

Realistic Living

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Cosmogenesis

Cosmology is a Narrative
by Gene Marshall

I am borrowing the word “cosmogenesis” from Thomas Berry who insisted that cosmology was a religious narrative. His Catholic imagery is in line with Teilhard de Chardin’s seeing nature as a presence of the holy. My imagery will be a bit more secular and Protestant leaning, but I am nevertheless standing on the shoulders of Thomas Berry in this and many other ways. My mentor Joe Mathews also informs this spin with his emphasis on the Land of Mystery experienced in the midst of this world.

I begin with Berry’s grand narrative of the near 14 billions of years of inanimate emergence followed by the evolution of life on Earth, the animate, beginning a mere 3.5 billion years ago, and thirdly followed by the beginning of human history a mere yesterday in this cosmogenesis of our human lives. Berry sees the animate as a leap of creativity within the inanimate and the human as second leap of creativity within the animate. This whole narrative of creation is our human story. Each of these these stages of the story remains an ongoing process.

The still emerging inanimate is seen in our own fingernails, teeth, and bones while the still evolving animate remains present in our teeth roots, bone-marrow and muscles. The inanimate and the animate exist intimately side by side.

Similarly, the animate and the human live intimately side by side. We humans share over 98% of our genes with the chimpanzee. We share 25% of our genes with the trees. Our human creation is still emerging, along with the still emerging overall inanimate structures and the animate evolution. Our new story of cosmogenesis is written within our own bodies, minds, and consciousness. This narrative of creation is a fresh telling of the first chapter of our Christian scripture. Genesis One tells us that all this is good. Yahweh does all things well.

INANIMATE

HUMAN



ANIMATE

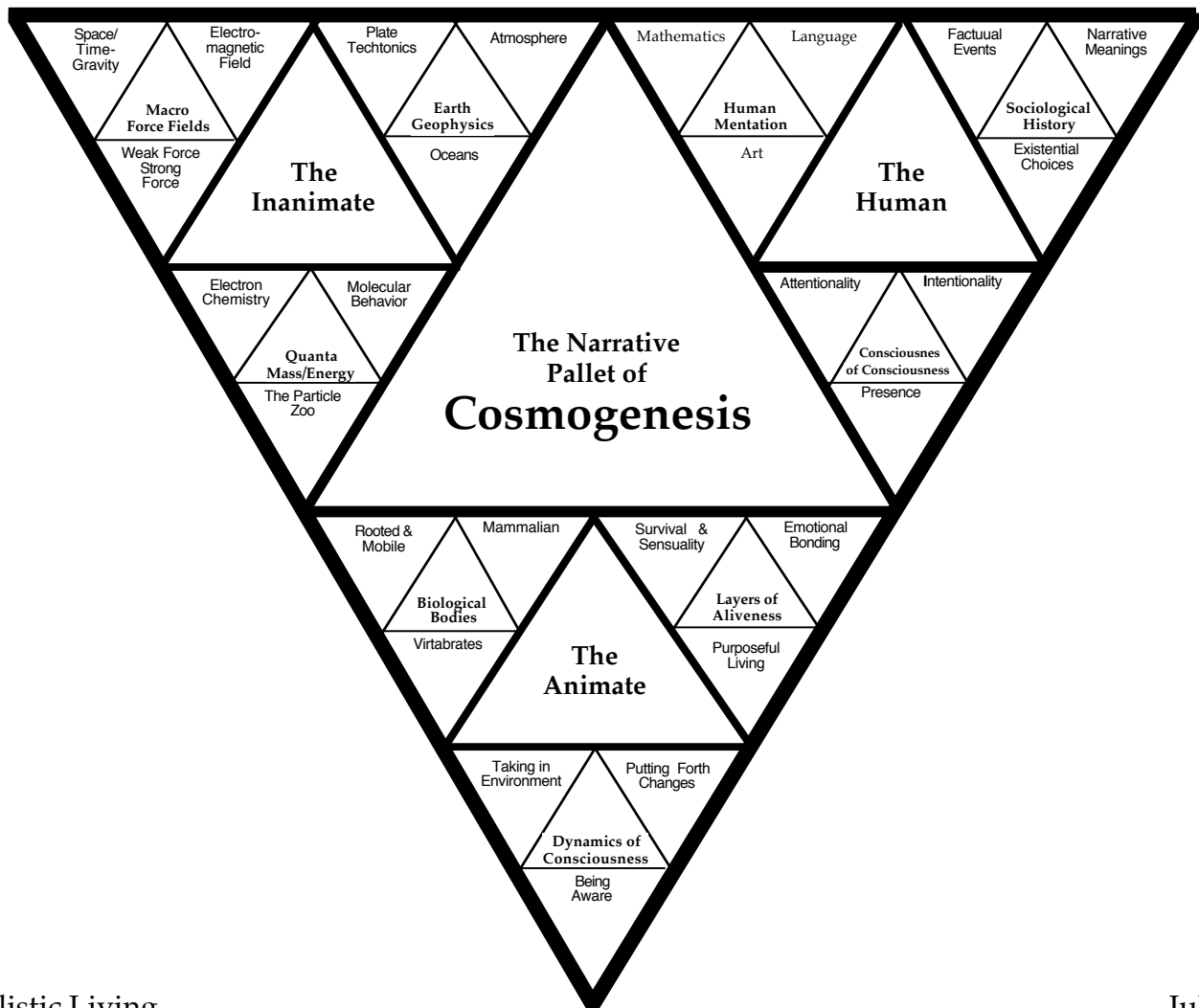
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Notice that the animate is made of the inanimate plus something we are calling the “animate.” We don’t really know what “life” is added to the inanimate, but we do know that the inanimate remains in our bones, teeth, fingernails, hair, feathers, and wood. The animate and the inanimate exist intimately with one another.

Similarly, the human is made of the inanimate and the animate. Humans share 25% of their genes with the trees. Humans share over 90% of their genes with the chimpanzees. And again we don’t know exactly what the human leap adds, but we do know that the animate and the inanimate exist intimately with the human. All three of these types of emergence are one cosmogenesis—one continuing action.

I am going to explore further how the **Inanimate** breaks down into these 3 processes: **Macro Force Fields**, **Micro Quanta of Mass/Energy** and **Earth Geo-physics**. I am going to explore further how the **Animate** breaks down into these 3 processes: **Biological Bodies**, **Dynamics of Consciousness**, and **Layers of Aliveness**. I will do a similar breakdown of the **Human**: **Human Mentation**, **Consciousness of Consciousness**, and **Human Sociological History**.

All these nine aspects of ongoing creation form an array of inseparable relations. The following chart provides a visual way to see how these nine dynamics are related to each other in one cosmogenesis of ongoing creation. The chart also suggests how each of these nine dynamics might have inclusive sub-parts.



The Inanimate

Post-Einsteinian cosmology views space and time as a space-time field that fills the whole cosmogenesis. Gravity is created by the curving or twisting of this fourth-dimensional field in the vicinity of large bodies of mass like Sun or Earth. Herein is a first enigmatic fabric of nature. Within this first and most basic field, electromagnetic waves, such as light, move at a fixed top speed. They pass through the curves and twists of the space-time field of reality. The weak force and the strong force that show up so prominently in the atomic realm are also found to be fields of force that extend throughout all space-time.

At the turn into the 5th century CE, the great theologian, Augustine, commented on space and time. He still saw time and space as independent from one another. But he disagreed with his culture that saw time as endless. He asserted that time, like space, had a beginning and had an end. There was no “before” the beginning of time and there was no “after” the end of time. Time was a finite part of the creation of the Infinite Almightyness. The space/time fabric of current cosmogenesis can also be viewed today as part of the finite or temporal creation.

Space/time and the other force fields can also be viewed as the most inanimate third of the inanimate aspect of cosmogenesis.



The Quanta of Mass/Energy can be viewed as the animate-leaning aspect of the inanimate spect of cosmogenesis. These tiny quanta are that of which the substance of our bodies and of the bodies of all plants and animals are made. Also, the whole environments of galaxies, stars, and planets are made

of these tiny configurations of mass/energy. It is still strange to most of us that our so-called particles of substance are also energy waves—and that all configurations of mass can be converted into energy, and all radiations or applications of energy can be converted into mass. And if these truths of the inanimate world are not enough to astound us, all mass and all energy come in distinct quanta—super-tiny bits of what it is that makes up any aspect of our inanimate creation.

Earth Geophysics can be viewed as the human-leaning aspect of the inanimate cosmogenesis. By “Earth Geophysics” I mean the tectonic plates of the Earth surface that crash together to make our earthquakes. I also mean the oceans of water that we take for granted, but are actually rare on the planets of our cosmos. We need to care for the oceans as we care for the water pipes in our own houses. And the atmosphere of the planet can be viewed as a third aspect of Earth Geophysics. The climate crisis is expanding the contemporary human imagination as we consider the results of the excess of carbon dioxide added to the atmosphere by the fossil-fuel burning of our industrial societies. This inanimate component of our cosmogenesis is calling upon the human species for an emergency response.

The Animate

The biological bodies of plants and animals as well as bacteria and viruses are where we first notice the presence of what I am calling the animate. We have seen in the course of life evolution over the last 3.5 billion years four prominent revolutions in the evolution of life on this planet. The first is the leap within some oceanside mineral-rich soup toward the first expressions of the animate cosmogenesis. The second is the jump from single-celled life to multi-celled organisms. A third revolution in aliveness towards the human aliveness might be the beginnings of vertebrate life forms and a fourth revolution the dawn and spread of the mammals. Primate mammals came down from the trees and evolved into an upright-walking creature growing ever bigger brains and thought power until a third aspect of cosmogenesis began its emergence—the human. I am viewing these biological revolutions in evolution as

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the inanimate-leaning aspect of the animate aspect of cosmogenesis.

The most animate aspect of the animate part of cosmogenesis I view as the dawn of consciousness within the depths of all of aliveness. Even plants and fungi take in the environment and put forth responses toward water, minerals and sunshine as needed for the optimization of their aliveness. I suggest we call this “consciousness.” Animal life is more obviously conscious in this way. Their mobile rather than rooted life requires a greater taking in of the environment and a sharper putting forth of aware living. The depth of being alive is being conscious—having some sort of awareness and some sort of intentional agency in the living of aliveness.

The human-leaning aspect of the animate part of cosmogenesis is the evolving power of natural intelligence. I see at least four stages of that evolution that happened before the leap into the human form of consciousness: (1) the intelligence to survive, (2) the sensorial intelligence—including the senses, the sensualities, and the sexualities of living, (3) the purposefulness enabled by the memory of past experiences and the anticipation of future challenges in order to make best case choices in the present, and (4) the emotional intelligence evolved most strongly in mammalian life—an aliveness in which the human shares so strongly.

The Human

What sets the human manner of living off from the chimpanzee and other primates is a type of intelligence capable of mathematics, art creations, and language-communication. These symbol-using forms of being thoughtful are a leap into an enriched level of aliveness beyond the also extremely intelligent chimpanzee. The chimpanzee and many other forms of life use another mental devices than symbols for their rational contents of conscious experience. These animals use what we might describe as “multi-sensory reruns”—smells, sights, sounds, etc. are remembered and recallable in a useful form that informs present anticipations and decisions.

Humans also use the multi-sensory-rerun device of intelligence, but add to it the symbol-using

mentation of mathematics, art creations, and language communication. This mental addition enables a universe of awareness “unthinkable” by these earlier-originated species. But this leap in mentation need not be thought of as something supernatural; it is only a new biological innovation within this now most able and most dangerous species of aliveness on planet Earth. I am suggesting we view this human intelligence, supported by a bigger and more complicated brain, as the inanimate-leaning aspect of being “human.”



A more animate-leaning aspect of being human I am calling “the consciousness of being conscious.” Yet it is the human mentation, described above, that enables a transformation in basic consciousness, the awareness that we are conscious and the agency to shape our modes of consciousness. Mind is just the interior experience of our powerful biological brain. We humans can now see that human consciousness is a deeper biological factor of this human cosmogenesis than the human thinking ability. Human consciousness is what does the intentional thinking that carries out the thoughtful projects using this brain. Our consciousness of being conscious also enables this mysterious something we call “presence.” This consciousness of consciousness is also the “agency” of activism that creates cultures and religions and estrangements, and shares in the healings of our estrangements.

Thirdly, the most human aspect of being human is a communal reality of inter-relations among individual humans sharing in a common culture,

polity, and economy. I am calling this “sociological history.” Many contemporary people have so over-emphasized individual freedom and thoughtfulness that history and the dynamics of social change have been neglected or almost totally eclipsed. But it is in sociological history that the human aspect of cosmogenesis is most fully realized.

As part of every generation and location of humans, we find an effective critique of inherited social fabrics and the creating innovations of fresh cultural replacements that lead to new political and economic structuring. This vanguard of people reconstruct the meaning of justice and motivate a society to manifest it. Such changes are typically vigorously fought by those who wish the established ways of life to be everlasting. This vanguard of people typically have a different idea about what is eternal and what is only one more aspect of the passing scenery.

For example, “democracy” is a word for how our social transitions can be non-violent as well as responsive to, for, and by the majority of people rather than simply managed by a powerfully favored few. Some sort of royalty or authoritarianism has dominated human history since the dawn of civilization, but a democracy of democratic nations has become the vanguard vision since the wrap up of WW II. And it is this democracy of democratic nations that can care for this humanly polluted planet.

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All these nine dynamics of cosmogenesis are giving us a new take on the myth of creation. Biblical myths of creation add to our contemporary sense of cosmogenesis is the vision of a Creator of the ongoing creation of cosmogonies and the assertion that this creation is good, along with its good Creator.

The Myth of Eden

So far this essay has been about a new myth of creation (cosmogenesis) with which to make contemporary the first chapter of Genesis. That first chapter of Genesis was put to paper during the 49 years that the Judean leadership were in exile in Babylon. That was roughly between 587 BCE and 538 BCE. That myth, found in the first chapter of the Christian Bible, was constructed from two prominent

sources: the cosmology of Babylon, and the seven-day week so strongly emphasized by the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel is the prophet who penned the story of the dry bones that took on life again. Those dry bones were an allusion to the Judean people who had lost their nation as well as their theologizing that went with that nation as the place where the Eternal Jahweh had opted to dwell.

We can hear the voice of Ezekiel in that Genesis-One myth as the voice of Jahweh, the Profound Reality Creating all things, who took only six days to create the cosmos and then rested on that seventh day, suggesting to all of us to take one day in seven for rest and some thankful worship of Jahweh. The Genesis-One story of creation is now in need of some replacement by the story of cosmogenesis that Thomas Berry (and that I in this journal) have sketched out for a 21st century Christianity. However that may be, the main point of Genesis One needs to remain the main point of the cosmogenesis narrative. All this cosmogenesis is good, including the human biological emergence and the free, human agency in all historical developments.

The 2nd and 3rd chapters of Genesis (the myth of Eden) contain a whole different creation story than the first chapter of Genesis. This much older story was first put to paper in the vicinity of 900 BCE, about 400 years before the story in the first chapter. In this creation story, Yahweh walked the Earth in the heat of the day to judge his newly formed humanity. Yahweh had made the first human out of dirt with Yahweh’s own hands. Woman was made from a rib of Adam, an offense to contemporary feminists who are clear that all men and women are made from the womb of woman. Our contemporary creation story has to correct that rib-of-Adam nonsense.

In this extremely old creation story, the most interesting part to me is that the humans got their start as a mud pie of an enormously intimate Divinity. There is no trace of contempt for our “material” nature in the old creation stories or in contemporary cosmogenesis narratives of creations in which humans are made from star dust and from a 3.5-billion-year-old evolution of blood, meat, and bone.

When we understand the myth of Eden as about a *specific time and place*, we typically misunderstand the metaphor. The myth of Eden is structured as an

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origin myth pertaining to the first human beings, but it is actually about a topic that is *present in all times of human history*. The fall is about a continuing departure or corruption of the human species from our birthright in realistic living. This fall takes place in every human every day in every place. Every culture of humans has already fallen. We are born into fallenness as so many of the Psalms point out, but the psalms also point out that human fallenness persists in human life alongside the goodness of the creation from which humans have fallen and are still falling. And some of the Psalms express strong hope that Yahweh will “create in me a clean heart.” I take that to mean asking Profound Reality to enable a return to my good creation from my fallen state that I am confessing. Such dialogue with Profound Reality is basic to the Hebraic part of the world.

In other words, the cosmogenesis of that goodness and the falling away from that goodness into humanly created unrealities characterizes all human lives past, present, and future. We twist our trust in Reality into rationalism, a trust in finite human reason. We twist our outgoing love for all that neighbors us into a slippery slope of human sentiments. We twist our freedom into a moralism of cultural norms. When we begin sharing in the healing of our fallenness (our created goodness, our sharing in the authenticity of the “body of Christ”), we find that these healings (these grace events, or Christ event) are never complete. New levels of our fallenness begin to appear. While we may “press on to the full stature of Christ Jesus,” as Paul put it, we still share in the old fall and the new fallings from authenticity that characterizes the human species. We remain “sinners being healed by grace.” We must not take on some arrogance that we have already arrived into full sainthood. We can find that even our best living, based on our healed lives, may still be laced with self promotion, moralism, rationalism, humanism, nationalism, and downright foolishness.

Furthermore, this fall and this healing are not a natural polarity of some sort. This goodness and this corruption do exist together in the same human being, but these two factors are not complementary, they are opposed to each other in a conflicting fashion. It may be true that our discovering our

fallenness makes us more clear and happy with our healings, but our fallenness still leads to the hells of despair and our recovery of our creation means a type of relief, peace, stillness, joy, freedom, confidence, mercy, and kindness.

In addition, this fall is not to be viewed as our material being as opposed to our spiritual being. In the first place, our so called “material being” is part of our “holy” human cosmogenesis goodness. Our story about the healed human, Jesus Christ. is a myth about restored-from-the-fall human perfection. This Jesus is human; he has a penis, pisses, ejaculates, shits, has strong passions, desires, thirsts, and hungers, is born from the womb of woman, suffers, and dies. And he is tempted in all the ways that you and I are tempted. Materiality is included in our created holiness. The fall is extra to our good creation.

All humans suffer, grow old if fortunate, and die dead. This is part of our creation, our cosmogenesis. If we want to use the term “spiritual being,” we must find a way to see it as our creation, our essential cosmogenesis. Here is a clue for our seeing a new view of authentic spirit: Holy Spirit is our normal everyday human consciousness being filled with the awe of profound consciousness by an experience of the AWESOMENESS of PROFOUND REALITY.

This profound consciousness can be described as a *trust* of Profound Reality, a *freedom* to respond to Profound Reality from nothing but our given freedom, and a *love* or affirmation of Profound Reality and an affirmation of care for all the neighboring beings with which Profound Reality is neighboring us. This **Holy Spirit of trust, freedom, and love does not make us God Almighty.** Nevertheless, we have understood **Holy Spirit** to be part of our experience of God, a participation in the Divine Reality along with Jesus.

We have touched with these deep matters a deeper way to understand the Eden myth as it is being carried forward in New Testament theologizing and taking its place alongside this essential *Holy Spirit of trust, freedom, and love* from which we have fallen and are still falling. Twenty-first century humanity has an aversion to facing this profound fallenness. This aversion is coming from a perspective of making

humanity the center of value, as opposed to holding Profound Reality as the center of value.

Our fallenness is an estrangement from Profound Reality, not simply a violation of some moral standards implanted in our culturally determined minds. The laws, the norms, the taboos, the principles are all human creations. None of them drop down or rise up from anywhere. All moral fabrics, however necessary for a workable society, are still only creations of the finite human mind, and can also be improved by that same human mind. Our estrangement from Profound Reality has a whole different order of fallenness from our failing to conform to our moral structures.

With the above contexts in our minds, let us examine the specific contents of that Eden myth about this so-called “falling” humanity. Adam and Eve are warned by the Creator of our cosmogenesis that they should not eat from a particular tree entitled “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This is not the tree of knowledge generally. What is forbidden is not our four unique and deep quests for approximate knowledge: scientific research, contemplative inquiry, interpersonal savvy, and social competence. These four truth pursuits of we humans are parts of the good creation—a love of the Creator—getting to know our creation and our Creator better—the “intellectual love of God” as H. Richard Niebuhr called it.

This forbidden tree is about values and about valuing profound realism first before we value our self-created approximation of realism. The human is forbidden to be the center of value for evaluating the actions of the Creator of the ongoing cosmogenesis. We are being asked to trust the absolutely all-powerful Profound Reality whose wrath and whose blessing are present in every micro-second of the course of human history and in the processes of the entire cosmogenesis.

We humans do not get to be “wise like God.” How dare we even dream of becoming as wise as Yahweh? Yahweh values us and determines what value we have. We humans do not get to judge the value of this One Living Profound Reality that we personalize as “Yahweh” or “Lord” in our biblical God-devotion. We are but finite creatures without God’s wisdom. In other words, this ongoing fall is

about our substituting our view of realism for the view of the Eternal Reality. We remain ignorant of the Whole Truth even as we accept the gift of forgiveness and trust in the Creator to “do all things well.”

This view has been difficult for us, for we do not have an explanation for all the horrific evil actions allowed to the human species. It may help us see the plausibility of trusting a seemingly untrustworthy God to notice that the human rebellion from realism is part of the gift of freedom to obey or disobey Profound Reality. The fall and the consequences of the fall are made possible by the blessing of humanity with the gift of freedom.

But what about the presence of suffering, old age, and death found in the very structures of the “creation” (the “cosmogenesis”). We do often ask the questions: “How can suffering, old age, and death be good? How can those parts of creation be Profound Reality doing all things well?” Let us also ask ourselves the following kinds of questions: “Would we want every grossly evil human person to live forever? Would we want every saintly person to live forever? Would not such everlastingness on the part of each of us make a huge mess in the cosmogenesis?” Is it not feasible that the perspective of Profound Reality on this topic is better than our own immediate preferences?

Nevertheless, it is still a leap on our part to trust Profound Reality and seek to be a pristinely realistic person. Such faith is a risk of our whole lives, as well as a true deed of realistic living. And unfaith (the lack of trust in Profound Reality) clearly leads to disturbing consequences including a destiny of highly conscious and painful despair on the part of these falling humans. But even such despair can be viewed as a doorway back to realism, for our actual despair is a sense of what we are running from or fighting with in the realism of Profound Reality. Reality, by being Reality, is wrath on unrealism. This wrath has also to be trusted as good for us, love for us from the perspective of Profound Reality and for those of us trusting Profound Reality.

The creators of the Eden myth were intuiting a perspective on all these very deep topics. The metaphor “East of Eden” arises within the storytelling intuitions of a people who have vividly known the deserts of dry land living east of the more coastal

“promised land” flowing with milk and honey. There were no cows and bees in the desert wilderness with Moses. Like the desert goats, Moses and company survived on desert plants as well as on the meat of the goats.

Like “East of Eden” being a metaphor for our despair, “Eden” became a metaphor for the “garden” qualities of realistic living in obedience to Profound Reality. The metaphor “East of Eden” became a metaphor for the “desert” qualities of living in our states of estrangements from Reality.

This land of estrangement from Profound Reality, as pictured in the Eden myth, is told as: childbirth becoming just pain and work becoming just unwelcome necessity. We might add to these old images, that in our century even some political candidates have come to view “service of the common good” or “going to war for your country” as just a silliness practiced by naive do-gooders. The fall can also be described as about humans becoming grumbling rebels and cynics toward living a radically realistic life—even tolerating the most destructive forces of the human species that are turning this garden planet toward an unsustainable inhabitation—climate crisis and pollution of our garden planet.

As indicated in the Genesis myths that follow the Eden story, we humans have become Cain’s murderous envy of our own brothers, entire cities of corruption bringing on a flood of wrath, and human-made building projects that seek to reach the sky, replacing our adoration of Yahweh with our love of our own amazing projects.

Moderating such bad consequences of the fall, Jahweh is pictured in the flood story as calling Noah to save the cosmogenesis from complete destruction. New Noahs are being called for once again today. Also, new efforts in our Biblical myth re-interpreting and even in some re-writing of them is also being called for.

The Foundation of Love

Beyond Trust and Freedom

by Gene Marshall

I began my theological journey in about 1952 with the reading of H. Richard Niebuhr’s essay “The

Nature and Existence of God,” later named “Faith in Gods and in God.” This essay framed for me the whole issue of being a Christian as having to do with trust. What did I actually trust to make my life meaningful? There are many meaning-givers: education, good work to do, sex, marriage, children, money. But all these “gods” of meaning for my life battle with each other and each of them also has a twilight in their meaningfulness for my life. In this Void of meaning for my life what does it mean to trust the Void? This was the question that Niebuhr gave me for understanding trust in the Christian God.

Years later, about 1961, I was introduced to a few passages on freedom from the book called “*Ethics*” by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This launched me into my first theological writing of the topic of the Free Human.

Though I had preached my first sermon in 1951 on the topic of “Let Love be Genuine,” a text from the letters of Paul, love had remained a difficult word to rid of sentimentality and moralism and perhaps co-dependance until the early 1970s. I think it was the myth of Atlas holding up the planet that ushered me into a more sober view of love. This went along with many other readings on love as both the task of witnessing to the Good News with individual persons, and the social task of helpfulness to every human being by pursuing justice for all the societies on planet Earth.

Here are more hints about how Love is foundational for Trust and Freedom:

Trust is the answer to the question: Who am I?

Freedom is the answer to the question: What do I?

Love is the answer to the question: How be I?

Who am I? I am essentially gratitude for my creation. I am also a confession for my grumbling about my gifts and about my imperatives.

What do I? I do my freedom in the confidence of my forgiveness using my fragile thoughtfulness about the ambiguous options that I confront.

How be I? I leave behind my self-created “I” to be my trusting gratitude and my gift of freedom to love my Creator and the neighboring beings that are assigned by my Creator to confront me.

In my 2020 book that I entitled “*The Thinking Christian*,” I came up with a few paragraphs on each

of the following sets of topics: (pages 69-83). We can call this set of topics “ordinary human consciousness in a state of profound consciousness in the presence of Profound Reality—Awe humanity before the Awesomeness—Holy Spirit before the Almighty Creator. Here is a list of those nine topics.

Trust

transparent attention - interior alertness
universal forgiveness - beyond desperation
effortless letting-be - worldly detachment

Freedom

primal merging - interior initiative
inherent purity - audacious boldness
attuned working - obedient liberation

Love

autonomous strength - love of self
enchantment with being - love of God
out-flowing compassion - love of neighbor

Autonomous strength is a quality of our love for “myself” when “I” am moving toward realism and when “I” am viewing as strength “my” view of “myself” as one of the neighbors that merit out-flowing compassion. We don’t love others instead of the self; we love others as we love the self.

We are demoting the self from an exclusive-ego-conceived love of self to viewing the self as one of those many persons needing love of a deeper sort. As we learn to properly love the self, we know how to love the neighbor. We love the neighbor and the self not only with the Gospel of Good News, but with the tasks of justice—social justice for all of us in our given societies. It is the same justice needed whether we are the oppressed or the oppressors or both.

All this loving of self and neighbor is given a foundation in our love of Being, our foundation in enchantment with Profound Reality as our God-devotion.

Esmerelda and the Unicorn

A Fairy Tale

By Joyce Marshall

Once upon a time —it was on the mountain—the cook was out climbing. She had had a hard week

and needed a break. There were many things she had to consider and climbing on the mountain trail was her “go to” place for contemplation.

After a good bit of uphill effort, she took a break and sat down by a tree, leaning back to rest there. Her hand felt something beside her and under just a bit of



Art by Alan Richard

earth, she discovered what appeared to be a key. It was fairly large and unusually shaped. As she examined it, she heard something moving in the woods. She looked up and saw an animal looking at her. It was a wolf. She was startled and even more so when the Wolf spoke to her.

“Don’t be afraid” he said. “I won’t harm you.”

She said nothing—too astonished to speak.

“I see you found the key, the key to the tower.” said the Wolf.

“The tower?” Esmerelda responded. For the cook’s name was Esmerelda.

“The tower is where the Unicorn is locked up” said the Wolf.

“The Unicorn?” Esmerelda said, even more astonished.

The Wolf came closer and sat down beside Esmerelda.

“You see, Esmerelda,” said the Wolf - (How did he know her name? she wondered) - “a long time ago the rulers feared the magic of the Unicorn and locked her in the tower - and basically forgot her. They are long time gone now. We creatures have been caring for her

- but we have had no way to release her. Until now. You found the key and you have hands to use it. Will you journey with me to the tower and release the Unicorn?"

Now here's the thing. Esmerelda, as I said, was at a point in her life of needing a change. So, such an adventure seemed to fit the bill, so to speak. She agreed and set out following the Wolf off the beaten path, through the thick of the woods a few miles to a place she had never seen—which seemed to be hidden to most eyes.

Sure enough, there was a tower and in its window, looking out wistfully, was a white Unicorn. The Wolf led Esmerelda to the door where she applied the key. It fit - and with some difficulty it turned and the door opened. Up the circular stairs they went where there was yet another door—and the key fit it as well. When that door opened Esmerelda experienced her deepest astonishment yet. The presence of the Unicorn was mesmerizing. She felt a sense of calm, of beauty, and an overwhelming love. They turned and descended—Esmerelda and the Wolf with the Unicorn following went out the door, and walked away from the tower. They turned and looked back and the tower had disappeared. They looked once more at the Unicorn and then she disappeared. Esmerelda exchanged a look with the Wolf and then he disappeared.

She found her way back to the path and the tree. She noted that she was still carrying the key. She placed it where she had found it—by the tree. The key disappeared.

Esmerelda walked back home—down the mountain. She said nothing to anyone about her experience. In fact, she never spoke of it. The life issue she was facing worked itself out. Time passed. Things changed. For Esmerelda, her life was transformed. She had become calm, beautiful, and full of love.

Love's Reconciling Power

Reflections by Alan Richard

The first time I fell in love, I was leaning against the cracked, exhaust-stained concrete of the south wall in the giant two-story garage, once an auto

dealership, where the Richard Oil Company parked and worked on the tank wagons that rolled out through the wide and tall entrance before sunrise every morning and returned almost two hours after sunset, their burden of fuel having been discharged into tanks on farms in an area that spanned three counties. I was 14, skinny as a rail, acne-afflicted, and sex-obsessed, which would have been unremarkable since the bodies of most of my friends now had marionette-like proportions, while they struggled with pimples on cheeks and forehead, and had become obsessed with the breasts and female genitalia they didn't have and with the male genitalia they did. My obsessions differed from theirs in a small but nevertheless consequential way, since an obsession with pronounced muscle tone and deepening voices filled the same disproportionate acres of real estate in my head blanketed in theirs with breasts and vaginas. This difference reinforced an anxious feeling of incompleteness that had been growing in me for some time, a dread of the approaching day when my friends would be launched over the threshold into manhood, leaving me in this tiny shit town without companions of any sort, taking comfort, to paraphrase the pulpy language shared by Gordon Merrick and Paul Simon, in the arms of those men of the night I'd read about in the novels I discreetly purchased on family trips to Merle Hay Mall and hid under my mattress at home. Leaning against that wall, I resented my father for having volunteered to serve as scoutmaster, thereby obligating me to attend troop meetings like the one that would commence in fifteen minutes. The other "town boys" in the troop were gathering in the garage they treated as their turf, having like me gone straight to the meeting site after school. While the meeting itself would be held in the office on the other side of the wall I leaned on, where my dad was finishing up his last minute pricing, the town boys were now focused on playing a game of horse using the basketball my grandfather had purchased before I was born, stored in the same place and used in the same way by at least two generations of boys before becoming our troop's equipment. Willing myself to sink into that concrete wall and be spared participation in the game, I was unprepared for what happened next.

LOVE'S RECONCILING POWER

I remember it this way: suddenly the ball was passed to an unknown yet familiar looking boy and all at once, time held its breath. The ball-dribbling boy swept across the garage floor, the momentum of his charge seeming to lift him smoothly into the air like a bird taking flight, while the dribbling arm became a vertical extension of his body that guided the ball smoothly toward its destination, releasing it at just the right instant into the hoop without touching the rim and descending gracefully along with it and landing just in front of it, motionless before the stunned and silent scouts. All of us knew something strange and beautiful had just occurred, something that the words ordinarily spoken after the execution of a flawless layup could not communicate, something that transcended that sport and sports in general. We had all witnessed a slice of reality being lifted out of ordinary time, transformed in the same way brilliant landscape painters transform the places they paint, delivering to us a rare instance when a possible achievement born with no existence outside the mind of the aspirant had been so skillfully matched to the actual conditions into which it was inserted, and the actual conditions had combined to form a receptacle fitted momentarily to receive it with a rare friendliness that brought necessity so close to freedom that they became as indistinguishable as the boy's discrete movements became when they flowed into each other and merged to become one miraculous lay-up.

The boy at the center of this had tripped me up and I fell, for the first of two times, in love. For years to come, his physique and his idiosyncratic way of managing his bodily presence from moment to moment on any given day always recalled for me the uncanny perfection of that moment in the garage. By the time he'd appeared there, puberty had transformed a kid I'd known years before as an annoyance interrupting the adventures my friend (his older brother) and I were having through our GI Joe avatars into a stunningly handsome, square-jawed young man with broad-shoulders and lean muscles that gave his body an idealized quality I didn't imagine to be possible for actual flesh, having seen it only in the photographs of a nearly naked young David fashioned by his creator Michelangelo out of hard marble, not squishy flesh, and in the

deliberately idealized sketches of superhero figures adorned in body-hugging costumes. This boy, who became my romantic partner through the remaining four years of high school and the first two years of college, was for me a variation on and a residue of the suspended moment that had brought us together. The sort of wonder this boy awakened in me was of the kind motivating the response of the artist when her sensitive eye, ordinarily honoring the natural landscape it takes in while separating art from model by reducing the complexity and enhancing the coherence of that visual reality in her work, gazes on this particular space at this particular time and confesses she has nothing to add. "The work is finished," she says. My first encounter with love, no less real for lacking experience and maturity, taught me that idealization is not a lie or a correction of a real thing but a reality that belongs to being as surely as the stages of an organism's life belong already to the viable seed that precedes it. As messy as reality can be, it also gives us rare moments when what happens truly also happens beautifully, and soothes our frustration during the months and years that lack such moments, since when the facts of life constrain possibility, as they do for most of us most of the time, the restlessness of aspiration matures into a patient and watchful gaze that looks both ways, as mindful of persistence and change in actual conditions as it is of the precise nature of real possibility the aspirant seeks to usher into full existence from the minimal existence it has, like geometric figures, in the aspiring mind and will have only there until conditions consistent with its embodiment themselves come to exist.

Love happened for me the first time in such a moment, and taught me that every moment wherein we witness Reality reconciling mutually exclusive yet equally essential forces without compromising or diluting them testifies to the sort of power love has and is. I do not claim that every encounter between opposing forces is a candidate for such reconciliation, but sustained attention to the fragile dynamic unity of any living being cannot avoid seeing that some such encounters are. And some charmed moments, sharpening the paradoxical quality that distinguishes living unity from the simpler unity of nonliving objects, afford us a glimpse of the unity of beauty and truth, of real existing beauty that isn't an imaginary

RECOMMENDED READING

projection cast onto what is ultimately monstrous and hostile. The power that affords such moments, that unifies without assimilating, eliminating, or diluting these forces can be justly called, if we have eyes to see, "love."

In an essay I'll be composing for the November issue of this journal, I'll take off from this initial "fall into love" to tackle the central role love must play in the resistance to and eventual defeat of the long alliance between lawless violence, covetous thievery, and blustering bullshit, for that will remain the task before us, one way or the other, this November.

ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall



MOVIES

Yesterday. A struggling singer-songwriter from Britain is hit by a bus during a 12-second global power failure. After recovering, he sings the [Beatles](#) song "Yesterday" for his friends and discovers that they have never heard of the Beatles. In fact, it seems that the Beatles never existed. He continues to sing their songs, which only exist in his memory, and becomes quite popular. I don't want to say more to ruin the story for you, This is a delightful story and extremely well done.

Living With Leopards - This hour-long documentary is one of the best I have ever seen. A team of photographers follow a leopard family (two offspring) from infancy to adulthood. It reveals a



much deeper level of consciousness on the part of this species than we have ever realized. The team names each one and captures their varying personalities. I don't think you have to be a cat lover like me to appreciate this fine piece of work.

RECOMMENDED READING

Reviews by Joyce Marshall



Middlemarch

by George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)

This novel, written in 1871-1872, was one I missed reading. I did read her *The Mill on the Floss* for freshman college English class in 1952 and mostly recall struggling with it. My daughter's recent expression of appreciation of *Middlemarch* drew me to take it off the shelf and read it, at last. It is a dense book. Not an easy read, particularly the first half. Whereas most novelists give you an inside look at only one or two characters, this one takes you into every character. She also does a masterful take on British culture as a whole. But by the time I got to the last two sections I could not put the book down. And I closed it with a great sense of satisfaction. Full of surprises, and simply brilliant, it is about a small community in which everybody knows everyone's business. It covers their marriages, their relationships, medicine, politics, money, religion, and social class.

We Were Made For These Times

10 Lessons for Moving Through Change, Loss, and Disruption

by Kaira Jewel Lingo

Parallax Press 2021

Our weekly local co-pastor circle used this book for our study the first quarter of this year. It became one of our most satisfying studies, bringing forth lots of personal sharing. Lingo grew up in an interracial family within an ecumenical Christian order. She lived in a residential community in Chicago, spent four years in Africa, a year in Brazil, and attended Stanford and Howard universities. She became a nun at age 25 in the community of Thich Nhat Hanh and spent 15 years living in monasteries on several

RECOMMENDED READING

continents, traveling and teaching mindfulness. Then she felt called to a different life. She is now married to an Episcopal priest, Adam Bucko. They co-lead courses together and are presently re-locating to a small monastery given to them in New York state where they will combine the contemplative gifts of Buddhism and Christianity. So, her story is quite interesting.

And her book deals with what is going on in the world today in the issues it raises for us. Here are some of the chapter titles: Resting Back and Trusting the Unknown, Accepting What Is, Weathering the Storms, Nurturing the Good. Chapters are short. Each one includes a meditation, practice suggestions, and a journaling exercise. I highly recommend this book for a group or an individual.

reviews by Alan Richard

On Bullshit

by Harry Frankfurt
2005

My cheeks turn red upon hearing the standard insults philosophers have endured since Athenian patriots took Socrates to court, so I mean no offense by my claim that the late Harry Frankfurt's *On Bullshit* doesn't feel like a philosophy book. In fact, I love books but I have wondered whether to call it a book. Its well-crafted rhythm, its word choices mindful of tone and pitch as well as lexical meaning, and its deft appeal to a dimension of human understanding where emotion and cognition intersect tempt me to review *On Bullshit* as "a thought-provoking and experimental composition for voice in which a brilliant pianist has, by denying himself standard musical notation and its habits and using the minimal primitive notation shared by journalists and advertisers, decisively demonstrated that music's unique essence does not belong to the conventional tools musicians use and strikes the sensitive ear as music even when dressed in the shabby, suffocating, ill-fitting and ink-stained scribbler's coat." The musical features of *On Bullshit* make listening to a practiced speaker read it aloud a richer experience than reading it silently. *On Bullshit*, written in an unadorned, direct, no-nonsense style as free of in-group language as it is of unnecessary explanations that talk down to the reader, doesn't

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provoke but focuses every sentence on its central issue, reminding us how urgent it is to awaken ourselves to the power and appeal of bullshit and the threat it poses, and how little time we have for this awareness to pass through the multiple gates of knowledge production. Frankfurt shows that bullshit is not the same as lying and that we have been wrong to treat it as less threatening. As he demonstrates by examining the logical consequences of the difference between bullshit and lying, bullshit is the greater enemy of truth. Moreover, bullshit lurks within democracy itself, spreading itself through incentives inseparable from the obligations and constraints of contemporary democratic citizenship. Frankfurt isn't playing, but this is not one of those black doom books to be read alone in low lighting with sharp objects locked away. It's brief (73 pages), keeps you eager to know what's next, and it's funny even when showing us the familiar mechanisms that are squeezing out bullshit in volume at an accelerating pace everywhere we look. This groundbreaking book offers insight essential to addressing the threat to American democracy posed by bullshit artists from Trump to Alito. None of us has any excuse to withhold an hour of our time to read or hear it. We urgently need to identify, contain, and stop the mass production of bullshit without delay because the nation's highest court by emitting in ineptly disguised decrees falsely labeled "decisions" appears to have finished off our republic. This republic, although aging, rickety and never great, has at key moments which were bought at the cost of immense sacrifice, looked toward the multi-racial democracy it could have been. In its place, these black-robed bullshitters founded the incipient authoritarian dictatorship where, as of last week, we live. Our task is as clear as the situation is dire. Harry Frankfurt's gift to we who would call the judicial bullshitters' bluff and walk an uncertain path toward democracy's recreation is this guide to bullshit, this map marking the dangers that lie ahead.

Philosopher of the Heart

Clare Carlisle
2020

Clare Carlisle announces her motivation for researching and writing about the life of Soren Kierkegaard in the book's title, *Philosopher of the Heart*.

Having been reading Kierkegaard's journals, she was intrigued by how he channeled his philosophical studies into his own life, which she describes as a series of great loves: his mother, his father, Regina Olsen, God, and authorship, his term for his work. She surveys his entire life from the vantage point of each stage of it, abandoning the strict linear narrative of most biographies and telling us different stories of Kierkegaard's past and future in each stage of the book to illuminate what Kierkegaard was living in that stage. The first of the two loves to which Carlisle gives the bulk of her attention is Regina Olson, who taught him, she tells us, the profundity of erotic love, showing how the disruptive change their love worked in him led him to read the Bible, despite the aversion to religion his father's Christianity had given him and his lack of interest in it prior to falling in love with her. As he had previously done with philosophical work, he channeled the Bible into his life, allowing the two to interpret each other and making Christianity a fundamental way of understanding the predicament of human existence.

The second love is Kierkegaard's authorship, the great work he envisioned that led him to call off his engagement with Regina once he began to see how it conflicted with their plans to marry. This work subsequently became indistinguishable for him from his devotion to God. From the vantage point of the two succeeding stages Carlisle depicts, Kierkegaard returns again and again to this decision and he is increasingly disillusioned with it. Many readers assume that the view encoded in *Fear and Trembling's* leap of faith, wherein Abraham's determination to obey God and kill Isaac co-exists with his conviction that Isaac will live, is Kierkegaard's permanent view about the breakup, and Kierkegaard did hold on to hope for a miracle for some time. But Carlisle shows us that Kierkegaard was increasingly uncertain of the wisdom of his decision. If the breakup with Regina did reveal something to him, not suddenly but slowly over time, it was that the confident certainty with which he had planned his great work could not survive its collision with existence, and in the books' final chapters she shows us how events his plan did not anticipate forced him to publish segments of it

out of his intended order, and how others scuttled his plan to end his authorship with a bang and to take up public authorship again as a pamphleteer who directly attacked the organized church and the society that had created it. His visibility as a Christian against Christianity stands in unresolved conflict with his earlier stance against outward marks distinguishing the man of faith from superficial churchgoers, since these violated inwardness, even if the visible church became the opposite of Christianity. It's no use to look for the explanation Kierkegaard never gave for this shift, or to speculate on what shape his authorship would have taken had his control over it been as total as he wished, or had his will to exit as planned withstood his urge to speak out. Existence got in the way.

The story Carlisle tells about Kierkegaard is a tragic one, its central protagonist a man whose lasting contribution lies in his refusal to separate the deepest thinking on eternal matters - philosophy, religion - from the shifting, pressing, unrelenting demands of an ordinary and brief life. He is not a role model or a hero of any kind. He could be gentle, loving, funny, and generous, but it was his cruelty, desire for admiration, and thin skin rather than his thought that sabotaged his desire to achieve worldly recognition while still alive. Carlisle's biography of Kierkegaard is the most balanced I've read and the most engaging. If it doesn't offer us a portrait that we'd hang on our wall to admire its subject, it offers a mirror for seeing into the paradoxes that trouble our own lives. In that sense, Carlisle has succeeded in the nearly impossible task her publisher assigned her: giving us a biography of Kierkegaard that is itself Kierkegaardian.

An Update on Realistic Living

The not-for-profit organization called "Realistic Living" is now in a transition year during which Joyce and Gene are passing their batons on to others. Gene who is 92 years old and Joyce, who is 90, are phasing out their activism and focusing on this baton passing. We hope to accomplish our goal of making 2024 an effective transition year by doing two more full-color journals, continuing our monthly Realistic Living Pointers, finishing the facilitation of Zoom Seminars

on *The Thinking Christian* and Circle Organizing, plus packing up our 41 years of contributions into useful resources for others who are responding to the call to realistic living.



A Plea for Financial Help

To complete this work, we need your help. Our financial support is always lowest this time of year, but this July the Marshall family are loaning money to Realistic Living in order to print and mail this journal. We are asking all our contributors to give more and sooner rather than later or less. And we are asking those of you who have not given recently, or perhaps, though appreciating our journal or our various programming, have not previously responded to our request to financially support this work, to do so now.

How to Help

Financial gifts to Realistic Living go directly into needed services. We raise and spend a budget of **\$30,000 a year** on programming that is useful to our constituency. A simple bank check is best for us.

We do not pay salaries to our three staff members, but only expenses that sustain our programming, electronic outreach, physical travel, and program attendance. Our 12-member official board is responsible for our non-profit 501-C3 corporation. The staff—Gene, Joyce, and Alan—seek the advice of this board, and our finances are legally reviewed by them.

A New Study Book

Gene has spent the last year writing a book that can be taught by Christian organizers to enable persons to see the importance of religion generally and specifically how we can resurrect the stories of the Old and New Testaments to anchor us in the July 2024

Exodus and Christ Jesus revelations of the Profound Reality that we all confront every day. Here is the title of this book:

Approximate Knowing

The End of our dogmatic View of Religion

It is sometimes said that we who want a next Christianity should teach only good contemporary theologizing, and leave the Bible behind.

The truth of this sensibility is that we must leave the evangelical Bible behind, for this interpretation of the Bible is demonic. I mean demonic along with Trump and Putin and Hitler. Even when it appears that an evangelical Bible lover is finding something like forgiveness or faith or love, they are not. They are finding their own misunderstandings of these holy words. They are seeing these words in an overall unholy context. The whole evangelical Bible must be left behind, indeed abolished.

More than simply abolished, we must replace the evangelical Bible with an appropriate tour of the original Bible, not as a document of rational beliefs or lasting moralities but as a revelation of existential truths about real lives then and our real lives now. We must begin by hearing afresh the stories of the Old Testament. Without this love of history, this vision of Creator, creation, & fall, this restoration of human goodness and prophetic vision, we have no hope of understanding of the New Testament as a revelation of Profound Reality.

Approximate Knowing is a study book about human intelligence and the use of that intelligence for creating the metaphors that assist us to access our essential relationship to the Awesome Land of Mystery and to invent religious practices that nurture us and prepare us for the tasks of profound consciousness healing and the tasks of social justice improvements.

These tasks requires teaching courses; one liners spoken at the water cooler may change a few lives, but that will not be enough to organize a next Christianity. Teaching three courses from this book can prepare five or more people for a Circle of people to do that job of being Co-Pastors of Next practice of Christianity.

This book includes study outlines for sessions on Human Intelligence and Religion, sessions on Old Testament Stories and sessions on the New Testament Stories spelled out in the text of the book. This book can be purchased from iUniverse.com and Amazon.com.

Realistic Living

is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."

Check out our newly revised web site: RealisticLiving.org



The road that we walk everyday.

Photo by Paula Brennecke

Realistic Living

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