

Why President Bush Got It Right about Intelligent Design By William A. Dembski, August 4, 2005

President Bush is to be commended for his courage, wisdom, and foresight in publicly supporting the teaching of intelligent design alongside evolution.

Courage -- because intelligent design is for now a minority position in science that faces fierce criticism from many in the scientific mainstream (criticism that he himself will now have to face).

Wisdom -- because he understands that ideas are best taught not by giving them a monopoly (which is how evolutionary theory is currently presented in all high school biology textbooks) but by being played off against well-supported competing ideas.

Foresight -- because he sees that intelligent design holds a winning hand in the scientific debate over biological origins.

Intelligent design is a winner in the public debate over biological origins not only because it has the backing of powerful ideas, arguments, and evidence but also because it does not turn this debate into a Bible-science controversy. Intelligent design, unlike creationism, is a science in its own right and can stand on its own feet.

Christians need to view this as a strength rather than as a weakness of intelligent design. There is a long tradition in Christian theology that sees God's revelation as coming through "two books": the Book of Nature, which is God's general revelation to all people; and the Book of Scripture, which is God's special revelation to the redeemed.

Accordingly, intelligent design should be understood as the evidence that God has placed in nature to show that the physical world is the product of intelligence and not simply the result of mindless material forces. This evidence is available to all apart from the special revelation of God in salvation history as recounted in Scripture.

Creationism, by contrast, takes a particular interpretation of Genesis (namely, it interprets the days of creation as six consecutive twenty-four-hour days occurring roughly 6,000 years ago) and then tries to harmonize science with this interpretation.

Now, it's true that creationism was largely the position of the Church from the Church Fathers through the Reformers (though there were exceptions, such as Origen and Augustine). Yet, during that time, church teaching also held that the earth was stationary. Psalm 93 states that the earth is established forever and cannot be moved. A literal interpretation of Psalm 93 seems to require geocentrism. And yet every creationist I know accepts the Copernican Revolution.

Although acceptance of intelligent design has now gone international and includes scholars of many different religious faiths and philosophical worldviews, among Christian proponents of intelligent design, the majority hold to a non-literal interpretation of Genesis 1. I'm one of them.

In our view, the evidence of cosmology and geology strongly confirms a universe that is not thousands but rather billions of years old. Granted, this raises problems of theodicy: how, for instance, does one explain death, disease, and suffering among animals prior to the emergence of humans, whose sin, according to Romans 5, appears responsible for these evils. Yet, in our view, such problems are answerable whereas the scientific evidence for an old Earth and old universe seems unanswerable.

Precisely because intelligent design does not turn the study of biological origins into a Bible-science controversy, intelligent design is a position around which Christians of all stripes can unite. And, indeed, there are creationists who also call themselves design theorists (e.g., Paul Nelson). To be sure, creationists who support intelligent design think it does not go far enough in elucidating the Christian understanding of creation. And they are right!

Intelligent design is a modest position theologically and philosophically. It attributes the complexity and diversity of life to intelligence, but does not identify that intelligence with the God of any religious faith or philosophical system. The task for the Christian who accepts intelligent design is therefore to formulate a theology of nature and creation that makes sense of intelligent design in light of one's Christian faith.

Even so, there is an immediate payoff to intelligent design: it destroys the atheistic legacy of Darwinian evolution. Intelligent design makes it impossible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist. This gives intelligent design incredible traction as a tool for apologetics, opening up the God-question to individuals who think that science has buried God.

The evidence for design in biology is now overwhelming. In the last thirty years, advances in molecular biology and the information sciences have revealed that the most basic form of life, the cell, is an automated city complete with miniature motors and engines, digital data storage, signal transduction circuitry, monorails that move packages from one location to another, and information processing at a level that human technology has not begun to approximate.

Even the simplest cell is a nano-engineered marvel. Indeed, biologists now need to be engineers to understand life at the subcellular level. Contrast this with Darwin and his contemporaries, who saw the cell as extremely simple -- basically, they saw the cell as a blob of Jell-O enclosed by a membrane. No wonder Darwin never addressed the origin of life in his published writings. For him, the origin of life was not a problem. Rather, how life diversified once it got here was for him the problem. That's why he wrote *On the Origin of Species* rather than *On the Origin of Life*.

The theory of intelligent design confronts biology with an immediacy of design that many scientists, committed as many of them are to a materialist worldview, are reluctant to accept. But for true scientists, this reluctance must be justified by evidence and not by an allergic reaction to design that is the result of cultural conditioning.

Twenty years ago, Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins asserted that "the evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design." A lot has happened since then, with the evidence of biology now revealing a universe chock-full of design. President Bush is therefore completely on target in wanting intelligent design taught in the public school science curriculum.