



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 13 November 2016
Our Place In The Cosmos

Bob Brunswick led the session. Below are the series of statements we looked at:

Pre-History Timeline (in millions of years)

- 13700 "Big Bang"
- 4500 Earth & Solar System
- 3700 First life – bacteria
- 500 Fish
- 300 Animals
- 210 Mammals & dinosaurs
- 0.2 first Humans

- 1 Immensity of Universe makes it difficult to believe planet Earth is important
- 2 Long delay in history of Earth suggests Mankind not original purpose
- 3 If creation continues we may expect a human species to surpass Homo Sapiens
- 4 In this world we cannot distinguish 'Hand of God' from normal natural processes
- 5 This planet Earth is 'fneely tuned' for life to emerge, unlike other planets
- 6 Similarly the Universe may also be structured for life in due course, but we know not whether this is self organisation or a cosmic 'blueprint'
- 7 If Chance is entirely responsible, that still leaves room for belief in a personal god
- 8 If in due course we do find 'Life' elsewhere, the Christ Story may have to be rewritten
- 9 "The more we understand about the Universe, the more pointless it seems to be"
- 10 Religion seems essentially 'man-made' to meet Mankind's need for meaning and purpose in life

Our Place In The Cosmos

According to radiometric dating of rocks, the Earth was formed some 4.55 billion years ago. It is a small part of our solar system which combines the sun, nine planets and their natural satellites, the asteroids, the comets, and the meteoroids. The sun, in which is concentrated 99% of the mass of the solar system, is a main-stream star which formed some 5 billion years ago and is located in our spiral galaxy, the Milky Way, about two-thirds out from the centre. The galaxy measures nearly 100000 light years across (around 575 000 trillion miles) so the sun is about 33000 light years, or about 191 trillion miles out from the centre of the galactic disc.

The Galaxy as a whole contains perhaps 100 billion (100000000000) stars similar to our sun. Beyond the Milky Way there are millions of other galaxies, each of which may contain as many individual stars as our own local galaxy. That puts in perspective the microscopic insignificance of the Earth within the universe as a whole.

In his book "Chance and Necessity" Jacques Monod wrote ". . . pure chance absolutely free but blind is at the root of the stupendous edifice of Evolution . . ." and concluded "The ancient covenant is in pieces; Man knows at last that he is alone in the unfeeling

vastness of the Universe, out of which he emerged by chance. Neither his destiny nor his duty have been written down."

Cosmologist, mathematician, physicist Freeman Dyson writes: "No! it is true that we appear to have emerged by chance, but the idea of chance is itself only a cover for our ignorance. I do not feel like an alien in this Universe. The more I examine it, the more I find in some sense the Universe must have known we were coming!!"

"We are sons and daughters of catastrophe!"

Today, science finds it difficult to believe this world was created for us. The Earth has existed for an immense length of time - and only recently has mankind appeared on the scene. Other forms of life have been present (Reptiles, Dinosaurs, etc) but have been wiped out by a series of catastrophes leading to climate change etc. Then the process of evolution has created the situation of today.

Notes From The Meeting

In 1648 Archbishop Usher had calculated (from the Bible) the world was created in 4004BCE. It is now known to be 4.5 billion years old.

In general, the numbers involved with the Universe are so large and outside our normal compass.

In 1927 the nature of the Cosmos and the Expanding Universe was proposed.

What is the role of Mankind: are we a result of pure chance, or do we have a purpose?

What is God?

The Old Testament view of a super-natural God, over-arching and intervening, is seen by many as simplistic. For some, a non-theistic God makes more sense.

If all of time were reduced to 24 hours, humanity appeared just over one second ago.

If all of time were reduced to a year, humanity first speared less than 8 minutes ago.

Some propose that it is self-conscious awareness, of mortality, self and others that separates us from the rest of Creation.

The name 'God' is inconvenient as it comes with so much cultural baggage. The 'voice within' perhaps?

Why do we strive to be better?

Is there an ultimate purpose?

Does it matter?

How does this impact on people of 'faith'?

The notion of Gaia – the planet adjusts to us.