

TRANSPERSONAL DIALOGUE: A NEW DIRECTION

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ABSTRACT: Paradigm debates over the last decade have paved the way for a new, more constructive stage of transpersonal dialogue. These debates, in clarifying differences among primary perspectives in the field, have made it possible to begin mapping the proper range and applications of these perspectives and thus to begin bringing differing views into productive collaboration. In this paper I take a step in this direction by proposing some ways a fruitful division of labor might be achieved between Ken Wilber's structural-hierarchical perspective and the spiral-dynamic perspective of theorists whose roots are in depth psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Paradigm debates over the last decade, especially those between Ken Wilber and his critics, have brought an end to the pioneering unity that the transpersonal community enjoyed in earlier years. Every new field of inquiry begins with a sense of common cause. Common ground is explored first, and only then, typically, are differences explored. The paradigm debates of the last decade need to be understood with this in mind. These debates, although heated at times, were necessary and have moved transpersonal inquiry forward. Because of these debates, differences among primary perspectives in the field have been clarified, and an opportunity now exists to begin a new, more constructive stage of transpersonal dialogue. In particular, it is now possible to begin mapping the proper range and applications of primary perspectives, with the aim of bringing these perspectives into productive collaboration. In this paper I take a step in this direction by proposing some ways a fruitful division of labor might be achieved between Wilber's structural-hierarchical perspective and the spiral-dynamic perspective of theorists whose roots are in depth psychology.

I begin with brief descriptions of five major transpersonal perspectives. Although I focus on only the first two of these perspectives in the ensuing discussion, it is useful to situate these two in the larger context of transpersonal dialogue. The five perspectives described below are not meant to include all major transpersonal perspectives. They were selected because, in addition to being among the most important perspectives in the field, they are perspectives that have been actively represented in recent paradigm debates.

- (1) *The structural-hierarchical perspective.* The structural-hierarchical perspective stresses a hierarchy of achieved structural abilities and capacities. Ken

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Wilber's integral psychology—which describes human development in terms of a holarchy, a nested hierarchy, of basic structures—is of course the primary example of this perspective within the transpersonal field. The structural-hierarchical perspective was introduced by Wilber in 1980 with the publication of *The Atman Project* and has been a major perspective within transpersonal psychology ever since. Many transpersonal theorists and scholars have aligned their work with the structural-hierarchical perspective, for example, Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan.

- (2) *The spiral-dynamic perspective.* The spiral-dynamic perspective has been a major perspective within transpersonal psychology even longer than the structural-hierarchical perspective, from the very inception of the field. The spiral-dynamic perspective focuses on deep sources of life that to a significant extent have been submerged but can be restored on a higher, transpersonal level. Transpersonal depth psychologists such as Stanislav Grof, David M. Levin, and Michael Washburn (the author) are representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective, and so, too, are transpersonal or Jungian theorists focusing on a core of indigenous humanness that has been left behind but can be regained, for example, Jürgen W. Kremer (1996, 1997) and C. Michael Smith (1997). Before the publication of *The Atman Project*—which marked his adoption of the structural-hierarchical perspective—Wilber's views were in substantial agreement with the spiral-dynamic perspective.
- (3) *The participatory perspective.* A major, more recent perspective in transpersonal psychology is the participatory perspective of Jorge Ferrer (2001, 2002). The participatory perspective stresses the co-created nature of spiritual knowledge, the centrality of “emancipation from self-centeredness” as criterion for making qualitative distinctions in spiritual matters, and respect for the irreducible diversity of spiritual traditions and individual spiritual paths. Ferrer's richly informed perspective draws on many sources, including postempiricist philosophy of science, postfoundationalist epistemology, post-Cartesian philosophy of mind, and poststructuralist philosophy of language and cognition. Ferrer credits the work Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (Maturana & Varela, 1987; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) as providing inspiration for his notion of participatory spiritual knowing as an enaction or bringing forth of a world or domain of spiritual experience.
- (4) *The feminist perspective.* The feminist perspective in transpersonal psychology has steadily grown in importance over the last ten to fifteen years. The feminist perspective focuses on gender differences in spiritual development and in the experience of the sacred. Peggy Wright (1995, 1996) is a feminist who has situated her thought explicitly within the transpersonal field. Many feminists have written on topics of importance to transpersonal psychology, topics such as goddess-centered spirituality, women's ways of spiritual knowing, and differences in women's and men's spiritual paths.
- (5) *The ecological perspective.* The ecological perspective in transpersonal psychology has also steadily grown in importance over the last ten to fifteen years. The ecological perspective focuses on the earth as a sacred dwelling place that is our home and the home as well of the other species living on it. Warwick Fox (1990, 1995), Ralph Metzner (1999), and Michael E. Zimmerman (1994, 1996) are important authors who have written on ecological issues from a transpersonal orientation or on transpersonal psychology from an ecological point of view.

All five of the perspectives listed, in sharing the transpersonal field, have much in common. All five perspectives also differ from each other in important ways. Of the perspectives, the last two differ from the first three in being perspectives that are defined more in terms of a focus of inquiry (women's spirituality, the sacredness of nature) than in terms of a theoretical orientation that would guide inquiry. Thus defined, these two perspectives can be aligned with widely different theoretical orientations and, in fact, are espoused by transpersonal psychologists representing most if not all of the major theoretical orientations in the field. At this time, most transpersonal psychologists agree that the feminist and ecological perspectives are essential to the transpersonal project overall and, therefore, that, theoretical differences among representatives of these perspectives notwithstanding, any adequate transpersonal psychology must account for gender differences in spiritual development and be heedful of the spiritual value of the earth and its forms of life.

Transpersonal psychologists, however, do not generally agree that the structural-hierarchical, spiral-dynamic, and participatory perspectives are all essential to transpersonal inquiry. These perspectives, unlike the feminist and ecological perspectives, are theoretical orientations designed to guide transpersonal inquiry. Moreover, these perspectives are the ones that, in the paradigm debates of recent years, have been most engaged in critical disputes. For example, some representatives of the structural-hierarchical perspective have argued that the spiral-dynamic perspective commits fundamental errors, and some representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective have argued that the same is true of the structural-hierarchical perspective. More recently, Ferrer (2002) has entered the debate by presenting not only a reconstruction of transpersonal theory from a participatory perspective but also a deconstruction of many of the ideas that undergird existing formulations of the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives, especially insofar as these perspectives have been advanced with claims to exclusive or completely objective truth.

The structural-hierarchical, spiral-dynamic, and participatory perspectives, then, are theoretical orientations that have posed serious challenges to each other and have thus competed for the allegiance of the transpersonal community. Given this history, the transpersonal community would do well at this juncture to reexamine these three perspectives with the aim of mapping their proper range and applications and exploring ways in which they might be brought into productive collaboration. In this paper I propose some ways a fruitful division of labor between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives might be achieved. It is my hope that others will propose ways the participatory perspective, in its account of enactive knowledge and spiritual diversity, and the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives, in their accounts of deep cross-cultural spiritual patterns, might be brought closer together.

Although I will not be discussing the participatory perspective in this paper, I want to express my agreement with the following constructive idea offered by Jorge Ferrer:

From the rigid universalism of rational consciousness to the pluralistic relativism of some postmodern approaches, from perennialist universalism to the emerging spiritual pluralism of the interfaith dialogue, Spirit seems to swing from one pole

to the other, from the One to the Many, and from Many to the One, endlessly striving to more fully manifest, embody, and embrace love and wisdom in all their forms. . . . If I am right about the generative power of the dialectical relationship between the One and the Many, then to get stuck in, or to freeze at, either pole as the Truth can only hinder the natural unfolding of Spirit's creative urges. (2001, p. 25)

I agree with Ferrer that it is a mistake to get stuck in either a rigid universalism that fails to value the irreducible diversity of the world's sacred paths or a relativizing postmodernism that fails to value the search for fundamental, cross-cultural patterns. The two sides of this unity-difference opposition, properly understood, are two sides of a creative tension, a generative dialectic, as Ferrer says. I hope that transpersonal psychology builds on Ferrer's suggestion.

The reader should know that I am a proponent of transpersonal depth psychology, a version of the spiral-dynamic perspective, and that for this reason my proposals for establishing a working relationship between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives will be supportive of the spiral-dynamic perspective's credentials. The spiral-dynamic perspective has been the target of strong criticism from representatives of the structural-hierarchical perspective, chiefly from Wilber. This criticism needs to be answered as part of any account that would explore how the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives might be reconceived as collaborating rather than conflicting approaches. The discussion that follows, then, in thus supporting the credentials of the spiral-dynamic perspective, is admittedly partisan. It is, however, partisan in an inclusive sense: it is partisan in seeking to clarify and defend the spiral-dynamic perspective's proper role in transpersonal inquiry, not in seeking to exclude any perspective or perspectives from the field, least of all the structural-hierarchical perspective.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The debate between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives began with the publication in 1980 of Wilber's *The Atman Project* (1980a) and "The Pre/Trans Fallacy" (1980b). The publication of these two works represented the first of several major turning points in Wilber's theoretical orientation, specifically a turn from a neo-Jungian, depth-psychological orientation (a version of the spiral-dynamic perspective) to a structural-hierarchical orientation. In Wilber's terminology, this was the transition from Wilber-I to Wilber-II. Looking back on this turning point, Wilber (1996, pp. 12–13; 1998, pp. 151–153) said that, in writing *Atman Project*, he had tried to make the Jungian model work but that he could not make it fit all the data. Moreover, in attempting unsuccessfully to make the Jungian model fit the data, he reported, he discovered that the Jungian model was riddled with serious fallacies, fallacies of the type he soon thereafter analyzed in "Pre/Trans Fallacy."

I was hugely influenced by *Atman Project* and "Pre/Trans Fallacy." I thought, and continue to think, that they are groundbreaking works of the highest importance. In reading them, however, I came to conclusions opposite to those Wilber was defending; for my theoretical orientation at that time had just turned toward, rather

than away, from Jung. At that time, I was just beginning to formulate my own understanding of the spiral-dynamic perspective, and in the initial stages of this endeavor, *Atman Project* and “Pre/Trans Fallacy” came as a revelation to me. These works brought essential issues into focus for me by clarifying the differences between the spiral-dynamic and structural-hierarchical perspectives.

For the next eight years I worked on my first book, *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground*, striving to formulate a version of transpersonal depth psychology that is free of pre-trans errors. Following the publication of the first edition of *Ego and the Dynamic Ground* in 1988—a second, revised edition was published in 1995—I published a piece in *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* in which I contrasted Wilber’s structural-hierarchical perspective and the spiral-dynamic perspective. In this article, entitled “Two Patterns of Transcendence” (1990), I argued (a) that the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives are both powerful and fully coherent explanatory paradigms (neither perspective, simply as a theoretical orientation, is based on a pre-trans fallacy) and (b) that the two perspectives present a fundamental choice for transpersonal psychologists. Wilber responded in the same issue of the journal, arguing that the spiral-dynamic perspective is based on a pre-trans fallacy, is inherently regressive, and cannot fit all of the developmental data.

“Two Patterns of Transcendence,” I can now see, was deeply flawed. In arguing that transpersonal psychologists should choose between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives, it gave the impression that these two perspectives are inherently at odds. Indeed, the two perspectives are at odds in their accounts of a good number of important particulars, for example, their accounts of “transcendence,” the transition from personal to transpersonal stages of development. The two perspectives, however, are not incompatible as general developmental points of view, that is, if neither one is forced to do all of the work. In preparing *Atman Project* for publication, Wilber correctly concluded that the spiral-dynamic perspective cannot account for all of the developmental data without falling prey to distortions and pre-trans errors. However, he incorrectly concluded, I believe—moving from one extreme to the other—that the structural-hierarchical perspective can account for all of the data without falling prey to difficulties of these sorts. The developmental data cannot be forced exclusively into either the structural-hierarchical or the spiral-dynamic framework. Although I have argued that the spiral-dynamic perspective is the proper vehicle for explaining transcendence, I have also—thanks primarily to Wilber’s comprehensive synthesis of the findings of structural-developmental psychology—employed both the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives in explaining development overall. This fact notwithstanding, “Two Patterns of Transcendence” overplayed the point of contrast and left the impression that the choice between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives is a mutually exclusive choice between perspectives fundamentally at odds.

Another major turning point in the debate between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives came with the publication in 1995 of Wilber’s *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*. This book, given its vast historical sweep and four-quadrant framework, vaulted Wilber to the level of a world-class philosopher. In thus greatly

enhancing his reputation, it also greatly added to the credibility of his criticisms of the spiral-dynamic perspective and other competing views, even if the criticisms themselves remained essentially unchanged. In *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, Wilber repeated his earlier criticisms of the spiral-dynamic perspective and added to these a number of witty caricatures, describing the spiral-dynamic perspective, for example, as a “Regress Express” on which “retro-Romantics” or “descenders” “follow their bliss” (here parodying Joseph Campbell) as they slide down the evolutionary slope toward a collision with a primitive “ground zero” (1995, pp. 105–106, 208, 521). The publication of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* was a watershed event. The magnitude of the accomplishment and the corresponding enhancement of Wilber’s stature dramatically realigned allegiances within transpersonal psychology. Wilber won over many new followers, and a general aura of doubt was cast on the tenability of the spiral-dynamic perspective.

The publication in 1996 of three issues of *ReVision* devoted to Wilber’s work was the next major event in the debate between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives. These issues of *ReVision*—which brought together a wide range of papers on Wilber and Wilber’s response to each of them—was in some respects a disaster for transpersonal psychology. What had been intended to be a fruitful dialogue turned out to be an acrimonious exchange between Wilber and critics representing many different perspectives, including the spiral-dynamic perspective. I took part in this exchange, contributing a piece entitled “The Pre/Trans Fallacy Reconsidered,” in which I argued that Wilber’s structural-hierarchical perspective, in attempting to cover all of the developmental data, falls prey to distortions and pre-trans errors. Wilber, in his response, argued that my criticisms were based on a misrepresentation of his position and that my own position was essentially a version of Wilber-I, which he had long ago abandoned as inadequate. If the exchange had continued, I would have argued that Wilber failed to address my criticisms and failed as well to see how my position differs in essential respects from Wilber-I.

The divisiveness of the *ReVision* exchange was made known to a wider audience in 1998 when it was republished in book form under the title *Ken Wilber in Dialogue* (Rothberg and Kelly 1998) and when Wilber came out with *The Eye of Spirit*, in which he presented in reworked fashion some of his responses to critics that were originally published in the *ReVision* series. With the publication of these two books, transpersonal psychology was fissured down the middle. A fault line opened, leaving transpersonal psychologists divided into pro- and anti-Wilber groups, thus obscuring the rich diversity of views in the field. Then another seismic event occurred: Wilber (2000b, 2002) seceded from transpersonal psychology altogether. Stressing that his project is properly understood as integral theory, not transpersonal psychology, Wilber parted company with his former intellectual colleagues.

AN ASSESSMENT OF WILBER’S ARGUMENT AGAINST THE SPIRAL-DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

The place to begin in considering the debate between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives is Wilber’s argument that the spiral-dynamic perspective is based on a pre-trans fallacy, specifically the fallacy of mistaking

what is earliest in development (i.e., prepersonal or, for short, *pre*) with what is highest (i.e., transpersonal or, for short, *trans*). All theories based on the spiral-dynamic perspective, Wilber maintains, hold that original sources of life—whether understood depth-psychologically as a deep psychic core or anthropologically as an indigenous humanness—possess a transpersonal character and for this reason need to be reawakened and retrieved if we are to achieve transpersonal wholeness. According to Wilber, however, this is a mistake because it confuses early and therefore primitive, merely prepersonal sources of life with truly higher, transpersonal sources, and in so doing it falls prey to a naively romantic glorification of origins and to a corresponding regressive desire to return to sources or conditions of life that, in Wilber’s view, are merely earlier, not higher. It falls prey, as Wilber puts it, to retro-Romanticism.

This argument against the spiral-dynamic perspective has been immensely influential, and understandably so, for it is insightful and has saved many transpersonal psychologists from serious errors. The argument, however, despite its insightfulness, is flawed and, despite having had great value, has also had damaging consequences. I shall begin by explaining why the argument is insightful and has had great value. Then I shall explain why it is flawed and has had damaging consequences. Then, in the next section, I shall use the results of this discussion to propose a division of labor between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives that I believe can help reduce conflicts between these perspectives and bring them into productive collaboration.

Wilber’s argument is insightful and has had great value because it brings into view an error to which some spiral-dynamic theorists have been susceptible. Some spiral-dynamic theorists have in fact mistaken what is merely earlier in development for what is higher and, consequently, have fallen prey to a regressive glorification of origins. This is a serious error. Moreover, as Wilber has explained, it is an error for which there is an explanation. As he says (1995), “since both prerational and transrational states are, in their own ways, nonrational, they appear similar or even identical to the untutored eye” (p. 206). Prerational and transrational states are equally unfamiliar and, therefore, “negatively similar” to the untutored eye. There is a reason, then, why some spiral-dynamic theorists have had difficulty properly distinguishing pre from trans and have been susceptible to seeing trans where only pre exists, thus elevating lower, merely pre psychic resources to higher, trans status. Wilber’s unmasking of this error has had considerable value, for it has led representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective to exercise needed caution in formulating their views.

Despite its insightfulness and value, Wilber’s argument is flawed and has had damaging effects. The major flaw in the argument is that it is based on an error equal but opposite to the error it attributes to the spiral-dynamic perspective. The error that Wilber criticizes, the unwarranted assumption that everything that is earlier in normal development is therefore higher, is indeed an error. Wilber’s “correction” of this error, however, is equally an error, for the contrary assumption that Wilber adopted in switching from a neo-Jungian to a structural-hierarchical perspective is also unwarranted. This assumption, that everything that is earlier in normal development is therefore lower, is unwarranted because it treats as equivalent two

terms that have different ranges of meaning. “Earlier” is exclusively a developmental term; “lower,” in contrast, can mean either “not yet developed” or “inherently primitive.” Accordingly, although everything that is earlier in normal development must be *developmentally* lower (for what is earlier is by definition developmentally pre), it does not follow that everything that is earlier in normal development must be *inherently* lower (for what is developmentally pre early in life might become developmentally trans later in life). It is crucial to distinguish between developmental and inherent senses of “lower” or “pre.” Wilber’s failure to do so constitutes a pre-trans error, as I (1996) have argued elsewhere.

Stressing the distinction between developmental and inherent senses of “lower” or “pre” takes nothing away from the structural-hierarchical perspective except the claim to being the only correct perspective. Wilber is correct in holding that many things that are developmentally pre are the kinds of things he calls pre “basic structures” and corresponding “transition structures.” Many things that are developmentally pre are either (a) inherently pre structures that are at once bases and functional components of all higher-level developmental achievements (pre basic structures) or (b) corresponding forms or expressions of self-identity, self-need, moral outlook, or worldview, which exist when, but only when, consciousness is identified with pre basic structures (pre transition structures). An immense amount of research supports Wilber’s distinction between basic and transition structures and supports the findings of structural-developmental psychology more generally. There is no question that structural-developmental psychology describes many important dimensions of human development. There is a question, however, whether Wilber’s structural-hierarchical theory, as Wilber claims, is the theory that best accounts for *all* of human development; for Wilber’s assumption that everything that normally emerges in prepersonal stages of development is inherently—and, therefore, merely—pre is suspect. Indeed, representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective reject this assumption as false. According to the spiral-dynamic perspective, some psychic resources that normally emerge in prepersonal stages of development, although limited to pre expressions early in life, are capable of trans expressions later in life. Examples of such resources are discussed later in the paper.

The assumption that everything that normally emerges as part of prepersonal development is inherently and, therefore, merely pre is not only, I suggest, unwarranted and in fact false; it is also damaging in its practical consequences. It has harmful consequences because it is an assumption that effectively reduces psychic resources that could be developmentally trans to a merely pre status and in doing so obstructs transcendence. If some proponents of the spiral-dynamic perspective have fallen prey to a regressive glorification of what is merely pre, Wilber, I suggest, has fallen prey to a repressive or suppressive vilification of what is potentially trans. Both of these errors are entirely understandable; and of the two, it is the latter that is perhaps the more understandable. To the untutored eye, to which pre and trans seem similar or even identical, it is perhaps even more difficult to distinguish between what is inherently pre and what, although developmentally pre, is potentially trans than it is to distinguish between what is pre and what is trans more generally.

It is of great importance, then, to understand that it is a factual, not a logical, question whether something that is developmentally pre is also inherently pre or

whether it is something that might later in life be developmentally trans. It is not a pre-trans *fallacy* (a logical error) to say of something that is pre early in life that it could become trans later in life. To be sure, such a statement might be factually false. Such a statement, however, is not necessarily or analytically false. Moreover, statements of this sort, according to the spiral-dynamic perspective, are in important instances true.

The major point that emerges from the discussion thus far is that the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives are in conflict only so long as defenders of these perspectives insist on the exclusive truth of their perspective. In particular, the two perspectives are in conflict only so long as defenders of the structural-hierarchical perspective maintain that all that, in normal development, is developmentally pre is inherently pre or so long as defenders of the spiral-dynamic perspective maintain that all that, in normal development, is developmentally pre is actually or potentially trans. If Wilber's structural-hierarchical perspective is to be made compatible with the spiral-dynamic perspective, then, Wilber would need to acknowledge that some psychic resources (i.e., potentials, structures, modes of functioning) that emerge early in normal development can later in life express themselves in higher, trans ways. In turn, if the spiral-dynamic perspective is to be made compatible with the structural-hierarchical perspective, its defenders would need to acknowledge that some psychic resources that normally emerge early in life are merely pre and that to return to these resources later in life would be merely regressive.

As a matter of fact most current defenders of the spiral-dynamic perspective strongly endorse this very point, and for this reason they find Wilber's criticism of the spiral-dynamic perspective forced and exaggerated. Most current representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective are versed in structural-developmental psychology, and of course they are keenly aware of Wilber's formulation of this perspective. At this point in the history of transpersonal psychology, most representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective agree with much of what Wilber has to say and would welcome a meeting of the ways between his structural-hierarchical perspective and the spiral-dynamic perspective. If Wilber were to participate in such a meeting, however, he would need to drop his dismissal of the spiral-dynamic perspective and acknowledge the possibility that much that is potentially trans can be found in what is developmentally pre.

A PROPOSAL FOR A DIVISION OF LABOR BETWEEN THE STRUCTURAL-HIERARCHICAL AND SPIRAL-DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVES

Thus far we have learned that the key to mending relations between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives is to distinguish between two types of developmentally pre psychic resources: those that are inherently pre and those that are not inherently pre and therefore can potentially, later in life, be developmentally trans. Distinguishing between these two types of psychic resources defines a working boundary between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives.

How are we to cut the pie? Among the psychic resources that emerge early in life,

which are inherently and, therefore, merely pre and which are developmentally pre but potentially trans? Wilber's account does not help us answer this question because in Wilber's view everything that normally emerges in early development—namely, pre basic structures and corresponding transition structures—is inherently pre. Help can be found, however, if we adopt a psychoanalytically oriented perspective, broadly conceived, and make a distinction between ego functions on the one hand and dynamic potentials on the other. As we shall see, whereas ego functions fit nicely within the structural-hierarchical framework, dynamic potentials are interpreted more parsimoniously and with less distortion from the spiral-dynamic point of view.

According to psychoanalytically oriented ego psychology, ego functions are actions performed by the ego as the organizing, controlling center of consciousness. The primary ego functions are these: synthesis, reality testing, discursive-organizing cognition, impulse control, intentional action, and ego defense. Ego functions are performed when the ego (a) holds on to the thread of experience or tries to integrate competing or disconnected elements of experience (synthesis); (b) attempts to determine what is real and what is not (reality testing); (c) explores the world, sorts data, forges or organizes conceptual representations, or constructs or tests explanatory hypotheses (discursive-organizing cognition); (d) asserts command of experience when challenged by currents of energy or affect (impulse control); (e) guides action toward preselected goals (intentional action); or (f) shields itself against perceived dangers (ego defense). Clearly, some things that Wilber classifies as pre basic structures are early-level ego functions, sensorimotor cognition and its related achievements in the area of intentional action being the most obvious examples. The structural-developmental perspective, from the very beginning, has been at its best when examining—indeed, when meticulously tracking the unfolding of—cognitive and volitional abilities like these and their corresponding expressions in relation to self-identity, self-need, moral outlook, and worldview (Wilber's transition structures).

According to psychoanalytically oriented depth psychology, ego functions are only one of two very different types of psychic resources, the other being dynamic potentials, primary examples of which are (a) the body as sensorium, (b) energy, (c) bioinstinctuality, (d) embodied affect, and (e) the creative imagination or autosymbolic process (Herbert Silberer's [1909] term). These dynamic potentials differ from ego functions in the following principal way: rather than being organizing, controlling functions of the ego, they are sources of experience that are located "beneath" the ego, in the deep core of the psyche—hence *nonegoic* potentials in my terminology—and that give rise to psychic materials (sensations, energies, feelings, and images) to which the ego might apply its organizing, controlling functions. Dynamic potentials are to a significant extent independent of the ego and spontaneous in expression. The ego can modulate, suppress, and even repress dynamic potentials. The ego, however, cannot determine exactly how or when dynamic potentials will express themselves. Moreover, if the ego can modulate, suppress, and even repress dynamic potentials, dynamic potentials in turn can dramatically affect and even overpower (e.g., absorb, rupture, or scatter) the ego. The ego and dynamic potentials ordinarily work together effectively. This co-operation, however, should not obscure the fact that the organizing, controlling

functions of the ego and spontaneously expressing dynamic potentials are very different kinds of psychic resources.

If I am here crediting psychoanalytically oriented ego and depth psychology for the distinction between ego functions and dynamic potentials, I am not suggesting that Wilber's integral psychology ignores either of these types of psychic resources. The contrary is true. Wilber's integral psychology has a place or, rather, places for both ego functions and dynamic potentials. It does not, however, sufficiently distinguish the two, for it groups these two types of psychic resources in a way that obscures their essential differences. Although, in Wilber's account, some ego functions are conceived as functions of what he calls the "self-system"—which in many ways resembles the ego of psychoanalytically oriented ego psychology—other ego functions are grouped together with dynamic potentials and conceived as basic structures or as corresponding transition structures. That is, some ego functions are conceived as structures that are not inherent to the self-system but that either (a) can be engaged by the self-system (basic structures) or (b) emerge when the self-system is identified with the basic structures of a particular psychic level (transition structures). The following passages summarize Wilber's conception of the self-system and its relation to basic structures and transition structures:

A simple metaphor may be useful to explain this distinction. The basic structures themselves are like a ladder, each rung of which is a level in the Great Chain of Being. The self (or self-system) is the climber of the ladder. At each rung of that climb, the self has a different sense of identity, a different type of morality, a different set of self-needs, and so on. These changes in the sense of self and its reality, which shift from level to level, are referred to as transition structures, or, more often, as the *self-stages* (since these transitions intimately involve the self and its sense of reality). (1986, p. 76)

Negotiating these structural developments is the self (or self-system), which is the locus of identification, volition, defense, organization, and "metabolism" ("digestion" of experience at each level of structural growth and development). (1986, p. 67)

It is the self-system . . . that is the locus of defense mechanisms (including introjection, projection, splitting, denial, reaction formation, repression proper, etc., arrayed in a hierarchical pattern). Thus, any *specific* aspects of any of the structures of consciousness can be dissociated, in one form or another, from the ongoing sweep of consciousness unfolding, if they are sensed as a threat to the self-system. (1998, p. 147)

The self-system is an inherent functional capacity of the psyche, which, when identified with basic structures, generates various transitional stages. (1998, p. 149)

As the locus of identification, volition, defense, organization, and metabolism, the self-system as conceived by Wilber quite evidently corresponds to the ego of psychoanalytically oriented ego psychology. It is an inherent, enduring center of the psyche that performs many of the organizing, controlling functions that Freud, Jung,

and their heirs have assigned to the ego. There is a major anomaly, however, and that is that, in Wilber's account, many of the principal ego functions do not belong inherently to the self- (i.e., ego) system but belong instead to—or, as transition structures, are expressions of—the hierarchy of basic structures. For example, rather than holding that sensorimotor, concrete operational, and formal operational cognition belong inherently to the self-system, as stage-specific “basic functions” of a developing ego, Wilber assigns these forms of discursive-organizing cognition, along with dynamic potentials, to the hierarchy of basic structures. Furthermore, rather than classifying corresponding self-identities, self-needs, moral outlooks, and worldviews as stage-specific “transition functions” of a developing ego, Wilber classifies these forms of cognition and self-regulation instead as transition structures, as structures that emerge when the self-system identifies with particular basic structures. What, according to psychoanalytically oriented ego psychology, are functions belonging inherently to the ego are thus effectively separated from the ego and are placed along with dynamic potentials in the basket category “psychic structure” (whether basic or transition), with the consequence that the distinction between ego functions and dynamic potentials is blurred.

Returning now to our main point, it is a matter of critical importance to make a clear distinction between ego functions and dynamic potentials because these two types of psychic resources are not equally amenable to a structural-hierarchical analysis. In particular, whereas ego functions fit nicely within the structural-hierarchical framework, dynamic potentials do not. Dynamic potentials can be made to fit the structural-hierarchical framework, but the consequence is that the number of dynamic potentials must be needlessly multiplied to meet the structural-hierarchical requirement that everything that normally emerges in a particular stage of development is inherently of the nature of that stage, inherently prepersonal if it normally emerges in prepersonal stages, inherently personal if it normally emerges in personal stages, and inherently transpersonal if it normally emerges in transpersonal stages. If we disregard substages and focus on the broad tripartite grouping of substages into prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal stages, the resulting multiplication of dynamic potentials that would thus be required is a tripling. For present purposes, let us focus only on the prepersonal and transpersonal stages and consider the doubling of dynamic potentials that would be required, from the structural-hierarchical perspective, to fit dynamic potentials into these stages.

Such a doubling would require that there are two separate, inherently pre and inherently trans sets of dynamic potentials, the former set normally active early in life and the latter set normally not active at all until later in life, whenever personal stages come to an end and transpersonal stages begin. Such a doubling would also require that these two sets of dynamic potentials, in being inherently pre in one case and inherently trans in the other, are completely unlike, having less in common with each other than either has with anything that normally emerges during personal stages of development. As Wilber says (1990, p. 260), “that *A* [inherently pre structures] and *C* [inherently trans structures] *appear* similar is never, in my opinion, because they actually and structurally *are* similar, *in anything other than an empty sense*. *A* has more in common with *B* [inherently personal structures] than with *C*, and *C* has more in common with *B* than with *A*” (emphasis in original). The

doubling in question, then, would require that dynamic potentials be divided into two structurally separate and wholly dissimilar sets of potentials.

This doubling is evident in Wilber's account of dynamic potentials (see 1990, 2000a). For example, Wilber divides imaginal-symbolic cognition into pre magical-symbolic cognition and trans archetypal cognition, holding that these two types of cognition have less in common with each other than either has with the operational cognition of personal stages of development. Wilber divides feeling into pre protoemotions (e.g., tension, fear, rage, satisfaction) and second-degree emotions (e.g., anxiety, anger, wishing, liking, safety) on the one hand and trans spiritual feelings (e.g., awe, ecstasy, and compassion) on the other, holding that these two groupings of affect are expressions of separate and wholly dissimilar structures. Wilber divides energy into pre libido (prana, bioenergy) and trans spirit, thus implying that the psyche is a conduit of two fundamentally different kinds of energy, one arising from a primitive "below," the other descending from a spiritual "above." Finally, Wilber divides embodiment into pre bioinstinctual embodiment and higher—fully personal but not yet transpersonal—centauric embodiment. His account of these two forms of embodiment is puzzling, though, because he explains centauric embodiment as a higher reintegration of bioinstinctual embodiment with developed personal or egoic basic structures, which account seems more consistent with the spiral-dynamic than with the structural-hierarchical, "transcend and include" perspective.

Unlike ego functions, then, dynamic potentials fit poorly within the structural-hierarchical framework, which is forced to multiply them needlessly and to exaggerate the differences between their pre and trans expressions. Dynamic potentials fit more parsimoniously and with less distortion within the spiral-dynamic perspective. The spiral-dynamic perspective does not have to multiply dynamic potentials because it explains different developmental expressions of dynamic potentials as different expressions of the same potentials rather than as expressions of inherently different potentials. Moreover, the spiral-dynamic perspective does not have to exaggerate the differences between pre and trans expressions of dynamic potentials because it sees not only the profound developmental differences that distinguish these expressions but also the substantial—and not merely empty or illusory—similarities that these expressions possess as expressions of the same potentials.

Table 1 sets forth the primary ways in which the spiral-dynamic perspective differs from the structural-hierarchical perspective in the interpretation of dynamic potentials. For example, rather than holding that magical-symbolic cognition and archetypal cognition are expressions of two separate and maximally dissimilar structures, the spiral-dynamic perspective holds that these two forms of imaginal cognition are developmentally pre (the primary process: Freud) and developmentally trans (the tertiary process: Arieti), respectively, expressions of a single dynamic potential: the autosymbolic process or symbol-producing imagination. Rather than holding that feelings such as tension, fear, rage, satisfaction, anger, anxiety, wishing, liking, and safety on the one hand and feelings such as awe, ecstasy, and compassion on the other are expressions of separate and maximally dissimilar structures, the spiral-dynamic perspective holds that all of these feelings arise from the same

Table 1
Dynamic Potentials: Two Interpretations

Structural-hierarchical perspective		Spiral-dynamic perspective	
<i>Pre Dynamic Potentials</i>	<i>Trans Dynamic Potentials</i>	<i>Dynamic Potentials</i> (inherently neither pre nor trans)	<i>Pre and Trans Expressions of Dynamic Potentials</i>
Magical-symbolic cognition	Archetypal cognition	Autosymbolic process	Pre: primary process (Freud); trans: tertiary process (Arieti)
Protoemotions (e.g., tension, fear, rage, satisfaction); second-degree emotions (e.g., anxiety, anger, wishing, liking, safety)	Spiritual emotions (e.g., awe, ecstasy, compassion)	Sources of affective response	Emotions such as tension, fear, rage, satisfaction, anxiety, anger, wishing, liking, safety, awe, ecstasy, and compassion have both pre and trans expressions.
Sexual-emotional energy (libido, prana, bioenergy)	Spiritual power (spirit)	Life energy	Libido (instinctually channeled energy) and spirit (free, unchanneled energy) have both pre and trans expressions.
Bioinstinctual embodiment	Centauric embodiment (transitional between personal and transpersonal stages)	Body	Pre: polymorphously sensual body of young body ego; trans: mature ego's return to fully awakened embodiment

underlying sources of affective response. Moreover, the spiral-dynamic perspective holds that most if not all of these feelings have both pre and trans expressions, for example, pre temper tantrums and trans holy rage, pre separation anxiety and trans “fear and trembling,” pre wonderment and trans awe, pre “bursting with delight” and trans rapture, pre attachment love and trans compassionate love. As for energy, rather than saying that libido and spirit are expressions of separate and maximally dissimilar structures, the spiral-dynamic perspective holds that these two types of energy are different, instinctually channeled and unchanneled or “free” expressions of a single energy, the basic energy of life. As for embodiment, finally, the spiral-dynamic perspective agrees substantially with Wilber that lower bioinstinctual embodiment and higher centauric embodiment are *not* separate and maximally different structures. The spiral-dynamic perspective agrees with Wilber that the latter form of embodiment is a higher integration of bioinstinctual life with the fully developed structures and functions of the mental ego.

According to the spiral-dynamic perspective, then, dynamic potentials are not stage specific in inherent nature and, therefore, are the type of psychic resources that, in being developmentally pre, can be potentially trans. To elaborate, the spiral-dynamic perspective holds that dynamic potentials (a) express themselves in pre ways early in development, (b) are then to a significant extent—but never entirely—submerged and quieted during personal stages of development, and (c) are then sometimes uncovered and reawakened in the fullness of their power later in development, at

which point they begin both to transform and to be transformed by the fully developed ego and in these ways begin to express themselves in trans ways. According to the spiral-dynamic perspective, dynamic potentials are essential to life at all stages, and for this reason the submerging and quieting of these potentials during personal stages of development is never complete. The submerging and quieting of these potentials—for example, in the transition from early childhood to the stage of latency and, in a less pronounced way, in the transition from adolescence to the “second latency” of early adulthood (Blos, 1968)—is never a complete burial and deactivation. Although the spiral-dynamic perspective focuses primarily on pre and trans expressions of dynamic potentials, it does not—or at least “proper” formulations do not—ignore or deny personal expressions, for example, ego-manipulated imagination, reduced-intensity psychic energy, genitally organized libido, attenuated affect, and mental-egoic (detached, subdued) embodiment.

The strength of the structural-hierarchical perspective, as already noted, is its meticulous tracking of the ego’s cognitive and volitional abilities. The structural-hierarchical perspective does an excellent job explaining the prerequisites and powers of foundational, intermediate, and advanced modes of discursive-organizing cognition and associated self-identities, self-needs, moral outlooks, and worldviews. The structural-hierarchical perspective, on the other hand, does poorly in accounting for dynamic potentials. The structural-hierarchical perspective does not sufficiently distinguish these potentials from ego functions, and for this reason it overlooks the fact that these two types of psychic resources unfold along different developmental tracks, ego functions, in normal development, unfolding in a holarchical, “transcend and include” manner, dynamic potentials unfolding in a spiraling, “submerged and then uncovered,” “quieted and then reawakened” manner (where the uncovering and reawakening are the beginning of a higher, trans expression of these potentials). It is to Wilber’s credit that he has attempted to bring the body, energy, affect, and the autosymbolic imagination within the purview of the structural-hierarchical perspective. Still, proponents of the structural-hierarchical perspective need to understand that dynamic potentials are not amenable to an exclusively structural-hierarchical, holarchical analysis.

The strength of the spiral-dynamic perspective is its account of dynamic potentials, including its account of the importance of dynamic potentials to transpersonal development and the special, spiral path by which dynamic potentials unfold. The spiral-dynamic perspective has been sensitive to the submerging and quieting of dynamic potentials during personal stages of life, to the phenomenon of alienation, and to the need to recover dynamic potentials in the fullness of their power in making the turn toward whole-psyche integration. If the spiral-dynamic perspective has thus done a good job explaining dynamic potentials, it has not, historically, done a good job explaining ego functions. Spiral-dynamic theorists, focused on the recovery of dynamic potentials, have not given sufficient attention to ego functions and have tended to underestimate their value. Indeed, spiral-dynamic theorists who have succumbed to pre-trans errors, seeing trans in what is merely pre, have misconceived ego functions—in particular, ego functions of later personal stages of development—in exaggeratedly negative terms. These theorists have tended to focus exclusively on the adult ego’s alienation from dynamic potentials and, therefore, have tended to see ego functions of later personal stages as little more than

symptoms of alienation. Formal-operational cognition has thus been seen as a type of thinking that, in its abstractness and linearity, inherently obstructs creativity; and the self-governing volition of the adult ego has been seen as a type of self-control that, in its disciplining of the emotions, inherently prohibits openness and spontaneity. If it is spiral-dynamic theorists who have succumbed to pre-trans errors who have been susceptible to such exaggerated distortions, they are not alone in wrongly assessing ego functions. Historically, the spiral-dynamic perspective has been one-sidedly focused on dynamic potentials and, consequently, has not given ego functions due or unbiased consideration.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Transpersonal psychology, I suggest, cannot get by without both the structural-hierarchical and the spiral-dynamic perspectives. Moreover, there is no good reason why it should have to choose between the two. As we have seen, the two perspectives are not inherently incompatible and in fact are fruitfully complementary when operating within their proper spheres of legitimacy. Conflicts arise only when one or the other of the perspectives is advanced as a view that can explain all of the data. Most current representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective are well aware of the findings of structural-developmental psychology and are thoroughly familiar with Wilber's formulation of this perspective. Few current representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective, to my knowledge, would want to deny the legitimacy and immense contributions of Wilber's work. On the other side of the debate, however, Wilber and proponents of Wilber's work have not been accommodating of the spiral-dynamic perspective. Wilber has sought to dismiss all versions of the spiral-dynamic perspective. This stance, however, has been a mistake. As we have seen, it is a mistake that has caused Wilber to fall prey to such errors as (a) assuming that everything that is earlier in normal development must be inherently lower, (b) forcing dynamic potentials into a structural-hierarchical, "transcend and include" developmental framework, and, consequently, (c) multiplying the number of dynamic potentials and exaggerating differences between pre and trans expressions of dynamic potentials. As I survey the transpersonal field at this time, most representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective accept much of what Wilber has to say on the vast range of topics about which he has written. The main point on which current representatives of the spiral-dynamic perspective disagree with Wilber is his claim that the structural-hierarchical perspective is the only correct perspective.

A major contribution of Wilber's more recent work is the "all-quadrant, all-level" (AQAL) perspective, which interlinks the following four dimensions of inquiry: (a) *the interior-individual (subjective or "I") dimension*, which examines the developmental emergence of levels of individual consciousness (corresponding to Wilber's levels of basic structures); (b) *the external-individual (objective or "it") dimension*, which studies the hierarchy of evolved organic and neurological structures correlated with the levels of individual consciousness; (c) *the interior-collective (cultural or "we") dimension*, which considers corresponding levels of cultural consciousness; and (d) *the external-collective (social or "its") dimension*, which examines corresponding levels of social organization. AQAL is indeed an

integral perspective. Transpersonal inquiry, since its inception, has focused primarily on the first, interior-individual dimension of AQAL; and as transpersonal *psychology*, it will continue to focus primarily on this dimension. As a general orientation, however, the transpersonal perspective long ago passed beyond the boundaries of psychology proper and began to be applied to or to arise within many other fields, cultural and scientific, theoretical and applied (see Boucouvalas, 1999). This widening of horizons was already well in progress when I published the first edition of *The Ego and the Dynamic Ground* in 1988, in which I suggested that, in light of its multidisciplinary character, “it would perhaps be better if transpersonal inquiry were to change its name from transpersonal *psychology* to, simply, transpersonal *theory*” (preface to first edition; 1995, p. ix).

Wilber’s four-quadrant, all-level AQAL is an excellent map of the larger transpersonal terrain. Transpersonal theorists in many fields can make good use of it. In using AQAL, however, transpersonal theorists should not, I suggest, interpret all four quadrants of AQAL in an exclusively structural-hierarchical, holarchical manner. If the recommendations made in this paper were to be implemented, development in the interior-individual quadrant—and perhaps the interior-collective quadrant, too—would need to be interpreted as unfolding along two, holarchical and spiraling tracks at the same time: ego functions unfolding holarchically and dynamic potentials unfolding in a spiraling manner. Such a reinterpretation would leave most of the match-ups between the interior-individual quadrant and the other quadrants intact because Wilber’s interpretation of the interior-individual quadrant and the spiral-dynamic interpretation agree that human development unfolds broadly through prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal levels. These two interpretations differ more in their accounts of the transitions between the three major levels and in their accounts of the psychic resources that contribute to the levels than they do in their general descriptions of the levels. A two-track, holarchical-spiraling interpretation, then, would not greatly affect Wilber’s ordering of the levels of interior-individual development and, therefore, would not significantly change his match-ups of these levels with corresponding levels in other quadrants.

Paradigm debates over the last decade have paved the way for a new, more constructive stage of transpersonal dialogue. Differences among primary perspectives in the field have been clarified, and it is now possible to begin mapping the proper range and applications of these perspectives and thus to begin bringing these perspectives into productive collaboration. I have taken a step in this direction in this paper by reexamining the debate between the structural-hierarchical and spiral-dynamic perspectives and by proposing some ways a fruitful division of labor between these perspectives might be achieved.

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