

Correspondence

Ken Wilber: A Note

- from John Rowan, 70 Kings Head Hill, North Chingford, London, E4 7LY

When I saw the reviews (Network No.69) of John Heron's new book "Sacred Science" by Joan Walton and April Ryedale Taylor, I was a bit taken aback to see the relish with which they endorsed Heron's 'devastating critique of the transpersonal theories of Ken Wilber' (Walton) and exclaimed that Wilber 'clearly wouldn't look for heaven in a grain of sand!' (Taylor). It struck me that people reading this who hadn't read Wilber might think that he had been dismissed or superseded or that he wasn't worth reading.

My own experience with Wilber is that he has a great deal to offer to anyone interested in deepening understanding in science, medicine and education by fostering both rational and intuitive insights, which is the aim of the Scientific and Medical Network.

It all started for me in 1981-2, when after ten years in the humanistic growth movement I felt that I was a self-actualized person. I had opened up my inner life in a remarkable way, both through group therapy and co-counselling, and latterly through working intensively with Bill Swartley in Primal Integration. I had done my Oedipal stuff, my Kleinian stuff, my birth stuff and my prenatal stuff, some of it (based on the work of Stan Grof and Frank Lake) using LSD to open up deeper pathways. I had worked through my hatreds and my compulsions, and was a fully functioning person. But I now had a feeling of 'next-step-ness'. Where do I go from there?

After some false starts, I discovered the work of Ken Wilber. In "The Atman Project" I found that he had described with extraordinary accuracy my path so far. No one else had described the Centaur stage (which is where I now was) with such precision. So I felt I could trust him to tell me what might come next. He said that it was a stage which he called the Subtle. After more false starts, I joined a Wiccan group and explored the richness and multiplicity of the Subtle. I started meditating on symbols of the Great Goddess. Some of what I learned there I put into a book called *The Horned God*.

Then in 1992 I was in therapy with Ian Gordon-Brown and he put to me the question as to whether I was resisting moving on into the Causal realm. Wilber speaks of the 'contractions' which often prevent people from this kind of onward movement. What I found was that there was nothing to stop me from moving on into this new realm, very different from the Subtle. I have been exploring that ever since, through daily meditation going beyond the symbols, and have had some remarkable experiences there.

What I am saying is that I have been testing Wilber's ideas 'on my pulses' and not just in the library. In his book *The Eye of Spirit* he updates his ideas and answers many of the criticisms which have been made. In doing so he expands and extends some of his ideas, responding in a remarkable way to perfectly valid critiques.

One of the most interesting books to have come my way in the last couple of years is *Ken Wilber in Dialogue* edited by Sean Kelly and Donald Rothberg. It includes chapters by Roger Walsh, Michael Murphy, Michael Washburn, Stanislav Grof, Jack Kornfield, Michael Zimmerman, Peggy Wright, Jeanne Achterberg, Robert McDermott, Kaisa Puhakka and others. Then Wilber responds, in a 64-page chapter. And then many of the authors come back again with briefer responses to him. There are final reflections by Wilber, Kelly and

Rothberg. These authors are all respectful of Wilber, and take him seriously, whatever their criticisms.

What seems to me sad about John Heron is that he does not have that respect. He charges in, trying to prove (it seems to me) that there is no good in Wilber at all. But if that were true, how come such decent and eminent people take him seriously?

Wilber seems to me an honest man, trying to do justice to an enormous and very difficult task. When people criticise him, instead of trying to prove that he is right and the other guy is wrong, he more often tries to show that the other guy is right too. He continually tries to reconcile seemingly incompatible views. It was so interesting to read his paper in a recent issue of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, where he outlined twelve different approaches to consciousness, and tried to show that they were all necessary, all complementary.

Also in recent years he has tried much more to open up his own personal life and personal development and personal practice to public scrutiny. His marvellous book *Grace and Grit* should be read by everyone who is undergoing pain and the threat of death. His own notebook *One Taste* says a great deal about where he has been, where he is at present and where he is heading in the future. He does not hide.

Anyone who wants to know what he stands for had better read *The Eye of Spirit*, which is one of those "The story so far: now read on" books. From there it will be easier to see which of his other books one might wish or need to read. I have got a tremendous amount from Wilber, know him to be a very friendly and positive man, and always look forward to his next book.

Life after Death

- from George Blaker, *Lake House, Vann Lake Road, Ockley, Nr Dorking, Surrey, RH5 5NS, England*

I was interested to read what Diana Clift wrote in the section on Local Group News in the April 1999 issue of the S.M.N. Review, page 31. Her words were "the personalities which came through (Trance Mediums) during the seances purport to be deceased members of the SPR though they do not reveal their identity and indeed hint that they are more composites than individuals".

That statement accords well with my own experiences in this matter. Seventy years ago when I had the opportunity to be present at numerous meetings with trance mediums I was puzzled by one aspect that kept emerging unpredictably from time to time.

I would not ask anyone to take for granted anything written on this whole subject. I am only reporting how it seemed, and seems, to me personally.

Those speakers "from the other side" who seemed to me to be the most advanced and highly developed guides and teachers of humanity, the most enlightened ones, showed occasionally a reluctance to be known by a name or identified as a personality connected with an earthly human life. I could not understand why they showed this reluctance, which was apparently not shared by those who had passed over more recently or for any other reason had not been able yet to achieve so great an advance in spiritual understanding. In recent months however I have learned that this does involve a subtle but fundamental modification of our usual concept of the nature of life after the death of the physical body.

As people progress in spiritual understanding the inner core of themselves, the "I" of which we are conscious, is preserved and indeed stays with them for ever. It is eternal. But gradually they come to feel that earthly names and personalities are no longer so relevant to or part of that central core. Instead they experience being more in accord with a certain area of consciousness, which is shared with some other souls too. They feel that they are, if you like, members of a Group, according to the qualities they have achieved, all in complete harmony with each other and having the same aims. They feel more at home and more complete as representatives of that particular area of consciousness rather than as separate individual personalities with an "ego" as they were on Earth. The central core that stays with them is distinct and different from the earthly ego. They see that the form in which they existed on Earth was due to and caused by the need to live that phase of life on Earth and was not required for their eternal being.

This transition to a slightly expanded consciousness evidently takes a considerable time. It does not happen to those who have only recently passed over, nor does it emerge in many other cases until much later. We should perhaps remind ourselves that before we focus on these later developments the primary and more immediate change to be contemplated is that an active life does continue after the physical body is discarded. It would be regrettable if concentrating on the more remote changes were to divert our attention away from events that are closer to us in time.

However, this modification of our ordinary belief in the nature of life after death is seen as fundamental to our evolving understanding of life and it has its own consequences. It is a first small step on the long path towards ultimate unity with the consciousness of God.

Chaos, Life and Freewill

- from Nick Thomas, 163 Toms Lane, King's Langley, Herts, WD4 8PA, England

This article was prompted by Chris Nunn's interesting article *On the Freedom of Free Will (Network number 68)*. The issue is the relevance of chaos theory to views that go beyond materialism.

I am an engineer by training and from my late teens I have been convinced of two things: 1) that there is more to human beings - and indeed all life - than mere materialism, and 2) that if there is an etheric or subtle body as part of that something more then it must interact with the physical in some real and effective manner, or of course it is redundant (the "engineers approach"). But how? As long as we subscribe to the picture given us by materialistic science there appears to be no "entry point" for the work of an etheric body. I believe chaos theory remedies this and I was very excited when it first became widely known for this reason. However, a subtle approach to the way we think about it is necessary. We do not want to repeat the old fallacies to do with vital bodies that change physical laws, or the preposterous ideas of "parallelism" whereby one body follows the action of the other without any real interaction. Neither do I wish to propose that chaos itself gives rise to life or freedom, which seems to be the kind of approach that is rightly dismissed e.g. by Nunn. The distinction is subtle and I failed to get it across at a Network working group some years ago!

What I am suggesting is that complexity - at the edge of chaos - makes "space" for other forces to work in. Thus a living organism may be regarded purely physically as being on the edge of chaos, so that, were physical forces the only ones at work then it would degenerate and decay. Thus its structure and function are not sustainable by physical forces alone, as

indeed we observe. It is only an act of materialistic faith to pretend that all the complex processes in an organism are reducible to the physical, for that reduction is in actual fact far from having been accomplished. Certainly the substances involved are being described with breathtaking detail, but not what "drives" the whole thing.

If physical forces are not the only ones at work then the very sensitivity characteristic of chaotic systems enables other forces to be effective, by providing a bridge between them and the physical. Thus forces of life can work into the physical organism without breaking or contradicting any physical laws. In mathematical language physical laws and forces are then necessary but not sufficient for life. It should be borne in mind that although chaotic systems are rightly described as being so sensitive to initial conditions that their future behaviour is not predictable, this property is continuously present, not only at start-up.

Thus I am proposing that an organism is in the realm of complexity such that it is on the edge of chaos, and without the presence of the etheric body it would behave chaotically, but if such a body is present then it does not do so. Instead it behaves as we observe: growing, reproducing self-repairing etc. These activities are characteristic of quite other laws than those exhibited by machines (discounting the obvious mechanical mimicry that is possible and which is not based on chaos).

Now, we should not adopt a "ghost in the machine" theory either, and the view being proposed does not warrant that. Rather we have in a living body a wholeness embracing both physical and other laws in an organic whole, not a physical marionette being manipulated by an etheric body. It is a wonderful whole such that both physical and living laws are in symbiosis. This is where I differ from the vitalist theory, which imagines that a vital body is required to change or oppose physical laws. It is thus not to be wondered at that experiments designed to show that physical laws "break down in an organism have never, to my knowledge, produced any results. But that does not prove a negative i.e. that no other laws are at work.

Thus the role of chaos is not to explain life or freedom, but to crack open the mechanistic nut by showing that the mechanistic determinism spawned by 18th and 19th Century thinking is quite simply false. However, the use of Hamiltonians and Laplacians in the 19th Century to analyse deterministic systems already then showed that under certain conditions the orbits in phase space become indeterminate, a favourite topic of study by chaos theorists. However, the issue was largely ignored until more recent times when increasing computing power enabled a practical study of the theory to be carried out.

Once all this is recognised we no longer have to wonder how life can influence matter, for the basis for an assumed paradox is removed. The issue of freedom is then shifted to another realm, as it is a spiritual question not a physical one. That free will can be effective (i.e. have real influence on events) - whatever its spiritual basis - can be understood in principle **if** the mechanistic refutation of its possibility (such as that of Laplace) is removed. A new kind of science is needed to study it in its own terms rather than borrowing inappropriate analogies from the physical realm.

Magnetising Water

- from Dr. Mark Braham, B.P. 907, La Chevrerie, St. Cergue, 1264, Switzerland

Jacques Benveniste's 'From Water Memory to Digital Biology' is fascinating, His discussion helps to expand the scientific horizon to the point that (to my mind) the very artificial, and still prominent dualism (as much a form of self-protection among spiritual enquirers as among 'materialist' ones) that conceptually separates matter and spirit, and the exoteric from the esoteric, leading to the mutual disparagement of each other's fields of enquiry.

Benveniste leads us to comprehending that water molecules are information carriers, and does so within the terms of reference of scientific method. No mystification here. But note the following quotation from that Trans-Himalayan school of human development known as Agni Yoga:

'Let me drink the living water which stands close to thy head - thus was it said in an ancient manuscript. The latest interpreters have attributed a symbolic meaning to the saying in this way: "living water" denotes the ocean of wisdom; "the head" means the summit of cognition, whereas the writing had a medicinal significance. The disciple asked the Teacher to let him drink the magnetised water that had stood by his bedside. Many sayings can be found about the magnetisation of water. On ancient images figures can be seen drinking from a vessel or sacred source.

'Long ago people already knew about the two methods of magnetising water. One, magnetisation by passes, the other, a natural one, when water was allowed to stand at a bedside. The first was preferred for certain ailments, but the second was considered better for general sustenance of strength. Such water was either drunk or sprinkled over one.' ('Aum', N.Y. Agni Yoga Society, 1940 § 407)

The subject in this case is magnetisation but does it not also imply information, and an ancient the recognition of water as an information carrier, given that magnetisation may structure information?

But let us go farther. In the same issue of Network, we find reference in 'The Mindful Heart', to behavioural changes from organ transplants and suddenly Benveniste's key fits the lock and opens it: the information carried by water molecules!. This may be too much of a jump and Benveniste may have a response, but given that every organ comprises cells, comprising water, comprising molecules, then perhaps 'cellular memories' are molecular memories, and as new and ancient science intimates, water is one of its carriers. And then I suppose, for those of us who have not had the opportunity to follow the literature on the subject, it is not the brain alone that stores memories, but the molecules, which distributed throughout the body, as well as in cortical locations, according to type, structure and function?