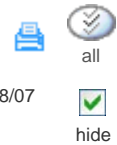


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Start Date: 02/08/07

1



Mark Edwards

Questions

What thoughts do you have on this key passage from Laszlo's article?

An integral TOE identifies the constituents of "every-thing" and states the rules by which the constituents relate to each other so as to form ever more complex things. It identifies the most basic kind of things that exists; the things that generate other things without being generated by them. Then it states the simplest possible set of rules-algorithms-that explain the emergence of the kind of things we have reason to believe exist. If it succeeds, it will be capable of explaining the origins of every-thing in the real world, together with the kind of relations that prevail among them.

Introduction

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Sara Ross

03/05/07 9:19AM



hide



Yes, I agree...

Andy, I thought these were useful points, and would like to reinforce both and relate them to the opening Laszlo quote about criteria for a TOE.

1. You wrote "Certainly we can make a conceptual distinction between the two types of hierarchy, but the point is that they are intimately related. Developmental hierarchies only come into being because of the participation of individual cells in the larger spatial communities of cells. They only acquire their higher developmental properties by linking up in communities with other, similar types of cells. Conversely, these spatial communities could not exist without the developmental process by which the individual members acquire their higher properties, because these are the bonds that hold the communities together. Development of any individual cell goes hand-in-hand with its joining a growing spatial community of cells. So we can look at these cells and their societies and see both types of hierarchies, they are really inseparable."

1.1 This seems to me to be one way of understanding why Laszlo's overall theory is nuanced slightly differently under the same framework to explicate the three levels of micro, meso, macro. It is explaining the emergence of each level. The meso of organisms and their social organizations is possible only by the micro level's existence (although there is no requirement that the micro "produces" the meso. E.g., other planets have the micro but no meso level organisms). Your example indicates how the micro level of organization is *not causal* for the higher level of organization into complex neural cells,

but it is necessary to exist before the more complex entity can develop.

1.2 To keep building on this, I use 2. below.

2. Andy also wrote: "I think many people have a problem with this view because they regard human beings as the highest possible form of life. Nobody comes out and point blank asserts that, but it is strongly implied in how they regard enlightened beings. The assumption seems to be the most highly evolved beings were and are human beings, who somehow while being human have had this consciousness that is far beyond that of an ordinary human being. I strongly disagree with this view. I believe that at a certain point evolution goes beyond humans, and at this point identification is with something transcending ...more...



private



31

Sara Ross

03/05/07 10:23AM



mop up my sloppy wording

hide

I saw some sloppy-wording in my "I agree" post. (I could edit the original post and re-submit it, but this way I can be sure any reader of the original sloppiness knows it got cleaned up.) In both cases, haste made waste.

In 2.3, I was conflating two things within one sentence. No can do. Corrected, 2.3 should read: The existence of the meso world of living organisms and their social organizations (whether human or otherwise) is entirely arbitrary, in my view. Earth happens to have a meso world. [this view is not related to TOEs at all, it is referring to the emergence of a meso-level world]

In 3.1, the last sentence had another in-haste conflation. Originally, 3.1 said: "Consciousness" should be accounted for within a TOE, but is not necessary to a TOE because such human "consciousness" exists only - as far as we know now - on this one teeny tiny little planet in the cosmos that just happens to have meso level life.

Revised 3.1: What we call "consciousness" should be accounted for within a TOE. Human "consciousness" exists only - as far as we know now - on this one teeny tiny little planet in the cosmos that just happens to have meso level life.

Adding: 3.2 "accounting for" consciousness and "presuming consciousness" are two very different activities. A TOE, in my view, should not presume such a thing as "consciousness" because it is a human construction of a concept to help people explain how the world works and the concept is constructed by particular epistemologies/world views (but not all). Laszlo's theory does not need the construct of "consciousness" to be coherent but it can account for it.

Adding: 3.3. this relates to Bonnie and Mark's discussion around process and structure, tangoing with the question of the nature of interior and exterior. Interior and exterior, too, are concepts we construct but dare not reify as "real things." Consciousness relates to that notion, too.

Adding 3.4. The gift I see in the effort Bonnie makes in her work is to challenge our presumptions about "what is" - and how we construct our beliefs about what exists, or not. Because we have language capabilities, we set our own traps by reifying the concepts language helps us construct.



private



32

Andrew Smith

03/06/07 2:22AM



hide

Sara:

I'm not sure, but I think your reference to micro, meso and macro is to distinguish cells, humans and the earth? If so, I have no problem with that, and what you said about one existing without the other, but I want to emphasize that I brought cells into the discussion only because I thought the relationship between developmental and ecological was easier to understand on that level. I wasn't saying anything about the relationship of cells to organisms. But thinking it over, I believe the relationship between developmental and ecological should be perfectly understandable on our own level, without the analogy.

Human beings develop through various stages. My claim is that each of these stages corresponds to the individual's becoming a member of a new kind of social organization, with higher more complex social organizations corresponding to higher, more complex stages of development. So the process by which an individual develops to a higher stage is also the process by which a spatial/ecological group incorporates a new member. What from the perspective of the individual is development to a higher stage is from the perspective of the social holon growth, expansion.

This is an example of one of my favorite and often discussed themes, that a great many apparently distinct phenomena can be understood as simply different perspectives of the same process. Every holon has its own perspective, so when we discuss hierarchy, where there are many different levels and stages of interest, many different apparently different processes are generated. Not only does each stage have its own characteristic holons and their behavior, but these holons and their behavior can be viewed from multiple other stages and levels within the hierarchy.

Wilber touches on this with his discussion of zones and perspectives, but he has not to my knowledge recognized that there are different perspectives from different stages, and that many of the phenomena he carefully distinguishes do not have to be distinguished. We can understand that many of them are all one thing, just viewed from different stages or levels.



private



33

Tom Murray

03/07/07 4:17PM



process and Process

In response to [Bonnitte Roy \(22\)](#)

RE Bonnie's:

[The answer from my view is that fundamentally, process has no inside or outside, but there is a cognitive process that creates those boundary conditions, which give rise to the structures, "interior" and "exterior".

In the same vein, fundamentally, process is neither wholes or parts, nor whole-parts, because there is a cognitive process that lays down the relational conditions "whole" and "part" (or the aspect of "one" and the aspect of "many").]

Maybe this is getting into material best saved for another forum, it seems like you are using a specialized definition of process here, lets call it Process (almost like process as Being). Not sure how you can get out of the epistemological hall of mirrors. In a more regular use of the term we can say things like "processes are relatively fast-moving structures and structures are relatively slow-moving processes" to try to solve the paradoxes that conceptualization creates. Your sense of process is not so much about "how things or structures change" (because that your pin its reality on things or structures, thus loosing its essence), but it looks like another perspective on the fundamental essence of reality (as others have pointed to information, mass/energy, A-Fields, holons, non-dual ground of being,). It seems that any of these theoretical perspectives can be used to transcend and include the others (though the proponents of each will argue for the supremacy of one).

hide

I think one way to approach the issue is to say that, whatever reality (and beyond) is made of we can't really know, and that all attempts to explain it are limited epistemologically (as you know), but that there are different types of *experiences* that reveal things to us about reality. Describing things in terms of process or Process is a strategy for describing a certain set of experiences and insights that, in their core, are beyond words and epistemologies. So the Process view is one that draws our attention to a certain type of experience (one could say a perspective, but you may not want to use that term) that leads to certain types of insights. Those insights can in turn be clumsily put into words, but the words are in the epistemic realm.



private

When you say "All of this, BTW, I consider to be meta-theoretical, not [...more...](#)



34

Tom Murray

03/07/07 4:25PM



RE Charles, Sara, Alan...

hide

I'm catching up after being away from the dialog. Various thoughts:

1. RE Charles': "Wilber attributes the rapid evolution of the bird wing and eyeball to spirit ... Laszlo attributes rapid evolution to the A-Field." Does there need to be any difference between Laszlo's A-Field or zero-point energy field (or morphic field) and Wilber's spirit? Seems like they are all different perspectives and vocabularies pointing to the same elephant. Laszlo uses the metaphors of science, Wilber the metaphors of religion and transpersonal psychology, but the implications for reality and humanity don't seem to be that different. The developmental implications of the emergent structures and the ethical implications of the connectedness of everything, and the properties of the mechanisms of cause and effect are really not so different in the two theories, IMHO.

2. RE Laszlo's "A genuine TOE can be created... "

I find this aspect of Laszlo's work epistemologically and pragmatically naive (based on this quote anyways). He distinguishes a "genuine" TOE as simpler to create than a "physical" TOE. I take a "physical TOE" as one that can be used to predict reality, meaning here what we observe-and yes that a tough one. What can he mean by a "genuine TOE" other than a theory that makes sense in the mind?-that provides a satisfactory (a feeling impression) explanation of what we observe? This is just another (sub-) definition of Meaning. So a "genuine TOE" is possible because a person can feel satisfied that all their important questions are covered. But that is not saying much, as it means that one can get very abstract and comfortable ignore so many pesky empirical details.

3. RE Sara's: "Do we *need* a TOE for any practical purposes? " -- I would say we need one to 1) generate meaning, which is pretty important (but may fall outside some definitions of "practical!"); and 2) to help us compare and contrast and synthesize and improve the myriad theories that *do* have practical implications.

4. RE Alan's " "The Darwinian paradigm cannot explain how this level of complexity could have emerged within the relatively short period of about 500 million years..." My memory is that Wilber is repurposing the opinion of someone who, unlike himself, [...more...](#)



private



35

Andrew Smith

03/07/07 9:59PM



hide

Tom, excellent posts, you make a great moderator in this forum. Reading your first post, I immediately understood more about what Bonnie and the people she was in discussion with

were saying than I was able to glean by reading, or at any rate, skimming, many of their posts. This to me is the essence of what a great mod does. Bridges conceptual and other gaps between participants, uses a more universal language that helps everyone join the discussion.

Just a comment on "The Darwinian paradigm cannot explain how this level of complexity could have emerged within the relatively short period of about 500 million years..." Did Wilber say this? On the one hand, it's consistent with many of his writings on evolution, but on the other hand, I know he's familiar with work in complexity theory, particularly Kaufmann. A purely Darwinian process (as if there were anything pure about Darwinian evolution!) is unnecessary, we know that there are other types of processes than can or could account for relatively rapid change. Wilber, and more generally people in this forum, are the last ones who should be creating a false dichotomy between Darwin, on the one hand, and some eros-driven process, on the other. Without judging the likelihood of the latter, I will just say there are other scientifically sound processes that can fill in many if not all the gaps that some (not all) think are left after random mutation/natural selection.



private



36

Bonnitta Roy

03/08/07 5:46AM



hide



In response to Tom Murray (33)

Tom writes (and I agree):

Describing things in terms of process or Process is a strategy for describing a certain set of experiences and insights that, in their core, are beyond words and epistemologies. So the Process view is one that draws our attention to a certain type of experience (one could say a perspective, but you may not want to use that term) that leads to certain types of insights. Those insights can in turn be clumsily put into words, but the words are in the epistemic realm.

Tom goes on to ask:

When you say "All of this, BTW, I consider to be meta-theoretical, not meta-physical"-I can see that I am missing an important point somewhere, because I have been interpreting some of it as metaphysical. Isn't a meta-theoretical perspective an epistemological one (and I thought you were drawing metaphysical as well as epistemological conclusions)..?

Funny, Tom, because you didn't miss anything-- because what you point out in the first paragraph is exactly what I meant with the above statement. It all has to do with what we were saying in an Anderson topic about one's relationship to theory. Here is how I was using the terms. A metaphysical approach assumes one is actually defining how reality "really is." On the other hand, a meta-theoretical approach, considers the utility of a theory, takes the theory and checks to see if it ITSELF is coherent, comprehensive, the most concise way to describe and make distinctions, etc... A meta-theoretical statement is talking about the UTILITY of a theory. It doesn't pretend to be making statements about the ultimate nature of reality (those would be metaphysical statements).

Without a metaphysical relationship to theory, then the model becomes, in your own words,

"a strategy for describing a certain set of experiences and insights that, in their core, are beyond words and epistemologies"

If then we consider that model from a meta-systemic perspective... then that's meta-

theoretical (sort of like checking the math that the physicists do to see if their hypothesis is sound) ... and is meant to imply no new metaphysical baggage.

Does that make sense?



37

Alan Kazlev

03/08/07 7:49PM



I have a different perspective

In response to [Tom Murray \(34\)](#)

Hi Tom

you said

4. RE Alan's "The Darwinian paradigm cannot explain how this level of complexity could have emerged within the relatively short period of about 500 million years..." My memory is that Wilber is repurposing the opinion of someone who, unlike himself, actually is an expert in evolution basing the idea on actual evidence in a scientific way. I assume that Alan, like the rest of us here, is not an expert in that field, and that he is basing his opinion on some other experts, presumably more of them or more prominent ones. So it brings up the question of how we, as participants twice or thrice removed from expertise, can evaluate truths when experts conflict and we are not experts. I guess this is a tangent but its a favorite topic of mine...

While it is true I am not an "expert" in the sense that I am not a specialist or professional palaeontologist or developmental biologist, I am knowledgeable enough to write on this subject (see the Palaeos com and Palaeos org websites which I have and do co-author), and was actually hired by an educational company to work on a poster that traced the evolution of birds from dinosaurs (including many transitional forms of bird-like dinosaurs) and the evolution of feathers (which has been explained by science through the so-called "evo-devo" hypothesis) and of flight (the power stroke being derived from the maniraptoran prey grab). So when Wilber goes on about half a wing and all that in ABHOE, I do know that he doesn't understand what he's talking about.

Similarly with Sri Aurobindo, when Wilber misinterprets him, I know exactly where and how. I've also started reading Gebser's *Ever Present Origin* (an exceeding difficult book!) and am amazed at how antithetical Wilber's position is to Gebser's (despite Wilber positive references to Gebser as one of the sources of his ideas - e.g. in *Integral Psychology*.)

As for where experts disagree, there are two different forms of this.

One is where you have experts who really *are* experts - e.g. Stephen Jay Gould vs Simon Conway Morris on the Cambrian explosion. In that case all one can do is either cite both, or follow the research to see where it leads. Re the latter option, here it looks like Simon Morris's views are being confirmed, e.g. Gould's [...more...](#)



private



38

Alan Kazlev

03/08/07 9:07PM



Here's a resource...

btw, re Wilber & Crichton, here's an interesting discussion on a Wilber forum: "Crichton's State of Fear vs. Gore's An Inconvenient Truth---so what is the integral response to climate change research?"

hide

<http://multiplex.integralinstitute.org/Public/cs/forums/thread/14441.aspx>

I've only glanced through so I can't comment. Anyway, just to reiterate; unlike Darwinism, Aurobindo, etc, Climate Change isn't a subject I have any competence in. In this context I am relying - perhaps naively - on the consensus of experts and also on my own spiritual feelings (biases?) about the Earth



private



39

Tom Murray

03/14/07 5:27PM



In response to Alan Kazlev (37)

Thanks for adding some flesh (feathers?) to the dialog Alan. I find many of Wilber's views on things, including global warming, off the mark, but again I am no expert in any of these areas. It was interesting to read your comments now knowing that you have put a lot of thought into some of these areas.



private



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30 Sara Ross

03/05/07 9:19AM



close



Yes, I agree...

Andy, I thought these were useful points, and would like to reinforce both and relate them to the opening Laszlo quote about criteria for a TOE.

1. You wrote "Certainly we can make a conceptual distinction between the two types of hierarchy, but the point is that they are intimately related. Developmental hierarchies only come into being because of the participation of individual cells in the larger spatial communities of cells. They only acquire their higher developmental properties by linking up in communities with other, similar types of cells. Conversely, these spatial communities could not exist without the developmental process by which the individual members acquire their higher properties, because these are the bonds that hold the communities together. Development of any individual cell goes hand-in-hand with its joining a growing spatial community of cells. So we can look at these cells and their societies and see both types of hierarchies, they are really inseparable."

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1.2 To keep building on this, I use 2. below.

2. Andy also wrote: "I think many people have a problem with this view because they regard human beings as the highest possible form of life. Nobody comes out and point blank asserts that, but it is strongly implied in how they regard enlightened beings. The assumption seems to be the most highly evolved beings were and are human beings, who somehow while being human have had this consciousness that is far beyond that of an ordinary human being. I strongly disagree with this view. I believe that at a certain point evolution goes beyond humans, and at this point identification is with something transcending humans."

2.1 I agree with you. You describe a quality of the "anthropocentric perspective."

2.2 Without that perspective, we could look at Laszlo's level of micro, meso, macro, and note that the meso is not an essential link for the macro to exist (where the macro is the larger cosmic world). I believe the distinctions of these scales or levels of existence are very useful, to help us (a) see the relations between "types of worlds" and (b) not mix up relation with causation.

2.3 The existence of the meso world of living organisms and their social organizations (whether human or otherwise) is entirely arbitrary and entirely dispensable in a TOE, in my view. Earth happens to have a meso world. Earth and its humans are not the center of the universe, though the anthropocentric perspective may infer something along those lines when humans' "consciousness" is viewed as the highest form of evolution etc.

2.4 If the anthropocentric perspective is not the one given preference, then there are a couple additional perspectives. Taking the eventual impacts of, let's say, earth's global warming or a world-wide nuclear holocaust moving to extreme ends, these perspectives may sound like:

2.4.1 So, humans wipe out themselves and most other living species; so what?

2.4.1 So, the earth as a living system dies: so what?

2.5 A TOE would need to explain the relations of such "happenings" and why they did not matter to all that continues on irrespective of the happenings.

3. Returning then to the opening excerpt: "An integral TOE identifies the constituents of "every-thing" and

states the rules by which the constituents relate to each other so as to form ever more complex things. It identifies the most basic kind of things that exists; the things that generate other things without being generated by them. Then it states the simplest possible set of rules-algorithms-that explain the emergence of the kind of things we have reason to believe exist. If it succeeds, it will be capable of explaining the origins of every-thing in the real world, together with the kind of relations that prevail among them."

3.1 Although there has been an absence of much energy here to investigate how Laszlo's TOE incorporates what we call "interiors" (it probably means we would have to read the same things and delve far more deeply than we yet have, in order to relate the multiple systems involved), when we adopt a non-anthropocentric perspective, we might note that projecting the necessity of a TOE to explain "interiors" only necessary at the meso-world level. It circles back to Andy's point (expressed in my terms, which may reflect your meaning, Andy, or if not, extend it) that we project our (real or imagined) human qualities all over the universe because we believe we have a special higher "consciousness." My take is that there may be a huge amount of projection onto the world/universe, rooted in anthropocentric/anthropomorphic perspectives. "Consciousness" should be accounted for within a TOE, but is not necessary to a TOE because such human "consciousness" exists only - as far as we know now - on this one teeny tiny little planet in the cosmos that just happens to have meso level life.

33 Tom Murray

03/07/07 4:17PM



close

**process and Process***In response to Bonnitta Roy (22)*

RE Bonnie's:

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Yes, "The way we language ideas is important" ...and alas, language is such a crude tool sometimes!

34 Tom Murray

03/07/07 4:25PM



close

**RE Charles, Sara, Alan...**

I'm catching up after being away from the dialog. Various thoughts:

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4. RE Alan's " "The Darwinian paradigm cannot explain how this level of complexity could have emerged within the relatively short period of about 500 million years..." My memory is that Wilber is repurposing the opinion of someone who, unlike himself, actually is an expert in evolution basing the idea on actual evidence in a scientific way. I assume that Alan, like the rest of us here, is not an expert in that field, and that he is basing his opinion on some other experts, presumably more of them or more prominent ones. So it brings up the question of how we, as participants twice or thrice removed from expertise, can evaluate truths when experts conflict and we are not experts. I guess this is a tangent but its a favorite topic of mine...

37 Alan Kazlev

03/08/07 7:49PM



close



I have a different perspective

In response to Tom Murray (34)

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Similarly with Sri Aurobindo, when Wilber misinterprets him, I know exactly where and how. I've also started reading Gebser's *Ever Present Origin* (an exceeding difficult book!) and am amazed at how antithetical Wilber's position is to Gebser's (despite Wilber positive references to Gebser as one of the sources of his ideas - e.g. in *Integral Psychology*.)

As for where experts disagree, there are two different forms of this.

One is where you have experts who really *are* experts - e.g. Stephen Jay Gould vs Simon Conway Morris on the Cambrian explosion. In that case all one can do is either cite both, or follow the research to see where it leads. Re the latter option, here it looks like Simon Morris's views are being confirmed, e.g. Gould's claim regarding the huge number of new phyla in the Cambrian has been falsified as some of these strange animals known from fossils of this time have turned out to be actually early cousins of recent forms. One (a cousin of the peripatus or "velvet worm") was actually originally reconstructed upside down, with protective spines on its back as stilt-like legs and legs as feeding tentacles on the back - hence the confusion!

The other is when you have experts and pseudo-experts. Wilber's problem is that he barracks for the pseudo-experts. So he supports Intelligent Design (based on the old "God of the gaps" approach - Laszlo uses this too), which is propounded by people who don't have qualifications in this area. He also makes the bizarre claim that very few biologists believe in Darwinism any more (that's news to me, and I worked as a volunteer

for a while in the paleontology department of the state Museum here). Just email ten biologists picked at random on the web and ask them what they think of all this! So you don't need to be an expert, just to consider the argument with honesty and integrity, after having consulted with experts (including experts of all points of view, to get all perspectives).

Here's another example, similar to the above. Almost all climate scientists say the Greenhouse effect is real. The *only* ones who don't are in the pay of big business or govt. Sure, these "nay sayers" also have good academic credentials, but what is their (not so hidden) agenda? Just as the Intelligent Design movement is (with the exception of a few "eccentrics" like Wilber and Laszlo) all fundamentalist Christian (in fact there is no contradiction between Christianity and evolution, and the two can even work together, as Teilhard and others have shown). So this is another way we can test the sincerity of experts. Do they have hidden agendas? Sure Wilber and Laszlo don't, both strike me as extremely sincere men, passionate about the Truth, but look at who are they citing as authorities. Are these the sort of authorities that are reliable? To get back to the Greenhouse question, I am no climate scientist, I know next to nothing on all this, but if the entire scientific community is in consensus here, and the only ones who are against it are supported by big business and conservative governments, then I would feel a bit sceptical ;-)

By the way, Wilber apparently supports the views Michael Crichton (I don't have the url, but i was surprised and disappointed), the novelist who considers the greenhouse affect a hoax and has lots of psuedoscience at the back of one of his books to "prove" it. (see his book *State of Fear*). This is why I see someone like Teilhard de Chardin as a better exemplar for an integral philosophy, because he was able to incorporate the findings of both religion and science in a way that did not discredit either (not that I'm a Teilhardian, but he's a good example of a constructive rather than an exclusionist approach).