

Debate About Intelligent Design

In the debate about intelligent design (ID), many tend to forget that evolution is merely an hypothesis about the origin and development of life. Evolution is a scientifically verifiable theory regarding changes within species but when used to explain large scale changes from one species to another, it's more philosophy than a science. The use of evolution to address matters of ultimate origins departs from science because it lacks empirical evidence. Intelligent design is a scientific theory that can be tested by empirical research.

“As a theory of biological origins and development, intelligent design’s central claim is that only intelligent causes adequately explain the complex, information-rich structures of biology and that these causes are empirically detectable. To say intelligent causes are empirically detectable is to say there exist well-defined methods that, based on observable features of the world, can reliably distinguish intelligent causes from undirected natural causes.”

“Simply put, intelligent design is the science that studies signs of intelligence. Stated this way, intelligent design seems straightforward and unproblematic. Yet depending on where the intelligence makes itself evident, one may encounter fierce resistance to intelligent design. Archeologists attributing intelligent design to arrowheads or burial mounds is not controversial. But biologists attributing intelligent design to biological structures raises tremendous anxiety, not only in the scientific community but in the broader culture as well” (William A. Dembski in *The Design Revolution: Answering Tough Questions about Intelligent Design*).

Opponents of the scientific theory of intelligent design repeatedly compare it with biblical creationism. This is a manipulative tactical effort to belittle those who endorse ID. It is also used to convince the public that intelligent design is code language for teaching biblical creation. It is not.

Intelligent design is the science that studies signs of intelligence in the natural world. It does not require that the designer is the God revealed in the Christian scriptures. The fact that many who accept intelligent design also believe that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), should not be used to discredit the scientific method.

Science based on empirical research should follow the evidence wherever it leads. Unfortunately, in the halls of academia, science has often become a cover up for applied materialist philosophy. It only allows the assumption that in the beginning were the particles, and impersonal natural laws, and nothing else. In this sense, life ultimately came from nothing. Nothing produced something. The famous evolutionary theorist, G.G. Simpson; “Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind.” Surely no empirical evidence could license such a conclusion.

Every critic of intelligent design I have met admitted to never reading anything by a leading proponent of it. This is academic dishonesty. To be fair, many also speak carelessly about evolution. They fail to respect the difference between the scientific evidence of evolution within nature and the unscientific use of evolution as a philosophy of ultimate origins. Intellectual integrity requires one to research a viewpoint before critiquing it.

The critical responses against those who support ID are consistently based on willful ignorance of the science of intelligent design. The information is available but the critics refuse to do their homework. A profitable public discussion is impossible with the continual regurgitation of the same ill-researched condescending ridicule. We need to move beyond reactionary oversimplifications if we want to promote thoughtful debate.