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Recent Observations - A Lecture

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Recent Observations — A Lecture

by Richard N. Bentley

It is better to be wrong
Than to be vague.
        What counts is coherence

From Newton and Galileo,
Superstring theory proposes
        A new answer.

What are the smallest
Indivisible constituents of matter?

I'm glad you asked. Why,
Electrons and quarks, of course,
        Particles with no size or structure.

Particles which combine to produce
        protons
                neutrons
                        atoms
                                molecules
All we've ever encountered in time or space.

Superstring theory tells
A different story. Every particle
        Contains a tiny filament of energy

Like a string. Just as a violin string
Can vibrate to produce sounds,
        Our strings vibrate to produce
                quarks, neutrinos, gravitons
                        and other particles.

Are you following me so far?
Good, this is fun.

String theory, then, explains
The beginnings of the universe.
        Can it be tested as a theory of everything?

Only if we concede that
A unified theory
        Need not have any physical meaning.

For the world of stars and planets
For the world of atoms and electrons
        We might ask,

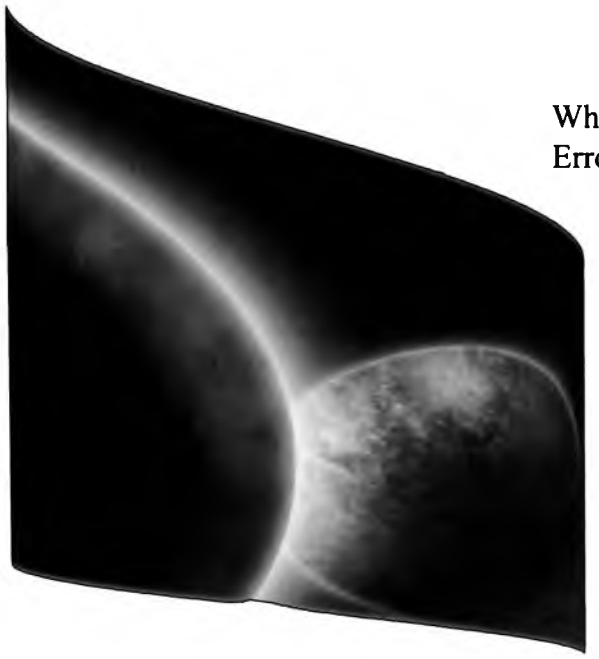
"If the results of the vibrating
Strings cannot be observed in any
        Conceivable experiment

Do they have a physical reality?"
Might you call them nonexistent even?
        Walk through a tunnel

Of time, and emerge in your own
Past, but you'll have to walk
        Longer than the age of the

Universe. Ah, I see you're ready
        To leave.
                Good-bye.

What counts is coherence
Error is acceptable.



Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall