

# Letters

## Notes on 'A Knowing Universe'

When a plea for an essentially religious point of view appears in a scientific publication, it ought to be at least clothed in entertainable evidence. Dietrick Thomsen's latest effort along these lines ("A Knowing Universe Seeking to Be Known," SN: 2/19/83, p. 124) is regrettably nude.

First of all, he can't have it both ways about causality. As he supportably points out, Bohr destroyed causality — at least in the Humean sense of the term. But Thomsen's argument is structured around Wald's highly anthropomorphic thesis that the universe must have been cleverly and purposefully designed to cause or permit the eventual evolution of life. The brand of causality here represented is so primitive that even Hume, in his long-ago lifetime, specifically repudiated it.

Secondly, causal or not, Wald's quoted reasoning leaves much to be desired. One does have to accept his view that life could not have evolved if a lot of precarious conditions had not been each precisely met. But one can also go out and jot down the license number of the first car to pass on the Interstate. And think, then, about the really enormous pyramid of prior events that brought that particular vehicle to that particular spot at that particular instant. The true probability that the timely arrival could have occurred by chance is impressively close to absolute zero. So, some mysterious force must have intervened to make it happen, right? The conceptual error here illustrated is one that scientists, of all people, should be able to avoid.

Finally, Thomsen is taking liberties with Bohr's own views. Bohr never regarded com-

plementarity as a universal principle. On the contrary, he specifically warned against its application in inappropriate areas.<sup>1</sup> And there is no record of his seeking help, in his research, from aesthetes, theologians, or mystics. One suspects that the notion of joining such people in a holy "Bohrean" crusade to assuage the universe's "need to be known" would only have struck him as funny!

<sup>1</sup>N. Bohr, *Phil. Sci.*, 4289 (1937)

Warner Clements  
Beverly Hills, Calif.

When George Wald theorizes that "consciousness formed the material universe and brought out life and overt forms of consciousness," this is simple regression to the big daddy explanation of cosmology to replace the big bang. This leaning reflects more psychological needs than meaningful cosmological inquiry. Dietrick Thomsen is also, evidently, a mystic at heart.

A materialistic explanation for consciousness will come soon enough. After all, it wasn't long ago that the mystics foretold there would never be a materialistic explanation for the origin of life! And don't be so sure that scientists won't soon develop a computer with consciousness.

A mystical explanation for the origin of the universe and a primordial theory for consciousness based upon that idea is a dead end; clearly seen in review of consciousness theory by modern philosophers who by rejecting scientific materialism have filled volumes with useless mumbo jumbo.

Warner H. Witmer  
Quakertown, Pa.

Strange how certain ratios stick in your mind. Having been "out" of physics for some time, why should I note the transposition in Dietrick Thomsen's "A Knowing Universe Seeking to Be Known" — protons are more like 1,800 times heavier than electrons — unless I've been away *much* too long.

But my real reason in writing is to comment on what I feel may be an undercurrent in this article: religion. For years I have pondered traditional Western religions. What was it that they worshipped? Why did they feel that they have to worship anything? Apart from the amelioration of some very wretched human conditions and attempts to promote better understanding, peace and love among us, I have come to the conclusion that in a religion there is a central need for followers to feel that there is something far more influential and powerful in their lives than any reality-based manifestation; that is, a god. Perhaps this "consciousness" of the universe in Mr. Thomsen's article is just another way of saying the same thing.

John Rhoads  
Wichita Falls, Tex.

We goofed on the proton/electron mass ratio. We meant to write, 1,800, not 1,080. The more exact figure is 1,840. —Ed.

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