

Sliding Doors

You can't discount the characters' blaspheming, but try and set it temporarily aside, and you have quite a good film. It's not the morality, but the moral message, and that comes over fairly well. But it's the film's basic concept, and its relation to the Christian view of God that got me thinking. And that's the idea of parallel universes.

In the film, Helen either just makes it or just misses the tube train - and from there her life takes very different though often parallel tracks.

This whole idea of alternative realities started with a bombshell dropped by Einstein and a couple of colleagues in 1935, just as the new Quantum Mechanics, the supposed theory of everything, was getting into its stride. The details are unimportant, but the upshot was that either there seemed no sensible way of understanding the universe or you had to adopt such bizarre ideas as to be unthinkable. One of these solutions, proposed by Hugh Everett in 1957, was that at each instant the universe splits in

an unimaginable multiplicity of alternatives.

Most physicists, if pressed, will adopt either the "no model" interpretation or, incredibly, this one. Everett himself later said he never expected the idea to be taken seriously, but that is conveniently forgotten.

Now Christians assign three particular attributes to God, one of them being omniscience - knowing everything. So that presumably means that God knows all the consequences of your actions, including those you don't adopt. Do all these alternatives just exist in the mind of God, becoming reality as all of us make millions of decisions daily? And if God already knows what those decisions will be, how does that stack up with free will?

I had an idea that you could reconcile free will with omniscience, by imagining watching a video of someone playing chess. The chess player is, for argument's sake, making free will decisions. But watch the video a second time - now you know what they will be. So the two can exist side by side.

Unfortunately, when you apply that to God, you squeeze out the second of His attributes, omnipotence. All we can do is watch the video, we can't change it. (*God's third attribute is omnipresence - which is how he comes to watch the chess player in the first place.*)

In fact, you can dream up little thought experiments that will capture any two of God's attributes, while the third always manages to wriggle away. You can never capture all three together.

Which brings us back to Quantum Mechanics. The problem is you can dream up a model to capture one of reality's attributes, but never all of them together. Light can be a wave or a particle but not both - yet it annoyingly it will be whichever you choose to measure.

Ultimately Christians and Physicists (*and Christian-Physicists*) have to come to the same conclusion - that some things will forever be beyond our understanding. It's just that Physicists can't bear to admit it.