

Meaning-fullness and Meaninglessness

“In exploring this meaning [in the natural world] we will move forward by philosophical, literary, mathematical and scientific analysis. This broad array of intellectual tools is needed for two reasons. First and foremost, since the universe is full of meaning—so rich to overflowing with evidence of its ingenuity—a number of disciplines are needed to capture this superabundance. Second, we are trying to break a spell, a kind of intellectual blindness caused by the ingrained habits of dogmatic materialism, and that blindness has infected virtually every intellectual discipline.” (Page 20)

Hamlet and the Search for Meaning

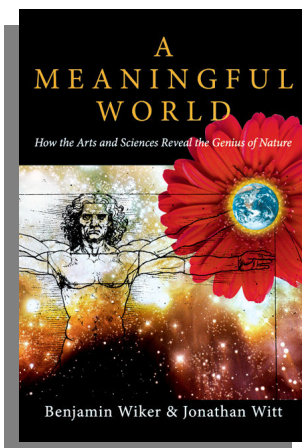
“Many since Darwin have attempted to reduce Shakespeare’s gifts to blind material causes like sexual selection, but a journey through Shakespeare’s most celebrated work, Hamlet, shows that all such attempts fail. The overarching form of Shakespeare’s works and the intricacy of his craft demonstrate not only the obvious (that an intelligent cause of high order is responsible for these plays), but that this cause cannot be reduced to blind mechanism. In light of this, we might begin to wonder whether not just Shakespeare, not just human art, but nature itself has been unjustly, and irrationally, reduced to far less than it is.” (Page 30)

The Periodic Table: A Masterpiece of Many Authors

“While it was a long and winding road, the journey was anything but random, for it was defined by (or better, constantly corrected by) nature itself. If the order [of the periodic table] were not in nature—and in nature in a way that we could discover it—then the road would have led anywhere and nowhere, and the journey would have been, as the author of Ecclesiastes put it, meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Happily, such was not the case. The periodic table of elements is, in fact, deeply meaningful, illuminating layers of order in the material world.” (Page 113)

A Cosmic Home Designed for Discovery

“There are other facets of our atmosphere that make not only life, but also science possible. We take for granted that we can see things, and sight is our most important sense for science. If our planet were covered with a very dense atmosphere, things here on Earth would be quite dark, a world of grays and blacks at best. At the same time, we need enough of an atmosphere not only to provide energy for living things, but to protect us from harmful light. . . . Without an atmosphere, we would be prey to the whole spectrum, and the higher energy gamma, x-ray and ultraviolet wavelengths are so energetic that they destroy the chemical bonds that make biological complexity possible.” (Page 162)



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