The Next Step? Suggestions for an Integrative Model for Theorising Ecstasy

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Abstract

The article emphasises the necessity of an integral approach for theorising ecstasy and makes a suggestion for how this could be achieved. Although at first it seemed that the compelling sociological theory of ecstasy by I.M. Lewis and the psychological theories by proponents such as Abraham Maslow, Martin Buber or Theresa of Avila contradicted each other and could not both be true at the same time, it now turns out that these two sets of theories have different scopes of application that hardly overlap. They are thus not conflicting, but incommensurable and useful in different contexts. A very elegant and simple model for demonstrating this is the quadrant model by the integral theorist Ken Wilber, as it makes the diverging applicability compellingly visual. Adapting it for the academic study of ecstasy, it can thus be understood that, while sociological theories apply mostly to the occurrence of ecstasy in hierarchical societies among individuals who identify strongly with their group bespeaking their socio-material desires, psychological theories are best employed with individuals who do not strongly identify with group norms and whose ecstatic states cannot be connected with upward social mobility or means to acquire material gain.

Keywords: integral theory, ecstasy, Ken Wilber, epistemology, methodology, study of religions, comparative religion, Religionswissenschaft
Słowa kluczowe: integralna teoria, ekstaza, Ken Wilber, epistemologia, metodologia, religioznawstwo, religioznawstwo porównawcze, Religionswissenschaft

Having outlined the strengths and weaknesses of seemingly commensurable but contradictory sociological[1] and psychological[2] theories of ecstasy in the last two issues of "Studia Religiologica", in this finalising article I wish to make an attempt to show

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[1] M. Deecke, *A Critical Assessment of Lewis's Sociological Theory of Ecstasy. Towards an Integrative Model for Theorising Ecstasy*, "Studia Religiologica" 2012, no. 45 (4), pp. 283–292.

[2] *Idem*, *A Critical Assessment of Psychological Theories of Ecstasy. Towards an Integrative Model for Theorising Ecstasy*, "Studia Religiologica" 2013, no. 46 (1), pp. 45–53.

how such instances as these could be integrated into a larger theoretical framework. This model is especially useful for theorising ecstasy, but could also give helpful guidelines on how exhausting and futile debates within the field could be spared and channelled in more productive ways. The specific model that I will take as the main analytic framework will most certainly seem controversial to many scholars of religion. But even if one repudiates this specific approach, one could try to acknowledge the necessity for an operation such as "integration", even if it could possibly also be achieved by other theoretical approaches.

The more general means by which the goal is to be achieved are the increase of complexity and the differentiation of the field in which one is operating. An integral approach to the field of ecstasy would be one that understands both the advantages and disadvantages of these means, assigns them a justified scope of application if they prove valuable, and thus allows them to merge into a bigger picture. In postmodern times, the (necessary and highly appreciated) work of nearly all-encompassing deconstruction of almost all grand theories and narratives of the humanities (and other faculties) has to be taken into account. This will lead to a certain *attitude* towards the integrated approach that recognises its usefulness and brilliance but takes everything in it *cum grano salis*. Therefore, if this overarching approach claims to be fit to make a step beyond purely deconstructive programmes, it is also because the usage of the theories happens with a certain *modus operandi*: the concepts and explanations it offers are not being reified, they are not taken as absolutes; it is more of a playful interaction with them which grants them degrees of truth but helps itself with pragmatics where not all gaps can be closed.

To some scholars this approach might seem ignorant, even presumptuous. Nevertheless, the undertaking is both necessary and promising: necessary, because the specialised research in even only one relatively small discipline of the humanities, the study of religions, is drifting more and more apart due to the growing specialisation of fields of research, sub-fields, and sub-sub-fields. Here and elsewhere, it is no longer possible to speak of a system[3] of scientific propositions, but possibly of webs and sub-webs, knots, threads, strands, tiers (the infamous notion of the *rhizome*), each with their own laws and incompatible accessions. Some structure is therefore highly desired. It is promising indeed, because *especially* the study of religions, once envisioned as the "Crown of the Humanities"[4] (Eliade), but never quite living up to that vision, could benefit greatly from an integral approach and bring some innovations into the academic field. In addition to offering a clear and conciliatory picture of how to combine or relate the manifold highways and byways of contemporary academic research on religion, the specific way chosen here does in my judgment at least contribute to the understanding of the history of religions. In short, this development can

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[3] "Die Zeit der Systeme ist vorbei." M. Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, GA 65, 1936–1938, Frankfurt am Main 2003, p. 5.

[4] As was indicated in the introductory remarks to the conference on "Religion: Fields of Research, Methods and Perspectives" in Kraków, September 12–14, 2012, http://www.religioznawstwo.uj.edu.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1138&Itemid=105 [accessed: 8.06.2013].

be characterised as an evolutionary process of more depth by higher complexity.[5] The point of reference for an integral approach here is provided by the work of Ken Wilber.

1. Ken Wilber in the academic study of religions

In the past, Ken Wilber has been almost entirely neglected in the humanities, but especially in the study of religions. This is the case even though his writings are deeply embedded in the academic research traditions of the humanities and the hard sciences, often making interesting syntheses of both. This imbalance can partly be traced to the fact that in Wilber's work it becomes apparent how blurry the lines between science and religion can be (sometimes even as two sides of the same coin) and that the identity structure of the modern sciences to a large extent relies on the self-conception as specifically not being religious. This explains, for example, why Jörg Rüpke in his *Historische Religionswissenschaft. Eine Einführung*[6] misses the point when he calls Wilber "a theologian", and thus makes him into an object of research instead of acknowledging him as an equal though differing partner *pari passu* on the same discursive level.[7] Also, such questionable allocations as "Philosopher of the New Age" miss the point, for he rather distances himself from the New Age than embracing it. His well-versed arguments on the gender discourse, the knowledge of developmental psychology, evolutionary theory, and last but not least, on comparative religion make him much more suited to an academic lecture hall.

Another reason for the neglect of Wilber is that the boundaries between science and philosophy are frequently transgressed but I have seen nobody from prevent this by making use of Habermas. Wilber is explicitly normative, as most approaches are normative in some sense or the other. Here is not the place to again launch an epistemological discussion about the notion of non-normativity as the cardinal criterion

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[5] Though the notion of complexity alone is not sufficient for characterising an evolutionary process, but has to be complemented by a theory of learning, since there are inhibitory, destructive forms of complexity; J. Habermas, *Zum Theorienvergleich in der Soziologie: am Beispiel der sozialen Evolutionstheorie* [in:] J. Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus*, Frankfurt am Main 1976, pp. 133–134.

[6] J. Rüpke, *Historische Religionswissenschaft. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart 2007, p. 153.

[7] For someone not to be acknowledged as a "*Religionswissenschaftler*" (academic scholar of religions) could not be stated more emphatically than by telling him that he is a "theologian." A physicist, a geographer, an economist, even a neurologist – they all have more chances of being seen as part of the larger field of *Religionswissenschaft* by their special disciplinary skill on religious phenomena than a theologian. This can to some extent be explained by the history of the discipline of *Religionswissenschaft* in Germany. It was in many places (and still is) situated in theological faculties, and therefore is to a large extent still in the (necessary, but by no means final) countermovement of emancipation against encroachment by the major Christian confessions. To call Wilber a theologian appears to be as displaced as, for example, asked about Einstein, identifying him as being famous for working in the Bern patent office; or pronouncing Wittgenstein a famous gardener or architect, for he was also active in that field. This argument is not about whether Wilber is to be seen on the same level as Einstein or Wittgenstein, but is merely supposed to illustrate that, though the statement in question might not be entirely false, it leaves very important parts out of the picture.

for valid knowledge in academia and the damage it has done. I attempted a short criticism in *A Critical Acclaim of Lewis' Sociological Theory of Ecstasy*.[8] But there remain many justified criticisms on Wilber's approach, which have to be dealt with in due course. Because of the limited space for this article and since one can only criticise what one understands, I wish here merely to explain and, if necessary, defend. In the meantime I would like to proceed to a (very) rough sketch of the integral approach, and thereafter, to its potential for theorising ecstasy.[9]

2. The main ingredients for an integral approach to ecstasy according to Wilber

It makes sense to begin with a fundamental diagram (Chart 1), which explains best what the term "integral" in its usage here means. Furthermore, scholars who do not share Wilber's further-reaching views might find this to be a comprehensive aid for bringing phenomenology and sociology of religion ("hermeneutics" and "positivism") together, instead of having them compete endlessly over the same issues again and again without any visible approximation. The diagram simply shows the main aspects that have to be considered for an integral – and this means multi-dimensional, multi-perspectival[10] – and flexible account of what, for example, ecstasy is about, without reducing it prematurely to one narrow cut-out of reality.
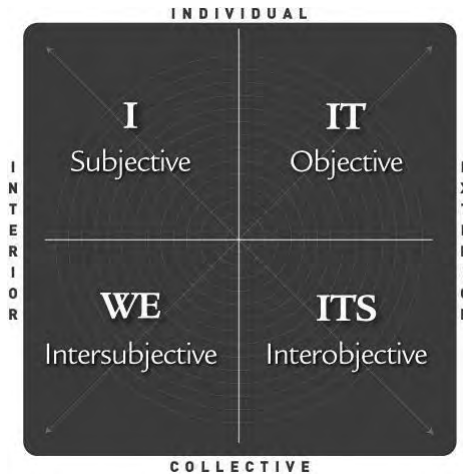

Chart 1. A basic version of the quadrant model (from: http://www.kenwilber.com/blog/show/505 [accessed: 8.06.2013]).

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[8] "Studia Religiologica" 2012, no. 45 (4), pp. 283–292.

[9] If not indicated otherwise all ideas and principles are taken from K. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality. The Spirit of Evolution*, Boston–London 2000, translated into German as *Eros, Kosmos, Logos*.

[10] Wilber would probably use the term "aperspectival" here, cf. K. Wilber, *Sex. Ecology...*, pp. 192 et seq.

Quadrants

The basis of this system is the so-called "four quadrants". They stand for the subjective, objective, intersubjective, and interobjective side of any given phenomenon in the world. These can also be linguistically formulated as approaches of the 1st and 3rd person singular and plural.[11] The 3rd person singular ("it") stands for that approach that has generally been used in the "objective sciences" (empiricism, classical physics, behaviourism, neurology, *Wiener Kreis*, and so on), whereas the 3rd person plural stands for theories that focus more on a systemic point of view, emphasising the connectedness and interrelatedness of singular objects. These two quadrants (upper and lower right, or simply UR and LR) stand for objects in the outer world, that are tangible, visible, etc., and therefore observable through the five senses or their technological extensions. Since the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment, research of these two quadrants has been highly emphasised, as they were very much neglected in the preceding centuries. In our society today, these are the approaches that are usually (and exclusively) accredited with the powerful label of being "scientific" (though in many cases they also rely on or take as a starting point first-hand-observations.)

However, for a complete picture of the universe and an adequate understanding of human beings, the "inner side" has to be taken into account as well. The notion of objectiveness makes sense only before the assumption of a subject that observes the objective. The subjective side of "the other" can of course never be observed directly ("peer into someone's mind"), but reasonable assumptions about it can be validated through (as in *all* scientific endeavours) probabilistic means. It is often neglected that the subjective side of the observing subject provides the only data that are unfiltered but pure experiences and can be observed through first-hand observations. If desired, they can be tested by questionnaires, participant observation, neurological tests and the like. And in fact it always has been, will be, and should be a legitimate field of inquiry, since it lies at the heart of human inquisitiveness, even though many researchers, due to the methodological difficulties that they inevitably see coming, wish to exclude it from "scientific" inquiries. But most theories that leave this out pay for their methodological correctness with epistemic incompleteness. Therefore, it is actually important to acknowledge that the events in the right-hand quadrants have correlations and analogies in the left-hand quadrants, the aspect of reality that is called the interior, or the subjective.

The 1st person perspective (slowly being given greater recognition in academia) is the expression of the individual experience. By systematic observation and methodological training one can make reasonable assumptions about this quadrant (most helpful: common sense) and arrive at reasonable generalisations. In this quadrant one finds, for example, the works of Freud, Jung, or Piaget. The individual inner realm also has a plural dimension: the "We", the shared values, common worldviews, phi-

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[11] Essentially in all languages of the world there are three grammatical persons (I, Thou, He/She/It) that represent different but equally valuable accessions to the world. All three have to be considered in the singular and plural (I and Thou in communication forming the We and enclosing the You) if one wishes to avoid neglecting all aspects of reality, cf. *ibidem*, pp. 149–153).

losophies and so on ("culture" in the English-speaking discourse). Here one would find theories developed by Dilthey, Max Weber, Kuhn, Gadamer, Mead, and many others, many of them naturally working on several quadrants at the same time. The point of the diagram is that all sides of the horizontal and vertical axes more or less mirror what happens on the other side, and therefore can be correlated in some way or the other. To give a comprehensive example of the two upper quadrants: "The brain is the outside, the mind is the inside..."[12]

How can this comprehensive and, in its simplicity, brilliant visualisation prove useful for the academic study of religion? First of all, it could serve as a basis for tolerance in communication and temperance in discussion, for each approach has good reasons for focusing more on one quadrant than the other. Secondly, many long and futile debates about the scientificity ("*Wissenschaftlichkeit*") of any given procedure and its methodological validity can be shortened greatly if one can quickly explain what one is working on and why the tools of inquiry therefore change. Thirdly, it is an effective means for organising interdisciplinarity, and actually explains why interdisciplinarity is the scientific demand of our time in the first place. The fourth and last point here: also from the standpoint of the teaching side of the study of religions, here we find a medium for acknowledging the highly different but equally valid and important questions students may ask when they undertake the highly idealistic endeavour of choosing comparative religion as their vocational education.

Therefore, let me summarise with these objectives: in the academic world what is here called "all four quadrants" should play a vital role in discussions, and should naturally be regarded as legitimate fields of inquiry, in the field of the study of religions or elsewhere. Each researcher will always have particular strengths and interests based on one or two of them. Depending on the interest of research, one will at times concentrate more on one or more on the other. But the university must be a place where discussion of all of them is the rule, not the exception.

Lines

The quadrants provide the observational framework for the assessment for any (?) given thing in the world. But this frame has not yet been equipped with the ability to depict motion, development (natural or historical), or life. Hence developmental lines can be charted, displayed in the diagram by the arrows emanating from the centre to the periphery. They indicate the timely changes and (hopefully!) development of the observed phenomena, e.g. a specific human being or a culture. In the UL quadrant one could thus indicate the inner development of a person from birth to death, while in the UR quadrant the institutions which the person encounters in the biographical process could be recognised. But since a person (or a culture, or a family, or an epoch...) has different aspects, a multitude of lines can be drawn to indicate different dimensions, such as cognitive, moral, spiritual and so on (or in the cultural development of LL a philosophical, an architectural, a moral line and so on). These lines are

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[12] *Ibidem*, p. 114.

supposed to be relatively independent from each other, so that, for example, while the cognitive abilities might be highly developed and manage increasingly complex operations, this does not necessarily mean that the emotional abilities are keeping pace.

Levels (stages, waves)

"Holon" is the notion Wilber uses for structurally distinguishable levels of development. This is Wilber's most fundamental ontological concept. He calls the interdependencies between holons of increasing complexity the "holarchy", preferring this term to the (dominant) "hierarchy", and thus attempting to avoid the notion of involuntary subjugation, instead emphasising its integrating, natural, and holistic character. A holon is made of other holons, but offers an increase of emergent qualities to the lower ones. At the time it is dependent on them. On each level (holon) a shift of abilities takes place, but without the lower one the higher one could not exist.

> [E]very holon is both a whole and a part, and can be considered in terms of its autonomy (agency) or in its terms of being constrained by other holons (in communion), both views being correct (but partial)[13].

And to give a more detailed account:

> [A] "level" in a holarchy is established by several objective criteria: by a qualitative emergence (as explained by Popper); by asymmetry (or 'symmetry breaks,' as explained by Prigogine and Jantsch); by an inclusionary principle (the higher includes the lower, but not vice versa, as explained by Aristotle); by a developmental logic (the higher negates and preserves the lower, but not vice versa, as explained by Hegel); by a chronological indicator (the higher chronologically comes after the lower, but all that is later is not higher [sic], as explained by Saint Gregory).[14]

The lines are structured by the occurrence of such holonic stages, which form an accumulation of variables that prove to have a certain stability in time. To indicate that there are qualitative distinctions, but also not to forget that they are not sharp-edged realities but cloudy entities, they are also referred to as *waves*. They are represented by concentric circles emanating from the middle of the diagram of Chart 1.

Wilber now assumes (and to a large degree succeeds in proving) that the development of the stages of the different realms does not proceed arbitrarily, but that it follows a certain order or logic of development, an idea that is also not alien to Habermas[15], who at least in his "transitional works"[16] expressed interest in the idea of social evolution in the sense mentioned here. At this point, Wilber uses ideas that have been

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[13] *Ibidem*, p. 57.

[14] *Ibidem*, pp. 62–63.

[15] J. Habermas, *op.cit.*, p. 134 ff.

[16] "In these works, Habermas begins to incorporate the results of developmental psychology, which aligns stages of development with changes in the kinds of reasons that the maturing individual considers acceptable. Analogously, societies develop through similar changes in the rational basis of legitimacy on the collective level. At this point in his theorising, Habermas's appropriation of the social sciences has become methodologically and theoretically pluralistic: in his view, a critical social theory is not distinctive in light of endorsing some particular theory or method but as uniting normative and empirical inquiry";

used by the positivistic research tradition of the 19th and 20th century, whereby in my opinion he avoids their major moral pitfalls. In the LL you have something similar to Comte's three-stages theory from magic to religious to scientific. Although there are important similarities between Comte and Wilber, Wilber's scheme outclasses such systems as Comte's (or Tylor's and the like) in at least three matters, and thus conceptualises it in a way that integrates the critique of postcolonial and gender studies: it allows for acknowledging each stage in its own right and importance and does not devaluate the preceding stages, nor overestimate later stages or vice versa; it does (try) not (to) put the present stage of the categorising theorist himself as absolute; it leaves room for further developments.

As a starting point for the scientific notion of levels, Wilber draws from Jean Piaget's widely acknowledged theory of the cognitive development of the child, which came into being in Europe but whose possible ethnocentric bias has been falsified in a vast amount of cross-cultural research in Nigeria, Zambia, Iran, Algeria, Nepal, Senegal, the Amazon, and aboriginal Australia[17]. Piaget developed a model that categorises the cognitive development in subsequent phases: sensory-motor (0–2 years), pre-operational (2–7), concrete-operational (7–11), formal-operational (11 and beyond).[18] Wilber takes a much broader approach, though, by not only taking into account the cognitive line but also considering the entire psychological development in a broader sense and adding to Piaget's cognitive stages corresponding modes of "being-in-the-world" with respective moral, psychic, sexual etc. aspects: those go from archaic, to magic, to mythic, to rational, to trans-rational. This is seen, for example, when the infant after birth ("archaic") has to outgrow its "magical" identification with inanimate objects to realise its physical independence in the world, develop a "mythic" worldview (thinking in roles and rules, group-identity, mother/father as all-powerful) to an identity of an individual self with far-reaching "rational" (formally operate on thinking, "Reason", autonomy of the individual) capacities. This can actually be understood as an integration of Piaget and Freud.

Correspondingly to the subjective development of the individual in the evolution of mankind, intersubjective realities of worldviews have come about that are also classified from archaic, to magic, to mythic, to rational and possibly further.[19] Because of the correspondence of the quadrants, an analogous development of the complex neocortex and analogous structure-functions in the UR quadrant that provides for the objective equivalent of the cognitive abilities is assumed. To sum up this

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J. Bohman, W. Rehg, J. Habermas, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2011 Edition)*, E.N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/habermas [accessed: 8.06.2013].

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 217.

[18] Cf. K. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology...*, pp. 213–244; F. Schweitzer, *Lebensgeschichte und Religion. Religiöse Entwicklung und Erziehung im Kindes – und Jugendalter, Gütersloh* (6. ed.), Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2007, pp. 110–111.

Here, as in all levels, the later encompasses the former, by transcending but integrating it, so that the earlier features are not lost but preserved, as they lay the foundations on which the later ones can build. All the above mentioned principles of qualitative emergence, developmental logic, chronological succession, and hierarchical integration also find their application in Piaget.

[19] K. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology...*, pp. 218 et seq., cf. J. Habermas, *Zum Theorienvergleich...*, p. 135.

very brief outline with two of the most important lines of the LR quadrant: a rough assessment of distinctive forms of societal organisation from the early beginnings of mankind to today could be summarised as follows: from groups (hordes), to tribes, to early states/empires, to nation states, to planetary systems. In the same quadrant there would be a corresponding developmental line of the technological faculties from foraging, to horticultural, to agrarian, to industrial, to informational.[20]

A pivotal idea that underlies all these assumptions is the biogenetic law that was discovered by Ernst Haeckel and even today remains one of the steadiest theoretical masterpieces of the life sciences. But the application of this law, which states that the embryo in its genesis of nine months ("ontogenesis") repeats the genesis of the whole species which took billions of years, is applied to the cultural development: just as the species of man had to undergo certain stages of cognitive, moral, emotional etc. development, these stages then have to be repeated by the individual infant. This figure of thought, the parallelism of ontogenetic and phylogenetic development in nature and culture, social and individual, is crucial.

These stages are not taken as definite realities that predetermine development, but seen as emerging creatively in autopoiesis. At any given stage the majority of individuals belong to a certain attribute (e.g. mythic), while others already think more "rationally", some still pertain to the "magic" mode of thinking. Therefore, there is always a smaller quantity that stays behind, and a minority that jumps ahead. Or, for example, in a culture on the magical-animistic level you will also find persons that have already transcended that level and think in mythic (conop), rational (formop), or trans-rational terms. Again, for the acquirement of the rich content and the logical succession of these stages the reader has to be referred further, especially to Wilber's opus magnum *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*. An overview of important lines of all four quadrants is given in Chart 2.

The concept of "levels" certainly has a normative notion, in the sense that more complexity (e.g. in the organisation of the brain, in the cognitive abilities, and so on) in combination with mechanisms of learning ("*Lernmechanismen*")[21] means a deeper and wider interiority and therefore deeper insight into the world and oneself. But at the same time it is understood that the "higher" levels rely on the "lower" ones, and could not exist without them. There is a hierarchy, but each part in it is appreciated. And the increasing complexity corresponds with both greater possibilities and good chances for greater pathologies: more rationality (formop) leads to more understanding, intelligence, creativity, freedom and self-realisation, but also provides one with the atomic bomb. But this insight allows one to re-establish the notion of cultural evolution in the sense of progress even after the bloody 20th century and a nearly collapsing ecosphere at the beginning of the 21st, if one takes into account the possibility to integrate and therefore "heal" these aberrances in due time.[22]

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[20] Cf. J. Habermas, *Zum Theorienvergleich...*, p. 140.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 134.

[22] One of the first attempts at the dawn of modernity to "think together" historical relativism and philosophical universalism was made by Johann Gottfried Herder. Likewise, in the fifteenth book of his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, we find the notion of stages ("*Stufen*") in nuce, cf.
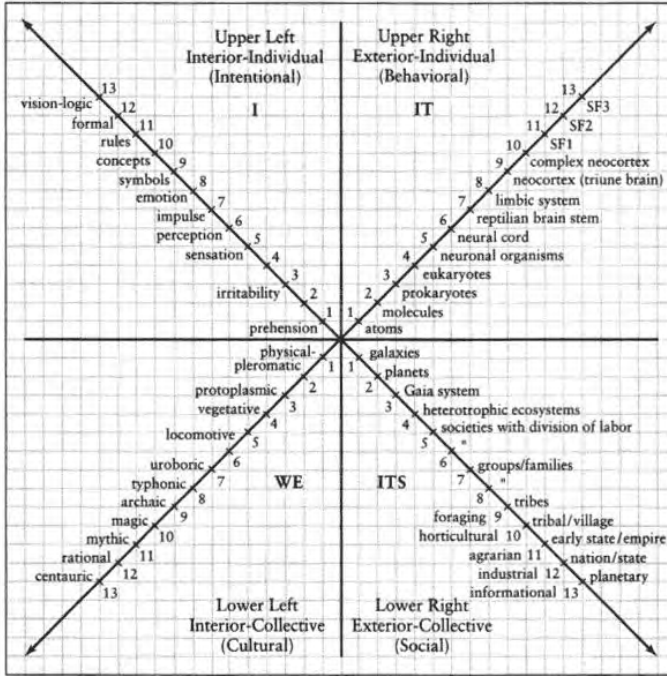
Chart 2. A version of the quadrant model with important developmental lines and stages (from: K. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality...*, p. 198).

The appreciation of "higher" stages does not aim to devalue less complex structures (individuals, societies, etc.), as the anthropologists of the 19th century maintained it:

> The word "level" is not meant in a judgmental or exclusionary fashion, but simply to indicate that there are important *emergent* qualities that tend to come into being in a discrete or quantum-like fashion, and these developmental jumps or levels are important aspects of many natural phenomena.[23]

From the increasing complexity (and therefore inner "depth") of a human individual, derives, for example, its receptivity for deeper levels of reality. One might in fact go so far as to say that those aspects of reality for which an entity has not yet developed receptors are *inexistent for it, because it cannot perceive them*.[24]

J.G. Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit, Werke in fünf Bänden*, Vierter Band, Berlin, Weimar 1978, pp. 357 et seq.

[23] K. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology...*, p. 33, italics in original, cf. footnote 50.

[24] And this is probably the most important reason why in academia one still has to continuously defend oneself if one talks of the reality of ecstatic experiences.

[S]timuli that don't fit the deep structure or regime are simply not registered and might as well not exist (in fact, do not exist, do not disclose themselves for that holon).[25]

Drawing from other developmental psychologists, Wilber adds further perspectives that are still to a large degree collectively neglected in our culture: the possibility of further developments after "rational", which he referrers to as "vision-logic",[26] and others call "dialectical"[27]. This whole realm of possibilities can be summarised as transrational, not negating the rational but encompassing and transcending it, and it goes beyond dialectical modes of thinking. Most evolutionary theorists do not agree on further developments after the rational (dialectical is the furthest anyone goes). And they naturally have to assume that the step they and their culture have reached is the highest there is (for Piaget this is formop, for Hegel dialectical). But at the same time it is not at all clear why processes of natural or cultural evolution should suddenly stop. They are, on the contrary, very likely to go on.[28] Thus, the openness of this model is indicated by small arrowheads at the end of the lines as a reminder that we are talking about a work in progress.

Wilber's great achievement is that he systematically connected and integrated results of psychology, the social sciences, philosophy, cognitive, and natural sciences with further possible (and likely) developments of consciousness. This is highly relevant for researching and understanding ecstasy. "Most of all orthodox Western Psychology fails us when we approach the higher regions of the spectrum of consciousness, ..."[29] And if we look at ecstasy, for instance, it is clear that some sort of system for categorisation is needed that does not automatically judge all forms of ecstasy as pathological or cunning inventions as means for material gain and upward social mobility, as Lewis does.[30] The notion that all quadrants and all levels have to be taken into account is referred to as AQAL.

The Pre-trans-fallacy

Before coming to the application of this model to research on ecstasy, there is one last point that I wish to make that offers an interesting challenge for thinking about religion. When comparing and contrasting different theories about religion, Wilber discovered that most theorists, who regard rationality as the peak of evolution, often characterise all religious phenomena as pre-rational ("magic", which is the reason why they distance themselves from it by researching). Therefore these are naturally

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[25] K. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology...*, p. 67.

[26] *Ibidem*, pp. 266–272.

[27] *Ibidem*, p. 266.

[28] "[E]volution, including the human, involves self-transcendence to new forms of agency and communion that integrate and incorporate both partners in a supersession: not just a wider whole – a horizontal expansion – but a deeper or higher whole – a vertical emergence – which is indeed why 'evolution is the result of self-transcendence at all levels,' and why it is 'self-realization through self-transcendence.'" *Ibidem*, p. 53.

[29] K. Wilber, *Integrale Psychologie*, Freiburg i. Br. 2001, p. 26, my translation.

[30] M. Deecke, *op.cit.*

valued as less than rational and justly excluded from rational institutions, such as universities. But not every mode of thinking or perceiving that cannot quickly be categorised as rational is therefore pre-rational or irrational. For as Wilber and others will not tire in pointing out, beyond rationality there are further developmental stages that envelope rationality but go beyond it, and these are well within human reach (especially if one has aspired to rationality). These are not pre-rational but trans-rational, therefore rational + x.

The next step after rationality would be what Wilber calls "vision-logic" which (among other traits) allows the bringing together of opposites in one thought, and which elsewhere is referred to as dialectical thinking (its equivalent on the cultural quadrant is postmodernity). The content of these stages cannot be outlined here more fully, which would be highly necessary for an appreciation, and I therefore have to relegate it to further reading. But the idea should start to become clear that what the child develops as distinct sets of capacities of greater and more complex understanding can roughly be understood as a repetition of the cultural development of mankind. The misunderstanding of a stage or phenomenon, thought to be pre-rational but in fact trans-rational, is referred to as the pre-trans-fallacy.

3. Consequences for research on ecstasy

Let me now finally come to the last point of this series of articles: what does this all have to do with researching ecstasy and the integration of sociological (I.M. Lewis) and psychological (Maslow, Buber, Teresa of Avila) theories of ecstasy?

Lewis's comprehensive theory works chiefly in one (or possibly two) developmental stages of the LR quadrant, the "mythical" or fundamentalist, where people share in tight-knit, hierarchical relationships and mainly have to find their identities in social roles ("persona"). Lewis's sample material draws extensively from the industrially undeveloped societies of the Maghreb, Central Africa, and India. Here we find segmented and patriarchal structures which make social mobility difficult. They are full of dominator hierarchies – especially concerning the role of women: they are often economically dependent on their husbands, have no access to public offices or power, have a very low legal status, and basically no possibility of changing their fate by their own efforts (all characteristics of levels 10 and 11 in Wilber's system, cf. Chart 2). We noted above that Lewis's main examples of ecstasy and spirit-possession comes from subjugated women. And it is self-evident that from a position of great impotency and helplessness the means to at least modify their fate would take the shape of the means that are available, which are here the means of a "mythical" worldview, since "rational" (formop) means are not yet wholly developed or systematically withheld from them. Here ecstasy in fact advances social status and is therefore used to attain it, helps in releasing societal tension, sometimes brings about wealth and in forms of direct and indirect aggression stabilises the society as a whole. I must add, however, that though also in this stage a kind of ecstasy that is not merely a means to an end but itself an end is possible, it is certainly more the exception than the rule.

The ecstatic *individuals* (whose general mindset does not have to conform to that of his society, since they can be ahead or behind of the common average) in Lewis's interpretation have mainly material gain and societal status on their mind and express these through ecstatic spirit-possession. I would like to maintain that whenever that holds true, the developmental status of the individual will also be found among mythic, mythic-rational,[31] and selves (cf. Chart 2, though the means with the last two would shift to more "rational" modes that publicly makes apparent that it is he or she that is in charge and not an alien spirit). But if the individual belongs to, say, stage 13 and beyond, and we still find ecstatic symptoms, the explanation would have to draw from something else to be convincing. From his selective interpretation, Lewis makes the mistake of overgeneralising and applying it to societies and people that belong to different stages. Though it explains *some*, it certainly does not apply to *all* ecstatic phenomena. Furthermore, the theory leaves individual experience completely neglected (UL). The scope of the theory is almost entirely limited to pre-rational forms of ecstasy and the lower quadrants, mainly LR.

The psychological theories we have looked at have their bias in almost entirely neglecting the kind of ecstasy Lewis was looking at, since they were more interested in transrational developments and wanted to point out their importance. Since the individual self with its higher autonomy really becomes only apparent in the "rational" stage, this led naturally to a less sociological and more psychological point of view and thus was also (but not exclusively) making use of introspective methods to illuminate on this subject matter. It was not the prerational, but the transrational that was being considered here, not the sociological but the individual.

One great tradition of ecstatics that Lewis never takes into account, even though he could easily have found it in the areas he examined, is Sufism. I believe that among the Sufis we would find two important features that could have given greater depth to Lewis's theory: there we find, generally speaking, a higher regard for women, and largely a disregard of material wealth and societal status. These cannot easily be rationalised away by insinuating that the true motivation here would be an even higher status by belonging to a religious elite. The role of women in Sufism is (arguably) one of much more equality and appreciation than of that the sample material draws from, though you find it in the same regions. And the aspiration of poverty and the seeking of loneliness make his main hypothesis for explaining this variation of ecstasy quite questionable. While Lewis neglects those phenomena that are recognised as the cream of the crop of a tradition and focuses exclusively on folk traditions, Buber, Maslow and Teresa do it the other way round: They draw their conclusions by looking exclusively at transrational developments.

The objective quadrant (UR) is the one that is least considered in the humanities, since most scholars here tend to focus on social and cultural issues. However, it can and does help to keep in the back of one's mind the fact that processes that occur in

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[31] "Mythic-rational" is situated somewhere between "mythic" and "rational", though "... it clings to myth, it has to be propped up with rationalisations, because everywhere rationality impinges on it." It uses "all the formidable powers of rationality to prop up a particular, divisive, imperialistic mythology and an aggressively fundamentalistic program of systematic intolerance"; K. Wilber, *Sex, Ecology...*, p. 260.

the individual have correlates in objective structures too, and that "genuine" forms of ecstasy have been made out under controlled circumstances even if it is impossible to apply such methods as EEG or MRT directly to historical (especially dead) subjects. But if one contextualises sufficiently by determining the social-cultural surroundings of the subject and its individual makeup ("character") through other methods (biographical, critical text-interpretation), one is far from making blind guesses but in fact developing grounded hypotheses. Even if they often have to be ignored in actual research for practical reasons, then, the results of neurological inquiries (e.g. brain waves, cortical areas, endogenous opioids, etc.) are to be considered. Are narcotics involved to trigger ecstatic experiences? What is their make-up? What are the most common psychosomatic effects they produce and how do those features relate to the individual case? And then the quadrants could be interrelated. For example: What is the connection between the contents of ecstatic experiences (visionary, auditory) and the belief-system of the subject (UL + LL)? How does society deal with ecstatics (LR → UL)? How does a nonconformist ecstatic deal with society (UL → LR)? And so on.

Thus, to sum up, the two sets of theories actually do not contradict each other, but in fact prove incommensurable, which does, however, not prevent them from complementing each other elegantly: the term "ecstasy" simply carries different meanings (intensional incommensurability) and the theories have an entirely different scope (extensional incommensurability[32]): Lewis's theory focuses on LR-phenomena in prerational stages; Maslow and others look at the UL-phenomena of transrational ecstasies. In order to understand the highly diverging occurrences of ecstasy and analyse them correctly it is necessary that they be described and categorised in relation to the developmental level of the ecstatic individual (UL1), its physical functions (UR), the socio-technical embedding (LR), the cultural environment (LL), and the level of consciousness the ecstatic is submerged in (UL2, regression or transgression[33]).

4. Final Conclusion

In my research on ecstasy, the application of the AQAL Model has contributed greatly to clarifying its role in different contexts. It has also helped me in appreciating valuable theoretical models that I otherwise might have dismissed entirely, since they seemed to negate my personal focus and interest in researching ecstasy. As a consequence, all-encompassing notions of the theories had to be downsized, but at the same time this was compensated by truly understanding their value in their respective fields.

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[32] E. Oberheim, P. Hoyningen-Huene, *The Incommensurability of Scientific Theories* [in:] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2013 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/incommensurability [accessed: 8.06.2013].

[33] Cf. T. Passie, *Trance und Besessenheitszustände* [in:] *Praxis der interkulturellen Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie. Migration und psychische Gesundheit*, München, pp. 358–359.

Many futile and aggravating debates can be spared if researchers simply indicate which side of the quadrant they are working on. This can enhance tolerance and acceptance of different research traditions, drawing from the advantages both sides bring. For those researchers who do not see a sense of direction in cultural development at all, the map of the four quadrants could still serve as a communicative aid or a mode of orientation.

I assume that this scheme could be applied to other fields of research in the scientific study of religions, e.g. in researching rituals. I do not want to overstate its applicability, and cannot judge its operationalisability in other fields. As a "theory of everything" it might lack depth of focus when it comes to detailed analysis. It could be, however, that the overall notion of an integral approach in the study of religions in general will prove to be increasingly meaningful and useful because it gives a clear orienting overview and ends up with better and deeper explanations of human behaviour than reductionist approaches, be they positivistic or phenomenological (hermeneutical). For an assessment of Wilber's work on the study of religions, an extensive and minute criticism of his work would have to follow. Also, for a multi-perspective research on ecstasy the "higher regions of the spectrum of consciousness" must be considered. If It is appropriate to expand *pessimistic* psychological models of human behaviour as Freudian psychoanalysis for the purpose of sociological analysis; it should become equally prevalent to make use of more *optimistic* models that expand the explanatory scheme from the subconscious to the superconscious. I can at least say for the study of ecstasy that leaving the notion of transpersonal states out of the equation does not make a great deal of sense. In the meantime, as there are many benefits that the research of Wilber provides for *some* scholars of religions, I would like to recommend not necessarily the appreciation, but the recognition of his work by *all* scholars.