

The Holy Mystery Between the Trenches

If you've known me for long, you may have heard a few stories about Vivian Hearn, the woman who gave me a "memo" that propelled me to keep working on the 80/20 formula, which in multiple ways laid the foundations for my business. That's the *very* short version of how important Vivian is to me.

Vivian has a dear friend William Moore. I've come to know and greatly admire William over the last couple of years. Just last month, William's 27-year-old son Quinnton was shot dead a block down the street from his parents' home. He had just taken his kids into the house and was walking to his car when the gunshots rang out.

Soul-crushing pain for William and his family. No one knows who did this or why. Senseless violence.

I realize this is the second newsletter in row I've opened with a story of pain and tragedy. I'm sorry to deliver such a downer, but stories of human suffering have everything to do with the problem Evolution 2.0 endeavors to solve. Let me step back a little and show you how...

A few weeks ago, I had dinner with a friend. We began exploring the great chasm in the Evolution debate. I said: Both sides have completely butchered this topic. The far-right believes that *poof*, God created zebras and penguins and chipmunks. It's childishly oversimplified. From a scientific perspective you just can't DO anything with that explanation. There's nowhere to go with it. It doesn't explain or predict anything the way a scientific theory ought to. End of discussion, debate, research.

Yet on the far-left is pure random accident. If you can believe there are billions of universes, then random accident and natural selection might be all the explanation you need for the exquisitely engineered ecosystem we inhabit today.

In several important ways this viewpoint is just as simple-minded as the far-right version. (Though at least the far-right version isn't completely dehumanizing.)

The truth is somewhere in the middle. That's what Evolution 2.0 is about – plumbing the depths of this mystery between the poles.

When you dive into the middle, both sides wrestle with a question that obstinately refuses to be ignored:

Why is life so bloody hard and painful?

Why are children tortured and trafficked? Why do lovely, 17-year-old daughters get mangled by drunk drivers? Why does Quinnton Moore bleed to death on his own street?



And while we're at it... why earthquakes? Why hurricanes? Why COVID-19?

Charles Darwin's views were colored by the tragic loss of his daughter Anne. In 1849, Anne and her two sisters caught scarlet fever. Anne succumbed at the age of ten. Darwin scholar E. Janet Browne writes:

“Anne was...*the apple of her proud father's eye, his favourite child*, he confessed to his friend and cousin William Darwin Fox. More than any of the other children she treated him with a spontaneous affection that touched him deeply; she liked to smooth his hair and pat his clothes into shape, and was by nature self-absorbedly neat and tidy, cutting out delicate bits of paper to put away in her workbox, threading ribbons, and sewing small things for her dolls and make-believe worlds.”

That kind of pain would color *anyone's* view of the world. If it didn't, you wouldn't be human.

If you're a Darwinian, you say... Crap happens. We live in a random universe. Everything's just natural selection in the end. If you happen to have a good life, you're just lucky, so have gratitude. But don't be the least bit surprised when tragedy strikes, because, as the most famous Neo-Darwinist of all, Richard Dawkins, is often quoted as saying...

...no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.

Suck it up, buttercup. Put on your big boy pants. And your game face too.

Fine. That does seem to solve the problem from a scientific point of view, doesn't it? But here's what it does not explain: **Why do we humans have such high ideals?** Where do *those* come from? A world resting on survival of the fittest and pitiless indifference should not produce notions of compassion and Mozart symphonies, or equality and love and art. In fact, taken to its logical end, the left-wing theory helped rationalize genocide on an unprecedented scale in the 20th century.

Besides, it does not even begin explain the way people actually behave. Few if any of the people who espouse this view live their lives in a way consistent with it. They're horrified when someone does.

Let's turn our attention to the right – the narrative I grew up with. The extreme version says, “All was once a haven of perfection. The Garden of Eden was the heaven on earth. But ever since Eve ate that apple, it's all been a downhill slide into the dung heap. But fortunately, ladies and gentlemen, Jesus is eventually gonna come back and rescue us from all of it. So let's all hold hands in the bomb shelter, sing hymns, and wait for the second coming.”

...Therefore, every bomb that goes off in Lebanon, every COVID death, every 27-year-old shot dead in the street is just one step closer to Jesus coming back. Glorrrry Haaaaaleluuuuuujah.

Folks, this is a dystopia. Taken to its logical end, it leads to total passivity. God is supposedly in charge... but somehow everything gets *worse* under his watch?

And, much like the atheists on the left, few Christians actually *live* as if the world is spiraling headlong toward Armageddon. They keep building hospitals and schools and churches, even though “everything's gonna burn.”



If you peel the onion on *either* side, there's a mystery at the center, the Tootsie Roll center of the Tootsie Pop, that I believe is the key to everything. That mystery is: Consciousness / Agency / Cognition / Free will.

As of this writing, I'm composing a paper that I'll deliver at the Cancer Evolution Conference. The short version is: *If an entity has the ability to make a free choice, you can make anything.* Which is exactly what life does...and nobody knows how it works.

One of the fiercest debates in the history of science is whether or not life is "special." Does life contain some special mysterious *something* that makes it different from non-life? Does it possess a "vital force"? Is it made of different stuff than dirt?

Innumerable scientists (especially Watson and Crick upon their discovery of DNA) have resolutely declared that life possesses no such thing. It's just physics and chemistry and there is nothing else to it. Nothing to see here, folks, just pass on by.

And while nearly everyone would agree that life is made of the exact same elements on the same periodic table as everything else, the essential question of *what life actually is* continues to perplex and confound the smartest people in the world. The famous physicist Erwin Schrödinger wrote a seminal book *What is Life* in 1943. He put a fine point on these questions, and the musings in his book have neither been improved upon much in the time since, nor answered.

I could walk you through one hundred years of scientific literature and show you how they've been struggling with this question. Or else trying to define the question out of existence. But the central question *behind* the question is: "Why is there pain?"

After years of contemplating this mystery, I'm convinced that an evolving world with struggle, choice, consequence is **required** for ideals like love, compassion and equality to even exist.

I propose to you, dear reader, that God gifted the *cosmos itself* with the ability to choose. This ability to make itself as it wishes is a gift. This means choice is not just about humans and legal proceedings and relationships. Choice is a fundamental property of all living things and perhaps, to some lesser degree, everything in existence.

This is why we have cancer. This is why we have disease. This is why William's son was shot on the street corner. *Choice.*

The far-left, of course, disagrees. Extreme atheists like Sam Harris, Jerry Coyne, Dan Barker and Daniel Dennett insist that choice is mere illusion... *You may appear to have decided to stop at the stop sign. The writers of Schitt's Creek may appear to have been clever and original. But in fact all those choices were made for all of us by millions of years of natural selection. We only possess a spectacular **illusion** that we are in charge of our decisions. The conscious mind is not the commanding officer, it's just the PR department.*

Ultra-conservatives likewise disavow the existence of true choice. If you travel all the way to the extreme right, you arrive at the Calvinist argument that everything is preordained by God. They believe that if you were to truly have a choice, that would limit God's omniscience and be an insult to his very Being.



Notice how these seemingly “polar opposites” are remarkably very similar in profound ways. *Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.*

But science is now validating the pervasiveness of consciousness. University of Chicago biologist James Shapiro just published a paper called “All Cells Are Cognitive” where he marshals enormous evidence to prove even bacteria have cognition – they make choices.

Christof Koch wrote a book called *Consciousness: Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist*. He makes a solid case that honeybees are conscious. They experience panic, tragedy and other “human” traits.

And then there’s James Lovelock who decades ago proposed the theory that the Earth itself is a living organism. Lovelock was *lambasted* by mainstream scientists decades ago. But Lovelock made a long series of predictions based on his “Gaia hypothesis”...and they kept coming true, one after another after another.

Another signature book is *Mind and Cosmos* by Thomas Nagel, an irreligious philosopher who calls out the elephant in the room: modern reductionist science has not the slightest clue what consciousness is, and therefore science has inevitably gone astray at the most basic level.

I believe as we move beyond the cartoonishly over-simplified narratives on the extreme right and left, and simply begin to **embrace the mystery** of what life actually is, something far more fascinating and majestic emerges.

In order to actually make sense of life, we have to acknowledge that *conflict and choice is baked into the cosmos from the beginning*, and that free will and choice are *necessary*. Thus evolution is an *inevitable consequence*. Now, to make sense of this, we must distinguish between two forms of evolution: Evolution Alpha and Evolution Omega.

Evolution Alpha is evolution of species. It’s competition. It’s natural selection. And, for that matter, it’s also business capitalism. Evolution Alpha is *competence*. And, by the way, if you’ve read *Evolution 2.0* you understand that it is not just struggle, desperation and survival of the fittest, but cooperation and optionality, innovation and discovery, beauty and surprise. It’s creative destruction. Finding new ways to use existing resources. Far from being meaningless and directionless, it’s goal directed and purposeful. Evolution Alpha’s purpose is to WIN.

Evolution Omega is advancement of the higher human ideals. Evolution Omega is *love*. It’s equality. It’s taking care of the poor, the sick, the widow and the orphan. Peace, love and understanding. Music and art. These “evolutionary” advancements have NOTHING to do with Evolution Alpha. In fact, they are often in direct opposition to each other. The highest ideal of Evolution Omega is to sacrifice one’s convenience, and perhaps even one’s life, for another.

Where did Evolution Omega come from? We all know it exists, but Evolution Alpha cannot explain it. The closest Evolution Alpha can come to it is “kin selection” – you being willing to die for your cousin or a member of your tribe. But it still doesn’t explain our modern Western notion of equality. In fact Evolution Alpha is the polar *opposite* of equality.



Evolution Omega comes from the Sermon on the Mount: *The first shall be last. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Love your enemies and pray for them. The meek shall inherit the earth. If somebody asks you to go one mile with them, go two. Turn the other cheek.* This message was the original counter-Darwinian manifesto. And it echoes even further back in the first chapter of Genesis: “And God said, let us make man in our image.”

This is humanity at its holiest.

About ten years after Jesus, Saint Paul suddenly started talking about how everybody is equal. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.” **Before Paul, this ideal of equality did not exist.** Paul was the first person in the history of literature to make such an unequivocal statement. If you value the principle of equal human rights, thank Paul.

It appears to me that the Biblical narrative is thoroughly consistent with the hypothesis that the Divine revealed himself to primitive, tribal, unsophisticated *Evolution Alpha* people... and that process of revelation led us to Evolution Omega.

Read Genesis, Leviticus, Numbers and Joshua. You’ll see very quickly that their notions about morality and culture are crude and unsophisticated. *An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.* But once you arrive at the Gospel of John or the epistle to the Romans, they are profoundly sophisticated.

I believe it was Evolution Alpha and human choice that led to these higher ideals.

God presented himself to Abraham and said, “Dude, I’ve got an adventure for you.” Abraham made the *choice* to take the assignment. What we don’t know is how many other guys and gals got the invite, and turned him down! Nobody was going to write a book about them.

This occurs again and again. Moses, Jeremiah, every prophet. These stories are an account of who said yes or no. *Choices.*

God gives them knowledge of his way. He gives them laws. He teaches them about the consequences of making wrong choices – and those Old Testament consequences were very Evolution Alpha! Nasty and brutal.

I don’t think most people have the courage to face this. But this is the way life works. We can’t get Evolution Omega until you understand the *consequences* of Evolution Alpha. We must reckon with the “natural order of things” before we can make choices that lift us above that order.

Evolution Omega has to be based on something. It does not work if it’s just hanging in thin air as some arbitrary postulate that we all hopefully agree on.

It’s no coincidence that the Declaration of Independence says men are endowed *by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.* Remove the creator, and it’s just empty air. Suddenly those rights are not rooted in anything. They become wet spaghetti.

Take out this infinite grounding point, the promise that “the first shall be last” and you get Pol Pot, Lenin, Mao, Stalin. People often say, “Religion has killed more people than blah blah blah...” No sir, let me correct you.



Atheistic governments have killed more people in the 20th century than all religious wars in all other centuries combined. 100 million dead in 100 years vs. 30 million in 5,000 years.

I believe the reason that the West has been so prosperous is because it takes this idea of equality extremely seriously. It's based on the idea that everybody possesses a divine spark. Even a psychotic killer on death row has that spark.

One of my favorite Jewish proverbs says, "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out." It's man's assignment and destiny... and blessing and curse... to be ever perplexed, peeling the onion, making new discoveries.

And making *choices*.

We will never know everything. I suspect we will keep discovering smaller and smaller subatomic particles. What if they never end? And... how many systems are in there in your thumb alone? I don't even know. I reckon you could definitively say that there are at least 25, 50, maybe even 100. What if *that* never ends?

Have you ever noticed that every scientific "answer" only provokes three more questions?

There are some on the far-left of science who think we've more or less already figured everything out. That's egotistical, narcissistic and stupid. We've scarcely begun to scratch the surface. Who knows how much more there is to discover? I find that exciting and full of promise and positivity. Also humbling. One blade of grass is 10,000 years ahead of any human technology.

"There is a correlation between the size of one's concept of God and a willingness to embrace complexity. Where one has a concept of God that is small, absent, hidden, distant or nonexistent, there is a stunting tendency, a drive toward reducing concepts down to their most manageable level. Where one's concept of God is awesomely wonderful, beyond-all-bounds-of-the-imagination expansive in Being, Holiness, and Intent, it drives toward appreciating, seeking and embracing complexity in the world. *So God, so the world, so to speak.*"

– Alan Pieratt

One of the great tragedies in the sciences and in life is the loss of humility, wonder and mystery. These gifts get subverted by status, titles and dominance hierarchy. The badges and ribbons kill science because the best thing you can get in any scientific experiment is a result you *did not anticipate*. That should humble all of us!

When we rest in an all-powerful, all-knowing, infinite source, we have grounds for a cosmic order *behind* science and the regularity of nature. For believing that the sun will come up tomorrow morning, for believing that gravity is going to keep us tethered to the earth, and for expecting that when we discover the next equation it will be beautiful, elegant, symmetrical.

I got my degree in electrical engineering, which means I studied a lot of physics and math. When you put on your geek hat and really appreciate that stuff, it is beautiful. Gorgeous. Theology teaches us to expect that beauty. Mathematics is by definition metaphysical.



Back to suffering. “Why did God make a world like this? A world where suffering and choice *might* lead to beauty and love and compassion?” This is where I think the conservative Christians have failed to take their own origin story seriously enough. In Genesis 1–4, we read the Adam and Eve story. The conservative Christians say, “In the Garden of Eden everything was perfect paradise.” This was drilled into my head growing up.

Who actually said that? Did the Biblical writers say that? I don’t find that *anywhere*. They also insist: “There was no death before Eve ate the apple.”

Again, who says? The Genesis story does not. Whether you read the story figuratively or literally, the importance of these questions does not change.

Please recall that the serpent, generally interpreted to be Satan, is the most evil, angry, vindictive, furious creature in the universe. So... *that guy* is hanging around there... and God doesn’t even warn them about him?

How is that in any way “perfect”?

Not perfect *at all*. Conflict, choice and danger are baked in from the word *go*. The whole thing is ready to snap like a trap from the beginning.

Many religious people don’t have the courage to deal with implications. But *this* is the struggle the ancient narratives ask us to wrestle with: A world of naiveté thrust into peril and sprung traps. Again, the religious right will have you believe it’s a simple story of lost innocence; the left insists it’s a mere fairy tale that has no relevance to modern life and is an embarrassment to science.

Both caricatures are, as usual, wrong. The story is as hard as life itself, and incredibly profound if you take it seriously and plumb the mystery in the middle.

I hosted a “seekers” study group at a church I attended years ago, which later moved to a bookstore in Oak Park, Illinois. A seeker group is a Bible study for people who don’t necessarily believe the Bible or even subscribe to Christian ideas.

One day everyone in our group voted to dig into the Adam and Eve story. About four or five weeks in, we had only made it to the middle of Chapter 3, because the story is so multidimensional. Every verse pries open a Pandora’s box of questions. You can get lost in that story. Four or five weeks into this thing everybody was mesmerized by the depth of the questions it was raising.

Well-intended people have stripped the poetry of its beauty by flattening the story down to a scientific narrative, which it is not. This saps it of its power. “If you don’t believe that a day is 24 hours, you’re a heretic.” One thing the story is trying to tell us is: the breath that God “breathes into Adam” is not oxygen. It’s spirit. It’s knowledge. Reflective self-awareness.

Ancient Mesopotamian literature does suggest that Adam was a real historical figure, but I contend that Adam was not the first human. Adam was the first prophet. In other words, the first human to get instructions from the Head Office. The first person to whom God offered a choice: “This is how I want you to live.”



Adam punted. He chose wrong and got thrown out of the Garden. It doesn't mean he was the only guy around. It means he was the only guy with an *awareness* that "this is how God wanted it to be." And he **CHOSE** not to live that way.

The great hope is that Evolution Omega can overtake Evolution Alpha because knowledge and choices can spread faster than the brutality of Evolution Alpha.

We all need to do what we can to help it spread. I believe Evolution 2.0 is at the forefront of helping Evolution Omega spread. I believe it is, in that way, quite literally, a holy work.

What Can You Do Be a Part of Evolution 2.0?

Evolution 2.0 is me, my assistants Lorena Ybarra and Emily Brookins, with volunteer Sam Bart. Plus a few other precious volunteers who contribute hours here and there. **We can really use your hands-on assistance.**

Another thing you can do to help is fund our virus research. I know of no one who is bringing a full-fledged "Evolution 2.0" viewpoint on virus evolution. It's 501c3 not-for-profit, so you can go to evo2.org and make a tax-deductible donation.

We could also use the following volunteers.

People who are skilled in...

- **Administration**
- **Project management**
- Finances
- Scientific papers, research, and projects
- Film (documentary screenwriters, editors)
- *All* forms of marketing ad copywriting; buying Google, YouTube and Facebook traffic; writing blog posts; shooting videos; podcasts; publicity angles, and news media

If any of the above piques your interest, please reach out and let us know. Email evolution@evo2.org with what your skills are and how you might like to help.

This is world-changing work. I believe that in 100 years everybody is going to acknowledge how important this is. I believe that down to my toes.

It's not easy to get people to see how far-reaching this is. Most people can't see past their next Facebook post. But we are shifting the foundations of civilization. We are moving the foundations of science. We're shifting the foundations of medicine.

And we could potentially save millions of lives. Maybe the life of someone you love. Maybe *yours*.

Carpe diem – Seize the day.

Perry Marshall

