

## Cells

We can see further evidence of God's design in the life at the cellular level. The cell is the basic structural unit of all living organisms. It is the smallest unit of life that can be classified as a living thing. That is why we have single-cell organisms, such as bacteria.

Cells are incredibly small: we have roughly ten trillion of them in our bodies. But they are also incredibly complex. However, before the twentieth century, scientists (including Charles Darwin) did not realize how complex the cell is. Ernest Haeckel (1834-1919), a German scientist who helped promote Darwin's work, stated that a cell was a "homogeneous globule of protoplasm."<sup>32</sup> He was quite mistaken, but only because scientific instruments in his day could not detect the cell's complex structure.

Robert Hooke (1635-1703) was the first person to discover the cell. In 1665, he published *Micrographia*, a book that described his observations obtained by looking through a microscope. When studying cork, he discovered the cell, so named because each one resembled the cell of a monk. To study the cell, Hooke used an optical microscope, also known as a light microscope. This type of microscope was invented in the early seventeenth century. Some credit Galileo Galilei with the invention of the optical microscope in 1609.

Early optical microscopes were simple, and though other scientists improved on their design, they were still limited. Michael Behe explains the limitations of the light microscope:

The investigation of the cell pushed the microscope to its limits, which are set by the wavelength of light. For physical reasons a microscope cannot resolve two points that are closer together than approximately one-half of the wavelength of the light that is illuminating them. Since the wavelength of the light is roughly one-tenth the diameter of a bacterial cell, many small, critical details of cell structure simply cannot be seen with a light microscope.<sup>33</sup>

In the nineteenth century, when Darwin and Haeckel were formulating and popularizing, respectively, the theory of evolution, the cell was assumed to be relatively simple, because its details could not be observed through an optical microscope.

In the twentieth century, the electron microscope was invented. The electron, the negatively charged subatomic particle, had been discovered in the late nineteenth century. An electron has a wavelength about 100,000 times short than that of visible light. Therefore, an electron microscope is able to provide much greater resolution than an optical microscope. The electron microscope was developed in the 1930s and refined after World War II. "The same cell that looked so simple under a light microscope now looked much different."<sup>34</sup> Now scientists were able to see the amazing details of the tiny cell.

Cells come in two broad types. There is the simpler prokaryotic cell of bacteria and the more complex eukaryotic cells of plants, fungi, algae, animals, and human beings. Eukaryotic

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<sup>32</sup> Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 101-102.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

cells are larger and have membrane-bound compartments in which specific metabolic activities take place. Behe describes the functions of a eukaryotic cell:

Just like a house has a kitchen, laundry room, bedroom, and bathroom, a cell has specialized areas partitioned off for discrete tasks. These areas include the nucleus (where the DNA resides), the mitochondria (which produce the cell's energy), the endoplasmic reticulum (which processes proteins), the Golgi apparatus (a way station for proteins being transported elsewhere), the lysosome (the cell's garbage disposal unit), secretory vesicles (which store cargo before it must be sent out of the cell), and the peroxisome (which helps metabolize fats). Each compartment is sealed off from the rest of the cell by its own membrane, just as a room is separated from the rest of the house by its walls and door.<sup>35</sup>

Edgar Andrews provides a similar description of the cell and its complexity:

Even the simplest single cell is a highly organized and complex structure. The living cell has aptly been likened to a factory, complete with a boundary fence (the cell wall); gates, docking bays and security systems; entry facilities for raw materials; shipping facilities for finished products; internal transport systems; power plants (mitochondria); waste disposal plants (proteasomes); machines for manufacturing proteins (ribosomes); an army of workers with many different skills (enzymes); messengers (mRNA); stock-pickers (tRNA) and blueprints (DNA).<sup>36</sup>

Andrews calls it cell the “living factory.” Each cell consists of thousands of different protein molecules (groups of atoms linked together by chemical bonds). “Proteins provide all the cellular structural material, they control cell growth and metabolism, and they include hundreds of worker ‘enzymes’ that carry out activity tasks within the cell—by catalyzing chemical reactions that would otherwise occur only slowly or not at all.”<sup>37</sup> These proteins form “molecular machines” that carry out many different functions within the cell. When we look at these machine-like devices that work in the living factory that is the cell, we see that they are irreducibly complex.

Behe offers many different examples of irreducibly complex mechanisms that operate at the cellular level of life. These mechanisms consist of several parts, each of which is needed to perform the task for which the mechanism exists. If one part is missing, the mechanism cannot function. For this reason, Behe argues that the mechanism could not have evolved, because it would not have evolved from a simpler, non-functioning system. (The theory of evolution states that organisms produced a positive trait through genetic mutation. This positive trait helps the organism survive better. Subsequently, that better-functioning organism is “selected” by nature through a survival of the fittest process. The problem is that an irreducibly complex mechanism

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>36</sup> Edgar Andrews, *Who Made God?* (Carlisle, PA: EP Books, 2009), 179.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 181.

doesn't work until all the parts are in place. If these parts were not in place, the incomplete and nonfunctioning mechanism wouldn't be more likely to survive.)

One example of an irreducibly complex mechanism is the humble cilium. A cilium is a hair-like structure that beats like a whip. It helps a cell to swim (as is the case with sperm) or it helps to move liquids over a stationary cell, such as those that line the respiratory tract. For example, if we inhale a bit of dust or pollen, the cells in the respiratory tract, each possessing several hundred cilia, beat together like the oars of a galley ship, propelling the dust-containing mucus up the throat so we can cough it out.<sup>38</sup>

Every device that moves through liquid—whether it's a boat or our bodies—requires a minimum of three things to work: a paddle, a motor, and a connector between the two. Without those three things, the system will not function. Cilia have these three components of course, but they are much more complex than that. Each little hair-like cilium consists of several microtubules bound together by proteins. (Think of this structure as a series of hairs “glued” together by some proteins to form a thicker hair.) The collection of microtubules forms the paddle. The motor of the cilium are arms of dynein, a protein. The connectors are nexin proteins that link each microtubule together. When the dynein arms move, it creates a tugging action on the neighboring microtubules. If the nexin connectors were not there, the microtubules would come apart. But because the nexin connectors exist, they produce a kind of counter-tugging, so that the bound microtubules wave back and forth, producing the swimming motion of the cilium.

The structure and function of the cilium is actually quite a bit more complicated than that. For example, it contains over two hundred different proteins. But the key idea is that each hair-like cilium needs a certain arrangement of parts in order to function. If the cilium did not function, it would not have survived the evolutionary process of natural selection. Therefore, the best hypothesis would not be evolution, but design. It would appear that someone had planned and built the cilium.

Behe observes that thousands of articles have been written about the cilia in scientific journals in recent decades. Yet only two articles attempted to suggest how cilia could have evolved. And those two papers disagreed with each other about how such evolution could take place. Significantly, neither article presented any mechanistic details that could show how the cilium might have evolved.<sup>39</sup>

Another irreducibly complex structure is the bacterial flagellum. The flagellum helps the bacterial cell swim, but instead of acting like an oar, it acts like a rotary propeller. The propeller of the flagellum is a hair-like structure called the filament, which fits into a universal joint called the hook. The hook attaches the filament to the cell's outer membrane. On the inside of that outer membrane, connecting to the opposite end of the hook, is the rod, which acts as a drive shaft. The rod is connected to the stator, which is embedded in the inner membrane of the cell. Within the stator is the rotor, which rotates the rod, spinning the hook and filament so that the

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<sup>38</sup> Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 59.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-69. Behe made this observation in 1996.

bacteria can “swim.” Several O-rings and other parts hold the structure together, and the motor of the flagellum is powered by a flow of acid through the membrane of the cell. The system is complex—irreducibly so.

Behe summarizes the scientific literature devoted to the bacterial flagellum:

The general professional literature on the bacterial flagellum is about as rich as the literature on the cilium, with thousands of papers published on the subject over the years. That isn't surprising: the flagellum is a fascinating biophysical system, and flagellated bacteria are medically important. Yet here again, the evolutionary literature is totally missing. Even though we are told that all biology must be seen through the lens of evolution, no scientist has *ever* published a model to account for the gradual evolution of this extraordinary molecular machine.<sup>40</sup>

Another example of irreducible complexity in biology is blood clotting. When you stop and think about it, blood clotting is amazing. “The function of the blood clotting system is to form a solid barrier at the right time and place that is able to stop blood flow of an injured vessel.”<sup>41</sup> Whenever we have a cut and start bleeding, a series of events occurs that results in a clot that saves our lives. In order to form the clot, a long series of events results in the production of fibrin. Fibrin is produced a protein called thrombin shortens another protein called fibrinogen. Fibrin molecules come together to produce a net-like structure that forms the initial clot. Many other proteins such as enzymes (which catalyze a chemical reaction) are involved in the long series of chemical reactions that results in the web of fibrin forming a blood clot. If any of the steps in this series did not occur, there would be no clot. If there were no clot, we could bleed to death. In other words, the blood clotting system is irreducibly complex.

It is amazing to consider how blood clotting works. If we had a cut that did not clot, we could bleed to death. If we had a cut and the clot formed too slowly or in the wrong place, we would be in trouble. If we had a clot in the wrong place or when we didn't have a cut, we would have a stroke. The fact that that our bodies know when and where to produce a clot through a long cascade of events points to the work of a designer. How else would our bodies know when to produce a clot, when to reinforce the clot (which occurs after the clot is formed), and when to remove the clot (when the wound has started to heal)?

## DNA

We could multiply examples of specific complexity in biology, but I want to focus on just one more example. This might be the greatest evidence of intelligent design. It is what Francis Collins calls “the language of God”: DNA.

DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid. This structure contains all the genetic information of a living being. Because the genetic information is written with a code consisting of four chemicals (represented by four letters—see below), it truly is a language. This is what

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 86.

Richard Dawkins, an atheist, says about DNA: “What has happened is that genetics has become a branch of information technology. The genetic code is truly digital, in exactly the same sense as computer codes. This is not some vague analogy, it is the literal truth. Moreover, unlike computer codes, the genetic code is universal.”<sup>42</sup> Of course, while he marvels at this code, he fails to acknowledge that all codes are the products of intelligent beings. Similarly, Bill Gates concludes, “DNA is like a computer program, but far, far more advanced than any software we’ve ever created.”<sup>43</sup> Of course, neither Gates nor Dawkins suggests that computer codes are the product of natural selection.

DNA is truly amazing. All our genetic information is stored in our DNA, which is contained in each of our cells. Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton describe it this way: “It is a superbly economical solution; compared to its size, the capacity of DNA to store information vastly exceeds that of any other known system. It is so efficient that all the information needed to specify an organism as complex as a human being weighs less than a few thousand millionths of a gram and fits into less space than the period at the end of this sentence.”<sup>44</sup>

Let’s take a look at the structure of DNA. I’ll try to keep this as simple as possible, but some technical details are necessary to show just how complex DNA is.

DNA consists of long-chain molecules called polymers (poly=many; -mer=unit). These polymers consist of nucleotides. The nucleotide consists of a sugar, a phosphate group, and a base. Nucleotides are joined together to produce the famous double helix structure of DNA. If you have ever seen a drawing of this structure, you can imagine how it looks: like a spiral staircase. Now imagine that this spiral staircase was straightened out so it resembled a ladder. The sides of this ladder are made of sugars and phosphates. The “rungs” of the ladder are made of two complementary nucleobases (groups of nitrogen-based molecules). There are about 3,200,000,000 nucleotides in the human genome. The nucleotides form the double helix structure, which is coiled in the twenty-three pairs of chromosomes present in each human cell.

The four bases that form nucleotides are cytosine, guanine, adenine, and thymine. These chemicals are represented by four letters: C, G, A, and T. These bases are designed so that C always pairs with G, and A always pairs with T. This means that there are four possible rungs: C-G, G-C, A-T, and T-A. Because of the way the bases connect, the information of DNA can be determined when only half of the ladder is on hand. In other words, each strand of the double helix can be used as a template to replicate more DNA. As Collins writes, “If you split all the pairs in half, cutting your ladder down the center of each run, each half-ladder contains all the information needed to rebuild a complete copy of the original.”<sup>45</sup> Portions of the whole DNA, called genes, are used to build proteins. The “half-ladder” of a gene can be used to build a

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Dawkins, “Genetics: Why Prince Charles Is So Wrong,” Checkbiotech.org, January 23, 2003, available at [http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/genetics\\_why\\_prince\\_charles\\_so\\_wrong](http://greenbio.checkbiotech.org/news/genetics_why_prince_charles_so_wrong) (accessed June 3, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Bill Gates, *The Road Ahead*, rev. ed. (New York: Viking, 1996), 228; quoted in Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 316.

<sup>44</sup> Nancy Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science : Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy*, Turning point Christian worldview series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 222.

<sup>45</sup> Collins, *The Language of God*, 102.

protein. If DNA did not have this structure of complementary bases, it could not replicate itself or produce proteins.

When the four bases (C, G, A, and T) are formed into three-rung sequences, they form a codon. There are sixty-four possible three-letter codons, which specify which amino acid will be used next to form a protein. (There is a bit of redundancy here: one amino acid can be spelled in different ways. So, for example, glutamic acid can be spelled GAA and GAG.) Amino acids combine to form proteins, the basic structural and mechanical units of the body. The arrangement of these codons, which are similar to words, form “sentences” of genetic information. Some codons even serve as punctuation marks, indicating where an amino acid chain ends and another one begins. In order to make a working protein molecule, the right amino acids must be arranged in the right sequence.<sup>46</sup> It is easy to see how this is analogous to language. I can take any number of letters and mix them together, but only when they are in a specific order do they form words. And those words must be in a specific order to form a meaningful sentence. In DNA, however, the sequencing must be much more precise. A change in one single letter, or one three-letter codon, can mean the difference between health and a debilitating disease.

The gene, a particular bit of genetic instruction, consists of hundreds or thousands of letters of code. A particular gene corresponds to an inherited trait, such as eye or hair color. There are about 20,000-25,000 protein-coding genes in the human body, each one controlling a different trait or function. “All of the elaborate functions of the cell, even in as complex an organism as ourselves, have to be directed by the order of letters in this script.”<sup>47</sup>

What is truly fascinating is how DNA is replicated to form new proteins. This occurs through the use of messenger ribonucleic acid (mRNA). To describe how this all works, I’ll let Collins and Pearcey and Thaxton explain:

The DNA information that makes up a specific gene is copied into a single-stranded messenger RNA molecule, something like a half ladder with its rungs dangling from a single side. That half ladder moves from the nucleus of the cell (the information storehouse) to the cytoplasm (a highly complex gel mixture of proteins, lipids, and carbohydrates), where it enters an elegant protein factory called the ribosome. A team of sophisticated translators in the factory then read the bases protruding from the half-ladder messenger RNA to convert the information in this molecule into a specific protein, made up on amino acids.<sup>48</sup>

Transfer-RNA (tRNA) rounds up the amino acids. Each tRNA molecule grabs hold of an amino acid with one hand, so to speak, and seeks out a strand of mRNA, where it grabs hold of the appropriate codon with the other hand. It keeps holding on until the necessary chemical reactions take place to link that amino

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<sup>46</sup> Andrews, *Who Made God?*, 185.

<sup>47</sup> Collins, *The Language of God*, 103.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

acid onto the end of a growing chain. In this way amino acids are linked together one by one in the correct sequence to form a functioning protein.<sup>49</sup>

Let's think about what this means: DNA is an incredibly complex code constructed of four letters (chemical bases). These letters form into codons, which specify which amino acids will be used to form proteins.<sup>50</sup> This extremely complex language is transcribed onto mRNA, and then this information is translated into a new protein.

Usually, when we see language, we realize it is the product of intelligence. Language does not arise out of natural causes, just as the ink on this paper did not assemble itself into words, sentences, and paragraphs. The DNA molecule is the medium (just like the ink on paper), but not the message. Information operates at a different level than matter. Therefore, information cannot be reduced to material it is written on. The arrangement of the nucleotides into codons and the arrangement of codons into genes is information. This information is used to construct the building blocks of the cell and to regulate human life. We can think of DNA as a set of instructions written with chemicals, just as the arrangement of the ink on this page forms information. Information is therefore more than the sum of its parts. It cannot be reduced to material causes.

Of course, Darwin knew nothing of DNA. If he had, perhaps he would never have come up with his theory of evolution, because DNA seems to suggest a designer.

James Watson and Francis Crick discovered the double helix structure of DNA in 1953. Crick later reflected on the complexity of DNA and the impossibility of DNA evolving out of inorganic compounds (the process of life developing from nonlife is called abiogenesis). According to him, "the origin of life appears to be almost a miracle, so many are the conditions which would have to be satisfied to get it going."<sup>51</sup> Instead of turning to the rational belief that God could have designed life, Crick turned towards a more interesting solution: He claimed that aliens sent an unmanned probe to earth to seed all of human life. This process he called directed panspermia. Groothuis explains:

He realized that the odds of life accidentally coming to earth through an *undirected* process were far too small. But *directed* panspermia was the "miracle" he deemed necessary to explain the origin of life, since life cannot come from nonlife without intelligence. It is a design explanation. However, this appeal to design is a classic case of an ad hoc argument. When naturalism fails to

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<sup>49</sup> Pearcey and Thaxton, *The Soul of Science*, 225.

<sup>50</sup> Only about 1.5 percent of human DNA is used to build proteins. The rest is so-called "junk DNA," the function of which scientists are beginning to discover. Many scientists will argue that this junk DNA is proof of evolution, but such claims create a "Darwinism of the gaps." Christians are often criticized for making a so-called "God of the gaps" when they attribute gaps in scientific knowledge to divine cause. So, for example, if we don't know how something works or we can't explain something now, we can either say "it evolved" or "God did it." Without further evidence, either claim could be true. Instead of making claims based on what we don't know, we should use the evidence available to decide whether evolutionists' claims or Christians' claims are true.

<sup>51</sup> Francis Crick, *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 88; quoted in Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 321.

explain the origin of terrestrial life, Crick appeals to an unknown and improvable alien source.<sup>52</sup>

Crick was a Nobel Prize winner. Yet when faced with evidence pointing him toward God, he decided to turn to science fiction instead. And even if his ideas were correct (and they are not), he would then have to deal with the question of where those aliens came from.

### **Summary**

By now, it should be clear that the universe has highly complex design. The fine-tuning of the universe, the complexity of simple cells and biological systems, and the information stored in DNA all point to design, not natural causes achieved by way of time, chance, and mutations. Only those who stubbornly reject the existence of a designer deny that there is design in the universe.

### **THEREFORE, THE UNIVERSE HAD A DESIGNER**

The first premise—every design has a designer—must be true. The second premise—the universe has highly complex design—seems to be true from all that we know. Therefore, the conclusion follows logically. The universe must have had a designer. Now, the only question is, Who?

### **AND THAT DESIGNER IS GOD**

This part of the argument is actually not conclusive. We will need to continue our presentation of evidence for the God of the Bible in order to show that the God who designed the universe is the one who sent Jesus into the world to die on a cross.

While this argument alone may not be conclusive, I believe it shows that God must be the designer. After all, this designer would have to be intelligent and creative, which is certainly true of God. And he would have to exist before the universe, since the universe itself, with its physical laws, seems to be fine-tuned for human existence. He would therefore want to create humans, and the Bible claims that humans are the height of God's creation. He would have to be extremely powerful and have the ability to design and create the type of universe that he wanted. The God of the Bible fits this description.

While it is possible the god of deists could be the designer, the true God revealed in the pages of Scripture is a better fit. To show that this designer is God, we will have to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the Bible, the evidence of the resurrection, and the problems inherent to other religions. We will do this in due time. For now, we must be content to use this argument as one of many to prove God's existence. This argument gains strength as it is used alongside many others, such as the cosmological argument and the moral argument, which we shall look at next.

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<sup>52</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 321.



## OBJECTION

Those opposed to the design argument speak of apparent flaws in nature, such as the blind spot in the eye<sup>53</sup> or the panda's thumb. Douglas Groothuis summarizes the counterargument this way:

1. If God, an all-powerful and all-knowing being, created life, then it would show no design flaws.
2. Live evidences design flaws. That is, it is not optimally designed because we can imagine another design improving on it.
3. Therefore (a), life is not designed by God.
4. Therefore (b), life is the product of Darwinian evolution (which is non-designed and nondirectional).<sup>54</sup>

Of course, we can admit that there are “flaws” in the design. There are birth defects and diseases, and people have accidental blood clots that lead to strokes and death. However, when people claim that the “flaws” of design are proof that there is no designer, they are making a mistake. They are claiming to know the purposes of the designer. They are assuming that if God (who is perfect) designed something, he would design it perfectly.

The Christian response to this counterargument is an easy one. God did not intend to create a perfect universe—at least not yet. Since the Fall, the universe has been tainted by sin. Somehow, this was part of God's plan (after all, he is all knowing and all powerful, and he works all things according to his will), so he was not taken by surprise. The Bible never claims that the universe exhibits perfect design. It is wonderful and marvelous in many ways, but not perfect—at least not yet.

In Romans 8:20-22, we are told, “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” But one day, there will be a new creation, one without sin. We can only imagine what life in a new, perfected creation will be like, but we can be sure it will be far superior to what we experience now.

## A DIFFERENT TYPE OF DESIGN ARGUMENT

The cosmological argument and the teleological argument require some scientific knowledge. It is important to deal with science, because naturalists try to use science to support their belief that there is no God. In order to disprove their argument, we have to look carefully at the scientific evidence. This is necessary, but it is not always easy and for some people,

<sup>53</sup> For a brief description of the eye's blind spot, as well as a test that reveals this blind spot, see <http://www.doobybrain.com/2008/02/25/the-human-eye-has-a-blind-spot/> (accessed June 7, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 323-24.

scientific arguments may leave them cold. However, another type of design argument is easier to understand and it may be more compelling to many people.

Many Christian philosophers have observed that humans have a “God-shaped vacuum” that cannot be filled by anything other than God. We have a spiritual longing that nothing in this earth can satisfy. This is what Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) observed:

What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.<sup>55</sup>

Humans try to fill this void with everything they can. And if the stuff we have (relationships, money, possessions, entertainments, pleasures) doesn't fill the void, we seek the stuff we don't have (more money, other possessions, new relationships, etc.). But nothing will work. Only Jesus can satisfy the longing we feel. As Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

Most people do not come to Augustine's realization. Once you realize that everyone has a spiritual longing that only God can fill, you see how desperately people try to fill it with other things. I have noticed many friends distract themselves with entertainment in order to avoid dealing with this hole in their hearts. I have seen other friends try to fill the hole with relationships. I had a friend in college who always had a boyfriend; I think she was incapable of going a week without a new love interest. Surely, she was trying to fill that vacuum with the latest fling.

This spiritual longing is often expressed in our culture. I often hear it when I listen to music. In “America,” Paul Simon sings:

"Kathy, I'm lost," I said, though I knew she was sleeping .  
“I'm empty and aching and I don't know why.”

That's how most people are: empty and aching, but not knowing why. And when they try to alleviate that spiritual ache with the things of this world, they fail.

Many people think that void could be filled if only they could go back to that time and place when they were happy. You know how this goes: “If only I could back to when I was young.” “If only I could back to that relationship.” “If only I could have that job again.” I think this sentiment is behind a lot of popular songs that mourn the loss of a relationship or the loss of youth. I remember driving in my car recently, listening to a particular album, and noticing that at least three songs talked about a lost relationship, a lost time, and a lost place.<sup>56</sup> Behind the mournful quality of those songs lies a desire to go back to that person, that time, and that place

<sup>55</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* 148/428, ed. and trans. Alban Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1966), 75.

<sup>56</sup> The album, should you care to know, is *Cold Roses* by Ryan Adams. Adams certainly does not write from a Christian perspective, but his songs are often more thoughtful than most pop and rock songs.

that was lost. I suppose the thought is that if one could go back, everything would be right, and the emptiness and hurt that one feels would be gone. All of this is a misplaced longing.

Our memories have a way of deceiving us. Our minds become colored by nostalgia and sentimentality to the point where we reinvent the past so that it becomes a veritable Eden. We think we used to be in Paradise and if only we could return, we would be okay. There is some truth to that, of course, because we are outside of Eden. But if we want things to be just as they ought to be, we need to go back farther than our youths, to a better relationship than our lost love, and to a place more special than our favorite vacation spot. We need to go back to a time before sin entered the world, to a relationship with God, and a place where he walked among his people. We need to back to the true Eden. Of course, we can't go back. Rather, we must go forward in a relationship with Jesus, as we look forward to the new Eden, the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and earth (Revelation 21 and 22).

C. S. Lewis writes about this desire for a “far-off country” that we all have in his sermon, “The Weight of Glory”:

We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.<sup>57</sup>

We all have this desire for a far-off country, for Paradise, for heaven. But we don't realize we are longing for heaven. Instead, we tend to believe that we can satisfy this desire with the things of earth. When we do that, we turn the things of earth into dumb idols, and dumb idols can never satisfy our longing. Thus, they leave us heartbroken.

But this desire, even if misdirected, is a very real thing. We actually desire for something, even if we cannot put our finger on it. Our desire is a clue that something beyond

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<sup>57</sup> C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (1949; repr. New York: HarperOne, 2001), 30-31.

this world exists that can fulfill us. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis shows how this desire points us to God.

Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy. I am not now speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us.<sup>58</sup>

If the very best of this world cannot satisfy this spiritual desire, we can do one of three things, according to Lewis. One, we can blame the things of this world or fool ourselves into thinking that we should have tried another woman, or holiday, or career. “Most of the bored, discontented, rich people in the world are of this type.”<sup>59</sup> Two, we can become disenchanted, attribute our desire to adolescence, and give up on a solution to this desire. Or, three, we can react in the Christian way.

The Christian says, “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or to be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let I get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.”<sup>60</sup>

We were made for another country, for heaven. God made us to glorify him, to reflect his glory in his world, and to worship and serve him. When we are not doing the things for

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<sup>58</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (rev. ed., 1952; repr. New York: Touchstone, 1996), 120.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

which we were made, we feel empty, depressed, frustrated, and lost. Not to do the things we are made for is like not using a hammer to drive a nail, but instead using it to play a violin. Our spiritual longings lead us to seek out our purpose, and this search points us to our Designer and Maker.

We can imagine this type of philosophical argument outlined in a formal way:

1. Each one of us has a deep longing for something.
2. The things of this universe do not satisfy this longing.
3. Therefore, something beyond this universe must satisfy this longing.
4. And this something is God.

Perhaps we cannot prove this argument the way we can the other ones, but it has an emotional and spiritual resonance that science does not. The first and second premises seem to be true, if we are being honest with ourselves. Of course, none of us has the capability of trying to satisfy this longing with everything in the universe, because there are many things that we cannot access, like unlimited wealth, great power, or the ability to travel everywhere we want. But if there is something outside this universe that can satisfy, it must be God, for he alone is beyond space and time.