

### **Outline the teleological proof of the existence of God**

There is a problem that arises when talking about God, e.g. “I love my dog, and my dog loves me.” There is a flaw in this statement as you would not be able to ask my dog in conversation about its love for me because the only being that we have the capacity of talking to is each other (humans). So if I were to say, “I love God, God loves me.” I reach a brick wall with this statement and I will show you in this essay that it could be possible to try and give proof of God’s existence using the teleological argument. The word Teleological comes from the Greek word “telos”, which means end or purpose.

The question of design provides a strong argument because the arguments start from the world, so they start from experience to argue in favour of God’s existence, so the argument is an a posteriori. The argument also holds order, regularity and purpose that can be observed in the universe. This kind of complexity could show proof of design. There are two main examples of design put forward by William Paley and Thomas Aquinas.

There are several versions of the design argument and maybe the most re-noun is the idea that Paley gives us about the watch with the use of analogy. Paley was a bishop who one day stumbled across a stone and then across a pocket watch whilst walking in a heath. This was around the time when pocket watches were first introduced and Paley had a fascination of how all of the cogs and bolts and tiny screws all intertwined into one to make the watch tick, he thought of the beauty and sophistication of the watch and that these traits must be a reflection of the maker, designer. Then he looked at nature, he found it amazing that such a complex thing could come to be there, how could such a thing of beauty come about from pure chance? He concluded that there must be a great designer of nature, God. Even if we did not know the purpose of the watch, we would still see that there is evidence of design. If we look at a watch, then we know that there must be complex design because it would be almost impossible for something like that to come about purely from chance. Behe, a professor of science, said that the idea of our universe coming about purely from chance is a bit like “a whirlwind passing through a hanger full of scrap and forming a Boeing 747”.

P Johnson tried to develop a Design argument of his own. He was unconvinced of Darwin’s theory of evolution and said that the sciences exclude the supernatural and almost rejects religion as a whole. He thought that in every culture there is a creation story, and in our modern culture, he says that Darwin’s theory of evolution is our creation myth. The problem Johnson had with Darwin’s evolution theory was that some single celled organisms are just too complex to say that they were just a product of pure chance.

Behe develops this idea by using an example of a bacterium’s biological motor. He explains that this motor is used to propel the bacterium forward and has about 50 different tiny parts to it and if one of these tiny parts were to be removed then the motor would cease to work. Professor Dembski would say about this that there must therefore be some kind of greater intelligence to allow something with that much complexity. Conclusively this shows more scientific proof of a greater designer also with the use of logic.

Simon Conway Morris, a Professor of evolutionary science at Cambridge said, "We still can't understand how evolution itself has evolved". This is encouraging because even scientists can not outright say the teleological argument is false because there is no way of proving it wrong.

Aquinas is a huge part of the debate because this argument features in his book, Summa Theologica (a 2.5 million word book on the proof of God's existence) as the fifth of his five ways of proving God. He said that non-intelligent objects and things produce beneficial order and require an intelligent being to bring it about, a being such as God. He says that all things are made by god, so everything is made with a purpose and order, it has therefore been designed. A good example of this is the human eye and any other eye for that fact because many creatures have evolved from different generations of animals but have developed a method of seeing in a very similar way.

A good way of explaining how God could be the great designer would be to think of an arrow and a target. The arrow has a purpose. It has an intelligence (of sorts) because an intelligent being has fired it. The direction must be from an external source, from God to the universe. The archer would give it a final cause and purpose and direction, God made everything good. The archer (God) would aim to some sort of goal (the target). As the target in itself has no mind of its own, God gives the final purpose.

The Argument is an ancient argument that stretches from ancient Greek Philosophy with people like Cicero, Plato and Socrates, all the way through history to people like Behe. The argument has been debated for about 2500 years and still there seems to be no settlement for the argument.

The question of design seems to cohere with our everyday life and experiences of the world and universe. It is, as Conway Morris (atheist) puts very fittingly, "evolution is almost eerily well suited", which would pose a question to whether everything is just a product of chance or there is structure to everything. Design seems to fit in quite well with science in this case because it has been scientists such as Behe and Dembski that have discovered the amazing complexity of evolution.

### **Do the strengths outweigh the weaknesses of the argument?**

One of the greatest weaknesses of the teleological argument is that fact that Paley uses analogy to explain the proof of God. He makes it unclear if he refers to the whole universe when talking about the watch, or just very small aspects of it.

Hume says that when talking about the universe, you would have to look at the universe as a whole, outside of it. Also we don't know of any other universes so we don't know how a universe would be designed and concludes that you can't make a leap of logic from how it would be designed to the universe's actuality.

David Hume, a 17<sup>th</sup> century critique argued against Paley's argument even before Paley came up with the argument for design. As he worked for the Church he would never directly criticise the teachings of the Church but do it discretely by the use of things like dialogues. In this case he used a dialogue

to try and shatter the argument to “*reductio ad absurdum*”. In his dialogue he had three characters, Philo, Cleanthes and Demea. Cleanthes, who believed in God and argues *a posteriori* to God, would be challenged by Philo, who is actually Hume will argue against design. Cleanthes said that all design necessarily implies a designer, so therefore a great design like the universe would imply a great designer like God. The universe is designed like a great machine so therefore there must be a great designer of the universe. This argument is very similar to Paley’s approach, but it seems to me that his argument is a very unsatisfying answer. So Philo (Hume) reduced this argument to absurdity by saying that there could be possibly be more than one god. Male and female maybe, even a whole society of gods that could be born and eventually die. There could be even institutions of gods learning how to make a universe and that ours was a “rude attempt of some infant deity who then abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance”. So basically if we look at all of the imperfections of the world, we would stop to think that if the world had been designed then, had it been designed very well?

This is a good criticism because it shows that there is logical inconsistency within the argument itself, the flaw in analogy itself.

Hume’s second argument that Philo presents to Cleanthes is that, there is defiantly order in the universe, but order does not necessarily lead to an assumption of design. He says that the universe is probable that it was a result of chance and that matter is everlasting. So therefore there is an infinite number of possibilities for certain things to happen. So this is a very strong argument for evolution being the answer for all life. This is a strong criticism because later on Darwin and his theory of evolution support it and here Hume points out that there is a logical jump in Paley’s argument that doesn’t actually have to be made.

John Stuart Mill said that due to the sheer amount of evil in the universe such as disease and natural disasters, he came to the conclusion that God cant be both omnipotent and benevolent but just benevolent. This argument is devastating because Mill himself comes from a religious background so it would shake himself as a person because it is damaging to his own faith.

Darwin’s challenge is that natural selection can account for the diversity of the universe and just by looking at somewhere like the Amazon rainforest where there are tens of millions of different kinds of plants. His theory can almost answer the question for how things seem to be without the idea of a designer God. Now it would even seem foolish and even socially unacceptable that someone would not buy into the idea of evolution because the evidence is so great. Darwin’s theory also backs up Hume’s earlier point about the rich diversity of life but also points out similarities that could be traced for many generations through the use of palaeobiology right back to single celled organisms. But this argument hits a brick wall because as Conway Morris said himself, “we don’t understand what evolution (things like single celled organisms) evolved from”. However, the argument from incredible complexity (Behe) suggests that some bacteria exhibit complexity that cannot be explained by natural selection alone. But Conway Morris said on the BBC Radio 4 programme: *In Our Time*, that “there is still a chance that science can prove evolution.”

Richard Dawkins, a professor of biology at Oxford supports Darwin's theory of natural selection and says that we are no more than a product of everlasting evolving genes that blindly (hence the name of his book 'The Blind Watchmaker') mutate to survive. He says that everything in the universe is just down to pure chance rather than such a thing like design. This is a good criticism because he used pure scientific evidence and reinforces Darwin's theory. If Richard Dawkins were to be asked by a critique of his work, like Paley for instance, he would say "A mystery? Maybe, but we just have to work on it!" This is a similar statement to Conway Morris and is another unsatisfying answer for a question that these scientists are so sure is correct.

Hume has made many criticisms but they seem to be flawed in some ways. He says that we should compare the universe to something like an animal but an argument could be made that the universe is not like an animal but something far greater. He said that if we can't see something then it isn't worth talking about. He then is almost inferring that there is chance of design, which could contradict his argument greatly.

I think that given all this evidence for and against God and the Design argument, they must all be considered before a decision should be made. Paley and Aquinas present the argument very skilfully but its flaws are exploited by the likes of Mill, Darwin, Dawkins and Hume. I can't say that the strengths outweigh the weaknesses because they balance each other out too much to make a valid judgement.