

FAQ:

Is ID an argument from ignorance?

The Short Answer: No. Some critics have misunderstood intelligent design and claimed that it is merely claims that because we can't figure out how some biological structures could have arisen, therefore they were probably designed. The argument for design is not like this. In reality, the argument notes that intelligent design theory is a sufficient causal explanation for the origin of specified (or irreducibly) complex information, and thus argues from positive predictions of design. The lack of detailed step-by-step evolutionary explanations for the origin of irreducible complexity is the result of the fact that irreducible complexity is fundamentally not evolvable by Darwinian evolution.

The Long Answer:

An argument from ignorance is one which says, "you haven't figured out the answer to the problem, therefore you can't, therefore I am right." Of course such an argument doesn't give the other side the opportunity to continue to research the solution to the problem. Often persistence and hard work will indeed yield a solution! Is intelligent design such an "argument from ignorance?"

Unfortunately it is a common misperception about intelligent design theory that it is merely an argument from ignorance against evolution, and usually mischaracterizes intelligent design as follows:

"Intelligent design theorists argue that evolutionists have not figured out how irreducibly complex structures could have arisen, therefore they won't figure it out, and they must have been designed."

In reality intelligent design proponents do not claim that evolutionists will not figure out how irreducibly complex structures evolved because they have tried and failed, but rather because irreducibly complex structures are in principle unevolvable. Consider the following quote from Charles Darwin In *The Origin of Species* Darwin:

'If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.'

Irreducibly complex structures represent such a fundamental challenge to Darwin's theory, because if they are changed slightly, they cease to function. Irreducible complexity is not something that is possible to evolve under Darwinian evolution, for Darwinian evolution requires that structures are functional along every step of their evolution, and if you change an irreducibly complex structure slightly, it cease to function. Thus, intelligent design does not claim that evolutionists "just haven't yet figured out how to evolved irreducible complexity" but rather that:

"Darwinists haven't figured out how to evolve irreducible complexity because irreducible complexity is in principle impossible to evolve. Irreducible complexity is a fundamental falsifier of Darwinism."

However, intelligent design theory does not merely depend on irreducible complexity being impossible to evolve. Intelligent design begins with positive predictions based upon our observational experience of how intelligent designers operates.

It is possible that the misperception of the way intelligent design theory works stems from misunderstandings of Michael Behe's book *Darwin's Black Box* (1996). *Darwin's Black Box* was one of the first of its kind for the ID movement, and although Behe did an excellent job of elucidating many biological examples of irreducible complexity, and also spent much time discussing the lack of literature detailing the evolution of irreducibly complex structures (See Chapter 8, "Publish or Perish").

This, in seeing this literature survey, one might be misled to believe that intelligent design theorists are arguing from the lack of explanations coming from the Darwinist camp. Behe did not make this argument, but rather argued that irreducible complexity was a fundamental falsifier of evolution, and simply used his review of the evolutionary literature to convince the reader that this really is true. Some websites trying to rebut Behe's claims (such as "Behe's Empty Box" at <http://www.world-of-dawkins.com/Catalano/box/behe.shtml>) began to stockpile references to articles purporting to explain how irreducible complexity could evolve. Amazingly, virtually all of these articles made Behe's exact point: they almost all dealt with nothing more than protein homology, sequence similarity, or mostly vague hand waving type explanations of evolution. The lack of testable step-by-step accounts of the evolution of irreducible complexity testifies to the fact that, regardless of the state of who has published or said what, evolution fundamentally cannot evolve irreducible complexity.

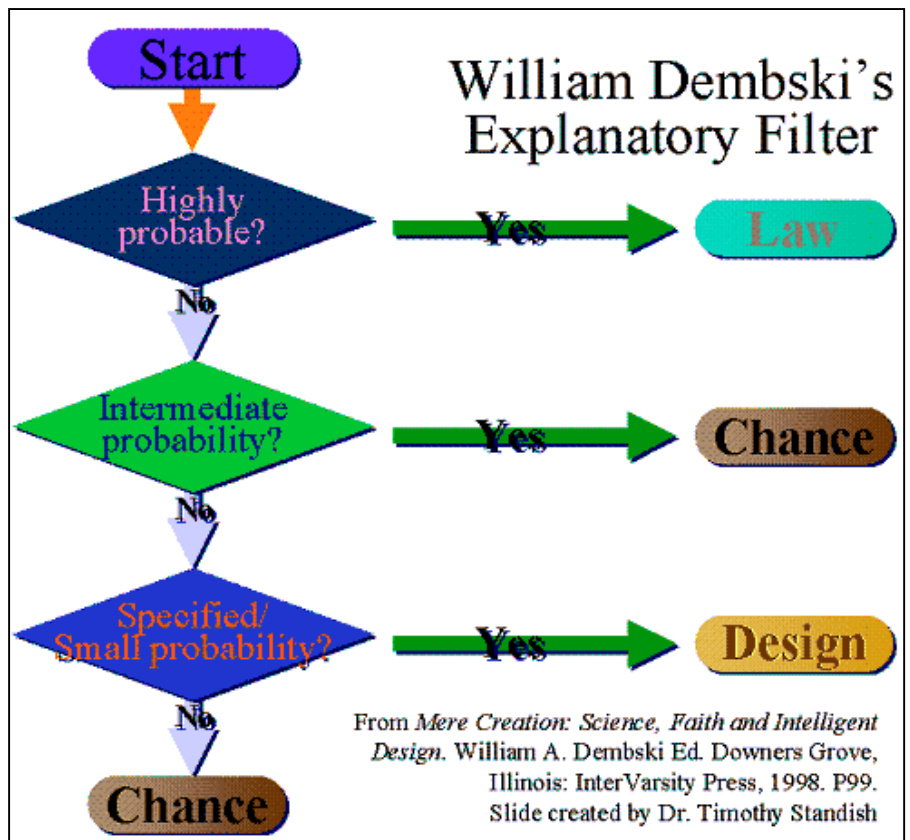
The theoretical way we infer design was expounded in more detail in *The Design Inference* (1998) by William Dembski. An essay by William Dembski lays out in detail how we can understand the products of intelligent design by examining how designers work:

CSI is a reliable indicator of design because its recognition coincides with how we recognize intelligent causation generally. In general, to recognize intelligent causation we must establish that one from a range of competing possibilities was actualized, determine which possibilities were excluded, and then specify the possibility that was actualized. What's more, the competing possibilities that were excluded must be live possibilities, sufficiently numerous so that specifying the possibility that was actualized cannot be attributed to chance. In terms of probability, this means that the possibility that was specified is highly improbable. In terms of complexity, this means that the possibility that was specified is highly complex. All the elements in the general scheme for recognizing intelligent causation (i.e., Actualization-Exclusion-Specification) find their counterpart in complex specified information-CSI. CSI pinpoints what we need to be looking for when we detect design. (Intelligent Design as a Theory of Information, by William Dembski at "http://www.arn.org/docs/dembski/wd_idtheory.htm")

To rephrase and translate this excerpt from a somewhat technical article, Dembski notes that intelligent agents can choose from one of many competing possibilities. Designer choices tend to be unlikely to occur and complex, and if they are then we can safely recognize that the choice made (which yielded the present object) was the result of design. This comes from our understanding of how intelligent agents operate--not from an argument from ignorance against evolution.

In *The Design Inference*, Dembski lays out a three-part explanatory filter by which we can detect intelligent design (at left):

This explanatory filter recognizes that there are three causes for things: chance, law and design. The premise



behind the filter is the positive prediction of design that designers tend to build complex things with low probability that correspond to a specified pattern. In biology, this could be an irreducibly complex structure which fulfills some biological function. This filter helps ensure that we detect design only when it is warranted. If something is high probability, we may ascribe it to a law. If something is intermediate probability, we may ascribe it to chance. But if it is specified and low probability, then this is the tell-tale sign that we are dealing with something that is designed. In these high information-situations, intelligent design theorist Stephen C. Meyer also emphasizes many of the positive predictions of intelligent design:

"Experience teaches that information-rich systems ... invariable result from intelligent causes, not naturalistic ones. Yet origin-of-life biology has artificially limited its explanatory search to the naturalistic nodes of causation ... chance and necessity. Finding the best explanation, however, requires invoking causes that have the power to produce the effect in question. When it comes to information, we know of only one such cause. For this reason, the biology of the information age now requires a new science of design.

(Stephen C. Meyer, *Mere Creation*, pg. 140).

"Indeed, in all cases where we know the causal origin of 'high information content,' experience has shown that intelligent design played a causal role."

(Stephen C. Meyer, DNA and Other Designs at http://www.arn.org/docs/meyer/sm_dnaotherdesigns.htm)

"Intelligent design provides a sufficient causal explanation for the origin of large amounts of information, since we have considerable experience of intelligent agents generating informational configurations of matter."

(Meyer S. C. et. al., "The Cambrian Explosion: Biology's Big Bang," in *Darwinism, Design, and Public Education*, edited by J. A. Campbell and S. C. Meyer (Michigan State University Press, 2003)

Intelligent design is thus a cause sufficient to produce the high levels of information, i.e. irreducible complexity, found in biology. Intelligent design is not merely an argument from ignorance against evolution, but is inferred because of its positive predictions of how we understand designers to operate.

Positive Predictions of Intelligent Design:

Table 1. Ways Designers Act When Designing (Observations):
(1) Take many parts and arrange them in highly specified and complex patterns which perform a specific function.
(2) Rapidly infuse any amounts of genetic information into the biosphere, including large amounts, such that at times rapid morphological or genetic changes could occur in populations.
(3) 'Re-use parts' over-and-over in different types of organisms (design upon a common blueprint).
(4) Be said to typically NOT create completely functionless objects or parts (although we may sometimes think something is functionless, but not realize its true function).

Table 2. Predictions of Design (Hypothesis):
(1) High information content machine-like irreducibly complex structures will be found.
(2) Forms will be found in the fossil record that appear suddenly and without any precursors.
(3) Genes and functional parts will be re-used in different unrelated organisms.
(4) The genetic code will NOT contain much discarded genetic baggage code or functionless "junk DNA".

Each of these positive predictions can be tested and found to be true in the scientific data.