

BOOK REVIEW:

Integral psychology: consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy
by Ken Wilber (2000)
Shambhala Publications, Inc.: Boston

REVIEWER: Merlin Baker, MACA

Counsellors today have access to information about every type of therapy and theory, and the sheer scale of information available can be overwhelming and confusing. Not only this, but for the first time in history, virtually anyone can access information about any culture, and any cultural practice, anywhere on the planet -- knowledge is global and accelerating. A well-intentioned professional can fall into a vague pluralism and fail to recognise the true value and authenticity of any particular approach. Understanding the complexities of modern psychology and humankind in general today requires a genuinely integrated approach to see the meaningful patterns that emerge, rather than the chaos.

Ken Wilber, American philosopher and author of over 25 books published over the last 30 years, has done a remarkable service to contemporary psychology by condensing and bringing together the major thinkers in psychology, consciousness and spirituality, both East and West. He outlines the most salient features of human development, including powerfully insightful views of the self, or self-system, which he describes as the foundation of his psychological theory. He brings the reader from modernity to post-modernity, and then introduces an 'Integral Model'. His Integral Model includes the higher reaches of spiritual practice and expanded levels of consciousness, and insists on evidence and validation of these dimensions of humanity just as we do for cognitive, moral, or any other type of development..

He reminds us that psychology can be seen as the study of '... the *constructing* and *creating* capacity of consciousness itself: the world is not merely reflected by consciousness, it is co-created by consciousness -- the world is not merely a *perception* but an *interpretation*.' (p172) He goes on to describe how consciousness develops through multiple lines and levels or stages, and also how it can *fail* to develop by falling prey to such obstacles as overwhelming trauma or neglect. He also discusses the aetiology of pathologies and, in general terms, what theoretical and therapeutic approaches are most appropriate to assist the client toward more healthy functioning.

This book offers a compact and coherent view of how, and why, major theories in psychology, consciousness, development, and therapy fit together, overlap, and also can remain distinct from each other. He brings all this together, along with his own contributions to the field, in an impressive array of summary charts. These charts serve to help us, as practitioners, to orient ourselves and locate our own points of view, along with appropriate forms of intervention or therapy, which can contribute toward a greater understanding of ourselves and the people we work with.

This book is a fresh and thorough overview of psychology, providing a precis of major theories. Wilber suggests that every viewpoint is true -- but partial -- and that no point of view is enough on its own. In other words, any viewpoint has at least some truth to it, and no viewpoint is entirely wrong. Moreover, Wilber shows how they fit together, or not, and why the Behaviourists don't like the Jungians who don't like the Reichians who can't understand the Solution-focused Therapists, and so on. As such, it is a valuable resource for those who do not want to be blindsided by schools of thought in psychology they may not know about or understand. Integral Psychology is essential reading for the contemporary counsellor or psychotherapist who wants a more complete,

comprehensive, and integrated view of psychology, to help understand and deal with the unprecedented complexities of living in the 21st century.