

**A CSIIIE<sup>1</sup> Yellowpaper #DIFS-1**

# **The Flatland and Fearlessness Teachings of Ken Wilber**

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## Abstract

This working paper examines what Ken Wilber has written about Flatland and how it may be homologous with Fearland—both ontologies and ideologies highly destructive and inalcitrant—both need to be taken more seriously within integral theory and the Integral Movement/Agenda at-large. The book *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality* (Wilber, 1995) is the prime reference for understanding the flatland teachings and the liberation from them *via* fearlessness teachings, of which Wilber’s work is arguably the most outstanding in the world today. A notion of *integral endarkenment* teachings is presented as a ‘balance’ (and critique) of the hegemonic *integral enlightenment* teachings. Research and educational recommendations are offered for future study.

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## Introduction

Beginning in 1982 at age 30, my first reading of Wilber’s work was generic and mostly an appreciation of his evolutionary (-involutionary), historical (universal), ‘big picture’ of individual and cultural development. It was a meta-narrative of the Kosmos that helped me orient a lot of my youthful thoughts and unanswered questions. It seemed to set a template for thinking itself.

Over the decades I would leave it and come back to it. Today, I cannot imagine I’ll leave the Wilberian framework of integral theory again. In 1982, in a rush of inspiration, I wrote an incomplete manuscript as a novice and integralist (before I called myself one) on a Wilberian approach to Education.<sup>2</sup> Seven years later, I had shifted my reading to utilizing his work for a specific agenda to better understand fear and fearlessness as foundational to liberation.<sup>3</sup>

A few years ago, in writing my book<sup>4</sup> it sunk in that he was *the most* profound, in contemporary context, of the integral and fearlessness teachers from around the world I’d studied. In this Yellowpaper I explore some recent insights—whereby, his flatland teachings are critical (essential core) as a guide to developments of ‘Fear’ Studies<sup>5</sup> and as a core to the curriculum of Integral Studies, the Integral Movement<sup>6</sup> and Integral Agenda.

### My Wilder Academic Pursuits

To really know Wilber’s work and agenda (i.e., Wilberland) in the 1974-1994 period, I gathered a serious inventory of how he was perceived and interpreted by his critics and how he responded. In a published paper<sup>7</sup> I argued that basically most all his critics misinterpret his work and intentions, and Wilber responded too often with unnecessary

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<sup>2</sup> Fisher, R. M. (1982). *Appropriate education: Future education as if the human being mattered*. Unpublished.

<sup>3</sup> This was not a value-neutral pursuit by any means, but was based on my vision that a ‘Fear’ Project was ruling the world and a Fearlessness Project was needed to counter it, and the sooner the better (see f.n. 7). Thus I consider myself a liberation educator.

<sup>4</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2010). *The world’s fearlessness teachings: A critical integral approach to fear management/education for the 21st century*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 55-61.

<sup>5</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2006). Invoking ‘Fear’ Studies. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 22(4), 39-71. See a recent application in Fisher, R. M. (2011). A ‘Fear’ Studies perspective and critique: Analyzing English and Stengel’s progressive study of fear and learning in *Education Theory*. Technical Paper No. 37. Carbondale, IL: In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute. [available ERIC ED518442 pdf].

<sup>6</sup> Basically, this refers to “a [loosely associating] group of people with, more or less, similar ideas around the globe and through time, devoted to an ‘integral agenda’ that includes but is not limited to the political realm (i.e., integral politics)... there are many sub-movements, sometimes conflicting factions, and some independent entities promoting ‘integral’ (i.e., an integral worldview) that are not aware of each other [and are not all Wilberian-influenced by any means]” (see CSIIE, in prep. *Integral Age Dictionary*).

<sup>7</sup> Fisher, R. M. (1997). A guide to Wilberland: Some common misunderstandings of the critics of Ken Wilber and his work on transpersonal theory prior to 1995. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 37(4), 30-73. This, first review of Wilber’s critics was called by Mark Edwards: “an excellent, if rather out of date review article” of the critics of Wilber’s writing; see Edwards, M. (n.d.). The depth of the exteriors: Part 1: Wilber’s flatland. Retrieved from <http://www.integralworld.net/edwards12.html>.

arrogance. My well-thought and well-intended sincere stance did not lead to “winning over” either side of the battles going on. With Wilber’s 1995 publication of *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality* the critics exploded and Wilber responded. To date, no one has been able to keep up with and summarize that data. Of late, Wilber is much less antagonistic and/or spends less time defending himself and his work, of which his deteriorating illness is one factor.

Because my research and educational interests intersect along the borderspace of Integral Studies and ‘Fear’ Studies, it’s important to share some context for this before diving into the bulk of this paper on flatland (an Integral Studies core) and fearlessness teachings (a ‘Fear’ Studies core) and their implications. First, it was my pursuit of wanting to know everything about fear and fearlessness that led the way, since 1989<sup>8</sup> and culminated academically in my dissertation on “fearless leadership” (fearlessness).<sup>9</sup> It was my first concentrated development of a notion of the ‘Fear’ Matrix, playing off the recent sci-fi action film of The Wachowski’s entitled *The Matrix*.<sup>10</sup> My research question, more or less, pivoted around “What is the ‘Fear’ Matrix?,” in an attempt to legitimize the question itself and the ongoing answers and/or provocations that would come from it in critical educational discourses, especially educational leadership development.

To say the least, my methodology was multidimensional, un-wieldy complex, decolonizing, schizoid and just plain wild at times—meaning, it “terrified” most everyone at some level. Was it violent? I don’t think so. Rather it, uncomfortably was challenging the subtle, institutional, symbolic discourse violence all around me in academia and the greater widerworld. If people were “plugged in” still, then I argued they were “Agents” of the ‘Fear’ Matrix.

Upon reflection, the methodology of my dissertation was a radical form of good critical integral praxis—post-postmodern critical integral theory. All of that designed and emergent as a “defense” strategy to protect me and the work from being undermined. Afterall, I was conducting it as an exposé and indictment while being a learner (grad student) in an institution (the System) built on a toxic paradigm I called a “culture of fear” dynamic.<sup>11</sup>

During those graduate years there was a lot of conflict going on. I realized I like learning to be embedded in “war zones,” or less dramatically, in conflict sites.<sup>12</sup> Wilber’s work

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<sup>8</sup> I co-founded the In Search of Fearlessness Project that year, of which some of the history (and agenda) of that project is summarized on my archival website: <http://www.feareducation.com>.

<sup>9</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2003). Fearless leadership in and out of the ‘Fear’ Matrix. Unpublished dissertation. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia.

<sup>10</sup> An ongoing project of DIFS is to further explore this film and it’s depiction of Phobos-Thanatos.

<sup>11</sup> Although I have written lots on the dynamic, as have other social critics, the best and first educational description of this dynamic in higher education (the academy) is Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher’s life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. See Chapter 2 especially.

<sup>12</sup> Roots for this interest, and Michel Foucault’s discourse analysis, were developed in my MA in Adult education at the same institution—see Fisher, R. M. (2000). Toward a ‘conflict’ pedagogy: A critical

(nor mine), as guide for much of my methodological framing and philosophy, was not appreciated by the academy, to say the least. I was then, like now, an exile.<sup>13</sup> Simply, I never got short-listed for any of the academic jobs I applied for over several years and no one sought me out. There are risks and real consequences to speaking one's truth. My enemy was systemic *fearism* (the root of all terrorism)—and it was 'everywhere'—and it loathed to be challenged overtly (not unlike systemic racism, classism, sexism, etc.). I am stepping on toes, and biting the hand that feeds me.

### Revolutionary Moment for Integral Studies: Ken Wilber's *SES*

Wilber had been "off" writing and publishing for some years before his opus work *SES* (*Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*). This popularly named "big fat book" (1995) is Wilber's finest philosophical treatise on liberation.<sup>14</sup> In a nutshell, in 763 pp he rips postmodernism apart (also modernism), and then reconstructs some potential areas to salvage it, recalibrate it, and move to a higher-level analysis and cure for the world's problems *via* an *integral-post-postmodernism*. Including, yet beyond, modernists, the postmodern critics of all stripes rallied to 'kill' this book from the get go, and Wilber's reputation re: becoming legitimized in the academy, was irreparably compromised by his vociferous critique.

Wilber, from cover to cover in *SES* reveals the Western violent "flatland (shallow) ontologies" (by many other names), lurking on the underbelly of modernism (scientism and systems holism) and postmodernism. He opens the book prophetically:

It is not the forces of darkness but of shallowness that everywhere threaten the true, and the good, and the beautiful, and that ironically announce themselves as deep and profound. It is an exuberant fearless shallowness [a product of "flatland ideology"] that everywhere is the modern [meaning contemporary] danger, the modern threat, and that everywhere nonetheless calls to us as savior.... [we're] lost... in a world [flatland] dedicated to surfaces and shadows, exteriors and shells, whose prophets lovingly exhort us to dive into the shallow end of the pool head first. (Wilber, 1995, p. xi)

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discourse analysis of 'conflict' in conflict management education. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia.

<sup>13</sup> References here to The Matrix trilogy and "exiles" (and "terrorists") of the Matrix itself (which I retranslated to the 'Fear' Matrix). For a more subjective story of this high tension relationship with the academy see Fisher, R. M. (2008). Fearless leadership: R. Michael Fisher's story (with Stephen John Quayle and Blaine Pope). In Four Arrows (aka Don Trent Jacobs) (Ed.), *The authentic dissertation: Alternative ways of knowing, research, and representation* (pp. 143-48). NY: Routledge.

<sup>14</sup> Many say this too, albeit, I'm a bit biased in that he sent me a hard copy of the ms. in 1994 to review and comment on, of which I did so diligently with great honor that he would ask. I'd never met him in person.

He attacks, from the start of the book, the “exuberant and fearless shallowness”<sup>15</sup> of his flatlander enemies (below, I’ll articulate how these are indeed the enemies of the Integral Movement and Integral (core) Agenda and enemies of true fearlessness. “Shallowness” is just one of the other descriptors Wilber uses for “flatland” in his teachings (see below for a listing of the many of them). My immediate interest as a fearologist was to see how and why he used “fearless” in this discursive context, and to unpack his rationale for criticism of its falsity and destructivity, when “fearless” is constructed within a flatland (shallow) paradigm and ideology. Here is the crux of the interest and intersection of ‘Fear’ Studies and its agenda with Integral studies and its agenda. What have they got to teach each other? My initiative to intersect these is both a first and unique contribution to the liberation literature.

Wilber’s post-high school years led him on a journey to becoming, more or less, an ‘outsider.’ He’s an independent scholar,<sup>16</sup> so nothing was really lost in that sense of his reputation that came from the postmodern onslaught of criticism at *SES* (e.g. he is a “wing-nut,” “new age” amateur populus philosopher, etc.). He was well aware what he was doing with *SES*. He “stirred” the resting hornet’s nest. Now, he and everyone could see how vicious it was—i.e., how ideological it was. Wilber defines *ideology* in a useful way that I’ll use in this paper:

*ideology*: hidden interests, hidden power claims, parading as truth, a truth that cannot be *exposed to evidence* without robbing it of its *power*.<sup>17</sup>

This echoes somewhat my own definition in ‘Fear’ Studies of the ideology (shallowness) of *fearism* as an enemy of true fearlessness:

*fearism*: is the systematic (often unconscious) production and perpetration of fear on others for the purpose of obtaining power for abusive control and manipulation of people, other species, and the environment. Fearism, as a process and discourse hegemony, creates an experience of fear that is normalized and naturalized, whereby the term “fear” is skewed to mean whatever those in elite power positions, who control much of the originary fear production (and its “management”), want it to mean, and whatever they want to teach others it means. Fearism is dedicated to keeping the cultural matrix of ‘fear’ operative and relatively invisible, while preventing any systematic critique and exposure of the real dynamics of fear (‘fear’) and fearism. With fearism, you don’t even feel or see the fear anymore—that is, if you don’t look deep enough.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> He dramatically, and rhetorically, constructs this opposition (battle) on p. xi (Introduction) (Wilber, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> He dropped out of his masters program in biochemistry and became a writer. He’s also been called many positive names besides an independent scholar (public intellectual):for e.g., philosopher, psychological theorist, transpersonalist, integralist, mystic, pundit, intellectual samurai, sacred warrior, defender of the dharma, Kosmic therapist, Coyote trickster, soul-guide, integral critical theorist, etc.

<sup>17</sup> *SES*, p. 435.

<sup>18</sup> Invoking ‘Fear’ Studies, 51.

Fearism, in other words, is attempting right now to erase that you ever read this definition. And remember, that if “fear” is skewed then so are most all the constructions of bravery, courage, and “fearless” etc., if it is embedded and still plugged-in to the program of the ‘Fear’ Matrix (culture of fear)—all maintained by fearism. Our fear management/education is thus compromised, to put it mildly.

My critique, and the DIFS agenda at CSIIE unfolds along this trajectory of a social justice challenge to the *status quo* flatland world that Wilber articulates so well. Arguably, most all fear studies (especially, in the West) to date, are deeply flawed because they are still plugged-in to fearism. In part, this claim is justified because of the lack of even having a term “fearism” in the available vocabulary (at least, in English-speaking discourses). Why has “terrorism” of late received all the publicity and use and not fearism? I’m reminded of Ventura’s (1996) claim that “When we don’t have apt words for something it’s because of an unspoken collective demand [defense] to avoid thinking about it.”<sup>19</sup> Terrorism is largely a distraction from uncovering the dynamics of fearism, albeit, there are some good critics now exposing this somewhat in their critiques of the “culture of fear” dynamic.<sup>20</sup>

Later, I’ll show the evidence that Wilber’s work situates as an integral study of flatland on a conceptualization (rather undeveloped) of what he called “*flatlandism*” (i.e., the pathology of ideology). After his big fat book and its shorter version popularized in *Brief History of Everything* (1996); his work generally, tended to slide down a slippery slope of popularization—as part of an attempt to sincerely forge a ‘bridge’ (even a partnership) with postmodernism (the enemy<sup>21</sup>). Technically, Wilber would say he was bridging his work with the healthy-side of postmodernism and leaving the rest. He worked hard at it and still does. There are pluses and minuses to that strategy. I’ll focus on the minuses, of which most disappointingly he leaves his snarling critique of flatlandism behind (i.e., in the wings behind the curtains). From my assessment, rather subjective but not entirely, he wants to make his work more accessible and popular (and effective on a big scale)—and thus, get funded by more mainstream folks.<sup>22</sup> An understandable pragmatic move, but its ethical move is entirely questionable to me (and some others) as an integralist.

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<sup>19</sup> Ventura, M. (1996). The age of endarkenment. In L. C. Madhi (Ed.), *Crossroads: The quest for contemporary rites of passage* (pp. 51-4). Open Court, 51.

<sup>20</sup> For popular accounts see Barry Glassner and Frank Furedi, among others (see Wikipedia “culture of fear” for a start to that literature. See Fisher, R. M. (2004). Capitalizing on fear: A baseline study on the culture of fear for leaders. Minneapolis, MN: Intellectual Architects, Ltd. [unpublished paper]

<sup>21</sup> For those readers disturbed by use of “enemy,” I can understand that this is a “hot” concept that can be more harmful than good—no doubt—however, from a critical integral perspective, arguably there is an important use and strategic to its use—with all due ethical and compassionate reflection. This nuance may make sense somewhat out in the following text; indeed, there is more to be explored with readers on this “use” for other venues beyond than this short Yellowpaper. Wilber does not use the term a lot but he does use it and so do I in my own fearwork.

<sup>22</sup> By this I mean, establishment of his first organization, the Integral Institute (2000) and later his online Integral University concept.

## Wilberland, Integraland, and the ‘Fear’ Project

Wilberland (or Integraland<sup>23</sup>) is my notion of all that spins in and around Wilber’s writings and applications, including critics and Wilber’s responses. I believe it is not easy for most people to enter this land, because our training is “too Western” and based in “dualism” and that is not Wilber’s standpoint for his work (he’s more East-West, and nondualist). In Fisher (1997)<sup>24</sup> I argued that the critics of Wilber and his work on transpersonal theory (now called integral theory) prior to 1995 needed to self-reflect on the larger patterns behind their criticisms. I also was suggesting to Wilber and pro-Wilberians to look at these too. Of the many patterns in the critiques, I suggested one, as likely the most important—and it is relevant to this current Yellowpaper. The empirically-based discourse pattern I pointed to (and a hypothesis as well), was that,

the fear is too immense for most conventional thinkers to open up the Pandora’s box of spiritual repression/oppression that has been going on for such a long time in the West. It takes a Sorcerer-Sacred Warrior, like Wilber, to dare enter ‘where angels fear to tread’.

I was addressing that one of the major theses left out of the critics’ writing at that time period was Wilber’s work on his pre-1995 “Dualism-Repression-Projection [DPR] (immortality project or Atman project),” which now I connect in a dark-shadow lineage in Wilber’s core writing, representing the roots of his later (post-1994) critique of: “Phobos-Thanatos,” “Flatland,” and “Boomeritis” projects. I’ve seen this pattern, a trajectory of inquiry and healing I call *integral endarkenment*,<sup>25</sup> in his work, avoided by critics for the most part (and/or mis-understood), as the core of Wilber’s depiction of the ‘Fear’ Project (my term). The point is that Wilber is going for the jugular and slicing at the ‘fear’ cancer—the pathological Light-Shallow-Flatland (false) “fearless” forces that are destroying this planet most viciously with a subtle (sometimes gross) violence not easy to detect for most. Quality, of everything, is being destroyed systemically.

Simultaneously of course, he was articulating the core of a critical integral theory as a counterhegemonic project: i.e., a healing cure (therapia) for this project. Wilber, aware of my fearwork initiatives, has not given it support but he also has not critiqued it nor has any other integralist or other.<sup>26</sup> His follower Wilberites likewise, Wilberians included but

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<sup>23</sup> I borrow this term from Michele Chase’s paper at the Integral Theory Conference 2010—it is a less Wilbercentric term (than Wilberland), and that’s likely a good thing to include more forms of integral thought and practice that is beyond Wilber’s influence.

<sup>24</sup> A guide to Wilberland, 59-60, 65.

<sup>25</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2011). Integral endarkenment: Go retro or something else? See my blogpost June 10, 2011 at <http://www.fearlessnesssteach.blogspot.com>.

<sup>26</sup> Albeit, in 1994 he wrote a letter to me saying my “transpersonal phobosology” concept sounded more like a “nose-disease” than anything else. He didn’t approve. I eventually call it “fearology.”

then also integralists are rarely interested. Some of these avoidances I have written about in my critique of “integral-lites.”<sup>27</sup>

In part, intuitively, I had struck up this battle with the ‘Fear’ Project, on my own grounds, with founding and leading the In Search of Fearlessness Project (1989-). The root piece of writing on this I published (Fisher, 1997) where I argued that “The Fear Project” was both ignored as Wilber articulated it all those years, and it was left out in being critiqued by his critics.<sup>28</sup> Why was that? I would now call the inquiry into this dark-shadow lineage of Wilber’s core writing in the Integral Movement as the “integral endarkenment path.” This is in contrast to the “integral enlightenment path” bias, the latter hegemonic in the movement. Sometimes I have referred to this distinction as “*integral-deep*” (full-strength) and “*integral-lite*.” Among many characteristics for each, the former dives into questioning the nature of fear and its role seriously and as highest priority, the later tends to skim over it with little serious analysis.

These are not simple dualistic categories or Manichean constructions, but they are problematic distinctions in the integration dynamics (specifically, dissociations) of major Kosmic forces (to be explained later). Integral Studies as a whole, has not given them the distinction and study they deserve and in that neglect, I believe is compromising the cura capacities the Integral Movement has of changing much of substantial nature on this planet in the next decade and after that it could be too late to intervene in the massive damage that ‘fear’ (“Fear’s Empire”)<sup>29</sup> will bring.

### “Anti-Flatland”: An Integral Endarkenment Path

We are in the realm of critical philosophy now, and the critical (conflict) theory that flows from it. Integral theory is one of the latest versions of critical theory.<sup>30</sup> Deeply intrigued in the overlapping interests of ‘Fear’ Studies and Integral Studies, only recently did I unwind a blurred set of connections in my own and Wilber’s writings. First, I saw his work as the most profound of the world’s fearlessness teachings, and that’s no small accomplishment. I was less impressed with his work as fear teachings. Next, I found his flatland teachings (critique), and my intuition told me it would establish a core curriculum and ethical agenda for the Integral Movement. I’m going to focus on *flatland* in his conceptual bag of tricks. Although, I’ll point (briefly) to its immediate connections with the other core endarkenment concepts he uses, e.g., DPR, immortality project, Atman project, Phobos-Thanatos and boomeritis.

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<sup>27</sup> Fisher, R. M. (2011). Integral posthuman destinies: A critical path. See my blogpost June 1, 2011 at <http://fearlessnesssteach.blogspot.com>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 65-66.

<sup>29</sup> Barber, B. R. (2003). *Fear’s empire: War, terrorism, and democracy*. NY: W. W. Norton.

<sup>30</sup> This is a long controversial claim, but no one has yet argued that it is false. Among the many writings on this by people (including Wilber and myself), I’d recommend the basic position being stated in Crittenden, J. (1997). Foreword: What is the meaning of ‘integral’? In K. Wilber, *The eye of spirit: An integral vision for a world gone slightly mad*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, x.



Despite my biased conflict perspective reading on Wilber’s pre-1997 work (in contrast to a more abstract theoretical and/or functionalist reading)—of which I most love—others close in Wilber’s cadre as students and colleagues tend to read his work less in this conflict (warrior, liberational) vein. Reynolds (2006), somewhere in the middle in his reading, goes so far as to claim that part of Wilber’s “social critic” agenda is to carry forth a campaign called “*anti-flatland*” (which is Reynold’s term, of which no one else in the Integral Movement has picked up on, not even Wilber) (p. 142). This anti-/against trajectory of the Wilberian Integral agenda is one I totally agree with, while on the positive side of the campaign the assertion is to reclaim “a Kosmos with depth and meaning” (p. 142). Interestingly, a quick search of the literature shows that no one has taken up the concept of “anti-flatland” within or outside of the academy.<sup>31</sup>

In my view, this anti-flatland work is the *core* curriculum (and politics) of the Integral Movement as a whole, both prior to and after the contributions of Ken Wilber. Reynold’s (2004, 2006) books,<sup>32</sup> and most every other book on Wilber’s writing give very little space and attention directly to “flatland” but they don’t leave it out completely. The current 2010 Integral book series published by State University of New York Press has several books of which the term “flatland” can barely be seen in between the covers or in the indexes. Why has the anti-flatland teachings been left watered-down or render more implicit (if not invisible) in the development of the newer branches of the Integral Movement and even in discussion of Integral Politics? Of course I mean implicit relative to Wilber’s explicit use of the term and associated terms.

Before reviewing exactly what Wilber’s means by using “Flatland” (or “flatland”) and all the associated and/or analogous terms with it, suffice it to say that his *SES* is jammed packed with usages of it explicitly,<sup>33</sup> which was a new addition to his vocabulary as part of Wilber-IV. This extended into his *BHOE* book as a popular summary of *SES*, where I have published<sup>34</sup> on how his rant against flatland in *BHOE* is decisively his most prophetic discourse (i.e., “*reject flatland*” speech) on the Integral enemy and the core of everything his anti-oppression work (and the Integral Movement, arguably) stands for (see Wilber, pp. 336-7).<sup>35</sup>

### Basics of the Wilberian (Anti-)Flatland Teachings

I had decades ago come across references to “flatland” as a metaphoric notion which represented the linear (scientific-technomechanical) mindset and values of the modern

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<sup>31</sup> The only use of it has to do with BMX-bike discourses, completely irrelevant to our topic here.

<sup>32</sup> Reynolds, B. (2004). *Embracing reality: The integral vision of Ken Wilber: A historical survey and chapter-by-chapter guide to Wilber’s major works*. NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin; and, Reynolds, B. (2006). *Where’s Wilber at?: Ken Wilber’s Integral vision in the new millenium*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.

<sup>33</sup> I found over 50 uses (entries on pages) of “flatland” *per se* throughout, yet the term, unfortunately, is not in the book’s index.

<sup>34</sup> See *World’s Fearlessness Teachings*, pp. 184-7.

<sup>35</sup> Wilber, K. (1996). *A brief history of everything*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

West that have dominated the natural landscape of so much of the planet, especially intense in our cities and farmlands—called the flatland grid. It was thought to be quite “unnatural” and causing much of our problems in the environment as well as our mind. In 1980 I read Marilyn Ferguson’s account of the importance of the flatland metaphor,<sup>36</sup> and my guess is that Wilber had read this as well in terms of thinking about consciousness and how consciousness transforms a vertical level and why it does this with great cultural difficulty. So, before explicating Wilber’s complex version of this metaphor (and phenomena), a few extracts from Ferguson are needed to set the stage. She wrote,

In the durable Victorian fantasy [novella], *Flatland* [Edwin A. Abbott, 1884], the characters are assorted geometric shapes living in an exclusively two-dimensional world. [A few new movie have been created about this<sup>37</sup>]. As the story opens, the narrator, a middle-aged Square, has a disturbing dream in which he visits a one-dimensional realm, Line-land, whose inhabitants can move only from point to point. With mounting frustration he attempts to explain himself—that he is a Line of Lines, from a domain where you can move not only from point to point but also from side to side. The angry Linelanders are about to attack him when he awakens.

Later that same day he attempts to help his grandson, a Little Hexagon, with his studies. The grandson suggests the possibility of a Third Dimension—a realm [reality] with up and down as well as side to side. The Square proclaims this notion foolish and unimaginable.

That very night the Square has an extraordinary, life-changing [transformational] encounter: a visit from an inhabitant of Spaceland, the realm of Three Dimensions. At first the Square is merely puzzled by his visitor, a peculiar circle who seems to change in size, even disappear. The visitor explains that he is a Sphere. He only seemed to change size and disappear because he was moving toward the Square in Space and descending at the same time.

Realizing that argument alone will not convince the Square of the Third Dimension, the exasperated Sphere creates for him an experience of depth. The Square is badly shaken [and comments]: ‘There was a dizzy, sickening sensation of sight that was not like seeing; I saw a Line that was no Line; Space that was not Space. I was myself and not myself. When I could find voice, I

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<sup>36</sup> Ferguson, M. (1980). *The Aquarian conspiracy: Personal and social transformation in the 1980s*. Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Tarcher, pp. 65-66.

<sup>37</sup> See “Flatland” the movie: <http://flatlandthemovie.com/>. See also “Dr. Quantum-Flatland” on Youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWyTxCs1XE4>). The makers seem to have the intention to show children (and adults) how easily it is to be intolerant when you only want to incorporate one or two dimensions to your world of reality and if anyone claims there are more or to come from more (three, four) then the dominator-dimension (e.g., Flatlanders) will attempt to create war on you because you are a threat—and these movies show the “fear” that immediately appears in the dominators (fear of the unknown and yet unknown)—this has huge teaching power on the problem of development. It also shows just how much the Flatland world is terrified of “above” (i.e., verticality, depth, in Wilber’s terms). Highly recommended educational (potentially liberational) materials.

shrieked aloud in agony, “Either this is madness or it is Hell.” “It is neither,” calmly replied the voice of the Sphere. “It is knowledge; it is the Three Dimensions. Open your eyes once again and try to look steady.”

Having had an insight into another dimension, the Square becomes an evangelist, attempting to convince his fellow Flatlanders that Space is more than just a wild notion of mathematicians. Because of his insistence he is finally imprisoned.

Ferguson gives us the sense of vertical transformation of perception, and how it changes everything. It is like an awakening—from one (or two) dimensional reality accepted by all (as normal), to another (third) or another (fourth), in which the awakened one tries to explain but the language isn’t there to do so. They try to teach and preach about it but no one seems to understand and can only think it is madness. It isn’t that they just don’t understand but partially also because they don’t want to understand—they fear what they don’t understand (fear of the unknown and fear of what is not yet known). There’s a lot of fear-based patterning in the ontology of the prior simpler dimensional-reality (norm), relative the newer, complex, higher vertical dimensions above them. And there is a lack of a critical literacy for one dimension to critique itself and to re-imagine other possibilities. That’s pretty much the theme of the story of Flatlanders. A great teaching lesson for humans everywhere today.

That story “Flatland” was written by a British educator in 1884. In my view, it should be core curriculum for teaching about tolerance and intolerance and diverse, potentially conflicting, worldviews (and their dimensional realities and ontologies)—e.g., Culture Wars. Yet, when I do a search of ERIC database today, which searches the mass of the formal educational literature published, only 11 hits appear between 1980s-to date. All the references to “Flatland” are to Abbott’s novella, all published by educators (and school teachers) writing in the domain of mathematics (and sciences and literature to a lesser degree). The “math” metaphor in Abbott’s story is focused on by math teachers as much as the “flatland.” And one educator wrote<sup>38</sup> that the book is a good piece of curriculum to help students lose their fear of mathematics, a potentially true notion, but what it leaves out is the social, cultural, political, philosophical, spiritual—and integral dimension to what that novella story can teach us. I’ll return to this theme of the role of the Wilberian fearlessness and flatland teachings for education at the end of this paper.

To understand Wilber’s critique of flatland, is to beg the question what is the general task of the *integral project*<sup>39</sup> (which includes Wilber’s thought and many others)? Mark Edwards<sup>40</sup> an integralist meta-theorist and critic of Wilber has captured the integral project well when he wrote: “*At its very core Integral Theory is about the depth and*

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<sup>38</sup> Baum, J. (1984). On teaching “Flatland.” *School Science and Mathematics*, 84(5), 363-66.

<sup>39</sup> This notion of an “integral project,” “integral agenda,” or “integral task” is pursued in the *Integral Age Dictionary* currently in preparation as part of CSIIE’s initiative. Readers are recommended to look there for a more in depth detailing of what “integral” is all about.

<sup>40</sup> Edwards, M. (n.d.). The depth of the exteriors: Part 1: Wilber’s flatland. Retrieved from <http://www.integralworld.net/edwards12.html>.

*transformative potential that is there in all aspects of the Kosmos.... qualitative depth.”* Indeed, when Wilber writes of the Deep and the Dark in *SES* he is calling for Quality (Depth, Spirit) to be restored to the Kosmos and thus valued because his reading of Western history and philosophy is that such Quality is being dissolved away because of human cultural processes that lead to loss of Quality in the cultural and natural world, and thereby in the world of the self. And his use of Kosmos, not merely cosmos, is a primary designation and representation of his integral project.

### *Flatlandism*

We have to both develop the critical literacy for the analysis of our times and imagine a new possibility beyond the frame we are stuck in. I am pretty sure Wilber’s flatland teachings<sup>41</sup> are meant quite consciously to be a building of a critical literacy of and within flatlandism and thus, an anti-flatland alternative for transformation of consciousness and a whole lot of other aspects of reality as we know it. In many ways, I see this metaphor as most apt for the transformation required particularly between first-tier memes and 2nd-tier in Spiral Dynamics integral theory. The macro-scale of such a meme shift, across the ‘Fear’-Barrier-2 (abyss) between these tiers, as a “quantum leap” (as Claire Graves called it), is for me the leap from *Fearland* to *Loveland*, and it begins with the lighting-up or awakening of Fear Management System-7 Yellow, Integral, Fearlessness (see my new book).<sup>42</sup> But I don’t want to go specifically into such references here.

What does Wilber-IV exactly say about Flatland and Flatlanders, in his grand narrative of history and evolution of consciousness, most directed to the development of the West (i.e., western mind and society)? First, the big fat book *SES* does not list “flatland” in the Index when there are over 50 pages on which it occurs if you flip through the book and highlight them as I did one night. Second, in writing the entry “flatland” for an *Integral Age Dictionary* project recently for CSIIE, I discovered one entry where Wilber explicitly names the enemy of integral praxis and the enemy of depth/quality, and *only there* on the last couple pages of the main text (p. 519):

It gets worse: in a flatland world, *intrinsic value* is given *only* to the web-of-life or the system as a whole (the great interlocking order)—and thus we are all fundamentally, basically, profoundly, nothing but strands in the wonderful

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<sup>41</sup> One danger is to over-personalize these teachings by calling them the “Wilber teachings” because there is a good argument to be made, and a reality to be unveiled, when he is seen as a voice of Spirit, in the transpersonal sense. I for one, always keep this in mind, and hesitate to overly attach all of what he teaches as only “about Ken Wilber’s view”—for that is a violent reductionism itself. Spirit is teaching spirit about what is going on and attempting to regulate (for health, for quality) this human-world-kosmos interrelationship.

<sup>42</sup> This is a complicated technical point and argument for Fearland to Loveland, and it is not meant to be read as “linear” as if still on and within the Flatland world of perception. I am speaking of another dimension, some might call it the soul dimension, and yet it has developmental (somewhat linear) hierarchical aspects of unfolding, challenges, tasks, and accomplishments—a journey motif. The other main point behind this assertion is that “integral” (Yellow meme) is located as distinct from the first-tier memes because the second-tier is identified in part because “fear” is no longer a main motivator (see Spiral Dynamics integral theory, à la Don Beck, Claire Graves, etc.).

web.

Here he is accusing the Flatlanders’ consciousness and approach, used in several worldspaces and domains of knowledge, including the “flatland holists” (or Eco camp) in particular in the above quote—accusing them of a violent reductionism of the Kosmos (and its full-Quality, qualities of depth) in terms of ontology and epistemology. It is a “flatland ontology” —as distortion, as false consciousness, as pathology, call it what you will it is a reductionism that is violent—that he most writes about in *SES*. This will likely become somewhat more clear as his Yellow paper develops Wilber’s flatland teachings. Let’s continue the quote:

This attempt to introduce ‘wholeness’ actually *instrumentalizes* all of us, instrumentalizes each and every individual living being, because now living beings *only* have part value, extrinsic value, instrumental value. Holism [as an ideology] always instrumentalizes everything! (Another example of the paradox of damage *inherent* in flatlandism: trying to holisticize [totalize] everything converts everything into parts, into fragments, with no individual wholeness value, no intrinsic value apart from the wonderful web).<sup>43</sup>

Message: *watch out for the promotion of Wholeness that is flat!* This is a subtle critical literacy Wilber specializes, for example, with his attack on Eco-Romantic (Descenders) mononature discourse as a “flattened orientation”<sup>44</sup> that fears and despises culture as progress—the Eco camp would rather find solutions to the world’s problems by going back not forward. But Wilber equally specializes in the critical literacy of the Ego-Idealist Ascenders who’s view of the Whole is also a “flatland paradigm”:

Both camps [Eco and Ego] would tear aggressively, often brutally, into the fabric of the Kosmos with their preferred ideology....<sup>45</sup>

A cursory search of the literature shows that Wilber has only used this term flatlandism a few rare times:

... why did my generation [boomers] become so stuck in pluralistic relativism,

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<sup>43</sup> I am reminded of the postmodern philosophers, from Nietzsche, to Lyotard, to Derrida, etc. who have more or less said we have had enough projects aiming for “Oneness” and “Wholeness” and “totalism” in this world—as terror—often referring to the pathological communism (totalitarianism) of Stalin, and facism of Hitler—and how the postmodern movement wants nothing more of modernism’s grand narrative agendas of such totalities (e.g., holism). On, the surface, there is an overlapping interest in Wilber’s flatland integral teachings with postmoderns, not to be forgot, as I often see it is. Wilber also sees the flatland ideology in these postmodernists, and that becomes the rest of his unique integral approach to come.

<sup>44</sup> “Thus, in this new and flattened orientation, during a pure encounter with nature, spirit would flow *from* nature and *into* me, instead of flowing *through* me and *into* nature. No longer did Spirit or the Over-Soul shine through me and illuminate nature with spiritual radiance, disclosing nature as a perfect manifestation of Spirit. Rather, now I am flooded by feelings released in my self by and from a mononature” (*SES*, p. 469). The ontological presumptions of Wilber’s integral theory are thus critical to detect the flatland ideology in experiences of nature, as one example above.

<sup>45</sup> *SES*, 449.

extreme egalitarianism, and anti-hierarchy flatlandism?<sup>46</sup>  
Again, there is no integralist studying and publishing on this concept (nor anyone else), and certainly no integralist claiming it to be core to the Wilberian and integral curriculum (other than myself). There was one person on the Internet, referring to the quote above, who applied it as a critique of their own field and theater community including most of the arts community:

[there exists a strong] feeling that sophisticated modern intellectuals don't dare take religion or spirituality seriously if they are to maintain their status in the eyes of their colleagues. Either that or the reductionism of American pluralism (what philosopher Ken Wilber calls 'flatlandism'; accepting all points of view but taking the depth out of all of them) leads to artists unwilling to make bold statements in this area for fear they will be thought naive.<sup>47</sup>

Noteworthy is the fear of being criticized for an integral perspective and bringing depth into the academy *via* spiritual and religious aspects of existence. The university (like our schools) in general—is a Flatlander institution perpetuating a Flatland culture. And, for readers, like myself, who have taken years of 'waking up' to the limitations of atomism (=Partland) and its mechanistic "part" focused way of seeing the world, it can be disconcerting and fearful to see a holism alternative we adopted (typical of most ecological thinking= Wholeland)<sup>48</sup> being crashed upon the shores of his flatland critique. I ask you be aware of this potential resistance (fear) in yourself<sup>49</sup> to what Wilber is challenging, as he attempts to build a critical literacy for us holists and Eco-Gaian-Green types so we can see through our own Descender flatland ideology (Thanatos) that may not be as fully helpful and liberating as we thought. I merely want to acknowledge the upset vertigo that can happen just like in the Victorian novel when the Square encounters the Sphere.

It can feel like a nightmare being so confronted at the base of one's ontological commitments (ontological security system)—and the culture you belong to that helped build this into you as "the way it is" and as "normal." So, be prepared for a little potential 'madness' potentiate here, albeit, you'd not likely have read this far if you weren't ready for an integral interruption in your ontological holism, so I don't expect too much to happen to you, though a deepening of understanding of the flatland assumptions and grid is something we all can use, I suspect. It's a 2000+ yr old 'virus' in us, and emanating

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<sup>46</sup> This excerpt is from Wilber, K. (n.d.). *The Integral vision at the millenium*. Retrieved from [http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/books/cowokey7\\_intro.cfm/](http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/books/cowokey7_intro.cfm/). It has been re-cited on the Global Resonance Network and included in another article exactly as above— see Wilber, K. (1999). *Boomeritis vs. spiritual growth in the new millenium*. *Tikkun Magazine*, Nov/Dec. Retrieved from [http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/nov1999\\_wilber/print](http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/nov1999_wilber/print).

<sup>47</sup> Coughran, B. (2008). "The busy world is hushed"—religion as portrayed in theater. Retrieved from <http://integrallife.com/member/bruce-coughran/blog/busy-world-hushed-religion-portrayed-theater>.

<sup>48</sup> Wilber and others often make the distinction in these lands (worldviews) as Mechanical (atomism) vs. Organic (holism) ontologies.

<sup>49</sup> And this fear is also 'fear' as a discourse in the history of the Western world—it is not just personal and not merely felt as fear as a feeling or emotion, but it is deeply ontological and likely quite unconscious.

from us, while moving through us as discourses do. It is an ancient ideology and discourse that penetrates deep, and shapes my experience—and it holds on, constantly influencing our perceptions, values, thinking and actions, often unconsciously. Just because you are “at integral” in some developmental sense (i.e., conscious of and embracing it), does not mean you are freed of flatland commitments (is that even possible?). This is what Wilber is attempting to help us with, by a deeper critical understanding of the ‘water that we swim in’ and have for 2000+ yrs in the West—and he asserts a critique that attempts to help in liberating us, if we do the work as well, of course.

A couple other uses (non-Wilberian, non-integral) are found on the Internet, for example:

Notions of normalcy defy (as they define) creativity because they say it comes from only one source. Flatlandism. A single point is a multidimensional entity if one is willing to pursue it outside the boundaries of the norm.<sup>50</sup>

The above is a paraphrase apparently from the SMIRK Manifesto which reads:

Another tool of conformity and death is *normalcy*.... Flatlandism is the practice of narrowing unknown views to the known view and then tightening up so that nothing changes. Its character is that of holding your breath and seeing no colors out of sequence.<sup>51</sup>

An eco-critique with an attack on “capital-reified colonization of the earth” and the taking over by “plastic people” used the term: “For better vision than the current codependent and myopic left-right flatlandism.”<sup>52</sup> In these non-Wilberian accounts, with their radicality, one can see an echo of the integral critique though they are not systematically developed by any of these other authors.

*The Stranglehold: Flatland Problem and Ideology*

Perhaps no more bluntly can we find Wilber (2002) expressing his recent flatland teachings (and critique) than the following:

Boomeritis is today’s version of flatland.... And flatland is the problem.<sup>53</sup>

Although I won’t be entering into the depths of this statement and the integral endarkenment lineage of concepts Wilber has published on over 30 years (e.g., Phobos-Thanatos, Atman Project, etc.)—I want to remind readers that it could be argued that

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous (2005). Retrieved from <http://void.nothingness.org/archives/situationist/display/20299/index.php?show-text=1>.

<sup>51</sup> S.M.I.R.K. (Society for the Maintenance of Irreverence Towards Ridiculous Kowtow). Retrieved from [http://home.teleport.com/~albumen/edocs/SMIRK\\_Manifesto.htm](http://home.teleport.com/~albumen/edocs/SMIRK_Manifesto.htm).

<sup>52</sup> Rasputin (2010). Certified inorganic: Eco-friendly spreading of disease, and self-recycling. Retrieved from [http://rasputins-rantoramathon.blogspot.com/2010\\_06\\_25\\_archive.html](http://rasputins-rantoramathon.blogspot.com/2010_06_25_archive.html).

<sup>53</sup> Wilber, K. (2002). *Boomeritis: A novel that will set you free*. Boston, MA: Shambhala, 54.

“Flatland” is another way of saying “Fearland,” as I hinted at earlier. And simultaneously, in this anti-flatland and anti-fearland trajectory there lies the important fearlessness teachings of Wilber—the latter which have been a basis for my own work (and DIFS to come).

Wilber continues with marking out the importance of flatland:

We basically live in flatland, and that’s the real problem.... We can’t even talk about helping people grow and develop the levels of consciousness if they don’t even know that there are levels of consciousness in the first place. So one of our main problems is simple education, getting these ideas circulated. If you only believe in flatland, there’s no way out.... Boomers claimed to be revolutionaries [60s-70s especially]... but they were—and still are—trapped in flatland. They did not overcome flatland, they embraced it [e.g., Green v-meme], got lost in it, ended up celebrating it. This is the major story of our time. Flatland.<sup>54</sup>

I only wish it was as easy as providing a ‘simple education, getting these ideas circulated.’ My experience is that is not so simple. The strength of Wilber’s conviction in these quotes is no doubt related to his free-wheeling novel (fiction-non-fiction) performative style (i.e., *Boomeritis* book). Other times he is more academic and calm in his teachings on flatland, of which I’ll document several passages below. However, there is an exception in his *BHOE* book where he let’s his prophetic voice rip for the first time full-force, 6 years prior to his *Boomeritis* [dialogical] rant:

*Good-bye to Flatland*

Q: So in all of these cases—the problem with the culture gap [e.g., Culture Wars], with vertical integration [transformation], with environmental ethics—they all hinge on a rejection of flatland.

KW: .... We cannot build tomorrow on the bruises of yesterday. Among numerous other things, this means a new form of society will have to evolve that integrates consciousness [self or I], culture [we], and nature [it], and thus finds room [respectively] for art [the Beautiful], morals [the Good], and science [the True]—for personal values, for collective wisdom, and for technical knowhow.

And there is no way to do this without breaking the stranglehold of flatland. Only by rejecting flatland can the Good and the True and the Beautiful be integrated. Only by rejecting flatland can we attune ourselves with Spirit’s radiant expression in all its verdant domains. Only by rejecting flatland can we arrive at an authentic environmental ethics and a council of all beings, each gladly bowing to the perfected

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 53-54.



grace in all. Only by rejecting flatland can we come to terms with the devastating culture gap, and thus set individuals free to unfold their own deepest possibilities in a culture of encouragement [not a culture of fear and mistrust]. Only by rejecting flatland can the grip of mononature be broken, so that nature can actually be integrated and thus genuinely honored, instead of made into a false god [and/or goddess like Gaia] that ironically contributes to its own virulent [violent] destruction. Only by rejecting flatland can we set the global commons free in communicative exchange [*a la* Habermas] that is decentered from egocentric and ethnocentric and nationalistic imperialism [i.e., fearism], racked with wars of race and blood and bounty. Only by rejecting flatland can we engage the real potentials of vision-logic [integral-aperspectival consciousness], which aims precisely at integrating physiosphere and biosphere and noosphere in a radical display of its own intrinsic joy. Only by rejecting flatland can the techno-base of the Infobhan be made servant to communion rather than master of digital anarchy, and in this way the Net might actually announce the dawn of global convergence [i.e., an Integral Age], not global fragmentation. Only by rejecting flatland can a World Federation or Family of Nations emerge in a holarchical convergence around the World Soul itself, committed to the vigorous protection of that worldcentric space, the very form of Spirit's modern voice, glorious in its compassionate embrace.

And thus—to return to specifically spiritual and transpersonal themes—only by rejecting flatland can those who are interested in spirituality begin to integrate the Ascending [Ego camp] and Descending [Eco camp] currents. In flatland you can only be an Ascender or a Descender. You either deny any existence to flatland altogether (the Ascenders), or you try to make it into God (the Descenders).

Q: So we really have come full circle here, right back to the archetypal battle at the heart of the Western tradition—the Ascenders versus the Descenders.

KW: Yes.... each still accusing the other of Evil, each still perpetrating the same fractured insanity it despises in the other.<sup>55</sup>

Sounds like Wilber is against flatland. Sounds like his integral theory is against flatland. Sounds like it is pivotal to the integral agenda itself.<sup>56</sup> Nowhere else in the Wilber tomes can we find such a systematic repetitive rant, critique, that is a summary of a bit fat book *SES* in two pages. I've got to think this is important to him and his work. Now, as to what

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<sup>55</sup> *BHOE*, pp. 336-8.

<sup>56</sup> An important debate could be brought against Wilber's "rejection" trajectory for integral theory, as in many ways it is not a term or concept that is thought appropriate to integral theory (and Wilber's teachings themselves) which emphasizes "include and transcend."

exactly is meant by *reject flatland* is open for interpretation and debate. Wilber doesn't directly follow his rejection speech with how to reject flatland. However, implicitly, his entire work is about this process of recognition of flatland and how to move away from attachment (identification) with it in practices (e.g., Integral Life Practices). For a first step, and one to come back to over and over, is purely a serious study of what is Flatland.

### *What is Flatland?*

Let me start by citing directly from the *Integral Age Dictionary* (in prep.): “(1) the term has been used generically to refer to the standardized linear “flatland grid” of geographies and cities; (2) Porter (2004), an architectural theorist, says it is “a euphemism [in the USA] for the picture plane.... All communication between the readers of an image and the originators of an image takes place in flatland.” And you can see there are other definitions and meanings (mostly not very philosophical or political) that can be found across the disciplines. However, when we turn our gaze on the use by Wilber, we enter a different multidimensional and richly articulated worldview and critique. Lew (2005) wrote that Wilber describes many spiritual experiences and realities which

stand in sharp contrast to the prevailing point of view of our western society that is based on the ‘scientific’ approach. This prevailing perspective grants reality only to things that have *simple location*—things that we can point to, or put a finger [measurement] on. Wilber calls this view “Flatland”—a land where reality is granted only to objects, events or processes that can be described in valueless [facts], empirical it-language [Right Hand quadrants, of “scientific materialism”].<sup>57</sup>

But if readers are quick to equate “Flatland” with “scientific materialism,” which is in part true, that would highly reduce the rich meaning that Wilber spins for Flatland. Such a simplified reading would also tend to equate Flatland with secular only initiatives like scientific materialism (i.e., reducing reality to the Right Hand quadrants = quadrantism<sup>58</sup>) or scientism. Such a critique would cover the past 300 years in the West. The reality is that Wilber's critique also places some sacred (spiritual and religious) doctrines and practices as also being embedded in Flatland. Some of those doctrines are 2000+ years old and some are in only the 100+ years. He is writing a rehabilitative kosmology for the universe and the problems within it on earth for the past 2000+ years. Such a kosmology, critical to the core of integral praxis, is for Wilber a critique of a “flatland cosmos” (like the cosmology of the Western world that tends to dominate at this time)—for example he wrote:

[re: postmodernity's discourses of Descent in the past 40 years particularly have cried out] ‘No more Ascent!’—that is, ‘Ascend to Reason, but no further!’—and this brought *nothing but* bad news. It not only flattended the

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<sup>57</sup> Lew, H. (2005). *Introducing Ken Wilber: Concepts for an evolving world*. AuthorHouse, 329.

<sup>58</sup> I am referring to Wilber's AQAL model (which includes a map/theory of 4 quadrants), and his notion of quadrantism, where one quadrant's way of knowing wants to claim it is *the only and best way* of knowing.

Kosmos to a one-dimensional, monological affair, it sealed out the possibility of deeper and wider developments....<sup>59</sup>

The full development of this theme in the Wilber teachings digs in in Chapter 12 “The Collapse of the Kosmos” (*SES*). “In place of Kosmos, flatland systems theory,”<sup>60</sup> he writes lamenting about the bad news of modernity. He continued:

The flattening, the leveling, the collapse of the Kosmos. The universe was pushed through a strainer of objectification, and the result was thin soup indeed. All that was left of a richly multidimensional Kosmos was simply the sensory/empirical exteriors and outlines and flatland forms, much as if a sphere had been projected onto a plane surface, producing only a series of flat circles—all span, no depth—at which point we say [as Flatlanders], ‘What sphere?’<sup>61</sup>

The metaphoric referencing in this text is right from Abbott’s novella. The complaint is one of loss of quality in the universe because of a partial, but faulty cosmology in modernity and postmodernity.<sup>62</sup> Wilber wrote,

And where qualities and values are measured in terms of better and worse (compassion is usually better than murder), empirical sizes are *not* better or worse, only bigger or smaller (a star is not better than a planet, only bigger). And thus the great interlocking order of [flatland] sensory surfaces and exterior forms—the final result of pushing the universe through the strainer of objectification—was inexorably the *disqualified universe*. The Kosmos, literally, was a shadow of its former self. The vertical and horizontal holarchy of depth and span was ditched in favor of merely a horizontal holarchy of span alone. *Qualitative* distinctions were replaced merely with *quantitative* distinctions and technical measurements.... *Greater* was replaced with *bigger*.<sup>63</sup>

The “bigger is better” mentality and dictum of a rationalist materialistic culture is a result of this collapsed Kosmos, and the ideology of flatland. Wilber links this with the “monomotives of flatland” (i.e., “weakest-noodle motivation” of pleasure and pain, survival)

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<sup>59</sup> *SES*, 373.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 415.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 417-18.

<sup>62</sup> He would not claim that the same is true for premodernity, but less so in general. The integral task is to include and transcend the best from premodern, modern, postmodern—not to privilege either one. However, the premodern wisdom traditions carry a strong value, in general, for the vertical hierarchical (holarchical) dimensions of reality, which most of modernism and most definitely all of postmodernism tore down (deconstructed). This is not taking into an account there are deconstructive postmodernism and constructive postmodernism but with limited space these won’t be distinguished in this paper. Arguably, integral is a post-postmodern (or constructive postmodern) project.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

and a reduction of our morality to a “utilitarian ethic” that would “simply level all moral distinctions” and thus “better” and “happiness” became ever more shallow and relative (i.e., all based on span not on depth).<sup>64</sup> In a “flatland world, the *more* there is of one, the *less* there must be of the other,”<sup>65</sup> writes Wilber, and that is the heart of the zero-sum game of competition on which capitalism and most views of materialism and utilitarianism flourish upon. The problem is the “flatland ontology” of the Western world. He wrote,

... the issue of intrinsic and extrinsic values;... theorists who mistake great span for great depth are always confusing more fundamental with more significant, and thus, once again, end up recommending regression as a direction for further growth; with a flatland ontology, the crucial depth dimension is missing, so there is no way for them to spot their mistake.<sup>66</sup>

At this point, it is clear there are consequences of flatland and the world that it creates. But still it is hard to define flatland *per se*, especially when it is used often by Wilber and others as a metaphor and rhetorical device of explanation. Is flatland a theory?, or is it a vehicle of transmission of a worldview, a theory, and ontology? It’s likely a bit of all of the above. Without overly dissecting these distinctions, I prefer in the context of this paper to focus on *flatland as an ideology*. Earlier, we saw Wilber’s definition of ideology and I linked it to a definition of fearism in my own work. Flatlandism is first and foremost an expression (with the added on ‘ism’) for a particular ideology and that’s not a particularly good thing.<sup>67</sup> From Wilber’s perspective and mine, this particularly virulent form of ideology is the root of all others, and thus, is killing us if we cannot stop it or undermine it to a significant degree—the sooner the better.

The characteristics and impacts of Flatland are well argued out and layed out by Wilber’s integral endarkenment teachings but let’s see how he explicitly refers to this:

[re: Ego (*contra* Phobos) and Agape (*contra* Thanatos)] ... to return to my point at the beginning of the chapter: stuck with these two variants of flatland ideology, any intuitions of deeper and higher occasions become immediately misinterpreted in terms of one or the other of these [two] monological paradigms.<sup>68</sup>

This is a key points in understanding flatland as ideology includes but is not limited to: (a) the linkage with Phobos-Thanatos [= ‘Fear’ Project], (b) that it is also a paradigm of a particular [reductionistic and violent] type (= monological). Later, I’ll track out his

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 428-29.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 432.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>67</sup> I am aware not everyone uses “ideology” in a negative way but that’s a more technical detail beyond the scope of this paper. I have sometimes used ideologism as a way to mark the unhealthy side of ideologies.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 515.

critical commentary on these two types (in “archetypal battle”) as Ego camp and Eco camp, which are so destructive because of how they have differentiated and then dissociated, and lack integration (the latter, is the main task of integral work). The two camps are ideologies at each other’s throat, each impacting all of us in discourses that produce evil and accuse each other of evil, and cannot see their own evil in the process. That’s the dangerous nature of all ideologies (pathologies). Their application, as ideologies, like the flatland ideology in general, moves across the quadrants and all levels, etc. We cannot ignore its profound impact, and no wonder Wilber has written so extensively about it to construct his fattest book yet (*SES*).

It is worth repeating that Wilber’s in his pre-1997 flatland writings especially is doing critical theory. Critical theory is a long tradition of challenging ideologies. Integral is a newest and unique form of critical theory. That said, my initial research of major integral books, articles, websites, and talks, tells me that the word “ideology” in general is never used (“anti-flatland” is as close as one gets, see Reynolds’s label, mentioned above). Worse, they never explicitly discuss that a major part of integral work is doing flatland ideological critique, as good critical theory/praxis—and worse still, my experience shows that they will ‘attack’ and ‘defend’ any implication that they haven’t covered such an ideological critique well.<sup>69</sup> All of that has led me to some exasperation with the Integral Movement thus far (e.g., integral-lite domination). The “why” behind this neglect is complex and not the focus of this paper per se, but some speculations will be raised at the conclusion of this paper—I have mentioned it is likely related to “fear” (‘fear,’ and fearism).

What else does Wilber say of flatland as ideology? According to one of the first biographer-theorists summarizing Wilber’s tome, Frank Visser wrote,

Wilber sees possible links in German idealism of Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling, who gave voice to similar insights just before flatland ideology struck and scientific materialism set in.<sup>70</sup>

It is interesting that Visser, a European and critic of Wilber’s integral theory, is a rare integralist to use ideology—further, he wrote,

In his [Wilber’s] opinion.... the fact that the multidimensional Kosmos has collapsed into the cosmos of matter, [has been] giving rise to the prevailing ideology of ‘flatland.’ Given that this is the case, we are now faced with the task of surfacing from this derailment—which in a certain sense was unavoidable—by once again spelling out the many dimensions of the Kosmos one by one.... According to Wilber we need to seek out ways that will lead us to a contemporary and progressive form of spirituality.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> In particular, I recommend reading the critiques I wrote of several of the new SUNY Press integral books in 2010, and in particular Mark Forman’s and his livid reaction (and my return response) to my ideological critique (see my blogposts: Aug. 8, 11, 18 at <http://fearlessnessteach.blogspot.com>).

<sup>70</sup> Visser, F. (2003). *Ken Wilber: Thought a passion*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 282.

Visser points to a cure (therapia) in terms of an integral educational task ahead of learning more about the dimensions of the Kosmos and putting them together again but he also alludes to the progressive spirituality (revision) being asked by Wilber and integral theory for this task. My point, for discussion in the future would be to suggest we need a good *critical ideology critique in/with our progressive spirituality*—and this would have to be embodied in praxis (in curriculum and pedagogy in Integral Studies) meaning: politics and spirituality cannot be separated if we want to undermine, heal, transform the power of the ideology of flatland—an ideology arguably, that is our “spirituality” (meaning, it is our cosmology predominantly as a culture in the West today).

Wilber, taking on (especially postmodern) feminist theory (shadow-side), wrote,

Denying female hierarchy thus denies the demand that females develop vertically, or actually *transform*. Any level of your development [as females]—red or blue or orange or green—was therefore taken to be just fine, as long as you were female. And this relieve women from the burden to hierarchically grow and evolve their own consciousness to higher levels. And I’m telling you, this let feminism perfectly rot.... this is nothing but more flatland ideology.... boomeritis feminism, flatland feminism. There is instead an *integral feminism* lying yet in our future....<sup>71</sup>

Here I see Wilber challenging feminists in their laudable and critical movement to find liberation—but to find it with a critique of flatland ideology, otherwise, they will merely reproduce it blindly. Similarly, a critique of Future Studies by a progressive futurist and integral thinker, Richard Slaughter, offered a chapter “Transcending Flatland”<sup>72</sup> where he wrote of the ideological underpinning that needs to be challenged and transcended:

Until recently the dominant futures project was essentially an expression of a late-modern outlook founded on notions of predictions, forecasting, and control. While other ‘layers’ of futures work, other traditions and ways of knowing were always available, the framing of Futures Studies (FS) occurred out of a broadly reductionist framework—what Wilber calls ‘flatland’.... this meant that current ideologies [of flatland]—economic growth, nature as a resource, cultural hegemony, etc—were insufficiently problematized and seen as natural [pre-given unquestionable truths = ideology]. Sterile, machine-led, notions of the future remained dominant in popular culture and official thinking alike. Hence, there seemed to be no possibility of a break with the past; the future was essentially [flatland] ‘more of the same.’ For some time FS has needed

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>72</sup> *Boomeritis*, 136.

<sup>73</sup> Slaughter, R. (2004). *Futures beyond dystopia: Creating social foresight*. Psychology Press, 100.

a wider, richer view.... [and] the work of Ken Wilber contributes to a broadening and deepening of FS. It suggests how the latter can shift its focus beyond the maintenance of the status quo within a taken-for-granted worldview [and ideology].

Among other things, to be discussed at the end of this paper, Slaughter opens the analysis to potential solutions to a flatland ideology, and he poses that Wilber’s meta-map, post-postmodern metaperspective is essential to guide us in “cultural recovery” and and “*act of epistemological recovery*” needed—but we’ll need a good diagnosis first he notes.<sup>74</sup> And for futures he suggests,

... it is difficult to see how the latter [transformation of the future and futurists and Futures Studies] could be operationalized without each individual making their own vertical ascent out of the ‘flatland’ that we may seek to diagnose and cure.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the good beginnings (with a critical theory and ideological tone) Slaughter offers us to negotiate and potentially “transcend” (ascend) the flatland ideology, it is clear his biased use of terminology, his lack of mention of fear (e.g., Phobos-Thanatos and Boomeritis) anywhere in the chapter, and his tendency to avoid going deeper and darker before ascent and transcendence. This is the common Light pattern that I and Wilber have critiqued early in this Yellowpaper. He is not an integral endarkenment author but more integral-lite. Basically, flatland as ideology is seriously underdeveloped in Slaughter’s offerings here for an (ontological and) epistemological recovery.

Others outside the Wilberian integral project *per se*, have critiqued the ideology of flatland in no uncertain terms—for example, Abbott’s novella is thought to be a critique of “social and political ideologies of flatland” (Smith, 1994).<sup>76</sup> The question arises as to whether there are ideologies in flatland (Flatland) or flatland is an ideology (maybe with sub-ideologies)—no doubt, both these alternatives are fair enough. Brewer (1994) makes an important connection with “consumer culture”:

[re: Stuart Ewen’s *All Consuming Images* book] “[it] conjures up the presence of a horizonless ideological flatland, an impoverished consumerist dystopia whose mirage-like surfaces leave the radical political imaginations no way out. For its gestures in the direction of post-post-modernism.... [unfortunately, Ewen’s book leads to a] pessimistic view of the massive *totality* of contemporary consumer culture....<sup>77</sup>

An environmentalist-activist wrote,

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 102, 104-05.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>76</sup> Smith, J. (1994). *Fact and feeling: Baconian science and the nineteenth century literary imagination*. University of Wisconsin Press.

<sup>77</sup> Brewer, J. (1994). *Consumption and the world of goods*. Psychology Press, 21.

Today the mad *pas de deux* of the Cold War is over—and with it the endless mobilization against a known, single, worthy enemy; with it the long, vile series of anticommunist ‘proxy wars’ and the policy realism that condemned us all to a Manichaeian ideological flatland, and cast the United States, in particular, as the world’s self-appointed gendarme.<sup>78</sup>

Another politically-based critic wrote,

[re: Senator McCarthy and the Red Scare in the USA in the 1950s] “McCarthy himself might have been discredited, but that tool, guilt by association; has been transformed into a universal art for managing difference the world over—to justify war and persecution—subverting legal and moral norms, aimed at establishing an ideological flatland.”<sup>79</sup>

Politically, flatland politics is about ‘divide and conquer’ and creating two sides—our side and your side, and guess which one is “right” and which is “wrong.” There are no options in between or outside the box. The above quotes show that an ideological framing of flatland (Flatland) is appropriate and perhaps useful. There is definitely a sense that flatland in these depictions is (was) harmful and dualistic to the core. The reason dualism is mentioned by me is to insert the distinction that Wilber’s integral writing (and flatland teachings) are situated in a nondual framework. This is a radical difference but again beyond the scope of this Yellowpaper to dive into. It is time to look at the philosophical (if not theological) underpinning to the political, cultural, and psychological dynamics of Flatland.

### *Flatland Ontology*

Likely one of the sturdiest concepts in understanding Wilber’s flatland teachings (and indirectly his fearlessness teachings) is his notion of flatland ontology. This concept indicates that flatland ideology has penetrated to (and/or arisen from) the very way we conceive of being, and the nature of reality—that is, ontology.<sup>80</sup> In some sense, we each carry this in our organism (an implicit Kosmology)—I mean we carry a sense of what reality is and isn’t, what’s valuable and what’s less so, and we orient our “self-sense” on that, and orient our culture and relationships on that. But is our ontological understanding (belief) really as solid and real and stable as we’d like to believe? Should it be? Wilber argues that with growth, and development of consciousness, our nature of self and reality change—thus, our ontological basis for existence and experiencing will likely also change, more or less. There is evolution involved in how we interpret ontological knowing

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<sup>78</sup> Athanasiou, T. (1998). *Divided planet: The ecology of rich and poor*. University of Georgia Press, 123.

<sup>79</sup> Kunhu, B. (2009). Guilt by association. Retrieved from <http://www.sucw.net/article1188.html>.

<sup>80</sup> Technically, ontology is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature of being.



and claims, and there is research involved (including philosophy) in “proving” and/or “probing” our sense of being and reality. It’s dynamic in the integral model.

Wilber says “with a flatland ontology, the crucial depth dimension [e.g., spectrum of consciousness] is missing” and its adherents cannot see that is the case<sup>81</sup> — not see their partial truths, nor see their distortions and violence in reducing the Kosmos from its full expression and beingness. According to Zimmerman,

Wilber argues that SDEs [spiritual deep ecologists] and modernists alike have more in common than either group might think, because members of both groups adhere to what Wilber calls modernity’s one-dimensional or ‘flatland’ ontology that has no place for subjectivity, interiority, soul, or spirit.<sup>82</sup>

Here we return to the two types of flatland that Wilber wrote about and I mentioned earlier. One is “spiritual” (SDEs), he calls flatland holism [Eco camp] and the other flatland atomism (modernism)<sup>83</sup>:

the Great Hierarchy of Being was collapsed into a monological and flatland holism of observable exteriors, namely, the great interlocking order [of systems theory and ecological theory]. In flatland holism... nature and reality are still conceived as hierarchical or holarchical (or composed of interlocking wholes), but these wholes are now all *empirical* (the great interlocking order [Web-of-Life], or the universal system.... [but still] collapsed; it is the result of *subtle* reductionism. Since the wholes and the holarchies are now all empirical, then *inner transformation* is no longer needed to see a truer reality. One simply pokes around, with more sophisticated instruments, in one’s already given empirical field.<sup>84</sup>

Both these are a rejection of the Otherworldly, for the privileging of the Worldly — and thus the 2000+ yr. old battle continues of which is the better way to go—to ‘God’ and to ‘Spirit.’ Zimmerman (2001) captures the essence of Wilber’s critique of both these flatland types as part of the “Descended grid” that Wilber is attacking and that is the enemy of integral:

Partly out of disappointment in Christian dogmatism and oppression, modern humankind turned away from seeking an otherworldly [and/or transcendent] heaven and sought to erect a paradise on earth.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *SES*, 63.

<sup>82</sup> Zimmerman, M. (2001). Ken Wilber’s critique of ecological spirituality. In D. Barnhill and R. Gotlieb (Eds.), *Deep ecology and world religions: New essays on sacred ground* (pp. 243-271). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 254.

<sup>83</sup> *SES*, 130.

<sup>84</sup> *SES*, 465-66.

<sup>85</sup> Zimmerman, 255.

Flatland ideology erases the vertical, transcendent, and transformative, at least in terms of an integral (Wilberian) perspective. This worldly-orientation is a result. The Descender's path is deadly. But of course, the Ascenders are equally deadly when non-integrated with Descent (Dark, Return)—each driven by their own 'fear' projection Phobos-Thanatos and unable to see that. The integral (ecological) philosopher Michael Zimmerman, writing on "Beyond Flatland Ontology" as the last section of his chapter, clearly states Wilber's project of rehabilitation of flatland ontology or industrial ontology, in part, and summarizes his own view based on Wilber's work:

For Wilber, the spiritual vacuum of modernity [the flatland Decended grid] can be overcome in part by demonstrating that the positive achievements of modernity constitute an important stage in the evolutionary development of Spirit-in-the-world. Balancing criticism of modernity's ecologically destructive practices and of the industrial ontology that gave rise to them, with acknowledgement of the authentic contributions of modernity to the emancipation of human-kind [in general] from material want and political oppression. Wilber seeks to persuade moderns to take seriously the need for a post-industrial ontology [or integral ontology] that restores depth to the cosmos by reintegrating what has been dissociated, i.e., the interior, subjective domains [Left Hand quadrants].<sup>86</sup>

Several terms now are being introduced equivalent to flatland ontology, such as Descended grid, flatland web of life, flatland cosmos, and industrial ontology. Valuable as that may be it is obvious in Zimmerman's writing here that he does not enter into the discourse connection in Wilber's teaching around Phobos-Thanatos and their intimacy with Boomeritis, and with Flatland. Zimmerman does an excellent job of summarizing Wilber's critique of flatland ontology, and I highly recommend this handful of pages, however, what is really missing is Zimmerman taking-up Wilber's speech of the need to reject flatland (I wrote on earlier in this paper). Relative to Wilber's contribution, Zimmerman adds nothing significant to the problematics of understanding better, and overcoming Flatland ontology. He more or less just summarizes it. However, one piece stands out in his section that begins to broach the real trouble ahead if we are to turn things around from a flatland (industrial) ontology to a postindustrial ontology:

To escape ecological destruction, then, a genuinely postmodern humanity must overcome its fear and loathing of transcendence, since such transcendence alone can integrate what modernity has dissociated [e.g., the Big Three: it, I, We] in the process of generating industrial ontology.<sup>87</sup>

Fear and loathing can be powerful in maintaining ideology—and likely, they are all that maintains ideology, including flatlandism. As well, the interesting insight here is that it was the dissociation process during modernity, according to Zimmerman, that generated

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 261.

industrial ontology (flatland ontology). There is a causal clue, accurate or not—it is partially true no doubt, but Zimmerman never really dives into the anatomy and dynamics of this relationship. One could argue that the flatland ontology was already part of the source of the industrial ontology that is more overt. The latter is a hypothesis I would make, because deeper below industrialism as ideology (and the industrial ontology that goes with it), there is Phobos-Thanatos, Atman project, Immortality project, and DPR lurking in Wilber’s endarkenment teachings—waiting to be synthesized further and to be recognized what I call the ‘Fear’ Project(ion). But I do appreciate the integralist in Zimmerman being willing to call a spade-a-spade, setting the task for postmodernity (and post-postmodernity =integral), in terms of the real problem with overcoming Flatland—and that is *fear* (‘fear’), with the loathing, arguably, merely a symptom of the ‘fear’ projection going on in evolution—and by that I particularly mean cultural evolution, for at least 2000+ years in the West (*a la* Wilber). The ontological basis of the “culture of fear” is sitting there in this Wilber teachings.

Admittedly, this Yellowpaper is more a collage than a tightly woven narrative as Wilber has written on Flatland. The topic is immensely complex and to summarize his work on it is beyond what this paper would do. More so, I’ve attempted to stimulate readers into provoking perhaps new thoughts and feelings, even creating new worldspace for re-visiting your integral understanding and theoretical positionings. Yet, what we are going over here is that cosmology is crucial in determining ontology, which is crucial in determining epistemology, which are crucial together in determining axiology (values, morals, ethics), which are essential to curriculum and pedagogy. Flatland has infected them all. Wilber and myself, among others, are attempting to bring about a Kosmic therapia, based in a spiritual world philosophy (and integral tradition). After all this, there are clues, some connections, and yet still much dissatisfying, at least for me. Yet, my disappointment leaves me more curious than ever. My challenge to integralists (especially integral-lites) ought to be clearer than it was before I wrote this. If so, then I have accomplished my main task.

### Phobos-Thanatos & The Ego-Eco Camp Battle

As I wrote earlier in this paper: sounds like Wilber is against flatland. Sounds like his integral theory is against flatland. Sounds like *againstness* is pivotal to the integral agenda itself. I have not always been embracing (or understanding) of Wilber’s need to assert such *againstness* as part of integral work—they seemed incongruent notions, when inclusion is pivotal to integral praxis.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Wilber’s ‘dialectic of progress’ as foundational in his Kosmology of *Eros-Agape* vs. *Phobos-Thanatos* is by necessity forced to accept ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and yet, Wilber (1996) himself ‘transcends and includes’ healthy duality and a dialectic in what I would call ‘transdialectic truth.’ On pp. 336-7, he repeats (nine times) ‘*only by rejecting flatland*, will there be liberation. ‘Rejecting’ is hardly dialectical. Sustainable ethical practice from a transpersonal level seems to involve something more than a ‘dialectic of progress.’ I support Wilber in this assertion and swing of the ‘sword’ but more work is required to ferret out how Wilber’s model is inconsistent and contradictory in this regard” (Fisher, 1997, *Thanatos* and *Phobos*, 41).

Yet, now I see that being against an ideology is sound critical praxis. The issue, from a critical integral theory perspective, is *how* to be *against* what is destructive with a fine-tuned critical literacy of knowing the enemy without falling into a Manichean dualism, and breeding more fear-based ideology (flatland ideology) in righteousness—which causes as much harm as that which one is attempting to stop and/or transform or heal transform? Thus we need a critical analysis of our own practices—an integral praxis. My concern is that if we ignore Wilber’s endarkenment teachings then we’ll never as integralists accomplish fearlessness but rather reinforce the Fearland/Flatland problem, even though, it will not easily be noticed we are doing so. Thus a critical literacy of fearlessness requires a deep and wide fearanalysis. Thus, DIFS’s role.

For DIFS critical ideological work, fearwork and conflictwork cannot be avoided. The archetypal battle has been well laid out in Wilber’s *SES* (and prior in his pre-1997 writings, with *Up From Eden* (1981) the darkest of his books). The battle is Love vs. Fear—translated into *SES* that means:

*Eros* and *Agape*, the two “patterns of Love,” [as Wilber calls them] in Wilber’s (1995, p. 338) Kosmology have met the enemy and it is *Phobos* and *Thanatos*, the two patterns of ‘fear’.... this universal ancient story of ‘Love’ and ‘fear’ (‘Good’ and ‘evil’) as the primordial conflicting opposites both metaphysically and experientially.<sup>89</sup>

This looks like a dualism within a nondual theory. That’s true. It sort of is, and it sort of isn’t. It is not an ordinary simplistic Manichean dualism by any means where one half of the dualism attempts to dissociate from the other—as in a flatland ideology. Rather, it is more a distinction of dual thinking, needed strategically within the nondual context. This is the integral approach. It is more complex than I wish to articulate in this paper but suffice it to say that critical integral theory and fearlessness teachings do not make the dualism mistake (at least theoretically)—for to do so would only produce more ‘fear’ not less. Liberation is against oppression, by very definition, but liberation can be a

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<sup>89</sup> Fisher, R. M. (1997). *Thanatos* and *Phobos*: ‘Fear’ and its role in Ken Wilber’s transpersonal theory. Unpublished paper, 2. This paper, the first of its kind looking at fear (‘fear’) in Wilber’s work, which is foundational to understanding his fearlessness teachings and flatland teachings, was sent to Dr. Michael Zimmerman in 1997, who responded to the first draft: “... I enjoyed reading your essay on *Thanatos* and *Phobos*. You have done a good job of tracking down the references to these and related topics in Wilber’s writings, and you have shown inconsistencies that he needs to address.... More careful analyses like yours are needed.... I don’t have any major criticism.” First point to note is that Zimmerman’s comments, and there were more, never directly talked about the work I was doing to bring out the nature and role of fear (‘fear’) in both transpersonal and integral theory. In my view, he didn’t get it. What he got is that my scholarship in this paper was good and pointed to inconsistencies in Wilber’s uses of these terms throughout the years, which was true as well. The paper was then sent, with Zimmerman’s letter of recommendation, to the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (Ed. Miles Vich) and although I received a note card it had been received and was to be reviewed, it never was. For two years I tried to contact him and nothing came of it. The paper was “lost” or “ignored” and I was never informed of its status. This makes me think of many things but it highlights the brutality and violence in those whom you’d believe it would not be so, and it shows how the topic “fear” does not want to be revealed as the ideology (‘fear’) it is. As I say in the Yellowpaper, it is fearism working to hide itself and the academy is as cowardice to face this as anywhere in our Western society.

liberational praxis and not an oppressive practice (i.e., a nonviolent practice). Again, all in theory this is fine but the real praxis is much harder and requires a vigilance as the Fearland and Flatland training in us is deep, often unconscious, and seeps through and into everything we do.

I have written extensively about Phobos-Thanatos elsewhere (see Appendix 1) and it is not the focus of this paper, but I am attempting to better link the fear ('fear') teachings of Wilber with his fearlessness teachings, and making the direct homology that these are the underbelly of his flatland teachings and core to understanding his integral theory of liberation. Let's recall his claim of the two camps in battle for 2000+ years in the West—and the reason is because the Ego camp is ruled by fear ('fear') and that is Phobos ("represses the networks of communions"<sup>90</sup>), while the Eco camp is ruled by fear ('fear') and that is Thanatos (*regresses* from the higher networks of autonomy)—both, in his words "two variants of flatland ideology." That said, Wilber is overtly clear that the worst of the two flatland ideologies is Thanatos and the Eco camp (the Descenders) which is most dominant in the West today.<sup>91</sup> "Thanatos, the dead and heavy hand of reduction and regression."<sup>92</sup> That said, Wilber's theory also indicates that they both play off each other and even intertwine and combine; both with their own egoism (fearism) agenda.

His point is that when Eros and Agape forces are dissociated then it is not Agape (love) that leads to the Eco path (Spirit-in-immanence) but Thanatos (fear), and it is not Eros (love) that leads to the Ego path (Spirit-in-transcendence) but Phobos (fear).<sup>93</sup> This is the pathological root of a flatland ontology and flatlandism—acting to maintain the dissociation, state of un-integrated divisive "split," and continuing to dissociate further—a cycle of brutality toward Kosmos. If the integral praxis is anything, if it is liberational, then Wilber says we have to deal with this problem—I call the 'fear' problem. No small task. Integral teachings are a critical way to deal with this problem, and I call that the fearlessness teachings. However, I'm also pointing out that without attention to Wilber's pre-1997 teachings on flatland, integral theory and the Integral Movement (Agenda) will be crippled to a large extent.

### Some Research & Educational Implications & Recommendations

*If this Yellowpaper says any one thing, it says: Flatland is an ontology and ideology and in that sense it is deeply recalcitrant to change, transform, or lessen its grip—and unfortunately, virtually all integralists (Wilber excluded) tend to underplay the severity and powerfulness of its dynamics. I believe they do this because of fear ('fear' and fearism)—a fear they themselves have not yet deconstructed and reconstructed—a 'fear' project they are culpable of and embedded within because they lack the critical literacy*

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<sup>90</sup> *SES*, 516.

<sup>91</sup> One can see this throughout the second-half of *SES* and especially in his chapter 13 "The Dominance of the Descenders."

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 521.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 515-17, 520-21.

*of fearlessness to detect it in them—that is, to detect the differences of Phobos and Thanatos in the everyday.*

And that’s where DIFS comes in. Our department of CSIIE is called Department of Integral and ‘Fear’ Studies to address much of the weaknesses I’ve diagnosed above. As well, I acknowledge a lot more diagnosis is still needed.

#### WILBER’S THERAPEUTIC (LIBERATIONAL) CHALLENGE:

How to heal this deepest of dualisms that had cruelly carved the landscape of Western culture for two thousand years? How to end the schizoid fracture.... that had dominated Western history from its inception?<sup>94</sup>

##### *A Few Recommendations:*

All the following are general, temporary, and roughly stated, and most specific to a Western context—and postmodern context—but they also point out that we have barely scratched the surface in terms of efficacious intervention into the power and recalcitrant nature of flatlandism on this planet. We need

1. to frame integral theory as primarily about the reclamation of *quality* in the universe, and where possible to create new *qualitative* valuing and worldviews to ‘balance’ (if not counter) the hegemony of the flatland *dequalification* (quantification) going on today (e.g., relate to the colonization of lifeworld, and continue A-ness/D-ness aesthetic research, and Flatland is Fearland both on a destructive path to erase *quality, depth, verticality, the Descender’s grid*),
2. a critical literacy of fearlessness and fearless standpoint theory and an integral conflict theory to aid our practices of understanding and intervention into this schizoid battle and fracture of the Kosmos (e.g., toward an ontopsychocultural therapia, and applications to peace and conflict studies, and nonviolence movements and education),
3. an integrally-informed critical theory to do the ideological analysis and offer liberational solutions to flatlandism; this will have to integrate the best of the conflict and critical theory traditions (e.g., Frankfurt school in contrast (and re-balancing) to a dominant functionalist and pragmatist use of integral theory and methods), and to see Wilber’s work as a spin-off from that tradition (with closer links to Habermas and the critical theory schools that specialized in ideology critique and resistance),
4. to distinguish an integral endarkenment (and enlightenment) discourse in the Integral Movement and decide which is better when, for what purposes (each as complementary) in the overall strategies and goals of Wilber’s therapeutic and liberational challenge—the promoters of integral-deep and integral-lite forms need to dialogue more; we ought to look at the fear (‘fear’) that is lurking in the applications of integral praxis (e.g.,

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 483.

repression of “prophetic voice”) and look at how an endarkenment teachings (with Matrixial theory, *The Matrix* film, Integral-R<sup>95</sup>) may enhance our emancipatory potential

5. to examine all of the above points in terms of a ‘new’ integral education curriculum and pedagogy (e.g., Integral Studies)—and that begins by acknowledging the newly forming ‘Fear’ Studies and its important role in understanding flatlandism and offering new ways to undermine it and/or transform it,

6. overall our methods need to be contextualized within a post-9/11 (culture of fear) (century of fear) context, with the best of premodern, modern, postmodern and post-postmodern skill sets

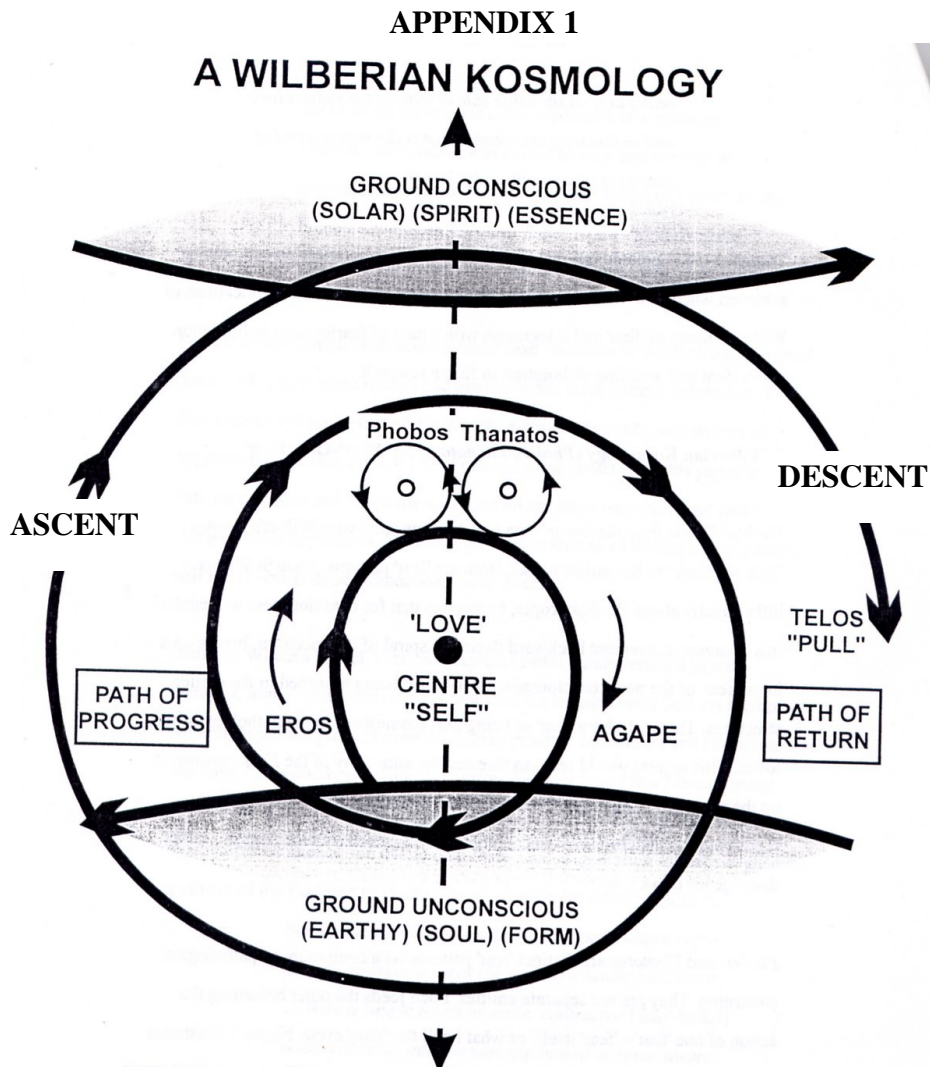


FIGURE 1 - Patterns of 'Love' and 'Fear': A Kosmology  
© Robert M. Fisher - 1997 -

<sup>95</sup> Matrixial theory (after the work of feminist-artist and post-Lacanian theorist Bracha L. Ettinger; and Integral-R is part of my “corrective” since 2005, see my blogpostings, 03/20/11, 08/15/10).