

God, the Universe and Everything

Excerpt from “The Remainder of My Life: an Autobiography Written in Real Time,” an AIDS memoir by Troy Carlyle

Current scientific thinking has the universe starting this way: no one knows exactly what set off the “big bang,” but in the beginning, everything we know of – the whole universe – was as small as an atom. Within a fraction of a fraction of a second, an incomprehensibly enormous burst of energy was exploding in all directions.

That’s how all this got started – as energy. Even the stuff we’re mostly interested in, which is matter, started as pure energy. This makes sense in a weird sort of way, since when you look at the elements that make up our world on a small enough scale, they can all be described as various configurations of energy – certain combinations of electrons orbiting around certain combinations of protons and neutrons – all of them types of energy.

Within a fraction of a second, the explosion had already created hydrogen and helium – it took a little longer for other elements to form... random collisions as the explosion grew in size and as the energy from the original explosion began to decay.

Within that first second, scientists say that most matter was “eaten up” by near-equal quantities of antimatter – but for a singular anomaly, there would be no matter today. This anomaly consists of the fact that for every hundred billion particles of antimatter, there was a hundred billion and one particles of matter. So everything we touch and can see in this massive universe of ours is the result of that ever-so slight tilt on the scale in the favor of matter. Every atom in the universe had the odds of a hundred billion to one to exist at all.

Even then, a massive amount of matter had to survive in order to produce the infinite randomness required to bring about the varieties of collisions needed to create the diversity of elements we enjoy today. Over a hundred different elements, from oxygen to iron to carbon – all the elements that make up everything around us such as cars and computers and skyscrapers – were born in those first few moments as the universe began.

No one knows how long it took the universe to “invent” the complex amino acids that form the basis for all life, but even these are made up of those same elements – carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen oxygen – that were created by way of random collisions during the first few instants after the big bang.

The explosion, of course, created an incomprehensibly enormous flash of light. So enormous, in fact, that they say a full one half of one percent of all radio and television static you see even today is leftover radiation from that original bang all those billions of years ago.

Imagine the odds that this original bang could have created all the pieces that would someday lead to the creation of a being capable of reflecting about the very event that created it. In order to understand the miracle of this, I strike a match, and imagine a particle within the original explosion of flame expanding into a miniature universe that contains, in the instant just after its creation (and just before its extinction) a race of beings who, in the course of that instant, come close to understanding what they are – how they came about – how small they are.

I have purposefully left God out of this discussion to this point. Bear with me – I’ll get back to God in a moment. For now, let’s simply imagine we are random chance

incarnate. Imagine that, as science indicates, we started as pure energy – gradually “colliding” into various forms of matter, and “voila,” here we are.

Doesn't that make you feel rare? Doesn't it make you feel privileged – to be made up of particles that each only had one in a hundred billion chance of survival in the first place? And then to be arranged in such a way as to exist and feel and think and love? If life wasn't already sacred enough, a solid understanding of how rare it is should instill in all of us a profound respect for the fact that there is any life, let alone ours!

I have only just begun to examine the beginning of the universe, and already I feel less inclined to kill or judge others – rather I feel like hugging and loving and just shaking everyone's hands and saying, “congratulations – for we are indeed fortunate!”

And if, by chance, I can wrap my mind around the enormous diversity in the universe – that there are millions of types of collisions between particles that result in thousands of different types of reactions that form all these different elements and compounds and life forms and suns and planets and black holes and quarks... if I can even start to understand that, but for this diversity, we would not exist... why, then, do I stubbornly “draw the line” at homosexuality?

Which brings us back to God. Well, *my* God created nature, he/she doesn't rail against it. Imagine for a moment that God hadn't clearly instructed us to destroy all that is impure... imagine that God's instructions, rather than being printed in a book, were implicit in the diversity all around us – in the diversity of the universe, in the very energy and the elements all around us. Imagine that we can see God's will in the faces of all the people in the world – in all the variety of races around us. Imagine that God's will exists in the fact that a notable percentage of each species of animal displays homosexual

tendencies, from flamingos to pigs to sheep to cats and dogs. Homosexuality is everywhere in nature! Was this really an error on God's part? Did he/she really not intend for such diversity to exist?

And exactly how does the concept that "homosexuality breeds homosexuality" work? The way I understand it, homosexuals don't breed at all. To my knowledge, a vast majority of *all* homosexual males and females were conceived by heterosexual parents.

But why must our sexuality be an issue in the first place? Is the very fact of our existence not enough for us to sit back in awe and wonder and mutual respect for all life... just for the enormity of the odds against it? Why can we not just smile and congratulate ourselves for making it this far? I have been given precious little time to love and exist and wonder... I hate getting bogged down in the mechanics of dealing with people who's "God" tells them I am an abomination and must be dealt with severely.

When I was very young, I was a sponge – absorbing information from all directions. Before I knew what sex was, I understood that I did not want to be a "homo" when I grew up. To be a "homo" was to be demented and perverted. No one wants that. So I fought those feelings. I denied them in myself and in the process denied myself my own childhood and adolescence. I continued denying them in my young adulthood. Not until I was thirty years old did I allow myself to consider the possibility that I might be gay, and even then, I proceeded with great trepidation – after all, who "wants" to be gay?

That's why I find it inconceivable that thinking humans could bring themselves to believe that being gay is a choice. Are there really, truly people out there who are stupid enough to think that someone wakes up one morning and decides, "hey, I think I'll live a

persecuted life – I think I want to be ostracized by my friends and family – I think I want to be spit on by humanity – I think I don't want my seed to carry my gentle spirit through new generations – I think I'll choose to be gay." Even if you ignore the existence of homosexual behavior among other species, surely you can't think that anyone would choose to be gay. The fact that homosexuality exists in a society so hostile toward it is itself the greatest testament to the fact that it *cannot* be a choice. Think about it, Mr Robertson and Mr. Falwell and Mr. Bush... God has made his/her word manifest in nature itself – the instructions are clearly written in the world around us and within us. He/she didn't simply jot a few notes two thousand years ago and tell us to "run with it." The instructions are alive, the Word is alive – and it's written everywhere you look.

And if we stubbornly insist on acting out violence against "sin" and "sinners," then let us do so without impunity. The twentieth chapter of Leviticus is where most of our rationale for killing gays comes from, so let's go ahead and implement the laws set forth.

"Anyone... who sacrifices his child as a burnt offering to Molech shall without fail be stoned by his peers." Apparently, this law doesn't apply if the child was sacrificed to a different god.

"I will set my face against anyone who consults mediums and wizards instead of me..." These are pretty strong words for those of us who occasionally consult the horoscope in the daily newspaper.

"Anyone who curses his father or mother shall surely be put to death..." This gives pretty clear instructions that we should not wait to let God judge the guilty party. We are instructed to put them to death now.

“If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife, both the man and woman shall be put to death.” Again, God makes clear that those people, like Jimmy Swaggart, who commit adultery, must be executed now.

“If a man sleeps with his father’s wife, he has defiled what is his father’s; both the man and the woman must die, for it is their own fault.” Since the term “mother” is not used, I can’t help but wonder whether the father in this case has remarried – which makes me wonder about biblical “family values.” In either case, it seems a lot of people are being put to death for sexual misconduct. This law is also interesting because it explains its own rationale. The reason it is wrong for a man to sleep with his father’s wife is because she is his “property.” She is not here considered a person in the way a man is considered a person.

“And if a man has sexual intercourse with his daughter-in-law, both shall be executed; they have brought it upon themselves by defiling each other.” It’s curious that this law doesn’t apply to a man’s own daughter but only his daughter-in-law. Lot, you may recall, had intercourse with his own daughters – an act that was apparently allowed and (some would argue) even sanctified by God. From today’s perspective, these are odd mores indeed.

“The penalty for homosexual acts is death to both parties.” This is the first law in the list that we still find in the common vernacular today. Curious that we don’t hear the death penalty being recommended for modern instances of the previously-listed crimes.

“If a man has sexual intercourse with a woman and with her mother, it is a great evil. All three shall be burned alive to wipe out wickedness from among you.” This seems to

me to be an unlikely situation, though I'm not sure whether I follow the rationale behind what makes it a particularly criminal activity.

“If a man has sexual intercourse with an animal, he shall be executed and the animal killed.” I just feel sorry for the poor animal. As if it wasn't bad enough the animal endured being raped, now it must also be murdered.

“If a woman has sexual intercourse with an animal, kill the woman and the animal...” In biblical times, woman were considered personal property, which is why the author felt the need to write a separate law that covered their behavior.

“If a man has sexual intercourse with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or of his mother, it is a shameful thing, and they shall be publicly cut off from the people of Israel.” Once again, we see a biblical “nuclear” family, where the parents have remarried. It's curious to me that sex with your girlfriend's mother is punishable by death, yet sex with your sister will only get you ostracized.

“If a man has sexual intercourse with a woman during her period of menstruation, both shall be excommunicated, for he has uncovered her uncleanness.” Since menstruation was considered “unnatural” and “unclean,” the best thing for men was to avoid all contact with them during these “vile” periods.

“Sexual intercourse is outlawed between a man and his maiden aunt – whether the sister of his mother or of his father – for they are near of kin; they shall bear their guilt.” For the first time in this list, no specific punishment is proscribed. So this is simply something you “ought not” to do.

“If a man has intercourse with his uncle's widow; their punishment is that they shall bear their sin and die childless.” This is a curious law indeed. God here admonishes us

that we should avoid our uncle's widow. I can't help but wonder whether followers are supposed to enforce the decree in the case where a child is born. Are good Christians supposed to then kill the children to ensure the widow dies childless?

“If a man marries his brother's widow, this is impurity; for he has taken what belongs to his brother, and they shall die childless.” If his brother is dead, then how can he still “own” his wife? Nonetheless, we are clearly instructed that she belongs to her dead husband, and we are once again left with the question of whether or not God wants us to kill her children.

To be fair, many Christians recognize the coming of Christ as creating a new covenant between God and man that nullifies many of the rules set forth in the Old Testament. Nowhere is this example more poignant than Christ's nullification of our Old Testament requirement to sacrifice animals through the crucifixion. Christ himself was completely silent on the subject of homosexuality, choosing to talk more about ways we *should* behave rather than how we shouldn't. One notable exception is his repeated admonishments against divorce, which is interesting – since many of the most vocal religious critics of homosexuality are themselves divorced, yet they paradoxically remain fixated on the Old Testament rule sandwiched among all the other obsolete ones.

While Christ didn't say much about things we should not do, he spoke frequently about loving each other – to the point of even loving our enemies – and warned us against throwing stones unless we are without sin.

I go through this exercise to try to better understand God's will, and to try to figure out where all this hatred and violence and denial of civil liberties comes from. Try as I

might, I find it difficult to reconcile this scripture with the current teachings of the church, and harder still to reconcile with my own sense of morality and justice, so I turn once again to the larger and more vibrant scripture – which is the legacy God left me in the form of the observable universe. All I need to know is written in the leaves of the trees and the sunlight and the love I feel and, yes, in the very randomness and diversity that makes all life possible in the first place.

I purposefully change the channel on my radio to a place between the stations, so that I can listen to the static. Within the white noise, I hear the voice of God.

-- Troy Carlyle

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