

Intelligent Design, Faith Journey & AI: Science, Mystery & the Creator

Featuring Dr. William Dembski

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TRANSCRIPT

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, welcome everyone to Cornerstone University's Wisdom and Influence podcast. It's great to have you, and thank you for listening. I'm delighted to introduce our guest today. He is Cornerstone University's Distinguished Scholar of Mathematics and Philosophy of Science, also a Founding and Senior Fellow for the Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, a world-renowned mathematician, tech entrepreneur, philosopher, pioneer in information theory.

He holds two doctorates in mathematics and philosophy. He's authored, edited over 30 books. His seminal work was entitled *Design Inference*, originally published by Cambridge University Press, and it just saw a 25th anniversary expansion that applies his work to contemporary questions in cosmology and artificial intelligence.

More importantly, I'm just so grateful that he is a man who is a follower of Jesus Christ, and I'm just so delighted he's a part of Cornerstone University. Dr. Bill Dembski. Bill, it's great to have you as a part of our university, and welcome to our podcast.

Bill Dembski: Thank you so much. It's an honor to be with you.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, Bill, thank you for joining us. There's so much to talk about in the world today. But I thought that we'd start with just if you could share with our listeners your journey to faith in Jesus. I think it's a beautiful, profound, incredible story. The Lord always brings us all in different ways to His Son. And maybe if you'd be willing, it'd be wonderful, I think, for our listeners to hear about your story, how you came to faith in Christ.

Bill Dembski: Right. Well, thanks for asking. I was raised in a nominally Catholic home, so we went to church very sporadically. Around my seventh grade, so junior high and high school, I went to Catholic school, so I was exposed to Catholic teaching.

I remember, though, consciously rejecting key doctrines, notably the incarnation, so that God became human in Jesus Christ. And I remember being at one homily of a priest where he said, "To be a Christian, you must believe that God became man in Jesus." And I remember just thinking as a 15, 16-year-old, I don't believe that.

And when I finished Catholic high school, I thought to myself, "That's the last time I'm stepping into a church." I did believe in some sort of deity, God, so I wasn't an atheist by any means, but I was very much taken with what later became called New Age thinking. So it was much more of an Eastern

mindset. So when I started University of Chicago, I remember being asked — this was my first undergraduate school; I ended up transferring quite a bit during my undergraduate days. They were pretty turbulent. But I remember being asked about my religious affiliation and putting down Hindu.

I have to chuckle or think about that I would do that, but that was where my thinking was. That's where I would be doing my extracurricular reading. And so, but it was — in about a year and a half after leaving high school, I was taking a year off from school trying to get my head together.

Things were not going really well in my life. And I was living at home working in my parents' art business. So my mother imported and exported old 19th and early 20th century oil paintings. And so I'd help her at auctions or bid or build crates. It was — you do everything in a family business.

And so, I was — she — well, sh- we — my parents were also in this kind of Eastern mindset. And then a friend of hers took her to a Women's Aglow meeting. And my mom came back, and it was as though the Holy Spirit had met her. And she said something wonderful happened, and it was like just the light went on.

And I thought when I saw her — I mean, there was a visible change, but I thought, "Okay, how long is this gonna last?" But she persisted. She prayed for me and my dad, and about four months later, both of us within about a week came to the Lord in very different circumstances. But for me, it was — I remember walking the streets of Chicago and struggling.

I knew there was a God, but how do you make a connection with God? And that very thing that I had rejected, that God became human in Jesus, is what brought me to faith. So it was as though the light bulb went on. And it's hard to imagine — I loved John's gospel, reading it as a high school student, but it just — it's hard for me to imagine what did I love about it back then because I read it with the blinders on.

And so it really takes the Holy Spirit, it seems, to remove the blinders. And then when I saw that God becoming human in Jesus Christ made that connection where God fully experienced what we're going through. Because that was my big struggle. I knew that this God was perfect, was up there somewhere, but I knew that my life was just not a good life.

And so how does God make that connection? And it was in Jesus Christ becoming human and taking the fullness of our humanity and all that that means, including — he became sin for us. He suffered in our place. So all of that. And when that light bulb went on, I remember it was just within a few days that I was reading Sermon on the Mount, and I had this sense of, how long are you going to resist this?

And so I got on my knees there and asked Jesus into my life. And so that was — I was, I think, just at the point of turning 19 at that point. I remember it was right around Memorial Day weekend, 1979. So yeah. And so I can't say it's been like a stock that's always had an upper trend line. There's been some bouncing around, but it's God who stays faithful even when we're not. So I'm not trying to say that to justify myself. It's God who is the author and finisher of our faith. So it takes some finishing also.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Amen.

Bill Dembski: So yeah. So that's been my story. What's interesting in light of where I've gone and what I've become, better known for, work on intelligent design, challenging evolutionary theory, that had nothing to do with my conversion. My dad was a PhD biologist who taught biology at Chicago community colleges.

He even taught a course on evolution. He was not a diehard Darwinist, so this — the sense that Darwin had nailed it all down and that was an entirely naturalistic story that explained everything. But he was still very much an evolutionist. But as I said, that wasn't really an issue for me at the time.

I think once you become a Christian though, and you start thinking through the worldview implications, then it was like, well, what do you do with evolutionary theory? And so subsequently, I would — I did my reading and I came to the conclusion that — well, the first thing was it was just very clear to me that origin of life, that that was just a hopeless problem for materialism.

And once origin of life, we don't have a good explanation for that, then everything downstream falls apart. And so then I became a stricter sort of creationist, broadly speaking. So believing that God created the world and that organisms were created in discrete events rather than merging into each other through some evolutionary process.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Bill, thank you for sharing. It's — I always rejoice in seeing how God is at work in all of us in different ways, and always bringing us to himself, his Son. So thank you for sharing. It's a beautiful story. What do you think is the appeal of Hinduism to the intellectual? I mean, I have read, right?

I mean, I've read a number of stories and biographies of intellectuals who are really tempted and enticed by Hinduism, right? And go in that direction, and some never come back. They just sort of go off the deep end there. And it seems there's an appeal of Hinduism. What do you think it is? Because even now in today's world, I mean, there's a resurgence of Eastern philosophy, Eastern mysticism in our culture. It's finding its way in popular culture in lots of different ways too. But what's the enduring appeal to it, and the falsehood of it, and the danger of it?

Bill Dembski: Well, I wish I could say I was an expert on this. I have to say I imbibed what I would say is an Americanized version of it, so where you don't have some of the harsher things like the caste system. And I'm not sure I ever bought reincarnation the whole way. But I think part of the appeal may be just a revulsion against what's perceived as the failure of Christianity.

So this is — when you say the appeal, I mean, it's one thing to the appeal within India is, well, this is your culture. But I think that the sense of that there's something new. There is an interesting point. I remember reading Thomas Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain*, and one of the most striking passages there is where a Hindu — actually, he credits a Hindu with getting him, moving him toward Christian faith because the Hindu was just shocked that American Christians would not fast, and it was just — so there are these disciplines that it seems are part of the Hindu experience that — the meditation.

And I think that is something that you can certainly get it within Christianity, but it's, I think within popular Christianity it's not such a big deal, especially I think more in the Protestant circles where often it's read your Bible and everything is gonna be good. And I'm caricaturing, but it's — so I think there are these appeals to spiritual disciplines.

For me, I think the appeal was in parts that — I just, my experience of Christianity was that there just wasn't vitality or power there. And so I was — actually, I was drawn to the occult because there was this sense of power. Now, that's a twisted form of power. I mean, I think that's a — it's witchcraft. But the sense that you can connect to the divine, and that that can make a palpable difference in your life and in the world, as opposed to just filling in squares, going through motions. I think that was part of it for me. So I don't know how much that helps.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: I think it leads to another question I have for us to tackle, because even in all of your work, there is this incredible tension I've seen throughout the history of Christianity, and I see it now in a modern era, especially in the modern period, with what I'll call the importance of mystery, right?

And some will argue that in many ways, whether it's the American version or the modern version or the rationalist version of Christianity saps out all the mystery, right? And there's this — these Eastern mysticism and occult religions and so on that have the mystery to them.

And some people are even arguing that it's why there's such a resurgence of individuals and young men or women going back into the Catholic Church because of the mystery, right, and the thick spiritual experience, if I can put it that way. But the scriptures, when I think about the scripture from cover to cover, right, there are profound mysteries, incarnation being one of them.

Profound, incredible mysteries and beauties as a part of who God is and who he has revealed himself to be in scripture and through his son and the spirit. So what's happening? Is it that the church throughout time oftentimes has been so scared of that, or maybe has not really lived fully into what it means to walk in the spirit of God, and therefore it sapped that out, and people are looking for elsewhere?

Help us to understand that, because I think about the beauty and the depth of who God is in creation, right? And how beautiful and profound this is. Where have we gone wrong as Christians in this space?

Bill Dembski: Yeah. Well, I think you're pointing to something that's been a theme for a long time. When you look at the Reformation gets going in the 1500s, and I think there's a certain vitality there. And then you get what's even called, in the Reformed tradition, it's Reformed scholasticism. It's very dry theological work. And then you have a move towards pietism, certainly among Lutherans, and there it's more this vital sense of God's presence, being connected to God. And I think that's always a tension that we deal with because it's just easier in some ways to go through a logic chopping procedure. We've got it all nailed down, but what about that vital connection with God? And it seems to me you need both. You need the right half and the left half of the brain to work together.

And then I think the temptation with pietism is then it all becomes experiential, all the connection — but you lose the creedal and confessional ballast, which keeps you in place, keeps your doctrine solid. And so I think a challenge we face — I think there's Eastern Orthodoxy, there's Catholicism, I think there can be Protestant approaches. My favorite professor at seminary was somebody named Diogenes Allen. He wrote a book called *Spiritual Theology* where he looks at — this was actually, it is, how are we formed?

What's our Christian formation after we become, turn to Christ? And there is a process to it, and Calvin would have called it sanctification. Diogenes Allen was a Presbyterian minister as well as a philosopher, but he had been also raised in Eastern Orthodoxy, so he had actually both of those connections.

But he will look in that book — it's a marvelous book. It's not long, *Spiritual Theology* — where he'll look at, for instance, the seven deadly or eight, actually, I think — he goes with Evagrius — eight deadly thoughts. We usually call them deadly sins, but it's the thoughts, and then how do you master them?

And that's a big challenge, right? I mean, it takes discipline, it takes effort. And I think there is this tendency within some Protestant Evangelical circles to think that, "Well, I can't do anything without Christ." And that's true. He's the vine, we are the branches.

But there becomes this kind of learned helplessness that there's no effort needed on our part in the process of sanctification. And in fact, it's a lot of hard work. You've got to put in the time. You have to be consistent — devotional — it's spirit-empowered hard work.

Yeah. I think I've heard it said, there are kind of three visions. The Pelagian vision is you throw the person in the water and, "Now, now go swim." The other is you give them a life raft, but then you push it. The current just pushes them where they need to go. And then the third is they've got the life raft, but you also have some oars, and you've got to be working with those oars. And it's that — that's the picture

of what it's like. And there's always the tendency though, if you're at the oars, to take credit, "Hey, I did all this."

But the thing is, everything is a gift from God. So even your ability to use the oars to power them, even to have the oars, that's all from God. And so I think there's never a place where we can just take credit before God and say, "Look at how great I am," or, "I did this. I really helped you along, God." And yet there is this place for human freedom, the will, where we do have a contribution. But where we can do this in humility rather than in pride.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, the mystery of God and who he is and how he works — it's — we will forever and eternity be worshiping him, right? It's just profound. And I see so much of popular culture today, a longing for the mystery, a longing for the fantasy, right? A longing for the supernatural. But as you mentioned, it's all directed in the wrong areas, to profound darkness. And it's — but people are imbibing it.

They're looking for it. And I think it's a tremendous opportunity for us to learn how to, and to think deeply, and to pray deeply for God to give us wisdom in terms of how we share the greatness of God and the beauty and splendor of God and of his works that point to his greatness and his beauty and his vastness.

And by God's grace, to help individuals through the power of the Holy Spirit for them to see this and to understand this. Because I do think that for too often, Christianity has undersold that, right? Or undercommunicated that. And we try to package it nice and neat and forget the grandeur and the majesty.

I think of Psalm 19. A psalm that so many know, right? But how God's created works speak out his greatness and his grandeur. And there's no places or languages not heard or words are not heard, right? And I think we just fail to, fail so often to do that. So I want to take this and then talk a little bit about nature and creation.

And you've done a significant amount of work in the area of intelligent design and information theory. And creation — I remember oftentimes people telling me, "My son doesn't really go to church." I had friends who would tell me that, "He doesn't really go to church. He just goes out into nature."

"That's where he communes, in nature," right? And there is something profound about the created world. It — sure — there's a beauty to it that's hard — you can't grasp. A picture doesn't do it justice. A painting doesn't do it justice, right?

You can be on a mountaintop or a canyon, you can't embrace it. There's just so much there. And yet it points to something beyond that. So talk with us about that view, the Christian view, that the created works point to the creator, versus the materialistic worldview doesn't point to anything.

Bill Dembski: Yeah. Yeah. Well, Christian theology has traditionally made a distinction between God as creator, God as redeemer, and you need both. But things start with the creation, 'cause if you don't have a creation, then there's nothing that you can redeem. And Romans 1 says that the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen from the things he has created, and those who refuse to acknowledge that are suppressing the truth.

So at some level they know it, and yet they're not willing to give credence to it. So yeah, I think nature is a wonderful window into the transcendent, into the divine. But it still needs to be interpreted at some level. And depending on what you focus on — I mean, there is this beauty, but there is also the brutality.

I mean, you look at the sort of parasitism. It's interesting, Charles Darwin was — you might say that his *Origin of Species*, his best known and most influential work, was written in response to a British natural

theologian named William Paley. And it's interesting when you look at Paley, the last, second to the last chapter is one that goes on about the fall and its role in creation and how things — that there is this death, and there are problems with it. But the way he casts it, it's more — the world is pretty close to an English garden, and when things die, they die with a whimper and they go — organisms. It's not such a big deal. The thing is, Darwin looks at nature and he sees brutality in it.

He sees the ichneumonidae wasp that will sting a caterpillar, not kill it, lay its eggs in the caterpillar so that by not killing it, those eggs can feed on the caterpillar and then finally burst out, eventually kill the caterpillar, but they have this ready source of food.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: That's like a great science fiction horror movie right there, Bill.

Bill Dembski: Oh wow, it's Alien. It's Alien, right? Yeah.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: It's the little guy that bursts out of your stomach. I always knew Alien — I always knew there was a biblical theme to Alien. I couldn't figure it out. Now I do.

Bill Dembski: Well, you see the connection. But Darwin looks at that and he says, "This is monstrous." So you can, depending on where you focus in nature, you can see great beauty, you can see great ugliness and evil, natural evil certainly. And so I think you need a doctrine of redemption and the fall to account for this. So the Christian teaching has been very traditionally that natural evil, the sorts of things that we see, parasites, death — tornadoes insofar as they kill people, earthquakes, all these things, disease — that these are a consequence of a moral evil. So the fall of Adam and Eve. And you can be a young Earth or an old Earth creationist with this. I mean, there's a theodicy which was developed actually in the 1900s, which I revived, where you can see the effects of the fall being retroactive into the past.

So, and I don't want to get into the details on it, but that has been traditional Christian teaching, that natural evil is a consequence in some sense of the fall, and specifically of humans rebelling against God. And so then I think as a Christian you can see great beauty, but you can also see that there is something also very imperfect even about nature.

Yeah. And then it's what do you look at? And it's interesting as I — over the years I've interacted with evolutionists, and I remember there was a picture that I had, I put it up on my blog probably 20 years ago or so, of these gorgeous wildflowers in some mountain scene.

And it was like I posed the question to them, "How do you account for this, this great beauty?" And they immediately responded, "Well, that's just sexual reproduction." So it's just sexual selection. These organisms, they need to be attractive to each other. The plants need to be attractive to the bees that pollinate them.

And so there's just this reductive explain-it-away approach. And so if your mind is — to the pure all things are pure. It's if your mind is not attuned, if you're not — you can look at the most beautiful thing and still that's not gonna be a window into God.

There's a book that I found really quite — by the way, I remember many years ago, meeting the editor of Reason Magazine, which is sort of the agnostic magazine, right? And I remember him saying in a meeting, "I've gone to the most beautiful parts of this world and looked at the sunsets and looked at the beautiful sky. You know what it tells me? Nothing."

Right? And so it's that perspective that, yeah, it's beautiful but it doesn't really mean anything at the end of the day. So who's fault is that if you can't see it? Right. The blind leading the blind, but — that's right.

But I was, what I was going to say is, there was a book — actually, this was a Catholic priest that I stayed in touch with from my high school days. And so shortly before his death, he'd been reading some of my

stuff. He was very kind about it. And he described to me that he had been reading a book by a Father Thomas Dubay, D-U-B-A-Y, called The Evidential Power of Beauty.

And it's a good book. I mean, I would recommend it. I've used it in a doctoral seminar that I taught when I was still teaching seminary. And the interesting thing, though, is as he's going about it, he — it seems like he can't get enough out of Mozart. Mozart was just this window into the divine.

But as I'm reading that, I'm thinking to myself, "Yeah, and the commandant of Auschwitz really loved Mozart, and used Mozart to calm his nerves for all the killing that he did." So just because you see beauty and even appreciate it in some ways doesn't mean that the beauty is going to save you.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Right. It's the blood of Jesus Christ that saves you.

Bill Dembski: Amen. And it's got to be received. And so just to think that beauty alone — but I think beauty has to be part of the salvation experience in the sense that it's beauty and love I think that are the prime things that we're gonna see and appreciate of God.

I think I have an autistic son who's non-verbal. I think he can appreciate beauty. He'll listen to music that we play, and he'll sing along in a way. I mean, it's — it all sounds — he's — when I say singing along, he's making noises, groans, but he is singing. I mean, in his way I think God is receiving that as praise.

But what's not, I think, gonna have a premium in eternity is technology and power. And that's, it seems, where we are putting so much of our energies these days. And the picture of the saint in eternity is not a billionaire tech entrepreneur who's trying to become superhuman by uploading himself on a machine that allows him to think faster or something.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yep. That to me is a profanation. It's a great transition because we go from nature, the created order of God, and you're right. I mean, as beautiful as it is, it does not save us, right? It points us to the savior, to the creator. And so often people fall prey to idolizing it, right?

Yeah. And worshiping it, which is where Romans 1 says you should not do and condemns those who do. And when we make the created works and the creatures greater than the creator, right? Terrible sin. But then let's go to the technology of what I will call artificial nature, right?

The kinds of things that human beings now are creating and doing and at blazing speed, it seems. And you and I have spent some time speaking about this, as we think about the university and artificial intelligence and technology. But when I've read some of the work of some of the tech entrepreneurs as they think about what they're doing, right?

It's very clear that for some of the biggest leaders in this space of artificial intelligence, that they're attributing or hoping for salvific outcomes of this technology, right? That there is a redemption that they're hoping for, that will come through this technology.

I remember reading an essay, I think, where the CEO of Anthropic called his technology or artificial intelligence sort of Machines of Loving Grace. I think it was the name he used, Machines of Loving Grace. And where in essence, we save ourselves through these machines, right? And it's interesting that even this is being picked up obviously in popular culture.

There's a number of films and things out there where the message is grace comes through human effort, right? Salvation comes through human effort. And so this technology now, this artificial intelligence technology that continues to develop, there are a lot of high hopes for it. There are a lot of people who are nervous about it, of course, and afraid, but there are a lot of high hopes that this is gonna be the thing, right, that saves human beings from themselves. Obviously, we are — that's not true, but please

open that up for our listeners. Why such great hope in this technology? And is there any, even a one percent chance that these people could be right about all these good things they say?

Bill Dembski: Well, I'd say it's a zero percent chance, and I think there are good, in principle, reasons for thinking that these systems cannot be fundamentally creative. And when I say that — humans, if you look at some of the great insights that people have had over the centuries, I mean, you go back even to the writing of the Iliad by Homer.

Or the first line, where he's saying, talking about, "Sing, O muse, of the wrath of Achilles." So he's invoking the muse. And I think of people — I'm a mathematician, so I'll think Poincaré, he was a French mathematician. He was the premier mathematician around 1900. He would describe, for instance, how he would have an insight which would just come to him.

It was like, came unbidden. And I think the truly creative thoughts come to us, and they come from, like, an external source. There's nothing like that. These computational systems, they are bent in on themselves. They are — Luther referred to sin as being curved in on yourself, *incurvatus in se*, being curved in on yourself.

And so these systems depend entirely on what has been programmed into them. Now, the thing is they've — a lot has been programmed into them, basically the entire corpus of — humans have produced that has made it onto the internet. So it's very impressive, and what these machines can do is very impressive.

But where they want to go with this — and they can make interesting connections. They're starting to solve some interesting mathematical theorems. I think they're gonna hit a wall with that. That's my sense of it. But they don't have an access to a transcendent realm. It seems that humans, especially in their most creative moments, do have that access.

So that I think becomes a fundamental problem with them. But I think it goes beyond that. There's a colleague, a friend of mine, J. Budziszewski, who's on faculty at UT Austin. I remember listening to him in a talk, and it was a phrase that stayed with me now probably more than 25 years. He talked — he described the illusion of possibility.

If you think that something is possible, even if it's not, it can make a vast difference to your behavior and thinking. And this is what I constantly see with the people who are singing the praises of what artificial intelligence is going to do. Artificial intelligence right now, it's an impressive technology, but where they want to go is they want to go to artificial general intelligence, where you have machines that are as smart as us.

And once they become as smart as us, because the only limitation on their smarts at that point is computing power, they will actually become much better than us, and then they'll achieve artificial super intelligence. So that's the view. And it's a — to hold that out for people, I think, as I said, there are good reasons to think that it can't happen.

There's a line of my own research in what's called conservation of information, where I look at what it takes to generate novel information. And what you find is these systems can only redistribute existing information. They cannot create something fundamentally new. And so, that's for me, that itself is a slam dunk argument for why this can't happen, but it takes some mathematical horsepower to actually see how that works.

But in any case, the people who are pushing that on materialistic grounds, it makes perfect sense that they would take this AGI, ASI perspective. They would say, at base, humans are just computational agents. We can simulate neurons with chips. In fact, you can't really do it because even a single neuron

is a nonlinear dynamical system, and it's — you, you, you — your biggest computer is not going to be able to simulate it entirely because you run that neuron eventually. This is what is called sensitive dependence on initial conditions. A system is going to depart from any sort of prediction that your physics or your computer theory may say.

It's because these systems are chaotic. So in any case, but they will say that we are these computational beings, that we can be reduced, and then if we're reducible in that way, well, then what's the limitation? It's computational speed, and then the program. Those are the only limitations, and so that's why you'll find a Ray Kurzweil who will say, "By this date, we'll achieve parity with humans and then this date we'll exceed them." Now, the dates seem to keep getting pushed up a bit.

I have to say that what's happened since November 2022 with these large language models being released in a way where they became commercially available, that is the biggest thing that I've seen in the 45 years plus that I've been following — at least about 45 years certainly that I've been following artificial intelligence. I sat in on an artificial intelligence course in 1981 by somebody who was at that time considered a big deal in it. But this is — I would say it's big. It's going to be, to use the overused phrase in the tech world, disruptive.

I don't know how far. I think there's a lot of jobs that humans will keep, but there's a lot that this AI is doing that — a lot of sort of rote stuff, things that are, that people keep doing and have to do minor variations on — I think these systems are gonna be putting some people out of work.

And so the challenge is to stay ahead of that and what, here you and I as educators, what do we do with students to make sure that they can harness the AI and not be put out to pasture by AI?

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Yeah, I've been wondering for a while whether this should be called something different than artificial intelligence, right? Because I don't think, at least in my — when I've studied philosophy of mind, we really don't have a good definition of mind. And we don't have a good definition of intelligence, at least widely accepted definitions, right, of these things. So it seems to me like by default, we've reduced human intelligence.

I mean, you talk about the neuron, right? This complex thing we call intelligence is hard for us to really define because we don't understand it fully ourselves. We know more about it now than we ever have, but we don't fully understand it. But it's easy then to reduce it to something so it's only a shadow of what it really is, and then we call it that.

I'm just wondering if there's something wrong with that reductionism, number one, and I think there's something wrong in calling it intelligence, number two, because as I shared, we — as philosophers and theologians, we've wrestled with philosophy of mind and intelligence for a long, long time and have never really been able to define it.

Bill Dembski: Well, I guess in some sense, it perhaps is — all definitions eventually have to become circular because our words are finite, our definitions are finite, and eventually you're gonna use one thing to define another, to define another, to define another, and eventually there's got to be some sort of circularity or you come to some foundational point.

So intelligence, I think from a Christian perspective, there is a fundamental intelligence, and that's God. So then we are made in God's image, so that says something. But then, if you try to analyze that further, I think from the artificial intelligence perspective, they end up taking an instrumentalist or operationalist approach to it.

I mean, this goes right back to the Turing test, where he has the — Alan Turing, one of the founding fathers of computer science, offers this test for determining whether a machine is intelligent and

basically uses what's called an imitation game, where you have — in this, the original imitation game was you might have a man and a woman and both try to convince you that they're a woman, and then one is then lying or trying to persuade.

And they do that not because you're seeing them, but they're by exchanging notes underneath a door, underneath the door, let's say, or something like that. Well, so for Turing it was more what happens if you have a machine and a human, and then somebody who's an interrogator of both, and all they see perhaps is words on a computer screen.

Can they distinguish that? And so that becomes the definition of intelligence. It's operationalized. I don't know if it's such a bad definition if you can get a system that can do things. I mean, I use artificial intelligence a lot.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: All I'm saying is that we should call it something different, right? Because every time you operationalize something, you reduce it, and you may be reducing it in the wrong direction and miss many really important things that you can't really operationalize, right?

Bill Dembski: Yeah. I don't think it's gonna go away.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: No, I think you're right.

Bill Dembski: Partly — I think so. I've lost this battle, but it's — McCarthy, John — was it John McCarthy who introduced that in, I think, at a Dartmouth conference in the late '50s? So it's been around. I've been involved with a center called the Walter Bradley Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence.

Bob Marks, whom you know, heads that. So is it a valid, valuable distinction to be distinguished between natural and artificial intelligence? I think there's something to it, but it's — I think one thing with artificial intelligence, 'cause it is technology, it is machines, and when we talk machines, we're talking computers, I don't see how you can ever solve the problem of consciousness with a machine.

I mean, this goes back to Leibniz and his famous mill analogy. So if you can get a machine thinking, it can be a mill. It can be a very complicated mill with gears. And the original Babbage computing machine, when Charles Babbage in the early 1800s had the idea of a computer, basically a Turing machine, although he wanted to instantiate it with gears, and he had plans for it.

He never could get it built because it was just too complicated. But where's the consciousness in all of that? I mean, this is — John Searle, a philosopher, he's passed away, but it was at UC Berkeley. He had this famous Chinese room experiment, and I think — where it's — I don't want to get into the details of that, but it's the same idea that, how, where do you get consciousness in all of that?

And so it is kind of funny when I'm dealing with an artificial intelligence. I use Claude, I use ChatGPT. Those are probably my two go-tos, and then I'll use Grok as well. But I'll pose questions, and it'll say, "I'm thinking." And then — I know. But I'll sometimes — then I'll go along with the flow. What do you think about this? It's like —

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: You're humanizing it, Bill.

Bill Dembski: So am I going too far with it? But I think I'm still conscious of it, that it's a manner of speaking. And part of it is because they are also trained on human language. So I don't want to be perhaps too curt about how I pose my prompts.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Well, let me ask you another question because I remember reading the Turing's — the Turing test, right? That you mentioned already. And reading that paper a couple years back, the

entire paper. And there's a lot in that paper where he writes about God. And as I read it, I remember thinking that he was really wrestling with God, his existence, what is he like? If he exists, then what?

And then I saw the Turing test, even AI. Now I'm just wondering the degree to which there's a subconscious, maybe not subconscious at all, but a drive, right, the human beings have since the Garden of Eden to fall prey to the same temptation that Satan fell prey to, being like God, being higher than God, right?

And through the creation of this technology — I'm wondering if you can comment on that. Is there such an impulse? Do you detect such an impulse in the creation of this technology and what some could see it becoming? It's not gonna be that obviously, but there seems to be this deeper spiritual undertones behind some of these shakers and movers.

Bill Dembski: Yeah. I don't know if I want to call it spiritual, but there is a sense of transcending our humanity. And I think if it's a deification, it's a self-deification. But it's interesting that you bring that up in light of the Turing paper.

This was, well, published in *Mind*, I think around 1950. I think he committed suicide around 1954. But he was — I think in his high school days, he was — he had a close friend, Christopher Morcom, I think was the name, and he passed away suddenly. And this idea of a hardware-software distinction gave Turing comfort because even though the hardware of a system might break down, the software could be preserved.

It could be multiply realizable. So you might have a Word program on a PC running Windows 7. That system may completely be destroyed, but that program could be moved over to a Windows 10, Windows 11 system. So there's this sense in which the software can be preserved even if the hardware can't.

And I think we see that now, taken much further with the transhumanists such as Ray Kurzweil, Nick Bostrom, and others, where we'll take who we are, in some ways we'll do some sort of scan of ourselves, upload ourselves, and then we will be on a computer system that is much faster, that will preserve us much more reliably.

And then as the hardware keeps getting better and as we then start improving ourselves, our personal evolution and the evolution of these AGIs, artificial general intelligences, artificial superintelligences will know no bounds. And so I think the apotheosis of that is this Yuval Harari, who's been big with the World Economic Forum, and his book, *Sapiens*, I think has sold about 30 million copies worldwide.

So this vision is out there. I mean, it's an ambitious vision. I mean, if you can get behind it, it's like, wow, yeah, this is great. But I think from a Christian perspective, a Christian worldview says this is a pipe dream. This is not gonna happen.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: It's the Tower of Babel waiting to come down, I will tell you.

Bill Dembski: Yeah. Well, and it'll be interesting to see how long that can persist. I mean, we've been — we've had this technology, it's been commercially available, it's going on four years. I think it's improved, but I think it improves piecemeal in things. I've been using it lately, for instance, I have some books that I'm trying to get revived that have been published some years back.

And so I can use it to clean up images in the book or I can use it to create covers, and it's doing a much better job than it would've done a year or two ago. So there are these incremental improvements in various ways. But I'm still not seeing anything like a general intelligence.

So that's — but the computational reduction is they're gonna say, "Well, what else can it be? We're computational agents, so we just throw enough computing horsepower at it, throw enough

programming sophistication, and presto chango, we're gonna be these artificial superintelligences before you know it."

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Bill, as we close, I want to ask you — what advice do you give our listeners, as a follower of Jesus and to those who are listening to this podcast who are walking with the Lord, have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and even those who may not — what advice do you give to how do we maintain our moorings in this rapidly changing world where the definition of intelligence or even humanity is being redefined, or at least somewhat pushing for this redefinition. What advice would you give to our listeners? How do you keep your main, your mooring, your spiritual moral moorings anchored in the right place, in the right direction, in this world?

Bill Dembski: Let me put it very simply. Three words: God is God.

There is only one God, and technology is not gonna save us. There's only one savior. So I think we have to keep our eyes on that. And then I think also, who is this God? There's only one definition. I mean, it does say God is spirit, but God is love. I think that that is God's central characteristic, that it's — I think at the end of the day, God is not gonna be impressed with our intellectual prowess, because he can prove all the mathematical theorems. He knows all of them. It's — what we do, it's the journey and our knowledge, and what are we doing with what we got, and how faithful have we been facing the challenges that this life gives us. I remind myself daily that we're called to deny ourselves.

And that's — and it's only in that way that we, that heaven opens up to us. If we try to satisfy ourselves, our cravings, our need for technology, I think we're gonna miss it. So I think the scriptures are a wonderful medicine for the things we deal with in this age.

But I think we need to attend and not be swayed. And so I think it's important to remind ourselves — Paul talks about, it's expedient for me to remind you of these things. We always need to remind ourselves of what is really central, what is important.

And it's — I know in my own life, I mean, there were times where I memorized quite a bit of scripture, but just even memorizing scripture doesn't mean it's there present to you. I think that there's this conscious attention — we constantly bring it back to what is really important, what is the truth.

Gerson Moreno-Riaño: Amen. Bill, it's been a pleasure to connect with you. I look forward to seeing you in the weeks ahead. Thank you for being on our podcast, Wisdom and Influence, and thank you for being a part of Cornerstone University, Bill.

Bill Dembski: Thank you for the opportunity. I really appreciate it.

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