

The Purpose-Guided Universe: Believing in Einstein, Darwin, and God

by Bernard Haisch

Imagine a pyramid made up of stacked basketballs. Picture it a thousand feet on each side and a thousand feet high. That's twice as high as the real great pyramid in Egypt. That's as tall as a hundred-story building. To stack such a pyramid would require about a billion basketballs. It's a big number.

Rounding off to the nearest billion, we live on a five-billion-year-old planet in a fourteen-billion-year-old universe. Our sun is one star amid a few hundred billion others in the Milky Way Galaxy. Our Milky Way Galaxy is one of a hundred billion or so other galaxies in the visible universe.

That's a lot of billions.

Given this large-scale picture of things, how could there be any purpose in any man or woman's brief life, amounting to perhaps eighty years or so on average, on one obscure planet? That is a question that matters a great deal to most of us.

As noted physicist Freeman Dyson said in his Templeton Prize lecture:

The greatest unsolved mysteries are the mysteries of our existence as conscious beings in a small corner of a vast universe. Why are we here? Does the universe have a purpose? Whence comes our knowledge of good and evil? These mysteries, and a hundred others like them, are beyond the reach of science. They lie on the other side of the border, within the jurisdiction of religion.

Is there a purpose behind the universe? There are two diametrically opposed answers coming from the two camps of science and religion, ensconced on opposite banks of the stream of life. In my view, neither is satisfactory, which is why I propose a third. But first the two opposing views.

There are those who believe in God. In the United States, the percentage of the population falling in this category has hovered around 90 percent for decades. The purpose of life for most believers is clear. It is to live the kind of life that will merit the reward of entrance into an everlasting kingdom of heaven. There, presided over by a heavenly, grandfatherly patriarch, with the able assistance of an angelic bureaucracy, choir, and legion of saints, the righteous will live in eternal bliss. Given the limited human attention span and the propensity to always want the latest and best, it is hard to see how the eternal-heaven business can actually satisfy the clientele for that length of time, that is, forever. One might worry that eternity could possibly become tedious. Still, that's the reward, and it's better than life down here . . . putting the eternity issue aside.

But you had better be careful, because one life chance is all you get in this view. Given the wide disparity of life circumstances and influences, this one shot at getting it right for all eternity may not seem fair. And indeed, I propose that it is most certainly not. That is one reason why I will suggest a more plausible and humane alternative.

On the other side are the secular humanists, meaning those who dislike and reject the idea of a God, who scoff at such a make-believe purpose as getting into heaven. Unfortunately, what they can offer in its place in the way of life purpose is rather limited.

The English poet Francis Thompson wrote: "An atheist is a man who believes himself an accident." That does seriously limit the options available for the purpose-of-life question. Life merely for the sake of living is a risky philosophy that could logically lead to nothing greater than an objective of achieving maximum wealth and pleasure here and now. Some people in this camp do come to this conclusion. Fortunately though, most have no less altruism than the believers — perhaps even more because there is no expectation of a reward in the afterlife for doing good here. The problem is that in this view all purpose is ultimately transitory. Recall Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg's, "The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless." Unfortunately, that would carry over to us individually as well.

The purpose I propose that life has is a grand one, and even, I think, a logical one: We are the means whereby God experiences his own potential,

and this is why the universe has some of the amazing properties conducive to life that it has. Making the analogy of God as a vast bonfire, we are candles whose tiny flame is the same fire. We are sparks of God living in a physical universe of matter and energy, in which we are able to experience things, make things happen, live and love and climb up or ski down mountains and enjoy operas or rock concerts — take your pick. The adventures we literally live out were merely possibilities existing pregnantly in the infinite intelligence that is God prior to the creation of the universe. You might think of the universe as some of God's thoughts, his daydreams. With the right combination of thoughts — the laws of nature — providing the basis, a universe capable of hosting life becomes possible. God then enriches himself by living through all the life-forms that the universe can provide . . . us included. Why shouldn't God get to enjoy the World Series or the Super Bowl or the Indy 500 through the enthusiasm of us fans? Of course, first you have to dream up a universe. God can do that.

In this view, heaven is not a place; it is a state of reunion with God, from whom our consciousness has temporarily and deliberately separated itself to make physical existence and all its richness possible. The purpose of life is to let God make his own potential real. And of course, this cannot be limited to human experience. God in this view seeks the experience of all living things on this planet and wherever else life might exist and whatever else it might be like.

Kaballah scholar Daniel Matt writes in his *God and the Big Bang*:

In the beginning, there was Existence alone — One only, without a second. It, the One, thought to itself: "Let me be many; let me grow forth." Thus, out of itself, It entered into every being. All that is has itself alone. Of all things it is the subtle essence. It is the truth. It is the Self. And you are that.

Or from a much more ancient text from India cited by Matt:

He manifested Himself as creation. It is He alone who is born into the world. He lives as all beings; it is only Him everywhere.

Let me be clear. This has nothing to do with so-called Intelligent Design. In the view I propose, *Darwinian evolution is essential for fulfilling God's*

purpose. The unpredictability and novelty afforded by evolution is absolutely necessary; otherwise, existence would be a preordained puppet show. It is the peculiar character of the universe itself — an issue that has come to the fore in astrophysics — and its origin in the big bang which I attribute to an infinite intelligence, not the microengineering of life-forms. It is, in fact, a more impressive feat of intelligence to dream up a few essential laws that can give rise to a universe in which life can evolve, than it would be to tinker around designing creatures like Santa in his workshop.

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