

# SOUL-MAKING DYNAMICS

Evolutionary and Revelatory  
Perspectives on the Human Soul

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“Call the world a ‘vale of soul-making.’  
Then you will find out the use of the world.”  
—*John Keats, Letter to his brother, April 21, 1819*

## Soul-Making Dynamics

I was known as an audacious child—and prone to freak accidents. I had one such accident on a hot and humid summer day at our neighborhood pool in suburban Cincinnati. This strange event changed my life, but it took place in all of ten seconds or even less.

I was just clowning around like any kid should, and thinking I was jumping into the kid’s end of the pool, I instead *jumped into the deep end*. I was just eight years old and not a swimmer. I had expected to gently hit the bottom of the pool, but was so startled by the unexpected depth of the water that I began to panic. Instead of four feet of water I had encountered *ten feet*. For a very frightful moment I was suspended underwater, frantically struggling and churning to get my bearings. Time suddenly slowed down as I entered total panic, about to drown; but before I could take a gulp of water, I was very suddenly pulled free by a vigilant lifeguard.

In that same moment, I had a stark near-death experience. I saw my short life pass before me in a complete review: scenes of parents, siblings, school chums, teachers, animals, my bedroom, riding my bike—an explosion of distinct images of encounters with each important person or thing in my

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young world. And each scene that paraded through had an aura of truth and light around it.

The feeling associated with this instantaneous experience was rapturous, despite the fact that I my body was paralyzed with panic. This poem by Emily Dickenson seems to capture its essence:

The Soul's distinct connection  
With immortality  
Is best disclosed by Danger  
Or quick Calamity—

As Lightning on a Landscape  
Exhibits Sheets of Place—  
Not yet suspected—but for Flash—  
And Click—and Suddenness.

Looking back, I believe this sudden “Danger” gave me a “distinct connection,” a vivid glimpse of my youthful but immortal soul, such as it was. I had an inkling even then: The real me on the inside is *wondrous*. But it is hidden away. There was an unfathomable “person” underneath the surface person I thought I was. It was a sacred self that knows my life better than I do, yet rarely reveals it!

Bearing this in mind, fast-forward a little more than five decades with me. I've undergone a lifelong quest—like so many of us—to attain knowledge of my authentic self, my soul's essence. And I've so often wondered: What exactly is the soul? Where is it located? Is the soul the same thing as the “spirit” or the “heart,” or is it something distinct? Is the soul created over time? Or does it get gifted to us somehow,

fully formed? How can I gain further knowledge or revelation about the human soul?

My tiny life review at age eight was the first hint of an answer, a personal mini-revelation of sorts: The soul *evolves* and is based on *experience*; the soul contains our original life experiences that are cumulatively stored up within us—everything significant right up to that exquisite moment when we are granted a glimpse of it. In fact, I believe that we are the subjects of something I now call *soul-making dynamics*. To paraphrase the poet John Keats, the world is a place of soul-making—and *that's* the “use of the world.”

In this short speculative book, I will depict the human soul as a species of the higher mind that is quintessentially *evolutionary* and *experiential*—a sacred vehicle of personal identity and immortality that contributes something crucial to the destiny of the evolving cosmos-at-large. And it possesses the makings of an eternal life, provided that we truly *want* to survive death.

In this piece, I present this conception as a hypothesis, one that is based on scholarly study, my own life experiences—and yes, revelation.

By the time I was twenty years old, I had discovered *The Urantia Book*,<sup>1</sup> the only text I have yet found that provides a seemingly authoritative account of the soul. This speculative essay is my attempt to not only to represent its otherworldly

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<sup>1</sup> *The Urantia Book* (Uversa Press, 2012). This 2096-page text was first published in 1995 by the Urantia Foundation and now exists in 14 languages. About a million copies are in print. My introductory essay, first published in the online edition of EnlightenNext magazine in 2009, can be found here: <http://evolving-souls.org/urantia-revelation/>.

teachings about the soul and the other elements of the self, but also to compare its description of the human soul to many others that have appeared over the centuries. I offer the Urantia Book's concept of the soul as I personally understand it—and as a model to be tested, examined, and compared—not at all as a finished truth to be accepted as doctrine.

## **A New Model of Soul Evolution**

Allow me to provide a more technical definition, which we will soon unpack: *The human soul is the largely unconscious harvest of the energetic reality of those human experiences that we generate through our more significant personal decisions. These daily choices for value or meaning become immortalized in—and as—the evolving self-consciousness, and in turn these newly spiritized contents of the growing soul, in each instance, contribute to the unfolding of cosmic evolution toward perfection.*

This definition paraphrases the even more complex understanding provided in the Urantia Revelation, but adds some interpretative twists in the light of new discoveries since the publication of *The Urantia Book* in 1955, which we will discuss.

But you may be wondering: What on earth has the capacity to “spiritize” or “immortalize” my thoughts and experiences? To get at this, please consider a key distinction, that between “soul” and “spirit.” Traditionally, the soul is tied up with our psychological life. By contrast, the spirit is seen as transcendent and pure. Many great wisdom traditions teach that a spark of divinity dwells within us, which I think is epitomized by the phrase “indwelling spirit.” It's also known

as “atman,” “higher self,” “inner spirit,” “spirit-self,” or by the gnostic-sounding Urantia Book term: “God fragment.” According to the assumptions of our model, it is this indwelling spirit or God fragment that seizes upon our significant thoughts, feelings, and decisions. It operates outside of our awareness but produces a profound result. It literally *creates* the soul by reaping the daily experiences of the human mind and psyche.

This duo of soul and spirit will be essential players in this drama, but a critically supporting role is played by yet a third element: what we will call the “existential self,” “Unique Self,” or “personhood.” My novel description of an evolving, experiential, and “immortalizing” human soul is in part made possible by newly emerging concepts of human personhood, including Unique Self theory.<sup>2</sup>

Recall that the term *ontology* refers to the study of real being, of that which unqualifiedly and substantially exists. According to my speculative model of the soul, both the indwelling spirit and our Unique Self are conceived of as ontological or existential realities, yet each has radically different functions in regard to soul-making. In turn, I sharply distinguish these two entities from the evolving human soul. While I depict both the indwelling spirit and Unique Self as unchanging in essence, the two are still able to provide the functional and structural setting for soul-making dynamics.

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2 My use of the phrase “Unique Self” draws inspiration from Marc Gafni’s theories of selfhood. See *Your Unique Self: The Radical Path to Personal Enlightenment* (Integral Publishers, 2012) and most recently *Self In Integral Evolutionary Mysticism: Two Models And Why They Matter* (Integral Publishers, 2015).

To better grasp the significance of the Urantia Book's revelations about the soul, I trace the unfolding of earlier notions of soul, spirit, and selfhood—both East and West and especially in Ken Wilber's mature thought—contrasting these older ideas with my own interpretation of the Urantia Revelation. The advances made in Wilber's theory of integral psychology, which I consider to be state-of-the-art, require that we make a several excursions into his integral theory as we compare it with the integrative psychology revealed in the Urantia Revelation. In addition, my model of soul evolution draws empirical support from paranormal evidence gathered by scientific research into NDEs (near-death experiences), specifically the life-review phenomenon. And in my case it all got started in that swimming-pool NDE that first opened the eyes of my soul.

## **The “Sacred Trinity” and the Evolving Soul**

I submit that we can better understand soul-making if we apportion three distinct aspects of self: the soul and the companion indwelling spirit, bound together by the moral choices of the Unique Self. I call these three the *sacred trinity*. To begin with, think of the soul or subtle body<sup>3</sup> as a domain

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<sup>3</sup> In esoteric literature, the phrase “subtle body” is often used to designate the domain of the human soul as distinct from the physical body and the higher or spiritual self. Classically, this concept of the subtle realm took the middle place among the three energies or bodies that the wisdom traditions thought to be present at birth, these being *gross*, *subtle* (or *psychic* or *mental*), and *causal* (or *spiritual*). These “bodies” stand for increasingly rarefied levels in the spectrum of ontologically real energetic substances (or “a gradation of frequencies,” as some might say). In addition, at least according to Ken Wilber, these realms are correlated

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of increasingly purposive and progressive soul-making, one wherein moral choices for true values catalyze a spiritualizing effect in the psyche, which in turn contributes to the progress toward completion of an “oversoul of the evolving cosmos” that we will examine soon.

We’ve noted that, according to the Urantia Revelation, any decision or experience that has meaning or value, no matter how ordinary, has the effect of kindling an immortalizing “down-grasp” by the indwelling spirit. The Urantia text further reveals that, in this living moment of dynamic experience, a potentially eternal “soul memory” gets deposited. (A full explication is to come later in this piece.)

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with—and provide support to—the existence of three major *states of consciousness*. These fundamental states are also present at infancy: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. Wilber’s helpful synthesis of the core teachings of the wisdom traditions indicates that these three basic states unfold through stages (or “state-stages”) and that the underlying spectrum of intrinsic energies (gross to subtle to causal) acts as the unchanging “host” or energetic container of this growth. We progress through holarchical stages as we generate ever more refined or expansive states of awareness as a result of our life experiences and quest for value and meaning. In other words, the energetic container itself stays the same, but the correlated states of awareness (waking, dreaming, and deep sleep) unfold in stages or levels as the child grows to maturity.

For example, in regard to the waking state, the growing child increasingly engages with higher and more complex realities through education and socialization. Likewise, the dreams of an adult become much more sophisticated than those of children—containing many more complex ideas, feelings, images, symbols, and archetypes. The same holds for experiences within the causal realm, which through devoted meditation can host increasing levels of self-realization that allow us to remain conscious even during deep sleep.

I accept this general heuristic scheme. But I believe a more advanced understanding of human reality is possible now in the light of new revelation, one that offers more explanatory power than the hard-won wisdom and evolving science on this subject that is best represented by Wilber’s work.

A strange notion this is—as if the soul has its own “brain” that remembers. And in a real sense this notion is correct. These memory deposits are *constitutive* of the growing soul and are not to be confused with transient material memories in the mortal brain. It’s amazing to consider that these “credits” result from a momentary intervention by the God fragment into the mental life of its human subject. In the words of the Urantia text: “Every time man makes a reflective moral choice, he immediately experiences a new divine invasion of his soul.” (196:3.20)

In an expanded definition, we can say that soul-making is the dynamic process of the evolution of unique souls driven toward perfection by the exigencies of highly personal moral choices for increasingly higher values such as truth, beauty, goodness, and love. My allusion here to “unique souls” points to something broached earlier: the truth of unique existential selfhood. Following the Urantia Revelation, we now offer the hypothesis that Unique Self is associated with the mystery of *free will*, so that it too is crucial in soul-making. The freedom to choose confers upon the individual, in each moment, a living opportunity for new experience that is unprecedented and entirely unique in the cosmos. Freedom and uniqueness live together—this should come as no surprise!

We posit that each evolving soul is unique because it is associated with (but is by no means identical to) a Unique Self that is conceived of as pre-given by deity, as we explain in a later section. This ontological selfhood is utterly changeless in itself, but endows the mind of its subject with the capacity of moral autonomy. As such, this notion of ontic selfhood does not require a referent or any contextualization; nor does it evolve—it just *is*. Unique Self is an individuation of

the absolute selfhood of the existential God, the I AM. This adamant self, in truth, has no “Kosmic address,” if I may borrow a phrase from integral theory.

In response, each individuated instance of the “I AM” offers back to God an entirely unique perspective on cosmic evolution. Each such entity is unique alongside one another, unique in all eternity, and thereby uniquely contributing to the completion of what we shall call “experiential Deity”—by virtue of its freedom to choose and grow through the vicissitudes of experience.

We can now turn to our allied notion of *universal evolution toward perfection*. This idea implies a *telos*, direction, or destiny of evolution—a far-distant goal of ultimate fulfillment in the domains of self, culture, and society—some sort of grand denouement that expresses a culminating purpose of our age-long strivings for progress.

I envision that *such a goal of evolutionary completion is at least implicit in our soul-making, moral decisions*. And this is why moral action, love, and altruistic service have a central place in this cosmology of the self. This view of soul-making contrasts with theories derived from monistic Eastern teachings—such as Ken Wilber’s—that contain a bias toward “consciousness evolution” as opposed to loving relationships. Theologically, we are speaking here of a confrontation between nondual monism and trinitarian theism.

We arrive at soul-evolving decisions in those moments when we feel and think through a given moral predicament or opportunity, and then freely *choose* to activate ever-more adaptive meanings and values in our relational experiences of the world. Or we may fail to do so, in which case the soul stagnates or even defaults on its charter to grow toward spirit.

All of this is the same as saying that evolution is *purposive* and that the individual soul's growth to perfection is the determining factor in cosmic evolution. When we speak here of perfection, we mean that soul-making dynamics leads inexorably to the soul's own completion and fulfillment—not in the blissful passivity of nondual realization—but ultimately as a *fusion* of our evolving soul with the indwelling spirit entity. This grand fusion, as we will elucidate later, initiates an eternal partnership in post-enlightenment realms of ascending afterlife experience on higher worlds—perhaps the ultimate meaning of “getting off the wheel.”

Fusion of soul with spirit is the *telos*. Such a fusion can occur during bodily existence, as evidenced by the rainbow-body phenomenon of Tibetan masters. It is also alluded to in biblical records of the resurrection of Jesus and the bodily “ascent” of Elijah (2 Kings 2:11), possibly Enoch (Gen 5:19), and in the Catholic dogma of the bodily “assumption” of the Virgin Mary to heaven. *The Urantia Book* depicts such fusion events as routine during the soul's ascent into higher non-material worlds and as common on more advanced material worlds but extremely rare on our planet.

Always bear in mind that this new model of the soul relies especially on the crucial distinction between the soul as an evolutionary, experiential reality and the indwelling spirit as a self-acting, existential reality impinging on and guiding human consciousness; equally crucial is that all of this transformative activity occurs in an environment of existential and unchanging personhood endowed with the prerogatives of relative free will. Our “sacred trinity” houses human endowments that have substantive reality and exist in separate but

intimately related domains that all contribute their own part to the ultimate fusion event.

This paper is offered in part as a correction to and enhancement of integral theory, and as an explication of a core teaching of the Urantia Revelation. Drawing from the Urantia material and from the data of NDEs (near-death experience), we depict the soul as an evolving yet ontological substance that literally immortalizes each and every poignant life experience that involves aspiration for higher values. This results in what depth psychologist James Hillman calls “the third, the middle position”—an evolving subtle-realm entity long known to wisdom traditions as the human soul. This presentation also offers a teleological theory of a “God of evolution” who becomes the synthesis of the collective soul evolution of all humans.

## **Traditional Theories of Soul and Spirit**

In this section we compare and contrast our hypothesis of the “sacred trinity” with key teachings in the world’s wisdom traditions. Most esoteric teachings of the past hold to some doctrine of the soul, and most depict the soul as an enduring entity or ontological substance of ultimate value. (Perhaps the singular exception in the world’s major religions is Buddhism.) The soul is usually held to be both immaterial and potentially immortal, but it is rarely described as an *evolutionary* acquirement or a repository of one’s life experience as such, nor is it clearly distinguished from other possible attributes of selfhood, such as the reasoning intellect, the indwelling spirit, or the Unique Self. Perhaps the epitome of this conflation of

attributes is reached in Descartes, who collapses the possible metaphysical components of the self into a thinking intellect with otherworldly divine qualities that stands far apart from the body as its physical vehicle.

In traditional Western religious thought deriving from Abraham or from ancient Greek thought, the material body supports the activities of human will and consciousness, whereas the soul is described as an immortal essence that survives the death of the body, later to be reunited with it in a “heavenly form” in a higher world. (Or it may be deposited in a new body through reincarnation, as in many gnostic or Platonic systems). In this essentially “dualist” conception, classically rooted in Platonism, the soul is also understood to be the seat of personhood—for if the “soul” that was originally linked to one’s body survives its dissolution, this means that the real person has survived death and entered into an afterlife. This surviving entity is the personal identity, or perhaps the *imago dei* (image of God) that is embedded in or somehow associated with the soul—this being the vague biblical notion that God bestows a stamp of intrinsic divine status on each individual at birth. In those traditions that hold to this notion of an *imago dei* (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), there is no consensus about the meaning of the term.

We have noted that, in the perennial esotericism found in the Christian and Jewish mystics, in Sufism (in its distinction between *qalb* and *ruh*), and in some gnostic and Neo-Platonic teachings as well as important Hindu schools, a clear distinction can arise between “soul” (or *psyche* or *subtle body*) and “spirit” (causal body, *pneuma*, or *atman*). But historically these terms have more often been used interchangeably and

confusingly—or are entirely conflated—especially in biblical Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

In those unusual cases in which “spirit” is sharply defined in Western scriptures or mystery teachings and thereby distinguished from the soul, it refers to an otherworldly entity or pre-existent “divine spark” that abides within us as a gift from a higher being. In ancient times many gnostic sects, notably Valentinianism, posited an indwelling *pneuma* that was trapped in the physical world. But perhaps the purest version of this notion emerges much later in liberal Quakerism, with its teaching of the “inward light,” re-baptized in the late nineteenth century as the “inner light” by the popular Quaker writer Rufus Jones. By far the most sophisticated presentation of an indwelling spirit in any Christ-oriented system is that

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<sup>4</sup> The influence of the great Christian mystics as well as the discoveries of modern psychology have led many modern Christians beyond classical Neo-Platonic dualism toward an awareness of a spectrum of levels of consciousness noted earlier. They may for example espouse a three-fold (“trichotomic”) view of human nature, which characterizes humans as consisting of a body, soul (*psyche*), and spirit (*pneuma*). But Christians (and Jews) are handicapped by the fact that the terms “soul” and “spirit” are used interchangeably in many biblical passages, and so it is well noted that the New Testament writers, following Paul, hold to a general dichotomy or fundamental duality: the view that each of us is comprised of flesh and “soul-spirit,” and that the two poles are opposed to each other in a war of sorts, which only by faith in the grace of Jesus Christ can be resolved in favor of salvation and survival after death. Nevertheless, the possibility of a clear distinction between soul and spirit was latent even in Hebrew scripture, and was evident at times in New Testament terminology. The Hebrew word *nefesh* (originally referring to a tiny replica of the human body) was translated as *psuche* (“psyche”). The Hebrew word *ruakh*, “vital breath,” came to be translated as *pneuma* (spirit), which later becomes *pneumatic hagio* (the Holy Spirit), which takes on a special meaning after Pentecost. The conflation of the two terms in the New Testament was rooted in the fact that *nefesh* and *ruakh* can refer, in Semitic thought, to aspects of life or the vital principle.

found in the Urantia Revelation, especially in Papers 107 and 108, with its teaching of the “God fragment” within.

By some interpretations, it may also be said that traditional Chinese religion distinguished soul from the spirit, as *yang* and *yin*. The Egyptians at times distinguished two entities known as the *ka* and the *ba*; the soul (*ba*) contained spiritual characteristics unique to each individual, and the *ka* was the pre-existent life force. The various versions of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* often describe a judgment after death, called the “Weighing of the Heart” ritual, in which the heart (which recorded good and bad deeds during life) was weighed on a scale against “truth and justice.” If the person was judged sufficiently moral, then an ascent of the *ba* into the next world could occur. This afterlife scenario provides perhaps the first ancient version of an ascending personal soul of the sort that is advocated in this essay.

Plato is of course the original source in the West of “substance dualism.” His dialogues depict the human body as a lesser reality that is distinct from the immortal soul, which is the source of life itself. The soul pre-existed the body, and was destined to survive the death of the body. In Plato’s *Phaedo*, Socrates teaches his students that after his death, his soul will for a time exist on its own “in another world.” It will be able to think and feel and know itself *as* himself, as Socrates, and will eventually be reborn in subsequent bodies.

Plato conflates intellect, soul, spirit, and personhood, but still manages to provide a rich concept of the ontological soul. In general, Plato believed that the soul is eternal—certainly not experiential or evolutionary—and that it repeatedly incarnates; that true knowledge (“innate ideas”) abides in the soul from eternity, but that these ideas are forgotten in the

trauma of birth. The purpose of education is the *recovery* of what one has forgotten upon entering a new body. (Please see the appendix on Plato's theory of soul.)

Whereas Plato was a dualist, Aristotle was a monist in regard to the human person. Aristotle represents a significant minority position in Western tradition that holds that no transcendent spirit of any sort exists and further, that the soul may indeed be the seat of reason, insight, and identity—and it may even be incorporeal—but it is *not* immortal; in other words, there can be no instance of a soul without the presence of the material body, nor a human body without a soul. Soul and body are seen as one in this monist conception, but the word “soul” is used to refer to a native capacity of a person to feel, think, perceive, or make decisions, rather than a separate substance that acts on its own.

In *De Anima* and elsewhere, Aristotle laid aside the idea that the soul is a distinct and eternal substance, roundly criticizing Plato's logical arguments for its existence. For Aristotle, the soul is instead the active principle or “form” of the body. A sculptor, for example, gives form to his materials and creates a statue of a person, thus making his raw materials seem almost animate. In the same way, the soul is the form that allows the body to activate itself—or, as Aristotle would say, “strive for its full actualization.”<sup>5</sup>

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5 Consider the human eye, for example: the actual form of the eye is what imparts to it the capacity to see. Its morphology “actualizes” the eye by allowing it to fulfill its practical function. In that sense, vision can't be understood as a separate substance that is somehow a thing apart from the physical eye. By the same token, our ability to engage in abstract thought, said Aristotle, may be a grand thing—possibly something divine—but it is merely another (albeit higher) form or capacity intrinsic to the body, which is mortal.

Western thought inherited an antinomy of sorts between its Platonic and Aristotelian lineages—with the soul being an immortal, ontological entity divinely endowed with reason and innate ideas according the Platonic traditions, versus the Aristotelian view of a mortal “soul” that is intrinsically embedded in physical form and function.

Although classical Christian thought, especially in the Hellenistic East, tends toward Plato’s substance dualism, the medieval scholastics in Western Europe constructed a viable alternative: Thomas Aquinas attempted to overhaul Aristotle’s anti-dualism, constructing an Aristotelian edifice around the Christian dogma of the immortality and resurrection of the soul. Yes, the body and soul were a unity as Aristotle had insisted, but it was a complex unity. Given that the soul is the abstract “form” of the body, it was truly a spiritual substance that could lead a separate existence after death.

But in all cases, salvation for Christians meant the reconstitution of the *whole man* in the afterlife, both body *and* soul. This afterlife unity of body and soul *must* be so, they believed, because Jesus himself had experienced bodily resurrection while on earth. It was now concluded by the Biblical writers and the Church Fathers that the example of the Incarnate Savior establishes for all time the path to conquer death.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Jews had no previous established belief in an afterlife for the soul, for in the times of Jesus, the Pharisees believed in a resurrection after death, but the Sadducees and others repudiated the idea of survival. Jesus’ followers determined that Jesus’ resurrection makes us capable of having our own personal resurrection, first of our soul immediately upon death, and then of our literal terrestrial body as it rejoins the soul after the general resurrection to come at the “End of Days.” As the idea matured into later Catholic doctrine, the general sequence became as follows: After death, the individual soul is judged. It is either sent to Purgatory for purification and rehabilitation, to heaven for an existence of eternal bliss, or is relegated to hell.

With the notable exception of esoteric Eastern Christian teachings associated with the Orthodox Church, the soul was not typically depicted as evolving toward perfection during terrestrial experience and in an afterlife of ascension. Rather, it is presented as a static entity that indwells us in this life that can be contaminated by immoral acts or sinful thoughts. The Roman Catholic rationale for judgment and the possibility of an afterlife was as follows. Humanity had fallen with Adam, and the human will was broken and sinful. We could be regenerated only by grace that resulted from our faith in Christ, and not by our decisions or even our behaviors outside of that grace—at least that was the Augustinian view that came to dominate Catholic doctrine. The Atonement of humankind provided by the incarnation of Christ and his death on the cross made possible a “one-shot” salvation of sorts, which was echoed later in the Evangelical Protestant emphasis on being “born again.” This redemption event was a single consecration of belief that in itself ensured eternal life.

The idea that the virtuous efforts of an experiencing self could generate a surviving soul did not exist in the early Western Christian theological equation. Saint Augustine offered many intriguing concepts of the soul, but he was unsure of how the soul was generated. He conceived of the human soul as endowed with reason (as opposed to animals, which also had souls), an endowment that enabled the soul to control the body; yet it was unable to salvage itself for

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But regardless of the soul's afterlife status, it will unite again with the body on the “Last Day.” At the dispensational resurrection of the dead, the bodies of all of the dead would reunite with the detached soul that had gone before it to the heavenly or hell realms.

survival after death because of soul's pedigree of Original Sin stemming from Adam. The human soul was co-extensive with the body and was intrinsically self-aware. It was more or less transparent to the reflective mind, but it was not able to evolve on its own through moral action. After death the soul would be reunited with the body after the general resurrection of souls at the end of time.<sup>7</sup>

As on earth, the Christian soul's heavenly existence was also seen as static and unchanging; the surviving person does not live on in higher worlds in a state a dynamic unfolding through experience. In other words, there were no higher stages of personal growth after the reuniting of the body and soul after the Last Judgment—only the eternal bliss of heaven. Only in the visions and revelations of Immanuel Swedenborg in the eighteenth century did the heavenly life come to be seen as one involving moral progression and relationships with others (even including heavenly child rearing and marriage).

The traditional Christian doctrine of being blissfully reunited with God in a static afterlife echoes the classical Eastern conception according to which the soul or *atman* exits the wheel of reincarnation and returns to bliss in the sea of consciousness or Brahman, as a drop dissolves into an ocean. And this ancient notion shares some features with Ken Wilber's emphasis—at least in his earlier work—on formless nondual consciousness as the highest realization, which he derives in part from the *Advaita* teaching that Brahman

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<sup>7</sup> See Goetz and Taliaferro, *A Brief History of the Soul* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p 32-47.

is impersonal, unchanging, and utterly beyond any I-Thou relationship.

Eastern Christianity's *theosis* teaching, by contrast, conceives of some version of an evolving soul and provides an important bridge between such visions of heavenly stasis and modern developmental psychology as well as more recent popular depictions of "life after life" found in the burgeoning phenomenon of near-death experiences.

According to the Eastern Christian Fathers, the ultimate aim and purpose of human life was defined as *theosis*, deification, or "divinization." The Eastern Fathers focused on Jesus' teaching that "ye are gods" (see John 10:34) and urged believers to engage in a "growth in grace" so as to "become perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matt 5:48) This doctrine culminated a profound line of Patristic thought that began with St. Athanasius in the fourth century, but was largely lost to Western Christianity especially after Augustine. Athanasius' central argument to the Council of Nicaea, which directly led to the formulation of the doctrine of the Incarnation, was also the conceptual basis of the later teaching of *theosis*; he declared that if Jesus is not both fully God and fully man, then we cannot logically share in the divine nature. His famous line about the Incarnation epitomizes the Orthodox concept of *theosis*: "He became man so that man might become God."<sup>8</sup> The Orthodox mystics relied

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<sup>8</sup> This doctrine was the basis of "hesychastic" heart-spirituality and was inherited in part from the so-called Desert Fathers who founded Christian monasticism. It was systematized in the sixth century by St. John Climacus of Sinai. Climacus essentially used Neo-Platonic categories to evoke a holistic approach to unceasing prayer. Striking a theme that became crucial in later theological developments, Climacus and his contemporaries did not pose a contrast between the body and mind or spirit as

on a doctrine of soul evolution that shares important features with the revealed view of the evolutionary soul offered in this essay, but never clearly conceived of a Unique Self or of an eventual fusion of the soul with the indwelling spirit.



Let us turn now for a moment to Asia to trace its contrasting ideas of soul, spirit, and personhood, as we continue our global survey of traditional beliefs.

It is far to say that the ancient Vedanta adepts penetrated to depths unprecedented in humanity's religious history. Doing so meant casting aside the symbolism and ceremonialism of the Brahman priests, then plunging into a devoted effort to actually experience the truth that lies beneath the world of flux. Deep within the person—concluded these sages—exists an eternal, incorporeal, intelligent “self.” The esoteric branches of Hinduism have since taught that this spirit-self constitutes the existential presence of a supreme deity. This distinction resolved itself into the concept of the indwelling *atman*—the microcosm of the “Self”—the perfect mirror of *Brahman*, who was the macrocosmic essence of the transcendent godhead. “A liberated person sees no difference between his own *atman* and *Brahman*, and between *Brahman*

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developed later in the West. They did not privilege any aspect of the human organism as being closer to the divine vision than any other. Instead, they depicted all elements of the human person as equally “fallen” in the face of God's utter transcendence, and thereby all parts—body, mind, imagination, and soul (compositely represented as “the heart”)—as equally benefiting from the gifts of grace conferred upon the believer practicing *hesychia*—noetic stillness and prayer of the heart. See my essay “Eastern Orthodox Christianity; Hesychia, Theosis, and The Urantia Book” at: [http://urantia-book.org/archive/sfj/orthodox\\_christianity\\_urantia.htm](http://urantia-book.org/archive/sfj/orthodox_christianity_urantia.htm)

and the universe.” (*Adhyatma Upanisad*). As we will later see, this conception is ratified by the Urantian notion of the indwelling spirit, a literal fragment of God.

Cosmically speaking, the *atman* was an impersonal entity; so also was the subtle body that was attached to it and that kept it in bondage to the law of karma (at least according to a later appearing doctrine). “Karmas” and life impressions (*samskaras*) were deposited in what might be called a subtle-body reservoir (*karmashaya*), but this repository was not a uniquely personal and experiential soul as we have conceived it here. One’s deposit of karmic debt merely contributed to the operation of a mysterious, impersonal mechanism—the inexorable law of karma—that generated the characteristics of one’s next incarnation.<sup>9</sup>

In this classic Vedanta teaching, the virtuous effort of an aspirant did not yield any new value in an evolving universe. It did not generate an immortalizing soul that contributes to cosmic evolution while conserving and expressing the moral

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<sup>9</sup> “*Atman* can be defined only through negating any personal attributes. Although it constitutes the existential substrata of human existence, *atman* cannot be the carrier of one’s ‘spiritual progress,’ because it cannot record any data produced in the illusory domain of psycho-mental existence. . . . As a necessary aid in explaining the reincarnation mechanism, Vedanta adopted the concept of a subtle body (*sukshma-sharira*) which is attached to *atman* as long as its bondage lasts. This is the actual carrier of karmic debts. However, this ‘subtle body’ cannot be a form of preserving one’s personal attributes, i.e., of any element of one’s present conscious psycho-mental life. The facts recorded by the subtle body are a sum of hidden tendencies or impressions (*samskara*) imprinted by karma as seeds that will generate future behavior and personal character. . . . The reservoir of karmas is called *karmashaya* . . . This deposit of karma merely serves as a mechanism for adjusting the effects of karma in one’s life. It dictates in an impersonal and mechanical manner the new birth (*jati*), the length of life (*ayu*) and the experiences that must accompany it (*bhoga*).” See <http://www.comparativereligion.com/reincarnation.html>

choices of a unique personality, and which later fuses with the indwelling spirit (according to our theory). The entire process was impersonal and inexorable; no Unique Self here, only the illusions of the personal ego that would entirely dissolve upon the achievement of liberation from the suffering of a bodily existence.

It is worth pointing out that these teachings also differed from classic Platonism and gnosticism that asserted the pre-existence of an immortal soul in a celestial world and its fall into a human body. The soul, now trapped in matter, only needed to be recollected and purified through the philosophic effort that led to the cognition of the ideal Forms—those innate ideas contained in the soul from eternity. Plato never conceived of a “subtle self” containing traces of one’s previous life that would determine the conditions of the next incarnation.

For his part, the Buddha added a profound corrective to Vedanta concepts of the *atman*: he did not deny the existence of moral, intellectual, or volitional aspects of this divine self, but he stumbled at the notion of an eternal, unchanging *atman*; there was a *functional* self, yes, but not an ontological soul or spirit. The attributes of this self may be immaterial, but immateriality in no sense meant permanence. All possible attributes of this *atman* were to be considered ephemeral. His predecessors had harbored a psychological delusion, a subtle attachment to a reified “it” that obscured the prospects of a deeper penetration.

But it is important to note that the later Buddhist doctrines of an indwelling *Buddha-nature* may have marked the return of the classical *atman* in a new form. And we should mention that the Urantia Revelation (see Paper 93:11) praises

this very concept as one that closely approximates its own teaching about the spirit-self, an indwelling gift of God that is not exactly impersonal, but is rather *pre-personal*, gaining “personalness” through its dramatic fusion with both the soul and the abiding Unique Self.

Allowance was made within classic Buddhism for the transmigration of moral characteristics into the next life; actions lead to consequences, but there is no ultimate “actor.” *Atman* is not identical with *Brahman*—Buddha found no evidence for either one. To believe in an eternal self is to hold to an artificial and ignorant construction. Reality itself is *anatman*—devoid of selfhood. What we experience as a person is not a thing but a process; there exists only collections of impersonal and impermanent elements arranged into evanescent configurations by the moral force of past deeds.

Not unlike the West, the great traditions of origin in India resolved themselves into a substance dualism (*atman* versus the illusory embodied ego-self) and various renditions of a Buddhist monism or the “pregnant” emptiness of *shunyata*—which shares some of the characteristics of Aristotle’s monism.

## **Integral Theory on Soul and Spirit**

With this as background, let’s move on to inquire into the conception and significance of our trinity of soul, spirit, and unique personhood as these may be depicted in Ken Wilber’s work, which constitutes perhaps the most useful synthesis to date of the best teachings of the wisdom traditions and modern depth psychology.

We learn from Wilber that it was the historic task of modern and post-modern criticism to disparage the metaphysical verities of the pre-modern past, essentially rejecting (and later ignoring) the notions of soul and spirit inscribed in the world's wisdom traditions.

As we have noted, these traditions were already problematic given the inheritance of a philosophic split between monism (in its Aristotelian, Advaita, or Buddhist versions) and dualism of Platonism and classic Hinduism. The “disaster of modernity,” as Wilber calls it, would go much further, nearly dissociating body (and brain) from mind, soul, and spirit—think Descartes. With the later triumph of scientific materialism, modernity now simply jettisoned any possibility that these attributes of selfhood had any ontological reality. It has fallen to Wilber to shepherd us through the dualism versus monism problem in the pre-modern traditions, and then navigate from there to a new framework that purports to transcend both the modern and postmodern critiques of metaphysics, but still enshrines their essential achievements. The result is a new evolutionary holism (or what Wilber now calls “integral post-metaphysics”) that permits an acceptable meeting point between religious experience and scientific facts and that offers a helpful framework for our effort to understand the experiential soul.

The early work of Wilber builds upon the highest “divinization” teachings of the East and West. For example, in the early book *Transformations of Consciousness* (Shambhala, 1986), Wilber and his coauthors compare the *theosis* teachings of Eastern Orthodox Christianity with similar teachings about consciousness progression in Islam and in Eastern religions. In this early work, he also exalts the “perennial” notion of a

grand hierarchy of universal levels of existence, the so-called Great Chain of Being—perennial because it can be detected in almost all traditions worldwide.<sup>10</sup> After showing how the Great Chain can be “temporalized” and then “quadrated,” he grew beyond these distinctions in his later thought, which as far as this study is concerned, reaches its culmination in the post-metaphysics of *Integral Spirituality*.<sup>11</sup>

But before we go further, let’s consider a possible problem with following Wilber into this territory. As noted earlier, some have pointed to an apparently inescapable bias in Wilber’s thought. I refer here especially to his frequent practice of borrowing from nondual Vedanta and Buddhist terminology and categories in his search for key distinctions in his philosophic analysis of consciousness. The semantic texture is often unmistakable. We’ve earlier summarized how he generally characterizes the higher or transpersonal levels of self as conforming to a series of terms commonly used in Eastern religious thought: that is, the progression from *gross to psychic to subtle to causal*. He depicts the ultimate disappearance of the self into a blissful nondual or unitive state as the highest achievement of the practitioner. Compare this to the *I-Thou* relationship that is exalted in theistic traditions, which depicts a creator deity as an infinitely divine *other* that communicates with and loves his creatures equally and without measure, regardless of their level of consciousness. This abiding

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<sup>10</sup> This essay assumes a general familiarity with Wilber’s thought. For those entirely new, I recommend *The Integral Vision: A Very Short Introduction to the Revolutionary Integral Approach to Life, God, the Universe, and Everything* (Shambhala, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> See *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World*, by Ken Wilber (Integral Books/Shambhala, 2006).

personal deity is also the source of the unique personhood of the creature. This personhood, this *imago dei*, is the vehicle of the endowment of free will which confers each person's precious freedom to choose or not choose to "do the will" of this Father God. So one must ask: Does Ken conflate his personal religion with his integral philosophy? Does he privilege nondual teachings over the theism of other great traditions?

A closer reading reveals that Wilber, especially in his *later* writings, has a fair-minded grasp of the claims about an ontological soul, a Unique Self, and even a personal God found in the Western traditions. As early as *Integral Psychology* (2001), he writes: "Looking deep within the mind, in the very most interior part of the self, when the mind becomes very, very quiet, and one listens very carefully, in that infinite Silence, the soul begins to whisper, and its feather-soft voice takes one far beyond what the mind could ever imagine . . . In its gentle whisperings, there are the faintest hints of infinite love."<sup>12</sup>

Even earlier, in a seminal essay, he writes of the soul with even more lyricism. "There is a timeless nature about the soul that becomes perfectly obvious and unmistakable: one actually begins to 'taste' the immortality of the soul, to intuit that the soul is to some extent above time, above history, above life and death. In this way one becomes convinced that the soul has existed before and will exist again."<sup>13</sup>

Then again, it should be pointed out that Wilber sharply distinguishes the soul as understood by the wisdom traditions from the popular belief in reincarnation. The soul, classically

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<sup>12</sup> Collected Works of Ken Wilber, Volume 4: 421.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*: 538.

understood, cannot be not a container of memories experienced in past lives. In the world's great traditions, he states, the soul had two defining characteristics: first, as "the repository of one's 'virtue' (or lack of it)—that is, of one's karma, good and bad," and second, "of one's 'strength' of awareness, one's capacity to witness the phenomenal world without attachment or aversion."<sup>14</sup> Memories of one's life are a phenomenon of mind, not soul, and it is not mind that transmigrates; only the soul does. Paraphrasing Wilber: according to any major religion or perennial philosophy, any past life memory refers to some other phenomenon, not memories in the personal soul.<sup>15</sup> But this may be a misreading that betrays his Buddhist bias; please bear this in mind what we later consider the possible reality of *soul memory*. It is interesting to note in this connection that neither the Dalai Lama and Ken Wilber himself have reported any memory of a past life.

Especially in his later work, Wilber evokes the supreme importance of the Great Thou, the notion of a personally contactable Absolute Personality who is worthy of devotion and worship. "There [is] Spirit in 2nd-person," he writes in a recent column. "This is God as a great Other, or God as a great Thou, e.g. Martin Buber's beautiful writings on the I-Thou relationship as what's fundamental in divinity. And all this 2nd-person relationship does is remind us that God is a living, intelligent, vibrant, creative intelligence. And we can be in direct relationship with that reality. And that's the importance of Spirit in 2nd-person, of a living, breathing,

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 341.

<sup>15</sup> <http://fourthturningbuddhism.com/death-rebirth-reincarnation/>.

intelligent “Thou.”<sup>16</sup> Let’s fill in the rest of Wilber’s Three Faces of God notion: God in 1st-person refers to the actual phenomenological experience of God, our own ecstatic “peak experiences” of the divine; God in 2nd-person is traditionally defined as the “I-Thou”; and God in 3rd-person is often described as the great “It,” the “great web-of-life” or the evolving universe as a whole.

That said, let’s return and consider our “sacred trinity” hypothesis of soul, spirit, and personhood in the light of Wilber’s mature thought—which would refer in this case only to the upper-left and upper-right quadrant in his famed AQAL model (all quadrants and all lines).

According to the original model, there are four fundamentally different possible perspectives on any given experience: every such “occasion of experience” can be seen either from the standpoint of an individual or the collective dimension, i.e., one versus many. And each such dimension has an interior and exterior, or an inside versus an outside.

The four quadrants or possible perspectives are therefore the *individual interior* (“I” consciousness—my consciousness experienced or felt by me on the inside); the *collective interior* (“we” consciousness—i.e., our culture as we experience or feel it as a group), the *individual exterior* (“it” or “you” consciousness—my body, my visible behavior as observed by someone from the outside), and the *collective exterior* (“its” consciousness—social systems and external environments as understood by objective outside observers). You’ll note the

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/kenwilberwakeupgrowup/2014/01/is-there-a-god-big-questions-series-question-1/>.

reference to first, second, and third person pronouns, which are universal structures in all languages.

Another variation is what Wilber calls “the Big Three”—the good, the true, and the beautiful, as identified in Plato, Kant, and many other thinkers. The *good* refers to our manners and morals arising from the heart, the “we-experience” of the collective interior; the *true* refers to objective truth or “it-propositions” of the exterior domains (the objective or scientific study of individual artifacts or whole systems); and the *beautiful* refers to the subjective world, the sense of aesthetic beauty and apprehension of life experience in the eye of each beholder—the upper-left quadrant.

Wilber’s point of inception had been to systematize and reframe what most of us agree to be the common core of the world’s traditions—the so-called “Great Chain of Being” conception of the perennial philosophers. Ultimate reality is composed of various nested levels or stages of existence, ranging upward from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. This abstract conception is usually accompanied by a “Great Chain” of living beings, ranging upwards from inanimate matter to planet and animal life, to humans, then an angelic hierarchy reaching up to a paradisiacal God at its apex. But the better metaphor is that of a “Great Nest.” Each level in the Great Nest is qualitatively different from the previous one, yet each senior dimension transcends but always includes (or nests) its juniors; for example, atoms are part of molecules, which in turn comprise cells, which comprise tissues, then organs, and so on.

Bear in mind again that, if we are speaking of the nested levels of the consciousness of the individual person, these levels can be experienced from the inside through my own

perceptions of my experience, or from the outside as one person's reported experience as it might be observed and interpreted by others.

We noted earlier that, with regard to human nature, many traditions present only two levels (i.e., the “body and soul” of substance dualism, which are not always necessarily nested), or three levels—the triad of body, soul (subtle body), and spirit (or causal body), as these are experienced within or observed from without. (Typically, these levels are presented as doctrines handed down by a master to a pupil—relying mainly on this single perspective.) Wilber's own early system follows Aurobindo and other sophisticated maps that designate up to a dozen levels or more in the spectrum of the self and universe.

Whatever the number of levels one arrives at, it is significant to note that, beginning with *Integral Psychology*, Wilber calls this hierarchical expanse of levels a *great morphogenetic field*. It's a pre-existing “developmental space”—stretching from matter to mind to spirit—in which various potentials unfold into actuality as a progression of state-stages. Then, in his post-metaphysical phase, he introduces a key refinement: the layer or levels within this space of unfolding are not in any sense pre-existent but are only the result of “Kosmic habits,” persistent practices with field effects that leave behind self-existing patterns that can be discerned by later adepts and utilized as guideposts on their own path.

The integral vision began as Wilber saw fit to differentiate at least four irreducible reality domains, leading to early renditions of the AQAL conception. In his later work, as epitomized by *Integral Spirituality*, he turns more than ever to methodological concerns as he teases out the distinctions

needed to better understand the mysteries and complexities of spirituality in relation to consciousness, culture, and science. The result is *integral perspectivism*, which offers us a fresh way of framing our problem of the soul and spirit in terms of more expanded perceptions and perspectives. What has flowed from this new model has been Wilber's attempt to "reconstruct the spiritual systems of the great wisdom traditions but with none of their metaphysical baggage."

Previously, the four key perspectives of his four quadrants had reigned supreme. Going beyond this widely embraced model first introduced by Wilber in 1995, he now expands from four quadrants to *eight zones* or *lifeworlds* or *world-spaces*. Each zone comes with its own unique method of inquiry. The novel idea here is that one must include the additional viewpoints of the *inside and outside of each quadrant*; this move allows additional perspectives or schools of thought to come into play, including such important disciplines as structuralism, behaviorism, and ethnomethodology, and systems theory. The result is *eight* irreducible domains rather than four. For example, let's consider the interior and exterior of the lower-left quadrant. In this space, the discipline known as hermeneutics interprets the interior or felt experience of a community as it is authentically expressed by the group itself, primarily involving the exegesis of texts or verbal communications; but ethnology is a cultural anthropologist's attempt to understand this same interior group experience with tools of analysis brought to bear from the outside looking in. In a simpler example, a music critic interprets the song lyrics of black Chicago blues artists of the 1960s; but a music journalist may inhabit that community for a few months in order to write a story that describes from the outside their experience

of their social world and living conditions in the south side of Chicago.

Crucial here is the notion that adopting the perspective of any one zone entails something you must *do*. When you take on a view, this means you *act* from it. You must engage in certain *injunctions* (i.e., experiments or enactments), points out Wilber, that are intrinsic to that lifeworld and that are actually performed and can be scrutinized and validated by peers who are adept in that realm. For example, enacting the viewpoint of your interior felt experience may involve writing a poem. Then one might go out and read the poem at the next poetry slam to the acclaim of fellow poets. Without such activity, the idea of taking the stance of that zone (in this case, zone #1 in Wilber's system—the first-person report of an interior experience) is just an empty abstraction. Such enactments will no doubt be necessary for reaching the deepest understanding of our soul or spirit or personhood in our own study.

We are still following Wilber's argument in *Integral Spirituality*. Along with his adoption of this more pluralistic approach to method, Wilber also introduced his post-metaphysical stance in this seminal book. Amazingly, in what is known as his critique of the *myth of the given*, he now steers around the question of ontology as being almost meaningless in a multi-perspectival universe. There are no absolutely real and pre-existing entities such as souls or spirits or levels of consciousness such as psychic, subtle, and causal, he declares. When we enact a given "world-space," we generate perceptions of different phenomena that may arise in that zone and which appear to exist, but such perceptions are only possible or plausible because we inhabit and act from that "perspectival

zone.” Writes Wilber: “[There is] no pre-given world, but simply a series of worlds that come into being (or co-emerge, or are tetra-enacted) with different orders of consciousness.”<sup>17</sup>

Wilber concludes his intricate argument in the book by calling for the “integralizing” of the world’s religions, whereby they become educational and inspirational conveyor belts of evolutionary progress that can carry the world’s people through all identifiable stages of consciousness development, leading again to the highest stage, which is—you guessed it—nondual realization. First of all, he envisions that success at the personal level in any given “integralized” religious tradition would now be defined as the ability to graciously become intimate or conversant with all existing stages of consciousness evolution (e.g., primitive, modern, post-modern), as well as competent with (“one with”) all states of consciousness and all perspectives on truth, and to fully integrate one’s shadow. And second, at the collective level, a genuine “evolutionary enlightenment” becomes possible if planetary civilization finds a way to honor all perspectives, all religious traditions, and all levels of consciousness, through the method of transcending and including the best facts, knowledge, and insights from each.

### ***The Urantia Book* and the Immortalizing Soul**

Wilber offers quite a grand scheme, but even more so does the mysterious *Urantia Book*, which purports to be a revelation to humankind that encompasses science, philosophy,

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<sup>17</sup> *Integral Spirituality*, p. 260.

cosmology, religion, and history. I like to think of this huge book as a universal encyclopedia. For several decades, in fact, it has served for me as a single-volume cosmic reference text that continually draws me back for more study and further comparison with contemporary thought.

Many of us consider the Urantia Revelation to be an “integrally informed” text, as Ken Wilber himself acknowledged at my first personal meeting with him in 1999. Its core philosophy of religion, for example, points especially to Ken’s “Big Three” of truth, beauty, and goodness.<sup>18</sup>

Wilber’s primary analytical distinction, that between the interior and exterior perspectives, is also cardinal in the Urantia Book’s philosophy:

When man approaches the study and examination of his universe from the *outside*, he brings into being the various physical sciences; when he approaches the research of himself and the universe from the *inside*, he gives origin to theology and metaphysics. The later art of philosophy develops in an effort to harmonize the many discrepancies which are destined at first to appear between the

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<sup>18</sup> Here are a few typical statements:

To finite man truth, beauty, and goodness embrace the full revelation of divinity reality. (56:10)

In so far as man’s evolving soul becomes permeated by truth, beauty, and goodness as the value-realization of God-consciousness, such a resultant being becomes indestructible. (111:3.7)

Religion is genuine and worthwhile if it fosters in the individual an experience in which the sovereignty of truth, beauty, and goodness prevails, for such is the true spiritual concept of supreme reality. (99:4.4)

See “Truth, Beauty & Goodness: 84 Occurances in The Urantia Book” at: <http://www.integralworld.net/warren1.html>

## Soul-Making Dynamics

findings and teachings of these two diametrically opposite avenues of approaching the universe of things and beings. (103.6.2)

The Urantia Revelation claims to be authored by high celestial beings tasked with the mandate of providing an epochal revelation suitable to the needs of an advancing scientific civilization in the coming centuries.<sup>19</sup>

Claims of revelation are always highly suspect and problematic, of course. And for those of us who accept the Urantia materials as revelatory, the problem of the “myth of the given” reasserts itself in a profound way. Its re-introduction of “givens” poses quite an irony when we remember that the likes of Ken Wilber are celebrating the idea that we have finally swept away such structures.

There is indeed no denying that a plethora of “revealed facts” purport to be given in this text. These include its statements about history and religion—but *not* its teachings on physical science, by the way. A section entitled “The Limits of Revelation” (see 101:4) states:

Mankind should understand that we who participate in the revelation of truth are very rigorously limited by the instructions of our superiors. We

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<sup>19</sup> Its 2,000+ pages, which are broken into four parts and 196 “papers” (chapters), offer sections on physics and cosmology; a lengthy account of geological, biological, genetic, and cultural evolution; a revelation of life after death, extraterrestrial life on other planets, and the nature of the angelic realms; a profound philosophical theology; teachings on morality and religious ethics; special instructions on global politics and social reform; a large section revealing the life and teachings of Jesus; and much more. For an introduction, see my own instructional videos at <http://www.Evolving-Souls.org>.

are not at liberty to anticipate the scientific discoveries of a thousand years. Revelators must act in accordance with the instructions which form a part of the revelation mandate. We see no way of overcoming this difficulty, either now or at any future time. We full well know that, **while the historic facts and religious truths of this series of revelatory presentations will stand on the records of the ages to come**, within a few short years many of our statements regarding the physical sciences will stand in need of revision in consequence of additional scientific developments and new discoveries. (Emphasis is mine.)

Note well the declaration above that “the religious truths” of the text will stand “in the ages to come.” It is here that we come face-to-face with “claims of real and pre-existing entities such as souls or spirits or levels of consciousness”—all of which are asserted in *The Urantia Book* on the basis of superhuman authorship. What shall we do with such apparent arrogance in our post-metaphysical age?

Our only recourse is to consider whether these “facts” still stand to reason for us now, six decades years after the publication of the book. How do these teachings about such universal structures hold up against our own current human knowledge, insight, logic, and experience? In this essay I have humbly attempted to do so by comparing the Urantia Book’s revelatory claims about the soul, spirit, and Unique Self to many of the more prominent philosophies and teachings on those subjects that have evolved on earth, as well as broach the new science of NDEs as possible empirical support.

With respect to the domain of spirituality, the Urantia Revelation teaches what I think of as a *cosmic religion of evolutionary experience*—or what might be called “cosmic experientialism.” I derive this conclusion in part from decades of study of the life and teachings of Jesus (provided in Part IV of the text, running over 700 pages, and based on the purported “angelic record”) and from my reflections on papers 100 through 111, which especially inform the following discussion.

In my reading, the *evolutionary import of human experience* is the crucial factor in Urantia cosmology.

We are told that the aim of the divine creators is to grow high-quality souls—not through esoteric initiations but through the moral challenges faced in ordinary lived experience. Indeed, *soul evolution through human decision-making is revealed to be the secret of the creation of the space-time domains*, the very purpose of the evolution of life from the moment of its implantation by celestial beings on a habitable world. In a real sense, the entire expanse of the evolution of planetary life—which under favorable circumstances culminates in progressive human civilization—is a substantive process that contributes to God’s own evolution; for as each human soul evolves, God evolves right along with it.

But how can God evolve if, by definition, God is perfect, omniscient, universal, eternal, and infinite? As in some phases of integral theory, *The Urantia Book* poses a powerful dialectic between God as existential and infinite, and God as evolutionary and finite. Put simply: In one phase of God’s divine

manifestation, a self-limiting and self-distributing aspect of God incarnates into evolving space-time reality by a variety of *involutional* divine agencies, including the fiat creation of an angelic host (a topic that is outside of the scope of this paper). Of concern for us here is that this “kenotic” God makes the evolving part of himself *subject* to human evolution. In a literal sense, God shares Godself with his creatures—even to the extent of gifting them with a spirit-fragment whose will is *subordinate* to human will. I noted earlier that this indwelling spirit, a literal fragment of God, is pre-personal but aims to achieve “personalness” by way of fusion with the person (the Unique Self) that it is indwelling—a fusion of energies, attributes, and wills. The technical term for this indwelling spirit-entity is the *Thought Adjuster*.

But let us revisit the fact that God provides other high gifts according to Urantia cosmology. We’ve noted that he also confers upon each person a Unique Self—which the Urantia text calls *personality*. Intrinsic to Unique Self personhood are the prerogatives of free-will choice—the ability to enact decisions through the vehicle of a human intellect housed in an animal-origin physical body. In addition, we are gifted with a “mortal mind” that can think and discriminate meanings and values that are the basis of each decision we make, large or small. (The cosmic origins of mind as such are beyond the scope of this essay.)

And this is where we get to soul-making dynamics: When any given decision participates in divine value, we’ve noted that the indwelling spirit “immortalizes” this experience in and *as* the individuating human soul. That’s the core teaching. The indwelling spirit literally transcribes or inscribes the experience into our soul.

If this is true, it means that something tremendous is going on behind the scenes in our inner life. We make a decent choice, and we quietly and routinely and immediately receive divine recognition of its spiritual import. From the human point of view, this is nothing short of a miraculous event—yet it happens to us all throughout the day. When we make a choice for the true, the beautiful, and the good, we experience a divine down-reach into the questing mind that preserves that choice for all eternity. As the Urantia text puts it: “Mortal memory of human experience on the material worlds of origin survives death in the flesh because the [indwelling spirit] has acquired a spirit counterpart, or transcript, of those events of human life which were of spiritual significance.” (40:9.4-9)

These soul-making transactions are a *spiritualization ministry* made possible by our sacred trinity. Remember that the God fragment is subordinate to human will. We lead off the process with our moral choices; the Thought Adjuster gets activated in response; and a soul memory forms. “The soul of man is an experiential acquirement,” states the revelators. “As a mortal creature chooses to ‘do the will of the Father in heaven,’ so the indwelling spirit becomes the father of a *new reality* in human experience. The mortal and material mind is the mother of this same emerging reality. The substance of this new reality is neither material nor spiritual—it is *morontial*. This is the emerging and immortal soul which is destined to survive mortal death and begin the Paradise ascension.” (0:5.10) Note that the authors coin a new term—*morontia*—to designate the substance that comprises the soul. This word is very much akin to the term “subtle realm” encountered before.

The dynamic generation of *morontia* material, this act of laying down a spirit-transcript within the soul, entails at least three steps:

- (1) A specific free-will choice for value, based on some apprehension of higher meaning
- (2) The spiritizing seizure of this impulse by the indwelling spirit
- (3) The deposit of the “transcript” of this immortalized experience within the subtle body (i.e., the morontial soul).

At the top of Paper 111, “The Adjuster and the Soul,” we read: “The soul partakes of the qualities of both the human mind and the divine spirit but persistently evolves toward augmentation of spirit control and divine dominance through the fostering of a mind function whose meanings seek to coordinate with true spirit value.”

All that said, let’s step back once again for context. Following the lead of the revelators, we can think of the indwelling spirit as a cosmic two-way mirror. On the one hand, it ennobles human recipients by providing us a direct window on the pure divinity that resides in our own consciousness; on the other hand, it also provides God with an intimate relationship to unfolding human experience. Here’s a good encapsulation: “Morontia evolution is inherent in the two universal urges of mind, the impulse of the finite mind of the creature to know God and attain the divinity of the Creator, and the impulse of the infinite mind of the Creator to know man and attain the experience of the creature.” (111.2.2)

The celestial authors of the Urantia text would likely applaud Wilber's "Three Faces of God." In Part IV, the book provides a startling first-person look at God (as incarnate) in its long biography of Jesus. (Technically, this material offers a zone #2 perspective because the story is told by a third-party narrator rather than in Jesus' own words.) The theological sections in Part I offer a stupendous expansion of our concept of God as a personal "Thou." But the Urantia Book's description of the third-person "face" of God is entirely novel and revolutionary. Termed "God the Supreme" or the "Supreme Being," this phase of the godhead—also known as "experiential Deity"—is covered in detail in Papers 115–117.

Think of God the Supreme as the up-to-the-moment "summa" of cosmic evolution in all domains of human experience at any one point in time. The Supreme slowly grows to perfection in and through the efforts of his evolving creatures; its evolution encompasses and "totalizes" the soul growth of all beings on all space-time worlds, as well as on worlds in higher dimensions. And this growth in divinity attainment is "AQAL": it is inclusive of all dimensions of the personal, scientific, social, and cultural evolution of all creatures residing across the universe in diverse and far-flung planetary and higher-dimensional cultures. In essence, the Supreme Being completes himself only to the extent that you and I evolve toward perfection as individuals and as the collective brotherhood/sisterhood of humankind on all worlds. Again, it is soul growth through the appropriation of higher values—spurred on through the agency of the indwelling divine spirit and always unified by the endowment of Unique Self—that is the hidden purpose and technique of this process.

Stepping back even further, consider the fact that in the Urantia Revelation, God is evolutionary as a *theologic* necessity. God's original infinity is, paradoxically, a limitation; and, in terms of integral post-metaphysics, God's infinity-status is a limitation on *divine perspective*. Infinitude can be a limit on infinity!

In Urantia Book terms, God must achieve “free will liberation from the bonds of infinity and the fetters of eternity.” So, to enlarge his perspective, the God as “Father” designs an escape from the fetters of his infinitude: he creates a finite and evolving universe that offers him a window on finitude as experienced through the “eyes” of his myriad human creatures.<sup>20</sup> As these creatures generate an immortal soul and hopefully survive death through their own choice to do so, and as they ascend through higher-dimensional worlds toward the ultimate embrace of the Divine Person, they continue to provide God with a unique and increasingly sophisticated portal on their unique evolutionary experience. The evolutionary experience of “descending” angelic beings—whose mandate is to support this grand project of cosmic evolution—also provides other perspectives for God to indwell. Meanwhile, God

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<sup>20</sup> “Nothing in the entire universe can substitute for the fact of experience on nonexistential levels. The infinite God is, as always, replete and complete, infinitely inclusive of all things except evil and creature experience. God cannot do wrong; he is infallible. God cannot experientially know what he has never personally experienced; God's preknowledge is existential. Therefore does the spirit of the Father descend from Paradise to participate with finite mortals in every bona fide experience of the ascending career; it is only by such a method that the existential God could become in truth and in fact man's experiential Father. The infinity of the eternal God encompasses the potential for finite experience, which indeed becomes actual in the ministry of the Adjuster fragments that actually share the life vicissitude experiences of human beings.” (108:0.2)

provides us with a portal on Godself through the indwelling spirit residing in the human mind, a literal fragment of the divine being itself.

And so we can say that in doing all of this, God offers himself a finite perspective, a view on things from the standpoint of “other-than-perfect-God.” But we can even say much more. The Divine Person multiplies this otherness to its mathematical limit, thereby expanding the possibilities of finite perspectives asymptotically toward infinity. He does this by enabling the evolution of untold trillions of perspectives—that is, he makes possible a material universe of evolving personal beings through whom God receives unlimited perspectives on evolutionary experience. To paraphrase the Great Chain thesis, all of cosmic plenitude is filled with infinitely unique experiential creatures—and for a good and sufficient divine reason. God distributes his possible perspectives beyond measure because each occasion of personhood “is unique, absolutely unique: It is unique in time and space; it is unique in eternity [and] it is unique when bestowed — there are no duplicates; it is unique during every moment of existence . . . ” (See Paper 112.) In this sense, God actually has two methods of experiencing us: through his Thought Adjusters, which are all uniform, and through his bestowal of personality, each one of which is absolutely unique. Both afford God a direct view of our evolving experience.

This, then, is God’s “clever” plan: He institutes various techniques of experiencing our evolutionary experiences in an incomplete but perfecting universe. This is why creature experience is the most precious commodity in the universe. It is God’s chief purpose for creating space-time and populating it with billions of inhabited planets and untold trillions

of humanoid beings. His divine plan, according to Urantian theology, was to set in motion the adventure of being human on the grandest possible scale, both in quantity and quality. In doing so, God had what we might call an ulterior motive: to allow each human adventure to be unique in all universes—and further, to have an exclusive window on each of our unique experiences of the space-time universe. Again, this technique affords the Divine Person a nearly infinite set of perspectives on evolution.

With this background and context in mind, let us return to our consideration of the Urantia Book anthropology of the sacred trinity. Human experience has a myriad of features, but it is conceived primarily as a function of will, that is, of moral decisions to act—our willingness to choose to love, to share, to receive, to feel, to think, to create. The Urantia text calls it “decision-action.” When such decisions are positive, creative, dynamic, and constructive, they can be summed up with the religious phrase of “doing the will of God.” (Technically, the divine will as represented by the indwelling spirit—which always points like a compass to higher values—is made apparent to awareness, and then the Unique Self freely chooses to enact this option.)

The soul is evolving through these decisions; the evolving soul is the summation of the epitome of all that we choose to experience, including the predicaments that we attract into our lives. It’s the repository of the spiritual essence of our life experiences, especially our personal relationships. The soul is the full story of our lives—the good, the bad, and the ugly—those episodes that have meaning and spiritual import. The indwelling spirit is that part of us that cognizes these essentials—literally duplicates them as our evolving soul.

## Soul-Making Dynamics

These faithful custodians of the future career unflinchingly duplicate every mental creation with a spiritual counterpart; they are thus slowly and surely re-creating you as you really are (only spiritually) for resurrection on the survival worlds. And all of these exquisite spirit re-creations are being preserved in the emerging reality of your evolving and immortal soul. . . And as you are the human parent, so is the [indwelling spirit] the divine parent of the real you, your higher and advancing self . . . And it is this evolving soul that the judges and censors discern when they decree your survival and pass you upward to new worlds and never-ending existence in eternal liaison with your faithful partner — God, the Thought Adjuster. (108:6:5)

In this sacred scheme, God relates to our experience like a curator, or a divine archivist. The indwelling spirit appropriates our most meaningful experiences, and creates God's archive of our best moments of experience. These "saved" events are our precious *soul memories*. They are the moments of decision-action that cross the line into spiritual value—our genuine choices of the true, the good, and the beautiful; and, just as valuable, these are our unfortunate or misguided or self-centered or tragic experiences that, on reflection, lead us to discern the deeper meanings of such values and to intend to "choose better the next time." This archive is the soul itself, co-created by God (the indwelling spirit-self) and by the human intellect, which executes daily decisions in the light of perceived values.

In other words, the soul reflects—in fact *is*—God’s perspective on our struggles and achievements. To use second-person language, the soul is what our life is and has been, *as God sees it*. It is God’s relationship to us from *God’s* perspective, Wilber’s second face of God, catalyzed by our own choices or divine value. Through the agency of our indwelling spirit, the soul makes note of these choices for higher values, as we reach for reality. The result is an *immortal soul that survives death*. Such is the role of the soul and spirit in human experience according to the Urantia Revelation.<sup>21</sup>

After death, the spirit-self takes custody of the immortal transcript of our life experience (i.e., the “high notes” of our lived experiences). In the resurrection after death, the indwelling spirit reassembles our identity, and ascends with us into the afterlife. It guides us further inward and upward into higher spheres of attainment, until the spirit fuses with the soul.

That which gives unity and coherence to the entire operation is the unique existential personality. *The Urantia Book* may have been the first modern scripture to convey a Unique

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<sup>21</sup> If you consider what blues is to jazz—as seen from the standpoint of jazz fans—you will understand what the distinction between soul and spirit is for fans of the Urantia Revelation. We can say that classic blues expresses the gritty, street-level feelings of our lived experience. It depicts the poignance of the murky experiences of daily life, especially our challenging personal relationships; but jazz is much freer. Though rooted in the blues, jazz operates from a higher zone of sheer beauty, lucidity, and abstraction. We might even say that jazz transcends and includes the soulfulness of the blues. The music of John Coltrane, and a few other greats, achieved a fusion of the two idioms, creating something entirely new: the ultimate musical marriage of feeling and abstraction. And this is not unlike the way in which our indwelling spirit-self literally takes on the highest notes of our life experience, absorbs them, and immortalizes them.

Self teaching, for in a similar way in which Marc Gafni defines Unique Self, it too defines “personality” (its technical term for Unique Self) as an adamantine entity that is unique in all the universes, and utterly beyond time and space.

The love of the Father absolutely individualizes each personality as a unique child of the Universal Father, a child without duplicate in infinity, a will creature irreplaceable in all eternity. (12:0.1)

What we don’t learn from Gafni is that personality, according to this definition, is absolutely unchanging. Further, as we have seen, personality is the seat of human will, our priceless gift of choice. We have faculties of feeling and thinking, but the will is central. Its alignment with the “divine will” is decisive. These are just a few of the other attributes of personhood according to the Urantia Revelation, in its incredible Paper 112:

- Personality unifies creature identity, and can survive death as the unifier of the surviving soul
- Personality is “changeless in the presence of change”
- It is characterized by morality—awareness of relativity of relationship with other persons.

Personality or Unique Self is a unifier that is absolutely changeless, and yet is intimately associated with morality and relationship. Its origin is the *First Source*, which is changeless and yet concerned with love and relationship—on the universal scale.

## **Contribution of NDE Study to a Theory of the Soul**

It is now widely known that contemporary research on thousands of cases of NDEs (near-death experiences) has yielded a rich set of new data that have been subject to multidisciplinary scientific scrutiny. Among many characteristics isolated by researchers, almost all experiencers (or NDErs) report the experience of a vivid and joyful awareness of a discrete soul or selfhood that has the potential to survive the death of the body. According to premier researcher Kenneth Ring, “Religious orientation was not a factor affecting either the likelihood or the depth of the near-death experience. An atheist was as likely to have one as was a devoutly religious person.”<sup>22</sup> And, as shown in my own case and many others, even a child can have an NDE experience comparable to that of an adult.

The “life-review” phenomenon often reported in NDEs has great import for our purposes. A widely used scale to classify and distinguish NDEs from other mental states was developed in 1983 by Professor Bruce Greyson, a psychiatrist who teaches at the University of Virginia. According to the Greyson NDE scale, the life-review phenomenon is unique to NDEs and is reported by 22 percent of NDErs. Very oddly, more atheists (literally 100 percent) reported having a life review than any other category of experiencer.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.near-death.com/experiences/experts04.html>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.near-death.com/experiences/atheists01.html>

Scores of life-review experiences have been documented in the research literature. Subjects invariably report having a “holographic” experience overseen by benign beings, in which they engage in a vivid *reliving* of life episodes in chronological sequence (or sometimes in reverse sequence). In these life-review experiences, NDErs report a clear perception of what it felt like for others in shared experiences that were under review, often accompanied by efforts led by a celestial being to draw life lessons.<sup>24</sup> According to Dr. Raymond Moody, “The Being of Light presents the dying with a panoramic review of everything they have ever done. That is, they relive every act they have ever done to other people and come away feeling that love is the most important thing in life.”<sup>25</sup>

This is a typical episode in a documented life review: “Reinee Pasarow described how the most positive thing she did was to give special attention to a not so lovable boy at a summer camp so that he would know he was loved. During the review, she said this act of kindness was more important from her viewpoint of expanded awareness than if she had been president of the United States or the queen of England.”<sup>26</sup> Reinee’s report correlates well with our own notion that even ordinary experiences get inscribed in the soul when there is a clear choice for value.

Hopefully this brief discussion lends support to our sacred trinity thesis. The commonality of such reports points to the possibility that the soul *is a repository of the most spiritually*

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.near-death.com/experiences/research24.html>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.near-death.com/experiences/experts03.html>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.near-death.com/experiences/research24.html>

*significant and poignant experiences of a person's lifetime, and that it is associated with an enduring identity that has the power to survive in the afterlife as a living and embodied being sojourning in a "higher world."*

Let's end this section with a life-review account by the famed experiencer Dannion Brinkley:

The powerful Being enveloped me and I began to relive my entire life, one incident at a time. In what I call the panoramic life review I watched my life from a second person point of view. As I experienced this I was myself as well as every other person with whom I had ever interacted . . . . When the panoramic life review ended, despite the many obvious mistakes I had made in my life, I experienced no retribution – no judgment and no punishment. I was the only judge presiding over my day in court! Given time to assimilate my life in retrospect, I was given the opportunity to know, first hand, both the happiness and the sorrow I had created through my actions.<sup>27</sup>

## **A Theology of the Soul as the Determining Factor in Cosmic Evolution**

There are many philosophic and psychological discoveries supporting our notion of the soul that are worth considering, but are beyond the scope of this study. For example, it should

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<sup>w</sup> <http://www.dannion.com/dannion-brinkley-near-death-experience/>

rightly be pointed out that the great German philosopher Hegel's famous concept of spirit (*geist*) buttresses our thesis. More specifically, his theory of recollection (*erinnerung*), comes close to my contention that life experiences (and their conscious recollection) are constitutive of soul evolution as it attains spiritization—and further, that the “recollection” of the immortalized experiences of an unlimited pool of Unique Selves is, in turn, constitutive of the evolution and completion of a universal consciousness that we have called the Supreme Being, and that Hegel calls “Absolute Spirit.”

In other words, this “God of evolution” becomes the “summa” of the composite soul evolution of all humans as they strive for perfection—both in Hegel's thought and in the Urantia Revelation, though much more lucidly presented in the Urantia text, if I may say. Such a robust theology of soul, by clearly distinguishing time (subtle-realm dynamics) from eternity (the immortalizing action of the indwelling spirit of God)—while yet pointing to the synthesis of time and eternity in and as the soul—allows that an existential Deity may personalize in space-time as the Omega of cosmic evolution.

Contrary to Wilber's notion that the “theistic” transactions of the subtle realm are enveloped and surpassed by causal or nondual spirit, we have maintained that an abiding relationship between soul and spirit is maintained in a dialectical duality, even after “mystical union” has occurred (recall that my term for this is “fusion”).

Such a persisting “I-Thou” duality was claimed, for example, by medieval mystic Meister Eckhart: “Even in the ultimate union in heaven, Eckhart insists, this distinction will

remain.”<sup>28</sup> We’ve noted that *The Urantia Book* reveals that, even after the fusion of soul and indwelling spirit at some point in the afterlife, the exalted individual continues on, able to pursue an eternal life of unlimited experience in higher worlds that perpetually contributes to the actualization of the Supreme.

We have also noted that Wilber has had to let go of the “involutionary givens” (i.e., the myth of the given) in his mature system. Yet Wilber persists in his contention that evolution has laid down Kosmic habits that follow a linear sequence through successive stages ending in formless, non-dual realization. The state-stages are universal and paradigmatic, and in fact, according to his book *Integral Spirituality*, are *mandatory* for individuals in all cultures. By this measure, any system that aims at a life of loving service through “decision-action”—i.e., soul-making dynamics—would rank lower than those pursuing a meditative path aiming at nondual states and stages.<sup>29</sup>

One might accept Wilber’s view that millennia of fervent practice have created a discernible morphic field that conforms to his unilinear sequence of spiritual development. But our study has suggested a more pluralistic understanding of how such Kosmic habits populate the etheric realms—or what Jose Ferrer calls a “a plural cornucopia creatively advancing

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<sup>28</sup> See Jose Ferrer, *Transpersonal Psychology Review*, 14(2), 3–24, 2011 “Participation, Metaphysics, and Enlightenment: Reflections on Ken Wilber’s Recent Work.” I follow Ferrer’s sources and argument here.

<sup>29</sup> The so-called Wilber-Combs lattice may allow such practitioners of “lesser road” paths access to higher states, but “only if they sacrifice the integrity of their own tradition’s self-understanding by accepting Wilber’s itinerary and non-dual endpoint.” See Ferrer, *Ibid.*, p 11.

in multiple ontological directions.” Ferrer continues: “Wilber wants to confine such ontological multiplicity to his unilinear evolutionary sequence, but I believe it is both more accurate and more generous to envision cosmic and spiritual evolution as branching out in many different but potentially intermingled directions . . . If we accept this view, we can affirm the ontological nature of a plurality of Kosmic habits free from Wilberian dogmatic constraints.”<sup>30</sup>

Incorporating the findings of paranormal studies and mounting evidence of inter-dimensional and extraterrestrial life, we can say that a nearly infinite variety of practices are unfolding on untold numbers of worlds in terrestrial and higher realms.

Finally, our concept of the Supreme Being not only accommodates but requires Ferrer’s “multiple ontological directions.” If soul evolution truly is directional, and if each Unique Self is truly unique in eternity—then it will require a Deity of Experience to encompass the field effects of those trails that each of us blazes on our way toward fusion with spirit. And that is because each sacred trinity of soul, spirit, and existential self is designed to provide a unique window on cosmic evolution for the Divine Person. Existential infinitude gives way to experiential plenitude. The personalization of the Supreme Being requires nothing less.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p 13.



## APPENDIX

### Further Considerations about Plato's Concept of Soul

Plato thought that only one part of the soul is immortal—the faculty of reason or *logos*. This is the primal Greek notion that rationality itself must be somehow essentially supernatural. Technically, the Platonic soul consists of three parts: reason or *nous*; emotions; and desire or the appetitive function.

Plato's dialogues endeavor to show that our ability to think and reflect, including the evidence of “innate ideas,” clearly points to the substantial reality of the soul. Also known as the *theory of recollection*, this is the observation that we seem to possess knowledge or ideas that we could not have acquired through experience or education, but which must have come to us from some previous existence or dimension. Plato illustrates this famously in *Meno*, where Socrates leads an ignorant slave to solve a complex geometrical puzzle.

Another aspect of the theory of recollection is the apparent existence in our minds of ideals or ideal concepts. For example, we can and do have the *idea* of perfect equality, but we don't observe that perfect equality exists in society—we can never have a true experience of it. And the same can be said for the ideas of justice, beauty, goodness, and many other abstract concepts. Whence do such ideals originate if they are not observable in this world, Plato wondered?

Related to this notion is Plato's famed Theory of Ideas, laid out especially in *The Republic*. Every significant word that we use in everyday speech, such as “justice” or “beauty,” is a

particular instance of a corresponding abstract Idea, or ideal Form, which he posits as being eternal and incorruptible. Just as physical things are sensible to our bodily senses, these eternal Ideas are intelligible to our intellect. Ergo, the reasoning soul is itself eternal.

Another proof on differing grounds is presented in *Phaedrus*, which depicts the soul as something that is uniquely able to “move itself.” Plato’s later speculations along these lines led to Aristotle’s formulation that God must be the “Unmoved Mover,” which was later adopted into Catholic theology.

One can see how far we have come from Plato with the modern idea of an evolving soul. The Urantia Revelation does hold that certain *a priori* ideas or intuitions are constitutive of reflective thinking (see 16:6). But this notion is only indirectly related to its teaching that human souls evolve through choices that lead to moral action in the world of ordinary relationships.