

Grasping the beginnings of life in the universe

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Nihil fit ex nihilo ??Nothing comes from nothing.

This is part of a thesis first argued by Greek philosopher Parmenides. It is associated with ancient Greek cosmology, contending there is no break in between a world that did not exist and one that did, since it could not be created ?ex nihilo? in the first place. The Greeks also believed that things cannot disappear into nothing, just as they cannot be created from nothing, but if they ceased to exist, they transform into some other form of being.

This is like today's laws of conservation of mass and energy that suggest energy can't be created nor destroyed.

Humankind undoubtedly began postulating these things shortly after we wandered from the caves and formed an organized society.

There's no question the stars at night presented untold marvels, questions and theories.

They still do. We now know they are not mere pinholes in the fabric of the heavens.

Religion has always fascinated me, in many ways. Originally christened Lutheran, I?was welcomed into the Catholic faith prior to my wedding, and have since joined my family in this faith. My mother had no use at all for religion, largely because of the traumatic experiences she had during the Second World War.

As a thinking person and objective journalist, I try to keep an open mind about everything ? and I?mean everything.

While most of us during the 1970s were more like Archie Bunker than we care to admit, I think we've all changed our viewpoints on many issues in the past few decades.

Here in Canada, we've enjoyed religious freedoms for some time. And these are enshrined in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We've sailed through the last few decades in the Great White North with few religious confrontations. In recent years, of course, we in the West have been faced with terrorist ideology and trying to understand Islamist beliefs.

I'll admit it, I?know very little about it, so I can't readily judge others. From the little I?do know, it's safe to say that the Islamist belief contends that we always have a duty to God and must submit to the will of God. Extremists always use religion as justification for their actions, but acts by extremists violate true Islam, the fastest growing religion on the planet.

Again, I?find all religious history fascinating and a really good read.

I?also talk with visiting Jehovah's Witnesses who come to our door. Why not?

They're polite, good natured and well spoken. I accept ?Awake!?' and read it when I have time.

A recent issue contained some really interesting articles, one of which addressed the beginnings of the universe.

There's long been opposition and debate surrounding the theory of evolution. But there are a couple of questions that have yet to be answered, by both religious and scientific scholars:

How did life get its start and how did things in the universe develop?

Did, as some high thinkers contend, life spontaneously arise from existing matter?

There's a train of thought that attests the building blocks of life ?? amino acids, proteins, carbohydrates and DNA ??floating around in primordial goo, accidentally came together and voila, life! The conditions in our atmosphere had to be perfect as well, with just the right amounts of sulfur, phosphorous, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon and hydrogen.

A typical protein molecule includes hundreds of amino acids connected in a specific sequence. The molecule must ?fold? into a specific three-dimensional shape for it to serve a purpose. The odds of even one single protein molecule forming spontaneously is ?improbable.?

How about self-replicating molecules that miraculously come to life from inert organic material?

I'm a betting man, and yet I can't fathom all of this happening by chance.

Creatures like ourselves develop from fertilized eggs. Cells multiply and specialize inside the embryo and take on various shapes and functions. How do these cells ?know? how to do this?

For us to ?evolve? changes would have to take place inside the cell at the molecular level. How do ?random mutations? arise and lead to a new and improved species? How can such beauty and complexity result from a seemingly random and unintelligent process?

We are self-aware; possess a consciousness, intelligence, moral qualities and emotions. We will sacrifice ourselves for others. We know right from wrong.

Some of these are inherent characteristics and not taught to us as youngsters.

The big bang theory may hold some measure of an explanation as to how the universe began. But my unanswerable question is: what existed prior to that??If something or some omnipotent being created the universe, where did they come from? If the universe is infinite, what's on the ?other side??

Of all the improbabilities and impossibilities, is humankind the best possible result in the cosmos?

Having studied and written about the human condition for more than three decades, my money is on the ?accident??explanation.

Surely an all-powerful force would have created something a little better LOL!

A higher purpose? The Creator??God?

?God said:??Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.?' ??Genesis 1:26.

Again, the existence of such a great and powerful God would beg the question: ?was He created just for us? Who created Him? Did He create other worlds and bipeds in His image?

We will not likely find any answers in my lifetime. But, we find them in the afterlife!

From something, to something else? I really hope so.

If you're looking for clues, glance skyward on a starry night.