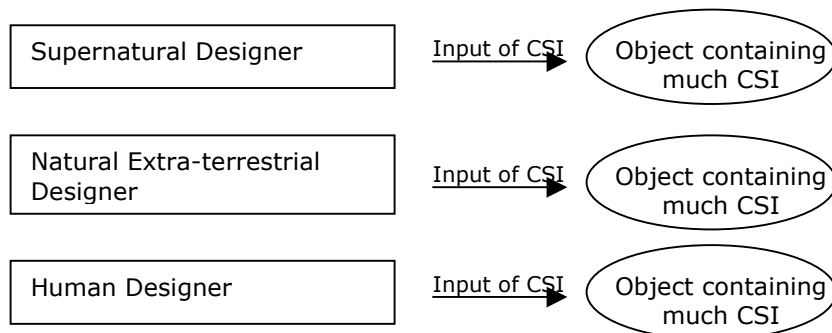


FAQ: What is the Identity of the Designer?

The Short Answer: Intelligent design theory detect design by looking for the very general tell-tale signs that a designer was at work. The tell-tale sign that is usually looked for is a form of information produced only by the action of intelligence called "complex and specified information." When we find complex-specified information (CSI), all we can infer is that the object was designed by an intelligence. The mere presence of CSI does not tell us anything about the identity of the designer. The fact that ID does not identify the designer is only because of epistemological limitations of the scope of this scientific theory. This question is thus left as a religious or philosophical question outside the scope of intelligent design theory.

The Long Answer:

The scientific theory of intelligent design cannot name the identity of the designer, but only detects the past occurrence of intelligent design in the natural world. Intelligent design theory cannot name the designer because it works off the assumption that all designers in general create a certain type of information when they act. While we can detect that type of information in the natural world to infer intelligent design, finding that type of information does not give us any more information about the designer other than that the designer intelligently designed the object in question. Consider the following diagram:



In this diagram, many types of intelligent agents could produce identical objects with high levels of CSI. Intelligent design theory can only find the object containing high levels of CSI and works backwards. While it can detect that the object was designed, it cannot discriminate what kind of designer designed the object, nor determine any specific properties about the designer, other than that it was an intelligent agent. All intelligent design theory can infer is that the object was designed. Intelligent design, as a scientific theory cannot identify the identity of the designer.

Intelligent design proponent and biochemist Michael Behe explains how we don't have to know the designer to be able to recognize intelligent design:

"Inferences to intelligent design do not require that we have a candidate for the role of the designer. We can determine that a system was designed by examining the system itself, and we can hold the conviction of design much more strongly than a conviction about the identity of the designer. In several examples above, the identity of the designer is not obvious. We have no idea who made the contraption in the junk-yard, or the vine trap, or why. Nonetheless, we know that all these things were designed because of the ordering of independent components to achieve some end.

[...]

The conclusion that something was designed can be made quite independently of knowledge of the designer. As a matter of procedure, the design must first be apprehended before there can be any further question about the designer. The inference to design can be held with all the firmness that is possible in this world, without knowing anything about the designer." (Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, page 196-197).

But shouldn't ID be able to determine the identity of the designer?

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, or how we know what we know and involves investigating when a person is justified in holding a particular belief. Many of the objections and questions in this section relate to the specific claims that intelligent design theory makes, or supposedly ought to make. Implicit in many of the questions seems to be the belief that intelligent design is silent on certain issues *when it shouldn't be*.

A scientific theory makes claims about the natural world based upon observations of the natural world and employing empirically-based mechanisms to explain those observations. A scientific theory cannot make claims which go beyond things that are possible to observe and cannot employ mechanisms which in principle could not be empirically-justified.

Every theory therefore has empirical bounds and limitations. In other words, a theory can only explain those things which are possible to observe and explain using empirically-based mechanisms and the tools and technology available to us. Theories simply are not capable of explaining things beyond their empirical bounds and limitations.

A theory also cannot help the bounds that it has--those bounds are imposed upon it by the laws of physics, the nature of reality, and the ability of humans to innovate and empirically observe the natural world. The fact that a theory has bounds does not make it any less scientific, or any less potent within its empirical bounds; it just means that a theory is constrained by what it is possible to observe in the natural world.

For example, it would be foolish to ask the quantum physicist, "How does quantum tunneling explain how chlorophyll makes plants green?" or to ask the botanist, "What does our current understanding of mechanisms of photosynthesis tell us about fundamental particles that compose atoms?" Such questions extend beyond the empirical bounds and limitations of a theory and the tools used by the scientists in each respective field.

Intelligent design is a scientific theory that also has a particular scope. Intelligent design cannot be faulted if its scope is limited; nor can it be ignored or dismissed on answers it provides to questions within its scope simply because it fails to address a question we would prefer to lie within its scope, but doesn't. Asking intelligent design to answer questions outside of its scope is to make a category fallacy. It is like asking a bachelor to whom he is married, when a bachelor is by definition unmarried. To fault intelligent design theory for not explaining enough, when its empirically-based scope limits what it can explain, is to fall trap to the same mistake.

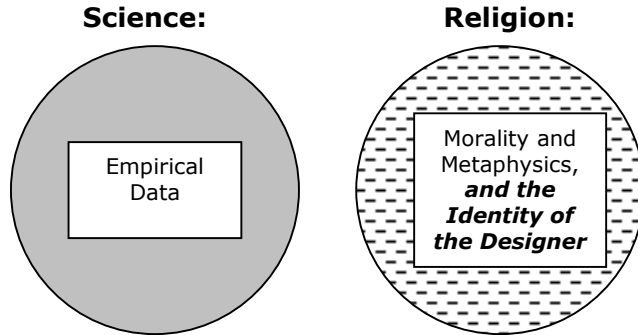
But what happens when questions are posed to the intelligent design theorist such as, "Who is the designer?" This is surely an interesting and important question. But for the scientist, the question must be asked, "What is the explanatory scope of intelligent design theory?" or more specifically, "How much can intelligent design theory explain based upon observations which are possible from the natural world?" Intelligent design bases its inferences on observations finding the type of

complexity produced by intelligent agents when they operate. As noted, when it finds this sort of complexity, it cannot infer more than the mere conclusion that life was designed.

Not identifying the designer is not a cop-out nor does it stem from an unwillingness to be honest about motivations. It results solely from the pure empirical limitations of scientific investigation:

[The] only commitment [of intelligent design theory] is that the design in the world be empirically detectable...This is not a matter of being vague but rather of not pretending to [have] knowledge that we don't have.¹²

The scientific method and empirical data are presently incapable of helping to understand the identity of the designer. Thus, the scientific theory of intelligent design simply cannot identify the designer because it is not a question which can be addressed through the methods of science. At this point, this question can only be answered via faith, or divine revelation, and other religious "ways of knowing." However, the fact that the identity of the designer is a religious question does not negate the purely scientific methods through which we can infer merely that an object was indeed designed. Thus, assessing the identity of the designer is essentially a religious question:



Thus, scientifically, one only can state that life was designed by an unidentified intelligence. Many people may believe that the identity of the designer is the God of the Bible, however these are religious claims, and presently outside the scope of scientific inquiry.