A Meaningful World

The Poison of Meaninglessness

We have been drinking a poison that first infects our heads, then slowly moves to our hearts. It is the poison of meaninglessness. Many people assume that science says the universe is without purpose and everything is a result of random, meaningless events. A recently released book, *A Meaningful World* by Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt,{1} seeks to be the antidote to this poison by looking at science and how certain features of the universe do not fit within the materialistic worldview. This book will be our guide as we consider the question, How does science reveal meaning in the universe? But first, we need to understand the poison before we can discuss its antidote.

Within the scientific community, the assumption of meaninglessness is a result of its members' worldview. Most scientists hold to a materialistic worldview where everything is explained by physical or material causes, which are purposeless, random, natural events. Furthermore, a materialist reduces everything to its basic parts and claims that ultimate meaning lies in these parts. For example, when people say that we are a product of our genes, they are reducing humans to their chemical parts. By this definition, people do not have a soul, and the illusion of human genius or creativity is explained as neurons firing in the brain or animal instinct.

So if that is the poison, what is the antidote? The antidote comes from Christians who break the materialist spell by showing that the world is full of meaning and purpose because it has a Creator. This can be done by looking at scientific evidence for a meaningful world.

A good place to begin is with the idea of genius. Why study genius? Because the most poisonous effect of materialism is the way it skews our self-understanding or our worldview. In a materialistic world without a purpose, there would be no signs of creativity and genius in nature. Before Darwin's time, the evidences of creativity and beautiful design in nature were some of the best arguments against materialism. However, the theory of evolution through random, natural causes denied the masterful work of design.

First, we will learn how to recognize some common elements found in a work of genius by looking at one of the most well-known geniuses of all time, William Shakespeare. Then, we will see if those same elements show up in nature.

How Do We Know It's Genius? The Example of Shakespeare

A Meaningful World describes four elements that will show up in a work of genius: depth, clarity, harmony, and elegance. If the world is designed by an ingenious designer, then we should see these four elements of genius in nature.

How do we detect genius in nature? Let's take a look at the work of a well-known playwright, William Shakespeare, as our model for describing the elements of genius.

Consider the situation in *Hamlet* where we get the famous and often misused line, "Methinks it is like a weasel."{2} The surface reading is that Hamlet and Polonius are looking at clouds and Hamlet observes that one looks like a weasel. As we delve deeper and consider the context, we find that Hamlet is actually exposing Polonius as a weasel himself.

The deeper meaning in Shakespeare's work has intrigued academics for years. And it points us to our first character of genius, *depth* or depth of meaning.

However, depth is nothing if it cannot be detected. So here we come to our next element of genius, *clarity*. Shakespeare did not write the scene with Hamlet and Polonius for his own whimsy, but so that the reader would detect the double meaning in Hamlet's weasel comment. Ingenious works have depth and meaning that beg to be discovered. Hence, they have clarity.

The last two elements of genius go hand in hand: *harmony* and *elegance*. Harmony would describe how various parts—or in Shakespeare's case, how various scenes—are interrelated. In all of Shakespeare's plays, the characters and scenes are related to each other; no scene is random or contradictory to the rest of the play. They are in harmony with each other.

The last element, elegance, is not about parts but about the unifying whole. When all of the parts have come together and operate harmoniously, then we have a new element, in this case a play. No one scene stands alone, but is within a context of the whole. One cannot understand the line "Methinks it is like a weasel" without setting up the context of the play itself.

So from Shakespeare we have identified four important elements to genius: depth, clarity, harmony, and elegance. Let's see if we can find these same elements in nature.

Genius in the Periodic Table of Elements

When we turn to chemistry to see if we find a conspiracy of ingenious design, we will find that, just like a cleverly crafted puzzle that was meant to be solved, when you arrange the elements according to weight, the periodic table makes a stunning natural jigsaw puzzle.

Now that scientists have solved the jigsaw puzzle, they find that it gives us amazing information about atomic properties. This insight has allowed us to make everything from pharmaceuticals to cosmetics to weapons to particle accelerators. So is it just coincidence, or does the periodic

table display the properties of ingenious design?

Let’s consider how the periodic table works. When you line the main elements up in groups of eight, the periodic table functions much like a Sudoku puzzle. Elements going across a row, or period, are related in their structure, while elements going down a column are related in their properties. Sudoku puzzles are designed by the puzzle maker with just the right amount of clues for the puzzle to be solved. If you look at the history of chemistry, you will find that the periodic table was first put together because there just happened to be the right amount of clues to give us a reason to be suspicious of design.

Remember those four elements of Shakespeare’s work: depth, clarity, harmony, and elegance? It turns out that when we consider the periodic table, these properties across rows and columns display a *depth* of meaning beyond the obvious weight of elements. Secondly, its properties are clear enough for us to discover them, so it has *clarity*. The jigsaw puzzle of the elements arranged in this way display a *harmony* that sings sweetly to chemists’ ears; for example it turns out that elements on the right of the table generally combine with elements on the left of the table. Third, the periodic table of elements is *elegant* in how it operates as a functioning whole. We could not know the characteristics of many of the elements without having other elements to compare them to. In this sense, the table reads like a play in which each element is a character whose personality is only really seen in light of the entire cast of characters.

Although a materialist would say that we are nothing but chance chemical reactions, it seems that our chemistry is not so random after all, but that it was designed with us in mind. Next we will find mathematics and physics also have the properties of ingenious design.

Genius in Mathematics and Physics

The worldview of many scientists would have us believe that the universe is meaningless because it is the result of chance random processes. In mathematics, a language of the universe, do we find the handiwork of genius designer?

In the book *A Meaningful World*, the authors emphasized the *clarity* of mathematics because the ability of the human mind to discern mathematical principles is quite remarkable. The universe seems to follow certain mathematical laws: the pattern of the multiplication table, musical scales, and the beauty of symmetry. These mathematical laws, however, are not elusive. Since ancient times man has been able describe truths about nature in terms of numbers, counting, and patterns.

We can easily find the *harmony* and *elegance* in the language of nature by looking at mathematics and physics. Math has harmony because, starting with basic arithmetic, you can build all the way up to complex principles like calculus and trigonometry. The elegance of mathematics is really seen when applied to physical phenomena. After many years of experiments, we have discovered that the complicated idea of gravity can be described by one simple equation. This is natural elegance.

The *depth* of mathematics is more difficult to grasp because we are so accustomed to using math. After Newton's time, mathematics seemed to be the end all, be all, of the universe. This was stretched to the point that some worshipped mathematics over God. But soon mathematicians and scientists found that we did not actually have the whole picture. With Einstein's theory of general relativity and quantum mechanics, mathematics grew as a field and continues to grow and refine.

Although mathematics is an abstract idea, it is the language of the physical world. As we have seen, mathematics and the way it describes physical phenomena displays clarity, depth, harmony, and elegance. Math is the language that God invented.

And it is one of the ways that He speaks to us of His existence.

Genius in Biology

Since Darwin's day, biology has been infused with the idea that everything from bacteria to human beings has sprung from the result of random, purposeless, natural causes. But nature seems to show the fingerprints of the creative genius of our creator, God.

Can we see those signs in biology? *A Meaningful World* describes harmony within biology at length. Let's take a look at the cell.

The cell contains many parts: the mitochondria, the nucleus, and DNA. Each of these parts has its particular job to do. And, in addition, each part has a job that is related to all of the other parts of the cell. Think of the cell like a car engine and mitochondria as the carburetor. A carburetor has a specific job in the engine. You cannot talk about what a carburetor is without explaining how it works within the engine. Its job is related to all of the other parts. This is *harmony*, one of our elements of genius.

But what about elegance, depth, and clarity? It seems that these are also apparent in biology. The *elegance* of the cell is how it functions as one intricate machine, like our car engine. The cell is a biological engine; actually it is a very efficient, self-sustaining, self-replicating engine.

What about depth in biology? Let's go back to the cell. Cells get their energy through metabolism. We used to think that this was a simple path with many useless byproducts. Upon closer inspection, one sees that those byproducts have functions within the cell that are necessary for its survival. As we continue to study the cell, we find more and more *depth* to its function.

Finally, how does biology demonstrate *clarity*? Were we meant to find the handiwork of a designer? Most biologists would agree that biology is the study of things that have the appearance of design. If it appears designed perhaps it was, and perhaps we were meant to discover that. The genius behind biology is clear enough that God says that we are without excuse.{3}

Hopefully, you can see that creation is a masterful work of a divine genius. As the book *A Meaningful World* has shown us, nature bears the hallmark of design that has us, its students, in mind.

Notes

1. Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt, *A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genies of Nature (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006).*
2. Hamlet Act 3, Scene 2
3. Romans 1:19,20 (ESV)

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