

PAUL KOESTER

Fragile earth lies in our hands

In our world of cars, concrete and steel, it's not often that we take time to meditate on the beauty of this planet, and how amazing it is that a complex, dynamic universe can offer such stability to its inhabitants.



As a cell without vital elements or a being without functional cellular systems will perish, our planet will perish without healthy ecosystems.

Every morning when we get up the sun is there. Droughts and floods always end, and the cold seasons are always replaced by warmth so we can grow food. Until now our climates have been so predictable that we could be confident there would always be enough sunlight, rainfall and warm weather to grow the crops necessary for our survival. We take these things for granted in a modern world.

We feel secure and stable because our lifetimes are just flashes compared to Earth's lifetime. Even the age of the earth seems insignificant when compared to the 18-billion-year age of the universe from which our galaxy, the Milky Way, was formed.

Fossil records indicate the human species has been around for 5 million years. Sixty-five million years ago the dinosaurs became extinct, and the only life forms that existed on earth until 600 million years ago were microscopic, unicellular bacteria. These survivalists have been on this planet for 3.5 billion years, most of the earth's history. We may be bigger, but we just got here. Feel insignificant already? Read on.

What amazes me most is the sheer vastness of the universe, and the amount of motion we are in. We live in a galaxy containing billions of stars. Ten percent of these stars have the potential to support solar systems like ours. We now know that there are more than a million galaxies like ours out there, hmmm...

Each of these galaxies is huge; the average galaxy would take 85,000 years to cross at the speed of light. Clusters of these galaxies are moving

away from each other, and our universe is expanding. Within our moving galaxy, the sun, along with the planets orbiting it, are orbiting the center of the galaxy at a speed of around a half million miles per hour.

Even at this awesome speed it still takes our solar system 200 million years to complete one trip around the center, which many astronomers believe to be a black hole of incredible mass.

Somehow we don't fall off or get dizzy while our sun orbits the galactic center. The earth hangs in there, orbiting the sun at 67,000 miles per hour while spinning at 1,000 miles per hour at the center. The 5,900-mile thick, gaseous atmosphere crucial to our survival even stays intact with all this multidirectional motion. A strange, invisible force called gravity keeps everything from flying apart.

Our 7,900-mile-thick earth is just a speck. Were the sun hollow, 1.5 million earths could fit inside it. Sixty miles below the crust of the earth is a partially melted layer of various elements. The earth is made up of many plates of crust which essentially float on this fluidlike medium. These plates are always moving, being forced under adjacent plates or mashed against each other, causing earthquakes and volcanoes. From the ocean ridges, fresh lava is ejected, building up fresh

crust while it is being destroyed at other areas where these plates converge. It's almost as if the earth is breathing.

This world of cyclical motion supports many forms of life; where there is water, there is life. All life, except unicellular organisms such as bacteria, is made up of cells — individualized, independent beings. Inside these cells, enzymatic reactions as rapid as 600,000 times per second perform their genetically programmed functions. What's really amazing is that of the 3 million or so species — from ants to zebras — sharing this planet, all contain their genetic codes in the form of DNA.

Just as a cell without vital elements or a being without functional cellular systems will perish, our planet will perish without healthy ecosystems. We can't protect future generations by controlling the motions of the solar system or galaxy, but we can control how we treat the fragile, interconnected world we live in. However, first we must be motivated by an appreciation of our mother who has not only provided the resources for our survival, but amazing beauty as well.

Long live Mother Earth!

Koester is a senior soil science major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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There are some changes this year in the procedure for enrollment that will be affecting International Students. Immigration laws state that non-resident students must be financially responsible to reside in this country. The UNL policy requires mandatory insurance for International Students. These students are required to show proof of adequate private coverage or be billed automatically. Private policies must be approved and waivers signed by 1/19/94 to avoid being billed on your tuition statement for the Student Insurance.

Coverage dates for International Students Spring/Summer Sessions are 1/10/94 - 8/11/94. No enrollment card needs to be filled out.

THE PREMIUM OF \$211.00 WILL BE BILLED ON YOUR SPRING TUITION STATEMENT.

Enrollment is open for US Resident students and ALL dependents until 2/11/94. If you have not enrolled in the Student Insurance program by then, you must wait until Summer Sessions begin. Applications for enrollment of US Residents and all dependents are available at University Health Center or by mail. Payments may be made by check, money order, Visa or Master Card. No cash payments please.

THE STUDENT IS REQUIRED TO COME TO UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER WHENEVER POSSIBLE! Sorry, we can only treat students, no dependents please!

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