

**Book Review****Review of William A. Dembski's Book:  
Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science & Theology**

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**ABSTRACT**

Dembski's treatment is less about the mechanism of a grand scale design by a supreme deity, and more about the specification of signs that are discovered to hold intelligent causes. Described this way, intelligent design is an open scientific question. I was pleasantly surprised to see this controversial topic couched this way. You can find this book at Amazon [http://www.amazon.com/Intelligent-Design-Between-Science-Theology/dp/0830815813/ref=cm\\_cr-mr-title](http://www.amazon.com/Intelligent-Design-Between-Science-Theology/dp/0830815813/ref=cm_cr-mr-title).

**Key Words:** intelligent design, science, theology.

Dembski presents his narrow definition of natural causation as something driven by necessity and contingency. That is, a natural cause is something that follows from determinism (cause and effect) or by a mindless random chance. Dembski argues that this view of nature is only self sufficient by assumption, and therefore deep reality holds out the possibility of intelligent causation that is both transcendental in its reach and unconflicted with natural causation. In fact, the evidences suggest that natural causation is not self sufficient, and this is plainly demonstrated in any effort were intelligent causation is discovered; be it in "... forensic science, artificial intelligence (cf. the Turing test), cryptography, archaeology and the search for extraterrestrial intelligence."

On page 106, Dembski writes, "... intelligent design properly formulated is a theory of information."

On page 107, he continues, "... the world contains events, objects and structures that exhaust the explanatory resources of undirected natural causes and that can be adequately explained only by recourse to intelligent causes." To look at the patterns of letters on a newspaper, and this much is clear. What Dembski calls an intelligent cause is far from a rigid formalism, as such causation can be as whimsical as any abstract painting. But on pages 109 and 110, Dembski oddly insist that intelligent design is not theistic evolution or teleological evolution.

In fact, Dembski's intelligent design is every bit consistent with teleology and any creative process that derives itself from a final cause. Perhaps feeling this conflict Dembski admits on page 212 that: "... An act of creation is always a divine gift and cannot be reduced to purely naturalistic categories. To be sure, creative activity often involves the transformation of natural objects, like the transformation of a slab of marble into Michelangelo's David. But even confined to natural objects, creativity is never naturalistic without remainder."

Dembski describes complex specified information (CSI) not merely as a complexity measure but also as a measure of intelligent specification/signification. Therefore, the CSI content is a quality of a sign that tells of intelligence. Intelligent designs becomes compatible with semiotics and panpsychism. How we read CSI is a property of both the universe and ourselves. We perceive of design because we can conceive it in ourselves. CSI holds a self referential quality.

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Pages 160 to 170 contain the most important philosophical insight: that it is not possible to generate CSI from natural causes. Dembski "proof" comes in three parts: (1) natural laws by themselves cannot generate new CSI independent of prior signification; (2) random chance by itself cannot generate new CSI with any statistical confidence; and (3) the combination of law and chance cannot generate CSI. Step (3) is most intriguing, as Dembski is able to break the sequence of natural causes into a sequence of one-way interactions where findings (1) and (2) can be applied independently. This is reminiscent of C.S. Peirce's discovery of the irreducibility of a triadic sign (three-way semiotic relationship) in terms of the less dynamic dyadic (the two-way relationship). We cannot explain CSI by natural causes because we cannot remove ourselves and our powers of conception from the chain of events, no more that we can turn a triad into a dyad. Naturalism only allows for a forward moving chain of events, and nothing more is permitted for semiotic interaction. I say this much in my own book, "Trinity".

Chapter 7, "Science & Theology in Mutual Support", contains a very interesting discussion related to rational behavior (consistent with statistical decision theory) and the abductive logic of C.S. Peirce. Abductive logic is found to be the most useful approach to permit dialog among different schools as diverse as religion and science.

Dembski's book is as much an interesting contribution to metaphysics as it is a bridge between science and religion.

## References

William A. Dembski, 1999, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science & Theology*. InterVarsity Press.