

Explorations

Big Bang Spirituality, Life, and Death

Kenneth Bausch *

[adapted from Bausch, 2016]

Abstract

Taking the Big Bang as the singular source of universal evolution, gives potent contemporary metaphors for understanding spirituality, life, and death. We can discover the nature of the Universe as we observe that its evolution is radically indeterminate, but manifests tendencies toward connectivity that manifest in self-organizing wholes. Like a traditional deity, the singularity that existed in the moment before the Big Bang is eternal and timeless. Everything that exists or comes into being, no matter how creative, is a manifestation of that first moment of creation. That the first moment of creation is always happening; it's happening right now. We (and every other thing) are products of that original creation and our own creativity is an expression of its creativity. This should comfort us, for it implies that when we lose our personal creativity at the end of our physical lives, we are likely to experience rejoining the original creative force of the Big Bang, just as religious faithful often expect death to reunite them with their creator God.

Introduction

"We have (in the world) the experience of a truth which shows through and envelops rather than being held and circumscribed by our mind" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 408). That is to say, the world thinks through us. We do not initiate either life or thought; the world does. This meaning in the world is never known until we express it in our lives and language. It is by perceiving and manifesting this ever-present but often obscured meaning that we become all that we can be.

As infants, we knew the world in the way of other highly developed animals, that is, through a kind of collective erotic sensing that knew no difference between ourselves and our mothers (primary caregivers). Our development of language splits that prelanguage unconscious unity (schematized as Subject0) into a conscious ego (Subject1), and its environment (Subject 2). This can be schematized as:

Original Subject → Ego + Other

or

* Ken Bausch, Institute for 21st Century Agoras, Cincinnati, OH.

Email: Agorasken@gmail.com Website: www.globalagoras.org

Subject0 → Subject1 + Subject2.

In addition, our efforts to understand ourselves and our environment (including other people) are schematized as:

Ego + Other → Communion
or
Subject1 + Subject2 → Subject3.*

On the subject of life after death, we need to parse the prospects of Subjects 0, 1, 2, and 3.

The book and this excerpted article are driven by my desire to make overall sense in the chaos of postmodernism. I was driven to question several religious, rationalist, and cultural standards:

- revealed religion, belief in God the Father, divinely sanctioned moral and ethical standards, dependence on hierarchical authority for rules and favors;
- tenets of the Enlightenment and classical science such as duality of body and mind, reification of the excluded middle, the demand for classic scientific proof for any rational conviction;
- cultural malaise resulting from uncertain ethical values.

The goal of this effort is to present a coherent systemic vision of our world and our roles in it. The method can be called syncretic imagination. From sources, I have read, have written about, and in my head, I perceived strong similarities in approaches that would seem otherwise divergent. I attempt to create stories that hang together and create a coherent background for meaningful and robust living.

Singularities

In Christianity and in some Eastern philosophies, there is an argument over the nature of Ultimate Reality/Divinity/Brahman. Does the Ultimate have attributes? Is it good, just, and compassionate, or not? Most modern day Western Christians would say, "Of course, God is good, just, and compassionate."

There is a strain of Christian theology, however, called negative theology, which holds that if we give God attributes, we put limits on God and put him on our level and the level of any object we describe. It was for this reason that St. Basil and his fellow bishops in 4th century Cappadocia said that they believed in God, but they did not believe that God exists. In other words, "The Creator transcends even existence. The essence of God is completely unknowable; mankind can only know God through His energies" (Fortescue, 1910). The Eastern Orthodox

version of this tradition, Hesychasm, became a dogma of the Orthodox Church with the publication of the decree of Tomos in 1351 (see, e.g., “Essence-Energies distinction,” 2016).

Parallel to this Christian negative theology is Advaita (non-dual) Vedanta as propounded in the eighth century by Adi Shankara (Satprakashananda, 1977). In this philosophy, the Absolute has no name or form or attributes. It is Nirguna (without attributes) Brahman (Satprakashananda). Daoism holds a similar view as revealed in the statement: “The Dao that can be described is not the Dao” (Lao Tsu, 1972, *Tao Te Ching*). In negative theology, Advaita Vedanta, and Daoism, God, Nirguna Brahman, and the Dao are absolute singularities – unknowable in themselves.

The Universe of the Big Bang bears remarkable similarities to the God of negative theology and to Nirguna Brahman and the Dao. It, too, is an ultimate reality. It, too, is a singularity. The universe before the Big Bang was an absolute singularity. It did not exist in space and time because it had nothing to relate to; and space and time are created by relations between things. Nothing can be said about a singularity. After the Big Bang, multitudes of chaotic energies were released to fend their way in an uncreated world (cf. Singh, 2005). The universe we inhabit is still finding its way, especially in intellectual and cultural arenas.

And yet, in a fundamental way the universe is still a singularity. As a whole, it has nothing to relate to because, by definition, it is everything. And we, at the atomic and sub-nuclear level are of the very same stuff as everything in the universe. We are one with the universe as a singularity.

Differences between the Big Bang and Other Singularities

How does our Big Bang singularity relate to the singularities of negative theology, Nirguna Brahmin, and the Dao? The principal difference lies in the relation to time. The Eastern singularities are eternal and timeless. For Advaita Vedanta, we are simply names and forms (*maya* = illusions) draped over non-dual reality. In the final analysis there are not two things; there is only non-duality. We do not relate to Nirguna Brahman with prayers or expect rewards and miracles. In Vedanta, we are one with the Absolute. Our glory is to live in awareness of that unity.

Our singularity is dynamic. Ever since the Big Bang, the world has been evolving cosmologically, chemically, biologically, psychologically, and culturally. In all of this evolution, our singularity has been expressing itself in its manifestations and in the “flesh” of the universe (as in Merleau-Ponty’s *flesh of the world*, 1968). It is perhaps true that the universe does not achieve consciousness except through us and our language. There is a vague, unexpressed meaning in the world that is never known until we express it. It may be that our singularity (that which we are) is one of becoming, and it seems to yearn to become conscious of its own existence through its creations as in evidenced in the evolution of life on planet Earth. In cosmic process, the power of the universe is ours to use. The universe is a miracle so it may follow that we can work miracles by tapping into that power.

Our personal involvement in the Becoming is sometimes enlightened by the verbal expressions and exemplary lives of persons in similar situations to our own. To a large extent, however, our understanding of what is going on is recorded in our bodily unconscious, where it and similar experiences of Becoming can sometimes be accessed through deeper reflection. So, we experience our share of the Becoming in our personal lives. We also contribute our share into its overall evolution.

Becoming equips all of its energies and entities to freely explore their possibilities. These innumerable experiments, big and little, express the nature of Becoming. Every achievement in the universe, every obstacle faced and overcome is *Becoming being real* in space and time. Every insight we have, every emotion we feel, and our every relationship is Becoming being real in our world.

As we are one with this Becoming, our job in life is to become all that we can be. The power of the universe is ours to use. Most of what we accomplish is in relationships with others. It is likely that at death we will be less individual voices in a chorus of expansion and harmony.

I once expressed our paradoxical relationship with Becoming in the following verse.

Am I God?

I am a body.

I am not two/not one with the universe.

I am a creative, chaotic, metaphysical contradiction as is the universe.

The universe and I and everybody else are the same hologram.

I am the creative force of the universe, especially in my microcosm where my body and environment provide the material limits that creativity requires.

I am free to do and be whatever I will

According to the laws of chaos,

I attract a uniquely beautiful constellations into my microcosm

That fits exquisitely into the overall design.

With attention, imagination, effort, and body wisdom, I co-create myself.

In free association with other bodies, I continue designing and producing the universe.

So I am God – and I'm not.

Scientific Analogies of Creation

The body of the universe has found exotic ways to symbolize for us the way it is put together. It presents the microcosm/macrocosm similarities to us in relation to both the little world/big

world of physics and the personal world/universal worlds of psychology and society. Recently, through the efforts of the scientists of chaos, exquisite artificial universes have been created by indeterministic and decentralized processes.

These chaotic processes are clues to the constituting process of the universe. They indicate how we function in the grand economy. They also sketch a solution to the freedom vs. predestination debate. They show us, as does the theory of the holoverse (described below), a divine economy in which we are both whole, center, and part.

The Holoverse

The high-tech, laser, three-dimensional photographs called holograms give sensual confirmation to our sense of being not two/not one. They demonstrate the relationship of the microcosm and the macrocosm, the age-old theory that the entire universe is reflected in its every part, as in the ancient Buddhist metaphor of Indra's Net (or Indra's Jewels), used to demonstrate how, though everything is Śūnyatā or emptiness, the universe is still dynamic, and each part of the cosmos contains the whole in a holographic manner (cf. Talbot, 1991; Robertson, 2009).

If you take an ordinary photograph of your face and tear off the part containing your chin, you will have two pieces; one will picture your chin; the other will show the rest of your face. Not so with the hologram. If you take a hologram picturing your face and break off the chin part you again have two pieces, but each one is a picture of your whole face. Break both pieces into two and you then have four complete pictures of your face, and so on. The whole is completely present in each of its parts. Regarding any two pieces resulting from breaking the hologram of your face, it is true to say, "These two are not two." In its relevance to the universe, this analogy says that its every part, its every molecule, planet, plant, animal, and human is an image of the whole universe.

The Strange Attraction of Chaos

Chaos theory provides a rationale for the random exquisiteness of the universe and our free participation in its creation. The strange attractors of chaos are both natural processes and equations. They generate harmony by chaotic processes. They exhibit remarkable characteristics. When their equations are graphed, for example, they often generate beauty of infinite depth and variety. They do this in unpredictable ways that do not seem to coerce the freedom of individual atoms or points (see, e.g., Field & Golubitsky, 2009).

A non-mathematical demonstration of a strange attractor at work is provided by the rise of cigarette smoke in a still room. The smoke rises but each individual atom within it is free to go wherever it will as each atom is indeterminate (free). The smoke gracefully rises curling at some point into two beautiful plumes which then separate into four plumes, thence to eight and eventual chaos. No two plumes are ever the same, but they maintain remarkable fractal [see below] similarity (cf. Gleick, 1987; Stewart, 1989).

Thousands of processes in fields as diverse as biology and electronics follow this same process as they progress from regular to periodic to chaotic.

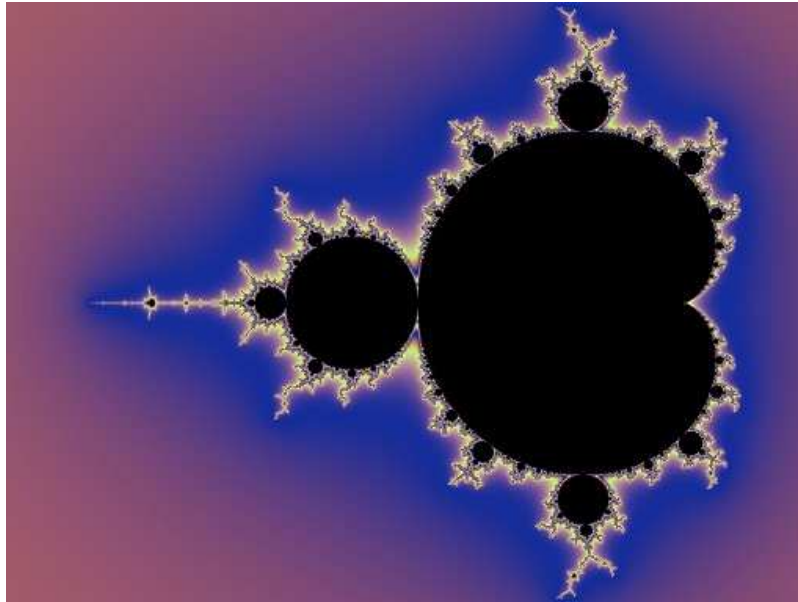
Fractal Grandeur

Fractal Geometry deals with fractional dimensions between our usual one-, two-, and three-dimensional representations of the world. In doing this, it deals directly with jagged lines and crinkled surfaces whereas traditional geometry deals with smooth lines and surfaces. An aerial picture of a rocky coastline, for example, has a fractal dimension of about 1:25, according to Stewart (1989, p. 219), whereas a protein molecule has a dimension about 1:7 (Stewart, p. 223), and a crumpled ball of paper has a dimension of about 2:5 (Stewart, p. 224).

Surfaces in nature are very irregular and have individual qualities. Traditional geometry smooths out the differences and reduces everything to approximations of straight lines and curves in order to compute lengths, areas, volumes, etc.

Fractal geometry, in contrast, tries to come to grips with the uniqueness of observed reality to discover its underlying structure. Using fractal geometry mathematicians can reproduce a fern on their desktop computers by following a few simple rules. Lucas Films generated the geography of the moons of Endor in this way for the film *Return of the Jedi* (Stewart, p. 229).

Visually the most remarkable production of fractal geometry is the Mandelbrot set which is sometimes called the gingerbread man because of its overall shape. It is generated using complex numbers and the simple mapping formula $z_{n+1} = z_n^2 + c$ (Stewart, p. 235):



We are ginger people. We are the Gingerbread Man

Wherever and whenever we awake in this evolving tableau, we disturb or expand the ongoing universal harmony.

Mandelbrot plotted the connectedness of every point c in the plane. There is no foreseeable sequence for plotting the connectedness of those points. They occur randomly all over the computer screen. The order is chaotic. Only after thousands and millions of iterations does the pattern appear. It is the gingerbread man.

Picking any spot on the gingerbread man we can enlarge it 100 times mathematically and find a design of jeweled splendor having elegance surpassing seashells and sea horses. Again enlarging this portion 100 times we find elegant designs by the same jeweler (perhaps it's Indra!). Repeating the process we find equally detailed but unique beauty by the same jeweler, etc. The Mandelbrot set has infinite depth. This progression is indicated in high definition color at "Mandel zoom 00 mandelbrot set.jpg" on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mandel_zoom_00_mandelbrot_set.jpg

I am reminded of the biblical phrase, "God's only begotten son," but in a depth that says he is begotten again and again infinitely. One is tempted to mimic the style of John Lennon singing about the walrus, so I craft another expressive verse:

God is the Gingerbread Man.

Jesus is the Gingerbread Man.
We are the Gingerbread Man.
Again, the One and the Many.
Again, not two/not one.
Again, infinite freedom and depth
In infinite elegant order
Randomly generated.
God writing straight with crooked lines.

It appears that we can place ourselves anywhere we please in this universe and still fit exquisitely into the grand design.

Chaos theory and fractal geometry deal with random (free) events that create remarkable unpredictable beauty. They situate my experience of being one with the world precisely because I am a free individual: I do what I please, and, whatever that is, it is just exactly right for the universe. I am one with the magnificent unity of the universe because I am a free individual. Paradoxical as that may seem, holographic principles account for this mutual freedom of cosmos and self.

The workings of chaos and fractals expand on the metaphor of the hologram. They show a likely scenario for the formation of the microcosm in the macrocosm. They also surprise us with the revelation that the universe is free.

Putting It All Together

Cosmic Perspective

The Big Bang singularity existed before its eruption – except to say “before” puts it in time, and the singularity is timeless (so it also exists right here, now, forevermore, unless timelessness renders it beyond the qualities of “existence”). After its eruption, the stuff of everything in the universe is the stuff of that singularity. Everything proceeds from this original Being as it chaotically transcends itself. Effusively it projects replicas (total parts) of itself. By thus scattering itself, Being is able to simultaneously *express and know itself*. The physical world is the body, reflection, and language of Being.

The Big Bang unleashed immeasurable free energy into an empty universe and let that energy find its own way. From then on, everything is one with the universe and the Big Bang in the manner of a hologram. As each bit of a hologram contains the whole picture; so each bit of the universe contains the whole universe with the intensity specified by the capability of the bit. Every energy, atom, galaxy, organism, and human from the eruption to the present day is physically the original stuff of the Big Bang. We are “not two” but one with that originary stuff,

known to the ancient Greek philosophers as the *apeiron*. Its freedom, wisdom, and power, resides in our bodies and our unconscious.

Every bit of the universe has a degree of freedom, which it modifies or loses when it couples with other bits, in which case the union of bits becomes free to tackle more complex problems. Evolution provides numerous examples of plants and animals joining in symbiosis to survive in hostile circumstances (e.g., Archibald, 2016). We all have joined other people to get something done, if only to push a car out of a ditch or throw a party for a friend. Evolution and our own experience seem to indicate that there is a natural drift toward cooperation and communication.

Evolution previous to the arrival of language displays the chaotic efforts made by organisms in their pursuit of survival, but even more so the exquisite beauty created by those efforts. Those wildly free efforts and the resulting beauty express the complete openness and effectiveness of the universe's wisdom. Evolution is the process of the Logos becoming Flesh. This material language of Being is alive and chaotically purposeful. Its every indeterminate particle co-creates a universal Mandelbrot set. Its every particle is free, creative, and self-transcending. It is in this context of Being expressing itself that we human beings find our ultimate glory. The world evolves as a straining towards the consciousness that language makes possible.

With the arrival of language, the Logos (soul or self) becomes conscious (self-conscious). Heidegger (1991) does not use the Logos terminology, but he does describe invisible Being behind the process of individual perceiving and knowing as follows:

Through this body flows a stream of life of which we feel but a small and fleeting portion, in accordance with the receptivity of the momentary state of the body. Our body itself is admitted to this stream of life, floating in it, and is carried off, snatched away by this stream or else pushed to the banks. (p. 79)

We locate ourselves in this stream of life by focusing our attention. Focusing in the chaos of the moment (using our "F in O"), we can bring elements of the stream into words, and therefore, into consciousness. In Nietzsche's terminology, we "bring Becoming into Being" with our will to power. In the cosmic picture and in Merleau-Ponty's terminology, we fulfill Being's yearning for conscious expression.

Merleau-Ponty's (1998) large vision is that we are the world's project. The world thinks through us. We do not initiate either life or thought. The world does. At the same time, the world does not achieve consciousness except through us and our language. The world and ourselves as subjects are mutually related. There is a vague, unexpressed meaning in the world that is never known until we express it. For Merleau-Ponty, Being needs us in order to truly be. If Being is below us and only expresses itself in us, human history is then "the history of the becoming of Being itself", according to Madison (1981, p. 235). In other words, Being becomes its conscious self through the expression of free human beings. The movement of human history is the cultural history of Being.

Psychological Perspective

In its prepersonal state, the infant knows its world through a kind of collective erotic sensing that is similar to that of other highly developed animals. We were “not two” with the universe. There was no distance between us and the flesh of the universe. In particular, we shared a boundless oneness with our mothers or primary caregiver who stood in for her (cf. Rochat, 2009).

After a year or so but notably by three, we developed language, and that changed everything. According to Freud (1920/2009), in the Fort/Da experience, Freud’s grandson learned to possess his mother symbolically with language. He also became a separate entity (an ego). Emotionally, this separation sets up two drives and a complex relationship between them. Ego yearns for its lost mother-me closeness; it also has an intense desire to be an individual. Life is the working out of these two conflicting drives, which Freud called Eros and Thanatos.

The development of ego splits our pre-language unconscious unity (schematized as Subject0) into a conscious ego (Subject1) and its environment, or *the Other* (schematized as Subject2). The transaction is schematized as;

Original Subject → Ego + Other
or
Subject0 → Subject1 + Subject2.

In the grand scheme of things, we are now “not two/not one” with the universe. The contradiction this seems to involve would rend this status invalid only in a world of essences that obeyed the dualism of language. As Merleau-Ponty (1964) has argued, “[T]his acknowledged contradiction appears as the very condition of consciousness,” and there are other “philosophies which show contradictions present at the very heart of time and of all relationships” (p. 19).

The Other, the partner to Ego, is that part of our life that we have not yet expressed in words. It includes physical relationships, interpersonal relationships, and relationships with our anonymous and generalized corporeal existence. We are tasked with bringing those relationships into consciousness by using language. In other words, our job in life is to use our intuition, imagination, and ingenuity to make explicit and orderly the influences in our lives (just as I have done here). In doing that, we resolve our personal conflicts between Eros and Thanatos, and simultaneously advance Becoming’s progress into conscious Being. This process can be schematized as:

Ego + Other → Communion
or
Subject1 + Subject2 → Subject3

We are at our optimum when we are acting as Subject3, when we are combining our rationality with our intuition, imagination, and feelings. In this state, we are using our abductive [or

retroductive] logic as named by C. S. Peirce (2013). In physics, this logic was expressed by Albert Einstein when he said, according to Wertheimer (1959), “I very rarely think in words at all. A thought comes and I may try to express it in words afterwards” (p. 213). In everyday discourse, I am working in Subject3 consciousness when I struggle to find the words to tell someone that I love her in the midst of an emotional scrap. Subject3 consciousness finds win-win solutions to conflicts.

As Subject 3, we seize our destiny to create a human world. Nietzsche expresses this sentiment in the strongest way. His phrase for Subject3 is “the will to power.” He says, “This world is will to power—and nothing besides! And you yourselves are this will to power—and nothing besides!” (cited in Heidegger, 1991, p. 18). The context of our lives is exuberant and self-transcending. Joy and the memorable things in life occur when my Subject3 communes with your Subject3. This is true from the intercourse that gives birth to new human life and also to the dialogue that leads to new intellectual breakthroughs.

After Physical Death

Will I survive physical death? Given the ambiguity of the word “I”, the answer depends upon the whether I am talking as Subject0, Subject1, Subject2, or Subject4.

- Subject0, the reality of the Universe available to our untapped unconscious wisdom continues to grow through physical, social and psychological evolution.
- Subject 3, communion of ego and other, is embodied in the progress of universal evolution.
- Subject2, Other, would remain as part of Subject0.
- Subject1 Ego, might pass away as an active subject.
- Alternatively, Ego and Other might continue to exist as foils for each other in ever expanding exploration and satisfaction.

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