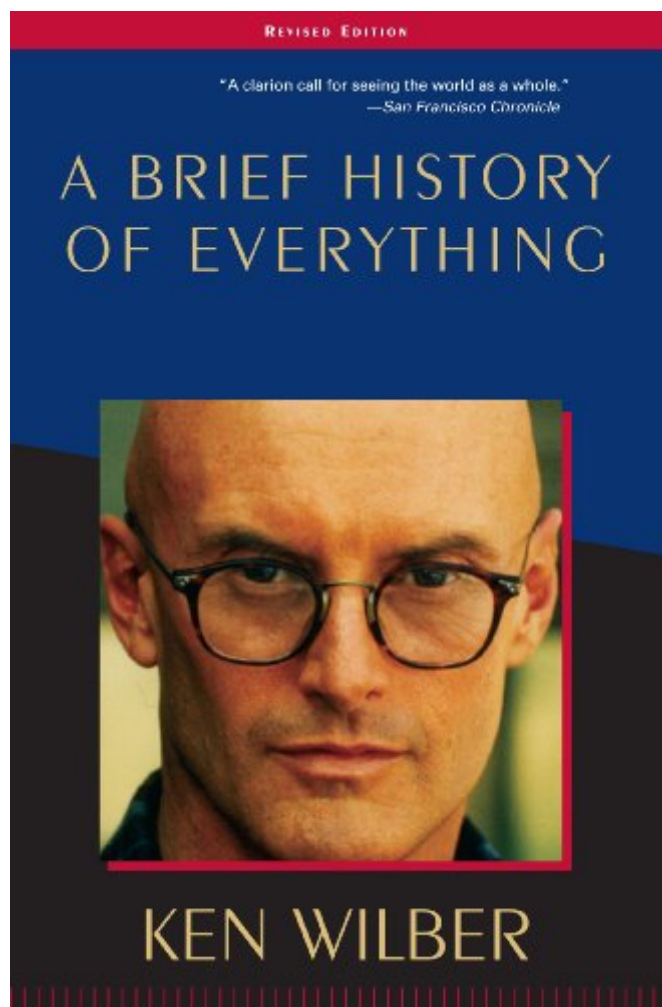


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A Brief History Of Everything: Revised Edition



Synopsis

A Brief History of Everything is an altogether friendly and accessible account of men and women's place in a universe of sex, soul, and spirit, written by an author of whom New York Times reporter Tony Schwartz says: "No one has described the path to wisdom better than Ken Wilber." Wilber examines the course of evolution as the unfolding manifestation of Spirit, from matter to life to mind, including the higher stages of spiritual development where Spirit becomes conscious of itself. In each of these domains, there are recurring patterns, and by looking closely at them, we can learn much about the predicament of our world and the direction we must take if "global transformation" is to become a reality. Wilber offers a series of striking and original views on many topics of current interest and controversy, including the gender wars, modern liberation movements, multiculturalism, ecology and environmental ethics, and the conflict between this-worldly and otherworldly approaches to spirituality. The result is an extraordinary and exhilarating ride through the Kosmos in the company of one of the great thinkers of our time.

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Customer Reviews

[For full review, see forthcoming, Torosyan, R. (2001). A system for everything: Book review of K.

Wilber's Brief History of Everything. New Ideas in Psychology, 19 (3).] Wilber manages to create a sweeping system for everything in life. He describes our spiritual evolution, and our dominant conceptual concerns: East and West, ancient and modern, individual and collective, physical and metaphysical. Wilber writes in an accessible common-sense style. He deliberately avoids a typical scholarly tone. While not free of some pretense at a monolithic voice, his work promotes rich conceptions of self-reflexiveness, interconnection, spirituality and empathy. Wilber shows how the major theories of biological, psychological, cognitive and spiritual development describe different versions of how to find "the truth." At the outset, Wilber refers to Douglas Adams's best-selling cult novel Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy. We desire final conclusions, just as Adams facetiously proposed the "answer that would completely explain 'God, life, the universe, and everything'" (p. xv). In the novel, that answer was "42," highlighting the absurdity of seeking such a final answer. Wilber's "answer," instead, is a framework for connecting evolutionary currents. At first, he uses a Socratic dialogue, beginning with "KW" for Wilber and "Q" for the questioner, be s/he reader, fan, or friend. Initially, this appears somewhat contrived. The text pretends to be an interview, when it is clearly the author's own highly controlled construction. Upon further reading, however, the stylistic device helps Wilber engage the reader in a dialogue.

This is a disappointing book. I had read a couple of Wilber's earlier books and liked them, especially the superb "Grace and Grit." At his best, he can be very good at explaining a nondualistic Eastern style philosophy. As the title suggests, this book is meant to introduce people to an all encompassing metaphysical system. No one could attempt such an enterprise without a little hubris. But why stop at a little? Wilber is fond of dropping the names of long lists of famous intellectuals whose work he finds consistent with, but subservient to, his system. Reality is sliced and diced in an endless taxonomy of levels, holons, stages, paradigm shifts, quadrants, centers, spheres and fulcrums before being reassembled into a nondualistic whole. Anyone satisfied with scientific explanations is dismissed as a "reductionist" holding what he calls "an insane world view." The science based world view is not so much argued against as it is insulted, dismissed and misrepresented. The most remarkable thing in this book is its bizarre description of neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory. He makes the astonishing claim that very few theorists believe in Darwinian evolution and that, "There is no evidence whatsoever for intermediate (fossil) forms." Wilber maintains it would take at least a hundred simultaneous beneficial mutations for something like a wing to evolve. He claims this would have to occur separately in both a male and a female who would then have to mate successfully. This is a grotesque caricature of Darwinian theory. Anyone who thinks it is adequate should buy this

book. Others should read Richard Dawkins "Climbing Mount Improbable." Wilber never names any scientists who advocate this version of evolution for the very good reason that there aren't any.

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