



The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead

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Is there a higher power in the universe? What happens to us when we die? Frank J. Tipler claims to scientifically prove the existence of God and the physical resurrection of the dead.

The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead Details

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From Reader Review The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead for online ebook

Josh says

Uses relativity and the possible energies of the "Big Crunch" and relativity to explain how god is a possible future. The book offers not entirely implausible theories providing hope about the physical universe and its ultimate future.

Carla René says

I've never read such a pedantic, implausible piece of trash in all my years of studying physics as it relates to Cosmology. First, the author (book written sometime in 1996 so I realise technology has changed quickly), a professor of Mathematical Physics at Tulane University (if one could call him such), has the unmitigated gall to firstly suggest that the "findings of his research with some of physics's top minds" has nothing to do with Christianity or the existence of Christ. It will encompass all religions in an attempt to explain their own trajectory and how it relates to cosmology and the actual laws of physics concerning the end times, and when the planets finally get hungry enough to eat themselves. (Wait...I think I just threw up a little in my mouth....no, I'm okay.)

Well, okay, I'll stomach that one and move on to a later chapter, but THAT, my friend, was when I simply tossed my cookies. Let me see if I can provide a brief (why would I subject anyone to more of this crap than needed? I'm not a masochist for God's sake) quote concerning his next topic of import:

After tangent upon tangent at disproving the Turing Test, he then goes on to say that it won't be God's Second Coming that will raise us from our mortality and transform us into glorified beings; nor will it be simply understanding and taking a closer look at the actual Laws of Physics themselves that will help to supply some answers to coming events. (Sorry gang--I'm a BIG Hawking/Penrose fan on this one.) His quote: "But the fundamental reason for allowing the creation of intelligent machines (thus tying it back to the impassable Turing Test) is that without their help, the human race is doomed. With their help, we can and will survive forever. To see this, let us first see how they could help us colonise space." THAT is his answer, folks! He used the rest of the book for finding practical ways of making these machines a reality. The kicker? Inside the first flap is this sub-title: "What if science, in its relentless drive to uncover the secrets of the universe, discovered God?"

I SO wanted to like this book. It borders on my Astrophysics Physics Thesis. But it sucks eggs. And not any old egg--a Turing Egg.

Ron says

Religion and science...ahhh, those classic antagonists. The Catholic Church sees fit to torture poor Galileo and Copernicus, whose observations do not fit in with the Ptolemaic geocentric universe that so nicely fits in with its philosophy. Petr Beckmann's fine History of Pi takes the Church to task for the Dusk and Night of scientific discovery in the Middle Ages. The litany of new atheist books out, from Dawkins to Hitchens,

claims we cannot have science and religion together.

On the other side, Hasidim take the plethora of evidence we have for the age of the universe and tell us that it was all planted by G-d to test our faith. (Faith?!?) Yes, really, the Earth is 5768 years old. And don't even get me started on this evolution business; I mean, c'mon, everyone knows it's just a theory. (Gravitation, too, is "just" a theory...it's hard to type while I float away.)

Or, can religion and science live together? Many of my fellow science geeks (me included) live in a world where we depend on accepted and experimentally proven scientific principles to advance our careers, and yet, we still manage to have some religion while not feeling like complete hypocrites. I justify this by defining the scientific universe to be that space of ideas that we understand enough to model, while religion concerns those ideas that cannot be proven or disproven. Yes, there are nuances, but it is a simple division that helps to guide me as I work and raise children.

Now comes along one Prof. Frank Tipler, who, with *The Physics of Immortality* (TPOI), takes everything one giant step further by asserting that science and religion not only can coexist, but religion is in fact a branch of physics. Holy mind-bend, Batman!

The first hint the reader has that this is all a bunch of mush is that this book came out nearly 15 years ago. If the theology as branch of physics idea had any legs, well...don't you think it's a big enough idea that you may have heard of it by now?

Yes yes, some ideas are so good, so ahead of their time, that they take at least that long to sink in.

In any case, Tipler, who co-wrote "The Cosmological Anthropic Principle," is continuing on a theme in that book: that there exists a singularity in space-time which he calls the Omega Point. His interpretation of this singularity is such that all life is resurrected in the Judeo-Christian sense when we reach this Omega Point in space-time. The rub is that Tipler claims to have a pure physics explanation and proof of this.

The main part of the book is a review of philosophy and cosmology, from Marx & Engels and Heidegger to Penrose and Turing. In one sense, the book fits right into the genre popularized by Hofstadter and Penrose about the science of consciousness and intelligence. Much discussion is given to computing bounds, testable physical theories, quantum mechanics, and general relativity (in the most general sense possible). Much better discussions of these things, and more, can be found in Penrose's "The Emperor's New Clothes."

In another sense, this book tries to cover the realm of human knowledge in about 300 pages, discussing technology, economics, religion, science, etc. It makes for a dizzying experience to try to keep a narrative going, and one gets the feeling that Tipler is merely showing off how much he's read over the years.

The death knell for this book, however, is the "Appendix for Scientists." I must simply quote the beginning to give you a flavor of the attitude he holds toward his readers:

"Unfortunately, even for the expert, the science in this Appendix for Scientists is extremely interdisciplinary. To comprehend it all without reference to a research library would require Ph.D.'s in at least three disparate fields: (1) global general relativity, (2) theoretical particle physics, and (3) computer complexity theory. My own Ph.D. is in (1), and I myself can understand (2) and (3) without the Ph.D.'s only because I've spent the past 15 years teaching myself those fields. I've done it, so you can do it."

In trying to democratize his knowledge ("I've done it, so you can do it."), Tipler is actually daring the reader

to verify that the contents of the book are simply bullshit. Hey, it should only take us, what, 15 years? By the way, the equations are correct as far as I can tell, but what they have to do with the truth of his asinine hypothesis, I have no idea. This appendix is the biggest snow job I have ever seen.

There is, however, valuable information in the book, so long as you try to take it out of context. It's just that you can find it elsewhere, better written, and with an actual point to be made that won't have you howling.

Matthew says

The physics explanations are extremely complex and incomprehensible, so when he uses his conclusions to support his omega point theory, there is really no way the reader can weigh the results or obtain even a basic understanding of what this guy is talking about. Definitely not effective at catering to the non physicist reader as he claims is his intention. I had to force myself to finish it.

Braden Canfield says

Tipler is nuts. Brilliant, interesting, compelling, but nuts. This book comes across as a genius's urgent need to heal the pain of the holocaust by resurrecting the dead in the grandest thought-experiment of all time.

Asgar says

Wandering the library, comfortably lost in more ways than one, I found myself gravitating towards the physics section. Scanning the spines of hundreds of potential candidates to fill in my spare time, I happened across one curious title... *The Physics of Immortality*.

As some modicum of hope stirred within me, disturbing - for a brief moment - the pessimistic cynicism that I have operated under ever since apostatizing at the age of seven, I pulled the book from the shelf and began reading on the spot.

It started out terribly hopeful. I was so excited, honestly. Despite the many arguments I've had with theists, where I speak with such condescending conviction; I was looking forward to finding how wrong I have been...

I read on... To find more promises of accrediting the after-life, the existence of a soul etc. He claimed religion was merely a branch of physics, which had a fantastical ring, to my mind...

A few hours passed, the guy persisted in bringing the reader up-to-speed on modern physics, which really was a topic in itself for other books, I thought to myself. Soon it just felt like he was procrastinating and displaying how much he knows about physics. Self-indulgent musing. Tedious... I found myself growing skeptical.

His appendix was impressive, he obviously knows his stuff, I resolved. Then I found myself thinking: 'hey, why haven't I heard of this book?!" And when I flipped to the start to find it was published over a decade ago, I just shat bricks. Really.

I. Shat. Bricks. All over the floor of the aisle.

It wasn't wholly due to the fact that I was really hoping for his outrageous theory of the Omega Point to be law, it was also because of the pompous language he uses in parts of the book. He talks like he's the next

fucking Issac Newton. And he waves his equations around in order to overwhelm his more laymen readers into accepting that he *must* be right because he obviously knows his shit. But his mathematics have no apparent relevance to anything he talks about.

I might as well construct some wild theory that cheese contains the only particle capable of resisting the gravitational pull of black holes, and that one day all matter will be sucked into a black hole, only to leave an abundance of cheese floating in space, wherein the dairy product will eventually clump into spheres, become massive enough to warp space and develop a gravitational field. Then a species of cheese dwellers will evolve.

It's going to happen, you'll just be dead, so you don't know if I'm right or not.

It's highly credible, I assure you, let me just toss some formulas and equations at you to make sure. *hurls massive clump of math*

Now we just need to figure out a way to splice human DNA with cheese.

EDIT - I don't usually utilize the fools method *reductio ad absurdum*, mind you, but the proposition in question is of such absurdity that it requires no reduction whatsoever.

Jef says

It's a wild idea, God as the infinite Turing machine at the collapse of the universe. He finds the idea of the eternal return very repugnant. Given the current guesses about the state of cosmology, I would have to reject the basic premise as having been tested and found to be false. The universe is flat and expanding forever, at least until it hits another brane. We live in a multiverse and that would imply an infinite number of infinite Omega Points.

The idea that the future ultimate computer can resurrect every possible human is flawed. Assume that the UC is benevolent (a rational hope!). Now if the computer resurrects all beings with all possible memories (roughly $2^{10^{17}}$ according to Tipler) the vast majority of these beings are going to have disjointed memories that make no sense. They will be in schizophrenic. It would be hellish to resurrect these beings. But, according to the halting theory of computer science, it is impossible to determine if the output of a computer program halts or if it produces an infinite sequence of gibberish. Therefore, a benevolent UC would NOT resurrect every possible human out of concern that it would be condemning the vast majority of those resurrected beings to a hellish existence.

Also, a problem with eternal life. We are finite state machines so it is inevitable that we would enter into a previous mental state and then evolve away from that state in a loop, destined to repeat the same things over and over in a infinite loop. Ok, but I don't think that is what most people think of when they think of eternal life.

Sam Eccleston says

I must admit I only read about 40 pages of this book, and usually under those circumstances I would not feel able to offer an opinion. However, the grandiose claims made in the introduction are followed by such deeply inadequate arguments that I feel able to make the following comment. I am confident, on the basis of the first 40 or so pages, that the rest of the work is utter nonsense.

The author, apparently a distinguished Physicist, feels equipped to hold forth in what must be described as a

rather condescending manner on issues philosophical and theological. Unfortunately, he seems to barely understand what is at stake in the issues he discusses. His treatment of John Searle's Chinese Room thought experiment is a particularly laughable case in point. He objects to Searle's conclusions on the basis that, in the scenario Searle envisages, the person in the room would be unable to access a sufficiently large amount of information in a sufficiently short time to pass a Turing test convincingly.

As first-year undergraduate philosophy students the world over will tell you, this is utterly irrelevant. Thought experiments do not, in most important respects, have to mimic an actual possible set of events to be accurate; what they isolate is the meaning of concepts. In this case, Searle is pointing out that processes can be designed to manipulate symbols in a way which is meaningful to an end user, but this does not mean that the process user, or the process itself, actually understands what is being done. His point is that thought cannot be boiled down to computation, so there is no way that a computer could 'think' irrespective of how great its computational powers were.

On the basis of this dreadful nonsense, I felt able to discard the book without further inspection.

Szplug says

I bought this purely for the purpose of seeing how Tipler, a theoretical physicist, was going to construct a mathematically-based proof that the *end of the universe* will consist of God resurrecting all the souls of those who have ever lived and taking them on an eternity-trip to Heaven, replete with memories, milk, and stardust cookies—and then freely stealing his ideas where applicable in order to incorporate them into my own half-baked conjecture about this infinite wad of Silly Putty™ we call existence. And that is, indeed, what the well-intentioned author endeavors to prove, backed by some serious mathematical noodling: for notwithstanding that the *milk and cookies* bit above was unnecessarily snide, my reading has yet led me to the conclusion that this Theodicy will transpire at the winding-down of the universe due to beatific entropy, the blessed conservation of matter, and, in a fit of inspired quiddity, the holy hand grenade—for as we approach the Omega Point of a contracting universe (and this state of contraction may be manipulable by ultra-advanced science and its aggregate of artificial intelligence, if the universe refuses to play along) its state will progress to that of infinite entropy and infinite information, transferred to ever-higher energy states and supra-complex algorithms via the ungodly energy levels siphoned from gravitational shear and such. The speculation about this *Big Crunch* and what it portends for our past-lived human lives—encoded information at its most basic level—once we approach the Omega Point and a cosmic waveform of infinite information, trailing an AI-augmented human science expanding its scope in exponential fashion, is actually quite interesting; it is the attempts to shoehorn such theoretical workings into soteriological loafers that force Tipler to strain, with his analogies, contemplations, and numbers, towards making God's promise of immortality workable, nay, reasonable, within the physical constraints of a universe/multiverse bound by the laws of physics. God is, in essence, the Omega Point, capable of operating through reversed time to set the salvational scenario for that endpoint's status and retro-enacting the miraculous through the vestiges of accelerated spacetime.

It all seems appropriately and wonderfully wackadoo—another reviewer makes the believable claim that *Tipler is nuts. Brilliant, interesting, compelling, but nuts. This book comes across as a genius's urgent need to heal the pain of the Holocaust by resurrecting the dead in the grandest thought-experiment of all time.* But I'll be damned if I don't appreciate another fellow taking the time and effort to put his own private visions into understandable prose and formulae, taking them to the absolute limit while holding fast to his convictions, and then making them available for the inevitable scorn and mockery that will attend to

them—as, apparently, it does to people like Esteban. Attaboy, Tipler!

Chris says

I understood about 5 percent of this book. I read it on the ferry to Ellis Island in order to impress a girl. She wasn't that impressed.

James says

Wishful thinking disguised as science.

Tim Pendry says

This is definitely a very odd book. Two decades ago, Frank Tipler, a seriously bright cosmologist and mathematical physicist, attempted to prove that the core revelation of religion - that God exists and we are immortal - could be derived from contemporary physics.

Tipler writes quite well so, noting the sections of pure science that cannot be easily understood (and their appendices 'for scientists' that perhaps only a handful of humans can comprehend), this can be read as serious entertainment at least by intelligent lay people.

His intelligence is not in doubt. He does not, at any time, fall into some of the more obvious traps of those who want religious revelation to be true but the book is ultimately unpersuasive. It stands as a theory of possibility and speculative science but no more.

The problem throughout is one of base-line assumptions. To get to the point where God exists, as absolute information at Omega Point, and can reconstruct us in physical form as an immortal *physical* sub-programme, he has to make a number of early leaps in the dark.

I do not doubt what I cannot understand - the mathematical physics - but I can reasonably doubt these assumptions and so the attempt to create a modern science-based primordialism becomes interesting and even entertaining but not something that will change my life.

As with many of my reviews, my interest is less on the claims of the author but why such claims appear culturally at a particular point in time and particular place - in this case, the United States in the final fifth of the twentieth century.

Perhaps the best way of approaching this is to look for the cultural clues when Tipler abandons science and starts looking into revelation and opinion - into theology, other religions and American Deism. Why does he even need to do this? Just to connect to his readers?

Surely his Omega Point Theory should stand on its own two feet as theoretical science and lead us to the conclusions without any requirement for any reference to the beliefs of the past. Is he suggesting that great

minds in the past 'intuited' scientific truth?

There is an ambiguity and woolly-mindness here that he corrects himself frequently but which will puzzle the European reader in particular. It reads a little as a variant of 'Fox Mulderism' - if not 'I want to believe' then 'I know you need to believe'.

What seems to be going on here is that a sincere mathematical physicist thinks he has found a theory of cosmology that ends up with outcomes close to those of the great religions and he wants to connect with his confused and less bright audience by offering hope.

One can imagine that some people might grasp at this straw - though I see no evidence that either scientists or theologians have *en masse* taken his theories very seriously. It is a straw that hopes to reintegrate science and religion, the liberal dream of the age.

There are clues to the ethical motivation throughout - family horror at the Holocaust (a nightmare that has become demonically symbolic for American liberals), the problem of evil, the fear of extinction, the quiet unusually ignorant rage against existentialism.

This is a cry for help from a decent man whose science has stripped away all hope in a culture that still believes in non-sense on no scientific basis at all. Science is superior to faith so someone needs to give faith a scientific basis! He tries. He fails.

It is a cry from the depths of an America that suffers from a cultural internal contradiction that is playing itself out with even more intensity two decades later - between simple stupid faith and the complexities of a science understood by only a few.

Recent decades have seen many attempts, often laughable, to reconcile religion and science, faith and reason. They usually end up a liberal spiritual mush that evades and avoids deep thought.

Tipler is rightly critical of liberal theologians who actually believe in nothing but a vague good will and an ethics based on no serious consideration of their origin. His is not a soft option by any means. His notes are sometimes worth reading on this score.

But we are not dealing with one of the more ridiculous appropriations of science to invent reasons to believe - you know the sort of thing: that quantum physics has *proved* that spirit inhabits all of existence. Aum! No, it does not.

To his credit, Tipler sweeps all this nonsense away so that his theory is not non-sense - it makes good sense once certain assumptions are taken for granted - but science of a sort. Unfortunately, it is highly speculative science. Little can be built on it.

'Speculative science' has its logic but it sits between the science of experiment and science fiction. It is science but not reliable or true in itself, a source of wonder which yet cannot be taken as a description of the world. Still, it drives the liberal imagination

However, frustrating though the book has been, there are insights into a wide variety of areas - and not just science. Unusually among scientists, Tipler has a breadth of knowledge that applies critical thinking to fields as diverse as history, ethics and religion.

I cannot really recommend this book ultimately to anyone looking for meaning in the universe - to find meaning in it would be to be guilty, I think, of 'mauvaise foi' - nor is it entertaining as such but I can suggest it to any intelligent reader for its nuggets of insight.

This is a book that could only have been written in the United States during a crisis of faith by a man of fundamentally liberal values faced with the internal contradictions of his own culture.

The book may last not as science but I think it may do as a text that helps document that crisis, a crisis that has since gone global ...

Tom says

Tipler is a recognized expert in the fields of computer science, physics, and astronomy/cosmology. This is a very difficult read. The second half of the book consists of mathematical equations proving his theory set forth in the first half: That every human that ever lived will be immortalized in an emulation--and matched with his or her perfect mate. It is worth reading to gain insight into computer and programming theory. It also does a good job of laying out the future of the universe, in line with modern scientific theory. A church of Tiplerites has sprung up around this man's books.

Art King says

Cosmos and nanotechnology

Imagine the entire cosmos conquered by nanotech self-replicating machines? That's just one of the far-out ideas to chew on in this book. Even if the whole theory doesn't hang together, a lot of the parts are extremely interesting.

Note: Readers without a background in science or engineering will find this tough going.

Ron Banister says

There are worse attempts. Met him at Tulane & more interesting in person than in his prose.
