Book Reviews

Laszlo, E. (2004). *Science and the Akashic Field: An Integral Theory of Everything*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International

Ervin Laszlo may be well known to many readers as a far sighted author; he was a founding member of the Club of Rome, founded the Club of Budapest, was affiliated with many Universities around the world, was nominated for the Nobel prize and he published many interdisciplinary books on questions of utmost relevance to those who are engaged in the realization and further development of the integral paradigm. And yet this is an unusual book.

Science and the Akashic Field is a most challenging attempt to summarize the foundations of a "theory of everything" on a solid *scientific* basis. His attempt stands in contrast, as Laszlo explicitly maintains, to Wilber's *Theory of everything* – as "... he does not offer such a theory" - which is, as we will see, not quite fair (p. 2). Laszlo builds his claim on his 40 years of interdisciplinary research as a professor of philosophy, systems theory and futures studies. At the core of his theory of everything is the *connectivity hypothesis*. In simple terms it means: in our universe (and in all other universes) everything is connected with everything in the information-conserving and information-conveying cosmic field of the quantum vacuum. This vacuum fills most of the universe (not matter!), and the vacuum preserves all information ever generated without any need of time and space or a medium. Therefore the total sum of information is immediately available everywhere and at any time if it can be "received" and decoded by resonance. Of course, Laszlos says, amoebas have more resonance with other amoebas than with human beings and vice versa. But in principle the experience of all predecessors can be used by every form of life and evolutionary challenge. This also means that evolution is *not* essentially based on trial and error, as the probability that life could have come to existence only in this way would virtually be zero.

Laszlo calls this quantum vacuum with all universal information the Akashic field or A-field, according to the Indian philosophy's concept of the Akashic Chronicle and along with thousands of years of the knowledge of sages, particularly in the East. This A-field cannot be observed, but its effects can be observed, measured and evaluated by scientific methods; and Laszlo quotes quite a number of examples and proofs of theses effects from cosmology to quantum physics, biology and consciousness development. Most of it is written in a way that even someone like me who is not very familiar with quantum physics, the leading edge of biology research and the details of complexity theories, can somehow understand. It is still not quite easy food.

The consequences of this basic hypothesis are far reaching:

- Consciousness and matter are just two aspects (interior versus exterior) of one and the same existential ground of everything (here and at a few other places Laszlo comes to quite similar conclusions as Wilber in spite of his initial devaluation of him). There is a free floating primary consciousness and unstructured energy field which continuously evolves and generates the manifold forms of our universe (among innumerable other universes).
- Nothing we experience and think is lost, it is available for all times, and others can built on it if they link with it through resonance with the corresponding wave functions.
- The root of our knowledge is not conserved in our brain or mind but in the A-field where everything is available (a thought that also turns up in Sheldrake's theory of morphic fields –

another challenging theory which is usually ignored or depreciated by traditional science - and is not mentioned by Laszlo either).

- Evolution is "directed:" from the original primary consciousness and unstructured energy field to continuously more complexity and coherence; i.e. evolution is neither wanton nor determined and produces its own unfolding.

This theory may throw new light on many problems and phenomena of our lives, as Laszlo explains in an exemplary way: the brain – mind problem, the question of immortality (only the contents of our consciousness are immortal, nothing else), para-psychological phenomena and altered states of consciousness etc.

This book takes up many threads that show the way towards an integral paradigm, and to an encompassing and interdisciplinary theory at a very abstract and yet substantial level. Laszlo connects these strands in what I would interpret as a kind of legacy in the shape of a coherent and awe inspiring whole. Of course there remain many questions and gaps in his theory of everything - or rather: many very fascinating questions can be generated on this basis.

One of the most important questions for me would focus on what this could mean for learning, transformation and social change. For example, it has been obvious for a long time now that we cannot fill the minds of students (and those of people in general) with new ideas and knowledge like an empty bucket. Instead, incorporating Laszlo's idea, we have to produce the best conditions for resonance with and realization of the knowledge readily available in the A-field. This would be of utmost relevance to all educational endeavours from school teaching to community development; we would have to motivate ourselves and others to produce new knowledge of our own and link it with our experience on the basis of what is available; and we could dispose of most of our training programs and methods that aim at "transporting" knowledge into the heads of learners. Many alternative and humanistic pedagogic approaches from Paolo Freire to Ruth Cohn or Confluent Education and the insights of new neurological research findings which all tend towards similar conclusions could be incorporated with Laszlo' theory. How this could be done in a way that promises to be much more meaningful and effective than traditional as well as modern "technical" approaches to learning would indeed be a huge field of research and further studies.

And of course strong resistance will also be provoked by this theory of everything, and we will have to find ways of handling it. When asking a distinguished and rather open-minded neuroscientist whom I know personally, whether he could tell me anything about the assumption that the roots of our knowledge may not be stored in the brain functions and in our minds but rather in a readily available field of knowledge in the quantum vacuum to which we may establish resonance, his reply was short: "This sounds like a rather abstruse theory and of little use for me!" I will still continue to discuss this topic with him, as my resonance with Laszlo's theory of everything was a different one indeed.

Reinhard Fuhr

Ferrer, J. N. (2002). *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory. A Participatory Vision of Human Spirituality* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press

People will want to dismiss this important book by Jorge Ferrer. Because Ferrer writes by carrying us through his thought *process*, there are many easy ways to dismiss it. In the beginning, he embroils himself in the familiar epistemology-ontology nightmare of postmodernism; and not surprisingly, despite his numerous "turns" to integrate the partiality of the one by moving toward the other, he fails to extricate this philosophical *Excaliber.* In the meantime, he builds a strong critique of the Cartesian moorings of other transpersonal models, by highlighting Wilber's and faulting it for the same problem: having built an ontological model based on a priori principles, and failing to negotiate the subject-object divide.

The SDi people[1] will (and have) dismissed Ferrer's book as a kind of last gasp attempt to salvage the pluralist perspective – the singular square on the board game of a current transpersonal culture of critique that says "do not pass Green."[2]

In objection to the perennialist's notion of an absolute structure of transpersonal development, Ferrer introduces a "participatory" component of spirituality: "… transpersonal phenomena are participatory events that involve ways of knowing that are presential, enactive, and transformative."

Ferrer claims his participatory model repairs two important fault-lines of the perennialist versions of how we "know" namely, the Myth of the Given (one cannot know "things as they are"), and the Myth of the Framework (the spectrum of spiritual experiences cannot be described by any one set of a priori (deep) structures). By incorporating the three features of the participatory model, we come to see instead that; 1) we *participate* **in** the ways things are (presential),[3] 2) we each constitute a unique set of human development through our *participatory situation with/in the world* (enactive),[4] and 3) participatory knowing is transformative.[5]

Ferrer's intentionally transparent exposé into a more pluralistic version of transpersonal theory was for me a pleasure to read. His writing engaged me, as if we were having one of those endless conversations that go through the night. And then, as if the dawn had come around, and roused us from the seriousness of our philosophical sleep, Ferrer stretches out his pluralistic thought, to "relax into a spiritual universalism." In the last chapter, which reads like a coda, he writes:

> In this book, I have introduced a participatory spiritual pluralism as a more adequate metaphysical framework than the perennialism typical of most transpersonal works. … I should stress here that I do not believe that either pluralism or universalism per se are spiritually superior or more evolved. And it is now time to make explicit the kind of spiritual universalism implicit in the participatory vision.

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[1] "Spiral Dynamics-Integral" community who have incorporated Don Beck's version of Spiral Dynamics (itself a digest version of the work of Clare Graves' research on human development) into Wilber's AQAL (All-Quadrants, All-Levels) model of integral theory.

[2] Consider, for example, Ken Wilber's comment to Daryl Paulson's about the book (quoted in Paulson's review at http://wilber.shambhala.com/html/watch/ferrer/index.cfm/).

3 Participatory knowing is knowing by presence or by identity … in a transpersonal event, knowing occurs by virtue of being (p. 122).

4 Participatory knowing … is an enaction, the bringing forth of a world or domain of distinctions … p. 123

5 ... a transpersonal event brings forth the transformation of self and world … and in turn draws forth the self through its transformative process in order to make possible this participation. p. 123

> There is a way, I believe, in which we can legitimately talk about a shared spiritual power, one reality, one world, or one truth.
>
> … my sense is that *the dialectic between universalism and pluralism, between the One and the Many, displays what may well be the deepest dynamics of the self-disclosing of Spirit.*[6]

"Ahhh," I sighed, as I reached out and stretched with him, "why didn't you just say so in the first place?" I hope Ferrer is planning a sequel – picking up in the next book where he's left us with this one.

Bonnita Roy

Frick, D. (2004). *Robert K. Greenleaf. A Life of Servant Leadership.* San Francisco: Berrett Koehler

I picked up a biography recently, tired of books on leadership, developmental theories, integral theories and the like that have been the staple of my reading diet for too long now. At the same time, I didn't stray too far from my usual interests. Last year, I read Robert Greenleaf's *Servant Leadership*, and was inspired by his vision of being a servant first, and then from that orientation of service choosing to lead. His thoughts on the subject appeared to have as integral a perspective on life and leadership as anyone I had come across. My interest thus piqued, I was curious to gain insights into this perspective from understanding the life behind them.

Don Frick's approach to biography veers from the standard account of the noteworthy life. He gives the reader a glimpse into the man behind the philosophy of servant leadership that has inspired many through vignettes that often focus as much on the context of Greenleaf's life as the events. The reader is taken through many tangents that serve to illuminate small aspects of the picture. Tales of Eugene Debs, the socialist presidential candidate and union activist, of Theodore Vail's presidency at the communications giant American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T), (where Greenleaf worked for over thirty five years), the Quaker movement in America during World War Two, and a host of other fascinating sidelights all illuminate the context in which Greenleaf's thinking developed.

Frick does provide descriptions of interesting events and activities in Greenleaf's life. His rapid rise within AT&T, his influence on a wide range of ventures; such as the reorganization of IBM under Thomas Watson Jr, the early formation of T-groups and the development of personnel assessment and training. The cast of characters Greenleaf met with and learned from reads like a whose who of the times. His influence on the formal leadership at AT&T through a succession of Chief Executive Officers was enormous. His seminal influence on many projects that he consulted on, and his founding of the Center for Applied Ethics (later the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership) serve to further magnify the impact of the quality of his thinking and presence.

Impressive and fascinating as all of this is in itself, it is only the gateway Frick provides to invite the reader into glimpses of the depths of Greenleaf's being. What drew me on in this narrative was the way Frick enabled me to feel like I was on the inside, temporarily able to perceive the world like Greenleaf. And what did I perceive in those moments? I saw life as a

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continuous inquiry into wholeness. Greenleaf described his philosophy as a "hole in the hedge" approach to life. Whenever he encountered anything of interest, he would slip through the hole in the hedge of everyday life and perceptions, and explore how some new person or idea could reveal another component of the deeper wholeness.

From this deeper encounter with Greenleaf the man, his seminal thinking on leadership came to life for me. I could now see the notion of the servant as leader, being a servant first who then chooses to lead, as an outgrowth of how Greenleaf lived his own life. This journal's lead article and Kai Hellbusch's contribution discuss Jean Gebser's opening of the field of integral thinking. There he is quoted as characterizing the difficulties in representing integral by saying that "this world[view] goes *beyond our conceptualization*." In the writings of Robert Greenleaf, and the description of his life that stood as a testament to this writing, there is a clear presence of a wholeness beyond our capacity for conceptualization. Frick's biography manages to provide glimpses of this wholeness as it took form in Greenleaf's life, and in this way appears to me to be as good an example of what it is to be integral as any I have encountered.

Jonathan Reams