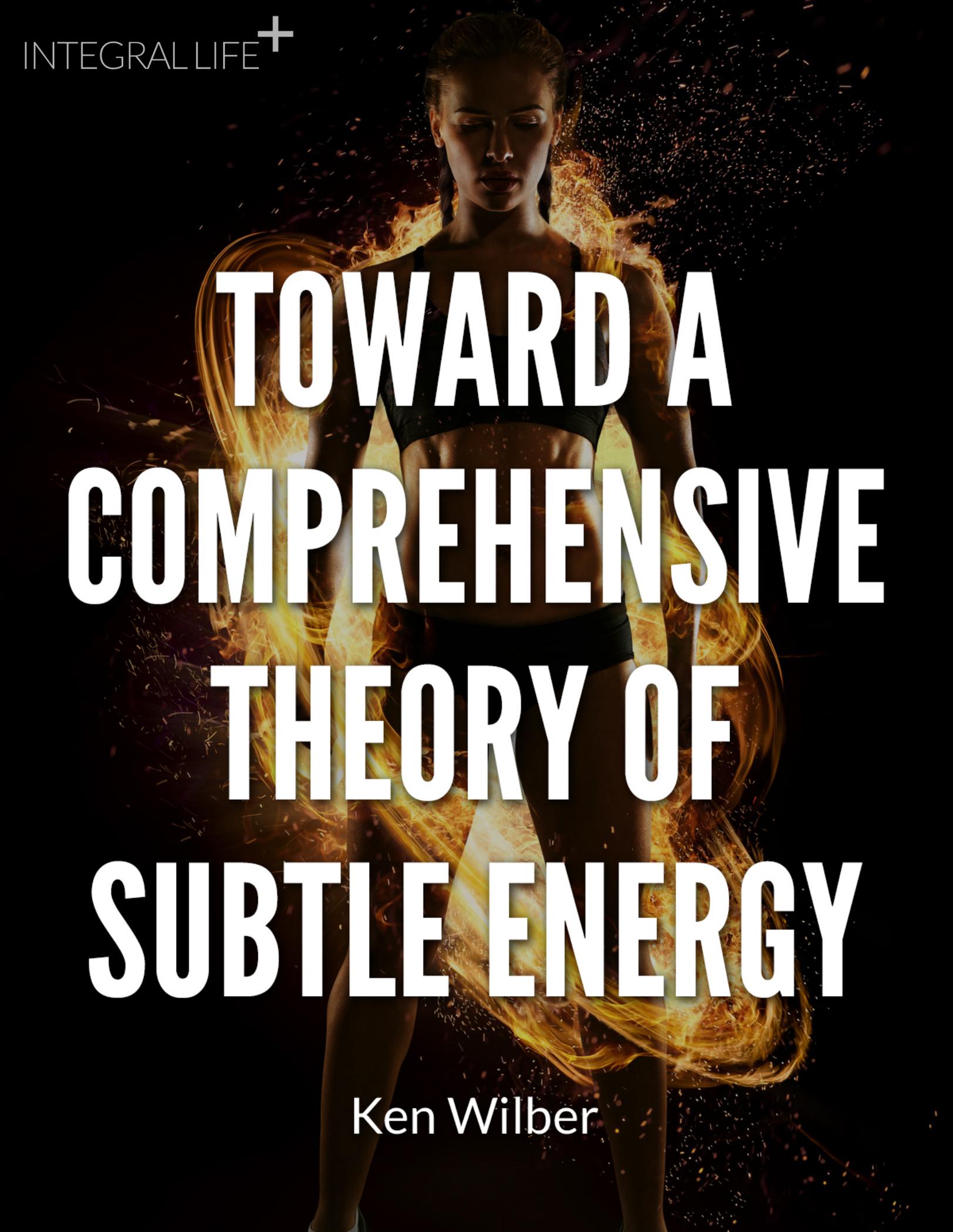


INTEGRAL LIFE<sup>+</sup>



**TOWARD A  
COMPREHENSIVE  
THEORY OF  
SUBTLE ENERGY**

Ken Wilber

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# INTRODUCTION

The following is an excerpt from the first draft of volume 2 of the Kosmos trilogy, tentatively titled *Kosmic Karma* (volume 1 of that trilogy was *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*). This excerpt suggests a coherent and comprehensive theory of the many approaches to subtle energies, their origin, nature, and development. This particular excerpt comes toward the end of the volume, which means that somebody reading this excerpt will not have the benefit (or the torture) of having read the first part of the book. I will therefore present a brief introduction, followed by an integral approach to subtle energies.

The first two excerpts from *Kosmic Karma* (“An Integral Age at the Leading Edge” and “The Many Ways We Touch”) can be found at [wilber.shambhala.com](http://wilber.shambhala.com); they explain the general approach itself. “AQAL” (pronounced *ah-quil*) is short for “all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types,” which is the metatheory of the integral approach, and which will be explained as we go along.

Following the background Introduction (Part I), I will outline an “Integral Theory of Subtle Energies” (Part II), and end with a comparison with other theorists (Part IV).

# PART I. FROM THE GREAT CHAIN OF BEING TO POSTMODERNISM IN THREE EASY STEPS

## *Overview*

Before we look at what modern science has brought to the picture of subtle energies, let's look at what the great wisdom traditions have to tell us. We will then attempt to bring both of them together in an integral theory of subtle energies.

The traditional “Great Chain of Being” is usually given as something like: **matter**, **body**, **mind**, **soul**, and **spirit**. In the Vedanta, for example, these are, respectively, the 5 sheaths or levels of Spirit: *annamayakosha* (the sheath or level made of physical food), the *pranamayakosha* (the level made of élan vital), the *manomayakosha* (the level made of mind), the *vijnanamayakosha* (the level made of higher mind or soul), and *anandamayakosha* (the level made of transcendental bliss or causal spirit. Vedanta, of course, adds *turiya*, or the transcendental ever-present Self, and *turiyatita*, or the nondual, ever-present, unqualifiable Spirit-as-such, but the simpler five-level scheme will work for our introductory purposes. We will return to the more “complete” version later.)

This five-level Great Chain of Being can be represented schematically as in figure 1. Although we have to be very careful with cross-cultural comparisons, interpretive schemes similar to this Great Chain or “Great Nest of Being” can be found in most of the wisdom traditions of the “premodern” world, as indicated in figures 2 and 3, which are diagrams used by Huston Smith to indicate the general similarities (or family resemblances) among these traditions.

With reference to figure 1, notice that the Great Chain, as conceived by its proponents (from Plotinus to Aurobindo), is indeed more of a Great Nest—or what is often called a “holarchy”—because each senior level goes beyond its junior levels but envelopes them (or “nests” them)—what Plotinus called “a development that is envelopment.” Each higher level, however, also radically transcends its juniors and can neither be reduced to its juniors nor explained by them. This is indicated in figure 1 as (A), (A + B), (A + B + C), and so on, which means that each senior level contains elements or qualities that are emergent and nonreducible.

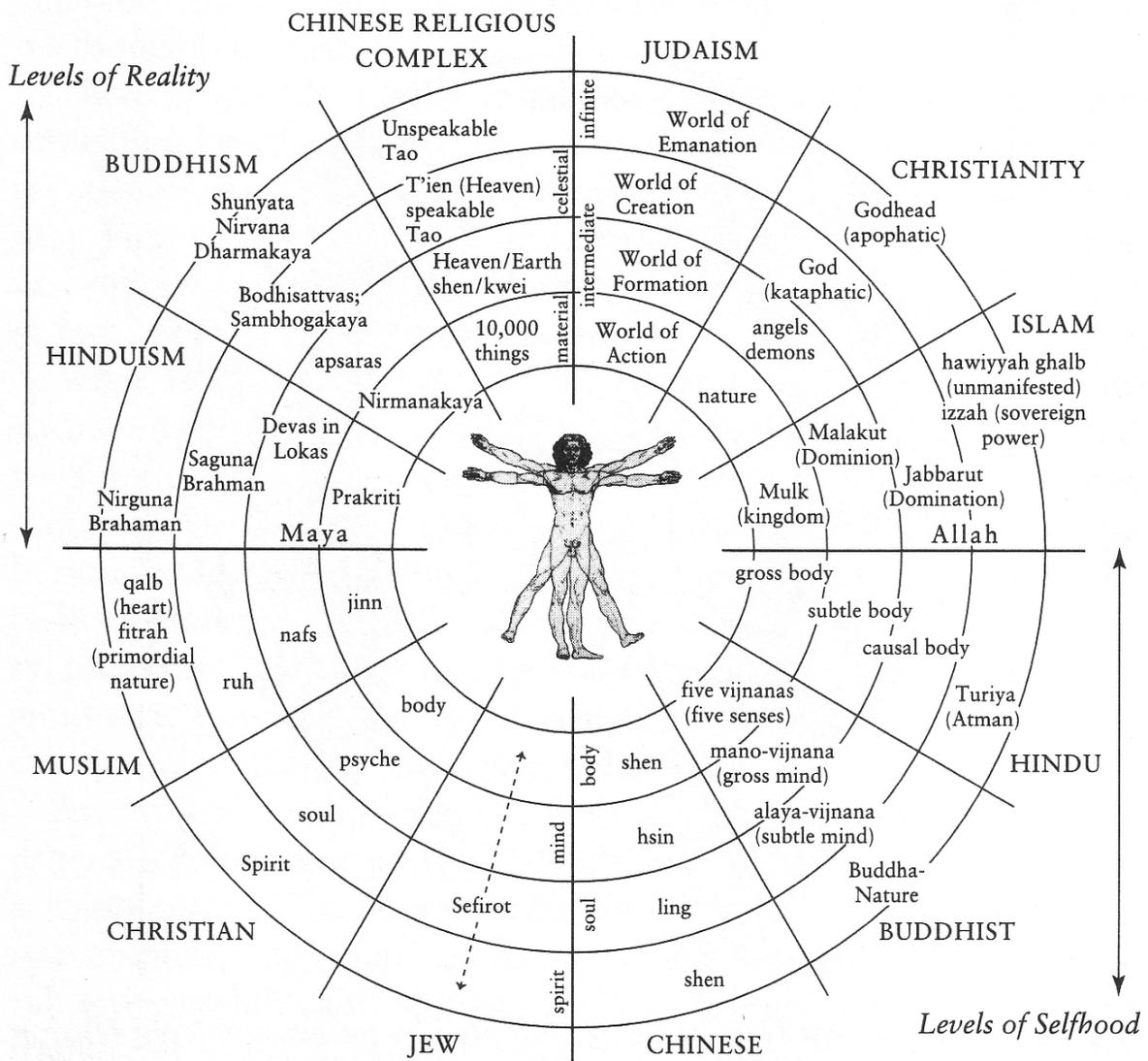
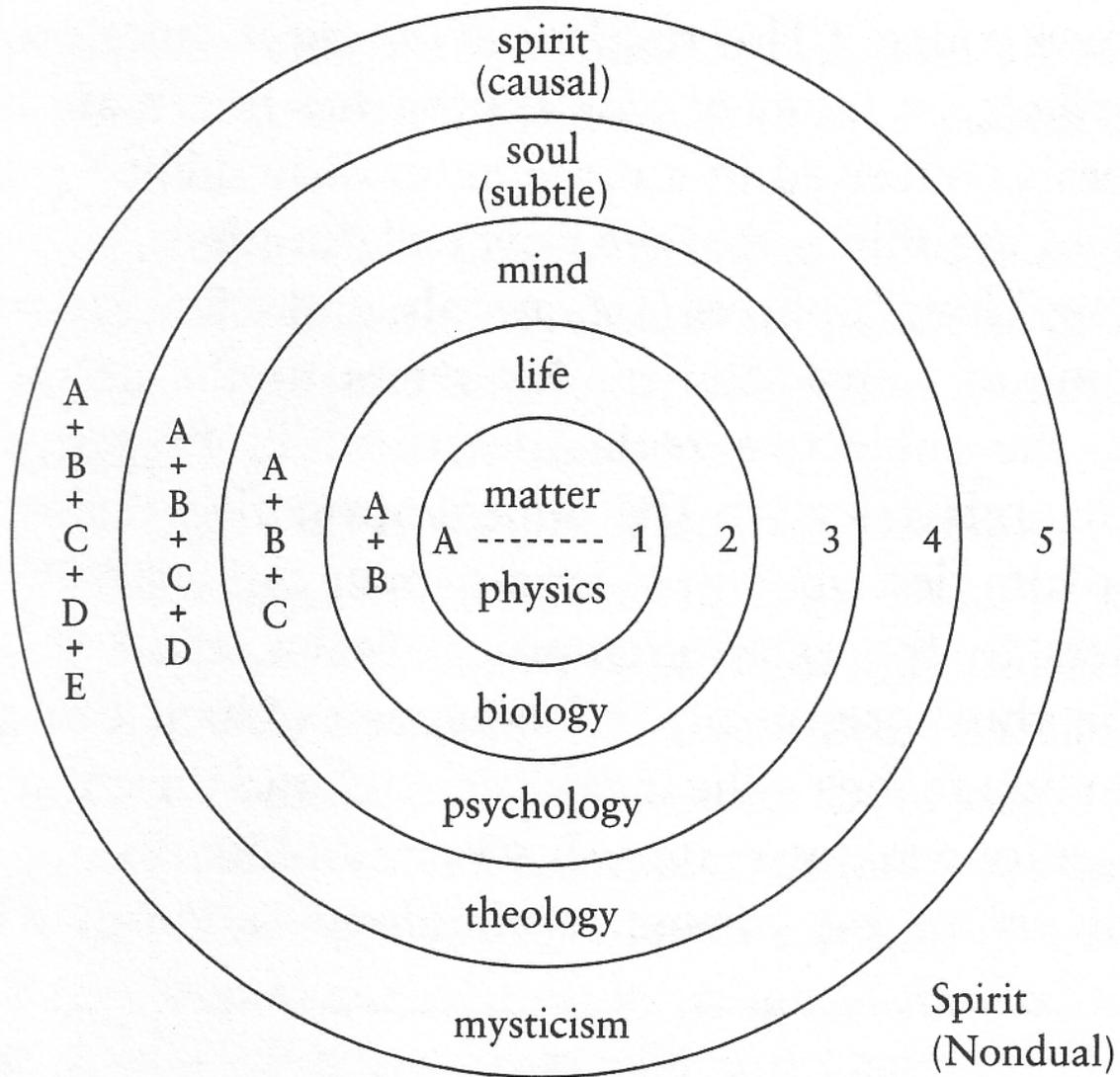


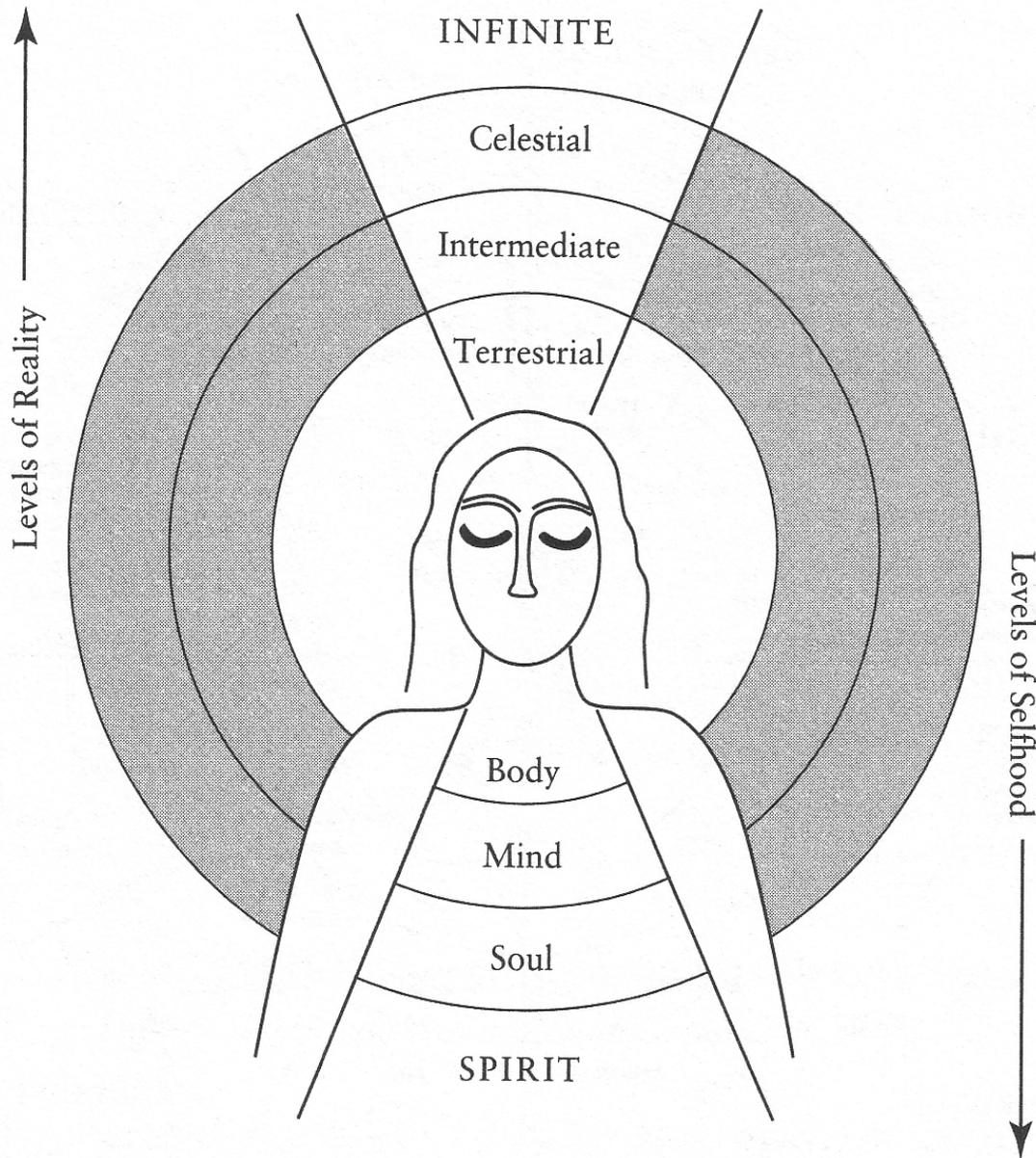
Figure 1. The Traditional Great Chain of Being



**Figure 2.** *The Great Chain in Various Wisdom Traditions*, compiled by Huston Smith (graphic layout courtesy of Brad Reynolds).

For example, when life (A + B) emerges “out of” matter (A), it contains certain qualities (such as sexual reproduction, interior emotions, autopoiesis, élan vital, etc.—all represented by “B”) that cannot be accounted for in strictly the material terms of “A.” Likewise, when mind (“A + B + C”) emerges out of life, mind contains emergent characteristics (“C”) that cannot be reduced to, nor explained by, life

and matter alone. When soul (“A + B + C + D”) emerges, it transcends mind and life and body. Evolution, then, is this “unfolding” of Spirit from matter to body to mind to soul to Spirit itself, or the realization of the absolute Spirit that was the Goal and Ground of the entire sequence.



**Figure 3.** “As Above, So Below” (from Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth*; reprinted with permission.)

The best introduction to this traditional notion remains Schumacher's classic *A Guide for the Perplexed*, a title borrowed from Maimonides's great exposition on the same topic. The general idea is of a great holarchy of being and knowing, with the levels of reality in the "outer" world reflected in the levels of self (or levels of "interior" knowing and being), which is particularly suggested by figure 3.

But, according to the traditions, this entire process of *evolution* or "unfolding" could never occur without a prior process of *involution* or "infolding." Not only can the higher not be explained in terms of the lower, and not only does the higher not actually emerge "out of" the lower, but the reverse of both of those is true, according to the traditions. That is, the lower dimensions or levels are actually sediments or deposits of the higher dimensions, and they find their meaning because of the higher dimensions of which they are a stepped-down or diluted version. This sedimentation process is called "**involution**" or "**emanation**." According to the traditions, before evolution or the unfolding of Spirit can occur, involution or the infolding of Spirit must occur: the higher successively steps down into the lower. Thus, the higher levels appear to emerge "out of" the lower levels during evolution—for example, life appears to emerge out of matter—because, and only because, they were first deposited there by involution. You cannot get the higher out of the lower unless the higher were already there, in potential—sleeping, as it were—waiting to emerge. The "miracle of emergence" is simply Spirit's creative play in the fields of its own manifestation.

Thus, for the traditions, the great cosmic game begins when Spirit throws itself outward, in sport and play (*lila, kenosis*), to create a manifest universe. Spirit "loses" itself, "forgets" itself, takes on a magical façade of manyness (*maya*) in order to have a grand game of hide-and-seek with itself. Spirit first throws itself outward to create

soul, which is a stepped-down and diluted reflection of Spirit; soul then steps down into mind, a paler reflection yet of Spirit's radiant glory; mind then steps down into life, and life steps down into matter, which is the densest, lowest, least conscious form of Spirit. We might represent this as: Spirit-as-spirit steps down into Spirit-as-soul, which steps down into Spirit-as-mind, which steps down into Spirit-as-body, which steps down into Spirit-as-matter. These levels in the Great Nest are all *forms of Spirit*, but the forms become less and less conscious, less and less aware of their Source and Suchness, less and less alive to their ever-present Ground, even though they are all nevertheless nothing but Spirit-at-play.

If we can represent the major emergent stages in evolution as (A), (A + B), (A + B + C), and so on—where the addition signs mean that something is emerging or being *added* to manifestation—then we could represent involution as the prior *subtraction* process: Spirit starts out full and complete, with all of manifestation contained as potential in itself, which we can represent in brackets: [A + B + C + D + E]. Spirit first steps down into manifestation—and begins to “lose” itself in manifestation—by shedding its pure spiritual nature and assuming a manifest, finite, limited form—namely, the *soul* [A + B + C + D]. The soul has now forgotten “E,” or its radical identity with and as Spirit, and, in the ensuing confusion and angst, the soul flees this terror by stepping down into mind [A + B + C], which has forgotten “D,” its soul radiance; and mind flees into life, forgetting “C,” or its intelligence; and finally life sheds even its vegetative vitality “B” and appears as inert, insentient, lifeless matter, “A”—at which point something like the Big Bang occurs, whereupon matter blows into concrete existence and it appears that in the entire manifest world, there exists nothing but insentient, dead, lifeless matter.

But this matter is curiously frisky, is it not? It doesn't just seem to lie about, on unemployment insurance, watching TV. This matter

astonishingly begins to wind itself up: “order out of chaos” is what complexity physics calls it—or dissipative structures, or self-organization, or dynamic becoming. But the traditionalists were more straightforward about it: “God does not remain petrified and dead; the very stones cry out and raise themselves to Spirit,” as Hegel put it.

In other words, according to the traditions, once involution has occurred, then evolution begins or can begin, moving from (A) to (A + B) to (A + B + C), and so on, with each major emergent step being but an unfolding or remembering of the higher dimensions that were secretly infolded or sedimented in the lower during involution. That which was dis-membered, fragmented, and forgotten during involution is re-membered, reunited, made whole, and realized during evolution. Hence, the doctrine of *anamnesis*, or Platonic and Vedantic “remembrance,” so common in the traditions: if involution is a forgetting of who you are, evolution is a remembering of who and what you are: *tat tvam asi*: you are That. *Satori*, *metanoia*, *moksha*, and *wu* are some of the classic names for this realization.

## ***Step One***

As beautiful and brilliant as that interpretive scheme is, it is not without its problems. It is not so much that the scheme itself is wrong, as that the modern and postmodern world has added several profound insights that need to be added or incorporated if we want a more integral or comprehensive view. This is what is meant by “from the Great Chain to postmodernism in three easy steps.”

### *The Problem*

The Great Nest, involution and evolution, dimension-levels of being and knowing: those were some of the profound contributions of the great saints and sages of the premodern world, and can indeed be found

in everything from the *Enneads* of Plotinus to the *Lankavatara Sutra* to *The Life Divine* of Aurobindo, all expressions of the great metaphysical systems.

But there is one item we should perhaps keep in mind as we moderns attempt to assess those ideas: the great metaphysical systems were, in the last analysis, interpretive frameworks that the sages gave to their spiritual experiences. These schemes, such as the Great Chain, were *interpretations* of living *experiences*—they were not some sort of fixed, rigid, ontological grids that are true for all eternity. If, in the following, I question the adequacy of some of these interpretations, I am not at all questioning the authenticity of the experiences or realizations of these great sages. I am simply suggesting that, as evolution itself continues to move forward, new horizons can be used to recontextualize and reframe these experiences in interpretive meshworks that are more adequate in the light of modern and postmodern contributions, so that the net result is something of an integration of the very best of premodern, modern, and postmodern forms of Spirit's own unfolding.

Toward that end, I will suggest three central difficulties with the interpretive frameworks of the great metaphysical systems, as well as three suggested remedies. In my opinion, we want to keep as much as possible of the great traditional systems while jettisoning their unnecessary metaphysical interpretations, interpretations that not only are *not necessary* to explain the same set of data, but interpretations that *guarantee* that spirituality will not get a fair hearing in the court of modern and postmodern thought.

The first difficulty can be seen with this example. If you look at any of the figures representing traditional metaphysics (figs. 1, 2, 3), notice that all of the levels higher than matter are indeed *meta*-physical, which means beyond physics or beyond matter. The material level includes, for example, the human brain as a complex material entity. This means,

according to the metaphysical systems, that the feelings of a worm (which are level 2) are on a higher level of reality than the human brain (which is level 1).

Something is clearly not quite right with that scheme. Part of the problem is that the relation of human consciousness to human neurophysiology is something that is *not obvious* (and not even available) to introspective phenomenology (i.e., to meditation or contemplation), which means that items such as dopamine, serotonin, synaptic pathways, the Krebs's cycle, hypothalamic regulation, and so on, were not generally available to the ancients. Again, this does not mean that their spiritual realization was flawed or inadequate, but simply that they did not have the advantage of some of the finite facts that modern science has discovered. Were Plotinus alive today, you can bet that several chapters of the *Enneads* would be devoted to brain neurophysiology and its relation to spirit. Were Shankara alive today, his commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras* would no doubt have extensive discussions on the relation of the *nadis* to neurotransmitters.

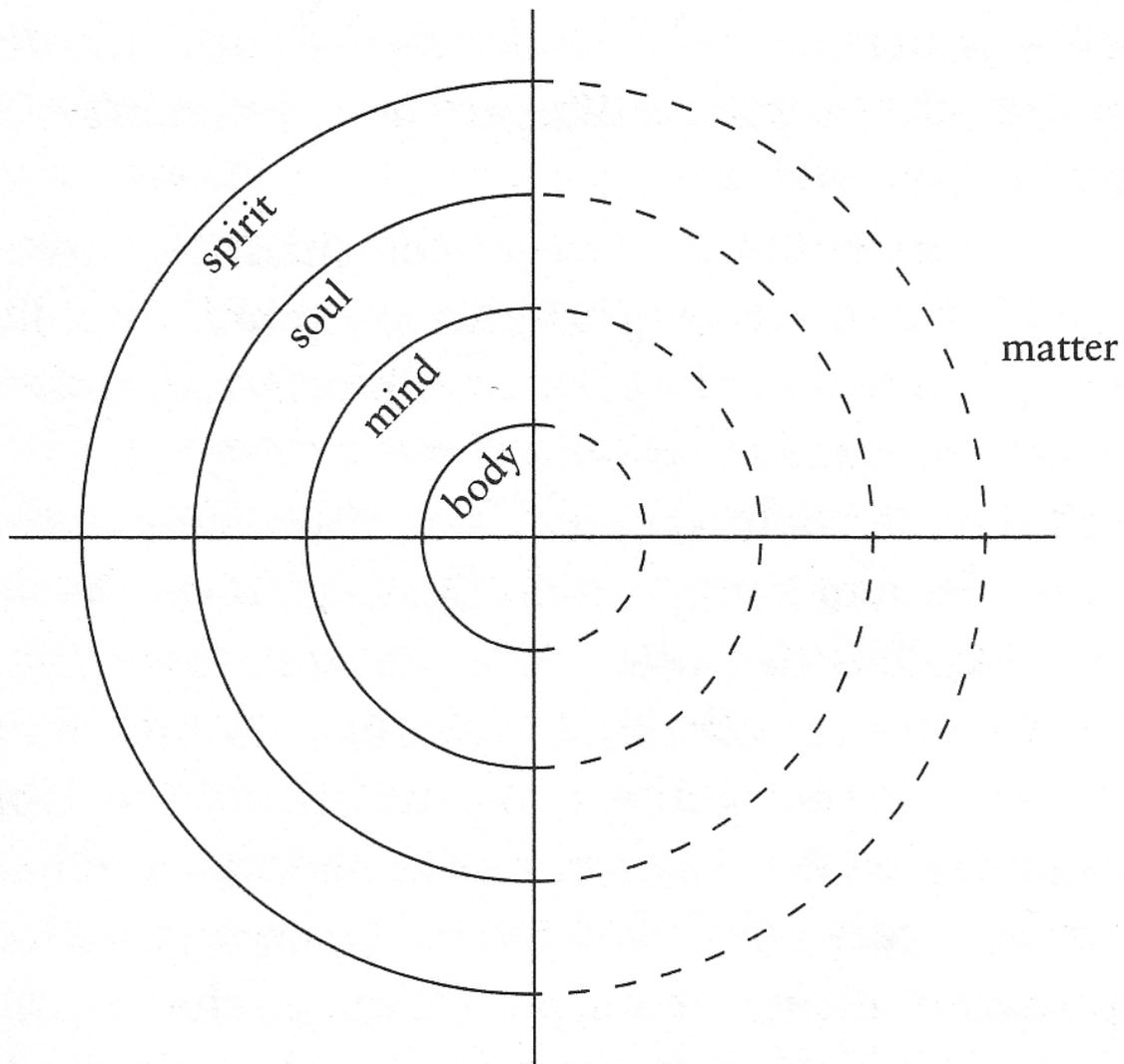
### *Suggested Solution*

What might Plotinus or Shankara have concluded about the relation of spiritual realities to material realities such as the brain? I believe they would have agreed to the following; but in any event, here is suggestion #1:

In the manifest world, what we call “matter” is not the lowest rung in the great spectrum of existence, but the *exterior form* of every rung in the great spectrum. Matter is not lower with consciousness higher, but matter and consciousness are the exterior and interior of every occasion.

This can be schematically represented as shown in figure 4, and in more detail in figure 5. The basic move here is to take what appears as

“matter” off of the bottom rung of existence (with all the other levels being higher and “meta”-physical) and instead make it the exterior form of all of the other levels. The traditions always understood that the levels “higher” than matter were “invisible” to the ordinary senses, and the same is true with our reformulation: namely, all the “interior” dimensions (feelings, mutual understanding, compassion, awareness, consciousness, etc.) are invisible to the exterior senses; but we can do so without unnecessary “metaphysical” interpretations. (I know, what about reincarnation? Hang on a minute....)



**Figure 4.** *Step One:* Matter Is Not the “Bottom” of All Levels but the “Exterior” of All Levels.

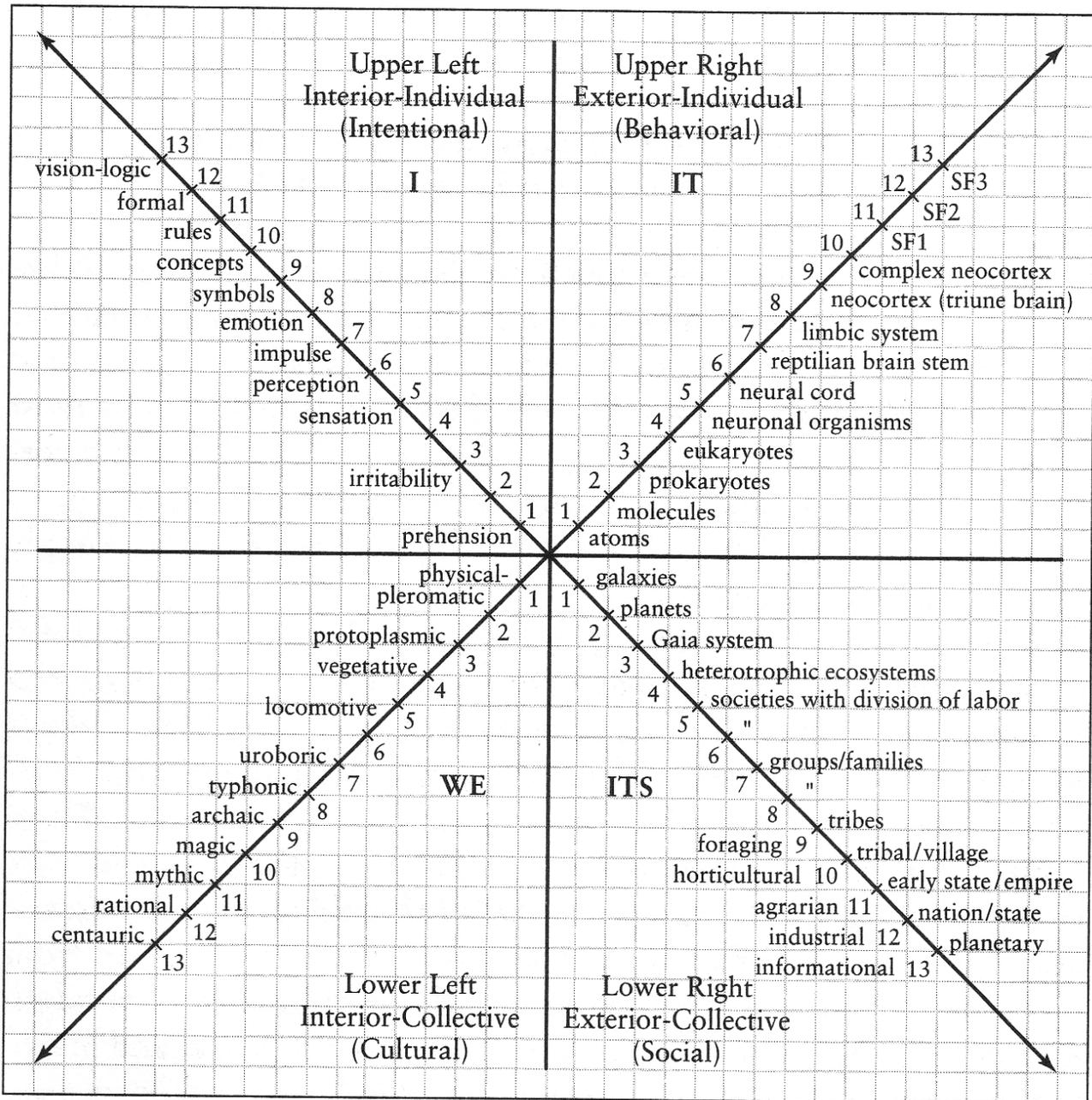


Figure 5. *The Four Quadrants.*

For the moment, we are confining our attention to the two upper quadrants. In the Upper-Right quadrant, we can see the evolution of exterior or “material” or “physical” forms, as disclosed by modern science. These exterior forms include, in order of increasing evolutionary complexity, items such as: atoms, molecules, early or prokaryotic cells, true or eukaryotic cells, organisms with a neural net,

organisms with a neural cord (e.g., shrimp), a reptilian brain stem (e.g., lizard), a limbic system (e.g., horse), a neocortex or triune brain (e.g., humans, with several higher “structure-functions” also listed).

Those are all “exterior” or “material” forms, in that you can see them in the exterior, sensorimotor world. But each of those material forms of *increasing complexity* has, as an *interior* correlate, a level of *increasing consciousness*. Thus (following Whitehead): atoms, whose exterior forms are physical entities such as neutrons, protons, and electrons, have an interior of prehension or proto-feelings (proto-awareness); neuronal organisms possess interior sensations; organisms with neural cords have perception; the emergence of animals with a reptilian brain stem sees the emergence of interior impulses and instincts; an exterior limbic system emerges with interior emotions; a triune brain is the exterior or material form of an interior consciousness that can contain, among many other things, formal operational cognition, postconventional morality, vision-logic, linguistic capacities, and so on. (You can see some of these correlations between the Upper Right and the Upper Left in fig. 5.)

In other words, matter is not on the bottom rung of that evolutionary spiral, but is rather the *exterior* form of an evolution whose *interiors* contain correlative levels of feelings, awareness, consciousness, and so forth. AQAL metatheory handles this by saying that every mind has a body, or every state of consciousness has a corresponding signature state of matter-energy, or every interior prehension has an exterior form—in short, every occasion in the Upper-Left quadrant has a correlate in the Upper-Right quadrant, and vice versa. It is not merely that higher levels (of life and mind and soul) imprint matter or leave footprints in matter (which itself remains on the lowest level), but that what we call matter is the exterior form of each of those interior levels (as suggested in figs. 4 and 5).

Thus, what the premodern sages took to be META-physical realities are in many cases INTRA-physical realities: they are not above matter, nor beyond nature, nor meta-physical, nor super-natural: they are not above nature but within nature, not beyond matter but interior to it.

There is simply no way a premodern saint, in deep meditation on the nature of the soul, would or could know that his or her brain-wave patterns were settling into theta-alpha states; no way to know that serotonin was increasing, neural lactic acid was decreasing, cellular oxygen requirements were significantly diminishing, and hemispheric lateralization was occurring. All of the interior revelations of the soul therefore seemed and felt as if they were not physical, not material, not connected to nature at all, not a part of the fabric of material manifestation: they were meta-physical in every way.

As we will see, there are some aspects of the higher dimensions that might indeed be truly meta-physical; but the first thing we should note is that a great deal of what premodernity took to be meta-physical is in fact intra-physical, not above nature but within nature. This is the first step in moving from metaphysics to integral post-metaphysics.

## ***Step Two***

### *The Problem*

Step #1 involves adding, to the profound wisdom of the *premodern* traditions, the invaluable contributions of *modern* science. Step #2 involves the further addition of the important contributions of Spirit's *postmodern* turn.

These contributions are summarized in the lower two quadrants of figure 5. The upper quadrants represent an **individual** being; the lower

quadrants represent a group, collective, or **system** of individual beings. The Left-Hand quadrants represent the **interiors** of an individual or group; and the Right-Hand quadrants represent the **exteriors** of an individual or group. Thus, the four quadrants are the inside and outside of the individual and the collective. (Again, please forgive these shortcuts in explanation. See, e.g., *The Marriage of Sense and Soul—Integrating Science and Religion*, for a fuller discussion.)

The important point with reference to postmodernity is simply this: just as the metaphysical interpretations that the ancients gave their authentic spiritual experiences could not take advantage of modern scientific discoveries, so they could not take advantage of the profound disclosures of postmodernism, ethnomethodology, cultural contextualism, the sociology of knowledge, and so on. All of those, taken together, deliver a devastating indictment: much of what the ancient sages took as metaphysical absolutes are actually culturally molded and conditioned.

### *Suggested Solution*

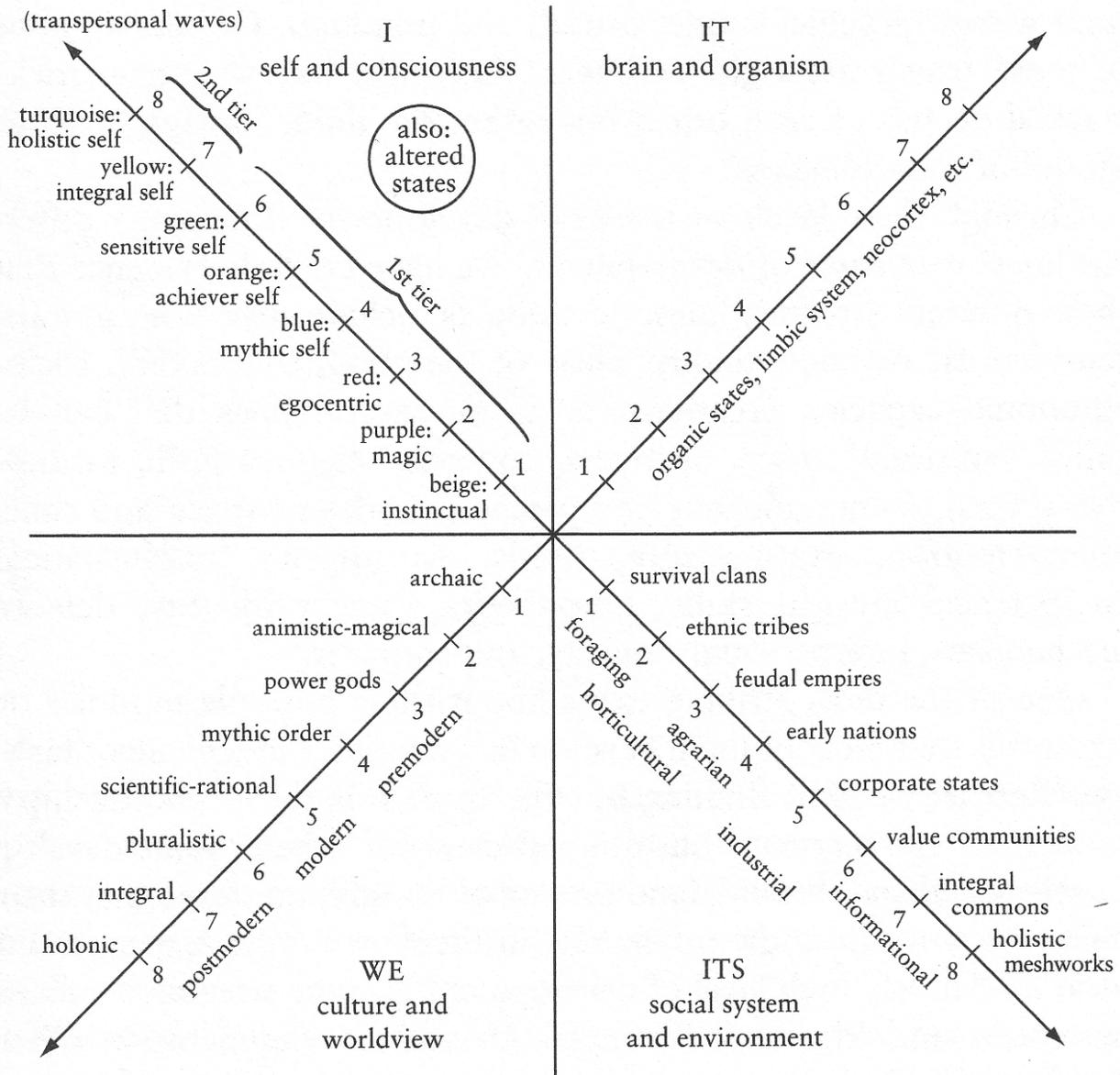
This does not mean that there are no cross-cultural truths or universals. It simply means that identifying them has to be done with much more care than metaphysics imagined; and that much of this identifying has to be done with research methodology, not speculative metaphysics. (See Excerpt C, posted on [wilber.shambhala.com](http://wilber.shambhala.com).)

The postmodern contribution to the discussion can be summarized by saying that every individual is nestled in systems of *cultural* and *social* networks, networks that have a profound influence on the knowing and being of individuals themselves. These networks are the Lower-Left (cultural) and Lower-Right (social) quadrants in figure 5. The LR quadrant represents **social systems**—the *collective systems* or *collective exteriors* of individual organisms, exteriors that can be seen in the

exterior or sensorimotor world (recall that all Right-Hand quadrants can be seen “out there” because they are “material” or “exterior”). These exterior systems include items such as ecosystems, geopolitical systems, modes of techno-economic production (foraging, horticultural, informational, etc.), and all of the visible, exterior, concrete aspects of collectives or systems. Note again that, for the metaphysical traditions, all of these “material systems” would be on the lowest rung of existence, whereas, for integral post-metaphysics, they are simply the collective exterior dimensions of the “higher” (now *interior*) dimensions. The Lower Right is especially “Nature” that the higher dimensions are now within, not above.

The LL or cultural quadrant represents all the *interiors of groups* or collectives, interiors that (like all Left-Hand quadrants) cannot be seen “out there,” interiors such as group values, identities, worldviews, cultural beliefs, background contexts, and so on. *Systems theory* focuses on the Lower-Right quadrant, and *postmodern poststructuralism* focuses on the Lower-Left quadrant—representing the exteriors and interiors of the collective.

Systems theory in its many forms emphasizes the fact that every individual organism is inseparably interconnected with its environment in dynamic webs of relationships and ecosystems, *all of which can be seen “out there”*—which again shows that “matter” is not the lowest level of being but simply the exterior form of all interior levels of being (in this case, the *exterior* form of the collective or *communal system*). Of course, nothing in systems theory or ecology deals with interior states of beauty, satori, samadhi, mutual understanding, values, worldviews, and so forth, because all of those are indeed interior (and therefore inaccessible with ecology or systems theory). Attempting to reduce all realities to one quadrant, as systems theory often does (e.g., Fritjof Capra), is known as *quadrant absolutism*, and is something an integral methodological pluralism attempts to avoid.



**Figure 6.** *Some Aspects of the Four Quadrants as They Appear in Humans.*

Postmodernism, on the other hand, is known for focusing on those interior or cultural aspects of an individual's being-in-the-world, where it emphasizes that much of what any society takes to be "given," "true," and "absolute" is in fact culturally molded, conditioned, and relative. That postmodernism itself is often caught in its own quadrant

absolutism (where it tries to reduce everything to cultural constructions in the LL) should not detract from the important truths that it has contributed—all of which we summarize by saying that every occasion has a Lower-Left quadrant or dimension.

The four quadrants, then, represent four inseparable dimensions of any individual's being-in-the-world. These dimensions are so fundamental that every major natural language contains them as first-person, second-person, and third-person pronouns, which can be summarized as I, we, it, and its. The **UL** is “I,” or the interior feelings or awareness of any individual sentient being (atoms to ants to apes). The **UR** is “it,” or the exterior form of a sentient being (i.e., its matter and energy—which includes, as we will soon see, subtle energy). The **LR** is the exterior form of a group, collective, or system of sentient beings or individuals. And the **LL** the interior or collective consciousness, collective values, intersubjective backgrounds, cultural contexts, and so on. Again: the interior and the exterior of the individual and the collective.

I have included one more diagram, which is the four quadrants narrowed to some of their forms as they appear in humans (see fig. 6).

I am not going to make a long drawn-out argument for this, but simply state my own opinion in the strongest way: any premodern spirituality that does not come to terms with both modernity and postmodernity has no chance of survival in tomorrow's world. One way to effect this integration is by using AQAL (“all quadrants, all levels”), which combines the enduring contributions of premodern, modern, and postmodern. The “**all levels**” part refers to the great spectrum of being and knowing first interpreted so brilliantly by the great premodern sages—matter to body to mind to soul to spirit (we will return to these levels in a moment). The “**all quadrants**” part refers to the refinements brought by modernity (namely, matter is not on the bottom of the rung

but on the exterior of the rungs) and by postmodernity (namely, every individual is set in cultural and social contexts).

Adopting something like an AQAL framework is the major second step in moving from metaphysics to integral post-metaphysics.

### ***Step Three***

#### *The Problem*

Here we begin to address the role and nature of energy—gross energy, subtle energy, and causal energy. I have already suggested that mass and energy are aspects of the UR-dimension of every individual being—that is, they represent some of the *exterior forms* of every individual (and every system, as we will see).

The problem here might be stated as follows. Given (1) the premodern lack of clarity about the role of matter, and (2) the fact that the ancients therefore pictured subtle energies as fundamentally *meta*-physical or super-natural; but given (3) the modern understanding of matter as not bottom but exterior, then (4) how can we re-interpret in a more adequate fashion the relation of subtle energies to gross material forms?

Put simply, because matter is not the bottom of all levels but the exterior of all levels, where does subtle energy fit into this scheme? In the premodern traditions, subtle energy or “prana” was usually depicted as the second level in the Great Chain (e.g., pranamayakosha): it was a level of etheric or astral energy “above” physical matter and energy. But if matter itself is re-interpreted, how can subtle energy likewise be reinterpreted to keep pace with modern and postmodern revelations of Spirit’s own unfolding?

## *Suggested Solution*

The suggested solution in this case comes in the form of three hypotheses, two of which we have seen already, and the third of which deals directly with this issue.

#1. *Increasing evolution brings increasing complexity of gross form.* In the Upper Right, for example, we find quarks to protons to atoms to molecules to cells to complex organisms. This increase in complexity of form (via such processes as differentiation and integration) has long been noted by evolutionary biologists. Ervin Laszlo: “Thus, while a new level of organization means a simplification of system function, and of the corresponding system structure, it also means the initiation of a process of progressive structural and functional complexification.” I think this “complexification” is fairly obvious and needn’t detain us.

#2. *Increasing complexity of form (in the UR) is correlated with increasing interior consciousness (in the UL).* This was Teilhard de Chardin’s “law of complexity and consciousness”—namely, the more of the former, the more of the latter. As we might put it more precisely, the greater the degree of exterior complexity of material form, the greater the degree of interior consciousness that can be enacted within that form (i.e., correlation of UR and UL).

#3. Further—and this is the connecting hypothesis—*increasing complexity of gross form is correlated with increasingly subtlety of energies.* As evolution proceeds to more and more complex gross forms, the increasing degree of gross complexity is accompanied by subtler and subtler corresponding (or signature) energy patterns. Since we are at this point focusing on individual beings, we have this: increasing evolution brings increasing *complexity of gross form* (in the UR), which is correlated with an *increasing degree of consciousness* (in the UL), and, in the UR itself, a *subtilization of corresponding energies*.

Thus, instead of interpreting higher levels as being essentially divorced from gross matter or gross form, the complexification of gross form is the vehicle of manifestation for both subtler energies and greater consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In short, each probability wave in the AQAL matrix has both interior consciousness and exterior form and mass-energy, and these exterior forms span the spectrum from gross mass-energy to subtle mass-energy to causal mass-energy (with genus and species like gravitational, nuclear, etheric, astral, psychic, etc. [see below]). Of course, each holon also has cultural and social dimensions, and the social dimension—or the interobjective dimension, the dimension of collective form—also has its collective energy fields, but again, we are here focusing on individual holons.

This “mass-energy” side of the holon is why the traditions often refer to these aspects as *bodies* with actual *energies*—that is, some form or type of “matter” (gross to subtle to causal) with its corresponding *energy* (as with “gross body, subtle body, causal body”), and these bodies are the matter-energy support for the various states of consciousness. Thus, these traditions (e.g., Vedanta, Vajrayana) specifically include BOTH a mind or consciousness component and a body or matter-energy component, and they explicitly state that you cannot have one without the other. As we would put it, each interior consciousness or “mind” (UL) is always inseparable from its corresponding energy or “body” (UR): thus, gross bodymind, subtle bodymind, causal bodymind.

In an AQAL framework, we have this: There is a given actual occasion, or a given individual holon. Seen from the exterior, that holon has a discernible form or pattern; it is a morphic unit. Those forms are not limited merely to gross forms. In the dream state, for example, you can see all sorts of entities, things, events, illuminations, images of people, and so on. Those are not gross forms, they are subtle forms—but forms nonetheless; they are the UR quadrant in the dream state.

In evolution, forms at a particular level of gross complexity take on a correspondingly complex energy pattern: the greater the degree of complexity, the subtler the corresponding energy. This spectrum of matter-energy is the UR quadrant, running from gross to subtle to causal mass-energy (with all sorts of subspecies—electromagnetic, etheric, astral, etc.).

But matter, form, and energy are how the individual holon looks *from the exterior*. All energy is some version of frequency per time interval (or space per time)—that is, energy itself is essentially of the “it” dimension. But the interiors of holons are not experienced as cycles per second, or possessing a wavelength of 6 microns, or repeating 2,000 times a second. Those are all third-person terms of the it dimension—a very real dimension (i.e., the UR). But the interiors do not consist of cycles per second or space with extension, but of feelings with intention, experiences with vivid emotions, lived awareness, felt consciousness (i.e., the UL). When a person says, “I’m running low on energy,” she means she is running out of intention, not running out of extension.

Of course, the energy states of the body (gross, subtle, or causal) can indeed be felt, but those feelings are interior apprehensions, not exterior forms. Both exist—feelings and forms—in all holons; but it’s important not to conflate them. What we might call *subtle materialism* (or the reduction of all interior consciousness to exterior subtle energies) is just as common as *gross materialism* (the reduction of all interior consciousness to exterior gross energies).

That is why we summarize this as: in evolution, the greater the degree of gross complexity (in the UR), the subtler the corresponding energy (in the UR), and the greater the interior degree of consciousness (UL)—and none of those can be reduced to the others.

If those connecting links hold, that would be the third major step in the move from premodern metaphysics to integral post-metaphysics, a move that, I believe, retains the enduring truths of the great metaphysical traditions but without what appears to be their outmoded interpretative frameworks. But that brings us to the end of this brief introduction and to the beginning of the main discussion of an integral theory of subtle energies.

## **PART II. AN INTEGRAL THEORY OF SUBTLE ENERGIES**

### *The Spectrum of Subtle Energies*

As usual, let's first touch bases with the wisdom traditions, then see how their profound insights might be updated with AQAL.

Common to many traditions is the idea that, in addition to a spectrum of consciousness, there is a spectrum of energy. One such spectrum runs from **gross** physical energy, to **etheric** energy, to **astral** energy, to **psychic** energy, to **causal** energy. Without, at this point, arguing the details, let's simply accept that as a type of subtle-energy spectrum that might exist.

In a general sense (which we will refine as we go along), these 5 levels of energy are essentially correlated with the 5 levels of consciousness (e.g., as presented in fig. 1). According to the traditions, these energies are not the same as consciousness; consciousness cannot be reduced to these energies; nor can these energies be reduced to consciousness. Rather, these levels of energy accompany and support their correlative levels of consciousness (so that a gross energy is the support of gross

consciousness, a subtle energy is the support of subtle consciousness, a causal energy is the support of causal consciousness, and so on).

You could represent the energy spectrum very much as in, say, figure 2 (physical energy, vital energy, mental energy, soul energy). *Every* level of both consciousness and energy higher than the lowest level (or “matter”) was completely *trans-material* (metaphysical, supernatural). These energies were said to form concentric spheres of increasing expanse, but they are themselves, in every essential way, *non-gross-material* (or ontologically pre-existing and separable from matter). The essential points of that formulation can still be true, and are true, I believe. But with the naturalistic turn in the AQAL matrix’s self-understanding, we can recognize that many of the items that the premodern traditions believed were entirely trans-material or metaphysical are actually correlated with complexifications of matter, not a mere transcendence of matter.

We suggested that this naturalization of metaphysical occasions has three important components: complexity of gross form (in the UR) is correlated with an increasing degree of consciousness (in the UL), and, in the UR itself, a subtilization of corresponding energies. We can depict this, somewhat crudely, as in figure 7.

In this figure, we see that the energy fields thought to be hovering metaphysically beyond matter actually emerge in intimate correlation with complexifications of matter. These subtle fields cannot be reduced to matter, but neither are they ontologically disconnected from matter altogether. The ghost disconnected from the machine is actually intimately correlated with the degree of complexity of the machine. Every mind has its body. Subtler, more sophisticated mind simply means subtler, more sophisticated body. As we will soon see, the traditions (particularly Vedanta and Vajrayana) had a very profound understanding of the relation of gross, subtle, and casual consciousness

with gross, subtle, and causal bodies—but they did not fully grasp connecting hypothesis #3 (namely, the relation of *all of that* to the *complexifications* of gross matter).

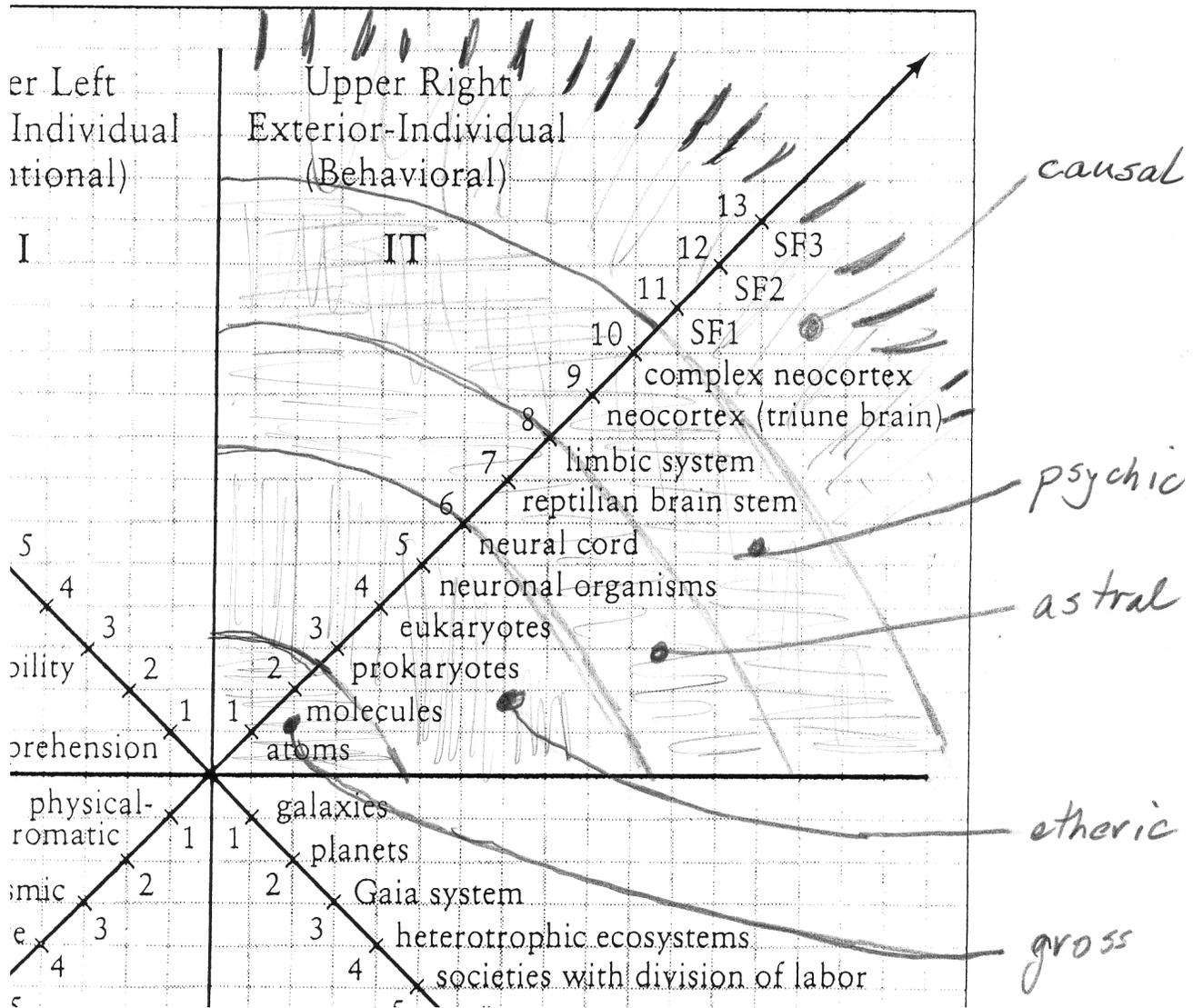


Figure 7. Complexification of Gross Form Is Accompanied by Subtler Energies.

The missing, connecting link is suggested in figure 7. In this figure, we simply assume the existence of the energy spectrum as given by the traditions (physical, etheric, astral, psychic, etc.), and then do something the traditions themselves could not do: take advantage of modern science and correlate the emergence of these subtle fields with

the evolutionary record, and thus track the correlation of subtle energies with complexities of gross forms. Here is a brief elaboration of what we find (as summarized in figure 7):

The earliest forms of evolution—such as quarks, electrons, protons, atoms, and molecules—are accompanied by the four, major, gross energy-forces: **electromagnetic, gravitational, strong and weak nuclear**. It is common to refer to these as “physical” energies or “gross” energies, and that is fine, as long as we remember that these “physical” or “material” energies are not the whole of matter-energy, but simply the lowest levels of matter-energy (i.e., the lowest levels of mass-energy in the UR quadrant). Generally speaking, gross energies surround their associated material bodies in various sorts of fields; the energy itself, in its typical form, propagates as a wave/particle event.

With the emergence, during evolution, of the complex material forms that we call “life” (starting with viruses and prokaryotes), a more subtle energy—often called “etheric”—emerges. As indicated, these etheric energy fields are said to surround the physical energy fields in a holonic fashion (i.e., as spheres of increasing expanse).

**Note:** in AQAL metatheory, the manifest Kosmos is composed of holons in various perspectives. A **holon** is a **whole/part**—or a *whole* that is *simultaneously* a *part* of other wholes—e.g., a whole atom is part of a whole molecule, which is part of a whole cell, which is part of a whole organism, etc. Individual holons, all the way down—atoms, quarks, fermions—possess a spark of sentience or prehension, so that all individual holons are sentient beings. All individual holons are also what Whitehead called “**compound individuals**,” or individuals compounded of junior individuals: a cell is a compound individual, compounded of molecules, which are compound individuals compounded of atoms, which are compound individuals compounded of....

When any occasion (or holon) is looked at in a *first-person stance* (as an “I” or sentient being), then we find the types of phenomena listed in the **UL quadrant** (such as prehension, feeling, impulses, awareness, consciousness, etc.) When that *same holon* is looked in a *third-person* or objective fashion (as an “it”), then we find the types of phenomena listed in the **UR quadrant** (such as a holon’s mass, morphic form, and energy, all of which can be described in third-person or “it” terms, unlike the UL, which can only be described in “I” terms). We are at this point tracing the evolution of holons by looking at their exterior forms of matter and energy (i.e., events in the UR quadrant) as they emerged in the course of evolution.

The general stages of this evolutionary emergence are suggested in figure 7 with regard to their UR forms. When a holon is looked at in a third-person or objective stance, we find that material bodies—such as atoms, molecules, cells—are surrounded by energy fields which are, by connecting hypothesis #3, *correlated with increasing degrees of complexity of gross material form*. Each of these energy fields—physical, astral, etheric, etc.—surround and envelop their junior fields just as their associated material forms surround and envelop their junior forms (e.g., a cell envelops molecules, which envelop atoms, etc.). Thus, the compound individuals and their associated energy fields are both “holonic.” We will return to these points as we proceed.

As evolution continues to produce a complexification of gross form, types of life emerge that begin to interpret environmental stimuli in very sophisticated ways, using organ systems such as a neural net and a reptilian brain stem. With the emergence of a brain stem and a paleomammalian limbic system, an even subtler energy—called “astral”—also begins to emerge. “Astral” can mean many things, but it particularly means a powerful *emotional energy* field—subtler than physical and etheric—that pervades the living organism (e.g., running

through the acupuncture meridians) and also extends beyond it, enveloping the physical and astral fields in a holonic expansion. (We will see these holonic energy fields when we come to a Burr diagram, below.)

But, again, it is not that these energy fields are radically meta-physical, because if they were, then all of these fields (because they would not in any way be bound to physical objects), could and would be surrounding all physical objects, whereas in fact, these fields only emerge with (and surround) material objects *of a corresponding degree of complexity*. A rock does not have an emotional field; a worm does not have a mental field, and so on. Taking advantage of the modern (or naturalistic) turn allows us to anchor these fields in nature without reducing them to nature. A natural history of these energy fields shows that they emerge in correlation with the degree of complexity of gross form, and both of them together (the form and its corresponding energy) are the UR correlates (or the observable exteriors) of the UL increase in degrees of consciousness. The forms and energies can be seen in third-person perspective (they are the “it” components, or the objective components, of all morphic units, or holons seen from the exterior); the consciousness can be known only in first-person acquaintance (as the “I” of holons seen only from within).

To continue the natural history of subtle energies: at the point where the evolution of increasingly complex gross form produces a triune brain, a yet subtler energy—known as “psychic”—emerges. “Psychic,” in this case, simply means “thought fields,” which are said to be produced by sustained mental activity. These fields surround and envelop the physical, etheric, and astral—but they ONLY emerge in, through, and around material forms that are complex enough to include triune brains.

The important point is that all of those fields—physical, etheric, astral, psychic—are an inherent part of the corresponding holons in the UR

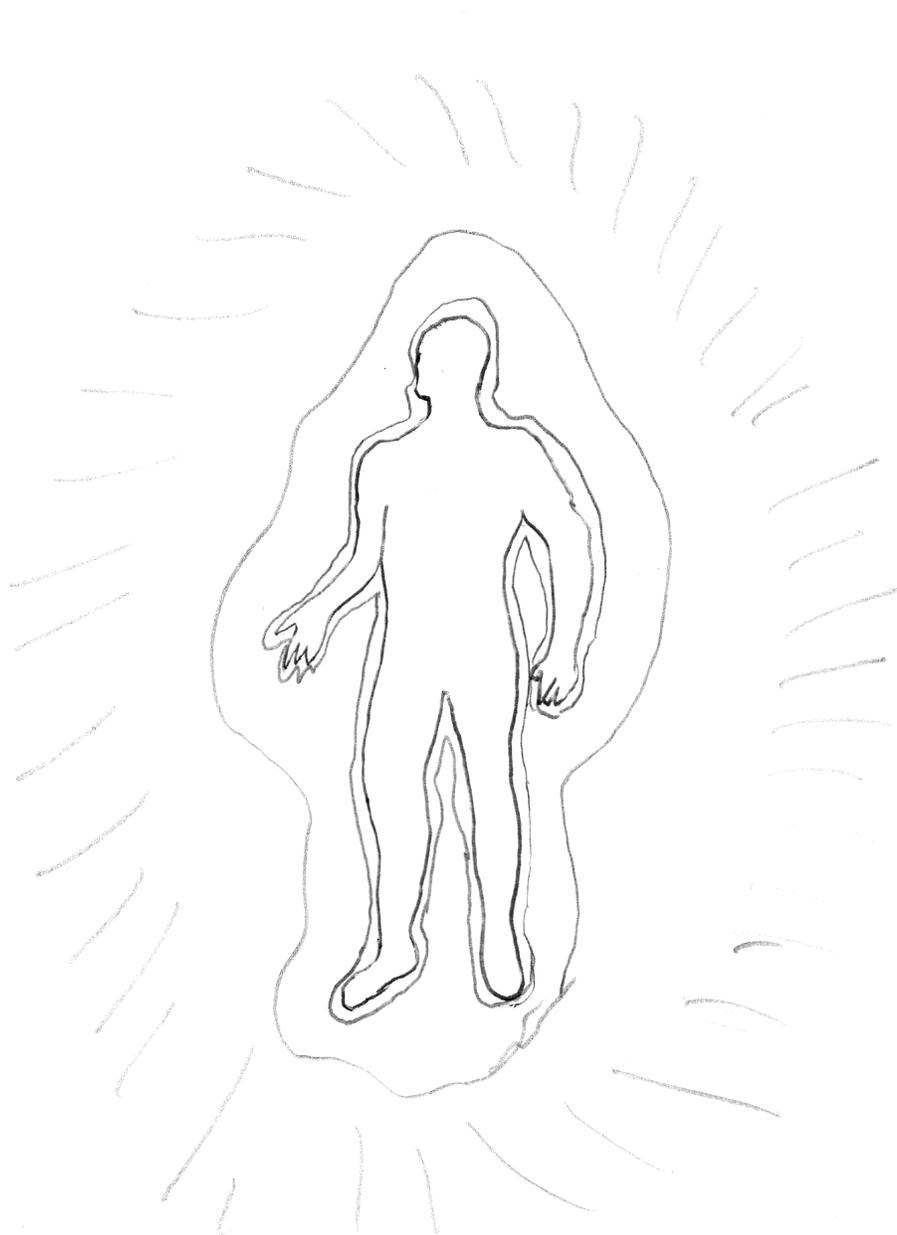
quadrant. That is, the *exterior* of an *individual* sentient being (atoms to ants to apes) consists of the individual morphic form and its related energy fields. Since every holon is actually a compound holon, then each holon contains all of the previous subholons in its own makeup, *each of which has its own interior prehension (UL) and exterior form and energy field (UR)*, and all of which continue their own relatively independent existence, but now enveloped and subsumed in the embrace of the higher holon whose subcomponents they now are—holons within holons, fields within fields, energies within energies, endlessly.

This is why the consciousness, forms, and energy fields are all holarchical. They are all nested hierarchies of transcend and include. In the exterior domains, which are marked by their *extension* in spacetime, you can actually see many of these holarchies: in the UR, cells physically envelop molecules, which physically envelop atoms. Likewise, in the UR, the psychic energy field surrounds and envelops (transcends and includes) the astral field, which surrounds and envelops the etheric, which surrounds and envelops the physical....

Harold Saxon Burr, the Yale physiologist who was one of the first great pioneers in the scientific (or third-person) study of energy fields, often used a diagram like figure 8, which represents experimentally detected energy fields.

Let me emphasize that this is a highly schematic diagram, simply to show what is involved. It includes a “**P-field**,” or any gross physical energies associated with this body; as well as an “**L-field**” (or “life-field”) and a “**T-field**” (or “thought-field”). Note the holonic character. Of course, none of these energy fields are merely local, or confined simply to a physical and localized space. The local aspects of these energy fields—represented by the shells in the diagram—are simply the areas of highest density of the fields (or, alternatively, the areas of

greatest probability of finding the signature energy). But many of these local aspects can indeed be physically detected with various instruments (e.g., Burr, Motoyama, Tiller). Also, well-known and highly respected psychics (e.g., Michal Levin) often perceive these energy shells in essentially the way Burr depicted them—fields within fields within



**Figure 8.** *Burr Diagram of Energy Fields.*

fields. This is not to say they do not appear in other ways, only that the Burr diagram captures some typical and important aspects of these energies.

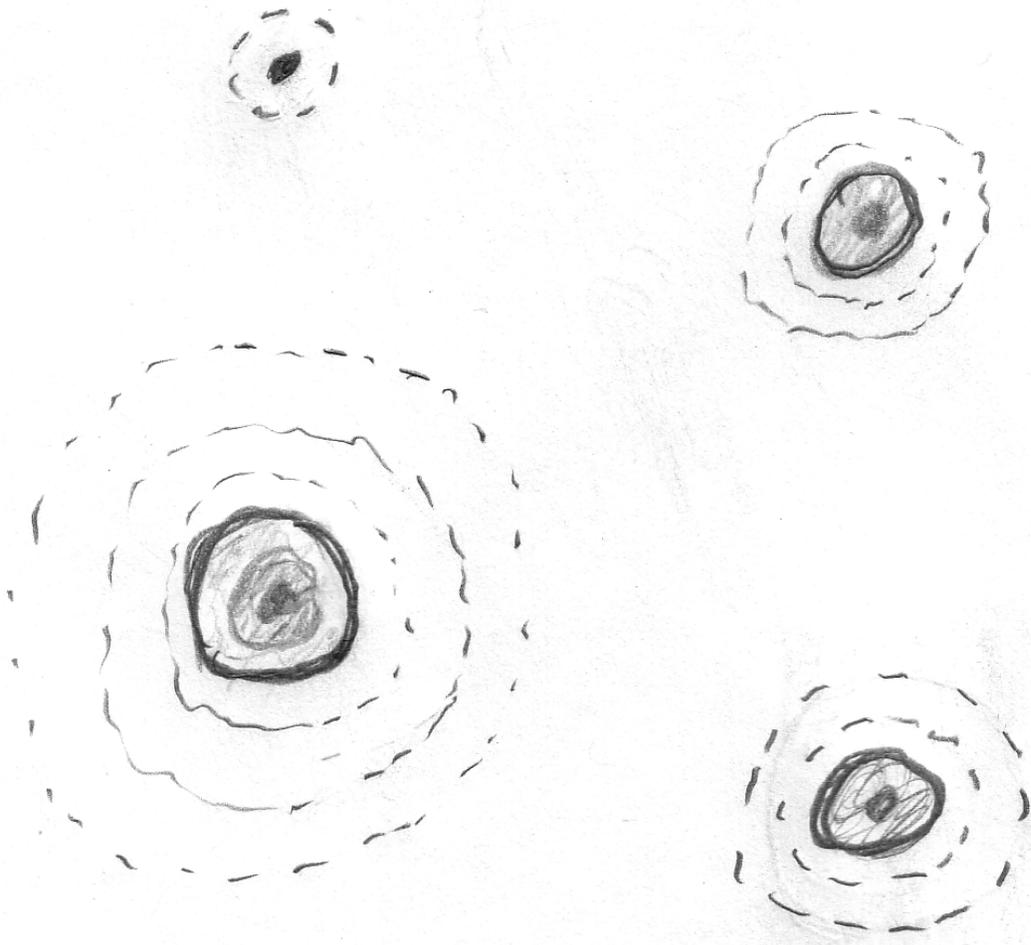
The point is that, on both the interior and the exterior, evolution is indeed, in many significant ways, *holarchical*: it is transcend and include. And thus the holonic milestones of ongoing evolution and development—in consciousness, in complexification of form, and in energy-field emergents—show a nested hierarchical pattern: the whole of one wave becomes a part of the whole of the next. In this regard, Plotinus was right on the money: development is envelopment.

Because each holon or compound individual contains or subsumes the matter and energy of its subholons, we can use a few more diagrams to schematically indicate what this might mean. With reference to the Burr diagram of holonic fields, each individual holon, as it emerges, has its own gross material form plus its associated energy fields: the greater the degree of complexity of the material form, the more energy fields surrounding it (hypothesis #3). This can be indicated as in figure 9.

In this figure, which represents actual occasions when looked at in an objective, third-person stance (i.e., holons in the UR quadrant), we can see that each level of increasing complexity of gross material form transcends-and-include (or subsumes) its junior levels of material form—but *all* of those levels are compound individuals *in their own right*, and thus all of them retain their own energy signatures, so that the compound individual itself is compounded of both its previous, junior, material components (represented by the solid spheres) and their associated energy fields (represented by the surrounding shells).

Although we have been focusing on individual holons and their energy fields in the Upper Right, the AQAL nature of all holons clearly implies that there would be, in the Lower Right, systems of *collective energy*

*fields* associated with *social holons*, and I believe there are (we will return to that topic in later sections).



**Figure 9.** *Holonic Matter and Energy.*

By the way, there are no energy fields in the Left-Hand quadrants, of course, because those are aspects of holons that are first-person

feelings, awareness, consciousness, and so on, whose *exterior (or Right-Hand) correlates* are mass and energy. All holons have four quadrants, which means all holons have interiors of consciousness and exteriors of form and energy (e.g., even subtle consciousness has a subtle body, and causal consciousness has a causal body, etc.), but consciousness is not itself energy, nor energy consciousness.

## ***Terminology***

As is no doubt obvious, when it comes to subtle energies, terminology very quickly becomes a major problem. There is, first of all, a bewildering variety of terms now being used for these phenomena; second of all, there is a large variety of phenomena being proposed; and third, there is a proliferation of theories attempting to explain the phenomena.

We have to start somewhere, so I am going to make a few semantic suggestions. These are suggestions only.

### *Level of Mass-Energy*

### *Corresponding Level of Consciousness*

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| 1. <b>Gross</b> Physical (gravitational, electromagnetic, strong and weak nuclear) | 1. Sensorimotor     |
| 2. Etheric, L-field 1 (L-1), or <b>Biofield 1</b>                                  | 2. Vital            |
| 3. Astral, L-field 2 (L-2), or <b>Biofield 2</b>                                   | 3. Emotional-sexual |
| 4. Psychic-1 or <b>T-field 1</b> (T-1)   | 4. Mental           |
| 5. Psychic-2 or <b>T-field 2</b> (T-2)   | 5. Higher mental    |
| 6. Causal or <b>C-field</b>  | 6. Overmental       |
| 7. <b>Nondual</b>  | 7. Supermental      |

One of the first items we need to address is the simple fact that, in any classifying scheme, the number of “levels” is rather arbitrary. In measuring temperature, for example, we can use a Fahrenheit scale (in which case there are 180 “degrees” or “levels” of heat between freezing and boiling water), or we can use a Celsius scale (in which case there are 100 levels). Which is correct? Both are fine, as long as we know which we are using.

The same is true of levels of consciousness, levels of material complexity, and levels of subtle energy. This is not to suggest that something real isn’t there, but simply that how we slice it up is largely arbitrary. The only thing that is not arbitrary, according to hypotheses #2 and #3, is that whatever the number of levels of consciousness, there are the same number of levels of matter-energy: they are the interior and the exterior of the same event.

I am going to present some suggested terminology in two installments: first, a list of the minimum number of energy levels that we seem to need in order to cover most of the relevant issues; and then later, a more refined taxonomy involving families, genera, and species.

There seem to be, at the present state of our knowledge, at least seven, major, different levels of energy. These roughly correlate with the seven chakras. They are indicated in Table 1, along with their suggested terminology. We will return to a refined taxonomy below.

## ***Involution and Evolution***

Before we turn to some refinements of this scheme, there is one last major item that needs to be addressed, an item that has probably caused more theoretical trouble than any other single item, not only in the area of subtle energies, but in the overall area of spirituality and mysticism and their relation to modern science.

Namely, where is the quantum vacuum located in that scheme?

According to modern quantum and relativity physics, the amount of vacuum density energy contained in a single hydrogen atom is greater than the amount of all other energy stored in all known stars. In other words, a whole lot. Various intriguing facts about quantum reality, such as that one, have led a long string of scientists—from LeShan to Capra to Zukav to Wolf (and dozens who shall go nameless)—to in effect equate the quantum vacuum with something like spirit, supermind, the Tao, Brahman, the Void of Buddhism, and so on. The result, in my personal opinion, has been calamitous.

To begin with, let's touch bases with the traditions and see where they might situate quantum realities. In QM theory, the wave potential is a vast source of creative energy that gives rise to denser material particles, including, eventually, particles such as quarks, electrons, and protons. It is this “creatix” nature of the quantum potential that has led many scientists to equate it with a spiritual potentiality, a type of vast field of infinite potentials that is unbounded spirit or limitless consciousness itself.

If that were the case, then the sequence of evolution would be something like this: out of the spiritual/quantum potential comes subatomic particles, which eventually gather together into atoms, which then gather together into molecules, which then form cells, which then form organisms.... In other words, in that scheme, the higher the level of evolution, the farther away from God you get.

Something is clearly not quite right with that scheme. But once you (mis)identity spirit with the quantum potential, there is no other way to go. Precisely because the quantum potential is not actually a radically formless or nondual domain, it cannot serve as anything resembling a genuine spiritual reality, but rather is simply one aspect of a manifest

realm that itself has qualities and quantities, and hence is not the radically Unqualifiable.

The wisdom traditions are in strong and virtually unanimous agreement on this point. We already saw the general view of the traditions concerning emanation (or involution). Even if we use the simple 5-level version, it becomes very obvious what the quantum potential actually is.

In involution or creation, radically unqualifiable Spirit decides to play a game of hide-and-seek, and hence “forgets” itself and throws itself outward to create a manifest world of manyness and otherness. As we saw, the first thing pure Spirit creates is soul, which then throws itself outward to create mind, which throws itself outward to create life (or prana), which then throws itself outward to create insentient matter (quarks, atoms). At the end of that ontological sequence, matter blows into existence as a crystallization and condensation of prana.

In other words, the quantum potential is not spirit but prana. More technically, the quantum potential is not spirit-as-spirit, it is not spirit-as-soul, it is not spirit-as-mind, but rather, the quantum potential is spirit-as-prana, which gives rise to spirit-as-matter.

What the QM formalisms are catching a brief glimpse of—in a merely third-person, abstract, mathematical form—is the staggering power of etheric-astral energy, out of which, as a sedimentation and crystallization, the entire gross material world arises. One version of this is: when the Schroedinger wave function collapses, prana gives rise to matter. But however we conceive it, that is the particular interface being activated.

## *The Two Truths Doctrine*

### *The Problem*

Such, in any event, seems to be the simplest and easiest way to unite the best of the wisdom traditions and modern science in this particular area. On the other hand, the simplistic and dualistic notion that there is, for example, an implicate order (which is spiritual and quantum) and an explicate order (which is material and Newtonian) has caused enormous confusion, and is still doing so. But even David Bohm, who introduced that notion, eventually ended up tacking so many epicycles on it that it became unrecognizable.

We just saw that, for the traditions, the energy side of the Great Chain of Being means that prana is implicate to gross mass-energy (which is explicate to prana). In turn, psychic energy is implicate to prana (which is explicate to psychic). And, of course, the causal is implicate to the psychic (and all lower) dimensions—“causal” is called **causal** because it is the cause, the start, the creatrix of the entire manifest sequence. Thus, each dimension in the Great Chain is implicate to its junior and explicate to its senior—a notion clearly spelled out by theorists from Fa-Tsang to Plotinus to Schelling.

But if you absolutize physics (i.e., if you confuse the two truths [see below]), then you will collapse the entire Great Chain into merely one implicate and one explicate order. And one of the many problems with that crude scheme, as we saw, is that if you equate quantum realities with a type of ultimate spiritual Creatrix, then as that “spirit” gives rise to atoms, which give rise to molecules, which give rise to cells, which give rise organisms, and so on, then the higher the evolution, the farther away from God you are getting.

Bohm vaguely realized this—and realized that his “implicate order,” *precisely* because it was set apart from the explicate order, could not actually represent any sort of genuine or nondual spiritual reality. He therefore invented a third realm, the “super-implicate order,” which was supposed to be the nondual spiritual realm. He then had three levels of reality: explicate, implicate, super-implicate. But because he was unfamiliar with the subtleties of Shunyata (see below), he was still caught in dualistic notions (because he was still trying to qualify the unqualifiable). He therefore added yet another epicycle: “beyond the superimplicate,” to give him four levels of reality.

Slowly Bohm had worked his way back to a crude version of the traditional Great Chain, which maintains that each senior dimension is implicate to its juniors. But *all* of this was supposed to be *based on physics*, which meant that Bohm was actually involved in a colossally reductionistic game that devastated the actual intermediate levels of the Great Chain (e.g., level 2, which is addressed by biology, and level 3, addressed by psychology, are all reduced to hidden variables in QM formalisms of gross matter-energy). This is not the union of science and spirituality, but the union of bad physics with bad mysticism.

### *Suggested Solution*

As suggested, this equating of quantum (or subquantum, or string, or symmetry) realities with some sort of nondual Spirit is perhaps the single biggest theoretical confusion in the entire field. First, because it confuses the nature of involution and evolution, and hence confuses the beginning of the involutory sequence—namely, causal spirit—with the beginning of the evolutionary sequence—namely, the vacuum potential (or some such), which actually represents spirit-as-prana, not spirit-as-spirit. In chakra terminology, this view confuses the enormous creative potentiality of Kundalini coiled at the base of the spine (muladhara) with Kundalini at the top of the crown (sahasrara). We

already know they are *both* Kundalini; but the muladhara is simply not the same thing as the sahasrara.

But second, and more important, it violates the two truths doctrine.

In the final analysis, the traditions are very clear that the “first step” in involutory manifestation is indeed a nondual Mystery and cannot in any way be adequately captured (or even hinted at) by conventional truth, including any sort of science, leading-edge or otherwise. The reason is that the great traditions from Parmenides to Padmasambhava are unanimous in what Vedanta calls the “two truths” doctrine: namely, there exists absolute or nondual truth, and relative or conventional truth, and they are of radically different orders. Relative truth is concerned with states of affairs in the finite realm, such as “water molecules contain one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms,” or “the Earth is 93 million miles from the Sun,” or “the quantum vacuum potential in one angstrom of space is equal to  $10^{2300000}$  ergs,” and so on. According to Nagarjuna, Shankara, and Plotinus, you can make definite true or false statements about such finite events, and truth in the relative realm is indeed a search for those conditions under which relative assertions are true. This is relative, finite, or assertoric truth.

Not so absolute truth, about which literally and radically NOTHING may be accurately said in a noncontradictory fashion (including that one; if that statement is true, it is false). The great transcendental dialecticians—from Nagarjuna to Kant—have thoroughly demolished any such attempts, showing that every single one of the attempts to categorize ultimate reality (as, for example, by saying it is a quantum energy potential) turns on itself and dissolves in *ad absurdum* or *ad infinitum* regresses. They are not saying that Spirit does not exist, but simply that any finite statement about the infinite will categorically not work—not in the same way that statements about relative or conventional truth will work. Spirit can be known, but not said; seen,

but not spoken; pointed out, but not described; realized, but not reiterated. Conventional truths are known by science; absolute truth is known by satori. They simply are not the same thing.

For Nagarjuna, the Real is shunya (empty) of all such categorizations. For Shankara, once the world of maya is created, you cannot make any statement about maya whatsoever: when you are in maya, everything you say is false; when you awaken, there is no maya—in either case, you cannot make a statement about maya (nor, therefore, about the “creator” of maya). For Plotinus, the “One” is “*not a numerical one*”—in other words, the “One” is only a poetic *metaphor* for Suchness, not an actual *model* of Suchness. (The vacuum potential, on the other hand, is a model, not a metaphor.)

In short, there is nondual or absolute truth, and there is relative or conventional truth, and one simply cannot take an assertion of the latter and apply it to the former. When we use finite words to try to represent ultimate Suchness, the most we get is poetic metaphor (or metaphoric statements), but the absolute is known only by a direct realization involving a transformation in consciousness (satori, sahaj, metanoia), and “what” is seen in satori cannot be stated in ordinary dualistic words, other than metaphors, poetry, and hints (if you want to know God, you must awaken, not merely theorize). Conventional and scientific truths, on the other hand, are assertoric, not metaphoric; they work with models, not poems; they are finite, dualistic, and conventional—all of which is fine when addressing the finite, dualistic, conventional realm.

The Upanishads concur: nirguna Brahman is “one without a second,” not “one among many.” The vacuum potential has a second (or an “other,” namely, gross matter); but Brahman has no such second, and therefore Brahman certainly cannot be identified with quantum anything. It cannot be known by assertoric or metaphoric knowledge, only by awakening. Even to call Brahman “infinite” is to miss the point

entirely, since the word “infinite” only has meaning by virtue of its opposite (“finite”), and therefore even statements like “formless, empty, infinite, unqualifiable, nondual” are actually *dualistic* to the core. Zen tries to hint at this by saying that the absolute is “not two, not one.”

Unfortunately, the physicists who started equating quantum realities with the Tao were simply ill-versed in the philosophical subtleties of the great traditions. Oddly, the original and pioneering physicists themselves—from Schroedinger to Planck to Einstein—refused to make that confusion—refused, that is, to identify the findings of quantum or relativistic physics with any sort of spiritual reality (as I found out when I edited all of their writings on the topic of spirituality: see *Quantum Questions: The Mystical Writings of the World’s Great Physicists*). Again, they were not denying Spirit—just the opposite—but they recognized that assertions about the relative realm are not of the same order as those about the absolute realm, and hence confusing them harmed the cause of both.

The vacuum potential, then, is part of the relative, finite, manifest realm. For just that reason, it can be studied by science. It is a reality that, in at least some ways, is apart from other realities; it has qualities; it has quantities; it has dimensions. None of those statements can be predicated of Suchness, in any way other than poetic metaphors. However, precisely because the etheric, astral, and psychic fields are indeed part of the manifest realm, they are the proper object of study of science. No contradiction is involved in saying that the quantum vacuum is the protrusion into the gross realm of its immediate senior, implicate order: namely, prana.

Doing so helps us, I believe, continue to move toward a truly integral theory of subtle energies.

## *Summary of Quantum Realities*

Following the great philosopher-sages (such as Nagarjuna, Plotinus, and Shankara), we can summarize the reasons that any sort of quantum or subquantum events are not Spirit:

1. Any quantum reality has some sort of characteristics, qualities, or dimensions that set it apart from manifest matter; but Spirit is radically *shunya* or *drsti* (empty of any and all qualities, including that characterization itself)—e.g., quantum vacuum has vast energy, spirit is unqualifiable.
2. Any quantum reality is different in some important ways from gross matter; but Spirit is not different from any manifestation, but is rather the Suchness or Isness of whatever arises.
3. Quantum reality has an opposite (e.g., non-quantum reality), but Spirit is radically nondual.
4. Spirit is dimensionless; quantum reality is merely in a different dimension.
5. And, most important, quantum material energy comes directly out of prana, not out of spirit (i.e., matter crystallizes out of spirit-as-prana, not spirit-as-spirit).

On the other hand, realizing that quantum-relativistic-gross events are the surface events or manifestations of an etheric energy field allows us to adequately account for these events in a way that is consonant with: the great wisdom traditions, the leading-edge of science, the body of knowledge of subtle energies, and their AQAL reinterpretation. Gross mass-energy is a surface manifestation of etheric fields, which are surface to astral-psychic fields, which are surface to causal, which is the

mysterious first film on spirit's Original Face as it manifests a world, moment to moment to moment....

## **PART III. SOME SPECIFICS OF AN INTEGRAL THEORY OF SUBTLE ENERGIES**

### *Refinements*

I mentioned that we would go into the correlations of energies and consciousness according to the traditions such as Vedanta and Vajrayana; also the intricate topic of reincarnation or transmigration; and a finer taxonomy of subtle energies (involving family, genus, species).

Start with the correlations. Both Vedanta and Vajrayana have a very simple but very powerful map of the relation of *states* of consciousness, *levels* of consciousness, and *realms* of bodies/energies. I believe this scheme is essentially correct, even when retrofitted in AQAL terms. Briefly:

According to Vedanta/Vajrayana, there are *three* major states of consciousness, correlated with *three* major bodies (or mass-energy realms), and *five* major levels/structures of consciousness. The 3 states are waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The 3 bodies are gross, subtle, and causal. The 5 levels/sheaths are the 5 koshas outlined earlier (gross material, emotional-pranic, mental, higher mental, overmental).

The relationships, in the average person, are as follows: the waking state, which possesses a material consciousness, is correlated with (and supported by) a gross body/energy. The dream state—which contains (or can contain) the 3 levels of emotional, mental, and higher mental—

is supported by a subtle body/energy. And the deep sleep state, which contains an overmental consciousness, is supported by a causal body/energy. See Table 2. (And note: the states and stages of consciousness are UL; the bodies/energies are UR.)

The brilliance of this scheme is that it manages to relate structures of consciousness, states of consciousness, and energies in a simple, elegant fashion, a fashion that, in those essential respects, has yet to be improved upon. I have written at length about these correlations and why they are important for any integral psychology. Here I will again attempt a very brief summary.

<b>State of Consciousness</b>	<b>Level/Stage/Sheath of Consciousness</b>	<b>Body-Energy</b>
<b>Deep Sleep</b> (Formless) ( <i>sushupti</i> )	5. <b>Anandamayakosha</b> (spirit-bliss)	<b>Causal Body</b> ( <i>karana-sarira</i> )
<b>Dreaming</b> ( <i>svapna-sthana</i> )	4. <b>Vijnanamayakosha</b> ( <i>buddhi</i> ; higher mind)	<b>Subtle Body</b>  ( <i>buddhi</i> ; higher mind) ( <i>suksma-sarira</i> )
	3. <b>Manomayakosha</b> ( <i>manas</i> ; mind)	
	2. <b>Pranamayakosha</b> (emotional-sexual)	
<b>Waking</b> ( <i>jagarita-sthana</i> )	1. <b>Annamayakosha</b> (sensorimotor)	<b>Gross Body</b> ( <i>sthula-sarira</i> )

Table 2. *Correlations of States of Consciousness, Stages of Consciousness, and Bodies (or Energies)*

To begin with, why do Vedanta/Vajrayana maintain that the waking state contains one level of consciousness but the dream state contains 3 levels of consciousness? According to Vedanta/Vajrayana, the item that *most* defines the waking state is that you are aware of gross sensorimotor bodies: you can see rocks, trees, rivers, towns, cars, planets, etc., all of which are gross sensorimotor objects or bodies

(hence, the gross realm). There are other things that you might be aware of in the waking state, but if you can see rocks, you are aware of the gross realm.

When you dream, however, you are not aware of rocks, trees, rivers, towns, or any other gross objects. You can, however, be aware of emotions, images, ideas, visions, archetypes, and so on—in other words, the 3 middle levels of consciousness *can all appear in the dream state*, and that means that the 3 middle levels of consciousness can all be supported by same subtle body. (This is not to say that this subtle body/energy cannot be subdivided, which clearly it can, inasmuch as both Vedanta and Vajrayana do so; but it is to say that all forms of subtle energy are genera of this family [see below]).

When you enter the deep dreamless state, however, even those levels of consciousness and energy fall away, and there is only a vast, almost infinite overmental consciousness—a blissful-radiant and nearly formless consciousness (anandamayakosha)—which is supported by a causal body/energy (which Vedanta terms “causal” and Vajrayana terms “very subtle”; i.e., the body/energies for Vedanta are called gross, subtle, and causal; for Vajrayana, they are called gross, subtle, and very subtle; I will follow Vedanta, although it is clear that they are both referring to essentially the same phenomena, inasmuch as they both *explicitly* identify these states/bodies with waking, dreaming, and sleeping).

One of the many reasons that such a model is important is that it allows us to grasp some very intricate and otherwise confusing relationships among states and stages. It is hard to give an indication of the profundity of the Vedanta/Vajrayana accomplishment in a short summary, but let me use one quick example that might help. According to both Vedanta and Vajrayana, the states and their bodies/realms are

*given* to a human from birth (and are fully present), but the levels or stages undergo *development* (and are not all present at birth).

Start with a few uncontested facts: an infant wakes, dreams, and sleeps—in other words, the infant has access to all 3 major *states* of consciousness. But an infant does not have access to all the major *stages* of consciousness (e.g., the infant does not have access to formal operational cognition, which emerges or develops during adolescence; nor does the infant have access to postconventional morality, nor to hypothetical reasoning capacities, nor to the orange meme, nor the green meme, and so on. The higher levels, such as *manas* and *vijnana*, have not yet emerged).

So if we look at the *contents* of an infant's dream *state*, what might we find? Whatever we find, it will not be contents from the higher *stages* of development: as research has made abundantly clear, the dreams of infants and children do not contain formal operational thoughts, nor postconventional impulses, nor turquoise visions, and so on. Rather, the contents of the various *states* are provided by the *stage(s)* of development that the person is at.

Thus, to use the simple 5-stage scheme, an infant has access to the 3 great states (waking, dreaming, sleeping) and their 3 associated body/energies (gross, subtle, causal); but the infant has developed only the first one or two levels of the 5 levels of consciousness: namely, the material-food and emotional-pranic levels. The higher levels/stages (mental, higher mental, overmental) have not yet directly emerged. Therefore, the actual contents of the infant's waking and dreaming states will be provided by those first two levels of consciousness.

As the child grows, matures, and develops, and the higher level/stages begin to emerge, then the contents of those levels will provide the much of the content for the various states. By the time a person reaches early

adulthood—and has developed, for example, formal operational cognition, postconventional morality, yellow values, etc.—then those contents can be found in both waking and dreaming states, as research has again repeatedly demonstrated.

Now, for both Vedanta and Vajrayana, the whole point of this scheme is that, when a person is highly evolved—or enlightened—then they have *consciously* and fully developed through all of the 5 levels/stages of consciousness; and therefore they can *permanently access* or Witness the waking, dream, and deep sleep states; such witnessing is called *turiya* (or “the fourth,” meaning the fourth great state beyond waking, dreaming, sleeping); and then unite the empty unqualifiable Witness with entire world of Form (a nondual realization called *turiyatita* or *sahaja*: “spontaneous” and “just so”).

This model allows us to see how an infant can have access to the 3 great states and bodies of gross reality, subtle reality, and causal reality—but not in any developed fashion that would allow it to permanently master those realms. Permanent realization and mastery demands development and evolution through the actual levels/stages, a development that converts “temporary states” to “permanent traits.” Nonetheless, according to Vedanta/Vajrayana, all of the structures/stages/levels of consciousness—whether we say there are 5 of them, or 7 of them, or 12 of them, or more—are all variations on these 3 great realms of consciousness and their 3 supporting bodies or energies.

The reason that model is especially important for subtle energies is that it allows us to see why an infant would possess a gross energy field, a subtle energy field, and a causal energy field (because it wakes, dreams, and sleeps), but it would NOT possess the species and subspecies energy fields that go with the specific stages/levels of consciousness unless it has actually developed those stages. For example, an infant, like an adult, would possess the family energy fields of gross, subtle,

and causal, but not the genus subfields such as T-1, T-2, etc.—in exactly the same way that the infant possesses the same general dream state as an adult, but does not yet contain, within that dream state, any thoughts from the stages of blue, orange, yellow, etc.

Forgive me for repeating myself, but the staggering brilliance of this scheme continues to just floor me. There are no other models even remotely like it in its explanatory capacities, and I have incorporated those aspects, virtually unchanged, in my own model of Integral Psychology. Needless to say, modern research allows us to complexify this basic scheme enormously—we now recognize at least 12 (or more) major levels/stages of consciousness, which exist in at least two dozen different developmental lines, none of which are covered by the Vedanta/Vajrayana model. But the extraordinary breakthrough insights are all contained in their pioneering discoveries.

### ***A Refined Taxonomy of Subtle Energies***

Let us use the common “family, genus, species” scheme, combined with the terminology in Table 1, to summarize our (suggested) conclusions. The three great families of energy are gross, subtle, and causal. (As necessary, we can add family turiya, and family turiyatita.)

1. The **family** gross-energy contains **genus** gravitational, electromagnetic, strong nuclear, weak nuclear.

A. The **genus** electromagnetic contains:

**species** (1) cosmic rays, (2) gamma rays, (3) x-rays, (4) visible light, (5) infrared, (6) microwaves, etc.

B. The **genus** strong nuclear contains:

**species** energies of (1) baryons, (2) hadrons, (3) mesons (etc.)

C. & D. (Likewise for any possible species in the **genus** gravitational and **genus** weak nuclear)

2. The **family** subtle-energy contains **genus** etheric (L-1, biofield-1), astral (L-2, biofield-2), psychic-1 (T-1), and psychic-2 (T-2)

A. The **genus** etheric ( L-1 or biofield-1) contains:

**species** energies of (1) viral, (2) prokaryotic, (3) neuronal, (4) neuronal cord (etc.)

B. The **genus** astral (L-2 or biofield-2) contains:

**species** energies of (1) reptilian brain stem, (2) limbic system (etc.)

C. The **genus** psychic-1 (or T-1) contains:

**species** energies of (1) red, (2) blue, (3) orange, (4) green (etc.)<sup>2</sup>

D. The **genus** psychic-2 (or T-2) contains:

**species** energies of (1) yellow, (2) turquoise, (3) coral (etc.)

3. The **family** causal-energy contains **genus** C-field (etc.)

A. The **genus** C-field contains:

**species** nirvikalpa, jnana (etc.)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This means that the mental or UL states and/or stages—such as the red meme, the blue meme, moral stage 4, conop, and so on—would have their own micro-energetic fingerprints or signature energy patterns. Red, blue, orange, etc. are the UL holons; the species energy signatures are the UR correlates that I am referring to in this taxonomy, but we don't have names for them yet. The same is true of the species energy in the genus T-2, and, indeed, for many of the individual and collective energy signatures in the AQAL matrix.

<sup>3</sup> Again, as with note 2, this means the energy signatures of those consciousness states. Nirvikalpa and jnana are the UL correlates of the species energies here.

Let me emphasize again that much of this is a matter of convention and semantics (including the number of levels we can reasonably postulate). This taxonomy is simply a series of suggestions as to what I believe is the minimum requirement to carry an integral theory forward.

Any good model opens up lines of further research, and the integral or AQAL model is no exception. I would be glad to discuss these issues with interested parties.

### *Reincarnation*

We come now to the most controversial topic related to subtle energies, namely, reincarnation or transmigration. I am reluctant to even comment on it, because once you take sides in this issue, you alienate the other half of the audience.

My own belief is that reincarnation does occur; however, for the moment, I am more concerned with suggesting a proposed mechanism for such an occurrence, rather than arguing that it does or does not happen. Let us simply assume that it does, and then ask, how can that occurrence be squared with hypothesis #3, namely, that subtle energies are associated with complexifications of gross form? Upon death, clearly the gross form dissolves; what happens to the subtle energies if they are *tied* to those gross forms?

At this point, one simply chooses to decide whether reincarnation exists or not. If you believe that reincarnation does not exist, then the integral theory of subtle energies that I have presented thus far needs no further adjustments (not in relation to reincarnation, that is). If, on the other hand, you believe in reincarnation, then an integral theory needs to be able to incorporate that occurrence. It can do so if it adds one hypothesis, as follows:

#4. *Complexity of gross form is necessary for the expression or manifestation of both higher consciousness and subtler energy.*

Hypothesis #4 introduces the possibility that the higher forms of consciousness and energy (i.e., higher than the gross-family realm) are not tied to complexifications of gross form *ontologically* but rather as vehicles of the *expression* of subtler forms and energies in that gross realm itself. In other words, it is not that higher consciousness and energies are bound to the complexities of gross form out of ontological necessity, but that they need a correspondingly complex form of gross matter in order to *express* or *manifest* themselves in and through the material realm.

The question of whether or not that is true is one thing; but if it is true, something like hypothesis #4 must be entertained. To avoid that hypothesis is to avoid the entire issue. For example, Francisco Varela et al., in *The Embodied Mind*, attempt to derive a spiritually attuned theory of consciousness that anchors consciousness firmly in the sensorimotor body—so much so that reincarnation, by their theory, is impossible. They present their theory as consonant with an updated Buddhism, but clearly it avoids this difficult issue. There is no way around something like hypothesis #4 if one wants to entertain transmigration.

With hypothesis #4, integral theory, at least in this particular regard, would revert to something closer to the traditional Vedanta/Vajrayana conception, but with a few major and important exceptions (which eliminate most of the metaphysical postulates required to drive the scheme, while still accepting the relevant data to be explained).<sup>4</sup> All we need note here is that it is exactly the bare essentials of the Vedanta/

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<sup>4</sup> What we call “involuntary givens” are accepted by Integral Post-Metaphysics, since it is theoretically impossible to do away with all of them; see [Excerpt A](#), posted at [wilber.shambhala.com](http://wilber.shambhala.com). The point is to postulate the fewest such “metaphysical” givens in order to get a Kosmos going, because metaphysics hides from validity claims, and thus metaphysics is open to—and almost always infected with—power drives.

Vajrayana model, already incorporated into Integral Psychology, that can be outfitted with hypothesis #4 and used to drive a possible explanation of reincarnation. There is no question but that this increases the metaphysical baggage of any approach, but it can be done in relatively modest ways that, further, are open to a fair amount of actual empirical and phenomenological testing (which is *the* antidote to metaphysics).

The bare essentials of the Vedanta/Vajrayana model, with regard to reincarnation, are as follows. It is true that there is no mind without its supporting body, and no body without its guiding mind (where “mind” means “consciousness” and “body” means “mass-energy”; in other words, to put it in AQAL terms, every consciousness state/stage in the UL has a mass-energy-body correlate in the UR). In simple terms, for both Vedanta and Vajrayana, the gross mind has a gross body; the subtle mind has a subtle body; and the causal mind has a causal body. We can, in fact, simply refer to them as the gross bodymind, the subtle bodymind, and the causal bodymind.

According to Vedanta/Vajrayana, although there is never a mind without a body, the subtle bodymind can exist without the gross bodymind, and the causal bodymind can exist without either of them. Hence, although there is never a mind without a body, transmigration can occur.

There are several ways that, according to the traditions, that statement is true. One, *ontologically*, during involution—which is also essentially the path that is said to occur in the *bardo* realm of the reincarnating or transmigrating entity (see below)—when Spirit first throws itself outward, it creates a causal bodymind. The causal bodymind clearly exists without either a subtle bodymind or a gross bodymind, since neither of them have yet been created.

Two, phenomenologically, when you go to sleep each night and begin dreaming, the gross bodymind does not exist and you reside primarily as a subtle bodymind; likewise, as you pass into dreamless-formless sleep, there is no gross or subtle bodymind, only a causal bodymind; hence, *phenomenologically*, the senior bodyminds can exist apart from the junior bodyminds.

Three, in certain nonordinary waking states—such as out-of-the-body experiences (or “astral travel”)—one exists in a subtle bodymind, not merely a gross bodymind. And in formless meditative states, one exists in a causal bodymind, not a subtle or gross bodymind.

The traditions therefore maintain that upon physical death, as the gross bodymind dissolves, the soul, existing now in its subtle state and actually supported or carried by a very real but subtle energy (or subtle body), transmigrates through a series of bardo realms or stations, until various karmic factors incline it towards the assumption of a new gross bodymind, whereupon rebirth in a physical body occurs.

Thus, the overall subtle body/energy (i.e., the *family* subtle-energy) is said to support various minds or states and stages of consciousness, including: (1) the dream state in all humans; (2) meditative states with form (e.g., savikalpa samadhi); (3) various nonordinary states (e.g., out-of-the-body experiences, near-death experiences); (4) and the bardo realms of transmigration.

This is why, for example, if, during one’s lifetime, one practices meditation and learns to enter the dream state with awareness (lucid dreaming), it is said that one can then control to some degree one’s actual bardo course of rebirth, because to master one is to master the other: they are essentially the same realms.

Hypothesis #4, then, involves the suggestion that a subtle consciousness, supported by a very real but subtle mass-energy, does not itself depend for its *essential* existence on the gross realm, although it does require a specific degree of complexification of gross matter-energy *in order to manifest* in the gross realm. If hypothesis #4 is true, then we would have warrant to say that this is why these subtler dimensions, although created and existing *in potentia* during involution, cannot actually manifest themselves until evolution in the gross realm reaches a required degree of complexification. Increasingly complex vehicles are required for increasingly higher realms; when these higher realms manifest, they are not apart from the complexification of form, but shine through them and by virtue of them: again, even with hypothesis #4, we would say that the higher realms are not actually above matter, but within matter. The difference with hypothesis #4 is that it adds: the higher realms, when they manifest, manifest within matter, but in themselves, they can exist without gross-family matter.

Thus, etheric energies cannot manifest until gross matter assumes the complex form of a living cell (a quark is not complex enough to “contain” or funnel etheric, psychic, or causal energies). As gross form continues to complexify—driven by the fact that even the stones cry out and reach for God—then increasingly subtler dimensions of both energy and consciousness can shine through them, until the entire Kosmos shines with the radiance of the Spirit that is their Source and Suchness.

Accordingly, a subtle bodymind can migrate from one gross bodymind manifestation to another gross bodymind manifestation, much as heat can pass from one material object to another; but it requires a complex gross bodymind to manifest—and further, any truly *integral* spiritual realization would require the enlightenment of the gross bodymind, the subtle bodymind, and the causal bodymind—which is surely why the traditions maintain that only humans (and not angels, not gods, not



energies are postulated as real, concrete, detectable, often measurable—if subtler—energies, stops the whole conception from spinning off into the vaporware of pure metaphysics. If you read hypothesis #4 in conjunction with the first three hypotheses, I think you will see that they are at least consistent with each other; and thus I believe that an integral theory of subtle energies can accommodate the existence of transmigration, if we decide, on other grounds, that there is enough evidence to conclude that transmigration occurs.

## ***The Chakras***

In my opinion, the real test case of any theory of subtle energies is whether it can adequately explicate the chakras. The chakra system is both beautifully simple and bewilderingly complex, but the basics need to be fully accounted for by any theory of subtle energies.

Let me begin a suggested elucidation by referring to figure 10. Here we can see the relation of the three major family-energies in the *human* compound individual. Even in infancy, as we have seen, a human being wakes, dreams, and sleeps, and therefore even an infant has access to gross, subtle, and causal realms (although the specific contents of those realms will be supplied by the stages of development).

This is indicated in the figure. Even though these three family-energies emerged or manifested only during the course of evolution, by the time of human emergence, all three family-energies are therefore intrinsic to a human holon. That is, gross family-energies emerged with the Big Bang; subtle-family energies emerged with living cells; and causal-family energies emerged with triune brains. Because each stage transcends-and-includes its predecessors, all three family-energies come with a human body (which is, in fact, a conjoining of three bodies).

Therefore, even an infant human possesses waking, dreaming, and sleeping states, as well as correlative gross, subtle, and causal family-energies—even though, again, the contents of those consciousness states will be supplied by developmental stages, and the genus and species of subtle and causal energies will likewise be supplied by the specific stages of development (e.g., only as the human develops concrete operational and formal operational thinking will the T-1 fields begin to light up, etc.).

This means that, if the great traditions were really alive to these realities, they would maintain that the chakras represent or contain *both* the three great bodyminds (because all three states/bodies are present from infancy) AND the various stages of consciousness development. In other words, *each chakra* contains gross/subtle/causal energies, AND each chakra is a *stage* of development or evolution of consciousness. Needless to say, that is exactly what we find. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of variations on the chakra system found in the different traditions. I will again give merely an extremely abbreviated treatment, and simply use one example: the overall summary of the chakras given by Hiroshi Motoyama. (In the following quotes, I have substituted “subtle” for “astral,” which is a mere semantic shift to be consonant with the terms we have been using; the meaning is unaltered.)

On the one hand, the chakras are indeed *stages* of evolutionary unfolding: “During spiritual growth, a person must ascend the evolutionary ladder through these dimensions step by step, gradually increasing his awareness of the higher realms.”<sup>5</sup>

Now for the hard part. Each chakra must also contain gross, subtle, and causal *energies and* their correlative consciousness *states* (because even in the lowest stage of development—the first chakra—an infant wakes,

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<sup>5</sup> The following quotes are from *Theories of the Chakras*, pp. 21, 281, 282.

dreams, and sleeps, and possesses a gross, subtle, and causal body). In other words, in addition to being a specific stage of development, each of the 7 chakras must contain three body/energies and three mind/states. Motoyama: “The chakras are the centers of the body’s energy systems, which exist in each of the three different dimensions: gross, subtle, and causal.” That is, *each* chakra has those three dimensions, which is why each chakra acts as an intermediary between the gross, subtle, and causal energies circulating at that chakra: “The chakras act as intermediaries between the three dimensions [gross, subtle, causal], and can convert the energy of one dimension into that of another.”

Each of those 3 energy/body dimensions, *at every chakra*, also has its corresponding mind (i.e., a version of waking, dreaming, and sleeping states, correlated with gross, subtle, and causal energies, so that each of the 7 chakras contains gross bodymind, subtle bodymind, and causal bodymind). Therefore, each chakra acts as the intermediary not only between the 3 different types (or families) of bodies/energies present at each chakra, but between the 3 minds (or 3 great consciousness states) and their 3 corresponding bodies/energies *at each chakra*. Thus, each of “the chakras are also intermediaries between the physical [gross] body and [gross] consciousness, between the subtle body and [subtle] manas, and between the causal body and [causal] karana, that is, between the body and the mind of each dimension” (i.e., between the consciousness/state and the body/energy of the 3 great realms present at every chakra).

At the same time, as development or evolution occurs, each of the 7 chakras can be awakened and entered with consciousness, at which point they function as actual *stages* (or “steps,” as Motoyama calls them) of evolution. The overall picture of the chakras, then, is quite sophisticated, and, exactly like the Vedanta/Vajrayana “bare essentials” model of 3 states, 3 bodies, and 5 levels, the chakra system covers

virtually all of the important bases. As a matter of fact, it is simply a slightly expanded version of that model, with 7 levels instead of 5. But the overall picture is consistent: the 7 chakras are 7 levels/stages of development or evolution. Each of those levels exist in three major dimensions: gross, subtle, causal. In the gross dimension, the chakras are associated with bodily organs and systems, such as the genitals, the solar plexus, the heart, the larynx, and the pituitary gland. In the subtle dimensions, the chakras appear as they are most often depicted, which is as subtle centers of energy and consciousness aligned along the spine (with secondary meridians as found in, e.g., acupuncture). In the causal dimension, the 7 stages themselves are so subtle and so ethereal they are starting to lose definition, but they are still present as the causal ground and support of all of the junior levels and dimensions—what Vajrayana calls “the very subtle chakras.”

This means that each of the 7 chakras has a gross, subtle, and causal energy dimension. At Motoyama points out, each chakra acts as a transforming station between those 3 energies as they appear at its chakra (e.g., the throat chakra can convert gross energy from food into subtle energy, or convert causal energy into subtle energy, and so on). *Further*, each chakra mediates the energy/body with the consciousness/mind at its chakra (e.g., the throat chakra mediates the gross, subtle, and causal energies with the waking, dreaming, sleeping states *at that level*). In other words, each chakra contains, at its level, the family-gross bodymind, the family-subtle bodymind, and the family-causal bodymind; and it mediates both those 3 energies with each other AND the various energies with their corresponding minds.

*Therefore*, and lastly, each chakra also represents a stage of development or evolution (the chakras are a variation on the Great Chain of matter to body to mind to soul to spirit) and, accordingly, each chakra is a transforming station that mediates between the great states of consciousness (waking, dreaming, sleeping, all of which are present

from infancy and present at all of the chakras) and the actual contents, features, genus and species of both energy and consciousness as evolution or development occurs through those *7 major stages* or levels. The genus and species of consciousness and energy are *not* fully present or manifest at infancy, and consequently development is the emergence and maturation of 7 levels of both consciousness and its 7 correlative signature energies or bodies (or genus and species energy-fingerprints at each of the 7 chakras). I will pursue some of these details in an endnote for those interested.<sup>6</sup>

As I said, the chakra system is both beautifully simple and bewilderingly complex, but in the last analysis, it is the simplest model that can adequately handle three things that we know exist: states of consciousness, stages of consciousness, and their associated energies, all of which can rather seamlessly be woven together with such a model. At this point, anything more is likely unneeded; anything less is likely inadequate.

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<sup>6</sup> To give several details: the infant at birth has all 7 chakras, particularly in their gross forms, but the higher chakras are largely dormant (particularly in their subtler forms). Each chakra contains or transduces a waking, dreaming, and sleeping state; and each chakra has a corresponding gross, subtle, and causal family-energy surging through it (although, again, the higher chakras are relatively dormant, and the genus and species energies are relatively dormant). As growth and development occurs, successively higher chakras are awakened, although, inasmuch as each chakra exists in a gross, subtle, and causal dimension, those dimensions can sometimes develop unevenly. Many adults, for example, mature through the gross chakras but with little subtle chakra awakening (Leadbeater, for one, wrote extensively on this topic). See *Integral Psychology* for a discussion of “three-realm” development.

Whenever a chakra awakens, it takes on the content of the stage of development that is its station; and it mediates between the great states of waking, dreaming, sleeping (and their energies), whose contents are then being supplied by the actual stage of development itself (as we saw with the example of the contents of the dream state). Again, this is essentially the Vedanta/Vajrayana model, only sophisticated and fleshed out.