

Chapter 1: Hierarchy and Beyond

For most people the world consists of a multitude of things, objects, or entities, such as rocks, animals, and humans. All of these are then ordered in terms of higher and lower: animals are higher than rocks, humans are higher than animals, and those who believe in angels would say that angels are higher than humans. This kind of thinking and perception of reality is hierarchical because in a hierarchy there are entities at increasingly higher levels. In this chapter I demonstrate that in addition to hierarchical thinking and perception, there are still other ways of viewing and experiencing the Kosmos including ourselves, and that these other ways are fundamentally important for the beneficial transformation of ourselves and society.

Holons and Holarchy (Hierarchy)

Hierarchy is fundamental to Wilber's thinking and his AQAL map of the Kosmos. He emphasizes that by hierarchy he does not mean a dominator hierarchy in which an upper level entity such as the head of an organization dominates lower level entities such as his staff. By hierarchy he means a natural or normal hierarchy, which is a fundamental ordering principle. To distinguish this ordering principle from a dominator hierarchy, he prefers to call it holarchy, a term used by Arthur Koestler (see Wilber 2000a: 29). However, he also uses the terms holarchy and hierarchy interchangeably, since a holarchy is a natural or normal hierarchy. When I refer to hierarchy, I always understand it in the sense of holarchy, unless I specify otherwise.

What is a holarchy or hierarchy? A holarchy or hierarchy is a system of holons at different levels. In this system lower level holons compose a higher level holon, and a higher level holon comprises lower level holons. Any holon is a part with regard to the higher level holon it composes, and at the same time a whole with regard to the lower level holon(s) it comprises. Therefore, a holon is a part/whole. For example, an organ is a part of an organism, but a whole with regard to the cells of which it is comprised. Or a word is a part of a sentence, but a whole with regard to the letters that compose it.

According to Wilber, manifest reality is made of holons, part/wholes, at different levels that form a holarchy or hierarchy. In simple terms this means that reality is like Chinese boxes in which bigger boxes comprise smaller boxes and smaller boxes are contained in bigger boxes. Or, instead of referring to boxes, one could compare holons to circles or spheres so that the whole hierarchy consists of concentric circles or spheres, bigger ones enclosing smaller ones and smaller ones being enclosed by

bigger ones (see Figure 1–1). Accordingly, “the Kosmos is a series of nests within nests within nests indefinitely” (Wilber 2001: 40).

Although this view of reality is rather limiting as I shall point out below, it does give us various insights (see Wilber 2000a). For example, each higher level holon includes and transcends its lower level holons. Because of the transcendence, the higher level holon has emergent properties that are not found in its lower level holons. Thus, a bird can fly, but its cells cannot. This shows that reductionism is not generally tenable. According to reductionism, which nowadays is very popular in biology, medicine and other fields, it is often naively assumed that a mere knowledge of molecules such as DNA or cellular function will allow us to understand the whole organism. But such knowledge of lower level holons does not necessarily give us an insight into the emergent properties of the higher level holon. Hence, a knowledge of all genes of an organism will not lead to an understanding of that organism, although it may be helpful.

Wilber (1998: 53) recognizes that Spirit or ultimate reality is not hierarchical. It is not hierarchical because it is not qualifiable in mental terms, that is, it cannot be captured through words and concepts. Hence, if nothing can be said about ultimate reality, it cannot be said that it is hierarchical. However, Wilber (1998: 53) insists that ultimate reality manifests itself as a hierarchy. Below I will show that we can interpret or think about manifest reality in a hierarchical or nonhierarchical way. Maybe one could even say that depending on our mode of thinking we create a hierarchical or nonhierarchical manifestation of the unnamable unmanifest. In any case, our perception of reality is to some extent dependent on our mode of thinking.

Beyond Hierarchy

Now let me demonstrate by means of three examples of hierarchies from simple versions of Wilber's map how hierarchies and hierarchical thinking can be transcended, or, in other words, how we can see the manifest world (that to most people including Wilber appears hierarchical) in a nonhierarchical way.

Science:

Figure 1–1 represents a scientific hierarchical view of the organism. According to this common view that can be found in almost any standard biology text and that is also accepted by Wilber, atoms form molecules which form cells which form organisms.

organism
cell
molecule
atom

Figure 1–1. Hierarchy of entities (holons) of successive levels of organization in an organism

Another way of representing the hierarchy of Figure 1–1 would have been in terms of concentric circles as shown for the hierarchy of Figure 1–2 below (see also Wilber 2007: 31). Additional levels could have been added such as tissues and organs between the cell and organism levels, and two types of cells could have been distinguished (procaryotes and eucaryotes as indicated by Wilber in Figure I -3) Also, an environmental hierarchy, representing the correlates of the fourth quadrant, could have been placed alongside this hierarchy (see Figure I–3 and Wilber 2000a: 87-93). However, for the following discussion it will be sufficient to consider the simple hierarchy of Figure 1–1. It is considered very basic and is usually taken for granted as self-evident. Wilber (2001: 39) wrote: “organisms actually contain cells, which actually contain molecules, which actually contain atoms. You can even see this directly with a microscope. That hierarchy is one of actual embrace.” Can we indeed see this? If we look at sections of plant organs at low magnification, cells do indeed appear to be rather evident. So holons appear to be directly visible and since holons are the basis of the hierarchy, at least the basis seems justified. However, if we study sections of the same plant organs under the electron microscope (or at very high magnification under light microscopes), the situation changes profoundly. Now we can actually see that the discrete cells of the low magnification view are interconnected by many strands, called plasmodesmata. Therefore, a minute traveler of macromolecular size could traverse the whole plant organism through thousands of so-called cells without encountering a barrier. That traveler could only conclude that there is undivided wholeness, not an assemblage of separate cells or holons. However, since the nucleus of the cells is too large to pass through the interconnecting bridges (plasmodesmata), for the nucleus as a structure there is a discontinuity between cells. But this discontinuity does not exist for the molecular products of the nucleus. Hence, it is a matter of perspective whether we see cells as separate entities or not. In any case, we cannot ignore that there is an underlying wholeness. Thus, the concept of the symplast “describes the entire living mass of the plant as a continuous unit, contrary to the idea that cells are separate individuals” (Moore et al., 1995: 69). Therefore, in contrast to cell theory, an organismal theory has been proposed, at least for plants (Kaplan and Hagemann 1991). According

to this theory, the partial walls between so-called cells are seen as providing a form of endoskeleton for the plant, not cellularity as it is commonly understood: cells are no longer the basic units (holons) of plants.

Animal cells differ in several ways from plant cells, but they are also interconnected. These interconnections, called gap junctions, are much finer than the plasmodesmata in plants. Nonetheless, they provide a continuum between the so-called cells and therefore the organismal theory could also be applied to animal cells. But it seems that the vast majority of biologists is not inclined to accept the organismal theory either for plants or animals. They are not willing to give up cell theory, which is considered a cornerstone of biology and the fundamental unit of cell biology, a major branch of modern biology.

However, it is not necessary to give up cell theory in favor of the organismal theory. These two theories can exist side by side as different perspectives of the same reality: one emphasizing the underlying continuity and the other a partial compartmentalization into cells. Thus, the two theories that appear contradictory actually complement each other and together they provide a broader and richer view of reality than each one alone.

How does this relate to hierarchical thinking? If we consider the organismal theory, cells can no longer function as fundamental units (holons) at one level of the hierarchy. As a consequence the hierarchy collapses at that level. What appeared hierarchical is no longer hierarchical. Thus a nonhierarchical view emerges. This does not mean, however, that therefore the hierarchical view at this level is totally wrong. It can still be maintained as another perspective based on the limited validity of cell theory. As cell theory and the organismal theory can coexist as complementary theories, so the hierarchical and the nonhierarchical views can also coexist and complement each other. I would say that the nonhierarchical view is perhaps more encompassing since it is based on the underlying continuity within the organism, but that does not totally invalidate the hierarchical perspective.

The major conclusion we can draw from this insight is that reality is not just nests within nests within nests, as Wilber (2001: 40) put it. Reality is also a continuum. Where almost everybody, including Wilber, thought that we have a clear-cut example of holons and a hierarchy, both of them vanished, at least from one perspective. So it seems that we cannot make universal blanket statements such as that manifest reality is fundamentally hierarchical, but we have to appreciate that different perspectives

illuminate different aspects of reality. This will have major consequences when we devise general maps of reality, as I shall demonstrate in the second part of this book.

Now one could argue that the breakdown of exclusive hierarchical thinking at one level such as the cellular level does not automatically apply to all other levels of the hierarchy of Figure 1–1. This is, of course, correct. But the hierarchy can also be collapsed at other levels. Molecules such as water molecules as well as other molecules may at least under certain circumstances unite into a larger continuum that transcends individual molecules, which then cease to be holons.

At the atomic and subatomic levels, David Bohm distinguished two kinds of order: an explicate and an implicate order. In the explicate order there are holons such as subatomic particles, but in the implicate order, which is like a sea of physical energy from which the explicate order arises, there is only “undivided wholeness” (Bohm 1995, 1996). Thus, as at the cellular level, there are two complementary views: reality composed of holons that provide a basis for a holarchy and undivided wholeness, a continuum, unity, that does not fragment reality into holons and thus does not provide a basis for a hierarchical view. (Wilber criticized David Bohm, but Falk (2006) showed that his critique is based on misrepresentation of Bohm’s ideas)

The same conclusion can also be reached at the level of the whole organism because it can also be seen as a nonentity (non-holon). If we think of the human organism, it is evident that it is not separate from the environment. Air with oxygen enters deeply into the lungs and from there into the bloodstream that circulates through the whole body. In addition, there are many other ways in which the human body is continuous with the environment. For example, the human body can be seen as an electromagnetic field that is continuous with the electromagnetic field of the environment and the whole universe. According to Laszlo (2004), the human organism—like everything else—is completely integrated into the A-field, which is the cosmic quantum vacuum, a superdense and superfluid sea of energy and information that integrates all other fields. Thus, the A-field “connects organisms and minds in the biosphere, and particles, stars, and galaxies throughout the cosmos” (Laszlo 2004: 112). Where then is the boundary between organism and environment? There is none in an absolute sense as Wilber (1979) himself has pointed out in his book *No Boundary*. Consequently, the organism is not a separate entity (holon). Organism and environment form a continuum. In general, if there are no boundaries between holons, holons cease to exist as holons. And if there are no holons, there cannot be a holarchy or hierarchy.

We can now conclude that where Wilber and others could only see a holarchy of holons, we can also see a continuum: a continuum between the so-called holons and a continuum between the levels of the so-called holarchy. The recognition of this continuum is of profound importance because it removes barriers that create separation, isolation, and alienation in many ways. Nonetheless, there is also a limited usefulness for thinking in terms of a holarchy. As pointed out above, it represents one aspect of reality and it is useful and convenient for communication. For practical orientation in this world, we need reference points and hierarchies provide that. The danger is that the habitual use of language referring to entities (holons) and hierarchies may mislead us into believing that holons and hierarchies are the only ordering principle of the manifest world as Wilber and our dominant culture take it for granted.

The spectrum of consciousness:

Figure 1–2 shows the spectrum of consciousness according to a common version of the Great Nest of Being with five levels: matter, body, mind, soul, and spirit. Since each level is demarcated by a circle, this presentation indicates well the nested relationship between the levels. Note that according to this hierarchical view, spirit includes and transcends all other levels, that is, matter, body, mind and soul. It is not the opposite of matter as in many dualistic systems. In this respect the hierarchical view is inclusive. It has, however, a negative consequence: since a hierarchy is asymmetrical, spirit completely includes the lower levels, but the lower levels do not completely include spirit. Hence, matter, body, mind and soul are not completely spiritual, not completely sacred. Especially, body and matter are the most inferior holons in the hierarchy. This conclusion has had disastrous consequences in many ways. It has often led to a devaluation of the body from a spiritual and religious perspective, and it has contributed to the view that, since nature is spiritually inferior, it can be exploited—the result: the environmental crisis. This shows that hierarchical thinking is not only an academic matter, but can have profound and disastrous consequences for the planet, society, and the individual.

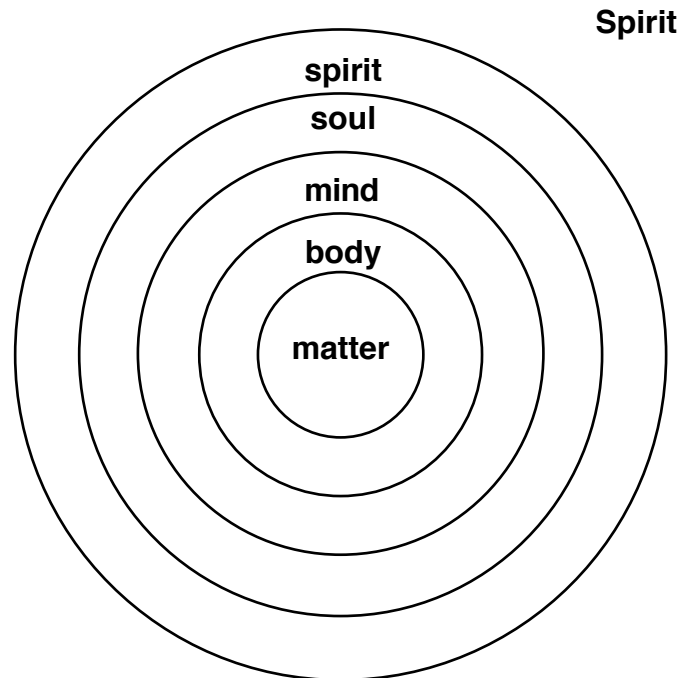


Figure 1–2. “The Great Nest of Being” or “The Great Hierarchy” (see also Figure 12–1 in Wilber 2000a: 444).

Wilber is aware of this problem and for that reason he makes a distinction between spirit (with a small s), which is the most inclusive level of the Great Hierarchy, and Spirit (with a capital S), which is the nondual ground of all Being. “Spirit is thus both the highest wave (purely transcendental) and the ever-present ground of all the waves (purely immanent), going beyond All, embracing All...The patriarchal religions tend to emphasize the transcendental “otherworldly” aspect of spirit; and the matriarchal, neopagan religions tend to emphasize the fully immanent or “this worldly” aspect of Spirit” (Wilber 2000d: 8). As indicated in Figure 1–2, Wilber places Spirit outside the concentric circles of the Great Nest which means that it is the ground from which the whole hierarchy with all its levels emerges (one could imagine it as being represented by the paper on which all the levels of the hierarchy are present). According to this view, Spirit resides in everything, even a grain of sand—everything is sacred. Unfortunately, Spirit (with a capital S) is not included in Wilber’s map of the Kosmos (Figure I–1), but is included in some of his other figures that are similar to Fig. 1–2.

As the Great Nest of Being, Wilber’s map of the Kosmos is strictly hierarchical; it does not represent the nonhierarchical perspective of manifest reality. What is this nonhierarchical perspective in consciousness in the interior-individual dimension of his map? It is, for example, a simple experience: when I look into your eyes, I do not only see a part of your body; I also look into your mind and soul and we can be spirit. It is an

experience of oneness and wholeness, an undivided wholeness. There is no fragmentation into holons and holarchical levels. We experience a sense of unboundedness that extends beyond the reaches of the corporeal reality visible to the human eye. (As I shall explain below, I refer to this as nonhierarchical holism in terms of undivided wholeness).

Culture:

Culture is the third dimension in the Big Three besides science and consciousness of the self. In Wilber's four quadrant map (Fig. I-1) we find culture in the lower left quadrant that represents the interior-collective dimension of the Kosmos. Figure 1-3 shows a portion of the cultural hierarchy from Figure I-1.

centauric
rational
mythic
magic
archaic

Figure 1-3. Part of the cultural hierarchy of the lower left quadrant of the version of Wilber's map that is shown in Figure I-3. The centauric level of the hierarchy is correlated with the level of vision-logic in the upper left quadrant. This hierarchy could have also been represented in terms of concentric circles as Fig. 1-2 above.

According to this hierarchy (that could also be presented in terms of concentric circles like Fig. 1-2), the uppermost level of the centauric, which is a cultural expression of vision-logic, comprises the rational level, which includes the mythic level, which contains the magic level, which envelops the archaic level. Since a hierarchy is asymmetrical, the reverse is not the case: the archaic level does not include any of the others; the magical level does not comprise the three levels above it; the mythic level does not contain the rational and centauric; and the rational level fails to envelop the centauric. This means that according to this hierarchical view, cultures at the lower levels are deprived of the upper levels. Is this a realistic picture? I think that even at the lower levels there might have been at least traces of the higher levels. Wilber (1998: 93), referring to Habermas, points out that in the earlier foraging tribes "formal operations were available to a significant number of men and women", and he adds that "it is quite likely that a chieftain would have to take multiple perspectives in order to coordinate them: vision-logic" (Wilber 1998: 93). He also admits that shamans could access at least the psychic transpersonal level and contrasts this to the low level of the

average person. However, Shinzen Young (1997, Session 23) thinks that a significant number of people in tribal cultures were enlightened.

Regardless of what percentage of the tribal population reached transpersonal levels of awareness, the above average and the average modes of consciousness interacted and thus created some sort of continuum between the two. And even for the average people that were relatively untouched by the above average mode of consciousness it is hard to imagine that they were 100% divorced from the higher transpersonal levels of consciousness. Therefore, it makes sense to conclude that even at the archaic and magic stages also higher levels of consciousness were present in the culture.

Wilber does not completely exclude the possibility that levels may overlap. For example, referring to Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Wilber 2005d, Disc 2, 10), he pointed out that in someone's morality 50% came from stage 4, 25% from stage 3, and 25% from stage 5. He adds, however, that it is impossible that someone whose morality is at stage 1 may have peak experiences of stage 5. I do not want to be so categorical: I can envisage that even at stage 1, the lowest stage of moral development, there can be at least a germ, if not more, of the higher stages including stage 5 and above. Consequently, there is the possibility that all levels are united and as a result the hierarchy, which requires distinct levels, dissolves (see also the section on Yin-Yang in Chapter 2). This does not mean that therefore the hierarchy is useless. On the contrary, levels can conveniently be used as markers and the hierarchy as a whole sheds important light on cultural evolution. But for a more comprehensive understanding the hierarchical view needs to be complemented by the nonhierarchical view.

In other words, the hierarchical view shows us one aspect of cultural evolution and the nonhierarchical view another. The latter does not entail the fragmentation inherent in hierarchies and holons that is reinforced by the use of language and therefore tends to become habitual. The power of habits should not be underestimated. Habits form deep roots. Profound transformation may be required to uproot them. Even in science revolutionary views often meet enormous resistance.

Holism

"Holism" can have different meanings depending on what one means by a "whole". A whole can be a summation of things, entities, parts. Such a whole has little or no integration and therefore barely merits to be called a whole; it is more a heap than a whole.

The whole, or, more correctly, the part/whole or holon in hierarchies and Wilber's AQAL map, is more integral: holons of the lower level in the hierarchy form a holon at a higher level and this higher level holon is not only a summation of the lower level holons, but an integration that leads to emergent properties, which are not present in the lower level holons. For example, when hydrogen and oxygen unite to form water, properties emerge that are not present in hydrogen and oxygen. As everybody knows, water is very different from its constituent parts, that is, the lower level holons hydrogen and oxygen. Thus, as we go up in the hierarchy, emergence occurs at each level, that is, each level includes and transcends the lower levels. For example, the mind has properties that are not found in the body and the soul goes beyond the mind.

Although holism in terms of hierarchy shows integration, this integration is limited for two reasons: 1. Holons as the basic units of a hierarchy are separate entities at any level of the hierarchy: for example, cells are usually perceived as separate entities at the cellular level of the hierarchy; 2. Any one level in the hierarchy is separate or distinct from other levels. Thus, fragmentation occurs in a hierarchy in two ways: through holons and levels (such as the horizontal fragmentation into cells and the vertical fragmentation into the levels of cell and organism). I have already pointed out how the fragmentation into cells occurs: the continuum of the living body of an organism such as a plant is fragmented into cells through boundaries that do not really exist. It is only because of these imposed boundaries that we can distinguish the levels of the cells and the organism. Otherwise the two are one, and the basis for a hierarchy vanishes. To refer to cells as holons, although it sounds holistic, obviously is not very holistic because it disregards the integration of the so-called cells. The same applies to other holons. And the fragmentation of reality into levels also is not very holistic, although the emergence of novel properties at each level points to integration and in this sense is holistic. Thus, holism based on hierarchy is only a very limited holism, only a little holistic. But as Wilber himself noted, "a little bit of wholeness is better than none at all" (Wilber 2001: XII). I agree.

Wilber (2000a,b) pointed out that holons have the capacity of communion, that is, they can be more or less integrated. If the integration is complete, the boundaries between holons are absent, which means that there are no holons and therefore no basis for the construction of a holarchy as I indicated above. An example of this is the implicate order at the atomic and subatomic levels. In the implicate order there is only "undivided wholeness" (Bohm 1996, 1996), not separate particles as in the explicate

order. It is interesting that Wilber actually acknowledges this “coherence, unity and wholeness of the physical plane” (Wilber 1999: 275).

Wilber also pointed out some integration between different levels of hierarchies. For this reason he called the levels also waves to indicate that they “interpenetrate and overlap (like colors in a rainbow) and are not rigid rungs in a ladder” (Wilber 2000a: 215). This sounds as if he recognized a continuum: waves, and especially overlapping waves, are continuous. But if continuity is admitted, then we lose distinct levels and the latter are a necessity for hierarchical thinking. So does this mean that Wilber himself is questioning and moving away from strictly hierarchical thinking? I shall return to this question in Chapter 2 in the section on “Hierarchy as a Fuzzy Set”.

In any case, there is a kind of holism that is still more holistic than the holism in terms of hierarchy (holarchy): it integrates holons at any level to such an extent that they vanish as entities, and it abolishes levels which means that it goes beyond hierarchies, emphasizing instead continuity, oneness, or “undivided wholeness” (to use David Bohm’s expression in a more general sense). In other words, nonhierarchical holism in terms of undivided wholeness does not fragment reality into holons and levels of a holarchy. Whether this nonholarchical holism is workable for all of reality or only some areas such as an organism (as I have shown above) remains to be seen. In any case, the well-documented organismal view that complements cell theory may serve as a model to see ever larger domains of reality in terms of undivided wholeness and to remind us that holarchical thinking, although useful, obscures the undivided wholeness. But even if nonholarchical holism should remain restricted in scope, it provides an important alternative to the hierarchical view, for example, as far as an organism is concerned.

Wilber (2000c: 118) also wrote that he sees the manifest world as “an interwoven network of interpenetrating processes or holons, which is indeed a type of holistic model”. I think it is a holistic model that goes beyond a model that dissects the manifest world into holons and levels. If it is admitted that holons are interpenetrating, then they may cease to exist as separate holons that are required for a hierarchy and we can no longer say that “reality is made of holons” (Wilber 1998: 61). If we see manifest reality as a network of interpenetrating processes, then it is even more obvious that it is a whole, a continuum, a unity, because processes by their very nature are interconnecting, and a network of processes is an undivided whole, not a set of Chinese boxes or nests within nests within nests.

Wilber (1999: 469) also wrote: "A radically separate and isolated and bounded entity does not exist anywhere." In his early neo-romantic phase (of which he is now very critical), he even wrote a book entitled *No Boundary*. However, this does not mean that reality is totally homogenous. It shows differentiation and because of this differentiation we can abstract entities or holons. For example, the waves of the ocean are all one with each other and the ocean, but we can nonetheless distinguish them. As long as we keep in mind the oneness, the distinction of waves is acceptable and may be useful. Furthermore, it represents the differentiation of reality. Thus, the waves are the many, and the ocean is the oneness. What complicates the matter is that the many are not given—they are the result of abstraction. And usually there is more than one way of abstracting the many. For example, in our culture, we usually divide the spectrum of the rainbow into red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet. But this is not the only way to abstract colors. There are African tribes that do it differently and the boundaries they draw do not necessarily coincide with boundaries between the colors we distinguish (see, e.g., Sattler 1986: 74). Another example is the abstraction of organs in a flowering plant such as a tulip. In textbooks it is usually stated that flowering plants *consist of* three kinds of organs: roots, stems, and leaves. This gives the impression that these organs are given in nature and obscures that fact that they are the result of abstraction. In the plant there is no line that separates roots, stems, and leaves from each other. The plant is a continuous whole. We divide it into roots, stems, and leaves by drawing boundaries that do not exist. Nonetheless, these boundaries are not totally arbitrary. To some extent they reflect the differentiation of plants. But distinguishing roots, stems, and leaves is not the only way of indicating the differentiation. There are other abstractions; other ways of dividing the plant that are unknown to most people including most botanists and textbook authors (see, e.g., Cusset 1982). As one says: there are many ways to cut up the cake—which means that there are many ways to cut up the oneness of reality. Usually we have been conditioned to see just one way of abstraction and then we often forget that the entities or holons are abstractions. Thus, we often forget—or never re-membered—that the "I" or self is an abstraction. In reality there is no boundary between the "I" and its environment that stretches to the infinity of the Kosmos. Consequently, "I" and the Kosmos are one. If, however, we want to indicate the differentiation, then there are many ways to draw boundaries such as the intestinal lining (the inner skin), the outer skin, the various layers of the aura, and so on (see, e.g., Brennan 1988). Canny (1981: 2) asked: "Where is the boundary of a dog? Where you pat it? Or the territory it defends against other dogs? Or how far away your neighbors can hear it barking? Or how far off it can follow your scent? To bacteria its boundaries

are mostly internal: the lining of its gut; to viruses they are cell membranes. So do not stand on your dignity about the real existence of any boundary; it is in your mind. Others may see important divisions of quite other kinds.” Consequently, there are many ways to divide the Kosmos into holons, and thus there are many ways to construct holarchies. Each of them reflects an aspect of reality. But none of them reflects the underlying undivided wholeness. And for this reason we also need a holism in the sense of undivided wholeness. However, ultimately, language is a barrier to the most inclusive holism in terms of undivided wholeness because language inevitable involves fragmentation. But even if a holism in terms of undivided wholeness cannot grasp the whole of the Kosmos all at once, even it represents only the organismal view of the organism, it already goes beyond the confines of a holarchical view of the organism. If in addition it embraces the unity of the organism and its environment, the unity of the observer and the observed, it is still more inclusive. And thus it is an important complement to holarchical holism.

Holism, Holiness, and Health

In ecology and environmentalism we refer to the 3 R's: reduce, reuse, and recycle. Implementing these 3 R's has become extremely important for the health of our society and the whole planet.

In science/philosophy and spirituality we should draw more attention to the 3 H's: holism (referring to wholeness), holiness (referring to the sacred), and health. These 3 H's are deeply interconnected, and according to common dictionaries such as Webster's, the words 'whole', 'holy' and 'healthy' even have the same etymological root. Thus, a discussion of wholeness and issues concerning holism are directly relevant to our deepest experience of existence and our health.

Being whole in the widest and deepest sense, so that we feel one with the Kosmos, even in its relative manifestation, evokes a feeling of awe and reverence that can be seen as an expression of the holy or sacred. Being one with the Kosmos means being in tune with the Kosmos, flowing naturally with the fluid Kosmos. According to Chinese medicine, health is the harmonious flow of energy, whereas sickness is due to blockage in this flow. Consequently, health like holiness is an expression of the harmonious cosmic oneness in which the microkosm of the individual mirrors the macrokosm so that they are one.

Since holarchical holism integrates holons and levels in the holarchy, it is a first step toward the expression of wholeness. However, since holons and levels are still separate to at least some extent, this kind of holism is still a rather limited holism and therefore can bring forth only partial holiness and limited health. On the other hand, in as much as the nonholarchical holism I discussed above can overcome the fragmentation into holons and levels, it can lead us towards better health and a more profound experience of the sacred. A still more complete experience of the sacred, which might be better called a sacred beingness, happens in the nondual awareness of the Ultimate or One Taste (Wilber 2000c, 2005d) that is beyond relative reality I discussed in this chapter.

Conclusions

Although I did not examine all hierarchies and all levels of hierarchies, I hope that I have demonstrated in general and through specific examples that hierarchical thinking can have shortcomings and limitations. Nonhierarchical thinking can overcome at least some of these shortcomings and limitations, specifically the fragmentation into holons and levels. In this sense nonhierarchical thinking is beyond hierarchies. Now, Wilber might argue that “beyond” entails ranking and that ranking is falling back into hierarchical thinking. But the “beyond hierarchy” does not include hierarchy and therefore is not hierarchical according to Wilber’s definition of hierarchy.

“Beyond”, in the context of this chapter and this book, also means that we are beyond being *caught* in one way of thinking such as hierarchical thinking, assuming, as Wilber does, that “the only way you get a holism is via a holarchy” (Wilber 2000b: 25). As I pointed out repeatedly—because this is a very important point—I am not against hierarchies. I recognize their value as an ordering principle and a means to hierarchical holism that reveals emergence, an important phenomenon that often is not recognized in modern reductionist science and flatland views. However, **hierarchical thinking is not the only way. We can also think in a nonhierarchical way and this kind of thinking reveals another important aspect of manifest reality that cannot be grasped through hierarchical thinking.** Therefore, “beyond” means that we embrace different kinds of thinking and do not get caught just in one way. Then hierarchical and nonhierarchical thinking can complement each other and together these two ways of thinking can provide a richer and deeper understanding of manifest reality than one alone. I shall return to the importance of complementarity in Chapter 6

In conclusion, I would not say that “the Kosmos *is* a series of nests within nests within nests indefinitely” (Wilber 2001a: 40, italics mine). Wilber himself, in terms of his

Integral Post-Metaphysics, may no longer claim that the manifest Kosmos actually *is* holonic because according to Integral Post-Metaphysics, “in the manifest world, there are no perceptions, only perspectives” (Wilber 2006: 255), which makes the holonic Kosmos also a perspective. Unfortunately, Wilber does not seem to allow any other perspective in this regard. In contrast, in this chapter and the next I tried to show that there are indeed other important perspectives. With regard to this chapter, I would say that from a hierarchical perspective the Kosmos appears as a series of nests within nests within nests; and from a nonhierarchical perspective the Kosmos appears as a continuum, a unity, and other ways that will be examined in the following chapters. Continuum does not necessarily mean that therefore manifest reality is like a homogenized soup. It is differentiated and therefore it is possible to draw boundaries that are not totally arbitrary, but reflect to some extent the differentiation that can be used to construct hierarchies. But continuity and oneness are nonetheless fundamental.

Holism and wholeness are related to health and holiness, the sacred, and therefore different notions of holism may affect our health and our experience of the sacred. In as much as the nonholarchical holism I discussed above can overcome the fragmentation into holons and levels, it can lead us towards better health and a more profound experience of the sacred. A still more complete experience of the sacred (if we can call it an experience), happens in the nondual awareness of the Ultimate or One Taste (Wilber 2000c, 2005d) that is beyond relative reality I discussed in this chapter.