European Journal of Science and Theology, June 2021, Vol.17, No.3, 57-63

INTELLIGENT DESIGN, PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY
REFINING THE MODEL OF INTERACTION

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(Received 9 February 2021)

Abstract

In an article published in this journal in 2016, I have argued that the theory of Intelligent design is best understood as a multidimensional phenomenon which comprises three dimensions: scientific, philosophical and theological. In the current paper, the previous model is refined and expanded. A fourth dimension, a biological one, is added and its connections to the other three are explicated.

Keywords: intelligent design, science and theology, specified complexity

1. Introduction

Intelligent design (ID) is one of the most controversial topics in the contemporary discussion on the relationship between Science and religion. ID can be defined as "a scientific theory that employs the methods commonly used by other historical sciences to conclude that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection" (a definition often used by the supporters of ID) [Discovery Institute, Center for Science and Culture, *Frequently Asked Questions*, http://www.discovery.org/id/faqs/#questionsAboutIntelligentDesign, accessed on 23.01.2021]. However, it has become apparent that ID is actually much more than just a scientific theory. Clearly, ID is linked with many religious and world-view questions, or at least can easily be linked with these. Most importantly, ID can be used to support the claim that there exists a supernatural being who has designed and created many or all features in the universe. Although the identity of this extremely powerful 'Intelligent Designer' cannot be revealed through ID (without further rationale), in the Western discussion, the designer is usually identified as the God of Christianity.

In a recent article published in this journal, I have argued that ID is best understood as a multidimensional phenomenon which comprises a scientific dimension, a philosophical dimension and a theological dimension. The analysis

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showed that the three dimensions are connected to varying degrees of strength, and that accepting the claims of ID one dimension may or may not have consequences for accepting its claims in another dimension [1]. In the current article, my aim is to further develop the model. In order to offer a fuller view of ID, a fourth dimension, a biological one, is added and its connections to the other three are explicated. In my view, the updated model describes more accurately the different layers of ID.

The main purpose of this paper is merely to expand the analysis offered in the previous article. Hence, the background information is kept to the minimum, and the focus is largely on refining the model of interaction between the different dimensions of ID. For further information about ID, the reader is referred to the original article on the topic [1], as well as to literature by both proponents and opponents of ID, e.g. [2-9].

2. ID as a multidimensional phenomenon

I have previously described ID as a multidimensional phenomenon comprising a scientific dimension, a philosophical dimension and a theological dimension [1]. However, it is possible that instead of using the term 'dimension', some other term (for example, 'spheres' or 'layers') could have been more appropriate to describe the many facets of ID. The metaphor of dimensions can be taken to imply that an object in a given space has coordinates in each dimension - in this case, scientific, philosophical and theological - whereas the model that I have suggested is based on concentric spheres. I am grateful to the examiner of my PhD dissertation, Professor Willem B. Drees, for pointing out this inaccuracy in his pre-examination report of my thesis. Yet, in order to remain loyal to my original idea and to maintain a connection with the previous article, I have decided to hold to the concept of 'dimensions' also in this paper.

In my previous article, I held that William A. Dembski's concept of 'specified complexity' can be regarded as the core of ID [1]. In Dembski's theory, an event or an object exhibits specified complexity if it is both 'complex' and 'specified', in other words, if it is both extremely unlikely to exist and if it can be described as a unique pattern constructable independently of the event. (For a more thorough explanation of the concept, see [10, 11].) Specified complexity is presented by Dembski as a purely scientific construct and, in my view, it should be taken as one, although some commentators have suggested that it might carry hidden religious connotations [12]. I have called this core dimension of ID the scientific dimension. Neither in this paper nor in the original one is my purpose to examine whether ID (in the form based on specified complexity) is a proper scientific theory. Elsewhere, however, I have argued that it is not [13, 14].

The scientific dimension is surrounded by what I named the philosophical dimension. In this dimension, supernatural considerations are brought in. Building on the theoretical assumptions that specified complexity is a reliable way of detecting traces of design and that examples of specified complexity can

be found in the natural world, it is possible to deduce that there exists a supernatural intelligent designer who has designed the objects portraying specified complexity. The questions concerning the identity and motives of the designer would be beyond the reach of human enquiry, however, because ID does not offer tools for answering them. Dembski himself defines intelligence very widely as "any cause, agent, or process that achieves an end or goal by employing suitable means or instruments" [15]. In this paper, the philosophical dimension is split into two (see the next chapter for details).

The outermost dimension surrounding both the scientific dimension and the philosophical dimension is the theological dimension, which enables connecting one's theological worldviews with the supernatural intelligent designer implied by the philosophical dimension. The theological dimension is clearly the most speculative of the three (or four). Even if one embraced the concept of specified complexity and was convinced that the existence of some kind of a supernatural designed can be proven, it is not possible to find evidence supporting any particular supernatural being through ID. Many of the most prominent advocates of ID are Christians and believe that the God of Christianity is the supernatural intelligent designer. This conclusion, however, is primarily based on their pre-existing theological commitments, not on the evidence provided by ID.

More precisely, in the original article, I defined the dimension of ID as follows (below, SC refers to specified complexity and CSI to complex specified information; see [1] for details):

(1) "Scientific dimension: ID as a formal method of detecting design. Proponents of ID maintain that - in the form presented by Dembski - ID is a scientific theory and a reliable method of detecting design. The core of the theory is expressed in Dembski's notion of SC/CSI. However, SC has been criticized for not being sufficiently well defined, and ID is yet to establish itself as a scientific theory.

(2) Philosophical dimension: ID as an inference to a supernatural designer. Assuming, *arguendo*, that SC would be a valid marker of design and there would actually be objects displaying SC in the natural world, there would have to exist a supernatural designer who has designed and created these objects. Yet, the identity and motives of the designer are beyond the reach of ID. In consequence, ID is compatible with a variety of different worldviews.

(3) Theological dimension: ID as evidence of the works of God. Most advocates of ID have a Christian background and hold that the supernatural designer implied by ID is the God of Christianity. Dembski, in particular, believes that CSI is inputted into the world by God through speaking the Logos. According to Dembski, ID and Christianity provide unique mutual support for each other."

The original model is depicted in Figure 1.

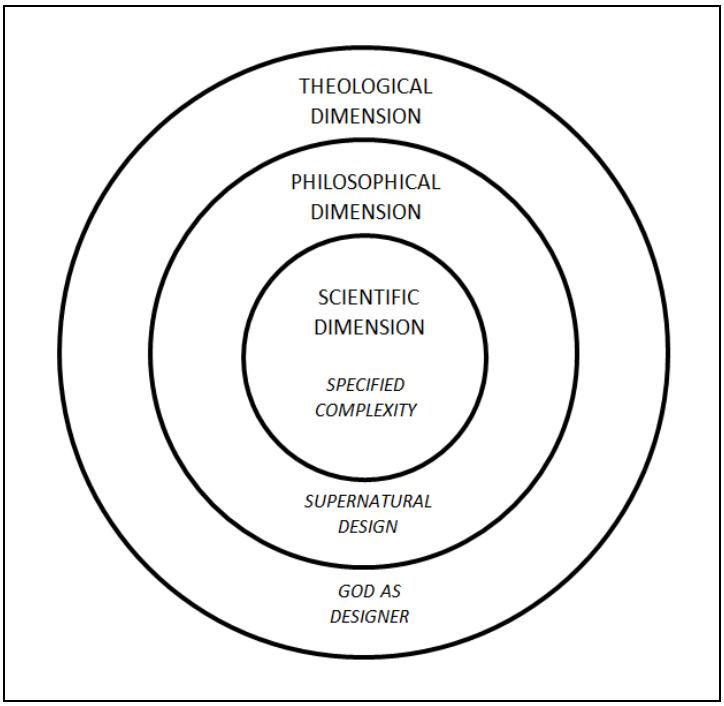

Figure 1. The original model: the three dimensions of ID.

3. Refining the multidimensional model

In this article, I offer two refinements to the original model, which was described in detail in the original article [1] and summarized above. First, I have renamed the scientific dimension as the logical dimension. Second, I have divided the original philosophical dimension in two, to the biological dimension and to an updated version of the philosophical dimension.

Renaming the scientific dimension as the logical dimension is, in my view, only logical. The concept of specified complexity lying at the core of ID is a theoretical construct based largely on logical inference and probability calculations. This can be highlighted by expressing Dembski's argument formally as a logical argument, as follows (utilizing the argument does, of course, require knowledge about the definitions of "small probability", "chance", "regularity" and "design") [10, p. 48-49]:

(1) Premise 1: Event E has occurred;
(2) Premise 2: E is specified;
(3) Premise 3: If E is due to chance, then E has small probability;
(4) Premise 4: Specified events of small probability do not occur by chance;
(5) Premise 5: E is not due to regularity;
(6) Premise 6: E is due to either regularity, chance or design;
(7) Conclusion: E is due to design.

More generally speaking, calling the innermost dimension 'scientific' sounds too general and somewhat vague, especially considering the fact that a new dimension which could likewise be called 'scientific', the biological one, is introduced in this paper. Therefore, I think that the adjustment I have proposed is in order.

The update offered here is even more necessary regarding the division of the original philosophical dimension into the biological dimension and to the new philosophical dimension. In the previous article, I had cut some corners when linking the innermost dimension (the scientific dimension) with the next one (the 'old' philosophical dimension). Connecting the logical version of ID to its philosophical implication is actually a two-stage process, not a one-stage one, as I have previously depicted it as. We need to discern, on one hand, between proceeding from the logical formulation of the ID argument as a formal method of detecting design to applying this method to Biology and, on the other hand, proceeding from analysing the (possible) findings observed in Biology to philosophical conclusions drawn from these findings.

The process of inference is rather straightforward as such - and already implicitly presented in the previous article. First, the logical dimension is linked to the biological dimension as follows: if ID as a formal construct is a reliable method of detecting design, then it can be applied to biological objects (and to all kinds of objects, for that matter). In other words, if specified complexity/complex specified information is a reliable marker of design, examples of design can be detected in the natural world by tracing signs of complex specified information. In this sense, the logical dimension implies the biological dimension.

It is not completely clear whether the idea of complex specified information can actually be applied to real biological objects. Namely, Dembski's formulation of the concept of complex specified information is based on the scenario that biological objects are formed through a random assembly of proteins. According to theory of evolution, however, proteins evolve in interaction with other molecules and gradually form more and more complex structures, instead of being drawn together randomly [15, p. 109-172]. Probability calculations in these two cases are quite different. For the sake of the argument, however, let us assume that complex specified information is a proper scientific construct.

Second, the biological dimension is connected to the philosophical dimension through the simple line of reasoning already presented in the previous paper: if objects portraying complex specified information can be observed in nature, then there necessarily also exists a designer who has designed these particular objects, a designer strong enough to input complex specified information into the processes of nature. In other words, if complex specified information exists in nature, a supernatural designer also exists. This is clearly what Dembski is hinting to when he writes: "The focus of the intelligent design movement is in Biology. That's where the action is." [3, p. 14] An updated version of the dimensions of ID and their relationships is presented in Figure 2.

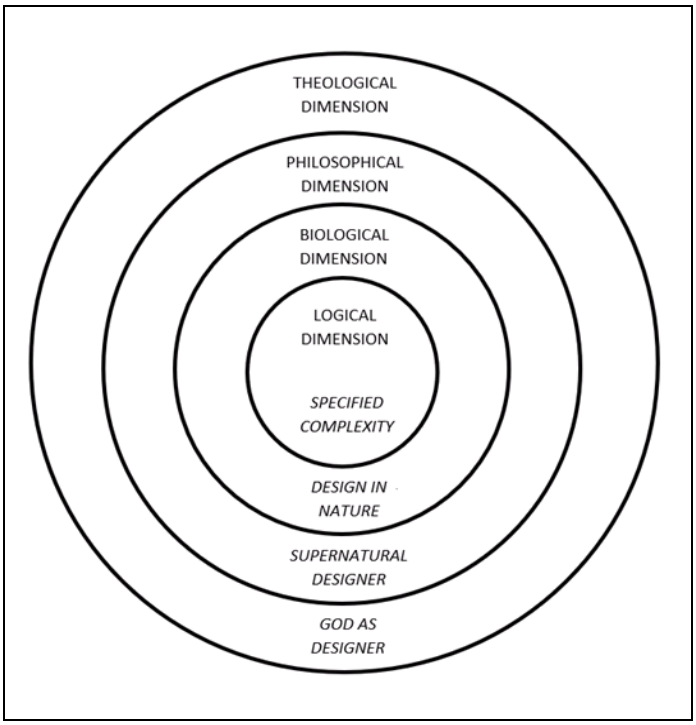

Figure 2. The updated model: the four dimensions of ID.

4. Conclusions

Complementing my original depiction of ID, I argue that ID can be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, comprising scientific, biological, philosophical and theological dimensions (see Figure 2). The model can be summarized as follows:

(1) Logical dimension: ID as a formal method of detecting design. The concept of specified complexity constitutes the core of ID. According to the proponents of ID, the method based on specified complexity is a reliable method of detecting design and hence ID is a proper scientific theory. Critics, however, have pointed out several problems in the argumentation of the advocates of ID.

(2) Biological dimension: If ID is a valid method of design inference and if it can be applied to all possible things (as ID theorists hold), then signs of design can also be detected in biological objects. However, it is not clear that the concept of complex specified information is applicable to biological organisms because they are formed in a more complex manner than ID suggests.

(3) Philosophical dimension: ID as an inference to a supernatural designer. If biological objects portraying specified complexity exist, then a supernatural designer who has designed these objects necessarily exists as well. It is not possible to reveal the identity of the designer or its motives for designing a

particular biological organism, however. In consequence, ID is compatible with many different worldviews.

(4) Theological dimension: ID as evidence of the works of God. It is not a secret that many of the most prominent ID theorists are confessing Christians and claim that the supernatural designer implied by ID is the God of Christianity. I have pointed out, however, that even Christians should not so straightforwardly identify the designer as God because the designer seems to lack several properties traditionally associated with God [14, p. 60-64; 16].

As mentioned above, it might be more natural to talk about scientific, biological, philosophical, and theological spheres instead of dimensions, but I feel that continuing to use the original terminology is also a justifiable choice. In all, I believe that the current model describes the nuances of ID better than the previous one.

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