

Designed to be Significant

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There are few more important questions in our society: do human beings have any significance? Christians agree we do, but can science provide any evidence to support this Biblical teaching? Mike Poole, in his article “Am I significant in the universe or just an accident?” (*Idea*, Jan/Feb 2006), suggests that modern cosmology provides evidence for God’s care in creating us. This is a welcome reminder that the argument from design is alive and well, but it overlooks the far more compelling evidence of God’s design in the biological world.

The Bible indicates that the cosmos does indeed provide evidence of man’s significance. But in contrast to the Big Bang scenario mankind is not so much a child of the cosmos as the cosmos a damaged child of mankind. Genesis 3 tells us that Adam’s sin caused physical changes in the world leaving it, in Paul’s words, in ‘bondage to decay’. If one man’s disobedience can lead to such cosmic, destructive results then mankind must have a significance that far exceeds its size in the universe. It is only in that context that the significance of the last Adam, Jesus Christ, who redeems not just us but the whole cosmos, becomes clear.

One difficulty with Poole’s view is that his attempt to establish the significance of mankind has the unintended consequence of reducing God’s significance. His account of the history of the universe *looks* very like deism: that God is merely the initiator who sets the universe going but then sits back and lets it develop according to its own laws. Design is found in the initial conditions of the Big Bang – the fine-tuning necessary to produce human life - but no subsequent Divine input is required.

Of course Poole is no deist. He would insist that God is involved in the creation at all times ‘upholding’ it (Col. 1.17) but the observable evidence for God is found only in the fact that the universe exists. Hence his position is indistinguishable scientifically from that of an atheist who finds the scientific laws (however they themselves might be explained) a complete and satisfactory basis with which to understand the evolution of the cosmos. To insist that God is in fact standing behind the whole process, like an unseen conductor, is impossible to disprove but for that same reason it is of negligible apologetic impact since this God has hidden his activity so carefully as to be undetectable. Atheists could therefore be forgiven for wondering why they should feel compelled to believe in such a God if their explanation for the history of the universe is scientifically adequate without God.

Poole also limits God by arguing that in order to make mankind, God would have to take billions of years to do it because of the laws of physics. But this begs the question, why did God set up the initial conditions of the universe in this way? If his purpose was to make mankind it is strange that he has used a process that took so long.

The creation according to Poole is one seamless act so that the existence of everything we see today is inevitable once God started the process. But Genesis 1 presents a *series* of

creative acts (however their timescale is understood) such that if God had not spoken on each of the creation days the world and all its life forms would not have been completed.

Aside from these essentially theological objections there is a major scientific stumbling block. Poole's argument rests in large part on the correctness of the modern 'Big Bang' cosmology. It is always dangerous to tie your apologetic, still more your interpretation of the Bible, to any prevailing scientific model. To do so runs the risk of taking the church into what could be a re-run of the 16th century Copernican fiasco if the Big Bang is overturned. Claims of its imminent demise may be exaggerated but there is some hefty criticism of the Big Bang model in the secular academy. See for example the open letter now signed by over 200 scientists originally published in *New Scientist*, May 22, 2004. It is a theory that has become increasingly bloated with speculative additions as it has to accommodate more and more contrary data.

There is a better place to find evidence for God than in a particular cosmological model. The biological world is rather more easily investigated and biological theories can be tested more readily than any cosmology. Biology provides much more robust evidence for God's care in the form of careful design that is impossible to produce by mere natural processes. We now know far more about the inner workings of organisms, including their biochemistry than Darwin could ever have imagined. The complex, interlocking nature of their biochemistry and physiology makes them impossible to assemble in a step-by-step evolutionary process. In addition, every cell contains an extraordinarily complex code in the form of DNA – cells are miniature information chips. This is evidence of an intelligent designer since we know that information can only be created by a mind. In a different context this link between information and intelligence has long been recognised. The criterion used by SETI researchers for distinguishing between radio signals from intelligent life and random noise is that they carry coded information (like the sequence of prime numbers in the 1997 film *Contact*). Similarly, computer scientists are well aware that systems cannot generate more information than is put in. It is arguments such as these that have led to the increasing impact of the Intelligent Design movement in the scientific community as well as at a popular level. And its belief in more than one creative act coheres well with the Genesis account.

The suggestion of design in the biological world is far more controversial than the concept of design in the fine-tuning of cosmology. The latter has been acknowledged and accepted by many secular scientists, but it in no way threatens modern cosmology. In fact, as Poole makes clear, the fine-tuning argument flows from the Big Bang model. But design in the biological world is in conflict with the theory of undirected Darwinian evolution. For example, it is axiomatic for Oxford zoologist Richard Dawkins that any appearance of design in nature is an illusion. So for atheistic scientists nature looks designed but it isn't – any appearance of design must be accounted for by natural selection. Conversely theistic evolutionists are really arguing that even though nature doesn't look designed (in that it is the product of a long and tortuous evolutionary process) it is in fact designed by a Creator working (undetected) in the background. Isn't it far more compelling to see our intuitive appreciation of design as real and resulting from God's involvement in the creative process by providing essential information to create all life? The recent advances made by the intelligent design movement mean that this intuition can be put on a secure scientific footing, and indeed

intelligent design opens up a whole new research framework for biology. For example, the pioneering work of William Dembski has produced a mathematical method to distinguish design from mere chance coincidences in a way that makes the design argument rigorously testable. Not only can biology survive without an evolutionary framework, it can be expected to flourish in its new freedom to follow the evidence wherever it leads. The debate over design in biology has only just begun: there is compelling evidence of God's design in the biological world. I am not "just an accident."



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