

Speculations On Ascending And Descending Octaves

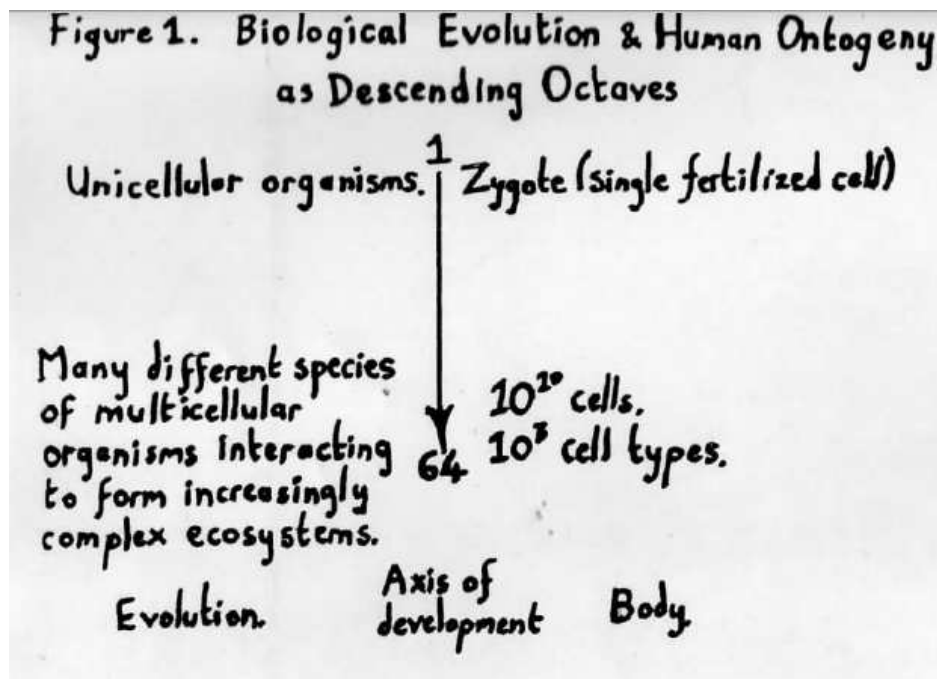
By S. Lee
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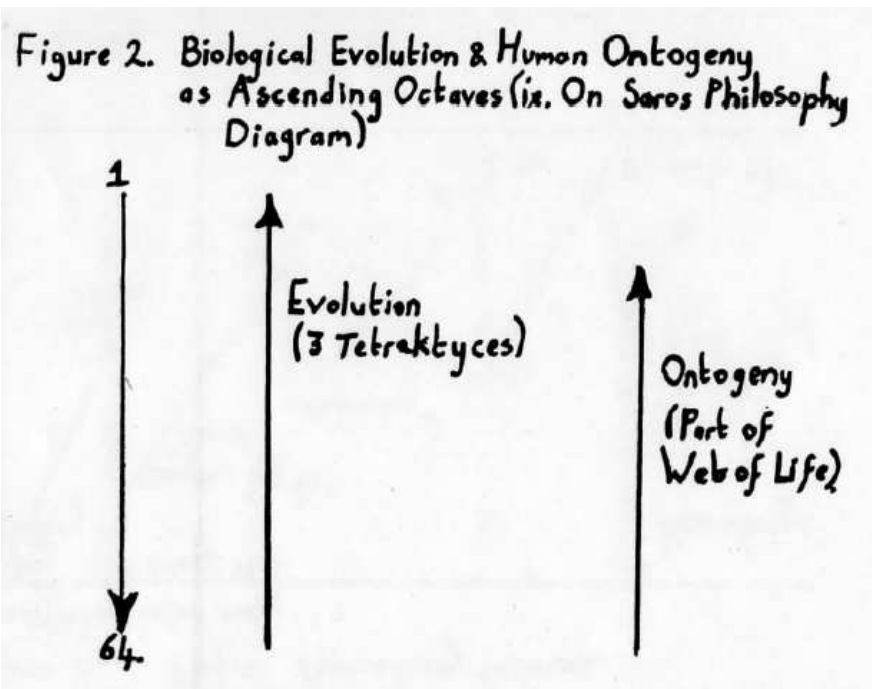
“How each the whole its substance gives,
each in the other works and lives!
See heavenly forces rising and descending
their golden arms reciprocally lending;
on wings that winnow sweet blessing
from heaven through the earth they're pressing
to fill the All with harmonies caressing ...”

- from “Faust” - Goethe

The Saros Philosophy diagram (Linear version) contains an apparent paradox. The process of evolution in Nature and the development of the human body can both be seen as movements in the direction of Unity to multiplicity, i.e. as descending octaves. Indeed both have been used as illustrations of how the three forces/processes unfold. Evolution is a process whereby the level of a single cell gives rise to complex multicellular organisations. There is differentiation into diverse species and ecological interaction between them. Similarly, the human baby begins as a single fertilized cell which undergoes rapid division to 2, 4, 8, 16 and so on to many cells. These differentiate and their interaction generates the complex structure of the adult body.

However, the manner in which both the development of the body and the evolutionary process are plotted on the Saros Philosophy diagram implies they are Ascending Octaves, i.e. processes of development in the direction of simplicity. (see figures 1 and 2).





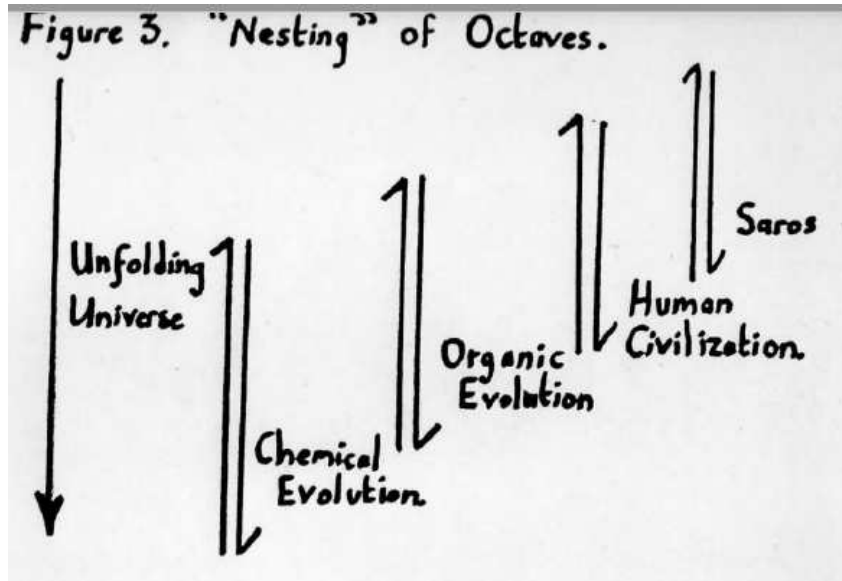
Saros Philosophy therefore seems to imply that developmental processes can be simultaneously both Ascending and Descending Octaves. One possible way of looking at this is to state the principle that: Any developmental process is a descending octave when observed as a closed system (i.e. with reference only to itself) but is an ascending octave when viewed as an open system (i.e. as part of a bigger whole). This sounds complicated but will appear simpler with a few illustrations.

If we consider the human body in isolation it is clearly a descending octave. It starts as a single cell which divides into many cells, the whole mass inevitably disintegrating into its basic constituents at death. However, if we look at the body as an open system in relation to its environment it can be seen as an ascending octave - the body takes in a variety of elements from the world and unifies them into a single whole. Before dying it may perpetuate this ability.

If we look at the development of one of the great world religions such as Christianity we see how an initial simple truth leads to the development of a multitude of sects and complex rituals etc. However, when looked at in the wider context of history they can be seen as major unifying forces in human society.

Consider a committee set up to tackle a particular problem. The problem will be seen to have various aspects. This may result in a division of labour amongst the individual members of the committee. The subsequent ramifications of the problem may be reflected in the development of specialist sub-committees. The development of our hypothetical committee is clearly a descending octave. However the function of the committee may be to unify the operations of a larger organisation - an ascending octave. If we look at the history of this organisation it is sure to be in the nature of a descending octave. Yet it may serve as an ascending octave in society, e.g. the organisation may be a government.

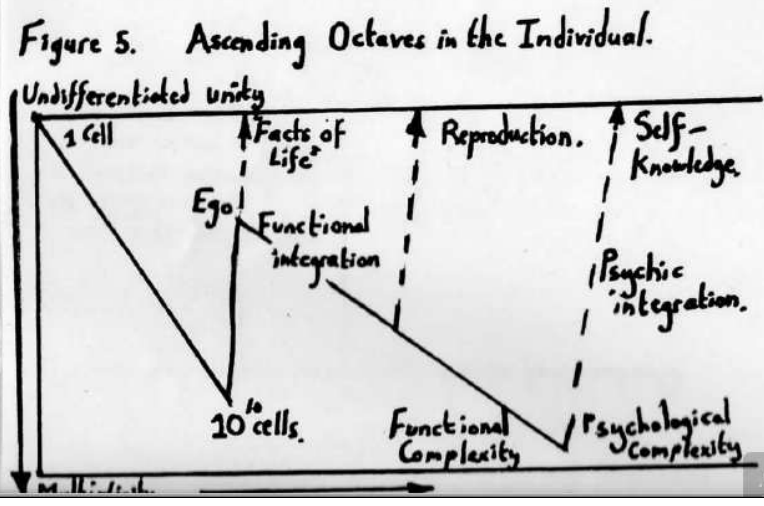
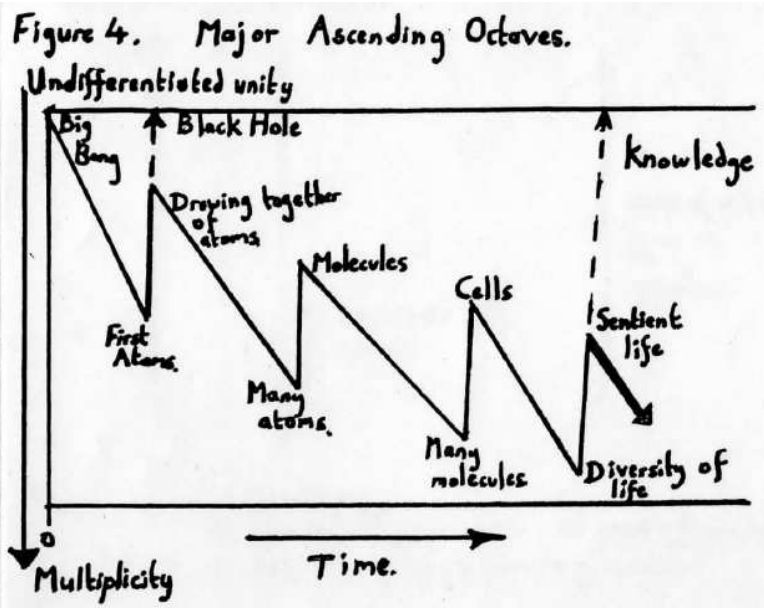
A particularly relevant sequence of octaves within octaves is given in figure 3.



A similar sequence of octaves can be seen in the development of the individual. The physical body is part of the ascending octave of life in the Universe. But its own development is in the nature of a descending octave. As differentiation proceeds, in order to maintain the integrity of the body an ascending octave is required - the nervous system. As a result of learning the nervous system becomes functionally more complex - a descending octave. Therefore in order to maintain its integrity another ascending octave is required. The subsequent integration of function is the ego. But as the developing child is forced to occupy an increasing number of roles the ego is differentiated into a variety of selves. Another ascending octave is clearly required, and so on.

The principle that a descending octave can be an ascending octave with respect to a bigger system has an interesting corollary: an ascending octave can be part of a bigger descending octave. This is clearly related to the Second Law of Thermodynamics: in closed systems not in thermodynamic equilibrium entropy (disorder) tends to increase. Put simply, if you want to grow or just stay alive you've got to kill things and eat them. This is not an aspect of the Universe I wish to dwell upon.

How far can an ascending octave ascend? Are ascending octaves just expedient measures to ensure the universe continues to hang together as it unfolds in increasing complexity? Or can an ascending octave go the whole hog back to the initial unity? These possibilities are explored in figures 4 and 5.



As shown in figure 4 a major ascending octave in the physical universe is associated with the force of gravity - the physical drawing together of the elements of the universe into the same space. This process may continue all the way back to the initial undifferentiated unity when matter is swallowed up in a black hole. This may be the eventual fate of the entire universe. However, what is more usual at this stage of the universe is for the ascending octave to be terminated in more diversification at a higher level. Another major ascending octave is that of sentient life - the tendency of the universe to become aware of itself. Our awareness of the world usually serves the function of propagating diversity at another level - cultural evolution. However if the conditions are right the ascending octave of awareness can be continued further. Cosmological speculations such as this one represent an intellectual striving towards the initial undifferentiated unity. Extrapolation from personal experience and traditional mystical teachings of various cultures suggest that with greater psychic integration the initial unity may be known directly as well as known about.

“We live in a Universe which is making itself, within a universe which is unmaking itself: self-integrating multiplicity within self-differentiating unity.”
 ~ Henri Bergson