

A purposive universe

The idea of pandeism brings us to the questions of (a) Does the universe have any purpose? (b) If yes, what might be the purpose of the universe.

The British atheist David Ramsay Steele addresses this question in his book *Atheism Explained: From Folly To Philosophy*. He asks the question, "Would God Choose to Create Our Universe?".

"Let's suppose that there is a God but there is no physical universe. We're angels at an angel seminar... Why would God want physical life to evolve at all? By hypothesis, something we can only call life already exists, in spirit form. We angels are one species of this spirit life. This spirit life has highly developed consciousness, and if we believe that the Devil started out as an angel, then these living entities have free will. What is it that's so wonderful about physical life that is unattainable in the spirit world? Given the things theists tell us about spirits, I have no idea of the answer to this."

Another atheist philosopher, Erik Wielenberg, wrote in *Value and Virtue in a Godless Universe*:

"Each of us is spit out into the universe into a set of circumstances not of our choosing, endowed with psychological and physical characteristics and potentialities bestowed on us by factors beyond our control. We have no say over whether to exist at all, or under what circumstances, or with what capacities to be endowed. And yet it is beyond doubt that our circumstances, together with our various capacities, determine what it is possible for us to achieve, and, at least to a large extent, what we in fact do achieve."

Even Christian doctrine is reluctant to speculate on the purpose of the universe, preferring to confine itself to the

purpose of human life, "To know, love, and serve God in this life, and to enjoy everlasting bliss in Heaven after death."

We need to go back to Plato to find someone willing to write about the purpose of the universe:

"In the *Timaeus* Plato presents an elaborately wrought account of the formation of the universe and an explanation of its impressive order and beauty. The universe, he proposes, is the product of rational, **purposive**, and beneficent agency. It is the handiwork of a divine Craftsman ("Demiurge") who, imitating an unchanging and eternal model, imposes mathematical order on a pre-existent chaos to generate the ordered universe (kosmos). The governing explanatory principle of the account is teleological: the universe as a whole as well as its various parts are so arranged as to produce a vast array of good effects. For Plato this arrangement is not fortuitous, but the outcome of the deliberate intent of Intellect (nous), anthropomorphically represented by the figure of the Craftsman who plans and constructs a world that is as excellent as its nature permits it to be."

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/>

Who is the divine Craftsman mentioned by Plato? It is certainly not the Christian God.

"'Finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order.' (Thus it appears that Plato's God, unlike the Jewish and Christian God, did not create the world out of nothing, but rearranged pre-existing material.)" (from "History of Western Philosophy (Routledge Classics)" by Bertrand Russell)

What I take from Plato is that we do see order and beauty in the Universe. We in the 21st century can see much more than Plato, for instance the discovery of the fine-tuning of cosmological constants which has resulted in the evolution of

conscious and intelligent beings. We see intelligent design, but no intelligent designer, which brings us to the idea of pandeism that the intelligent designer sacrificed itself to create the universe.

The lack of clear communication from an intelligent designer is proof that he/she is not able to communicate. David Ramsay Steele writes:

“In science-fiction stories where people start to receive telepathic communications from alien beings the question usually doesn't arise whether they are deluded. The reason is clear: the messages cohere and provide information that is sometimes independently confirmed. However, outside fiction, whenever God speaks to devout believers, he always talks exactly like a fortune cookie. He rarely says anything specific enough to be tested, and when he does, what he says is wrong approximately fifty percent of the time.”

If the intelligent designer sacrificed itself to create the universe, it is not difficult to infer that he/she had a purpose in doing so. As he/she is not able to communicate, we cannot be certain what this purpose is; that is left for us to work out.

It follows from the idea of pandeism that the purpose of each human life must be related to the overall purpose of the universe. The basic principle is the Golden Rule (which can be considered a law of reciprocity in some religions), the principle of treating others as one would wish to be treated.

Apart from the Golden Rule, it is likely that the purpose of life is different for each individual. It appears that if the actions of an individual are aligned with the purpose of the Universe, life becomes easier and more satisfying. Aligning with the Universe could be something as simple as caring for the environment by using less plastic. This is the practical application of pandeism.