

The "Illusion" of Design

By Craig Paardekooper

The idea that nature is designed by an intelligence is not a new idea, neither is it dependent upon modern discoveries of astronomy or biology.

According to the Bible, this idea has always been obvious to all people, including the peoples of antiquity.

"¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

Romans 1 v 18-20

The Romans

Stoicism was a philosophy that was founded in Athens in 300 BC and became popular in the Roman Empire among such leaders as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius. In these selections from Cicero's [On the Nature of the Gods](#) (45 BC), Cicero outlines the basic Stoic argument about design in nature. The selections come from Book II, chapters XXXVII, XLIV, and XLVII.

Cicero wrote in 45 B.C., at the beginning of the Roman occupation of Judea, so what he says reflects what was known when the Book of Romans in the New Testament was written.

Who would not deny the name of human being to a man who, on seeing the regular motions of the heaven and the fixed order of the stars and the accurate interconnexion and interrelation of all things, can deny that these things possess any rational design, and can maintain that phenomena, the wisdom of whose ordering transcends the capacity of our wisdom to understand it, take place by chance? When we see something moved by machinery, like an orrery or clock or many other such things, we do not doubt that these contrivances are the work of reason; when therefore we behold the whole compass of the heaven moving with revolutions of marvelous velocity and executing with perfect regularity the annual changes of the seasons with absolute safety and security for all things, how can we doubt that all this is effected not merely by reason, but by a reason that is transcendent and divine?...

Can any sane person believe that all this array of stars and this vast celestial adornment could have been created out of

atoms rushing to and fro fortuitously and at random? or could any other being devoid of intelligence and reason have created them? Not merely did their creation postulate intelligence, but it is impossible to understand their nature without intelligence of a high order...

To come now from things celestial to things terrestrial, which is there among these latter which does not clearly display the rational design of an intelligent being? In the first place, with the vegetation that springs from the earth, the stocks both give stability to the parts which they sustain and draw from the ground the sap to nourish the parts upheld by the roots; and the trunks are covered with bark or rind, the better to protect them against cold and heat. Again the vines cling to their props with their tendrils as with hands, and thus raise themselves erect like animals. Nay more, it is said that if planted near cabbages they shun them like pestilential and noxious things, and will not touch them at any point. **Again what a variety there is of animals, and what capacity they possess of persisting true to their various kinds!** Some of them are protected by hides, others are clothed with fleeces, others bristle with spines; some we see covered with feathers, some with scales, some armed with horns, some equipped with wings to escape their foes. Nature, however, has provided with bounteous plenty for each species of animal that food which is suited for it. **I might show in detail what provision has been made in the forms of the animals for appropriating and assimilating this food, how skilful and exact is the disposition of the various parts, how marvelous the structure of the limbs.** For all the organs, at least those contained within the body, are so formed and so placed that **none of them is superfluous or not necessary for the preservation of life.**

Cicero observes that the trunk of a tree serves the purpose of supporting the branches, and drawing up sap from the roots, whilst the bark protects the trunk from weather. Each part serves a clear purpose.

He points to the variety of different and distinct animals that would have arisen independently. (This would require multiple repetitions of the miracle of evolution for each kind). Each animal has a different covering serving a specific purpose.

He points to the digestive system of animals that can process and assimilate the foods nature provides, and the muscular and skeletal systems of animals that enables them to move and find food.

Finally he says that all the organs in the body are necessary for the preservation of life.

The Greeks

In [Western philosophy](#), the term and concept of *teleology* originated in the writings of [Plato](#) and [Aristotle](#). Aristotle's '[four causes](#)' give special place to the telos or "final cause" of each *thing*. In this, he followed Plato in seeing purpose in both human and nonhuman nature.

Aristotle

Aristotle sought to explain the World as *logical*, as a result of **causes** and **purposes**. The "**Four Causes**" are his answers to the question **Why**: "*We do not have knowledge of a thing until we have grasped its why, that is to say, its cause.*" "**Cause**" is the traditional translation of the Greek *aitia* (αἰτία), which has a technical sense better translated as "**explanation**".

Aristotle argued that there are four kinds of answers to "**Why**" questions (*Physics* II:3, and *Metaphysics* V:2). *Cause* results in *change*.

- **Matter**: a **material cause** is determined by the matter that composes the changing things. For a table, that matter might be wood; for a statue, it might be bronze or marble.
- **Form**: a **formal cause** is due to the arrangement, shape, or appearance of the thing changing. Numerical relationships are of this nature: **I** and **II** form **III**.
- **Agency** or **Efficiency**: an **efficient cause** consists of things apart from the thing being changed, which interact so as to be an agency of the change. For example, the efficient cause of a table is a carpenter acting on wood. In the natural world, the efficient cause of a *child* is a *father*.
- **End** or **Purpose**: a **final cause** is that for the sake of which a thing is changing. A seed's end is an adult plant. A sailboat's purpose is sailing. A ball at the top of a ramp will finally come to rest at the bottom.

For example, the cause or explanation of a table is that it is solid and grained because it is made of wood (**material**), it does not collapse because of its design with four legs of equal length (**formal**), it occurs as it does because a carpenter made it from wood (agency, or **efficiency**), and it has particular dimensions because of is intended to support objects (**purpose**).

Aristotle saw that everything has a final cause or purpose. Purpose is therefore what produced it, and purpose is a property of Mind.

[Aristotle](#) argued that [Democritus](#) was wrong to attempt to reduce all things to mere necessity, because doing so neglects the aim, order, and "final cause", which brings about these necessary conditions:

Democritus, however, neglecting the final cause, reduces to necessity all the operations of nature. Now, they are necessary, it is true,

but yet they are for a final cause and for the sake of what is best in each case. Thus nothing prevents the teeth from being formed and being shed in this way; but it is not on account of these causes but on account of the end. ...

—Aristotle, Generation of Animals 5.8, 789a8-b15

To know, says Aristotle, is to know by means of Causes (see Anal. Post. 94 a 20). A thing is explained when you know its Causes. And a Cause is that which is responsible, in any of four modes, for a thing's existence. The four Causes are:

- (1) The Final Cause, the End or Object towards which a formative process advances, and for the sake of which it advances—the logos,^b the rational purpose.
- (2) The Motive (or Efficient) Cause, the agent which is responsible for having set the process going; it is that by which the thing is made.
- (3) The Formal Cause, or Form, which is responsible for the character of the course which the process follows (this also is described as the logos,^b as expressing what the thing is, or is to be).
- (4) The Material Cause, or Matter, out of which the thing is made.

Logos, or final cause, is the same word used in "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God."

Nature provides many examples of the appearance of purpose or final causes. The lens of the eye serves a purpose of focusing light upon the retina. The retina serves a purpose of receiving light and transmitting a signal to the brain. The brain serves a purpose of storing and processing information. Muscles serve a purpose of supporting movement. Lungs serve a purpose of taking in air. Alveoli serve a purpose of transmitting air to the blood stream. Haemoglobin serve a purpose of carrying oxygen. The heart serves a purpose of circulating blood etc. Aristotle observed that many things have a purpose or teleos, and this explained WHY they existed.

The appearance of purpose is so pervasive and universal - we can understand why the Bible says that "what can be known about God is plain to them". The immediate impression, the primary observation, is that purpose is there.

Of-course, in modern times we are told that this appearance of purpose is just an illusion. A great effort is made to explain it away by vastly improbable processes.

Whether one is a philosopher or not, it is impossible not to notice this teleology. In all ages, all peoples have been able to see it. What Cicero observed in the structure of a tree would have been observed also by the Egyptians, Babylonians, Indians and Chinese, and all the civilizations of the ancient world.

Plato

Plato saw that physical things approximate to ideals or standards. Ideals can be of form (beauty), or function (purpose) or of wisdom (truth). This suggests that physical things were formed to match an ideal or idea in the mind of a creator.

In Plato's dialogue Phaedo, Socrates argues that true explanations for any given physical phenomenon must be teleological. He bemoans those who fail to distinguish between a thing's necessary and sufficient causes, which he identifies respectively as material and final causes:^[8]

Imagine not being able to distinguish the real cause, from that without which the cause would not be able to act, as a cause. It is what the majority appear to do, like people groping in the dark; they call it a cause, thus giving it a name that does not belong to it. That is why one man surrounds the earth with a vortex to make the heavens keep it in place, another makes the air support it like a wide lid. As for their capacity of being in the best place they could be at this very time, this they do not look for, nor do they believe it to have any divine force, but they believe that they will sometime discover a stronger and more immortal Atlas to hold everything together more, and they do not believe that the truly good and 'binding' binds and holds them together.

—Plato, Phaedo, 99

Socrates here argues that while the materials that compose a body are necessary conditions for its moving or acting in a certain way, they nevertheless cannot be the *sufficient* condition for its moving or acting as it does. For example,^[8] if Socrates is sitting in an Athenian prison, the elasticity of his tendons is what allows him to be sitting, and so a physical description of his tendons can be listed as *necessary conditions* or *auxiliary causes* of his act of sitting.^{[9][10]} However, these are only necessary conditions of Socrates' sitting. To give a physical description of Socrates' body is to say *that* Socrates is sitting, but it does not give any idea why *it came to be* that he was sitting in the first place.

To say why he was sitting and not *not* sitting, it is necessary to explain what it is about his sitting that is *good*, for all things brought about (i.e., all products of actions) are brought about because the actor saw some good in them. Thus, to give an explanation of something is to determine what about it is good. Its goodness is its *actual cause*—its purpose, telos or 'reason for which'.^[11]

It is interesting that Socrates identifies telos with the Good.

Explaining Away

Here are quotations from the leading proponents of evolution, frankly admitting that nature presents a powerful "illusion" of design.

- F.AYALA "Darwin's theory of natural selection accounts for **the design** of organisms."
- F.AYALA "**Explaining design without a designer**"
- DAWKINS "The purpose of this book is to resolve this paradox to the satisfaction of the reader [and] to impress the reader with **the power of the illusion of design.**"
- DAWKINS "As an academic scientist I am a passionate Darwinian, believing that natural selection is, if not the only driving force in evolution, certainly the only known force capable of producing **the illusion of purpose which so strikes all who contemplate nature.**¹"
- DAWKINS "Darwinian natural selection can produce **an uncanny illusion of design.** An engineer would be hard put to decide whether a bird or a plane was the more aerodynamically elegant. **So powerful is the illusion of design,** it took humanity until the mid-19th century to realise that it is an illusion"
- DAWKINS "Biology is the study of complicated things that **give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose**"
- DAWKINS "Natural selection is the only workable explanation **for the beautiful and compelling illusion of "design" that pervades every living body and every organ.**¹"
- F.CRICK "A biologist must constantly keep in mind that what they see was not designed, but rather evolved."

Preparation for an Apocalypse

I have often wondered about the intense debunking of religion that emerged in the 19th century and continued into most of the 20th century - was this was a coup d'état of the mind? With the Covid scam-demic and its apocalyptic overtones, was the debunking a necessary preparation for what is happening now? Certainly it took away a pillar of society, which would allow lawlessness to flourish - creating a petri-dish for evil.

The opposition to natural theology began with the **X Club** founded by Huxley in 1864.