

2016 IBHA Conference – University of Amsterdam, July 14-17

BIG HISTORY AND INTEGRAL THEORY

Bill Bryson Meets Ken Wilber

Frank Visser

What are we looking for?



And where should we look for it?

Assumptions questioned

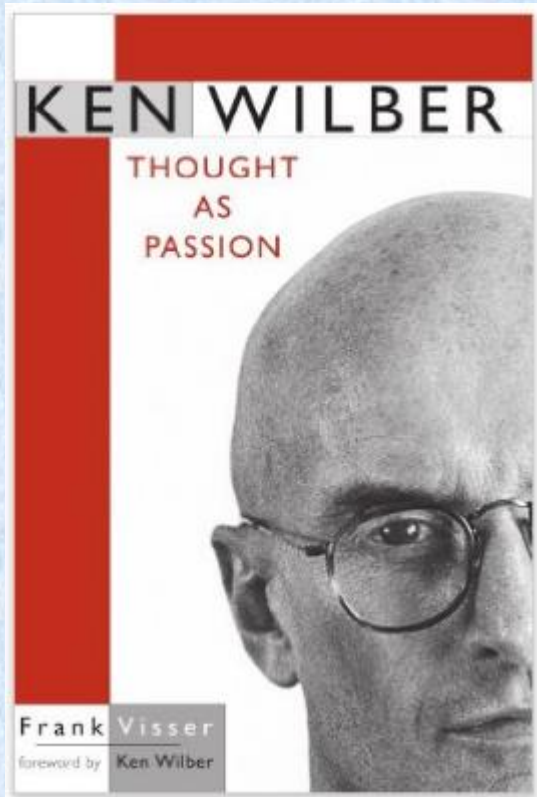
- Is Big History “**The Framework for All Knowledge**” or only of a certain type of knowledge?
- How does (human) consciousness and **interiority** in general (or even spirituality) fit into a standard Big History framework?
- Does Big History have an **externalist** bias, with its main focus on the hard empirical sciences?
- Is the Big History field as it stands capable to cover “everything”, or is it in need of **complementary** approaches?

- Introducing Ken Wilber
- Integral Theory Highlights
- Comparison with Big History
- Discussion

Introducing Ken Wilber

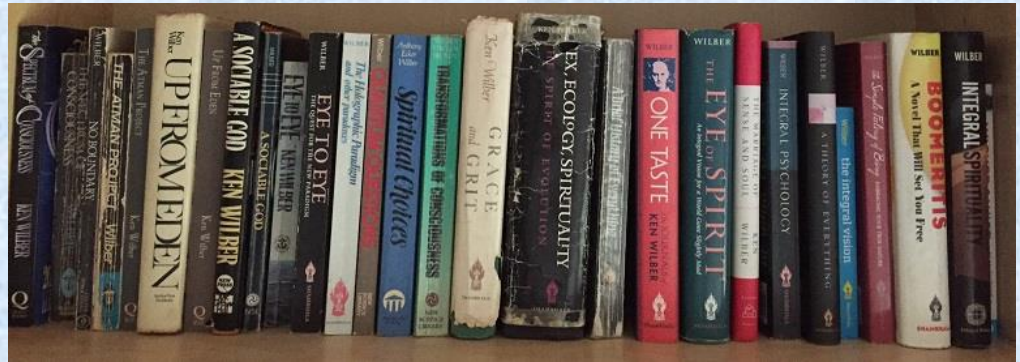


Who is Ken Wilber?



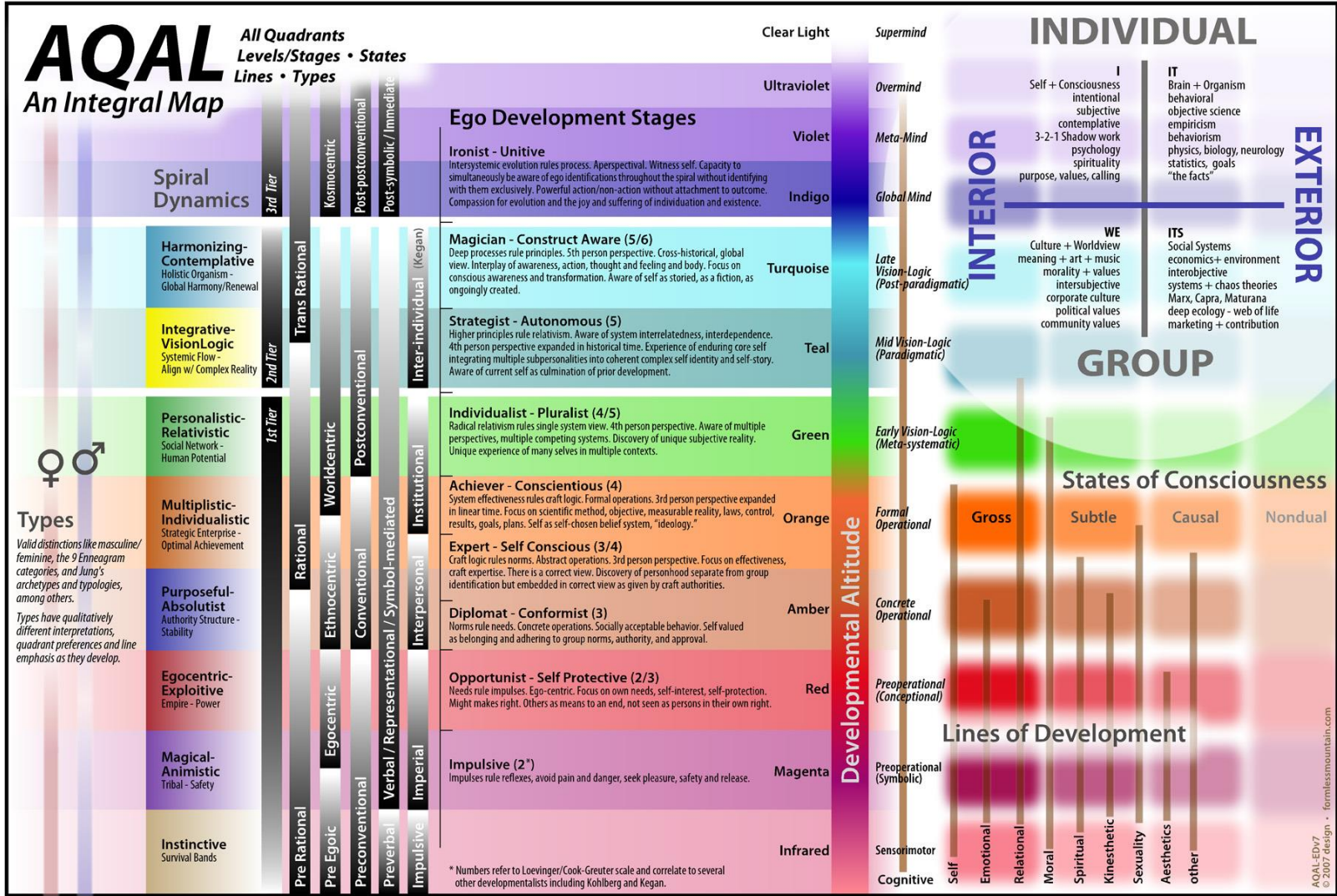
- Founder of “Integral philosophy”
- Author of over 25 books covering science, the humanities and spirituality
- “Ken Wilber is the most translated academic author in the United States.”
- “Ken Wilber is an unknown celebrity” (Wouter Hanegraaff, UvA)
- “Ken Wilber is the Einstein of consciousness research” (John White)

Books by Ken Wilber



- The Spectrum of Consciousness (1977)
- No Boundary (1979)
- The Atman Project (1980)
- Up from Eden (1981)
- The Holographic Paradigm (1982)
- A Sociable God (1983)
- Eye to Eye (1983)
- Quantum Questions (1984)
- Transformations of Consciousness (1986)
- Spiritual Choices (1987)
- Grace and Grit (1991)
- Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (Kosmos-trilogy Part I) (1995)
- A Brief History of Everything (1996)
- The Eye of Spirit (1997)
- The Marriage of Sense and Soul (1998)
- One Taste (1999)
- Integral Psychology (2000)
- A Theory of Everything (2000)
- Boomeritis (2002)
- The Simple Feeling of Being (2004)
- Integral Spirituality (2006)
- The Integral Vision (2007)
- Integral Life Practice (2008)
- The Fourth Turning (2015)
- Integral Meditation (2016)
- The Religion of Tomorrow
- Karma and Creativity (Kosmos-trilogy Part II)

Integral Theory Highlights



The Wilberian Narrative

“An important function of integral theory is to provide a **coherent narrative of cosmic, terrestrial, and human development.**”

--Michael Zimmerman, “The Final Cause of Cosmic Development: Nondual Spirit, or the Second Law of Thermodynamics?”, 2010.

“Flatland [materialistic science] accepts no interior domain whatsoever, and reintroducing Spirit is the least of our worries. Thus our task is not specifically to reintroduce spirituality... [but rather] **the rehabilitation of the interior in general...**”

-- Ken Wilber, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion*, 1998.

Core beliefs of integral theory (1)

- Ken Wilber's motto is: "**Everyone is right**": every point of view in science, philosophy and religion contains partial truths. "Nobody is smart enough to be wrong all the time."
- Integral Theory attempts to integrate these partial truths into a **comprehensive and coherent** philosophy.
- The phenomena you are able to perceive depend on the **perspective** you take. Sensory approaches can only see sensory reality. Introspective approaches see the mind.
- We need to combine **as many perspectives as possible** to arrive at a final conclusion about existence.

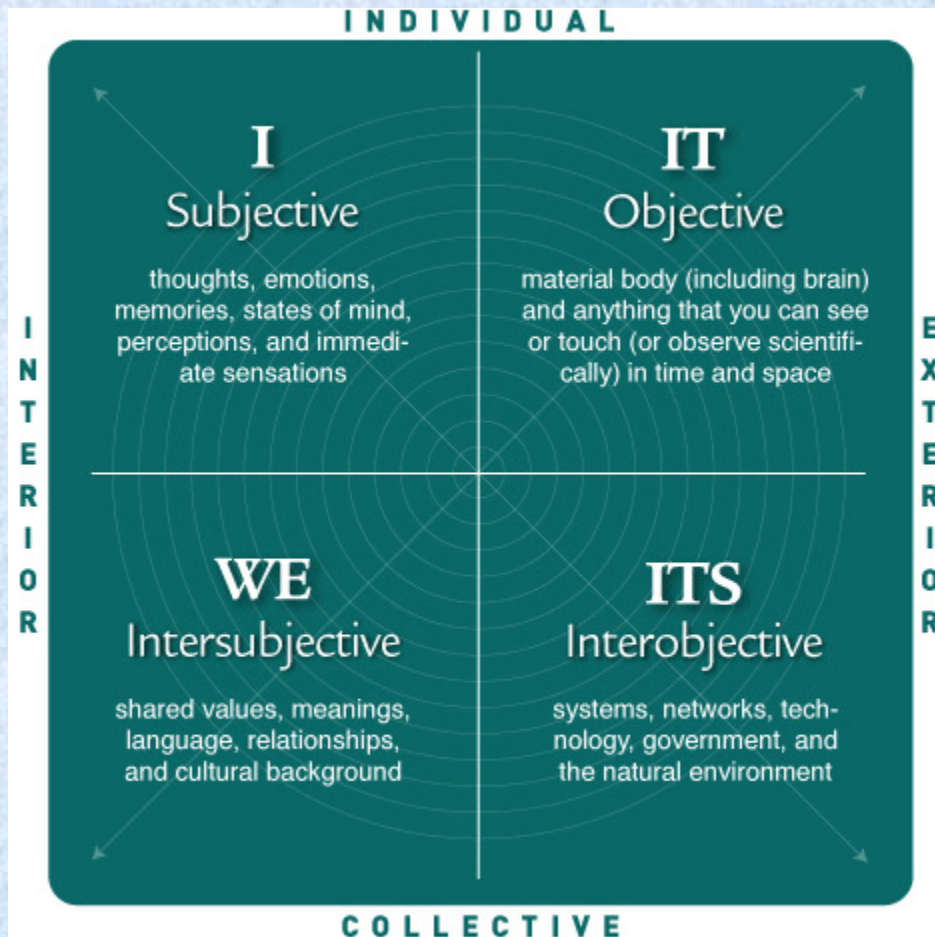
Core beliefs of integral theory (2)

- Reality has an **interior dimension**, as well as an exterior dimension, and current scientific approaches have trouble understanding the interior dimensions of existence.
- Complexity, consciousness and culture have **evolved**, from their most primordial form to the present state, and will continue to do so in the future.
- The more controversial aspect of this philosophy: this evolution of consciousness and complexity is an intensely ***driven process***, called “Spirit of Evolution”, Eros or Spirit.

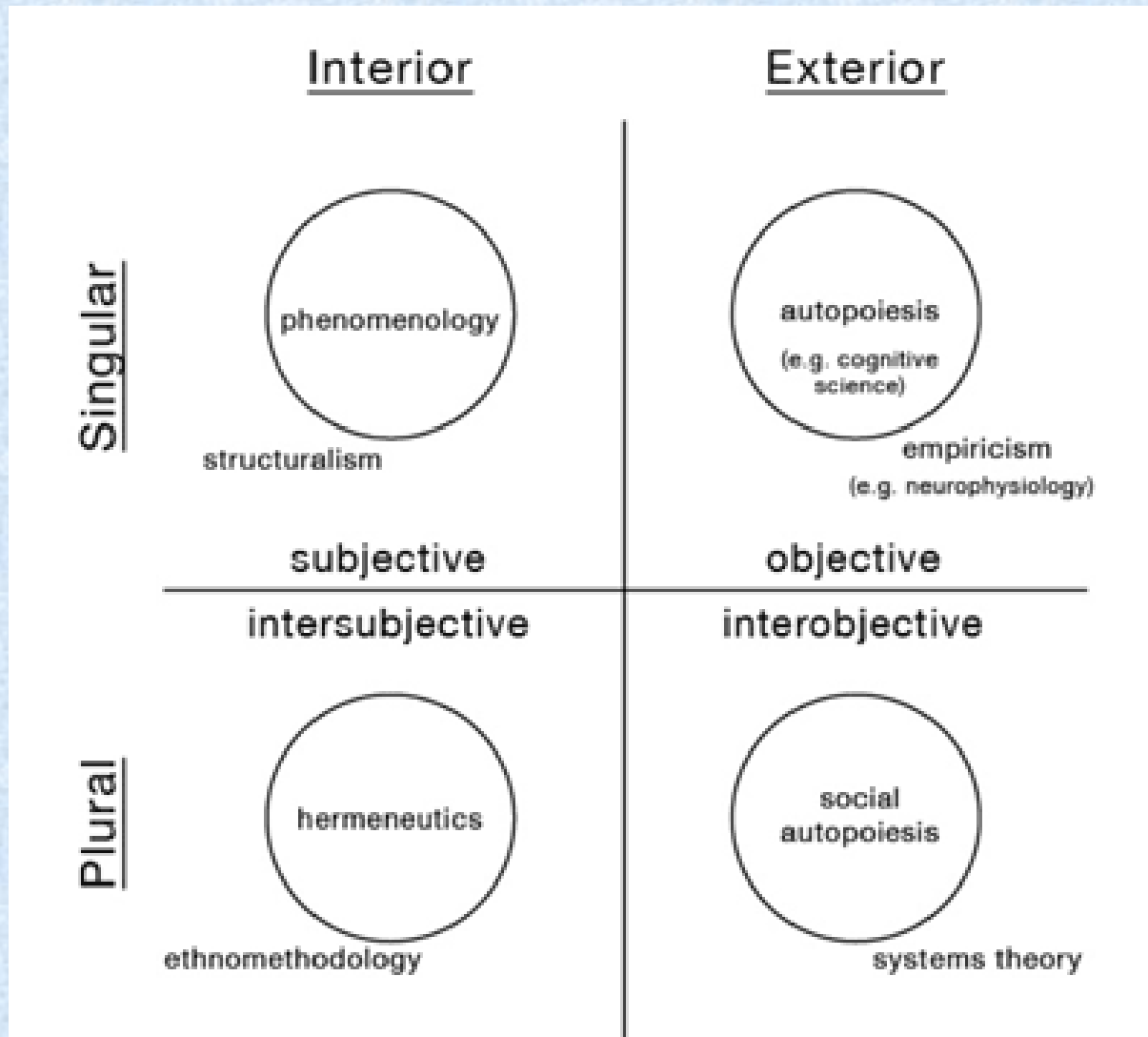
Three types of valid science

- Sensory or **empirical** science: the eye of the flesh
- **Symbolic** or mental science: the eye of reason
- Spiritual or **meditative** science: the eye of spirit
- Wilber's innovative suggestion: all three types of "science" follow the same procedure:
 - Follow an instruction, set up an experiment
 - Observe a phenomenon, do a perception
 - Compare your perceptions with colleagues

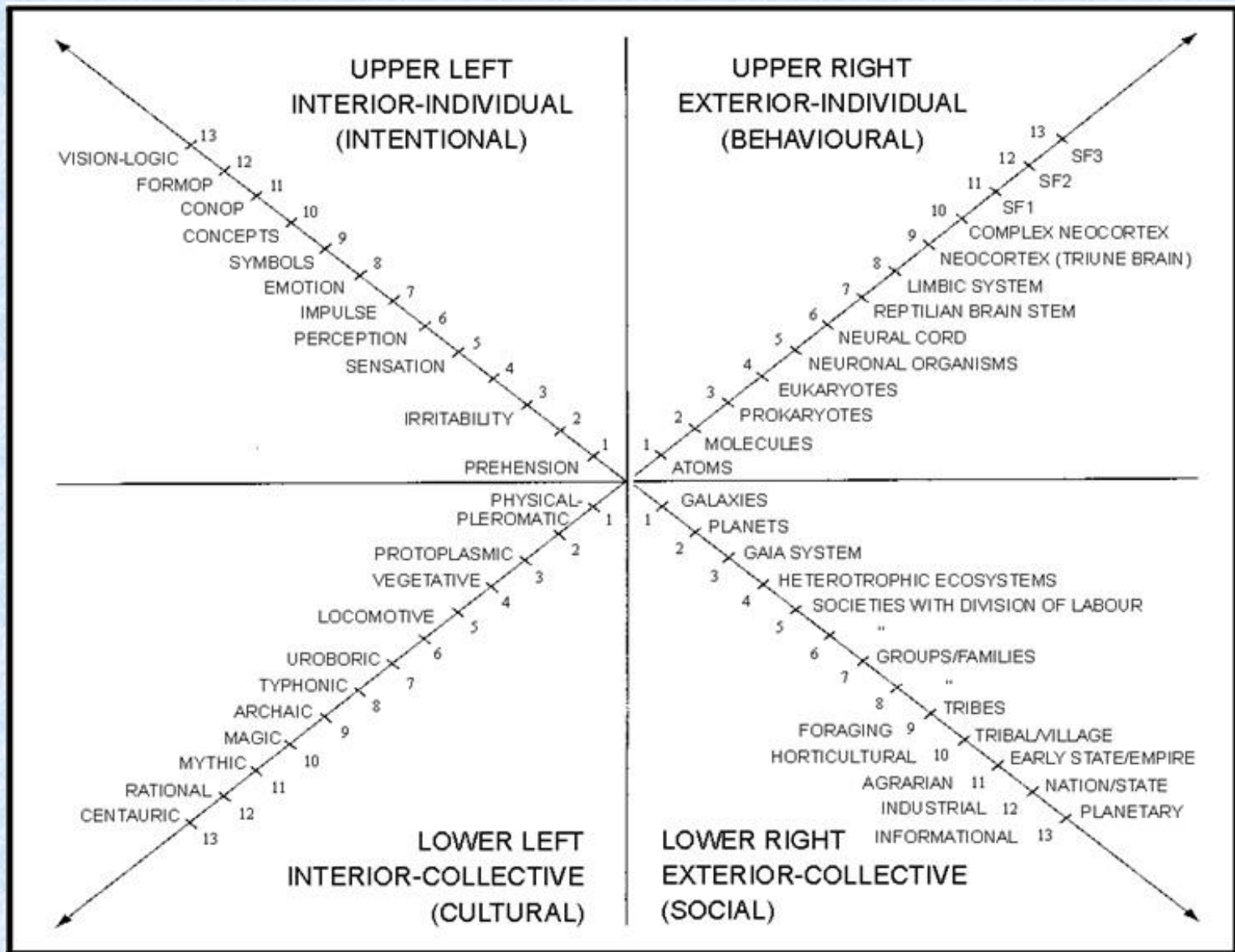
The Four Quadrants (1)



Eight ways of knowing

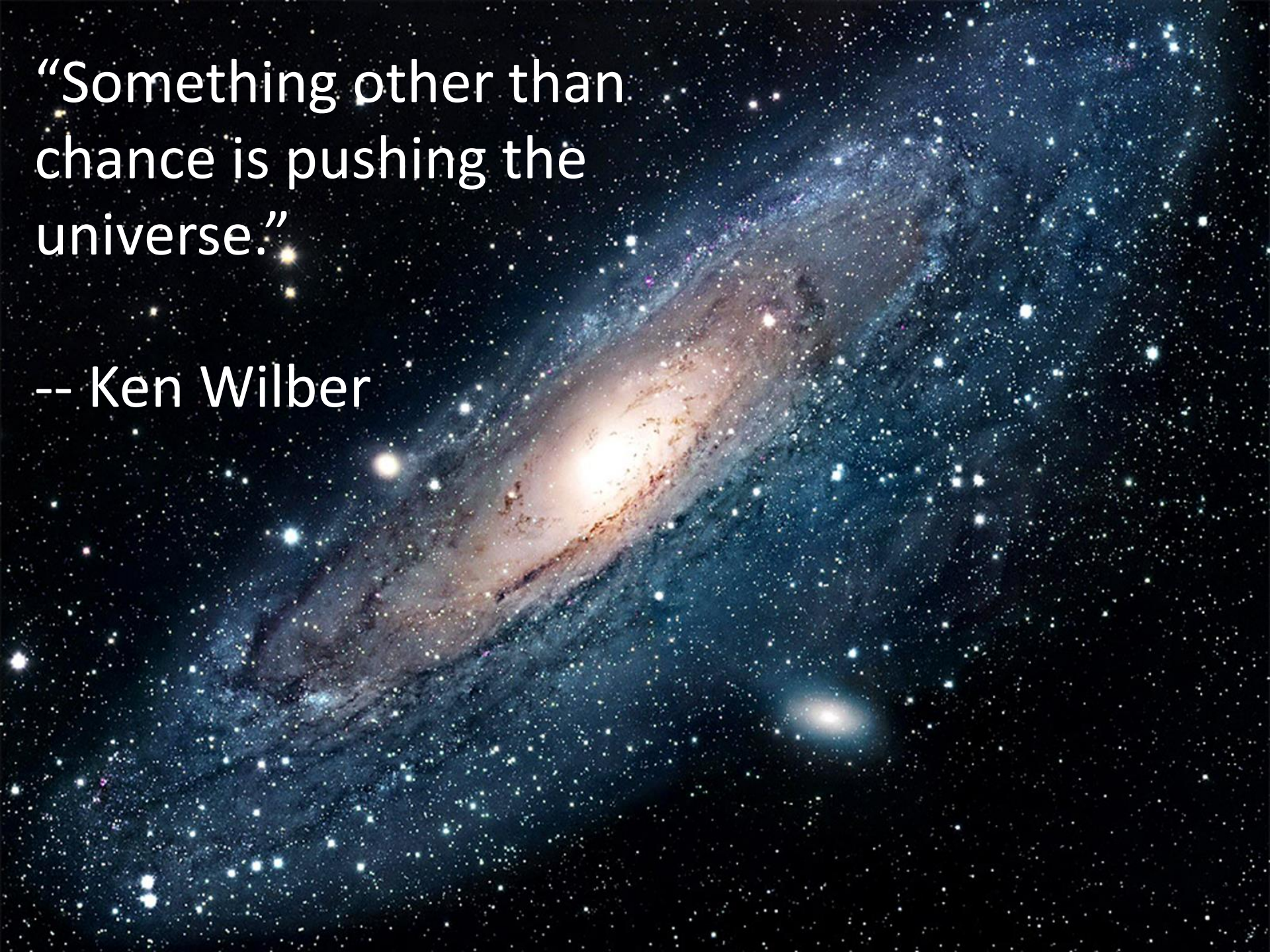


The Four Quadrants (2)



“Something other than
chance is pushing the
universe.”

-- Ken Wilber



Ken Wilber on self-organization



“[T]here is a **force of self-organization** built into the universe, and this force (or Eros by any name) is responsible for at least part of the emergence of complex forms that we see in evolution... After all, from the big bang and dirt to the poems of William Shakespeare is quite a distance, and many philosophers of science agree that **mere chance and selection are just not adequate** to account for these remarkable emergences.”

-- “Some Criticisms of My Understanding of Evolution”,
www.kenwilber.com , December 4th, 2007.”

Ken Wilber on immanent Spirit



“You either postulate a supernatural source of which there are two types. One is a Platonic given and one is basically theological - a God or intelligent design - or you postulate **Spirit as immanent** - of course

it's transcendent but also immanent - and it shows up as a **self-organizing, self-transcending drive within evolution itself**. And then evolution is Spirit's own unfolding. Not in super-natural, but an **intra-natural**, an immanently natural aspect. And that's basically the position I maintain.”

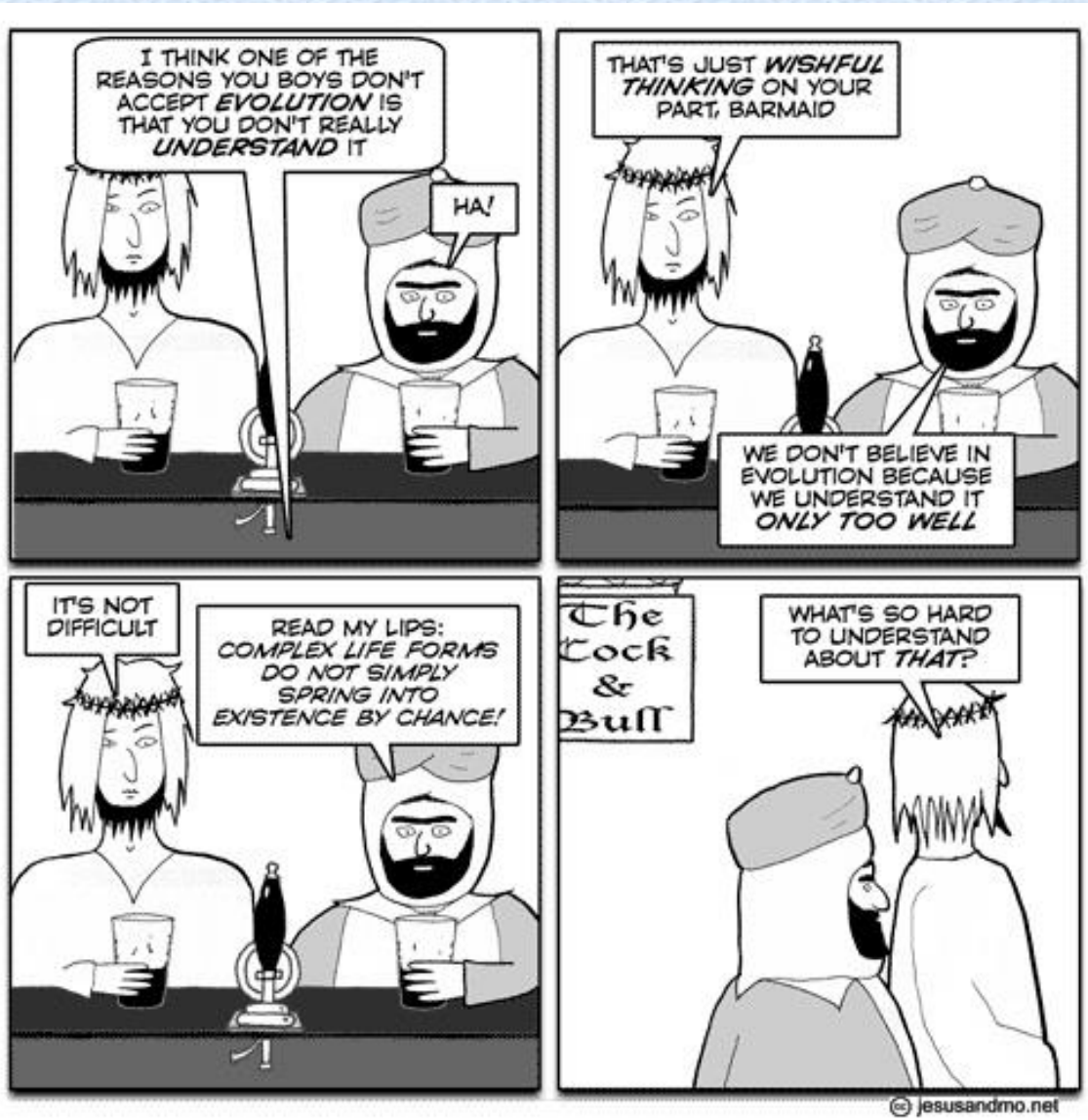
-- “Ken responds to recent critics”, www.kenwilber.com, (ca. 2006).

Wilber's crypto-creationist logic

- Science tries to explain evolutionary emergence with chance.
- Chance is not capable of explaining evolutionary emergence of complexity.
- Therefore, “something other than chance” is needed (i.e. Eros) to explain complexity.

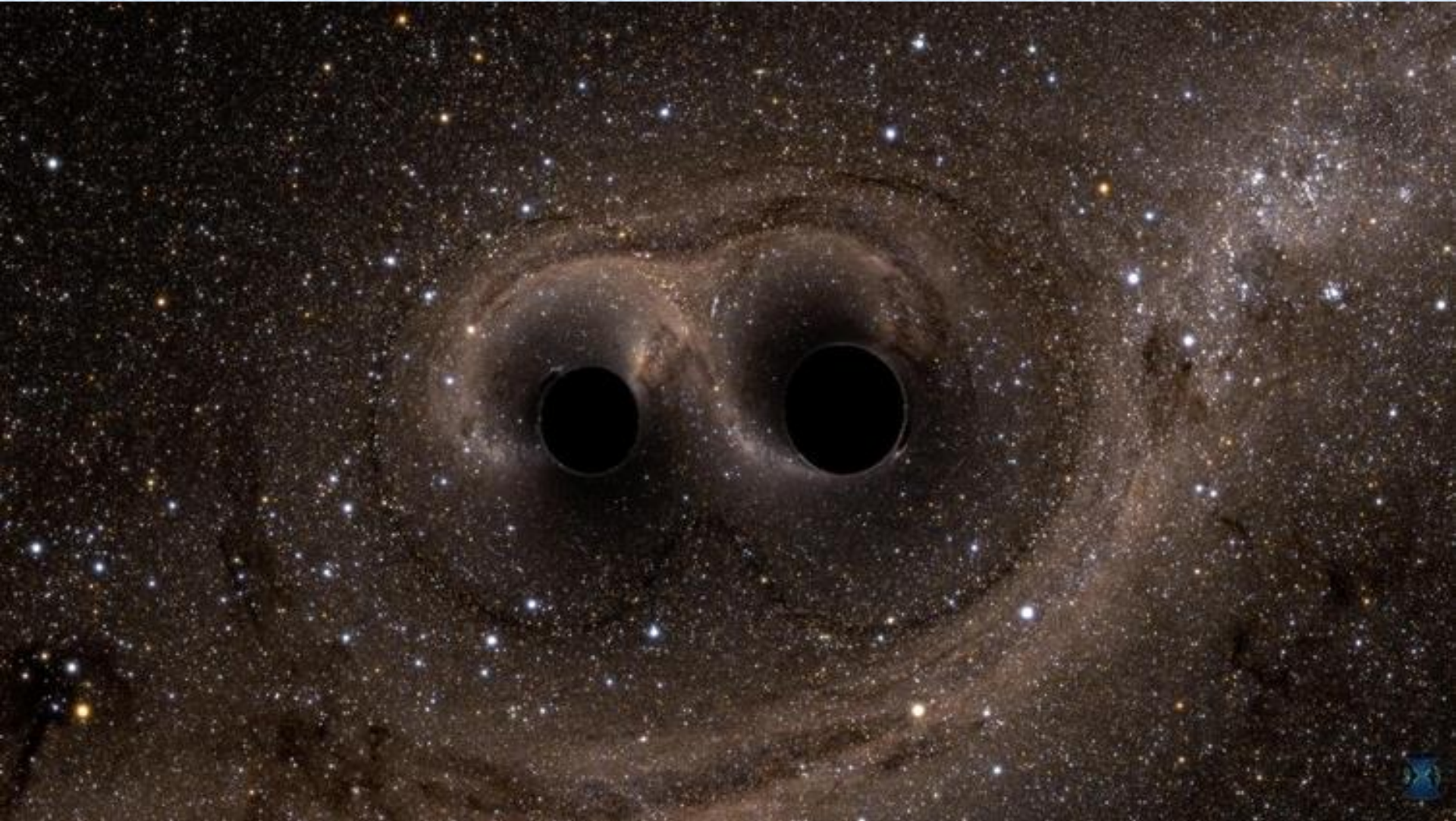
Wilber and Dawkins on chance

- “Something other than chance is pushing the universe...
Chance is exactly what the self-transcending drive of the Kosmos overcomes.”
-- Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything* (1996)
- “It is grindingly, creakingly, crashingly obvious that, if Darwinism were really a theory of chance, it couldn't work.”
-- Richard Dawkins, *Climbing Mount Improbable* (1997)

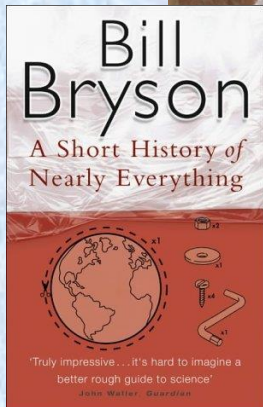
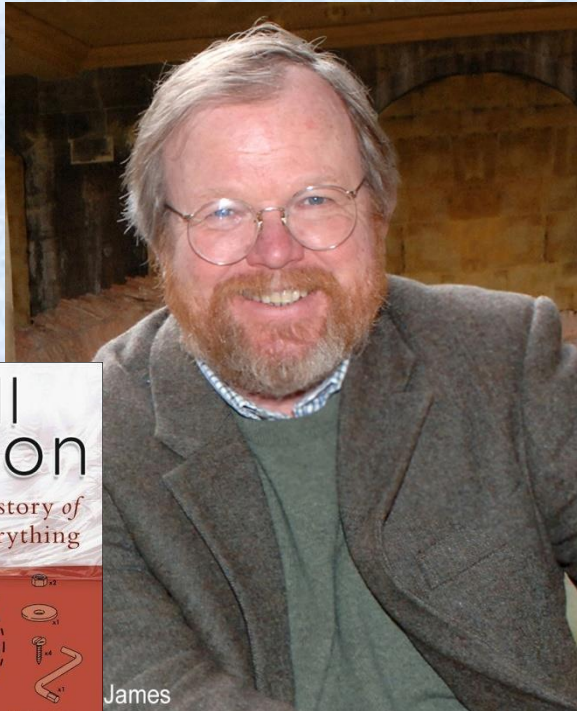


Source: www.jesusandmo.net, October 21, 2014

Comparison with Big History

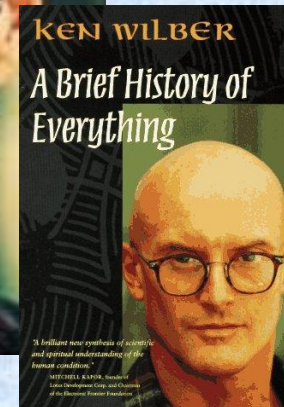
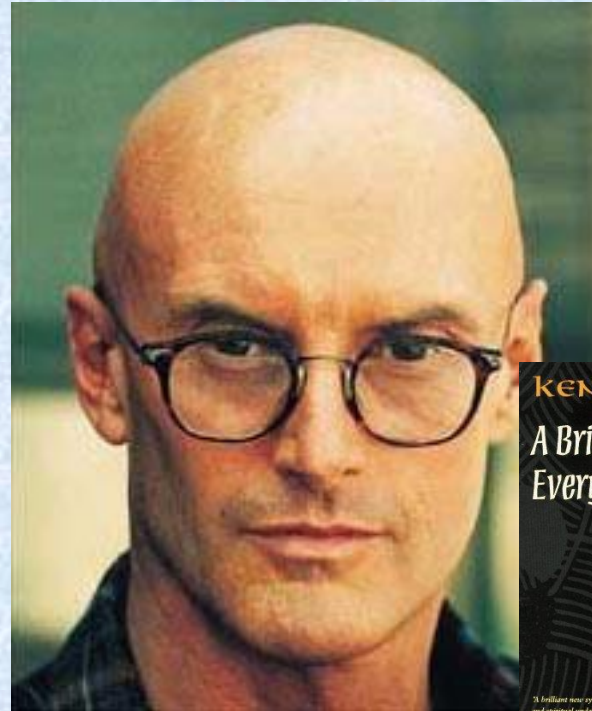


Two iconic “everything” authors



BILL BRYSON

“A SHORT HISTORY OF NEARLY EVERYTHING” (2003)



KEN WILBER

“A BRIEF HISTORY OF EVERYTHING” (1996)

There's almost no overlap between these two popular books.

Two domains of human knowledge: externalist vs. internalist

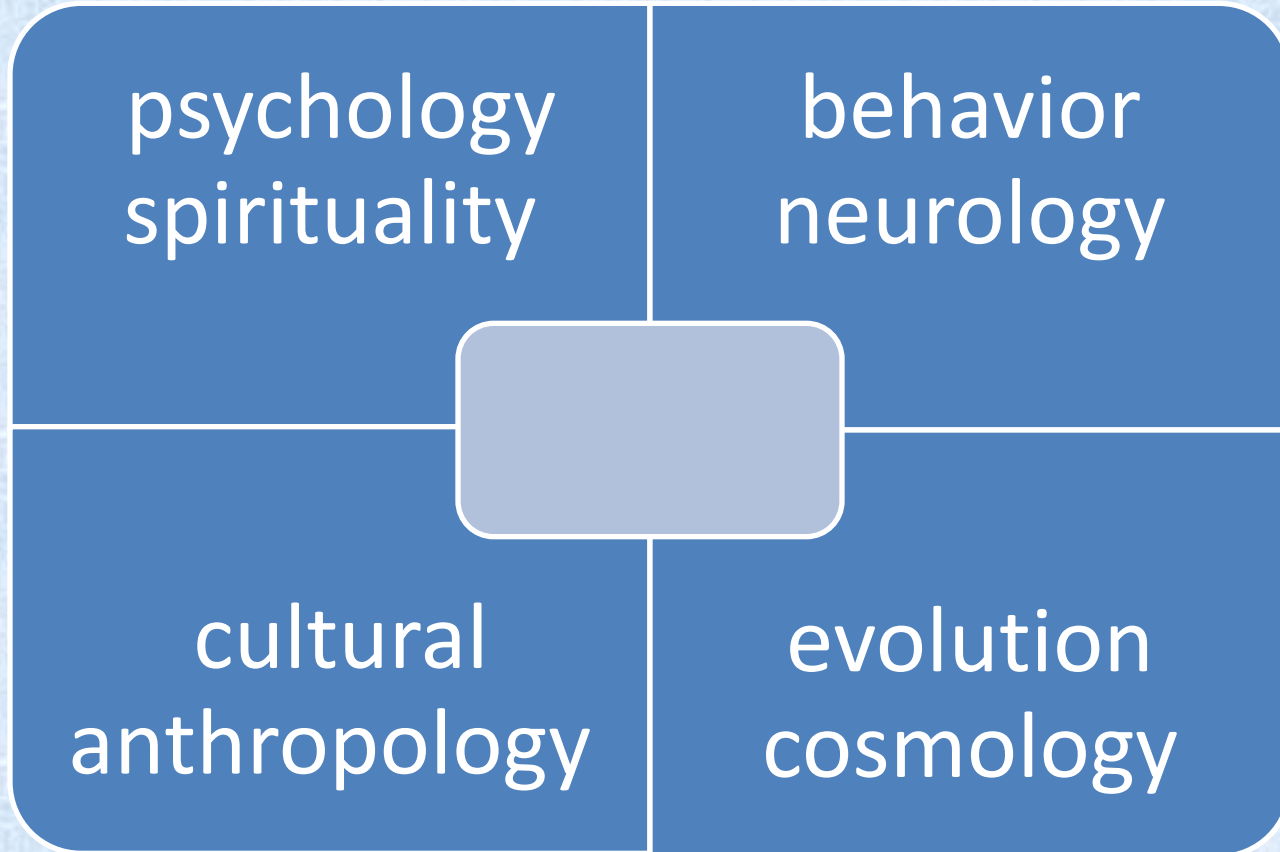
BILL BRYSON	KEN WILBER
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cosmology• Astronomy• Physics• Geology• Chemistry• Biology• Anthropology <p>“what can be perceived”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cosmology (Jantsch)• Anthropology• Rise of modernity• Postmodernity• Human development• Spirituality• Integral philosophy <p>“what can be experienced”</p>

Integration of IT into BH?



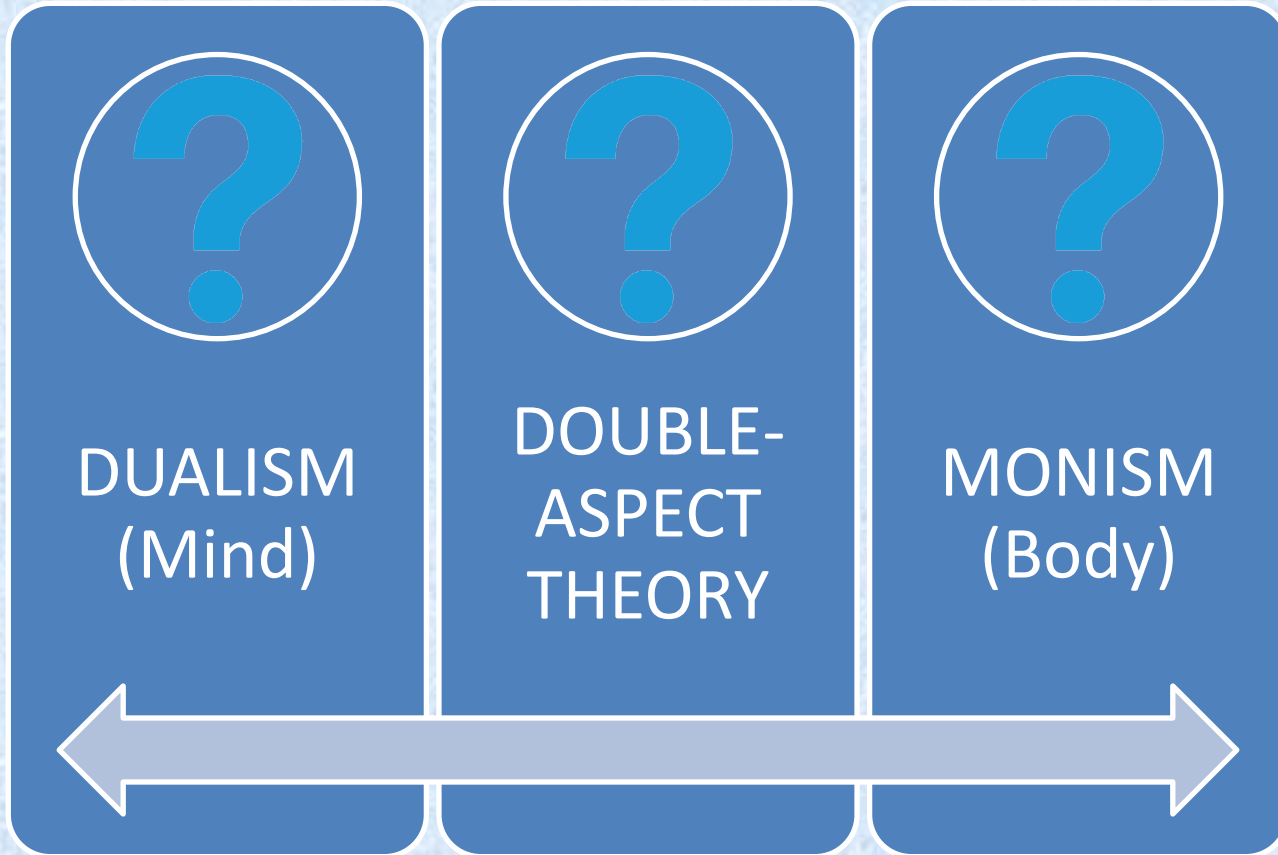
Integral
Theory
fits here.

Integration of BH into IT?



Big History fits here.

The Mind-Body Problem



Integral Theory

Big History

A Comparative Analysis

	BIG HISTORY	INTEGRAL THEORY
STRONG	<p>EMPIRICALLY GROUNDED IN THE SCIENCES</p> <p>THE REPOSITORY OF EMPIRICAL, “SETTLED” SCIENCE</p>	<p>DEEP OVERVIEW OF THE HUMANITIES</p> <p>UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN VALUES SYSTEMS AND WORLD CONFLICTS</p>
WEAK	<p>INTERIORITY/CONSCIOUS- NESS NOT ON THE MAP</p> <p>NO LANGUAGE FOR OUR CULTURAL PROBLEMS</p>	<p>INSUFFICIENT GRASP OF COSMOLOGY AND EVOLUTIONARY THEORY</p> <p>CULT-LIKE STATUS</p>

Cross-Domain Concepts

- SELF-ORGANIZATION
- ENTROPY
- ENERGY-USE
- NATURAL SELECTION
- EMERGENCE
- “TRANSCEND AND INCLUDE”
- AN “EROS IN THE KOSMOS”
- “CREATIVE ADVANCE INTO NOVELTY”

Conclusion

BIG HISTORY

- “Outside” view of things
- Consciousness has marginal status: it plays no role in cosmos and evolution, though it does in human culture
- Rise of complexity happens in spite of the Second Law, under favorably conditions

INTEGRAL THEORY

- “Inside” (and outside) view of things
- Consciousness covers half the map of reality
- Kosmos is driven by Eros: “Something other than chance is pushing the universe”
- Natural philosophy, “emergentism”

Discussion

ANY
QUESTIONS
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