

The Design Argument for the Existence of God

1) Outline the Design Argument for the existence of God

The Design Argument for the existence of God also called the teleological argument makes the basic assumption that there is order and design in our universe, which everything fits together and all things function to fulfil a specific purpose. The key idea associated with design arguments are that God's existence can be argued for, by the way things in the world are structured, or that the world cannot have come to be the way it is through the course of chance, but by a great designer - God (the God of classical theism.) The Design argument is concerned with showing that God is the Creator of the world; the basic argument for design is:

The universe has order, purpose and regularity
The complexity of the universe shows evidence of design
Such design implies a designer
The designer of the universe is God.

It is argued that such design cannot come about by chance and can only be explained with reference to an intelligent, great designer. It is possible to demonstrate this by drawing an analogy between the works of human design and the works of nature, concluding that there are sufficient similarities to infer design of a similar nature. This is illustrated particularly well through the famous analogy by William Paley comparing the world to a watch. However it is also agreed to be on a different scale; due to the fact that the works of nature are far greater than the works of man. Therefore the designer of nature and the world is infinitely greater than the designer of for example a watch. This point is made particularly by the philosophers Hume and Kant.

The design argument is an a posteriori argument, which means that it is based on observation of the apparent order in the universe and the natural world. Socrates an ancient Greek philosopher gave an excellent quote to summarise this point. ***“With such signs of forethought in the design of living creatures, can you doubt they are the work of choice or design?”***

The design argument can be split into two main parts. The first is Design qua Regularity which looks at design in relation to the order and regularity in the universe. The second is Design qua Purpose which looks at the evidence for design in relation to the ways in which the parts of the universe appear to fit together for a specific function.

2) What are the strengths of the design argument?

The design argument cannot be argued in any instance to be a weak argument; history runs with the argument showing that philosophers as early as the ancient Greeks like Socrates in around 300BC discussed the teleological argument. This argument has continued through the 12th century by Aquinas and on into the 17th century. Still no philosopher has been able to truly abolish this argument so it has carried on with Paley in the 17th century and on with Brown in the 19th century where it still has not managed to be ruled out. Philosophers to this day like Vardy are arguing it; therefore this perennial argument which comes up year after year is in its self a strength.

William Paley in his book called Natural Theology offers possibly the most famous analogy for the existence of God through the teleological argument. His analogy is between a watch and the world, his argument was design qua purpose. If we were to come across a watch, we would be able to conclude that it shows all the marks of contrivance and design. We would take the accurate assumption that it was not made through chance, but designed by a watchmaker. In this same way we can look at the world and our universe, that it has been designed, by a great designer – God. Therefore this is a clear outline of the design of the world being proof of God. Vardy wrote in his book (The puzzle of God) about Paley's argument that we should notice from this analogy that we do not need to know the purpose of the watch or the universe in order to infer a designer, simply that the design implies a designer. This analogy is a definite strength of the argument; it offers clarity and makes its point by relating the world to something more manageable to imagine which we can relate to. Paley is not the only philosopher who has used an analogy to describe their viewpoint. Aquinas and Hume have also used effective analogies clarifying their argument.

The teleological argument is an a posteriori argument. This means that the design argument can only be known to be true or false by reference to experience, to how things actually are in the world. This means that one bases their opinion on what they can see, touch, hear etc... That one can rely on their own senses, this a posteriori argument means that everything around us is evidence for the design argument its tangible. For example the food chains throughout the animal kingdom. They all show incredible example of purpose for how sustainable it is and that from this order each can live of another. It shows incredible design, and that it is not by chance that these food chains operate; after all you wouldn't find a cat trying to eat a dog instead of a cat if it got hungry. The cat would follow its instincts designed for it and look for a mouse. It is a great strength for the design argument that its characteristic then, is the logical foundation upon which it is built. This makes it easy and straight forward for people to understand; it follows logical thinking.

Contrary to what might be believed, the design argument does not need to reject the principles of evolution in order to claim a designing God. However theistic supporters of evolution argue that scientific principles alone are not sufficient to explain how evolution led to the perfectly balanced natural order that prevails. This is the anthropic principle, which proposes that the reason and purpose of the cosmos' existence is the support of human life. ***“it almost seems as if the universe must in some sense have known we were coming.”*** – Freeman Dyson. This principle is a definite strength of the Teleological argument, especially because it runs with science, and explains what science cannot. The anthropic principle is a recent development of the teleological argument. The principle makes the point that if there had been just a minute change in the values of, for instance, the stronger nuclear force of the charge of the electron, then intelligent life, or any form of life at all would have been almost entirely unlikely to develop. This planning that seems so apparent for the existence of intelligent life cannot be accounted for, by physical laws alone since there are innumerable ways that electrons could run. There must be more than physical laws to account for the tremendously high improbability of life. This point is one of A.E.Taylor's points. F.R.Tennant in his writings 'Philosophical Theology' agrees with the anthropic principle stating that the cosmos is constructed for the development of human life and this could not have happened by chance. This agrees with Dyson's argument.

Tennant also postulates the aesthetic principle. This is the principle that states that the universe is more than simply orderly; it possesses a natural beauty beyond that which is necessary to live. Beauty is held to have no survival value nor has human appreciation of beauty any apparent real value in helping humans to live together or to be more effectively in the environment within which they find themselves. Naturally there is a survival value in females and males finding each other attractive, but what is the survival advantage of seeing the beauty in a snowflake. These two thought provoking questions are raised by Vardy. The ability to appreciate beauty, therefore, may be held to be an indication that there is a God. Clearly this is another strength of the teleological argument the anthropic principle and the aesthetic principle both bring up questions that science cannot answer, making the point of God being the designer of the universe. This aesthetic argument shows how beauty goes beyond what is needed for human survival; it gives pleasure and reflects God's glory.