

The Anthropic Principle

by Judah Etinger

The anthropic principle suggests that the universe appears to have been created specifically for the existence of life on earth, with a large number of coincidences that allow life to exist.

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Job 12:7, Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:20, Colossians 1:16

Topics: "Intelligent Design", "Creation Theology"

Description

Judah Etinger delves into the anthropic principle, exploring the intricate design of the universe that seems tailored for the existence of life on Earth. Through various examples like the Earth's distance from the sun, its tilt, and atmospheric composition, he highlights the delicate balance that allows for life to thrive. Etinger discusses how even slight changes in universal constants or physical properties would render life impossible, leading many scientists to consider the concept of intelligent design or a Creator behind this intricate design.

Transcript

The subject of the creation of the universe has been debated and pondered by people for centuries. Today, scientists continue to move forward in their quest to discover the true origin of mankind. One discovery that has intrigued many for the last few decades is something called the "anthropic principle."

The anthropic principle may be taken to mean that scientists have discovered a very large number of coincidences in the universe that allow life to exist on this planet. In other words, the universe appears to have been created specifically for the existence of life on earth. For a better idea of what this entails, consider the following examples:[1]

If the earth was located only slightly farther away from the sun, it would freeze like the planet Mars. If it was only slightly closer, it would burn up in heat like the 860°F temperature on Venus.

If the earth did not revolve regularly on its axis, half of the planet would be in permanent darkness without vegetation. Meanwhile, the other side of the planet would be an uninhabitable desert, suffering from the overwhelming heat of permanent exposure to the sun.

If the Earth were not tilted at 23°, it would not have the seasonal variation that produces the abundance of crops that feed the planet's huge population. Without this tilt, less than half of the present land used for cultivation of crops would grow vegetables.

If the earth was only a small percentage smaller, the reduced gravity would be incapable of holding the atmosphere that is essential for breathing.

If the planet Earth was twice as large, the effect of increased gravity would make everything on the planet's surface weigh eight times what it weighs today. This increased weight would destroy many forms of animal and human life.

A much thinner atmosphere would provide no protection from the 25,000 meteors that burn up over the earth every day. A thinner atmosphere would also be incapable of retaining the higher temperatures required for the existence of human and animal life.

If the atmosphere were not 78 percent nitrogen and 22 percent oxygen and other gases, breathing would be impossible.

If nuclear forces were decreased by only a few percent, the particles of the universe could not have come together in nuclear reactions to make the ingredients from which life must be constructed (such as carbon atoms).

If the combined masses of the proton and electron were a little more rather than a little less than the mass of the neutron, the effect would be devastating. The hydrogen atom would become unstable. Throughout the universe, all the hydrogen atoms would immediately break down to form neutrons and neutrinos. Robbed of its nuclear fuel, the sun would fade and collapse. Across the whole of space, stars like the sun would contract in their billions, releasing a deadly flood of x-rays as they burned out. By that time, life on earth, needless to say, would already have been extinguished.

The ultimate conclusion is that if the universe was changed in the slightest way, no life could exist. (Although the possibility remains that other forms of unknown life might be able to exist, even the evolutionary cosmologist Stephen Hawking stresses, "It seems clear that there are relatively few ranges of values [for these coincidences] that would allow the development of any form of intelligent life." [2]) Thus, more than a few scientists think that this chain of "coincidences" could at the very least suggest the work of a Creator or "creative force." Hawking, one of the world's most respected cosmologists, remarks, "I think there are clearly religious implications whenever you start to discuss the origins of the universe. There must be religious overtones. But I think most scientists prefer to shy away from the religious side of it." [3]

The book Stephen Hawking's Universe concludes that the odds against the accidental formation of a universe such as this would be comparable to shaking the parts of a watch in a barrel and having them fall into place as a working timepiece. [4] What implications could these incredible probabilities entail? Well, if one can determine how unlikely it is that a given pattern can arise by chance, one has his or her answer as to how likely it is that the structure is deliberate. Here is a simplified example for illustration:

Suppose you find a quarter lying on the street. Without a moment's thought, you assume that someone dropped it accidentally -- that it's there "by chance." You assume this because it's so commonplace an occurrence. After all, consider the alternative: that someone placed it there deliberately. Though it's theoretically possible, your own personal experience tells you that it's pretty unlikely.

Now, what if you found three quarters, all close to one another? Still, it seems more likely that someone dropped a cluster of coins by accident, than that the person put them there. (Maybe you feel it's a close

call.) Part of this calculation (which is less certain than the prior one) involves something else, too: a reasonable guess about people's reasons for doing things. It's hard to think of a good reason for someone putting three quarters on the ground deliberately.

Let's take it one step further. Suppose you again find three quarters, but this time they are all touching one another, forming a triangular arrangement. Was this deliberate, or by chance? Chance certainly can't be ruled out, but it seems "suspicious." It's now likely that you'll change your mind and think that someone did it "on purpose" -- even though the purpose is hard to imagine.

Finally, what if you find ten quarters stacked neatly one on top of another? Though once again you can't prove it didn't "just happen," the odds against it will seem so great (It's so odd, you'll think) that you'll be certain the stack was placed there for some unknown reason.[5]

And so it is with the properties of the universe. Rather than an enormous accident, the hundreds of "coincidences" observed throughout the universe may constitute a deliberate pattern. Many scientists think that the best explanation is "intelligent design." The renowned science writers John Gribbin and Martin Rees note, "This combination of coincidences . . . is indeed remarkable. There is no better evidence to support the argument that the universe has been designed for our benefit -- tailor-made for man."[6]

Nobel Prize winner Max Planck, whose research revolutionized today's understanding of atomic and subatomic processes, just as Albert Einstein's theory of relativity revolutionized today's understanding of space and time,[7] concluded, "According to everything taught by the exact sciences about the immense realm of nature, a certain order prevails -- one independent of the human mind. . . . This order can be formulated in terms of purposeful activity. There is evidence of an intelligent order of the universe to which both man and nature are subservient."[8]

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