Wall Street Journal Article: Science making the case for God?

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In 1966 Time magazine ran a cover story asking: Is God Dead? Many have accepted the cultural narrative that he’s obsolete—that as science progresses, there is less need for a “God” to explain the universe. Yet it turns out that the rumors of God’s death were premature. More amazing is that the relatively recent case for his existence comes from a surprising place—science itself.

Here’s the story: The same year Time featured the now-famous headline, the astronomer Carl Sagan announced that there were two important criteria for a planet to support life: The right kind of star, and a planet the right distance from that star. Given the roughly octillion—1 followed by 24 zeros—planets in the universe, there should have been about septillion—1 followed by 21 zeros—planets capable of supporting life.

With such spectacular odds, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, a large, expensive collection of private and publicly funded projects launched in the 1960s, was sure to turn up something soon. Scientists listened with a vast radio telescopic network for signals that resembled coded intelligence and were not merely random. But as years passed, the silence from the rest of the universe was deafening. Congress defunded SETI in 1993, but the search continues with private funds. As of 2014, researchers have discovered precisely bubkis—0 followed by nothing.

What happened? As our knowledge of the universe increased, it became clear that there were far more factors necessary for life than Sagan supposed. His two parameters grew to 10 and then 20 and then 50, and so the number of potentially life-supporting planets decreased accordingly. The number dropped to a few thousand planets and kept on plummeting.

Even SETI proponents acknowledged the problem. Peter Schenkel wrote in a 2006 piece for Skeptical Inquirer magazine: “In light of new findings and insights, it seems appropriate to put excessive euphoria to rest . . . . We should quietly admit that the early estimates . . . may no longer be tenable.”

As factors continued to be discovered, the number of possible planets hit zero, and kept going. In other words, the odds turned against any planet in the universe supporting life, including this one. Probability said that even we shouldn’t be here.

Today there are more than 200 known parameters necessary for a planet to support life—every single one of which must be perfectly met, or the whole thing falls apart. Without a massive planet like Jupiter nearby, whose gravity will draw away asteroids, a thousand times as many would hit Earth’s surface. The odds against life in the universe are simply astonishing.

Yet here we are, not only existing, but talking about existing. What can account for it? Can every one of those many parameters have been perfect by accident? At what point is it fair to admit that science suggests that we cannot be the result of random forces? Doesn’t assuming that an intelligence created these perfect conditions require far less faith than believing that a life-sustaining Earth just happened to beat the inconceivable odds to come into being?

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Eric Metaxas (born 1963) is an American author, speaker, and TV host. He is best known for two biographies, *Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery* about William Wilberforce and *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* about Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He has also written humor, children’s books, and scripts for *VeggieTales*. Metaxas is the founder and host of the NYC-based event series, “Socrates in the City: Conversations on the Unexamined Life” and the co-host of the nationally syndicated weekly Sunday morning program, 100 Huntley Street. Metaxas was born in Astoria, Queens, grew up in Danbury, Connecticut and graduated from Yale University, where he edited the *Yale Record*, the nation’s oldest college humor magazine. Metaxas lives in Manhattan with his wife and daughter. He is Greek on his father’s side and German on his mother’s, while he was raised in a Greek Orthodox environment.