and neurological explanations for NDC have yet to find a coherent system by which subjective phenomena can be fully explained and validated (Newberg and D’Aquili 1993:197). The *Hard Problem* may be threatened by these technological advances, but its authority has yet to be persuasively challenged. Newberg and D’Aquili may be able to predict basic dispositions of quietude or ecstasy in a subject simply by examining a subject’s brain with various brain imaging techniques, but they cannot narrate with any degree of certainty what a subject is actually experiencing until the subject herself reports the content of her consciousness. Newberg, D’Aquili and Rause admit that this conclusion, ‘... may not be

very epistemologically satisfying, but up to now any alternative has escaped us' (2001:129). Indeed, it continues to escape all current researchers, but Newberg and D'Aquili have made significant headway.

### **7.6 Conclusion: Does NDC have a Place in Physicalist Theories of Consciousness?**

This chapter was introduced with the question of whether the ontological gap between the brain and consciousness, the *Hard Problem*, can be solved in an epistemologically coherent Physicalism? Renewed vigour in consciousness studies indicates potential, but to what extent has it offered adequate answers? In an attempt to answer this question the research of six eminent scientists, some working together, was reviewed and salient features distilled from their findings which have particular bearing on Wilber's definition NDC. It has been comprehensively argued that Wilber skews scientific protocols in his attempt to empirically prove the realness of NDC as an experience and, since they are indivisible, the Realness of the ontology which enables it – *Absolute Subjectivity*, the Ground, *Geist*, Spirit, or Mind (Wilber 1983b:76). Wilber is unaccommodating of the potential of Physicalist attempts to explain the non-duality of mystical consciousness because he places mechanistic strictures on its ontology and reductionistic limitations on its epistemology.

In an attempt to clarify the proposal tendered in this study a number of popular philosophical hypotheses were briefly reviewed and excluded on the bases of incoherence, inconsistency, or dualism. These included Naïve Realism, Constructivism, general types of Idealism, and various theories of Contingency – Epiphenomenalism, Emergence, Identity Theses, Property and Substance Dualism, Interactionism, Occasionalism, and Supervenience. Further clarification was offered by laying basic foundations for Physicalist theories of consciousness: the evidence from evolutionary theory and natural selection; the holonic character of the many ways in which matter exists; the statistical-mathematical likelihood that brains can evolve; the necessity of a new form of 'open' or 'inclusive' monism; the need for a re-definition of consciousness; and obviously a strict adherence to scientific standards. One of the popular solutions offered in keeping with all these standards suggests that consciousness is a simulation somehow generated by the brain. The merits and demerits of this hypothesis were considered and criticised. It is alternatively argued that whilst the brain is capable of hypothesising and simulating, consciousness is not a simulation in its totality. Simulation is rather a function of consciousness alongside many other faculties such as intentionality, selection, differentiation, and memory.

Additional moderating criteria were then included to refine the methodology. The continued discovery and application of the ‘laws of the universe’ are fundamental – bearing in mind that the scientific epistemologies embracing such laws span a wide and diverse spectrum of possibilities. The minimum principles necessary for scientific legitimacy include objectivity, replication, demonstration in the public domain, reliability, universality, and of course, coherence and consistency. The problem of an adequate language or means of description of phenomena like NDC again came to the fore. The problematic question of whether scientific proof can be valid for ineffable phenomena was briefly reiterated. Consequently further investigative limitations are placed on the nature of the non-dual experience which precludes the physical realness of absolutist innuendos. Thus defended, it is nonetheless accepted that the brain as consciousness can manifest the ‘illusion’ of the realness of the Absolute, in other words, that ‘real illusions’ are possible and scientifically permissible as long as their ontology is referred to brain function. For Nørretranders, and in a different sense for Dennett, consciousness as a whole is therefore an illusion. Moreover the classification of mystical experiences as ‘illusions’ need not denude the vitality of the phenomena since most mysticisms similarly endorse the illusory nature of the *self* and the ephemeral world it perceives.

The results of these initial moderating criteria indicate that it is impossible to co-validate Physicalist and Essentialist philosophies. Whilst it is admitted that science has yet to adequately explain phenomena like NDC, its exponential progress indicates potential for increasingly viable theories. These advances have already contributed to the rising tide of discontent expressed in traditional Essentialist renderings still prevalent in post-modern Christianity. As a means of illustrating the academic vigour of recent advances in consciousness studies, the theories of Dennett, Edelman, Tononi, Nørretranders, Newberg, and D’Aquili were then considered. This survey revealed a number of significant agreements and as many important differences. The differences are however generally concerned with biological, operational, and technical details rather than overall concepts. All six theorists, in various ways, agree that some fundamentals are implicit to Physicalist explanations of consciousness. Each of the following ten points is split into two parts; the first encapsulates the broad areas of agreement among the six scientists, but excludes differences of opinion regarding physiological and functional details; and the second bulleted portion considers its implications for NDC as it has been defined in this thesis. The outcome is revealing:

1. Matter in evolution through eons of natural selection is the root ontology of consciousness. This also means that genetically heritable qualities are subject to evolutionary adaptations and these adjustments are significantly influenced by inherited and current conceptual and environmental contexts.
  - If consciousness is the product of biological evolution, then NDC as a particular type of consciousness must also be evolutionarily determined. Since evolution is still in process NDC cannot be ontologically ultimate. It is possible that the properties of NDC are the product of genetic heritability and Newberg and D'Aquili make a strong case for this probability. It is certainly true that the experience of NDC is to some extent fashioned by inherited and present socio-cultural and religious contexts.
2. A physically deterministic and causal necessity is implicit to the operational aptitudes of consciousness. Consciousness is therefore principally a biological process which has developed self-assessing attributes which enable the *appearance* of 'self-awareness'. This is manifest in its ability to reason about its own reasoning through differentiating, rational, analytical, and abstracting capabilities.
  - If the physiological process called consciousness is deterministically defined then NDC is equally the product of biological causality and it cannot therefore transcend the properties of matter. The experience of spacelessness and timelessness in transcendence as it is described by Wilber (1976:236; 1993a:36, 287) must similarly be an abstracted construction rather than an Absolute Reality behind reality. This physiological delimitation does not impose the same limitation on the phenomenology of NDC.
3. The notion of *self* is therefore also an abstraction. All six theorists variously agree that the *self* is a fabrication of brain processes which has no locus of existence independent of the functional properties of certain distributed neurological operations.<sup>389</sup>
  - If the *self* as the felt sense of individuated personhood that 'possesses' consciousness is a fabrication, then NDC as a phenomenon, since it is narrated by the *self* and ultimately sublates the *self*, must also be a fabrication. However, since NDC transcends or sublates the *self* Newberg and D'Aquili's thesis makes theoretical sense. It has been shown that for them AUB is the platform out of which the *self* emerges

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<sup>389</sup> Susan Greenfield, another significant researcher in the science of consciousness, agrees that, '... the brain cannot be so easily compartmentalised. We now know, thanks both to clinical observation and to neuro-scientific research, that there is no simple one-to-one matching between a function and a particular part of the brain (2001:6).

and it thereby assigns a property to NDC which, in a sense, does precede the bifurcations of disintegrated consciousness. This is theoretically consistent with a Physicalist hypothesis, but for the moment it remains a deduction without substantial proof.

4. The experience of the unity and integration of consciousness is acknowledged, but afforded different degrees of 'realness' between the six theorists. Dennett, Edelman, and Tononi agree that a multiplicity of parallel sequences function as competitive processes from which cohesive assemblages are distilled into Centres of Narrative Gravity or Dynamic Cores and these 'coagulations', for want of a better word, form the basis of consciousness.
  - If NDC is the definitive condition, not just of unity, but of consummate non-duality and complete synthesising integration of all simultaneity, then is it a kind of 'ultimate' Centre of Narrative Gravity or Dynamic Core? Dennett would reject the notion out of hand, and Edelman and Tononi would be suspicious of its implications for neurophysiology, but Newberg and D'Aquili's theory of *Deafferentation* - the blocking of all neurological processes from forming concepts or senses - explains why the feeling of such complete absorptive oneness with the All might be experienced. NDC may then be physiologically explained either as the pre or de-coagulation of multiple parallel neurological functions. Again, the hypothesis may not contradict Dennett, Edelman, and Tononi's theories, but it remains unproved.
5. Consciousness is the heavily edited product of much more expansive and unconscious or subconscious processes of input and response. In other words, nothing enters consciousness whole. That which 'appears' as awareness is therefore a very small part of that which the brain does. Nørretranders calls this winnowing process Exformation.
  - If, as Wilber claims, NDC is the highest realisable expression of consciousness then is it simply the product of over-Exformation to the point that nothing enters consciousness, or is it under-Exformation in that consciousness is flooded with so much input simultaneously that it synthesises this multiplicity into a single oceanic experience? We have seen that Newberg and D'Aquili suggest a certain truth to both processes. *Deafferentation* prevents data from clustering into concepts and this results in quiescent states of AUB whereas, under certain unusual conditions, the quiescent branch of the autonomic system can be driven to such intense levels of activity that it floods the normal antagonistic reaction between the sympathetic and

parasympathetic systems, but this state of consciousness is ecstatic rather than quiescent. In this way *trophotropic* and *ergotropic* states of AUB are both neurologically explained.

6. The deterministic underpinning of consciousness does not preclude the real experience of free will, although there is disagreement about how this happens. Moreover, the deterministic premise motivates curiosity and informational acquisitiveness for its own sake. The scope of informational variety processed by the brain requires measuring or weighing up of options which results in speculative mechanisms leading to abstraction and uncertainty. This process is equally the root of imagination and creativity, and its synthesising capacities, through Edelman and Tononi's *Differentiation and Informativeness*, allow for the generation of new ideas.
  - If, as Dennett argues, free will is not freedom *from* physical determinism, but the learnt ability of the physically limited brain to make considered choices – a process he explains in the *Intentional Stance* – then surely the volitional pursuit of mystical consciousness is equally tenable? The brain's propensity to acquire information, particularly information that promises the highest rewards, substantiates the allure of NDC. If uncertainty causes disequilibrium in the form of fear, anxiety or loss of definition, then it follows that the absolute realness and 'bliss' associated with NDC is the most reassuring solution.
7. There are number of neurological and conceptual limitations to the capacity of consciousness. The most important of these is phenomenological privacy – the realisation that no one can experience anyone else's consciousness.
  - This point poses one of the most significant challenges to Wilber's claims in his *Three Step Exemplar* applied to *Transcendelia*. Scientific corroboration of non-dual phenomena as it is narrated by mystics is empirically impossible, but Dennett's *Heterophenomenology* may open the way for more reliable quantitative assessments. Language as a mediating agency is generally an unreliable scientific resource, but it has to be included as a functional necessity in any attempt to study consciousness. Dennett would not support the following idea, but if his method is applied and standardised it could add credence to the scientific study of NDC.
8. Based on reliable empirical research, consciousness can only process one set of focussed operations at a time. It is not possible, in other words to think about two things

simultaneously. We may be able to perform multiple basic operations concurrently if they are sufficiently habituated, but we are not able to think about them at the same time.

- Clearly *trophotropic* NDC is not concerned with thinking about anything at all, but *ergotropic* AUB is concentrated attention on a single intention – not in any analytical or theoretical way, but as a means of honing, refining or purifying awareness of indwelling or pervasive divine presence. It is possible that meditation is simply the trained capacity of consciousness to direct and magnify its focus to the extent that subliminal awareness of other thoughts and senses is attenuated. Edelman and Tononi assert that when the Dynamic Core is modulated to its maximum capacity it may be possible not to be aware of being aware (2004:127-128). This description resembles the experience of NDC and, with further substantiation, may endorse it as a real experience.

9. Very significantly, all six theorists admit from various vantage points that epistemological limitations in Physicalism foreclose the possibility and legitimacy of explaining subjective conscious qualities exclusively through the instruments of objective quantities.

- Dennett achieves this by denying the existence of such qualities, but it is easy to misunderstand his intention. His personal narration of his sense of liberation and joy in science reads very much like mystical prose. Moreover he is the only theorist who develops the imperative of pleasure in evolutionary processes – a biological propensity which may lie at the root of Newberg and D’Aquili’s assumption that the brain is fundamentally configured, as a kind of base state, for deafferented equanimity – a notion akin to common descriptions of NDC.<sup>390</sup> The fact remains, NDC embodies phenomena too abstracted for science to explain its form, but it does not prevent science from explaining its neuro-physiological *ontos*.

10. Dennett, Nørretranders, Edelman, and Tononi all argue, again from differently motivated perspectives, that either NDC does not exist as it is narrated by mystics or that it represents the absence of consciousness. This conclusion hinges on their assumption that consciousness only exists when its operational faculties are functional and active – albeit in varying degrees depending on particular states of consciousness.

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<sup>390</sup> According to Macrone (2002:174) Sigmund Freud suggested that, ‘... we have the most fun when we feel absolutely nothing, especially not desire. Pleasure is a state where nothing ever happens. This is because Freud thought of pleasure not as a positive feeling but rather as the absence of “unpleasure”, or, in the charming German phrase, “unlust”. The psyche detests tension, which comes in many forms (anxiety, desire, guilt, etc.), and it instinctively wants to be rid of it. What we really want, and what the pleasure principle seeks, is a steady, undisturbed state, which Freud called “homeostasis”. The pleasure principle is thus the psychological equivalent of the principle of inertia.’



- If consciousness only exists when it is doing something, does NDC therefore not exist since it is claimed to be an *Apophatic* un-doing of all disintegrated processes? Even the Neurotheology derived from Newberg and D’Aquili’s studies falls shy of the total void described in *trophotropic* contemplation, but they explain that the brain can remain in alert repose or a high degree of attentive poise in all its potentials in the consummate emptiness or fully deafferented condition of NDC. In this sense Dennett, Nørretranders, Edelman, and Tononi would be right – NDC does not exist because their definition of existence requires a bounded specification of a type of existence as compared to other types of existence or non-existence. NDC, on the other hand, is not so much the selection of a particular state of consciousness, but rather a highly attuned contentless awareness. It accommodates all possible modes of conscious existence without defining itself by any. The suggestion is speculative, but it does not contradict the theories of the scientists when it is properly qualified.

These ten points make it patently clear that none of the fundamental criteria necessary for a consistent and coherent Physicalist description of consciousness necessarily contradict or disqualify mystical experience. The guiding maxim tendered in the introduction of this thesis remains intact. Clearly a good measure of theoretical refinement will be necessary to validate the suggestion, but its viability is at least substantiated ‘in principle’. The difference, of course, is apparent in the description of the ontology ascribed to the content or cause of NDC. Like consciousness itself, NDC must be a particular configuration of neurological processes – nothing more. The ontology of *Absolute Subjectivity*, Spirit, *Geist*, or Mind as it is variously named by Wilber, must be assigned to a process resembling Newberg and D’Aquili’s theory of *Reification*. In this way the metaphorical content which mediates the agency of AUB leading up to and reflecting on NDC is neurologically explained. Nothing can therefore be said about the real existence of God or Mind – this is not the province of science, but NDC as a physiological and experientially real phenomenon is accepted. In this Physicalist view the *Hard Problem* is not feasibly solved by denying the real experiences of consciousness since the phenomenology of inner subjectivity is integral to human definition. The expanded ontology of the brain as it is described by the former scientists can accommodate all the faculties of consciousness without requisite Essentialist extrapolations – although Newberg and D’Aquili may, as has been argued, fall prey to some assumptions. Even Dennett, the most aggressive Physicalist, says, ‘According to the materialists, we can (in principle!) account for every mental phenomenon using the same physical principles, laws, and raw

materials that suffice to explain radioactivity, continental drift, photosynthesis, reproduction, nutrition, [and even] ... antimatter and black holes are now included in the standard scientific ontology' (1993:36). With such an endorsement a physical account for all conscious phenomena becomes both possible and necessary if we hope to establish a unified ontology with a coherent and consistent epistemology. Ramachandran (2003:44-45) concurs that, '... it is only in the brain that we can eventually hope to find the answers.' Even so says Davies (1992:xv), not everything is or ever can be fully accounted for by science, '... ultimate questions will always lie beyond the scope of empirical science as it is usually defined... Probably there must always be some "mystery" at the end of the universe.'



## CHAPTER EIGHT CONCLUSION

### 8.1 The Foundational Context of this Research

Among its many other purposes and functions, religion straddles the spaces that separate opposites. Beliefs around the existence and nature of life and death, sin and salvation, heaven and hell, and body and soul occupy much of spirituality's energy in its attempt to heal the schisms or vindicate the better in the pairs. And yet, it is precisely the dynamic and necessary tension between opposites that animates human imagination and intellect – it almost seems as if we *need* the uncertainty to fuel the creative power of the human mind. Consciousness exercises and cultivates all the resources of faith, reason, and imagination as it strains to answer the most fundamental and ubiquitous of questions: why is there an explanatory gap at all, where does duality come from? This is the *Hard Problem* and its expanded ontology surveyed in this study braces the full spectrum of human knowledge and experience. These bifurcations are manifest in infinite variety. Every conceivable discipline, save mysticism, labours either to bridge the gap or deny its existence by choosing one side in the pair as real and true and the other as not, but often this is still a tacit acknowledgement of duality and the *Hard Problem* remains safely intact.

Arguments about the existence or non-existence of God are generally too worn out to be of any interest and most people, it seems, have distributed themselves on a spectrum of possibility between faith and reason. Any number of variables from culture and ethnicity to economics and the unpredictability of life will motivate people to move closer to faith or closer to reason. A single life-changing event, a tragedy or an illumination, can shift us from our chosen place and thrust us into denial of God, or into pure and dedicated faith. Either way, it has never been possible to be a Physicalist and an Essentialist at the same time. Rucker (1997:214-215) similarly acknowledges that, 'Both types of knowledge are real, and both are important. But it is very hard - perhaps impossible - for us to see the world in both ways at once.' Does this mean that Physicalists are incapable of faith and Essentialists incapable of reason? Certainly not. Physicalists surely have faith in the reliability of science, rationality, and logic – as do most Christians, and Christians who enjoy the privilege of sound scientific education will 'mostly' choose to believe in evolution. There is, in other words, a profound extent to which faith and reason inform and invigorate each other's noetic development. Having acknowledged the inseparability of faith and reason as a highly

complex, creative, and integrated conscious process, there is nevertheless no sense in which God's existence can be simultaneously true and untrue – *except in the mystical realisation of NDC*. How can this be? Armstrong (2008:175) explains that mystical apprehensions are generally unconcerned with anthropomorphic interpretations of God as divinised Super Person. Moreover any notion of 'existence' applied to God must be 'other' to all conceptual, rational, imaginable, and corporeal modes of existence. Armstrong therefore encourages that it is better, '... to call God "Nothing" because God is not another being. Jews refrain from speaking God's name, in the same way as Muslims forbid any visual representation of the divine, as a reminder that that any human expression of God is bound to be so limited as to be potentially blasphemous' (2008:175). Perhaps, as the Buddha advises (Thanissaro 1996), it is not so much a matter of the problem being unanswerable by faith or reason, but that the question should not be asked at all. This is not a form of infidelity or intellectual abdication, but the realisation that the answer to the question has no measurable existence.

Mysticism is a discipline set apart from all others. It has no epistemology like any other, and submits to no ontology apart from any other. Mysticism is an anomalous discipline that defines the lives of so few and confounds the curiosities of so many. How is it that the tenacious *Hard Problem* is at its weakest, maybe even finally thwarted, in mystical consciousness? Is there any other discipline that can go some way towards unravelling mysticism's secret? This conundrum motivates the question tendered in this thesis: *is there a way in which a Physicalist interpretation of non-dual mystical consciousness can move towards a resolution of the Hard Problem without diluting the mystical phenomenon as it is described by Essentialists?* The preamble in this conclusion indicates that it may be naïve to ask the question at all. And yet it is not unreasonable to wonder what would happen if we were ever to finally solve the *Hard Problem*? Would there be anything left to do? Everything would fall into perfect place and everything would make sense – no conflicts would exist, no uncertainty, and therefore no reason to think. Having solved the problem of duality would we simply wallow in blissful equanimity - would the reason for consciousness' existence become redundant and end in entropic stasis? Is it heaven or is it hell? The circularity of the question sets us back at our point of departure, and it is at this point that the argument of thesis began.

With all indications mitigating against the possibility of finding a coherent and consistent answer to the question, the heuristic invitation extended in the Introduction of this study challenges that an attempt must nonetheless be made. Somewhat like the accidents of natural

selection, heuristics sometimes happens upon new insights that are sufficiently enticing to motivate further research. As an experiment, this research suggests, un-intuitively perhaps, that a Physicalist interpretation may reveal new and useful insights into mystical phenomena. To set about a Physicalist explanation of NDC requires obedience to science's epistemological standards and restriction within its ontological terrain. With these delimitations accepted, a guiding maxim is set in place to measure the noetic viability of phenomenological claims in mysticism through scientific protocols, and mysticism has equal recourse to challenge those strictures. The formal results of this endeavour reveal the viability of theories pertaining to the ontological status of properties – in this case the ontology of NDC and the possibility of ascertaining the veracity of such knowledge through scientific instruments. The Integral Philosophy of Ken Wilber is chosen as the vicarious agency through which this investigation is conducted because it embraces and attempts syntheses of all possible genres of thought and experience – all of which find their fullest realisation in mystical non-duality. Wilber (1993a:25) explains the area of research in farcical phrase:

Is consciousness really matter, or is matter really consciousness? The idealists, or mentalists, just could not stomach the thought that consciousness was not much more than a fancy lump of clay, differing not at heart from rocks, tables, and dirt; thus, they were always on hand with the question. "But where does the impression of matter have its existence?" The answer, of course, is that material impressions exist only in consciousness, and so the conclusion is obvious: all matter is but a mental idea. This however, was too much for the materialists, who would reply, "Well, then, where does consciousness come from?" The answer here being, "From nothing but physical process in the human brain," and so the opposite conclusion is equally obvious: all ideas are just material.

For Wilber the answer is palpable, the solution is to be found neither in faith, nor in reason, but only in NDC (1996e:xvii; cf 1997c:95; 1999e:613; 2001:2). Kourie (1992:86) describes this form of mystical awareness as, '... consciousness of union with the Divine, or the Ground of Being, or Ultimate Reality.' The essential qualifiers of Wilber's description of NDC are aptly summarised by Kourie (1992:86):

The mystical experience is characterised by *awareness*, although the sensory-conceptual apparatus of the mind remains in abeyance. Such a state of consciousness, characterised by non-intellectual, non-sensory perception is different from everyday experience. Normal sensing, characterised by the duality of a subject-object framework, whether

comprising either ordinary observation or highly complex scientific reasoning is thus absent in the mystical experience itself.

Wilber's *Three Step Exemplar* applied to *Transcendelia* is an attempt to empirically verify the Reality of *Absolute Subjectivity* realised in NDC. However, in so doing he contravenes the threshold of noetic viability set as a minimum standard of compliance in scientific research. The hypothesis put forward in this thesis argues that coherence and consistency is more likely to be attained through a non-dual Physicalist epistemology, but can its conclusions reach far enough into the non-dual phenomenon to ratify its truth-claims?

The conclusions of this debate will be listed shortly, but by way of contextual reiteration a number of provisions are set in place. The question concerns the nature and adequacy of evidence. In the particular version of NDC considered in this mystagogical context, evidence is something of an oddity. It has been shown in the course of this research that NDC requires no evidence in and of itself and, indeed it has no discernable content to be measured as evidence. For this reason a unique kind of methodology has to be constructed that permits the inclusion of highly subjective personal consciousness without breaking the rules of scientific method. Bell, Swenson-Wright and Tybjerg (2008:2) reveal some potential dangers regarding the quest for evidence. Firstly, when we engage our faculties of reason with a particular goal in mind, we actively tend to ignore evidence that does not support our hypothesis. Secondly, the ways, '... in which evidence is used, accepted, and challenged varies widely' (Bell, Swenson-Wright and Tybjerg 2008:3). Thirdly, the ways in which knowledge is generated, mediated, and authenticated in one discipline may be inadequate or inappropriate for other disciplines. Caution must therefore be applied when multi-method approaches are used in order to avoid unsubstantiated ontological confluations. Fourthly, most researchers submit to the density of occurrence and the repeatability of evidence as reliable markers of validity – that is, if something happens often enough in the same way it must be true. Of course it may *not* be true, but in some instances where alternative forms of evidence are absent it seems to be the best bet. Finally, and most importantly, Bell, Swenson-Wright and Tybjerg (2008:4) point out that, 'Certain beliefs become important to us – become evidence – exactly because they generate an elegant and satisfying explanation.' To what extent, it might be asked, do some types of argument earn the right to evidence, not because they are necessarily true, but because they are normalised or because they appear to be the most persuasive? These hurdles have been variously encountered in this thesis. Armstrong

(2008:174-194) surmises that the lack of evidence for a believer is often a necessary validation of faith, whereas an unbeliever considers it a fundamental weakness. Is Wilber first and foremost a 'believer' or does he really have the evidence he claims? Armstrong argues that both approaches are flawed and her conclusions align closely with those listed below.

## **8.2 General Conclusions**

### **8.2.1 Ontology and Epistemology**

The relational problem between ontology and epistemology is located at the forefront of this debate. The ontological domain of science, whatever its disciplinary type, is necessarily defined within closed systems of matter and our apprehension of its many manifestations. The ontology of mystical phenomena, particularly as it is described in Wilber's rendition of NDC, submits to no such limitations and this contravenes the appropriation of epistemologies designed for science when they are imported into mysticism. In brief, science cannot measure NDC as a subjective phenomenon. Thus acknowledged, science can however measure the physiological configurations which support it, cause it, and mediate its various states. Furthermore, scientific method can quantitatively study the socio-cultural, religious, symbolic, aesthetic, and theological narrations of mystical experiences and, depending on how criteria are selected, it can validate mystical phenomena on the basis of this inferred evidence. The rapidly growing field of consciousness research has made significant strides in its study of the human brain and these findings can inform and endorse, in principle, the real experience of NDC.

Difficulties associated with inductive and deductive methodologies nevertheless come to the fore and conclusions will have legitimacy on the condition that epistemological coherence and consistency are maintained. Again, this means that objective manifestations of phenomena pertaining to the occurrence and contexts of NDC can be measured and assessed, but not the inner personal experience itself because the rule of phenomenological privacy prevents it. Scientific method must, in other words, be willing to accommodate the 'assumption' that mystics are truthfully and accurately reporting their experiences because science cannot observe the phenomenon directly. This means that scientific applications to NDC have no choice but to permit the inclusion of meta-narratives and it has been argued that Dennett's (1993, 2004, 2006) method of Heterophenomenology may provide sufficient safeguards to substantiate its procedural legitimacy.



### 8.2.2 Essentialism and Physicalism: The Asymptotic Limit of Heuristic Enquiry

As a means of demarcating the possible spectra of opinion regarding the ontological nature of NDC, two broad categories of opinion are explained. Essentialism defers final validation to trans-material and trans-conceptual ontologies whereas Physicalism limits its truth-claims to objective and empirically verifiable ontologies. On the basis of this fundamental disjunction it is concluded that Essentialists and Physicalists can neither prove, nor disprove each other's truth-claims. Moreover, because of the problem appropriated from Gödel's *Incompleteness Theorem*, it is not even possible for closed noetic systems to fully prove the completeness and consistency of their *own* truth-claims. Nørretranders (1999:46) asserts that Gödel's discovery:

... forced scientists to admit that they would never be able to prove everything in this world, that human understanding of the world will forever contain intuitive insights that cannot be proved; that human beings know more about the world than they can explain via a formal system.... This realization, understandably called the most profound proof ever carried out, concerns the limits of the certainty of human knowledge, the limits of what we can prove. It is proof that we cannot prove everything, even when we know it is true.

Nørretranders (1999:413) therefore challenges that we must, '... learn to be aware of the fact that we are not aware of everything; learn to be conscious that consciousness is limited.' This simply means that neither Essentialists nor Physicalists can claim any form of final truth, particularly not *Absolute Truth*, in their respective observations of NDC, and Wilber is therefore mistaken to assume that his epistemology can. At best, both Essentialists and Physicalists can report on its observable features – for Essentialists this 'observation' extends legitimacy to inner esoteric or subjective features as well as exoteric objective features, whereas Physicalists are typically limited to demonstrable impartiality. Thus distinguished, Physicalist approaches to consciousness can now validate inner subjective experience on the basis of coherent theories associated with certain neurological functions and processes. Thanks to the scientific and philosophical insights of Physicalists like Dennett, Edelman, Tononi, Nørretranders, Newberg, and D'Aquili this means that inner subjective experiences, even those as abstract as NDC, can now be scientifically and biologically authenticated.

### 8.2.3 The Problem with Wilber

The extensive survey of the foundational principles supporting Wilber's Integral Philosophy informs important aspects of this study. The formidable scope of Wilber's syntheses of vast bodies of informational types and categories is truly innovative and his theory must qualify as a significant intellectual achievement. The elegance and structural cohesiveness of his AQAL Model with all its mediating agencies and intra-dynamic synergies indicate profound insight and, indeed, spiritual wisdom as all possibilities are sublated into a *Kosmic* matrix of non-duality. The Descending and Ascending movements of consciousness have a form of *ontos* – a being-ness that is sentient and intentional and this may give the impression that Wilber proposes a co-substantiation of matter and Mind, but the reality is a transcendental realisation that matter and Mind are, in paradoxical form, transubstantiated as *non-dual being*, but not of the type that permits the reduction of Mind to matter, or the elevation of matter to Mind. The *Hard Problem* 'appears' to be accordingly solved. It is not only Wilber's methodological acuity which deserves credit, but the persuasiveness and passion with which he expresses his hypotheses. Whilst many attempts at *theories of everything* have been submitted over the years, Wilber's is surely the most sophisticated and thorough. Wilber's personal development through mysticism in the Perennial Philosophy, into Transpersonal Psychology and science, and finally into the intricacy of his struggle with duality in the movements of Involution and Evolution yield an integral theory which is foremost in its class. As a metaphorical instrument embracing almost every aspect of thinking and experience, Wilber's Integralism sets a new benchmark as a discipline for future development.

With these accolades deservedly recognised, a closer reading of Wilber's epistemological applications as he attempts substantiations of disparate ontologies in science and mysticism transgresses the threshold of noetic viability set as a minimum standard in science. Whilst Wilber admits that his model is purely metaphorical and consists only of orienting generalisations (1997a:ix-x, xvi; cf 1998b:vii; 1999e:21; 2000a:x), his primary premise nonetheless claims the provability of *Absolute Subjectivity* realised in NDC. It is however, not consistent to claim veridical absolutes in partial models. Consequently, Wilber's (2000a:284) assent to, '... an experimental, verifiable, repeatable proof for the existence of Godhead, *as a fact* ...' is contradictory and his 'scientific' *Three Step Exemplar* fails on the basis of epistemological incoherence. Moreover, Wilber's (1997a:xix) claim that his method applied to *Transcendelia*, '... is one of the simplest proofs, no doubt, of God's insistent

existence...’ must assume *a priori* knowledge which he cannot prove. Wilber (1993b:41) defends that, ‘... when we say Mind is Reality, this is not so much a logical conclusion as it is a certain experience - as we pointed out, Reality is “what” is understood and felt from the non-dual and non-symbolic level of Mind.’ Notwithstanding this qualification, Wilber nonetheless goes on to make absolutist claims on the basis of his version of reconstructive science. In consequence of these disjunctive epistemological and ontological confluences it must be recognised that science must remain agnostic if it reaches into mysticism. Wilber is therefore mistaken to claim that science can corroborate truth-claims associated with mystical *gnosis*.

To complicate his postulations further, Wilber clearly subscribes to the veracity of evolutionary theory, and since this includes the advent of time and space in various ‘Big Bang’ theories, Wilber cannot simultaneously claim timelessness and spacelessness as ontological absolutes in NDC. The point here is that in evolutionary terms matter and time have existed since the moment of the universe’s birth some 15 billion years ago, whereas consciousness is an extremely recent appearance on this enormous scale. If so, how can Wilber claim that Consciousness predefines and transcends time and space? The Croatian philosopher Arvan Harvat (1999) similarly argues that Wilber’s attempt to, ‘.... integrate a thoroughly non-dual approach like Zen with an evolutionary view is ultimately impossible: if your model includes absolutely *everything*, how can it change?’ It is principally these unsubstantiated inclusions of ultimacy and absolutism that imbue Wilber’s philosophy with ontologies which transcend physicality and his philosophy must therefore be classified as a form of Essentialism. The implications of contingent abstractions from these primary errors destabilise too much of Wilber’s hermeneutic processes for it to be afforded significant recognition in the scientific fraternity. The unfortunate result of this failure is that Wilber is now most often classified as a popular *new age* writer.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Gamez (2007:22-23) explains the dangers of unstable hermeneutic circles. It is in the nature of these epistemological structures to contain self-referencing elements which increase the risk of inconsistency and incoherence. Gamez (2007:23) sites the common pluralistic assertion that ‘everybody is right’. Wilber (2001a:3) clearly states, ‘I have one major rule: everybody is right. More specifically, everybody - including me - has some important pieces of the truth, and all of those pieces need to be honoured, cherished, and included in a more gracious, spacious, and compassionate

embrace.’ Whilst Wilber’s assertion is resonant with pluralistic overtones, he does qualify the nature of such inclusions into carefully graded and appropriately positioned holonic sequences – in which case the difference between pluralism and integralism is well argued, but the notion that ‘everybody is right’ remains epistemologically problematic. Gamez goes on to explain that such inclusions remain stable when they include their own truth-claims, but become unstable when they include absolutist claims. An inclusionist like Wilber must, by virtue of his definition, include absolutists, but since the absolutist disqualifies the veracity of all theories but his own, the inclusionist is left with a contradiction. Since the inclusionist is committed to believing that ‘everybody is right’, he also has to believe that the absolutist is right, but if he believes the absolutist he contradicts his own claim that ‘everybody is right’. This simple thought experiment clearly reveals that Wilber’s ‘one major rule’ forestalls his ability to postulate a coherent and consistent epistemology. In other words, there is no epistemology that can claim that ‘everybody is right’ without the risk of self-referential contradiction.

The conclusion tendered in this thesis is that the coincidence of science and mysticism is asymptotic rather than authentically integrated. This means that science can and must continue to inform the nature of consciousness as a physiological process *and* as a subjective phenomenon. This also means that it must inform, insofar as it can, aspects of mysticism and it may even prove its empirical properties and processes, but it must recognise that it cannot prove its phenomenological objects. Ramachandran (2003:36-37) concurs that, ‘... this approach to consciousness will take us a long way towards answering the riddle of the benefits of consciousness and why it evolved.’ These potentials are illustrated in Chapter Seven where the theories of prominent scientists of consciousness were surveyed and further details will be enumerated shortly.

#### **8.2.4 Modernism, Post-Modernism, and the Science-Mysticism Dialectic**

Wilber rightly maintains that the evolution of consciousness from pre-modernism, through modernism, to post-modernism profoundly influences the character of contemporary religious consciousness. As such Wilber focuses in Teilhardian terms on NDC as the end-purpose of evolution and consequently reduces the efficacy of all other disciplines to categories of mere interpretation in varying degrees of noetic disintegration. Consequently any Physicalist theory is relegated to modernist reductionism or post-modern deconstructivism. The question here is whether NDC indeed has a capacity advantage over all other knowledge types? Based

on a critical analysis of Wilber's approach it is concluded that there is no way in which he can posit NDC as the agency of absolute transcendental *gnosis* without circumscribing all other possible approaches to true knowledge. This implies that there is ultimately only one *True* epistemology and it pertains only to itself in the ineffable mystery of NDC. The difficulty here has been thoroughly argued; Wilber's epistemology cannot prove its own premises. Nørretranders (1999:x) emphatically contends that it has become increasingly clear that, '... the basis of objectivity is itself subjective; that no formal system will ever be able to substantiate or prove itself.'

Spirituality as it finds its fullest expression in mysticism does not primarily intend to prove itself or guard dogma. It rather yearns for resolution in liberation from attachment into the extraordinary creative ability to transcend itself into deeper and more integrated realisations of its own fundamental non-dual nature. The transcendental qualities of mysticism, particularly of the Apophatic kind, are thus acknowledged, but does the phenomenological sense of ultimacy and ineffability in NDC necessarily foreclose the viability of sound scientific research – that is – research that retains empirical coherence and consistency by reframing the scope of ontology applied to NDC? Contra Wilber's tacit foreclosure on such advances by pinning NDC at humanity's intellectual pinnacle, the vigorous pursuit of knowledge in all its forms can surely add value and intellectual credibility to the emergence of new spiritual paradigms. Moreover, if such investigations are scrupulously navigated there is no reason why science may not inform and add credence to the transformative vitality of mysticism. This means that Physicalism must have *de facto* access to mysticism if Wilber's claim to integralism is to hold true. It does not mean that science is necessarily able to validate all mystical truth-claims in its own terms, but its domain of research should not be relegated to ontological inferiority as a result. The supremacist idealisation of mysticism does not endear it to the wider academic community and its allure as a field of study should therefore expose it openly to interdisciplinary research.

### **8.2.5 Consciousness, Phenomenology, and Language**

It must be conceded that theological, religious, and a variety of other socio-cultural contexts inform, and to some degree direct the phenomenon of non-duality in mysticism. There is, in other words, a limited extent to which Constructivism has objective validity, but when it comes to consciousness as personal experience – the actual sense of what it feels like to 'be me' – the *phenomenon* of consciousness remains definitionally hidden from third-person

observation. The various interpretations of Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger attest to the phenomenological obfuscations implicit in ontologies ascribed to consciousness. The same recondite qualities must therefore hold true for definitions of NDC. Despite the verification Wilber claims through his *Three Step Exemplar*, it must be accepted that the phenomenology of NDC can never be ontologically represented if it is to remain true to its transcendental definition. Since Wilber's rendition of NDC is formless and void, there can be no quantity or quality for his epistemology to measure if its epistemology is based on reconstructive science. Colloquially, it is not possible to measure nothing (Armstrong 2008:176). Whilst Wilber's AQAL Model of consciousness is a thorough synthesis of everything which appertains to conscious experience, his aperspectival claim is to some degree denuded by the priority he affords to mysticism. Wilber's integral approach claims inclusion of all possibility, but the full spectrum of all these possibilities only assume their proper meaning through NDC. In other words, Wilber clearly defends an intentional perspective rather than authentic aperspectival neutrality and this tendency skews his claim to balanced integralism.

Additional difficulties arise in Wilber's description of the non-dual phenomenon. If NDC is the 'Condition of all conditions' (Wilber 1993b:xvi) or the pervasive 'Suchness' (1996a:86-87) which defines and transcends all temporal properties, then what is it? Wilber answers that it is 'Reality' (1993b:36), but what is Reality? Wilber says 'Reality' is contentless, formless, and void (1993b:264), but if it is void how can it be 'Supreme Identity' (1995a:522)? Wilber can only answer these enigmatic questions by recruiting additional mystical obfuscations, which is legitimate in mysticism, but since NDC has no quantitative or qualitatively discernable ontology, and therefore no conclusively applicable epistemology, it must be concluded that Wilber's '*Transcendelic*' epistemology is contradictory. The real and profoundly transforming experience of NDC must be acknowledged, but it is ostensibly unaffected by the extent to which epistemology implies ontology, and this intellectual bewilderment is exacerbated by the poverty of language. Methodological problems in the language of mysticism necessarily forestall the possibility of phenomenological investigation which is contrary to Wilber's claim that knowledge of union with God is possible (1976:235). Moreover, how can intentionality and structure in symbolic systems transmit meaning in a language whose subject reference is ineffable? All the obscure qualities which Wilber ascribes to NDC and then superimposes on his integral scheme must therefore be conceptually idiosyncratic.

This contradiction is thereby transported into Wilber's use of language. Inasmuch as Wilber's Integral Philosophy supports the use of mystical-type language, his tendency to translate its idiom into other ontological and epistemological territories confuses or overlays his Integral intention with an Essentialist bias. A survey of significant nineteenth and twentieth century linguists and philosophers such as Saussure, Frege, Kripke, Chomsky, Wittgenstein, and Russell reveal that the application of analytical linguistics to phenomena like NDC educe theoretical disjunctions in the relationship between language and consciousness. A balanced Integral Philosophy must surely be neutral in its inclusion of all linguistic possibilities whereas Wilber's version often presumes a spiritual-mystical priority. In other words, Wilber's use of God-like qualities (*Absolute Subjectivity*, Suchness, Mind, Ground, trans-rationality, Spirit, ineffability, *Geist*, and Consciousness) as a pre-script to all manifest disintegrations in ordinary consciousness delimits the heuristic potential of all disciplines except Vision Logic where it assumes consummate primacy. This is idiomatically legitimate in mysticism as Kourie (2008:4) cogently explains:

... in apophatic mysticism no predicates that can be attributed to finite beings can be attributed to God: *non est hoc Deus, non est hoc*. Language is ontologically impoverished and unable to capture the Reality, which is *no-thing*, the divine *abyss*. *Apophasis*, meaning "unsaying" or "speaking away", subverts the tendency of the mind to arrive at ultimate truth, and acknowledges the inaccessibility of the divine. Even the most eloquent language mitigates against disclosure of Reality. Thus, there is a process of stripping away or *ascesis* of attitudes and concepts and imagery; hence the use of paradox, deconstruction and the denial of names in order to lead to the abyss, or the void - the blinding brilliance of the divine darkness. Thus language is manipulated and brought to breaking point in order to illustrate the ineffability of the divine.

It is, in other words, a conceptual absurdity to *talk* about *ineffability* and this explains the pervasive use of metaphor, allegory, poetry, and symbol in mystical narratives. Gamez (2007:250-251) rather cryptically endorses that we can only, '... go so far within philosophy, within language, and yet this limitation can extend indefinitely. When some theories are pushed to their limits they abolish speech, but the practice of speech is not affected... [it] is a further move within the language-game, not an escape from it.' There is, in other words, a sense in which we must *talk about* that which we *cannot talk about* because talking about that which we do not or cannot know is a way of integrating its peculiar *ontos* into consciousness. Wilber, on the other hand, aligns its paradoxical nomenclature with an Ultimacy which pre-defines the *Kosmos*, but this assumption, even if it is corroborated in the phenomena of NDC,

remains the fabric of belief. In short, Wilber prefaces his entire Integral Philosophy on the un-provable assumption that the *Kosmos* actually 'is' as it appears in NDC. Consequently, Wilber's epistemology may hold appeal for fellow Essentialists who are implicitly predisposed to a spiritualised interpretation of the cosmos, but Wilber's epistemological methodology and the premises which he imports to pre-define it betray the science by which he claims to authenticate it. Wilber's mysticism thereby subsumes his integralism and this polarity necessarily perturbs the epistemological precision and cogency of his holonic argument because everything in his model is, as it were, tilted to point to the ultimacy of non-dual Oneness. There is however, no way in which such an intentional 'tilt' can be conclusively proven as a cosmological and evolutionary propensity.

### **8.2.6 The Promise of Science**

Beneath the seeming fluidity of Wilber's Integralism and its natural syntheses and interdependencies remains a series of epistemological predicaments which, upon closer examination, destabilise the basic fabric of his hermeneutic process. It is consequently clear that it is incongruent for Wilber to claim provable self-evidence of an ineffable, timeless, spaceless Reality realised in NDC through the spatiotemporal agencies of empirical science. Epistemological standards are thereby compromised since reason-based disciplines are definitionally barred from verifying transcendental absolutes. Consequently, a series of phenomenological and self-referential fallacies punctuate Wilber's hypotheses. The *Hard Problem* thus remains unsolved since Wilber's theory of non-duality includes *Kosmological* Absolutes which necessarily differ from all other forms of being. Whilst this *Kosmological* Absolute as Mind sublates the *All*, it can only do so if it has a capacity advantage over the *All* and Wilber's integralism must therefore capitulate to a form of dualism. Wilber's paradoxical and mutually irreducible transubstantiation of matter and Mind is enticing and in keeping with the mystical idiom, but its importation into any other discipline forecloses the possibility of verification. In summary, there is no way in which an Essentialist philosophy like Wilber's can extract truth-claims from its own premises by appropriating closed-system techniques from Physicalism. The ontological, epistemological, phenomenological, and methodological province of Physicalism necessarily implies monism – even if it subsists in 'open' or 'inclusive' forms. In such schemes there is no sense in which any trans-elemental properties can be incorporated and this means that Essentialism and Physicalism cannot be authentically integrated. The absence of such integration does not however prevent the value of mutual information. Kourie (1992:83) clearly draws out this distinction:



One of the greatest problems that besets the modern world is the lack of mysticism. Rationalism and scientism deny the validity of anything which is non-productive technologically or materially, resulting in unqualified activism and the glorification of the measurable and replicable. Even with traditional religions a paroxysm of pragmatism and the visible is evident. However, recent times have witnessed renewed interest in the phenomenon of mysticism which is indicative of a refusal to accept what can be seen and measured as indicative of reality. An increasing number of scholarly and scientific studies by theoreticians of mysticism have appeared, the aim of which is to analyse and elucidate the nature and problematic of mysticism from within a critical-philosophical perspective. The issues raised are particularly pertinent and can contribute to a variegated yet global mystical consciousness which is vitally important in this pluralistic era.

Kourie correctly identifies Physicalist tendencies to quantifiable mechanisation of human phenomena, and recent reorientations in some sectors of the science of consciousness are likewise beginning to recognise the pallidity of modern and post-modern deconstruction. In keeping with these new advances this study demonstrates the heuristic advantages of such research endeavours – even when the subject matter of the disciplines are principally asymptotic. Kourie is therefore right to encourage the ‘scholarly and scientific’ study of mysticism and credits the utility of ‘critical-philosophical’ perspectives. This does not however imply epistemological conflation of disparate ontologies.

With reference to Wilber’s epistemologically inconsistent attempt at integration it follows that a true or at least axiomatically provable non-duality can only exist in Physicalism. Since Physicalism is resolutely committed to the premise that the substance of the universe is all that there is, it must explain all phenomena in terms of *that* substance and the various ways in which it interacts and manifests. The problem of consciousness reveals the apex of this descriptive challenge since it appears to subsist in qualities rather than measurable quantities. It is argued on the basis of recent developments in the science of consciousness that the physiological properties which define consciousness are now sufficiently understood to enable the inclusion of subjectivity as a function of the brain. In an attempt to illustrate the pertinence of these findings the research of six eminent scientists was reviewed and relevant features distilled from their hypotheses to support the possibility of NDC as a physical phenomenon. Epistemological sufficiency in keeping with the guiding maxim or minimum standard of compliance requires subscription to basic research conventions. These standards include objectivity, replication, demonstration in the public domain, reliability, universality,

and coherence and consistency. As the insights from Dennett, Edelman, Tononi, Nørretranders, Newberg, and D'Aquili's theories were surveyed a number of 'in principle' agreements emerge which inform the usefulness of scientific applications to phenomena like NDC. These are:

1. Theories of evolution and natural selection do not forbid the emergence of phenomena like NDC.
2. Genetic and memetic heritability play a role in the manifestation of mystical phenomena.
3. The brain has simulatory or hypothesis-making capacities which may educe phenomena which have no representation in the 'real' world. This is typically the substance of dreams, imagination, hallucination, and some forms of ergotropic mystical states.
4. Physical determinism does not preclude the real experience of free will and intentional adherence to spiritual disciplines is therefore theoretically permitted.
5. Physical causality does not prohibit the appearance of phenomena that 'seem' absolute.
6. The notion of a *self* which possesses volitional consciousness is a simulation and exists only in the functional properties of certain distributed neurological operations. Mysticism, particularly of the *Apophatic* kind, endorses that the *self* is an illusion. Consciousness as the brain permits the evolutionary viability of such simulations.
7. The experience of unity and integration is the product of highly complex and competitive parallel processes which, through various neurological processes, educe the felt sense of connectedness. If these processes are sufficiently accented they may elicit ecstatic experiences of oceanic non-duality.
8. Newberg and D'Aquili's theory of *Deafferentation* explains the blocking of all neurological processes from coagulating into differentiated awareness and this may precipitate trophotropic experiences resembling NDC.
9. The brain's tendency to accrue information, particularly information that promises high rewards, substantiates the allure of experiences like NDC. If uncertainty causes disequilibrium in the form of fear, anxiety or loss of definition, then it follows that the absolute realness and 'bliss' associated with NDC will become an evolutionary locus of attraction.

10. Phenomenological privacy precludes the possibility of experiencing anyone else's consciousness. Science is thereby forced to include personal narrations of experience as a sufficiently reliable source of scientific corroboration. Dennett's carefully constructed method of Heterophenomenology sets standards which may guard against subjective biases and there is no reason why the same method cannot be applied to mystical narratives.
11. Edelman asserts that when the Dynamic Core is modulated to its maximum capacity it may be possible not to be aware of being aware (2004:127-128). This description resembles the experience of NDC and may in time endorse NDC as a real physiological experience.
12. Dennett includes the importance of pleasure as an evolutionary impetus. If NDC, given its common associations with bliss, Nirvana, Heaven, and Eden, is interpreted as the highest Pleasure, it follows that consciousness as the brain will cultivate the possibility of its realisation and facilitate its experience.
13. Very significantly, all six theorists variously admit that epistemological limitations in Physicalism foreclose the possibility and legitimacy of explaining subjective conscious qualities exclusively through the instruments of objective quantities. In other words, Physicalism may be able to explain what NDC is in all aspects of its physical and representational processes and contents, but it can never access the personal *phenomenon* of NDC directly. This means that the scientific study of NDC has to make at least one basic assumption that it cannot prove – that NDC actually exists.
14. In Physicalist renditions of consciousness, consistency and coherence in keeping with the threshold of noetic viability postulated as a guiding maxim in this study are retained.
15. The *Hard Problem* is consequently resolved since no duality subsists in the ontology of consciousness as the brain.

The appeal of such a coherent scheme comes close to a resolution of the primary question tendered in this thesis. It indeed appears that there is a way in which Physicalist interpretations of non-dual mystical consciousness can move towards resolution of the *Hard Problem* without diluting the mystical phenomenon as it is described by Essentialists, but its congruence conceals an anomaly. In the idiom of propositional logic Barrow (2008:261) quotes Raymond Smullyan:

Mysticism might be characterised as the study of those propositions which are equivalent to their own negations. The Western point of view is that the class of all such propositions is empty. The Eastern point of view is that this class is empty if, and only if it isn't.<sup>391</sup>

In similar vein Gamez (2007:i) quotes *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*:

This is the perfectly pure demonstration of the perfection of wisdom. No one has demonstrated it, no one has received it, no one has realised it. And since no one has realised it, no one has therein gone to final Nirvana.

The obfuscations of these two quotes reveal a fundamental flaw in the Physicalist argument and it ultimately refers back to Kurt Gödel's *Incompleteness Theorem*. In brief, Wilber is right to approach NDC with science, but he cannot do so if he imbues it with absolute, timeless, spaceless, transcendental, and ineffable qualities. Physicalism can approach NDC and endorse its non-duality and its phenomenological qualities without breaking the primary rules of coherence and consistency, but only if it retains NDC within materiality and by doing so it must recognise two things. First, that it has to concede 'belief' in NDC's existence because it cannot prove it, and second that it cannot reach directly into the phenomena itself and cannot therefore prove the phenomenal objects of it conclusively.

### **8.3 NDC: A Mystical Disambiguation**

Inasmuch as the methods, processes, and ontological territories of Physicalism seem increasingly able to describe consciousness and its many manifestations in innumerable brain states, including NDC, the primary non-dual phenomenon remains unaffected. In other words, NDC as the profound experience of consummate absorption in equanimity remains anathema to both Essentialist and Physicalist explanations. Armstrong (2008:177) explains why. She differentiates two general ways of arriving at truth by referring to Plato's descriptions of *Mythos* and *Logos*. Both principles are indispensable and complementary in much the same ways as the preamble to this conclusion venerated faith and reason, but there is a difference. *Mythos* pertains to those aspects of experience which refer to meaning rather than matter. It is, in other words, not influenced or measured by reason and rationality, but finds expression in aesthetics, ritual, symbolism and the affections of imaginary senses.

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<sup>391</sup> Barrow does not acknowledge his source and extensive Internet searches revealed only that many other authors use the same quote from Smullyan, but none indicate its source in Smullyan's own work.

*Logos*, on the other hand, is systematic, substantial, quantifiable, and relates to observable phenomena. *Mythos* appertains mainly to the inner, personal, and subjective experience whereas *logos* refers to exteriority, function, and form. *Mythos* is therapeutic and *logos* is pragmatic. *Mythos* gives meaning to life whereas *Logos* gives structure. In effect, *mythos* describes the orientations of Essentialism and *logos* narrates the processes of Physicalism.

Armstrong's (2008:176) assertion is that neither approach is sufficient in its capacity to explain the most fundamental condition of human experience. A volitional act of submission to the existence of a definitive trans-elemental property like *Absolute Suchness* or Mind still requires an act of belief and it must therefore have a root in intellection. Essentialist descriptions of phenomena like NDC therefore reach their noetic limit in the poverty, not only of language, but also in the concepts which language mediates and Wilber is right to identify this incapacity. Kourie (2008:11) notes that in the experience of NDC, 'The language of intentionality is replaced by a new understanding of reality, a non-dual consciousness, no longer hampered by the rationalisations of the intellect.' The 'new understanding' to which Kourie refers is not a deeper or more profound quantity or quality of consciousness – it is neither the zenith of faith, reason, nor affection, but a consummate disambiguation of differentiation *and* of union. It has no resemblance to any notional or experiential quality and no location in any physical property. Any conceptual-theoretical approach, be it Essentialist or Physicalist, must approach NDC neither as a quality nor as a quantity, but as the illusory shadows of a 'non-something' that has no definition in existence. The religious, spiritual, and mystical disciplines adhered to NDC are not therefore intended to be descriptions *of* the phenomena, but methods to approach its realisation and metaphorically illustrate its character (Armstrong 2008:190). The mechanisms by which such apprehensions are effected do not convey injunctions in reason or faith, but rather recognise it as an art (Armstrong 2008:187). If the 'art' is perfected, the transformation of the exercitant is likewise perfected in the extent to which the virtues attached to NDC motivate the transformation of the world into qualities which ensure maximum survival – not just quantitatively in terms of the absence of duality, but qualitatively in terms of Perfect Pleasure – the Kingdom of Heaven. The principle virtue emanating from NDC is love. McNamara (1984:60-61) maintains love as, '... the essence of mysticism... [which] is always pure - a purity won by relentless effort and rigorous restraint.'

Despite the methodological and epistemological exactitudes of Physicalism, and despite the integral and aesthetic meaningfulness of Essentialism, there is no discipline, idiom, or affection that captures, justifies, or explains the kernel of NDC fully. Nørretranders (1999:294) refers to the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) whom, he says, ‘... anticipated at the end of the nineteenth century many of the new ideas of the twentieth, [and] talks about a direct perception of the world as *haecceity* – “thisness.”<sup>392</sup> The Danish Peirce expert, the physicist Peder Voetmann Christiansen (1988:35), describes *haecceity* as follows; ‘It is a direct, shocking experience of an object which causes language to evaporate like a drop of water on a glowing sheet of metal. All we can do is point our index finger and say “that”.’ The nature of NDC is therefore neither a sense, nor a thought, nor a word; and neither is it not a sense, nor a thought, nor a word. It just is - and is not. NDC remains the preserve of that ineluctable paradox which is the definition of mysticism. Thereafter silence!

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<sup>392</sup> The concept of *haecceity* appears to have been invented by Duns Scotus (1266-1308). It signifies the property of an experience which inheres to the essence of that experience before its conceptual definition is differentiated (NationMaster.com).



*Where there is no ambient doubt to speak of, there is no need to speak of faith.*

(Dennett, D. C. 2004. *Freedom Evolves*. London, New York: Penguin Books:161)





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