

In spite of my criticisms of RFEP, to be fair, it offers a helpful starting point for discussion, as we have already seen. What we need to remember is that it is just that.

Note

¹*Summa theologiae* I, q. 45-7 and I, q. 103-5.

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Response to Discher and Van Till Dialogue

Since Mark Discher seems to have generated all of the negative comment in the Discher-Van Till dialogue (Letters, March 2003), I thought in the interest of balance, I might offer three criticisms of Howard Van Till's thesis:

1. Given his own theological predisposition to believe the universe as it really is, is most probably the universe as imagined by RFEP (Robust Formational Economy Principle) advocates, and his acknowledged inability to prove that or to disprove ID (Intelligent Design), Van Till's RFEP seems as opened as ID to the charge of being folk science.

2. Van Till by his own admission believes that God exists, created the universe, and can act within it. Therefore he has no theological justification for denying that God could be involved in occasional episodic acts of special creation. Indeed, one could argue that many of Jesus' miracles were precisely such acts and that in doing them, Jesus was drawing our attention to the creative capacity of the divine word as revealed in the first chapter of Genesis.

3. RFEP comes perilously close to deism. This is not to say that Van Till is a deist, but it is to say that his reasons for not being a deist tend to undermine RFEP.

I found the exchange between Discher and Van Till quite enlightening. In my judgment, the argument went to Discher.

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On Super-Intelligent Design

The December 2002 issue of *PSCF* highlighted various approaches to divine design, including Van Till's advanced RFEP (Robust Formational Economy Principle) along with more standard Intelligent Design (ID). This same special issue also included a remarkably prescient and highly relevant observation by Moorad Alexanian made while commenting upon Thorson's wider reflections concerning naturalism (*PSCF* 54: 287-8). In this, Alexanian exposes questions that may be "truly beyond the reaches of science no matter how it is defined" (p. 287).

The salient "ontological problem" which Alexanian addresses is absolutely crucial for those of us who support intelligent design as long as it is not *anthropocentrically* construed. Following Alexanian, we may suppose the existence of a Creator, "conscious and intelligent to an infinitely higher degree" (p. 288), presumably quite transcending human capacities of rational understanding and so even science. He postulates that this idea may constitute the "underlying rationale for advocates of intelligent design to infer an Intelligent Design" (p. 288). Unfortunately the general impetus for ID seems to be rather more complex and unnecessarily subject to *anthropomorphic* considerations.

Most standard discussions of ID entail, if unwittingly so, a *hidden* proviso akin to the Protagorean motto whereby *man is the measure of all things*. In order to even qualify, a *properly intelligent* design ought presumably to be accessible through human reason and scientific understanding at least in principle. However, Scripture often reminds us that God's ways are not our ways. So it would be quite presumptuous, even idolatrous, to postulate conformity between God's capacities and human expectations. Even if God wished to provide us with the blue print and explanation about intelligently designing and sustaining His creation, we could not grasp this message. Human capacities *are not infinite*, Alexanian's most telling point!

Perhaps Super-Intelligent Design (SID) might better fit the infinite capacity of God's own "toolbox" ranging well beyond potential scientific acumen. This wider scope could include various natural processes and chance events often designated "acausal," stochastic, or random. For if intelligent design were construed less *anthropocentrically*, it *could* accommodate natural processes and events that transcend our capacity for complete understanding. Now, a creator God must possess intelligence characteristic of conscious beings, Alexanian stresses, though *extending far beyond our human capacities* even "to an infinitely higher degree" (p. 288). An *adequate* assessment of intelligent design would therefore at least have to *incorporate*, rather than *exclude*, natural processes that transcend complete scientific comprehension. Accordingly, there is really no a priori justification for trying to "eliminate chance" in the style that some mainline proponents of *restrictive* ID unnecessarily choose.

In conclusion, intelligent design as such is not the central issue but rather its *range, scope, and degree*. Most Christian believers recognize that God is able to create and sustain the universe by whatever means he deems appropriate. Humans ought not to pretend to be privy to his ways or to adjudicate what constitutes legitimate modes of design. If we truly acknowledge that God's ways cannot be fully accessible to human understanding, it would behoove us to employ apophatic theology rather than relying upon humanistic Protagorean prescriptions. A humble God-centered view of these matters, appropriately reflecting a child-like modesty, would openly concede his "infinitely higher degree" of intelligence (p. 288), being receptive to hints of that veiled Super-Intelligent Design so deeply embedded all throughout creation.

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