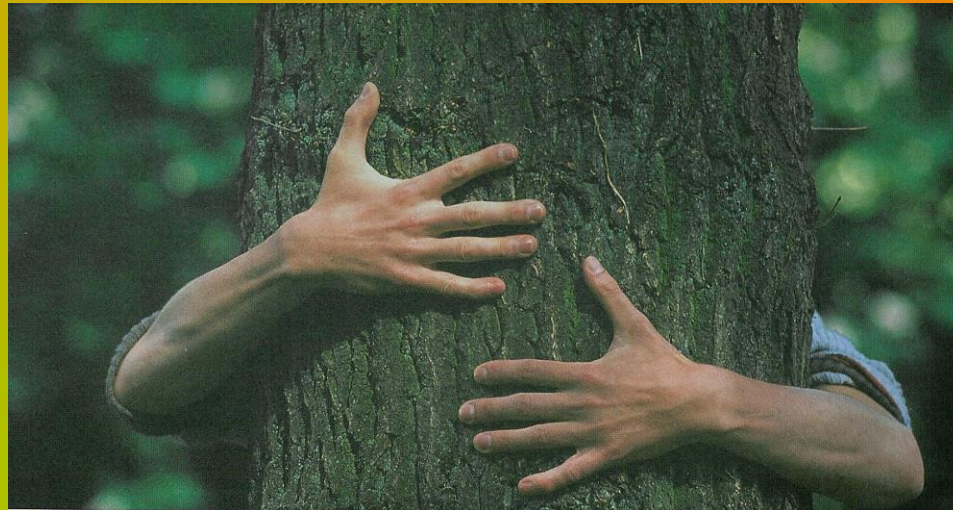


# Spiritual Experiences in Nature, Eco-friendliness and Human Well-being



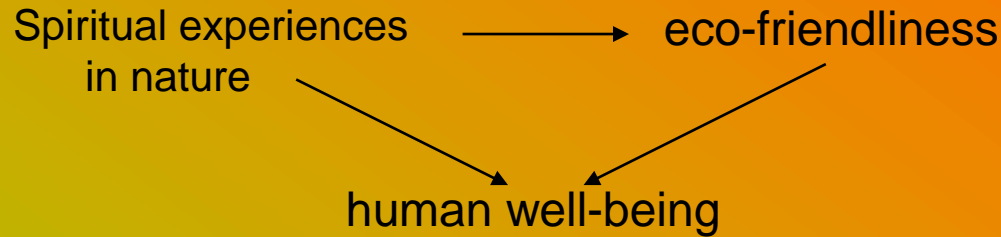
Cathrien de Pater  
International People Plant Symposium  
2012

# Content

- The Question
- Empirical Research
- Visualisation
- Pitfalls
- Conclusion



# The Question



*Always?*

→ When not, what are the pitfalls?



# Empirical Research on Spiritual Experiences in nature

- Terry Terhaar (foresters USA)
- CdP (foresters NL)
- Trigt & van Koppen (villagers NL)
- Jana Verboom: peak experiences in nature (NL)
- Other research into pilgrimage, sacred places, indigenous spirituality, etc.

# Terry Terhaar (2005, Yale)

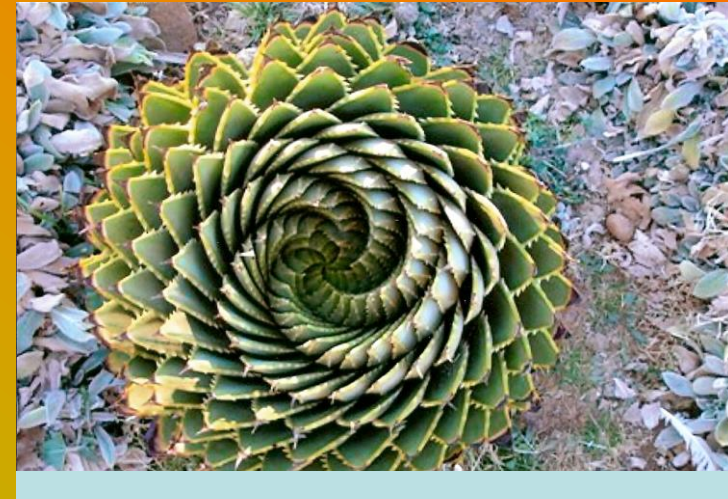
## *Intense Human Experience with Nature*

- Most mystical experiences take place in nature..... But little attention for this fact
- Literature research
- Empirical: 100 foresters, NW USA
- Qualitative + Quantitative research: interviews + enquiries



# Terhaar, Findings: 7 key dimensions

1. Feeling of unity
2. Ineffability;
3. Noëtic quality;
4. Strong 'affect'
5. Timelessness and spacelessness;
6. Paradox
7. Presence of an "Other"



# Terhaar, conclusions:

Mystical nature experiences  
– positive *and* negative -  
are beneficial for the  
individual, because they:

- Help the process of personal transformation;
- Give meaning to one's life;
- Provide a framework for values and ethics
  - Especially in the environmental domain



# Foresters' spiritual concerns

(de Pater, 2007)

## Purpose:

- to find an adequate initial framework for the description and explanation of spiritual and other deep-felt values held by forest and nature managers.



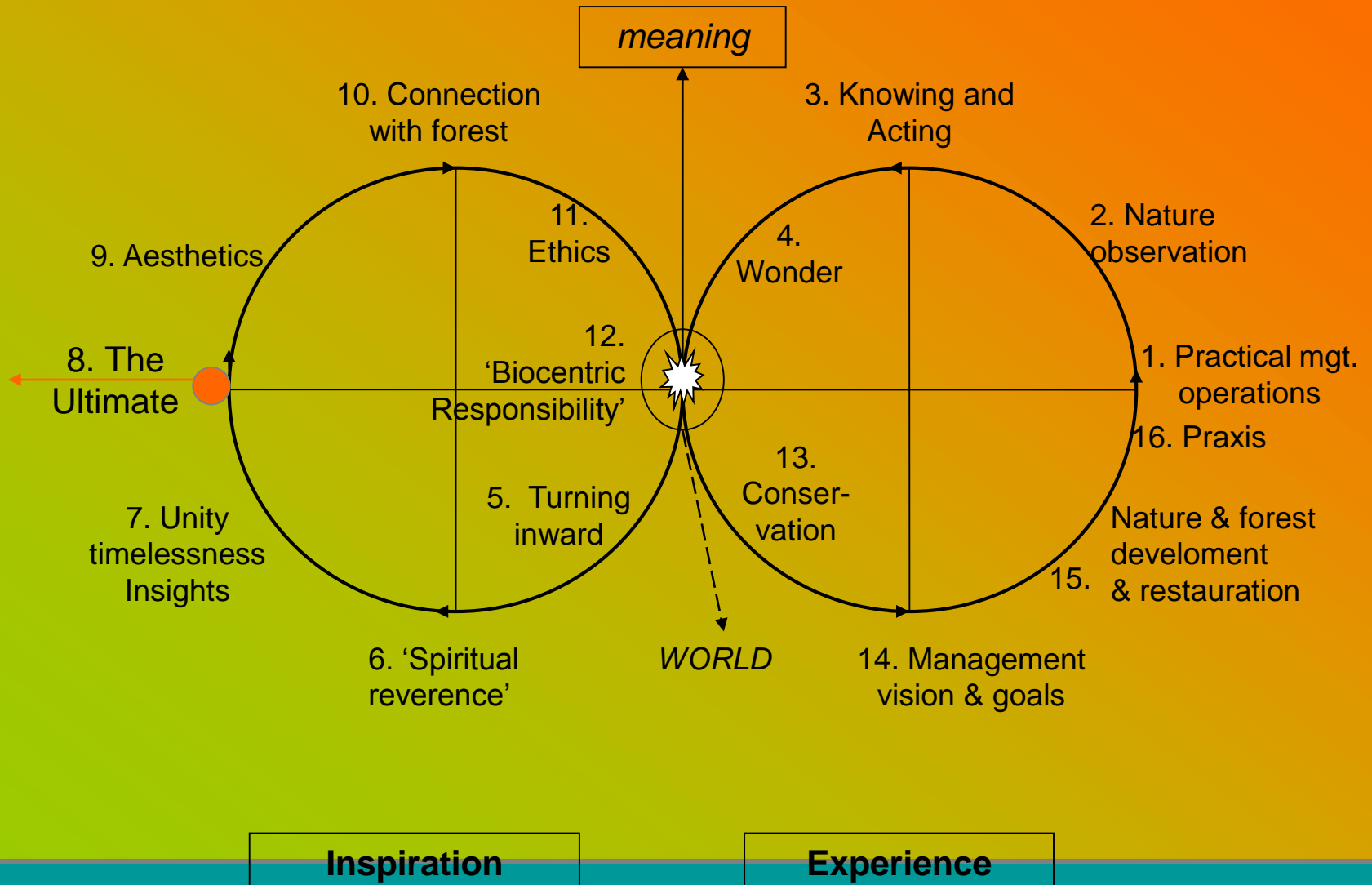
# Foresters' spiritual concerns

(de Pater, 2007)



- 12 foresters/farmers
- Qualitative reserach: in-depth interviews
- → 3 domains of key concepts:
  - *'Inspirational Dynamics'*
  - *'Biocentric Responsibility'*
  - *'Spiritual Reverence'*

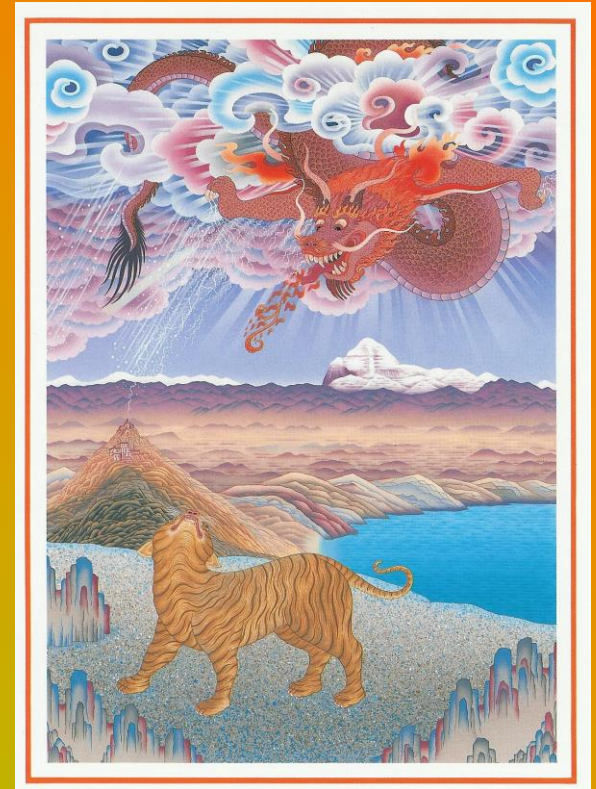
# The framework



# What are the pitfalls?

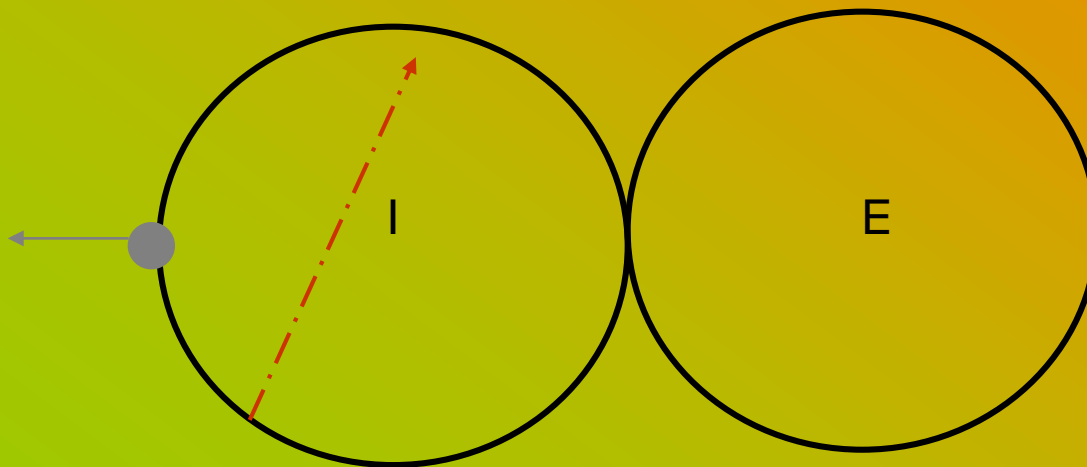
*Not:*

- fearful experiences (to be overcome by engaging in them: the hero motive)
- Leaving the cycle when one should



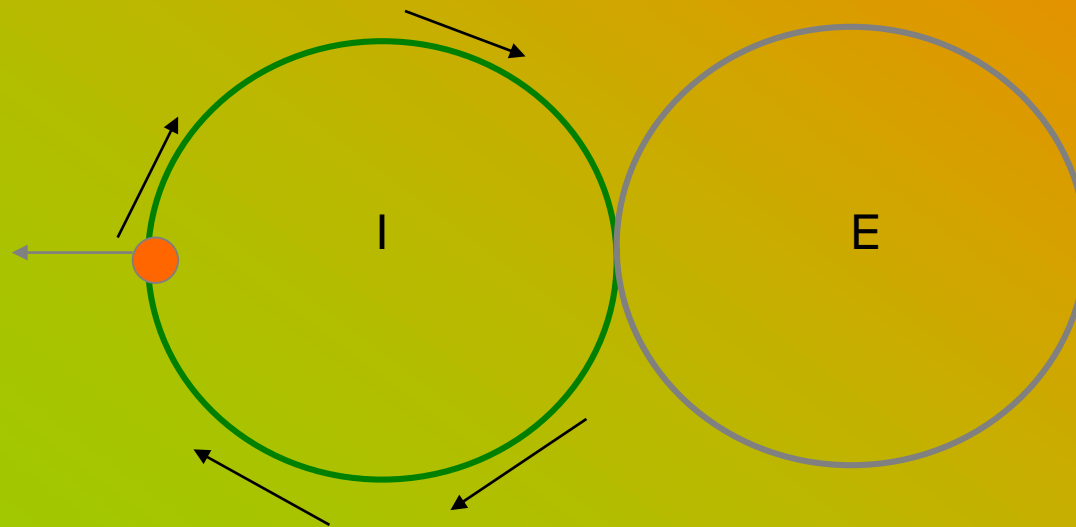
# Pitfall 1

Not completing the cycling while *one thinks one does*: projection, incomplete individuation (Jung)



# Pitfall 2

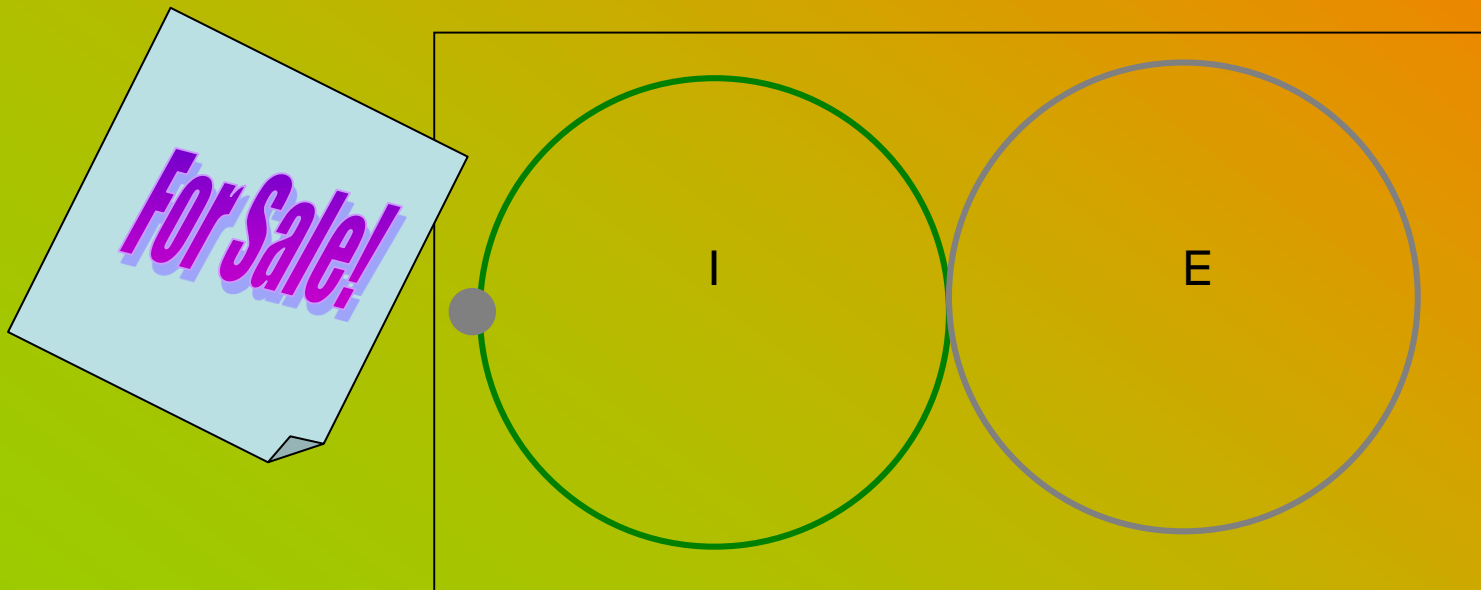
- Going round in the left cycle *only*: narcissism, egocentrism, inaction (Hedlund-de Witt 2011)





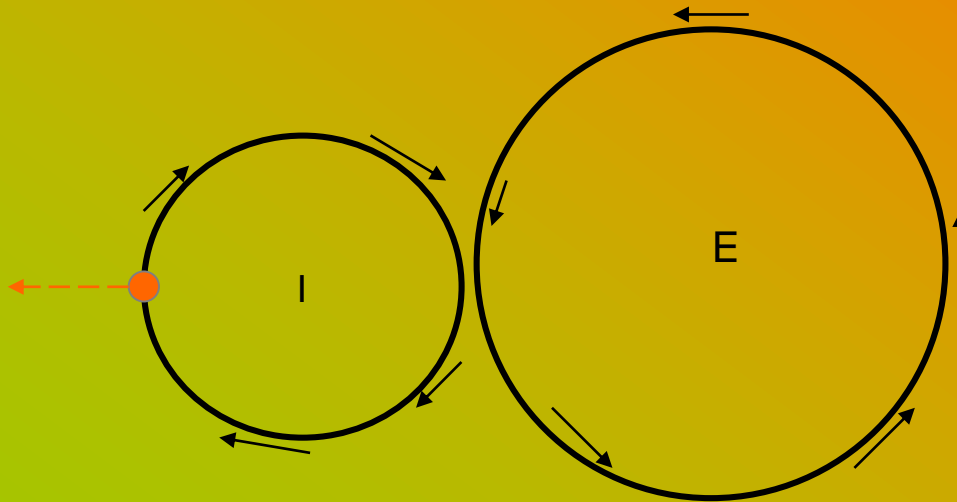
# Pitfall 3

- Instrumentalisation & commodification of spirituality



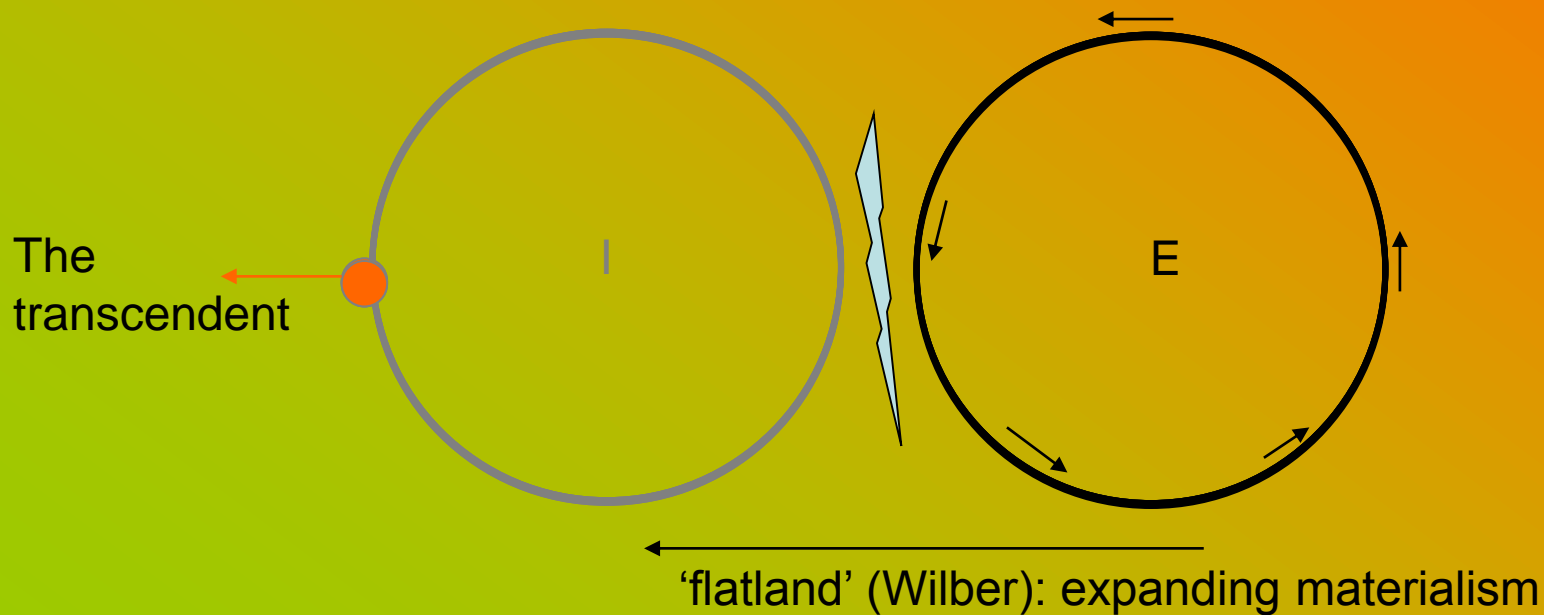
# Pitfall 4

- Dualism  $\rightarrow$  disbalance



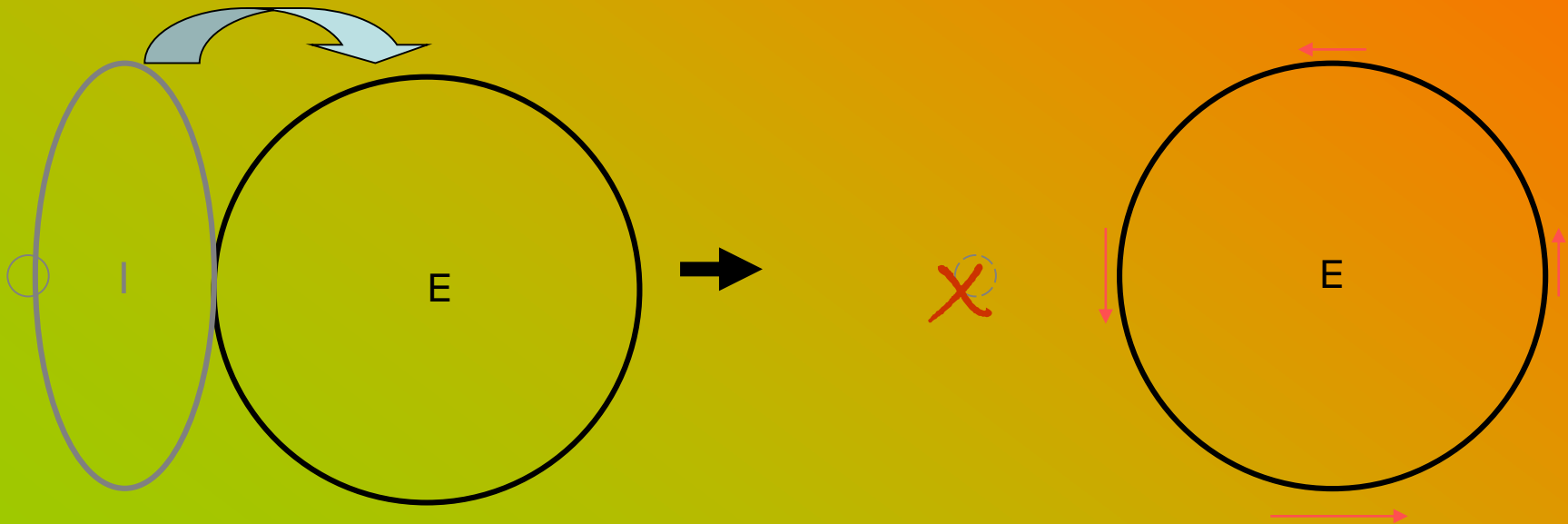
# Pitfall 4 (cont'd)

- Extreme Dualism



# Pitfall 5

- Extreme Immanenticism



→ 'Pre/trans fallacy' (Wilber), totalitarianism, ecofascism

# Where to go?

- Back to balance at a higher level

