

FAQ:

Could something be designed if it were an "evil design"?

The Short Answer: Yes. The scientific theory of intelligent design deals with the efficient cause of life--the mechanism that created it. The scientific theory of intelligent design is independent of the final cause, or the purpose of the design. In other words, things can be designed whether they are an "evil design" or a "good design." After all, both torture chambers and <insert your favorite movie here> were intelligently designed. This is thus a theological question about the "problem of evil," and thus requires a theological answer. Many religions attempt to solve the "problem of evil." Christianity solves it by noting that evil is not the fault of God, who is perfect, but that God has allowed evil to enter this world because it chose sin and rebellion against Him. Nonetheless, under Christianity, God promises to one day eradicate evil, and forgive us of sin if we choose to turn to Him in repentance and trust Jesus Christ as our savior from evil.

The Long Answer:

In science, theories are confirmed or disconfirmed comparing the data to predictions that the theory makes. A prediction of a scientific theory must be generally true for the theory under all circumstances, such that it can be confirmed through repeated experimentation by any scientist. In intelligent design theory, some claims about what designers produce are true in all circumstances, but some are not. In other words, there are some characteristics of designers which are universal among all possible intelligent agents, and some characteristics which are particular to only a subset of intelligent agents. Although it is clear that specified complexity is always the product of design, because designers may act with intentions unknown to us, it can sometimes be difficult to make broad scientific claims about what a designer would or would not produce in all situations. Such non-universal claims about what a designer would or would *not* create something enter us into the realm of theology and philosophy. To assess whether a claim about a designer is philosophical or scientific, we must turn to philosophy.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle realized that we can explain the origin of any object or entity through various "levels" of causation. Often called Aristotle's "four causes," these ideas have been the bedrock of introductory philosophy courses for the past 2000 years. A brief look at these four causes will help show how they are relevant to this discussion.

Final Cause: Final causes are the ultimate purpose for the existence of something. The final cause asks "what is a thing's meaning or reason for existence in the grand scope of reality?" For example, if we ask, "why are there chairs?" the final cause would be "because people need something to sit in." In the case of chairs, their final cause is not necessarily moral or religious, however final causes very often are of a moral or religious nature. For example, if you ask a Christian, "Why do humans exist?," the traditional answer is "To know God personally and glorify Him." Final causes thus can have strong moral and religious implications, as they tend to account for a metaphysical reason for existence.

Efficient Cause: The efficient cause is the mechanism or method by which something is created—the "how." Returning to the chair example, the efficient cause of a chair might be a woodworker. The efficient cause has great importance in the intelligent design - evolution debate, which is essentially a debate over the efficient cause of life—"how did life arise?" Evolutionists, even theistic evolutionists, would claim that our efficient cause is the Darwinian mechanism--mutation and selection. In contrast, design theorists claim our efficient cause is some combination of intelligent design and evolution (microevolution). Questions about the efficient cause thus look to universal predictions of the two theories which allow us to determine which mechanism was involved in the production of a biological structure.

Formal and Material Cause: These lower levels of causation are less important here. Formal causes ask about the pattern, essence, or physical structure of a thing. The formal cause of a chair is the shape into which it is made so people can sit in it. The formal cause of a human is more complicated, and would include our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual construction. A material cause is the physical matter from which a thing is made. Thus, the material cause of a chair could be wood, or plastic. More specifically, it could be atoms and molecules. A human’s material cause would be cells, proteins, and biomolecules, etc.

In assessing the claim “a designer wouldn’t design...” we must determine a claim is against a final cause or an efficient cause. Objections to final causes, the moral or religious reason something exists, lie outside of the realm of science. These theological objections can be answered through theological explanations, and are not relevant questions for the science of intelligent design. However, some objections could deal with the efficient cause. Let’s try to distinguish between the two.

Type of Cause	Nature of Cause	Type of Objection to ID
Final Cause	Moral or religious reason for the existence of a thing.	Theological.
Efficient Cause	The mechanism or method by which a thing is created.	Scientific -- here you are trying to discriminate between design and evolution.
Formal Cause	Essence, structure, or building design of a thing.	N/A
Material Cause	The matter of which a thing is composed.	N/A

Distinguishing between “Final” and “Efficient” Objections to Design

At the Hillsdale College intelligent design debate, Darwinist philosopher Michael Ruse objected to intelligent design because he claimed a designer would not create people with the disease sickle-cell anemia. Others have objected that a designer would not create things like viruses (or perhaps one might include "Type III Secretory Systems"), which are designed to kill. In fact, Many early evolutionists promoted their theory not necessarily through scientific evidence for evolution, but rather through negative theological claims of what God would or would not have created. One such example comes from Darwin himself, who wrote:

I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae [a large family of parasitic wasps] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars.

A variation of this method of argumentation is also exemplified by noted evolutionist paleontologist, the late Stephen J. Gould, who argues that we wouldn't have such an 'ugly' or 'inelegant' design:

Orchids manufacture their intricate devices from the common components of ordinary flowers, parts usually fitted for very different functions. If God had designed a beautiful machine to reflect his wisdom and power, surely he would not have used a collection of parts generally fashioned for other purposes. Orchids were not made by an ideal engineer; they are jury-rigged from a limited set of available components. Thus, they must have evolved from ordinary flowers. (Stephen J. Gould)

Such arguments are based upon the *personal views* of these evolutionists, and are theological, rather than scientific. At first glance, this appears a moral objection, saying that morally speaking, a designer would not create people with diseases, pain, death, etc. Such an objection would be a clear example of the “problem of evil” objection. This age-old objection states that a kind, loving, all-powerful God would not create a world with disease, pain, and other evil characteristics (such as red lights and moldy bread). This is clearly an objection that deals with the final cause, as it asks, “why, in the moral sense, would a designer create?”

The science of intelligent design theory quickly disposes with such moral objections through the simple observation that even things with an evil moral purpose can be intelligently designed. Torture chambers and electric chairs, terrible as they may be, are full complex specified information. Though some designers do not create evil, such as the God of the Bible, such a claim is not true for all designers in general, and thus does not attack the scientific theory of intelligent design. This shows how questions about final causes are not typically applicable to the science of intelligent design theory, because designers can create for a variety of different metaphysical reasons, though their products are still designed. Having addressed the scientific issue, such theological objections still beg for theological answers.

The science of intelligent design theory quickly disposes with moral objections through the simple observation that even things with an evil moral purpose can be intelligently designed. Torture chambers and electric chairs, terrible as they may be, are full complex specified information ... Having addressed the scientific issue, such theological objections still beg for theological answers.

Most religions attempt to provide solutions to the problem of evil at some level. Volumes have been written by religious commentators on this subject, as coping with evil is a fundamental struggle with which all human beings must contend. We all lose loved ones, we all experience pain and loss. In writing an intellectual explanation for the "problem of evil" Christian author C.S. Lewis prefaced his discussion saying:

[T]he only purpose of the book is to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering; for the far higher task of teaching forgiveness and patience I was never fool enough to suppose myself qualified, nor have I anything to offer my readers except my conviction that when pain is to be borne, a little courage helps more than knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all.

Lewis drives at the crucial human element involved in all discussions of the "problem of evil," but there is still the intellectual side. Harsh though it may seem, many philosophers believe there is no logical conflict between believing in an all-powerful and all-loving God and accepting the existence of evil in the world. Famous Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne wrote, "It seems to be generally agreed by atheists as well as theists that what is called 'the logical problem of evil' has been eliminated, and all that remains is 'the evidential problem.'" In other words, the problem can be solved, but it is sometimes difficult to accept.

Christianity solves the "problem" by explaining that evil is ultimately not the fault of God, but rather is the result of human sin and the sin of evil spiritual beings. Both groups have rebelled against God, who is fundamentally loving and good. God thus did not create the physical or spiritual world full of evil, but His creations, in their own free will, chose evil. Additionally, though the world chose evil, Christianity teaches that God has redeemed it from evil. An analogy is that humanity was on a boat with God, and it was safe, dry, and happy. Humanity chose to jump off the boat into the swirling ocean, incurring the consequence of imminent drowning. Yet, while drowning in this ocean of evil, God in His mercy has thrown us a life-ring, Jesus Christ, if we choose to grab on to him. This is the essence of the Christian solution to the problem of evil.

Thus, the scientific theory of intelligent design is untarnished the presence of "evil designs" and the Christian faith too has a more than adequate response to the alleged "problem of evil." Though intellectually explained, evil is no less difficult to deal with on a personal level. Christians believe that in the midst of affliction of evil, they can turn to a God who Himself became a man, and experienced evil, empathizes with their struggles, and ultimately overcame evil. For guidance in dealing with evil in your own life, we'd love to talk to you. Please feel free to e-mail the IDEA Center at info@ideacenter.org to talk to someone.