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Big, Indeed Epic, History

While this is not specifically a theme issue, all the articles in this issue address how to read aspects of what is sometimes called “Big History.” In my last editorial, I noted that there are two trillion galaxies in our universe. Considering such and Big History, rather dramatically raises the question of why there is something, rather than nothing. It seems to me that every material thing has a cause. We see no popping into existence, no spontaneous generation. Consistent with that, it appears as well that the material universe had a beginning. We call it the Big Bang. We can measure its wave effects still propagating. We can see it unfolding as we look back further and further in time by catching light that has been traveling since that beginning. If the cause of the material universe were material, that cause would need a cause, and we would have an infinite regression (a problem in itself) that ignores entropy. It seems that there must have been a cause: one that was not material, that has always been, and that was incredibly powerful. The material universe cannot explain its own existence. Something else, immensely powerful, is out there.

It seems to me as well from looking at the material universe, that the something else is purposeful, smart, and generous. The material universe is expanding at precisely the rate of speed required for us to exist. If the expansion were a billionth faster, stars and planets would never coalesce. If the expansion were a billionth slower, gravity would pull everything together to a big and final crunch with no stars or planets. The material universe is expanding at precisely the right rate to make personal life possible. That looks purposeful, smart, and generous. Paul Davies, Arizona State University astrophysicist, in *Super Force: The Search for a Grand*

Unified Theory of Nature (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), put it this way:

The laws which enable the universe to come into being spontaneously, seem themselves to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design. If physics is the product of design, the universe must have a purpose, and the evidence of modern physics suggests strongly to me that the purpose includes us. (p. 243)

How generous for the source to choose to make a space for new beings who could live, and themselves choose how to shape their lives. A place where new conscious beings might come to know the creator, but would not have to. The most central reality is present, but intentionally and sufficiently hidden, such that knowledge of and relationship with that reality can be a free response to its invitation.

There is evidence and reason enough, without being overwhelming. One might survive for seventy, eighty years, without acknowledging any source or purpose to this surprising universe. Yet I marvel at the long list of constants in physics, in addition to expansion rate, remarkable for how essential and precise they are to support life. Walter L Bradley enumerates examples in “The Fine Tuning of the Universe,” in this journal, vol. 70, no. 3 (2018): 147–60, <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2018/PSCF9-18Bradley.pdf>.

So if the physical universe we can observe indicates that there is something not-material which is powerful enough to create the material; that is purposeful, smart, and generous enough to make it happen in a way that supports the development of conscious life; it might be expected that such a creator would have an interest in the resulting conscious life.

Acknowledgment

If that were to happen in regard to Earth, where would be the best location to reach the sentient life on that planet? Maybe centrally, where Asia, Europe, and Africa meet, and therefore not favoring any one ethnic group or region. If we look more closely at that area, there was a people group that claimed that the creator was speaking to them and that the creator promised to come to Earth as a male child who would be himself the almighty God (Isa. 9:6), born specifically in an obscure little village called Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), a descendant of their King David (2 Sam. 7), yet be associated with a despised region called Galilee (Isa. 9:1–2).

There is one who more than fulfilled these markers. His life transformed his followers (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003]). Acts 4:13 puts it this way (in my translation): “Seeing these uneducated, common people act and talk this way, they were astonished and could tell that these people had been with Jesus.”

Not only individuals, but communities and whole societies were changed; not yet perfected, but set on a better course that we should not take for granted. Tom Holland traces some of these points of transformation in *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (Basic Books, 2019). Now 2.5 billion people claim to follow Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, as part of the world’s largest, and still growing, global movement. In our current year, we find more Anglicans in church each Sunday morning in Nigeria, than in England. Brazil has 166 million Christians as the largest Catholic country in the world, alongside 43 million Brazilian Protestants. In the last one hundred years, South Korea has gone from about one percent Christian, to now actively 25% Christian ...

This is Big, Indeed Epic, History.

James C. Peterson
Editor-in-Chief

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