

Probability for a Creator God

Psalm 19 says: The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows his handwork.

And St. Paul says: Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, **invisible though they are**, have been understood and seen through the things He has made.

Today I want to talk to you about the universe and whether there is a greater probability that there is a great Designer of the universe or whether there is a greater probability that the big bang, evolution and natural selection alone created our universe and every life form in it.

In your life and mine we operate all the time by probability. Every time we get in a car or aircraft, we perhaps unconsciously estimate probable safety and time of arrival. When we invest in the stock market, we estimate the probability that the investments will hopefully pull positively, and on that basis we make choices. We use probability everyday and we trust a higher probability rather than a lower one. Common sense we call it.

I think it was in Grade eleven in high school that a teacher instructed me that there was no God. The universe had evolved he said through the big bang, evolution and natural selection. There was no evidence of a God and no need for one.

When I questioned him about how that could ever be with the complexity of all things; he said all you need is enough time and anything can happen. There are multi universes, billions of planets and we just happen by accident to be the one where life has evolved over millions of years. End of story!

Mo Gawdat, Chief Business Officer for Google X, which is in charge of so called 'moonshots' like the Google driverless car, decided that he would take a 'moonshot' at happiness and try and design an algorithm

for happiness. When his son died unexpectedly, he was heartbroken initially but having designed this algorithm for happiness he deliberately applied it to his situation and was able slowly to cope with his great loss. Out of that experience and his research he has written a book called Solve for Happy.

In this book he finds that part of his algorithm will necessarily have to deal with the question as to whether there is a God or not? He believes that in order to be happy we have to believe that life goes on after this one. This is particularly poignant for him when he loses his son to death. Will he ever see son Ali again? Only God could make that happen he feels.

So, he attempts to solve the God question in terms of asking whether the universe happened by chance or design, using mathematical probability. In chapter 14 titled *Who made who?* He delivers a number of arguments all based on probability. For me, his most convincing, is his argument based on human proteins and their evolution. Here it is.

Proteins are made up of amino acids strung together in a specific sequence. The sequence determines how the protein will behave. They fold themselves based on the sequence in which they are strung and they keep folding until they find a stable minimum energy to maintain the integrity of their structure.

There are 20,000 proteins that make up the body. In 1969 Cyrus Levinthal, physicist and biologist, noted that the protein molecule has an astronomical number of possible folds leading to its final structure. Nobel Laureate Christian B. Anderson calculated that it would take many years for a single simple protein to form by random sampling all fields until it arrived at a stable structure. **That would be a trillion times longer than the known age of the universe.**

Gawdat says “What would be the only way for that protein to fold correctly within the time it had for the task? The answer...is

intervention. The protein would have needed to know the primary sequence before it started to fold. **Knowing how something is bound to be before it starts is what we call design...**the protein needed to be programmed with the exact steps to follow to get the job done in time.

For twenty thousand proteins in your body to randomly fold and make one of you, it would take a stroke of luck equivalent to rolling twenty thousand dice at the same time and getting them all to land on six. And note that each dice is not made up of six faces but rather trillions of faces. Good luck with that!”

Conclusion? The concept of Design and a Designer has a very significantly higher probability than randomness.

Put another way if the probability of arrival safely at your destination was as low as the probability of randomness creating the universe you would never bother getting into your car or any form of transport. It would be absolutely futile.

However, this does not mean that evolution or natural selection do not work, because once formed organisms do evolve and naturally select. There is no reason why the evolutionary process itself could not have been designed and guided by a Great Cosmic intelligence. And that is the position of the church today and of many scientists who have a personal faith in God.

For Scripture the question has been based on probability.

For St. Paul, all one has to do is look up and see the wonders of the universe and conclude that, though God is invisible, the probability is that God is none the less present. Just look at the stars!

It is important, as Mo Gawdat argues, to realize that **there is no scientific way to prove that something does not exist. Absence of proof that something exists does not prove that it doesn't exist.**

That is also true of things like dark energy and dark matter which are invisible. Yet we are coming to understand, though we know almost nothing about them, they appear to exist because we can see effects. That's a bit like watching the wind move tree branches. We can't see the wind but we see the branches moving.

In terms of probability, absence of proof that something does not exist, he says, should also be seen as a probability that it *might* exist.

And St. Paul says: Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, **invisible though they are**, have been understood and seen through the things He has made.

Psalm 19:1 says; The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

As Einstein once said of the probability that there exists a deity “ We are in the position of a little child entering a huge library filled with books in many languages. The child knows someone must have written those books. It does not know how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child dimly suspects a mysterious order in the arrangement of the books but doesn't know what it is. That it seems to me, is the attitude of even the most intelligent human being towards God.”

There was a period in my life when I abandoned the idea that there was a great Designer of the universe. I bought into the naturalistic and atheistic hypothesis for about two years. There were several things that brought me out of that and back to Theism. For me the **complexity of all life** demanded a better explanation than simply multiplying chance by a million or even a billion years. For me a billion years of explosions in a print shop, or a monkey making random keystrokes on a computer will not produce the concise Oxford dictionary from random arrangements of

all the letters. Mathematically it is possible but the probability for that to happen is in the trillions of years, again a process much older than the universe.

I have also been struck by the fine tuning of our solar system: the Goldilocks distance of the earth from the sun, now in jeopardy through global boiling, is not too hot, not too cold to prevent life: and the presence of abundant water, the ozone layer and gravity to maintain the atmosphere.

If the Big bang had been different by one part in 10 to the 60th the universe would either have collapsed or expanded too rapidly for the stars to form. Similarly, life would not be possible if the force binding protons to neutrons differed by even 5%.

But there were also **experiences** that drew me closer to God that have continued into ministry. I have discovered that prayer puts up probability of a desired outcome. Following prayer I have seen patients miraculously leave palliative care units and intensive care units.

I have also come to realize that what is often considered a coincidence has a better probability of being Divine intervention. Archbishop Willima Temples once said: When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't, they don't.

I have personally come to realize, time after time, that I can seek Divine guidance and protection.

The Bible does spend a lot of time on the self revelation of the Deity. According to the Biblical record the burning bush that confronted Moses turned out not to be a coincidence but an intervention. I am glad that this bush is a symbol of the Presbyterian Church because it leaves the door open for Divine intervention in the church and in our lives.

As some of you know I spent a number of years in Northern California. I know that the weather in the foothills can be very severe, very fast.

Grass Valley and Auburn that I knew so well were the settings for an amazing story of coincidence, or was it something else?

The streets were flooded, trees down, snow in the Sierras and this storm had been going on for three days. In many locations the power was out.

Father O'Malley had taken to writing his sermon by candlelight. The winds howled outside his small bedroom. Suddenly the phone rang. It was the hospital in Auburn. Someone was dying and had asked for the last rights. Could he go?

Father O'Malley said he would try his best to make it, but he told her that the river is over its banks and trees are blown down all over the place. He estimated a probable time of arrival about 2 hours.

It was only thirty miles but it was hard going. He squeezed around fallen trees and somehow managed to keep making progress. It was madness. Everyone was indoors except the odd emergency vehicle. When he finally got there, it was way past midnight.

"Glad you made it father" said the night nurse. "He is slipping fast but still coherent. He has been an alcoholic for years and his liver has finally given out. He has been here this time for two weeks with no visitors. He has secluded himself in the woods for years. We've been calling him Tom."

Father O'Malley went into the room.

Tom was surly with him and demanded that he get on with the last rights. After O'Malley had said the last amen, Tom wanted to talk. O'Malley sensing a problem that lay beneath everything, asked Tom whether he would like to make a confession?

Tom absolutely refused. As the hours dragged by O'Malley returned to his question for the fourth time, would he like to make a confession?

Eventually Tom said that he had never told anyone this, but now since he was going to die, it wouldn't make any difference if he confessed to

something so terrible. That he had done, that he had thought about it every day of his life ever since.

Apparently, he had been drunk one night many years ago. He had been a switchman for the railroad.

He began his story: “Thirty two years, 2 months and 11 days ago I was working in Bakersfield on a night like tonight. It was a bad winter storm, lots of rain and very low visibility. It was two nights before Christmas and it was the swing shift and the whole yard crew were drinking through the shift. I was drunker than the rest of them and so I volunteered to go out in the rain and wind and push the switch for the northbound 8:30 freight.

Tom lowered his voice almost to a whisper “I guess I was more drunk than I thought, because I pushed that switch in the wrong direction. At 45 miles an hour that freight slammed into a passenger car at the next crossing and killed a young man his wife and two daughters.

“I have had to live with my being the cause of their deaths everyday since then.”

There was a very long pause of silence as Tom’s confession hung in the air. After what seemed like an eternity, Father O’Malley very gently put his hand on Tom’s shoulder and said quietly “If I can forgive you, God can forgive you, because in that car were my mother, my father and my two older sisters.

What’s the probability of that??

Was it just coincidence?

Or the hand of God bringing together the only two people in the whole world who could free each other from a darkness, through forgiveness?

God works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform...

Amen.

