

# Do we have to be the center of everything?



## Highland Views

Chris Highland  
Guest columnist

We might imagine the opening of the biblical book of "Gen A" (Genesis) was written one evening by a poetic dreamer. They looked up at the starry sky, and looked down at the deep brown earth, and won-

dered (all "spiritual" moments are essentially wonder), asking, perhaps aloud to the night wind: "Where did all this come from?" The poet scratched on their smooth stone slate: "In the beginning,

someone must have made all this, the domed cerulean sky and the rugged flat earth. Then the trees and bees, and you and me. But how,

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when, why?" And a story began to form.

Origin stories usually place the storyteller in the center of the action. "Gen A," and frankly the entire biblical narrative, places humans, and a very specific group of humans in a very particular place on the rough and rocky land, on the main stage of history. In a sense, a history before history. The poetic author – and many others who followed with their own vivid vignettes – presents a vision of creator and creation that could be summarized in the following way:

Somehow there was Someone before Time and Space. The Original Poet imagined a rock, a very large rock, and flung it into the void of space. This Artist dreamed up "day" and "night," and on a blank page called "the heavens" drew a hot flaming globe and twinkling lights. Turning the cosmic potter's wheel, strange creatures were hand-crafted into fragile shapes. The Breather exhaled into these mud sculp-

tures and the forms became living beings. Seeds dropped from star-filled pockets to grow forests and fields. From the first dirt beings animated by water and air, the whole Human Tribe has descended.

To look at this story – The Great Story – from this perspective, offers a viewpoint that can lead to only one conclusion: The Universe was made for us, for humans. We are the most important creations of a Creator – a Creative Force or Poetic Power – who placed us in center focus. Their primary attention and intention is Humanity. We are at the center of the universe – "our" universe.

The eminent astronomer Carl Sagan, lecturing at Cornell in 1994, said: "There is no center to the universe." Though human history is replete with stories that position us at top center in creation, we fool ourselves. This is an illusion of the highest magnitude. Sagan dims our godlike self-image: "We are not at the center ... we are near an obscure spiral arm 30,000 light years from the center of the Milky Way galaxy ... and there may be 100 billion galaxies."

By the way, might want to check your GPS – our lactic galactic neigh-

borhood (the Milky Way) is about 100,000 light years across, containing something like 400 billion stars. And we're the center of everything? Joke's on us (think of driving across the country with a AAA map from the 1950s – navigation could be disorienting. As Steinbeck said: "To find where you are going, you must know where you are." Do we really know where we are in the cosmos?).

Envisioning Sagan's challenge to the "It's All About Us" fantasy, I drew a spiral. In the center, of course, is Me. I'm in the middle, the whole plot of the Great Story is about me, for me. As we move out along the spiral we find it's about My Family, then My Tribe and their superior beliefs. Expand further to My Country, and the exceptional History of My Country. Then we come to My Species and My Planet, then jump to My Sun and My Solar System. Here we have to pause, pull over to the side of the road and check our map closely. We're definitely lost. We check the latest star maps, most recent distant photos from the Webb telescope, and we're no better off than Steinbeck lost with his dog.

What we face with fearful dizzi-

ness is a farce of our own making. My Galaxy and the belief that Life is unique to My World among all worlds. Really?

In the beginning ... we look back and see the end. "Gen A" hasn't helped much. We're hopelessly bewildered by the immensity of the vastness and grandeur. We call our awe religion and our wonder faith, but we stand alone in our hubris, still believing it's all for us, beginning to end.

Thousands of years ago, a wise teacher in China named Master Lao described another kind of spiral where the centerpoint spins out and falls back. He wrote, and I paraphrase: "Cultivate virtue in yourself, in your family, in your community, in your country, in your world ... and it becomes universal" (Tao Te Ching, 54). That's probably a more central and sensible map to follow.

*Chris Highland served as a minister and chaplain for many years. He is a teacher, writer and humanist celebrant. Chris and his wife, the Rev. Carol Hovis, live in Asheville. His latest books are "Friendly Freethinker," "Broken Bridges" and "A Freethinker's Gospel." Learn more at [chighland.com](http://chighland.com).*