

Intelligent (with a capital 'I') Design  
By Gerry Barclay

School boards throughout the country are pushing for its inclusion in the science curriculum; congressmen are rushing to endorse it; my school, Highline Community College, has even had two Science Seminars about it. If there's smoke, there must be fire. Right? Right! So let's take a closer look at Intelligent Design (ID) 'Theory'.

Briefly, ID 'Theory' states that many features of living creatures seem too complex to have originated by a natural process, i.e. evolution, and so must have been designed by an Intelligent (with a capital 'I') Designer. One falsification of ID 'theory' is that there is so much in nature that appears to be less than intelligently designed. Consider male genitals.

Many male mammals, including us, have testes that sway in the breeze away from the body. Manufactured in the testes is of course sperm. Sperm carry our genes. Our genes are no less than the future of our species. Therefore, sperm carry the future (with of course an equaled contribution from the egg). And so the future of our species is out there dangling dangerously and subject to all sorts of mishap. If you, as a man or boy, ever stopped short on your bicycle only to be hurled forward onto that nasty bar between the seat and the handle bars, you don't need to be told the meaning of 'nut cracker' (and it's not suite). It's even worse for chimpanzees, our closest relatives in the animal world. Male chimps have huge testicles that are common targets in the fierce fighting that is frequent among these violent creatures. Falling on a bike bar is like a ride in the park compared to having your scrotum ripped off. So why are testes so precariously placed?

The reason that sperm are produced outside the core of the body is that it is too warm inside. The sperm need the slightly cooler temperatures found in the scrotum to develop properly. But couldn't a truly Intelligent (with a capital 'I') Designer have done better? Couldn't sperm have been designed that could withstand the warmer temperatures inside the body? Thusly placed, they would remain safely tucked in, out of harm's way. But wait, there are even more problems with male genitals.

After suffering the indignities and pain of being bumped, prodded, poked, and scrunched in the scrotum, our poor sperm must follow the unnecessarily long and tortuous path through the vas deferens and finally exit through the urethra, basically a sewer line that also disposes of urine. So, we share our future with a waste conduit? How intelligent is that?

Since I'm sort of on the subject, here's another example. The average adult spends about 10 minutes a day eliminating solid waste (lots of variation though). Over 50 years that comes to 3042 hours or about 127 solid days in the can. Think of all the projects you could complete, the people you could meet, or the books you could read (scratch that last one) if you didn't have to waste (get it?) so much time. In addition, solid waste creates lots of problems.

First of all, it's expensive. We spend billions of dollars per year on waste treatment facilities to detoxify our sewage. Not to mention the money we spend on toilets, toilet paper, People Magazine, etc. Much worse, the lack of proper waste treatment is still a major cause of disease in much of the world. Why so much waste if we are Intelligently (with a capital 'I') Designed? Couldn't a truly intelligent designer have designed a more efficient system that would minimize or even eliminate poo production?

I could go on and on; nature abounds with much less than perfect design. Space will allow me just one more example. How about the eye?

The eye is such a marvel of creation that is an icon of the ID movement (and its 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessor, the argument from design). Or is it really such a marvel?

The light receiving receptors of the eye, rods and cones, reside in the retina at the

back of the eye. Strangely, however, they face not toward the light but backward towards the brain. The nerves that connect the rods and cones to the brain exit out toward the front of the eye and then do practically a 360 back to the brain through a hole (!) in our retina (a.k.a. the blind spot). One problem with this awkward arrangement is that it leaves us susceptible to retinal detachment if hit hard enough in the head from behind or the side. The much more sensible squid's eye has it right. Rods and cones point forward, no exit holes, and no problems with detachment. Could the Intelligent Designer perhaps be a squid?

In the light of evolution, poor design is explainable and even predicted. Evolution is sloppy. It tinkers with existing structures shaping them in ways that allow organisms to get by just long enough to pass on their genes. Lack of perfection is expected; suboptimality is no surprise. Surprising instead is an Intelligent (with a capital 'I') Designer who designs so poorly. There is one way out of this conundrum of the Designer who designs poorly, but perhaps not one that ID 'theorists' would (or could) embrace.

Perhaps the designer is not intelligent with a capital 'I'. Maybe she, he, it, or they are just sort of intelligent. Or maybe the designer is lazy or doesn't care or has other priorities. Maybe the designer is coyote, the trickster, and things like dangling testes, wasteful inefficiency, and backward retinas are a cosmic practical joke. I can imagine that most ID 'theorists' would not be too keen on adopting any of these particular points of view. In the words of ID superstar, mathematician William Dembski, "Intelligent Design opens the whole possibility of us being created in the image of a benevolent God."<sup>1</sup> And from the founder of the Intelligent (with a capital 'I') Design movement, former law professor Phillip Johnson, "Our strategy has been to change the subject a bit so that we can get the issue of *intelligent design, which really means the reality of God*, before the academic world and into the schools."<sup>2</sup> (my italics)

By now I hope you have noticed that every time I use 'theory' or 'theorist' in connection with ID, it's in quotes. A theory in science is a well-documented explanatory principle. There is no documentation to support ID; we find instead a lack of data, a lack of logic, and a leap of faith. ID does not explain anything. It is tantamount to saying 'just because'. And in no sense is ID an accepted scientific principle. To the contrary, the scientific community has roundly rejected ID 'theory' (see for example the AAAS (the largest scientific organization in the world) resolution on ID 'theory' at its website, <http://www.aaas.org/news/releases/2002/1106id2.shtml>).

While ID is not a scientific theory, it does qualify as a theory in the generic sense, i.e. a speculation. In fact, one could properly say that, unlike evolution, ID is just a theory.

1. Science Test, Church & State Magazine, July / August 2000.
2. American Family Radio, Jan 10, 2003 broadcast.

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