

Assess the view that the design argument provides a convincing proof for the existence of God.

(25 marks)

The design argument can be used by theists, to provide evidence to support the existence of God, although there are many issues surrounding the validity of this theory. The basic argument consists of five main points, each of which can be used to suggest the need for a designer. It is the fact that these points merely suggest there is a designer, yet many theist philosophers leap from this, to the idea of the designer being God, which causes friction surrounding the argument.

Firstly, there are regularities in the behaviour of world, and laws of nature seem to be a true and regular concept most of the time. This suggests the world contains order and structure. An example of this can be seen with the formation of the human body, and how such a complex structure is created in a set way, each and every time. Swinburne believes in 'design qua regularity', meaning he believes that due to the design evident in the world, there must be a designer. Furthermore, he believed that the designer must be external, to enable him to impose this regularity without being part of it – the only being external to our world, which we know of, is God. So, for Swinburne, the evidence of regularity can support the idea of there being a God.

On the other hand, Hume argues that the design argument fails because far from showing order, the universe displays many instances of disorder. This is a direct contradiction to Swinburne's idea of an ordered world. However, one can find many reasons for this disorder, to actually strengthen the design argument. Firstly, the disorder experienced may just be 'blips' in the structured system, from which nature reorders itself. A prime example of this is a storm – the event itself may be seen as showing disorder, however, it may just be nature's way of rebalancing the atmosphere. Also, the disorder may be part of the overall plan – such as freewill – which is all relative. Finally, this argument doesn't suggest that God still intervenes with the world, so therefore even if God did designed the world, that doesn't stop external factors from affecting it, which could explain the instances of disorder Hume was commenting upon.

Also, it is easy for one to see that the universe is more than a simply orderly structure – rather it features some things that are just beneficial, not necessary. These beneficial concepts vary from the feelings one experiences when 'in love' to the positive affect a beautiful landscape can have upon each of us. Thus, the world has been formed in such a way as to make our life more pleasant and enjoyable. Paley argued that as the world has been designed to enhance the quality of life, for mankind, the designer must have been very loving. The classical idea of God is that he is benevolent; therefore he is the only being that fits the requirements of the designer.

One also notices that objects within the universe seem to be working towards an end purpose, much like the fact 'humans are goal orientated' (1) beings. The human eye displays this kind of purpose, as it not only allows us to live comfortably and to appreciate the world around us, but is also acts as a gateway to the human soul, displaying our emotions and granting us a sense of perspective. Therefore, the eye has a definite, although varied, set of purposes, which it has been designed to fulfil. Aquinas had a 'design qua purpose' view to the design argument. He believed that when looking at the world, a clear level of design is

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evident and that everything within the world has a function – even when this purpose is unknown. Aquinas believed that these things carried out their function simply because they are designed that way. Thus, as everything is working towards an end purpose, God must be the ‘driving force’ <sup>(2)</sup> behind the world.

Furthermore, most scientists are now happy to agree that the chances of the universe of being created, and then evolving, in the way that it has, by random chance or chaos is so small that its not worth calculating. This idea of probability can be seen in the instance of a storm. For a storm to have occur, all the elements with regards the atmosphere, have to correct – one could argue that the chances of this happening randomly are so slim that this provides evidence to support the idea of a designer.

However, Hume argued that the world could have come about from a time of disorder, which would somehow explain the evident order within the world. However, Tennant would respond to this by accepting that a chaotic cause for the universe may have been possible, although the chance of all the conditions being right for human life – particularly the evidence of beneficial things, to enhance intelligent life – happening through chaos is incredibly unlikely.

Finally, the way the world manages to sustain itself, whilst also providing the ideal environment for human life to exist and flourish, displays the delicate balance the world is in. The forest, for example, co-exists alongside humans to maintain the balance of carbon dioxide and oxygen in the atmosphere. One could argue that this balance must have been purposefully designed. Tennant proposes the ‘anthropic principle’, which follows the assumption that the world has been made ‘for the development of intelligent life’ <sup>(3)</sup>, and provides the essential provisions to sustain such life. Tennant goes on to suggest that God designed the world, as it is; so that intelligent life can exist to sustain the world.

Hume’s main criticism is that the argument from design proves the need for a designer, but fails to prove the need for that designer to be God. This is basically highlighting the leap many theist philosophers take when deciding that the designer must be God. Conversely, as Paley stated, the only being we know of, who is benevolent, omnipotent and external is God – so as there is no one else we know of who could be the designer, we should except that the designer is probably God.

Additionally, one of Hume’s proposals was that the designer needn’t be incorporeal, and instead asked, ‘why can it not be a perfect human?’ So, Hume rejects the idea of an omnipotent, external designer, in favour of a being we can relate to as humans. However, this argument is easily counter-criticised. A perfect human, by definition, cannot exist and even if a human did have the power to create the universe, this idea can be rejected, as it would suggest that all humans would share this power – which clearly we do not. Another major flaw with this criticism is that the world came about long before mankind developed, so how could a human have created it?

One of Hume’s weakest flaws relates to the idea that it is too simplistic to compare the universe to a machine, as Paley did. However, one can easily argue that Hume has misunderstood this comparison. A watch is, indeed, a simplistic mechanism, however, despite this, it required a designer. Yet, the world is so much more complex that it is unimaginable to suggest that it could have come about without the intervention of a designer.

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Finally, Hume rejected the idea of there being just one designer, in favour of there being multiple designers. However, the principle of 'Ockham's Razor' can be taken into account to counter-criticise Hume. This principle basically rejects the idea of overcomplicating an issue, in this case, by increasing the number of designers - and thus Gods – needed to create the universe, particularly as one God, by definition, is capable of creating the world independently.

To conclude, I believe the design argument is relatively successful in providing convincing proof for the existence of God. Although an atheist, like Hume, can easily come up with a number of criticisms of the argument, it is equally as easily to find enough evidence to dismiss these criticisms. However, the idea that this argument merely proves the need for a designer is understandable, as scholars have to make a leap in order to include God in the argument. Therefore, one could say this is an incomplete theory and it thus fails to conclusively prove the existence of a God.

- (1) 'Primary Evidence' handout.
  - (2) 'Aquinas – a classical...' handout.
  - (3) 'Versions of the Design...' handout.
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