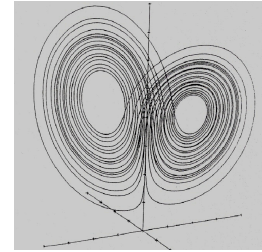


Some Big Questions

By Donne Hayden

Edward Lorenz found in his research on weather patterns that “the repetitions were never quite exact. There was pattern, with disturbances. An orderly disorder.” . . . Lorenz eventually created a “map” of unpredictable and aperiodic behavior. The map displayed a kind of infinite complexity. It always stayed within certain bounds, never running off the page but never repeating itself, either. It traced a strange, distinctive shape, a kind of double spiral in three dimensions, like a butterfly with its two wings. The shape signaled pure disorder, since no point or pattern of points ever recurred. Yet it also signaled a new kind of order.



–James Gleick
*Chaos: Making a New Science*¹

Chaos is, in fact, a force throughout the universe, its own entity, an archetype of destruction and transformation that operates in every life.

–Caroline Myss, *Entering the Castle*²

Chaos becomes sacred when it moves us in ever more powerful ways, to more consciously be about the greatest of human adventures: the quest for spiritual intimacy. . . .

Whatever else we thought the meaning of life was before we encountered chaos, we now know some-thing different as the quest for spiritual intimacy becomes primary. What we used to make fun of, we will find ourselves doing, and what we used to do, we will now walk away from. . . .

–James R. Newby, *Sacred Chaos*³

In the bulletin today, you will find these three quotations about chaos, though it is not the topic *per se* of my message today. I wanted you to see three descriptions of chaos: the first, from a scientific point of view; the second, Caroline Myss’s assertion

¹ James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987).

² Caroline Myss, *Entering the Castle: An Inner Path to God and Your Soul* (New York: Free Press, 2007), page 55.

³ James R. Newby, *Sacred Chaos and the Quest for Spiritual Intimacy* (New York: Continuum Publishing Group, 1998), Introduction. (By the way, James R. Newby—weighty Friend—was once a minister in this Meeting.)

that chaos is a “force in the universe”; and then James Newby’s comment on “sacred chaos,” chaos as a creative, spiritual force. My topic, however, has to do with other possible forces in the Universe and some Big Questions about that possibility.

I believe in something—something conscious and intelligent—greater than humanity. This something I believe in has traditionally been called “God” by others who also believe. Because all the stories and teachings about this entity come from earlier times, the explanations no longer satisfy my hunger to understand. As a rational, well-educated, and reflective person, I accept the knowledge science provides us for how the material universe works, but I keep mulling over ways to understand the Great Something. I ask many Big Questions, always more interested in the questions themselves than in the un-likely possibility of receiving a definite answer. If one is going to think about these things, one must be comfortable with ambiguity and accept mystery as ultimately the only possible response.

Today, I’m going to share with you some of my **Big Questions**. Those uncomfortable with ambiguity, those who want clear and specific answers, will be dissatisfied today, as, I suspect, they must be most of the time.

First Big Question: Everything that exists on earth in the material realm also exists throughout the universe. All earth elements are also star elements. If this is so in the material universe, how can it not also be true in the non-material realm of consciousness and intelligence? We humans are more than matter, and that part of us that contains consciousness, we call the soul. Caroline Myss refers to the soul as “our nonphysical essence,” and psychologist Carl Jung described the soul as “an entity

endowed with the consciousness of its relationship to deity.”⁴ If the source of materials for everything material on earth comes from and exists elsewhere in the Universe, and if among the materials that make up human beings are the elements of *consciousness and intelligence*, it makes sense to me that the source of those too exist elsewhere in the universe.

(I don’t necessarily expect anyone to agree what I say—these are my questions and I share them with you simply as food for thought.)

Second Big Question: If there is not Something people call “God,” why do perfectly rational people continue to believe it exists? Of course, I am not the first to ask such a question. Philosophy professor C. Stephen Evans phrases it in this way: “Suppose that it is true” he writes,

that human beings have a fundamental need to believe in and worship a God. Should this be interpreted as a sign that faith in God is suspicious in nature because it is likely to be a product of wish-fulfillment? Or should it be interpreted as verifying the existence of a "God-shaped hole" in human nature, which was implanted by God . . . ?

Critics often remark in this context that the existence of a need does not guarantee that it will be satisfied. A shipwrecked sailor on a life raft may have a desperate need and a burning desire for pure water. He may want it so badly that he hallucinates its reality. Clearly this doesn't mean there is water available to him. Likewise, a person may need or want God but God may not be there for [that person] or anyone.

Notice, however, that the analogy breaks down. The sailor as an individual may not get any water, but it would be very odd if he had this need and water did not exist. The fact that people in general have a need for water is strong evidence that there is such a thing as water, though this does not imply that an individual person will get water on any specific occasion. In a similar manner, the fact that we have a deep need to believe in and find God strongly suggests that God is real, though of course this does not mean that any one of us will actually discover God and establish a relation with [God]. It would be very odd indeed if we had a fundamental need for something which did not exist.⁵

⁴ Myss, page 49.

⁵ C. Stephen Evans. “The Mystery of Persons and Belief in God.” *Truth Journal* website <<http://www.leaderu.com/truth/3truth07.html>>. Portions of this article taken from *The Quest for Faith* by C. Stephen Evans, (c)1986 by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the U.S.A. and used by permission of Inter Varsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downer's Grove, IL 60515.

Next Big Question: So how do we reconcile this near-universal need among humans to believe in this Great Something, with the fact that, using all the tools available to our intellects, i.e., logic and the scientific method, we can't prove the Great Something even exists? One answer occurs to me: Logic and the scientific method were developed in a world of matter to explain a world of matter—the material world. If the Great Something exists outside and beyond the material world, our earth tools are not effective in explaining it. Perhaps this is why all the great mystics, who specialize in non-material reality, tell us that the mind or intellect cannot know God. For example, in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a classic of medieval mysticism, the anonymous author wrote that “the intellect of both [humans] and angels is too small to comprehend God.” Writing centuries before the Enlightenment, the author says with all confidence, “Rational creatures such as men and angels possess two principal faculties, a knowing power and a loving power. No one can fully comprehend the uncreated God with his knowledge, but each one, in a different way, can grasp [God] fully through love.” “By love God may be touched and embraced, never by thought.”⁶ Contemporary mystic Caroline Myss tells us that “if we really want to know God, we have to get rid of our preconceptions about God” and “surrender our need for our world to be ordered according to *our* conceptions

C. Stephen Evans earned his doctorate in philosophy at Yale University and continued his studies on Kierkegaard as a Marshall Fellow in Denmark. A recipient of grants from the Danforth Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities, he has taught at Wheaton College (1974-84) and at St. Olaf College where he was a professor of philosophy and Curator of Hong Kierkegaard Library. He is the author of many articles in philosophical and psychological journals such as *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, and *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, and has written several books, including *Subjectivity and Religious Belief* and *Kierkegaard's "Fragments" and "Postscript."*

⁶ Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing and the Book of Privy Counseling* (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, April 2005), page 42 and 46.

of justice, logic, and rational motives.”⁷ Some of us have a great deal of trouble with that surrender. I did, still do, but through personal experience, I finally realized the value of such surrender—“not my will, but Thine”—that’s a big one. I have finally figured out that I really should listen to that discernment and follow it. I *do* know that it makes no sense rationally, but it is probably the most powerful thing in my life.

I still keep trying to understand, and occasionally I have flashes of insight, often fueled by my “big questions.” One such insight came from that statement made by Caroline Myss in her book, *Entering the Castle*: “Chaos is, in fact, a force throughout the universe, its own entity, an archetype of destruction and transformation that operates in every life.”⁸

This assertion brought up a question that is the ultimate heresy. If this were a hundred years ago, I might be hanged for what I’m about to say, the question I’m about to ask. In our culture, it’s worse than not believing in God at all. Are you ready? Here’s the **Really Really Big Question**: *What if there’s more than one?*

God, I mean. Actually, I don’t mean God in the sense of the Bible and Jewish and Christian tradition. I mean, what if there isn’t one God contradicting himself all over the place—swearing eternal love and affection at the same time He smites you with boils and plagues, takes your first-born child, and sends you off to die in war or starve to death in the wilderness. What if there is not one God like that, but various *Forces* at work in the universe, and because *we* are part of the universe, also at work in our lives and experience?

⁷ Myss, page 55.

⁸ Ibid, page 135.

If “chaos is a force in the universe,” surely there are other forces. In fact, we know there are. Creation is a force; destruction is a force; perhaps trans-formation is a force. Life itself is a force—we even call it that, i.e., “the Life Force.” Love is a force, one that more complex animals like us have a particular resonance with or, if you’ll pardon the pun, attachment to.

Imagine that it works this way. The universe operates under the sway of various forces. In the material universe, the Forces of Chaos and Creation and Destruction are in constant interplay with each other; all are necessary. Chaos—for any of you artists—chaos is the raw material—it’s all there, but unordered, jumbled; Creation selects, orders, and builds. Destruction—as slow and relentless erosion or as sudden as an exploding star—results again in Chaos, which provides the raw material for new Creation, and the process goes on and on.

Other forces operate in the material universe, forces like Gravity and Magnetism, Light, the Life Force, and all those forces identified by scientists. In the non-material universe, we find other Forces. Light again, although in a different sense. Or perhaps Light operates as a Force at both the physical and non-physical levels. As for the Life Force, recent research indicates that life may be pervasive in the universe, but only at the microbial or bacterial level. *Complex life*, which includes intelligence and consciousness, evolves over billions of years to produce creatures like the higher animals here on earth (including us, of course), and may be rarer than previously thought.⁹ **Big Question:** Is *Consciousness* a Force in the Universe?

⁹ See the book *Rare Earth: Why Complex Life is Uncommon in the Universe* by Peter D. Ward and Donald Brownlee.

Two More Big Questions: First, is Love a peculiarly attentive Force we call “God” because we are so tuned into it? (Jesus taught that “God is Love,” but we can surely turn that around: “Love is God”). Second, why does Love exist? It is not necessary for the preservation of a species—look at the dinosaurs. Giant lizards, tiny brains, but boy, could they survive as a species. It took a comet to clear out that bunch. But did they *love*? Can lizards love? I could be wrong, but I don’t think so. More complex life forms are necessary for Love to come into play. Only because we have evolved to a level of consciousness can we love. *Love and belovedness require consciousness and intent.* Unfortunately another force requires those qualities. Evil, too, requires consciousness and intent.

In his *Journal*, George Fox de-scribes a vision in which he perceived the forces of Love and Evil in this way:

[Having been shown images of the evil committed by wicked people] *I cried unto the Lord, saying, “Why should I be thus, seeing I was never addicted to commit these evils?” and the Lord answered, “That it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions?” and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings...*

We know that Love exists and that it is a powerful Force, but many of us are reluctant to grant Evil the status of a Force, partly because it is associated with the old image of a red and horned devil. Think about it, though. Destruction alone is not evil; Nature, which can be extremely destructive, is not evil. **Big Question:** Considering human actions, like the Holocaust or torture at Abu Grahیب and elsewhere, who can seriously doubt that intentional cruelty or cold disregard for the sufferings of others is

genuinely evil? What else can we call it? But Evil requires the same level of evolved consciousness that Love does.

A Russian scientist speaking of his near-death experience said that through it, he had learned that “Life is made for Love,” and he understood that what people call Hell is simply the absence of Light and the absence of Love. These three Forces of Life, Light, and Love seem to cluster together, as do the Forces of Death, Darkness and Evil, as do the Forces of Chaos, Creation and Destruction, as do the qualities of Consciousness, Intelligence, and Imagination.

In a way we humans *are* special: we would rather *not* be in a way. But we provide an opportunity for *all* these universal forces to intersect and interact. In each human being—both in our physical bodies and in our non-material consciousness or soul—we find the Forces of Chaos, Creation, Destruction, Light, Life, Love, Darkness, Death, and Evil, Consciousness, Intelligence and Imagination. And there is another tri-logy: Balance/Harmony, Belovedness, and Suffering. Perhaps we are, indeed, children of the universe (as the 1960s “Desiderata” informed us—“You are a child of the Universe”).

A final series of Big Questions: To which Force do we give the most energy? I’m convinced that when we add our energy to one of these Forces, we generate more of that energy. Inhabiting matter as we do, we are creatures especially suited to experience *as well as to generate* Love and Evil.

If we pay attention, if we listen to the still, small Voice, if we “mind the Light,” are we being guided to choose Life, Light and Love over Death, Dark-ness and Evil? Do we find guidance in the great religious writings like the Bible, though they use language alien to our 21st century understanding of the universe? Is the God who chose to be in relationship with the Israelites the Force of Love making Itself known to creatures

sufficiently evolved to be “endowed with the consciousness of [their] relationship to deity”?

Many big questions. No answers, just food for thought.

I will leave you with this advice from George Fox in one of his letters. When I read it, I thought of it in terms of these universal forces.

Prize your time and the Lord's love for you above all things. Mind the Light in you which shows you evil, which checks you, when you speak an evil word, and tells you you should not be proud, nor wanton, nor fashion your-selves like the world, for the world's fashion passes away. Mind the Light. It will keep your mind humble, heart lowly, and turn the mind within to wait upon the Lord, to be guided by Him. Mind the Light. It will bring you to lay aside all evil, to wait on Christ for teaching till an entrance be made to your hearts and refreshment come from His presence there. Mind the Light and it will not allow you to conform to the world's evil customs . . . Mind the Lord's love for you and mind the Light above all things. (Epistle 17)