

# The Need for Philosophical and Spiritual Dialogue

## Reflections on Ken Wilber's *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*

ROBERT McDERMOTT

I am writing out of a recognition of Ken Wilber's contribution to the transpersonal movement. I am delighted to join others in acknowledging the ground-breaking character of Wilber's latest work, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution (SES)* (1995). I am also offering suggestions concerning ways in which this work might have better served the ideals which he espouses. I believe that his readers are not well served by his style of argument against alternative perspectives and his treatment of some of his colleagues. This massive work—the fruit of enormous labor, vast knowledge, and brilliant intellect—is seriously diminished by what strikes me as caustic argumentation and overly harsh critique of contemporaries, including many contributors to the transpersonal perspective. Because I so admire Wilber's scope and precision and care so strongly about the capacity of transpersonal perspectives to revision Western thought and culture, I am taking advantage of this issue of *Re-Vision*—a journal which Ken Wilber himself founded—to plead for a less combative exchange of ideas from and within the transpersonal community.

Although I have not met Ken Wilber personally, I am positively predisposed to him and his writings. His books have been an important source of insight in

my attempt to interpret and to some extent bridge my two successive teachers, Sri Aurobindo and Rudolf Steiner. I count his friends, Frances Vaughan and Roger Walsh, among my closest friends, and I had the privilege of studying *SES* with them and several others. My wife and I are especially grateful to him for his *Grace and Grit* (1991), which was helpful to us after she suffered a serious stroke two years ago.

I believe that we look in vain, however, for the healing potential of this book; it takes one opponent after another and argues against them, often with little apparent sympathetic understanding of their positions. The 240 pages of notes in *SES* in particular are in need of an editor and prevent the book from reaching its great potential. Let me give just a few examples. In a typical passage, Wilber criticizes “most Eco-camps”—he includes everyone from deep ecologists and ecofeminists to various exponents of the so-called “New Paradigm”—for lacking a sense of “the extensive dynamics of intersubjective communicative exchange” presupposed by their “web-of-life” theories (740). He then describes them as “some of the most quarrelsome groups around—trying to get various eco-groups together is like trying to herd cats”; he says that they amount to “a bunch of angry, monological, divine egos shouting

about systems theory, and they have no idea why the world doesn't respond with gratitude to their saving graces” (740). One wonders how members of the “Eco-camp” might be expected to respond to this kind of characterization? How is Wilber's reference to ecofeminists and advocates of Great-Goddess spirituality as “power-hungry theorists” (666) calculated to further the cause of “intersubjective communicative exchange”? We should join with Wilber in objecting to the use of ad hominem attacks by many “Eco-Romantics,” but not when he claims that “these critics seem to gravitate to the past phylogenetic structure that corresponds with the ontogenetic structure in themselves that is immediately prior to their failed personal integration” (665).

*SES* is counterproductive in its harsh evaluations of those who have, or had, reason to consider themselves Wilber's colleagues. Take Theodore Roszak, for instance, who has made many learned and insightful contributions to enlightened thinking since his *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969). Why does Wilber denounce Roszak's recent *Voice of the Earth* (1992) for its critique of reason, as if Roszak could possibly subscribe to the simple-minded view that, as Wilber puts it, “reason is the Devil,

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Gaia is the God/dess" (690)? Is Roszak really attempting "to cure the human race with ecopsychology" (685)? By what criterion could it be claimed that Roszak "aggressively denies any truly transpersonal sphere" (689)?

Can we imagine this kind of attack on colleagues at the back of Plotinus's *Enneads*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, James's *Principles*, Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom*, or Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine*? These works contain arguments, of course, but truly great thinkers, particularly those who present themselves as representing a mystical perspective, do not need to slash and burn philosophical opponents. Such ungenerous comments can only obscure the flow of significant insights for which Wilber is justly commended.

Addressing Ken Wilber more directly, let me emphasize that quotable negative remarks from a person of power not only get repeated, but effectively replace the very positive body of work to which they are attached. The tone of *SES* in the kind of passages to which I have alluded suggests to me that the author has not yet accepted the responsibility of his highly visible influence. I also resisted a similar responsibility when I was first appointed president of the California Institute of Integral Studies. During my first two years in this position, I found much that I did not admire and said so, cleverly and quotably. When the board-appointed presidential evaluator visited the institution as part of a five-year review, he heard about many positive accomplishments of my tenure (I was reappointed for another five years), but also heard about those negative comments I had made four and five years earlier. As Wilber's contentious comments are published in this major work, they will outlive all of us, and for as long as the book is read will continue to detract from its achievement.

As Ken Wilber is, along with Stanislav Grof, one of the two most influential exponents of transpersonal thinking, we should expect his writings to exhibit equanimity in the service of insight, eschewing combat, condescension, and overconfidence. The transformation of an embattled to a dialogical

consciousness should be the first goal, and enduring characteristic, of a philosophy or psychology claiming to be transpersonal.

A philosopher such as Wilber cannot represent the value of the spiritual and simultaneously be so contentious and dismissive of perspectives with which he finds fault. Doing so undermines his own claims and causes extreme reactions. Being right is not the only value—and a perspective which is so unskilled at sympathetic listening is not likely to be more right than others. Wilber has long ago, and at a very young age, established his intellectual brilliance and his role as one of the pre-eminent spokespersons of a transpersonal world view. It is now time for him to assume a more senior attitude, one which shows tolerance, offers encouragement, and more convincingly exemplifies the values, and more particularly the mode of discourse, of a leader of a spiritually based, transformative perspective.

I believe that such a combative and divisive mode of argumentation is destructive not only of his relations with thinkers and writers who would naturally be his colleagues, but will also prove ineffectual against mainstream thinkers. Some readers, and especially defenders, of *SES* might take its intellectual pugilism to be a tactic, a way of impressing the East Coast intellectuals and chronically contentious philosophers, or a way of "taking on" the mainstream paradigm on behalf of the wimpy West Coast. There are surely situations in which many of us might want Wilber's searing intellect to demolish Richard Rorty, Daniel Dennett, or the *New York Review of Books*. My higher, older self, however, reminds me that Gandhi is right, that belligerence is not effective, not even in combat with "nothing but" flatland materialists.

It might be helpful to remind ourselves that the *dia* of *dialogue* means "through," so that philosophical dialogue, of which there has been so little, and of which Wilber could become an exemplar, means penetrating the thought of others by sympathetic imagination. At a minimum, sympathetic thinking should be a complement to critical thinking. Ideally, given the damage

wrought by too much criticism and too little tolerance, great thinkers representing the transpersonal perspective should serve as exemplars of community-based dialogue.

The idea of a community of dialogue would seem to be central to a transpersonal movement, a welcome and necessary improvement on both the model of the scholar-thinker working alone and the academic model according to which each thinker advances by discrediting the opinions of all others. In *SES* Wilber considers a contemplative community to be the best source for progress in developing a transpersonal metaphysics. Unfortunately, Wilber's mode of discourse is in tension with the mystical perspective that he applauds.

Perhaps the next two volumes of *SES* will not suffer from this tension. That Wilber has agreed to respond to the contributors to these issues of *ReVision* devoted to his work is a convincing indication of his willingness to participate in what should prove to be a productive dialogue.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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ous fashion!). But influx from these states can therefore occur at any developmental (frontal) stage, simply because all individuals wake, dream, and sleep. Moreover, every individual, at no matter what age, goes through an entire "round" every twenty-four hours, plunging from waking (gross) into dream (subtle) into deep sleep (causal), and then around again. I have fully acknowledged that point from my earliest to my most recent books.

I have simply pointed out that the great preponderance of evidence indicates that these *states* are converted to stable and enduring *traits* only through a process of incorporative structuration, which of necessity includes and builds upon previous enduring structures. Furthermore, as consciousness grows and evolves and gains in strength—precisely through the ongoing march of developmental structuration—it will increasingly remain "awake" under all possible states, a *constant state of witnessing carried unbroken through waking, dream, and deep sleep states*, a constancy which is prerequisite and mandatory to full realization of nondual Suchness (and a constancy which, if you have experienced it, is unmistakable, self-referential, postrepresentational, nondual, self-validating, self-existing, and self-liberating).

Thus, in the advanced stages of spiritual practice, the self will remain fully conscious in waking, dream, and deep sleep, and thus it will eventually recognize *that which remains the same under all possible changes of state*. In other words, it will recognize the changeless, the timeless, the spaceless—it will recognize, or re-cognize, its own Original Face, its own primordial nature, the ever present Emptiness in which and through which all states arise, remain a bit, and pass. God-consciousness has become, not a changing state, but a timeless trait.

### Shaking the Spiritual Tree

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 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.

McDermott asks if we would ever hear polemic from the great spiritual philosophers, such as Aurobindo or James or Plotinus. The answer, of course, is yes. In fact, the vast majority of spiritual philosophers have engaged at one time or another in intense polemical discourse—Plato, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Fichte, Schopenhauer, Schelling, Augustine, Origen, Plotinus, to name a very few. They do so, I believe, precisely because they understand the difference between what Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche used to call "compassion" and "idiot compassion." This is perhaps the hardest lesson to learn in politically correct America, where idiot compassion—the abdication of discriminating wisdom and the loss of the moral fiber to voice it—is too often equated with "spirituality."

I think, on the contrary, that we admire these spiritual philosophers because idiot compassion was foreign to them, because they all had the moral courage to speak out in the most acerbic of terms when necessary, to make the hard calls and make them loud and clear. People too often imagine that "choiceless awareness" means making "no judgments" at all. But that itself is a judging activity. Rather, "choiceless awareness" means that both judging and no judging are allowed to arise, appropriate to circumstances. I think this is exactly why so many great spiritual philosophers engaged in such incredibly *intense* polemic, Plotinus being a quite typical example. Plotinus so aggressively attacked the astrologers that Dante felt it necessary to consign the entire lot of them to the eighth ring of hell, and Plotinus unrelentingly tore into the Gnostics as having "no right to even speak of the Divine."

I used to think that if somebody engaged in that type of forceful polemic, he or she could not be very enlightened. I see now it is exactly the opposite. We tend to believe genuine spirituality should avoid all that, whereas in fact it quite often engages it passionately as a manifestation of its capacity to judge depth (i.e., its capacity for discriminat-

ing wisdom). Plotinus's acerbic and occasionally sarcastic attack on the astrologers and Gnostics is paradigmatic: they were a politically powerful and unpleasant lot, and it took courage to claim they had no right to even speak of the Divine. If McDermott is sincere about his pronouncements, then he would have been there to publicly condemn Plotinus, no doubt; but the point is that right or wrong Plotinus stood up to be counted, and it is a service to us that he did so in no uncertain terms. Moreover, Plotinus is not saying one thing in public and another in private; you know exactly where he stands.

The question is thus not whether these great spiritual philosophers engaged in polemic, for they did; the question is why. When such sages engage in intense polemic, I suppose we sometimes get nothing but their lingering neuroses; but we often get the full force of the overall judgment of their entire being, a shout from the heart in a sharp scream. It takes no effort at all to act out the former; it takes enormous courage to stand up and voice the latter, and this is what I have come to admire in all the sages and philosophers I mentioned who have left us the full force of their summary judgments.

Contrary to McDermott's sincere but misplaced pronouncements, such polemic comes not from this side of equanimity, but from the other side. One taste is the ground of intense judgments, not their abdication. These are not lunatics blathering prejudices; they evidence more like what the Tibetans would call the wrathful aspect of enlightened awareness.

McDermott tells us that he used to publicly and passionately voice his own judgments of qualitative distinctions and discriminating wisdom, but that he quit doing so in order to become a better administrator. I accept his choice. But I think it would be catastrophic for everybody in the transpersonal field to adopt that same stance and abdicate the public voicing of one's discriminating wisdom.<sup>11</sup>

There are many who see all too clearly the sad shape our field is in. They talk about it often in private. They tell me about it all the time. They are truly alarmed by the reactionary, antiprogres-

sive, and regressive fog thickly creeping over the entire field. Yet most of them are not willing to stand up and be counted, precisely because the countercultural police await, poised and ready to sanctimoniously damn them. A little less administrative juggling, and a little more discriminating wisdom backed with occasional polemic, is exactly what the entire field could use, in my opinion. I, at any rate, can no longer sit by and smile numbly as depth takes a vacation. And in a more honest process, where our public pronouncements actually match our private statements, we just might find that spiritual awareness includes, not excludes, the fiercest of judgments.

### Miscellaneous

1. I would like particularly to express a deep appreciation for Roger Walsh's superb summary of some of the central themes of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*. Given that his essay, in its various forms, has now been read by approximately three times the number of people who have read *SES* itself, you will understand that I am altogether relieved that it is fair, accurate, and informative; and, beyond that, a model of academic exposition and excellence.

2. Although I have an enormous sympathy with the inclusionary intent of Jürgen Kremer's essay, and with the great heart he clearly expresses, I am sorry to say that I find his actual argument rather confused. I will briefly respond by saying: a) I have, in *The Eye of Spirit* (in press), given an extensive outline of the shadow side of evolutionary thinking; b) Kremer refers to Winkelman's criticism of *Up from Eden* (1996b), but Kremer gives no response at all to my extensive critique in *SES* of Winkelman's approach (the performative contradiction embodied in Winkelman's stance is shared, in my opinion, by Kremer); c) any individual can be above or below a society's center of gravity, and thus remarkable accomplishments are open to virtually any society;<sup>12</sup> d) volume 2 deals with many of Kremer's issues in great detail; e) despite Kremer's disclaimer ("The reader [should] resist temptations to see my descriptions as amounting to some form of ideal or perfect image . . . nostalgically or romantically projected into the

past"), I find Kremer does just that, evidenced in the fact that his entire essay is full of examples of allegedly "integral and nondissociated consciousness" of the indigenous mind, and yet *only one sentence* is given to a specific example of the often extreme and brutal shadow side of many indigenous cultures. I do not consider this fair, balanced, or anthropologically representative.

3. "Relationship as Spiritual Practice" by Jeanne Achterberg and Donald Rothberg is a wonderful piece. I could simply say "ditto" and that would cover my response! These types of issues are so important as we all struggle toward a genuinely integral practice.

Donald says that "I think that [Wilber] would claim that spiritual paths occur in relation to all four quadrants. In this sense, relational models can fit within his theory." That is indeed the point of what I'm trying to do, namely, make room for various authentic approaches in a more integral view. At the same time, I tend deliberately to leave the details open and fluid, so that those more competent than me can fill them in (or correct them altogether!).<sup>13</sup> In fact, I basically publish only my broad and orienting conclusions. I have thousands of note pages of evidence and arguments, often in frighteningly boring detail, and although I sometimes present those details in elaborate footnotes, for the most part they never see publication (unless one of my conclusions is challenged, and then I am happy to drag out all the evidence). But I offer none of these generalizations lightly, nor without what I consider to be very substantial evidence.

Thus, when the authors state that "Wilber himself has in his recent work created considerable conceptual space for relational approaches, although most of the practical and theoretical work remains to be done," I could not agree more.

Many of the *ReVision* essays carried in this "conversation" understandably focused on various criticisms and negative reactions, but the great preponderance of responses have been more in line with those of Jeanne's and Donald's, namely, finding my orienting outline to be useful in furthering their own substantial contributions. It is unfortunate that we could not have focused on

more of these positive responses to my work, but that, perhaps, is for yet another round in yet another forum.

### NOTES

1. Incidentally, Washburn's "ptf-3," mentioned in his *ReVision* article, is indeed a fallacy: it is simply another name for Washburn's inability to recognize the Trikaya (the existence of gross, subtle, and causal realms). His collapse of tripartite into bipartite thus forces him to view any renormalization as a fallacy.

Washburn states this fallacy as "inferring separateness from difference"; in fact, all I do is infer separateness from separateness (waking, dream, and deep sleep are separate; I simply say, do not equate waking and deep sleep on the basis of the fact that they are both nondreaming). Moreover, even if I did infer separateness from difference, the separateness still might actually be there. Washburn does not in any way demonstrate otherwise; his thesis, on the contrary, rests on the conflation of relatively different and separate dimensions (the collapse of the Trikaya), and this can be demonstrated with much more confidence than his contrary suggestions.

Washburn also raises the issue of mind/body in relation to ego and centaur. Why do I say that it is only centauric vision-logic that can integrate mind and body? This is, of course, a relative affair and a matter of degrees. One might even make the argument that the mind and body are not truly integrated until radical Enlightenment, and I would not argue with that. But generally speaking, I describe the centaur as an integration of mind and body because 1) this directly follows the evidence of Loevinger, Broughton, Graves, and others; and 2) the centaur, as the great transition from the gross bodymind to the subtle bodymind, represents the "final" integration of that gross bodymind.

More technically, because vision-logic is on the edge of the transmental, the self of vision-logic is increasingly disidentifying with the mind itself. Because vision-logic transcends formal rationality, it can more easily integrate formal reason and body.

It is true that each stage generally transcends and includes its predecessors, but that refers most specifically to the basic structures themselves (which are without inherent self-sense). But we must never forget that the basic structures are negotiated by the self, and the leading edge of self-development is the home of the death-terror. Thus, whatever the leading level of development with which the self's center of gravity is identified, just that level is the central nexus of the death-seizure. While the basic structures can be rather cleanly integrated, the self-stages, with their boundary of death-terror, cannot. Only as each basic structure is transcended and stripped of self-identify,

Wright, P. 1996. Gender issues in Ken Wilber's transpersonal theory. *ReVision* 18(4): 25-37.

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## Toward Transpersonal Philosophizing

Robert McDermott

In *SES* Wilber shows that he knows how to "shake the spiritual tree." As he confirmed in his response to my article, "The Need for Dialogue in the Wake of Ken Wilber's *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*," he has no regrets. My article was not solely in response to *SES*, nor addressed exclusively to Wilber, but was focused on the relationship between *SES* and the transpersonal community.

Wilber's response confirms my claim that *SES* (particularly the notes) is polemical: it is, and deliberately so. This exchange has established that we really do disagree. Wilber defends polemics (from the Greek, *polemikos*, war), claims a long list of spiritual philosophers as his models, and insists that the combative and contentious arguments of polemics are consistent with spiritual awareness, equanimity, courage, and honesty.

Wilber says that colleagues tell him "all the time" about "the sad shape the field is in" (p. 30). These individuals are reportedly "alarmed by the reactionary, antiprogressive, and regressive fog thickly creeping over the entire field" and encourage Wilber "to stand up and be counted" (p. 31). By contrast, I am hearing from colleagues who are alarmed by the polemics in and concerning *SES*, and by the disparity between such polemics and transpersonal values. My article and this response recommend "discriminating wisdom" and the moral fiber to voice such wisdom ideally joined to interest, humility, and compassion concerning the opinions of colleagues. I believe that this combination would help to create a transpersonal philosophy worthy of the agreement and emulation it seeks.

cated by Wilber to dialogue about significant issues as they are described and identified by the present discussants results in less of a conversation and much more of a series of monologues than I had hoped for. But then Wilber's vision-logic, and certainly the indigenious mind process I am talking about, calls in part for a different setting and a different kind of interpersonal exchange than a journal can offer.

3. Let me mention some examples of areas where I had wished for more detailed dialogue:

- I find Wilber's lack of "thinking with" Kelly's constructive suggestions disappointing.

- Wright (1996) points to a lack of critical political theory in Wilber's writing when she states that he "confuses the issue of who has the *power to set priorities* with the *act of having priorities*" (27). No response from Wilber on this particular, significant issue.

- The three interviews Rothberg conducted potentially present a major challenge to Wilber's assumptions, and they could lead to exciting discussions about the application of various transpersonal models. However, Wilber's response to the actual interviews is minimal.

- It is interesting to notice how Wilber reads McDermott and fails to distinguish between critical disagreements, outspokenness, and level confrontation on the one hand and putdowns, dismissive commentary, and demeaning caricatures on the other hand. (And no response to Zimmerman on this topic.) I heartily agree with Wilber's advocacy for honest disagreements and outspokenness. Yet Wilber writes about my article that "I find his [Kremer's] actual argument rather confused" without either saying what his reading of the argument is or why the argument is confused. An equivalent statement would be "I find Wilber's actual writing rather dissociated." Either of these remarks may be true, but they may be stated dismissively or in an engaged level of dialogue; the latter requires different wording and the creation of context through argument and explication.

4. Let me address some more of the specifics in Wilber's reply to my article. Wilber points to my lack of his discussion of Winkelman's reviews of his

work. However, Wilber's critique of Winkelman's approach is quite beside the points which I am trying to make—no need for me to respond to these criticisms. My model is not one of cultural relativism, and Wilber fails to explain how the performative contradiction identified in Winkelman's work applies to my article. And Wilber has yet to answer the detailed objections by Winkelman and myself regarding available archaeological and anthropological evidence which challenge his model as a whole (a discussion of cultural relativism, even if valid, is no response to these specific points).

Wilber's statement about a society's center of gravity is a restatement of his own published work and not a response to the inherent contradictions and unclarity related to Wilber's work that I point out in my article, especially in regard to his contradictory statements about rational societies and the present stage of the majority of their members.

Wilber finds my discussions of the indigenous mind process neither "fair, balanced, [n]or anthropologically representative" (p. 31). This reminds me of debates around racism where one of the defensive responses to discussions of the Middle Passage is: "Well, African peoples had slaves, too." Indeed—but it misses the point of engagement with the complicity in racism and colonialism. Naturally, within the Eurocentered place where Wilber stands he has to find my discussion unbalanced, which is exactly what my critique addresses. The shadow of modernity continues to loom.

Finally, no author can be expected to address all the critical issues raised in the *ReVision* issues, yet Wilber's selection of topics for his responses is disappointingly nondialogical. Wilber's contributions to the field of transpersonal theory are impressive, yet, vision-logic, to my mind, requires a quality of dialogue about these issues which I have yet to see manifested in his response. The groundwork for the emergence of that possibility may have been laid with these *ReVision* issues. I am eager to be engaged in a quality of discourse (which I have called "participatory concourse") which would do justice to the stage which Wilber sees emerging.

In this brief response, I make two recommendations: that transpersonal thinkers regard polemics as counterproductive, and that in their writings, particularly in relation to each other, they manifest the ideals characteristic of transpersonal world views, disciplines, and modes of consciousness. Wilber's phrases "discriminating wisdom backed with occasional polemic" and "the wrathful aspect of enlightened awareness" (p. 30-31) are presumptuous and damaging when addressed to his spiritually striving colleagues. Even if transpersonalism were a tree to be shaken, its spokespersons are not branches or fruit to be pruned and hacked.

The following points are offered both as a response to Wilber and as a plea to the transpersonal community that it not go the way of academic movements which are characterized by factions and ad hominem arguments.

1. The best way to clean up a field is to strive for wisdom based on practice, and to express ideas clearly and dispassionately. Self-appointed critics and authority figures can't be too careful about mixed motives and shadows. Attempts to impose improvements on the work of others usually generate defensiveness and scarcely ever better thinking. (By complaining about Wilber in this regard I of course run the same risk and am subject to the same criticism as I am addressing to his criticisms. I hope that I am performing this task with sufficient caution and respect; others will decide.)

Once polemic begins, thinking on both sides typically fixes on winning rather than on cooperating in an effort to reach a higher or deeper insight. Wilber's references to my position as involving "idiot compassion," "administrative juggling," and "political correctness" are perfect examples of counterproductive polemic. These insulting characterizations are not aids to our dialogue. A polemic does not generate truth; it breeds fear, anger, and further polemics.

2. Wilber misses my point concerning his position as a philosopher and my current position as administrator of an institution of higher learning (as well as a teacher, lecturer, and writer on trans-

personal philosophy). I am not confusing philosophy with administration. It was with respect to the responsibilities of a person in a leadership position, a person who wields power and influence, that I consider our responsibilities to be similar. In that context I continue to recommend wise compassion over what Wilber calls "the fiercest of judgments" (p. 31) and polemics.

3. I would not want Wilber or other transpersonal thinkers to "sit by and smile numbly as depth takes a vacation" (p. 56), but neither would I want them to follow the example of Plotinus, which Wilber cites with approval, of saying that the Gnostics had "no right to even speak of the divine." I continue to read Plotinus's *Enneads* for its sublime philosophical mysticism—and despite Plotinus's mistaken attack on the Gnostics. We are only in this century beginning to develop an understanding of the Gnostics after centuries of polemical misunderstandings and attacks.<sup>1</sup>

4. As an alternative to polemics, I think we would do well to join in developing a philosophical method and attitude that is a direct expression of transpersonal values and practices. The spirit of such an approach was well expressed in the concluding portion of Donald Rothberg's (1996) introduction to the *ReVision* issues on Ken Wilber. For a start, for example, we should strive to enter sympathetically into competing positions and to offer suggestions for their improvement. Wilber is like most philosophers in not allowing for the fact that he understands his own position better than he understands and reports the positions of others. One of the aims of a transpersonal world view is an active and insightful imagination, one which can see what lives in positions other than one's own. Admittedly, there has been little of this ability on display in the history of philosophy, but transpersonal philosophy is supposed to be an improvement over the past.

With his vast knowledge, incredible intelligence and capacity for productive work, Ken Wilber can yet emerge as a model transpersonal. I join with his many readers in gratitude to Ken for taking us as far as he has and for joining

in this dialogue. We are also mindful that this dialogue has been made possible by countless hours of facilitation and editing by Sean Kelly and Donald Rothberg. We are profoundly grateful for their *upaya*.

#### NOTE

1. In *Ennead* 2.9, "Against the Gnostics; or, Against Those that Affirm the Creator of the Cosmos and the Cosmos Itself to be Evil," Plotinus does not attack individual Gnostics by name but he does attack their ideas with a lack of restraint which suggests the intensity of the competition and the mix of similarities and differences between his teachings and those of the Gnostics—concerning which, see Inge, Henry, Jonas, Brehier, Rudolph, and Willis.

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