



Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science Theology

William A. Dembski , Michael J. Behe (Foreword)

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The Intelligent Design movement is three things:

a scientific research program for investigating intelligent causes

an intellectual movement that challenges naturalistic evolutionary theories

a way of understanding divine action

Although the fast-growing movement has gained considerable grassroots support, many scientists and theologians remain skeptical about its merits. Scientists worry that it's bad science (merely creationism in disguise) and theologians worry that it's bad theology (misunderstanding divine action). In this book William Dembski addresses these concerns and brilliantly argues that intelligent design provides a crucial link between science and theology. Various chapters creatively and powerfully address intelligent discernment of divine action in nature, why the significance of miracles should be reconsidered, and the demise and unanswered questions of British natural theology. Effectively challenging the hegemony of naturalism and reinstating design within science, Dembski shows how intelligent design can be unpacked as a theory of information. *Intelligent Design* is a pivotal, synthesizing work from a thinker whom Phillip Johnson calls "one of the most important of the design theorists who are sparking a scientific revolution by legitimating the concept of intelligent design in science."

Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science Theology Details

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Author : William A. Dembski , Michael J. Behe (Foreword)

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From Reader Review Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science Theology for online ebook

Rod Innis says

A good book on how studies of living things refute the idea that evolutionary mutations can explain the complexity of life as we examine it.

Mark says

Mathematical/philosophical approach to determining the argument from design of the universe and living things, etc. The birth of a new science?

John says

Dembski Admits that Intelligent Design is fundamentally a Religious, not Scientific Idea

So the truth was stated finally by William Dembski in this popular account explaining the origins and principles of "Intelligent Design"; in which he admits that there is indeed a religious link to what he claims is primarily a scientific hypothesis (But a scientific hypothesis proposed originally by William Paley hundreds of years ago, which was rejected soundly by leading scientists afterwards.). There is nothing in this book which explains how science works, by careful observation and rigorous testing of ideas (hypotheses). Those ideas which are accepted through this rigorous scientific method are either incorporated within longstanding scientific theories, or may themselves be the incipient idea(s) of a new scientific theory which replaces an outmoded one (Most notably, in exactly the same manner that Einstein's Theory of General Relativity and the Theory of Quantum Mechanics replaced Newton's theories of physics, known now as classical mechanics; the latter are now subsumed within the two 20th Century theories forming the core of modern physics.). Dembski clearly doesn't understand how modern science works; he pretends to have such understanding via sloppy logic and intellectually dishonest statements which occur frequently throughout this book.

Intelligent Design is not scientific since it does not adhere to any of the long-established tenets about science itself (Intelligent Design has been judged correctly as the latest flavor of creationism enjoying some popularity amongst fundamentalist Protestant Christians; one notable biologist has referred to it as "reborn creationism"). It can not be tested, simply because it does not generate any testable hypotheses. Moreover, despite claims to the contrary, I have yet to see any peer-reviewed articles testing Intelligent Design; instead, every single book and article published in praise of this idea is merely an attack on the Modern Synthesis Theory of Evolution; this evolutionary theory is itself the central underlying theory for contemporary biology as much as General Relativity and Quantum Mechanics are for contemporary physics (Any current scientific controversies about the Modern Synthesis are related to understanding the tempo and mode of evolution as seen from the fossil record and the relative importance of random genetic drift as the primary means of causing evolutionary change; they, themselves, do not mean that the Modern Synthesis is in trouble as the successful unifying theory it has been for nearly a century in explaining biological phenomena.). And Intelligent Design is not a new idea at odds with mainstream science, but rather the latest incarnation of an idea dating from the 17th Century regarding a "Great Chain of Being" which was subsequently tested - and

rejected - by Enlightenment and later scientists, most notably naturalists, leading up to of course Darwin and Wallace, who almost simultaneously came up with the Theory of Evolution via Natural Selection (The Modern Synthesis Theory is its direct descendant, and includes its principles, as well as evidence from biological sciences as diverse as genetics, molecular biology and developmental biology, which were unknown to both Darwin and Wallace.).

The arguments presented by Dembski are not only intellectually dishonest, but now, irrelevant, as determined by Republican Federal Judge John Jones in his landmark, historic decision for the Kitzmiller vs. Dover Board of Education trial; Jones concluded that intelligent design is a religious doctrine masquerading as science (His decision is posted online at: http://www2.ncseweb.org/kvd/all_legal/2005-1...). Furthermore, thoughtful, reasonable conservatives like Charles Krauthammer and George Will have written lucid, brilliant columns praising the theory of evolution via natural selection, and condemning intelligent design for being an unscientific, religious doctrine.

There are other, more important - and intellectually sound - books available on the so-called "creation vs. evolution" controversy, which I regard as more worthy than any of Dembski's self-serving defenses of Intelligent Design. Philosopher Robert Pennock's "Tower of Babel" is a splendid historical overview and philosophical deconstruction of creationism, including the best written rebuke of "Intelligent Design" which I've come across (He also covers Dembski's "explanatory filter", and demolishes it too from a philosophical perspective.). Philip Kitcher, another philosopher, published "Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism" back in the early 1980s, but his arguments are still quite valid today. My friend Ken Miller's "Finding Darwin's God" has an eloquent critique of Intelligent Design, focusing on Michael Behe's mousetrap model of irreducible complexity which claims to bestow validity on Intelligent Design. Distinguished American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) invertebrate paleobiologist Niles Eldredge offers yet another brilliant critique of Intelligent Design in his book "Darwin: Discovering the Tree of Life", the elegant companion volume to the AMNH Darwin exhibition which he curated, soon to embark on a tour taking it to many of North America's and Great Britain's finest science museums. And last, but not least, Eugenie Scott, Executive Director, National Center for Science Education (www.ncseweb.org), has written a fine textbook on this issue, "Evolution vs. Creationism". All of these books are more desirable than Dembski's "Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science & Theology". Otherwise, if you insist on purchasing this book, then perhaps you might choose to acquire instead a splendid text devoted to Klingon cosmology (Neither Klingon cosmology nor "Intelligent Design" can be regarded as scientific, since both depend on faith, not reason, to validate their principles.).

(Reposted from my 2006 Amazon review)

Dave Lester says

"Intelligent Design" is the seminal, flagship book of the Intelligent Design movement and William Dembski is certainly regarded as one of the leaders. I must confess that large portions of this book were over my head. Dembski's mind is one to be reckoned with.

Of course, this book (and movement) have been mocked by scientists and dismissed. I would agree partially with the critics. I believe it is impossible to link intelligent design (ie, pointing to a god or Creator) as strictly scientific. This book should rightly fall mostly in the philosophy category but having said that, Dembski's argument (as much as I can tell) is certainly compelling.

The work is organized into three parts: the first section is in regard to the historical backdrop of the debate about theology and science. Part two talks about the theory of design specifically and what Dembski would

say is scientific argumentation that leans that way. The final part is arguing that science and theology can go together. In a simplistic way, the author suggests that since God created the world, science is a way of understanding what He has created and that the world (in many ways) points to him.

Well worth the read for those looking to understand the ID movement or gain a grasp on the issues that relate to the philosophy.

Mike (the Paladin) says

This is a somewhat difficult book to read thus I give it 3 stars. I realize that almost all who come to this book will come with their mind already made up... hopefully from earlier thought rather than simple indoctrination.

Be prepared here for a lengthy discussion of philosophy, history (including history of thought), a look at early forms of reasoning and the process (and processes) of thought that led some to reject them.

I'd recommend C.S.Lewis's Miracles above this book, at least for those not looking for an in-depth study. The writings of Descartes may give a leg up on the reasoning.

I won't try to list or go into discussions and arguments here as, I couldn't do justice and I still have a ways to go.

While not the deepest or even the best on the subject and while making assumptions of its own it seems worthwhile to me. From basic reasoning and thought to dealing with "non-argument" (statements that attempt to side step a question by using ridicule or leaning on "assumption" as in the things that "everybody knows") it attempts to be honest. As I said I am not a master of what's here...and may (am at least considering) purchase(ing) the book...this depends more on funds and cost than the book itself. I want to get it back to the library. The book is divided into 3 parts and deals openly and logically with its topic. I like it..but need to spend more time with it, just me. 3+ stars.

Charles says

I'm torn between two extremes in attempting to review this book. On the one hand, I often felt like erupting with gales of laughter. On the other, I sometimes found myself touched by a profound sadness.

The laughter wanted to break out every time Dembski dispensed with some of the accumulated knowledge of philosophy or science with a single sentence that largely followed the form of: "it ain't so." Now, he may have repeated this "ain't so" mantra in various ways, but it still boiled down to the same thing. Pretty amazing hubris, if you ask me.

The laughter, and some serious snorts of derision, did break out when early in the book he briefly described Michael Behe's concept of "irreducible complexity," stated that it was a fact, and preceded to build the rest of his argument on top of that shaky ground. What he doesn't tell you is that Behe's "irreducible complexity" is about as solid a place to build a theory as quicksand is for building a house. Of course, Dembski, as do most of the intelligent design "theorists," don't tell you a lot of things you'd need to know to make an informed decision on their views. That brings me to the sadness.

It's sad to me that a person who appears to profess himself a Christian is willing to do anything to win his argument. Dembski didn't tell a lot of blatant lies, as other of his colleagues have done before him, but he certainly committed a lot of "omissions." I might have suspected some of those omissions were due to ignorance, but he left out things in his discussion of the mathematics involved, and from what I understand that is supposed to be his field. For example, his discussions of probabilities are rife with these omissions. In the process, he manages to brush off anyone who is seriously struggling with questions about the relationship between science and religion. Just when we need someone to give us an open and honest viewpoint on the puzzle, writers like Dembski are busy trying to pull some sleight-of-hand.

Ultimately, the book insults both science and religion.

Randy says

According to Darwin and the theory of evolution, biological systems may look designed, but that design is illusory because there's a purely undirected process, namely natural selection acting on random mutations that can produce that appearance without there being any actual guidance or intelligence behind it.

The theory of Intelligent Design proposes in contrast that key features of living systems can be best explained by the activity of a designing intelligence, and that living systems look designed because they were designed. Prior to Darwin, British natural theology had also inferred design from biological features such as the eye, but because of the limits of scientific knowledge at that time, had not been able to establish that conclusion rigorously. This has now changed. Advances in biochemistry have revealed not only vastly increased complexity, but also a whole new level of organization to biology, and that is information. Dembski has developed a criterion, specified complexity, which can reliably distinguish information-rich structures from ones which exhibit only order. The questions then arise, what best accounts for structures exhibiting complex specified information, and does science currently have the tools to answer that question?

To begin with, I.D. advocates invoke a procedural rule that was important to the formulation of the historical sciences in the nineteenth century, which is that we should explain things by reference to known cause and effect processes. This rule, sometimes called uniformitarianism, is that our present knowledge of cause and effect should guide our inferences about the past. What we know from our uniform and repeated experience in the present is that, for example, only intelligence produces information-rich digital code. So the presence of digital code in DNA is strong evidence of a prior designing intelligence. This conclusion is based entirely on a standard canon of scientific method.

Nevertheless, the question of the design inference brings to light two opposing views of reality which contend to undergird science and its attempts to make sense of the natural world. Naturalism, the view that nature is a closed system and that what is basic is matter in mindless motion, is currently the default position of modern science and indeed in all of Western culture. At odds with naturalism is theism, the view that Logos, or Intelligence, is basic to reality. The former view allows only natural causes to be invoked in

scientific explanations, not so much because of the so-called "limits of science", but because of the perceived limits of reality which preclude any other causes. Theism, on the other hand, allows for natural causes to be interwoven with intelligent causes in the natural world.

The difference between Darwinism and I.D. is that the former cannot even consider intelligent causes because of the restrictions placed upon it by naturalism. Intelligent Design, however, can consider either natural causes alone or in combination with intelligent causes, depending on where the evidence leads. It does not insist on intelligent causes before examining the evidence, but theism gives it a broader range of possibilities to consider. Thus much of the knowledge gained from evolutionary biology would still play an important part in a new paradigm of Intelligent Design; only its inflated claims to explanatory supremacy would be jettisoned. I.D. is only adding to science's conceptual toolbox, not taking away from it.

The invocation by critics, of methodological naturalism, the rule that science must restrict itself to natural explanations, presupposes naturalism and really is not helpful. Unless one dogmatically holds to those first principles, it becomes clear that rather than protecting scientific practice from anarchy, this rule arbitrarily closes off paths of investigation that could actually lead to the truth. Dumping methodological naturalism and adding the causal category of agency will not lead to appeals to magic and a loss of scientific rigor. Agency is a category we use all the time in other scientific disciplines, such as archeology and forensics.

Intelligent Design, then, though it has religious implications, is no more a religious theory than is the Big Bang theory, which also has philosophical and religious implications, but is clearly a scientific theory. Remember, the contrast that I.D. is drawing is not between natural and supernatural causes, but between natural and intelligent causes. The charge that I.D. invokes miracles also presupposes naturalism and a closed system of natural cause and effect into which intelligent causes are seen as a violation. I.D. would, however, see natural and intelligent causes working in harmony. Even so, however, the recognition of the effects of intelligence says nothing about how those effects were produced. The recognition of human agent causation certainly does not cause us to invoke a miracle.

Dembski argues that "logically, intelligent design is compatible with everything from utterly discontinuous creation (eg. God intervening at every conceivable point to create new species) to the most far-ranging evolution (eg. God seamlessly melding all organisms together into one great tree of life." However, it is incompatible with theistic evolution, which "takes the Darwinian picture of the world and baptizes it". According to theistic evolution, design is real, but not empirically detectable. It can be seen only through the eyes of faith. What makes I.D. revolutionary is its demonstration that design is actually empirically detectable.

For Dembski, the bottom line is this: from an evolutionary vantage, intelligence is a byproduct of purely blind, material processes; it is not something that is fundamental. It is an adaptation, a survival technique or mechanism, but not something that has any claim on reality. Intelligent Design turns that around and says that if there is good evidence of design in biology, then this design is from an unevolved intelligence. That means that intelligence is something basic to reality and should be basic to our understanding of science.

The implications of this are huge: "It was Darwin's expulsion of design from biology that made possible the triumph of naturalism in Western culture. So, too, it will be intelligent design's reinstatement of design within biology that will be the undoing of naturalism in Western culture."

Nichelle Seely says

I started reading "Intelligent Design" by William A. Dembski because I wanted to know what exactly this idea consisted of. I'm a fan of popular science books and natural history, and was interested to see what arguments Dembski put forward, since he himself is a mathematician.

My first observation is that Dembski could have used a good ghostwriter. To put it bluntly, I found this book to be incredibly boring. The language is ponderous and tepid, and it is not unlike reading a textbook. Every few pages I found myself slipping into a fugue state while reading, a semi-sleep that I would come back from with the realization that I had skipped over the last few paragraphs. So it is possible that I missed some salient points, although I tried to go back and re-read what I missed. In addition, according to the preface, various chapters were rewrites of previously published magazine articles. So stylistically, some of the chapters didn't quite mesh, and there were redundancies from chapter to chapter. Some tighter editing would have been nice.

My second observation is that the book waivers between being directed to a curious science-based audience and an already accepting Christian audience. Although Dembski is at pains to emphasize the non-Christian nature of Intelligent Design (ID), he undercuts this assertion with sections about Christology being the fulfillment of science, and evidence from the Bible for the viability of God's involvement in the world; Dembski apparently assumes that most religious readers will be Christian. If he is indeed trying to capture the support of religious non-Christians or agnostics or other spiritual disciplines, his argument would be more effective if he left out, or at least tempered, the emphasis on Christian theology.

Now, as to the actual content: the book is divided into three main sections. Part 1 is the history of Darwinism/naturalism, the outlook championed by most evolutionary scientists today. Part 2 is devoted to the actual theory of ID. Part 3 details the bridging of science and theology. An appendix addresses specific common objections to ID.

I found the history to be of limited value, because it honestly reads a little like a rant against various agnostic/atheistic philosophers. It also presupposes a knowledge and acceptance of the Bible in trying to illustrate how to recognize "the divine finger" in creation. I have read the whole of the Bible, but others may not have, and anyway if you're not a Christian you're not going to care what the Bible says (see my second observation above).

Part 2 and the appendix are most germane to the argument for ID. You could skip everything else and get an understanding of ID. The two main pillars for ID according to Dembski are elements of "irreducible complexity" in biological systems and the "specified complexity" of biological systems. I'm not going into these here, as this is a book review and not a white paper, but suffice it to say I personally wasn't convinced by Dembski's arguments.

Jeff Noble says

Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science & Theology by William A. Dembski (?)

Benjamin Thompson says

Apparently I read this in High School. Looking over the notes I took and the report I completed on this book it seems like Dembski's argument for specified complexity is fairly sophisticated. I must say I find it substantially more compelling than Behe's work on irreducible complexity. But I may do a second read through for a deeper analysis.

Víctor Alfaro says

Buen libro. Un poco pesado para quienes (como es mi caso) no han estudiado ciencias. Sus explicaciones en algunos puntos se torna pesado, en algunos bastante claro, ya que utiliza ejemplos matemáticos complejos para explicar su posición con respecto al diseño inteligente. Interesante, y se enfoca en sustentar que todo lo creado, al estudiarlo, y ver su complejidad, apunta a la existencia de un diseñador inteligente (Dios).

Karla Goforth Abreu says

This is not my review but says it better than I could:

Intelligent Design is organized into three parts: the first part gives an introduction to design and shows how modernity--science in the last two centuries--has undermined our intuition of this truth. The second and central part of the book examines "the philosophical and scientific basis for intelligent design." The final part shows how "science and theology relate coherently and how intelligent design establishes the crucial link between the two." This suggests that Dembski is not simply rejecting Darwin and naturalism on fundamentalist or biblical grounds.

Salmonxt says

Great work done by Dr,Prof William.

Stinger says

Intelligent Design taken as a whole presents well reasoned arguments for the role of design as a viable option in the scientist's toolbox of possibilities for causation. Naturalism is justly taken to task for its myopic view of the world. The logic of the argumentation by Dembski is tight. However, the book, while informative, is

not reader-friendly or overly enjoyable. As well, though the author adroitly handles objections to ID, the theory itself is not fleshed out. What we are left with is a strong skeleton seemingly devoid of life - inspiration or guidance to propel science to seek new avenues of discovery. Thus, while the book is a success in proving the author's thesis, it leaves much to be desired for ID as an alternative to the naturalistic Darwinian evolutionary paradigm.

Yousaf Feroze says

Awesome Book of all-time 21 Century...
