

Try Not To Think of Elephants

A bromide is a sedative, often taken in a glass of water. The name comes from the fact that sodium and potassium bromides were used as early sedatives. The concept of bromide has recently gained a literally cosmic significance with the assemblage of data from the new Universal Mapping Project full-spectrum satellite observatories.

Though the UMP survey is only three-quarters complete, evidence is compelling that the universe is not saddle-shaped, as Einstein thought, nor spherical as many before him believed. It is, instead, shaped like a slightly tapering cylinder. The proportions are startlingly similar to those of a common water glass.

Worse, the distribution of galaxies within the universe is similar to that of bubbles within a glass into which a bromide has been dropped and then stirred. Much that was puzzling about the distribution of matter within the universe is now rendered comprehensible by this insight. Moreover, cosmologists attempting to peer beyond the limits of the universe by studying infinitesimally small distortions in its boundary tell us that they believe they have begun to establish the dark presence of an enormous hand, clutching the glass.

The price of this discovery is, of course, a potential lessening of our self-esteem. Is that all we are? negligible specks within a bromide contained within some vastly greater universe? Is that all our lives mean? But cosmologists tell us not to despair! Ours could be a noble destiny. Perhaps the hand holding the glass containing our universe belongs to a

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Br

Bromine

79.904

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But cosmologists tell us not to despair! Ours could be a noble destiny. Perhaps the hand holding the glass containing our universe belongs to a great philosopher or theologian who, having finally discerned some key insight into the nature of God or Existence, now settles him-or herself down to a night's well-deserved sleep. Perhaps it belongs to a great peace-

leader who has fallen ill upon the verge of putting an end to some all-encompassing war, and who needs but a night's rest to restore the energy needed for his climactic deed. We could be playing a key part in something great beyond our imagining.

It's best to focus on this possibility.

It's not easy, of course. There's an old joke about a man who was offered a thousand dollars if he could keep from thinking about elephants for half an hour. Two minutes later, he cried out excitedly, "I haven't thought of elephants yet!" It's impossible to look upon those computer-generated photographs of our bromidic universe and not think how much we look like a glass of Alka-

Seltzer. Alka Seltzer, of course, is most commonly used as a cure for hangovers.

There's the unbearable part! That all our hopes and fears, aspirations and despairs, good works and bad, might be nothing but the most minor workings of a universe whose ultimate purpose is to ease the deserved sufferings of some drunken lout! There he sits, his trembling hand everywhere about us, his dim thoughts focused only on his own throbbing pain, while drops of sweat larger than supergroups of galaxies bead up on his apelike brow, rank with self-inflicted poisons. His clothes? none of the best, you may be sure? are stained, his shoelaces are untied, and perhaps his trousers are unzipped. A string of drool

that could swallow up every star we can see in the night sky connects the lips of his slack-jawed mouth. And that's it? That's all? That's the purpose of our lives?

But try not to think about it.

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