

William A Dembski. *The Design Revolution*. (Intervarsity, 2004), 334 pages.

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Author Qualifications

William Dembski's most significant contribution to the Intelligent Design (ID) movement has been his development of a scientifically-rigorous set of criteria identified as "*specified complexity*" (SC). SC is discerned through a "design filter," the purpose of which is to distinguish between blind causes resulting from unguided interactions within nature on the one hand, and purposeful causes resulting from the intentions of an intelligent designer on the other.¹ Indeed, the title of the book is an indication that the author considers ID to constitute a revolutionary paradigm that is of such a magnitude as to equal previous major scientific paradigm shifts cited in Thomas Kuhn's book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (pp. 19, 305). Paul Davies assessed Dembski's work as follows, "*Dembski's attempt to quantify design, or provide mathematical criteria for design, is extremely useful.*"² Measuring his historical impact on the ID movement, it has been noted that Dembski edited an anthology of ID papers from a conference at Biola University concerning the same theme. As Giberson and Yerxa stated, "*Almost overnight Dembski had become the most important design theorist and, next to [Philip] Johnson, the major spokesperson for the design movement.*"³ To this end Dembski is more than adequately equipped for the multi-disciplinary task of advancing the inference of design in the physical world, having earned degrees in statistics, theology, and psychology, as well as a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Chicago. He also did postdoctoral work at the same institution, MIT, Princeton, and Northwestern Universities. And he does not communicate dispassionately. In his preface he reveals his motivation by stating that ID challenges not only the "***grand idol of evolutionary biology (Darwinism)***, but [also ...] *the ground rules by which the natural sciences are conducted*" (p. 19—boldface mine).

Summary

While Dembski's earlier work, *Intelligent Design*, is self-described as a *systematic* treatment of ID considerations, the goal of his complementary work, the sequel, *The Design Revolution*, is best stated

¹ William Dembski. *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology*. (Intervarsity, 1999), pp. 127f.

² Referenced in Larry Witham. *By Design: Science and the Search for God*. (Encounter, 2003), p. 149.

³ Karl Giberson and Donald Yerxa. *Species of Origins*. (Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), p. 205.

in its subtitle, “*Answering the Toughest Questions about Intelligent Design.*” Over the course of forty-three chapters, each title identifies individual objections to ID that have been raised during his years of lecturing, writing, and debating on this subject. These questions are broken down into six major categories from theological consideration at one end of the spectrum, to mathematical questions on the other. Although the thesis of ID is profound in terms of the ramifications that logically follow from detections of design, its direct goals are quite modest. Distinguishing itself from the stronger claims of naturalism on the one hand and so-called “*scientific creationism*” on the other, ID’s goals are more modest. As Dembski states, “*Intelligent design is the science that studies signs of intelligence. Note that a sign is not the thing signified. Intelligent design does not try to get into the mind of a designer and figure out what a designer is thinking. Its focus is not a designer’s mind (the thing signified) but the artifact due to a designer’s mind (the sign)...the designer’s thought processes lie outside the scope of intelligent design. As a scientific research program, intelligent design investigates the **effects** of intelligence and not intelligence as such*” (p. 33—boldface mine).

In advancing Dembski’s thesis he first of all identifies in the *abstract* the three possible modes of accounting for the cause of physical phenomena: 1) innate physical necessity, 2) blind chance, and 3) design by an intelligence. Then with respect to the *specific* object that is under examination, the three potential alternatives to be considered for the purpose of determining its explanation are: Is the object contingent? Is it complex? And, in advance of the investigation, is its phenomena specified (in contrast to being attributable to chance processes? -- p. 87).

Evaluation

William Dembski has thoroughly established himself as the superior intellect in comparison to ID detractors in the ID debate. I am not aware of an equivalent defense of Darwinism posed by the other side of this discussion when considered in terms of a posture of patient submission to the charges urged by an opposition to one’s intellectual position. In humility Dembski refrains from name-calling, while on the other hand employing intellectual rigor in his defense of the ID inference. He is equally competent in his treatment of both philosophical/theological and scientific themes. Furthermore, he employs an amazing balance of depth and clarity within the span of, on average, a handful of pages for each chapter. It will be difficult to find a more substantial treatment of the array of ID issues within the same amount of pages as *The Design Revolution*.

One aspect of Dembski's book which I would identify as a weakness entails a glaring omission in his argument. In my opinion his neglect of this matter seriously detracts from the weight of what I consider to be a wonderful book in every other way. To be specific, insights from 20th century cosmology have roundly indicated that the entire cosmos (matter, energy, space, and time) had a beginning out of a zero-volume singularity identified as the Big Bang. Three ramifications which bear most strongly on the question of the conceptual legitimacy of Darwinism include firstly the origin of the universe utterly apart from the four aspects of nature cited above that, by definition, scientific reality must entail. Secondly, the fact that the Big Bang implies a beginning of all material things out of nothing, philosophically undermines the materialistic objection that miraculous intervention is impossible. And thirdly, the light-travel time-aspect of the Big Bang paradigm indicates two firm delimiting realities of nature that include firstly that the cosmos as a whole is finite in terms of its age. Secondly, given the observable aspect of the expansion of the universe, the window of time in which life is supposed to have developed by unguided means is on three counts becoming increasingly limited with respect to parameters of time within which the Darwinian project is supposed to have thus-far developed. These include the required accumulation of the range of elements that are essential to life, sudden appearance of primitive life on the early earth, and the sudden appearance of advanced life forms in the Cambrian Explosion. For these reasons, I find it incomprehensible that Dr. Dembski fails to give mention to the fatal aspects of Big Bang cosmology with respect to the Darwinian claim. For example, on p. 282 Dembski decries the Darwinists' determination to assert that any materialistically biological proposal is possible given sufficient time. Why does Dembski neglect to mention the ridiculously minuscule amount of time their paradigm actually has to work with? And why, secondly, is there no mention of Big Bang realities in his chapter on miracles (24)?

In addition I have to consider the utter lack of both references and a *topical* index to constitute a serious defect for a book that otherwise so effectively fills the necessary role for a reference book on how to effectively verbalize ID arguments.

Recommendations

The above objections notwithstanding, *The Design Revolution*, ought to be found on every scientist's bookshelf so that it can be studied and repeatedly referred back to over time. The contents are of the highest caliber, even as the writing style is of top notch quality.