



Give Us Ten Minutes... We'll Give You the Kosmos

By Stephen Kiesling

**Go ahead. Check your watch.
Let's see if we can pull this
off. The next 10 minutes may
change the way you think
about evolution, psychology,
ecology, even God.**

caption for art
on left-hand
page
about how
Science
dominates
our view of
possibilities

You may come away feeling that the half of the Kosmos that tends to get crushed flat by modern science — your emotional life, your dreams, your spirituality — actually provides the high ground we need to make sense of our lives.

But first let us give the credit to Ken Wilber, author of such monumental works as *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*, *A Brief History of Everything*, and *The Marriage and of Sense and Science*. Not a guru, but a voracious reader and disciplined thinker who is attempting to synthesize all that is known about science and religion. Each of his books is well worth devoting a long weekend. In fact several scholars and volunteer think tanks devote full time to him. Think of what you're about to read as Wilber lite. There's a bit of a climb before the view gets exciting. It'll be worth it.

So get ready... *Go!*

The story of our universe can be viewed as 14 billion years of nesting: Atoms nested into molecules, which nested into the first living “organelles,” which nested into cells, which, in turn, nested into more and more complex organisms all the way up to highest functions of the brain. Each level of nest incorporates all the ones before it and then adds its own qualities. There are no molecules without atoms, no cells without molecules, no living organelles without cells, and no complex neocortex at the top of the brain without a reptilian stem at the base.

(Okay, pause, take a deep breath, and glance at these nesting levels in the

Upper Right portion of the diagram. These are the individual objects that can be measured and manipulated so successfully by modern science. Notice, too, the progression of the nests: From physical matter to life to mind to higher consciousness. Got it? Good!)

Now notice that for each Exterior on the Upper Right, there's a corresponding Interior on the Upper Left. Atoms have physical interactions, living cells excite each other, more complex organisms sense each other, act on impulse, have perceptions and then emotions — nesting toward more and more complex brains that use symbols, form concepts, and use creative reason. Once again, each Interior level incorporates the ones before and adds its own qualities. There can be no perception without sensation, no concepts without emotion, no creative reason without every nest below.

(Let's pause again — just long enough for a hard-nosed scientist to pipe up that this Interior stuff isn't important because we can't measure it — we can only interpret it. But, frankly, that's silly. Humankind has spent thousands of years figuring out how to separate good interpretations from bad ones. Interpretation is part of the process that creates hard-nosed science, which, of course, is only hard-nosed now for those scientists like to think it is...)

Which brings us to the next big push: the Lower Left.

Like it or not, every truth exists within a context or culture — with its own corresponding nestings. Random atoms (a culture, of sorts) nest deeper into cells, which nest deeper into the instinctual world-view of reptiles, into the emotional bonds of mammals, into the Archaic world-view of primates (in which the mind is undifferentiated from nature). With the arrival of the human brain comes a gradual separation from nature, from the Magic and Mystic levels (in which the bush Moses saw literally burned but was not burned) to the Rational (in which we wonder critically about such beliefs), to the Integration of mind and body and spirit. Once again, each level incorporates the ones before and adds its own qualities. We can engage in sign language with apes, we can empathize emotionally with dogs, and we fall at the same speed as “pet rocks” all because these cultural levels exist within us.

(Oh my! The air is getting thin up here.... Just one last push before the summit!)

The thing to remember for this fourth, Social truth, in the Lower Right, is the overall progression from physical matter to life to mind to higher consciousness. So we start with galaxies, (the largest society of matter), which nest deeper into complexity to create planets, which nest deeper to create the first contained ecosystem, which nests into the animals with a division of labor between sexes, which nest into families, which nest into tribes, which nest into early states and empires, to nation states, to a planetary society.

wise man with abstract symbols
teaching

INTERIOR INDIVIDUAL INTENTIONAL
Subjective Truthfulness, Sincerity,
Integrity, Trustworthiness



INTERIOR CULTURAL
Mutual Understanding, Justness,
Cultural Fit,
people celebrating/
worshipping together

scholar with anatomy chart
studying

EXTERIOR INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIORAL
Objective Truth, Correspondence,
Representation



EXTERIOR—SOCIAL

family of
hunter/gatherers

Whew! That's the hard part. Now we can play!

Looking at this model, the first thing that jumps out is what Wilber calls the “self transcending drive of the Kosmos,” the drive to both include and go beyond what was before. Whatever you choose to call this drive — spirit or consciousness or creativity or depth — the point is that the universe is clearly going somewhere. And, says Wilber, “because the universe has direction, we ourselves have direction. We are part and parcel of this immense intelligence, this spirit in action, this God in the making.”

The next thing to jump out is that Wilber's chart not only traces the evolution of the universe, but the life cycle of each human being. We each start as a single, excitable cell, which nests deeper and deeper until we pick up a body and brain. That brain gets born into an Archaic world in which there is no separation between the self and the world. Then, around age two, our world becomes Magic, when it seems to be an extension of us. Next, about age six, comes the Mythic stage as we discover the roles given to us by society. And next, around age 12, comes the increasing Rational stage as we learn to question those roles and beliefs. Many of us also catch glimpses of a higher level, where mind and body and all of creation are experienced as one.

Some rare individuals — the mystics and saints and sages from all cultures — live in this higher state, pointing the way. And, explains Wilber, they all tell a variation of the same story: “The story of awakening one morning and discovering that we are one with the all, in a way that's timeless and eternal and infinite.” And yet the descriptions of those mystics illustrate a profound irony: The experience of the oneness is reserved to the few.

Wilber goes on to explain how some folks, having experienced this state of oneness, come to believe that no truth is better or higher than any other. But that's nonsense. The experience of oneness is truth at the highest level we know. There are countless lesser truths below that — not to mention an infinite supply of ideas that are just plain false.

A Brief History of Psychology

Increasing nests of complexity toward this higher experience of “oneness” also means increasing potential for things to go wrong. Freud was among the first to notice that trauma at the emotional and sexual levels of development could create problems at every subsequent stage of life — so that to move forward truthfully, one first had to go back. Cognitive therapists then identified how problems at higher, rational levels of development could, for example, immobilize us with depression. More recently, transpersonal therapists have directly approached feelings of isolation at an even higher, spiritual level. And yet as Wilber's diagram makes clear, to understand ourselves fully we have the daunting task of exploring all our levels.

So truly understanding the root cause of depression, for

example, means becoming transparent to ourselves — bottom to top. But, if we're short of time, we can also pop a Prozac. Why? We have to remember that sinking deeper through all those Interior levels is just one kind of solution, working with one kind of truth. For a brain scientist, depression may be seen as too little serotonin in the brain. Pop the Prozac, balance the serotonin, and the depression goes away.

Of course the problem with Prozac is that it won't help you to understand or interpret your interior pain. Worse, the quick Exterior fix creates the impression that our Interior depths are not real and don't matter. So, if you think about it, such scientific "cures" take half the Kosmos away. Wilber calls this the creation of "Flatland." Interior depths get flattened by the tremendous power Exterior science, yet Interior depth is what gives life meaning.

The goal, says Wilber is not to deny either the Internal or the External, but to use both so that your true intentions match your behavior. That is, your left will match your right. You won't lie to others because you haven't lied to yourself.

Environmental ethics

We can also trace in this diagram our responsibility for maintaining our environment. Says Wilber, "because human beings contain matter, life and mind, as components of our own makeup, then we must honor all of these not for their own intrinsic worth, which is the most important, but also because they are components of our own." In other words, it's not just that harming the biosphere will eventually catch up with us and hurt us from the outside. It's that the biosphere is literally internal to us, is a part of our very being, so harming it is literally suicidal, both from the inside and the outside.

A Brief History of God

As our brains, our interior life, and our society have evolved toward greater depth and complexity, so has our concept of God. In the Archaic world, when men and women divided into hunters and gatherers, the Gods were both male and female. In the Magic world, where women farmed with hoes, the Gods were mostly female. In the Mythic world of empire building, when man's strength was required to handle a plow, God became man — and so He remained in the Rational world of nation states. But today, in our increasingly Integrated/Planetary world, we are gradually putting brackets around the particular Mythic stories of our wisdom traditions so that we can all talk together about God as Spirit and share our experiences of the sacred within.

According to Wilber, the biggest challenge facing our world is not the income gap between rich and poor but the gap in levels of consciousness. The world is peopled with Mythic folks killing in God's name, with Rational folks trying to conquer the environment, and even with people who have moved beyond those levels of consciousness only to be immobilized by the mistaken notion that all truths are equal.

What to Make of It?

By Ken Wilber

Say you have a blinding, ecstatic, mind-blowing experience of inner light.

The experience is direct and immediate, but then you come out of it and want to tell me about it — or maybe you just want to tell yourself. Now you must interpret what the experience was. Was it Jesus Christ? Buddha-mind? an angel? an alien UFO? or a food allergy?

How you interpret this experience will govern how you will fit it into your life, how you will share it with the world, and what your future relationship will be to this light. Unfortunately, what often happens is that people try to interpret these experiences through just one quadrant of truth — and sometimes just one level in one quadrant. This process devastates the other quadrants and squashes the fullness of the interpretations, cripples the fullness of the experience itself.

Here are examples of what can go wrong:

Upper Left: Many people interpret these experiences rather narcissistically solely in terms of their higher Self. They tend to completely ignore the cultural and social and behavioral components. The New Age movement is full of this Self Only interpretation.

Upper Right: Others see the experience merely as a product of brain states. They attempt to interpret these experiences as coming solely or predominately from theta brain states or massive endorphin release and so on. But this merely technological interpretation completely devastates the cultural and social components, not to mention all the inner states of consciousness itself.

Lower Right: Others interpret the experience as proof that "ultimate reality" is Gaia or the biosphere or the social systems. In other words, that we're all strands in some wonderful web. But again, that one-eyed view flattens out all our interior levels of development and is rightly called ecofascism.

Lower Left: Others interpret this experience merely in terms of collective cultural consciousness and a coming world-view transformation. This overlooks what individual consciousness can do at any given point, and denies the importance of social structures and institutions in helping to support and embed these experiences.

The whole point here is that we want to find ourselves in sympathetic attunement with all aspects of the Kosmos. We want to touch the truth in each of the quadrants. And we begin to do so by noticing that each speaks to us with a different voice. If we listen carefully, we can hear each of these voices whispering gently their truths, and finally joining in a harmonious chorus that quietly calls us home.

