



The North Texas

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Unintelligent design

by John Blanton

Popular creationist William Dembski talks about Intelligent Design. He has written or has participated in a number of books, including *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology*, *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance through Small Probabilities* and also *No Free Lunch: Why Specified Complexity Cannot Be Purchased without Intelligence*, which seems to be about Intelligent Design.

In his recent book, *The Edge Of Evolution*, creationist Michael Behe argues that Intelligent Design, not random mutation, accounts for evolution.

Creationist Robert Koons spoke at the University of Texas at Dallas five years ago, and he appeared to support Intelligent Design. When considering how things came to be the way they are, he said we should consider design first and look for happenstance later on (my wording). Please review our original coverage here:

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/2004/2004april/april2004.htm#koons>

And it goes on.

The new creationists look at the world and they see intelligence, purpose, and design. I am sure they have this world view because they see intelligence, purpose, and design in their own lives. Beyond that, they do not peer too deeply. Although the universe has been around for over 13 billion years, people have been around only two or three million years, and recorded history goes back less than ten thousand years. And creationists think the world was designed for them. My observation is that creationists tend not to be deep thinkers.

Without putting too much emphasis on it, let us say purpose and design are manifestations of intelligence. At the risk of redundancy these can be considered separately.

EVENTS CALENDAR

June Program

Saturday, 20 June, 2009

2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Preferred Truth

A talk by Aron Nelson:
The philosophical position of
preferred "truth" vs evident
reality, apparent in the frequent
admission, "I don't care what the
facts are; I'm gonna believe what
I wanna believe".

NTS Board meeting and social dinner

Saturday, June 27, 2009

7 p.m.
Sweet Tomatoes
15225 Montfort Dr.
Dallas, TX 75248

Let us know if you are coming.
We sometimes change or cancel
these events.

Phone (972) 385-7160

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Creationists want to invoke Intelligent Design to explain what is not so apparent and also some things that are. The creationists observe that things turned out so very well for us, there must be, or at least there must have been, some superior intelligence meddling with the universe. Some go so far as to say this super intelligence favors the human species, or at least a proper subset of the human species, above all else.

So, that got me to thinking. Just what is Intelligent Design? For that matter, what is *intelligence*? It's something to think about. So I did.

We all know what intelligence is. We learned it growing up. There was a kid in high school. He knew a lot of stuff. He was intelligent.

But wait. On my shelf I have a computer disk with lots of words on it. Lots of good information, but I don't think it represents intelligence. Intelligence must be something else.

Being able to solve difficult problems in math is considered a sign of intelligence. But I have a piece of computer software that solves complex differential equations and other hard problems. Even so, nobody believes this tool is intelligent. Somebody intelligent has designed this tool, and they are the source of intelligence. Somebody has just stored his own intelligence inside the software. But where did the programmer get *his* intelligence? While the programmer brought some originality to the software, most of what he contributed came from learning stuff that was previously invented. But somebody invented *that*.

Obviously this process cannot have gone on forever. At some point somebody must have created something where nothing existed before. I don't have the dictionary in front of me right now, but I believe the definition for this is *genius*.

Think of genius and you may think of Albert Einstein. Clearly Einstein was a genius, and smart, too. He invented useful ideas, such as relativity. A person such as Einstein represents the concept of intelligence. Intelligence resides in smart people.

But there are examples in nature of creativity. Ants team up and construct elaborate tunnel systems, and they manage a beneficial (to them) social network. Their cousins the wasps and also bees construct nests and hives out of various materials. Birds gather leaves and twigs and build nests, some quite elaborate. Up the scale, beavers build dams across streams and create their own lakes in which they create homes for themselves out of trees that they mow down with their sharp teeth.

Is all this genius—some manifestation of intelligence? Is there a continuum of intelligence right down from Einstein to slime mold growing on a rock? When the creationist talk about Intelligent Design, is this what they mean by *intelligent*?

Probably not. Most likely, if you ask these creationists they will tell you all intelligence, real and perceived in nature and the human race, derives ultimately from a higher intelligence. Just as the smart kid in

school got his intelligence from books, all the intelligence we see around us is inherited. Nature does not invent intelligence.

What about purpose and design? I thought about design, and I remembered in a previous life I did some design. The circumstances were like this:

I worked for a company, and I did what they told me, and they gave me money on a periodic basis. I took the money home to show my wife, and she was very happy, and she took the money and paid the mortgage and some other bills. And we lived like that.

The important phrase to remember is “We lived like that.”

What I did for various employers often involved design. They needed a widget that performed some function they favored, so I designed it, and they built it and sold it for money, and they gave me some of the money. There seemed to be purpose involved in all of this.

So, I thought about purpose. If I were an all-intelligent, all-powerful person, what would be my purpose? Why would I even bother?

My purpose I could understand. If I did not do any designing my employer would not pay me, and I would starve in the streets. My wife would not be happy, either.

But why should I care about starving in the streets? I learned long ago we must all pass this way eventually, though not in so dramatic a fashion in the streets. Why should we put off the inevitable? At least why put it off until we have had children.

And the answer dawned on me.

Intelligence, purpose, design—all of it is manifest only in entities, life forms or whatever, that survive and prevail in competition with other entities doing the same. Without the filter of survival the concept of purpose will not exist. Here is a trivial example:

You won the lottery. The government took away most of your winnings, but you will still receive \$1 million a year for the next twenty years. The alarm clock goes off in the morning. Do you now put on your shoes and go into your job? Don't waste time mulling over a response.

I said it was a trivial example. Even the very rich still have things they want to do. Some of the very rich go in to work every day to make more money. Those who do not work have activities they enjoy, their hobbies, their social networks. They have the need to do something. Where did they get this drive, this ambition, this purpose? They inherited it from their

ancestors who hid from predators in the cold and the dark and never won the lottery.

So you did not win the lottery, but you are an omniscient, all-powerful being. And you are the only one. And your purpose for meddling with the universe, carefully cultivating a lonely planet in the manner of a house plant and stirring up reproducing life forms on this planet is what? To beat out all the other omniscient, all-powerful beings? Not likely if you really are the only one. A hobby is even less likely.

Consider the possibility of competition among omniscient, all-powerful beings. The competition would arise due to some sort of survival filter, as we see in nature on this planet. At this point things get too deep for me. If somebody knows how cultivating life on a small planet boosts the survival of an omniscient, all-powerful being, please explain it now.

Without over drawing this introduction, I will skip to the argument: The only place we see intelligence, purpose, and design in the universe is as a consequence of natural selection. Entities, particularly life forms, exhibit these traits only as something that is accidentally acquired by individuals and then retained in populations through the naturally filtering process of survival.

The irony is that creationists, in seeking to impute a higher purpose, have only succeeded in exposing a bare patch in their reasoning. They propose intelligence to explain the appearance of purpose and design in nature without realizing the philosophical poverty of their argument.

Before wrapping this up, allow me to illustrate an additional bit of irony.

My first patented invention involved a machine that wrapped a binding strap around a stack of U.S. currency. Go down to your bank and ask for a stack of 100 dollar bills. Possibly the teller will hand you the stack all tightly bound with a plastic strap around the middle.

Three of us worked mightily on this design, and we had reason. Another team had failed, and our customer, the Federal Reserve, wanted a design. They wanted it by a certain date. Else, nobody would get paid. We have covered that situation already.

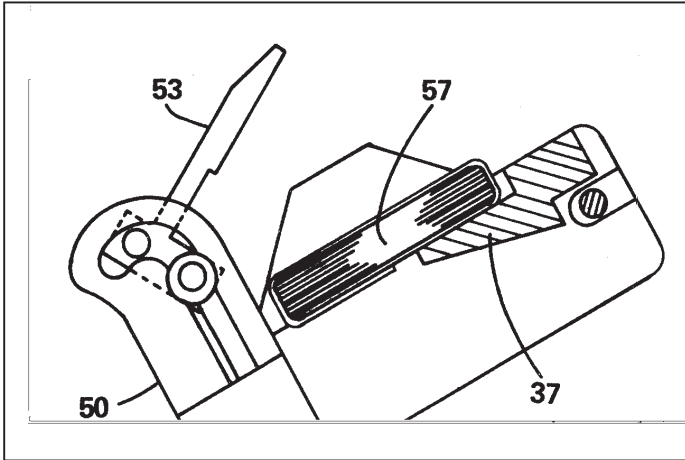
In a flurry of activity I drew many pieces of the machine on my drafting table, and one of them was the metal piece that pressed down on the stack of bills while the strap was applied.

The clamp piece needed only to span the width of the top bill, and it had to be strong enough to not bend or break when the clamping force was applied. Just about any shape would do.

However, the first view of the clamp, with a squared off end did not look right so I measured off an angle and drew a line so the machinist would be directed to give the clamp piece a tapered end. When we applied for the patent I gave the patent attorney this drawing. Not knowing or caring what was critical about the shape of the clamp piece, the patent attorney's drafts-

man simply copied the original taper angle, and that is what went to the Patent Office. See the figure.

I pulled up the patent document from the Internet, and there



From U.S. patent number 4,155,213. Item 53 in the drawing has the unintelligently designed feature.

it still is. Preserved for all eternity is the same angle that, years ago, I set into my drafting machine. Although it has no critical purpose, this angle was preserved along with the pertinent aspects of the design. The survival of a purposeful design has also resulted in the survival of this feature, as well.

So it appears to be in nature. The creationists see intelligence and purpose in nature, and scientists point out examples of random survival without purpose and with no associated cleverness. I suggest creationists should look here first before heading off into the wilds of superstition to hunt for an Intelligent Designer.



Future Meeting Dates

20 June 2009 —
A talk by Aron Nelson:
The philosophical
position of preferred
"truth" vs evident
reality.

18 July 2009 —
Danny Barnett will
present material from
his book on the history
of homeopathy in
America.

15 August 2009 —
Presentation by
Claudia Meek

19 September 2009 —
John Brandt will
present a talk on food
and nutrition myths.

17 October 2009

14 November 2009

12 December 2009

Fees going up

Reality has overtaken the NTS (imagine that). The cost of printing and mailing newsletters is about to cause us to lose money on these operations, so...

So we are resolving the issue in a pragmatic way. Starting 1 July 2009 the new fee structure will be as follows:

	Newsletter by e-mail	Newsletter by post
Members	\$30	\$50
Non-members	\$10	\$25

In short, membership will be \$30, and we will not mail you a newsletter. Membership is still \$30, and we will charge \$20 to print and mail your newsletter.

If you were planning to join or to renew under the old rates, you can still do so during the month of June.

Note the following: Twenty years ago NTS membership was \$30 per year, and you received six newsletter issues a year by mail. Turn the clock forward, and we have kept your out-of-pocket cost the same by dropping the hard copy newsletter.

Those with an affection for paper have two options:

1. Pay an extra \$15 per year (you were paying \$35) and continue to receive the newsletter by post.
2. Download your newsletter from our Web site in PDF format and print it on your printer, which is what I do. The newsletter you print at home is exactly the same as the one you are now receiving by mail.

Enjoy.

John Blanton
NTS President and Web Master
skeptic75287@yahoo.com

Got any ID?

by John Blanton

It's a line from an old joke, and I will spare readers the remainder.

Time *does* pass quickly when you are having fun. It's been two months since I remarked on the apparent passing of the IDEA clubs. Cofounded by Discovery Institute propagandist Tracey Luskin, the IDEA (Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness) clubs are an ID outreach to students and others.

Casey Luskin is an attorney with a B.S. and M.S. in Earth Sciences from the University of California, San Diego. His Law Degree is from the University of San Diego. He is co-founder of the Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness (IDEA) Center (ideacenter.org), a non-profit helping students to investigate evolution by starting "IDEA Clubs" on college and high school campuses across the country.

<http://ideclubok.org/casey-luskin>

Back in April I surmised this was an IDEA whose time was past. In January Luskin had blogged about the "Confused Darwinists" and their false notion of the death of the IDEA.

But IDEA Clubs are certainly not "dead." In fact, the IDEA Center's primary program is helping students to start extra-curricular IDEA Clubs on university and high school campuses around the United States and the world. In August of 2008, the IDEA Center hired its first full-time staff member, Mr. Brian Westad, as its new IDEA Club Director, to oversee the IDEA Club program.

Right now, as of January 2009, there are about a dozen IDEA Club chapters that are active or in-formation. In fact, since the Darwinists first started proclaiming the false death of IDEA, we've received over eight inquiries into starting new IDEA Clubs. Not only are rumor's of IDEA's death greatly exaggerated, but the more the internet Darwinists declare IDEA to be dead, the more IDEA seems to be growing. If you're interested in learning more about starting an IDEA Club, please contact Brian at brianw@ideacenter.org.

http://www.evolutionnews.org/2009/01/confused_darwinists_play_coron.html

Of course, this was refreshing news from the creationists. We are eager to monitor the progress of their grand IDEA, because, as I observed in April, IDEA clubs in the US and elsewhere appeared to be empty shells. Repeating myself:

Certainly the outlook for IDEA on campus can't be all that bleak. A recent check on the IDEA Club Web site showed the following for the United States:

24 university chapters
6 high school chapters
2 community chapters

<http://ntskeptics.org/2009/2009april/april2009.htm#idea>

IDEA club activity listed on the Chapter Locations page pointed largely to empty or broken links and to inactive sites. The page carries the following note:

[Editor's Note: This Chapter Locations page is currently being updated; some of this information is accurate but some is out-of-date. As of early 2009, there are about a dozen active / in-formation IDEA Clubs. Please keep checking back for updates in the near-future. Thanks! —The management.]

<http://www.ideacenter.org/clubs/locations.php>

What a marvelous idea! My inclination is to do just that. Starting this month I will track the status of the IDEA club links to see if this really is an IDEA whose time is past.

Take a look at the table. I have listed the sites linked from the IDEA locations page in the left column. In the right column are notes I made when I followed the links. Here is a short interpretation of my notes:

1. Date: If just a date is listed, then the link pointed to a page that mentioned this most recent date.
2. "No date" refers to a fresh-looking page, but a page with no date.
3. The "inactive" note means the link points only back to an IDEA Center page or else to a page with a stale date.
4. "Broken" means just that. No page is linked.
5. The UC Berkley server sent back a page telling me it is forbidden for me to access this link.
6. The University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada, link points to a fresh-looking page, but the page only mentions the club was formed in 1999.

Some club pages had contact information, and I sent e-mail to these. In one case I called the phone number listed, but there was no answer. I will follow up if I receive any responses.

This table is fairly large. Future installments of this series will only summarize changes in status or else will point to a copy of the table I am going to maintain on our Web site.

Skeptics, don't let this happen to us. The NTS has been around since 1987, due largely to support from you. What I find hard to believe is that creationists are so quick to throw in the towel. Could it be the Discovery Institute fellows are the only ones who really believe their stuff? Naw! Can't be. I have heard that the most abundant substance in the universe is hydrogen. Credulity is a close second.



IDEA Link	Status
Armstrong Atlantic State University	9 January 2009
Baraboo, Wisconsin	No date
Boise State University	Inactive
Braeside High School, Nairobi, Kenya	Inactive
California State University of Sacramento	Inactive
Cornell University	Broken
Fork Union Military Academy	Inactive
Franciscan University of Steubenville	Inactive
George Mason University	Inactive
Hillsdale College	Inactive
James Madison University	Inactive
Midwestern State University, Texas	Inactive
Myers Park High School	Broken
Ole' Miss (University of Mississippi)	Inactive
Poway High School	Unknown
Pulaski Academy	Inactive
Scripps Ranch High School	Inactive
Seattle Central Community College	Broken
South Mecklenburg High School	Broken
Stanford	Inactive
Tri-Cities IDEA Club	15 January 2009
University of California at Berkeley	Forbidden
University of California at San Diego	Broken
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Inactive
University of Missouri, Columbia	Inactive
University of Nebraska, Lincoln	Broken
University of Oklahoma	Broken
University of the Philippines, Tacloban College	Inactive
University of Texas at Dallas	Inactive
University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada	Active(?) 1999
University of Virginia	Inactive
Vanderbilt University	Inactive
Wake Forest University, North Carolina	Inactive
Western Baptist College, Oregon	Inactive
Westminster College, Missouri	Inactive

NTS in trouble

Skeptics, this is serious.

Last year the creationists put out their highly-promoted video *Expelled*. It's by Nathan Frankowski and features film and TV personality Ben Stein as narrator.

When the video came out, we skeptics took great glee in pointing out the obvious: The video is pure propaganda, highly inaccurate and sometimes not even false. That's what we skeptics do. We state the obvious.

For example, evolution is true, and creationism is false. Astrology is a bunch of superstition. The term *phony psychic* is redundant. And there are no ghosts.

Now everybody is jumping on the band wagon and stating the obvious.

As reported by Eugenia C. Scott in the March-April 2009 issue of *Reports of the National Center for Science Education*, a lot of other people are also stating the obvious.

An *Onion* review mentioned:

There are terrible movies, and there are terrible movies that cause harm to society by feeding into its ignorance.

A review in the *Grand Rapids Press* cited:

Ben Stein hosts this pro-Intelligent Design documentary that forgets to include a compelling argument for this viewpoint, and instead chooses to equate Darwinism and its legions of rational scientist followers with Nazis and the Holocaust.

Even famed movie critic Roger Ebert chimed in:

The more you know about evolution, or simple logic, the more you are likely to be appalled by the film.

Well, that tears it, Skeptics. If everybody and his dog are going to head out and state the obvious, then what's left for us? It's as though the world has gone suddenly sane. Time has come for somebody to cook up a few conspiracy theories.

You can also join the NCSE and support additional rational thinking and writing.

P.O. Box 9477
Berkeley, CA 94709-0477
<http://ncseweb.org/>



Sanity strikes

There's more of the same. See the previous story.

In a fit of unspeakable sanity, the Texas Senate has ousted a creationist from the Texas Board of Education. The *San Antonio News* reports:

The Texas Senate ousted Don McLeroy as chairman of the State Board of Education on Thursday. Supporters of the Bryan dentist claimed McLeroy was punished for his strong religious beliefs.

McLeroy is a devout Christian who believes in creationism and the notion that the Earth is about 6,000 years old.

What's going on, here? As a devout Christian who believes in creationism and the notion that the Earth is about 6,000 years old, McLeroy would seem to be a natural for the trust of educating Texas children.

Would somebody please get a map? Are we talking about the same state? The same planet?

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/46402537.html>



What's new

by Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the *What's New* column at <http://www.bobpark.org/>]

Texas creation: "Somebody's gotta stand up to experts."

So spoke Don McLeroy, the dentist who chairs The Texas Board of Education which met this week to set new science standards. The issue that dominated the meeting was creationism. The experts lost. The tactic was to insert ambiguities that could be construed as calling for creationism to be taught. Creationists will use that to lobby textbook publishers. The publishers just want to sell books and Texas is a big market. McLeroy says he believes the sudden appearance of fossils supports the creationist view. What fossils? Texas used to float on a fossil ocean of oil. It has disappeared a lot faster than it formed.



Bob Park can be reached via email at opa@aps.org.

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www.ntskeptics.org