

An Enneagram-based Model of Transformation

by Susan Rhodes

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Susan Rhodes is a cognitive psychologist with an ongoing research interest in individual differences, psychospiritual systems, and transformational processes. She has been exploring the both the enneagram and Ken Wilber’s work since 2000 and started writing articles addressed to an enneagram audience about the links between the two systems in 2005. She has also written two books about the enneagram (*The Positive Enneagram* and *Archetypes of the Enneagram*) and is working on a third: *The Integral Enneagram*.

Since 2006, I’ve been writing articles for the *Enneagram Monthly* (EM) linking the enneagram with Ken Wilber’s Integral Operating System (IOS). The following piece presents a comprehensive enneagram-based model of transformation based on a synthesis of both integral and enneagram theory. Readers unacquainted with the enneagram can check out the following articles from my website (www.enneagramdimensions.net): “[The Enneagram in Brief](#)” (on the personality enneagram), “[Reconciling Personality with Process](#)” (on linking the personality and process enneagrams), and “[The Enneagram & Ken Wilber’s Integral Kosmology](#)” (on linking the enneagram and the IOS, with an emphasis on the pre/trans fallacy and how retro-Romantic assumptions currently limit the field of enneagram studies). Please note that the article below is designed for both an integral and enneagram audience, so some basic integral concepts are explained that will be quite familiar to regular Integral World readers.



With the publication of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (SES) in 1995, Ken Wilber formally adopted a holarchic model of transformation to serve as a centerpiece for his emergent IOS based on Arthur Koestler’s holarchic approach to living systems as originally outlined in Koestler’s *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967). Koestler envisioned each element within a living system as both a part of something greater than itself and a whole in relationship to the parts it enfolds—and coined the term *holon* to describe the dual nature of such elements. The term *holarchy* is designed to convey the idea that living systems are a hierarchy, but a cooperative hierarchy in which the levels are linked to one another by up- and down-facing (*Janus-faced*) holons. It’s the Janus-faced nature of holons which makes it possible for energy and information to flow between the levels of a given system.

In SES, Wilber used Koestler’s work to create his own approach to holarchy, an approach designed to reconcile two opposing ideas within the transpersonal/integral community: (a) we evolve primarily via *ascent* (by moving upwards towards self-transcendence) and (b) we evolve primarily via *descent* (by moving downwards towards self-immanence).¹ Wilber portrays these two moves as compatible aspects of the same process:

The first movement [of Spirit] is a *descent* of the One into the Many:... Spirit *immanent* in the world. The other is a movement of return or ascent from the Many to the One:... Spirit *transcendent* in the world (*italics his*, SES, p. 330).

Here Wilber says that ascent and descent are basically two sides of the same coin. On the same page, he observes that in Plato, “the two movements were given emphasis and equal importance,” but that “when the unifying One is forgotten, the two movements fall apart into warring opposites...into ascetic and oppressive Ascenders...and shadow-hugging Descenders.” From this perspective, a move in one direction represents the ignoring or denial of the other:

To the Ascenders, “this world” is, in form and function, illusory at best, evil at worst—and the Descenders are the primary representatives of that evil. The Descenders [however] accuse the Ascenders of being repressive, puritanical, life-denying, sex-denying, earth-destroying, and body-ignoring (*SES*, p. 356).

Wilber says that he’s opposed to either extreme, that he wants to dignify both currents. Then we can have healthy (integrative) ascent (= self-transcendence or Eros) and healthy (integrative) descent (= self-immanence or Agape). However, if we place these forces in opposition, we tend to distort one or both of them, so that both Eros and Agape become non-integrative. When we try to ascend non-integratively, we cut off access to lower levels, fearing they will impede or contaminate us (leading to self-alienation or Phobos). When we try to descend non-integratively, we “fall” from the heights into the depths, regressing towards oblivion (leading to self-dissolution or Thanatos). So in summary, there are four possible moves he describes when it comes to transformation:

- integrative ascent = *self-transcendence* (*Eros*)
- integrative descent = *self-immanence* (*Agape*)
- non-integrative ascent = *self-alienation* (*Phobos*)
- non-integrative descent = *self-dissolution* (*Thanatos*)

These moves are summarized in Table 1. Interestingly, although Wilber discusses each of them at various places in *SES* (especially pp. 348–351), he never puts this information into tabular form. Had he done so, he might have spotted a potential problem with his characterization of one of the moves: *self-immanence* (*Agape*). Although he discusses Agape in the context of Ascenders versus Descenders (see, e.g. the discussion in Ch. 9 and in the Notes, pp. 759–760), it is nowhere to be found in his Chapter 2 discussion on the capacity of holons to descend; there he focuses only on descent from a non-integrative perspective (solely in terms of Thanatos, not Agape; p. 52).

When this discrepancy was called to his attention by colleague Fred Kofman, Wilber said *mea culpa*, characterizing the slip as inadvertent in a subsequent Shambala interview. But curiously, he went on to say that “I still sometimes list the fourth drive as self-dissolution, simply because that is so much easier to understand in an introductory statement. But my actual position should now be clear, thanks to Fred” (http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/interviews/interview1220_2.cfm/).²

TABLE 1. FOUR KINDS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL MOVES

	INTEGRATIVE	NON-INTEGRATIVE
ASCENT	<i>EROS</i> (self-transcendence)	<i>PHOBOS</i> (self-alienation)
DESCENT	<i>AGAPE</i> (self-immanence)	<i>THANATOS</i> (self-dissolution)

Hmmm...if the correct version of integrative descent is actually “self-immanence,” why hang onto the incorrect version (self-dissolution)? And if the correct version is really correct, why should it be so much harder to explain? Questions like these nagged at me when I read this material; it made me wonder whether this slip was just inadvertent or whether it reflected a more substantive problem. For despite his endorsement of self-immanent descent in *SES*, anyone familiar with Wilber’s earlier writings would know that for many years prior, he spoke of descent exclusively in terms of Thanatos (see, e.g., *The Atman Project*, 1980/1996, pp. 121–125 or pp. 78–79 and p. 120 in *Up From Eden*, 1981/1996). It is only with the publication of *SES* that Agape makes its appearance, as part of Wilber’s new emphasis on integration. Wilber does not fully explain this seeming change of heart, leading us to guess at the reasons why he wants to reconcile ascent and descent.³

However, there is reason to suspect that although Wilber clearly embraces the *idea* of reconciliation, he remains inwardly ambivalent about the goodness of descent, despite his glowing comments about it in *SES*. There are a number of subtle clues to support this idea, starting with his long-time focus on Thanatos, not Agape. And then there is his comment to Shambhala that it’s easier to speak of descent in terms of self-dissolution rather than self-immanence. A third clue lies in his discussion of shadow work in Chapter 6 of *Integral Spirituality* (2006), which is stunningly brief, especially when we consider the importance of the topic (one that Jung spent literally decades exploring). While we wouldn’t expect Wilber to go that far, we’d expect a more thoughtful discussion than he provides. If we really saw descent as something that matters, wouldn’t he want to spend a little more time discussing it? (Compare Wilber’s approach with, e.g., Jorge Ferrer’s extensive and thought-provoking explorations of immanent spirituality at Integral World and in his books, e.g., *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory*, 2002).

But perhaps Wilber’s reservations about descent are most evident in *Grace and Grit* (1991), where he poignantly describes what happens at the point he realizes that his wife Treya is fighting a losing battle with cancer—and there is absolutely nothing he can do about it. As her health deteriorates, Wilber becomes increasingly angry and unable to rise above his feelings, until finally he stops meditating and begins to drink. One day, while Treya is in a German clinic undergoing yet another treatment, Wilber wanders into a little German pub full of older men dancing in a line. He sits alone at a table, nursing a drink. But when the men beckon to him, he uncharacteristically allows himself to be dragged into the line. Soon, he finds himself overwhelmed by his feelings. “For fifteen minutes, I seemed to lose all control over my emotions...I stayed in that pub for two hours. I never wanted to leave. Somehow, in that short period, it all seemed to come to a head, to rise up and wash through my system, to be exposed and to be accepted.”

When recounting this life-changing experience, Wilber adds wistfully that he’d like to claim that this breakthrough came from “some powerful meditation session with blazing white light,” rather than “in a little pub with a bunch of kindly old men whose names I do not know and whose language I did not speak” (p. 307). This remark, while poetic, reveals just how disconcerted Wilber is by the fact that his breakthrough happened as the result of an experience of descent, not ascent. It’s as though this experience violated some deeply-held but unconscious belief that it is via states of expanded consciousness (“blazing white light”) that we grow, *not* via experiences of vulnerability, helplessness, and emotional desolation. Remarks like this are one of the reasons why those in the Descendant camp are likely to be skeptical about the depth of Wilber’s commitment to descent.

They have a point there. But if Wilber has trouble coming to terms with descent, he is not alone. In the following section, we’ll take a look at why it can be so hard for virtually *anybody* in modern culture to see descent as having intrinsic value (but especially intellectuals like Wilber).

The Bias Against Descent

Traditionally, the vast majority of spiritual aspirants during the post-axial period have embraced ascent (transcendence) as the goal of spiritual practice. As noted above, Wilber has also been a big fan of transcendence, despite his kind comments about descent in *SES*. The chief way in which Wilber has sought to incorporate descent (or at least integration) into his model is by promoting the concept he calls “transcend and include,” described as follows:

To say that evolution proceeds by differentiation and integration is to say that it proceeds by transcendence and inclusion. Each stage includes its predecessors, then adds its own defining and emergent qualities: it *transcends and includes* (*Integral Psychology*, 2000, p. 151, *italics mine*).

This statement clarifies Wilber’s formal commitment to the idea of integration. One of his great insights, as expressed in Chapter 8 in *Transformations of Consciousness*, is that ascension without inclusion (non-integrative ascent) can result in the development of increasingly subtle yet troublesome pathologies as we ascend—pathologies that can persist even at very advanced stages of spiritual development. This brilliant insight cuts straight through the illusion that once we get past

the ego-based stage of development, we're more or less home-free. Wilber offers a convincing argument that this is not so—that there are pathologies that can arise on any rung of the ladder. Being aware of this possibility gives us the foresight to anticipate problems before they arise and make corrections before minor problems turn into major ones.

Clearly, *transcend-and-include* is an improvement over the old *transcend-and-deny* approach long favored by ascetics of every stripe, because it helps us think of transcendence as a predominantly additive process (in which we integrate our past experiences as we ascend) rather than a subtractive process (in which deny or repress our past experiences in order to ascend). That said, it's all too easy to think we are being inclusive when we are actually spiritually bypassing: skimming the cream and leaving the rest.

Anyone who has taken on the task of real integration knows that “inclusion” is a deceptively bland word for describing what can be an incredibly tumultuous process involving powerful forces that resist reconciliation. Genuine inclusiveness involves surrender to whatever arises in the moment—even when what arises is extremely disagreeable. When we find ourselves face to face with experiences that are frightening, painful, or deeply unpleasant, our first impulse is to recoil. (And usually, it's our second, third, and fourth impulse, as well!) Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of acceptance to the contrary, we do not always reach the point where we accept the inevitable, especially when it means backtracking instead of moving forwards.⁴ And while we might like the idea that it's always possible to integrate while continually moving forwards, there are many times when our life circumstances don't allow us to do this. For example, children living in chaotic households usually have to wait until adulthood to work out their confused feelings; so do people whose lives are so full of responsibilities that they are not really in a position to do deep inner work because it's too destabilizing.

The bottom line is this: Inclusion is something that often takes place *after the fact*, thus necessitating a reversal of direction, a temporary return to an earlier stage of development in order to recover what has been lost along the way. Most of us don't like this idea much, because we see it as interfering with our lives. However, it's a process with tremendous creative potential, containing the seeds of deep inner revitalization. But that potential can be realized only when we allow ourselves to let go of the need to be constantly progressing.

I once went through a significant reversal which was preceded by dreams encouraging me to go back the way I came—something I was loath to do. At first, my prayer was always, “Please don't make me sit in the little chairs!” I envisioned myself scrunched up as a hapless adult in seats intended for a kindergartner, and this image made me extremely uncomfortable. I did not want to experience the weakness, vulnerability, and shame associated with remedial work. Although I fought it for years, I eventually allowed life to bring to me the experiences I needed but was afraid to take on—experiences that did indeed bring me to those little chairs. Ironically, one of the by-products of those experiences was the blossoming within me of a deep love for children—something I never felt before. Had I not “regressed,” I would not have found that gift of love.

But in a culture where failure is not an option and many people have lost faith in the power of life to support their needs, it's hard to voluntarily allow such experiences. It's easier to pretend

everything is fine, all the while falling apart inside. Despite our Horatio Alger stories and avowed admiration for those who are willing to try, try again, there is buried within the modern American psyche a profound fear of failure, a fear which—while often denied—nonetheless persists. Our collective refusal to acknowledge the fear of falling down into the rabbit hole has created a powerful cultural taboo against descent.

But such taboos are never completely hidden from view. They have a way of making themselves known, especially when it comes to the way we speak. In their fascinating book, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson analyze commonly-used metaphors to see what they tell us about our cultural beliefs. As the result of their study, they made the following observations about how we perceive “up” and “down”:

Happy is up; sad is down.

Conscious is up; unconscious is down.

Life is up; death is down.

Control is up; dependency is down.

More is up; less is down.

High status is up; low status is down.

Rational is up; emotional is down.

They conclude that we live in a culture where “up is good and bad is down” (p. 16)—a finding that probably comes as little surprise to most of us. We can also add to this list the idea that “progressing is ‘up’ and reversing is ‘down’,” in that spiritual progression is associated with success, truth, and higher consciousness, while spiritual reversals are associated with failure, confusion, and lower consciousness. This is why, within a purely spiritual context, Ascenders outnumber the Descenders by a goodly margin. And they have outnumbered them for a long, long time.

The 1960s saw a resurgence of interest in downwardness; the emerging generation wanted not only to aspire upwardly (to “get high”) but to “get down”: to heal the rift between upwardness and downwardness, between masculine aspiration and feminine intimacy. They succeeded in part—temporarily—but could not manage to embody their insights in a way that allowed them to become permanently grounded in mainstream culture.

So almost half a century later, “up” is still better than “down”—which means as a culture, we continue to embrace the former (ascension, light, heaven, sky, spirit, assertiveness, the sun, will, penetration, clarity, the known, the ideal, and the eternal) while denigrating or denying the latter (descent, darkness, the earth and underworld, the sea, the soul, the moon, willingness, surrender, mystery, the unknown, fecundity, receptivity, and the ever-changing).

The denial of the feminine downwardness is strongest when it is associated not just with the earth (the material world) but with what lies beneath her surface (with the mysterious energy that Hilary Hart calls “The Unknown She” in her book by the same name). So despite gains in women’s status, the embracing of diversity, support for Women’s Studies, and the proliferation of programs

designed to support a pro-feminine (or at least, pro-feminist) ethos, the taboo against the genuine experience of descent—which is feminine to the core—remains in force to this day.

So what happens to those of us who can no longer deny the need to descend, but who live in a culture so dedicated to denying that need? We run into roadblocks at every turn. Our culture rewards us for supporting its values, not setting them aside. Friends, family, and co-workers encourage us to move forwards, not backwards. We encounter our own inner blocks, as well, roadblocks that both create resistance to descent and the temptation to substitute the outward trappings of descent for the real thing.

But genuine descent experiences can't be faked; they arise in the context of real and often intimate experiences that are more likely to create confusion than illumination (at least initially). They also have a tendency to demolish our psychological and spiritual illusions, especially the illusion of personal control. And this is why it's so tempting to trade in our original aspirations for illusions that can never quite be realized: because we're afraid to confront that possibility.

Perhaps this is what happened to the original Romantics of the early 1800s, those poetic souls who with the advent of the industrial revolution started questioning the March of Progress that seemed to be steamrolling its way over their pastoral culture. They did not like what they saw and thus shrank away from it, preferring their longings for the past to the difficult task of creating a better future. They justified this recoiling by embracing the belief that “down is good” (that goodness lies in nature, the ideal, and the humanities) while simultaneously rejecting the idea that “up is good” (that goodness also lies in invention, the real, and the sciences), making the two into opposites instead of complements. When that kind of oppositional thinking arises, the chances for integration are slim, because virtually no one wants to integrate what they view as evil. And this is how we end up with Ascenders and Descenders, each in a different camp.

The Descenders in the modern day retro-Romantic camp may long for a return to innocence (or in enneagram circles, to essence), but this is a return can never happen. So those who embrace this view cannot help but get caught in indecision, unable to go forwards or backwards. Therefore, the net effect of retro-Romanticism is to instill a subtle dread of the future that keeps people forever spinning their wheels, stuck in a world of illusion. And this is why it is such a debilitating philosophy (and why Wilber is an adamant foe): because to the extent that it enshrines all things pre-modern, undeveloped, and undifferentiated, it becomes a paralyzing and strength-sapping philosophy that takes us nowhere fast (and also makes us an easy target for exploitation by those who claim they know how to get us un-stuck).

But despite the flaws in retro-Romantic philosophy, we reject at our peril the deeper impetus from which it arises: the genuine and abiding need to know that life is not just about transcendence, but about immanence—about the created Kosmos: its mysteries, depths, and opportunities for experience. The Romantic impulse speaks to our heartfelt need to know that *we actually belong on Earth*—that there is a genuine purpose for our presence here. For without that sense of purpose, we have little incentive to dignify either ascent or descent, much less reconcile them. For me, that purpose has to do with fulfilling the *dharmā*: grounding the energy of Spirit in the physical plane, such that the Earth is replenished and

we are transformed. When we are in sync with the *dharma*, we are present in the moment. And we are sensitive to the need of moment, whether it beckons us to break new ground or re-map the old.

Wilber’s transcend-and-include approach facilitates that process by bridging the gap between the Uncreated and the Created, between the masculine and feminine, so that the two can come into alignment—so that we can honor the dual ideas of “growing up” and “growing down.” But this is a difficult nut to crack. And it’s made more difficult by the fact that, despite his wish to be inclusive, Wilber himself seems more fundamentally attuned to the idea of ascent than descent—not because he is anti-nature, anti-feminine, or anti-immanence, but because he is *par excellence*, a thinker: an idea-oriented, objectively-grounded, rationally-motivated philosopher whose brilliance shines brightest when he is tying together diverse ideas into a cohesive, comprehensive, and logically-consistent whole. This highly mental orientation permeates every nook and cranny of his IOS, such that—no matter how passionately Wilber speaks of integration, uses emotionally evocative phrasing, revises his language to honor the feminine (e.g., referring to streams and waves instead of lines of development), or even incorporates Integral Life Practices involving the body, emotions, or shadow work into his system—he can’t entirely overcome the fundamentally mental, categorically-oriented, and objectively-grounded perspective so intrinsic to his point of view.

And we shouldn’t expect him to, because it’s impossible. The great lesson of the personality enneagram is that we each have a point of view that is at the core of our personality. In the enneagram system, each point of view is represented by one of nine points that are mapped onto the enneagram circle and linked by both the outer rim and inner connecting lines that reveal how the different points of view interact. Each viewpoint is intrinsically partial and therefore unavoidably biased in some way. While we can expand its horizons, laugh at its foibles, and partially compensate for its blind spots, it remains a defining feature of our inner landscape (Fig. 1).

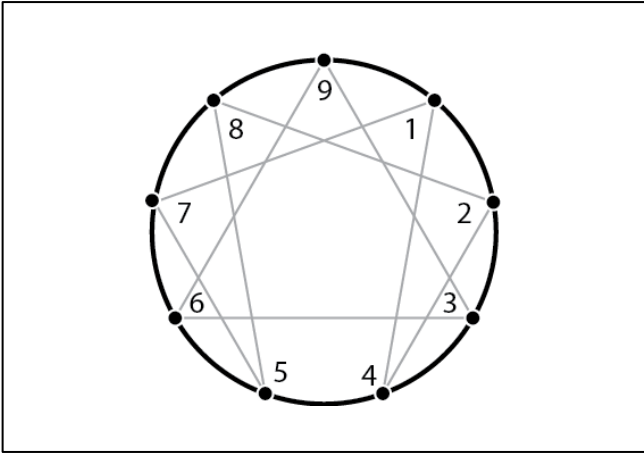


Fig. 1. The enneagram and its nine points of view.

While the understanding that each point of view/enneagram type is partial has often led to the pathologization of personality (on the basis that partiality implies a lack of wholeness), it also allows us

to realize that it is impossible for a single individual to devise a system that is so utterly aligned with Truth as to be completely aperspectival. And this is as true for Wilber's IOS as for any other system: however insightfully conceived, it cannot help but be imprinted with the perspective of its creator, a perspective that is inevitably subjective in nature. Ironically, if the creator has an innate preference for objectivity (as do the three mental or "head" types on the enneagram, Types 5-6-7), that creator can easily come to unconsciously feel that his particular system is not just objectively-oriented but *literally* objective (and therefore superior to less objectively-oriented systems); such is the energy of these types.

In Wilber's case, it seems evident that he is a mental type: a sublime thinker with the ability to create a psychospiritual system that is both meticulously detailed and sweepingly comprehensive. But a system created by someone with this point of view is likely to be oriented more towards ascent than descent, because mental types are associated with the element of air, which naturally moves upwards, not downwards. Spiritually speaking, they tend to be more innately attracted to impersonally-oriented, cerebrally-focused, and upwardly-trending paths (such as Zen) than to paths involving either worldly action (a focus of body types 8-9-1) or personal devotion/dedication (a focus of the heart types 2-3-4).

Unlike Wilber, I'm a heart type on the enneagram (Type 4), and heart types are associated with the element of water, which flows downward and is feminine in nature. But I also have a strong Five wing, which gives me an affinity for air, as well—and this is probably why I resonate so strongly with creating a transformational model that integrates upward and downward movement. But as the result of enneagram study, I've become aware that any model I generate is likely to resonate more with either mental or emotional types than with body types 8-9-1 (who are associated with fire, anger, and practical action). This is because the position of my point on the enneagram, which is at the opposite side of the circle, makes it hard for me to fully understand their points of view. Although I'm interested, I'm just not all that attuned to their perspectives and concerns. But knowing about this blind spot at least helps me acknowledge my probable limitations as a model-builder and to be especially open to feedback from body types and others whose perspectives differ from mine.



It is a working assumption in the enneagram community that every individual is associated with one of the nine types. And unfortunately, all the types have blind spots—which means that none of us are exempt from the painful business of discovering the nature of our blind spots and how they shape our perceptions. Most of us would rather pretend they don't exist, because they make us feel incompetent and therefore vulnerable. But they also make us human. Wouldn't it be great if we could get beyond our insecurities, so that instead of denying or avoiding our blind spots, we could see them as mysteries that spark our curiosity—even when they are marked with signs like Off-Limits, Danger, or Keep Out? Opening to our blind spots might lead to some interesting new experiences, if only we could break through our fears, let ourselves go, and dare to explore the territory that lies beyond our well-trodden paths.

But alas, I digress (although perhaps to illustrate how the path of water tends to meander rather than heading straight towards its objective). My main point here has been to make the case that there is a powerful cultural taboo against descent and to discuss the implications of that taboo. I have noted that its effects may be particularly felt by intellectual types already predisposed towards an upward path. But there is also a shadow dynamic that comes into play here, in that these types are averse to surrendering mental control and therefore tend to defend against it. So their focus on upwardness is often associated with the desire to avoid feeling-laden, body-centered experiences that may require them to “get out of their heads.” This is why they tend to be particularly sensitive to this taboo.⁵

Wilber is unlikely to be exempt from these tendencies, which is why it would not make sense to fault Wilber for his seeming lack of enthusiasm when it comes to descent. If anything, we could commend his efforts to be inclusive, despite a natural predisposition to upwardness. And we could appreciate the “up” side of his upwardness, in that it has made him particularly insightful when it comes to understanding the holarchical/hierarchical nature of the Kosmos and the disadvantages of both retro-Romanticism and flatland materialism. I have certainly benefitted from his insights on retro-Romanticism, which have been invaluable for challenging the idea (so prevalent in enneagram circles) that personality development causes a loss of essence (see particularly *The Eye of Spirit*, pp. 365–77).⁶

Integrating Descent and Ascent

Now that we’ve looked at some of the reasons why it’s so easy to overlook the transformative potential of descent, we can return to our earlier discussion of Wilber’s model of transformation and how it can be reconciled with his evolving IOS. You will recall from the discussion at the beginning that when I was initially trying to puzzle out Wilber’s approach to descent, I didn’t understand why he preferred to speak of descent as self-dissolution, rather than self-immanence. While we have already discussed one possible reason (i.e., that he naturally prefers ascent and retains reservations about descent), there is another equally plausible reason: that in pairing it with Agape (“the embrace of the lower by the higher”), he is inadvertently creating a mixed metaphor, because Agape implies the kind of lofty descent we associate with higher beings (angels, Gods, and saviors) while self-immanence implies the much grittier descent associated with ordinary human beings incarnating into conditions of physical limitation. So it seems we are talking about two very different kinds of descent here, only one of which (self-immanence) is directly related to the process of human transformation. So if we want to understand the nature of self-immanence, we would do well to first distinguish it from Agape, a topic to which we will presently return.

There are three factors we have to consider when trying to understand self-immanence as it pertains to transformation. First, there is the fact that self-immanence must precede self-transcendence, because only that which is truly immanent can be transformed. Second, self-immanence has to develop after birth, not before, because it is not a passive process but something requiring our active cooperation and participation. Third, it is a time-consuming process that

requires diverse life experiences, so it develops only gradually, over a period of many years—which is why mid-life is so often seen as the point at which meaningful transformative work can commence. Based on these givens, it makes sense to envision the first half of life as a self-immanent descent into the world and the second half as a self-transcendent re-ascent to Spirit.⁷ And as Frank Visser notes in Chapter 3 of *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion* (2003), this is precisely the trajectory envisioned by the majority of transpersonal theorists and depth psychologists.

There’s only one problem here. And it’s that this model is closely associated with the retro-Romantic idea that non-rational states are intrinsically more spiritual than rational states. According to this idea, we are born into a non-rational (and thus exalted) state which is lost during early life due to ego development. Therefore, the task is to divest ourselves of ego in order to return to a former state of innocence/essence/being. So retro-Romanticism is a zero sum game in which the best we can do is to regain lost territory.

Wilber rejects this kind of thinking, because it commits the *pre/trans fallacy*, which is the error of seeing the non-rationality of infancy as equivalent to the trans-rationality of enlightenment (see his discussion in Chapter 7 in *Eye to Eye*, 1983/1996 and Chapter 5 in *The Eye of Spirit*). So it should come as no surprise that so much of Wilber’s time and energy from the 1980s onward has been devoted to publicizing the problems with this view. Nor is it surprising that he came to reject the “descend-then-ascend” model that seemed so otherwise plausible: because it is so closely associated with the view that descent involves the development of faculties that obscure Spirit. Wilber needed a model in which the development of the thinking self could be viewed as supporting rather than obstructing transrational development. So he envisioned an entirely progressive model—which at the time meant a model with no descent phase (or at least no descent occurring during personality development). So he took the position around 1980 that soul descends prior to birth such that we are born “fully-descended”—at the nadir of consciousness. From that point on, our consciousness is increasing, not decreasing; we are moving in the direction of Spirit, not away from it (Fig. 2).

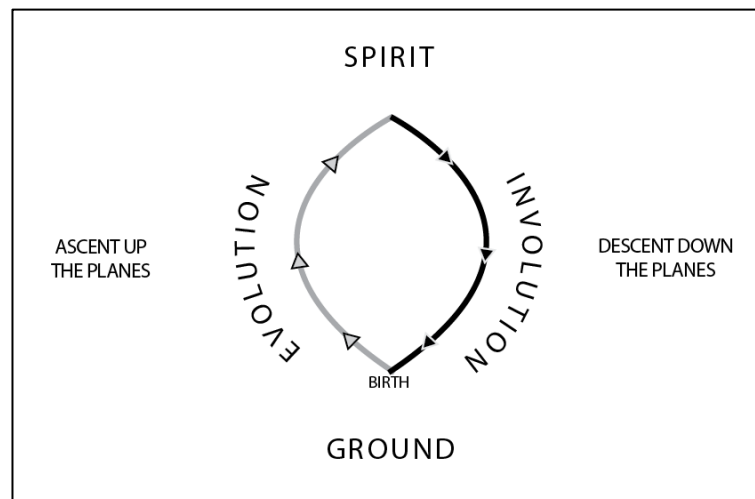


Fig. 2. Ken Wilber’s 1980 model of transformation.

This figure shows a simplified version of Wilber’s *ascend-only* model as presented in Chapter 18 of *The Atman Project* (1980). It is “ascend-only” in the sense that, by relegating descent to the period prior to birth, it in effect denies it a formative role in the process of transformation.⁸ If we fast-forward 21 years, we see the same reasoning in *The Eye of Spirit* (2001), where Wilber says that at birth, we are basically unconscious or in a fused state of consciousness, i.e., at the absolute end of the involutory cycle (see, e.g., p. 168 and p. 374). Elsewhere in *Eye*, Wilber’s warns us not to “confuse these evolutionary and involutory lines, because the crisscrossing of these lines usually leads to a pre/trans confusion of one sort or another” (p. 167).

While I understand Wilber’s pre/trans concerns, I reached a point in my work where there was just no way to proceed further without resolving the problems created by the model depicted in Fig. 1. The more certain I became that self-immanence ought to be associated with the first half of embodied life, the more certain I became that there was a way to get around the pre/trans problems to which Wilber alludes. But just how can this be done? In a nutshell, by envisioning a model in which *both descent and ascent are seen as moves towards Spirit*, not just ascent. In the next section, I’ll present such a model and explain how it works.

A Figure-8 Model

To devise an integral model of any sort, we have to start with the assumption that whatever elements we want to integrate (in this case, Spirit and matter) are actually worth integrating—that each has intrinsic value. Our model should capture the cooperative, dynamic, and potentially growth-producing nature of the relationship between them. It should be broad enough to be widely applicable and yet detailed enough to be of practical use.

Fig. 3 introduces a figure-8 model of transformation that can be used to describe the general relationship between Spirit and matter in the context of the human life cycle, a relationship that can be expressed in terms of a dynamic current of energy flowing between two complementary poles. Using such an approach, we can create a model of the human life cycle that involves four phases:

- Phase 1: descent from Spirit to physical birth
- Phase 2: descent from birth to mid-life
- Phase 3: ascent from mid-life to physical death
- Phase 4: ascent from death to Spirit

According to this model, Phase 1 descent begins in Spirit, as the soul descends the planes until it enters the body before or at the moment of physical birth, at which point it is “half-descended” with regards to involution. The soul is half-descended because, although it is physically ensouled, its individuality has yet to be developed—something that can happen only after birth, via further descent through the sub-planes of physicality. During the period between birth and mid-life (Phase 2), the fledging soul learns to adapt to the conditions of its environment and to actively participate in its own development through the choices it makes, moving ever deeper into the physical world as it

grows, adapts, and matures. Its seed nature develops into a persona (social self) and perhaps into the kind of personality that embodies its true inner nature.

Once the soul has absorbed all the lessons it can currently absorb from the process of involutory descent, it's ready for Phase 3 in the cycle: evolutionary ascent. The downwards movement towards the nadir now becomes an upwards movement towards the nexus of the figure-8. Hence, the focus shifts from self-development (necessary for living in the world) to contextualizing the self (necessary for assimilating life's lessons at a higher level). Thus, during this phase, the sense of personal self becomes backgrounded so that the transpersonal self can potentially emerge. As a result, the focus is on larger preoccupations: the welfare of the family, the future of the family business and/or legacy for future generations, the meaning of one's work and life, and end-of-life concerns, both practical and spiritual. After physical death, the soul enters Phase 4, crossing over into the realm of Spirit, where there is the opportunity for evaluation, assimilation, and synthesis of its life experiences during the re-ascent through the spiritual planes.

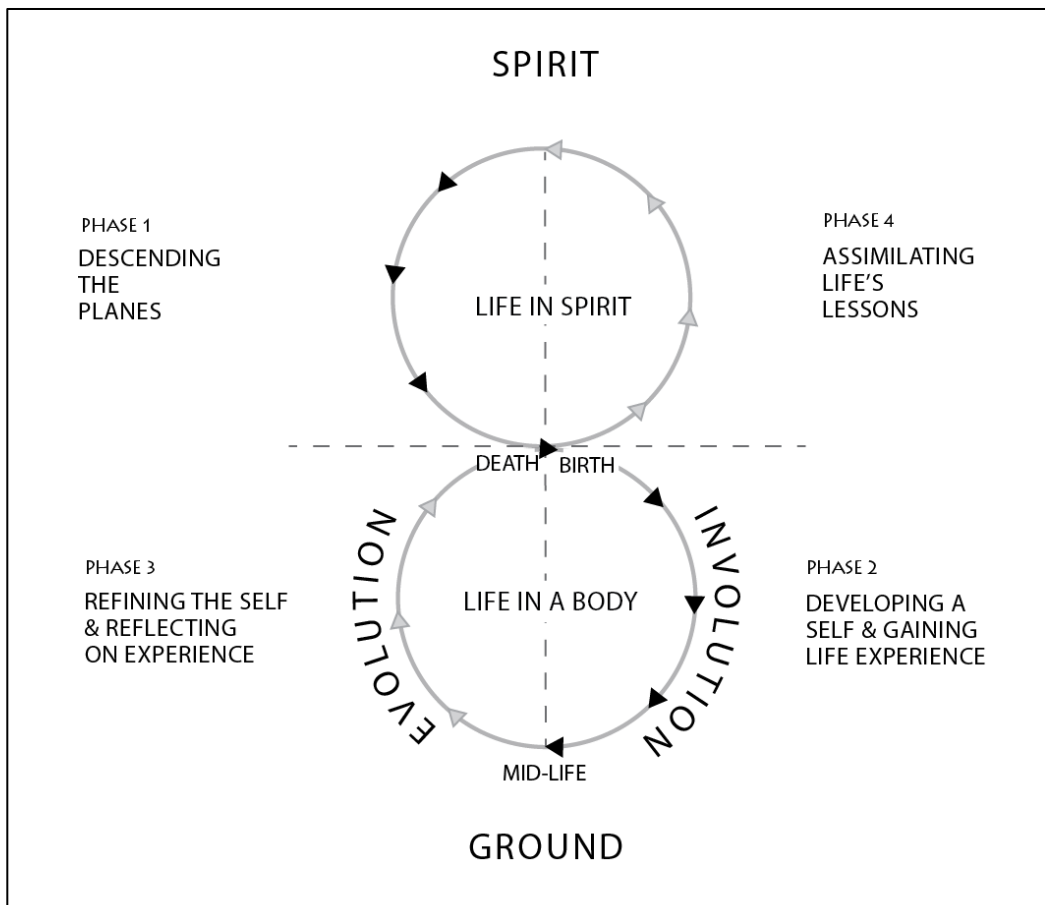


Fig. 3. The figure-8 flow between Spirit and matter (ground).

Now there is something important to notice about the nature of this figure-8 process, which is that although it (a) involves a descent followed by a re-ascent and (b) this re-ascent involves a shift in orientation, *it does not involve an reversal of direction* (such that we literally retrace our steps, moving counterclockwise up the planes, returning along the exact path by which we descended). This is a critical point, because it speaks to the difference between the retro-Romantic model and the figure-8 model. In the retro-Romantic model, embodied descent is portrayed as an unfortunate departure from an idealized spiritual state: a sin in need of redemption, a mistake in need of correction, or a pathology in need of healing. As a result, the path of return is seen as an *undoing* or erasing of the mistake/sin/pathology, almost as if it never really happened. But if we think of descent in this way—as a mistake—we rob it of its dignity and power to transform. And this is why an integrally-oriented transformational model must of necessity depict the path of return as a *continuation* of the path of descent (not a departure): so that the focus is on one cooperative process, not two conflicting forces.

In the figure-8 model, the descent from Spirit to matter is characterized as the natural move of the human soul from the expansive realm of Spirit into the limits of physicality for purposes of both grounding Spirit in matter and raising up matter toward Spirit (and experiencing transformation in the process). As the figure-8 shows, at no point in the process are we really moving away from Spirit; we're always moving directly or indirectly *towards* Spirit. Thus, descent and ascent are complementary processes that are part of an overarching transformational process or arc that is essentially progressive in character. Even the harmonious geometry of the figure-8 embodies the essential goodness of the process, portraying a dynamic, interactive flow of energy between Spirit and matter.

Of course, from the perspective of the incarnating soul, the move into physicality brings greater limitation—limitation we may not like, because it makes us feel less free. However, the limitations to which we are subjected nevertheless provide us with opportunities to develop qualities that accelerate our spiritual growth, such that, at the end of the cycle, we potentially find ourselves at a higher point than where we started (Fig.4).⁹

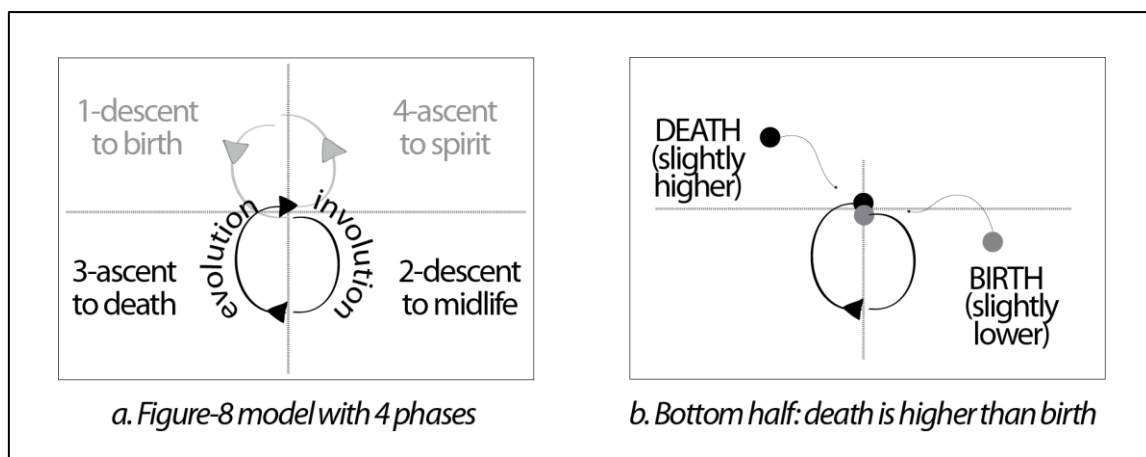


Fig. 4. Moving up the planes.

The cycling motion of the figure-8 flow relates to the cyclical nature of transformation, which happens as not as the result of a one-time event (like an LSD trip or an experience of *satori*), but as the result of repeated exchanges of energy between Spirit and matter over time. And this is why daily spiritual practices support the transformation of consciousness: because they establish a stable circuit through which energy can flow, such that it eventually becomes possible for higher energies to be anchored within the lower bodies of the physical vehicle.

The placement of birth and death at the nexus of the figure-8 provides us with a plausible explanation as to why newborns “come trailing clouds of glory” and the dying so often seem to be in another world: because in both cases, the soul is near the place where Spirit meets matter (so it is aware of both domains).



Once we are satisfied that we have a viable *descend-then-ascend* model that avoids pre/trans problems, we can use it to develop a revised table of transformational moves. The original table focused on four possible moves during embodied ascent (Phase 3). However, we now have a new phase: embodied descent (Phase 2). So we need four moves for each major phase, eight in all.

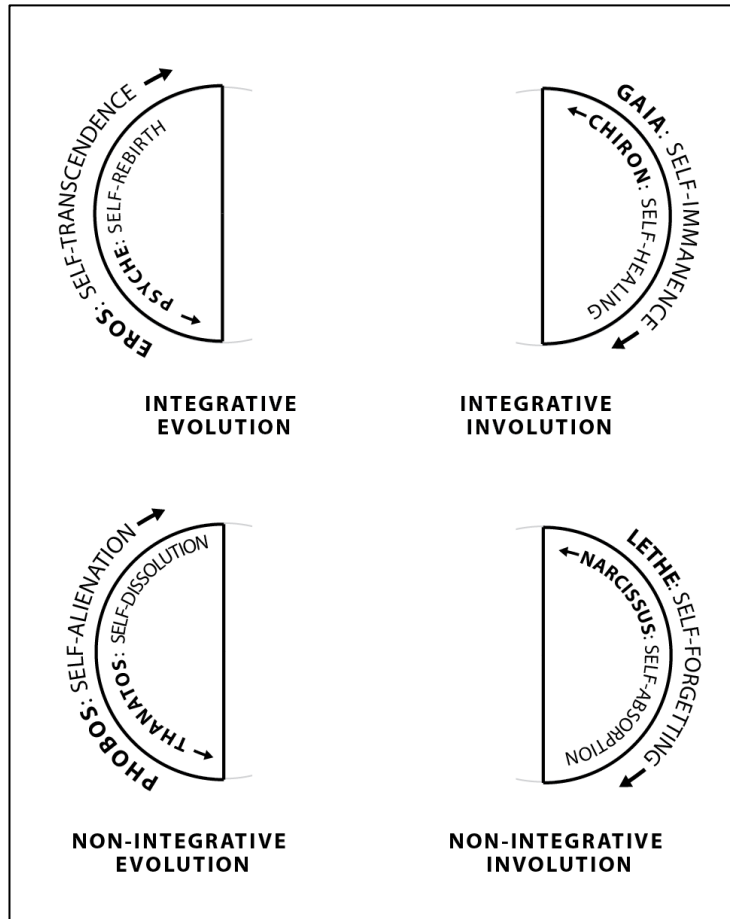
Let’s start by focusing on Phase 2, since it comes first in the cycle. The dominant process here is descent—ideally, integral descent or *self-immanence*. I decided to associate that process not with Agape, but with *Gaia*, since self-immanence is all about coming into harmony with the Earth and its environs. For non-integral descent, I have adopted the term *self-forgetting* and the symbol *Lethe*, because we are talking about the unconscious descent of Spirit into matter, which happens when we forget our divine origins as we grow. The other two involutory moves are integrative and non-integrative ascent occurring during a predominantly descent-oriented phase of life. During involution, upward moves are not transcendent moves but to a return to an earlier stage in psychological life (where we are, as noted above, retracing our steps up the planes whence we came). So ascent during involution constitutes a reversal.¹⁰ In its non-integrative form, it is rooted in an infantile desire to avoid growing up (and thus to avoid fully incarnating), which is why I associate it with *self-absorption* or *Narcissus*. In its integrative form, ascent done during involution is associated with genuine inner rebalancing, and can thus be characterized as *self-healing* and associated with *Chiron*, the Wounded Healer whose woundedness ultimately helps him to heal others.¹¹

So at this point, we have four moves associated with Phase 2 (see above) and three moves associated with Phase 3 (*self-transcendence*, *self-alienation*, and *self-dissolution*). What we still need is a term to describe integrative descent that happens within a predominantly ascent-oriented (spiritual) context—the kind of descent that brings about profound, transformative change, i.e., *self-rebirth*. Since integral ascent is associated with Eros, I paired integrative descent with *Psyche* (the consort of Eros).

Table 2 summarizes these eight transformational moves. (You will notice that Agape has disappeared from the equation, as it should.) In the next section, we’ll look at these eight transformational moves in more detail.

TABLE 2. EIGHT KINDS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL MOVES

		EVOLUTION		INVOLUTION	
		INTEGRATIVE	NON-INTEGRATIVE	INTEGRATIVE	NON-INTEGRATIVE
PROGRESSING		<i>EROS</i> (self-transcendence)	<i>PHOBOS</i> (self-alienation)	<i>GALA</i> (self-immanence)	<i>LETHE</i> (self-forgetting)
		<i>AGAPE</i> (self-immanence) <i>PSYCHE</i> (self-rebirth)	<i>THANATOS</i> (self-dissolution)	<i>CHIRON</i> (self-healing)	<i>NARCISSUS</i> (self-absorption)
REVERSING					



The Eight Transformational Moves

Now that we've identified the eight moves, we can look at how they interact with one another—at (a) how the involutory moves set the stage for the evolutionary moves and (b) how integrative moves differ from non-integrative moves.

Integrative Descent & Ascent. During the first half of life, descent is the dominant process, so moving forwards is about committing to the process of embodiment in a way that allows us to fully descend into the midst of physical life. This is most easily done when we feel sufficiently in touch with our spiritual origins that we are able to make this descent into limitation with courage, confidence, and a sense of adventure—to become fully incarnate in life (= **self-immanence/Gaia**). Because life is not perfect, even the most well-integrated among us sometimes experience setbacks as part of the process of growing up and adjusting to life in the planes of limitation; moving backwards is legitimately done in order to identify and heal inner splits that would otherwise hamper our continued ability to grow; so integrative reversal is usually associated with psychological work done to regain inner balance (= **self-healing/Chiron**).

During the second half of life, ascent is the dominant process, so moving forward is about reflecting on our life experiences, assessing our present situation, and progressing beyond personal or selfish fulfillment (= **self-transcendence/Eros**). It's also about finding out who we really are, which may necessitate a descent into the psychic depths in order to sort out the real from the unreal. So moving in reverse is legitimately done to facilitate deep-level transformation. While it may have psychological overtones, it is not done primarily to solidify the self and self-image but to separate the self from its self-image, so that only the essence of our identity remains. This can be a tortuous (Dark Night of the Soul) passage which involves letting go in a way that can seem like a death. But if the process is truly integrative, the ultimate result is not disintegration but inner renewal (= **self-rebirth/Psyche**). (Can you see why I find Psyche a better symbol for describing this process than Agape? Psyche is associated with the journey into the deep whereas Agape, as noted earlier, is associated with heavenly dispensations, not transformational descent.)

Non-integrative Ascent & Descent. What I have described so far is a transformational path that is mainly integrative in focus—a process in which an individual moves forwards in a relatively balanced and steady fashion but is open to the need to retrench when the need arises. However, things sometimes go wrong and so do we. When this happens, we still move through the cycle, but we do it in a way that is not very integrative, which puts us out of sync with life. This makes us more prone to setbacks and reversals; and when we do fall down, we fall further and have more trouble getting back up.

During descent, it is unfortunately quite common to lose touch with our divine origins, especially when the cultural consensus tells us inner or spiritual experience is not real (= **self-forgetting/Lethe**). When this happens, we have no sense of groundedness in Spirit, which in turn robs us of confidence and makes us prone to hang back, in an increasingly regressive and self-

centered refusal to grow up (= **self-absorption/Narcissus**); it's easy to see the potential link between this move and retro-Romanticism.

If we haven't worked out most of our psychological kinks during descent, once we cross over the nadir, we find it hard to deal with the spiritual challenges of re-ascent, because we remain fragmented, and this fragmentation tends to amplify our fears. So our ascent then becomes based on the desire for escape from psychological conflict, leading to over-detachment and/or asceticism (= **self-alienation /Phobos**). This is a high-risk ascent strategy, because lack of emotional balance is likely to derail us at some point (just as soon as we stop strongly clamping down those errant emotions!). At that point, what happens is what psychologists politely call "decompensation": the Fall. At that dramatic moment, all our defenses suddenly give way and we literally fall to bits, back down to the bottom of the circle, the place of maximum chaos and confusion (= **self-dissolution /Thanatos**).¹² Gestalt psychologist Claudio Naranjo describes such an experience in Marianna Caplan's *Halfway Up the Mountain* (1999), in which he ascended too high too fast, until he precipitously fell to a much lower level of consciousness.



After discussing non-integrative moves, I would be remiss if I didn't say flat out that even the most non-integrative of processes can be transformed into something more integrative, because what shifts the energy is our desire for something better. *The Boy from Baby House 10* (2009) tells the story of Vanya, a small boy with cerebral palsy who was shipped off to a Russian orphanage in infancy, where he subsisted on very little food and even less stimulation for six years. Nonetheless, he taught himself to talk and tried to teach the other kids, too. At age 6, he sought help from foreign volunteers, despite being confined to a back room where they weren't allowed. When a panel of "experts" decided he was an imbecile and sentenced him to life in a state mental hospital (with conditions so bad that most children soon die), a Christian volunteer—knowing where he was headed—told him that if he was ever in need, he should pray to the angels for help. Vanya didn't know anything about prayer or angels. But when he found himself confined to a crib in a dungeon-like asylum, he seized on this idea and did just as she said. For months, the situation looked bleak. But eventually, through a series of impossible events, he was not only freed from the asylum but adopted by an American woman who gave him the family he always wanted.

Enter the Enneagram

The eight transformational moves described above focus only on what happens during the embodied part of the life cycle, which is represented on the figure-8 by the bottom circle. While envisioning the entire transformational cycle as a figure-8 enables us to understand the flow of energy between Spirit and matter, it's the bottom (embodied) half of the figure-8 that's our main focus, since there's a limited amount that we can say about the disembodied half (!).

Once we turn our attention to the bottom circle, we can envision it as an enneagram (Fig. 5). And although the enneagram is best known today as a tool for describing personality, it was first

taught as a system that reveals the nature of transformational processes. G. I. Gurdjieff, who was the first to publicly unveil the enneagram, hinted that it was an ancient but hidden teaching that reveals the relationship between different levels (octaves) of reality. Several decades later, it was utilized by Oscar Ichazo to describe nine personality types (or as he would put it, nine ego fixations).¹³ If we back off from Ichazo’s negative interpretation of personality, we then have two enneagram models: Gurdjieff’s (which describes the nature of a nine-step transformational process) and Ichazo’s (which describes nine personality types or points of view).¹⁴ The geometry is identical; only the applications differ.¹⁵ However, it is Gurdjieff’s interpretation that is usually regarded as more fundamental, in that he speaks of the enneagram in a much more global fashion:

The enneagram is a universal symbol. All knowledge can be included in the enneagram and with the help of the enneagram it can be interpreted....The enneagram is a schematic diagram of *perpetual motion*....The understanding of this symbol and ability to make use of it give man very great power....A motionless enneagram is a dead symbol; the living symbol is in motion (p. 294, *In Search of the Miraculous*, italics his).

From this description, we can see that there are dimensions to the enneagram that are deeply esoteric—that its roots extend far back into the past and its innate properties are not just intellectual, but dynamically energetic. That is why it is a living symbol.

In the Preface to J. G. Bennett’s *Enneagram Studies* (1983), A. G. E. Blake states that “the principle of the enneagram is great secret” and that “through this principle, we can work our way to reality.” Bennett clarifies the cyclical nature of this work, observing that “everything that happens, happens in cycles,” (p. 14) and that the enneagram can be used to depict the life process of “any plant or animal, including man” (p. 4).

It is obviously possible to depict the sub-processes within the life cycle in many different ways, one of which is to divide the circle in half. When this is done by enneagram theorists, the first half is inevitably depicted as involutory (as a descent towards greater complexity, density, and mystery) and the second half as evolutionary (as an ascent towards greater oneness, lightness, and clarity).

Bennett associates the right side of the enneagram with the *material* and the left side with the *spiritual* (p. 32–33). A. G. E. Blake associates the right side with “increasing complexity” and the left with “increasing unity” (*The Intelligent Enneagram*, 2003, p. 313). And in his depiction of the human life cycle, birth is an event positioned at the top of the circle, followed by a right-hand descent in which we are “becoming independent” (“forming” the self and adjusting to “Outer

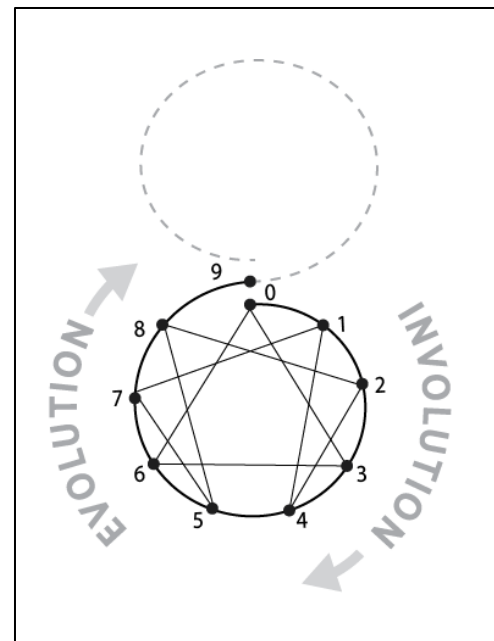


Fig. 5. The enneagram on the figure-8.

Society”); at the nadir, we begin a new phase of development in which we are moving towards “greater vision/transcendence” (surrendering the self and attuning to “Inner Society”) (p. 153). Nathan Bernier depicts right-hand descent in terms of increasing *attachment* and left-hand ascent in terms of increasing *detachment* (*The Enneagram: Symbol of All and Everything*, 2003, p. 386); he also labels the right-hand side as “private life” and the left-hand side as “public life” (p. 383), a characterization consistent with the idea that the first half of life is about developing the self while the second half is about participating in something larger than the self. It is clear from his descriptions that the process begins at Point 0, ends at Point 9, and that the two halves of the process are quite distinct (the first half of the process laying the groundwork for what happens in the second half).

Thus, there is ample support in the enneagram literature for the idea that transformation involves two major processes—involution and evolution—and that both are part of the embodied life cycle. If we need more evidence, we have only to look at the numerous transformational processes that these authors have mapped onto the enneagram, all of which involve both involutory and evolutionary phases. Bennett describes the transformation of raw ingredients into a meal, the training a professional singer, and the transformation of consciousness; Blake depicts the human life cycle, the development of human culture, sexual intercourse, and the nature of a dramatic story (using for that purpose two Schwarzenegger films, *The Terminator* and *Total Recall*). And Bernier has examples too numerous to count; he maps at least 50 kinds of transformations onto the enneagram, ranging from everyday transformations (building a ship, the growth of a tree, developing a vegetable garden, tailoring a garment, giving a party, eating a meal, conducting an experiment, and going on a trip) to deep transformations of consciousness (the evolution of Beethoven’s symphonies, the stages of life, development of the “I,” the inner journey, and the Path of the Buddha).

At about the time I was getting pretty deep into this enneagram literature, I was also delving more deeply into Wilber’s work. This is why it was easy to notice that they were using very different models of transformation. I also noticed that the enneagram-based model seemed to make more sense (to have better “face validity”), was supported by more examples, and was better able to account for the differences between the first and second half of life. Later, I came to realize that adopting a descend-then-ascend model could resolve certain problems in Wilber’s theory, as discussed above. So at that point, the challenge was to find a way to use an enneagram-based approach without creating pre/trans problems, which I managed to avoid by (a) characterizing both phases of the transformational cycle (descent and ascent) as essentially progressive and (b) emphasizing the idea that although we return to our point of origin (Point 0), we are potentially transformed in the process, such that the return brings us to a higher place than we started (Point 9).

The result is a transformational model based on seven propositions, which are summarized below. Propositions 1–4 are re-statements of well-established enneagram teachings; propositions 5–7 are reasonable inferences that can be made based on those teachings:

1. The process enneagram can be used to map any type of transformational process—i.e., any sequential series of steps by which raw materials are transformed as the result of traversing the transformational arc (symbolized by the circle).
2. The natural progression is to go around the circle in a clockwise direction, starting at Point 0/9 and ending at Point 9, such that we descend down the right side and ascend up the left.
3. There are nine archetypal steps/points in the transformational process, four of which (1–4) occur during involution and four of which (5–9) occur during evolution; Point 0/9 is the beginning/end and thus represents a point of departure and arrival.
4. During involution, descent is progressive (forward-moving) and ascent is a reversal (backwards-moving); during evolution, ascent is progressive and descent is a reversal.
5. While it is generally desirable to move forwards, due to setbacks, reversals, or the need to retrench, we often move in a “two steps forward, one step back fashion.”
6. Any move we make in whatever direction can be either integrative or non-integrative, where integrative means *in sync with the energy of the moment*; the main focus in integration is thus on synchronizing our current state of consciousness with what is happening right now.
7. Because there are two major transformational phases (involution and evolution) and two primary orientations (integrative and non-integrative), there are eight possible transformational moves; when categorized by phase, involutory moves are more *psychological* in focus while evolutionary moves are more *spiritual* in focus; when categorized by orientation, integrative moves tend to facilitate transformation while non-integrative moves tend to inhibit it (although we can via intention move into a more integrated state at will).

These propositions allow us to retain the progressive, non-Romantic focus of Wilber’s *ascend-only* model while adopting a *descend-then-ascend* model which is compatible with both integral and enneagram theory. The model has four key advantages for integral work:

- Solves critical problems within Wilber’s integral theory that are the result to trying to pair an ascend-only model with emergent teachings intended to reconcile ascent and descent
- Provides a way to incorporate self-immanence into the cycle of transformation without committing the pre/trans fallacy
- Unveils eight transformational moves that provide additional insights into how the process of transformation works in real life
- Re-dignifies the idea of descent (so that we stop thinking of descent—and by extension, the feminine world of creation—as something fallen or unspiritual)

The last point here is perhaps the most important. For a very long time, the path of ascent has dominated the transformational landscape. This is beginning to change, but how fast is it changing (and how deep is the change)? We all want a better world, but can this really happen if we secretly view it as something ugly, unreal, separate, or trivial? Even the idea of the world being a “playful” projection of Maya does little to dignify the earth or our relationship to it. Our vision of the world ultimately determines what it becomes. So if we don’t like what we see, maybe we had better start imagining something better!

Sufi teacher Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee envisions a world alive with magic, in which creation is revealed as “a dazzling spectacle of light upon light.”¹⁶ I hope the rest of us can do the same.



Postscript: There is a great deal more that can be said about the enneagram and how it can be productively used in integral work, e.g., for understanding the nine steps/stages through which we progress, the nature of the challenges arising at each step, and how the challenges of one step relate to other challenges in the cycle. These topics are extremely fruitful for integrally-oriented inner work. But that is not all the enneagram has to offer; we haven’t even gotten into how we can use the personality enneagram in integral work—or can fruitfully compare the personality enneagram, process enneagram, and Wilber’s IOS and emerging variants to creating new models of integral thought. And it’s a two-way street; as noted earlier, my initial interest in integral ideas was for purposes of challenging the retro-Romanticism within the enneagram field; it was only later that I realized how much the enneagram had to offer integral studies. In addition to providing the basis for developing an alternative transformational model, the enneagram (as a personality system) can be directly mapped onto AQAL and the eight hori-zones, which bear a striking resemblance to the nine personality types (the “extra” type is Type 9: the one symbolizing the synthesis of all types). But that’s all I’m going to say for now! I just deleted seven pages (count ‘em, *seven*) of additional material after finally admitting to myself it was not directly relevant to the topic under discussion. (I’m already writing a book and decided that I should not be writing another under the guise of an article!) However, the book is forthcoming (early- to mid-2013); anyone interested in this material can meanwhile reference the articles listed in the introduction or contact me at susan@enneagramdimensions.net.

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Notes

¹ See Frank Visser's discussion in Chapter 3 of *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion* (2003) or Michael Daniel's discussion in Chapter 1 of *Shadow, Self, Spirit: Essays in Transpersonal Psychology* (2005).

² What Wilber refers to as *drives* I prefer to call *moves*, because the latter is a more value-neutral term that only describes the act (without reference to the motivations underlying it). To speak of drives is to suggest that our moves are unconsciously motivated (especially by primitive impulses, as posited by Freud), when it is more accurate to say that our actions are motivated by a variety of factors both conscious and unconscious.

³ Judging from Wilber's discussion at the beginning of *SES* (especially the Introduction to the 2nd edition), the emphasis in *SES* on the integration of ascent and descent stems less from a sudden enthusiasm for descent than from Wilber's need to address the anti-hierarchy arguments of his critics (e.g., eco-feminists, post-modernists, and assorted Green-meme activists) who favor a heterarchical (web-of-life) approach on the basis that hierarchies are intrinsically exploitative, anti-female, and anti-ecology. Wilber had for decades adopted a pro-hierarchy position. By adopting a holarchic model of hierarchy and dignifying the role of both ascent and descent, Wilber had a chance to win over his critics by demonstrating that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the idea of hierarchy. However, the rather quick transition from an essentially ascent-oriented position to a more integrative position introduced unforeseen complications into his model, such as how to characterize the role of self-immanent descent.

⁴ In Chapter 6 of *Integral Spirituality*, Wilber provides us with a 3-2-1 technique for doing shadow work, a technique designed to help us re-own disowned aspects of the self by changing our perspective on them (moving from seeing them as an "it" to a "you" to an "I"). In this way, we more or less form a relationship with whatever we have disowned and are thus able to take responsibility for it in some fashion. The technique makes sense as part of a larger theory but in its present form cannot stand alone (as an entire theory), because of its lack of breadth and depth.

⁵ If mental types *do* embrace descent-oriented paths, they tend to do so in a way that enables them to thoroughly map out the territory and thus retain some degree of control over what happens there; they are thus most drawn to depth work that involves esoteric systems, shamanism, or alchemical/magical practices.

⁶ Between Wilber's natural predisposition and his ongoing battle against retro-Romanticism, he does at times seem to throw out the baby with the bathwater when it comes to descent-oriented paradigms; his rejection of Carl Jung as a retro-Romantic is a case in point. (See Ray Harris' excellent article on this website, [Revisioning Individuation: Bringing Jung into the Integral Fold](#), for a well-reasoned argument for restoring Jung to a position of respectability in the world of integral thought.)

⁷ When it comes to the transformational cycle, references to the first and second half of life are not meant to be taken literally. People vary considerably in terms of the rate (and the way) that they traverse the transformational arc. There are those who "arrive" at the nadir very quickly and spend much more of their lives in evolutionary pursuits, those who spend more time moving deeply into life, and those who tend to get "stuck" at various points in the process (and for varying periods). Some people progress at a more or less steady rate while others race through some stages and move slowly through others. Some experience dramatic reversals while others do not. The transformational sequence may be fixed, but each path is unique.

⁸ See Chapter 18 in *The Atman Project* (1980) and Chapter 17 in *Up From Eden* (1981/1996) for a justification of Wilber's ascend-only model. It is interesting to note that in *The Atman Project*, Wilber characterizes involution as a form of contraction (p. 195). However, while involution necessarily involves increasing degrees of limitation as we descend the planes, it may or may not involve increasing degrees of contraction, because contraction is a *response* to limitation, not limitation itself. This is an important distinction, because it is by separating a stimulus from our response to that stimulus that gives us the power to decide how we want to respond.

⁹ Although limitation appears to constrict us, the downward movement into limitation can be likened to the compression of a spring that provides the kind of latent energy that can eventually springboard us upwards, such that we ultimately arrive at a point higher than where we started—an idea that Arthur Koestler refers to as "recler pour

mieux sauter”: stepping back in order to spring forward. See also my discussion on the role played by limitation in creative work in the last chapter of *The Positive Enneagram* (2009).

¹⁰ If it sounds strange to characterize ascent as a reversal, it’s not unprecedented. *The Cosmic Doctrine*, a higher teaching dictated to esotericist Dion Fortune, posits a theory of involutory descent and evolutionary ascent consistent with the approach I advocate here (see Chapter 28); earlier, in Chapter 22, there is a mention of the dangers of looking “backward up the planes” during involution (p. 132) and of the devolutionary (backward-moving) path, noting that continued devolution leads to the inability to maintain form and thus the dissolution of form into unorganized elements (which is said to lead to death, as opposed to Love). A few lines later, the book ends. The last line is “Therefore, choose Love and live” (p. 185).

¹¹ I am indebted to Charmaine Sungy for her suggestion of Chiron as the most appropriate symbol for therapeutic reversals that occur during the first half of life.

¹² Trepidation about the possibility of “the Fall” is another reason why the enneagram points on the left side of the circle are associated with fear, particularly Point 6, where we are said to meet the Dweller on the Threshold (symbolizing our greatest fear). However, all the points on the circle are associated with challenges designed to test our mettle. Studying the issues that arise at each point on the process enneagram can help us anticipate those challenges in a way that helps us appropriately respond to them (see Bernier, pp. 325–333). If we know our type on the personality enneagram, we can also look at the relationship between the two (between our enneagram type and the enneagram point we are traversing on the process enneagram), to see how the two interact (and thus get additional insights on how to proceed).

¹³ How Oscar Ichazo actually derived or received the teachings he set forth on the personality enneagram is hard to pin down, because he has told different stories over the years. What seems crystal-clear is that, because Ichazo regards the nine enneagram types as nine ego fixations, his main goal in enneagram work (especially in the 1970s) was to use the enneagram to overcome “the tyranny of the ego”(see *Interviews with Oscar Ichazo*, 1983; see also my discussion in Chapter 6 of *Archetypes of the Enneagram*.) When Ichazo’s teachings were later imparted by Gestalt psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo to other people (many of whom became the leaders in the field), these teachings retained this strong anti-ego focus. (See Naranjo’s *Character and Neurosis*, 1994/2001; see also A. H. Almaas’s first three chapters of *Facets of Unity*, 1998, which is specifically retro-Romantic in its claim that personality development separates us from Spirit.) I formulated an alternative approach based on the idea that personality development paves the way for transpersonal development (see the introduction to *The Positive Enneagram*, 2009). This is why Wilber’s discussions on retro-Romanticism and the pre/trans fallacy have played such a pivotal role in my work.

¹⁴ One of the advantages of the enneagram as a tool for describing personality lies in its ability to help us understand not just the “what” of personality (the outer behaviors or attitudes) but the “why” of personality (the core energy or motivation underlying the behaviors). Because I see the nine types as arising out of a mysterious core self, I don’t think of them as social personas (much less “neurosis types” arising out of an ego defense system). While any individual may indeed have ego defenses and other forms of psychological imbalance (some of which are intimately associated with the type), the type or “type structure” is not itself is not a form of neurosis, but is a core energy that profoundly affects our perceptions, cognitions, and decision-making patterns. For this reason, even though I speak of the types as “personality types” (because this is what people relate to), I actually view them as “core motivation types,” or “core energy types.”

¹⁵ See Chapter 14 in P. D. Ouspensky’s *In Search of the Miraculous* (1949/2001) for Gurdjieff’s teachings on the process enneagram.

¹⁶ *Spiritual Power* (2005), p. 68.