

The New Story

An edited transcript of an interview with Dr. Brian Swimme

A cosmic story is a way in which we orient ourselves in the world. The fact is that humans require this. Butterflies don't have a cosmic story that they talk about. Their story is actually built into their DNA. Wolves, whales... all of them know what they are doing because it is part of their genetic inheritance.

“Stories situate us in the world in a way that gives us a fundamental meaning, orientation and direction.”

We require stories that are expressed in our culture so we can find our way forward. They enable us to know what's important to do, and what's important to avoid. Who are we? What are we about here? Stories situate us in the world in a way that gives us a fundamental meaning, orientation and direction.

Today, we live right at the juncture between stories. We're in that chasm between a story that used to function and a new story that has yet to function effectively. The stories of the past, we regard as important. We pay a lot of respect to them. But we know that they do not actually give us a careful, accurate depiction of the Universe. We've surpassed the level of knowledge that those stories gave us and that we needed at that time.

So even though we know that they no longer function as cosmic stories, we still try to squeeze psychological insights out of them. They are important without question. But we need a new story. We need a story that actually comes out of what we know about the Universe. That's our moment. We're done with a certain phase of our existence. Today, we are living in an exciting moment that finds us entering into a new way of being human, which requires a new story—a new account of what it means to be human.

“Our way forward is to begin to live in the Universe we know about.”

One way to understand the last 400 years of modern science is that this was humanity's way of arriving at a new understanding of the Universe. But it's an understanding that is rooted in empirical, observational detail. It's not coming from any particular scripture. It's not coming from any particular group of elders. It's coming from a careful examination of the Universe and of life and of Earth and of humanity.

Now, all of that knowledge has been growing and developing. Only in the last few decades has this knowledge entered into a coherent story – a new story about the birth of the Universe, and the development of life. It's all fitting together now.

Our way forward is to begin to live in a way that is coherent with our actual knowledge of the Universe...to actually live in the Universe we know about. It's as simple as that: to live within the life that we know about. We have discovered more about life in the last 100 years than in the entire history of humanity put together. In the last 100 years, what

we discovered in biology, and geology and ecology and astronomy - all of this surpasses all the knowledge in the history of humanity.

And we haven't yet learned to live within that knowledge. We regard it as beside the point, as if it was not really relevant to our personal lives. So our way forward is to learn that this new knowledge, this new story, actually enables us to see who we are, to see where we are, and to see what it is we are to do as a species, as individuals, as nations, as corporations.

It provides a fundamental pathway into a future of vibrant life.