

Extract from

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## Creativity and Imagination

There are times when it feels that the devastation being wrought on this planet is beyond repair, that we have done too much and gone too far. It can feel overwhelming and beyond hope. And then I remember that we live on a planet that is 4.6 billion years old and that we are part of a Universe that is currently 13.8 billion years old and that is still emerging. And this reminds me to trust again in the wisdom of these ancient, natural processes and more importantly, to try and learn from them so that my own behaviour becomes constructive and my actions are informed.

I have learned that fundamental to the nature of this Universe is creativity. This is a creativity that balances on a knife edge. In the initial unfurling of that fireball, science tells us that if the Universe had expanded one trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second faster, that the early matter would have spread apart too quickly and galaxies could not have formed; if it had happened one trillionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second slower everything would have collapsed back into a black hole as unrealised potential. Such elegance and precision. Even our own Earth, occupying as it does that slither of time/space that is the habitable zone, happens to be exactly the right size – a smaller planet may have burned out while a larger one might not have achieved the correct surface temperature for life to come forth – and the right distance from the sun, not too near so that we are burned and not so far that the rays of the sun are ineffective. Not only that, but our planet turns on an axis so that all sides receive the kiss of the sun. British Palaeontologist Richard Fortey wrote that *'if life is just a matter of chance, then the dice were loaded in its favour.'* And it would seem in this Universe that the dice are loaded in favour of something.

This creativity is such, that over and over in this Universe and on this Earth, the impossible has eventually become the inevitable. We can see such examples in the transformation from particles and atoms into swirling galaxies of stars; from dust into planetary systems, from seeds into lilies, from matter into consciousness. This Universe can bring into being from the narrowest possibility the most wondrously spectacular and intricate of formations, what would have seemed impossible appearing as naturally as if it were always here and just waiting to be unveiled.

From molten rock to oceans, continents, forests and jungles, the towering eucalyptus and the tiny, determined hummingbird, the noble, sauntering elephant and the bewildered and curious human being, creativity has fashioned a planet that in the words of Brian Swimme now 'sings opera'. A planet that exalts in diversity, a planet with the ability to respond to catastrophic situations with creative ingenuity. Consider this example: when the first cells over-ran their food supply they used their creative intelligence to capture the photon particle in flight and to convert its energy into the molecular structures for food, what we now call photosynthesis. They did this without arms or brains or legs. This creative act was to be the foundation for the flourishing of life to come. We are totally dependent on the energy of the sun as is the entire Earth system. It courses through us, mobilising us, feeding us, warming us. The creativity inherent in the capture of its energy, the wildness of imagination that could dream up such a feat, is one example of the endless possibilities inherent in life. We live on a planet, in a Universe, with the capacity to constantly give birth to itself. The statement that there is nothing new under the sun reflects a mind-set whose eyes are closed because *everything under the sun is new!*

In tandem with creativity is imagination but what is the capacity of imagination, this thing that Einstein once said was greater than knowledge? In my view, it is the deeper modes of knowing, a response beyond rational thought, an activation of the hidden part of us where the Earth lives and dreams; it is the horizonless landscape of possibility and potential where what comes to us in vague, elusive dreaminess is etched into being. There are many ways to know the world. It is always coming to us, flooding us. It has been to our detriment that since the time of the Enlightenment we have valued science, rationalism and empirical modes of knowing over other modes of knowing such as the knowledge that comes to us through our senses, our feelings, our dreams and our intuition.

Right now, we have reached a point in the evolutionary history of the planet where the human being is creating its own evolutionary future. Until recently, the Universe evolved through its own processes, but now humanity is, ignorantly and destructively, altering those natural processes, so we are, to a certain degree, involved in how we will evolve. How we imagine the world is how the world will be. We imagined that life in Ireland would be better with a new motorway and so we created one, clearing woodlands and habitats and removing ecosystems that we depend upon. We imagined that society would be better without apartheid and so we worked to abolish it. We imagine that the world will be better without poverty and so we continuously work towards eradicating it. At the same time we imagine that life will be better if we are rich and so we orient our life towards earning and accumulation. Our imagination has the power to determine our reality. In our imagination lies the ability to form concepts and ideals of things that have never yet existed. The poet Rilke wrote *"fear not the strangeness you feel. The future must enter you long before it happens. Just wait for the birth for the hour of new clarity."* And this is our imagination, the future entering us and daring us to birth it. How marvellous it will be depends on our capacity to think beyond what we see in front of us, to think beyond the impossible, to be creative.

Passionist priest, Thomas Berry has written how the exterior shapes the interior. If we lived on the moon we would not have the environment necessary to create and shape our spirituality or evoke in us the wonder at the different manifestations and representations of beauty in the world. As it is, we live on a planet rich in colour and form and scent. To be able to wander free and let our mind be led by where this planet wants to take us next is the task of imagination; to forget ourselves and give ourselves over to the larger forces that permeate this world. And from this are such wonders produced as song and dance and language, religion, poetry and art; the first spacecraft, such acts as photosynthesis and respiration.

For too long we have lived locked into the narrowest of mindsets, thinking of our own individual lives as isolated and existing independently. We are pressured to conform to the cost of the unique quantum of creative energy that is our life and we reward such questionable behaviour as competition and professionalism. We look 'out' at nature and admire it forgetting that we ourselves have come from it and are as much 'nature' as the bird on the tree. It cannot be over-stated that the way in which we think as well as the values we hold, needs to be changed. There are many ways in which we could do this but just as the Universe can be thought of to be the primary revelation of the Divine, so too it can be thought of to be our primary teacher. Nature's ways are our ways, the qualities of the Universe are our qualities. Observing its principles and ways of being can only serve to guide our bewildered species as we seek a wisdom that as yet has eluded us. Imagination springs from hope and the promise of something to come, it is innate in each of us and will have no small hand in determining the human future.