

In the Beginning **An Autobiography of the Universe**

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It is difficult to say precisely when I first began flaring forth, since, like any infant, I have no conscious memory of the event. My scientist-selves say I'm 13-and-a-half billion years old that is—barely a teenager. Sometimes I feel like I'm not even that old; like I'm still being born. I know I recently achieved a meager degree of consciousness, what I like to call *self-reflection*, but this ability, this gift, is, like me, still in its infancy. I remain mostly unconscious and am nowhere close to grasping the full meaning of my existence. Maybe someday, as I continue to awaken, or grow, or evolve, or whatever I decide to call it, the fragments of my experience will all coalesce into some kind of unified awareness and there will be no further need my unconscious secret self. Maybe someday I'll feel whole.

I know most biographies begin at the beginning and move linearly through time, so I hope you won't mind if I skip around a little bit. For I really don't think I can say much without first saying something about my human manifestation. Not that being human is anymore important than or takes precedence over the rest of me. But because I have no conscious memories of my past beyond my human experience, everything I say about myself stems from my ability to self reflect, to imagine what must have happened, to work it out logically in my mind, which, seems to me, is the unique thing about my having obtained humanhood. As I said in my manifestation as Thomas Berry, in my book, *The Dream of the Earth*, "In reality the human activates the most profound dimension of the universe itself, its capacity to reflect on and celebrate itself in conscious self-awareness."¹ This is similar to what I wrote as Brian Swimme in, *The Universe is a Green Dragon*:

The primeval fireball existed for twenty billion years without self-awareness. The creative work of the supernovas existed for billions of years without self-reflective awareness. The star could not, by itself, become aware of its own beauty or sacrifice. But the star can, through [the human], reflect back on itself. In a sense, you are the star. Look at your hand—do you claim it as your own? Every element was forged in temperatures a million times hotter than molten rock, each atom fashioned in the blazing heat of the star. Your eyes, your brain, your bones, all of you, is composed of the star's creations. You are that star, brought into a form of life that enables life to reflect on itself.²

¹ Berry, Thomas, *The Dream of the Earth*, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA, 1988, 1990, p.132.

² Swimme, Brian, *The Universe is a Green Dragon*, Bear & Company, Inc., Sante Fe, NM, 1984, p.58f.

It's quite an accomplishment, even if I do say so myself. But being human isn't all it's cracked up to be, let me assure you. I've made a lot of mistakes since first entering my human phase a little less than three million years ago. I just don't have the hang of it yet, that's all. I know 2.6 million years seems like plenty of time to gain some degree of expertise in just about anything, but keep in mind, a billion seconds ago was 1981, and I'm nearly fifteen billion years old. Even though I'm but a teenager, 2.6 million years is nothing to me. It's hardly a blink. Problem is, this human-being stuff is so darn destructive and volatile it may be my undoing and everything I've worked so long and so hard for may end in hardly a blink!

I guess that's why I'm saying all this now, hoping to remind myself, as best I can in my mostly unconscious and fragmented state of awareness, that there's a bigger picture out there than I'm always aware of. If I can become mindful, in my manifestation as the human species, that I am more than human, that I am also in the beginning, and in the stars, and the starfish, and the grass, and clouds, and birds, and stones, and all other people and beings, no matter how different or trivial they might seem, then I think I might see a brighter day dawning yet. This little chemistry experiment may blow up in my face, but, right now, as far as I can see, being human is also my greatest hope.

Now let's see, where was I? Oh yeah, my story. Getting back to my flaring forth, or banging forward, or whatever you want to call it, I must say, this was no small event! And I have to admit, I was more than a little angry the day I was born. Who wouldn't be? There I was, all tucked away, safe and perfectly content to sleep in the quiet and comfort of my dark singularity when all of the sudden, KABOOM, I'm hurled out into this plethora of noise and light. Boy was I hot! In fact it took me several hundred thousand years to cool down. But I'm glad I finally did because that's when things really started happening. Once I cooled off a little my subatomic particles were, for the first time, able to interact with each other and I began manifesting myself as the first elements, hydrogen and helium. It's difficult to fully appreciate the magnitude of this accomplishment. Prior to this point, photons, that is, my light, were the bully of the universe. Other particles didn't fair well in my cosmic playground because light kept crashing into them and breaking them up. But hydrogen and helium are transparent, which meant light passed right through them. This enabled these atoms to start sticking together; forming huge galactic clouds that eventually collapsed in upon themselves and formed the first generation of stars.

Needless to say, I was quite the child prodigy, only one billion years old and I had already learned to become the first elements and the stars. Actually, though I may not sound like it, I'm really being rather modest. I didn't just make a few stars; I made lots of them, more than you would care to count! At the time, you see, I was pretty empty, and vast regions of myself started condensing, forming a lot of black holes in the process. (Black holes... ha... more like cosmic acne if you ask me). These, in turn, caused density waves to stir many of the hydrogen and helium clouds I'd created which forced them to collapse into thousands of stars at once. Since there

were about a trillion of these galactic clouds, I'd essentially created stars and all the galaxies at the same time (give or take a few millions of years).

If I were prone to playing with toys as a child, I'd have to say the stars were among my favorite. Stars are like giant Easy-Bake Ovens, only not so easy. In them, after several generations (of stars that is), I forged all the elements—hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur, phosphorus and, especially, carbon—that would enable me to manifest myself as organic life. But, there I go again, getting ahead of myself. As is obvious, or, at least, should be obvious, we can't have biology without ecology, so I had to start manifesting myself as something besides stars. I'd like to say I did it intentionally, but the truth is I was throwing a bit of a tantrum, or, in galactic terms, I was throwing a supernova.

If I recall correctly, the helium and hydrogen inside my star selves are extremely attracted to each other, which may be a rather sterile way of saying they love each other, they have passion for each other. We could even conclude, at my most elementary level, I'm comprised of passionate love. But I digress. The point here is the friction caused between the love making of hydrogen and helium causes the stars to burn. When these elements are all used up, however, my star selves may try to survive by burning a few other elements, but eventually I'm doomed to self-implode. On occasion a few elementary particles called neutrinos rush away from the implosion and blow off the outer layers of the star containing elements like carbon, oxygen and nitrogen. Sometimes these elements reorganize as new stars and sometimes they become planets. Of course, it was all a lot more complicated than I make it sound. Before I could accomplish anything I had to formulate the four laws that hold everything together—the gravitational, the electromagnetic, and the strong and weak nuclear interactions. But these are more than I really understand in my limited ability to self reflect, or care to get into here anyway. The important thing to note is that by age ten billion I had manifested myself, among other astral bodies, as planets.

We all know what comes next. Life! Of course, I use this term loosely. To suggest I haven't been alive from the get-go, 13.7 billion years ago, would be absurd! Biology might be a better term to use. "Biology" connotes a certain quality of life, just as "Human" connotes a certain quality of biology. Naturally, it took a long time to get to the human. Of all my planet manifestations, Earth was among the few just perfect for achieving biology. At first, however, I was entirely inhospitable. I was more like a boiling ball of red lava than the crusty blue planet I have become. In time I cooled off enough to let the liquids remain on my surface, forming oceans that were charged for millions of years by an intense, planet-wide lightning storm. In one of those billions of lightning strikes, a proto-cellular chemical reaction occurred which led to my manifestation as the first cell.

The great thing about being a cell was that I could recreate myself again and again without the ten billion years of fuss it took the first time, simply by swallowing a drop of hydrogen rich sea water and spitting out another identical cell. Although

my cellular memory is good, I must admit, it isn't always perfect which is why once in a million reproductions I end up with a mutant cell. Call it a stroke of genius, or a stroke of luck, these mutations are precisely what enable me to take on new biological forms, ever increasing in their complexity. In fact, if it weren't for the mutants, life on Earth would have ended a long time ago after the first prokaryotes exhausted their food supply. In my mutant form I learned to eat the remains of deceased cells and harness the energy I needed from their bodies. Another of my mutant forms learned to eat photons, sunlight, which led to the process of photosynthesis, feasting on the delicious Sun. Still others learned to absorb carbon from the air, which eventually altered the entire Earth's atmosphere. These cells, which formed vast communities throughout the entire world, began excreting oxygen into the atmosphere. At the time, oxygen was highly dangerous to just about everything, including the cells themselves. Too much oxygen to fuel the flames and the Earth would turn it into another cosmic ball of fire. Biology was again threatened with extinction. Had it not been for yet another mutated form of my cellular self that learned to breath and transform oxygen, I'd have been sent right back to the dark ages, so to speak.

Another important form of mutation came when I learned the value of sucking the life from other beings. I know it doesn't sound very appetizing, but at some point I began attaching myself to other cells, drilling holes through their membranes and feasting on their insides while using their DNA for my own purposes. To make a long story short, we eventually became dependent upon each other and formed a symbiotic relationship which led to the first multicellular organisms, which, in turn, led to the variety of complex biological life forms that have come and gone ever since.

I'm quite proud of everything I've been able to achieve since then, although I am somewhat embarrassed by all the attention given to the dinosaurs. I know T-Rex is a cool look for me, but I have to admit, the saurian age was a big disappointment for me, if not a complete waste of time. I know 170 million years isn't really a lot of time, at least not for me, but the impatience of youth really turns me off to the fact that the dinosaurs got me no closer to self-awareness than I'd ever been. If it weren't for some freak accident that wiped most of them out, I'd probably still be snoozing. Even with all their faults, my warm blooded manifestations have been able to achieve a degree of awareness in almost no time, especially after they were no longer threatened by my saurian tirades.

I like to think of myself as the type who can give credit where credit is due, but getting back to my human phase, I'm not so certain I'm going to be much better off than I was with Mr. Rex. Sure being human makes me a lot smarter, but what good is this going to do me if the only thing I learn to do is destroy my Earth-self and all my forms of life I've worked so hard to achieve? As the genius Albert Einstein, for instance, I discovered a great deal about myself, about how I work through time, space, motion, matter, gravitation and energy. But so far the best I've been able to do with this information in create horribly destructive weapons. And today a nuclear

holocaust isn't even the worst of my worries.

I have often considered the invention of agriculture my most important accomplishment during my Neolithic phase. Now I'm wondering if it wasn't another big mistake, the precursor to this anthropocentric attitude that says it's perfectly fine to interfere with my natural life forces and rhythms. Or maybe it was when Classical Civilization began, when I stopped looking at the Earth as my mother and began worshipping male dominator gods like Indra, Zeus, Thor and Yahweh. In more modern times I thought science might be the ultimate answer, but its technologies are so out of harmony with my natural ecosystems that I'm becoming one sick puppy.

Sometimes I imagine a conversation going on between my cosmic parents. Dad says, "Honey, I'm worried. I think our child is... I think our child is human!"

Mom responds, "Don't worry, it's only a phase."

I sure hope she's right. Not that there's anything wrong with being human. I'm just worried about my self-destructive behavior. I've got to outgrow this thing. I hope I'll be around long enough to evolve into a being that can truly awaken to my fullest potential, taking what is best about being human into the future as one of the latest elements that helps shape my next phase. Humans are an important part of the whole process, an important part of the Whole, but they're not the Whole. In the future I'll probably look back and say humans were proto-conscious, not fully conscious. But my ultimate hope is to grow up and become a fully conscious being.