

## Heidegger and Wilber on the Limitations of Spiritual Deep Ecology

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In addition to an interest in higher states of consciousness and non-traditional approaches to spirituality, members of the 1960s counterculture also exhibited strongly anti-technological and pro-environmental attitudes, which not only helped to foster the nascent environmental movement and to steer it in new directions, but also led to the founding of hippie communes, many of which ended in dismal failure, so socially naïve were the well-intended youths who flocked to the countryside in order to get closer to nature. The author of the *Unibomber Manifesto*, whose assertions may seem like cultural fossils from a previous era, allegedly carried to a violent extreme a generation's phobia against technological modernity. Throughout modern times, of course, many people—including pastoralists and romantics—have protested against the wrenching social, economic, political, and environmental changes that have been wrought in the name of technological "progress."

In the 1960s, some American radical ecologists began replacing pastoralism with what one critic has called "retro-romanticism", which includes renouncing the modern ideal of progress, celebrating tribal lifeways, and seeking to protect large wilderness areas, defined not as places in which humans interact harmoniously with nature, but rather as areas that were to be mostly free from human presence. These radical ecologists, including some deep ecologists and ecofeminists, were often influenced by countercultural trends calling for a nature-oriented spirituality, one that is concerned not with a transcendent or otherworldly God, but rather with the living Earth and all its inhabitants. Although I am in some ways sympathetic to nature-oriented spirituality, in this essay I argue that there are certain dangers associated with a nature-

oriented spirituality that denies the transcendent aspect of nature and the divine, and that insists instead that the divine is wholly immanent with the material processes of nature.

In what follows, I define nature-oriented spirituality as an effort to identify divinity with nature's complex forms and processes, primarily as involved in Earth's ecosystem. Nature-oriented spirituality has much in common with paganism, pantheism, and other religious traditions which deny that the divine transcends the domain of "nature" and its complex forces. Not all deep ecologists and ecofeminists adhere to this kind of spirituality, but some do. I will use the term "spiritual deep ecology" as a shorthand expression for those forms of deep ecology and ecofeminism compatible with an immanentistic, nature-oriented spirituality. Spiritual deep ecology and nature-oriented spirituality amount to ideal types to which few published positions correspond in all details. Nevertheless, those familiar with the literature on deep ecology, ecofeminism, and nature religions will recognize numerous areas in which they can be read as "spiritual deep ecology" and "nature-oriented spirituality."

Those adhering to a nature-oriented spirituality maintain, with considerable justification, that Western man's often exploitative attitude toward nature has been influenced by other worldly religiosity, which portrays this world as corrupt and fallen, in contrast with the perfect and sacred other world that is our true home. But just as in the case of other countercultural movements, nature-oriented spirituality has its dark side, some aspects of which I examine in this essay. At the outset, however, I would like to note that some of the more sophisticated kinds of nature-oriented spirituality (including the versions developed by Matthew Fox, David Abrams, and Gus diZerega) are to varying degrees less subject to the criticism that I have to offer. Moreover, ecofeminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether has demonstrated brilliantly that spiritual reverence toward creation or nature is compatible with a vision of the divine as simultaneously transcendent and immanent.

Just as there is a dark side to experimenting with mind-expanding drugs, however, so too is there a potentially dark side to promoting a nature oriented spirituality. Of this dark side, most environmentalists and the American public are largely ignorant. In the twentieth century, however, a violent and powerful political movement understood itself as a nature-religion, one major goal of which was to purge the world of the allegedly life-denying and nature-hating views of Jews and Christians. This movement was German National Socialism. Although the anti-modern, anti-Enlightenment, anti-industrial, and pro-nature rhetoric of the Nazis in the early 1930s was largely betrayed by their subsequent commitment to rearmament and industrial productivity, the Nazi government passed environmental laws that were the most far-reaching in the developed world. Affirming that humanity is but one strand in the great web of life, Nazi ideologues trumpeted the now infamous slogan Blut und Boden (“Blood and Soil”), which may be understood as a racist version of bioregionalism. Elsewhere, I have described in some detail the ecofascist dimension of National Socialism.

In my critical examination of nature-oriented spirituality and spiritual deep ecology, I use two different lenses: Martin Heidegger’s ontology and Ken Wilber’s transpersonalism. As we shall see, even though Heidegger and Wilber sharply disagree about historical teleology and the merits of modernity, they agree that nature-oriented spirituality risks adhering to a one-dimensional or “flatland” ontology, the immanentistic or this-worldly orientation of which conceals the transcendental dimension of human existence, nature, and the divine.

Paradoxically, by giving so much credence to the naturalistic view that humankind is nothing but a clever animal, or merely one thread among others in the great web of live, radical environmentalists end up adhering to the scientific materialism of the modernism that they often otherwise renounce.

### The Heidegger Connection

One wing of the countercultural revolt that began in the 1960s sought to liberate oppressed Others of all sorts, including blacks, Hispanics, women, animals, and even nature itself. Curiously, however, some counterculturalists who used to vocabulary revolution, liberation, emancipation, rights, and social progress, did not take seriously how much this vocabulary was rooted in modernity, which some counterculturalists sharply criticized for its “domination” of nature. Indeed, to the consternation of historically-informed liberals and socialists, some counterculturalists believed that modernity was inherently flawed and would thus inevitably lead to social and ecological catastrophe. For such counterculturalists, including a number of radical environmentalists, real liberation meant not merely gaining voting rights for blacks or equal employment rights for women, but rather throwing off the yoke imposed by the whole social, political, economic, industrial, and technological apparatus of modernity, in order to generate lifestyles that would bring human beings into closer relationship to each other, to nature, and to the sacred. I am personally familiar with this yearning for greater simplicity, for an end to the desecration of nature, and for a superior alternative to the spirituality found in mainline churches. Although appreciating the passion and concern exhibited by these anti-modernist sentiments, I now regard some of them as rather confused and possibly dangerous.

For years, I published essays that condemned technological modernity, even though I simultaneously supported various liberation movements that were manifestations of its most positive dimension, i.e., its drive to liberate humankind from the scourges of ignorance, poverty, and political oppression. One factor stands out in my failure adequately to integrate this positive aspect of modernity with my condemnation of its ecologically-destructive industrialism. Much of my critique of modernity was derived from the thought of Martin Heidegger, who—by the early 1930s, when he became affiliated with National Socialism—saw little, if anything positive

about modernity. Indeed, he interpreted technological modernity, including modern science, as the nihilistic culmination of 2500 years of cultural degeneration. Democracy, rationalism, socialism, communism, capitalism, empiricism, universal human rights—all of these were, for Heidegger, not signs of human progress, but instead symptoms of Western humanity's decline, understood as an increasing loss of contact with Being. Ostensibly, this gradual loss led the West to be governed by a one-dimensional ontology that forces things to show themselves only as raw materials which are useful for enhancing the power of the technological system, the primary goal of which (despite talk of "improving" the human estate) is power for its own sake. According to Heidegger, the control obsession that originated in Western thought had become a planetary destiny in the twentieth century. Under the guise of movements promising human liberation and fulfillment, humankind had been reduced to the status of a clever animal, as defined by thinkers like Darwin and Freud. Nature had been reduced to the status of a gasoline station for fueling ever more gargantuan industrial projects. Modern humanity has become blind to the fact that our capacity for understanding what and that things are involves an openness to that which transcend all things: the being of entities.

Although my environmental concerns led me to use Heidegger's thought to justify a radical ecological critique of technological modernity, my interest in various civil rights movements forced me to downplay his strongly anti-democratic views. Many other people, including the leading counterculturalist Herbert Marcuse, who studied with Heidegger, shared this ambivalent attitude toward modernity. The 1987 disclosures about the extent and duration of Heidegger's affiliation with national Socialism, however, forced me to make a more responsible and internally coherent assessment of his (and thus my own) views about modernity. In doing so, I arrived at the following two conclusions.

First, it was no accident that Heidegger could so readily interpret his own thought as being consistent with National Socialism, for he agreed with that movement's view that Western history involves a long decline from classical (especially Greek) antiquity, that modernity was the culmination of that decline, and that the only remedy was a revolution that involved the "complete transformation of our German Dasein [Heidegger's term for human existence]." Second, despite enthusiastically supporting Hitler's movement, Heidegger criticized Nazi ideologues, since—as their biological racism demonstrated—they usually adhered to some variety of modern naturalism. In Heidegger's view, naturalism was itself another manifestation of modernity's one-dimensional ontology, and hence could not provide an alternative to modernity. The material power of modernity was inversely related to its spiritual ignorance. Blind to the transcendent dimension that differentiates humans from other beings, modern humans conclude that they are nothing but animals involved in a struggle for survival in the face of the overpowering forces of nature.

From Heidegger's viewpoint, the Nazis' worship of overpowering nature and their celebration of the inchoate impulses of "blood" kinship were not instances of regression to ancient Greek ways of thinking, because the ancient Greeks were in touch with the ontologically transcendent, even though they could not adequately articulate it. The Greeks did not worship nature, understood in modern terms as material substances and processes, but rather celebrated nature understood as physis, that is, as awe-inspiring presencing, appearing, or manifesting. This manifesting constitutes what Heidegger calls the "being" of entities (Sein des Seienden), and what the ancient Greeks (supposedly) experienced as the self-disclosure of entities, or their entry into presence from concealment. Such presencing or being is not experienced by non-human animals, which allegedly lack the ontological openness necessary for such presencing to occur.

Influenced by German idealism, which distinguished between the natural and the historical domains, Heidegger rejected the Nazi view that humans are merely intelligent animals governed by natural laws and struggling for survival in competition with the rest of life on Earth. Because some version of this naturalistic materialism is shared by most moderns, Heidegger was able to conclude that the historical reality of National Socialism amounted yet another dreary instance of modernity's impulse to gain control of everything through science, technology, and industry. Many commentators have noted that National Socialism contains two apparently contradictory elements: a fascination with nature-worship, on the one hand, and a commitment to industrial technology, on the other. Jeffrey Herf uses the term "reactionary modernism" to describe this complex tension within Nazi ideology." According to Heidegger, however, the dominant impulse of National Socialism is only partly reactionary or regressive, and primarily modernist. Nazi efforts to resurrect pagan divinities like Wotan and to restore blood ties to the land occurred within the context of a general commitment to modern materialism or naturalism, for which the transcendent has no meaning. Hence, Heidegger believed that Nazi efforts at reestablishing a relation to pagan nature divinities were incapable of restoring Germany's relationship with the transcendent. In his view, humankind could establish an appropriate relationship with nature only after discerning that nature, physis, involves a transcendent dimension.

In 1947, Aldo Leopold would call humans "plain citizens" of the land, but in the 1930s Heidegger insisted that humans were unique in existing as the opening in which things can manifest themselves and in this sense "be." Scorning Nazi ideologues who promoted a materialistic religion of nature, Heidegger encouraged the Nazis to put their conceptual and spiritual houses in order by adopting his own philosophy, which emphasized the transcendent and non-naturalist dimension of human existence and "nature" alike. For Heidegger, even though an eagle has far better eyesight than a human, the former cannot discern the "beauty" of

an entity or a landscape, for beauty (like meaning, intelligibility, and purpose) can be discerned only by those who can comprehend the being of an entity, i.e., who can encounter the entity as entity. Being “is” not itself an entity or a property of an entity, but rather names the ontological event in which an entity presents or reveals itself. In a conclusion that is repellent to the modern sensibility, Heidegger asserted that humans cannot adequately be defined as animals. He maintained that homage should be given neither to the complex processes and forces of material nature, not to the gods who supposedly correspond to those forces, but rather to transcendent being, by virtue of whose radiance entities can appear as entities within a specific historical epoch.

Reading Hegel and Marx, Schelling and Heidegger, has convinced me that humankind has a far more complex relationship to “nature” and to the “divine” than some spiritual deep ecologists would have it. Human interaction with nature and the divine is always mediated by cultural, linguistic, and technological means. In other words, God and nature as such manifest themselves only within a “world” generated by human existence, which itself is sustained by a transcendent dimension that is not of human origin. My efforts to read Heidegger as a forerunner of radical environmentalism were met with resistance by some deep ecologists, who regarded Heidegger’s emphasis on human existence as a residual form of anthropocentrism, which they hold responsible for much of modern humanity’s efforts to dominate nature. Heidegger himself, however, would have been equally critical of much of today’s nature-oriented spirituality, which is in some ways influenced by the same naturalism that discloses nature as a filling station and humans as no more than clever animals.

Unfortunately, despite rejecting the biological racism that he regarded as central to the historical form actually taken by National Socialism, Heidegger not only ardently supported and movement during the 1930s, but continued to revere its “inner truth and greatness” long after the

movement had led Germany to self-destruction and had murdered millions of innocent people in the process. Attempting to make sense of all this, Jacques Derrida suggests that Heidegger was guilty not of biological racism, but rather of metaphysical racism, according to which the German language—more than any other—is profoundly linked with ancient Greek. From this perspective, the “inner truth and greatness” of National Socialism meant that Germany was capable of initiating an historical epoch as great in its own way as the era established by the ancient Greeks. Heidegger’s own aspiration was to become the spiritual leader of the Nazi revolution, which could then carry out its true mission of awakening German existence from its blindness to the transcendent being of entities. The sheer scale and awful consequences of Heidegger’s political misjudgment (not to mention his postwar silence about the Holocaust) has led many people to conclude that his thought is little more than an apology for fascism.

Though understanding the reasons for this conclusion, I cannot agree with it. Because Heidegger used his own thought to endorse German fascism, efforts must be made to identify those aspects of his thought that led him in that direction. There are aspects of Heidegger’s thought, however, which retain their importance despite his own politically perverted application of them. The political problems with his thought can be traced to two major factors: first, the above-mentioned metaphysical-linguistic racism and nationalism; second, the view that Western history involves ontological degeneration, which ends in the materialism and naturalism that are essential to all modern political ideologies. During the past decade, I have looked for a way of understanding human existence that, on the one hand, avoids any such racism, but that retains what is valid about Heidegger’s idea of the transcendent dimension of human existence and nature; and, on the other hand, affirms the progressive dimension of modernity, but that acknowledges its destructive attitude toward the natural world and its dissociative attitude toward

the human body, emotions, and the female. In many respects, I have found that Ken Wilber's writings accomplish all of this.

### The Wilber Connection

I first read Ken Wilber's book, Up From Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution, in the early 1980s, when I was still seeing the world through the Heideggerian lens. The book was important to me for at least two reasons. First, it demonstrated that transcendent dimension of human existence could be explained not only in Heidegger's terms, but also in terms that were consistent with the "perennial wisdom," defined in part as the esoteric dimension of the great religious traditions, about which Heidegger had little positive to say after about 1930. Second, the book convinced me that I needed to reconcile my critical view of modernity (as causing so much ecological destruction) with my positive view of modernity (as promoting emancipation from ignorance, poverty, and political oppression). Third, in contrast to Heidegger's lack of interest in cosmology and his denial that human history is the process by which human kind is actualizing some hidden potential, Wilber's book offered evolutionary and teleological view of the development of consciousness, a view that took into account both Hegel and modern cosmology.

In several other books, but especially in his recent work, Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution, moreover, Wilber acknowledges the problematic and destructive character of modernity's treatment of nature, but maintains that the solution to such treatment lies not in returning to a pre-modern condition, but instead moving beyond modernity, without at the same time sacrificing its positive achievements. Like Heidegger, Wilber holds that human existence involves a transcendent dimension that enables people to be self-conscious and thus to encounter entities as entities. As a neo-Hegelian, however, and thus unlike Heidegger, Wilber reads human

history as a broadly progressive process which moves from prepersonal to personal and eventually to transpersonal modes of awareness. The transpersonal means the “personal plus,” i.e., states of consciousness that include the personal or egoic, but go beyond the limitations of such consciousness, including a strong attachment to its own perspective on matters. Wilber regards thinkers like Emerson and Hegel as exhibiting a mode of awareness that synthesizes various perspectives that may otherwise seem contradictory. Such “vision-logic,” according to Wilber, opens the way for genuinely transpersonal modes of awareness.

Wilber maintains that modernity’s democratic ideals—including the affirmation of universal human rights and the goal of eliminating political oppression—are not a decline from some earlier and preferable condition, but instead both express and consolidate the personal mode of consciousness, which Wilber regards as superior to the prepersonal mode. In the prepersonal mode, people are less capable of distinguishing themselves either from their tribe or from the natural environment. Some spiritual deep ecologists praise prepersonal existence as being “closer to nature,” especially when contrasted with modernity’s abstract, complex, dualistic, and anthropocentric egoic consciousness. Wilber argues, however, that nostalgia for the prepersonal past is misguided. Those who yearn to return either to the natural womb or to prepersonal social relations not only promote regressive attitudes that fail to understand human consciousness and its teleological trajectory, but also refuse to assume the moral and historical responsibility that belongs to beings who are self-conscious, historical, and thus capable of being aware of being aware of the transcendent dimension of things.

Wilber warns against committing the pre/trans fallacy involved in confusing prepersonal states with transpersonal states. It is interesting to note that his first book, No Boundary, commits this fallacy, by suggesting that the non-dual awareness to which so many spiritual seekers aspire is achieved by reuniting with the ground from which all things emerge. In other

words, the end of dualism in all its unhappy manifestation, including the dualism between humanity and nature, is achieved by returning to the state of innocence characteristic of infancy, that is, by returning to Eden. Later on, however, Wilber concluded that far from being the solution to the problem of dualism, returning to the womb/infancy/Eden (that is, to prepersonal existence) amounts to an error that is fatal psychologically and socially, no matter how attractive such a return might otherwise seem.

Instead of regressing, Wilber encourages people to progress or to evolve toward more integrated states of awareness that embrace what is valid about the prepersonal and personal levels of awareness, even while moving beyond their limitations. The provocative title of his 1981 book, Up from Eden, emphasizes that the development of self-conscious in the Garden of Eden was a fall “upward” even though it led to expulsion from the state of infantile innocence. Spiritual development involves an evolutionary process that takes one away from infantile bliss, then leads one into the increasingly anxious and alienated states of individual personhood, and finally guides one toward transpersonal states that integrate at a higher level the things that were separated in personal states of consciousness.

By criticizing spiritual deep ecology’s “retro-romantic” longing for an idyllic prepersonal way of life, and by emphasizing the development of consciousness—a development that must be supported by appropriate improvements in material, social, political, and cultural arrangements--, Wilber might seem to be just another modernist who spurns the supposedly apocalyptic fantasies of environmentalists. In fact, however, unlike many proponents of modernity, he agrees that there is an ecological crisis, which is a leading symptom of modernity’s self-destructive effort to dominate the body, emotions, the female, and “nature” in general. In Up From Eden, Wilber maintains that the ecological crisis results from two interrelated trends of human evolution, especially as it has occurred in the West. First, in the process of achieving a personal or

individuated state of consciousness, modern Western “man” increasingly dissociated himself from everything that he associated with the previous (thus “lower”) state of consciousness, i.e., nature, body, female, emotion. But, such dissociation is not a necessary consequence of achieving individuation, because a person can learn to differentiate himself/herself from the body, emotions, and nature, without dissociating himself/herself from them. Second, the process of individuation brings with it an increasing sense of mortality, which gives rise to ever more intense death anxiety. To some extent, Wilber concludes, the western project of “dominating” nature is a manifestation of a culture-wide denial of a culture-wide denial of death: by controlling nature, Western man proposes to overcome mortality.

In Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (1995), an enormous and complex work that cannot be summarized in an essay of this length, Wilber continues to affirm that there is an ecological crisis, but de-emphasizes the role played by death anxiety in the modern subject’s assault of nature. Instead, he takes a somewhat different approach to explaining modernity’s destructive treatment of nature. This approach leads to a conclusion that has interesting parallels with how Heidegger, in the 1940s, criticized the “historical reality” of National Socialism. Just as Heidegger maintained that Nazis enamored of nature adhered to their own version of modernity’s metaphysical naturalism, so too Wilber concludes that “retro-romantics” (his term for most radical environmentalists and nature-oriented spiritualists) adhere to their own version of modernity’s metaphysical naturalism, the Great Mechanical World-System or “web of life” of which humankind is but a strand. Other contemporary critics have noted that radical environmentalists appeal to ecological science to support their views, even while otherwise condemning modern science for regarding nature as an object to be controlled and exploited. Wilber, however, goes on to argue that most environmentalists (including spiritual deep ecologists) and modernists alike share a one-dimensional ontology, according to which the

cosmos is composed of nothing more than complex materials processes. In this respect, too, Wilber agrees with Heidegger's contention that National Socialism was metaphysically "the same" as other modern political ideologies that adhere to a materialistic ontology, which is incapable of recognizing the domains that transcend the physical and the organic. Wilber differs from Heidegger, however, in affirming that modernity achieved many of the social and political goals conducive to the development of personal consciousness, which is itself the precondition for moving to a more integrated, transpersonal level of consciousness. For Wilber, National Socialism differed from liberal democracies both by repudiating the ideals and constitutional guarantees of individual liberty, and by denying that Western history involves an advance over earlier periods of human history.

Wilber's progressive reading of natural evolution and human history leads to another important disagreement with Heidegger. We recall that Wilber and Heidegger concur that human existence involves a transcendent dimension ignored by modern materialism. To some version of such materialism most moderns adhere, whether they be liberal democrats, communists, socialists, fascists, or most kinds of radical environmentalists. But liberals, communists, and socialists all warn against regressing to premodern forms of social organization, while Nazis celebrate tribal forms of organization in which a homogenous "folk" celebrate their blood-ties with the sacred landscape. Liberal, socialists, and communists (at least in principle) affirm that modernity has emancipatory aims that are important enough to justify the loss of tribal forms of social organization. In the 1930s, however, Heidegger favored overthrowing democratic principles and establishing an authoritarian regime, even though he criticized those Nazis who described this process as the renewal of primitive German tribal religion. For Heidegger, democracy had to be pushed aside in order to make possible the recovery of something truly primordial; not ancient blood ties, but instead the German relation with being.

Some radical environmentalists, like many people in modern times, yearn for a simplified tribal life in closer proximity to the land. Moreover, and perhaps most disturbingly, a few radical environmentalists have made racist remarks about non-white people who are allegedly incapable of establishing a healthy relationship with the land. In my opinion, most American versions of radical environmentalism are not verging on some form of eco-fascism, but European Green parties with similar ideals and policies (including the idea that we must roll back modern industrialism and commercialism to make a livable planet for humanity and other living beings) must constantly work to avoid becoming captured by right-wing, proto-fascist political movements. In a future political emergency, triggered off by serious environmental problems, one must reckon with the possibility that rhetoric associated with contemporary radical American environmentalists may be put to dark political purposes that most such environmentalists would not countenance today.

For Wilber, unlike Heidegger, dismantling democratic principles and institutions does not encourage the recovery of humanity's awareness of the transcendent dimension, but instead encourages prepersonal modes of awareness, authoritarian social structures, and mythic belief systems that undermine the positive achievements of modernity. Because Heidegger lacked a developmental view of history and human awareness, he envisioned the reawakening of Germany not at the actualization of some hidden potential, but rather as a reappropriation of the original Greek encounter with the transcendent, i. e., the ontologically primal. Even though for Heidegger the point of such a reappropriation was not to turn the Germans into ancient Greeks, but rather to make the Germans authentically German, he had no standard against which to compare the value of the "authentic" ancient Greek world with the "authentic" German world, except insofar as they were both epochs in which transcendent being appropriated a people for a

new world-historical disclosure of entities. These worlds are simply different. One is not more advanced than another.

Some spiritual deep ecologists might criticize Heidegger's infatuation with the Greeks, since they allegedly gave rise to the anthropocentrism and humanity-nature dualism that figure prominently in the ecological crisis. From Wilber's perspective, however, the saving grace in Heidegger's appreciation of the Greeks was his affirmation that they were in touch with the transcendent, of which modernity had become largely ignorant. Radical environmentalists yearning for a "return to the Pleistocene," however, appear to renounce any interest in or concern with the transcendent. For this reason, such environmentalists risk promoting views that are psychologically regressive and politically reactionary, even though in the United States such views must swim against strong currents of individualism and democracy. As Wilber makes clear, however, those same currents have helped promote an ecologically destructive attitude toward nature, because they themselves operate in the metaphysical context of naturalistic materialism, which cannot account for subjectivity, consciousness, soul, spirit, and other dimensions that transcend the material plane.

Considering the vast topic of subjectivity reveals yet another difference between Wilber's approach to the modern humanity-nature relationship and that of Heidegger. Heidegger holds that humankind elevates itself to the status of a titanic subject which regards everything as an object for domination. According to Heidegger, this virtual self-deification of the human subject resulted from loss of contact with the transcendent domain on which human existence depends. Forgetting that the human is not a "thing" at all, but rather the historical-temporal no-thingness or openness in which things can first reveal themselves and this "be," modern humankind conceives of itself as one thing among others: a clever animal. Seeking to deny its own

mortality and finitude, the clever animal uses rationality as the instrument both for guaranteeing its survival, and also for taking total possession of the planet and the universe beyond.

Wilber could agree with much of this explanation, some version of which can also be found in spiritual deep ecology texts that condemn Western humanity's arrogance and control-obsession. In Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality, however, Wilber adopts a rather different approach to the issue of subjectivity. He suggests that the apparent human arrogance that leads to an assault on nature is itself the symptom of moderns who feel that the Great World System postulated by natural science (and adopted by most modernists and radical environmentalists alike) has no place for the subject. By demonstrating the practical and matter-shaping power of his rationality, Western "man" desperately attempts to signal that he exists, despite not having any place in the universe, at least according to the very same modern science that makes possible his effort to control nature. In view of this analysis, Wilber contends that postmodern society must re-establish a place for subjectivity in the cosmos, if the ecological crisis is to be resolved. Without acknowledging his own transcendent subjectivity. Western man will continue trying to "prove" himself through ever more extravagant "conquests" that may prove fatal to the human species and very damaging other life forms. To be sure, not all Western men, much less all Western people, exhibit the aggressiveness, arrogance, and acquisitiveness of some of those who run modern corporations and governments, but perhaps they feel most acutely the absence of their own significance and strive to demonstrate it by being "successful," even if this involves undermining the biosphere on which human life depends.

Many spiritual deep ecologists maintain that since human is destroying the biosphere, humans must adopt a more humble attitude and acknowledges that they are merely one strand among many in the great web of life. Rejecting this contention, Wilber maintains that they ecological crisis arises from what existentialists once described as modernity's "crisis of

meaning,” which involves the loss of the transcendent, including God, soul, subjectivity, interiority. Portraying humans as simply one animal among countless others would do nothing to solve this crisis of meaning, since naturalistic science already portrays humankind in this way. This self-interpretation of humankind has proven to be unsatisfying to many people, including—if there behavior is any indication—the very “captains of industry” who are often held responsible for causing so much environmental damage.

Why the successes of early modern science revealed that humankind might be able to control its own destiny by mastering the forces of nature, many early moderns began turning their eyes away from Heaven and toward the Earth. Renouncing the otherworldly aspirations of religious people on the path of Ascent, moderns increasingly chose the path of descent. Concluding that only the material would exist enabled them not only to liberate themselves from the political constraints of otherworldly religions, but also enabled them to focus all available energy on controlling the material world in order to improve human well being. Anyone familiar with the hunger, disease, poverty, ignorance, and sectarian violence in early modern Europe can appreciate the enthusiasm with which so many intelligent people greeted the emancipatory projects of modernity. Material abundance, military power, and (relatively) democratic institutions alone, however, have not been able to satiate the human desire for something non-material, i.e., for the transcendent.

Wilber contends that many spiritual deep ecologists have also renounced the path of Ascent in favor of the path of Descent, though for a somewhat different reason. They believe that an otherworldly orientation creates a binary opposition in which the immaterial soul is regarded as superior to the material body. Ensouled “man” thereby justifies his domineering treatment of body, woman, and nature. Despite having some validity, this argument runs into difficulty when one takes into account the increasing agnosticism and atheism of modern elites who controlled

science, industry, banking, and technology. Far from being otherworldly, they were becoming heavily invested in materialistic ideology. One might retort that they were motivated by the Protestant work ethic, but this approach does not satisfactorily address the fact that modernists are materialists, not transcendentalists. By adopting their own version of modern science's materialistic world system, environmentalists ended up in basic metaphysical agreement with modernists. According to Wilber, however, if the path of Ascent is denied and if the transcendent dimension is rejected, the only direction left for a materialistic people ever greater consumption of material goods, which can never satisfy the yearning for the non-material.

We can sum up Wilber's position as follows. Spiritual deep ecologists maintain that they key to solving the ecological crisis is for people to discern the sacredness of the material world, its plants, animals, and ecosystems. Talk of the transcendent dimension would seem to risk reaffirming human arrogance and anthropocentrism. But Wilber argues that there is no room for the sacred dimension in a materialist ontology, any more than there is room for genuine subjectivity or inferiority in behaviorist psychology. Moreover, contemporary human arrogance is fueled by what amounts to profound human insecurity, including a haunting lack of significance. As a non-dualist, Wilber maintains that the divine is fully present in each phenomenon, but that the divine cannot be exhausted by any such phenomenon. The introduction of transcendent subjectivity in humankind (or in whatever other life forms such subjectivity has emerged) enables life forms to recognize the transcendent domain for the first time. Such subjectivity is neither a human product nor a possession, but rather the emergence of a divine possibility that has been moving toward self-actualization in cosmic history. Humans go astray, though understandably and perhaps unavoidably, by thinking that their own egos are identical with transcendent subjectivity, i.e., the mortal ego is God incarnate. For moderns who have renounced the transcendent dimension, the mortal ego must strut about as what Freud called

the “prosthetic god,” decked out with mechanical equipment that extend ordinary human capacities. For such a god, there is no genuine transcendence, only ever greater material power.

Reconciling human corporeality with transcendent subjectivity has always been one of the most difficult challenges for human beings, who are always tempted to renounce such subjectivity in favor of an semiconscious life “closer to nature.” If Wilber is right, however, only an evolution of transpersonal consciousness will enable humankind to reintegrate that which has been dissociated—body, female, emotions, nature—in the development of personal consciousness. And transpersonal consciousness involves the recovery of the forgotten transcendent dimension. Hence, for Wilber, efforts of spiritual deep ecologists to revivify pagan religions and tribal ritual are profoundly misguided, especially when such efforts take place within the context of a materialist (“flatland”) ontology. Using such rituals to encourage people to come “closer to nature,” while defining nature as the “web of life” (i.e., what modern science means by the Great Interlocking Order, or Cosmic System) will not only fail to satisfy the widespread human yearning for authentic transcendence, but may also encourage highly problematic regressive tendencies in the psychological and social domains. A more satisfactory path is one discernible in the perennial wisdom, which calls for the reconciliation of Ascent and Descent, transcendence and immanent, spiritual and material.

In my opinion, Wilber achieves a great deal in his analysis of modernity, retro-romanticism, and the ecological crisis. He manages to include much of what is worthwhile in Heidegger’s views about the transcendent domain, while discarding the anti-modernist sentiments that led Heidegger to such political trouble. Moreover, Wilber’s view of the transcendent includes important aspects of spiritual traditions that Heidegger—as a modernist despite himself—either rejected or adopted in truncated ways. Also, Wilber’s neo-Hegelian

evolutionary cosmology takes into account the fact that contemporary science seems to be pointing toward a recovery of the transcendent, through about all this I have only been able to comment only in passing. Wilber's contention that modernists and environmentalists alike adopted the materialistic world-system of an earlier phase of modern science, and that this world-system deprives many humans of a satisfactory sense of personal and group significance, allows him to conclude that nothing good will come of well-meaning efforts to "re-sacralize" nature, unless the transcendent dimension of nature, humankind, and the divine is first rediscovered and reaffirmed.

Obviously, Wilber has attracted a number of critics, not only because he criticizes the basic premises of spiritual deep ecology, but also because of the feisty and sometimes acerbic style in which he does so. Because a number of these criticisms were aired in three issues of ReVision devoted to Wilber's writings, I will not review them there. The major complaints, as the reader may well imagine, are usually related to his contention that there is an "evolution" of consciousness, for that contention justifies a "totalizing" narrative that allegedly privileges the very same Western institutions that have justified destruction of natural areas and oppression of indigenous peoples. The idea of an evolution of consciousness also allows him to dismiss as "regressive" efforts to regain contact with living nature by exploring tribal rituals and shamanic practices, even though Wilber himself once suggested that shamans were the first to achieve transpersonal awareness.

Gus diZerega, a political theorist who seeks to synthesize spiritual deep ecology with Hayekian evolutionary liberalism has offered the most probing critique of Wilber's evolutionary transpersonalism. DiZerega's critique is especially important in view of the fact that, like Wilber, he celebrates the positive social achievements to modernity and affirms that the divine involves immanence and transcendence, but he seems more receptive than does Wilber to the possibility

that neo-pagan rituals and shamanic practices may involve authentic and non-regressive encounters with the divine. Like some other critics, diZerega suspects that Wilber is too committed to rationalism and thus cannot adequately accommodate the experiences and entities—including gods and goddesses, angels and demons—that are so often encountered by spiritual adepts in various traditions. Wilber, however, agrees that such experiences are wholly consistent with developing more integrative, transcendent modes of consciousness. Wilber writes that

Some of these transcendental phenomena include preliminary meditative states; shamanic visions and voyages; arousal of kundalini energy (and disclosure of the whole psychic anatomy of subtle channels, energies, and essences); overwhelming feelings of the numinous; spontaneous spiritual awakenings; reliving of past traumas, even the birth trauma; identification with aspects of nature—plant identification, animal identification—up to an identification with all of nature (cosmic consciousness, nature mysticism, and the world soul.) [[[add this to a new footnote: A BRIEF HISTORY OF EVERYTHING, 107-108]]]

According to Wilber, all the things listed above, along with the prepersonal archetypes of the collective unconscious (Jung) and transpersonal archetypes, are as real in the worldspace appropriate to them "as rocks are in the sensorimotor worldspace and concepts are in the mental worldspace." [[[Make a new footnote for this reference: BRIEF HISTORY, 108]]]

Perhaps the Wilber vs. diZerega dispute will not move forward until the two parties engage in a conversation in which mutual suspicion is set aside. Just as diZerega suspects that Wilber's interest in consciousness evolution conceals important spiritual phenomena, so too Wilber suspects that DiZerega's interest in the Goddess involves too much regression, not enough

progression. Since I see much value in the work of both diZerega and Wilber, I regret that they often seem to talk past one another. A closer examination of their differences and similarities must await another occasion, however.

I appreciate the motivation behind the force of many of the criticisms made of Wilber's work, I remain convinced that he has made an enormous contribution to the contemporary discussion of the divine, nature, and humanity. In particular, he has something important to say both to modernists and to spiritual deep ecologists: that the way beyond ecological crisis lies in solving the crisis of meaning created by the adoption of a one-dimensional materialist ontology. Wilber makes clear that this crisis cannot be solved by a spasm of life-denying transcendentalism and otherworldly yearning, but rather by developing a multi-dimensional, non-dual ontology that allows room for what has been so long excluded. Human awareness makes possible discernment of dimensions hidden to the view of the most far-seeing bird and unnoticeable by even the most sharp-nosed hound. Such discernment enables people to realize that material nature, however incredible its beauty, organization, and complexity may be, is only one manifestation of a divine with infinite dimensions. A truly deep spiritual ecology would acknowledge the depth dimension of reality, rather than maintaining that material natural system—the “web of life”—exhausts the infinite dimensions of the divine. Wilber is playing an important role in the process of generating such a deeply spiritual ecology.