

Truth Sheet # 09-05

Does intelligent design postulate a “supernatural creator?”

Overview: No. The ACLU, and many of its expert witnesses, have alleged that teaching the scientific theory of intelligent design (ID) is unconstitutional in all circumstances because it posits a “supernatural creator.” Yet actual statements from intelligent design theorists have made it clear that the scientific theory of **intelligent design does not address metaphysical and religious questions such as the nature or identity of the designer.**

Firstly, the textbook being used in Dover, *Of Pandas and People* (Pandas), makes it clear that design theory does not address religious or metaphysical questions, such as the nature or identity of the designer. Consider these two clear disclaimers from *Pandas*:

*“[T]he intelligent design explanation has unanswered questions of its own. But unanswered questions, which exist on both sides, are an essential part of healthy science; they define the areas of needed research. Questions often expose hidden errors that have impeded the progress of science. For example, the place of intelligent design in science has been troubling for more than a century. That is because on the whole, scientists from within Western culture failed to distinguish between intelligence, which can be recognized by uniform sensory experience, and the supernatural, which cannot. Today we recognize that appeals to intelligent design may be considered in science, as illustrated by current NASA search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI). Archaeology has pioneered the development of methods for distinguishing the effects of natural and intelligent causes. We should recognize, however, that if we go further, and conclude that the intelligence responsible for biological origins is outside the universe (supernatural) or within it, we do so without the help of science.”*¹

*“[T]he concept of design implies absolutely nothing about beliefs normally associated with Christian fundamentalism, such as a young earth, a global flood, or even the existence of the Christian God. All it implies is that life had an intelligent source.”*²

Or consider these quotes, giving essentially the same explanations, from the scientific writings of leading design theorists Dr. Michael Behe and Dr. William Dembski:

*“Intelligent design is modest in what it attributes to the designing intelligence responsible for the specified complexity in nature. For instance, design theorists recognize that the nature, moral character and purposes of this intelligence lie beyond the competence of science and must be left to religion and philosophy.”*³

“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

¹ *Of Pandas and People*, pg. 126-127 (emphasis added).

² *Of Pandas and People*, pg. 161 (emphasis added).

³ William Dembski, *The Design Revolution*, pg. 42 (InterVarsity Press, 2004) (emphasis added).

*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."*⁴

Some critics allege that ID proponents are being "coy" about the identity of the designer to pass off religion as science. Yet intelligent design proponents are very open about their beliefs about the identity of the designer. For example, Michael Behe and William Dembski acknowledge that they believe the designer is God, but explain that this belief is a personal religious belief, and such beliefs are not derived from the scientific theory of design:

*"Although intelligent design fits comfortably with a belief in God, it doesn't require it, because the scientific theory doesn't tell you who the designer is. While most people - including myself - will think the designer is God, some people might think that the designer was a space alien or something odd like that."*⁵

*"[T]he designer need not be a deity. It could be an extraterrestrial or a telic process inherent in the universe. ID has no doctrine of creation. [Eugenie] Scott and [Glenn] Branch at best could argue that many of the ID proponents are religious believers in a deity, but that has no bearing on the content of the theory."*⁶

Behe and Dembski agree that design theory's inability to identify the designer is not a "weakness," but a strength. The reason why ID theory does not identify the designer is because ID limits its claims to those which can be established by empirical evidence:

*"[A] scientific argument for design in biology does not reach that far. Thus while I argue for design, the question of the identity of the designer is left open. Possible candidates for the role of designer include: the God of Christianity; an angel--fallen or not; Plato's demi-urge; some mystical new age force; space aliens from Alpha Centauri; time travelers; or some utterly unknown intelligent being. Of course, some of these possibilities may seem more plausible than others based on information from fields other than science. Nonetheless, as regards the identity of the designer, modern ID theory happily echoes Isaac Newton's phrase hypothesis non fingo."*⁷

*"This is not a matter of being vague but rather of not pretending to knowledge that we don't have."*⁸

You wouldn't learn any of this by reading the ACLU's legal briefs. But the *Pandas* textbook and leading ID theorists all agree that when it comes to the nature or identity of the designer, "the intelligent design explanation has unanswered questions..." There should be nothing illegal about teaching students something we can learn through the scientific method: that life bears the informational characteristics we commonly find in objects we know were designed.

⁴ Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, pg. 197 (Free Press, 1996).

⁵ Michael Behe, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 02/08/01.

⁶ William Dembski, *Commentary on Eugenie Scott and Glenn Branch's "Guest Viewpoint: 'Intelligent design' Not Accepted by Most Scientists*, designinference.com/documents/2002.07.Scott_and_%20Branch.htm.

⁷ Michael Behe, "The Modern Intelligent Design Hypothesis," *Philosophia Christi*, Series 2, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2001), pg. 165, emphasis added. "Hypothesis non fingo" literally means "to feign no hypothesis," or perhaps more precisely meaning "to not make any scientific hypothesis on that subject."

⁸ William Dembski, *Commentary on Eugenie Scott and Glenn Branch's "Guest Viewpoint: 'Intelligent design' Not Accepted by Most Scientists*, designinference.com/documents/2002.07.Scott_and_%20Branch.htm.