

Vrinte, Joseph, (2002). *The Perennial Quest for a Psychology with a Soul: An Inquiry into the Relevance of Sri Aurobindo's Metaphysical Yoga Psychology in the Context of Ken Wilber's Integral Psychology*. Delhi, India: Motilal Barnarsidass. xx + 568 pp. ISBN: 81-208-1932-2, hard cover, \$50.00. Reviewed by Daryl S. Paulson.

It was only a matter of time before someone compared and contrasted the works of Sri Aurobindo and Ken Wilber. Joseph Vrinte has done this in a rather balanced and fair manner, providing specific criticisms to the works of each.

The book, consisting of twelve chapters, a preface, acknowledgements, epilogue and bibliography, is particularly valuable in that Vrinte has in-depth knowledge of the works of both Ken Wilber and Sri Aurobindo. Yet, it is clear that Vrinte is partial to Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy.

Chapter 1 (Psychotherapy) provides a summary background of the four psychotherapeutic schools, to wit, psychoanalytic, cognitive-behavioral, existential-humanistic, and transpersonal. Vrinte does not place Wilber's work in an "integral" category, as Wilber would like, nor does Vrinte discuss positive psychology or neuropsychiatry. Vrinte argues that, for complete growth, a spiritual component is necessary.

In Chapter 2 (Conventional Psychotherapy and Spiritual Disciplines), Vrinte posits that the personal self and deeper self (transpersonal self) must be harmoniously integrated. Frances Vaughan, John Welwood, Roberto Assagioli, Brant Cortright, Ken Wilber, and Michael Washburn have also made this point. Yet, Vrinte concludes that this process is not an easy endeavor and cautions against handing over aspects of life to a deeper self for which one needs to take personal responsibility.

In Chapter 3 (Metaphysical Psychology), Vrinte argues that human existence, in all practices and forms, actually is part of larger spiritual phenomenon that leads to the Godhead. The self-sense that makes this journey continually expands its awareness, beginning at the egoic self, continuing into the Soul level, and culminating in Spirit. Vrinte begins, then, a systematic process of comparing Wilber's and Aurobindo's philosophies, as well as discussing both Western and Eastern views in this connection.

Vrinte, in Chapter 4 (The Transpersonal Psychological Movement), presents the history of the transpersonal psychology movement. For Vrinte, it began just after Maslow wrote the book, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*. Vrinte also discusses valuable contributions made by Cortright, Grof, Aurobindo, and, of course, by Wilber and Washburn, to the growth of the transpersonal movement. According to Vrinte, two fundamental transpersonal paradigms exist: Wilber's structural, or "ladder model," and Washburn's "spiral," or "U-turn" model. Vrinte also discusses the practical applied aspects of both transpersonal psychology and psychiatry in a section on psychotic disorders, border-line disorders, and neurotic disorders and comments on John Nelson's book, *Healing the Split*, and aspects of the chakra system. He concludes this chapter with a section on meditation and trans-

personal psychotherapy, emphasizing the importance of individuals opening to deeper levels of Being.

Chapter 5 (A General Introduction to Ken Wilber) presents adequate summaries of Wilber's books, omitting, however, *The Holographic Paradigm*, *A Sociable God*, *Quantum Questions*, *Spiritual Choices*, *Grace and Grit*, and *Boomeritis*. Although it is nearly impossible to characterize Wilber's work, Vrinte's summaries provide a summary discussion for each one, including how they fit into Wilber's self-proclaimed evolutionary stages – Wilber I through Wilber IV. Vrinte also presents Aurobindo's stage model of consciousness, as articulated by Ken Wilber and presents comments on other areas, such as lines and levels of development, modernism and postmodernism, and the four quadrants, as well as Wilber's incorporation of Beck and Cowan's book, *Spiral Dynamics*. Vrinte presents Wilber's view particularly in relationship to Aurobindo, including ascent/descent components of spiritual growth, levels of spiritual consciousness, the Great Chain of Being, and application of spiritual insights into one's lived experiences.

Chapter 6 (Sri Aurobindo's Metaphysical Vision) begins with an introduction to Aurobindo's writings, particularly *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Vrinte then discusses the role of integral yoga in linking mind, body, emotions, and spirit to the Supreme presence, *Sachidananda*. This process requires an integration of all levels and dimensions of one's being, a concept also favored by Wilber, that eventually leads to a radical transformation – a heightening, widening, and integrating – of one's consciousness. Part of this process is linking the frontal self (personal self) with the Psychic Being (soul) to become a soul-infused personality. The centering of one's personal being in the psychic being is similar to Psychosynthesis as presented by Roberto Assagioli. It is this deeper Self that guides one throughout life, serving as an intermediary between spirit and personality.

In Chapter 7 (The Psycho-Spiritual Nature of Man), Vrinte discusses Aurobindo's views concerning human spiritual developmental potentials. Aurobindo viewed humans as consisting of an outer, frontal being and an inner being of various components. The outer being consists of the body, mind, and emotions, and is what most Westerners view as “themselves.” The goal in life for most is comfort and pleasure: eating well, playing well, and sexing well. Yet, for those who seek, there is a deep inner sense of being – the psychic being – that has a vastly different view of life and purpose than being a simple pursuit of comfort and pleasure. The psychic being generally does not present itself until a person has developed his/her personality to some degree and is ready for spiritual development. The psychic being is equivalent to the soul, or Wilber's psychic-subtle self-sense. As in psychosynthesis, the psychic being is not the highest level of spiritual development . . . Spirit is. Aurobindo also conceives a vertical system of development similar to Wilber's.

Chapter 8 (Sadhana in Integral Yoga and Its Difficulties) presents some requirements and problems commonly encountered on a spiritual path. For Aurobindo, three aspects are required – devotion (Bhakti Yoga), action (Karma Yoga), and knowledge (Jnana Yoga) – and these aspects must be blended into an integral path (Purna Yoga), or a number of problems can occur.

Chapter 9 (The Transpersonal Psychological Movement and Integral Sadhana) discusses psychotherapy and spiritual pursuits. Western psychology, particularly the depth psychologies of Freud and Jung, argue that individuals need to work through their unconscious, repressed materials, if they are to be made whole. The Eastern view asserts that this repressed material must be transcended. The bulk of the chapter presumes the aspirant has already developed successfully into formal operations stage of life and is ready and able to move to trans-egoic levels. There is disparity in this chapter relative to Aurobindo, at least as Vrinte presents him, and transpersonal psychology. The ego is viewed as the main source of problems in spiritual development from a yoga perspective. But the term, “ego,” as used by Vrinte, would be better interpreted as “persona.” Aurobindo’s ego and depth psychology’s ego have different meanings, and Vrinte is not clear in differentiating them. In some ways, this chapter is rather unconvincing in that Vrinte seems merely to parrot the position of Aurobindo as if it were a law of physics.

In Chapter 10 (A Critical Evaluation of Ken Wilber’s Commentary on the Refinements of Sri Aurobindo’s “Individual” Integral Yoga), Vrinte tells us that Wilber has been strongly influenced by Sri Aurobindo, particularly as Wilber moved from Wilber I (a Jungian perspective) to Wilber II (a developmental view). Yet Wilber, over the years, has moved through Wilber III, Wilber IV, and now into Wilber V. Wilber certainly does not reject Aurobindo, but he does go beyond what Aurobindo has discussed as concerns of human development, such as feminist positions, cyberspace, and systems theory. Wilber views Aurobindo’s short-comings not as a personal point of contention, but as the result of unavailability of important discoveries made since his time. Perhaps the biggest short-coming, according to Wilber, is Aurobindo’s over-valuing of the individual subjective level (Wilber’s upper left hand quadrant), at the expense of the cultural intersubjective or the social system. Yet Vrinte does present arguments showing that Aurobindo did consider social and cultural implications in his works, in terms of metaphysics, sociology, religion, and ethics. Vrinte also notes that Wilber and Aurobindo agree that the future of humankind depends on achieving “post-postformal” development (second tier for Wilber, Cosmic Being for Aurobindo).

Chapter 11 (Ken Wilber’s Critical Interpretation of Various Aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s Metaphysical Vision) attempts to refute Wilber’s hesitation about whether Aurobindo ever realized the highest levels of consciousness, as Wilber claims Adi Da and Sri Ramana Maharshi did. Aurobindo did, in Vrinte’s view, and he questions if Wilber actually knows what the highest spiritual level is, other than via his construed definitions. Wilber’s ultimate unity is, for Vrinte, a static unity, and he asserts that Aurobindo’s realizations were beyond static unity consciousness. Vrinte also argues that the Buddha, Shankara, or Ramakrishna were not integral in their practices.

For Aurobindo, spiritual development is a two-phase process. One climbs to the next level (an ascent) but, also, there is a push from the divine to the individual to channel itself downward to the human (descent). Also, for Sri Aurobindo, one must move ever more deeply within to connect to the psychic being and bring it to constant personal awareness, a rather radical transformation. While Wilber’s view is similar, it consists of more of a “1–2–3 process” for each developmental level. First, there is

a disidentification of, say, level k , and a movement to level $k + 1$ and, finally, a movement toward integrating levels k and $k + 1$. In truth, all-in-all, Aurobindo's and Wilber's views do seem quite similar.

Vrinte also states that, unlike Wilber, Aurobindo views not only an evolution of individuals, but also, of a species. Wilber does view humans as growing through evolution, but not exactly as Aurobindo does. This is a small point, probably not worth taking reader time here. Finally, Vrinte discusses differences between Wilber's vision logic and Aurobindo's spiritual mind, Wilber's psychic levels and Aurobindo's psychic being.

In Chapter 12 (Sri Aurobindo's Metaphysical Yoga Psychology), Vrinte presents Aurobindo's view of psychology, as related to attaining self-perfection in life. Although Aurobindo did not construe a psychology as Westerners think of psychology, he did describe a behavior component, a humanistic component, a Freudian component, as well as a transpersonal component. Vrinte also discusses what could be called psychopathology, which includes illnesses due to yoga and psychological health and contrasts it to Wilber's view of psychopathology.

In the Epilogue, Vrinte mentions that Wilber has officially withdrawn his affiliation with Transpersonal Psychology to promote Integral Studies. Vrinte presents some points that continually plague Wilber's reputation. Wilber, although superb at integrating concepts, has little regard for the views of others, except how they might fit into or strengthen his own works. He has been unable or unwilling to work with others in a collegial manner that promotes a sense of positive regard or well-being for colleagues. People who know Wilber or have worked with him are often puzzled by his insistence that *he* is right. Vrinte states that Wilber does not always interpret Aurobindo correctly – also a criticism voiced by many other theorists and scholars in an assortment of other areas. Well, whatever, Wilber has contributed immensely to transpersonal studies.

In summary, this book is a masterpiece of scholarly comparative work, presenting both Wilber and Aurobindo, for the most part, fairly. Although there certainly are differences between the philosophies of Wilber and Aurobindo, there also are many similarities. In reading this book, one will gain a clear understanding of Wilber's works to date, of Aurobindo's works, and how they differ and yet complement each other. This book is strongly recommended to all transpersonal theorists, scholars, philosophers, and students of religious studies.

The Author

Dr. Joseph Vrinte, a citizen from The Netherlands, has worked intermittently for the last twenty years as a mental health worker in various mental health institutions and a clinic for drug-addicts in Amsterdam. He received his B.A. from Lucknow University, his M.A. in Philosophy/Psychology from Rohilkhand University in Bareilly and, his Ph.D. degree from the same university. This book is his third major work. His published dissertation is entitled *The Concept of Personality in Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga Psychology and A. Maslow's Humanistic/Transpersonal*

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Reviewer

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