

Chapter 11: A Modern Ancient Story

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ROUGH DRAFT OF INITIAL PARAGRAPHS

Creation

In the beginning, God created the conditions from which emerged everything that ever has been and ever will be.

Who is this God? For reasons unfathomable to us, this God is fundamentally a trinitarian spirit of perfect love. As *spirit*, God's fundamental existence is other than physical. As *trinity*, God's fundamental existence is a oneness that maintains its oneness while also being a threeness. This threeness is a 'community' of 'persons' existing in a perfect unity of mutual love, indwellingness, rationality, and holiness. But this is not an egalitarian 'community', even though it is perfectly united in its oneness. For each 'person' has its 'role' within the unity. One 'person' is the source of divine will – whom we call *the Father* (or simply *Father*). Another is the one who 'speaks forth' the divine will – whom we call *the Word*. And another brings about the divine will – whom we call *the Holy Spirit*. None of them is solely responsible for their mutual love (for they constitute this love together, and this love constitutes them), but each of them has their own 'role' or 'responsibility' within the oneness of being God. As a perfect unity, they engage in their 'roles' with perfect unity of mind, purpose, and love.

Why God should be like *this*, as opposed to having some other fundamental nature (or as opposed to not even existing at all), is beyond our comprehension – this is simply the brute fact of God. *How* we can know God is like this will be part of our story later on.

So God *created*.

God brought forth this Creation with purpose – *to provide the conditions under which loving beings, including (but not limited to) beings bearing God's image, would come to exist in loving relationships with God and with each other*. God did not *need* to bring about loving beings, but rather in freedom chose to do so. The Father willed that this be so, and the Word and the Spirit, through the knowledge and wisdom and power that are simply part of God's nature as the trinitarian spirit of perfect love, brought about the *initial conditions* for the physical realm in which such loving beings would emerge and flourish. We call this physical realm 'matter, time,

and space' – *the universe*. 'The universe', though, includes not only physical reality, but also any metaphysical states that came into existence with Creation, such as numbers, mathematical theorems, logic, linguistic meaning, and mind (if indeed any of these are metaphysical rather than physical states.) Since God created both the physical and metaphysical realms, then God's own existence is *metametaphysical*.

To contain the initial conditions of Creation, God created *ex nihilo* (from nothing) some initial mode of physical existence. This might have been a 'singularity' – a microscopic piece of matter of infinite density and heat-energy. Or, as some have proposed, it might have been an 'oscillating loop' of heat-energy. Or it may have been something else of which we have not even yet conceived – or which we might never rightly conceive. Regardless, as the Creator of the initial mode of physical existence, God could give it value – which God did, for God said 'This is good!'

About 13.7 billion years ago (as measured from our human perspective!), this initial physical condition suddenly 'exploded', doing so with an intensity of heat-energy and with a rate of expansion that is almost beyond comprehension to our limited human minds. Whether it was 'our' initial conditions that God created, or some previous initial conditions from which ours descended, we cannot yet say – as I write this, the whole issue of multiverses is still too imprecise and unresolved to give any sort of confident Materialist or theistic interpretation. Nonetheless, what we *can* say is this: in the beginning God created the initial conditions from which emerged everything that ever has been and ever will be.

The physical reactions that resulted from this event initially brought about a quark-gluon plasma, which quickly went through a number of developmental stages. Atoms were able to form about 300,000 years after the Big Bang, and photons (light particles) were able to break free about 100,000 years later (creating the cosmic microwave background radiation). Somewhere in this process, dark matter and dark energy emerged. Though generally isotropic and homogenous, slight perturbations or deviations in the expanding plasma led to clumping of elements into denser concentrations. These clumps gained size and density through their gravitational ability to attract baryonic matter, a process that resulted in the formation of the earliest stars roughly eight billion years ago. Within stars, the internal process of nuclear fusion, with its immensely high temperatures, transformed lighter elements into heavier elements. Some of these stars burned out to become black holes, which added further local gravitational force, drawing hot gas and

various space-objects into galactic structures. Filaments, chains, and clusters of stars, black holes, galaxies and various other types of astronomical bodies and objects continued to form. Exploding stars would eject their various elements back into space, in effect recycling these elements into the intergalactic medium. Over millions and billions of years, these elements were – and still are – eventually pulled back into other astronomical bodies, whether stars, black holes, planets, floating gas blobs, or other space objects and structures – or even into life-forms here on Earth or elsewhere. Eventually all these elements will end up absorbed back into another star, then millions or billions of years later will once again go through the cycle of being blown up in a stellar explosion and re-circulated again – or eventually stuck in a black hole somewhere. Meanwhile, all this time, and infinitely into the future, the whole of space has kept expanding at an increasing rate. Moreover, all this may have been taking place not just in the four dimensions of our awareness (three dimensions plus time) but rather in ten or eleven dimensions.

The immensity and awesomeness of this process is mind-boggling, yet even at their most fundamental level, the laws of physics are not sufficient to undergird the continuing existence of all that is happening in space, or even space itself. For undergirding everything from the clusters of galaxies to the multiple dimensions of the universe, is the sustaining activity of God. So God did not simply ‘get the ball rolling’ then let it go. For space – with its physical and energy content along with whatever multiple dimensions there might be – is sustained by the sustaining action of God. Like the possible multiple dimensions and possible multiverses themselves, this sustaining action of God is far from fully understood (and never will be by our limited mental abilities). Nevertheless, we can say that God’s relation to the physical (and metaphysical) realm is not just that of Creator but also that of Sustainer.

Out of these billions of galaxies, at least one has emerged (though possibly many others have too) containing within it a particular piece of ‘rock’ that possesses certain remarkable physical and chemical properties. The galaxy of which I am speaking is, of course, our Solar System, which emerged about 4.5 billion years ago; and the particular piece of ‘rock’ to which I refer is, unsurprisingly, that teeny-tiny body we name Earth, which came to exist roughly the same time as the Solar System itself.

Earth – the place where *we*, the tellers and hearers of this story, *live*. As Creator and Sustainer of the universe, God could attach value to the Earth – which God did, saying ‘This is good!’

The physical and chemical properties of Earth are remarkable because they provide the conditions needed to incubate and sustain the emergence and evolution of *life*. Perhaps other astronomical bodies with life have come to exist, or have even existed and died away, or will eventually come to exist – we do not yet know. Regardless, conditions in this universe are remarkably fine-tuned for life, whenever and wherever life might arise. This fine-tuning may be due to the Creator’s intentional condition-setting prior to the Big Bang. Or it may be due to the Creator’s intentional condition-setting prior to the emergence of multiverses. Either way, the fine-tuning of the initial conditions was nothing less than the Creator’s intention, to create the conditions necessary for the eventual emergence of loving life.

Among the many factors crucial to life on Earth is its distance from its star – the Sun. The Sun is a relatively new star, comprised of debris from earlier burned out suns. The warmth of the sun was one of the many factors that enabled life on earth to emerge, probably beginning as single cells. How cellular life came about continues to be subject to great debate and investigation today. Nonetheless, the oldest fossilized form of life yet found appears to be microbial, and has been dated to about 3.5 billion years ago (about a billion years after Earth came into existence). Not that Earth’s conditions back then were supportive of the forms of life that exist today. Significant levels of oxygen, probably produced by bacterial photosynthesis, did not come along for another billion years (that is, about 2.5 billion years ago). Other conditions for the emergence and evolution of increasingly-complex forms of life included a range of geological, hydrographical, and atmospheric changes, including the effects of massive volcanoes, changing oceanic chemistry, and shifting tectonic plates. Over time, these and other processes created conditions conducive to the emergence of multi-cellular life-forms, from which eventually emerged the common ancestor of all currently-living things – possibly from the earliest form of sponge, roughly 800 million years ago. The ability of cells to absorb and shape minerals (an ability which would be required to form bones, shells, teeth, and so on) likewise began roughly 800 million years ago. From here eventually evolved the various branches of life, with the countless millions of species – from the smallest microorganisms to the largest dinosaurs to *homo sapiens* – that have emerged, evolved, died out, or survived over the past several hundred million years and on into our own period of geobiological history.

As the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, God could declare this wondrous, emergent, evolving life on earth to have value – which God did, saying ‘This is good!’

This good creation includes various species which have evolved complex cognitive capabilities, including intelligence and relationality, ranging from dolphins to elephants, from dogs to chimps – but especially hominids. From among those species which evolved increasingly-complex cognitive abilities emerged creatures capable of proto-love and *agape*-love – although thus far it appears only hominids have evolved the capacity for *agape*-love.

Over many millions of years, various types of hominids emerged, evolved, migrated, disappeared, or, in the case of *homo sapiens* alone, survived. To what extent hominids others than *homo sapiens* have been capable of *agape*-love we will never know. Regardless, at some point God elected hominids (possibly *homo sapiens* in particular) to hold a particular status, namely as bearers of the image of God. In one sense, all of the universe can be considered to bear God's image, at least in the limited sense that any created thing bears to some extent the imprint of its maker – yet *homo sapiens* bear this image in a much more significant way. Aspects of this divine image in *homo sapiens* include human love (imaging God's intra-triune love), moral responsibility (imaging God's holiness), rationality (imaging God's rationality), creativity (imaging God's creativity), and linguisticism (imaging God's communicativeness through the Word and Spirit). All these aspects emerged through the evolutionary history of hominids – and yet being 'the image of God' is not simply a matter of evolution, for it is the prerogative of God, not of evolution, to say 'These creatures I elect as bearers of the divine image'. At this election, whenever it may have been in evolutionary history, God imparted another aspect to complete that image, an aspect that evolution cannot produce – the gift of 'spirit' or 'soul'.

As the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, God looked upon all that had emerged from the original physical conditions, including the emergence of space, astronomical objects, life, consciousness, proto-loving beings, and *agape*-loving beings. God knew from the time of setting the initial conditions that all this would eventually come about. So to all this God gave infinite value by saying, 'This is really *very* good!'

[More about hominids, their migration out of Africa, the emergence of hunter-gatherer groups, the migration around the globe, the emergence of language, tool-use, culture, civilizations, technology, etc. Future evolution of humanity; etc.]

The Fall...

Redemption...

Israel

The Word Incarnate – Jesus of Nazareth

The Spirit

The Church

Eschatology...