

Does the Universe have a Purpose?



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No. In the absence of evidence, the only reason to suppose that it does is sentimental wishful thinking and sentimental wishful thinking, which underlies all religion, is an unreliable tool for the discovery of truth of any kind.

The extension of analogies is another tool that accompanies wishful thinking in the toolboxes of the credulous. That an intricate mechanism, such as an engine or even a spoon, is commonly associated with a purpose cannot be taken to be evidence that the universe as a whole is associated with a purpose, any more than the existence of a cheetah implies that it has been designed with a purpose in mind. Cheetahs have evolved by the bloody, directionless, unguided processes of evolution: they have not been provided for the purpose of killing antelopes. Similarly, the universe has evolved over its 14 billion years of current existence by the directionless, unguided processes that are manifestations of the working out of physical laws: it has not been made for the purpose of providing platforms to enable cheetahs to stalk their prey or humans to generate great art or to entertain delusions. That we do not yet understand anything about the inception of the universe should not mean that we need to ascribe to its inception a supernatural cause, a creator, and therefore to associate with that creator's inscrutable mind a purpose, whether it be divine, malign, or even whimsically capricious.

Theologians typically focus on questions that they have invented for their own puzzlement. Some theologians are perplexed by the nature of life after death, a notion they have invented without a scrap of evidence.

Some are mystified by the existence of evil in a world created by an infinitely loving God, another notion that theologians have invented but which dissolves into nothing once it is realized that there is no God. The question of cosmic purpose is likewise an invented notion, wholly without evidential foundation, and equally dismissible as patently absurd. We should not regard as great the questions that have been invented solely for the sake of eliciting puzzlement.

I regard the existence of this extraordinary universe as having a wonderful, awesome grandeur. It hangs there in all its glory, wholly and completely useless. To project onto it our human-inspired notion of purpose would, to my mind, sully and diminish it.

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