

*The following is a response by Ronnie W Rogers and William Dembski to the question: Does the possibility of intelligent intervention potentially undermine Science. September 2005?*

**RESPONSE BY: Ronnie W Rogers**

I am not surprised that the vast majority of scientists you are around are theistic evolutionist—heavy on the evolution—and/or practical or philosophical atheist.

As you probably know, I am a 6 day literalist. I believe in Micro-evolution and not Macro....I also believe in the ID movement as an academically and scientifically plausible challenge to the naturalism—science which only allows natural or material answers because it seeks to deal with just the material evidence, problems, hypotheses etc., without moving into the discussion of Genesis, or the nature of God, gods, intelligence etc.

Concerning the problem you posed, "...In other words, science involves experiments that are repeatable, falsifiable, and theories that are testable. If two scientists conduct the same experiment in different places and on different dates, and get different results, this position would say that it is simply no good to say that an interventionist God exists, because in that case how can we say that the different results obtained were not the result of God altering the laws of nature or "intervening" at the moment of the experiment....

Maybe the following will help.

1. Science needs to be divided into two kinds. First is operational science, which does involve experiments that are observable, repeatable, falsifiable, and testable. This is what we usually think of as science—the scientific method. Normally, under this method of science, if God intervened in one test and not the other, then the hypothesis would fail. However, most often, if not always, theists are not arguing for the intervention of God in these kinds of test, nor to change the procedure (see causes in chapters I included). While a theist would have to say it is always possible that God can intervene, he would also be on safe ground to say it is not probable that He will in such experiments. Regardless, the components of the testing are still in place. Only those things which can pass the criteria of operational (empirical) science are accepted regardless of why they did not pass i.e. are not repeatable.... Therefore, I would say, when we test a new battery that is supposed to last longer than the older model, under this method, if the new battery cannot be proven to last longer than the older, and the test replicated, then the new battery fails the test. This conclusion is irrespective of whether God intervened or the new battery was just not as good because by all that we know it simply failed.
2. The second kind of science is origin (or historical) science—and this is more to the point. This includes things like, forensics, paleontology, cosmogony, which by their very nature are singular, unobservable and unrepeatable events. In this area of science, tools like plausibility, probability, causality and uniformity are

- employed by whoever wishes to apply science to this area be he an evolutionist or... Based on these tools, as well as others, the empirical data is examined and a theory is developed, which based on what is known, is the most plausible of theories. For example, when an evolutionary scientist explores the past, or hypothesizes how things happened, he is not using the “scientific method” of observability, repeatability....Consequently, the evidence should be allowed to lead to the most plausible answer regardless if it is intelligence or not. Imagine having a crime scene where the judge rules that he will not allow the jury to conclude based on evidence that Bill killed his wife because we know Bill is too nice of person to murder his wife—an a priori decision to reject evidence because of its nature regardless how compelling it is.
3. In other words, science, when it is convenient for the evolutionist, is defined as only involving experiments with empirical data that are repeatable, falsifiable, and theories that are testable. Therefore, if two scientists conduct the same experiment in different places and on different dates, and get different results, then the theory or hypothesis does not pass the test. They would argue the possibility of God intervening undermines that. First, it doesn't undermine it—see item 1. Second, by selectively and conveniently conflating operational and origin science—the equivocation fallacy, they are able to argue how the “God factor” could undermine operational science—which they just refer to as science—and thereby get away with convincing people that science cannot allow the possibility of intervention even in the remote past. Of course this is disingenuous since they cannot use their own standard to talk about anything that happened yesterday. They cannot even employ the scientific method to prove their grandmother loved them or existed. Of course this is why many erroneously say that speculating about the past, origins, is not science, when actually it is origin science but not operational science. They must play by the same rules that they impose on others. In conclusion, science involves the scientific method, but it is not limited to it.
  4. It is interesting that the scientific theory cannot pass the test of the scientific method.
  5. Just another thought, it seems that a good argument can be formulated that if only a certain kind of cause—natural—can be found then that would undermine science as well if science is in fact seeking to find the real cause of something; for example, if one concludes a priori that the cause of something could *only, ever*, be natural then one is actually promoting naturalism or materialism—needs elaboration, but you get the idea.
  6. I think Dempsey does a good job of offering safe guards for unnecessarily attributing things to God.

I hope I helped and addressed some of your concerns. I have included two chapters from the book, *Come Let us Reason* by Geisler and Brooks. The first chapter explains in greater detail what I am saying and the second chapter's explanation of different causes is helpful.

My brother, be assured of my prayers for you. You will face many challenges, but I know that God has raised you up, and sent you. Remember always, that it is you that he sent and not the Dennis that some out there may want to mold you to be.

Please let me know if I can help in any way.

Indebted  
Ronnie W Rogers

## **RESPONSE BY:**

### **Uncommon Descent; Weblog of William Dembski**

**August 30, 2005**

#### **[The Undermining of Science?](#)**

If intelligence is a real causal power in the natural world that is not reducible to the law-governed interactions of matter and energy, then how can intelligent design avoid undermining science? This worry can be restated as follows: If two scientists conduct the same experiment in different places and on different dates, and get different results, to infer the action of such an intelligence seems then to undermine science because, in that case, the different results come about from intelligence intervening in the experiment and thereby suspending the laws of nature at the moment of the experiment.

This worry makes two assumptions that are themselves problematic. Let's start with the reference to "the same experiment." In what sense are scientists ever conducting the same experiment? There are always differences. And those differences can produce different results even on purely materialistic grounds. Take a chaotic system like the double pendulum: go [here](#) and [here](#). Chaotic systems have the feature that even if they appear identical to us (regardless of our precision of measurement), because of sensitivity to initial conditions, their behaviors will be different.

Now, with chaotic systems, one might still argue that if the systems in fact were given identical initial conditions and not merely given initial conditions that appear identical to us, then they would behave identically. Because the equations of motion for dynamical systems are deterministic, there would be merit to this argument provided that the universe as a whole operates according to deterministic equations of motion.

But quantum mechanics doesn't seem to allow this option, indicating that there are indeterministic processes at the subatomic level. These indeterministic processes can filter up and be amplified by chaotic phenomena, so the ideal of chaos being deterministic at the microlevel can in practice never be sustained. The one way out of quantum indeterminism is to posit some hidden determinism, either through Bohmian

hidden variables or quantum many-worlds. But besides constituting speculative interpretations of quantum theory (they are not identical with quantum theory as such), these options have no practical relevance to our initial worry, namely, that identical experimental set-ups should produce identical results. Identity at the quantum level is in principle beyond the power of observers to determine. This is the measurement problem, and its practical import does not go away regardless of one's interpretation of quantum mechanics.

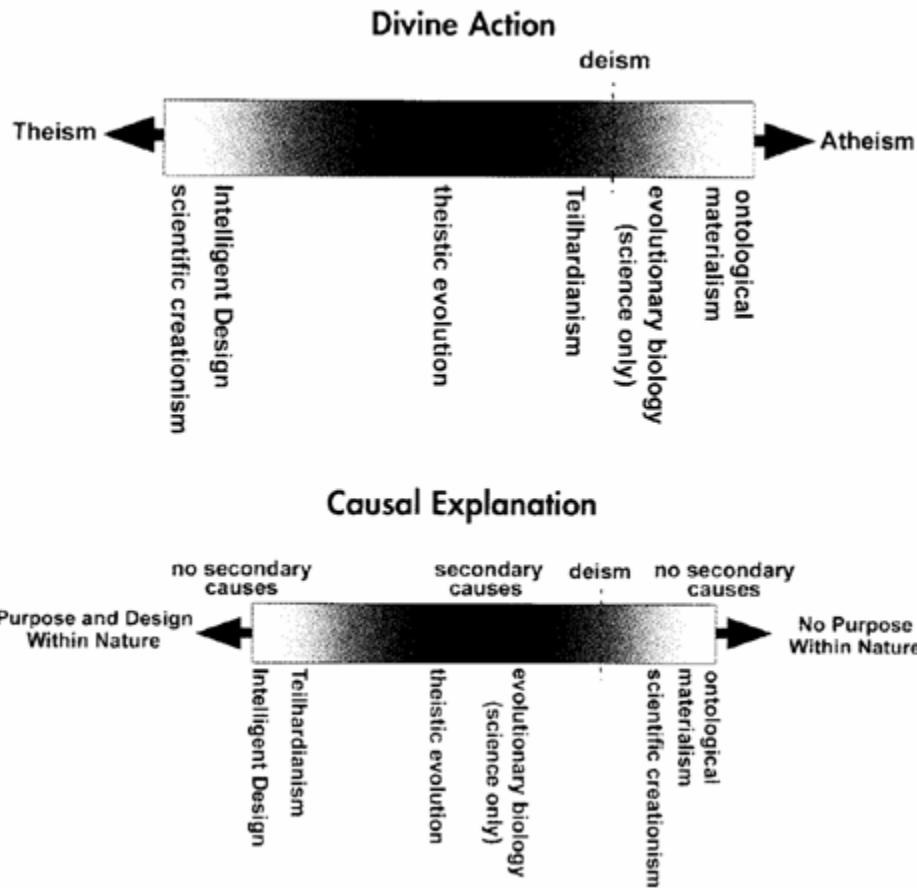
It appears, then, that reproducibility of experimental results is an ideal to which science aspires and yet an ideal that only makes sense in quite limited circumstances where it is possible to constrain an experimental set-up sufficiently so that similar set-ups lead to similar results. There is no compelling reason, however, to universalize this ideal so that it applies across the board. Indeed, why should we think that different circumstances can be matched up in all relevant respects so that they become law-governed and thus behave identically?

This brings us to the other faulty assumption in worrying that ID undermines science, namely, that the laws of nature characterizing the interaction of matter and energy are causally complete — in other words, that they completely prescribe the behavior of physical systems. There is no reason to grant this point. Just because certain physical systems when configured in certain ways lead to predictable behaviors does not mean that all physical systems are like this. Alternatively, just because reproducibility holds for some experimental set-ups doesn't mean that it holds, or should hold, for all experimental set-ups.

Here's an experimental set-up: a room with a desk, blank music paper, a quill and ink, and Mozart. What laws characterize the music that Mozart is going to write? Put Mozart in that room and let him write some music. Now go back in time and put Mozart back in that same room. Is he going to write the same music? No one knows. Moreover, the integrity of science is not threatened either way.

Bottom line: reproducibility of experimental outcomes is great when you can get it. But there's no reason to think that you can always get it. In fact, reproducibility should be viewed as the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, most circumstances are far too messy to admit the experimental control that makes reproducibility possible. And to think that this messiness can somehow be eliminated or that it disappears at the fine structure of the universe is itself an unsubstantiated article of faith.

In closing, I want to consider two diagrams from Marty Hewlett and Ted Peter's book *Evolution from Creation to New Creation*. How such diagrams locate ID in relation to other views follows directly from faulty views of science like the one addressed here.



Neither of these diagrams does justice to intelligent design. ID is compatible with any form of divine action that makes a difference in the natural world, and this includes everything from Teilhardianism to Scientific Creationism on the first diagram. ID makes an epistemic claim about the detectability of design in nature, not about its implementation. As a consequence, the second diagram also misrepresents ID: ID is fine with design working through secondary causes, primary causes, or some combination of the two.

Properly speaking, ID is not a slice on these continua but a swath that includes all slices that take teleology seriously.

Filed under: [Intelligent Design](#) — [William Dembski](#) @ 9:30 am