

Astronomy Lessons

by

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Inferential Cosmology

"He who does not know what the world is does not know where he is, and he who does not know for what purpose the world exists, does not know who he is, nor what the world is."

Marcus Aurelius

Where did we come from, where are we going,
are there laws governing causal reasoning?
I attempt to read about things I don't understand —
cosmology, evolution, personal relationships.
Each has its own unanswerable questions.
It comes down to progression.

We assume a common ancestor.
We let go extinct that which is obsolete.
Heritable traits pass from one generation to the next,
I get brown eyes from my father, reclusiveness from
my mother. It's easier to remain cloistered in a world
of my own than face the inquisitiveness of others.

I resent those who force me to develop,
swallow reluctance and adopt change.
My origins are secret.
Growth has no long-term goals,
I am fire, banked against the possibility of no dawn.

I saw us descending from a common organism.
I saw us as uniformly distributed matter.
I saw us adapting together, swimming upstream,
back to the places that spawned us.
Drift fascinated me, so I did.
Divergence is king.

Pluto's orbit is eccentric—that comforts me.
I volunteered for a one-way trip to Mars
if only to pierce the firmament and let biases
be confirmed. I am that which can go extinct.
The hardest decision to make—what attributes
to carry forward, into an ever-probable universe.

Evaporation

Under pressure, I often fail to liquefy.
We all have a critical point where we coexist.
On Mars water survives as ice or maybe vapor.
Memories of twilight streams collect
rippled reflections. Introspection ends
in dry channels, carved by long ago floods.

Here, pond water only moves with a breeze,
unless prodded from beneath by small fish.
Lovers ghost from room to room, looking
for each other, passage lingering on air,
which is why I try and leave doors open.

Rivers need the shores to define them.
Satellites cling to orbits around Earth.
We explain love as an act we mean to do.
Intent, after all, is the basis of society —
the reason we rise in the morning.

The Origin of Humans

Is this the Madagascar glow you told me about? Tall baobab trees blazing with the last light of a faded sun? Are the water-storing trunks and flat tops twisted out of a fairy tale? Are these the trade winds dreamed of, carrying us on outbound tide to sunset? Can we drift beyond the horizon to meet the dusk halfway? Why can't golden light be our new illuminated currency? Does slip-silver of leaping fish catch the wind and flip us back to radiant fantasy? Will the glistening cycle of beginning and end bring us closer to eternity? Who wouldn't long for Africa during a full moon? Would you leap into sapphire waters from hewn cliffs, clutching my outstretched hand?

The Problem with String Theory

The opening move involves the transfer
of wrapped string from one player to another,
fingers and thumb weaving diamonds between
empty spaces. It's a game as old as mankind,
and elegantly explains the whole lot—all known
natural forces, what the world is made of down
to the subatomic composition of the universe.

It's in the passage of filament from one person
to another where theory goes astray.
In the rush to take possession of the loop,
gravity falls out the holes and rolls away,
leaving us unable to explain the one thing
that would help us explain everything.

In the end, it doesn't matter, because it won't be
mathematical precision that pushes theoretical
physics out of the nest, but a length of cord
oscillating back and forth from player to player,
starting at Opening A, cat's cradle,
continuing onward in infinite combination.

Fluidity

This morning we left the house just before dawn,
yoga mats over one shoulder, water bottles clutched
in one hand. Above, the sky thinks about fading
into day, the stars knocking out their last rays of silver.
We squint for Saturn, find Venus slinking down
into the treetops at the end of the street. Cetus
the Whale lurks in the east. We look in vain for
the moon, three days from full and blue. I discover
later it set at 4:13 in the morning, still a bit too
early for us to be up and out. We'll make the effort
to catch the moon on Wednesday night and Thursday
morning, to bask in the steady glow. After, we'll drive
to yoga class, reflect in silence the whole way,
mirror the moon on our poses, and walk out to
bright sunshine, morning an echo, stars faded
to sleep, readying themselves for another night
of holding up the heavens. We remember the moon
casting light like molten metal. We are the crucibles,
filled with liquid memory, works of art in progress.

Sky Ornaments

When I arrive home at dusk my headlights
slip along the sides of those pink plastic

monstrosities and catch a knowing glint
in bead black eyes. Dozens of pink flamingos

line the drive, beak to tail, steel legs at 45-degree
angles, permanent strut, stalking the depths

of the asphalt, wading the no man's land
between drive and front yard. They stand in

social groups of my choosing and I bleed guilt.
One night I come home at midnight to find the

flamingos gone, having taken flight on polymer
wings, soaring, wheeling, dangling bare wire legs

as they glide across the face of a bright blue moon.

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