

# 8 Orders of Being: Draft – not for publication

8/12/2025

## Orders of Self: Eight Stages in the Development of the Proximal Self

orders	Wilber's attitudes	identity / locus	motivation / focus	currency / lens	realm / layers	Benner's Self centers
8°	violet	I see through the eyes of God	re-union, harmony	unitive consciousness - pure unbounded awareness	transpersonal / spiritual	Spirit (energy)
7°	turquoise	I am a product of the unique circumstances of my being	meaning and purpose in my life; release of suffering of others	compassion - identification with other beings	transpersonal / spiritual	Soul (perspective)
6°	teal	I am the one who chooses which perspectives and abilities to use	resolution of internal conflicts	integrity - ability to be integrated	intra-personal / internal	Soul (perspective)
5°	green	I am the multifaceted creation of my many experiences	self-awareness in the midst of contradictory impulses	perspectives - holding diverse points of view	intra-personal / internal	Mind (connections)
4°	orange	I am the one choosing my roles and relationships	authority over my role and clarity in my relationships	authenticity - being who I believe myself to be	interpersonal / relational	Mind (connections)
3°	amber	I am my roles and relationships	approval of others and security in my role	esteem - knowing worth in relationship with others	interpersonal / relational	Mind (connections)
2°	red	I am the one having my experience	mastery over what I am experiencing	possessions - having fine things and using them well	personal / material	Body (place)
1°	magenta	I am my experience	connection to -being in- the material world	experiences - attending to everything that arises	personal / material	Body (place)
0°	beige					

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## Introduction to the 8 Orders

I have always loved maps. On family vacations when I was a kid I would ride in the car with the paper map open in my lap. My dad would ask, “How many miles to where we plan to stop for the night?” I would find where we were on the map and add up the little numbers next to the highways and give him the total. I could look at the map for where we were going and it was all just an indication of what was to come, but when I looked at the map from where we had been, I could see what we had already witnessed. The map was a predictor of what was to come and a reminder of what had been.

My son, Dan, played a video game as a kid that was a battle between two armies. His army had scouts, and when he sent them out the map of the game began to have features on it. He couldn't see the territory until one of his had been there to tell about it.

Back when I was in college, I discovered a fascination with how we form relationships with each other. I had no idea that I would choose to be a psychotherapist. I was working on a

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degree in chemistry. But in organic chemistry I noticed that that different molecules would form different bonds and that they seemed to have a sort of personality.

Since then, I have been creating my own map of how we relate to each other as persons who have a growing capacity to be conscious of our surroundings. That map has continued to grow and evolve. I have shared it as a graphic like this one, but I have only published an explanation of it in a book that didn't get a wide readership.

In my writing now I have many times wished to reflect on current events from the point of view of this map, but I know the chances of my readers knowing what I was talking about when I suggest that some errant public policy was the product of Second Order thinking by people with no awareness of their own Fifth Order.

While most of my attention has been on individuals and their one-on-one relationships, it has also become clear that the pattern of the 8 Orders is present in all developmental sequences. And while we tend to think of such sequences as growth and progress, we can also see when growth is stunted and systems experience regression. That is largely what is happening in the world today.

To be able to use the map of the 8 Orders of Being we need a legend. We need that box in the bottom corner of the paper map that tells us that the blue lines are two-lane roads and that the circle with the star in it marks the capital city of the state. This is that legend.

This project features a series of videos and essays to enhance accessibility. The core material is organized into six sections, accompanied by related videos available via a YouTube playlist and the website.

- Part One: Cognitive Maps – Examines what cognitive maps are, provides examples, explains how they help us form perspectives, discusses their limitations, and distinguishes between simple, complicated, and complex maps as a means of understanding chaos.
- Part Two: Structure of Being – Explores the attempt to align thoughts with reality by observing truth claims, common features, distinctions, dimensions, development, and dialectics.
- Part Three: Graphic of the 8 Orders – Offers a visual walkthrough of the map, highlighting its components and relationships.
- Part Four: Developmental Hierarchies – Considers how growth occurs through stages, with a particular focus on normal human development to illustrate these hierarchies.

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- Part Five: Evolution of Human Community – Discusses how individuals and systems move through developmental stages, shaping cultures and governance through self-organization and emergence.
- Part Six: Transcendentals and Strange Loops – Addresses the forces and qualities that connect and transcend layers of reality, illustrating interconnectedness and mutual impact among the layers.

## Part One: Cognitive Maps and their Purpose

### What Cognitive Maps are for:

Cognitive maps are mental models that organize information, aid understanding, decision-making, and learning by structuring knowledge and clarifying experiences. While they reside in our brains, we often need a graphic representation to help us learn or recover them.

I've been to the mall before, but shops open and close, and it has been a while since I have been here. I find the kiosk near the entrance where there is a big map of the place. On it is a red X that says next to it, "You are here." Okay, now I am oriented. But where is the shoe store I am looking for? Second level above the Food Court. I can take the stairs to my left or there is an escalator down to the right. I try to calculate the shortest route.

This map, as with all maps, tells me three things. Where am I? Where might I be? What might I do to get there? Every useful map will aid me in these three tasks. They will help me get grounded in this current place and time. They will suggest to me where else I might be or what else I might seek to create. And they will give me guidance about how to get there. They will offer strategies.

In a larger sense they will help me align with what is real.

We cannot fully know what is real. Reality is something we can approach but never fully grasp. It is an asymptote. But the more our understanding of our circumstances correlates with reality, which is to say, the truer it is, the better it will be at helping us create what we need.

Whenever we find ourselves in a new situation, we must craft a new cognitive map to help us navigate. If I am dating someone new, I will tend to assume that what is expected of me will be the same as with my former partner. But this is not the same relationship, and I will have to create a new understanding of it for it to be successful.

Any newly developed maps must be closely aligned with actual conditions to ensure their utility. Since we don't know what is real, we make guesses and choose what we think is most probable. Every cognitive map is an approximation.

Whenever we encounter a problem, we sort through the existing maps in our folder to find one that will guide our choices. Some maps will work just fine, but others are out of date or map a different territory or they don't show enough detail. We may need to craft a new map.

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### Aspects of Awareness and Perspectives:

The primary function of the map is to clarify our present circumstances. It facilitates awareness, which enables the formation of perspectives. This process directs attention toward specific elements and frames them through one's current identity or societal expectations, leading to interpretations of events. These interpretations are structured using a cognitive map.

Cognitive maps help us interpret the world, but meaning also relies on our identity and focus.

Awareness involves:

- **focus** of attention,
- **locus** of identity, and
- the **lens** or map through which one views reality,

collectively forming perspectives that shape perception and interpretation.

### Benefits and Limitations of Cognitive Maps in Personal Development:

Cognitive maps organize thoughts and identify patterns to support self-awareness and planning, but they can privilege certain views, create selective patterns, and limit growth by hiding possibilities.

Any map we make will be most useful if it does two things well. It must be closely correlated with reality. It must be true. And it must give us something we can do to name, address, and resolve the problem. It must define strategies.

Sometimes we have a map that may be accurate in terms of what is observed, but it doesn't give us a strategy to address the problem. It may be true that my son who won't clean his room is willful, but that observation won't help me deal with the mess in his room.

Quite commonly we will find that we are using a map that describes a strategy for solving a problem and find that the problem it solves is not the one we face. When my car was overheating, I switched out the water pump only to learn that the thermostat was bad. When the only tool I have is a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail. The map is okay but it doesn't fit this territory.

Sometimes we have a way of seeing the world that we favor even though it isn't well aligned with reality. This can happen with ways of thinking that are the result of trauma or when we are part of a community that requires its members to see from a particular perspective. The cognitive map only works if we select the right data points to affirm it.

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We need the best maps we can find, and we also need to know when they aren't helpful. They are powerful, and as such, they can be healing or harmful. We must be very cautious about the cognitive maps we use and share with others.

### Complexity of Reality and Cognitive Mapping Challenges:

Reality is chaotic. It is possible to map it and relate to it using simple maps. But as Einstein points out to us, sometimes we need a more robust map.

Some theorists speak of systems as complicated or complex, but I believe it is more accurate to just understand that reality is chaos and that we can get by with maps that are not that robust. It is important to define the terms simple, complicated, and complex.

Simple maps allow us to relate to common problems like how to open a door. There are lots of kinds of doors, but they have similar features and once we notice where the handle is and whether we can see the hinges we then can open the door easily. Unless it is locked.

Some maps are complicated in that they require a set of steps, each completed successfully, and all done in the right order. Baking a cake is complicated, but when we do it well, we can be sure that we will end up with a cake.

Planning a metropolitan transportation system is complex. There are multiple interdependencies. When one factor, say the age of the buses or the scheduling of a ball game, changes, the whole system is impacted. There is no best solution to the problem, only some that are better than others.

Reality as I said is actually chaotic. But we can't think in those terms, so the best we can do is to let a computer discover patterns in the chaos like fractals and Mandelbrot sets.

When we have spent some time in relation to a system and the problems it presents, we can come to solutions that are simpler. Complex thinking takes a lot of energy. To be efficient, we evolve simple solutions.

When I was first learning to tie my shoes, the process was super complicated. There were lots of steps and if I didn't do it right my shoes wouldn't stay tied. Now when I tie my shoes the process is so simple, I don't even think about it. In fact, if I try to think about it, I get confused. Muscle memory.

We can trust that the problems we face will seem simpler once we can sufficiently understand them. But sufficiently understanding them will often require that we be able to think in complex terms.

The behavior of viruses and the development of pandemics are complex. But once we understand them, we wear masks and get immunized.

### Part Two: Structure of Being

The 8 Orders is a cognitive map for understanding the nature of being itself and thus serves to orient us toward that which is real. There are some things we know about what is real that are revealed as the structure of being. In this section we look at these characteristics to name what we want to have reflected in our comprehensive map.

Let's start by reviewing what we have already noted about the nature of cognitive maps in general.

- Cognitive maps help us organize information and make decisions that will move us toward what we need. Healthy organisms are ones that can make choices that increase their chances of getting what they need. We increase our chances by understanding the world in which we find ourselves. We get data through our senses and then use that information to make sense of the world and then to make meaning about what is happening now and then make choices about what we are going to do.
- There are many types of cognitive maps: frameworks, heuristics, theories, algorithms, models... These are templates for meaning making. They arise for us from our engagement with the world. As we discover more and more, we find that some of what we believed was accurate is not a reliable map. We want to gather more accurate maps.
- We use what is true to guide us to what is real. All our maps are approximations of what is real. We cannot fully know what is real, but the more our understanding is aligned with what is real, the better our choices will be at creating what we need.

#### Three primary disciplines for discovering what is real by explaining what is true:

Humans throughout our history have been seeking to discover what is real. We told each other stories around the fire 100,000 years ago, and then, with the advent of written language, we have built on our forebears' wisdom, building whole disciplines of understanding and practice.

Once a single discipline, these have now separated into distinguishable areas of study. We encounter them now as theology, philosophy, and science.

Over the course of the last century there have been great strides in each of these disciplines. The changes are so fast that most of the human community has not been able to keep up. We are able to enjoy the results of this leap forward in the technologies that

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enrich our lives every day, but we mostly don't see how this is possible from the old paradigms which we still hold in our heads.

One of the goals of promoting use of the 8 Orders is to offer a single framework for understanding and appreciating the advances in these three disciplines. They are each seeking to know what is real. What do they all agree about?

For this consideration I have chosen what I believe to be the highest expression in each of these fields.

**New Science** [complexity, quantum mechanics, cosmology], The New Science is not just a change in facts—it represents a new worldview. It invites us to see the world as alive, evolving, and interrelated; to question strict materialism; to consider the role of mind, meaning, and creativity in the universe; and to rethink how we approach health, education, ecology, economics, and even spirituality.

- revised models of the smallest things (particle physics and quantum mechanics),
- the largest things (cosmology of Black Holes and Big Bangs), and
- the nature of being and how we think about it (Systems Dynamics and Complexity).

**Progressive Theology** [process theology, O'Murchu, Whitehead, Delio, Rohr, Teilhard, Gurdjieff], Forms of Progressive Theology may be found in all the World's Great Religions.

- draws from multiple religions,
- welcomes insights from science,
- affirms a spirituality that embraces paradox and uncertainty,
- is concerned with social justice, and
- invites interpretations of scripture that are metaphorical, not literal.

**Integral Philosophy** [Aurobindo, Wilber, McIntosh] Integral Philosophy is a holistic, developmental, and inclusive worldview that aims to connect all the valid pieces of human knowledge into a more complete understanding of reality, self, and society.

- Seeks to honor and include insights from multiple disciplines and traditions rather than favoring one over others.
- Understands that reality arises in multiple dimensions
- Tracks development along multiple lines over increasingly complex stages.
- Is non-dualistic, seeing reality as fundamentally interconnected, and encouraging a synthesis of spiritual insight and rational understanding.

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### Structure of Reality

In the aggregate, these disciplines suggest to us that Reality has structure. There are four aspects that I want to raise up. They are that

- everything is different [particularity],
- layered [textured],
- emerges in stages [develops], and
- erupts out of tension [emergent].

These are aspects we want our map to consider.

### Distinctions

A distinction is simply the recognition that *this* is not the same as *that*. No two things are exactly alike. Distinctions are made in order to maintain clarity in our understanding.

One way we do that with groups of things is to create a boundary. We say in effect, this thing is all the things within this border. Our family is this set of people. Our property is the land from here to there. Our area of concern is this set of issues.

Systems have boundaries. All the things my home uses to control the temperature of the air is the HVAC system. The collection of things that promote learning for my children is the education system. The envelope of gases that encases the planet is the atmospheric system.

Some systems have what appear to be obvious boundaries. I am that person who is encased in this bag of skin. Except that sometimes I can have an out of body experience. When I get engrossed in a book, I am in the book, not in the room my body is sitting in. How we form the boundaries of systems can be dynamic.

Another way we make distinctions is by creating dualities. We differentiate between *warm* and *cold*, *up* and *down*, *in* and *out*... But these distinctions are also fluid. He who was my *enemy* can become my *friend*. That which was *better* is now *worse*.

At a particular level of thinking such distinctions are helpful and even necessary. But there is a point where we discover ways of understanding that are more inclusive and wholistic. Two things we have seen as very different are now seen as aspects of the same thing.

We discover that *up* creates *down* and *alliances* create *enemies*. We discover that while dualities help us maneuver in the world, there is also a quality of non-duality... of everything being a part of everything. We learn that just as making distinctions is helpful, so is seeing the unitary nature of all things.

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### Dimensions: Layers and Holons

We have already noted that it is helpful for us to create systems by which to distinguish *this* from *that*. Reality has other sorts of dimensions. Reality arises in a gradient of density that allows us to see that events of different types are arising all in the same space-time location.

Music is material vibration, produced by skillful musicians, playing in tune and time with others in alignment with the notation of a composer, which may be interpreted differently by the guidance of a director, which evokes an emotional response in the listeners, which connects an audience into a resonant whole, which may result in a transcendent experience.

Reality is layered. For the purposes of our map, we differentiate them as

- the material or personal realm,
- the relational or interpersonal realm,
- the interior or intrapersonal realm, and
- the spiritual or transpersonal realm.

There is another dimension of reality we acknowledge with the use of the term *holon*. A holon is something that is simultaneously a whole in itself and a part of a larger whole.

The term was introduced by writer Arthur Koestler in his 1967 book *The Ghost in the Machine*. He combined the Greek word *holos* (“whole”) with the suffix *-on* (suggesting a part or particle, as in *proton* or *neuron*).

A holon has integrity as an individual entity but also exists as a component within a larger system. Holons are organized in nested hierarchies (sometimes called *holarchies*). For example: Atoms are holons within molecules. Molecules are holons within cells. Cells are holons within organisms. Organisms are holons within ecosystems or societies.

Holons have a place in both philosophy and science. Holons are used to describe complex adaptive systems where parts and wholes are interdependent. The concept is central in the Integral Theory of Ken Wilber, where holons help explain nested structures in evolution, consciousness, and culture.

Everything is a thing unto itself. It is a whole thing. And everything is a part of a larger whole. So, it is a whole-part. A holon.

### Development: Transformation and Emergence

Everything grows through stages of progressively greater complexity. Whether we are talking about an academic discipline like mathematics or a living organism like a birch tree,

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the growth happens in a series of predictable steps. As we will see, these steps are how every iteration of this series will happen. There may be minor variations, but each step is predictable and necessary for the growth of this holon.

Each stage is attained by transformation. This is not just a thing getting bigger; it is a qualitative change in which new skills and capacities are acquired. This allows the system to be innovative. Transformation is the movement from one stage to a more structurally complex and effective stage of development.

Jean Gebser, who is the author of another developmental map which is widely appreciated, notes that these changes are not smooth but rather are "mutations" in the way we have been thinking. They are disruptions. While transformation will happen somewhat spontaneously in certain circumstances, when it comes to the transformation of consciousness, it will happen more easily and readily if we embrace it.

There are two aspects of the phenomenon of emergence that we will note here. One is that it is the process by which transformation happens. The other is that it is the new thing that is created.

[Another cognitive map that sits alongside the 8 Orders is the Transformation Octave. It is an application of the Law of Seven of George Gurdjieff. There is a video in the 8 Orders playlist on YouTube which explains the steps in that sequence. There is also a text version at <https://justconflict.org/summary/of-the-transformation-octave/> ]

### Dialectics: Energy for Transformation

The fourth thing we notice about the nature of reality is that there is conflict. Chemical bonds are possible because there are opposite electrical charges on molecules and atoms. Mountains form because tectonic plates collide. When we tell stories about the history of person or a people, we tell the story of the conflicts they faced and how those shaped them.

As we have seen, development is a process of movement from one stage to another which is more complex. This happens through what is called emergence. Emergence is the mechanism by which elements at one level of complexity interact to create a wholly new thing at a higher level of complexity.

Depending on context, the process can be described as thesis-antithesis-synthesis, affirming-denying-reconciling, or arising-arousing-longing. All refer to what Gurdjieff called the Law of Three, which aligns with the concept of emergence in complexity science.

If we place with sufficient density and proximity the elements of fuel, heat, and oxygen we will have fire. We must have all three. If we take one away, the fire dies.

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If we have a well-constructed sailboat and we bring together water, wind, and a skilled helmsman, we will get a boat that goes faster than the wind. If we take away any of the three the boat will be “in irons.”

If in the context of a significant relationship we have knowledge of each other, respect for each other, and a willingness to act on each other’s behalf, we will have trust. If we take away any of the three, trust is lost.

*“When the three are held in tension, a new arises in a fourth dimension”*

If we are going to have a cognitive map by which we discover and hold what is true, that is, which aligns us with what is real, then it will have to account for

- distinctions including both duality and non-duality,
- dimensions which are both the layers of experience and the relationship between systems,
- development by which we move to greater understanding of complexity, and
- dialectics by which we harness the tensions in creation to create more robust cognitive maps.

### Part Three: Graphic of the 8 Orders

While a cognitive map is a concept we hold in our mind, sometimes we need a “cheat sheet.” We need a graphic representation that holds and reinforces the relationships and processes that make up the terrain of the map.

There are several versions of the 8 Orders that are rendered in graphic form. The most addressed one is that which illustrates the development of consciousness. This is the development of the proximal self. *Proximal* as we use it here is to differentiate it from *distal*. Proximal is that side which is closest to the middle. Distal is that side which is closest to the outside. Thus, the distal self is that which others see. Our proximal self is how we see and understand who we are.

I encourage you to print out a copy of the map for yourself. Having it in your hand will make it easier for you to follow along and afterwards you can post it on your refrigerator for easy reference.

#### A Legend for the Map

The graphic is a grid that I made from an Excel spreadsheet. The horizontal layers are representations of the layers of the 8 Orders. The vertical columns represent various aspects of the Orders. Let’s start with the vertical columns.

On the far left we have the numbers of the orders. Most developmental maps use names to identify the layers or levels. I prefer numbers to help us remember the order in which they arise. We go from bottom to top because our ability to access complexity increases as we go higher.

The second column gives the colors that Ken Wilber used. Frederick Laloux copies this usage, and it is common in this discourse to find folks who reference the colors. Clare Graves used colors with Spiral Dynamics, but Third Order is Blue in Spiral Dynamics and Teal is Yellow. I mention that because you may hear these references if you follow other authors on this topic.

On the far right is the column labeled for David Benner’s work with what he calls Self Centers. I include this column because I want to honor that others are mapping similar terrain. I don’t have room for everyone’s schema; there are literally hundreds of them. And I was reading Benner when I first created this graphic.

Next to that is the realm/layers column. In older versions this is just realms, but that can sound like reference to a medieval kingdom. These are the four major dimensions of the map displaying layers of lesser density but greater complexity as we move up. Identifying

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these layers is what I bring to this conversation that is new. I don't know of other developmental maps that have this feature.

The middle columns attend to the three aspects of a perspective, namely, focus, locus, and lens. These are expanded by a consideration of *who we understand ourselves to be*, *what is motivating us to act*, and *what we most value in the energetic exchange at this level*.

These aspects of perspectives are ones I elaborated on in the prior section.

### Climbing the Developmental Ladder

Once you are familiar with the 8 Orders you will come to see that they are not just named as different colors, they each have different flavors. There is a quality to each of them, and you will come to see how you are at each of them all the time.

The move up is more about the ability to go to a particular level when you need to be there to make sense of something that is arising for you. For example, when you are troubled about something you can trust that there are multiple impulses arising in your interior... in your feelings. This is Fifth Order. As you practice attending to what is arising for you at this stage, you will be able to observe and distinguish between these impulses.

Because we can't move up until we have done the work at each level, you won't be able to rise to Sixth Order [at least around this issue] until you are sufficiently aware of these apparently conflicting impulses. But once you have done that work, the resolution that comes at Sixth Order comes easily, almost automatically.

This is the process we will tease apart in the next section.

### Part Four: Developmental Hierarchies

A developmental hierarchy sees that certain qualities which arise along a given developmental line do so in a fixed sequence. This sequence happens for every instance of the same type. Each thing that develops does so by doing the steps in the same order. And no thing can develop without addressing and to a certain degree completing each of the steps. The steps in the hierarchy are universal, sequential, and essential. This is true for all developmental processes whether we are talking about the growth of a tree or the learning of mathematics.

One of the best-known early developmental hierarchies is Abraham Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*. Maslow asserted that we could observe that the needs of humans are arrayed in a hierarchy and that the lowest needs must be sufficiently addressed before the higher order needs get our attention.



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

At the lowest order we have certain physical and relational needs. We need food, air, and water. We need warmth and sleep and freedom of movement. If we don't have these basic needs, we will focus all our attention on getting them. These are the physiological needs.

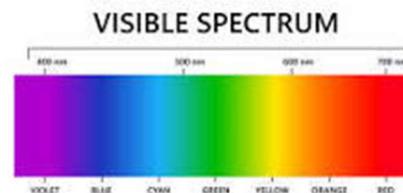
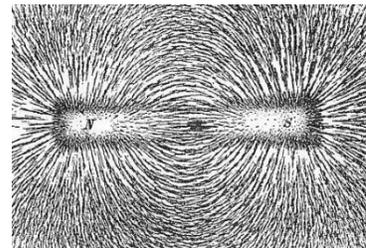
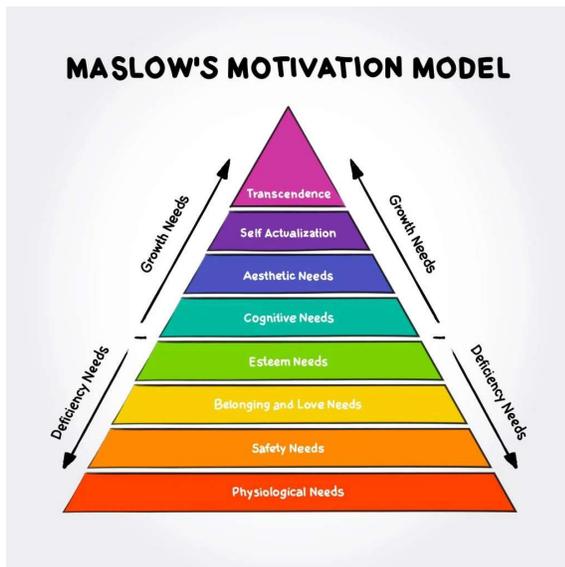
When they are met, we are free to pursue the higher order needs of safety, and then love and belonging, then esteem, and finally self-actualization. Each level sets the stage for the next higher one. If those needs are not met, the lowest order needs are the ones we tend to place as the highest priority.

The opposite is also true. That is, when the lower order needs are met, attention to the higher order needs increases. Being satisfied puts upward pressure on the process of development. Creating social systems in which people's lower order needs are met does not result in them being lethargic. Rather it increases their motivation for self-actualization.

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These dynamics are not solely the properties of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. They are properties of all developmental sequences. This includes the 8 Orders. Early on Maslow only needed five levels for his purposes but later added three more to expand the meaning of Self-Actualization. But the number of levels is somewhat arbitrary. Like the spectrum of visible light there is no clear boundary between one color and another.

These are not eight separate things. They are eight distinguishable characteristics of the one thing that is our experience... of our lives.



## We now turn to the 8 Orders.

The 8 Orders is a model for the structure of being itself. But we can't see being. We can only observe how the structures of being impact objects and processes. Much as we can't see an electro-magnetic field, we can't see the structure of being. but when we toss iron filings onto a glass plate and place a magnet below it, then we can observe the flux lines as the iron filings align themselves to it.

Most commonly the 'iron filings' I toss onto the glass plate to allow us to observe the 8 Orders is the experience of consciousness. Awareness is core to our knowledge of ourselves. But for this exploration I want to narrow the field even further. I want to look at how the properties of *control* and *power* arise and transform as we move through the 8 Orders.

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### Power and Control

For many years I worked in the field of domestic violence intervention. A common expression of the problem we were seeking to address was that certain men used power and control in relationships with their women partners. The term "power and control" was used to talk about a single thing, not two distinct properties. This was one of the things I found to be troublesome about how that community defined the problem we were addressing. For us here I want to make a distinction between *power* and *control*.

To be sure, they are closely related. But I want to show a way of understanding them by which they are inversely proportional. The less we try to be in *control*, the more *powerful* we become.

By *control* I mean the act of directing, regulating, or restraining behavior and outcomes. Control is about restriction.

By *power* I mean the capacity or ability to influence outcomes, shape events, or get things done. Power is about influence.

Control is a factor in the enactment of politics. Power is a factor in the deliberations of politics. You can have power without control (e.g., a respected elder who influences without rules) or control without true power (a bureaucrat who enforces policies but can't inspire change).

- When I use my power to get something else to change, I am in control, I have **power over**.
- When I join with someone else to create what we both want, I am using **power with**.
- When I am getting myself to change such that I am creating more of what I need, I am **empowered**.

The distinction between power and control is subtle but crucial.

### Power and control at each of the steps/stages

Remember that we are looking at a spectrum here and that the steps or stages are simply ways we have of holding distinctions in our awareness. They are not experienced as distinct except for one important phenomenon. When we are looking at any given experience, situation, or problem we focus on it from a particular locus and we view it through a particular lens. Remember the focus, the locus and the lens. There are things that arise for us that can be best seen from a particular perspective using the best possible lens.

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There are things that we simply don't see until we are able to rise to a particular stage of our development. When we can focus on them, we can understand them and relate to them better if we use a complex enough lens. And when we do so we feel as though we are looking from a new perspective.

We are going to climb through the 8 Orders to see how the properties of control and power shift as we do so.

3°	amber	I am my roles and relationships	approval of others and security in my role	esteem - knowing worth in relationship with others	interpersonal / relational	Mind (connection)
2°	red	I am the one having my experience	mastery over what I am experiencing	possessions - having fine things and using them well	personal / material	Body (place)
1°	magenta	I am my experience	connection to -being in- the material world	experiences - attending to everything that arises		
0°	beige					

First Order is the realm of whatever is arising in the moment. It is the home of "it is what it is." We can be confident that reality is arising whether we are conscious of it or not. And we know that far more is real than we can possibly know. Neither power nor control are in evidence at First Order.

Second Order is where the perceived chaos of First Order begins to have shape. We have the power to give things names and to understand how to act to change our experience. We can control whether we are hot or cold, hungry or fed, tired or rested. At Second Order there is very little that distinguishes control from power. All of what we do, which is an expression of control, arises at Second Order. And much of what we do to gain control is a reaction to our fear of being powerless.

4°	orange	I am the one choosing my roles and relationships	authority over my role and clarity in my relationships	authenticity - being who I believe myself to be	interpersonal / relational	Mind (connection)
3°	amber	I am my roles and relationships	approval of others and security in my role	esteem - knowing worth in relationship with others	interpersonal / relational	Mind (connection)
2°	red	I am the one having my experience	mastery over what I am experiencing	possessions - having fine things and using them well	personal / material	Body (place)

Third Order introduces to us the collective power of the larger community. We discover that our ability to use language to shape our experience comes from the long history of those who have gone before. We are ourselves shaped by culture and government. Our wish to drive fast is constrained by legal consequences. But when we comply with the law we can appeal to the courts and use that power for our own benefit.

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Fourth Order arises for us as we chafe at the social forces we experience that seem to limit our capacity to be most truly ourselves. Deciding who we are and how we will show up in our lives is to a significant degree a reaction to the controls of others. We want the power to be ourselves with authenticity and integrity. We will be the captain of our destiny.

			others			
6°	teal	I am the one who chooses which perspectives and abilities to use	resolution of internal conflicts	integrity - ability to be integrated	intrapersonal / internal	Soul (perspective)
5°	green	I am the multifaceted creation of my many experiences	self-awareness in the midst of contradictory impulses	perspectives - holding diverse points of view	intrapersonal / internal	(connections)
4°	orange	I am the one choosing my roles and relationships	authority over my role and clarity in my relationships	authenticity - being who I believe myself to be	intrapersonal / internal	(connections)

Fifth Order catches us up short. We can only escape it by a denial of our own interiority. We discover that we are not only not in control of others, but we are also not even in control of ourselves. We are not who we claim to be. There are parts of us which act to thwart other parts of us. It is as though there are multiple aspects of our will which conflict with each other. Some parts try to control other parts. But in the awareness of these conflicts and of the parts themselves we discover that our simple awareness can soften the tension. Simply paying attention to our own interior is itself a source of power.

Sixth Order feels like dawn after the dark night. Profound tensions reveal themselves to simply be the natural order of things. Existence is inherently paradoxical, as it should be. Those tensions are not flaws, but the edges by which the contours of reality are formed. We can see clearly that the only control we have ever had was the power to choose how we would show up in the world. Any effort we make to change others, whether people or systems, was futile. We have power in the world by creating what we need such that others have it as well.

8°	violet	I see through the eyes of God	re-union, harmony	unitive consciousness - pure unbounded awareness	transpersonal / spiritual	Spirit (energy)
7°	turquoise	I am a product of the unique circumstances of my being	meaning and purpose in my life; release of suffering of others	compassion - identification with other beings	transpersonal / spiritual	Soul (perspective)
6°	teal	I am the one who chooses which perspectives and abilities to use	resolution of internal conflicts	integrity - ability to be integrated	intrapersonal / internal	Soul (perspective)

Seventh Order may be evidenced to us by a deep listening to our interior or it may come to us as intuition or as voices of spirit guides or angels or a variety of spiritual beings. We can align ourselves with the guidance that such influences can offer us. We can discern wisdom and folly, and our only control is to soften into alignment with the unique purpose of our being. Such alignment is softly powerful.

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Eighth Order is the realization that everything is connected to everything everywhere all the time. There is nothing to control. Everything is just as it must be. And there is no self except the totality of the universe. We have the power to move mountains and the wisdom to leave them where they are.

### States and Stages

As we consider states of being and stages of development it is important that we recognize that they are very similar but also distinct. A *state* may be characterized by qualities of a given order, and a *stage* of development may have similar qualities, but it is useful to see them as different.

For example, I may have a fleeting sense of the source of my anxiety and thus a window into my own interior at Fifth Order, but I can only get there when in a session with my therapist. I can experience that *state* but am not yet at that *stage*.

Similarly, I may have a very stable sense of the father that I am and want to be and that this is a durable Fourth Order *stage* that I have created which distinguishes me from my own father. But when my son lies to me, I may have a flash of Second Order rage and want to smack him. My *state* at that moment is less mature than my *stage*.

### Transcend and Include

Moving to a more mature stage involves transformation. We become able to use cognitive maps that consider more of the complexity of reality and thus we can make choices that do a better job of creating what we need. Moving to higher orders opens us possibilities we didn't see before. We transcend the old way of being to a new way of being. This new way is only possible by building on the prior structures. None of this is possible without a deep grounding in all the prior orders. They stand on each other's shoulders. Almost nothing is lost as we embrace the reality of all 8 Orders. But there are things we must let go of.

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orders	Wilber's attitudes
8°	violet
7°	turquoise
6°	teal
5°	green
4°	orange
3°	amber
2°	red
1°	magenta
0°	beige

To move from First to Second, we must construct the very useful fiction that we are separate from the World. Without that distinction there is no relationship. We must **give up our identification** with the experience we are having.

To move from Second to Third we must give up our freedom to do whatever we want. We must **align with the greater good** and the existing structures of culture and community.

To move from Third to Fourth we must let go of being who we think others want us to be and the security of pleasing them and **allow ourselves to find our unique path and purpose.**

To move from Fourth to Fifth we must **lose our idealization of ourselves and see our own messiness.**

To move from Fifth to Sixth we must calm our anxiety about paradox. We must **allow two apparently opposite things to exist equally.**

To move from Sixth to Seventh we need to abandon our need to know how we know and just **allow ourselves to discern from a place of clear intuition.**

To move from Seventh to Eighth we must **let go of any notion that we are separate.**

And after Eight? What comes after Eight?

### Part Five Summary

Part Five was initially conceived as a selection of applications of the 8 Orders to problems relate to the future of the human community on planet Earth. We are living in a time of multiple crises [a poly-crisis] which is the product of a set of human choices that are the result of a failure to align with reality, and which are the result of a failure to make the choices which will move us toward what we need [the metacrisis.]

As I have considered what to include in this survey, the material has grown too large for the purposes of this essay and the accompanying video series. As a result I am only going to summarize here the problems considered and will address them in another format. I have a Substack and will post there essays that address each of these problems.

#### The Mind-Body Problem

We experience the phenomenon of having a mind and we strive to be mindful but we can't see how this experience arises from the neurobiology of our bodies. How do brains create consciousness? This matters because we cannot be aware of everything. What do we choose to be conscious of?

#### Formation of intimacy and the quality of being present to each other

We know that we enjoy the quality of being emotionally and physically close to another and we know that we suffer when we don't have that. What is intimacy and how do we create the quality of presence?

#### Intimacy Inhibitors and the Quality of Maturity

Given how important such relationships are for our well-being, why is it so hard to create and maintain these qualities? If maturity is a measure of a system's ability to embrace complexity, why don't all systems choose to be innovative?

#### Governance as the way a System Self-organizes

When organisms form relationships with similar elements in a system, the system becomes an organism itself and makes decisions on behalf of all of the elements. The way the system organizes itself is its form of governance. There are two impulses that are in tension in the formation of governance. They are the aggregation of power into a subset of the system, and the distribution of power and resources to the whole system. We experience them currently as the tension between autocracy and democracy. The winning impulse depends on the aims of the system itself.

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### Nonviolence as a Sixth Order Perspective

While nonviolence is typically understood as a set of practices for social protest, the roots of the philosophy have to do with a larger understanding of the best practices for how humans live and interact with each other. It is itself a philosophy of governance. What would such a social system look like if it embraced nonviolence or satyagraha?

### What then Must We Do?

And finally, what does such a society look like and what can we each do now to bring it into being? What is a healthy individual with healthy relationships in healthy communities do to heal the larger human community and with it, the planet?

## Part Five: Evolution of Human Community

*[This is the initial draft of what Part Five was to become. As stated above, these topics will be explored in articles on Substack. They are included here only for curious readers who want to know what to expect.]*

What does the cognitive map of the 8 Orders of Being suggest to us about the nature of our current devolution into authoritarianism, and what can we do to constructively care for each other amid this cultural collapse?

### Emergence of Mind

Life on planet Earth has become increasingly conscious through the process of evolution. We observe that we ourselves have become more conscious through the course of our lives. This expansion of consciousness has arisen in the context of an aspect of our awareness that we call our minds. So just what is a mind and how do we generate it?

We associate our minds with our brains. Perhaps because our eyes, ears, nose, and mouth are in our heads and our brains are there too, we think of the location of our self-awareness, and thus of our minds, as being in our heads. But we can also observe that sometimes the apparent center of our awareness may be in a book or a movie and not in our physical bodies at all. And when we are under anesthesia, our minds cease to create consciousness, but our bodies continue to function. A mind is created by a body but is not the same as a body... a brain.

### Self-organization

From the article in Wikipedia...

*“Self-organization occurs in many physical, chemical, biological, robotic, and cognitive systems. Examples of self-organization include crystallization, thermal convection of fluids, chemical oscillation, animal swarming, neural circuits, and black markets.”*

Self-organization will arise in systems composed of very simple elements but is particularly robust in Complex Adaptive Systems. These are systems [a collection of elements and processes that associate themselves with a given attractor] which are composed of elements which are themselves adaptive [in that they are capable of making choices which affect the system], and which cannot be adequately explained by a cognitive map which is not itself complex [observes the presence of multiple interdependent variables.]

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### Emergence of Mind: Slime mold, ants, starlings, athletes on a team

Most of us have never seen a slime mold. There are thousands of species of slime mold, most are microscopic, and they exist in nearly every ecosystem. They are for most of their lives single cell organisms [like amoeba], but when conditions are right, they go from their disaggregated state to an aggregated state by coming together into a clump that looks and behaves like a single organism. In this state the community of cells will create fruiting stalks and the cells at the end of the stalk become spores by which the species is spread.

All of us have seen ants. Again, there are thousands of species, and they inhabit nearly every ecosystem. They live in colonies which harbor a queen who produces the eggs from which all the other ants are born. Though the individual ants only live a year or two at most, a colony may live a decade. Researchers who observe the behavior of the colony can see that colonies can alter their behavior in a manner that suggests they become more mature.

Starlings form huge flocks which sometimes collectively create what is called a murmuration. These are typically seen at dusk. The birds fly in great swirling clouds that twist and turn, form and disband, and then form again. A quick search on YouTube will reveal many videos of the phenomenon.

While slime molds, ants, and starlings are very different organisms they share a capacity to interact with each other such that they appear to be single organisms. While made up of many distinct parts, they display consciousness. How do they do this?

Researchers who study these species and these phenomena started by trying to find the element in the system that told the others what to do. Which is the “head slime mold.” Does the queen control the colony? How do the starlings know when and how to fly? In every case the answer is that there is no leader. The decisions arise collectively out of the interactions of the organisms in the larger system.

When the temperature and humidity are at a certain level, the slime mold organisms find and connect with each other and then those join with others until they are in a mass with hundreds of thousands of their fellows. Once in the aggregated state they each adopt specific behaviors that are determined by their location in the mass.

Ants have a vocabulary of scents and gestures and by that can tell each other where the food is. They have different assignments depending on the needs of the colony, but these orders don't come from the queen. She is not in charge. Rather she is cared for and pampered by her attendant ants but is a sex slave who only lays eggs.

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There is no King of the Starlings. The murmuration is constructed by each bird flying at the same speed, the same distance from each other, while turning toward the center of the flock when they get to the edge. Tiny fluctuations cause the swirling patterns.

Each of these phenomena appear to be the result of a mind that controls the behavior of the organism. But the mind is an emergent property of the interactions between the elements of the system.

We also see that the phenomenon of mind arises in well-functioning human systems. When we have a conversation with our friends about where to eat dinner we may find we have trouble “making up our mind.” We watch sports, especially team sports, to see how well the team can function together. Is the team playing with “one mind?”

I remember when my ability to watch a soccer match became astute enough to see not just the skill of the players but the cleverness of the team. I was surprised that the level of play of club teams was generally superior to that of national teams, even though the national teams were typically staffed by the best players in the country. Yes, the individual skill of the players is important, but no single player can score a goal. It takes a team to score. And doing so is really difficult. It takes a group effort in which the whole team is “of one mind.”

Mind is an emergent quality of a complex adaptive system in which the elements in the system share a common aim, are able and willing to be in close communication with each other, and are looking for novel ways to approach the aim. If what we are doing isn't working we will do it differently next time, we will rely on each other, and we will have a clear notion of the goal.

### Evolution of Intimacy/Presence

For mind to arise in its most robust form, the elements in the system must be able to function in harmony with each other. We can't know the consciousness of a slime mold or an ant or even a starling. But we know what it is like to be on a team. To keep this as simple as possible we are going to begin with a team of only two people... a dyad. What is it like to be of one mind with one other person? How do we construct emotional/relational intimacy? How do we construct the quality of presence?

Intimacy develops. It follows a developmental hierarchy and thus is subject to the stages in the 8 Orders. It is a specific line of development in the structure of reality. The thing that is developing is the relationship between two people. The maturity of each person matters, but the thing that is arising is the relationship itself and with it certain qualities.

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At First Order two people are aware of each other and they are aware that the other is aware. The seed for the relationship is this shared awareness.

At Second Order the central concern is the boundary between self and other. Can we join this relationship and maintain our own individuality? The relationship depends on both parties being willing to consent to the formation of an “us.” Is it safe to be a relationship?

At Third Order the agreements we make form shared structures. For the relationship to be a durable structure there must be a just distribution of power. Is this a primarily mutual relationship? Do we each have the same rights and responsibilities?

If these three conditions are met, we have a well-constructed relationship.

9/12/2025

### Evoking Presence

orders	Wilber's altitudes	Personhood	Presence		realms/ layers
8°	violet	I am one with all Creation	Relationship has oceanic qualities		transpersonal/ spiritual
7°	turquoise	I am not separate from others, their needs are mine	Relationship has purpose and seeks the care of others		
6°	teal	I discover new perspectives by integration of apparent conflicts	Relationship discovers a perspective by which it integrates disparate needs	Conversation	intrapersonal/ internal
5°	green	I am the multifaceted creation of my many experiences	Relationship tested as it discovers multiple views and needs		
4°	orange	I am the one choosing my roles and relationships	Relationship forms its own unique identity as it identifies and addresses topics	Relationship	interpersonal/ relational
3°	amber	I am my roles and relationships	We have mutual accountability, shared rights and responsibilities		
2°	red	I am the one having my experience	We feel safe to choose shared experience		personal/ material
1°	magenta	I am my experience	We experience each other, are aware of each other		
0°	beige				

At Fourth Order the relationship can be differentiated from all the other relationships. This relationship can now do something as its own self. It can contain an interaction between the people in it. It hosts a conversation. The seed of the conversation is a topic. Can the relationship host a conversation in which all the parties are talking about the same thing?

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At Fifth Order the conversation which was seen as a single thing we observe to be multiple. This conversation, while about one topic, reveals multiple perspectives. Can the relationship observe about itself that it contains multiple perspectives about the one topic?

At Sixth Order: At sixth order the relationship adopts a perspective by which the diverse perspectives revealed at fifth order form the basis of a new more inclusive perspective. This new perspective is more powerful than the previous ones because of its ability to better understand and explain the complex realities of the situation.

Let's apply this sequence to a case example.

Mom and her teenage Son are having an argument about a comment Son made to Mom. As Mom was driving a stretch of winding road, she said to Son that he should never drive faster than 50 on this road. Son, who has been practicing driving with his Dad in anticipation of getting his permit, says to Mom, "Dad says it's okay to drive 55 here."

The initial conversation was heated and only served to fracture their relationship, so they returned to it when they were with a consultant. The consultant started by asking them to reconstruct the durability of their relationship, acknowledging that they are mother and son. Mom has authority that Son does not. Nevertheless, in the safety of the consulting room they can have a mutual conversation about the event.

They agree that the topic is Son's comment, "Dad says it's okay to drive 55 on this road." Mom shares her perspective from her role as an emergency room nurse that she is afraid for his safety as he is coming to an age when he will be driving. She envisions him coming in on a gurney and going out in a body bag.

Son then shares that he is trying to find a way to be responsive to the guidance of both his parents but that he is not getting consistent input. He wants to honor his parents, but he can't if they don't agree.

Mom can see that Son deserves consistent guidance. Son can see that Mom wants him to be safe. They both come to see that the comment that started the fight had very different meaning for each of them, and they both want the same things. The relationship is one in which safety and clarity are central values.

The ability of the relationship to hold these diverse perspectives is a milestone for Mom and Son. It serves as a template for addressing future conflicts. The intimacy thus created becomes an enduring resource for them.

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### Intimacy Inhibitors: the pre-trans fallacy

I share this story of Mom and Son because it is a rare and beautiful example of what can be. Much more commonly the parties in dispute are unable to see that the perspective of the other is itself valid for the other. Most people can only accept that one thing can be true... and because they know that what they believe is true, then what the other believes must be false. Or, at the very least, they must convince them that they are wrong so that they can win. Getting to a Second Tier—Non-dual—Sixth Order consciousness is possible only when we can allow that multiple perspectives are valid.

Whether we actively think about it or not, we are all aware that we no longer see things the way we used to. We have adopted new ways of thinking that are better than the old ways. We have in some small ways become enlightened.

When others don't see things as we do, we may assume they are not yet as enlightened as we are. Our assumption is that our way of making meaning is superior to theirs. It may not occur to us that their way is better than ours. It is a level above and thus is more mature or in a "trans" position to ours. We think it is below and thus "pre."

When someone who has been an active member of a faith community that has fixed beliefs begins to question those beliefs and to form new ways of understanding the world which they find to be superior, members of the community will see them not as growing but as backsliding. The community will assume their own perspective is the correct one and thus anyone who doesn't agree with them is lesser. They are pre, not trans.

Thus, when in a conversation in which it becomes clear that the parties hold different perspectives, seeing the other's perspective as having validity requires an act of will. The parties will have to be able at Fifth Order to contain the anxiety about being wrong and be open to the other to even hear the differences. And if they are very skilled, they may even be able to appreciate and incorporate the perspective of the other which characterizes Sixth Order.

### Evolution of Governance

As with everything else, governance systems evolve in accordance with the 8 Orders. Even a casual consideration of what we know about how human communities have structured themselves will show that process. We have moved from tribal life with little to no formal structure, to collections of tribes joined together by a strongman, to kingdoms to empires.

Better scholars than I have chronicled this progression. My first teacher was Clare Graves in his schema called Spiral Dynamics. That map was later applied by Chris Cowan and Don Beck and then adapted further by Ken Wilber. Wilber's framework was then the basis

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for the work of Frederic Laloux in his book *Reinventing Organizations*. Laloux found examples of governance systems in businesses that fit the characteristics of each of the levels up to Sixth Order – Teal.

If you want a more academically based survey, I recommend *Nonzero* by Robert Wright. It is an exhaustive look at the development of civilization which he then follows up by showing parallels in biological development. Not only do these accounts closely parallel each other, they also point to the direction that humanity is moving. It is not difficult to see that democracies are more evolved than monarchies or aristocracies.

	Current examples	Key breakthroughs	Guiding metaphor
<p><b>RED organizations</b></p> <p>Constant exercise of power by chief to keep troops in line. Fear is the glue of the organization. Highly reactive, short-term focus. Thrives in chaotic environments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mafia</li> <li>• Street gangs</li> <li>• Tribal militias</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Division of labor</li> <li>• Command authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wolf pack</li> </ul>
<p><b>AMBER organizations</b></p> <p>Highly formal roles within a hierarchical pyramid. Top-down command and control (what and how). Stability valued above all through rigorous processes. Future is repetition of the past.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catholic Church</li> <li>• Military</li> <li>• Most government agencies</li> <li>• Public school systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal roles (stable and scalable hierarchies)</li> <li>• Processes (long-term perspectives)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Army</li> </ul>
<p><b>ORANGE organizations</b></p> <p>Goal is to beat competition; achieve profit and growth. Innovation is the key to staying ahead. Management by objectives (command and control on what; freedom on the how).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multinational companies</li> <li>• Charter schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Meritocracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Machine</li> </ul>
<p><b>GREEN organizations</b></p> <p>Within the classic pyramid structure, focus on culture and empowerment to achieve extraordinary employee motivation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture driven organizations (e.g., Southwest Airlines, Ben &amp; Jerry's, ...)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment</li> <li>• Values-driven culture</li> <li>• Stakeholder model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family</li> </ul>
<p><b>TEAL organizations</b></p> <p>?</p>	<p>?</p>	<p>?</p>	<p>?</p>

Chart from page 36 of Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations*

Rather than summarizing the work of these fine scholars and social change practitioners, I want to just look at the characteristics of each of the first six orders to suggest the level of complexity that each can express.

First Order is fully in harmony with the natural world. The rhythms of social life are aligned with the cycles of the seasons and the vagaries of the weather. While there may be appeals to the gods for good hunting or for rain, there is no sense of being in control.

Second Order [Red] brings the notion that we can separate ourselves from the natural world. We can

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control the food supply by cultivation and so we divide the labor we each do. But with civilization and connection to a place we discover that we have enemies. We need protection. To be safe we need to ally ourselves with the strongest warrior. We must distinguish ourselves from our enemies.

Third Order [Amber] introduces the notion that we can make durable agreements. We can have treaties and alliances. We can make laws and have judicial systems. We can all worship the same gods and thus know that we see the world the same way. Harmony comes through uniformity to a higher standard.

Fourth Order [Orange] brings with it the discovery that diversity is a potential advantage. If it weren't for the errant ant that wanders off the pheromone trail laid by the others the colony would not find new sources of food. Innovation is essential to progress. We have a renaissance.

Fifth Order [Green] is tough. It is the highest of the first-tier levels and is spoken of as the Mean Green Meme. It is the level at which it becomes clear that the wellbeing of all depends on the wellbeing of "the least of these." The larger system is crippled when resources are not distributed to those who need them. But the owners of the wealth don't want to encourage the lazy freeloaders. This tension between the needs of the larger system and the willingness of the privileged to support those who are less so is the roadblock to evolution to Second-tier governance systems.

Sixth Order [Teal] is a breakthrough but appears as nonsense to those who cannot understand the complexity of the total system. At this level we can clearly see that any social solution that makes any portion of society lose will weaken the whole society. There is no winning that doesn't help the whole society thrive, which is to say that if anyone loses, we all lose.

### Non-violent action for the transformation of governance

Sixth Order is thus the expression of the great teachers of nonviolence, from Jesus of Nazareth to Mohandas K. Gandhi, to Bayard Rustin, advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr. While early Christianity does not appear to most as a political movement, certainly Gandhi's efforts to free India from British rule and King's campaign to extend the full rights of citizenship to all members of American society are just that.

We should note that just because a particular political action actively works to minimize physical violence does not mean that it is an expression of non-violence. There are programs and political campaigns which eschew physical violence that fall short of the philosophy and practice of Gandhi and King.

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Gandhi's term for the political philosophy we call Non-violence is Satyagraha. Derived from words in Hindi, it is an expression of a commitment to Sat or Satya, which is Truth, combined with Agraha, which is forceful action, all wrapped up in the Hindu principle of Ahimsa, which is to do no harm. Satyagraha is a life philosophy which can have expression in political action, but which is fundamentally a life lived in harmony with the truth, expressed bravely, and without malice or harm to others.

### Political Polarization

We are seeing extreme political polarization in the world today. This is an international phenomenon, but as I am in the US I will focus on its appearance in the American setting. We tend to speak of this polarization as Left vs. Right, or Red vs. Blue. There are multiple perspectives that tend to move to opposing ends of a perceived spectrum. Let us consider some examples.

✂

There is a political perspective which supports what has come to be identified as DEI. This affirms that we as a society prosper when we appreciate diversity, when we distribute resources equitably, and when all people are included.

Unfortunately, the effort to spread the good news of DEI was often implemented by a set of practices which did not respect the perspectives of those who were not already convinced of its value. People felt threatened and pushed back. They looked for a strong man who would respect their culture and their way of life.

✂

Another perspective is that America is from its founding a nation for white people who are Christian. If other races and religions understand that White Christians will dominate the Nation, they will live and let live. But when White Christian Nationalists are not allowed to celebrate their race and their religion, those who would deny them are identified as their enemies.

However, those beliefs are not in accord with reality. Separation of church and state is a fundamental principle and since our founding this nation has moved toward recognition of the full citizenship of all without regard to race or religion.

✂

Outside of the portion of our citizens who are descended from native peoples, nearly everyone is an immigrant or the descendant of immigrants. We are a nation of immigrants. One of the reasons for our nation's success is that we are largely people who had the

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courage to leave home and travel to a new place to start a new life. We are entrepreneurs. Immigrants are the lifeblood of America.

Nevertheless, for those whose livelihood is eroding, the prospect of people entering the country feels like an attack on them. The larger economic system is baffling. Those who seem strange become targets. Not only are the aliens a threat, so are those who would welcome them.

✂

Despite the affirmation that all men are created equal, this equality has come slowly to women and people of color. And despite vicious racism, Black men gained the right to vote before women did. Even though efforts to pass an Equal Rights Amendment have failed, women are gaining status. But those gains took a huge step backward with the repeal of Roe vs. Wade and the permission it gave to states to criminalize abortion.

Most people agree that there are certain circumstances in which the choice to terminate a pregnancy is a just one. It is never an easy choice. The factors impacting the decision can be very complex. But there is stark disagreement about who should make the decision.

That there are men who want to make that decision is not surprising given the long history of patriarchy. But that there are women who don't want women to have a voice in what happens to their own bodies is puzzling. Some women are mostly motivated by their own freedom. Others are motivated to feel safe and protected. They believe they will get that if they are allied with strong men.

There are many more polarized political perspectives. We can parse out regulations for gun ownership and the right to carry them in public. We can consider whether climate change is real, is it caused by human behavior, and do we need regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? We can consider if it is important for us as a nation to care about starvation and disease in other countries. The list is long.

In our consideration of the 8 Orders as a developmental sequence we can see that the positions that people take on these various perspectives is an expression of the highest level of thinking they are able to access to form cognitive maps to explain these phenomena.

If someone is primarily operating at Second Order, they will feel threatened by DEI and by immigration. If they are more attuned to the fear of the other than love of neighbor, they will also oppose women's rights and with it support for women to control their own bodies.

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Christian Nationalism may claim the Bible as a Third Order authority, but it also rejects the clear wording and historical interpretation of the Constitution, also a Third Order authority.

On the other hand, for those who can appreciate the freedoms that come from Fourth Order perspectives that all people are indeed created equal, the notion that women should have agency over their own bodies is obvious. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are givens at Fifth Order.

Polarizations may be better thought of as up and down, not left and right. We respond to the issues in the public square according to the highest level of cognitive development available to us. Those who are primarily at Second Order will be confounded and threatened by those who are at Fourth Order.

### What Comes after Democracy?

We can see a natural progression towards democracy as a system of governance. It is a system that maximizes expression of Fifth Order values. Each person has an equal right to participate in the decision-making process. While we have never had democracy in its fullest sense, we can see that it is the most mature of the existing styles of collective guidance and decision-making.

The founding fathers were geniuses in their construction of the Constitution. The US Constitution has been the template for many other democracies in the world. The founders, anticipating the harmful polarizations which autocrats might use to dismantle a democracy and shape it to their own ends, created the tricameral government of courts, legislature, and executive. If someone were to take over one branch of the government, the other two could protect the republic.

It is easy to point out the hypocrisy of a group of property-owning white men--some of whom owned other humans--designing a governance system based on the proposition that all men are created equal. They were not living in the society they were trying to create. They had a vision of a world they had never personally experienced and yet were so dedicated to that vision that they would risk their own lives. They were at best living in a Fourth Order/Orange world while they dreamt of a Fifth Order/Green society.

What the framers of the Constitution did not anticipate was the two-party system. They assumed multiple parties would form. But what we have now is dualism that overrides the tripartite structure. It cripples democracy by making fealty to the party a more urgent priority than concern for the public.

Gerrymandering congressional districts clearly demonstrates this. The goal of these actions is not to better represent the people, but to shore up the power of the party. While

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it is illegal to apportion districts on the basis of race, it is legal to do so to favor the party in power. This sabotages democracy.

One consequence of this sabotage is that many have given up on the idea of democracy. “It certainly isn’t working for me,” they say. “Better to rely on the tried-and-true Strong Man approach. He may not be a paragon of virtue, but at least he will break what needs to be broken.”

If we back away from democracy we are giving up on a system that we have never fully tried. Even the best of the Constitutional ideal is only an approximation of democracy. The existing system tries to ensure that everyone who is a citizen gets a vote. However, in most circumstances, we only decide who will make the decisions. Maybe there is something better... something that the map of the 8 Orders can help us find.

### When Governance Works Best

The science of complex adaptive systems alerts us that there are variables that support the optimal functioning of the system. We want to maximize those which will bring about the emergence of mind in its most robust form, so how the elements in a system relate to each other is crucial. A nation will be strongest when the governance system maximizes those variables.

### What is a healthy hierarchy?

Central to the problem of maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of governance is the question of how we deal with hierarchy. As we have seen, there are naturally occurring hierarchies and socially constructed ones. The naturally occurring ones are just a feature of reality. It is folly to attempt to thwart them. But some expressions of socially constructed hierarchies are damaging to the health of the system.

It is common for groups of people to organize themselves by selecting a leader. This constructs a hierarchy. It is also common for an enterprise to hire workers. This also constructs a hierarchy. The matter at issue here is less about how the hierarchy is formed than what it is designed to do. If the hierarchy is for dominance, it is harmful. If it is to support the system as a whole and with it the people, the employees, the elements of the system, then it is healthy.

Dominance hierarchies are so common as to be ubiquitous. I am personally most perplexed about this in the culture of Christianity. Jesus preached that the first shall be last and was killed for fear that he would try to usurp the King or the Emperor. And then the first thing the Disciples did after his death was to shore up the leadership of the Twelve. A beloved part of the musical heritage of Christianity is Handel’s Messiah in which we sing,

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“He is King of Kings, He is Lord of Lords.” Throughout the history of Christianity groups broke free of the dominance the church hierarchy only to go on to form a new hierarchy. We seem to be unable to imagine that we can thrive without a dominance hierarchy.

This is a central feature of the current government in the US. Never has a President claimed such authority to himself and never have so many citizens applauded his efforts to gather power to himself. While he says that he is doing this for the people, he only has in mind a small subset of the populace. This is dominance run amok. This is authoritarianism.

But the idea of making decisions by distributed means is absurd to anyone who is unable to think in terms of complex cognitive maps. That systems can and do self-organize in ways that optimize the system is beyond the grasp of most people. The leading edge of cognitive development for most of the nation is only Fourth Order- Orange.

Most Americans don't understand how and why vaccines work. We think if we let people who are struggling into our nation we will weaken it. We think that people who have money are smarter than those who don't so we should let them be in charge. And we think we pay out too much in taxes for the benefits we receive. This is the way the world looks to people who see from a Second Order perspective.

We will have to create contexts in which people are invited to think in more complex ways. I personally have enjoyed the privilege of being surrounded by people with open hearts and heads. Everyone should be so fortunate. But what might we do to create such a world?

### Envisioning the Future and How we get there

Here I will only be sketching out in the broadest terms my vision of what human societies might look like were they to support the health of humans and the planet. I am heartened that I am not alone in trying to discern this vision. And I will alert you to the probability that by the time you read this I will have amended this cognitive map.

#### The necessity of community

It has so rapidly become true that we can now easily communicate with nearly anyone on the planet that it seems absurd that we are in a crisis of loneliness and estrangement. While it is true that electronic communication doesn't give the same sense of presence as being in person, it is also true that people are able to have deep and close relationships without ever having physically met. Interpersonal alienation is not simply a problem of electronic communication technology.

Nor is it the fault of the algorithms. Yes, they skew and manipulate, but they only do that to those for whom the best way to spend their time is on a device. When kids have a chance

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to have free range to play in the park they do. They want to be with peers in an environment that is not overly constrained by adults.

We don't as a society value children enough to set aside the resources to give them the best possible start in life. We want women to have babies, but we don't want to have to help parents raise them. Healthy children need healthy communities.

### The features of healthy communities

Let us then consider what healthy communities are like. When communities are places of safety and support such that those who live in them know that they matter and those around them have their back, and when issues that are raised are named, addressed, and resolved, then people can live full lives. This breaks down for me into three sets of needs.

#### *A Shared Story*

We need to have a way to talk about who we are and how we got here that is true enough to keep us grounded, while being inspirational enough to give a sense of purpose, and practical enough to show us a path forward.

#### *A loving Ethic*

We need to embrace the understanding that our differences are not flaws. We are each uniquely created, and our identity and experiences are vital for the well-being of the whole community. Everyone matters and anything that minimizes another minimizes the whole. We make a system great by fully resourcing every element of the system.

#### *Participatory Governance*

The more the elements in the system are engaged with the processes of the system, the more robust the system becomes. Each person has something to offer, and that offering happens in connection with others. We benefit by encouraging the participation of everyone in the actions of the larger community.

### Admonitions for us all.

I will close this essay with consideration of what this looks like in practice. My vision is not of something new but of a way of being that is ancient and common. The only novel aspect of it is that it minimizes dominance while maximizing the contributions of all.

#### Here is what I hope we will all be able to do.

**Know that you matter.** Give yourself permission to create what you need. This requires that you know what you need and that you are willing to act on your own behalf. This is especially hard for those of us who were told early in our lives by those whose job it was to

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care for us that we were not important. There is no one who is more vital to the wellbeing of the planet than you are. And there is no one who is less vital.

**Clarify your purpose.** You are not an accident. Know that you matter and that you have a job to do. Your assignment may change over time. Continually ask yourself, “What is mine to do right now and right here.”

**Seek intimacy with others.** Your ability to care for yourself and the planet is multiplied by your ability to connect deeply with others. Practice getting to the point where you can experience personal transformations in the relationships you create.

**Discover common aims.** Your purpose aligns with those around you. Find those you align with and work with them. While you will have a unique role in the alliance, you will be bound together by a common purpose.

**Build alliances.** Those you work with will know others doing similar things for similar reasons. Connect with them and learn from them and teach them what you are doing.

**Link to larger and larger aims.** The largest aim is the wellbeing of all. Your aim is a subset of that. Find and strengthen the alliances that connect you to ever more inclusive and expansive aims.

### What might this look like in practice

When we know that we matter, we know that what is bothering us matters. We are each the only one occupying our place in the cosmos. We are each the steward of our being. If there is irritation in the system at our location, it falls to us to repair it. What is the problem?

We claim responsibility for the problem by creating a cognitive map that is true, that is, it points to what is real, while offering a way for us to address the problem. There is something we can do.

Maybe the problem is that pothole the city hasn't fixed. Maybe the problem is that my immigrant neighbors are living in fear. Maybe the problem is that my children are inconsiderate. Whatever the problem is, my perspective on it is mine alone. For at least this moment, my purpose is to address this problem.

Effectively addressing this problem will require that I build connections with others. Who else sees this as a problem? How do they see it differently than I? Can our diverse perspectives lead to a fuller understanding of the problem? How many others can we find that care about this problem?

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What is our aim? There is a shared purpose which is the attractor for the community of those who care about this problem. Can we be very clear about this aim? It is this aim that will guide us, not some person who has authority over us.

As communities with allied aims connect into a web of shared concern, this forms a resilient matrix. We come to trust that we are a part of an expansive effort to heal the world. We embody the interconnectedness of the whole.

## Part Six: Transcendentals and Strange Loops

We have not paid much attention to the Seventh and Eighth Orders. Nor have we looked at the system as a whole. In this final chapter I want to fill in some of the blanks with consideration of transcendentals and strange loops. They are features that allow us to see the connections inherent in the fabric of being.

In the scholastic tradition of medieval philosophy, transcendentals are properties of being itself that apply to everything that exists. They go “beyond” particular categories. We will

Transcendentals			
love	freedom	justice	time
<b>Kenosis:</b> Sacrificial love; acting to benefit Others or All without protecting the Self.	Freedom comes from alignment with a <b>larger purpose</b> .	<b>Cosmic order:</b> Justice effects an evolutionary change toward resonance between all systems.	<b>Time is eternal.</b> There is only now.
<b>Agape:</b> Extending the same compassion to others that we feel for ourselves. "Love your neighbor as yourself."	Freedom comes from alignment with <b>my authentic self</b> .	<b>Systemic change:</b> Justice creates a new order in which future transgressions are less likely.	<b>Time is relative.</b> What is known to be past or future may be experienced as the now.
<b>Eros:</b> Desiring to bond with another to create a sense of wholeness in oneself.	Freedom comes from alignment with <b>the world</b> such that I am not constrained.	<b>Restoration:</b> Justice restores the original balance or stability.	<b>Kairos:</b> a season or "at the right time." Time can appear to move faster or slower.
<b>Philia:</b> Bonding with others to create safety and belonging.	Freedom is doing whatever I want.	<b>Retribution or Revenge:</b> "An eye for an eye..." Harm is shared equally.	<b>Chronos:</b> time is exact and unwavering .

often find these named the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Unity is also sometimes on the list. They transcend insofar as they are qualities that are not restricted to a single context or realm.

in the graphic of the 8 Orders of Being I have included four other qualities that appear to me to be transcendental. They are love, freedom, justice, and time. This is certainly not an exhaustive list. Honor is also transcendent. But these four are ones that I encounter frequently. I find that being able to see

flavors of the same thing as being characteristic of the different layers helps me appreciate the deeper aspects of these qualities. Further, the intersection of the characteristics of a given layer and the nature of a given quality helps me see the circumstances in which the quality arises with greater appreciation.

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For example, most people are not familiar with the use of the term kenosis to designate a kind of love that is willing to sacrifice for another. It is not my invention, but I suspect we will need to sit with it for a bit for us to be able to get our heads around the idea. That it is a characteristic of love in the Transpersonal Realm may suggest that it is rare and only accessible to spiritual adepts.

Not so. We see toddlers soothe other children by giving them their own toys. They spontaneously give of what is theirs for the benefit of others. My son was only four or five years old when he learned of a project to build schools in Nicaragua. He went to his room and brought out his bank of coins. It was all the money he had in the world, and he gave it to the project. This is sacrificial love. It is kenosis, which comes from the Greek for self-emptying.

One of the characteristics of Transcendentals is that we don't have to be fully engaged at a particular level to experience them, but when we experience them, we are in a sense pulled to that level. I may believe about myself that I am unable to observe what is arising for me at Seventh or Eighth Order, but if I focus my attention on the realization that the only moment we can be in is Now... then I begin to see the unity of all things.

Theodore Parker introduced us to the image of the Moral Arc of the Universe and noted that, while we cannot see the far end of the arc, we trust that it bends toward justice. This notion of justice is not about retribution. It is about the transcendental quality of justice. By viewing justice from the perspective of each of these layers we come to a more wholistic vision.

Our consideration of transcendental qualities helps us to see the various realms or layers as different dimensions of the same thing. We can come to see the whole of being.

Strange loops are also a window into the wholeness of being. They also connect between the layers but by association with a given process or product.

### What is a strange loop?

Strange loops are heuristics that help us deal with the chaos in our lives. They are models for describing the fundamental nature of being, as well as a cognitive map used for solving problems. They are valuable tools for thinking about and thus relating to complex situations.

The first use of the term strange loop was by Douglas Hofstadter in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, Gödel, Escher, Bach [1980]. He returned to the notion in a second book; I am a Strange Loop [2007]. I urge you to consult these to see the origins of the term, but I am going to take the concept a bit further than what I think Hofstadter was referencing. For

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one thing, he was talking about what I have come to see as a special case of strange loops. In the normal use of the word *strange*, strange loops are not at all strange. Indeed, they are ubiquitous. They are everywhere all the time.

We know a loop when we tie our shoes, but another form of a loop is a process that repeats itself, though with minor variations. In this sense a conversation is a loop. We take turns speaking and we each imagine that we are responding to what the other has said. Conversation is an example of a dynamic loop.

Some loops appear to us as static. A tabletop is a static loop. We know that at the atomic and subatomic level what we get are probability clouds for where a packet of energy may be at any given moment, but, in the aggregate, some things appear solid. Indeed, they are loops made of loops which are made of loops. They are holons. Reality is a complex and dynamic set of interrelated loops.

We can't get our heads around such dynamic concepts. Instead, our brains take the data from our senses and form representations called mental objects which we then believe to be real. After all, we think, seeing is believing. But consider a movie on a monitor. It is a set of pixels of various colors that fire to create an image in our minds. The higher the refresh rate on the monitor, the clearer the image my brain can construct.

One of the benefits of the heuristic of a strange loop is that it reminds us that reality is not the objects we think we are relating to. It reminds us that while the conversation I have with the checker at the grocery store may be very narrow around whether I have any coupons, that person has as full and rich a life as I do. I may only be able to relate to them in the moment as an object, but they are in fact a rich and dynamic set of loops.

This is very important. While I experience the world as a set of objects, reality is a set of interconnected dynamic loops whose complexity I can only begin to grasp. Every object we relate to is a loop. Brains use a heuristic to make the chaos of our lives simple enough for us to conceptually grasp and then respond to. But, indeed, all is chaos.

A mark on a page can be a letter, which is part of a word, which helps to form a sentence, which fits into a paragraph in a section of a chapter of a book. And the book was created out of the mind of the author. This raises a fundamental question. Do the letters create the book, or does the mind of the author create the book? And of course, the correct answer is, yes.

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Strange, yes?

The quality of strangeness is the aspect of the loop that appreciates not only that the loop is constructed of many nested levels, but that the higher and the lower levels appear to co-construct each other. The process by which the lower levels create the higher levels is a process complexity theory refers to as emergence. And the process by which the higher levels invite the lower levels into being is referred to as the quality of mind.

"Are you going to the party?"

"I don't know, I haven't made up my mind."

Strangeness is the property of a loop by which we can see that those levels that appear to be in a hierarchy with each other are in fact creating each other. In the Hofstadter book, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* he highlights the M.C. Escher drawing of two hands each drawing the other.

When we understand that the mental objects we create are in fact strange loops, we can contemplate the loop to experience and enjoy its strangeness. We can discover the multiple levels that interact to construct the loop and thus come to see it with greater depth.

### Building Healthy Relationships

*[This portion of the essay is not included in the video and I will be posting an article on Substack that more fully addresses these questions.]*

One of the more surprising revelations from quantum physics is that, when we look for a particular quality in the quantum state, we not only find it, but we durably create it. If we look for a wave, we find a wave. If we look for a particle, we find a particle. And once we have observed a particular packet of energy, it remains what we observed it to be.

At another level of being, when a teacher looks for a student to be capable, the student becomes more capable. The expectation calls forth a particular way of being. It is not just that we see what we look for. We create what we look for.

We can readily notice that we show up differently in different relationships. What we less readily notice is that the more we show up in a particular way in a given set of relationships, the more that way of being becomes a durable part of our identity.

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As parents, we worry that our children may be hanging out with the wrong crowd because they are learning bad habits. Criminal justice reform advocates have long noted that prisons are training grounds for criminal behavior. What we less often notice is how our own values and thus behaviors are a product of the communities in which we place ourselves.

Jean Piaget noted, and Robert Kegan has reinforced, that we are more highly influenced by peers than by authorities. I am less likely to do what I am told than I am to do what is the norm for my community. This makes it critical, if I am to become the best me I can be, that I find and engage communities with the highest possible standards of behavior. We must create ways to be around those we look up to.

But the very communities that once were the drivers of healthy transformation have fallen into stagnation and disarray. We see this both in religious and political organizations. In political parties and in social reform organizations the goal has become to "make the other lose." Whether the goal is to tell others what to do, or to shape who gets to decide, the framework is objectifying and dualistic.

We don't really expect politics to be ethical. We have a very narrow definition of corruption. If one has not done something which will result in a criminal conviction, one has "not done anything wrong."

More troubling for me is the failure of faith communities to be the "beloved community" envisioned by Moses and Lao Tsu and Jesus and Muhammad and Gandhi and King. The most rapidly growing religious sect in America is the one pollsters classify as the "nones," meaning they have no religious affiliation.

Christianity is seen, rightly it seems to me, as antiquated and anti-science. Rejection of evolution, denial of women's rights to their own bodies, and the assertion that marriage can only be between a man and a woman are at odds with the beliefs of most Americans. Even the most progressive of American churches struggle with latent privilege and the protection of dominance hierarchies.

Central to the way beliefs are formed and articulated is the notion the community shares about the nature of God. Beliefs about the nature of God form a heuristic by which a great many problems may be addressed. If God, "knit me in my mother's womb," then surely

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abortion is murder. If God "created us male and female," then there are only two genders and transgender, or non-binary persons are abominations.

Many decide that they have no use for God in their lives and thus "don't believe in him." But if we do that, we abandon any cognitive map with the title "God," and with it all the guidance and insight that can come from such heuristics.

Nancy Ellen Abrams is the co-author of several prominent writings in the field of cosmology. When she recognized that her ability to draw from the wisdom of 12-step recovery depended on having a "higher power," she went in search of *A God that Could be Real*, the title of the book she then wrote. What she came up with is fascinating and deeply useful. What is more, she models for us the permission to construct for ourselves the relationship with God which will best enable us to create what we need. God revealed Godself to her in the process of emergence.

We create and are created by all the relationships we have, especially those we give attention to. If we want to have a rich and dynamic relationship with all that is real and relevant, we need communities in which God is a collaborative creation born from the needs and experiences of all.

### Relating to “the All”

The totality of being is just too big, too complex, even too chaotic, for us to relate to. It is the loop that contains all loops. The strange loop which contains all strange loops is not a heuristic for our daily lives. It is just too complex.

Instead, we can simplify the complex concept by selecting certain aspects of the whole which are most relevant to us. We condense our sense of “the all” into our sense of what matters. We reduce it to something that we can hold as a mental object, and with which we can construct a relationship. We form a relationship which we can then use to inform the choices of our daily lives.

If the scope of our concern is the totality of the processes which make up the biosphere, we may name it as *Gaia* or even *Mother Nature*. But if we want to be inclusive of all the dynamics of being, the title most used is *God*.

For most people that word, that title, does not mean what we are talking about here. For most people, and certainly for those who are unable to use complex cognitive maps, God is

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outside of the world we inhabit. So, it may be that we will have to find a different name. *Source* and *Ground of Being* are used. But it is hard to have a sense that the Ground loves me. Personally, I want to try to reclaim the name *God*.

Since we must define what we mean when we use that term in any case, I am inclined to use *God*, and *religion*, and *spirit* knowing I will need to do the work of defining my perspective. I will have to be clear about what I understand to be the nature of God and my relationship to Them.

Yes, Them. God is gender non-binary. God is not a person, but an entity with which I desire to create a personal relationship because I find such a relationship enriches my life and results in my making choices that are observably better, not just for myself, but also for others. While I am a loop that resides within the loop that is God, I am not God. I am in God. And while I have a mind of my own, to the degree to which I can align my mind with that of God, I am able to act in a manner that values and enriches all of creation.

For early Mesopotamians, God was a king. For Jesus, God was a father. For me, God is a Strange Loop.

### Postscript

I asked at the end of the segment in which we looked at the graphic of the 8 Orders, “What comes after the Eighth Order?” Some philosophers who work with developmental sequences suggest that, as more of us are able to reliably construct our consciousness at the higher orders, we will begin to discern what follows. We will start to see what characterizes Ninth Order. I don’t think that is the case.

Some years ago, I heard a lecture by Alan Watts in which he paraphrased the creation myth from the Vedanta. It has stuck with me as a way to understand the mystical insight that the divine is hidden in the material world. My paraphrase of what I remember Watt’s having said is this.

*“For eons, the Divine existed in undifferentiated wholeness. God was bored. So, God determined to fashion a game of hide and seek in which God disguised Godself as the rocks and the rivers and all the living things and then waited to see if there was anything that God had created that could find God.”*

More recently I have learned of the ancient Egyptian symbol of the Ouroboros.



From the website Egypt Tours Portal:

*“The Ouroboros is one of the oldest symbols in ancient Egyptian history, having originated around 1600 BCE. It represents concepts such as rebirth, immortality, and cyclicity. It is depicted as a serpent or dragon biting its own tail. The name Ouroboros translates to “Devouring its Own Tail” or “All is One,” symbolizing the cyclic nature of time, the*

*universe, and the idea that creation emerges from destruction and life from death.*

[[https://www.egypttoursportal.com/the-ouroboros-symbol/#the\\_ouroboros\\_symbol\\_origin](https://www.egypttoursportal.com/the-ouroboros-symbol/#the_ouroboros_symbol_origin)]

Some cosmologists posit that, in the deepest, darkest, coldest reaches of space, particles pop into existence and then collapse. Matter and anti-matter are formed together and destroy each other. But sometimes, the matter is not destroyed.

Perhaps the ancient insight is correct. Perhaps form arises from formlessness. Perhaps what comes after Eighth Order is First Order. Perhaps the undifferentiated nature of the unity of Eighth Order longs for the particularity and diversity of First Order. Perhaps there is no end without beginning.

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