

RESPONSE TO JORGE FERRER'S
"SPEAK NOW OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR PEACE-
A REVIEW ESSAY OF KEN WILBER'S
THE MARRIAGE OF SENSE AND SOUL"

Ken Wilber
Boulder, Colorado

I have a great deal of admiration and respect for Jorge Ferrer and his work, much of which is original and profound. I sometimes have less respect for his critique of others' work, for I often get the feeling that Jorge is off in his own world, creating an elaborate straw man and then obsessively and laboriously working to triumphantly knock it down. So it is, again, with this piece. I agree with much of it; it just has little to do with my work.

What I very much appreciate about the essay is how it highlights many of the problems with the monological hegemony of modern scientism and positivism. The problem is, I agree with most of what Jorge says, and I have already made most of these points in my other writings. Jorge, on the other hand, tries to set up my position as being a variant of positivism by failing to understand the extent of my commitment to epistemological pluralism. Jorge claims that, with positivism, I subscribe to methodological monism, whereas in fact, as I make quite clear, I subscribe to a unity-in-diversity of methods, a *diversity* that includes sensory, empiric, hermeneutic, transcendental, aesthetic, analytical, transformative, dialogical, dialectical, etc. The *unity* aspect is simply a commitment to injunctions that can be shared (whether those be meditative, interpretative, sensorimotor, ethical, etc.); some sort of direct illumination or apprehension (whether spiritual, mathematical, sensory, moral, interpretive, etc.); and an openness to having one's experience corroborated or challenged by others. Those three strands are a simple-and very general-set of guidelines which act to anchor our truth claims in sharing, openness, and honesty.

Jorge, unfortunately, takes my examples of these three strands in sensorimotor science and claims that is how I use them for *all* modes of knowing and experience, and this is simply preposterous. In hermeneutics, for example, we are working, not with sensory experience, but with interpretations, chains of cultural contexts, webs of

sliding signification, dialogical and dialectical modes, and so on. **In** contemplation, we are working with direct mystical apprehensions, illuminations, insights, *satori*, *samadhi*, and so forth. My writing, taken as a whole, makes it perfectly obvious that none of those can be reduced to the categories of *sensorimotor evidence*. In *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (1998), I was, of course, talking about natural science and the categories of sensorimotor evidence, and so *of course* I drew most of my parallels with that type of knowledge. But to say, as Jorge does, that I am therefore using nothing *but* the categories of positivistic empiricism to frame all knowledge is a profound misreading of my work

Here's a short example: the fact that I use "data" (as in sensory data, mental data, spiritual data) leads Jorge to think that I am being scientific (or importing the categories of sensory empiricism and positivism into all modes of knowing). But when I first introduced the term "data" (in *Eye to Eye*, chapters 1 and 2), I specifically explained that I was using it as William James did, to mean any direct experience. Further, as James pointed out, direct experience (or radical empiricism) is nondual, not divided into subject versus object—a pure "happening," as it were. Thus, sensory data is just *one version* of all sorts of valid data or valid experience or valid awareness—including mental awareness or data (hermeneutics, ethics, etc.) and spiritual awareness or data (*satori*, *samadhi*, etc.). Yet every time I use the word "data"—even though I have made abundantly clear what I mean by that term—Jorge tends to see it as evidence that I am using it in the sensory, positivistic, or scientific fashion, whereas I am doing just the opposite: I am showing that natural science is an unnatural reductionism of the rich range of awareness, experience, or data available to the human condition. I **am** deliberately using some of science's terminology to reclaim it for a broader, deeper endeavor.

In a long section, Jorge points out why hermeneutic investigations, among many others, cannot be reduced to sensorimotor positivism and methodological monism. I completely agree. In *Eye to Eye* (1990) and *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* (1995) and *A Brief History of Everything* (1996), I argued extensively the same point, especially emphasizing that mental experience cannot be reduced to the categories of sensory experience, nor hermeneutic reduced to analytic, nor phenomenological to empiric, nor historical to natural, nor cultural to sensorimotor (nor can spiritual experience be reduced to mental or sensory categories). To do so is a profound category error, an argument I made at length. I particularly dwelt on the numerous and profound differences between monological, dialogical, and translogical modes of experience and awareness. Yet Jorge takes my overall position to be that the categories of positivistic science cover all knowledge! The fact that monological, dialogical, and translogical share the very general three strands (injunctions, apprehensions, and confirmations) *does not alter in the least* the fact that they are also dramatically different modes in their actual operation. Jorge seems to have trouble with the idea that modes of knowing can be both similar and different (in fact, he seems to have trouble with both/and logic). He therefore obsessively focuses on my similarities in the modes of knowing and chooses to ignore my voluminous work on their important and profound differences, which allows him to ignore my commitment to epistemological pluralism.

Jorge likewise doesn't seem to grasp consistently what I mean by empiricism, and especially the difference between broad and narrow empiricism, and therefore he reacts to the term in the same way he does "data." Broad (or deep) empiricism, as I use it, simply means direct experience or direct awareness in any domain (and, again with James-and Whitehead-c-that does *not* have to be a dualistic notion! It certainly is not in my usage). In the way I use the term, for example, reading and interpreting *Hamlet* is a mental experience, governed by dialogical, dialectical, and hermeneutic insights; an advanced stage of meditation is often a spiritual experience, imbued with transcendental illuminations, and so on. Again, Jorge tends to think that this means that I am reducing all experience and knowledge to the categories of sensory positivism, whereas, in fact, I am-again-showing that the restriction of experience to sensory experience is a profound travesty. I do not say all knowledge can be based on Kuhn, Popper, and narrow empiricism-I say that those are examples of a reduction of experience to merely sensory experience, but even then they are following the three strands of valid knowing. Jorge has, yet again, missed the central point.

But I believe I understand his concern: by even using *some* categories that are also employed by empirical science, we run the risk of allowing the monological-scientific hegemony to continue. This is a concern that I definitely share. But it is one thing for Jorge to voice this concern, and quite another to charge that I myself am simply continuing this reductionism! My extensive writings on aesthetics, hermeneutics, meditative awareness, *satori*, emptiness, pluralistic interpretations, worldviews, ethics, dialogical and dialectical modes, etc. shows unmistakably that, although I occasionally use empirical-scientific terms (for precisely the reasons [outlined above]), I cannot be charged with reducing all of those modes to sensory knowing and methodological monism! To do so would be an outrageously unfair charge, and would also show, [believe, a marked lack of generosity of a spirit of understanding. Nonetheless, I repeat: I take his point, and I agree with it: we must be very careful in using terms that are also used by reductionistic scientism and positivism, because we run the risk of importing their restrictions. But to accuse me of doing so in a sweeping and profound way is silly; I believe only a sloppy reading of my work could accuse me of positivism.

Jorge's other two issues-falsifiability and the perennial philosophy---can be dealt with rather briefly. I agree that falsifiability does not work as the sole or even major criterion of scientific knowledge; I never said it did. Rather, I use a very general version of falsifiability as merely one of several criteria of valid knowing (as does Habermas, Peirce, etc.). It simply means we hold all of our experiences open to further refinement (corroboration or challenge). Even if a single spiritual teacher doesn't do this, the experience of a broader community does, or else no new religious insights would ever emerge.

As for the perennial philosophy, Jorge and I have had this friendly argument for a long time-s-he is suspicious of most (though not all) forms of universality (and perennial philosophy), while I insist on some types of *unitasmultiplex*(or universal pluralism or unity-ill-diversity; again, Jorge seems to have trouble with both/and logic). I find Jorge's fear of universality to be overblown, and, frankly, it has the appearance of

being driven often by politically correct agendas. Nonetheless, I think his warnings are always worth taking seriously, even if one *doesn't* carry them to his extreme. Jorge has, for example, strongly criticized theorists, such as myself, who have spoken of deep similarities between, say, the Buddhist Dharmakaya (and Emptiness) and the Vedanta causal body (or *nirguna* Brahman).

And yet, according to Vajrayana Buddhism, one type of the Dharmakaya is experienced in deep dreamless sleep (formless consciousness): the Sambhogakaya, in the dream state; and the Nirmanakaya, in the waking state. According to Vedanta, the causal body is experienced in deep dreamless sleep, the *subtle* body *is* experienced *in* the dream state, and the gross body in the waking state. Therefore, if you believe that there are similarities in deep dreamless sleep between individuals, it follows that there are some profound similarities between the Buddhist Dharmakaya and the Hindu causal body (and likewise Sambhogakaya and subtle body, etc.).

Of course there are many important differences between these Buddhist and Hindu notions, and those need to be rigorously honored; and yet-simultaneously-there seem to be important and profound similarities. I emphasize both: unity-in-diversity, and hence find the perennial philosophy a good place to start-but not end-s-one's spiritual dialog.

One of Jorge's main problems, in my opinion-and this is not the first "critique" of my work Jorge has attempted-is that he gets so carried away with his own theoretical points-many or even most of which I agree with-that he goes on and on about them, with the clear implication that this refers to defects in my work, whereas often he is simply repeating points I myself have exhaustively made elsewhere. Jorge's elaboration of these points is sometimes unique and profound, but when he gets carried away, it often has very little to do with the critique at hand. This is why I find Jorge to be a fine theoretician but an uneven, sometimes quite poor, critic. He has a recurrent tendency to make a fine point, but unnecessarily and unfairly at somebody else's expense. Still, I always enjoy reading his material, and look forward to his future writings, especially where he *focuses* on his own important ideas.

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Request for reprints to: Ken Wilber. 6183 Red Hill Road. Boulder. CO 80302.