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Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology (Book Review)

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One of the difficult aspects of considering a career in the arts is the fact that one cannot "aggressively demand the right to practice his art, regardless of whether or not it connects with the world around" (161). The authors include some rather startling facts and figures. Less than 20 percent of today's artists and writers earn enough to cover their expenses. If you are still interested the authors have some very practical advice: 1) seek commissions, 2) be willing to compromise, 3) be a conciliator, willing to talk about your work in laymen's terms, 4) listen to criticism, 5) work in the community, not within an elite artistic circle, as comfortable as that might be sometimes, and 6) be a responsible businessperson when it comes to your work and career.

The final chapter in the book is an urgent call for responsible Christian artists to take this cultural calling very seriously. It is critical that the artist understands clearly the trends and media of his or her own time. On the other hand, some things never change, the most important being that "the world wants stories, not one big one, but many small ones. Stories in which we recognize our own lives, narratives rooted in personal experience, and a real, earthy, gritty world; anecdotes and metaphors and illustrations" that illuminate the reality of our lives (177). Scripture provides a model by recording the stories and metaphors used so consistently by Christ himself. The authors encourage us to reject

the "knee-jerk irony" so characteristic of contemporary art in its detachment and lack of involvement or commitment. Like Jesus in the wilderness, advise the authors, beware of pretension and power, serve God first, take responsibility for your work and actions, and let your work affirm basic and lasting values over the long haul.

Finally, a few words about the layout and illustrations included in the text. On the outer margins of each page, the authors have included many quotes from a broad range of writers and artists. These quotes illustrate the authors' wide-ranging research. More than 50 black-and-white illustrations are set in separate boxes with text to demonstrate the point visually. The text is exceptionally brilliant, easy to read, and free of jargon. I have used *Art and Soul* as a text for a Senior Seminar in the visual arts, and it was enthusiastically received by the students. Its usefulness, however, is certainly not limited to the classroom: anyone involved in music, theatre, film, or the visual arts will find a wealth of stimulating material for inspiration and discussion on a variety of levels. I have found this book to be the most valuable addition to my library in a long time.

Intelligent Design: The bridge between science and theology, by William A. Dembski (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999). 312 pages. \$19.99. ISBN 0-830-815813. Reviewed by James Mahaffy, Professor of Biology, Dordt College.

Ever since the psalmist cried out, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps.19:1), believers have praised the Creator as they have seen His hand in the creation. However, our current science, unlike that of the days of Isaac Newton, has become increasingly secular and no longer sees the hand of God in the origin or the sustaining of the creation. There is a current movement among evangelical Christians called "Intelligent Design" (ID) that seeks to refute this idea. This movement, whose origins can be traced to the arguments of Phil Johnson in his 1991 book *Darwin on Trial*, sees the neo-Darwinian synthesis on origins as a failure and seeks to show that the world (or creation) provides evidence for a designer. Part of the attractiveness of the movement stems from the support given by people such as Mike Behe and Bill Dembski, scholars with established reputations in the fields they are challenging. Behe, a biochemist, makes a case for the "irreducible complexity" of certain structures at the cellular level. Dembski, who has published in the areas of mathematics and philosophy, developed mathematical support for

the scientific detection of design, and in 1998 he published his theory in the book, *The Design Inference* (Cambridge Press).

While his previous book was written for mathematicians, *Intelligent Design: The bridge between science and theology* is written at a level that can be understood by the average science undergrad. The book is also broader in scope, beginning with the historical and philosophical background of modern science. This context is a real strength of the book and is especially important for science students, since scientists tend to think their science is based solely on the evidence and they often try to be ahistorical, denying the effects of their own culture and history. I especially enjoyed the chapter devoted to British natural theology, which analyzed its strengths and weaknesses very well. Dembski also makes clear (as others have) that Darwin's theory was accepted in large part because it provided a non-miraculous explanation for origins that fit the philosophy of the science of that age. I also applaud the attempt to dethrone the stranglehold of a contemporary science

based on naturalistic methodology that consciously segregates God and theology within different and separate realms.

Dembski's unique contribution to the debate is found in a chapter that explains how one can show mathematically that certain patterns can not have occurred by chance but required a designer. While mathematics is not my strength, I have been assured by one of my mathematical colleagues that his math appears to be reasonable. The fact that there have not been many arguments from the scientific world showing faults with his math (and his arguments have had strong visibility in academia) confirms my impression. It is, of course, no surprise that the world looks designed. Even one of the articulate opponents of creation, Dawkins (who has entitled one of his books *The Blind Watchmaker*), acknowledges that the world looks like it was designed even as he develops his thesis that it can not have been. Dembski's contribution is to add a mathematical rigor to the argument that the world looks designed. The point is not that it is the only or even a right argument; the fact that he makes it is something that Christians should be aware of.

The book contains a very useful appendix that deals forthrightly with some of the problems that critics have seen in the Intelligent Design movement. Critics of ID would do well to read Dembski's thoughts on topics such as "why an ID position does not lead to a God of the gaps" and "how is ID different from Scientific Creationism (Flood Model Theory)." Though one may not agree with every point that he makes, I thought his responses were quite reasonable.

That does not mean that Intelligent Design or Dembski's position is not without its faults. I believe the movement puts too much faith in proving design from a scientific basis without using the God of the Scriptures. It is clear (from references throughout the book) that Bill Dembski himself believes in the God of Scriptures, but he thinks Intelligent Design can be shown on purely scientific grounds. In his own areas Dembski displays good command of the literature and provides fine refer-

ences, but in other areas he is guilty of oversimplification. For example, in his dismissal of neo-Darwinism he cites only ID adherents for philosophical and scientific critiques of naturalism. Phil Johnson (in *Darwin on Trial*) at least showed a solid command of the secondary literature on evolutionary theory. While Dembski is not a biologist and can not be expected to know the primary literature in this area, he should cite more of the secondary summaries of the evolutionary literature. Another weakness is Dembski's failure to recognize that part of the appeal of the neo-Darwinian synthesis lies in its explanatory power. (*Note Bene*: This does not mean that I endorse the neo-Darwinian synthesis, but one can not dismiss it purely on philosophical grounds without understanding why the theory is so broadly accepted in the scientific community.) Dembski also sees ID too much as the only critique. While I respect ID for its contributions, his list of the new generation of scholars (pp.120-121) is exclusively restricted to those of the Intelligent Design movement.

While my apologetic would differ from Dembski's, he does provide powerful academic arguments that attack an entrenched idea in the scientific community: that the diversity and complexity of the world can be explained without reference to a creator, and I applaud him for this effort. Yet I fear this and other ID arguments will not shake the paradigms that are too entrenched in secular science. But they may help open the door to the acceptance of genuinely different and Christian perspectives in the sciences. I see the influence of ID increasing among evangelical lay people where it may even replace the flood model theory as the popular science model for Creation. For such reasons, this is a movement that Christians should become more aware of by reading the works of the major proponents of this movement. *Intelligent Design: The bridge between science and theology* and Mike Behe's *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Chemical Evolution* are two good starting places for believers who want to be better aware of the Intelligent Design perspective.