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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Does God Exist? – The Design of the Universe

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching argues that the conditions permitting life are best explained by an intelligent designer. It opens with a lottery illustration in which survival depends on selecting one yellow ball among billions of white ones. The illustration introduces its claim that a highly improbable, life-permitting outcome reasonably prompts a question about intentional arrangement.

The teaching describes interconnected conditions involving galaxies, stars, Earth, the moon, and Jupiter. It presents these as examples of the narrow requirements for life on Earth. It then moves from planetary conditions to the universe's physical constants and initial conditions, arguing that changes to these values could prevent the formation of the structures needed for life.

The teaching deliberately uses mainstream cosmology as common ground with skeptics. It acknowledges disagreement among believers about aspects of that model, including questions about the age of the universe. It does not attempt to settle those disputes here; its stated purpose is to argue that fine-tuning points to design even within the model accepted for this discussion.

Three explanations are considered: physical necessity, chance, and design. The teaching rejects physical necessity because it sees no reason the constants and initial conditions must take life-permitting values. It rejects chance as an inadequate explanation of the combined improbabilities, using repeated lottery wins to illustrate why an intelligent arrangement would be suspected.

The multiverse hypothesis is discussed as an attempt to explain a life-permitting universe through many universes with different conditions. The teaching objects that this proposal lacks observational evidence and introduces more assumptions. It appeals to simplicity through Occam's razor and uses a repeated winning poker-hand illustration to explain why merely proposing many universes does not persuade it to abandon design.

The conclusion presents intelligent design as the preferred explanation of fine-tuning. The teaching includes the qualification that this argument does not provide an absolute proof of a designer; it argues for the greater plausibility of that explanation over chance. It closes with Romans 1:20, connecting the created world with the perception of God's power and nature.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The opening lottery illustration connects an improbable survival outcome with suspected design.
- The teaching presents life-supporting conditions as interconnected.
- Its planetary examples include Earth's star, moon, and relationship with Jupiter.
- It distinguishes physical constants from initial quantities on which natural laws operate.
- Mainstream cosmology is used as common ground without settling believers' debates about it.
- Physical necessity, chance, and design are the three explanations considered.
- The teaching rejects the claim that life-permitting values are physically necessary.
- Repeated lottery wins and poker hands illustrate its objection to chance.
- The multiverse proposal is challenged on evidential and simplicity grounds.
- The conclusion favors an intelligent designer while retaining the argument's stated limit as a proof.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. In the opening illustration, the one ball that permits survival is _____.
2. The planet discussed as helping draw asteroids and comets away from Earth is _____.
3. The force used in the example of attraction and planetary orbits is _____.
4. The three explanations considered are physical necessity, chance, and _____.
5. The proposal involving many universes is called the _____ hypothesis.

6. The closing Scripture connecting creation with God's invisible nature is Romans _____.

Challenging

1. The two types of fine-tuning discussed include physical constants and initial _____.
2. The teaching uses the mainstream scientific model to establish common _____ with skeptics.
3. The proposed explanation that the universe must be life-permitting is physical _____.
4. The principle of simplicity invoked against multiplying universes is Occam's _____.
5. In Plantinga's poker illustration, the dealer repeatedly gives himself four _____.
6. The conclusion favors an intelligent _____ as the explanation of fine-tuning.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of the yellow-ball illustration, and how does the teaching connect it with life-permitting conditions?
2. How does the teaching move from conditions for life on Earth to conditions governing the universe?
3. Why does the teaching adopt mainstream cosmology for this discussion while leaving some theological questions aside?
4. What reasons does it give for rejecting physical necessity and chance?
5. How are Occam's razor and the poker illustration used in the response to the multiverse hypothesis?
6. How does the teaching distinguish a preferred explanation from an absolute proof of a designer?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. yellow
2. Jupiter
3. gravity
4. design
5. multiverse
6. 1:20

Challenging

1. conditions
2. ground
3. necessity
4. razor
5. aces
6. designer