

***Exploring the God Question  
More on Mind and Consciousness — and God***

My name is Peter, Peter John Bowes. You might choose to think a parent thought long and hard about the names to give the boy child that arrived three years after his sister Mary, but such assumptions would be way off the mark. I took a very long time apparently to let out my first cry. Because I was not expected to live, there was something of a panic in the delivery room because the baby needed a name and a baptism for the afterlife. Peter and John were the names easily to mind, and then I yelled. Some might say I haven't stopped since!



What beliefs were these only 80 plus years ago that made such an act a necessary one to ensure my destination was heaven rather than hell? Well as you can see, I made it past the first post.

My father was missing from the first ten years of my life most of which he spent as a Japanese Prisoner of war and working on the Burmese railroad of death. How he survived that hell I do not know and on his return

home this hollowed-out man did not live long. I wonder how my life has been shaped by my absent and unknown father? Not thinking or knowing why I was doing what I was doing, I served at 17 as a regular soldier, like him. I lasted three years and then once more a civilian, studied for a science degree and worked in the early days of the new computer industry. A successful project for my American employer was rewarded by an instruction to make a third of my team redundant. I could not stand the inner conflict and left to study theology in Switzerland before returning to be a Baptist Minister for 18 years in Edinburgh. That ended in conflict too and I went on to become a psychotherapist for the next 30 years. I do wonder what links these phases of my life. I now tend to think it was, and remains, a searching for meaning that my life mattered.

There is a need within us all to find hope and meaning for existence. We are meaning-making creatures. One of the emerging themes of my questioning is spirituality. I began to define spirituality as a unique quality of being human which embraces that need for meaning-making.

I believe it is beyond contention that human beings in all places and at all times, in order perhaps to make meaning of themselves and their lives, have needed a language that gives expression to some aspects of that experience, This language all human beings recognise as the language of spirituality. Whatever this is, all human beings have it. It is inherent in Augustine's "O God thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless

until they find their rest in Thee” to Camus’ “Here is what frightens me: to lose one’s life is a little thing, and I will have the courage when necessary. But to see the sense of life dissipated, to see our reason for existence disappear, that is what is intolerable. A man cannot live without meaning”. This concern, or angst, is felt by us all and we each interpret it in our own way. We feel the need and are driven by that need to be part of that which is sensed as bigger than ourselves.

Freud needed a language to describe and capture the meaning he made of his observations about his patients. He derived the science of psychology for that purpose. It is, more accurately, *psyche* – ology. Needing to capture something of what he observed of himself and others he drew on Greek mythology and the beautifully evocative image and story of the butterfly emerging from its chrysalis.

He sought to understand ‘Mind’ and, needing a language to describe to us how our minds might work, used, to describe how that Mind functioned, the very personal *Das ich, das uber ich* and *das es*. Curiously Bruno Bettelheim shows us, the American English translation of this making meaning of human behaviours, appeared as the Latin ego and super ego and Id. Mind became an object and thus mental processes could be described with the promise of their correction without getting into the wonder and mysteriousness sensed and honoured by Freud’s entering into mythology. So today we speak of the ‘mind’ as if it existed, could go wrong, and give us mental health problems which, if only we could find the mind, could be fixed.

Something similar has happened in many languages with the concept of soul and spirit. It is evident, as I have already claimed, that human beings everywhere and probably always, have needed a language with which to name our experience of ourselves and others. We know we are saying something that is real when speaking of our souls and of our spirits. However, I have read many books especially those by theologians and including some well-known individuals who are bold enough to teach classes in Spirituality in Universities, who insert the definite article before soul and spirit. No longer then speaking of an experience but of an object. The Soul. The Spirit. Just as we still must ask ‘What and where is the Mind, we must also ask ‘What is THE Soul then?’ And where is it that we might study and shape it?



Some religions take refuge from the demand of this question by claiming an answer given by revelation to tell us how God made us or breathed life into us. No one can argue with such a claim of revealed truth, of course. The result is the separation of human beings into different camps needing sometimes fierce defence at the borders so one group is not contaminated by the other. What I am saying is that the experience we have of ourselves and others in our Universe is the same but the meaning we put on it will depend on how each construes or interprets if you prefer, his or her world just as my mother was doing at my birth.

Many of us will have seen this picture painted some 17,000 years ago in the depths and darkness and confinement of the Lascaux caves deep beneath the ground. You can read several authors' interpretation of the event. It is difficult to avoid importing into our ancient ancestors lives the meanings with which we construe our very different world views

What do you think was the experience and the understanding of the individual who painted a hand by blowing red ochre onto his or her hand placed upon the rock face? Who can know? It may all be just graffiti? A MeToo twitter record of homo sapiens evolving away from their Neanderthal neighbours in the same era? David Lewis-Williams is a cognitive archaeologist who researched in these caves. His book recording his work is called *The Mind in the Cave*. He believes that even at the time of the origin of the paintings in Lascaux there were unusual individuals who experienced what we now call 'altered states of consciousness' from use of hallucinogenic substances. These shamans appeared to his neighbours to be able to go to other realms outside of the common experience. Thus, they were important figures who could tell what the gods were saying, for example. So, in the deep dark, confined and remote space of the caves, a few, a very few given the restriction of the space where these images are found, sought to enter into the experience of the shaman sensing the faces of the stone caves were boundaries between here and other realms which they too could cross into as they had seen like the admired and feared shaman do, or at least that was their interpretation of what they experienced. They too could participate in being part of that mysterious other. They too might find their place in the Universe in a more meaningful way. Perhaps.

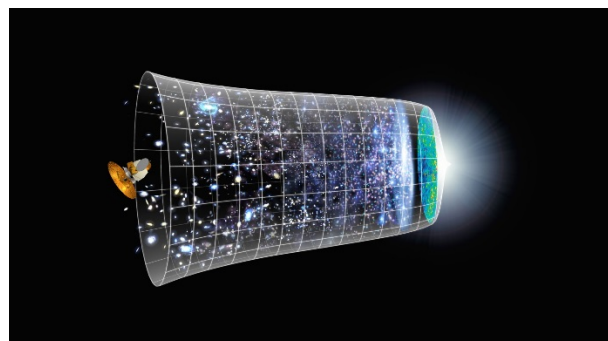
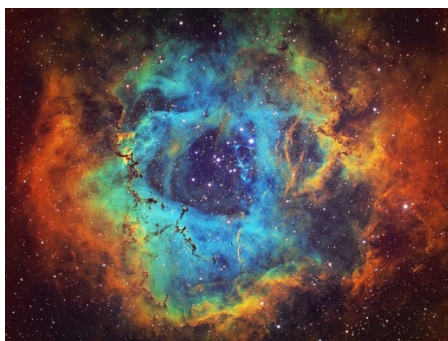
These paintings were made during that period in our evolution as homo sapiens, when what is referred to as the big bang of our homo sapiens evolutionary development took place. Archaeological evidence makes clear that suddenly, well over say 30,000 years, we began leave objects with our dead to take with them on the now presumed journey to another realm. We gave stone objects significance by carving them, as never done before, and what followed was an explosion of art and craft, and representations of this other world experience. We became religious in multiple ways. The transformation is astonishing and as yet inexplicable. Neanderthals to a large extent did not make this breakthrough in meaning-making and became extinct.

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Understanding brain evolution that led to this big bang expansion into meaning-making is one thing but the dawn of consciousness itself that makes possible our realisation of our finiteness, our past and the expectation of a future, is a wonder which is far from being understood.



Consciousness evolved as the two-sided brain evolved. How, why, and when is a conundrum immersed in awe and wondering. It is difficult to imagine what 'primitive consciousness' could mean. There was a time with consciousness, awareness of a someone aware of being an agent in this world became reality, and a time when that was not present. Consciousness and meaning-making emerges. There must have been a dawning of our early ancestors' sense of being part of something bigger than themselves with a past and future and an always growing need for significance, spiritual meaning.



Accessed November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020 <https://www.thoughtco.com/origin-of-the-universe-3072255>

We in our day rather than retreat to a cave, may look at the Hubble telescope images in awe of the beauty of our Universe. We feel a response within our beings to such images. Or maybe when gazing up to the night sky in rural Northumberland. We know the experience is real. We can wrap up that experience in the same envelope of spirituality since it is a characteristic of being human, but we have no science for it.

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We can change perspective and realise that the source of the pixels of these images captured as they come to us from up to 13.7 billion years ago and accept the fact of science that can make and prove that assertion I just made. We can discover that Hubble *records* events which occurred 13.3 billion years ago and that science can make that observation, knows its meaning and can calculate the time of its origin. We can follow, if we are brilliantly gifted, Professors such as Brian Greene who is able to use mathematics to say when this Universe began, and when it will stop expanding, reverse and die. Don't worry, it's a while away yet.

Greene is one of those scientists following in the footsteps of Einstein whose brains gave us 'string theory'. Greene like Einstein might say he didn't work that out but that it was a realisation that such a theory was waiting to be discovered once someone was able to think the science, concluded it had to exist. You look at a two-dimensional image of an expanding universe. You can now choose to focus in on a tiny part of that image in three dimensions, focusing on matter of some kind, any kind. String theory is needed to understand matter as we think of it in smaller and smaller finite parts. Greene now knows his mathematics requires at least 9 other dimensions to the three you just used, in order to postulate about its existence. No, I can't imagine what that means either. But just as we may have thought to have found the Rosetta Stone of atomic physics at this level, we are off again into the need for expanding awareness that makes a 13.7 billion years representation a Model T Ford creation. Is humanity now nearer to that Theory of Everything and we may know it all? Who knows, but the profound need for meaning of our life will not cease and surely even as we bow before the immensity of what we now know (and, we may think, all that we have yet to know), the deep deep need to find our place and meaning within it all *increases*. That ever-increasing sense of awe certainly does not decrease, does it?

Science may at one time have thought that all there was to know would be known and we would have a theory of everything. Yet it still seems that the more we discover, the more we discover there is more to be understood. Brian Greene spells out his mathematical formulations that calculate the beginning and the end of the Universe that sustain us as humans and attempts a Theory of Everything. But, in the very last sentence of this book, *The End of Time*, Greene eulogises over the magnificence and richness of this Universe and even our current science about it and what brought it into existence and will see it to its end. And he says, 'it stirs my soul'. Sorry, Brian, can you show me what this soul is then? Not matter surely!

Evolution theory wants to be the science of how we came to be humans in an expanding Universe; creationism is a theology that gives meaning to humans that they matter in such an understanding. As a psychologist, I know for sure that we need both perspectives. As a theologian I am utterly astonished to encounter what was written two thousand years ago about an event in this expanding universe. One of those whose writings we have, John, had the advantage of a few decades in which to wonder about what had happened. He said '*in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*' Our task in every generation is to think this through as more and more revelations about the nature of matter and the Universe of matter become known to us. John's insight is far from irrelevant.

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Paul's personal encounter with those who had met with Jesus, found meaning that provides light that brings meaning to human beings in our day. How on earth it was possible for Paul to think these thoughts? Somehow Paul sensed that in the stories he was hearing, filtered through the experience of the few that had met Jesus and the meaning of that encounter as they struggled with its uniqueness, that a theology of everything was at hand. It is incomprehensible to me until the possibilities of encounter even second hand, with the creator of the Universe emerges into my conscious awareness. I share with all human beings the need to find meaning and assurance that I matter in the grand scheme of things. John and Paul provide envisioning that FEELS true.

What could it be like then to encounter the Creator of this Universe albeit through the words of those who had met Him? Listen to Paul's words again: *'The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or ruler or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together'*. That's Colossians 1:15 to 17 written as a letter to a group of first century people that Paul thought able to understand his meaning and what it meant for their meaning about themselves in their first century world. The question that matters is can you make that fit your 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge and experience?

But I ask you again, how on earth could Paul have formulated these words? Revelation? Maybe but all that does is set Christianity against all other such revelations. But recognition of our evolution, consciousness and emerging deep need for our meaning and significance, now makes us all in every age and every place, seek out meaning for what we label as our souls. And every one of us must do that for ourselves and be humble enough to see what others have found before us and adapt it to our own day and the knowledge science gives us.

Paul says we were 'created in Christ'. Could that mean, if you will, that we and our world exist in the mind of Christ the Creator. Those Hubble pictures are within the mind of Christ. Thought into existence by the Creator. Those multiple dimensions of string theory of which we must now speak, are not unknown to the Creator.

This form of creationism is an elegant way for us today to find meaning that we matter so very much in the Creator's mind in which is held the theory and theology of everything there is. The meaning and purpose and significance that we reach for in our soul searching that we do with all mankind together. We are all thought of in the Creator's mind together, all are needed, wanted, together to bring about the Creator's purpose. As this Creator walk amongst us and died by our hand for us. No wonder then that the few records we have in the New Testament of those closest to meeting with that mind of Christ are so potent for finding meaning in every generation.

We are evolving to an awareness of the author of our creation. No wonder our souls are searching yet.