

We are all a single individual

We think of ourselves as individuals, as a person, and independent life form. But if you look at it differently we are a colony of cells composed of billions of individuals, many of which are very different. In fact some members of the colony don't even share our DNA. Part of the colony of cells are the bacteria in our intestines that help us digest food, a nonhuman life form that lives inside us, and that we require to survive.

However to describe ourselves as a colony of cells doesn't seem accurate. Just as a car is a collection of parts, it's really a car. As a package it has properties that can't be fully appreciated as individual pieces.

Now let's move the point of view the other way. Are we really individuals or are we just part of a greater life form? Part of a life form that includes not only all of humanity, but all life on this planet acting as a single organism that is about a billion years old? That we are like cells of a greater organism? Actually this point of view is very accurate and offers a unique perspective of what we really are.

It's a little harder to imagine being like a cell in a single billion year old life form because you are here reading this as an individual person contemplating it in your own mind. You feel a sense of personal identity, and the concept that you are just a part of a greater whole feels very foreign. But are you really an individual?

Society is an organism that we are all part of.

For example - although you are experiencing these words you are now reading as your thoughts, they are not really your thoughts. They are my thoughts going through your mind. And, they aren't really my thoughts either. I'm just piecing ideas together from other peoples thoughts in a slightly new way. It is much like building a computer. I'm just really assembling parts that other people have built. The words I use to think with are other people's words. Words don't come from us, they come from society. Society is a greater being that we are part of. And everything that we think and do in our daily lives is controlled by the greater social structure.

But this structure isn't limited to just humans. We are dependent on the community of life forms on this planet. Plants give us the oxygen we breathe and the food we eat. We are all part of a greater community of life forms that all evolved together and probably from a single source.

It is likely true, or at least approximately true, that some billion years ago a single bacteria started reproducing and that all life on Earth is descendant from that single individual. Even though it split into multiple individuals, one could look at it as a single life form existing in more than one location. Those individuals mutated and formed early life that evolved into everything that is alive today.

If we look at this from another point of view all life on Earth is still that one individual continuing to evolve and adapt to survive. Rather than seeing Earth filled with a lot of different life forms, we are just one big individual, a single life form that continues to evolve. I also contend that these views are not mutually exclusive. That the views that we are all a single individual, that we are individual plants and animals, and that we are a colony of cells, all three are true. They are just different points of view. Just like a rock is a collection of atoms, and a gravel pile is a collection of rocks.

What is important about this view is that it gives us a more comprehensive history and a bigger picture of who we are, how we evolved, and where evolution is taking us. By understanding what we are we can then contemplate how our existence fits in with the evolution of the universe. It might give us some insight into how our evolution is part of the universes evolution and where we fit into the big picture. How it is that by understanding ourselves that we are the universe understanding itself through us.

