

God and Nature

Realistic Living Pointers, Nov. 15, 2019

By Gene Marshall

I will start this meditation with a slight rephrasing of the New English translation of part of Psalm 139—verses 13-18.

It was You who fashioned my inward parts;
You knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise You, because You fill me with Awe.
You are wonder-full, and so are Your works.
You know me, through and through;
my body is no mystery to You,
or how I was secretly kneaded into shape
and patterned in the depths of the Earth.
You saw my limbs yet unformed in the womb
and in Your records they were all recorded,
day-by-day they were fashioned,
not one limb was late in growing.
How deep I find Your thoughtfulness, O my God!
How inexhaustible are Your topics!
Can I count them? They outnumber the grains of sand!
To finish the count my years would have to equal Yours!

This poem gives us a sense of how it is can be true that our relation with the nature of our own bodies can also be a relation with the Unconditional Reality that conditions all things that have conditions, such as our bodies. The Unconditional can only be spoken of in poetry or religions symbols. "You" (we sometimes say "Thou") in the above poem is such a religious symbol. This symbol includes the meaning that we can relate to the Unconditional in a personal manner, as we might relate to parents, friends, lovers, spouses, children, and yes to our own body.

I recently noticed an often ignored feature of my own body. I found myself saying, "How fortunate that is. How glad I am to have it that way. I wonder how many million years of animal lives and deaths it took to evolve that." Such awareness of our bodily nature, according to this Psalm, is also an awareness of God.

So is nature God?
Or is our God nature?

Unraveling such questions depends upon how we understand the word “nature” and how we understand the word “God.” Here are two ways that “God” is commonly misunderstood.
God is an object or process within nature.
God is a process or a being in some non-temporal realm, implying a minimizing of the temporal/material realm of nature.

Here is another way to see the meaning of “God” and “nature” and the relation between the two.

God is the *Unconditional Ground of Being* that MOVES in both creation and destruction of each and every conditioned being of nature.

God is the **No-thing-ness** out of which all things come and all things return
God is the **Every-thing-ness** within which all things are connected.
God is the **Total Demand** upon our profound consciousness that is being made by this Unconditional Ground that is confronting us and conferring upon us the freedom to be response-able in facing these encounters that meets us in every event of our lives.

The Nature of Nature?

Two very different views of “nature” also need to be kept in mind. One view is that nature is what we are told by the natural sciences—the knowledge that we use for our practical needs, our technological innovations, and our predictions of the future. A second very different view of nature is expressed in this truism: “The more we know about nature, the more we know we don’t know.”

The first view of “nature” excludes any sense of “the Unconditional” for “God as the Unconditional” is not a being of any sort, and therefore cannot be perceived by the natural sciences.

The second view of “nature” sees nature as impermanent, temporal things and processes that participate in a Permanent Final Mysteriousness that we meet in every natural thing, process, or event of nature.

Which of these two views of nature is the correct one? They are both correct, but the second is the more profound view of “nature” within which the first view of “nature” is an aspect. How can we understand this better?

The “laws of nature” are all approximations of “nature” in that second deeper sense. For example, humans have long preformed the ancient ritual of standing before the rising sun and the then again standing before the setting sun. This was something more than

worshiping the sun. It involved honoring the Unconditional Mystery of it all. This daily rising and daily setting had strong symbolic meanings for the whole scope of our coming and going lives.

It was a scientific revolution to see ourselves on the surface of a great ball the surface of which was moving from west to east. Rather than viewing the sun rising and setting, we were just passing by the sun while standing on a moving surface. This bit of new understanding of the wonder of nature did not end the wonder, it even expanded the wonder.

Here is a more contemporary example of a scientific revolution that expanded the wonder. When we think about that aspect of our lives called “gravity,” we have no problem pointing to a force that pulls us back “down” after we jump “up.” We see things fall “down” from what we call “up.” But as we probe the nature of gravity further and ask how gravity works with regard to the fact that our planet is circling the sun and the moon circling the Earth we enter some clearer meanings concerning what we mean by “gravity.” Sir Isaac Newton gave us some basic mathematics on this topic. The bigger the mass of an object the bigger the force of gravity generated by that mass. And the force of Earth’s gravitation lessens with the distance from the Earth. Newton’s math tell us how fast that lessening takes place. Newton never liked the idea that gravity was a force operating at a distance, but that was the way it seemed to him. The Earth seemed to have a big sucking power pulling on us and on every object we drop or throw.

Einstein’s law of gravity is a revolutionary view of “gravity” that fits better to all the facts of gravitational behavior. In this more accurate view of gravity, we do not have a force operating at a distance. Instead, Earth’s gravity is the result of a warp in space-time that affects the behavior of each bit of mass in each location of space/time surrounding this massive object. Don’t stop reading; you can experience this every day! You may not have been looking at your experience in the Einstein way.

Imagine yourself in a car driving at steady speed of 60 miles per hour. Then say, you need to put on the breaks and quickly reduce your speed. Everyone in the car is thrown forward against their seat belts. Loose object take flight in the direction you were going. That is an experience of gravity, not because some heavy mass is sucking you forward, but because your de-acceleration is a change in velocity with respect the fabric of space-time.

Turning is also a type of acceleration. When a jet-plane pilot turns his or her plane in a tight left turn at a high velocity, the pilot can feel a pull to the right of several g’s. (that is several times the gravity of the Earth). Acceleration through the fabric of space/time is gravity. And gravity is acceleration through the fabric of space/time.

So why do we feel gravity standing still on the surface of the Earth? Supported by the Earth is a form of acceleration in relation to this warp in space/time. Non-acceleration is what is happening in this space-time medium when you are falling from an airplane before your chute opens. When your chute opens you are yanked upward because you are making an acceleration in that warped space/time that surrounds the Earth.

So what is this space/time fabric? We are used to seeing three dimension of space that are independent from one dimension of time. What does it mean to talk about an influential relation between space and time ?

Here is a surprising example of how this connection between space and time is so. If you are in a space craft circling the Earth at the high velocity required to stay in orbit you are doing a great deal of acceleration through the space/time fabric. Time would slow down for you in relation to the time passing on the surface of the Earth. So, if you were to live several months in that state of motion and then return to Earth, you could be seconds younger according to the watch on your arm in relation to the persons and clocks that stayed on the Earth.

So why is this shift from the Newtonian universe of understandings to the Einsteinian universe of understandings important to the topic of “God” and “nature”? Answer: These are good examples of how our scientific knowledge is always an approximation of nature. The Newtonian Universe is still a good approximation. The Einsteinian universe is a better approximation. Still better approximation are possible. This is true for all aspects of all the natural sciences.

For most of our living, we can get along fine with our Newtonian approximations. We may know that both atomic energy and cell phones require some post-Newtonian science, but most of us don't work in those technical fields. All of us do live in the same nature, however, and we may serve the same Profound Reality as our God-devotion.

To imagine experiencing a big scientific revolution, consider yourself in Einstein's position when he was becoming clear that the Newtonian mathematics did not cover some of the signals he is getting from “nature.” He is intuiting another way of viewing the universe. He is living in a gap between the Newtonian regular physics and a post-Newtonian regular physics. That gap is an interesting witness to the nature of human knowledge.

Even after the General Theory of Relativity was fleshed out and documented with more and more facts, Einstein's universe is still an approximation of nature. This became clear as sub-atomic physics began to use successfully a pattern of thought that violated the strict cause-and-effect types of logic that dominated both the Newtonian universe and the Relativity universe. Probability types of human conceptuality were working splendidly in understanding these tiny aspects of physical composition.

Einstein fought with this view of physics, saying at one point that he “did not believe that God played dice with the cosmos.” He was saying that this deep dive into an understanding of “nature” simply had to have a cause-and-effect explanation. But this gap in the rational structure of physics has not closed.

These revolutions in physics may have taught us something we do not want to know—that our human minds are incapable of a rational view of nature. This does not mean that what we know about nature is invalid. It just means that approximation is going to be the best that the human mind can ever do.

This awareness does not conclude that nature is not real or that we can make up whatever science we want. Nature still impacts us with support for and rejection of our theories about nature. “Nature,” however, is now being viewed as a boundless mysteriousness that will never be fully known by a human mind.

In this strange new world of nature, we humans are having fun making up alternative physics for our science fiction stories, but in our search for realism we must not believe these stories. For example, the Star Trek series of stories has had a lot of fun with the idea of “warp speed.” But there is no such thing as warp speed in the actual cosmos. On this topic, mysterious nature is telling us that one gram of matter in order to be accelerated to the mere speed of light would require the energy of the entire cosmos—which is to say that nothing substantial gets to travel at the speed of light. Only massless electromagnetic waves and gravitational waves get to travel at that speed, and even they can travel at no greater speed. Light from a very distant star can take billions of years to reach this planet.

We humans with all our powerful imagining
do not get to say what Profound Reality is.
We live in Reality. We live in nature.
We do not live in our words,
even if we think we do.

It is not our words that tell Reality what to be. It is Profound Reality that tells us what our words are to mean. We define our own words, but if these definitions are not obedient to Reality, then our words are just gibberish.

In a similar way Profound Reality is related to our whole culture—all our writings, art, mathematics, customs, roles, rules, morals, rituals, myths, and icons have meaning only to the extent that they are grounded for their meaning in Profound Reality. Otherwise, these human constructions are delusory gibberish.

We are indeed installed in our culture of thoughts, roles, and practices, but we are even more deeply installed in the wonder-filled Unconditional Profound Reality which is the source of all our meaning and realism. When we over trust our mind's knowledge, we lose conscious contact with Profound Reality. We become stuck in some **sickness of unrealism** that can only be healed by the **grace/love** of Profound Reality restoring us to our appropriate ignorance