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*Natural Theology, Science and Intelligent Design*  
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In the 13th century, the theologian Thomas Aquinas argued that nature itself revealed the existence and character of God, almost as well as biblical revelation. Aquinas' work became the basis for a field of knowledge called Natural Theology, and for its dominant school of thought, Thomism. Thomism became an influential theology with the within the Catholic Church, and its more recent concepts still underlie key aspects of Catholic theology some eight centuries later.

Aquinas identified "Five Ways" to approach the study of nature. The fifth holds, "Reality has a natural order, which could not have come from nothing, yet which precedes mere humans." This is a philosophical way to say that something (a god in Aquinas' mind) is responsible for the order of the natural world. Given this premise, natural theology focuses on two goals, one which builds upon the other. It first examines nature, aiming to understand it, and, then second uses what it learns from nature to draw conclusions about nature's creator, i.e., God.

In the Enlightenment Period of the 17th century, a new method for studying nature arose. This new approach, called science, brought a materialist approach to the study of nature, the first stage of natural theology. As a discipline, science was willing to study anything in nature, but its materialism caused it to reject natural theology's second stage. Since there was no physical, material evidence for a god, it argued, there was no way it could approach such questions. There was simply no data to which its methods and procedures applied. In the religion-science debates of the 19th century, science promoted this limitation as an advantage, as an indication of its reliability and its truth claims.

In the end, science won out over religion. Visit any major American university today, and you will find that the science departments dominate the institution. They are most well-funded, most numerous, and among the largest on campus. When the applied sciences such as medicine, agriculture and engineering are included, it becomes clear that science has won the debate over reliability and truth, while religion has been relegated to a secondary status.

Enter Intelligent Design. In reaction to science's eclipse of natural theology over the past century or more, Intelligent Design (ID) wants to re-engage with the second of natural theology's goals, that of using nature for evidence of nature's creator, i.e., God.

Like the best natural theologians in the centuries following Aquinas, ID is willing to draw upon the cutting edge in understanding nature. Thus it is willing to draw upon what geologists, biologist, chemists and psychologists have learned about the natural world. It does not have a problem with the notion of evolution in and of itself, but with the materialist claim that this is the entire story, that there is nothing else.

In ID's view, evolution simply describes the laws of nature. These laws, however, provide an insufficient explanation for the natural world. Rather than limiting its task to the description of nature, as does modern science, ID argues that our knowledge of the "creation" enables humanity to study the "creator." If this can be done successfully, a sufficient explanation for the natural world will then be obtainable.

To accomplish this task, ID presents itself as a science rather than natural theology. In doing so, it accepts science's definition of what constitutes truth. By accepting this standard of validity, it actually raises the bar for getting its ideas accepted. This is necessary, however, for it actually sets forth its ideas as scientifically testable. In other words, ID holds that its claims can be tested through standard, scientific research methods. This may be the case, but to this date, the proposed research has yet to be carried out and the results made available to the public.

While ID waits for its experiments to be carried out, it would do well to reexamine its roots in natural theology. Over the centuries, natural theology changed and developed, learning the holes in its arguments and identifying ways to counter them. Rather than misrepresent itself solely as a science, Intelligent Design should embrace its links to natural theology and build upon them.