

James M, replying to the question: In the parable, the Story of Everything is personified. Is there any reason it is called a "he"? Why not a "she"? What if it were a "she"?

While I enjoyed the story and could have accepted it written in either gender, there was some added value to the use of the male gender. It seems some of the characteristics and actions of the SoE reminded me of a stereotypical male. Would a male stop and ask for directions or ever admit being wrong? The SoE eventually admitted his lack of answers and went about trying to fix his perceived problem himself. The SoE was a lead character in the book serving in the capacity of something akin to an alpha role. While there are certainly alpha females, we tend to think stereotypically in terms of an alpha role being filled by a male. The added value comes from the ease of imagining and accepting the SoE character. I think the perception of the character adjusts if the gender is changed, but the story plays out with the same message. And of course as society adjusts to a more neutral perception of roles, the gender makes even less of a ripple on the read of the story.

Dick B: I bought the book and devoured it. I am so very interested and pleased to see what you are doing. I am a long time reader and studier of Teilhard de Chardin and I found so many comparisons to his "The Phenomenon of Man" in your book. I kept wondering if his name would come up. I have so many other things I could tell you but will, for the present, just keep in touch by the blog. However I did want to share with you the attached document which is the introduction to a book titled "Meditations with Teilhard". I thought there are some interesting parallels between this little story and the ending of your book with Adam and his granddaughter.

John Kotre: The parallel with Adam and his granddaughter is intriguing--the young girl whose innocence elicits something from the old man. I don't believe Adam would have ever told his story were it not for her presence.

For other readers ... *Meditations with Teilhard de Chardin* was edited by Blanche Gallagher. The introduction, written by Jean Houston, tells of Jean's walks with the man she met as a 14-year-old on the streets of New York. She knew him only as "Mr. Tayer."

"The walks were magical and full of delight. Not only did Mr. Tayer seem to have absolutely no self-consciousness, but he was always being seized by wonder and astonishment over the simplest things. He was constantly and literally falling into love. I remember one time when he suddenly fell on his knees, his long Gallic nose raking the ground, and exclaimed to me, "Jeanne, look at the caterpillar. Ahhhh!" I joined him on the ground to see what had evoked so profound a response that he was seized by the essence of caterpillar. "How beautiful it is," he remarked, "this little green being with its wonderful funny little feet. Exquisite! Little furry body. little green feet on the road to metamorphosis." He then regarded me with equal delight. "Jeanne, can you feel yourself to be a caterpillar?"

Oh yes:" I replied with the baleful knowing of a gangly, pimply faced teenager.

"Then think of your own metamorphosis," he suggested. "What will you be when you become a butterfly, *une papillon*, eh? What is the butterfly of Jeanne?" (What a great question for a fourteen-year-old girl!)"

Sue W: Tucked in my Holy Bible is a punched 8 ½ by 11 inch, folded glossy paper with a Biblical story, Litany, verse and homework. A nine or ten-year-old girl read this during Sunday school at Holy Cross Lutheran Church. On another Sunday, I probably read The Creation. The ideas I had then changed in 2003 when I read *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling* by Ross King. Mr. King described Michelangelo's interpretation of the biblical story, seen by thousands who visit the Sistine Chapel. What I learned from the book was an earlier restoration artist was responsible for the touching hands of God and Adam: Michelangelo had described the drawing differently.

Differences between Creation and Evolution occurred in my high school Biology Class with Mrs. Fotias. Separation of church and state existed in Detroit Public Schools because my classmates practiced both Christian and Jewish religions (Islam was not prominent then). Hence, the chapter about Charles Darwin was taught the origin of the species as an impersonal lecture. Years later, in the Colloquium course, I read an abridged version of the Origin of the Species. This time the discussion presented different ideas from a variety of religious constituents.

I still see conflicts between Creation and Evolution interpretations. Who is right? I wasn't around then. In one science-fiction interpretation a *Star Trek Next Generation* episode titled "All Good Things ..." Q took Jean-Luc Picard back in time to witness the amino acids failing to join. This was an evolution story for a television audience. But it is only one interpretation, just as Michelangelo gave us one interpretation of The Creation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

John Kotre: Interesting . . . Michaelangelo's ceiling was once under consideration as a cover for the book!

Burne W: The web site has the suggestion that religion and science might be able to converse. I find that hard to believe. Religion seeks evidence to support its conclusions. Science seeks conclusions that fit the evidence. Religion's conclusions are flawed because it denies evidence that doesn't fit its conclusions. Science' conclusions are flawed (and science knows it) because there may be more evidence forthcoming. The cosmologies collide, but can not break through the wall. One has to put on a different cap in order to discuss each discipline.

John Kotre: Your position is a lot like that of Stephen Jay Gould, who argued in *Rocks of Ages* that religion and science were Non-Overlapping Magisteria (NOMA). One cap for religion, a different cap for science. The problem is that I've only got one head. No matter how much I try to compartmentalize religion and science, ideas from one compartment leak through to the other. Something in there is working on a single story.

Marilynn R: The story has a lot of charm...a lot.

John Kotre: There is a tone of innocence and wonder that runs through it. I believe that is the tone in which Stories of Everything should be told, heard, written, changed, made sacred, etc. It's the tone that the Story had to recover before it could yield to change.

Marilynn: The Old Story of Everything is such a benign character. Takes on all the revelations of his own inadequacies and demise with such composure and acceptance. I think the institutional representatives of the Old Story of E have been considerably more resistant and nasty.

JK: Really an interesting observation, and the first time it's been brought up. When we first meet the Story, he is well aware of the evil that has been done in his name by those "institutional representatives." Yet, to his shame, he does nothing about it. In the last chapter he comes out in a New form, but the parable ends before the institutional representatives of the Old can resist, get nasty--and worse.

Marilynn: Also, the application of Darwin's theory of evolution to explain many aspects of life doesn't come through. It's been more influential than is suggested in your parable.

JK: Actually, I think the idea of evolution is broadly applied in the parable. It starts with Darwin and biological evolution and then gets carried over to the evolution of the cosmos. Historically, I think the changes occurred in that order, though I'm sure the cosmologists weren't "applying" Darwin's idea. Also, the Story realizes that *it* has evolved. I believe there's an historical connection here as well, with "higher criticism" of the Bible beginning about the same time that Darwin came along.

It's true that there's no reference in the parable to the evolutionary account of the origin of religion. I welcome that account as another narrative, but I don't regard it as science because it's not falsifiable. The origin of religion involves beliefs and behaviors that go back before the time of written or symbolic records. There's nothing like a DNA or fossil record against which to check its propositions. I'm happy to remain in the dark about the origin of religion.

Marilynn: And I guess dividing personalities into activist and inquisitive doesn't seem adequate.

JK: Another novel observation, and I'm guessing that you're referring to Elise and Adam. Their natures were indeed different, but I'm not sure why they had to separate because they could have complemented each other so beautifully. I think the separation had to do with neither realizing how deeply the longing for the Story was embedded in Adam. But that's just a guess.

Theresa: I guess I'm torn between two poles - either everything matters or it doesn't. I came to the conclusion that there can't possibly be only one book of everything, or one story of everything, since EVERYTHING to me means infinity. And even the largest of human minds, say Einstein's, is still far too puny to comprehend anything so enormous as infinity, so how could any one thing capture it? But most importantly, does it matter? Does everything in infinity matter? Does anything or nothing encompassing all of infinity matter? Obviously no human could ever know that, since no one has died and come back to tell us about what's going on on the

other side (hoping there is one).

Anonymous: Loved the story of everything so much--i read parts of it to my grand-daughter and let her read it out loud to me and ask questions-kids have such interesting interpretations of life--anyways-i thought someone might enjoy this little bit of humor from long ago days gone by--in my mis-spent youth i would have long discussions with my pal richard about the origins on the universe and the absurdity of life in general-usually under the influence of some mind altering substance--our inevitable conclusion was "the worms are growing us for food"--i think back on that and wonder sometimes if it isn't true--it always makes me smile when i do---:)