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God and the Evolving Universe

James Redfield, Michael Murphy & Sylvia Timbers

About the Book

From James Redfield, the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Celestine Prophecy*, and Michael Murphy, the author of the perennial bestseller *Golf in the Kingdom*, with documentary filmmaker Sylvia Timbers, comes the story of the past, present and future of human potential – and a journey that can take contemporary seekers to their next level of spiritual evolution.

It is no accident, argue James Redfield and Michael Murphy – major co-creators of today's spiritual boom – that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed an explosion in new human capacities. Daily we hear and read about supernormal athletic feats, lives transformed by meditative practices, healing through prayer – and we experience these things ourselves. Many people sense a growing reconciliation of science and spirituality, the rise of a new worldview, and the mysterious possibilities of synchronicity and transcendence.

The authors contend that thousands of years of human progress have delivered us to this very moment, in which each act of self-development is creating a new stage in planetary evolution – and the emergence of a human species possessed of vastly expanded personal abilities.

Written with the insight of *The Celestine Prophecy* and representing a unique pairing of global visionaries, *God and the Evolving Universe* is a book that deepens our knowledge of personal growth, and shows how each of us

can begin to integrate our extraordinary experiences into a heightened synchronistic flow – allowing us to participate consciously in an unfolding evolutionary adventure.

With exercises that readers can use to develop the abilities they are reading about, God and the Evolving Universe heightens readers' awareness of their place in personal/planetary evolution and sets the stage for actualizing the next level of human potential.

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GOD AND THE EVOLVING UNIVERSE

The Next Step in Personal Evolution

James Redfield
Michael Murphy
and Sylvia Timbers

We dedicate this book to the many pioneers and heroes who
have set the stage for a deeper understanding of human nature.

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AUTHORS' NOTE

Today we stand poised at a threshold in human history. The shock and horror of terrorism continue to haunt us, reminding us of the alienation and hatred that have too often characterized human history. Yet, at the same time, we see reflections of the best in human nature, as people around the world continue to hold a vision of peace and justice as they demonstrate the love and heroism that reflects a greater humanity.

We believe we are on the brink of a new understanding of who we are as human beings, an understanding that includes the depths to which we can plunge when we fail to pursue our greater potentials. In a sense, a new urgency has been declared in our search for self-awareness. During the last four hundred years, science has opened the world to us with discoveries our ancestors could not have imagined. It has revealed the nature of distant galaxies, the structure of subatomic particles, and the evolutionary process that brought our universe from a tiny seed to this immense and still-expanding cosmos.

But the threshold we've now reached involves more than our physical existence. Irresistibly, we are called upon to join our exploration of the evolving universe with an equally daring and disciplined exploration of the inner life. In spite of the negative actions of a few, there has rarely existed a wider interest in mysteries of the soul nor so many experiments in personal transformation.

Such experiments are happening around the world, informed by discoveries in psychology, anthropology, and

medical science as well as once-esoteric knowledge from every sacred tradition. They are increasing in number and sophistication today because there now exists more publicly available knowledge about our transformative capacities than at any time in human history. The nature of spirituality and the inner life is coming more clearly into focus, bringing us a vision of human transformation that is unprecedented in its scope and beauty.

Our aim in writing *God and the Evolving Universe* is twofold. First, we want to add depth to the popular understanding of our human potential by discussing a wide range of capabilities and experiences that are now available to us, all of which can be more readily sustained through disciplined intention and practice. And second, we want to suggest that a widespread actualization of these capacities would herald the dawning of a new evolutionary step – a step as significant as the emergence of life from inorganic matter and the rise of humanity from the first tiny cells, a step that would bless us with spectacular new abilities and levels of experience.

We believe that humankind's exploration of the inner life, in its infancy now, can reveal new frontiers of creativity, antidotes for hatred and alienation, and possibilities for cultural transformation beyond those we presently imagine. As we present this picture of further evolutionary advance, we contend that history is not merely cyclical, but that it is going somewhere and, indeed, that it has been struggling all along toward higher ends.

In Part One we survey the high points of this remarkable journey. We begin with a look at the mystery of how we came to be on this planet in the first place, and at the world's astonishing evolution from the Big Bang to the appearance of life on Earth to the emergence of humankind. We then briefly chart some of the great turning points of human history that have prepared us for the evolutionary step we can now foresee.

In Part Two we discuss the emergence of extraordinary human capacities, looking not just at how they feel and impact us, but also at ways in which they seem to seek integration with other emergent attributes in a manner that can ultimately lift us to a greater life.

In Part Three we offer a vision of how the cultivation and disciplined maintenance of these aspects of human nature could contribute to the renewal of institutions and culture, to an expanded communion with other levels of existence, and toward the eventual transformation of the body itself.

And in Part Four we suggest specific exercises, which we believe can facilitate personal and social transformation. We include A Guide to the Literature of Transformation, which includes important classic and popular books that have helped set the stage for a new vision of human possibility. We hope that this information will help you explore the extraordinary life that is your birthright.

Come join us as we explore an evolution that has not only brought us to where we are today, but is ongoing – and calling us to participate.

J.R., M.M., S.T.
Fall 2001

Part One

Awakening

1

THE MYSTERY OF OUR BEING

FOR MANY YEARS, a new worldview has been forming intuitively in the hearts and minds of people around the world. Though this emerging picture of our place in the universe has not been fully articulated, it is based on a central perception that we have capacities for a greater life than most of us have realized – a life that seems essentially joined with the evolution of the universe itself. We sense this connection, many believe, because we and the world are unfolding from the same transcendent source and are secretly moved to manifest more and more of our latent divinity.

THE EVIDENCE OF EXPERIENCE

The awakenings that inspire this view of the world, which come to us in many ways, can be enriched by reading various philosophers, scientists, saints, and sages who have opened new perspectives on human nature and the universe. As we shall see, the visions and practices of these pathfinders are available now in great abundance. However, the intuitions and insights that most typically lead us to a sense of our unfulfilled capacities and their relation to the Transcendent come not from books but from direct experience. For many, such openings come during

prayer or meditation. For some, they arrive through counseling or other activities designed to help us through difficulty. But just as often they appear when we least expect them – at play, at work, or in moments of reverie. But no matter what the moment's trigger was, or its hidden roots, our ordinary way of being in the world suddenly blossoms into the extraordinary.

We might be walking in the woods on a summer day with sunlight streaming through the trees when everything is seen in a new way. Colors seem richer. Trees and bushes stand out with a more vivid presence. Sounds are magnified and we smell fragrances we hadn't noticed before. The woods are suddenly magic and alive. In that instant, we enter a world that is usually unseen. Was it hallucination? Or is this how the world would always look if our senses were more developed?

There are other kinds of experience that call us beyond the familiar. Have you ever sensed a friend's thought before she said it or known who would soon call on the phone? Even if such events seem trivial, they point to powers we tend to neglect. Have you ever pictured a significant turn in your life and been amazed when it actually happened? When such things occur, we are filled with a sense of something uncanny – a higher intelligence, a destiny that wants to be actualized in us.

And there are awakenings that are stranger still. Some involve contact with a distant or deceased loved one – through an urgent whispering in the night, a fleeting vision, a fragrance unique to the loved one, or an immediate and disturbing sense of his or her nearness. Several recent Gallup polls have shown that more people than we think have experiences such as these, as well as glimpses of luminous worlds beyond the range of our physical senses. And there are moments even more compelling when our very identity shifts and we are lifted to a larger, more encompassing sense of our self. We know more than ever

before who we really are and what we are meant to do. We and the world share a common end, a secret source, and a mighty journey.

Sadly, though, these moments pass. A veil drops. We return to our normal awareness. But we cannot entirely forget such awakenings, however brief they may have been. Even as their memory fades, we are haunted by them. Again and again they whisper to us, reminding us that more awaits us. What larger life do they reveal? Is our present existence all we are meant for? What greater destiny do we and the world share?

In the chapters that follow, we will explore such awakenings and ways in which we can follow their lead. For it is the case, we believe, that they begin to reveal a greater life pressing to be born in us. Through practice, what they show us can be nurtured and eventually integrated as a permanent aspect of our being.

But to do this we must appreciate their fundamental significance and the social forces that work against them. We need a philosophy that gives a context for them and guidance for their development. Superstition will not do. Dogma will not help us. We need a vision that will stand the test of time. To understand what these haunting moments point to, we must draw upon our best resources, including science, religion, philosophy, literature, and the arts. We will turn to all of these resources in the chapters that follow.

And there is no better place to start than with science and the mystery of evolution. Experiences such as those we've described shake our world, and suggest a depth to our existence often lost in the everyday business of life. We are led to revisit the perennial questions. Who are we? How did we get here? Where might we be going? The story of our evolving universe, which grows in magnificence every day, gives us an indispensable foundation for addressing such questions. The universe *is* going somewhere, and its

momentum was triggered in the first instant of the Big Bang.

THE STORY OF EVOLUTION

We began
as a mineral. We emerged into plant life,
and into the animal state, and then into being human,
and always we have forgotten our former states,
except in early spring when we slightly recall
being green again.
That's how a young person turns
toward a teacher. That's how a baby leans
toward the breast, without knowing the secret
of its desire, yet turning instinctively.
Humankind is being led along an evolving course,
through this migration of intelligences,
and though we seem to be sleeping,
there is an inner wakefulness
that directs the dream,

and that will eventually startle us back
to the truth of who we are.

RUMI
thirteenth century

Science has enjoyed no greater triumph than the discovery of evolution. In showing that the universe unfolded from a tiny seed and gave rise to life and humankind, it has found a truth that unites the discoveries of many fields, including astronomy, physics, geology, biology, paleontology, anthropology, and psychology. And in making this discovery, science has provided a unifying context for the transcendent abilities described in this

book. The human longing and capacity for a greater life is an emerging part of the evolution story.

That story goes something like this:

Some fifteen billion years ago, from a mysterious something no larger than a single atom, our universe exploded into existence and within a second was millions of miles across. Try to picture it: enough energy to form our entire cosmos racing outward at ever-accelerating speed, blossoming with light, and coalescing to form successive generations of stars that create ever more complex elements. It is an image that stretches our mind to its limits: The energy in that first seed gave rise to this entire universe, now trillions upon trillions of miles across with stars and galaxies too numerous to count. Step by step, for some ten billion years, it set the stage for evolution to take a great leap forward. A new kind of existence would emerge on Earth.

In the waters of our primordial seas, organisms appeared that were different from the complex molecules that had preceded them. They could move through their own volition, reproduce themselves, and contact their surroundings with new sensitivities. Evolution had entered a new stage. Life had begun. Single-celled creatures populated land and sea.

And from these improbable tiny life forms, over the course of four billion years, there came bacteria that filled the atmosphere with oxygen, which made multicelled plants and animals of many types possible. Among these complex organisms were fish, whose gills evolved into the lungs of amphibians that could breathe the Earth's abundant oxygen and begin to move on land. From these first terrestrial creatures came reptiles and dinosaurs, birds and mammals, and the primates that would evolve into *Homo sapiens*.

Though science has not yet revealed all the ways in which this evolution took place, we now know that

increasingly complex life-forms appeared on Earth, with capacities to sense their surroundings, process information of many kinds, manipulate objects in their environment, move with agility, and care for their young in ways that exceeded their ancestors' abilities. These capacities developed until evolution was ready to take another leap.

In Africa there appeared an animal that stood erect, used tools with care, and began to speak. A new kind of species had appeared, with a brain greater than any before it and a capacity for self-transformation that was new on Earth. It created intricate social groups, discovered fire, told stories of its origins, and painted pictures that haunt us still. It looked to the stars and the spirit world. From its very beginnings it began to sense a divinity beyond the reach of its senses.

We can look upon the appearance of our species as a third stage of evolution, analogous to the emergence of matter and life, because in it something new came into being. Self-reflection and inwardly directed change were added to the processes governing the development of earlier life forms. This increasingly self-aware creature often felt others' pain. It began to long for a greater life. And through the fire that grew in its heart, it eventually set foot on the moon, beamed timeless music toward the stars, released the power of the atom, and built the complex human world growing inexorable around us today.

The universe has traveled a mysterious journey from its birth. It went from darkness into light. It became a cosmos of a trillion galaxies in which matter gave rise to living things. And then, just a moment ago on its cosmic scale, one of its creatures started to wonder who it was, where it had come from, and where it might be going.

THE FACT OF EVOLUTION

The epic of our evolving universe, which is often retold by scientists, theologians, and philosophers, is a still-developing story. But no matter how it is described or what theories are proposed about it, we know that evolution is a fact. The universe was born with the Big Bang and over the course of many billion years gave rise to matter, life, and humankind. Though we do not know all the details of this stupendous unfoldment, we know that it happened. That the universe evolves has been proved according to the most rigorous standards.

Scientists, for example, have found exciting fossil remains from thousands of plant and animal species ranging in size from microscopic organisms to *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Paleontologists have greatly improved their estimation of fossil ages using carbon dating and other methods so that they can determine with increasing precision when life began and for how long particular species flourished; and in doing this, they have mapped the progression of species from the simplest to the most complex. Geneticists have refined their understanding of the genetic mutations and recombinations that cause variations within plant and animal populations and give rise to new species, while geologists have learned how climatic and geological changes affect the evolution of life.

And astrophysicists have discovered that the cosmos itself is evolving, leaving records in the sky of its marvelous past, while astronomers gradually map its contours and reveal to our increased astonishment how it gives birth to new galaxies, stars, and planets as well as distant objects that remain mysterious to us.

Meanwhile, paleontologists and anthropologists are learning more and more about humankind’s emergence from our primate predecessors. They have found, for example, that by one hundred thousand years ago our species had diverged from its immediate relatives with a brain as large, a hand as dexterous, and a physique as agile

as ours today. Like the evolution of the cosmos as a whole and animal species on this planet, the development of our human ancestors is becoming increasingly evident, and all the more mysterious for it.

Viewed as a whole, these discoveries form an increasingly awesome panorama and a wondrously detailed view of life's advance. According to Ernst Mayr, the eminent historian of biological thought, evolution 'has been confirmed so completely that modern biologists consider [it] simply as a fact.'

HOW THE UNIVERSE IS EVOLVING

But in spite of the ever-growing evidence that evolution is real, some people still deny its existence. One cause of such misunderstanding is a failure to distinguish evolution-as-fact from theories of how and why it is happening. We know that the cosmos, animal species, and humankind are evolving, but we are still learning about the ways in which evolution works.

It is important, for example, to remember that Charles Darwin's discovery that living creatures have evolved from a common ancestor must be distinguished from his theories of how that happened. Darwin (and his fellow naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace) proposed that among plants and animals, those individuals best adapted to their environments generally survive in greater numbers and have more offspring than organisms that are less well adapted. By increasing the relative number of their more successful genes among members of their species, organisms improve the survivability of their species. Darwin believed that all species emerged through this process, which he called 'natural selection.'

However, the more scientists have learned about the history of living things, the more they have had to refine

and broaden their theories to account for evolution's complexities. Contrasting evolutionary theory at each of the three Darwin centennials (1909, the hundredth anniversary of Darwin's birth; 1959, the hundredth year after publication of his landmark book *The Origin of Species*; and 1982, the hundredth anniversary of Darwin's death), Stephen Jay Gould wrote:

> … 1909 marked the acme of confusion about how evolution happened in the midst of complete confidence that it had occurred.
>
> [But] by 1959, confusion had ceded to the opposite undesired state of complacency. Strict Darwinism had triumphed … Nearly all evolutionary biologists had concluded that natural selection, after all, provided the creative mechanism of evolutionary change. At age 150, Darwin had triumphed. Yet, in the flush of victory, his latter-day disciples devised a version of his theory far narrower than anything Darwin himself would have allowed.
>
> [Some] experts even declared that the immense complexity of evolution had yielded to final resolution … [But] now [in 1982], Darwinian theory is in a vibrantly healthy state. Confidence in the basic mechanism of natural selection provides a theoretical underpinning and point of basic agreement that carries us beyond the pessimistic anarchy of 1909. But the constraints of an overzealous strict version, so popular in 1959, are loosening. Exciting discoveries in molecular biology and in the study of embryological development have hinted at modes of change different from the cumulative, gradual alteration emphasized by strict Darwinians.

Gould himself contributed to this break with strict Darwinism. With Niles Eldredge, he developed a scheme of

evolutionary development called the model of punctuated equilibria, which modifies Darwin's emphasis on the gradual change of living species. Darwin believed that new species developed gradually over enormous periods of time, but his view was at odds with the fossil record, which has many gaps between species. To account for this discrepancy, Eldredge and Gould (as well as other biologists) have proposed that such gaps remain in the record because new species develop rapidly, usually at the edges of their ancestral populations, and for that reason leave relatively few traces of their transitional forms. If they do not develop in this manner, they will be reabsorbed into the species from which they arise. 'Lineages,' Gould wrote, 'change little during most of their history, but events of rapid speciation occasionally punctuate this tranquility.'

Another change in evolutionary theory is underway among scientists studying self-organization, the tendency observed among both inorganic and living forms to create orderly, self-perpetuating patterns. Until recently, most evolutionary theorists, following Darwin, believed that natural selection worked with *random* changes in living things to produce species best adapted to survive in a given environment. But reflecting the newer view, biological theorist Stuart Kaufman wrote:

> We have all known that simple physical systems exhibit spontaneous order: An oil droplet in water forms a sphere; snowflakes exhibit their six-fold symmetry. What is new is that the range of spontaneous order is enormously greater than we have supposed. Profound order is being discovered in large, complex, and apparently random systems. I believe that this emergent order underlies not only the origin of life itself, but much of the order seen in organisms today. So, too, do many of my colleagues, who are starting to find overlapping

> evidence of such emergent order in different kinds of complex systems.
>
> Most biologists, inheritors of the Darwinian tradition, suppose that the order of ontogeny (the development of organisms from fertilized egg to adult) is due to the grinding away of a molecular Rube Goldberg machine, slapped together piece by piece by evolution. I present a countering thesis: Most of the beautiful order seen in ontogeny is spontaneous, a natural expression of the stunning self-organization that abounds in very complex regulatory networks. We appear to have been profoundly wrong. Order, vast and generative, arises naturally.
>
> [If] this idea is true, then we must rethink evolutionary theory, for the sources of order in the biosphere will now include both natural selection *and* self-organization.

To repeat, evolutionary scientists realize that evolution has features that remain mysterious to us. We emphasize this because our basic proposals about human transformation do not stand or fall with the changes of evolutionary theory that will come with new scientific discoveries. Our acceptance of evolution as a reality must not be limited by the fact that evolutionary theory is incomplete.

As you will see in the pages that follow, knowledge of how evolution has brought us to where we are and continues to operate in human affairs can help us create practical ways to realize our greater potentials. If we deny that it is a fact or dismiss it as irrelevant to our further development, we forfeit a wondrous inheritance.

THE MEANDERING COURSE OF EVOLUTION

In ancient Turkey there was a river called the Meander that had more twists and turns than a corkscrew. That legendary body of water gave us a verb we still use today to describe looping and languorous journeys such as those we see in the evolution of species and the long, tortuous paths of human change.

But though it meanders, evolution also progresses. And more than that, we believe, it is possibly en route to a stupendous transition. In this book, we present evidence that points toward such an event, evidence that another evolutionary step is tentatively beginning in the human race, both spontaneously and through deliberate practice.

The meandering course of evolution from the Big Bang to living species to the appearance of humankind has created the inorganic, biological, and human worlds, which can be seen to comprise three evolutionary stages or domains. In this progression, evolution itself has evolved, first when matter gave rise to life, and second, when life produced *Homo sapiens*.

The evolutionary theorists Theodosius Dobzhansky and Francisco Ayala have called these two watershed events instances of ‘evolutionary transcendence’ because in each of them there arose a new order of existence. ‘Inorganic evolution went beyond the bounds of [its] previous physical and chemical patternings when it gave rise to life,’ Ayala wrote. ‘In the same sense, biological evolution transcended itself when it gave rise to man.’

The appearance of life and the emergence of humankind marked the beginnings of new evolutionary eras. They were made possible, though, by countless changes that preceded them. For example, the creation of new elements in exploding stars and the subsequent formation of complex molecules on Earth made living cells possible, and the evolution of land-roving vertebrates from fishlike ancestors led to the development of primates, which, in turn, evolved into *Homo sapiens*.

A principal architect of evolutionary theory, G. Ledyard Stebbins, described many small and large steps of organic evolution, distinguishing minor from major advances of living things. There have been about six hundred forty thousand of the former, he estimated, and from twenty to one hundred of the latter during the hundreds of millions of years of plant and animal development. Though such estimates only approximate the actual number of advances that have occurred among living species, they reflect the immense complexity of evolutionary progress.

We cite Stebbins here to draw an analogy at the heart of this book. We believe humankind is also evolving by minor and major steps toward another epochal change. To our way of thinking, the evidence suggests that a new evolutionary domain is tentatively forming in the human race. This emerging domain, like the emergence of life from inorganic matter and humankind from animal species, has been made possible by countless advances large and small, from the birth of spiritual awareness among our ancient ancestors to recent scientific discoveries about our still mostly untapped capacities for extraordinary life.

But given human ignorance, free will, and perversity, this advance is not guaranteed. As we have said, evolution meanders – and has sometimes nearly come to a stop. In the first microseconds of its birth, for example, after a first cosmic collision of matter with antimatter, the universe was left with a relatively small surplus of material particles – but without that surplus the universe would have been nothing more than pure energy. There would have been no elements, no stars, no planets, and no place for life as we know it to evolve. This was among the first of many events that can be seen in retrospect as hazardous close calls in our cosmic adventure.

The Earth’s collision with a meteor sixty-five million years ago was another close call. It enabled our mammalian ancestors to flourish by causing the dinosaurs to vanish,

but if it had been more severe, no mammals – nor any *Homo sapiens* – could have developed on our planet. And in the human sphere, entire cultures have disappeared, while others have endured for long ages without significant progress. At all its levels, the evolving universe has been filled with both narrow escapes and long periods of time that give no evidence of lasting advance.

The same principle holds for the evolutionary possibilities we are exploring here. Ecological disaster, cataclysmic war, unforeseeable diseases, extraordinary social upheavals, or other catastrophes could so diminish life on Earth that few people or institutions would have the will or resources to cultivate the extraordinary capacities at the heart of the evolutionary advance we foresee. Such events could destroy the conditions for any kind of widespread human progress, let alone a third evolutionary transcendence.

In short, *neither animal nor further human evolution is automatically progressive*. Progress occurs when there is change toward a *better* condition, however that improvement is defined, whereas biological and human evolution is sometimes regressive and often leads to the extinction of entire species and cultures. Biologists such as George Gaylord Simpson and Francisco Ayala have proposed criteria by which animals can be judged to have progressed, among them an increase of adaptive behaviors, development of more efficient sensory organs, increase of energy level as in the warm-bloodedness of birds and mammals, growth of information-processing skills, improved care for the young, expansion into new environments, and progress in individualization.

Similarly, there are many criteria by which to judge individual human development, whether physical, emotional, moral, cognitive, or spiritual, as well as standards by which to assess the progress of human cultures, such as care for the young and the weak,

promotion of individual rights and liberties, social justice, prosperity, artistic expression, stewardship of animal life and the environment, and religious freedom. By these or any other criteria, many individuals and cultures will be judged *not* to have developed beyond their predecessors, and some have even clearly regressed.

And the same principle holds for the development of extraordinary human attributes. Long experience in the sacred traditions has shown that ecstasies, illuminations, and supernormal powers provide no guarantee of lasting goodness and growth, and many contemporary studies have shown that meditation, psychotherapy, and other ways of growth do not automatically transform those who undertake them. Whenever we propose that progress *might* or *could* occur, we do not mean that it necessarily *will*. Further human advance depends on us, even if there is reason to believe the scales are tipped in favor of it.

A HIDDEN TELEOLOGY

As we have noted, evolution has clearly demonstrated many kinds of progress. Observing this obvious fact of our universe, many scientists, philosophers, and theologians have asked if evolution has a telos, a fundamental aim or drive to manifest the increasing complexity evident in the development of elements and stars, the creatures of Earth, and the emergence of consciousness in our species. As we will see, many such thinkers have concluded that this is the case.

We share their view. In spite of the randomness evident in the world around us, which can be seen as a kind of dice rolling, we think the dice are loaded. With all its meanders and close calls, our evolving universe has given rise to ever-greater complexities in the material world and the growing capacities of humankind. To see this can give hope

in times of doubt, optimism in the midst of negativity, and courage to tap our deepest potentials.

At the core of this book is our belief that the universe has a telos, a fundamental tendency to manifest its latent divinity. Though evolution suffers many close calls and wanders at every level, it has given rise for billions of years to greater and greater capacities among the Earth's living things. To say that evolution appears to meander is not to say that it has no direction. Indeed, many attributes of living things exhibit clear lines of progress *across* evolutionary domains.

For example, a single-celled organism's dim perception of the outside world, the improved human vision produced by sensory training, and the extraordinary visual acuity reported by certain athletes and mystics exhibit an apparent continuity. This development of perceptual ability has unfolded for some four billion years, though improved sensory capacities among our animal ancestors were produced by natural selection and their further development in us requires our uniquely human consciousness and intention, deliberate training, and the ego-transcending gifts, or graces, of transformative practice.

In other words, the ability to perceive environmental stimuli continues to develop even though it is shaped in different ways at different stages of evolution. And the same principle is evident among other capacities. Bodily awareness, movement, information processing, and other abilities that are shaped by natural selection during animal evolution can be amplified by human discipline and at times, it seems, by higher powers.

In Part Two, we develop the idea that all of our human attributes, each of which has evolved from those of our animal ancestors, are capable of further development. Taken as a whole, such advances suggest that evolution is influenced by purposes or agencies that to some extent

transcend and subsume the mechanisms presently recognized by mainstream science. The multibillion-year development of such capacities suggests that nature indeed has a telos, a tendency to go beyond itself, a drive or attraction toward greater ends.

If this universal tendency does indeed exist, it must have been operating from the Big Bang through the development of the inorganic world to the advent of life and human consciousness. And it must be with us still. Humans have long sensed that something transcendent calls us on, often framing their intuition in myth, poetry or philosophic speculation. In the next chapter, we will see that this intuition has developed since the Stone Age.

2

A HISTORY OF HUMAN AWAKENING

EVOLUTION ENTERED A new domain with the appearance of humankind. Intelligence, communication skills, and other attributes of animal life advanced dramatically as our species formed newly creative social groups, harnessed fire, developed new tools, learned to speak, and tried to make greater sense of the world around them. As their capacities developed, our ancestors awoke to the Transcendent and began to advance toward the truth of their higher nature. This evolution began in the Stone Age and accelerated during the civilized era, often meandering, sometimes regressing, but preparing us nevertheless for still another evolutionary leap.

In this chapter, we will briefly review some of the great turning points that constitute this general advance. In this we will not try to be all-inclusive, for such an attempt would take us beyond our competence and the scope of this book. We are not trying to be definitive here in our judgments about the relative importance of history's great cultural flowerings. Our intent is simply to suggest the continuity of humankind's growth in consciousness, its irrepressible drive to exceed its apparent limitations, and its ever-astonishing capacity for further development. We have had extraordinary predecessors. Countless pathfinders have opened frontier after frontier for us to explore. By reviewing the advances they have made, we