

The Truth and Uselessness of the Phrase, “Everything Happens for a Reason”

There is no question that everything happens for a reason; in fact, that phrase is a tautology – that is, it is necessarily true. Why? There are at least five possible reasons why things happen.

First, actions may happen due to physical laws and physical bodies being in certain situations, which cause things to happen. For example, gravity causes us to be attracted to the earth. Another example would be biochemical reactions in one’s brain that cause one’s behavior.

Second, actions may happen by chance. Actually, however, chance may be nothing other than an admission of ignorance of other, real causes. A possible example of chance is the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, where we cannot determine both the location and velocity of particles.

Third, actions may come about because of free will. For this option, we have a mind or a soul that is not physical that directs our bodies to perform actions. Most people assume that we have free will, but we would presumably not have a free will if we are nothing but physical stuff arranged in a certain way; for in that case we’d only be subject to physical laws.

Fourth, actions may come about because they are determined or caused by God. This option obviously assumes that God exists and that God interacts in the world (i.e., the theist conception of God). And if God exists, it is an open question whether God causes everything or just some things to happen.

Fifth, actions may come about from something that we’re not aware of, in which case we do not know what the reason for them is.

In sum, “everything happens for a reason” is necessarily true. The phrase is usually used to explain why something happened (such as an accident or a romance); however, the problem is that the explanation is too vague and therefore is not a real explanation at all. So the next time you hear someone say “everything happens for a reason,” ask them what reason it is that they’re referring to (and perhaps point out all the other possible reasons mentioned above), and how they know that.