

# 7

## C. S. LEWIS AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN

*John G. West*

A FEW MONTHS AFTER BEING DISCHARGED FROM THE ARMY AT THE end of World War I, a twenty-year-old C. S. Lewis published his first book, a cycle of poems titled *Spirits in Bondage* (1919).<sup>1</sup> The opening poem, “Satan Speaks,” provided a grim view of nature that might startle many of Lewis’s later readers:

I am Nature, the Mighty Mother,  
I am the law: ye have none other.  
I am the flower and the dewdrop fresh,  
I am the lust in your itching flesh.  
I am the battle’s filth and strain,  
I am the widow’s empty pain.  
I am the sea to smother your breath,  
I am the bomb, the falling death...  
I am the spider making her net,  
I am the beast with jaws blood-wet<sup>2</sup>

Many of the poems in *Spirits in Bondage* displayed Lewis’s passionate, even angry, atheism during this period of his life, inspired by what he referred to as the “Argument from Undesign”: the idea that the pain, cruelty, and wastefulness of nature supplies the best evidence against the view that a benevolent deity created the world.<sup>3</sup>

Lewis’s captivation by the argument from undesign reflected not only the personal tragedies of his life (such as the death of his mother from cancer during his childhood), but also his reading of scientific ma-

terialists like H. G. Wells who nourished the young Lewis's imagination with depictions of the universe as vast, cold, and impersonal.<sup>4</sup> Even after Lewis became a Christian, he remained skeptical of the traditional "argument from design," which purported to show that from various features of nature one can prove the existence of the Christian God. In his book *The Problem of Pain* (1940), Lewis prefaces his first chapter with a comment by Pascal that "[i]t is a remarkable fact that no canonical writer has ever used Nature to prove God."<sup>5</sup> Writing to a former student in 1946, Lewis reaffirmed that "I still think the argument from design the weakest possible ground for Theism, and what may be called the argument from un-design the strongest for Atheism."<sup>6</sup> And writing in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (1956), Lewis recalled the impact on his thought of the Greek materialist Lucretius's refutation of design: "Had God designed the world, it would not be / A world so frail and faulty as we see."<sup>7</sup>

Lewis's powerful attraction to the argument from undesign makes all the more remarkable his eventual embrace of several arguments favorable to design.

#### FOUR LEWIS ARGUMENTS FRIENDLY TO A UNIVERSE BY DESIGN

LEWIS COUNTERED THE ARGUMENT FROM undesign with several positive arguments in favor of the existence of a transcendent intelligent cause for nature. They include:

##### **1. The argument from natural beauty.**

FROM EARLY ON, Lewis's pessimistic view of nature as "red in tooth and claw"<sup>8</sup> was counterbalanced by the longings stirred within him by nature's beauty.<sup>9</sup> Even in *Spirits in Bondage*, the bleak vision of nature presented in some of his poems can be contrasted with poems describing scenes of overwhelming beauty that raised glimmers of the transcendent. For Lewis, our experience of beauty in nature pointed to the reality of something beyond nature:

Atoms dead could never thus  
 Stir the human heart of us  
 Unless the beauty that we see  
 The veil of endless beauty be<sup>10</sup>

In Lewis's view, the longings provoked by earthly beauty could not be accounted for by a blind and mechanistic material universe. They required a transcendent cause outside of nature. This cause was not necessarily personal, but it did go beyond blind matter and energy. As a consequence, it put an intelligent agent back on the table as one of the options for discussion.

## **2. The argument from morality.**

LEWIS EVENTUALLY recognized that the argument from undesign suffered from a critical flaw: If the material universe is all there is, and if human beings are simply the products of that universe, then on what basis can they criticize the universe for being so bad?<sup>11</sup> By judging the universe in this way, human beings are presupposing the existence of a moral standard outside of material nature that can judge nature. But where did this moral standard come from? The existence in every culture of a standard by which the current operations of nature are judged implies the existence of a transcendent moral cause outside of nature. Again, this transcendent moral cause is not necessarily personal, but a transcendent personal God is one of the alternatives that can now be considered.

## **3. The argument from reason.**

AS DISCUSSED in detail in chapters 6, 8, and 9, Lewis argued that reason cannot be accounted for by an undirected material process of chance and necessity such as natural selection acting on random mutations. If reason could be accounted for in this way, according to Lewis, we would have no reason to trust the conclusions of our minds, including the conclusion that our minds are the products of a material process of chance and necessity. The bottom line for Lewis is that the existence of reason

within nature points to a need for reason outside of nature as a transcendent intelligent cause.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. The argument from functional complexity.**

ACCORDING TO Lewis, “universal evolutionism” has schooled us to think that in nature complicated functional things naturally arise from cruder and less complicated things. Oak trees come from acorns, owls from eggs, and human beings from embryos. But for Lewis this “modern acquiescence in universal evolutionism is a kind of optical illusion” that defies the actual data of the natural world.<sup>13</sup> In each of the aforementioned cases, complex living things arose from even more complex living things. Every acorn originally came from an oak tree. Every owl’s egg came from an actual owl. Every human embryo required two full-grown adult human beings. We see the same pattern in human culture. The “evolution” from coracles to steamships, or from one of the early locomotives (the “Rocket”) to modern train engines, requires a cause that is greater than either steamships or train engines. “We love to notice that the express [train] engine of today is the descendant of the ‘Rocket’; we do not equally remember that the ‘Rocket’ springs not from some even more rudimentary engine, but from something much more perfect and complicated than itself—namely, a man of genius.”<sup>14</sup> Lewis made clear the relevance of this truth for understanding the wonderful functional complexity we see throughout nature: “You have to go outside the sequence of engines, into the world of men, to find the real originator of the Rocket. Is it not equally reasonable to look outside Nature for the real Originator of the natural order?”<sup>15</sup>

This is explicitly an argument for intelligent design, and Lewis implies that this line of reasoning was central to his own disavowal of materialism. “On these grounds and others like them one is driven to think that whatever else may be true, the popular scientific cosmology at any rate is certainly not.”<sup>16</sup> This argument for intelligent design does not in and of itself lead to the Christian God according to Lewis. But it opens the door to considering the alternatives to materialism of “philosophical

idealism” and “Theism,” and from there one may well progress to full-blooded Christian theism after further reflection.<sup>17</sup>

Despite Lewis’s clear support for the idea that key features of nature point to an intelligent cause, there have been efforts recently to cast Lewis as an opponent of the contemporary argument for intelligent design. Most notably, theologian Michael Peterson argued this thesis in a lengthy piece published in 2010 and serialized the following year on the BioLogos Foundation website.<sup>18</sup> Peterson’s mischaracterization of Lewis’s views on Darwinian evolution were already discussed in chapter 6. The next section will examine Peterson’s misrepresentation of Lewis on the question of intelligent design, followed by a discussion of how Lewis in fact rebutted several key objections raised against the modern theory of intelligent design. (Readers more interested in what Lewis had to say than in Peterson’s interpretations of Lewis are invited to skip the following section.)

### LEWIS AND THE STRAW MAN VERSION OF INTELLIGENT DESIGN

MICHAEL PETERSON ACKNOWLEDGES THE OBVIOUS fact that Lewis put forward various arguments in favor of an intelligent cause of the universe, but then asserts that “none of these lines of reasoning are really design-type arguments.”<sup>19</sup> This statement is clearly false with regard to the argument from functional complexity described above (which Peterson does not discuss); but Peterson’s claim is also misleading with regard to Lewis’s argument from reason, which Peterson himself earlier admits is “closely related” to “design-type” arguments. Regardless, Peterson’s overall point is even more problematic: His thesis seems to be that Lewis would have rejected the argument for intelligent design as it has been developed over the past several years by scientists and philosophers such as Michael Behe, William Dembski, and Stephen Meyer.

Peterson’s evidence for this thesis is thin to say the least. Lewis died in 1963, and so any arguments about whether Lewis “would” have opposed or embraced current arguments about intelligent design are high-

ly speculative. Aslan's warning in the *Chronicles of Narnia* would seem to be apropos: "[N]o one is ever told *what would have happened*."<sup>20</sup> Be that as it may, the most serious problem with Peterson's thesis is that it is based more on his misunderstanding of intelligent design than it is on Lewis's views about anything. Indeed, Peterson spends more than 40% of his article providing a highly inaccurate rendition of intelligent design rather than presenting evidence of Lewis's own views on the topic. Now if intelligent design really consisted of some of the claims Peterson puts forward, Lewis might well have opposed it. The problem is that Peterson misrepresents the modern theory of intelligent design, and so his article in the end provides almost no insight into what Lewis would have thought about the theory as espoused by its actual proponents.

Unfortunately, Peterson shows scant evidence that he has read much by the intelligent design proponents he seeks to critique. Of the scores of books and technical articles published by intelligent design theorists over the past two decades, Peterson appears to base his criticisms on a grand total of two books, Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* (1996) and William Dembski's *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (1999).<sup>21</sup> Both volumes were published more than a decade ago. Although important, they hardly provide an adequate summary of the current state of thinking among intelligent design proponents. In a footnote to his original article, Peterson does reference a third book, *Signature in the Cell*, published in 2009, but it is unclear whether he has read it since he attributes the book to someone named "David Myer." In fact, the book was written by Cambridge-trained philosopher of science Stephen Meyer.<sup>22</sup>

Peterson's mischaracterization of intelligent design commences with his initial description of its origins. He states that "[i]n the late 1990s, the 'intelligent design' (ID) movement emerged... rejecting evolutionary principles and purporting to have a hot, new scientific argument for God."<sup>23</sup> There are multiple problems with this claim.

First, although the modern intelligent design movement gained prominence by the late 1990s, it began to emerge considerably earlier

with the publication of the books *Chance or Design?* in 1979, *The Mystery of Life's Origin* in 1984, and *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* in 1985.<sup>24</sup> These books, in turn, built upon discoveries in physics, cosmology, and biology reaching back to the 1950s.<sup>25</sup>

Second, intelligent design theorists did not offer intelligent design as “a hot, new scientific argument for God.” In fact, leading intelligent design proponents (especially William Dembski and Michael Behe, the two scholars cited by Peterson) made a much more nuanced claim. They argued that scientific evidence corroborates the proposition that key features of nature are the product of an intelligent cause rather than an undirected process such as Darwinian natural selection. Far from claiming that this is a “hot, new scientific argument for God,” they emphasized that modern intelligent design theory in biology—unlike the old natural theology of say, William Paley—could not reach that far on its own. This is not to deny that intelligent design has positive implications for belief in God. If nature supplies evidence that it is the product of an intelligently guided process, that understanding of reality certainly lends more support to belief in God than the idea that nature is the product of a blind, undirected process like Darwinism. Nevertheless, any claim that an intelligent cause detected by science must be God (let alone the God of the Bible) requires additional arguments from philosophy and metaphysics to justify it.

In the words of biochemist Michael Behe, intelligent design as a scientific research program “is limited to design itself; I strongly emphasize that it is not an argument for the existence of a benevolent God, as Paley’s was. I hasten to add that I myself do believe in a benevolent God, and I recognize that philosophy and theology may be able to extend the argument. But a scientific argument for design in biology does not reach that far.”<sup>26</sup> Mathematician William Dembski likewise stressed that modern intelligent design theory is “more modest” than the old natural theology because it does not try to claim that science alone can get you to the God of the Bible. That is why “[i]ntelligent design as a scientific theory is distinct from a theological doctrine of creation. Creation presupposes a

Creator who originates the world and all its materials. Intelligent design attempts only to explain the arrangement of materials within an already given world. Design theorists argue that certain arrangements of matter, especially in biological systems, clearly signal a designing intelligence."<sup>27</sup>

Given that these comments from Dembski appeared in one of the two books advocating design that Peterson actually cites, it is mystifying how Peterson could get things so completely wrong. The mystery increases when later in his article Peterson seemingly contradicts himself and insists that "IDers will not say that the Intelligent Being behind nature is God."<sup>28</sup>

Well, which is it? Do "IDers" claim that intelligent design is "a hot, new scientific argument for God"? Or do they refuse to divulge whether the intelligent designer is God? The actual answer is neither. As the previous quote from Behe attests, intelligent design proponents who believe in God are certainly willing to say so. *What they are unwilling to do is claim that science alone can establish their belief in God.* They are unwilling to make this more expansive claim because they are being honest about the limits of modern science. Modern science cannot prove everything, and intelligent design theorists do not claim otherwise.

The third and perhaps most serious error in Peterson's description of intelligent design is his sweeping claim that the intelligent design movement "reject[s] evolutionary principles."<sup>29</sup> That is simply false, at least in the way that Peterson defines evolution.

Peterson's expansive definition of evolution encompasses not only "biological evolution" but "cosmic evolution," which he describes as "beginning with the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago" and continuing with the production of galaxies and stars and planets.<sup>30</sup> Peterson's conflation of "cosmic evolution" and "biological evolution" into one meta-narrative is intellectually sloppy. "Cosmic evolution" and "biological evolution" are hardly the same thing. They are based on different evidence, make different claims, and raise different issues. Lumping them together may make the term "evolution" seem more grandiose, but it does almost nothing to illuminate the topic under discussion. Peterson's definition

of “biological evolution” is just as unhelpful. It focuses entirely on the claim that biological life is the product of a long history of common descent without even identifying the mechanism that is supposed to make wholesale biological change possible.

The problem for Peterson is that modern intelligent design theory is not opposed to either “cosmic” or “biological” evolution as he defines those terms. Most intelligent design theorists certainly do not reject “cosmic evolution” beginning with the Big Bang. Indeed, many of the standard arguments for intelligent design in cosmology, physics, and astronomy are premised on the long history of the universe outlined by Peterson.<sup>31</sup> Nor is intelligent design incompatible with “biological evolution” when such evolution is defined merely as common descent. Although intelligent design theorists hold different views about the adequacy of the evidence for “universal” common descent (i.e., the idea that all organisms ultimately descend from the same common ancestor), they repeatedly make clear that intelligent design itself is compatible with such a belief. Thus, William Dembski writes that “[i]ntelligent design is compatible with both a single origin of life (i.e., common descent or monophyly) and multiple origins of life (i.e., polyphyly).”<sup>32</sup> Biochemist Michael Behe goes even further and affirms: “the idea of common descent (that all organisms share a common ancestor) fairly convincing, and have no particular reason to doubt it.”<sup>33</sup> Discovery Institute, with whom most of the major proponents of intelligent design are affiliated, likewise states that if “evolution” is defined as the idea “that living things are related by common ancestry, then there is no inherent conflict between evolutionary theory and intelligent design theory.”<sup>34</sup> Given that the quotations from William Dembski and Michael Behe just cited appeared in the only two books about intelligent design actually cited by Peterson, it is hard to understand how he could get this point wrong too. But he does.

Contrary to the muddled presentation in Peterson’s article, the key tenet of “biological evolution” that intelligent design directly challenges is not common descent, but something Peterson curiously left out of his definition of evolution: The Darwinian claim that biological change is

the product of an unguided process. Darwin was not the first person to propose that life had a long history or even to believe in common descent. His more important contribution was the hypothesis that such change over time could be achieved through a blind and undirected mechanism that could create fundamentally new things without the benefit of any foresight or planning. The mechanism that was supposed to achieve such wonders was natural selection acting on random variations (random mutations, according to modern scientists). It is important to understand that this claim that life is the product of a mindless and unguided process is not merely the invention of today's atheist Darwinists like Richard Dawkins. It was the core claim made by Darwin himself, and it is the core claim made by modern evolutionary theory today (sometimes known as "Neo-Darwinism").<sup>35</sup>

It is this in-your-face claim that biological change must be the product of an undirected process without foresight that intelligent design challenges based on the scientific evidence. Whether or not undirected material processes are capable of producing the exquisite beauty and functional complexity we see throughout the universe is *the* fundamental issue for intelligent design. Peterson's critique thus completely misses the point from the outset.

Peterson's confused view of intelligent design does not get any clearer later in his article. For example, he apparently thinks he is arguing against intelligent design when he claims that "Christians need not accept the notion that there are complex biological structures created directly by God without antecedent forms; they may hold a different view of how God brought about biological complexity."<sup>36</sup> But, again, intelligent design does not demand any such "notion." It does not rule out the existence of antecedent biological forms but only the Darwinian claim that such antecedents must have been produced as part of a mindless and undirected process.

Throughout his attack on intelligent design, Peterson seeks to convey the impression that intelligent design theorists reject the scientific method, reject "mainstream science," and are even "proposing God as

a scientific explanation.”<sup>37</sup> Wrong, wrong, and wrong again. Far from rejecting the scientific method, intelligent design theorists seek to apply the methods of modern science to the issue of detecting design in nature. Indeed, as Stephen Meyer meticulously argues in his book *Signature in the Cell*, modern intelligent design theorists employ the method of the historical sciences pioneered by Charles Lyell and adopted by Darwin himself. That method is based on the idea that “the present is the key to the past,” and it seeks to explain past events by recourse to causes we see regularly operating today. As Meyer points out, we have abundant evidence from our own personal experience that intelligent causes can and do produce certain kinds of highly functional complexity (think computers, automobiles, and toasters). At the same time, we have abundant empirical evidence that non-intelligent causes do not seem able to produce these same kinds of highly functional complexity on their own today. Given this situation, the best explanation for the kinds of highly functional complexity under investigation is an intelligent cause.<sup>38</sup> Again, the logic of the design inference articulated by Meyer follows the very scientific method employed by Darwin to come to his conclusions. So if adopting this approach constitutes a rejection of the scientific method, Darwin himself stands guilty of the same charge.

As for the intimation that intelligent design theorists reject “mainstream science” in favor of “an alternative way of doing science,” Peterson has confused raising questions about current scientific theories with rejecting “mainstream science.” The present author knows quite a number of intelligent design theorists and scientists. He does not know of any who reject the periodic table, the germ theory of disease, the sphericity of the earth, the law of gravity, the discoveries of genetics, or any number of other findings of “mainstream science.” Most of them embrace the standard models in cosmology and geology, and all of them accept core teachings of chemistry, cellular biology, mathematics, and similar disciplines. What they don’t accept are dogmatic claims that unguided mechanisms are sufficient to explain the exquisite beauty and functional complexity we see throughout the biosphere and the universe. And

when did questioning certain aspects of current scientific theories become a wholesale rejection of “mainstream science”? By that silly standard, Darwin himself was an opponent of “mainstream science,” as are all scientists who propose new scientific theories or challenges old ones. Fortunately, “mainstream science” itself recognizes (at least in principle) that scientists need to be willing to reconsider old ideas based on new evidence. So instead of subverting mainstream science, intelligent design proponents are upholding its core commitment to open scientific inquiry.

Peterson’s assertion that intelligent design scientists are “proposing God as a scientific explanation” is equally misplaced. Intelligent design theorists are proposing that science can detect the effects of intelligent causes within nature, not offering “God as a scientific explanation.” There is a difference, and Peterson, as a philosopher, ought to be able to grasp it.

Peterson also offers up the hoary chestnut that intelligent design is based on “God of the gaps” reasoning that tries to fill current gaps in scientific knowledge with God. Wrong again. As Stephen Meyer points out, the modern version of the design inference is not an argument from ignorance, but an argument from knowledge. It based not on what we don’t know about nature, but about what we *do* know. We have first-hand knowledge of what intelligent agents are capable of producing, and we have growing evidence about what unguided Darwinian natural selection *cannot* do in both the lab and the wild. Based on that extensive knowledge, design theorists argue that intelligent causation is the best explanation for certain features of nature.<sup>39</sup>

Ironically, it is Darwinism, not intelligent design, that has the real problem with reasoning from the “gaps.” Darwinists typically embrace what biologist Jonathan Wells has aptly termed a “Darwin of the Gaps” approach.<sup>40</sup> Time and again, when functions for certain biological features have not been immediately apparent, Darwinists simply assume that the biological features must have been the product of a blind and undirected Darwinian process. This was the sort of flawed reasoning that led to the misclassification of the appendix and the tonsils as use-

less “vestigial organs,” and which more recently inspired the colossal mistake of concluding that more than 90% of our DNA is “junk” because it doesn’t code for proteins.<sup>41</sup>

A final point about intelligent design: While Peterson seeks to define “evolution” as encompassing everything from the formation of planets to the development of life, he tries to reduce modern intelligent design to mean irreducible complexity in biology, and then to suggest that this is completely different from “fine-tuning” arguments at the level of the universe. But this is an arbitrary distinction. Irreducible complexity is simply the “fine-tuning” argument applied to biology. Just as the laws of nature are finely tuned for the existence of life, many systems in biology seem to be exquisitely fine-tuned for their functions. These are conceptually the same kinds of arguments, which is why intelligent design theorists are interested in the fine-tuning of nature at all levels—from the universe as a whole to the operations of the cell to the chemical building blocks of life itself.

At this point, some readers are undoubtedly wondering what any of this has to do with C. S. Lewis’s views on intelligent design. They are right to wonder: Although Michael Peterson’s article is titled “C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design,” in the end it has very little to do with Lewis. It is mostly a platform for Peterson to launch his own misguided critique of intelligent design. That is unfortunate. If Peterson had focused more on what Lewis said, he might have realized that Lewis has important lessons to teach us about the contemporary intelligent design debate. But they aren’t the lessons he thinks, as we are about to see.

### **LEWIS’S REFUTATION OF SEVEN ARGUMENTS AGAINST INTELLIGENT DESIGN**

ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT KNOW how Lewis would have viewed the modern theory of intelligent design because he is no longer with us, we *do* know how Lewis would have responded to many of the standard arguments against intelligent design—because he responded to these same arguments when dealing with the issues of his own day. Lewis’s respons-

es to these arguments show just how skeptical he was of many standard materialist claims, and just how sympathetic he was to some of the main points raised by contemporary intelligent design theorists.

### **1. Unguided natural processes supersede the need for intelligent design.**

ONE OF the most common arguments made today against intelligent design in biology is that intelligent design is unnecessary because we now *know* that complex biological features habitually emerge from simple parts through unguided evolutionary processes. Biologist Kathryn Applegate of the BioLogos Foundation, for example, claims that amazingly complicated molecular machines such as the bacterial flagellum (which functions like a high-tech outboard motor) self-assemble without any guiding intelligence because “[n]atural forces work ‘like magic.’” Applegate continues: “It is tempting to think the spontaneous formation of so complex a machine is ‘guided,’ whether by a Mind or some ‘life force’ but we know that the bacterial flagellum, like countless other machines in the cell, assembles and functions automatically according to known natural laws. No intelligence required.”<sup>42</sup>

One wonders whether Dr. Applegate draws the same conclusion every time she opens a spreadsheet program and discovers that it “magically” adds and subtracts sums—no intelligence required. Or when her word processing program “magically” checks the grammar and spelling of her blog posts—no intelligence required. One further wonders whether Dr. Applegate has ever visited a modern assembly line, where robotic equipment “magically” assembles any number of amazing products—no intelligence required. Of course, intelligence *is* required for each of these actions; the intelligence simply happens to be pre-programmed from the minds of men into the computer operations and assembly instructions. Similarly, the so-called magical assembly of the bacterial flagellum requires massive amounts of genetic information encoded in DNA, and as Stephen Meyer has persuasively argued, that information requires intelligence.<sup>43</sup>

As discussed earlier, Lewis thought that the sort of argument offered by Applegate was based on “a kind of optical illusion.” Or to put it more strongly, “[t]he obviousness or naturalness which most people seem to find in the idea of emergent evolution... seems to be a pure hallucination.”<sup>44</sup> Lewis observed dryly that in the real world “[w]e have never actually seen a pile of rubble turning itself into a house.”<sup>45</sup> Instead, what we actually observe in nature are complex living things habitually arising out of equally complex living things, and simpler things that turn into complex things being preceded by the very complex things that they grow into. Acorns become oak trees not from something even simpler than an acorn, but from fully developed oak trees. Eggs that hatch into chickens ultimately arise not from undifferentiated protoplasm but from fully developed chickens who lay eggs. Molecular machines in bacteria ultimately arise not from simpler parts but from earlier bacteria that already have those same molecular machines. As a result, the ordinary physical processes of nature do not explain the actual origins of the complex functional features we find in nature; even less can they explain away the need for an intelligent cause for those features. “On any view, the first beginning must have been outside the ordinary processes of nature,” wrote Lewis.<sup>46</sup> From our own experience of the creation of machines and human artifacts, the natural candidate for that outside cause is an intelligent designer according to Lewis.

## **2. Intelligent design is unnecessary because of the laws of nature.**

A VARIATION of argument 1 is the claim that “natural laws” can create highly complex biological features without the need for intelligent design. Dr. Applegate alluded to this idea when she claimed that “the bacterial flagellum, like countless other machines in the cell, assembles and functions automatically according to known natural laws” and that this meant there was “[n]o intelligence required.” Wrong again, according to Lewis, who pointed out that the “laws of nature” are absolutely incapable of causing anything on their own: “The laws of motion do not set billiard

balls moving; they analyze the motion after something else (say, a man with a cue, or a lurch of the liner, or, perhaps, supernatural power) has provided it.<sup>47</sup> The laws of nature require input from outside, and if the effects caused are beyond the reach of blind chance (“a lurch of the liner”) the input will need to come from an intelligent source (“a man with a cue” or a “supernatural power”).

### 3. Intelligent design is a science-stopper.

ONE DOES NOT have to delve very deeply into current debates over intelligent design to encounter the claim that intelligent design is a “science stopper.” But as Lewis made clear, it would be more correct to say that intelligent design is a science *starter*. “Men became scientific because they expected Law in Nature,” wrote Lewis, “and they expected Law in Nature because they believed in a Legislator”—a.k.a. an intelligent designer. Thus, if people are concerned about the future progress of science, they should be worried about the abandonment of intelligent design by the scientific community: “In most modern scientists this belief [that behind nature is a Legislator] has died: it will be interesting to see how long their confidence in [the] uniformity [of nature] survives it... We may be living nearer than we suppose to the end of the Scientific Age.”<sup>48</sup>

### 4. Intelligent design is simply an argument for God.

CRITICS TYPICALLY insist that modern intelligent design theory is simply an argument for God. However, as already explained, contemporary intelligent design theorists maintain that their version of the design argument is considerably more limited. In their view, evidence of design in nature may be enough to establish a purposeful cause for nature, but it does not answer all questions, such as the problem of evil, and so it cannot establish the existence of an all-wise, all-good, and all-powerful supernatural being taken by itself. Here is where Lewis’s concern about the “argument from undesign” actually weighs in favor of the contemporary version of the design argument. Lewis essentially supports the more humble position of modern design theorists like Michael Behe and

William Dembski that evidence for design can refute materialism, but standing alone it is not enough to establish Christian theism.

### **5. Intelligent design is demeaning to God.**

ALTHOUGH THE argument for intelligent design within science is not enough to establish the existence of God, it certainly has implications for those who already believe in God. If one happens to be a theist, it is natural to attribute the design of the world to God. But some theistic critics of intelligent design have taken to arguing that it is demeaning to God or nature to view God as a designer because then nature becomes somehow mechanical or God becomes merely an engineer. To those who make this argument, perhaps the best reply may be a single question asked by Lewis: “Would you make God less creative than Shakespeare or Dickens?”<sup>49</sup> God is certainly more than a designer. But do we dare contend that He is less? And the works of Shakespeare are certainly the products of intelligent design, but surely that does not make them mechanical or less beautiful.

### **6. Intelligent design is philosophy, not science.**

ANOTHER ARGUMENT frequently employed to refute intelligent design is that it is “philosophy, not science.” This argument is typically used to shut down conversations about the scientific evidence for intelligent design; but it also is typically applied inconsistently. Darwinian theory purports to provide scientific evidence that life is the product of an un-directed process rather than intelligent design. Is *that* claim scientific? If it is, then so is intelligent design, because it purports to provide scientific evidence that bears on the very same question addressed by Darwinism—whether life is the product of a guided or unguided process. If it is scientific for supporters of Darwin’s theory to offer empirical evidence and arguments *against* intelligent design, it should be equally scientific for supporters of intelligent design to offer empirical evidence and arguments in *favor* of intelligent design. Of course, perhaps Darwinian theory itself is philosophy rather than science, and then in that case perhaps intelligent design is too. But in either case, isn’t the real issue

determining what the truth actually is? Rather than trying to decide the debate over intelligent design by drawing arbitrary lines between science and philosophy (something notoriously difficult to do), why not focus on what evidence and logic actually show? At the basis of the “philosophy, not science” objection is the assumption that scientific and philosophical reasoning are two very different things that can never be mixed (there is usually an additional assumption as well on the part of scientists that scientific reasoning is superior to philosophical reasoning). Lewis provided a helpful corrective here, because he forcefully argued against the idea that scientific reasoning is substantially different (or better) from other kinds of reasoning. Contending that “the distinction... made between scientific and non-scientific thoughts will not easily bear the weight we are attempting to put on it,”<sup>50</sup> Lewis noted that “[t]he physical sciences... depend on the validity of logic just as much as metaphysics or mathematics.” Thus, “[i]f popular thought feels ‘science’ to be different from all other kinds of knowledge because science is experimentally verifiable, popular thought is mistaken... We should therefore abandon the distinction between scientific and non-scientific thought. The proper distinction is between logical and non-logical thought.”<sup>51</sup> Applied to the modern debate over intelligent design, Lewis’s point means that the debate cannot be decided by drawing arbitrary lines between science and other disciplines.

### **7. Intelligent design is anti-science because it violates the scientific consensus.**

INTELLIGENT DESIGN is frequently attacked as “anti-science,” a charge that usually is based on no more than the bare fact that intelligent design proponents disagree with key parts of Darwinian theory. Since Darwinian theory is the “consensus view of science,” challenging it makes one “anti-science.” QED. The ridiculousness of this argument has been addressed already: If one follows the logic to its conclusion, Darwin himself would have to be declared anti-science for challenging the scientific consensus of his own day. So would Galileo. So would Einstein. As pre-

viously discussed in chapters 1, 4, and 6, Lewis provides an antidote to this kind of complaint by pointing out that the science of any given era may be driven more by larger cultural attitudes than the weight of the evidence. Lewis also had a keen appreciation for the radical changeability of science.<sup>52</sup> Thus, scientific beliefs cannot be regarded as sacrosanct, and those who challenge them should not be regarded as enemies of science any more than those who challenge at elections the existing party in control of government should be regarded as enemies of representative democracy. What is required in science is a robust exchange of ideas, not efforts to suppress legitimate debate. Hence, it is not an adequate refutation of intelligent design (or any other idea) to label it “anti-science” merely because it challenges the existing consensus.

#### **FOLLOWING THE ARGUMENT WHEREVER IT LEADS**

C. S. LEWIS WAS A literary scholar, not a scientist, and so he did not feel it was his place to enter too deeply into the scientific debates of his own era. He also cautioned Christians about relying too heavily on the findings of science for their apologetics. After all, the findings of science are in a constant state of flux. At the same time, as C. John Collins explained in chapter 5, Lewis was willing to draw on the insights of science in his own apologetics. Perhaps more importantly, Lewis urged Christians with a scientific aptitude to keep up with the science of their day because “[w]e have to answer the current scientific attitude towards Christianity, not the attitude which scientists adopted one hundred years ago.” He further encouraged Christians to write books about science that would counter the materialist worldview implicitly by presenting “perfectly honest” science.<sup>53</sup>

Most important of all, Lewis was a consistent champion of following an argument wherever it might lead, without placing artificial barriers to the consideration of new ideas. Many people do not realize just how much Lewis modeled this principle in his own life, or how he encouraged students to adopt the credo as their own. A good example is his role in founding the Socratic Club at Oxford University. From 1942 until he

left for Cambridge University in 1954, Lewis served as President of the club, a weekly gathering of students and scholars devoted to living out the injunction of Socrates to “follow the argument wherever it led them,” especially in debating the truth or falsity of Christianity.<sup>54</sup> “We never claimed to be impartial,” remembered Lewis. “But argument is. It has a life of its own. No man can tell where it will go.”<sup>55</sup>

The Oxford Socratic Club likely had a profound effect on many students, but no more so than on one regular attendee who later recalled that “the Socratic principle I saw exemplified there—of following the evidence wherever it may lead—increasingly became a guiding principle in the development, refinement, and sometimes reversal of my own philosophical views.”<sup>56</sup>

The attendee in question was a young Antony Flew, who went on to play an important role in legitimizing the contemporary debate over intelligent design. Eventually becoming one of the most noted atheist philosophers in academia, Flew startled the world in 2004 by publicly renouncing his atheism in favor of a belief in God (although not Christianity).<sup>57</sup> Following the credo he had seen embodied by Lewis’s Socratic Club, Flew had continued to follow the evidence until it led him to a complete change of mind.

Flew credited new scientific evidence for intelligent design as a key reason for his conversion. As he told one interviewer in 2004, “I think the argument to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it.”<sup>58</sup> Flew’s reading had included books by intelligent design theorists Michael Behe and William Dembski, and he was especially influenced by the argument for design based on the biological information encoded in DNA.<sup>59</sup>

In the end, Lewis’s greatest contribution to the intelligent design debate may have been his steadfast insistence to Flew—and many others—that they should pursue an argument wherever it might lead. That insistence inspired Flew to consider seriously new evidence for intelligent design despite the prejudices of the existing intellectual establishment. And the evidence changed his mind.

As Lewis said, an argument “has a life of its own. No man can tell where it will go.”

### ENDNOTES

1. C. S. Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of Lyrics*, edited by Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1984); also available online at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2003>, accessed June 23, 2012.
2. “I: Satan Speaks,” *ibid.*, 3.
3. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 65.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Pascal, quoted in C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 13.
6. Lewis to Dom Bede Griffiths, Dec. 20, 1946, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), vol., II, 747.
7. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 65.
8. The phrase is Tennyson’s, but one can hear echoes of it in Lewis’s poem “Ode for New Year’s Day”: “For Nature will not pity, nor the red God lend an ear.” C. S. Lewis, “VIII: Ode for New Year’s Day,” *Spirits in Bondage*, 14. For Tennyson’s line see “In Memoriam A. H. H.” (1850), Canto 56, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.online-literature.com/donne/718/>.
9. See Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 7, 16, 152–158. What I am describing here as the argument from natural beauty is one part of Lewis’s larger argument from “joy.” For a helpful overview of the development of this argument, see Kathryn Lindskoog, *Finding the Landlord: A Guidebook to C. S. Lewis’s Pilgrim’s Regress* (Chicago: Cornerstone Press, 1995), xiii–xxv; also see Lewis, “Surprised by Joy;” Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, revised and expanded edition, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 3–19.
10. “XXVI: Song,” Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage*, 50.
11. See Lewis to Dom Bede Griffiths; C. S. Lewis, “De Futilitate,” in *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 65–67, 69–70.
12. See C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, 1960 edition (New York: Macmillan, 1978), especially, 12–24; Lewis, “De Futilitate,” 57–71; Lewis, “Religion without Dogma?” in *God in the Dock*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 129–146.
13. C. S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, revised and expanded edition (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 90; also see C. S. Lewis, “Modern Man and His Categories of Thought,” *Present Concerns*, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 63–64.
14. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?,” 90.
15. Lewis, “Two Lectures,” *God in the Dock*, 211.
16. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?,” 91.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Michael L. Peterson, “C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design,” *Perspectives on Science and the Christian Faith* 62, no. 4 (December 2010): 253–266; Michael L. Peter-

- son, "C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design," [www.biologos.org](http://www.biologos.org) (April 2011), accessed May 18, 2012, [http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/peterson\\_scholarly\\_essay.pdf](http://biologos.org/uploads/projects/peterson_scholarly_essay.pdf).
19. Peterson, "C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design" (2010), 255.
  20. C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 133.
  21. Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996); William Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999). In contrast to Peterson's outdated citations to books and articles by intelligent design proponents, he cites several books from recent years attacking intelligent design. See Peterson, "C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design" (2010), note 13, 265.
  22. Stephen C. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell: DNA and the Evidence for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperOne, 2009). In the BioLogos version of Peterson's article, the inaccurate reference to Meyer's book has been corrected.
  23. Peterson, "C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design" (2010), 254.
  24. James E. Horigan, *Chance or Design?* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1979); Charles B. Thaxton, Walter L. Bradley, and Roger L. Olsen, *The Mystery of Life's Origin* (Dallas: Lewis and Stanley, 1992 [second printing]); Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1985).
  25. See Jonathan Witt, "A Brief History of the Scientific Theory of Intelligent Design," accessed June 23, 2012, <http://www.discovery.org/a/3207>.
  26. Michael Behe, "The Modern Intelligent Design Hypothesis," *Philosophia Christi*, 3, series 2, no. 1 (2001): 165.
  27. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology*, 248.
  28. Peterson, "C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design" (2010), 256.
  29. *Ibid.*, 254.
  30. *Ibid.*
  31. For discussion of these arguments by scholars supporting intelligent design, see Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay Richards, *The Privileged Planet: How Our Place in the Cosmos is Designed for Discovery* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2004), and Stephen Meyer, "A Scientific History and Philosophical Defense of the Theory of Intelligent Design" (2008), accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.discovery.org/a/7471>.
  32. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology*, 250.
  33. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, 5.
  34. Answer to the question "Is intelligent design theory incompatible with evolution?," *Top Questions*, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.discovery.org/csc/topQuestions.php>.
  35. For documentation of the fact that Darwinian evolution is supposed to be unguided and lacking in foresight, see discussion in chapter 6 in addition to West, *Darwin's Conservatives: The Misguided Quest* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2006), 13–17; and West, "Nothing New Under the Sun: Theistic Evolution, the Early Church, and the Return of Gnosticism, Part 1," in Jay Richards, editor, *God and Evolution: Protestants, Catholics, and Jews Explore Darwin's Challenge to Faith* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2010), 38–40.

36. Peterson, "C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design" (2010), 259.
37. Peterson, "C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design" (2010), 257, 259.
38. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell*, especially 150–172, 324–348; and Meyer, "A Scientific History," 11–17.
39. Meyer, "A Scientific History," 27–28; also see Wells, "Darwin of the Gaps," *God and Evolution*, 121–122.
40. Wells, "Darwin of the Gaps," 128.
41. See Casey Luskin, "Vestigial Arguments about Vestigial Organs Appear in Proposed Texas Teaching Materials," *Evolution News and Views*, June 20, 2011, accessed May 19, 2012, [http://www.evolutionnews.org/2011/06/vestigial\\_arguments\\_about\\_vest047341.html](http://www.evolutionnews.org/2011/06/vestigial_arguments_about_vest047341.html); David Klinghoffer, "Looks Like the Appendix Isn't a 'Junk Body Part' After All," *Evolution News and Views*, Jan. 4, 2012, accessed May 19, 2012, [http://www.evolutionnews.org/2012/01/now\\_its\\_the\\_app054761.html](http://www.evolutionnews.org/2012/01/now_its_the_app054761.html); Jonathan Wells, *The Myth of Junk DNA* (Seattle: Discovery Institute Press, 2011).
42. Kathryn Applegate, "Self-Assembly of the Bacterial Flagellum: No Intelligence Required," *The BioLogos Forum*, August 19, 2010, accessed June 23, 2012, <http://biologos.org/blog/self-assembly-of-the-bacterial-flagellum-no-intelligence-required/>.
43. Meyer, *Signature in the Cell*.
44. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?," 90–91.
45. Lewis, "The Funeral of a Great Myth," *Christian Reflections*, 90.
46. Lewis, "Two Lectures," 211.
47. Lewis, *Miracles*, 58–59.
48. *Ibid.*, 106.
49. *Ibid.*, 65.
50. Lewis, "De Futilitate," 61.
51. *Ibid.*, 62.
52. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," *God in the Dock*, 92; Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 219–223.
53. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," 93.
54. "The Founding of the Oxford Socratic Club," *God in the Dock*, 126.
55. *Ibid.*, 128.
56. Antony Flew with Roy Abraham Varghese, *There Is a God* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 42.
57. "Lifelong Atheist Changes Mind about Divine Creator," *The Washington Times*, Dec. 9, 2004, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/dec/9/20041209-113212-2782r/?page=all>.
58. Antony Flew interview with Gary Habermas for the journal *Philosophia Christi* (Winter 2004), accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.biola.edu/antonyflew/page2.cfm>.
59. Gene Edward Veith, "Flew the Coop," *World*, Dec. 25, 2004, accessed June 25, 2012, <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/10094>. In addition to Behe and Dembski, Flew was heavily influenced by intelligent-design-friendly physicist Gerald Schroeder. On the design implications of DNA, he cited an article by Discovery Institute Senior Fel-

low David Berlinski. See Flew, *There Is a God*, 127. It should be noted that Michael Peterson in his article wrongly implies that Flew's conversion was either not connected to intelligent design or even hostile to it. Michael Peterson, "C. S. Lewis on Evolution and Intelligent Design" (2010), 255, 259.