

The Roots of Intelligent Design

Some people claim that intelligent design developed in response to modern court cases or debates over Biblical creationism in the twentieth century. Others assert that intelligent design grew out of “Christian fundamentalism.” This selection of readings and other resources is designed to allow people to investigate and discuss the roots of intelligent design for themselves. The readings and questions can be used for personal study and reflection or for group discussion.

Especially suitable for: small group discussions, or a mini-course of 2 or 3 sessions.

Greco-Roman Thought

1. Read the selection from Plato’s dialogue “Philebus” available for free at <http://www.discovery.org/a/9731>. (a) Who was Plato, and when did he live? (b) What argument for intelligent design did he present in this dialogue? (c) How is the argument presented by Plato similar to or different from arguments you’ve heard being made today?
2. Read the selection from Cicero’s dialogue “On the Nature of the Gods” available for free at <http://www.discovery.org/a/9671>. (a) Who was Cicero, and when did he live? (b) What argument for intelligent design did he present? What kinds of evidence from nature did he cite? (c) How is the argument presented by Cicero similar to or different from arguments you’ve heard being made today?
3. What light do the selections from Plato and Cicero shed on the claim that intelligent design must be based on the Bible or derives from Biblical creationism or “Christian fundamentalism”?

Judaism

*The following selections are available in the free sourcebook on **Design in the Bible and the Early Church Fathers**, which can be downloaded for free at <http://www.discovery.org/a/9691>. The page numbers given refer to the pages in this sourcebook.*

4. According to Proverbs 8:1-3 and 22-35, does nature reflect the wisdom of God or a blind and undirected process? What specific parts of nature reflect the wisdom of God? (p. 3)
5. According to Job 38-42, what truths can we learn about God by observing nature? (pp. 3-7)
6. According to Psalm 19:1-6, what do the heavens declare? What do you think this passage means? (p. 7)
7. (a) According to the Wisdom of Solomon 13:1-9, what are some of the characteristics of men who are “by nature foolish”? What truths aren’t they able to discern from the natural world? (b) What inference should the wise man be able to make from observing the natural world? (p. 9)

8. (a) Who was Philo of Alexandria, and when did he live? (b) According to Philo, what is the problem with denying that God actively created the world? (pp. 9-10)

9. (a) Who was Josephus, and when did he live? (b) According to Josephus, God is made known to us through which of his “works” in nature? (p. 10)

10. (a) In their arguments about design in nature, do Jewish writers appeal primarily to evidence that only Jews can accept, or do they point to facts, observations, and arguments that non-Jews can see and understand? (b) How are these writings from Jewish thinkers similar to or different from the writings of Plato and Cicero on design? (c) What do these Jewish writings show about whether the design inference is based primarily on the authority of the Bible or on evidence and logic to all human beings regardless of whether they accept the Bible?

Early Christianity

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11. (a) What truths about the character of God can we learn by observing specific features of nature according to Jesus in Matthew 5:44-45, 48 and 6:26-30? (b) In what way is Jesus making a design argument? (p. 7)

12. (a) According to the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:19-21, why can all people (even those who are not Christians) be expected to know something about God? (b) Do you think Paul is true? Why or why not? (p. 7)

13. According to Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:8-18, what testimony has God given about Himself to non-Christians? (p. 8)

14. (a) Who was Theophilus, and when did he live? (b) According to Theophilus, what are the ways we can see God through his various works in nature? (pp. 11-12)

15. (a) Who was Athenagoras, and when did he live? (b) According to Athenagoras, how do we know that matter was shaped and ordered by God? (p. 12)

16. (a) Who was Irenaeus, and when did he live? (b) According to Irenaeus, how did the heathen know that there is a Creator? (p. 13)

17. (a) Who was Dionysius, and when did he live? (b) According to Dionysius, how do we know that the world was created by God rather than by the purposeless and unregulated collisions of atoms? (pp. 13-18)

18. (a) Who was Lactantius, and when did he live? (b) According to Lactantius, how do we know that the world is the product of design? (pp. 18-19)

19. (a) Who was Athanasius, and when did he live? (b) According to Athanasius, how do we know that the world is the product of design? (pp. 19-22)

20. (a) Who was Chrysostom, and when did he live? (b) According to Chrysostom, why should even pagans know that God exists?

21. (a) In their arguments about design in nature, do Christian writers appeal primarily to evidence that only Christians can accept, or do they point to facts, observations, and arguments that non-Christians can see and understand? (b) How are these writings from Christian thinkers similar to or different from the writings of Plato and Cicero on design? (c) What do these Christian writings show about whether the design inference is based primarily on the authority of the Bible or on evidence and logic to all human beings regardless of whether they accept the Bible? (p. 22)

Modern Science and the “Age of Reason”

22. Listen to podcast on “Thomas Jefferson and Intelligent Design,” available for free at http://intelligentdesign.podomatic.com/player/web/2008-07-04T19_24_48-07_00. (If you are using these questions for group discussion, you might choose to play this podcast for your entire group before your discussion.) (a) Was Thomas Jefferson a Christian? (b) Would Jefferson have agreed that intelligent design was based on the Bible or Christian fundamentalism? Why? (c) What evidence did Jefferson cite in support of the idea of intelligent design? (d) What is the irony of people today citing Jefferson in order to shut down open discussions about intelligent design? (e) What light does Jefferson’s view shed on the claim that intelligent design is based on Christianity or that anyone who supports intelligent design must be a Christian or even a “Christian fundamentalist”?

23. Read about the views of Alfred Wallace at http://www.forbes.com/2009/02/05/alfred-russel-wallace-intelligent-design-opinions-darwin09_0205_michael_flannery.html. (a) Who was Alfred Wallace, and why is he important in the history of evolutionary theory? (b) Did Wallace agree that Darwin had disproved the idea of intelligent design in biology? Why or why not? What specific biological feature in humans did Wallace think the process of undirected natural selection could not explain? (c) What light do the views of Wallace shed on the claim that belief in intelligent design must be based on religion rather than science?

Conclusion

24. What are the most important things you have learned from these readings?

25. What do these readings show you about the origins of intelligent design as an idea? Is intelligent design a response to modern court rulings or an outgrowth of “Christian fundamentalism”? Is it dependent on the authority of the Bible rather than the observations of nature and the inferences drawn from those observations? How long have people been debating about whether there is evidence of design in nature?

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