

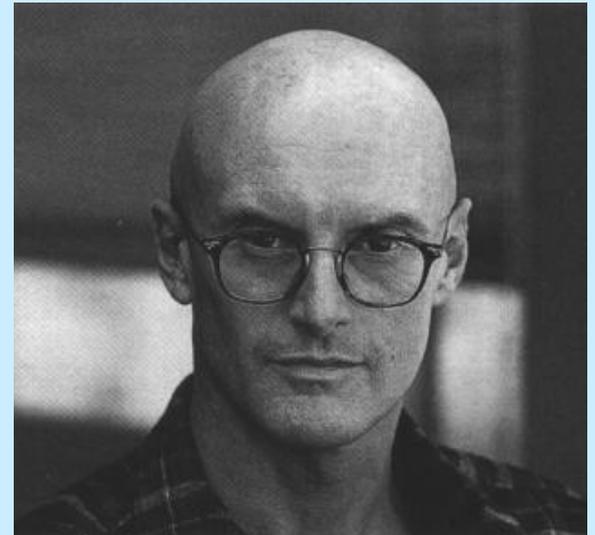
# **Ken Wilber and Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration.**

Bill Tillier

October, 2001

# Ken Wilber

- **Wilber's major focus is on human development.**
- **Extensive review of past literature (East and West) on development and higher levels.**
- **His full spectrum model attempts a broad synthesis of human experience and development.**
- **Wilber:**
  - 46 years old.
  - Self educated.
  - Reads, meditates, writes.
  - Prolific and successful author.
  - Leading transpersonal theorist.



# Overview - 1

- **“Transpersonal experiences may be defined as experiences in which the sense of identity of self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, psyche or cosmos.”** Roger Walsh & Frances Vaughan, "On Transpersonal Definitions", **JTP**, Vol. 25, #2, 1993.
- **“Development is a process of continual transcendence...evolution is indeed, self-realization through self-transcendence.”** Ken Wilber, "A Developmental View of Consciousness", **JTP**, Vol.11, #1, 1979.

# Overview - 2

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- **Root of psyche (and psychology) is spirit.**
  - Psychology needs to include soul and spirit.
- **We need to wakeup to the “daylight view:”**
  - Universe is alive and conscious on all levels.
- **Reality is made up of a complex hierarchy of holons: small parts that can exist alone and also form parts of the larger whole (a term coined by Arthur Koestler).**
- **“The perennial philosophy” describes common Human experience as a hierarchical series of levels. (a term coined by Gottfried Leibniz, popularized by Aldous Huxley).**

# Overview - 3

- **Wilber reviewed the perennial philosophy to “arrive at a master template of a full-spectrum developmental space.”**
- **This space defines the common parameters that guide and constrain development.  
[Developmental potential is to yeast as this space is to the bread pan.]**
- **The “spectrum of consciousness” describes our possible range of Human experience.**
- **The basic levels of reality and experience are the core of this approach to psychology:  
– body --> mind --> soul --> spirit**

# Overview - 4

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- **Wilber describes 9 basic levels in 6 groups:**
  - **Group 1).**
    - **Level 1: Sensorimotor (matter, sensation, perception).**
  - **Group 2).**
    - **Level 2: Phantasmic-emotional (impulse, emotion, image, symbol).**
  - **Group 3).**
    - **Level 3: Repmind (Representational mind) (concepts).**

# Overview - 5

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- **Group 4). Conop (Concrete Operations)**
  - **Level 4: Rule/role.**
  
- **Group 5). Formop (Formal Operations)**
  - **Level 5: Formal-reflexive.**
  
- **Group 6). Postformal -->**
  - **Level 6: Vision-logic.**
  - **Level 7: Psychic (vision).**
  - **Level 8: Subtle (archetype).**
  - **Level 9: Causal (formless) / Nondual.**

# Overview - 6

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- **Development is an evolution from lower to higher levels.**
- **Each of us must go through each level.**
- **Between levels are transitions (“fulcrums”) of development: nine deaths and rebirths of the self. Each fulcrum has its own unique challenges & risks (pathologies).**
- **Transitions between levels involve both “transcending and including” the lower.**
- **Each new level presents new and unique problems and new opportunities.**
- **A new world view creates a different context for human experience at each level.**

# Overview - 7

- **Development also involves various “lines:”**
  - Examples: cognition, ego (self), moral, affective, interpersonal, artistic, etc.
- **Each line develops according to a common, sequence of steps: a generic template.**
- **However, lines develop independently, at various rates:**
  - person will be at different levels on different lines.
  - Wilber: “overall development is a very messy affair.”

# Kosmos

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- **Cosmos has come to refer to the physical universe; the planets, stars, etc.**
- **Wilber uses the original meaning (and spelling) of the term: Kosmos**
  - Literal meaning: “everything.”
  - Physical matter, life, mind, soul, spirit, etc.
- **Wilber has developed the four quadrant model in order to be able to address a broader spectrum of phenomena and to capture “everything.”**

# Four Quadrants, Each With a Unique Focus

**Interior Aspects**

**Exterior Aspects**

**“I”**

**“IT”**

**Individual  
Aspects**

**“WE”**

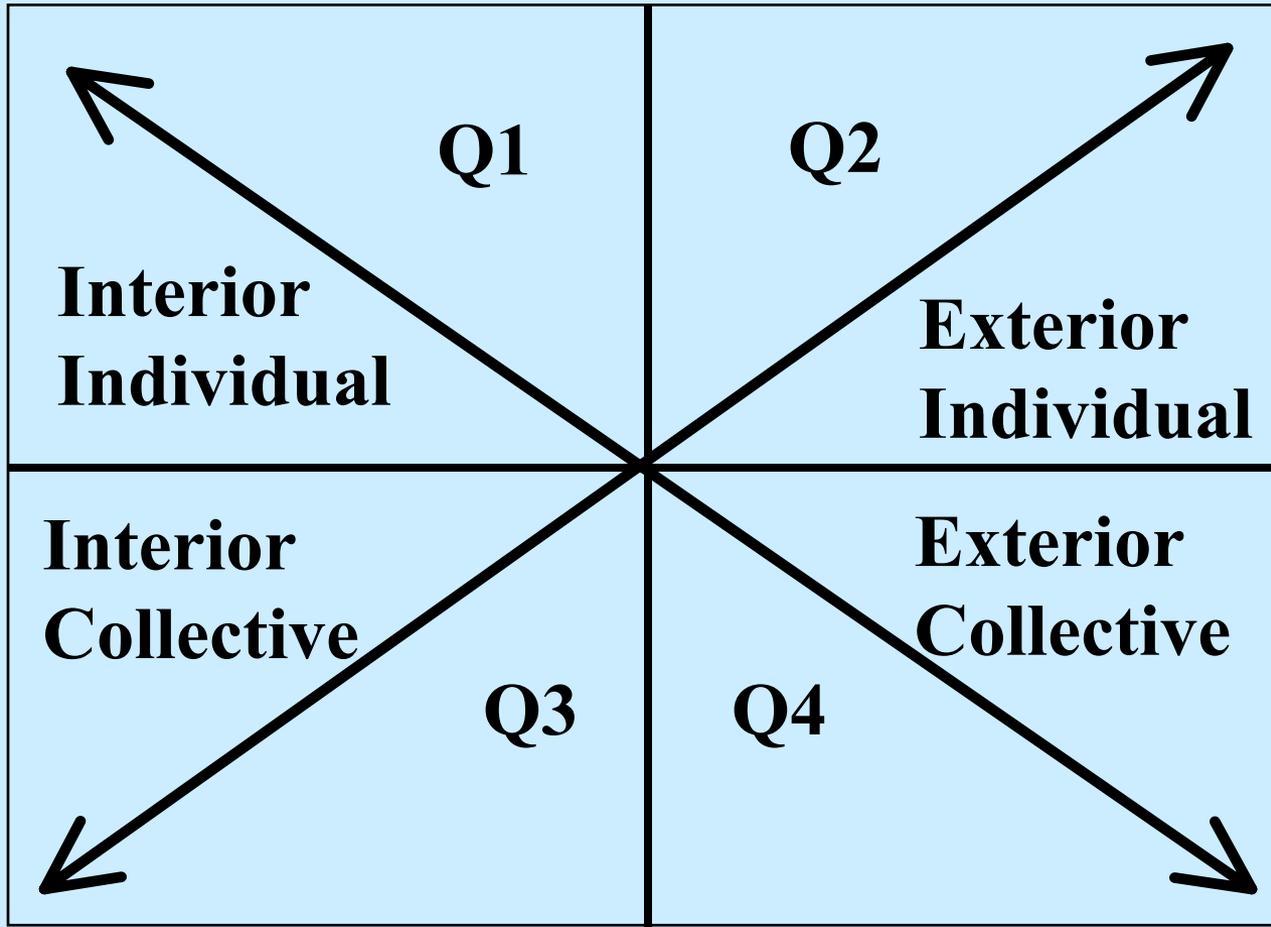
**“ITS”**

**Collective  
Aspects**

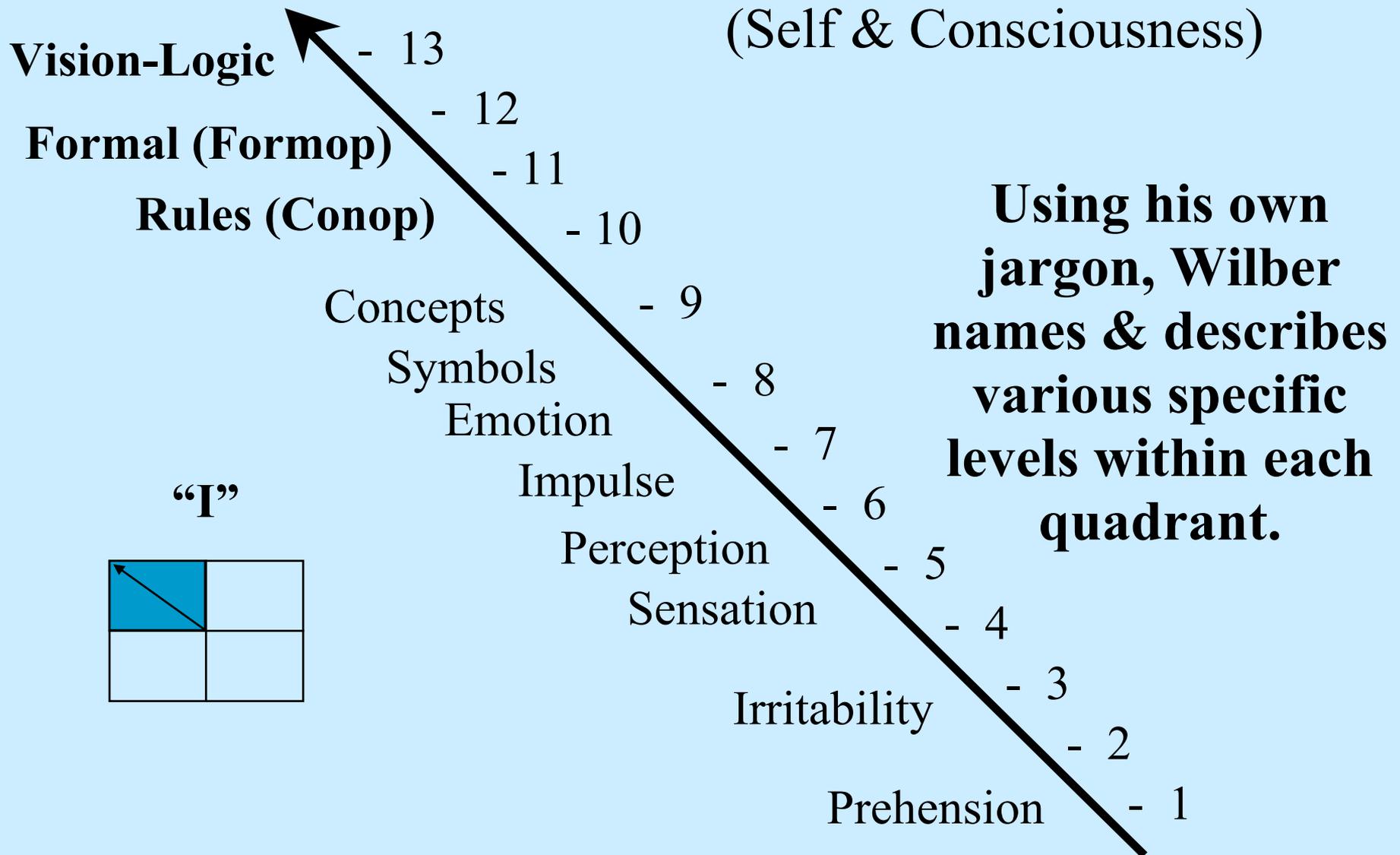
# Each Quadrant Has Different Contents

<b>Interior Aspects</b>	<b>Exterior Aspects</b>	
<b>Mind, mental states, intentions, subjective</b>	<b>Brain anatomy and physiology, behaviour, objective</b>	<b>Individual Aspects</b>
<b>Cultural, worldviews, group identity, intersubjective</b>	<b>Social, physical infrastructure, political systems, interobjective</b>	<b>Collective Aspects</b>

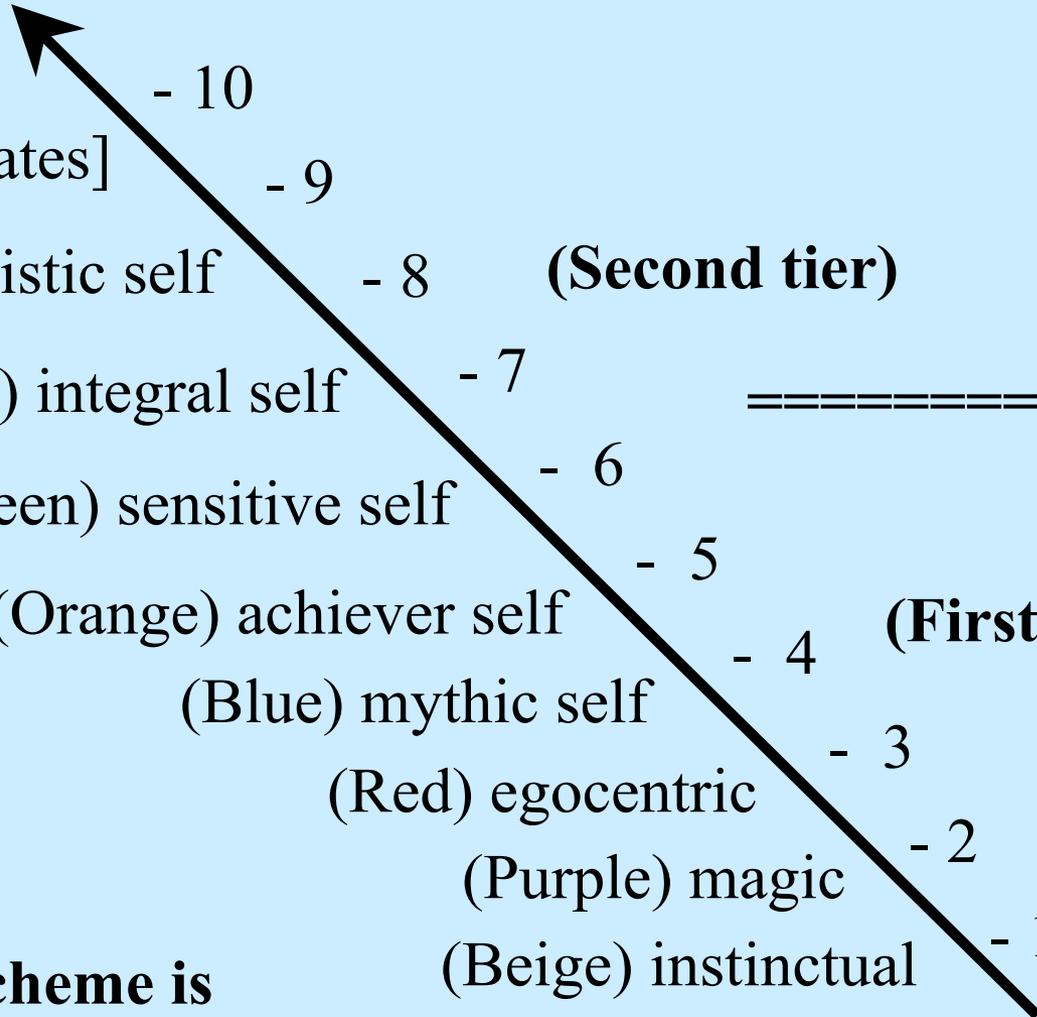
# Each Quadrant Has Its Own Dimension



# Q1: Interior - Individual



# Q1: Simplified



[Also includes altered states]

(Turquoise) holistic self

(Second tier)

(Yellow) integral self

(Green) sensitive self

“I”

(Orange) achiever self

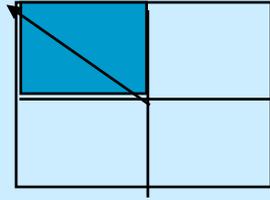
(First tier)

(Blue) mythic self

(Red) egocentric

(Purple) magic

(Beige) instinctual



Beck's spiral scheme is presented in ( ) brackets.

# Q1: Example Theorists

Freud

Jung

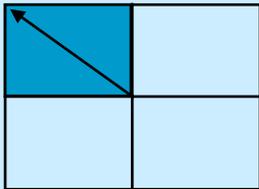
Piaget

Aurobindo

Plotinus

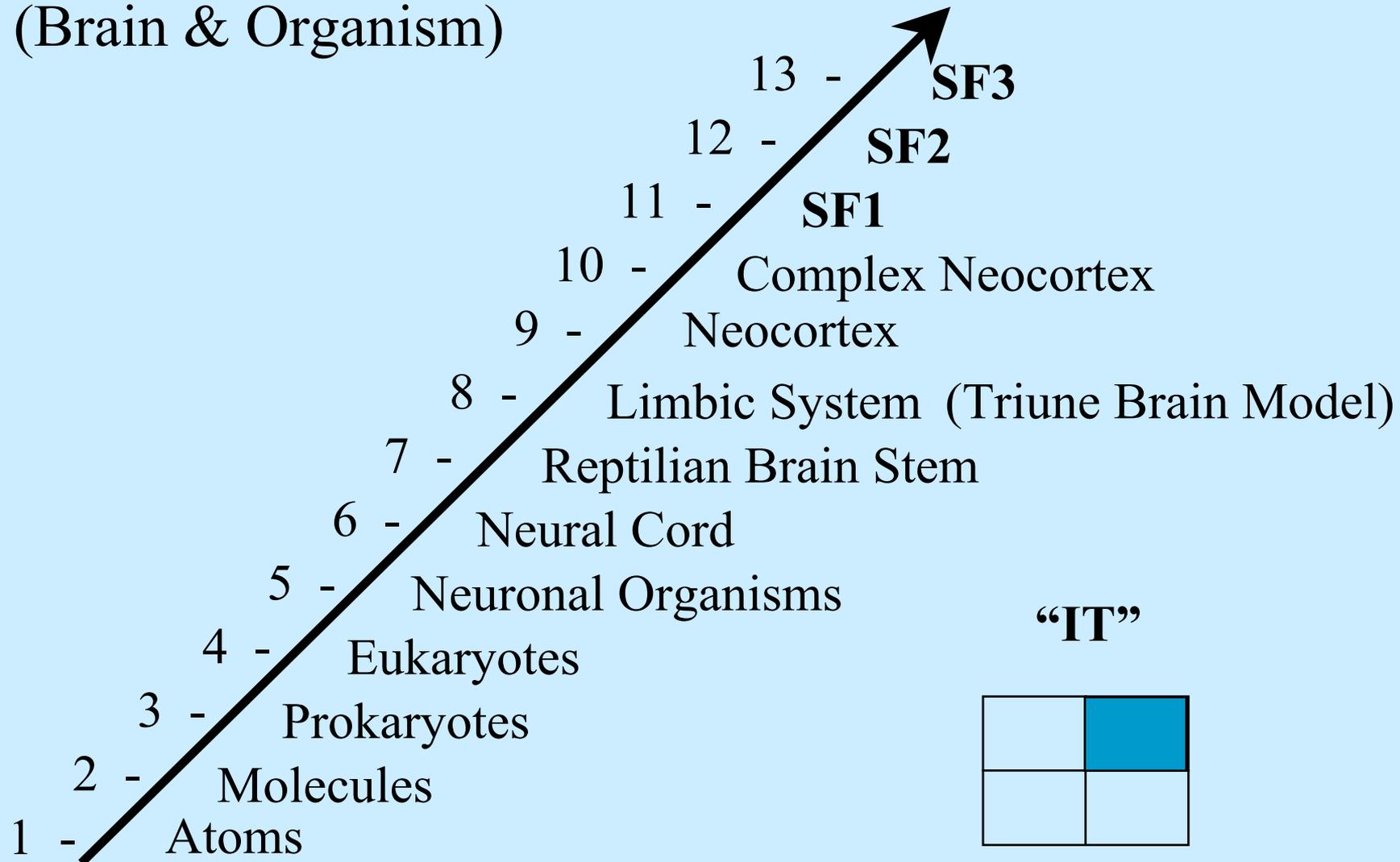
Buddah

“I”



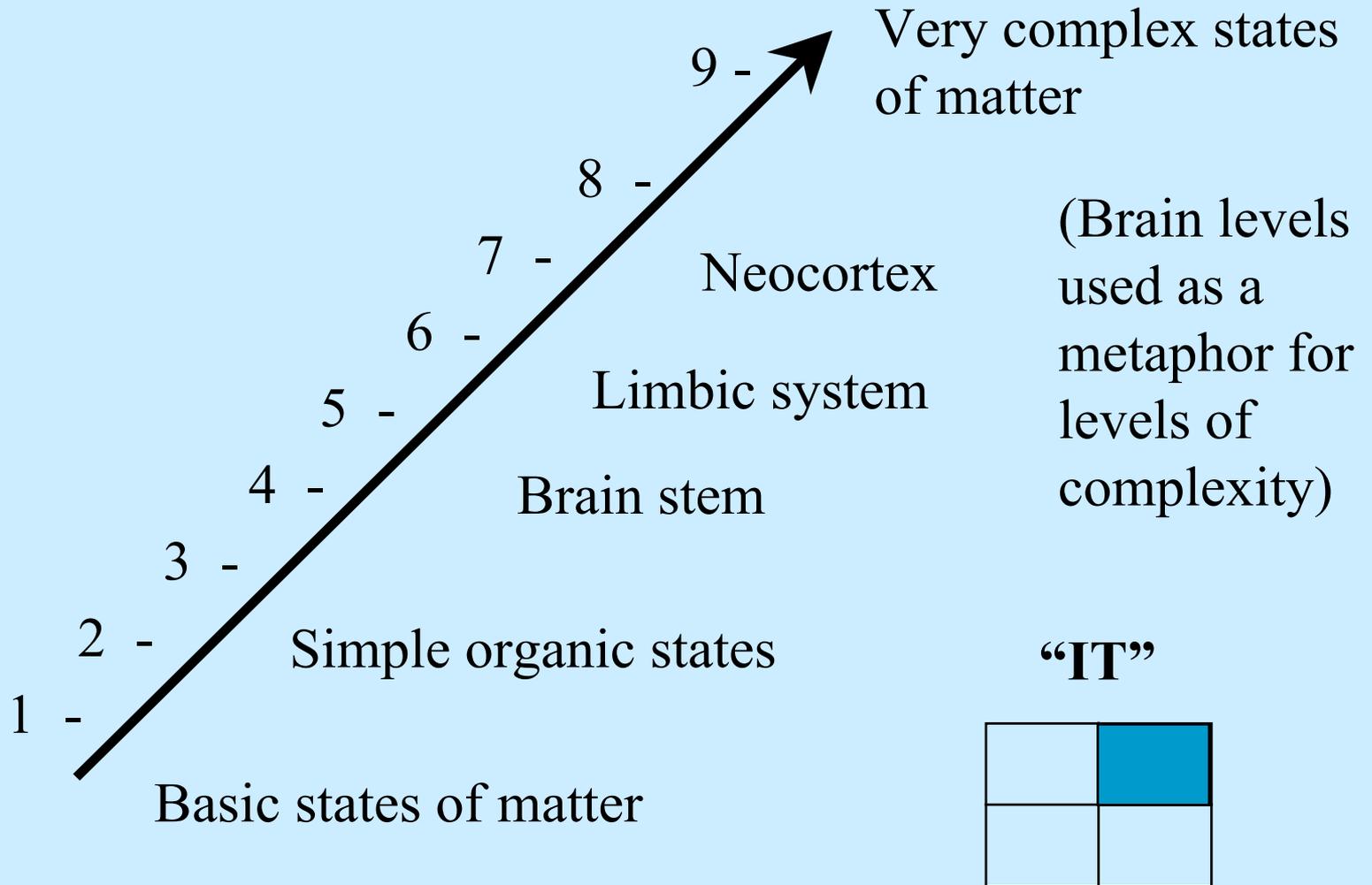
# Q2: Exterior - Individual

(Brain & Organism)



“IT”


# Q2: Simplified



# Q2: Example Theorists

Typical Areas of Study:

**Empiricism**

**Behaviourism**

**Physics**

**Biology**

**Neurology**



**B. F. Skinner**

**John Watson**

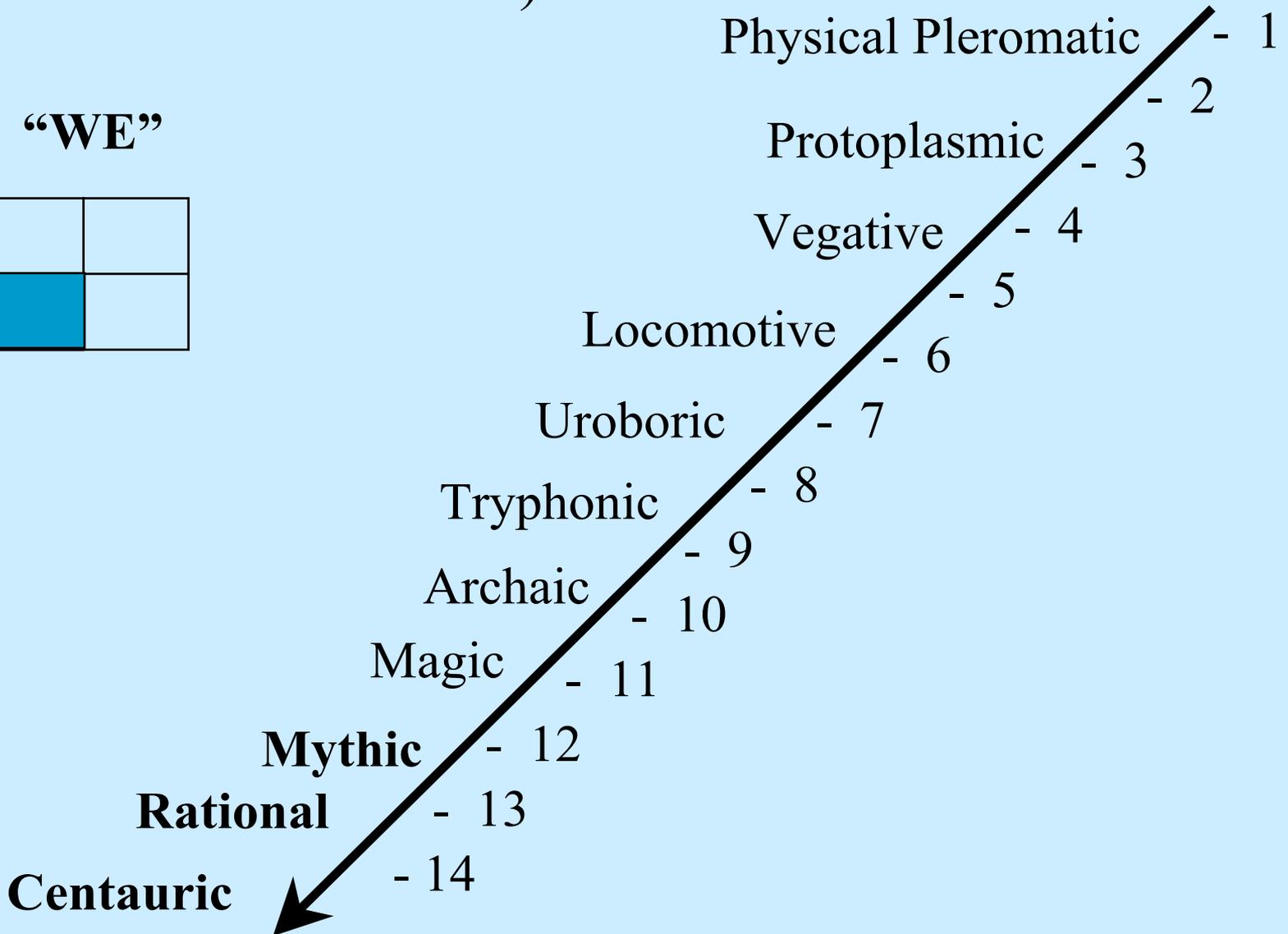
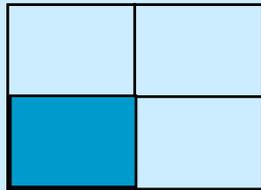
**John Locke**

**“IT”**


# Q3: Interior - Collective

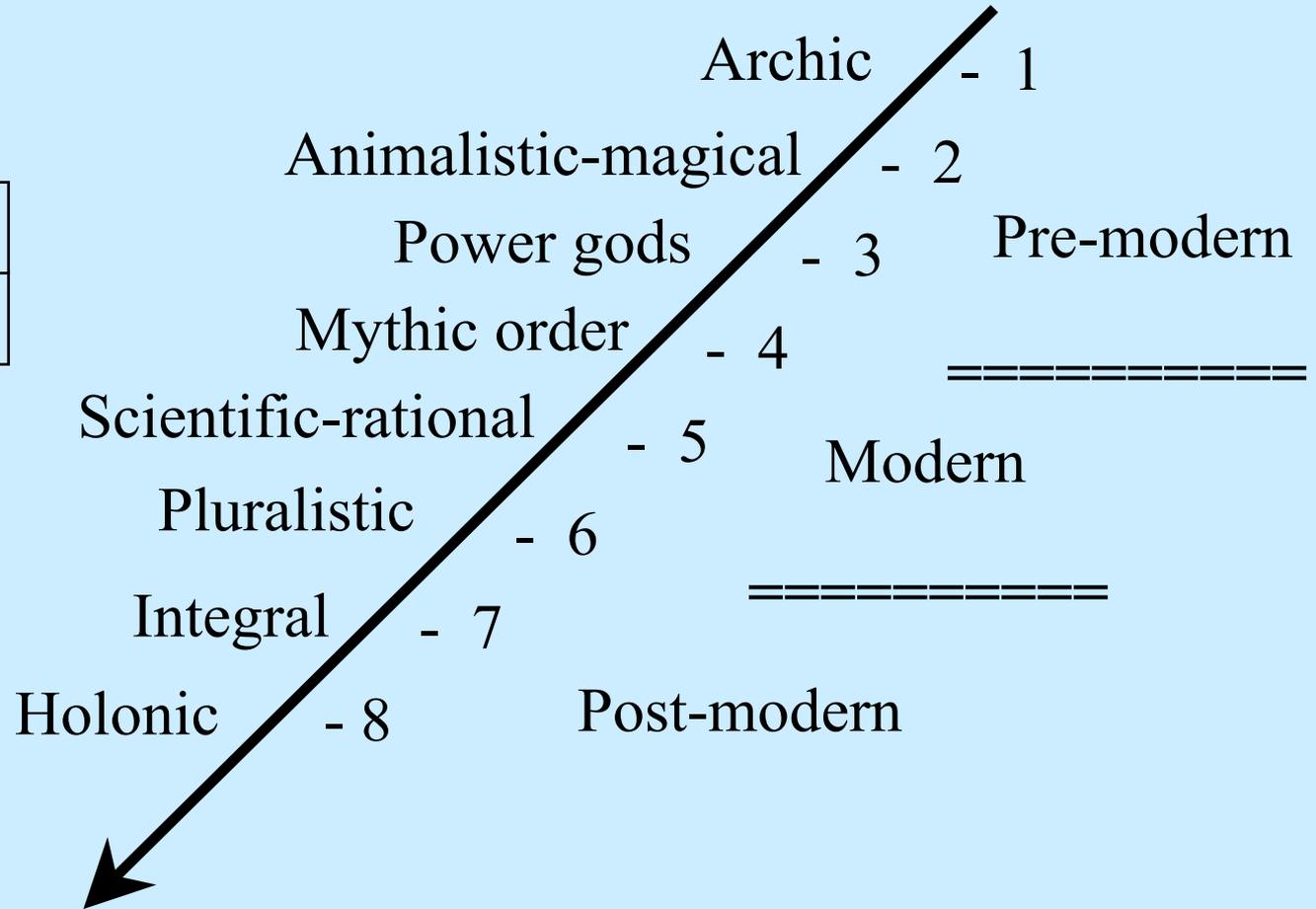
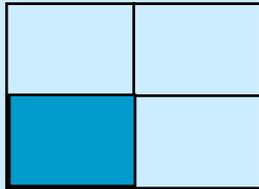
(Culture & Worldview)

“WE”



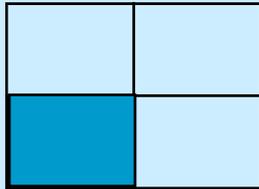
# Q3: Simplified

“WE”



# Q3: Example Theorists

“WE”



**Thomas Kuhn**

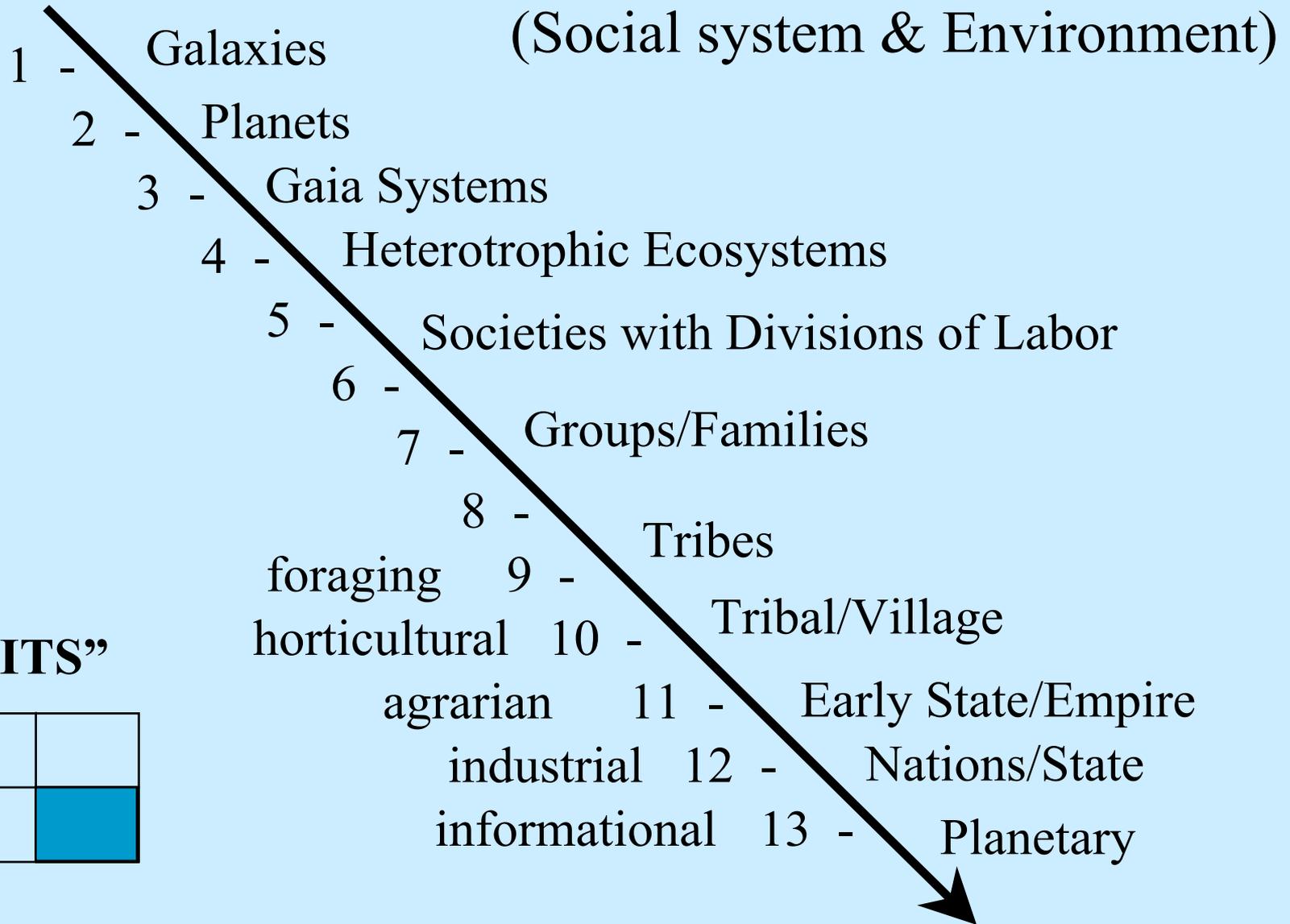
**W. Dilthey**

**Jean Gebser**

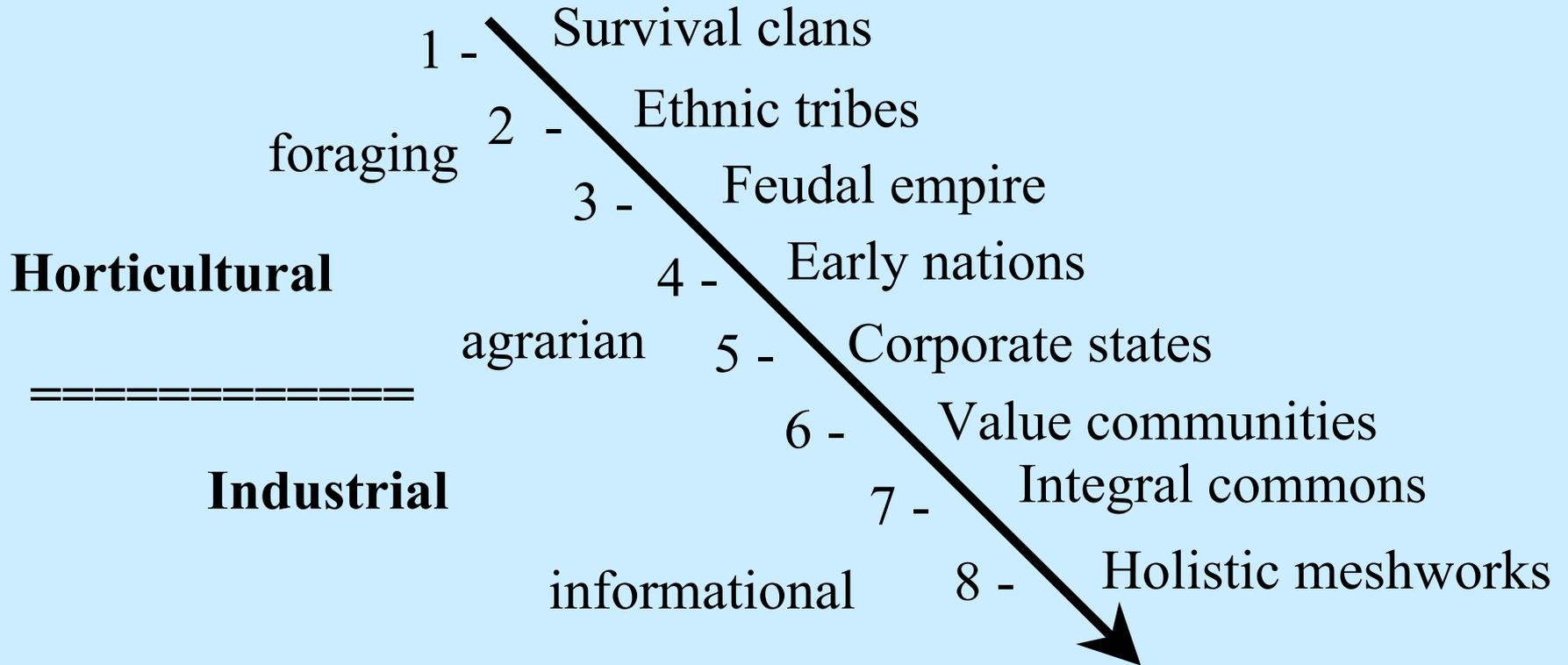
**Max Webster**

**Hans-Georg Gadamer**

# Q4: Exterior - Collective

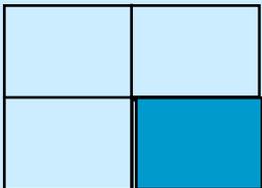


# Q4: Simplified



**Industrial**

**“ITS”**



# Q4: Example Theorists

- von Bertalanffy  
(Systems Theory)
- Talcott Parsons
- Auguste Comte
- Karl Marx
- Gerhard Lenski

“ITS”


# Four Approaches

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- **Each quadrant must develop it's own unique methods of analysis and study.**
- **No quadrant is privileged, we always need to consider all four types of analysis.**
- **The ideal goal for Wilber is to understand life from a broad viewpoint that integrates and balances all four approaches:**
  - **“AQAL” approach (all quadrant, all level).**
- **We can further simplify this into the “Big 3:”**
  - **art (I) / morals (WE) (Left side).**
  - **science (IT) (Right Side).**

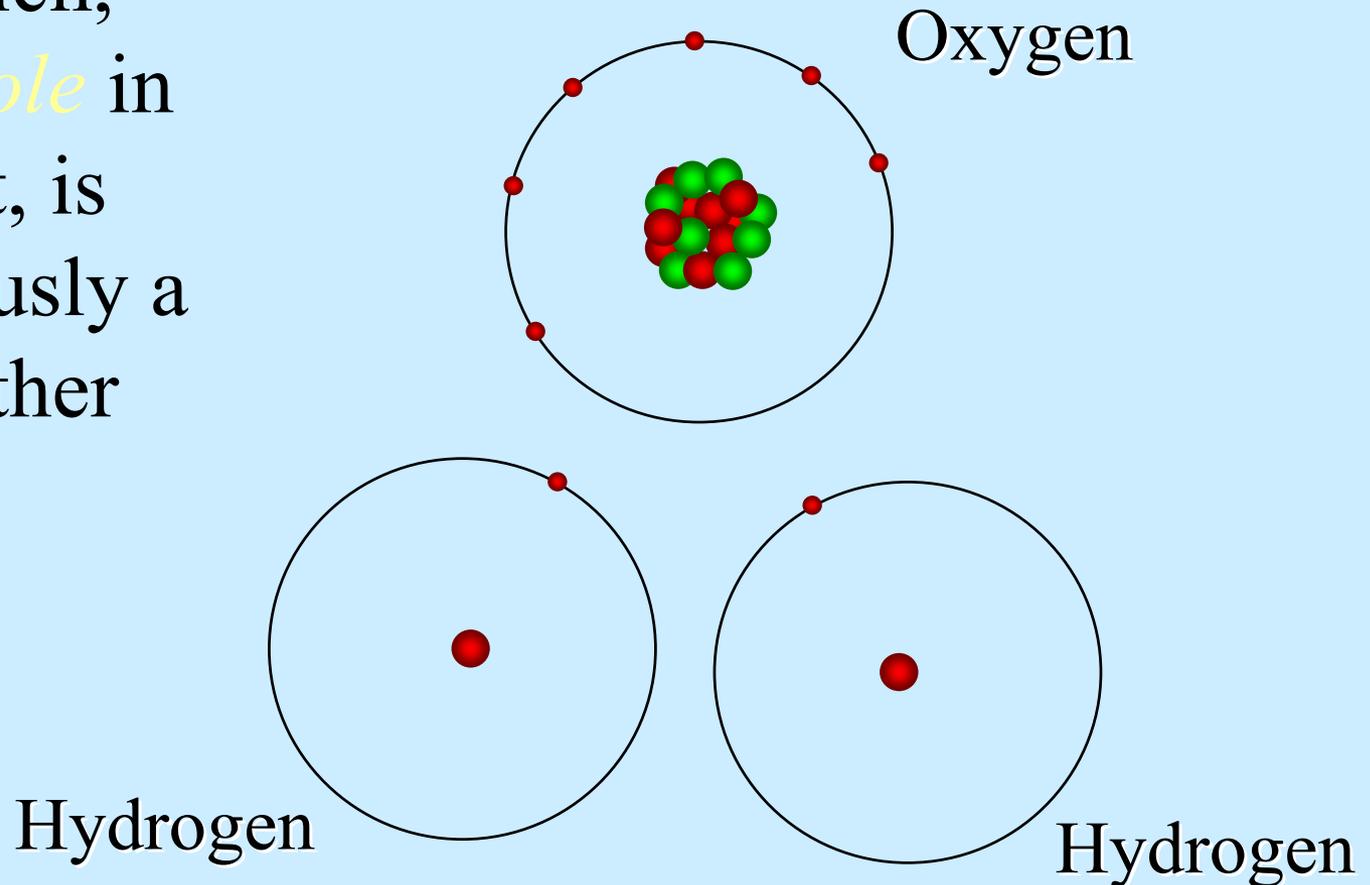
# The problem today

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- **Modernity divided the big three; art, science and morals (religion): a good thing, it unleashed science from the grasp of religion and politics.**
- **In postmodernity, the division has extended too far: it is now a dissociation. Now, science (the right side, “IT” view) dominates all. The vital left side aspects (the “I” and “WE” ) are reduced to quantitative, “flatland” variables: a bad thing.**
- **Wilber seeks to restore a balance and bring the “I” and “WE” aspects back.**

# Holon

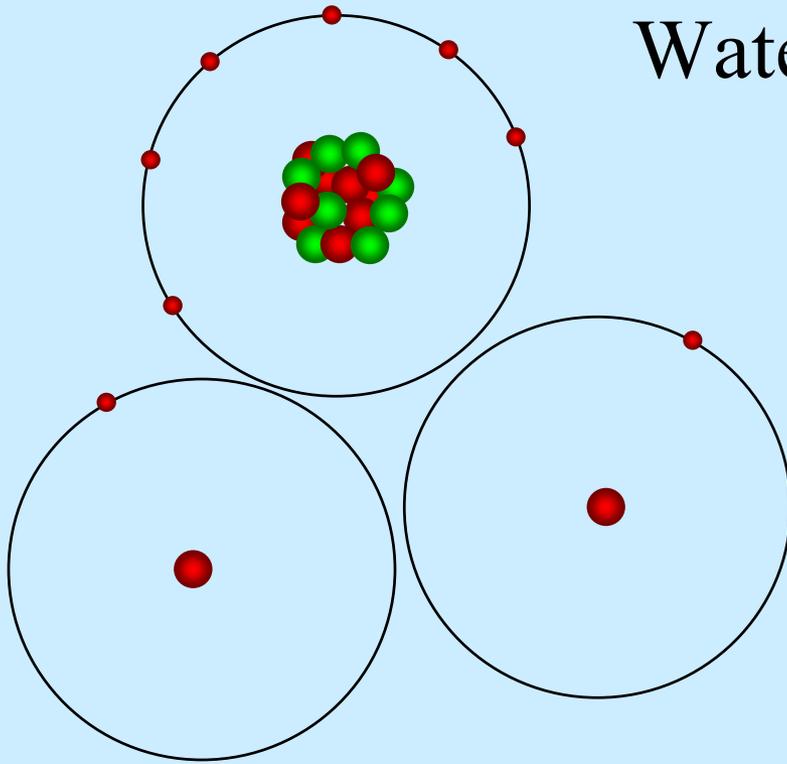
“...that which, being a *whole* in one context, is simultaneously a *part* in another context.”



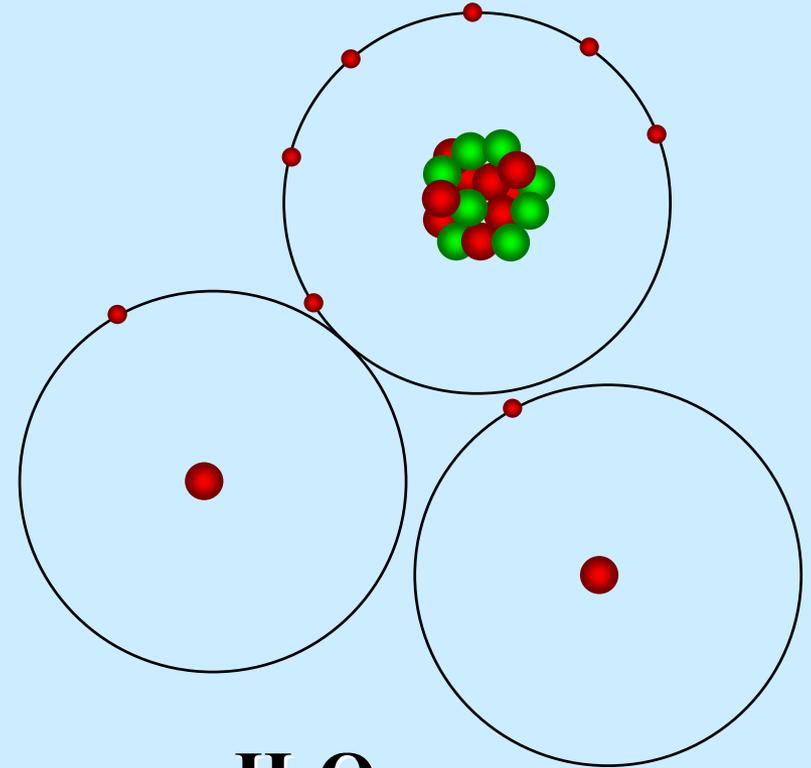
Whole individual atoms

# Holon(s)

Water molecules



**H<sub>2</sub>O**



**H<sub>2</sub>O**

Holons combine to form still larger wholes that Wilber calls holarchies.

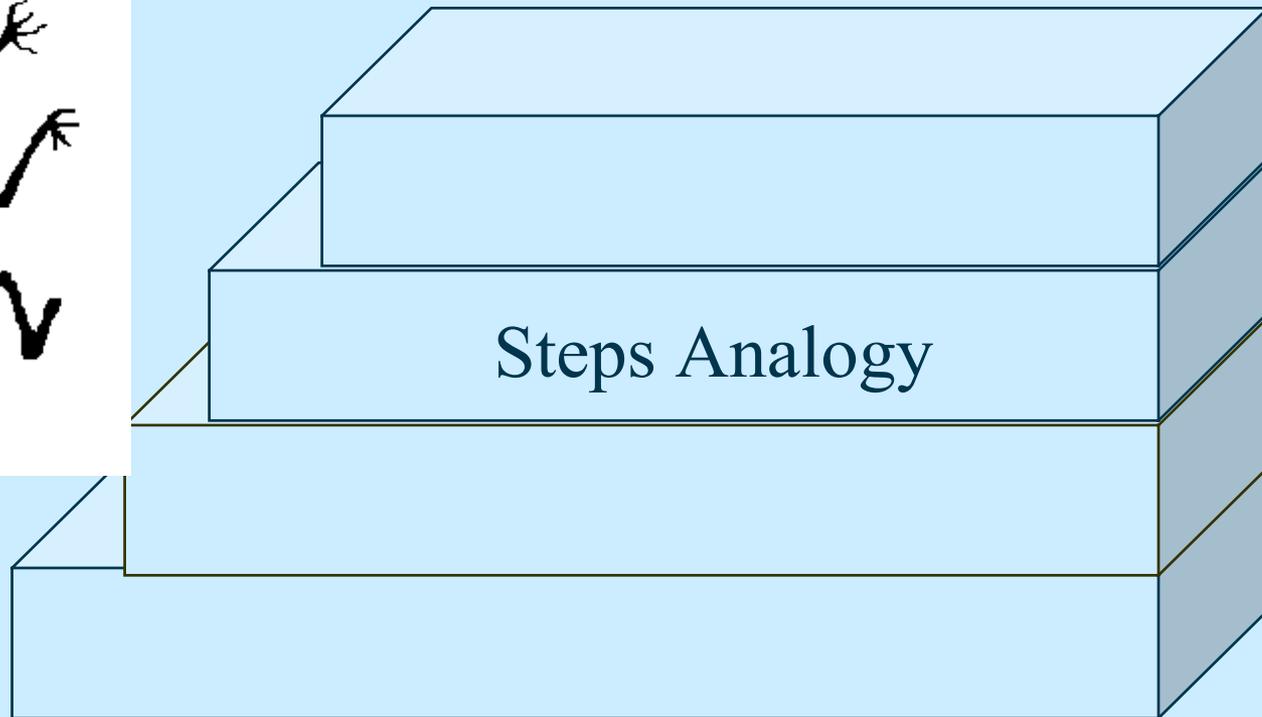
# Four Aspects to Each Holon

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- **No holon exists in just one quadrant; each holon has a presence in all four quadrants.**
- **Thus, for each holon that we want to examine, we have to apply methods from each of the four types of analysis:**
  - **Example: A single thought is a holon with four inseparable aspects (intention, behavior, culture, and social aspects), each with its own validity claims (subjective truthfulness, objective truth, intersubjective justness, and interobjective functional fit).**
- **A coffee mug represents the whole Universe.**  
Thich Nhat Hanh

# Transcend & Include

**In Wilber's approach, in development, each step up both transcends and includes the previous step.**



# Two Types of Structures

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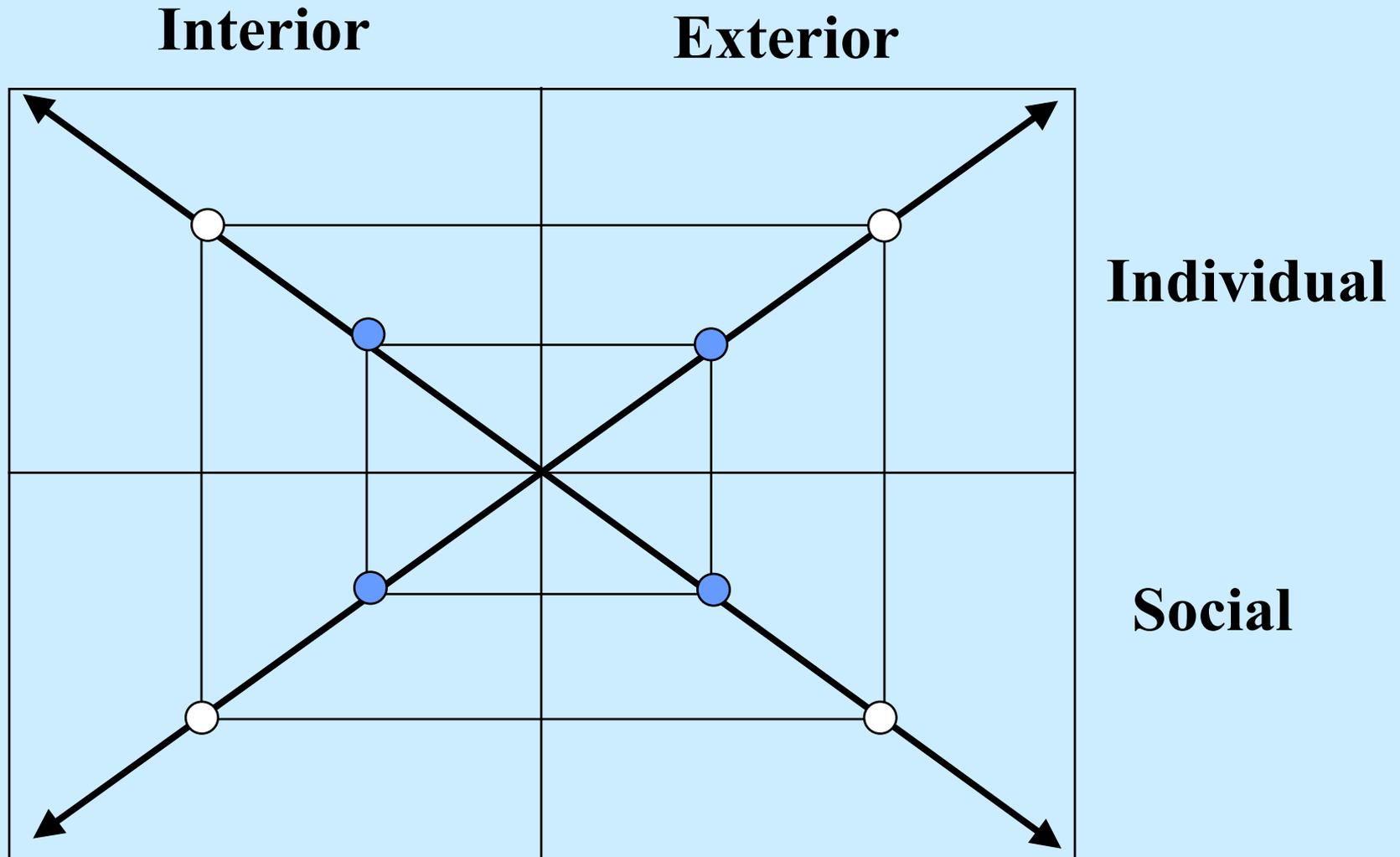
- **Some structures are **basic** and endure to form part of the next level:**
  - e.g. Piaget’s lower levels remain to form part of the next level.
- **Some structures are **transitional** and are replaced by higher levels:**
  - e.g. Kohlberg: Stage 2 replaces 1.
  - (Doesn't this distinction appear to contradict Wilber’s “transcend and include” model?)

# Levels Evolve

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- **One must identify with the new level, disidentify & transcend the lower, then include & integrate the lower into the higher.**
- **Something new “emerges” at each higher level that moves evolution ahead.**
- **Higher levels are more integrated than lower.**
- **Higher levels can “understand” lower, but lower can not “understand” higher.**
- **Growth reflects increasing consciousness.**
- **New levels bring a new view of the world.**

# Co-evolution



# Self

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- **“I” of one level becomes “ME” of next:**
  - (the subject of one stage becomes an object of the next).
- **The self is a “navigator” of development:**
  - “The self is responsible for balancing and integrating all of the levels, lines, and states in the individual” Wilber.
- **Self is both a constant rudder and a developmental line (self guides development but it also develops as well).**

# Criticisms of Wilber - 1

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- **Some argue with Wilber's interpretations of his primary references.**
- **Despite thousands of references, how academic and objective is he?**
- **Despite thousands of pages, how original is Wilber?**
- **Other theories may be “just as good” at explaining things:**
  - e.g. Michael Washburn, Stan Grof, R. Assagioli.
  - Grave's model (D. Beck's spiral dynamics) is another good alternative.

# Criticisms of Wilber - 2

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- **Wilber has strong views of:**
  - The nature of spirituality.
  - The nature of regression.
  - Some critics contest his ideas.
- **Although he writes with authority, he is also often vague & contradictory. This might reflect that we do not not understand Wilber (or that he is a poor author) or that we are seeing his thinking evolve as he writes.**
- **In the past, Wilber has used an aggressive (nasty) approach in answering his critics.**

# What Does Wilber Add to Dabrowski?

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- Brings together and integrates many **divergent approaches**.
- More emphasis on **collective aspects**.
- **Evolution** of consciousness provides the main context of development.
- Distinguishes more **levels** of development.
- Metaphysical **Spirit** drives all growth.
- Elaborates higher stages of **Spirituality**.

# Dabrowski Adds:

- The role of **developmental potential** in growth.
- **Positive disintegration** is necessary for growth.
- The role of **psychoneurosis** in growth.
- Emphasis on the role of **emotion** in growth.
- **Additional contributions:**
  - Context of integration and disintegration.
  - Role played by the developmental dynamisms.
  - Volitional aspect of growth (Third factor).
  - The personality ideal.
  - The hierarchy of values.

# Similarities - 1

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- **Multilevel approach.**
- **Multidimensional approach.**
- **Wilber's levels parallel Dabrowski's.**
- **Higher levels present new world views.**
- **Higher levels are increasingly conscious.**
- **Each level has a characteristic pathology.**
- **Both conceive of a strong role for the self.**
  - Dabrowski's Third Factor is conscious; similar(?) to Wilber's unconscious, drive to evolve / pull towards Spirit.

## Similarities - 2

- **Both agree the average level seen today falls far short of the highest possible:**
  - Wilber: less than 1% will develop transpersonal spirituality.
  - Dabrowski: Level V is also very rare.
- **Both say that developmental exemplars describe and lead us toward the higher levels.**
- **Both describe how ML and MD interact:**
  - Development is not uniform.
  - People are often on different levels on different dimensions (Wilber's developmental lines).

# Differences - 1

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- **The hallmarks of development:**
  - **Wilber: evolving consciousness & Spirit.**
  - **Dabrowski: emotion (OE) & disintegration.**
- **Wilber: focus on building upon the lower levels -- the “transcend and include” model.**
- **Dabrowski: focus on lower levels disintegrating: allows the self to consciously re-order and revise itself to create the new, higher level. (a “transcend through revising and overcoming the lower” model).**

## **Differences - 2**

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- **Wilber: Development moves through nine basic levels of increasing consciousness, thus, nine major transitions (“fulcrums”) of development. Each transition has its own unique challenges & risks (pathologies).**
- **Dabrowski: Development moves from a basic unilevel integration, through disintegrations, to a second, multilevel integration of reality.**
  - **Essentially, one major transition between Unilevelness and Multilevelness.**
  - **Incremental transitions between five levels.**

## **Differences - 3**

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- **Wilber sees pathology as a defect of the given developmental transition: either a problem with differentiation from the lower level or a problem with integration into the higher level.**
- **Dabrowski sees a positive role for psychoneurosis in growth and creativity.**
  - **Minority view: at odds with traditional views of Wilber, Freud, Maslow and others:**
    - **Traditionally, neuroses are seen as a coping mechanism, symptom does some job to protect person and maintain stability, not growth.**

# Differences - 4

- **Developmental potential:**
- **Wilber:** each person has the potential to go to the top “if they choose to,” and if their developmental course is favorable (however, in most cases, too much energy is diverted into transitional pathologies and there is not enough energy left for development).
- **Dabrowski:** not everyone has the intrinsic factors necessary to move ahead.
  - This is a function of biology (a property of the nervous system).

# Differences - 5

- **Developmental Potential:**
- **Wilber: a “metaphysical” approach:**
  - potential is simply within everyone: spirit is within us, pulling us “up” to develop.
- **Dabrowski: a “genetic” approach:**
  - DP is a product of biology. Phenotype reflects genotype. Potential is in our biology (genes).
  - Different individuals have different biology, so show different properties.
  - We are pushed to advance by our internal sense of who we ought to be (our 3rd factor).

## Differences - 6

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- **Wilber describes the higher spiritual levels in much greater detail (mostly derived from Eastern works).**
- **Dabrowski's level V can be inferred to include Wilber's higher Spiritual stages but he did not distinguish these higher realms in detail.**
  - **Aside: Should we expand Dabrowski's upper level? For example, Bill Hague has suggested we should consider adding Spiritual OE.**

# Differences - 7

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- **Both authors agree on subject-object:**
  - S only: all ego, a primitive, nondual state. Other is only a reflection of self.
  - S -- O: Dual state, average person. S sees and relates to O as a role.
  - S <--> O: Still dual state. ML person, S can see self as O and other as S:
    - basis of empathy: Dabrowski's "highest" description of S - O.

# Differences - 8

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- **Wilber goes further to describe:**
  - S = O: moving toward nondual, S and O blur somewhat but are still separate.
  - ALL: nondual. S and O disappear. Absolute S and Absolute O are again all one absoluteness. Timeless, spaceless, pure, nondual awareness.

# Differences - 9

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- **Wilber appears to endorse the cognitive emphasis of traditional models and gives emotion a limited (and lower) role.**
- **Dabrowski focuses on emotion:**
  - Emotions are a critical aspect of advanced development & of the highest levels:
    - Differentiates higher & lower emotions.
    - Emotion works with cognition and imagination to anchor & guide higher values.

# Alternatives?

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- In the metaphysical tradition, Stanislav Grof's The cosmic game (1998) is excellent [but a bit “out-there”]. Between Wilber & Dabrowski.
- Kent Bailey's Human paleopsychology (1987) is outstanding. Gives an evolutionary, “contemporary academic” backdrop [a difficult academic book].
- Elaine De Beauport's The three faces of mind is also recommended as an accessible overview [a multiple intelligences approach].

# Reference

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- **Wilber has written about 20 books.**
- **One of his latest books is perhaps the best introduction to his overall work:**
  - Wilber, K. (2000) Integral psychology: Consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

## Note:

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- This presentation is revised from an earlier one given jointly by Jeff Wieckert and myself at the The Third Biennial Conference on Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, July 10-12, 1998, Kendall College, Evanston IL.
- I would have liked to present the original lecture as we gave it on the Dabrowski web page, but I do not have the full set of slides as we presented it there.
- The End.