

# The Meaning of Meaning

Some people might argue that without an omnipotent rule giver that nothing has meaning. They might say that we merely exist and that even if there is a reason we exist that the universe has no purpose, and that humanity certainly has no purpose. Some might say that we are just one planet in a universe of trillions of trillions of planets, a mere speck of dust, and that there might be millions of other planets with more advanced life than us. Why would our existence matter?

Does the Universe have preferences? Is there things the Universe cares about? Is the Universe itself trying to accomplish something?

Let's look at what the universe is. Some 13.72 billion years ago there was the "Big Bang" and somehow the universe came into existence. From that point the universe started to evolve. First energy condensed into matter - just hydrogen and helium gas to start with. But as time progressed gravity pulled the gasses together and as heat and pressure grew nuclear fusion started and the first stars were born.

After a few hundred million years (for red giants) the star burns through the lighter elements and when it gets up to fusing iron the star collapses and goes supernova and spews out all the heavier elements into space. Over the next 10 billion years this process continues creating generations of stars and solar systems until our little speck of dust planet - the Earth - is born.

Somehow, in a process we don't fully understand, organic chemicals combined to create early life. Early life evolved into more complex life through random mutations with survival as a filter. That which wasn't improved didn't survive. This survival filter is what turns random variations into evolution.

What is life? What properties does life have? One property of life is that life continues. If it doesn't continue that it is no longer alive. When a species doesn't continue it goes extinct. We are the descendants of the life that continued. Our ancestors all the way back to perhaps a single bacteria were the ones who got it right and continued to exist as an organism of increasing complexity. And humanity is the result of that process.

Evolution is a property of the universe. Humanity is a result of evolution. We are the result of what the universe does.

It would seem that the universe has properties and that evolution is a property of the universe. That if you start with a big bang and apply the laws of the universe over time that life emerges. When life emerges it evolves and it continues to exist based on survival. The better tools it has to survive the more likely it will avoid extinction.

So here we are and we evolved intelligence. Being intelligent helps us to survive. The smarter we become the better our chances are. In fact there's nothing between us and extinction other than dumb luck and our ability to outwit anything that could kill us. Thus evolution selects on that which is smarter.

The universe evolved into us. We are the universe. The universe contemplates its own existence through us.

We have, in fact, become smarter and smarter and we can now go out into space with our space based telescopes and peer back at the universe to the beginning of time. (Or at least within a few hundred million years of the beginning of time.) We are at the point where we can contemplate the universe. We know how big it is - how old it is - how it started - and we understand the physics behind how it works. Not completely of course, but for some evolved pond scum on a speck of dust we know quite a bit.

But what does it all mean? Let's connect the dots. The universe comes into existence and it evolves. Evolution is a property of the universe. The universe evolves life. Life accelerates evolution. Life selects on its ability to continue to exist. Since intelligence is a survival skill life becomes smarter. Humans evolve and contemplate the universe.

But we are the universe. We are not something that is outside looking in. We are star stuff. The properties of the universe created us. The more we understand the universe the more likely we are to survive. As we become smarter we get to the point where we contemplate our own creation process. But we are the universe, so it would be correct to say that the universe contemplates itself through us. That we are the mechanism that the universe created to become self aware through us.

I'm not saying that the big bang had intent to create us for some higher purpose. But it's more like asking, "How does a rock know how to roll downhill?" It doesn't have to know how to do it, or have the intents to roll downhill, it just does. Rocks have mass and when they are exposed to gravity it rolls downhill.

Similarly universes evolve and when they do they create intelligent life and eventually that life contemplates how it was created. This may be happening on other planets and we are one of many places in the universe where this is happening. Or we might be unique and this is it and if we fail it might take billions of years before it happens again. Different people have opinions but no one actually knows. All we really know is that it's happening here.

If life is an emergent property of the universe, and if intelligence is an emergent property of life, then we are part of a greater process that leads to the universe developing the ability to be self aware. That the laws of existence leads to this and humanity is part of that process. That is that we are part of that process so far and as long as we cheat extinction.

Our higher purpose is to continue the process that created us in the first place.

If we continue on the path that we seem to be on then we will continue to evolve. Our evolution will require us to become even smarter and have our understanding of reality expand. The universe will become smarter through us. We therefore have a purpose in that we are part of a natural process that leads to the universe becoming self aware. Does that have meaning? Is this some kind of a higher purpose? Is this the meaning of meaning? I think it is.