

FAQ:

Isn't ID Trying to Sabotage Science?

The Short Answer: No, definitely not. Many people view intelligent design theory as somehow trying to "sabotage science" by doing a variety of things including a) injecting theology into science (or substitute belief in God of the scientific method) or b) forcing a political agenda upon science. There may be some religious implications of intelligent design theory, but that does not make it an attempt to force theology upon science. There may be some individuals who would like to see public policy changes in light of intelligent design theory (many have also sought to make public policy changes in light of evolutionary theory), but that does not mean that intelligent design theory is not a bona fide scientific theory or is trying to "sabotage science." Intelligent design theory is trying to do neither of these, as it is a serious scientific research program. For those who want to see how the research of the ID movement is real science with a science-oriented basis and goal, visit the International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (ISCID.org).

The Long Answer:

Many have claimed that intelligent design is trying to somehow "sabotage science." This claim comes from primarily two claims:

- a) Intelligent design is trying to inject theology into science (or substitute belief in God of the scientific method)
- b) Intelligent design is forcing a political agenda upon science.

Neither claim is valid. Both claims will be discussed and evaluated.

a) Intelligent design is trying to inject theology into science (or substitute belief in God of the scientific method)

Some have claimed that intelligent design is trying to "substitute the scientific method for belief in God." Intelligent design is not trying to so inject theology into science. Theology is the study of God. Intelligent design theory argues for intelligent design through the principles of science and the scientific method. Science is a way of knowing. Science's "way of knowing" is to use the scientific method:



i. Observation: The ways that intelligent agents act can be observed in the natural world and described. When intelligent agents act, it is observed that they produce high levels of "complex-specified information" (CSI). CSI is basically a scenario which is unlikely to happen (making it complex), and conforms to a pattern (making it specified). Language and machines are good examples of things with much CSI. From our understanding of the world, high levels of CSI are always the product of intelligent design.

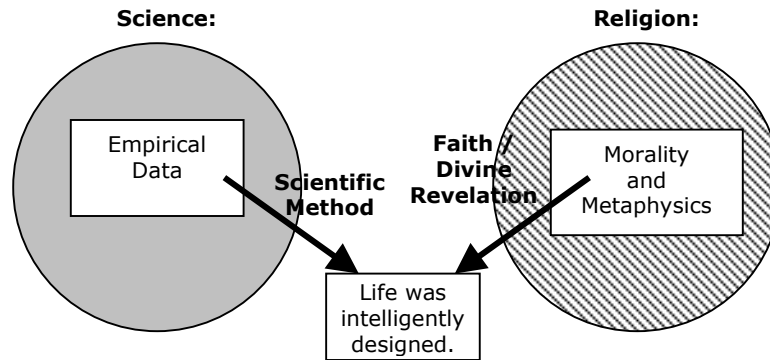
ii. Hypothesis: If an object in the natural world was designed, then we should be able to examine that object and find the same high levels of CSI in the natural world as we find in human-designed objects.

iii. Experiment: We can examine biological structures to test if high CSI exists. When we look at natural objects in biology, we find many machine-like structures which are specified, because they have a particular arrangement of parts which is necessary for them to function, and complex because they have an unlikely arrangement of many interacting parts. These biological machines are "irreducibly complex," for any change in the nature or arrangement of these parts would destroy their function. Irreducibly complex structures cannot be built up through an alternative theory, such as Darwinian evolution, because Darwinian evolution requires that a biological structure be functional along every small-step of its evolution. "Reverse engineering" of these structures shows that they cease to function if changed even slightly.

iv. Conclusion: Because they exhibit high levels of CSI, a quality known to be produced only by intelligent design, and because there is no other known mechanism to explain the origin of these "irreducibly complex" biological structures, we conclude that they were intelligently designed.

In the description of intelligent design, there were no appeals to faith or divine revelation or any scriptural text. Intelligent design theory makes its claims based solely upon what is inferred through the scientific method.

Religion is also a way of knowing. Religion "knows" things through faith and divine revelation. Faith and divine revelation can also tell us that life was designed. Thus, both intelligent design (via the scientific method) and religion (via faith and divine revelation) are telling us that life was designed:



Intelligent design, however, does not inject any non-scientific theological claims into science. Intelligent design only claims what can be inferred through the scientific method: that life was designed by an intelligence. Non-scientific claims include the identity of the designer, which cannot be determined via the scientific method. Thus, intelligent design theory does not seek to force religion upon science. If religion happens to make claims (via its own methods) that intelligent design theory makes via the scientific method, so be it. Intelligent design theory does not use religious methods or "force" theology into science. It only makes claims via the scientific method and is thus not trying to force anything upon science which is not warranted by the data.

Some fear that design might subsume science into a science where everything is a designed object. Biologist Rudolph Raff explains this concern quite well:

"As the influence of the intelligent designer grows ... the relationships between the phenomena and explanations becomes increasingly arbitrary ... [until] one reaches a point where all biological features are 'special creations' and other explanations become unnecessary." (Raff, Rudolf A., "The creationist abuse of evo-devo." *Evol Dev*, 3(6): 373-374 (2001))

Raff wants design and teleology out of science because he is afraid that it will "take over science". Yet intelligent design theorists are sensitive to these concerns and want to keep intelligent design theory within its proper bounds. In fact, design theorist William Dembski would see Raff's arguments as typifying the reasons for the exclusion of design from science:

"What has kept design outside the scientific mainstream these last 130 years is the absence of precise methods for distinguishing intelligently caused objects from unintelligently caused ones. For design to be a fruitful scientific theory, scientists have to be sure they can reliably determine whether something is designed. Johannes Kepler, for instance, thought the craters on the moon were intelligently designed by moon dwellers. We now know the craters were formed naturally. This fear of falsely attributing something to design only to have it overturned later has prevented design from entering science proper." (Dembski, *Mere Creation*)

Dembski understands Raff's sort of concerns. What would solve Raff's problem, however, would be a rigorous criteria which allows scientists to know when to detect and infer design, and when not to. If such a method could be found, then what is best explained naturally remains explained naturally, while what is best explained through design, becomes explained through design. As Dembski subsequently says, "[w]ith precise methods for discriminating intelligently from unintelligently caused objects, scientists are now able to avoid Kepler's mistake." (Dembski in *Mere Creation*) In calling what Kepler did a "mistake," Dembski shows that he doesn't want intelligent design theory to take over biology or science. Intelligent design theorists want design to be inferred where the evidence warrants--no more, and no less. Follow the evidence wherever it leads! If the evidence points to evolution, and that has non-scientific religious implications away from theism, so be it. If the empirical evidence points to design, and that has non-scientific religious implications towards theism, then also, so be it.

b) Intelligent design is forcing a political agenda upon science.

This charge often comes from charges that intelligent design theory is trying to force some "cultural renewal" or force some political agenda upon science. Charges are often brought by citing the "Wedge Document," an internal document from the Discovery Institute where it talks about a strategy to "defeat scientific materialism" and "reverse the stifling dominance of the materialist worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions." ("Wedge Document" as quoted from <http://www.discovery.org/csc/TopQuestions/wedgeresp.pdf>) Does this represent an improper political agenda that is trying to force political or religiously motivated ideas into science?

"In any case, the "Wedge Document" does not propose replacing "science" or the "scientific method" with "God" or "religion," as one reporter claimed. Still less does it advocate imposing a particular conclusion on scientists as a condition of their practicing science--something that would be absurd. Instead it advocates open debate and argument (see below). Proponents of intelligent design have long insisted that all scientists must be free to follow evidence wherever they think it leads. It happens that many (thought not all) of our fellows think that a considerable body of evidence now points to the intelligent design of life and the universe. Most of these scientists and scholars think that this evidence support, or is at least consonant with, a theistic view of the world. The "Wedge Document" does nothing more sinister than announce our intention to support the research of such scientists--among others.

(From "The "Wedge Document": "So What?" at <http://www.discovery.org/csc/TopQuestions/wedgeresp.pdf>)

The Discovery Institute notes that it is not trying to change science, but rather refocus its emphasis on non-materialistic theories which might bear more fruit for the scientific enterprise:

"The Center for Science and Culture [part of the Discovery Institute] is not attacking the scientific method. It is challenging the philosophy of scientific materialism, and the false scientific theories that support it....we are challenging the truth of particular scientific theories (such as neo-Darwinism and the theory of chemical evolution) using appropriate scientific methods, canons of reasoning and evaluation and, most importantly, scientific evidence. To say that challenging a particular scientific theory constitutes an attack on science itself is to misunderstand science profoundly. Science advances precisely by such challenges. Reasoned argument about how to best

interpret scientific evidence is, and always has been essential to the practice of science--indeed, in a real sense it is science.

Second, as noted, we are challenging the philosophy of scientific materialism, not science itself. Our detractors fail to make this critical, but obvious distinction. We don't know why. But we suspect that some scientists have so equated science with their own materialistic worldview that they regard any challenge to that worldview, or any challenge to the theories that give it plausibility, as tantamount to an attack on science itself.

Others suggest that our discussion of an "overthrow of materialism" shows that the Discovery Institute is pursuing an illegitimate political agenda. But materialism is not a political party or government. It is a system of thought. We are not planning to "overthrow" a political regime by force or otherwise. We are not asking anyone to impose our perspective on anyone else, or to make our perspective a condition of employment. In contrast, many of our scholars and scientists have been pressured to affirm neo-Darwinism and other materialistic ideas as a condition of their employment in certain public universities and research center.

Instead, the "Wedge Document" makes clear that we are advancing an intellectual challenge to a philosophical perspective and to a set of theories that previously have made that perspective seem credible. The kind of "overthrow" we are seeking is an intellectual one, a shift in perspective that can only be achieved by research, writing, and reasoned argument-- as the "Wedge Document" itself makes clear. Our intellectual interlocutors may disagree with our perspective (and we respect their right to do so), but we do not see how they can reasonably object to our methods or to the facts that we have a plan to persuade and influence science and culture *with our ideas*.

And who doesn't try to persuade others with their ideas? Certainly, any group that contends for a point of view in the public square--whether the Darwin-only lobby at the National Center for Science Education, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Association for the Advancement of Science or the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association--wants to see its ideas influence others. And such groups have plan about how they want to achieve such influence. So again: Where is the scandal?"

(From "The "Wedge Document": "So What?" at <http://www.discovery.org/csc/TopQuestions/wedgeresp.pdf>)

Are the intentions of intelligent design organizations covert?

No. Although many critics of intelligent design have called it "Creationism's Trojan Horse" (i.e. a covert attempt to sneak creationism in through 'science'), the Discovery Institute notes that all the intentions of the "Wedge Document" have been made public for some time. Consider the following excerpt from the Discovery Institute in its defense of itself to charges made by Barbara Forrest and others that they have a political agenda:

"Our initial strategy for influencing science and culture (which was first articulated in the "Wedge Document") has been repeatedly discussed at numerous conferences, in book and articles, on our website and in our brochure. Indeed, much of the offending text from the document had already appeared on our website and in our Center brochure (So much for a secret conspiracy) Further, Professor Phillip E. Johnson of the

University of California at Berkeley published an entire book articulating his version of the wedge strategy in the year 2000. Yet Barbara Forrest and others have invented and then hyped a supposed secrecy surrounding the wedge strategy, characterizing the "wedge of intelligent design" as a Trojan horse." At one point Forrest claimed that the "Wedge Document's" "authenticity...has been neither affirmed nor denied by the Discovery Institute." Yet if Professor Forrest had wanted to know whether the document was authentic, all she had to do was ask. But she didn't."

(From "The "Wedge Document": "So What?" at <http://www.discovery.org/csc/TopQuestions/wedgeresp.pdf>)

The intelligent design movement is very forthright about what it is trying to do: it is trying to bring to recognition the scientific evidence supporting intelligent design theory, which challenges a naturalistic and materialistic paradigm which has reigned over science for decades. The methods and means of this movement is research, writing, publication, and dialogue. There are no secrets about the information the intelligent design movement seeks to disseminate. The fact that they have a non-secret strategy for disseminating this information does not make the movement "covert" in any way.

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