# A Cosmic Speculation about The Purpose of Humans in Universe

Posted on 19 November 2010 by **cjf**

In Buckminster Fuller's essay Guinnea Pig B, he lays out the hypothesis that the purpose of Humans in Universe is to support the integrity of cosmic evolution:

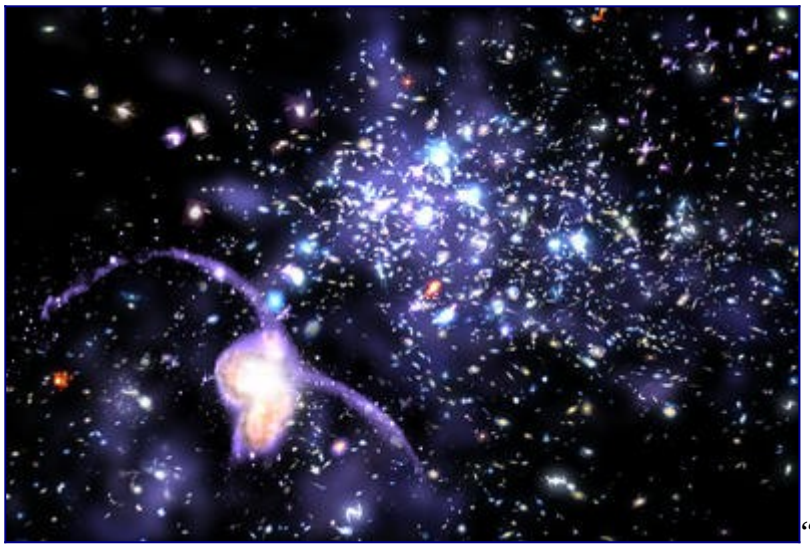
> In our immediate need to discover more about ourselves we also note that what is common to all human beings in all history is their ceaseless confrontation by problems, problems, problems. We humans are manifestly here for problem-solving and, if we are any good at problem-solving, we don't come to utopia, we come to more difficult problems to solve. That apparently is what we're here for, so I therefore conclude that we humans are here for local information-gathering and local problem-solving with our minds having access to the design principles of the Universe and — I repeat — thereby finally discover that we are most probably here for local information-gathering and local-Universe problem-solving in support of the integrity of eternally regenerative Universe.
> —R. Buckminster Fuller

This precept of the function of Humans in Universe is, to me, one of the most deeply motivating responsibilities that I have ever taken on as a working hypothesis. I love the way it engages me as a co-designer in Universe. And I love the way in which it inspires me to a higher purpose.

Recently I read a National Geographic news article that Time Will End in Five Billion Years, Physicists Predict and my mind went into a tizzy. The following fairy tale emerged:

## A Cosmic Evolution Fantasy

Captain's log of Brenda S_____ dated 5,000,002,010 CE (that is, 5 three-illion, 2 one-illion and 10 years CE).



"I have just returned to Earth after a 7,042 year survey of our galaxy cluster testing the integrity of the fabric of space-time throughout the isotropic vector matrix. What a trip! Our team has verified that all the millennia of research and development by countless humans and other sentients throughout Universe has succeeded in

holding time together: the Universe will continue for the foreseeable future! We have verified that all vital parameters for managing the entirety of the cosmos are within fail-safe tolerances!

“Of course, there are a few issues (there always are); we found a few anomalies and recent theoretical articles suggest that in another 2-4 three-illion years we will probably need to embark on another major collective problem-solving project to re-design Universe for the next phase of cosmic evolution. But since life expectancy is currently only 700,000 (700 one-illion) years, that project will be left to tomorrow’s youth. I hope to help them get started, but now I’m back on Earth to rest, catch my breath, take stock of the project that has consumed the last 600,000 years of my life, write my magnum opus on the cosmic syntropy/entropy ratio, and celebrate the success of my biggest scientific accomplishment: the proof that the largest engineering project in the history of sentient life has succeeded!”

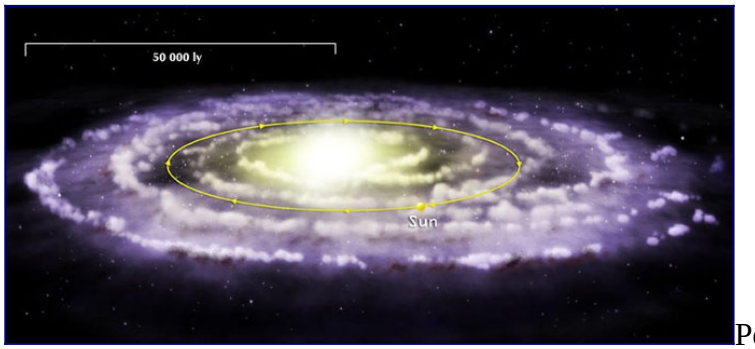
[A quick note about entropy and syntropy. Entropy is a complex and subtle concept. For the purposes of this fantasy, you can think of it as the amount of disorder in a system. The famous second law of thermodynamics observes that entropy is always increasing and by extrapolation there is a long history positing the heat death of the Universe. Syntropy is the order or “negative entropy” in a system. Syntropy is often associated with life which can take disordered soil and water add sunlight and build beautiful flowers. Buckminster Fuller also associated syntropy with notions like ephemeralization where human design tends to provide more and more capability with less and less material, energy, and time. These ideas are not typically factored into computations in the physical sciences. But I’ll let Brenda finish telling the story. …]

“It is funny to think back 5 three-illion (that’s 5 billion in the short scale) years to when Earth’s aborigines first gleaned their purpose in Universe: to be its stewards and to take on the glorious role of individual initiative-takers serving as trimtabs and linchpins in support of the integrity of *cosmic evolution*. I suppose we should thank R. Buckminster Fuller for making that great insight so palpable even though by now most of his ideas have proven too quaint to be of much use in present day science or engineering (of course, several of his ideas still provide good rough first-order approximations, but we’ve learned a lot in the last 5 three-illion years!). He was also an early supporter of the hypothesis that syntropy can overcome entropy which has become the heart of my life’s work.

> 541.16 The excess effectiveness of gravity over radiation equals the excess of cosmic integrative forces over cosmic disintegrative forces. This gain of syntropy over entropy is invested in the constant intertransformations and transpositionings of eternally regenerative Scenario Universe.
> –R. Buckminster Fuller

“I’ve dedicated my life to understanding and measuring just how minute is the excess effectiveness of syntropy over entropy. The story is adequately told by the history of our major “plagues”. First, from the 1300s–1720s we had the Black Death until health and sanitation practices could meet human needs in the same way that rapidly evolving science and technology could expand the food supply. Then in the 2020s-2210s we had the great ecological collapse where we lost 90 cities and nearly 2 billion people before *emergence from emergency* spurred us to learn how to effectively engineer Earth’s ecosystems. Eventually, we were able to sustainably support all human needs but it required a major overhaul of the economic system which had previously favored short-sighted profit over the critical importance of a long-term perspective.

“The clarion call of cosmic evolution seems to never end. So when Humanity finally tuned in to the imminent, long predicted demise of Earth due to our Sun’s overheating 4 three-illion years ago, we undertook solar system scale design operations to fix it. Our ignorance led to the loss of a number of planetary and asteroid colonies. But the solar system re-engineering campaign was ultimately effective, Earth was spared and the regenerativity of life continued.




Perhaps, the most devastating “birthing” of a new era was the third major galaxy-scale engineering project when we lost a few star systems (9 three-illion sentients, mostly human, perished). Fortunately, the just completed, first ever attempted, Universe-scale re-design project has succeeded! Of course, it took hundreds of generations to design and dozens more to implement with countless trials and errors along the way. Everyone understood that the consequence of failure would be the end of time itself. So every resource was dedicated to squeezing every last unit of syntropy out of every energy source and life form throughout the cosmos. In the end it was the first “new era” project ever undertaken with no serious unexpected consequences and no major loss of life!

“The story of sentient life’s quest to meet the succession of greater and greater cosmic design challenges that ushered in each era is remarkable in many ways. For one, the bone-chilling enormity of the consequences of failure were daunting to the first people who identified each new challenge. History records that many found the prospect too enormous and psychologically “checked out”. They didn’t realize that unexpected resources would appear once you start asking the right questions! Even when large segments of society started moving diligently toward the solution, their conditioned reflexes honed during the previous era of technological development hindered clarity of thought allowing mistake to compound with mistake until each plague became unavoidable. It was fascinating for me to discover how all this can be explained by the fact that the cosmic syntropy/entropy ratio is less than 4 joules per 10-illion gram-kelvins! But you’ll have to wait for my book for the details.”

## Reflecting on a Cosmic Evolution Fantasy

Back to reality. Of course, I have no idea what the future holds. And I’m not confident that this off-the-cuff “syntropy/entropy ratio” is the right concept let alone if it’s meaningful. But I like the idea that the function of humans in Universe is to solve design problems with greater and greater scope. It has been our history. It may be our future to see our design capability develop beyond the city-scale to the global-scale to the solar system scale and ultimately to the cosmic scale. It is an exciting quest … one that I’m proud to be a part of.

Some results in physics suggest that Sun and then eventually time itself will wind down and end. But we have split the atom, put men on the moon, keep a team of people in space all the time, populated a world with more than 1,000 billionaires, invented airplanes that can be powered by bicycle, computers that have automated previously laborious tasks, an Internet where anyone can

learn about almost anything and communicate with almost anyone. We've nearly eliminated hunger and slavery. We completely eliminated smallpox and rinderpest. War and violence are the lowest in history. Most of our poor live lives that the Queen of England could have only dreamed of 100 years ago. Is the integrity of **eternally regenerative Universe** really impossible? Might it be that the real function of Humans in Universe is to support **cosmic evolution** on an on-going basis?

Right or wrong, I think it is a fantastic working hypothesis. Even if Universe and time wind down to cosmic death, wouldn't it be more exciting and more psychologically healthy to toil "to the last syllable of recorded time" trying to design a solution in which life goes on and on eternally?

What do you think of all this? Post a comment and we'll discuss your thoughts.

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# 22 Responses to "A Cosmic Speculation about The Purpose of Humans in Universe"

1. **jeannie moberly** on 20 November 2010 at 7:03 pm

I hope humanity gets past its more immediate hurdles to ever be able to consider this faraway future. But I also worry about the species that share this planet, with their demise we lose undreamed of potential destinies.

Reply

2. **cjf** on 21 November 2010 at 9:36 pm

Certainly meeting the current hurdles are a prerequisite to reaching any future hurdles or, indeed, of realizing a future at all. As Humanity takes on a greater role in co-designing Universe, it is imperative that we focus on first things first. If too many of us get too worried about galactic-scale concerns before we've even figured out how to ensure civilization's long-term viability on Earth, our response could be inadequate and fall short. All hands on deck!

Still I think it is important to have a sense of mission. We obtain perspective in realizing that our mission could be more than just "saving the Earth" and our civilization which depends on the capital provided by our ecosystem. Note well: this isn't a once and done deal! Working in support of eternal regenerativity requires eternal responsibility and eternal vigilance.

As to the other species, I was careful in the post not to specify the nature of sentience. I found Stefano Mancuso's TED Talk about plant intelligence and Bonnie Bassler's TED Talk on how bacteria communicate to be awe-inspiring accounts suggesting that we may have underestimated the consciousness inherent in all life. More evidence that our arrogance leads to misunderstandings about how the world really works.

But personally, I think it is more likely that we destroy so much of the ecosystem that civilization collapses than that we eliminate all life on Earth. In a few million years, Nature will repair any damage that we do (it only took Nature 65 million years to go from Dinosaurs to Humans, she can do it again if necessary). The question is will homo sapiens be around to help save life on Earth when the Sun starts overheating a billion (or 3-illion) years from now?

Reply

3. **Don Briddell** on 22 November 2010 at 12:11 am

CJ, Sounds like you might be interested in Ken Wilber and Andrew Cohen, both consciousness evolutionaries, also Shri Aurobindo.

Would you be interested in evidence the universe cannot end, nor begin for the matter?

Reply

4. **cjf** on 24 November 2010 at 7:13 pm

Andrew Cohen's post The Evolution of Enlightenment seems apt. I'd add Barbara Marx Hubbard to your list. I recently read a preface by Ken Wilber: interesting (but I do not like his AQAL thesis: distinguishing between those four quadrants seems very artificial and fragmenting to me). Shri Aurobindo: there are too many interesting authors to read!

As far as I'm concerned the jury is out about the future of the Universe. I am curious about the different theories, so I'd be interested in your evidence about the Universe neither beginning nor ending. If Universe cannot begin or end, my story would lose some of its punch. It would still be important to participate in cosmic

evolution: we would be choosing the future we wanted without the drama of cosmic death and all that. But we'd still need to choose a future … somehow. Different world views will strive for and accommodate different futures. Of course, it could all be … just a dream.

I am striving to practice the discipline of being a hard-nosed realist. Of all the suggestions for the purpose of Humans in Universe that I've seen, Bucky's cosmic evolution is the most compelling and inspiring to me. Do you know of another story that works better for you?

Reply

5. **Don Briddell** on 25 November 2010 at 12:21 am

CJ,
Interesting to get your viewpoint. The Fractal Universe Model along with celestial plasma mechanics makes much more sense to me.

In the realm of philosophy, even Bucky could not satisfy me back in 1966 when I left the country amid the turmoil of the 60's. To be sure Bucky was inspiring, but what I liked most was the idea that something did not come from nothing which in turn lead to structuralism as a bases for thinking. At the time modern thinking was background independent, as a physicist would say. I nor could Bucky as I understood what he was saying, could build anything meaningful if one had to begin from a conceptual base that says locality is separated from Totality. Anything with an beginning and an end is background independent, and all the thinking was of that nature. The thinking was (and still is for the most part) suggesting that a local event can be lost and our connection to totality is through the local event. The definition of structure in the dictionary is the parts make the whole.
Bucky, I saw the problem this sort of thinking produced, but never followed it through.

I became interested in the definition of structure as advanced by metaphysics, namely Vedantians, who insist and proved to me, that the whole makes the parts, and not the other way around. This switch says correctly the string makes the knot. So called "modern" thinking agrees with the English dictionary that insist the knot make the string, i.e the parts, "knot" make the string "the whole".

Physics has been saying form produces structure. I agree with Vedic inspired thinking, which says structure produces form. Thinking as do moderns cripples efforts to understand the universe and how to understand it.

So on hearing about a culture that is background dependent, that did not regard form as distinct from structure, that saw locality and Totality as inseparable, I and my wife, went off to live with these people and learn more. We were not disappointed.

Vedanta resolves the physics of life by providing physics with a metaphysical context. It has stood the test of time, codified some 5000 years ago. It is not the place here to go into it. You might learn something of this thinking from such illuminaries as Swami Vivekananda in his book "Juana Yoga". There are numerous

others if you are interested.

What Wiber and Cohen offer are elements of Vedanta in modern clothing.

I too consider myself a realist, or more precisely a structural realist. I add the word “structure” because a lot that goes for realism, is non-structure. Big Bang for instance is non-structural. It says something began from nothing and then disperses into universal heat death. That thinking negates there being a meaningful universe. What is the point of evolution if the end product is universal death?

There is an alternative.

Reply

6. **Dick Fischbeck** on 25 November 2010 at 12:58 pm

   Bucky talks about our metaphysical chess game at 43:00 in this video from the chronofile:

   Title University of Santa Barbara, California [3 of 3]
   Date 1972 Jan 11
   Original Format 1 videoreel of 1 (60 min.) : sd., col. ; 1 in. Memorex chroma
   Duration 0:59:34

   http://collections.stanford.edu/bucky/bin/mediaplayer?fileID=1079892096X&n=1

   Reply

7. **Dick Fischbeck** on 25 November 2010 at 1:06 pm

   “We are problem processes. This is our function.” -Bucky

   Reply

8. **Leo Bellew** on 27 November 2010 at 11:26 pm

   (1) We are almost to the point of gaining one year of lifespan per year. Once I/we can simulate you in software from your DNA, and predict and resolve your bio-problems before they arrive, your lifespan could become unlimited. The concept of lifespan is now more of a drag than a help.
   (2) Where to put the people? Yes, you have it correct IMHO, in Space. At the risk of overconfidence, let’s begin by grabbing up all the Sun energy that now streams out uselessly into Space, hitting nothing.
   (3) Isn’t that dangerous? Not if you have youself properly backed up. I have no idea how at the moment, but I see no impediment as nanomotes become common.
   (4) Problem solving is secondary IMHO. The reason we are here is to do good (i.e. have lots of fun and help others – future and even past – to do the same).

   Reply

9. **Bill Patterson** on 2 December 2010 at 10:50 pm

"The cosmic syntropy/entropy ratio is less than 4 joules per 10-illion gram-kelvins." That says it all.

Although I think the queen of England 100 years ago had it better than many of the world's poor have it today, it is quite true that for the average person things are substantially better today than in generations past.

But also on the negative side: the US is trying to become a third world country, the nuclear threat is still present, and cynics still take suckers' lunch money.

Let us light as many candles as we can rather than cursing the darkness. Your blog is at least one candlepower if not a joule (sp?).

Reply

10.**cjf** on 3 December 2010 at 1:13 pm

Leo,
(1) We certainly are approaching the one year of "life expectancy" gain per year. Which would make us essentially immortal (modulo accidents and untreatable conditions). However, I wonder if it isn't likely that there will be a series of ceilings blocking immortality. Indeed, that is a fundamental assumption in my story: *eternal regenerativity is always and only threatened by the next limiting factor.* Each such boundary condition might block immortality for years (difficult issues might take eons to overcome). For instance, after we get to 200 year lifespans, maybe suicide starts to become inevitable because we do not understand how to address the psychological issues involved in sustaining immortal humans. Or maybe there is one type of kidney or neuron cell that doesn't respond to any of our rejuvenation technologies. Then when those cells start dying, we hit a ceiling. My story suggests that individual organism regenerativity as well as ecological, solar system and cosmic scale regenerativity issues will be eternally with us as we aspire to reach and surpass each boundary of prior achievement. So our purpose as problem-solvers in support of eternally regenerative Universe may never end. I think it is an enthralling thought experiment!

Aubrey de Grey's TED Talk is very informative on the mortality issue:
http://www.ted.com/talks/aubrey_de_grey_says_we_can_avoid_aging.html

(4) Doing "good" is a loaded expression. Doing good by whom? Is there a decision procedure to determine if every given action qualifies as "good" or "bad"? Are there degrees of "good"? As I see it, there is what happens and there are the reactions and resultants from "what happened". "Good" or "bad" are only relative to a value, commitment, or objective. For instance, if the objective is working in support of eternally regenerative Universe, then it is "good" if an action supports regenerativity and "bad" if regenerativity is compromised.

Once one has chosen a world view (including a value system and sets of commitments and objectives), then problem-solving is inherent. I'm not sure it matters that problem-solving is secondary because once the world view is selected, you will have lots of problems to work on!

Having fun and helping others are probably necessary psychological factors to

sustain us throughout our quest. That is, I don't see them as our purpose, but as factors helping us to fulfill our function as co-designers in cosmic evolution.

Reply

11. **cjf** on 4 December 2010 at 2:53 pm

Don, you ask "What is the point of evolution if the end product is universal death?" I agree! That was what galled me about the National Geographic article that "Time Will End in Five Billion Years". I also reject that future: we can do better!

I just read about a new theory by Roger Penrose that the universe may have existed for ever. It is clear that we have a lot more to learn about Universe: what it is and its behavior. I chased a bunch of cosmic fish trying to think through it all. In the end I think I want to focus this thread on the question: what, if anything, is our purpose in Universe? Does Vedanta offer a characterization of the purpose of Humans in Universe?

Reply

12. **cjf** on 4 December 2010 at 8:34 pm

Dick, the Stanford R. Buckminster Fuller Digital Collection video from 1972 is all about the purpose of humans in Universe. I thought the whole video was great to watch if you have 2 and a half hours to spare. Great resource! Although they numbered the videos incorrectly: [2 of 3] is really [1 of 3], [3 of 3] is really [2 of 3], and [1 of 3] is really [3 of 3]. I see no way to tell Stanford of their mistake.

Reply

13. **cjf** on 4 December 2010 at 9:17 pm

Bill, I'm glad you liked my syntropy/entropy ratio. I spent some time thinking about it. The mass of the Universe is 1.59486 × 10^55 kg which is about 10^58 g. A 10-illion is 10^27. So the 4 joules of syntropy are dispersed over nearly half the size of the known Universe. I think that makes it undetectable with modern technology 😉

It is amazing how health measured in terms of lifespan has doubled over the past 200 years. This video of Hans Rosling's 200 Countries, 200 Years, 4 Minutes is fascinating and visually makes the point that almost all the world has exceeded the health and wealth of England in 1810. However, I understand that almost everyone in the poorest countries has access to a cell phone. Queen Victoria didn't even get the luxury of radio until after 1895 let alone point-to-point wireless communications and access to the Internet. But you are probably right that there are some measures upon which some poor may not have it as well as Victoria did when she died in 1901. My point is that the world has become overwhelmingly wealthy and capable over past few hundred years, but too few recognize how close we are to eliminating poverty. If we do not suffer an ecological catastrophe or war, abject poverty will probably be gone within 15 years … it is already on the brink.

Reply

14.**Don Briddell** on 5 December 2010 at 12:20 am

CJ,

Most definitely Vedanta looks entirely to the question of what consciousness is all about, what it is up to, and where it is going. To summerize Vedanta's answer to this question will take some thinking. I will work on it and reply later. It may take me till after I get my Christmas rush work finished in a few weeks.

Don

Reply

15.**Dick Fischbeck** on 5 December 2010 at 11:54 am

Also, see page 79 in Thomas's anthology.

"Problems, problems, problems."

http://books.google.com/books?id=VWF_6f0UCkYC

Reply

16.**Dick Fischbeck** on 5 December 2010 at 11:59 am

http://books.google.com/books?id=vqUbe3pSZdwC&pg=PA79&lpg=PA79&dq=problems+problems+buckminster+zung&source=bl&ots=4iWDlzCAQO&sig=dQJ05-5_OixbdXlRga2cTY4CIWE&hl=en&ei=rLb7TKjYAsqs8AaTrMi7Cw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBcQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false

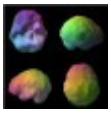
Reply

17.**Rich Wilkens** on 12 December 2010 at 11:51 am

Well, I'm a biologist so I have a more Earthly view. I don't think humans have a purpose. We are the product of a series of natural causes. If we have a purpose it is to reproduce. Now, we humans and our magnificent, complex brains may concoct a purpose in any number of abstract ways. Of course, I am a big fan of both concoctions and abstractions as they are what makes me a human. I'm fond of us. Still, I don't see how we have a grand cosmic role to play. Fine with me.

Reply

18.**Joshua Pang** on 19 December 2010 at 9:44 pm



Responding to the original request for feedback, all I've been thinking about is that — you know — You ARE Barbara and that scenario you presented is a

representation of right now. Imageination abstraction is reality?!

Reply

19. **Skip Shuda** on 8 January 2011 at 1:29 pm

A fascinating story and exploration on “purpose”. Lots of great comments in this thread too.

This topic is right on the edge of what things I’m trying to discern on how cosmic evolution unfolds – and what “purpose” means. Does a flower have an evolutionary purpose? Does water have an evolutionary purpose? If we cast them in the context of supporting evolutionary telos/directionality, then I think they absolutely do. In that sense, humans are at the top of the evolutionary chain… as we know it. I think your proposed purpose for humans as “problem solvers” fits with Andrew Cohen’s view of humanity as the universe waking up to itself.

BTW – as a Wilber fan, I’d like to defend the four quadrants with two assertions:
1) the quadrants force us to consider all aspects of a Holon when our tendency is toward focusing on one quadrant or another (e.g. systems theory focus on the lower right is a favorite of engineers/scientists – largely ignoring culture, human interiors, etc.)
2) the map is not the territory. Insofar as we parcel our world into 4 quadrants, you are correct – it IS fragmented – and unrealistic. Real life has a flex-flow-multi-dimensionality

CJ – I want to join your quest to explore… mind open, ideas flowing – but with discernment and hard-nose examination.

To life!

Reply

20. **cjf** on 8 January 2011 at 9:26 pm

Rich, OK, let’s start with what you call “natural causes”. These natural causes have results or effects (that is the basic definition of a cause, right?). A purpose can be viewed as simply the end result of “the product of a series of natural causes”. So the scientific question becomes “what is the purpose of humans”? What is the nature or characterization of this inherent product of natural causes? Let’s look at the natural causes evident in human behavior. There’s information gathering: “what is your name? Where is the bus stop?” There’s problem-solving: “how might I cook this rice to make a delicious meal?” You already see part of regenerativity: procreation. If we agree that the cosmos exists, then both biological evolution and astrophysics suggest that there must be cosmic evolution. Even if our role in cosmic evolution is incidental, we must have some impact upon it. So the question becomes “what is our impact in Universe”? There is a subjective impact: causes that we are subject to: que sera, sera. But there must also be an objective impact: what aggregate effects (designs) might we strive toward? My first cut answer is my essay. Do you see any pattern in our cosmic design impact? Do you have any aspirations for our impact? A sustainable ecosystem on Earth?

Anything else?

Dick, great references: keep them coming!

Joshua, “Imagination abstraction is reality” … I think I’m with you. But do you have any thoughts about what is the purpose of Humans in Universe? What do you think of Bucky’s thesis “*that we are most probably here for local information-gathering and local-Universe problem-solving in support of the integrity of eternally regenerative Universe*“?

Skip, “To life!”: great comments! As to Wilber’s AQAL or four quadrants, I can see how the model helps with … I’ll call it “wholism” and so it has merits. I am a champion of the idea that “bad” theories can lead to great results. My favorite example is that despite knowing for more than 2,200 years that Earth is spherical, most Carpenters correctly employ Euclidean geometry rather than spherical geometry when designing a closet.

In the interest of moving forward, let me propose that a more dynamic, more incisive model should be sought. I’ll propose Buckminster Fuller’s Twelve Universal Degrees of Freedom model as a possibility. I don’t think that the 12 degrees of freedom is spot on either (we can probably do better: maybe by marrying AQAL with the 12 degrees?). At least it is clear that both Wilber and Fuller disdain “flatland”!

Reply

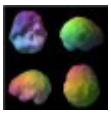
21. **Dick Fischbeck** on 9 January 2011 at 3:22 pm

What is the meaning of life? Reality gives you problems, and you do your best to solve them. You need no more meaning than that.

http://www.kilroycafe.com/ideas/meaning/meaning.pdf

Reply

22. **Joshua Pang** on 11 January 2011 at 11:32 pm



http://www.visionsthemovie.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10

Reply

23.