

A Letter from Wernher von Braun

November 1996

On 9/14/72 the following letter written by Dr. Wernher von Braun was read to the California State Board of Education:

In response to your inquiry about my personal views concerning the 'Case for DESIGN' as a viable scientific theory for the origin of the universe, life and man, I am pleased to make the following observations.

For me, the idea of a creation is not conceivable without invoking the necessity of design. One cannot be exposed to the law and order of the universe without concluding that there must be design and purpose behind it all. In the world around us, we can behold the obvious manifestations of an ordered, structured plan or design. We can see the will of the species to live and propagate. And we are humbled by the powerful forces at work on a galactic scale, and the purposeful orderliness of nature that endows a tiny and ungainly seed with the ability to develop into a beautiful flower. The better we understand the intricacies of the universe and all it harbors, the more reason we have found to marvel at the inherent design upon which it is based.

While the admission of a design for the universe ultimately raises the question of a Designer (a subject outside of science), the scientific method does not allow us to exclude data which lead to the conclusion that the universe, life and man are based on design. To be forced to believe only one conclusion – that everything in the universe happened by chance – would violate the very objectivity of science itself. Certainly there are those who argue that the universe evolved out of a random process, but what random process could produce the brain of a man or the system of the human eye?

Some people say that science has been unable to prove the existence of a Designer ... they still maintain that since science has provided us with so many answers the day will soon arrive when we will be able to understand even the creation of the fundamental laws of nature without a Divine Intent. They challenge science to prove the existence of God. But must we really light a candle to see the sun?

Many men who are intelligent and of good faith say they cannot visualize a Designer. Well, can a physicist visualize an electron? The electron is materially inconceivable and yet, it is so perfectly known through its effects that we use it to illuminate our cities, guide our airliners through the night skies and take the most accurate measurements. What strange rationale makes some physicists accept the inconceivable electrons as real while refusing to accept the reality of a Designer on the ground that they cannot conceive Him? ...

I have discussed the aspect of a Designer at some length because it might be that the primary resistance to acknowledging the 'Case for Design' as a viable scientific alternative to the current 'Case for Chance' lies in the inconceivability, in some scientists' minds, of a Designer. The inconceivability of some ultimate issue (which will always lie outside scientific resolution) should not be allowed to rule out any theory that explains the interrelationship of observed data and is useful for prediction.

We in NASA are often asked what the real reason was for the amazing string of successes we had with our Apollo flights to the Moon. I think the only honest answer we could give was that we tried to never overlook anything. It is in that same sense of scientific honesty that I endorse the presentation of alternative theories for the origin of the universe, life and man in the classroom. It would be an error to overlook the possibility that the universe was planned rather than happened by chance.