

APOLOGETICS



Keep The FAith

Episode 9 – Door number 3, please

Hi guys and welcome back to our 9th companion for this exciting apologetics series on the podcast!

We're back now with our new argument, a re-formulation of the old Teleological argument known as the Fine-Tuning argument.

Let's look at it to remind ourselves of it:

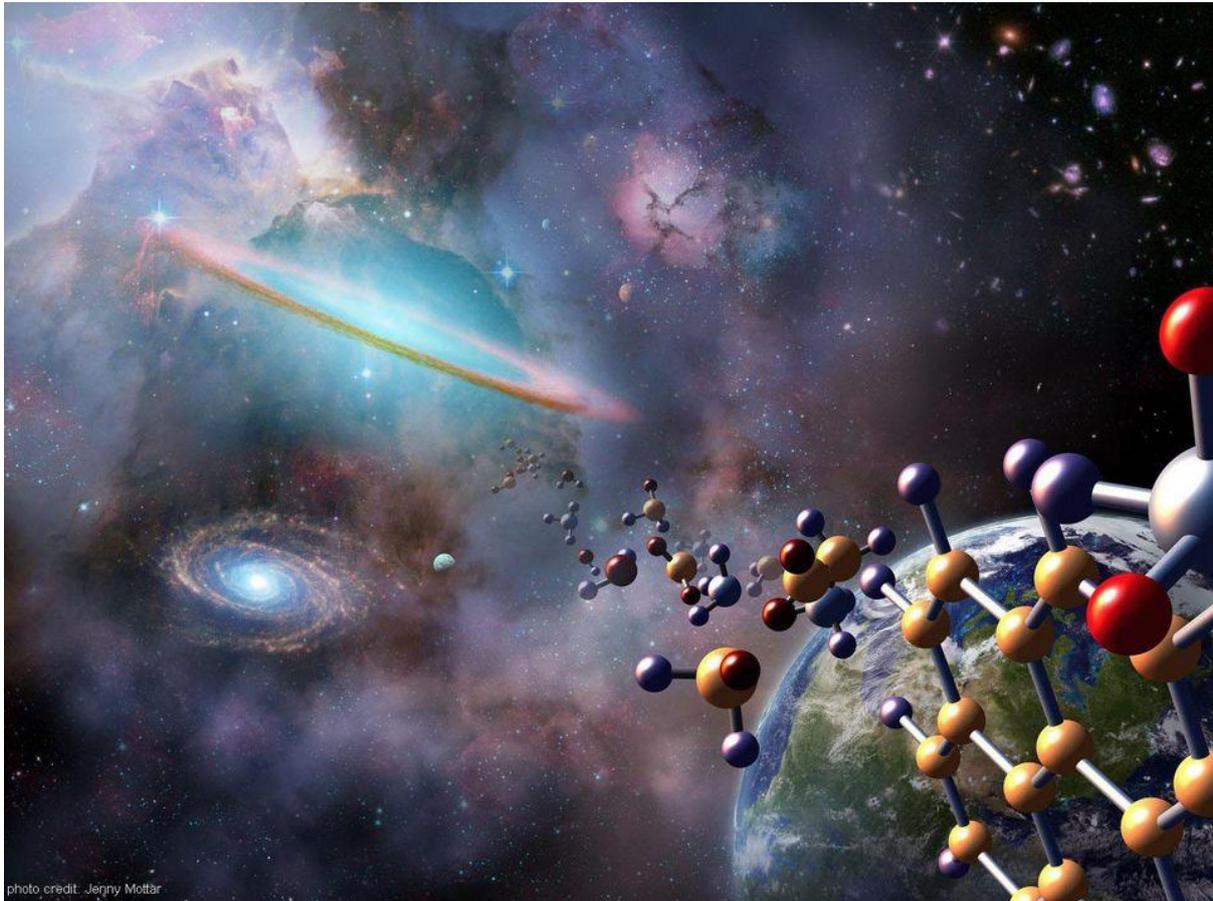
- P1. The universe is fine-tuned for life
- P2. Fine-tuning can potentially be explained by chance, necessity or design
- P3. It is not due to chance or necessity
- C. Therefore, the fine-tuning of the universe is the result of design

Last week, we were in our first premise, the idea that the universe is finely tuned for life. In order to back this claim up, we looked at the cosmological constant and quantities, and how well-balanced they all are to permit life.

If you wanted more information on these, specifically, because you're a *hardcore nerd* (like me – no shame here), then click this image to go to a seriously deep article:



Or this image for a different version of the same article, with some slightly different looks, twangs and emphases:



This week we built off the back of that and looked at the potential options for why this might be the case. We're in premise 2 – fine-tuning can potentially be explained by chance, necessity or design.

If I take us back a week or two and remind us of our mobile phone version of the watchmaker's analogy, we can begin to already see the way we might tackle this:

Imagine you were walking in the woods one day, happily minding your own business as you bumble around enjoying nature, when, all of a sudden, you step on a brand new phone on the floor!

You have two options. You can either look at it and say

“Weird. Why would nature randomly assemble atoms into the form of a phone right here?” and walk off, not bothered in the least, or you could look at it and say

“Damn, someone dropped their phone, this isn't here because of a random chance of nature or quantum mechanical madness, this isn't supposed to be here, this was designed by someone.”

Which would you choose?

All this is to say that, if you came across something so incredibly well-designed as a phone or, in the original analogy, a watch, you would be warranted in assuming it had been designed by someone. Paley stated that the universe is so much more complex than a watch that it also requires an explanation, we can't just chalk it up to "wow, weird, that was lucky".

Now, this mentions the issues of chance or design, but you'll notice that the fine-tuning argument has a third option not contended with here – necessity. On the watchmaker's analogy, how do you deal with design?

Well, you simply add in a third reaction. After "why would nature randomly assemble atoms in to the form of a phone here" and "someone dropped their phone, this hasn't been formed here this way by a chance or quirk of nature", you then have a third option – to look at the phone and say "this must be here out of necessity, there could be no other time or place this phone could be, it is unequivocally meant to be right here and right now".

Do you get that? Do you see what's being said?

Let me extrapolate this back out to our argument.

We can explain the existence of the fine-tuning we discussed last week in three ways:

1. It was just a stroke of luck, complete chance
2. It *had* to be this way, there is literally no other way it could have been
3. It has been designed this way by a superior intellect and transcendent power

Now, key to this premise is that these are the only three options available to explain the existence of the universe as we know it.

We aren't dealing with whether or not they are good options yet, that's next week (so make sure you come back!), we're just dealing with these being real possibilities.

Chance

Let's just establish each of these are possibilities.

Again, at this point in the argument, we don't need to know whether they're probable, just whether they're possible.

If you're not sure on the difference there, let me give you an example – when builders were working on the Golden Gate bridge, a lot of them fell off. All but one of them died from the fall. Let's say, for the sake of argument, 100 people fell off – 99 died and 1 survived. From this we can say that it's possible to fall off the bridge and not die, since 1 person did it, but it's certainly not probable, since only 1% of people who fell survived.

For this option in the argument to work, it just needs to be that one lucky worker who fell off, it's just needs to be possible.

So, the question is – is it *possible* that the universe is this way because of chance?

In order to do this, we have to ask: is this self-referentially incoherent and is this logically incompatible?

Self-referential incoherence would be something that invalidates itself, so an example would be if someone were to say "it's absolutely true that absolute truth does not exist" or "it's wrong to teach that morality is objective". They're referring to the thing they're claiming doesn't exist to prove their claim.

First-off, there is nothing about something coming from chance that is self-referentially incoherent. There is nothing about a universe having been created by chance that is self-referentially incoherent. If it were that it created itself, that would be self-referentially

incoherent, because how could something that needed to be created in order to create itself... create itself?

Secondly, there is nothing that is logically incompatible about the idea of something happening by chance – we see things happen seemingly by chance all the time, like the chance of getting hit by lightning in a storm is around 1 in 700,000.

The idea of the universe being this way by chance is not logically inconsistent, there is nothing about the universe intrinsically that removes chance as a variable.

Necessity

Let's clear up specifically what we mean when we say 'necessary', because in a philosophical sense it is quite different to how one might think of it otherwise.

This means there was no possible way in which the universe could have been otherwise, the universe simply must exist in this form, undeniably.

[The Wikipedia entry](#) for this idea of metaphysical necessity states "*a proposition is said to be necessary if it could not have failed to be the case*" – so it couldn't have been any other way. Again, we have to review this through the same two criteria – is this self-referentially incoherent and is this logically incompatible?

Well, there's nothing self-referentially incoherent about this claim. The claim isn't anything like the universe needed to not exist in order to exist or something else mad, it's simply the idea that the universe could be necessary in the same way God is necessary. That is fine.

Secondly then, is there anything logically inconsistent about this idea? I wouldn't say so. I can't see how the idea of a universe which is necessary would be illogical.

Because this is the companion, I always like to put in a chunk of further reading and a deep-dive into a subject, so let's do that with this idea of a necessary universe!

When someone says the universe is necessary, they may be talking about two separate ideas – either that the fundamental fabric of space time is necessary due to its own nature (that is to say that, if space-time is a universal property and is unchanging, and is required to exist for a universe to be substantiated, then it is necessary), or that the fundamental laws of nature exist necessarily (again, because of their own nature – the thought might be that they describe the way the universe is and therefore the universe is beholden to them).

Let's look at each!

Firstly, thinking of the fabric of space time as necessary is a flawed idea, scientifically speaking. Stephen Hawking himself recognised that the model of space time he has proposed is just one of many possibilities. Remember – for something to be necessary it can't be possible for it to be different. There are multiple models of space time, however, some have a beginning and some don't for example, so this really is a non-starter (even though it sounds cool to chat about space time).

Secondly, the idea that the fundamental laws of nature are necessary is a 'no, but yes, if...' kind of answer.

So, let's start with the tentative yes – in order to believe the laws of nature exist necessarily, you need to be something called a '[platonist](#)'. A platonist is one who, loosely, follows the ideas and philosophy of Plato (unsurprisingly). This is tied in with [abstract object theory](#), which essentially believes that abstract objects, such as numbers and properties, actually *exist* in another dimension. Honestly, this isn't an episode of X-Files talking about other dimensions, this is a sophisticated philosophical belief set.

Let me try to explain that – basically there are *concrete* objects which we see around us and can test empirically to see what they are (like, let's say, an elephant), and then there are *abstract* objects which we cannot see but encode the concrete objects with properties (so all the properties that make up that elephant, like being big, having a trunk, being grey, having four legs, having big ears, etc). So, for every set of *abstract* properties (everything an elephant is) there is only one *concrete* object that encodes exactly that set of properties and no others (an elephant). If a rhino had the same properties as an elephant it would be an elephant, not a rhino.

The key thing here is that, in order for the laws of nature to be necessary, they would have to be *abstract objects that exist as a Platonist would believe*. The laws of nature are mathematical equations, and only *exist* on Platonism.

I (spoiler alert) am not a Platonist, but let's just go along with this thinking for a minute, just to play it out.

The problem for a Platonist here is not whether or not these equations exist, because they would argue that of course they do, it's *why they're true*.

I'm going to deal with this ham-handedly, no doubt, so I'll step aside and let William Lane Craig explain this portion of the debate (taken from [this article](#)):

“On Platonism even false laws of nature exist necessarily as mathematical objects. They differ from the actual laws (that is, those that describe the actual world) in their truth value, the actual laws being true and these other laws being false.

But here's the thing: as mathematical objects the laws of nature are causally effete. They have no causal powers and so cannot be the cause of anything. The idea that nature's laws cause things is a misconception that is very widespread, even among professional scientists. They seem to have forgotten that laws are just mathematical objects which may be either true or false, depending on whether they are descriptive of the actual world or not, but they don't determine which world is actual. On the contrary, which world is actual is explanatorily prior to which laws are true or false.”

So, ultimately, the idea that the universe is necessary comes down to these two predicators, but neither one is sound.

We're skipping ahead to next week a bit there, but hopefully you found it interesting and helpful to understand this part of the argument!

Design

Finally, then, we come to design. The idea that the universe is a finely-tuned as it is because there is a transcendent designer who made it that way.

Let's subject it to the same scrutiny.

First-off, is it self-referentially incoherent? No, we're not saying the universe designed God so that he could design the universe, that would be manifestly incoherent.

We're simply saying that a transcendent being designed the universe to these exact degrees for a life-permitting environment. That floats just fine.

People may say that this is simply the God of the gaps, but it really isn't. The God of the gaps would be, where science is unclear on something, you simply say “God did it” and walk off.

Instead, what we are doing here is taking the science as it stands and referring it to a very

real possibility which can be philosophically and logically tested. If a God of the gaps rebuttal was levelled here, I would be tempted to rejoinder with an atheism of the gaps rebuttal, it flies both ways. You can't decry someone for saying "there's a gap in knowledge here, fill it with God" and then on the other side of your mouth say "there's a gap in knowledge here, quick – fill it with atheism" (aka "we don't know what did it but we know it wasn't God").

Secondly, is this idea logically inconsistent? I wouldn't say so, no! There are no logical limits outside of pre-supposing naturalism that would stop this from being possible – if metaphysical entities exist then it's not illogical to think that could have been the source of the physical realm.

We'll cover this again when we eventually land in the ontological argument, which is my favourite.

So, there we have it! The second premise – fine-tuning can potentially be explained by chance, necessity or design.

Next week, we're going to actually explore whether these three *possible* options I've laid out here in this episode are actually *probable*, because that really is where the rubber hits the road.

That's all for this week, guys!

As always, don't be afraid to get into the youth whatsapp chat and let us know how you are, what you're up to and what you're thinking. Get your prayer requests ready for Thursday and get involved in our Bible study! And you can grab us on Instagram @chawnyouth.

Speak to you next week!