The Watchmaker

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Imagine you are walking on a beach. Warm sand beneath your feet, hot sun on your back. You can hear the ocean waves and the cry of the seagulls flying above you. As you scan the sand for seashells or driftwood, a glint of silver catches your eye. It is a pocket watch, half buried in the sand.

Had the sunlight caught a wet shell or some washed up kelp, you might naturally assume it arrived there by random forces of nature. The watch, however, speaks of design and assembly, of ownership and use. The watch was not just swept together by the sea. It is a piece of precision engineering, treasured by someone, and its appearance on the beach is out of place.

Evidence of Design

As the philosopher, William Paley, pointed out in his original Watchmaker Analogy, '...every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation'[1]. His argument, known as the Teleological Argument, is simply that anything showing evidence of design implies evidence of a designer. Creation shows evidence of design, therefore creation contains evidence of a designer.

The Teleological Argument

This argument for the existence of God has been around for thousands of years. In the 4th century BC, the philosopher Socrates asked, 'Do you not think then that he who created man from the beginning had some useful end in view?' He went on to describe the evidence of design in the human body: the nose to smell, eyes to see, ears to hear. He applauded how all these 'portals of ingress' are arranged together, while the passage by which the body expels waste is mercifully in a 'hindward direction', away from the nose. He asked, 'When you see all these things constructed with such show of foresight can you doubt whether they are products of chance or intelligence?'[2]

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Today we see even more than Socrates ever imagined. He looked at the body from the outside, we can look at the inside. Consider our DNA with its code that tells every cell exactly how to behave. Or the irreducible complexity of those living cells, with their systems and processes, engines and vehicles, each playing its part to perfection. All evidence of design.

The Heavens Declare

The famous Roman writer, Cicero, in the 1st century BC, pointed to space for his teleological argument. 'For when we gaze upward to the sky and contemplate the heavenly bodies, what can be so obvious and so manifest as that there must exist some power possessing transcendent intelligence by whom these things are ruled?'[3] In this way, he agreed with the Psalmist David, who wrote, 'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.' (Psalm 19:1)

In modern times, it is this appeal to the universe around us that has often been used to make the argument from purposeful design. The earth sits in a wonderful "Goldilocks Zone", a finely tuned habitable space within the galaxy, outside of which life as we know it could not exist. Our large neighbouring planets keep us from being bombarded by space matter. The tilt of earth's orbit gives us seasons. Earth's moon determines the ocean tides. Our relative size and distance from the moon and sun is why we can see perfect solar eclipses. This distance also affects the water cycle. Any closer to the sun and most water would boil. Any further away and most water on earth would freeze.

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In 2009, NASA launched the Kepler Space Telescope to discover other planets similar to earth. They expected to find a huge number. But, while several thousand candidate planets were identified, only a small handful come close to being earth-like, and none enjoy the same conditions as our home. Our planet is truly unique in the universe.

The Creator God

Sir Isaac Newton, the father of modern science, would sometimes sign his work with the Latin phrase, 'God created everything by number, weight and measure'. He understood the earth is not only designed and created, it is also fine-tuned by its Creator. The Bible confirms this view. As the Psalmist wrote, 'You knit me together … Marvellous are Your works!' (Psalm 139:13,14).

However, our ability to recognise design in nature is often hampered because we are told repeatedly that nothing and no one created the world we see. We are told creation only has 'the appearance of design', and that actually natural processes brought everything together through unguided chance and random mutation. Here we return to the watchmaker. It might be possible to calculate the odds at which a watch could assemble itself if the right pieces were shaken together in a jar. What is impossible, however, is that all those pieces would appear in that jar spontaneously, without any designer present (see The Chicken or the Egg).

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Now consider which is more probable: that the pieces of the watch, having been provided, were assembled by chance or by the One who provided them? This is the essence of the teleological argument. As a stand-alone argument, it only shows us that a god-type being is probable. Used alongside the Cosmological Argument, it builds a very strong case for God. Whether that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would depend on what you believe about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

The Bible describes God as the one who created the earth with His hands. It describes a God who planned everything out before time began and then does it. The evidence of design in creation is overwhelming. It was not random processes that caused the wonderful artistry we see around us. It is not a coincidence. It is evidence of the designer. It is the fingerprint of God.

[1]Natural Theology, Chapter III, by William Paley (1809 AD)

[2]Memorabilia, Book I, IV, by Xenophon (370s BC)

[3]De Natura Deorum, Vol. XIX, II, by Cicero (45 BC)