Religion

When physicists vote on the universe



AL **EARLEY**

A recent survey of roughly 1,700 physicists asked them how to explain one of the strangest facts in science: the universe looks finely tuned for life. The numbers that set the strength of gravity, the expansion rate of the universe, the masses of particles and the initial conditions at the beginning all fall within ranges so narrow that a tiny change would make stable galaxies, chemistry or life impossible. One accepted figure for the expansion rate is one part in 10 to the 90th power. Outside that window the universe either collapses or expands so fast that stars never form. Physicists call this fine-tuning. The survey asked what they think explains it.

The largest group, about 26%, said the constants are simply brute facts that need no further explanation. Roughly 20% pointed to a multiverse, the idea that there are vast numbers of universes and we happen to live in one of the rare ones that permits life. About 16 to 19% said there must be some deeper principle that forces the numbers to be what they are. Only about 9% chose an intelligent designer. A smaller number preferred some kind of cosmic Darwinism in which universes somehow reproduce. The popular narrative says scientists must choose between a designer and a multiverse. The survey shows that most physicists choose neither. They simply say there is nothing to explain.

Paul described this pattern long ago. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse" (Romans 1:18-20). The evidence is not hidden. It is written into the fabric of what has been made. Yet many who study that fabric most carefully conclude that it cannot point to God. They suppress the plain implication and call the fine-tuning a brute fact.

Philosopher of science Stephen Meyer argues that this response misses the force of the evidence. In his book "Return of the God Hypothesis" he presents three discoveries that, taken together, point beyond pure chance or pure matter. First, the universe had a beginning. Observations of distant galaxies and the mathematics of general relativity indicate that space, time, matter and energy came into existence a finite time ago. A beginning requires a cause that is not itself part of the material universe. Second, from the beginning the universe has been finely tuned. Meyer notes that when we find systems in ordinary experience that must be set within narrow ranges to work, a recipe, an engine, a piece of software, we uniformly attribute them to a mind. Third, since the beginning, large amounts of functional information have appeared in living cells. DNA carries digital code that builds proteins. That kind of specified information, Meyer argues, is the product of mind, not of undirected chemistry.

"For though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened" (Romans 1:21). Meyer notes that for more than a century many scientists have operated under a rule called methodological naturalism: science is limited to materialistic explanations only. Harvard biologist Richard Lewontin once said the commitment to materialism is absolute; a divine foot cannot be allowed in the door. Under that rule, design is ruled out before the evidence is weighed. Yet, the evidence for a designer has not grown weaker with time. It has grown stronger. The question remains open: when every other finely tuned system we know is the work of a mind, why treat the universe differently?

What do you make of the fact that most physicists in the survey treat fine-tuning as a brute fact rather than something that needs an explanation? Does Romans 1:18-21 describe a pattern you still see when brilliant people face evidence that points to God? Where do you see the difference between following the evidence and a prior commitment that forbids certain answers?

The heavens do indeed declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). The same Lord who spoke the universe into being, set its constants and wrote the code of life is the one who invites us to know him. When we look carefully at what he has made, and refuse to suppress the truth, his name is lifted high.

Al Earley is the pastor of La Grange Presbyterian Church.

Leaving a mark



DAWN **REED**

A few years ago, my beloved was asked to preach the annual sermon at the Kentucky Baptist Convention's annual meeting. (He's from Big Creek of Pike County. Neither of us saw that coming.)

He would have the privilege of sharing a sermon with his preacher friends and peers from all over the state.

For the occasion, my beloved did two things. He prayed for the Lord to give him the exact words to speak, and he bought a new pair of pants.

The perfect slacks were chosen at a nice clothing store out of our area. While they weren't extravagant, they were the nicest britches that Big Creek boy had ever owned.

A short time later, we made our way to the annual meeting in Louisville. He was ready with the Word; I was excited that he would be sharing the Word.

In the hotel room the morning of, I did what I've done for decades. I got the ironing board out and plugged in the iron to get his preachin' clothes ready. I ironed his shirt with great care. Then, it was time to press the fancy pants.

When the iron hit the fabric, it stuck. And sizzled. The heat of the iron scorched the dress pants, leaving a huge mark on the leg. They were ruined. "I'm sooo sorry!" I gasped.

All the points go to my beloved. He calmly said, "I'll just wear the ones I wore yesterday." And he did.

A hot iron on poly blend pants can leave a huge mark. Hurtful, critical words can leave a huge mark, too.

Followers of Christ need to be careful with what comes out of our mouths. Proverbs 12:18 shares insight: "Reckless words pierce like a sword …" Yikes!

In the Bible we find many examples of people who scorched with their words: Pharaoh, Jezebel, Nabal, the Pharisees. Jesus did not. When He saw outcasts, lepers, the demon possessed, people caught in sin, the sick, lame, and blind He saw their worth and potential. He spoke with kindness and compassion.

Galatians 6:10 encourages us to do good to all people when we have the opportunity. I'm gonna say, let us speak good to all people when we have the opportunity. Even in an election year.

Ephesians 4:29 reminds us, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up …" Unwholesome talk is not just four-letter words, but words that tear people down.

Psalm 19:14 shares, "Let the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be pleasing in Your eyes, O Lord …" (NLV). Yes, please!

I saw a powerful quote recently but can't cite the source: "Be the one who leaves people feeling lighter, safer, and more seen. Who speaks with kindness, makes others feel valued, and reminds them of their worth. Be the kind of person people feel better for having met."

Our words can be sweet as honey or they can burn a blister, leaving a permanent mark.

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