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Holarchy, the Nested Hierarchy of Holons

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Arthur Koestler coined the terms "holon" and "holarchy" in 1967 in his book *The Ghost in the Machine*. Most recently these words have been repopularized by the philosopher Ken Wilber. The word holon is a neuter form of the Greek "holos," meaning "whole." Holon refers to an entity or concept which is simultaneously a whole, yet a part of a larger constellation. Holons are stable, autonomous, and self-reliant, but are also subject to control from higher holonic authorities. They are also intermediate forms upon which the entire holarchy is built. The holarchy is a nested hierarchy of holons. Hierarchy is not the most perfect word for this explanation, but for lack of another it will be used. Its inappropriateness is derived from the holarchy's emphasis on horizontal translation as opposed to vertical [transformation](#). One thing does not become another, but transcends and includes the previous. Development is envelopment. This is due to the nested nature of holarchies.

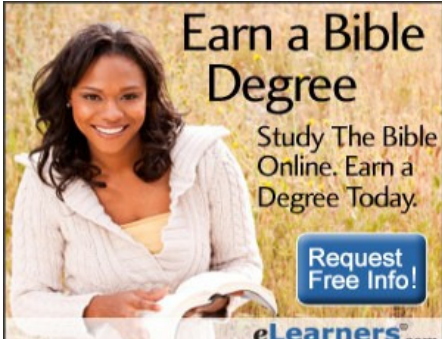
An example of a holarchy is that of the particle, atom, and molecule, and on upwards through the great chain of being. The particle is a discrete, self-contained monad (of course particle physics will delve deeper eventually, but for the sake of discussion...) of which several may comprise an atom. Several atoms together form a molecule. The test to see if a holarchy is formed by these holons is to remove one unit and see if the nest can survive. To remove the atom means no molecules can exist, but particles still persist. However, remove particles and atoms and molecules are no longer found. Particles and atoms represent the increasing differentiated yet integrated aspect of the holarchy.

Energy to matter to the universe to the multiverse. Cells to organelles to organs to organisms. Societies to ecosystems to planets. These are holons in holarchy. When these separate holarchies are considered, it can be understood that each holarchy is a part of another larger holarchy as well. This form of thought represents an attempt to integrate all aspects of reality into a theory of everything, much like the attempt in physics to find a grand unifying theory of the one fundamental force of the universe. However, holon and holarchy can envelop and include all [trades](#) and disciplines, matter and the immaterial, concrete and abstract, etc. Ken Wilber has attempted this in his book *A Theory of Everything*, published in 2000, as a laymen's introduction to his integral theory of reality.

A basic version of a very in-depth idea was presented in this book as a figure called "The Great Holarchy." Wilber cleverly shows that many traditions, including science and religion, are not "nonoverlapping magisteria," but nested holons. Wilber covers the entire realm of reality in this figure. Envision concentric circles each encompassing the next, including matter, life, mind, soul, and spirit. Each is paired with the school dealing with each holon, respectively physics, biology, psychology, theology, and mysticism. How beautifully it comes together. Each can exist without the next, as long as each it includes still remains.

To explore a bit further, consider the Descartes problem of mind/body dualism. Are the two separate entities or is there some mechanism by which the immaterial mind can affect the physical brain and body? No answer is presented, but the question becomes more intricately framed when holarchy is brought into the conversation. Modern research has proven that consciousness is not simply some transcendental noumenon holding its own existence, as described by some religious traditions. Physical brain state correlates disprove the disembodied theory of consciousness, but it does not prove the reductionist approach that consciousness is nothing but neuronal interplay either. We do confirm that science and spirituality overlap in some sense, and should be both seen as brothers in their philosophical search for truth. Brain and consciousness are two holons, with brain nested within consciousness. We have seen in many scenarios brain continue to function without consciousness, as in comas. Yet consciousness cannot function without brain. This coincides with our expectation of holons in holarchy.

Holons are not a new idea, as they are seen and recognized by most everyone in daily life. But having labeled the concept has allowed us to think more clearly and [apply](#) the notion to other realms of thought and reality. Integration of holons within holarchy has guided our thinkers one step closer to "the big picture" and will likely [unlock](#) more secrets of the universe. Progress will be had, but it will not be a transformation, but a translation, for where would we be and where would we go without a history. Progress itself is a holarchy of history and time!

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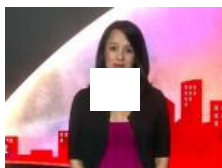
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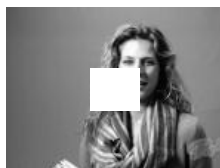
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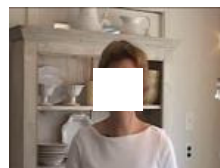
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A poor student was admitted to the university, but the family had no extra money to pay his tuition. In order to realize his college dream, he used to sell goods door to door in the summer. In order to gather the fees, he could not bear to spend a penny, and he bit the bullet and begged some food to the people.

By: [toryyang](#) | [News and Society](#) > [Philosophy](#) | Dec 28, 2011

Darling, I am growing old, silver threads among the gold.' Telltale signs you're an old coot

I want you to know -- and coot lovers worldwide demand that I tell you -- the coot is an honorable, hard working, entirely meritorious fowl. It is a medium-sized water bird in good standing, well known and up-to-date in its membership in the rail family Rallidae. They constitute, and proudly too, the genus Fulica with eye-catching predominantly black plumage. They are common in South America, Europe, and North America, too.

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