**Is the Origin of Life a Scientific Question?**

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**The Origin of Life: What Are the Possibilities?**

The origin of life has been debated for a long time. Basically, there are four possible explanations for the existence of life on earth:

1. Life on earth arose spontaneously.
2. Life on earth has always existed.
3. Life on earth came about through a supernatural act of creation by an intelligent Being.
4. Life was seeded from space.

**The Application of Science to the Question**

Science is supposed to be about things that are observable. That is, science can probe only things that we can detect with our five senses. Science also must be repeatable. This means that when an experiment or observation is repeated, we get the same results. These restrictions on science have led to what we call the scientific method, the general rules that we follow in doing science. The scientific investigation of the origin of life presents us with at least two problems. First, since life began before people were around, we hardly can observe the process. Second, since the origin of life appears to have been a unique event, we hardly can repeat it.

How do these four possibilities stack up? The fourth possibility doesn’t really explain how life came about, but instead passes the question off to some other location. Many would object that the third option is unscientific and hence ought not to be considered. If we restrict the definition of “scientific” to questions that can be answered through the application of the scientific method to natural processes, then option three may be considered unscientific. However, what is the status of the other two options? Option one is the assertion of abiogenesis, the belief that life must have arisen from non-living things through a natural process. However, abiogenesis has never been observed. To the contrary, it has been shown numerous times that biogenesis is true, that only living things give rise to living things. That is, abiogenesis has been scientifically disproved. To persist in belief in abiogenesis, one must believe in something that clearly is unscientific.

What about option two? Life can be eternally existent only if the earth and the universe are eternal. However, the overwhelming scientific consensus today is that the universe is not eternal but instead had its origin a finite time ago. This conclusion most often is reached by appeal to a big bang origin for the universe. In fact, the vast majority of scientists today would opine that the big bang is a scientific fact However, not all scientists agree with the big bang model, but one may scientifically conclude a finite age of the universe by other means. For example, the second law of thermodynamics requires that the universe will eventually suffer a “heat death,” where no usable energy remains. This clearly is not the case presently, so the universe cannot be eternal.

Hence, to accept either option one or option two requires violating basic conclusions of science. Since neither option one nor option two is scientific and option four does not answer the question of the ultimate origin of life, only extreme bias against any possibility of the supernatural origin of life would lead one to reject the third possibility. The fact that none of the four options are scientific underscores the fact that the origin of life is not a scientific question.

**Attempts to Answer the Question**

Perhaps the best solution to this dilemma is to conclude that life does not exist. Some may insist that is a silly response. It is, but it is no sillier than some other suggested responses. For instance, some people may say, “Well, we’re here, so option one must have happened.” As reasonable as that may seem to the person saying it, it hardly proves that life arose spontaneously. One could just as easily say, “Well, we’re here, so option three must have happened.” A person who believes in the eternality of the universe could just as easily assert that option two must be true, because we are here. This approach commits the informal fallacy of begging the question (i.e., assuming what you are trying to prove while making an argument).

A better approach might be to assert that the only reason why we have not observed abiogenesis is that it so rarely happens. That is a logical possibility, but it has no empirical evidence to support it. Belief in abiogenesis is the reason why so much attention is given to the search for evidence for life elsewhere in the universe. This search takes many forms, such as programs leading to the discovery of extrasolar planets, planets orbiting other stars. So far, we have found about 2,000 other planets, but none are clearly earth-like, that is, suitable for life. Another manifestation for the search for life elsewhere is the seemingly never-ending missions to Mars. Each mission to Mars reveals no evidence for life on Mars (and frequently shows just the opposite to be the case), which is followed by the next mission that appears to be based upon the premise that we just haven’t looked in the right parts of Mars yet. Then there is SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. SETI operates by listening for radio broadcasts from planets orbiting other stars. The first SETI program was in 1960. Today SETI operates almost continuously, and it has generated a tremendous amount of data. What has been the result of all of this data? We have found no evidence of any alien transmissions.

There are other avenues that the search for life elsewhere has pursued. Suffice it to say that none have produced any encouraging evidence for life elsewhere. Therefore, as far as science has been able to demonstrate thus far, life does not exist anywhere else. One may object that all the data are not in. That is true, but when are all the data ever in for any question in science? By this reasoning, we can never reach a conclusion in science, because some future data might contradict the conclusion that the current data leads to. In science, we work with the data that we have in hand. Sometimes further data overturns an earlier conclusion. That is the nature of science—it changes. However, that never can be the justification for reaching the opposite conclusion suggested by the data that we now have. Only bias in favor of abiogenesis causes abiogenesis to persist as a real possibility in the minds of many scientists.

The prospect that life is unique to the earth is unsettling to many scientists. That would leave the door wide open to the possibility that the earth has special status. In turn, that has theistic implications. But what if the best data, the best science, lead to that conclusion that there might be a Creator? Only extreme atheistic bias would preclude God’s existence. It is no wonder that some scientists have concluded that their science tells them that there is no God—that was the assumption that they started with. Once again, we encounter the informal fallacy of begging the question.

The lack of the existence of life elsewhere, along with recognition of the extreme complexity of even simple life, and the fact that matter does not spontaneously order itself into complex machinery such as required by life has led some to posit the eternal universe. They reason that the probability of life arising spontaneously from non-life is vanishingly small, so small that life could not arise in a universe even billions of years old. However, they believe that if the universe is eternal, then even an event extremely improbable as the origin of life eventually will happen. In a universe with a finite age, it is inconceivable that life could arise, but in an eternal universe, it is inevitable that life will arise at least once somewhere. Many people who believe in option four, that life originated elsewhere and was seeded on the earth, believe in an eternal universe. However, as previously stated, there are good reasons to believe that the universe is not eternal, not to mention God’s revelation that He created the universe.

**The Multiverse**

Enter the multiverse. The multiverse is the idea that our universe is just one of an infinite number of universes, collectively referred to as the multiverse. The proposal is that existing universes give rise to new universes all the time. Each universe in the multiverse has a finite age, but collectively, the multiverse may have always existed. In this sense, the multiverse is a return to an eternal entity. The multiverse has been invoked to explain a number of physical and cosmological difficulties. Just one of these problems is the origin of life. If the origin of life is so improbable as not to have occurred in a single universe of finite age, then increase the odds by positing an infinite number of universes, even though each universe has a finite age. The reasoning is that this still amounts to an infinite number of chances, which means that in at least one universe life will arise. It is not happenstance that we are in that universe, because we would not be here to contemplate this question if we were not.

To most people, the multiverse idea seems desperate and just a wee bit crazy. But this idea has gained tremendous traction among cosmologists, astronomers, and physicists. They even talk of some sort of observational tests for the multiverse. They claim that early in the existence of our universe, other universes might have left an imprint. However, if another universe really could breach the barrier between universes, wouldn’t that universe then be a part of our universe? Otherwise, that situation would seem to contradict the very definition of universe, the totality of physical existence. Ultimately, the existence of other universes, if they really are other universes, lies beyond the realm of science, because they are not part of physical existence, at least the physical existence that we will ever be able to probe.

**Conclusion**

Let us return to the question of the origin of life. Every attempt to explain life contradicts science. But don’t feel bad about that, because science is a very limited practice. There are many things, such as the answers to moral questions that we cannot learn from science. Clearly, a Creator is a logical possibility (yes, this is a possibility, scientifically). If science cannot tell us the origin of life, then if we wish to learn about life’s origin, we must look elsewhere. The first few chapters of Genesis are an account of the origin of life and everything else in our universe. We know that the Bible is inspired by God and hence is authoritative and reliable. The few other possibilities briefly discussed here contrast with the simplicity of the creation hypothesis. This illustrates the futility of man’s thinking that the Apostle Paul wrote about (Rom 1:21; Eph 4:17–18).

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