

Top Questions and Answers About Intelligent Design Theory

1. What is the theory of intelligent design?

The scientific theory of intelligent design holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection. Note: Intelligent design theory does **NOT** claim that science can determine the identity of the intelligent cause. Nor does it claim that the intelligent cause must be a “divine being” or a “higher power” or an “all-powerful force.” All it proposes is that science can identify whether certain features of the natural world are the products of intelligence.

2. Is intelligent design theory the same as creationism?

No. Intelligent design theory is simply an effort to empirically detect whether the “apparent design” in nature acknowledged by virtually all biologists is genuine design (the product of an intelligent cause) or is simply the product of an undirected process such as natural selection acting on random variations. Creationism is focused on defending a literal reading of the Genesis account, usually including the creation of the earth by the Biblical God a few thousand years ago. Unlike creationism, the scientific theory of intelligent design is agnostic regarding the source of design and has no commitment to defending Genesis, the Bible or any other sacred text.

3. Is intelligent design theory incompatible with evolution?

It depends on what one means by the word “evolution.” If one simply means “change over time,” or even that living things are related by common ancestry, then there is no inherent conflict between evolutionary theory and intelligent design theory. However, the dominant theory of evolution today is neo-Darwinism, which contends that evolution is driven by natural selection acting on random mutations, an unpredictable and purposeless process that “has no discernable direction or goal, including survival of a species.” (NABT Statement on Teaching Evolution). It is this specific claim made by neo-Darwinism that intelligent design theory directly challenges.

4. Is intelligent design based on the Bible?

No. The intellectual roots of intelligent design theory are varied. Plato and Aristotle both articulated early versions of design theory, as did virtually all of the founders of modern science. Indeed, most scientists until the latter part of the nineteenth century accepted some form of design. The scientific community largely rejected design in the early twentieth century after neo-Darwinism claimed to be able to explain the emergence of biological complexity through the unintelligent process of natural selection acting on random mutations. However, new research and discoveries in such fields as physics, cosmology, biochemistry, genetics, and paleontology have caused a growing number of scientists and science theorists to question neo-Darwinism and propose design as the best explanation for the existence of specified complexity in the natural world.

5. Are there established scholars in the scientific community who support intelligent design theory?

Yes. Intelligent design theory is supported by doctoral scientists, researchers and theorists at a number of universities, colleges, and research institutes around the world. These scholars include biochemist Michael Behe at Lehigh University, microbiologist Scott Minnich at the University of Idaho, biologist Paul Chien at the University of San Francisco, emeritus biologist Dean Kenyon at San Francisco State University, astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez at Iowa State University, mathematician William Dembski at Baylor University, and quantum chemist Henry Schaefer at the University of Georgia, among others.

6. Do scientists supportive of design publish peer-reviewed articles and research?

Yes. Although open hostility from those who hold to neo-Darwinism sometimes makes it difficult for design scholars to gain a fair hearing for their ideas, research and articles by intelligent design scholars are being published in peer-reviewed publications. Dr. Stephen Meyer has published an article supportive of design in the Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington (a peer-reviewed biology journal published at the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution). Jonathan Wells recently published a pro-intelligent design article with one of the oldest still published biology journals in the world, *Revista di Biologia*. Biochemist Michael Behe has defended the idea of “irreducible complexity” in the peer-reviewed journal *Philosophy of Science*, as well as publishing research critical of the mechanism of neo-Darwinism in the peer-reviewed journal *Protein Science*. Examples of peer-reviewed books supporting design include *The Design Inference* (Cambridge University Press) by William Dembski and *Darwinism, Design, and Public Education* (Michigan State University Press).

7. Should public schools require the teaching of intelligent design?

No. Instead of mandating intelligent design, Discovery Institute recommends that states and school districts focus on teaching students more about evolutionary theory, including telling them about some of the theory's problems that have been discussed in peer-reviewed science journals. In other words, evolution should be taught as a scientific theory that is open to critical scrutiny, not as a sacred dogma that can't be questioned.

8. Is teaching about intelligent design unconstitutional?

Although Discovery Institute does not advocate requiring the teaching of intelligent design in public schools, it does believe there is nothing unconstitutional about discussing the scientific theory of design in the classroom. In addition, the Institute opposes efforts to persecute individual teachers who may wish to discuss the scientific debate over design in a pedagogically appropriate manner.

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