

What does Christ have to do with It?

Theological implications of Intelligent Design, and an Alternative View

Paul Arveson, 3/19/06 Wrestlers, National Presbyterian Church

Introduction

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1. Intelligent Design is a form of Natural Theology

The question is, how can mankind attain true knowledge of God?

Faith and reason: which comes first?

Credo ut Intelligam - Anselm

Faith before understanding

No man can boast of attaining knowledge of God;

it is a gift, by grace through faith. The

philosophers in Athens scoffed at Paul's message.

If the Jews or Romans had understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.

Intellego ut credam - Abelard, Pope John Paul II

Understanding before faith

Thomas Aquinas - Argument from Design, 13th century

The wonders of nature provide manifest evidence of design; design implies a Designer.

He referred to the "moral convenience" of Revelation -- that is, such revelation was

convenient, because of sin, though theoretically unnecessary.

John Paul II's Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (14.9.1998) dedicates ample space to the issue of the "natural knowledge of God", as both an ascending pathway of reason towards faith as well as a descending pathway from Revelation toward the universality of reason, simultaneously offering a link between the two routes.

One form of the Argument from Design: the God of the Gaps

History: Newton (1687)

The planetary orbits are accounted for by the law of gravitation, but minor perturbations from other planets disturb the orbits causing them to be unstable or chaotic and they will decay in a few thousand years. So, every so often God pushes the earth in just the right way to keep it stable. This is proof of God's existence, because if this didn't happen we wouldn't be here.

LaPlace (1787)

There are variations in the orbits, but they are bounded and not chaotic.

One day, the French mathematician Laplace presented his newest, most extraordinary work, *Celestial Mechanics*, to the emperor Napoleon. The emperor said, "Monsieur Laplace, they tell me you have written this large book on the system of the universe and have never even mentioned its Creator." Laplace is said to have answered, "Sir, I have no need of this hypothesis."

In so saying, Newton's gap was filled with an improved scientific explanation.

Paley's watch

**Complex, precise design implies a designer - beginning of Intelligent Design argument
Darwin tried to deny the need for design by finding a natural way for design to emerge. In the minds of many, this triggered the culture war, although it really goes back to the Middle Ages.**

2. Intelligent Design Today

Nancy Pearcey

“Total Truth”

Bill Dembski

Senior Fellow of the Discovery Institute

a leading light of the ID movement

Author of “Intelligent Design”

Phil Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*

"I therefore put the following simple proposition on the table for discussion: God is our true Creator. I am not speaking of a God who is known only by faith and is invisible to reason, or who acted undetectably behind some naturalistic evolutionary process that was to all appearances mindless and purposeless. That kind of talk is about the human imagination, not the reality of God. I speak of a God who acted openly and who left his fingerprints all over the evidence."

Evidentialism. “Evidence that demands a verdict.” All kinds of legal terminology is used in this context.

God of the Gaps theology creates competition between science and theology

In its extreme form, it assumes that natural explanations exclude God. (Methodological Naturalism = Naturalism). Any filling in of gaps counts as points against God. This tragic assumption pits science and faith against each other. Scientific theories and God are mutually exclusive. Phil Johnson takes this view. So do atheist materialists like Dawkins and E.O. Wilson and many in the past. These people characterize the relationship between science and faith as imperialism. Both sides are trying to take over all of the territory.

Dembski continues to defend the God-of-the-Gaps argument.

“There is no precise line of demarcation for deciding when a search is to be given up and when the object of a search is to be denied existence. Nevertheless I would offer a necessary condition. The failure in practice to discover a thing is good reason to doubt the thing’s existence *only if* a diligent search for the thing has been performed.” Dembski, ID, p. 245

But how do we know when a diligent search is completed? When a gap is permanent and not merely a temporary one? We don't. And I am especially suspicious of alleged gaps in biology, which is a very young science. We only discovered DNA 50 years ago, only sequenced the human genome 5 years ago. Every issue of *Science* magazine reports important new discoveries in biology.

Another concern is that like any gap argument is trying to prove a universal negative statement. This is a practical impossibility. "There are no WMD in Iraq."

3. Intelligent Design and Christ

The "Big Tent"

ID is usually vague as to the actual character of the intelligent designer. They want to keep the tent big and wide enough to embrace all kinds of belief and unbelief, and they want their views taught in public schools. However, in his book Dembski is clearly interested in focusing on Christ to make his case for ID.

Dembski: a Christian ID proponent

The *Logos* of John 1

In his chapter on "The Act of Creation", Dembski again refers to Christ. He discusses John 1, which highlights the word *logos*.

Greek philosophers did use *logos* to cosmic design or reason or plan. Cosmic reason.

Augustine said that the Platonists had some conception of the *logos*, but not the distinctively Christian claim that the Word was made flesh.

Dembski affirms that the "Word (*logos*) became flesh and dwelt among us". But what he really wants to get to is his favorite topic, information theory.

"Information theory is just another name for *logos*. This is an information-rich universe.... Information -- the information that God speaks to create the world, the information that continually proceeds from God in sustaining the world and acting in it and the information that passes between God's creatures -- this is the

bridge that connects transcendence and immanence. All of this information is mediated through the divine *Logos*, who is before all things and by whom all things consist (Col. 1:17). The crucial breakthrough of the intelligent design movement has been to show that this great theological truth -- that God acts in the world by dispersing information -- also has scientific content. Information, whether divinely inputted or transmitted between creatures, is in principle capable of being detected via the complexity-specification criterion." [p. 233]

Christ is the *Logos*, and the *Logos* is information theory. This is the main theological point of Dembski's book. Information is the mediator between God and the universe, between God and man. And this is not meant to be an analogy, but a reality.

Now idols are some tangible or creaturely thing that is set up to serve as a substitute or channel or mediator to God. But the Scripture says that "there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ." (I Tim. 2:5) Not information theory.

The only connection Dembski makes between Christ and science is based on an analogy to number theory. In these passages, Dembski makes no mention of the crucial feature of Christ's mission: the Cross.

4. Theodicy in ID

Definition: If God is good and all-powerful, why is there suffering and death? Why do bad things happen to good people?

Design arguments don't help to understand suffering and death

Beautifully designed things like HIV, the malaria parasite and the influenza viruses are killers of millions of people. (picture)

Life appears to be full of pragmatic strategies for exploitation, parasitism, disease, cancer, and death. Design is morally indiscriminate, indifferent. (Dawkins presses these points hard in his books.)

Saying the Fall explains everything is not very satisfactory. There is plenty of fossil evidence of death occurring all the way back to the beginning of life on earth billions of years ago. (fossil)
The “Intelligent Designer” God might be malicious.

5. Intelligent Design and the Bible

Romans 1:18-20 - the justification for all Christian approaches to natural theology.

What does Romans 1 really mean?

As with all forms of natural theology, the Reformers argued that the noetic effects of sin were sufficient to suppress the saving knowledge of God apart from Special Revelation. That is why they were without excuse, and that is why Special Revelation is necessary, and why faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, which is the main thesis of the whole book of Romans.

Calvin concludes:

“In vain for us, therefore, does Creation exhibit so many bright lamps lighted up to show forth the glory of its Author. Though they beam upon us from every quarter, they are altogether insufficient of themselves to lead us into the right path.” - *Institutes*
Book 1 Ch. 5

Suppose we already believe in God. Can we then find evidence in nature to prove or support God's existence?

Of course -- it's everywhere: through the eyes of faith

“Earth's crammed with heaven, And every common bush afire with God; And only he who sees takes off his shoes; The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”

Author: Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Source: Aurora Leigh (bk. VII)

Still not proof or support - e.g. the evidence of a Big Bang does not prove or support our faith, but the Big Bang is consistent with the Bible story. Because it doesn't rule out other possibilities.

On closer examination of Dembski's many allusions to Christ, it is revealing to see what he leaves out.

Namely, the cross. Philosophers and intellectuals just

don't seem to know what to make of this. The only analogy that Dembski came up with to relate scientific theories to Christ is a rather obscure one based on number theory. Later he described the relationship between the Creator and the *Logos* in terms of information theory. We are always making God into our favorite images, instead of letting Christ define what we mean by God.

6. The Reformed Alternative to Natural Theology

In the midst of Athenian Greek philosophical speculation about the nature of God, Paul intruded on the scene and interrupted the civil discussion with a gruesome and scandalous story (Acts 17).

The Crucified Christ is the Logos

I Cor. 1

18: For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

19: For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart."

20: Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

21: For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

22: For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,

23: but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

24: but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

25: For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

A different starting point for theology

Theology starts at the foot of the cross

Luther: "True theology and recognition of God are in the Crucified Christ. Our understanding of who

God is and how God is active in the world should begin from the cross and the resurrection of the Crucified.”

This is a radical departure that brings in the character of Christianity with full force. Not generic theism with the cross and resurrection tacked on but is Trinitarian to the core. The cross negates any idea that God's self-revelation must conform to our standards of what is fitting for God.

So instead of starting with reason and science, or instead of starting with Genesis, the Reformers take Jesus Christ as the starting point for access to the knowledge of the true character of God.

Jesus is much more than a designer. Much more than a channel of information. In Christ God made a Son of Man, who can therefore relate to us in every way, including in our suffering and grief as well as our joy. Jesus is our personal Savior, our Lord and Redeemer who walks with us through life day by day.

Christ is the foundation of theology

***1 Cor. 3: 10:* According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it.**

***11:* For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

Creationists think they are the most Biblical of Christians. They say that “creation is the foundation”. But the Bible claims that Christ is the foundation. No other foundation can be laid for knowledge of God, of ourselves, of the universe. Christ is the solid rock, all else - including creation itself - is sinking sand.

A God who hides

In Christ God is paradoxically hidden, because there is nothing more remote from the beauties of creation than a man hanging dead on a tree as a criminal.

More verses from Matthew on how Jesus suppressed the evidence:

Matt. 9:27-31

Matt. 11:25-26

Matt. 12:15b - 19

Matt. 12:38 - 40

Matt. 13:10 - 13

Matt. 13:34-35

Matt: 16:20

Matt: 17:9

Isa. 45:15 “Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.”

Why? “So that your faith might not rest on human wisdom but on the power of God.” - I Cor 2:1-5

A God who empties himself

Phil. 2:6-8: Christ, though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death--even death on a cross.

Theologians refer to this as *Kenosis* - self-emptying
The nature we observe is consistent with this description of God.

Theodicy comes right at the beginning

Christ the Crucified is on the side of the losers in the struggle for existence.

Christ identified with us and all of life in his suffering.

Hebrews 4:14: Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

15: For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

16: Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Natural history is His story

If the creation is to be consistent with the character of the true God revealed in Jesus Christ, who made it, then we should expect such a revelation to be characteristic of God's work in general.

He is hidden, he deliberately left no fingerprints.

New life and new creatures emerge out of death and destruction. The creator's designs are not analogous to those of human designers. 2 Cor. 5:17, Isa. 55:8-9

Evolution is consistent with this kind of a Creator. This doesn't necessarily imply that evolution is true. It just means that evolution is one possible description of biology. It seems to be a plausible explanation, but it could be wrong. This is something for biologists to decide. Either way, the existence of God is not in question.

The Creator's interaction with the universe

So how does God interact with the universe?

James Houston: "The verb '*bara*', to create, is deliberately used here, indicating also that all analogies using human metaphors - make like a potter, create like an author, shape like a sculptor, compose like a musician - fail, for how is God said to 'create'? For in the sense of his transcendent power He brings all into being out of nothing."

"No infinite amount of time - even the 20 billion years now being postulated for the 'Big Bang' hypothesis for the origin of the universe - nor any infinite amount of space, can help us to conceive the ineffable mystery of the Creator and His eternity of being. When we talk of God as 'Creator' and of 'knowing Him', we are thus introducing a qualitative difference that no amount of scientific data can either prove or disprove. It is an altogether different way of knowing."

Is there design and purpose in this universe? Yes, but it is not like a human design.

**Eph. 1: 7-10 - God's plan for the fullness of time
There is one truth, but its unification is not to be found on earth, but ultimately in Christ, who is the truth, the *Logos*, the design, the purpose of everything.**

**There are real, irreducible mysteries in theology:
Alister McGrath**

"The category of 'mystery' plays a particularly important role in any discussion about theological closure. The key point here is that the category of 'mystery' affirms both the

coherence of a multi-levelled reality, and its complexity, which is such that its meaning cannot be totally determined by any one writer or era. As a result, what one generation inherits from another is not so much definitive answers as a shared commitment to the process of wrestling.”

7. Summary:

Solo scriptura, solo fide

It is our faith that opens the door to knowledge of God, not proofs or evidence.

Heb. 11:6: “And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Pascal

“What meets our eyes denotes neither a total absence nor a manifest presence of the divine but a presence of a God who conceals himself. Everything bears this stamp.”

“The heart has reasons that reason knows nothing of.”

Freedom to believe or disbelieve

“God seems to prefer a balance of evidence, with reasons to believe and disbelieve, so a person's heart and will (not coerced by overwhelming evidence) can make the decision, and so we can develop a "living by faith" character with a trust in God serving as the foundation for all thoughts and actions of daily living.”

Craig Rusbult, a Christian chemistry professor

8. Conclusions

Don't make such a tight connection between God and evolution that you believe supporting one detracts from the other. We don't have to find fault with science in order to justify our faith. This is faulty reasoning. Stop obsessing about evolution.

There are Christians on both sides of the evolution question. There are atheists on both sides. The critical, decisive antidote to the threats of naturalism is faith in Christ, not attacks on Darwin.

This is good news. Faith in Christ crucified sets us free from sin. It also sets us free from the fear of science

and new discoveries. We are released to enjoy all the wonders of the universe that science is revealing every day. Psalm 111:2.

Everyone accepts microevolution; there is no controversy about this. Take microevolution seriously and teach it in schools. We ignore it at our peril. This is the process that generates new viruses that have the power to kill millions.

We may soon need to draw upon our faith in order to comfort each other in the face of a pandemic. Let's unite around our faith in Jesus Christ, who suffers along with us.

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