

Is the Teleological Argument strong?

The Teleological Argument is an a posteriori inductive argument which was put forward in many forms by ancient philosophers such as Plato and Cicero to the more modern philosophers and theologians such as Aquinas and Paley. It is an argument to prove the existence of God. The name of the argument comes from Greek "telos" which means purpose or aim. Aquinas's argument which was in his Summa may be summed up in this way:

1. All designed things have a designer
2. The Universe is designed
3. Therefore it has a designer, this designer is God

This argument, as seen from point one and three, is begging the question (in other words, it is a circular argument). This makes it weak because it has already asserted one of its premises in the conclusion. It is as though he is saying that "it's true because it is true". This isn't sufficient enough for a sound argument. Also, Aquinas doesn't provide any justification for the second point. These points make it look like it's a very weak argument.

However points can be given for the universe being designed, such as the seasons and death. This point however can be combated by saying that the universe, may indeed, have some features of a design but there are many which show that it doesn't have design, for instance the fact some women have ectopic pregnancies.

The fact that it is an inductive argument means that it is not necessarily true, it is contingent (may not be true) and is not as strong as something that is necessarily true. However, deductive arguments never tell us anything new about the world, which unlike inductive arguments which although may not be necessarily true, do tell us something new. However, the question (about the strength of the argument), should not be subject to our preference of knowing more about the world. So, the fact that it is not necessarily true does weaken the argument.

The argument is also a posteriori, this gives room for Scepticism (which doubts the external world) to weaken the argument. Scepticism says that we can never have knowledge of the external world which means the 'order' or 'purpose' we see in the world can also be doubted. As Descartes put it, the only thing that is infallible was your own mind (this clearly illustrated when he said "I think therefore I am"). How do we know that order, purpose and beauty in the world isn't the working of an Evil Demon?

David Hume, the British Empiricist, raised objections to the teleological argument which was put forward by Paley however his objections can be used against Aquinas's argument too. Hume's first objection was that we can not assess whether a universe was designed because we have no experience of universe being designed or built. When you stumble upon a house you know whether it is good or not through experience of other houses, you can not say this about the universe because it is unique. Therefore, how can we determine it is a well designed universe? Hume's second objection is that it is a farce to liken the universe to something mechanical because the universe Hume then goes on to say that "When we infer any particular cause from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and can never be allowed to ascribe to the cause any qualities, but what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect." This means that just because it may

prove a designer, doesn't mean that we can label the designer with such titles such as omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent.

The question now is, are Hume's objections valid? The first objection is saying that we can not know something if we had not experienced it and it is unique, however, we have not seen the human race being created and it is unique yet we have many anthropologists and more importantly we are actually finding more and more about universe through the studies done by cosmologists. His second objection, which was combated by Swinburne, can not possibly be true because the order the universe has

In conclusion, the Teleological Argument is strong because the first two objections that were put forward by Hume have been combated by Swinburne and do not hold up. However, Hume's third objection still holds, this makes the argument weaker because it shows that the argument does not fulfil its purpose (to show God's existence – the definition being of a Judeo-Christian God). The objection that it is an inductive, argument does not hold because although it makes it less likely to be true, that does not mean that is not true. Also, the fact that it is a posteriori, may mean that scepticism can doubt it but the common sense approach (put forward by Wittgenstein) says that we should not be affected by such things. Wittgenstein says "Here is one hand, and here is another" and that is proof enough.