



This and several other reviews were contained in the celebrations of Ken's work that we recently posted to KenWilber.com. The editors of the site went through the archives and pulled out dozens of old reviews, containing mostly positive criticism, and put them together as a type of celebration of Ken's work over the past 25 years. For the full collections, please see: **Meta-genius: A Celebration of Ken's Writings**—[Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#)

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### **A Brief History of Everything**

by Ken Wilber; Shambhala, Boston, 1996; paper, \$14.

*Review by Russ DiCarlo*

Compared to *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, its 800 page, highly acclaimed predecessor, *A Brief History of Everything* is a stroll in the proverbial park. But not simply because of its shorter page count. The book has been written in an interview format, which makes it more personable, more reader-friendly, and far less intimidating than the earlier book. And Wilber's sprinkling of humor throughout is an unexpected delight. Ken Wilber has come out to play.

Yet make no mistake, this book, which centers on evolution, human development, consciousness, and spiritual realization, is no lightweight. As a distillation and synthesis of his previous works--more than a dozen since his classic *The Spectrum of Consciousness*--there's plenty of substance here.

Nonetheless, the effect of this style of presentation makes Wilber's insights seem less "scholarly" and more immediately relevant to day-to-day life. Here's an example: Wilber

suggests that, ultimately, Spirit reveals itself in three distinct ways in the physical world--through the sense of “I,” the subjective or inner aspect of spirit or consciousness; through the “we” space, the community of spirit that pivots on ethics, morals, and culturally accepted worldviews; and through the “it” domain of objects and things, the measurable outer garment of God studied by science.

This obvious, yet not clearly recognized, distinction was useful. As a management consultant, I have known intuitively that most managerial methodologies are predominantly “it”--focused, using the scientific method to streamline systems. That’s all very well and good. At some level I have known that to neglect consciousness and the inner development and growth of individuals within an organization is to become imbalanced and fall short of an organization’s ultimate potential. To do so is to cut off the left hand of spirit in expression.

But unlike before, I now possess a potent and clear conceptual model, a more expansive framework that I can share with corporate executives. From my perspective, these individuals need to embrace both domains if they want their organizations to thrive.

In *A Brief History of Everything*, Wilber describes two streams of spiritual movement--the “ascending path” of evolution, which embodies the realization that in back of all forms, behind the Many, there is the One, and the “descending path” in which the One finds perfect expression as the Many. According to Wilber, it is the inability of “ascenders” and “descenders” to fully integrate these two movements of spirit that has led to fierce battles and bitter gridlock throughout history--ascenders and descenders, “still crazy after all these years.” This distinction proved immediately helpful to me in my desire to better understand some of the polarizing forces that are playing themselves out on the world scene, right here, right now.

Warning: This book is not intended for the spiritually immature or dogmatically inclined. Whether you are a new ager, a systems thinker, an unflagging environmentalist, or a hardline fundamentalist--if you have fallen into a sense of complacency and righteousness regarding your own partial take on the good, the beautiful, and the true--Wilber is sure to rattle your cage.

But herein lies Wilber’s greatest gift. He sniffs out and exposes limited, dysfunctional, and half-baked thinking like a champion bloodhound in hot pursuit of its

quarry. Through an amazing capacity to synthesize and clarify Eastern and Western psychologies and spiritual traditions, he is able to paint a unique and broad panorama where all the puzzle pieces can fall into place.

One can only hope that this book will be a crossover title for Wilber, allowing the brilliance of his insights to shine among a much broader audience.

Russ DiCarlo

*The reviewer is an author and management consultant whose book Towards a New World View: Conversations at the Leading Edge was excerpted in the last issue of The Quest.*