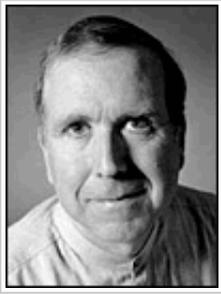


Kevin Kelly: New World Man

January 22nd, 1999 | Category: [Interviews](#)



Kevin Kelly is probably best known by the magazine of which he is Executive Editor. *Wired*, the self-proclaimed “voice of the digital revolution,” is his day job. Other revolutionary non-*Wired* involvements include publishing and editing the *Whole Earth Review*, a journal of unorthodox technical news from 1984 to 1990. In 1989 he launched the first 24-hour virtual reality jamboree, and the first venue to bring VR technology to the public. He was co-founder of the Hackers’ Conference and is an early board member of the Well, the first “real” online community.

All of this among other things. Not the least of which are two books: *Out of Control* and *New Rules for the New Economy*. *Out of Control*, published in 1994, is a virtual bible of emerging science, new technology and their impending implications. It’s some five-hundred pages of conjectures and syntheses of some of the highest-order concepts being explored this decade. The recent *New Rules for the New Economy* focuses more on economics and the impact of the ever-expanding global network on the economic rules of the past.

Roy Christopher: *What is your educational background? I’ve read about your involvement with The Whole Earth Review and The Well (and Wired of course), but what did you do before that?*

Kevin Kelly: I am unqualified to be doing what I do. I am a college dropout. I went to Asia instead of college. I spent the 1970s, off and on, roaming remote parts of Asia as a photographer. I now have 36,000 slides of an Asia that is no longer, and a great appreciation of the ephemeral nature of civilizations.

RC: *Who do you admire writing about science right now?*

KK: Science is broad for me. I prefer the social ramifications of science, so I like authors like Tom Bass (*Eudaemonic Pie*), Steven Levy (*Artificial Life*), and Dava Sobel (*Longitude*). I don’t read a lot of “hard” popular science books, but I do read a fair amount of science journals and scientific textbooks.

RC: *Being a pioneer of applied computer science and the online community, does the current trendiness of CS and especially the Web bother you in any way?*

KK: Nope. The only difference is that my esoteric tastes in hanging around hackers and geeks is now suddenly mainstream, so the competition to say something new is much tougher.

RC: *Does corporate involvement in the content of the Web concern you? Do you think the Web will be controlled by corporate interests, like television or radio are?*

KK: I am not a web-utopian. From day one it was clear that the web and the internet would be run by commercial interests, and I said as much back then, so I have not had any dreams crushed.

RC: *Toward the end of Out of Control, you pose a series of questions. One for instance sticks with me in light of your new book: “What are the down sides to connecting everything to everything?” Have you found an answer to that one since then?*

KK: I’m still working on that one. One possible answer is found in a new book called *The Corruption of Character* which is about the limits and dangers of extreme flexibility (and connectivity by implication) in the work place. The thesis is that we can’t handle the connections and uncertainty psychologically, so we limit them ourselves and set up routines and walls, just to remain whole. We’ll see.
