



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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*Sex, Ecology, Spirituality—The Spirit of Evolution*  
By Ken Wilber  
Shambhala Books  
Cambridge, Mass.  
Reviewed by David Boadella

Not Breakfast reading, nor a book to slip into your pocket, Ken Wilber's blockbusting magnum opus is the first part of a trilogy on the Kosmos. Kosmos with a capital K is used to indicate this is a book not only about physical nature, and human nature, but also about spiritual nature.

Wilber's theme, for 524 pages, is a vast one: the web of life and the pattern of connection between levels of existence; the past, present and future of our gender

relationship as man and woman; and the evolution of consciousness towards awareness of the essential ground from which all differentiations and individuations are supported.

Moving easily across this huge tapestry, from cosmology to biology, from ecology to sociology, from anthropology to psychology, and from philosophy to spirituality with apparently equal ease, Wilber is master of his elements. Against the pathological dualisms that split nature from culture, science from religion, men from women and which create a schizophrenic image of God, Wilber offers basic polarities of reality within which we need to explore creative synthesis. Starting with “twenty tenets” which govern what he calls patterns of existence, laws of form, or tendencies of evolution, Wilber constructs a cartography of the emergent properties of the Kosmos in a way that unfolds both the depth and the breadth of the interconnected systems into which both world and world views are organized.

Wilber’s mind combines the properties of both searchlight and laser. As searchlight he opens a beacon to encompass an integrated view of world, life, human beings and God. As laser, he probes into weaknesses and confusions in both current and ancient world views and mind-maps, to expose category mistakes, blind spots and logic jumps, and to highlight the central nodes of his organizing vision. The 238 pages of footnotes, constituting a book in itself, contain a running commentary and instant dialogue with many of the key philosophers that have anticipated or seen beyond our modernistic perspective. In addition, Wilber uses these footnotes to explore the finer points of his agreement with, or painstakingly articulated differences from, his major contemporaries: Varela, Hebermas, Foucault, Grof, to name only a handful of the dozens of heavy-weights that Wilber takes on as playful sparring partners.

Based on his twenty tenets of holism, Wilber unfolds his four-quadrant model of the world: in the upper right (exterior-individual), a spectrum from atomic particle to the most organized form of biological substance, the human brain; in the lower right (exterior-social), he unravels a spectrum of systems from galaxy through biosphere to various orders of social system, to differentiated global communities; in the upper left (interior-individual) Wilber portrays a spectrum of interior experience in which consciousness in some form or other goes “all the way up and all the way down”, from pre-atomic prehensions (Whitehead) to transcendental consciousness. Finally, on the lower left (interior-social), Wilber explores the cultural dimensions of interiority, from holonomic non-locality (the connected universe) to a projected global “buddha-field” of resonant awareness.

Wilber draws clearly on his earlier spectrum model of consciousness which has been so valuable within psychotherapy and transpersonal psychology; and also on the co-related social-evolution model he mapped for us in his book *Up from Eden*, extended by Jean Gebser’s model of four stages in human cultural development. But *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality* is several quantum jumps higher in breadth of integration and depth of relatedness. Wilber’s earlier books become simply stepping-stones in the construction of a higher-order and wider-ranging vision.

The human sexual drama becomes a central thematic, with a long time span overview of the development of patriarchy since the paleolithic, and a mapping of male and female polarities as wholesome and equal expressions of a more basic polarity contained within the twenty tenets, between *agency* and *communion*, terms which Wilber takes some chapters to explain and develop. Wilber is at war with fundamentalism of all sorts, and

will enrage the extremist wings of the feminist movement for his critiques of their one-sidedness, just as he will upset the male world of system specialists for their neglect of interiority and of subtler levels of significance; the “value free” sociologies proud of their objectivity, and purged of all subjectivism.

To do justice to this massive foundation-document of the twenty-first century would require a sub-book in itself. I resist the temptation to try to summarize the details of Wilber’s revolutionary arguments, thought-designs, or differentiated blueprints for the future. Instead, I will try to give some feeling for the spiritual momentum of this work: Wilber’s book is at once a celebration of life, a warning to humanity (with no doomsday overtones), a compassionate protest against sectarianism in all shapes and forms and a deeply committed statement about the meaning of the world and the meaning of our place within it.

There is a powerful marriage of content and form in this book. Every sentence scintillates, and breathes with fresh life. There are no dull moments, no plodding through the complexities of world themes. The book, if over-heavy physically (1350 g) and weighty in argument, is super-light in tone. It reads like a prose-poem on person, nature and culture. Wilber dances. His rationality is passionate, and his passion is rational, never least than when he writes about the trans-rational.

Faced with the complexities of the modern world, and the onesidedness both of what Wilber calls the “ascenders” (the neo-spiritualists retreating from the scientism of the century) and of the “descenders” (the neo-modernists, placing all faith in technology and abandoning the genuine spiritual legacy of the past), many of our contemporaries relapse into pluralism. As Alexander Lowen once remarked: “anything goes, but nothing comes

off.” Wilber, by contrast, outlines clear positions, defines radical choices, embraces both poles of many levels of experience and consistently explores the differentiated unities lying behind our dualistic viewpoints.

Kosmos I is a book of compassionate commitment about the specifics of grounding basic values in the major domains of human experience. In the long chain of transmission from Pythagoras, through Plotinus, Eckhardt, Bruno, Spinoza and Schelling, down to Bergson and Whitehead at the start of this century, Ken Wilber has now established a secure place.

For the Gorbachev Foundation, newly engaged in creating the International Green Cross, the Earth Charta, and the annual State of the World Forum, with an emphasis on the crucial need for humanity to reconnect to fresh forms of fundamental values such as respect for life and for the earth, and for the basic human qualities which underlie our neuroses, our splittings, our endless wars and global crises, Wilber’s book is essential reading as a trans-planetary survey of our problems and our possibilities. This is a book to live with for the next five years, and carry with you long into the next century.

I await, with impatience, the second and third volumes of what Larry Dossey has described as “one of the most significant books ever published.”