

## William Dembski Part I

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Robert J. Marks:

Mindmatters.ai is under the auspices of the Walter Bradley Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence. So who is this Walter Bradley? We talked today with William Dembski about who is Walter Bradley, why a center was named after him, and a new biography that's coming out, today on Mind Matters News.

Announcer:

Welcome to Mind Matters News where artificial and natural intelligence meet head on. Here's your host, Robert J. Marks.

Robert J. Marks:

Greetings. We are with the Walter Bradley Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence. Mindmatters.ai is a website, which is sponsored by the Walter Bradley Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence. A lot of people know about Mind Matters. A lot of people know about the Walter Bradley Center, but not about Walter Bradley per se. Well, there's a new biography and we recommend it to you. It's a biography of Walter Bradley written by William A. Dembski and me, and it's title is, "For a Greater Purpose: The Life and Legacy of Walter Bradley." And to talk about Walter Bradley and some of the contents in the book, we have today with us, William A. Dembski who needs no introduction, do you, Bill?

William Dembski:

I don't know. I like an introduction now and again, but-

Robert J. Marks:

You like an introduction.

William Dembski:

But I guess it's even better not to need one.

Robert J. Marks:

I guess so. Well, I think that Bill is at least in the area of intelligent design, a type of celebrity. He was one of the founders of intelligent design, did a lot of work in the mathematics and the probability of intelligent design. He published a book with Cambridge. Is that right?

William Dembski:

That's right.

Robert J. Marks:

What was the title of the book?

William Dembski:

"The Design Inference."

Robert J. Marks:

"The Design Inference," which is still in print. You're looking to reprint that maybe, is that right?

William Dembski:

I actually got the rights back from Cambridge. I asked them for it and they gave it to me. So I'm planning a second edition.

Robert J. Marks:

So you're going to add to it, right? So we're going to see brand new stuff on it?

William Dembski:

Its going to be very radically rewritten. Although, I mean, I think the core ideas will still be there.

Robert J. Marks:

Okay. So I met, when I came to Baylor University, I met William Dembski and we resonated, we just had a lot in common in terms of probability in genetic algorithms and evolutionary computing. And we've done quite a lot together. We've published some really good archival journal papers. We put together a book, "Introduction to Evolutionary Informatics," which is available now, and is a really great book. The third author of that is Winston Ewart, and that is still available. And that has to do with the mathematics of evolution and it builds on Bill's foundational work. But we're not here to talk about that, we're here to talk about Walter Bradley.

Robert J. Marks:

Now what's interesting is that we wrote a book about the biography. Again, the name of the book is, "For a Greater Purpose: The Life and Legacy of Walter Bradley." We're going to put a link to that in the podcast notes. And just my introduction, before I begin to query Bill. I tell the story of a retiring professor in my department whose office was cleaned out. They took his books, they took his papers, they put them outside, and just to make sure that the night person took away the box of papers and stuff, somebody wrote very boldly "trash" on it, and they put it on top of the box. And I thought, "What a terrible metaphor for the life of a person, a career of a professor."

Robert J. Marks:

Now, the person I'm talking about had much more in his life than these books and these papers. But if you think about it, what does your life stand for? What does your life mean? What have you accomplished in your life? And the reason I think that we wrote the book on Walter Bradley is that Walter Bradley's life exemplifies what one can do, if one wants to achieve great things in academia, in ministry, in apologetics and in other areas. So we're excited about the book and you are going to find out so very much about Walter Bradley in the book.

Robert J. Marks:

It turns out that today's heroes are primarily people like celebrities, musicians, politicians. We very rarely take a person of character and a person of high accomplishment and hold them up as heroes. Well, I think both Bill and I can agree that Walter Bradley is indeed our hero, and we're going to find out today why he is our hero with all of the incredible stuff that he has done, and these things are covered in the book. The book, again, I think the politicians say in order to get across the point, you have to

mention a third, three times. So this is the third time that I'll mention it. "For a Greater Purpose: The Life and Legacy of Walter Bradley."

Robert J. Marks:

The irony about Walter's life is that you cannot be like Walter Bradley by trying to be like Walter Bradley, rather you're like Walter Bradley if you spend your life, as the book says, for a greater purpose. Not looking at your accomplishments and not looking at things that you would like to do to build up your legacy, but to do things that should be done for the purpose of doing them right. We met, Bill Dembski, Walter Bradley, and I met at Baylor University, and you were somewhat instrumental in getting Walter Bradley to Baylor, in a sense. You gave some input into the provost at the time.

William Dembski:

Yeah, I was a, at least for a time in my tenure at Baylor or stay at Baylor, I should say, I was never even on a tenure track, but I had some connections and influence with people that were doing hiring. There was this big vision at Baylor to turn Baylor into a full-fledged research university, but that was also faithful to its Christian commitment. And so they were looking for faculty that were both excellent in their research and also committed Christians. And so Walter's name was one that was floated, and I was asked to make some initial inquiries with Walter, whether he might be interested in coming to Baylor. I mean, after that, it quickly shifted over to the provost's office and it seemed that they were just very excited at the prospect of bringing Walter on. And they did indeed, I think it was around 2002. And then with Walter here, that led to him recruiting you. So, it's like the dominoes were falling. And then you and I-

Robert J. Marks:

I was the second domino. Yeah. Walter Bradley recruited me to come to Baylor. The president at the time, Robert Sloan writes a testimonial in the biography of Walter Bradley. And this is what Robert Sloan, the President of Baylor University, currently the President of Houston Baptist University writes about Walter Bradley when he came to Baylor University. And this is very typical of the accolades that we get about Bradley. It says, "Walter Bradley is one of the most remarkable Christian scholars I've ever known."

Robert J. Marks:

That's saying a lot because Walter Bradley is one of a number of different faculty. But for Robert Sloan to have said, "He is one of the most remarkable Christian scholars I've ever known," is saying a lot. He said, "All of us, as his colleagues were encouraged by his enormous capacity to integrate historic Christian faith with cutting edge scientific thinking." And so that was Walter Bradley's accolades from Robert Sloan, who was the President of Baylor. Now we have another one here. Let me see if I can find it. This is from the previous provost at Baylor University. That was David Jeffrey. And I don't remember what he said, but David Jeffrey was the one that hired me with the approval of Robert Sloan. So yeah, the accolades are really, really high for Walter Bradley.

William Dembski:

There are just so many endorsements and paragraphs written at the end of the book about him. I was just reading it the other night when I saw the passage from David Lyle Jeffrey. So it's there, it's just probably hard to find because there's so much.

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, because there's so many things at the end. Let me read some of the other accolades. And these are from kind of celebrities in the philosophy and apologetics community. We have people like William Lane Craig saying, "Walter Bradley is one of the most extraordinary men I have ever known. I am in awe of him." That's a comment again from William Lane Craig. We have Douglas Axe, who those of you that are familiar with the Discovery Institute know about. Douglas Axe said, "Luminaries like Walter Bradley paved the way for me to dedicate my career to advance design thinking in biology."

Robert J. Marks:

We have a number of other ones. Let's see. We have Brian Thomas, who is a professor here in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Baylor University. He says, "Walter was instrumental in helping me understand that my gifts and talents as an engineer could be used to serve the poor and marginalized." Hopefully we can get to this, what Professor Thomas was talking about. Walter was one of the founders of the idea of appropriate technology. The idea is that in developing countries, you do not need a new supercomputer. You need technology, which is going to help the country where it's at, and Walter Bradley was a pioneer in this.

Robert J. Marks:

One of the things he did is noticed around the world that coconuts were a waste product. In fact, coconut hulls used to accumulate on the grounds of these developing countries. And they used to fill up with water and just like abandoned tires, mosquitoes would lay their eggs in there. It would be a great farm for mosquitoes coming out. So the question is, is how could coconuts be used in order to, in a free market sort of situation, to do some incredible things? So Walter was the pioneer of that. And his idea was to go into these different countries and not help the people, but rather help the people help themselves. The idea was to set up a company which nationals could take over. They could run and use their local natural resources in order to perpetuate the business. And then Walter would step away and the business would continue.

Robert J. Marks:

So this is what Professor Brian Thomas in our department is still doing. He goes to places such as Haiti. He used to go to Africa, still does, Central America, and help the poor and marginalized. One of the things he did for example, which was really cool, and this was under the sponsorship of the Bradley Center. He went to Haiti, and one of the fascinating things is that everybody in the world today has a cell phone, no matter where you go, but the problem is they have problems with wifi, with reception, but more importantly, they have problems with recharging their cell phones.

Robert J. Marks:

So he run around and started these little micro businesses where he put out solar panels and nationals would run little businesses where people could take their cell phones and get them recharged for a small fee. And so he had these little micro businesses all around. This is a classic example of so-called appropriate technology. But this is the tip of the iceberg. Walter did a number of other things. One of the other things he did was the coauthor on just a classic book, *The Mystery of Life's Origin*. Bill, I wonder if you could comment on *The Mystery of Life's Origin* and maybe the impact that Walter's book had on you.

William Dembski:

Sure. Well, in the mid-eighties, when that came out, the work, the books, popular books that were critical of evolutionary theory and origin of life that were naturalistic origin of life accounts, where it was largely the young earth creationist literature, and there were some good valid insights there, but it was also always combined with a young earth, six, 24 hour a day creation approach. So, there was always this sense of conflation of science and religion. And then in the end, people on the atheistic side could always say, "Well, it's really just a science versus religion controversy."

William Dembski:

And what this book did was it really put the whole question of the origin of life as a science versus science controversy and showed that all these naturalistic scenarios for explaining how life could have arisen by purely materialistic means, couldn't work. That there is an information problem and an entropy problem that was in super bowl for these materialistic scenarios. And the thing is the book was published by Philosophical Library. This was a publisher that had published eight Nobel laureates. It was respectable. It was finally getting out of the Christian publishing ghetto and getting the material out in front of the mainstream audience.

William Dembski:

And I don't mean to be unkind and say Christian publishing ghetto, but there's a sense in which credibility is just so hard won and this is what was really needed to get that book, get it the eyeballs that it needed from the people who understood what the debate was and could really engage in it. So it was groundbreaking, came out in the, I think it was 1984, '85. In the appendix, it raised the question of, "Well, if naturalistic or materialistic origin scenarios don't work, then what could?" And it raised the possibility of intelligent design.

William Dembski:

And the thing is with the origin of life, if you don't have a naturalistic origin of life, then you really don't have a naturalistic theory of evolution, because evolution, biological evolution is downstream from an origin of life. So if you've got a gaping hole at the start, everything that follows isn't going to work either. So it was a huge event. I mean, I give Walter credit, John Buell, who was with the foundation, or actually I think it was Probe Ministries at the time, that got behind it, Charlie Thaxton, Roger Olson.

William Dembski:

And it was just wonderful to see 35 years later, this new edition, and it's not just a new edition, it's not like it's just been lightly touched up. I mean, you have all these contributions by luminaries in the field of origin of life, coming at it from various perspectives and disciplines, and really bringing it up to date. So here you have a 35th anniversary edition, but that really does bring the discussion up to date. And nothing has really changed except that the problems have gotten worse for the materialists. The information problem is worse for them. So the case that Walter Bradley and his colleagues made back 35 years ago is if anything, stronger now.

Robert J. Marks:

Yes, and it turns out that Walter's work has been celebrated by some pretty top flight scientists. We have Fritz Shaffer, for example, who gives a comment on Walter Bradley in the book. Fritz has been nominated for the Nobel prize a few times in chemistry and Marlan Scully, who was a PhD and a member of the National Academy of Sciences. This is what Scully wrote: "Walter is an outstanding example and role model for young faculty. He greatly improved engineering at both Texas A&M and

Baylor. Walter is a great friend and colleague. He is indeed and in fact, a distinguished professor and a Christian."

Robert J. Marks:

Yeah, Walter in writing and coauthoring, "The Mystery of Life's Origin," yeah, hit a nerve with some people. Some people didn't like the fact that his last chapter had to do with possible theistic solutions to this. And that's one of the things that the authors of "The Mystery of Life's Origin" did. They didn't talk about theology or anything.

Robert J. Marks:

They laid out the possibilities of, at the end of the book, after going through all the problems, they laid out all of the possibilities for the mystery of life's origin. Could it have been panspermia where life was planted here? Could it have been just spontaneous generation where chemicals turned into life? That was basically what they debunked in the book. And there is also the possibility of a creative God. And so he presented a small section, or the authors presented a small section at the end of the book about that. And I don't know, people didn't like that. I don't know why they don't like that explanation Bill, what's the deal?

William Dembski:

Well, I think it's a matter of presuppositions, right?

Robert J. Marks:

It is a matter of presuppositions.

William Dembski:

If you want the world to be a certain way, and if God is not supposed to be part of that, then anything that would point to it becomes a challenge. And there are people who just don't like it.

Robert J. Marks:

Well, this brings up one of my favorite Walter Bradley stories. He was under deposition for textbooks in Texas. And Walter is from Texas, Texas adopts textbooks and things such as biology. And there's always a question of the degree to which evolution should be presented. Should the controversy be also presented? And Walter was on deposition by the opposition and it was an ACLU lawyer that came up and says, "Dr. Bradley," - they always say "Dr. Bradley" in the most condescending tone that they possibly can. He said, "Are you a Christian?" Walter says, "Why, yes I am." He says, "Dr. Bradley, how is it then that you can be objective when looking at scientific issues, if you're a Christian?"

Robert J. Marks:

And Walter shot back, he says, "Well, I'm not really the one that is not objective. You live in a little silo of materialism. You can't see outside of the silo. I live in a much larger perspective, a much larger worldview. My question is not whether or not God did it. My question is, how did God do it? And I would submit to you, sir, that you are the one with the narrow perspective on life, and I have a much more broader perspective and could therefore be much more objective in my analysis than you and your ilk."

Robert J. Marks:

And it shut up the ACLU lawyer. And he totally changed the topic immediately, which I thought was just a genius response on Walter's side. But we're going to talk a little bit more about Walter's book in a subsequent podcast. We've been talking to William Dembski. Again, William Dembski and I have written, "For a Greater Purpose: The Life and Legacy of Walter Bradley." The foreword is by J.P. Moreland, who used to work with Walter Bradley in different projects. And this is available, like everything else in the world, on amazon.com. And so until next time on Mind Matters News, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

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