

BOOK REVIEW

of

Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt,

A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature,
IVP Academic, 2006.

This book is in the Evangel Library,
and this review is by Larry D. Paarmann.

A certain talk show host bemoans the fact that a segment of the population and certain political leaders seem to promote and revel in mediocrity; rather than promoting and encouraging excellence in our society, we are supposed to not really excel in anything lest we seemingly show ourselves in some way superior to others. You may not observe this because our society is very inconsistent about such things. Superiority in sports and in entertainment is widely celebrated. In most other areas the supposedly democratic ideal of equality is promoted. I do not want this book review to be unnecessarily controversial nor perceived as a soapbox for my own opinions, but these comments are relevant to this book. The book celebrates genius. And that very fact struck me as almost being original since such ideas seem to be so infrequently expressed. The authors celebrate genius among men, but ultimately the genius of God. Does it somehow seem inappropriate to think of God as a genius? It is certainly a stimulating idea is it not? The authors argue not just for the evidence of design in the universe but evidence of genius! The concepts and the ideas in the book seem to me to glorify God in a way that I have not seen before in intelligent design literature. Thankfully it is not just my perception, but the book is endorsed by James Sire, Michael Behe, Phillip Johnson, William Dembski and others. To quote James Sire: "I have been reticent to affirm the value of the cosmological argument from design, but no longer. Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt have convinced me that from literature to mathematics, physics to biology, the very phenomena of the world breathe intelligence. *A Meaningful World* is a masterful argument, a tour de force, framed with brilliance and wit. Here is a convincing case for a universe charged not only with meaning, but with the glory of God." Previously I found the long list of physical constants in the universe precisely tuned for life to exist, the critical position of our solar system in our galaxy, the critical position of our planet, etc., etc. to be interesting but sort of ho hum. So what? That's just the way it is. But this book is different. It argues not just for an amazing set of circumstances, not just a philosophical argument and empirical evidence that points to a designer, that could be some cold impersonal "force," but it argues for the genius and the glory of God. And it implies that we miss it only by our sins. It practically hits us over the head. If we can't see it, the problem is with us.

There are ten chapters in this book. Chapter 1 is titled Meaning-fulness and Meaninglessness. Chapter 2 is titled *Hamlet* and the Search for Meaning. Chapter 3 is titled Shakespeare and the Elements of Genius. Chapter 4 is titled The Geometry of Genius. Chapter 5 is titled The Periodic Table: *A Masterpiece of Many Authors*. Chapter 6 is titled A Cosmic Home Designed for Discovery. Chapter 7 is The Genius of the Elements. Chapter 8 is The Reemergence of the Living Cell. Chapter 9 is titled The Restoration of the Living Organism. Chapter 10 is titled The End of the Matter: *A Meaningful World*.

The book starts out in Chapter 1 as follows: "This book's central claim is simply stated: the universe is meaning-ful. It is rather curious that anyone would have to make an argument to that effect. But some today take it as a given that the universe is ultimately meaningless." They go on to develop that not only many philosophers and scientists hold that life is ultimately meaningless, but it has spread to those of us in the street. The authors continue: "But for all the respect it commands, the assumption of meaninglessness is only an assumption, a dogma that keeps many from seeing what should be obvious: the universe, rather than being devoid of meaning, is, like a great work of art, full to overflowing with meaning: complex, integrated and intelligible order, rather than senseless piles of gibberish. Contra nihilism, the universe has more meaning than we can imagine – layers of meaning that scientists, among others, continue to discover." Wiker and Witt flatly state that "To anyone not educated out of such an intuition, this is a commonsense view hardly in need of an argument." Nevertheless, as quoted a few lines above, the purpose of the book is to provide just such an argument: apparently many have been educated out of their own commonsense intuition. Many, however, openly argue otherwise. The authors' state: "We should now recognize Weinberg's [Steven Weinberg, physicist and popular science writer] view as encapsulating precisely the view of meaninglessness that undergirds both philosophical and banal cultural nihilism. In his belief that the universe is ultimately a meaningless, purposeless whirl of matter, devoid of intelligent governance by a benevolent, divine being, he is the intellectual heir of Epicurus, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and he helps to provide the intellectual, scientific 'verification' of the popularized nihilism of Sartre, Woody Allen and even *Seinfeld*."

At the end of Chapter 6, in the context of considering such bazaar notions as multiple other universes besides our own supposedly by scientists, perhaps an infinite number, so as to provide some justification to indicate that such a universe as ours with all the indications of being designed to support life is no big deal, the authors write "It is difficult to deal with evasions such as multiverse theory; that is, the evasions are so evidently ludicrous it is difficult to take them seriously. A hypothetical alternate universe is, by definition, not causally connected to our universe so not in any danger of being outed as a mere fiction. Unfortunately, since the desire to avoid the commonsense conclusion of design is so strong among some scientists, many have retreated to such Alice-in-Wonderland reasoning." Yes! But can we even really consider it "reasoning" at all? Such is the drive to suppress the Truth!

It is not possible to go into detail here. Suffice it to say that the authors do an excellent job of presenting the basis for meaning, and design, and genius in the universe. Most people assume it. Even most of those who deny it inconsistently act as if it were true. Although I don't think I would want to go quite as far, but the words of Guillermo Gonzalez, Assistant Professor of Astronomy at Iowa State University, and coauthor of *The Privileged Planet* include the following about the book: "I am not exaggerating much to say that this book is in the same class as the works of genius its authors describe."