

The self-aware universe: a theological meditation

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Opinion

And they who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit,

if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you...

--Romans 8:8-9

You should never look a gift universe in the mouth.

---G.K. Chesterton

No one can deny "the mystery of life." One may feign to believe the universe a nothingness, but one cannot do so after truly reflecting on the mystery of life and the mystery of oneself. Intellectual beings must need to reflect on the great questions: What does life mean? Why am I...me? Is there a God? Why is the universe so big, and what does this mean? How should I live?

The universe

To wonder about the mystery of life is necessarily to contemplate the universe. It is massive, colossal, and spectacular. Its awesomeness can reduce us, by comparison, to a state of insignificance. But *something* in our minds rejects this insignificance. Something proclaims that there must be *more*. And we can discern the "more," and sense something *beyond* the physical universe. This astonishing universe and little old me...actually mean something. And indeed, this awesome universe, to be something, must *be* reflected upon.

Life on earth "exploded" inexplicably in the Cambrian Era, about 570 million years ago. At that time, nearly all of the modern plant and animal phyla first appeared--a fact which commands far greater respect and allegiance to life and this planet than do any of the dogmas of the latter-day environmentalists. The finely tuned delicacy of life is a miracle that is unlikely to be found, I think, anywhere else in the universe. But the universe, through Man, *reflects upon itself*--a fact which is cause for trembling.

A scientific consideration of the universe, free from theophobia, compels the acknowledgement of a Creator and a Creation. There is ample evidence to indicate both the specificity and the contingency of the universe. Unless this evidence is wilfully and unscientifically dismissed, the very specific way in which the universe had to begin demands the pre-existence of a Designer/Creator. For example, physicists studying the K-2 meson have concluded that, at the moment the universe began, the ratio of protons to antiprotons must have been ten billion *plus one* to ten billion ($10 \times 10^9 + 1 / 10 \times 10^9$), in order for all the different basic elements to have been formed. What is the statistical probability of the random occurrence of such a specifically exact ratio? The odds against it are, shall we say...astronomical.

Father Stanley Jaki's discussion of the earth/moon system (in his amazing book *Science and Creation*) reduces the probability of life elsewhere in the universe to a virtual zero. Let's look at the facts. A huge asteroid seems to have struck the primaeval earth, knocking a large amount of material from its mantle into space. This material coalesced into the body which became the moon which revolves around the earth. Scientific analysis reveals a moon/earth

ratio of 0.012, with the moon's density and composition being the same as that of the earth's mantle. Afterwards the moon acted as a shield for the earth, protecting it against *other* marauding asteroids. The moon also drives the magnetism of the earth's core; and the system of oceanic tides, in an amazing balanced synchrony which is both life-giving and life-protecting. Shall we mention Jupiter? That planet, the largest in our solar system, is placed just right to balance the earth's orbit, and also to attract space debris and meteors away from the earth! Perhaps we should speak of an earth/moon/Jupiter system, or even...Well, the point is, that the parameters within which life can exist and flourish are narrow and infinitesimally unlikely to occur at random.

It seems obvious to me that our spectacular universe was *designed* to be the home of its present inhabitants--human creatures, trying our best to understand what is going on around us. The universe is designed to *think*. by having *us* think. It was designed from the beginning to claim that there is a God, that He is Spectacular and over-whelming and almost Unbelievable--so much so that often one tends not to *want* to believe, because to believe is to have to comply with the message of the spectacular universe. But since God exists, the universe created in His Image must, of necessity, return to Him in love and transcendental freedom. The perfection of *Grxi* requires a universe that does exactly what this one is doing--making us think and wonder and recognize that He exists and that we are to return to Him in an amazing way because we can recognize His presence in our own capacity to love, to be free, and to exist in a transcendental life. What could be more perfect than God's making such a universe, which by necessity exemplifies the attributes of God? *Tr*) know and love Himself, which is eternal life. God in His perfection created the universe, that it too would do the same through a unique creature freely loving in His transcendental Image.

Through man, the universe possesses an upward mobility. Creation, as we observe it, moves in an anti-entropic (spiralling upward, not winding down) direction, through mankind's giving witness to a future genuine freedom, away from matter and toward the spirit of God. That the universe culminates in man makes it credible that a man may culminate in the knowledge and love of God. Man is privileged to investigate his universe, and in so doing to try to create what he will, but in his quest he only truly finds the real Creator. That matter knows itself, chooses itself, loves itself, and loves its Creator, all through man the creature, is the message of the awesome, spectacular universe. Everything that we can think or do puts the rest of the universe to shame, and all because, through mankind in the Image of God, the universe reflects upon itself; and if this reflection is

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done properly as God has instructed. any human being may embrace it all with God in eternity.

One remembers how St. Hildegard perceived nature as the living garment of the Holy Spirit:

I am that supreme and fiery force that sends forth all the spark of life. Death has no pail in me, yet do allot it, wherefore, I am girt about with wisdom as with wings. I am that living and fiery essence of the divine substance that flows in the beauty of the fields. I shine in the water, I burn in the sun and the moon and the stars. Mine is that mysterious force of the invisible wind; I sustain the breath of all living. I breathe in the verdure and in the flowers, and when the waters flow like living things, it is I. I am the force that lies hid in the winds, from me they take their source, and as a man may move because he beadles, so doth a fire burn but by my blast. All these live because I am in them and am of their life. I am wisdom. Mine is the blast of the thundered word by which all things were made. I permeate all things that they may not die even when they seem to die. I am life...eternal life.

Sin: original and otherwise

“Freedom” is illusory when manifested in anti-transcendental acts, which are a rejection of the mystery of life and life’s Creator. Such acts constitute homage to worthless things—things which, though also part of God’s creation, become worthless when they do not bring us back to God, when they cause us to forget how all the surrounding universe, day in and day out, is a unique experience of the mind of God.

Sin is any action which offends the personal, transcendental God. It comes under myriad shapes and forms. It is *Evil, using Freedom*. It is willful entropy (“winding-down”) and slothful selfish sensuality. Sin always takes a means for an end. It is anti-love entropy that rebels against God. It is a forgetting of the universe as rightly understood. Paganism, or more precisely, the neo-paganism so rife today, is that frame of mind in which sin is not denied merely, but willfully sought out for the sake of Self. Neo-paganism reverses virtue and vice: it becomes “manly” to know and take pleasure in sin, and to ridicule and blaspheme against the Creator of the universe (how anti-environmental is *that?*). Sin makes us outcasts of Nature—unclean, degenerate creatures who are cursed, infected, and humiliated by serpentine thinking and carnal deceit—instead of an incredible, rare creation made in the Image of God. Sin is a self-induced suffocation of the natural sense of the Sacred. It animalizes men by making them lose sight of their origin and rightful destiny.

The consequences of sin go even further. The awareness of guilt withers away. The sinner flutters with egoism and wantonness, and is led to Godlessness in the face of over-whelming evidence for God. Sin destroys the mystery of the self—there is no more “Why am I me?” because the answer (“To .know, love and serve God, and not offend Him”) requires a true knowledge of sin, guilt and the Incarnation. The embracing of sin leads to the loss of logic, the destruction of reason, and the rejection of the transcendental virtues. Love is missing. All that exists is self-without-mystery.

To make the sinful conditions just enumerated even *possible*, there must have been some initial calamity in God’s universe, one that allowed for a crippling unfaithfulness, not only to God but to the planet and all natural Creation. This calamity was Original Sin, and it is evidenced by the “cacophony of the human scene,” to use Cardinal Newman’s phrase. Mankind is out of synchrony with the universe!

There exists a deep wound in human nature because Man’s capacity to choose evil led our first parents temporarily to forget God. This was the hazard of Creation: the freedom of “choice” implies logically the freedom to choose wrongly. Evil is gigantic because we can ignore the transcendental and be unfree, and yet call this “freedom.” Fundamentally, original sin is the culpability of Man’s forgetting that he is Not of God’s Creation. Psychologically, the so-called “unconscious” is original sin—that is, forgetfulness. To reflect on the mystery of our own existence and on Newman’s “cacophony” is to realize that some-thing went wrong shortly after freedom was given to the universe in the form of the human creature (*Vide Nigro, “The Attainment of Psychological Freedom:’ Social Justice Review, Nov.-Dec., 2002).*

Conclusion

Without a wholehearted—dare I say, almost pantheistic—assent to the universe, one finds it difficult to understand God’s personal transcendental engagement with His Creation—with each one of us—such that He is in a timeless and immediate contact with the whole universe, missing not any one of us nor anything we do. He Who created the universe from an infinitesimal point of energy, misses not a leaf, a tear, a word, a molecule, nor any creature, human or non-human. All being is pleasing to Him save that from the free creature who is unwilling to follow and trust the moral constants of His Natural Law and the Church He gave us.

Because offensive actions against God insult the divine substance and must be forgiven, the Creator provided a way to re-establish full life in oneness with Him. In His perfection, He gave the power to conquer all evil in His Image of transcendental, personal love which endures forever. Our task is to realize God in all we do, so that we must not sin, and when we (inevitably) do, we must seek forgiveness.

This awesome universe demonstrably has a Designer who created it to reflect His own perfection, in that it contains a Creature capable of freedom and love, surrounded by a wider Creation which proclaims, “I-Am-Who-Am is here!”—so that Creation itself may choose God and the transcendental life of loving truth. The unique and most productive understanding of the universe is through the Old and New Testaments, where it may be seen that an original rejection of God resulted in catastrophe of choice for the human creature.

Because that creature could not figure things out on his own, God sent Himself through Jesus Our Lord to open the creature’s way to return to Him. What a unique and astonishing concept! God’s Son, Jesus, would become human and die freely out of love for Creation made in God’s Image, and then prove life after death by rising from the dead! Jesus did not have to die, but nothing else would have impressed us. If a consideration of the universal Creation wouldn’t do it, then only the fact of Incarnation-and-Resurrection could.

The Incarnation resanctified matter in such a way that the creature could have moral constants, just as there are physical constants in the rest of the universe. These moral constants are proclaimed by God’s Church: the transcendentals, the Ten Commandments, the Virtues and the Sacraments. All this is based upon a true concept of freedom for humans. The Church heals the deep wound of Creation by announcing the duty to secure one’s salvation, as well as the means to do so.

Without sin, the Incarnation and the Resurrection would have been irrelevant. Since they obviously were and are *not* irrelevant, man must come to a recognition of the significance of sin. Man must know and understand sin; man must reject sin; man must be aware that sin offends a loving, personal, transcendent God and, therefore,

is contrary to the order of the universe and constitutes the worst form of “environmental pollution.” Man must understand that the Way to overcome sin is to follow the precepts of the Church; and the Church must hew closely to teaching about sin, forgiveness and salvation.

Reader, after billions of years the universe now contains you! Savour it! Whatever you are doing, it is much more than most of the vast universe has done, morally speaking, in all the aeons of its existence. So do that which is right! Sin no more, but promote loving truth. Live each moment for-God, Christ and the universe, and- all will be yours beyond belief. But remember, first you must understand sin; to sin is to deny God and mistreat the universe.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.