Contents

CHAPTER 1

Matter and Energy. The Interplay of Elementary Particles and Elementary Forces

1.1 An Attempt to Describe the Natural World Using the Smallest Number of Elementary Phenomena 1

1.2 General Foundations of the Physical Sciences 4

1.2.1 Some principles 4

1.2.2 Some properties of the elementary phenomena are governed by very exact and strong laws of conservation. 4

1.2.3 Prohibitions 5

1.3 Elementary Forces and Particles 5

1.3.1 Elementary forces 5

1.3.2 Elementary particles 7

1.4 Elementary Particles 8

1.4.1 "Bricks" and "mortar" 8

1.4.2 Creation of the elementary particles 9

1.4.3 "Life" and "death" of elementary particles. 11

1.5 The Existence of Atomic Nuclei Is Due to the Forces of Attraction Between Their Nucleons 12

1.5.1 The weak force limits the number of stable hadrons. 12

1.5.2 Strong force binds the nucleons together 13

1.5.3 Binding energy of a nucleon 14

1.6 Matter and Free Energy – The Intimate Connection 15

1.7 What Are the Conclusions for the Future Development of Mankind?. . . 17

CHAPTER 2

The Universe: How Is It Observed Here and Now? Its Past and Possible Future

2.1 What Is the Universe? 19

2.1.1 A definition of the Universe 19

2.1.2 Beginning of the Universe 19

2.2 Expansion of the Universe 21
2.2.1 The red shift 21
2.2.2 The five eras of the Universe 21
2.3 What Is Known About the Universe Today? 21
2.3.1 The average composition of the Universe 21
2.3.2 Chemical composition of cosmic matter 24
2.3.3 Composition of photons 25
2.4 The Universe as a Whole 26
2.5 The Future of the Universe 28
2.6 What Conclusions Can Be Drawn for the Future Development of Mankind? 29

CHAPTER 3

The Origin and Nuclear Evolution of Matter

3.1 The Creation of the Elementary Particles in the Very Early Universe . . . 30
3.1.1 Unknown phase: Era of superunified force (Planckian Era or Very Hot Era) 30
3.1.2 Era of grand unified force (Hot Era) 31
3.1.3 Era of unified force (Lukewarm Era) 31
3.1.4 Cold Era and Very Cold Era 32
3.2 Evolution of the Elementary Particles. A Very Rapid Development in the First Seconds of the Universe 33
3.2.1 Beginning of the Cold Era: Evolution in the "Hadron Epoch" . . . 33
3.2.2 Production of hydrogen, deuterium, and helium: The Universe a few seconds old; Lepton Epoch 33
3.2.3 The Photon Epoch, from the first minute to the first million years. 36
3.3 The Beginning of the Present Very Cold Era: The "Stars Era". The Evolution of Galaxies, Stars, and Life 37
3.3.1 The largest of the cosmic structures: The development of galaxies . 37
3.3.2 The evolution of stars; the nuclear and gravitational reactors . . . 37
3.3.3 The protostar evolves from diffuse matter 39
3.3.4 The longest living stars, those of the Main Sequence 42
3.3.5 Red Giants: The cold stars with the hot interiors 43
3.3.6 Evolution towards hot dense stars 44
3.3.7 Explosion of a supernova: The most spectacular event in a galaxy. 45
3.3.8 Extremely dense stars: Neutron stars (pulsars) and black holes . . . 45
3.4 The Burning of Hydrogen – Nucleosynthesis in the Stars 46
3.4.1 Deuterium: The fuel of protostars 46
3.4.2 The slow burning of hydrogen 47
3.4.3 The burning of hydrogen in a catalytic cycle assisted by carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen 49
3.5 Helium also Burns, but under More Extreme Conditions 49
3.5.1 Production of carbon from the burning of helium 49
3.5.2 A very vital step: The production of oxygen 50

3.6 Carbon, Oxygen, and Other Elements of Medium Mass Burn in a Flash . 50
3.6.1 Energy production and energy required for nucleosynthesis. 50
3.6.2 Iron, the nuclear ash 50
3.7 The Systhesis of Heavy Elements: The Need for an External Energy Source 51
3.7.1 How can uranium be synthesised?. 51
3.7.2 The "s-process", the slow-process of neutron capture 52
3.7.3 The "r-process", the rapid-process of neutron capture. 53
3.8 Cosmic Rays – A Strange Form of Matter. 55
3.9 What Are the Conclusions for the Future of Mankind? 56

CHAPTER 4

Chemical Evolution and the Evolution of Life: The Cosmic Phenomena

4.1 Chemical Evolution: Another Phase in the Evolution of Matter 58
4.1.1 Special case of the electromagnetic force: The chemical force. . . . 58
4.1.2 The actors in the chemical play 58
4.2 Chemical Synthesis Occurs in Cosmic Space. 62
4.2.1 Interstellar gas contains very many, often very complex compounds 62
4.2.2 Some of the interstellar molecules exist in solid form 63
4.2.3 Comets: Rare and strange, but formidable, chemical reactors. . . . 65
4.2.4 Meteorites often consist of very "sophisticated" chemical compounds 66
4.2.5 "Organic molecules" on the Moon and planets 67
4.3 The Origin of the Planets 70
4.3.1 Have the planets been formed "by chance"? 70
4.3.2 The protoplanet, the first stage of evolution 71
4.3.3 The chemical evolution of the Earth: A complex and dramatic development. 72
4.3.4 All stable elements present in the Universe exist on Earth. 75
4.3.5 The history of the Earth has been influenced by the movement of the continents 77
4.3.6 The first phases of chemical evolution were driven by different energy sources and were influenced by a number of factors. 78
4.4 Synthesis of Complex Molecules on the Primitive Earth 82
4.4.1 The primitive atmosphere includes mostly molecules containing hydrogen. 82
4.4.2 The amino acids; their ease of synthesis 83
4.4.3 How were the large molecules, the polymers, produced? 84
4.5 What Is Life? The Need for a General Definition. 85
4.5.1 Could life have originated spontaneously? 85
4.5.2 The physical aspect of life 86
4.5.3 What kind of elementary forces can play the role of energy carriers for living systems? 88
4.5.4 What kind of elementary particles can play the role of carriers of life? 88

4.6 The Chemical Elements, Particularly the Light Elements, Are the Carriers of Life 89
4.6.1 Why are the light elements best fitted for this role? 89
4.6.2 Why is hydrogen oxide – water – the unique medium for living organisms? 91
4.6.3 The source of free energy for life: The stars of the Main Sequence. 92
4.6.4 The chemical composition of the living organism is similar to the chemical composition of the Universe. 94
4.6.5 Life is only possible in a Universe having the characteristics of our type of Universe. 96
4.7 What Can We Hope to Know About the Spontaneous Formation of Terrestrial Life? 97
4.7.1 The problem: The uniqueness of life in our present state of knowledge 97
4.7.2 The protobionts: The first living structures 98
4.7.3 The evolution of the living being occurred at the switch-over point from one energy source to the next 98
4.8 Evolution of Living Beings 101
4.8.1 Genetic evolution 101
4.8.2 The evolution of Man 102
4.8.3 The evolution of the brain 103
4.9 What Are the Conclusions for the Future of Mankind? 104

CHAPTER 5

The Eternal Cycle of Matter on the Earth

5.1 Matter on This Planet Is Almost Indestructible 105
5.1.1 How stable is terrestrial matter? 105
5.1.2 Terrestrial matter is isolated by the gravitational field; the amount of matter is constant 106
5.1.3 Division of the Earth into five "spheres" 106
5.2 The Gaseous Sphere Acts in the Exchange Between the Other Spheres . . 108
5.2.1 The main components of the atmosphere 108
5.2.2 The most active component, oxygen, a product of the biosphere . . 110
5.2.3 Ozone: Modified oxygen which acts as a shield for the biosphere . 112
5.2.4 The carbon cycle, a chain directly related to the flow of energy in the biosphere and technosphere 113
5.2.5 The "inert" nitrogen cycle, which controls the activity of the biosphere 116
5.2.6 The micro-components of the atmosphere, the troublesome "details" 117
5.2.7 Dust particles, a troublesome constituent of the atmosphere 119
5.3 The Hydrosphere – A Crucial Factor in the Existence of the Biosphere. . 120
5.3.1 The cycling of water, the largest terrestrial material cycle 120
5.3.2 Quality of water, quality of life 122

5.3.3 Man's demand for water is gigantic 123
5.3.4 Drinking water, where purity counts 124
5.3.5 The erosion of the planetary surface 125
5.4 The Solid Earth, the Litosphere 125
5.4.1 The main components of the Earth's crust 125
5.4.2 The Earth's crust, the main source of materials for our civilisation 126
5.4.3 Metals "prepared" by Nature, the most widely used. 128
5.5 Ordered Matter and Entropy 130
5.5.1 Concentration means increase of order and decrease of entropy . . 130
5.5.2 Impact of substances in very small amounts: Poisons 131
5.5.3 Material dissipation and waste formation increases entropy. 132
5.6 What Are the Conclusions for Mankind's Future Development? 133

CHAPTER 6

The Flow of Energy on the Earth

6.1 The Source of Free Energy on the Earth 135
6.1.1 The quality of energy: The ordered and disordered forms. 135
6.1.2 The elementary forms of energy 136
6.1.3 How large is flux of energy? 137
6.2 The Energy Sources on the Earth 139
6.2.1. Solar energy – The most important source 139
6.2.2 Spectrum and albedo of solar light 140
6.3 Solar Energy and Climate 142
6.3.1 The solar energy flux is not constant 142
6.3.2 Solar energy is transformed into numerous forms and types of energy 145
6.3.3 The past and future of the terrestrial climate 147
6.3.4 The local climate depends on continental drift 148
6.4 Non-solar Terrestrial Energy Sources 150
6.4.1 Other non-solar flows of energy play a small but not insignificant role 150
6.4.2 The importance of the amount of stored energy 151
6.5 How Much Energy Does Man Need? 152
6.5.1 Does man need energy at all? 152
6.5.2 The sources of energy are changeable 154
6.6 The Indirect Use of Solar Energy 156
6.6.1 The biosphere as Man's energy source for technology 156
6.6.2 Transformation of solar into kinetic energy: Wind. 157
6.6.3 Transformed solar energy: The kinetic energy of falling water . . . 158
6.6.4 The "insignificant" form of solar energy: The heat of the oceans . 159
6.6.5 The best forms of stored solar energy: Oil and coal 159
6.7 The Direct Technological Use of Solar Energy 163
6.7.1 The simplest way: Space heating. 163
6.7.2 Solar energy converted into electricity on the Earth's surface 164
6.7.3 The extraterrestrial conversion of solar into electrical energy 166

6.8 Technological Use of Non-solar (Nuclear) Energy 167
6.8.1 The heaviest elements: The gift of the supernova 167
6.8.2 Geothermal energy results from the nuclear decay of radionuclides 168
6.8.3 The fission of the heavy nuclides is one of the most abundant terrestrial energy sources 169
6.8.4 Fusion: The second coming of nuclear energy 174
6.9 Are There Other Sources of Energy? 177
6.10 Energy Production as a Source of Dangerous Waste and Environmental Problems 179
6.10.1 Energy production and nonradioactive waste materials 179
6.10.2 Radioactive waste from nuclear energy 181
6.10.3 Are fission reactors really dangerous? 182
6.10.4 Radioactive waste and its management 183
6.10.5 Fusion: The controlled thermonuclear reactor – Is this the "clean" solution? 185
6.10.6 Thermal waste, the local and global problem 186
6.10.7 Surface waste in the production of energy 186
6.11 The Economics of Energy Production 188
6.11.1 The energy cost of energy 188
6.11.2 What is the price of energy? 189
6.12 What Are the Conclusions for the Future Development of Mankind? . . 190

CHAPTER 7

The Biosphere: The Coupling of Matter and the Flow of Free Energy

7.1 The Biosphere: The Coupling of Matter and the Flow of Free Energy . . 192
7.2 The Terrestrial Biosphere: Mass and Productivity 193
7.2.1 The greatest component of the biosphere is, in terms of mass, in the form of trees 193
7.2.2 The biosphere's productivity does not match its pattern of distribution 196
7.2.3 The surprisingly simple chemical composition of the biosphere 198
7.3 The Magnitude of the Flow of Energy in the Biomass 199
7.3.1 The direct net flux of energy in the biosphere is some 92 TW 199
7.3.2 The total solar energy flux consumed by the biosphere 200
7.3.3 The biosphere in the past 201
7.3.4 The green plant is not only a synthesiser, it is also a water vapouriser 204
7.4 The Biosphere as a Source of Food for Mankind 206
7.4.1 How much free energy in the form of food does Man need? 206
7.4.2 Man requires numerous structural materials for his body 206
7.4.3 The winning of food from the biosphere 208
7.5 Agriculture, Source of Food for Humans 209
7.5.1 Agricultural requirements of the average man 209
7.5.2 Human food quality 211

7.6 Constraints on the Further Development of Agricultural Production 213
7.6.1 Can the area under cultivation be increased?. 213
7.6.2 Can agricultural production be doubled over the next 50 years? . . . 215
7.7 The Ocean. A Source of Human Food? 216
7.7.1 How productive is the ocean? 216
7.7.2 The ocean is an important source of proteins 219
7.8 Food Production Needs a Large Energy Input 220
7.8.1 Solar and technological energy input to agriculture 220
7.8.2 Single-Cell protein – A new food source 222
7.9 The Biosphere Is More than a Source of Food 223
7.10 What Conclusions Can Be Drawn for Mankind's Future Development? . 223

CHAPTER 8

Is the Future Development of Mankind on This Planet Possible?

8.1 Is It Possible to Consider the Future? 226
8.2 The Main Problem: The Increase of the World Population 226
8.2.1 Is it wrong to consider mankind as part of the biosphere? 226
8.2.2 The growth of world population in the past 227
8.2.3 The reference case used in this chapter – A stable world population of 8 billion. 228
8.3 Problem No. 2: A Place on the Earth for Everyone. 229
8.3.1 How much space will each inhabitant have in the future?. 229
8.3.2 Organisation of space and transport: The energy lost 231
8.4 Problem No. 3: Food for Everyone. 231
8.5 Problem No. 4: Material Resources for Everyone 233
8.5.1 Maximum recycling and minimum use 233
8.5.2 Material recycling and energy 236
8.6 The Ultimate Problem for the Future of Mankind: The Flow of Free Energy 237
8.6.1 Why energy? 237
8.6.2 The prognosis for energy consumption 237
8.6.3 How much energy is needed to produce the technological energy used by Man? 239
8.6.4 The future source of free energy. 240
8.6.5 Not only the free energy sources are important but also the sinks! . 241
8.7 The Future Climate of This Planet. 242
8.7.1 Will the terrestrial climate remain favourable? 242
8.7.2 The possibility of controlling the terrestrial climate 243
8.8 The Quality of Life. 243
8.9 What Conclusions Can Be Drawn Concerning the Future Development of Mankind? 244

CHAPTER 9

The Distant Future of Mankind – Terrestrial or Cosmic?

9.1 The Natural Constants and the Future of the Universe 247
9.1.1 The very far future 247
9.1.2 How stable are the natural laws and constants? 247
9.2 The Future Development of the Universe 249
9.3 The Future of the Galaxy and the Sun 250
9.3.1 The stability of galaxies 250
9.3.2 How stable is the cosmic neighbourhood of the Solar system? . . . 252
9.3.3 How stable, how predictable is the Sun? 254
9.4 The Future of the Planet Earth 256
9.4.1 The stability of the planet 256
9.4.2 The fall of small cosmic objects and earthquakes 257
9.4.3 The future terrestrial climate 258
9.5 The Possibilities for Mankind: Self-destruction, Self-isolation, Expansion 259
9.6 Human Colonies in Space – Possibility or Nonsense? 261
9.7 The Existence of Other Planetary Systems with Intelligent Life 262
9.7.1 How many stars have planetary systems? 262
9.7.2 How many planets having intelligent life could exist? 264
9.8 The Extraterrestrial Exchange of Information 265
9.9 Summary of the Limits of World Population Growth 267
9.10 Human Galactic Expansion and the Drake Limit 268
9.10.1 The expansion velocity 268
9.10.2 The energy need for cosmic journeys 270
9.11 Is It Really Impossible to Colonise the Galaxies? 272
9.12 The Very Distant Future; Mankind on This Planet 273
9.13 What Are the Conclusions Concerning the Distant Future of Mankind? 273

Bibliography 275

Index 281