

The Philosophy of Richard Kirby

By Gordon Arthur

I. Reflections on Dr. Richard Kirby by Gordon Arthur¹

Trying to describe the thought or philosophy of Richard Kirby is like trying to capture a whirlwind. Ideas came at you from all directions simultaneously and it was easy either to get carried away or to get blown away.

His training was initially in psychology at North East London Polytechnic in England (now the University of East London), followed by training for ordination at General Theological Seminary in New York City, where he gained an MDiv, and post-graduate work in theology at King's College, London after his return to Britain, where he gained a PhD in theology. He lived in Britain from his birth in 1949 to 1978 and 1986 to 1994 and in the United States from 1978 to 1986 and again from 1994 until his death in 2009.

Richard's had interests including astronomy, ethics, finance, mathematics, philosophy, psychology, science fiction, theology, sociology, and the theory of government. He could speak about almost any topic at a moment's notice. His primary interests, however, were encouraging the religions to work together to relieve suffering and developing an Anglican counterpart to the Society of Jesus (called the Order of the Academy of Christ), which stressed the importance of learning within a framework of prayer, a way to combine the contemplative and the active life. Ultimately the latter project did not take off as he intended, but it was part of the impetus for the formation of the Kepler Space Institute, which was the main focus of the last few years of his life.

His doctoral dissertation was a study of the Theological Science of Thomas Torrance and it concentrated on the role of evidence in Torrance's definition of cosmic disorder. This was part of a wider project to harmonize theology and science by emphasizing that while science itself could be seen as morally neutral, the way it was applied frequently was not. He often quoted Einstein's belief and sadness that his famous equation, $E = mc^2$, had led directly to the Manhattan Project and its results over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Accordingly, he was always keen to emphasize the morality behind scientific discovery and to encourage its practitioners to act in ways that were beneficial to humanity. He would therefore have been delighted to know that Kepler Space Institute adopted *Reverence for Life within Ethical Civilization* as the basis of its philosophy.

The People's Astronomy was his final book, compiled in three days from a collection of existing material and it was intended to build enthusiasm for astronomy among those without scientific training. The Table of Contents follows, along with the Foreword, Preface, Endpiece, and Afterword. The full book is at <http://bobkrone.com/node/206>.

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¹ I am indebted to the appreciation produced for Richard's funeral (part of which I wrote) for refreshing my memory on some of the details in this section.

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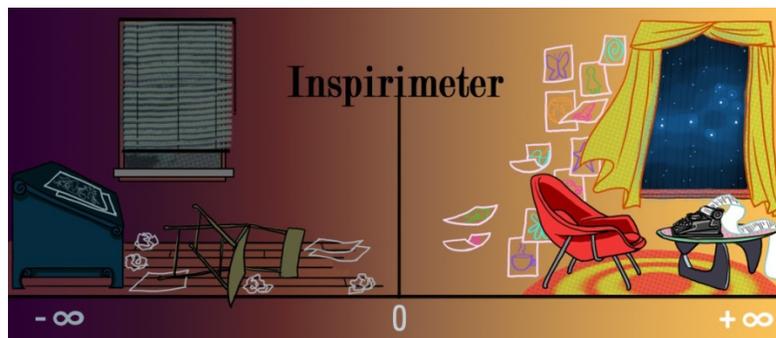
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III. People's Astronomy Foreword: Dr. Bob Krone

Dr. Richard S. Kirby has been intellectually orbiting Earth with the ideas in this book since, as a fourteen-year old scientist in England in 1961, he knew of Yuri Gagarin, Alan Shepard, and John Glenn orbiting the Earth to begin the Space Age. On January 1, 2009, Dr. Kirby activated his de-orbit rocket and opened the Kepler Space Institute. Now he brings to Earth's people *The People's Astronomy*. Conceptual images help. So view the following image collage, which Rich Kirby created. He titled it *The Inspirimeter*.



The Inspirimeter is a conceptual overview of the desired evolution of human progress on Earth and into Space. Scientist, historian, scholar, astronomer, philosopher, minister Richard Kirby has brought the meaning of the Solar System and the stars to young and old on Earth with this small book. Similar to Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (1998), *The People's Astronomy* answers the question for every human: "Why should we go to space?"

Since the Big Bang, humans have had the urge for flight as part of their genetic construct. The mythical Greek account of Daedalus's flight from prison to the Sun may be the first such story. Recorded history, science fiction, and the entertainment world continually focus on humans departing cradle Earth for good or for evil.

Dr. Kirby picked Astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) to represent our new university, because Kepler was the first to calculate the *Laws of Planetary Motion* and his laws are still used today to calculate satellite orbits.

The International Space Station has been growing since 1998, as it orbits the Earth every 90 minutes, because scientists and technologists have given us accurate mathematical means to plan and create space exploration and human development in Space precisely.

So why is this such an important book for the Space Age?

Forty-two of us, who have dedicated our lives to flying and to space over the last fifty years since John Glenn orbited the Earth, collaborated in writing *Beyond Earth: The Future of Humans in Space*.² Its 293 pages are filled with both the theory and detailed explanations of *How* and *Why* humans will settle in Space. It was this book that helped Richard Kirby fire his intellectual de-orbit rocket and bring his life's thinking to an Earth landing for people everywhere.

The ultimate answer to *Why Go?* is our desire for improved human evolution, and even its survival. Along the way, human space exploration and development will bring huge positive changes to our Earth and to the cultures, politics and societies on Earth. You will find Rich Kirby's imagination for those changes in *The People's Astronomy*. Working with Richard Kirby takes one on a path through forests of paradigms. He is one of Earth's most innovative thinkers for both theory and practice. We have launched the Kepler Space Institute into a sea of global problems which the leadership and Faculty are committed to address.

Whether you are an astronaut, a fourth grader, a "Woman of the Stars", a teacher, an artist or musician, in government, industry or non-profit work, and regardless of where on this planet you live, you will find your personal hopes, optimism and capabilities expanding as you envision a better future from each chapter of *The People's Astronomy*.

Bob Krone, PhD, Colonel, USAF (Ret)

Provost, Kepler Space Institute
April 11, 2009

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² (Toronto, ON: Apogee Space Press, 2006).

IV. People's Astronomy Preface and Endpiece: Dr. Richard S. Kirby, Ph.D.

Author's Preface: The People's Astronomy

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work, which they who fought here have thus far so nobly, advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln: *Gettysburg Address*

With the death ten years ago of Carl Sagan, known as the People's Astronomer, a gulf opened in an American culture.

Although the intermittent successes of NASA and the space civilization building of the American people have gone on, sometimes slowly, sometimes fast, sometimes bravely, sometimes with less courage, sometimes profitably, and sometimes unprofitably, the space civilization building and the concept of the astronomical sciences (astronomy, cosmology, and astronautics) operative in American culture has remained essentially that of the aristocracy of the intellect.

Phrases like "it's not rocket science you know" indicate the idea that astronautics and rocket science is for the super bright, or for the technocrats called geeks, nerds, mathematicians, and assorted oddballs. Although Jacob Bronowski, in his book *The Ascent of Man*, declared himself completely opposed to the idea of an aristocracy of the intellect, saying that this could only cause the extinction of the human race, there has not been a movement towards the democratization of intelligence within the realms of Astronomical Civilization Building or ACB.

With the heroic leadership of Dr. Bob Krone and his book *Beyond Earth*, with its forty-two authors, this situation has changed. With the coming of Wikipedia, and the democratization of epistemology and public knowledge, the situation has also changed within the realm of the Encyclopedia.

It only remains to apply this to the world of the space sciences, to give a new inheritance to “every man, every woman” under the cold but perhaps friendly light of the stars. This, anyway, is the purpose of this little book.

David Livingston, the producer of *The Space Show*, is the proximal or immediate cause of the rapid appearance of this book. It is partly a compilation of my earlier writings on this subject, going back nearly forty years.

Our purpose is to show a new way of thinking about the space sciences in such a way as to offer a cosmic citizenship to all people everywhere, and to show the ways in which the magnitude of the heavens can help them be truly heavenly in delivering wealth and problem solving and even a new concept of home to the most ordinary man, woman and child everywhere. This is indeed a heroic quest, as has been pointed out by the historians of astronomy, such as Arthur Kessler in his book *The Sleepwalkers*, and was Rudolph Thiel’s book *And There Was Light*.

On a personal note, I would like to say that I have been a textbook writer for nearly my whole adult life and in presenting this small textbook as a key to finding a new home in the heavens, I send it out with a blessing and a desire that it will give happiness, profitable living and effective problem solving with galactic amounts of grace. My thanks to my editors, Dan Shaw and Dr. Gordon Arthur; to my Secretary, Barbara Frost; to Dr. Bob Krone, Provost of Kepler Space Institute; to the contributor of the Afterword, Rabbi Dr. Moshe Dror; and to my students, friends, and family everywhere.

Endpiece

In this Third, Relational, Age of Space,
the cosmic beauty of the family
is now being liberated
for the people’s homes and hearts

by the freeing of the gentle inner light
of the space sciences and domestic arts
for the higher nutrition
And for the good of planetary humankind
cherishing Mother Earth, reverencing environments,

blessing soil and seed and space and satellite,
as we settle civilization in space
by the awakening through kindness and forgiveness
of the women’s rights, through love’s ubiquitous genius
by nourishing in farm and field

Earth's and Heaven's fertility,
releasing in ecstasy Cosmic Woman's glorious fruitfulness
in the bliss-dance of galactic babe and birth, infant and child
and the women's wisdom, earthedness and peaceability
to pursue the Absolute Cultural Goods
of Sanity and Survival, Peace and Heavenly Sustenance,
in love, health and happiness
of astronomically great stature
in the present high heroines' New Time
of the Women and the Children,
and the untortured Animals, of the Stars,
for our wise old people and their worship,
in our brave young humanity and their adventures,
in the healing of our hates
through the kissing of our mates
in the quiet song of joy
in the blessed Martian fields
and in exotic cosmic climes
in asteroidal mines,
in vagrant comets' tails,
from the Cradle of Humanity
to the Cradles of the Cosmos,
seeking the Soul of the World,
finding her together.

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V. Afterword by Moshe Dror

Hello and Welcome.

I would imagine that after reading through all of this heady and powerful material you might want to say WOW, and relax.

Not just yet.

These ideas are going to project a good part of humanity into space in the not too distant future, and they will propel you as well.

Just consider – we are the heralds of one of the most wonderful and beautiful aspects of human culture in all of its glories ... either what we have actually seen and witnessed or even dreamed of.

We are on the great journey of “Prophetic Imagineering”. We may not be prophets, but we might actually be students in a school for prophets where we can envision our ideas as part of the Imagineering capabilities of our cyber media.

Some of this may actually happen, some are basically visions, all are desiderata – what we would like to see happen. It is important to remember that we are not going INTO space. We are already IN space. We have been IN space since we have been – period, and as Bucky Fuller reminds us – we do not have an instruction manual.

That is what this exploration is about. We are creating at least a part of the instruction manual for how to live on spaceship earth and use it as the launching pad for the extended human as we leave the cradle and become sailors into the sea of the cosmos.

It is our generation that is privileged with the multiple tasks of being simultaneously – a

Citizen – living in a city,
Netizen – living in Internet, networked in Cyberia
Cosmozen – citizen of the cosmos.

We already have Cosmonauts and Astronauts. *Nautes* is Greek for “sailor”. Cosmos is derived from the Greek idea of “orderly arrangement”. It was Pythagoras who is said to have been the first to apply this term to the “universe” probably originally meaning “the starry firmament”.

Astron – Greek for “star”. So we have an ancient vision of the sailor unto the stars – US.

According to Wikipedia, there are about 500 people who have already flown in excess of an altitude of 100 kilometers (62 miles) or in the United States’ definition, 80 kilometers (above 50 miles). Space travelers have ALREADY spent over 30,400 person days – a cumulative total of over 83 years – in space. These numbers will obviously only grow in the future.

One might look at another way to view this monumental journey of humanity. Nearly every religious and spiritual tradition suggests that the founder of the tradition left home and went on a journey – Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Abraham, Mohammad, and others. Indeed the very first act of the Hero’s Journey is just that – to leave home and go on a journey of discovery.

The journey that still today relates to more than half of the human community is that of Abraham, and by extension all of the members of the Abrahamic faith communities.

Abraham was the first ‘IVRI – Hebrew. The term “ivri” means “crossing over”. In the days of Abraham the crossing over was either of the rivers or of the desert – depending on the tradition.

So basically Abraham was a “Boundary Crosser”.

The personal significance of Abraham was to cross over conceptual boundaries and develop an entirely new worldview – a *zeitgeist* – to use the appropriate term of Richard Spady.

Abraham's journey was in many dimensions. His was a journey in geographic space – across the land. Ours is in Cyberspace and Inner Space – and Outer Space. We are all boundary crossers. As Nicholas Negroponte, the founder and director of the MIT Media Lab, suggests we are the generation that is shifting from seeing the world as atoms and are learning how to see the world in terms of bits. This shift from atoms to bits is probably one of the most significant and profound boundary crossings in all of human history. It is this shift that is making possible all of the visions and actuality of our Space Age. Without this shift in *zeitgeist*, we would be still earth bound and grounded.

None of us knows how all of these visions will actually work out in our human history. And, as Andrew Cohen reminds us:

Not knowing is the secret of wisdom. That's the mystery that gives us access to the very source of liberating clarity. When we don't know, there is an empty space through which the mysteries of life and death are revealed to us.

Richard Kirby and the contributors to this exploration of discovery do not deal with the technology of space at all. We are all dedicated to the idea of the synergy of High Tech and High Touch, and in moments of Grace – High Holiness. It is also the spiritual aspects of this journey that fascinate us all.

We are all dedicated to the power of the vision that binds all of humanity together, regardless of where their bodies may be.

Perhaps this was best said by the philosopher-mystic, Teilhard de Chardin:

Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.

The dimensions of awe and wonderment that so motivated Kant, who wrote of the starry skies above and the morals of humanity, are an extension of the Psalms and the analogue of every spiritual tradition of humanity where the heavens can be seen as a place of goodness and happiness. Can we get there? Who knows?

We are able to vision, dream and DO. Kirby and friends are on the same journey as Teilhard who reminds us all:

You are not a human being in search of a spiritual experience. You are a spiritual being immersed in a human experience.

WELCOME and LET'S ALL ENJOY THE JOURNEY

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About the Author: Gordon Arthur is the author of *Law, Liberty and Church: Authority and Justice in the Major Churches in England* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006); "The Development of Canonical Jurisprudence in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England", *Ecclesiology* 4 (2008): 308-25, and *On Frustrated Vocation* (Ilford: FeedARead, 2012) He gained a BSc in Physics from Birmingham University in 1984, an MA in Philosophy of Religion from King's College, London in 1998, and a PhD in theology, also from King's College, London in 2004. Gordon is Associate Editor of the *Journal of Space Philosophy*.

For more details see www.linkedin.com/in/gdarthur.

Editor's Notes: Publishing Dr. Gordon Arthur's article on the special life and works of Dr. Richard Kirby gives us, in Kepler Space Institute, Inc., great satisfaction. Rich Kirby's inspirational leadership, 2006 to 2009, was the stimulation for us to operationalize our years of discussions about a new education and research entity into what Rich titled *The Kepler Space University* (headquartered in California) on 1 January 2009. He became our founding President. Kepler Space Institute, Inc. is the corporate entity that sponsors our activities today, in 2014, and which holds our visions for the future formal establishment of the first Space University in the United States. Gordon Arthur has been critically important throughout this entire period. He was a protégé of Rich Kirby and has been our Associate Editor for the *Journal of Space Philosophy* since its founding in 2012. Dr. Moshe Dror, who authored the *Afterword* for Rich's *People's Astronomy* book, was an Israeli scholar who worked closely with Rich Kirby from the 1990s until Rich's death in September 2009. We mourned his passing in 2012. **Bob Krone, Editor-in-Chief.**