

## Science, Religion and A Living Universe—A Response to James MacAllister

James.

I've found both your contribution and Duane Elgin's contribution to this discussion fascinating. I watched your video (*Bacteria to Biosphere: Gaia Is the Symbiosis Seen from Space*). I found it very interesting and informative in terms of cellular biology. I then ran off both your text (*Is The Idea That The Universe Is A Living System Scientific Valid?*) and Duane's contribution (*Deep History: A Living Systems Paradigm*). I studied the texts quite carefully.

In this discussion—Is the Universe a living System?—the context seems to be “living system.” But, as far as I can see, you have ignored this context and, instead, focused on the word “living.” You have, in effect, made it the new context for the discussion. You seem to be saying to us, “If you want to determine whether there is life in the universe, look at cellular life on Earth.” But we, of course, respond, “We are not saying that life in the universe is like cellular life on Earth. We know that it isn't. We are saying that the universe manifests some creative life force analogous to human life.” So how can we find some common ground?

You stress in your writings that in determining scientific matters we must turn to the best science that is available. With all due respect, when exploring the universe the best scientists we should turn to in this discussion are not cellular biologists. They are cosmologists and quantum physicists who have been studying the context of the universe for over a century. But following your own advice I find no reference in your video or article to any physicists. Nor do I find any discussion of things that may suggest to us some “creative manifestations of life”: non-locality, implicate order, gravity, expanding universe, background energy, wave/quantum, continuous creation, space/time, uncertainty principle, field theory, probability theory etc. etc. In contrast, Duane's discussion relies very heavily on the insights of quantum physicists—but he goes very cautiously. And, as you will see below, quantum physicists are pondering the same things we are pondering.

The second thing that seems quite dominant in your article is the patronizing references to religion “God did it”(mentioned three times); your comparison of Duane Elgin to the creationist Michael Behe—which I found quite amusing. (Without any knowledge of Duane's beliefs, an analysis of his writings leads me to believe that the religious fundamentalists and creationists wouldn't even let Duane Elgin in the back door.) In his paper I find no use of the term “God” nor any reference to religion). But, most telling are the words in your last sentence.

*“When personal or religious beliefs are claimed to be scientifically valid without undergoing the hard work, discipline, and vigorous scrutiny required by science, they are deserving of the disdain of scientists and they need to be exposed to those who are not scientists for what they are: “woo-woo.”*

I find this criticism of Duane Elgin way out of line. But I also find it very revealing. You seem to have an obsession against religion. Your approach gives me the impression of an almost religious fervor and reminds me of the worst characteristics of some fundamentalist religions. We are deeply indebted to

modern science. But you seem to see science with its rules, strict regulations, procedures, disciplines similar to court procedures, as a sacred Church of Science. There are “the faithful”, the scientific community, and there are “the outsiders”, the rest of us. There is the obligation of “the faithful” to speak out against the non-scientific heretics and false prophets who don’t have the scientific “creds” and dare to make comments about science without an imprimatur.

Despite Galileo and problems in the past, today there is no intrinsic conflict between religion and science. I found Ken Wilber’s *book Quantum Questions* quite revealing in this regard. He provides excerpts from Heisenberg, Schroedinger, Einstein, DeBroglie, Jeans, Plank, Pauli and Eddington.

There is a constant refrain among all of these quantum scientists that there is no conflict between science and religion. But they also agree that you cannot use religions to prove science nor the other way around. In his introduction Wilber has this to say.

*“Planck’s view, if I may summarize it, was that science and religions deal with **two different dimensions of existence (my italics)**, between which he believed there can properly be neither conflict or accord, any more than we can say, for instance, that botany and music are in conflict or accord. The attempts to set them at odds, on the one hand, or “unify them’ on the other are “founded on a misunderstanding or, more precisely on a confusion of the images of religion with scientific statements. ” (pg.6)*

James, I find no need to defend concepts of a living universe coming from theologians, anthropologists, philosophers or from any other discipline. I find your insistence on cellular biology as the only determinant of life in the universe totally unconvincing. In making your scientific case you fail to consider the insights of those scientist with the greatest knowledge of the universe—the quantum physicists. And your “woo-woo” attack on Duane Elgin without one single example from his writings of a religious compulsion, well, I find all of this...unscientific.