



WHAT'S WRONG WITH INTELLIGENT DESIGN THEORY

Modern neo-creationism claims that we have scientific evidence of intelligent design in the universe, especially as the appearance and diversity of living organisms is concerned. In particular, William Dembski has made the claim that evolution by natural selection cannot explain the obvious information content of living beings, and Michael Behe has contended that living organisms are “irreducibly complex” machines that could not have originated by natural means.

While there are plenty of details to be addressed (and that have been addressed in other places, see references below), I will focus here on the major conceptual problems with intelligent design (ID) theory. First, any claim that something is impossible in this context reduces simply to a statement of ignorance. Essentially, Behe is saying that he cannot imagine how a natural process could generate structure X (e.g., the flagellum of a bacterium). But surely that implies nothing about the actual impossibility of the phenomenon in question. Had Behe been discussing the origin of lightning in ancient Greece he would have accepted the “theory” that it was a manifestation of Zeus’ anger simply because the science of the time did not have a satisfactory answer.

Second, Dembski’s call for reintroducing the possibility of supernatural explanations in science betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of what science is. Let us suppose that scientists agree to consider God as a possible hypothesis whenever they carry out an experiment. What are they supposed to do with such “explanation”? Once we say, well, God probably did it, that marks the end of scientific inquiry. Since God can presumably do anything, and since we have no idea of how and why He

does it, we might as well pack and go home. Philosophers of science have long recognized that good science is *productive* science, meaning science that leads to further inquiries and discoveries. ID leaves us dead in the water because it is no science at all.

Further readings:

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- Sober, E. 2001. The design argument in W. Mann, ed. *Blackwell Guide to Philosophy and Religion*. Blackwell, Oxford.
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