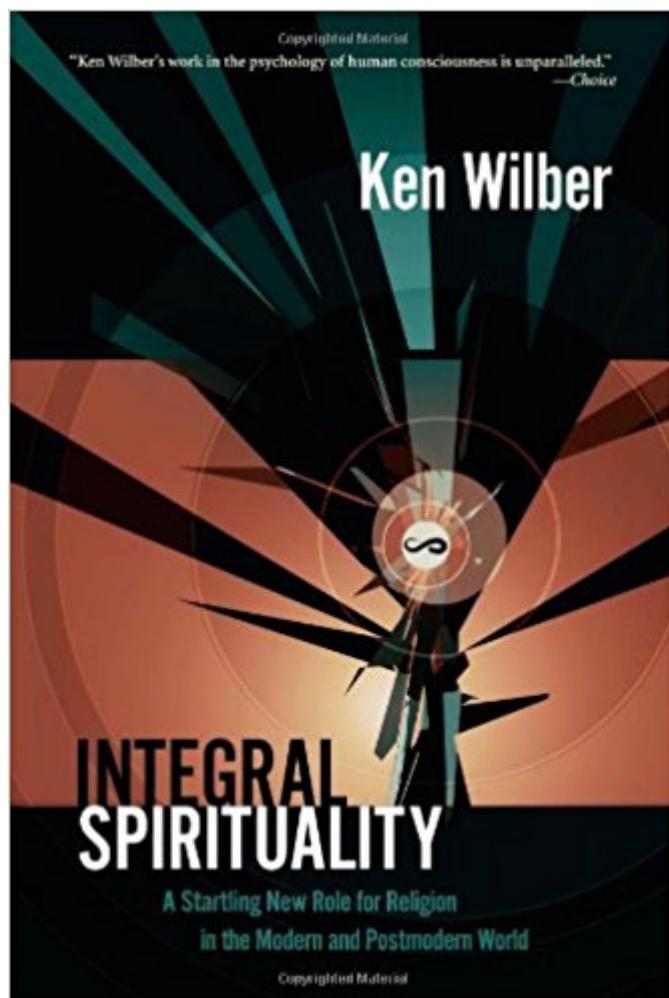


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Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role For Religion In The Modern And Postmodern World



Synopsis

Integral Spirituality is being widely called the most important book on spirituality in our time. Applying his highly acclaimed integral approach, Ken Wilber formulates a theory of spirituality that honors the truths of modernity and postmodernity "including the revolutions in science and culture" while incorporating the essential insights of the great religions. He shows how spirituality today combines the enlightenment of the East, which excels at cultivating higher states of consciousness, with the enlightenment of the West, which offers developmental and psychodynamic psychology. Each contributes key components to a more integral spirituality. On the basis of this integral framework, a radically new role for the world's religions is proposed. Because these religions have such a tremendous influence on the worldview of the majority of the earth's population, they are in a privileged position to address some of the biggest conflicts we face. By adopting a more integral view, the great religions can act as facilitators of human development: from magic to mythic to rational to pluralistic to integral "and to a global society that honors and includes all the stations of life along the way.

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Customer Reviews

In one of his previous books "Sex Ecology and Spirit", Ken Wilber introduced a wildly ambitious schema that (as one previous reviewer accurately calls it) attempts to butt-weld western psychology onto eastern spirituality. His All-Quadrant-All-Levels (AQAL) model is a dizzyingly complex schemata that tries to appease, well, pretty much every major thinker in the eastern and western

canon. Despite the ponderous weight of "Sex, Ecology and Spirit", there were major holes in his exposition, and "Integral Spirituality" was written, I suspect, to plug some of those holes. I believe that there are 2 major problems that Wilber addresses in "Integral Psychology". The first problem is that, although Wilber spent the bulk of "Sex, Ecology and Spirit" savagely critiquing the limits of a menagerie of postmodernist thinking, he did not incorporate the insights of postmodernism into his AQAL model. The second problem is that, in "Sex, Ecology and Spirit", even though he divides the world into four irreducible quadrants in his AQAL model (the individual interior, the individual exterior, the social interior, and the social exterior), he reads the history of the Enlightenment as the differentiation of only three spheres of values (aesthetics, morals and science). Clearly, one sphere of value missing. Scholars of Wilber might find then, that the first 5 chapters of "Integral Spirituality" are a tedious re-tread of the AQAL model found in previous books. But this particular presentation of the AQAL model offers something fundamentally different. It embraces postmodern insights into its core, by providing a much more nuanced discussion of inter-subjectivity.

Integral Spirituality lays out a worldview that tries to encompass and take whatever is of value from as many worldviews as possible. It assumes that no particular position is completely wrong and looks for patterns of meaning across the world's wisdom traditions. Anyone familiar with Wilber will already know this, but for those new to him this point may be useful to mention. There are many reviews that criticize this book for repeating material that is repeated in other books. I agree with these criticisms and I think there is a bit too much of a commercial focus on the website as well. I was expecting less repetition and more editorial discipline, but I still think the book justifies a 4 star rating based on its other merits. Hopefully, Ken will get away from doing this in future publications. What I enjoyed specifically about this book was the material on Integral Methodological Pluralism (although this appears in other places) and the somewhat different focus on an Integral Post-Metaphysics. The material on the shadow and disowned self was also interesting and I'm also glad he included a chapter on an Integral Life Practice. Integral Life practices involve engaging every level of being such as body, emotion, mind, soul and spirit to bring about transformation of consciousness. While this book does indeed contain a lot of recycled material, it is worth purchasing for the new material and some of the new ways that old ideas are presented. Going forward, however, I hope Ken Wilber works more closely with his editors, gets clear on the audience for a particular book and avoids unnecessary repetition and rambling. Ken is certainly a very important philosopher with a useful point of view.

I had the pleasure of teaching this book to a small undergraduate seminar on the Sociology of Religion last quarter. The reaction was decidedly mixed, with some students finding the material to be exciting and mind-expanding, while others, though sympathetic to the ideas, were totally turned off by Wilber's egotism and bad writing. My #1 recommendation to Ken and the Integral Institute is to fully, integrally utilize the talents that are being gathered and produce works that are edited for maximum impact -- there is a world of sentient beings to save, and time is short! Overall, Wilber's analysis is incredibly valuable, and if this is the first of his books you read, you will learn much. However, it is less clear that INTEGRAL SPIRITUALITY adds much to what he has already said. I still recommend THE MARRIAGE OF SENSE AND SOUL as the best introduction to his work. I will limit my substantive comments to a few points of critique: 1) The topic promised by the subtitle is only covered in Chapter Nine, "The Conveyor Belt," and is not examined with the depth or with the respect that it deserves. 2) One of the most fascinating aspects of the book, for anyone who has been following Wilber's project over time, is that he has stopped bashing the "Mean Green Meme" (bad writing exemplified!) and incorporated postmodernism into his AQAL system. Now he's taken to bashing all spiritual authors and teachers who have NOT incorporated postmodernism! 3) As a sociologist and long-time political activist, it is by turns amusing and annoying to me how superficially Wilber treats his lower-left and lower-right collective quadrants (cultural and social).

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