

R.S Essay

“The design argument is challenged far more by science than by philosophy.” *Discuss with specific reference to the work of Darwin and Hume.*

For many years, theologians, philosophers and scientists have been desperately trying to give evidence and prove whether or not the existence of God is accurate. Plato gave the first full articulation, in combination, of the various elements in the design argument. The synthesis was distinctly his, and the argument he offered follows directly from central themes within his own philosophical position. Ever since that moment people in the world have been developing the idea and trying every year to extract new information on the subject which will solve the mystery. According to Hume, there could never be sufficiently strong evidence to establish the existence of something that is contrary to the laws of nature. However, is Hume right? Many people think Hume, nearly three-quarters of a century before Darwin theory on ‘Evolution’, buried the design argument in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. And it is true that he offers remarkably ingenious criticism of the argument. But there are three problems that have gotten less attention than they deserve. The first is that some of his criticisms are of the design argument as support for the traditional God, loaded down with "omni-" attributes. They are weaker or not even relevant against the claim for some intelligent designer. The theory of evolution, formalized by Charles Darwin, is as much theory as is the theory of gravity, or the theory of relativity. Unlike theories of physics, biological theories, and especially evolution, have been argued long and hard in socio-political arenas. Even today, evolution is not often taught in primary schools. However, evolution is the binding force of all biological research.

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), although not the first to propose the theory of evolution, first put forward a comprehensive theoretical explanation for it in his *The Origin of Species* (1858). Based on his study of species in their own habitat, Darwin proposed that similarities between species could be explained through a common heredity - that is, that they both shared a common ancestor. For obvious reasons, this argument causes problems for believers in the design argument because it goes totally against Christian morals and beliefs. Darwin's theory removes the entire need for God and gives an explanation of the world that removes the need for him. Darwin (and Richard Dawkins afterwards) have said that natural selection is just random and is not intended and designed.

The challenges posed by Darwin in his theories of evolution and natural selection are not really that hard to answer for believers of the Design argument. They can just argue that God placed these processes on earth at the very beginning of existence and ever since there has been a kind of continuous process of design. In this way, evolution can be compatible with the Design argument and there is not really a challenge at all. Another point that a believer in the design argument could argue is that Darwin's theory just assumes that all of this stuff happened from scratch and he doesn't explain why the his theory is there is the first place. It doesn't fully explain the purpose of the universe- we've got so much good and beauty but we've also got evil. Why would a designer of a perfect world want to create something corrupt, deceitful and dangerous? If you go along with the idea that there is evil so that we can

see how special good is, then a few questions arise. Why is there so much beauty in the world? On the other side you ask yourself the question why is there so much evil as well. All in all the good and evil probably balance each other out. The fact remains that there are scientific problems with Darwinism that are quite independent of what anybody thinks of in the Bible. In addition, the doctrine of Darwinism can be shown to be a philosophical assumption not proved by scientific observation. Intelligent design includes a belief in God, Darwinism includes a belief in materialism. Both are "religious" or philosophical worldviews. Materialism did not found modern science, Theism (the belief in God) did (Pascal, Newton, Faraday, etc) There is a difference between origin science (a type of forensic science which looks into evidence for past events) and operation science (which is observation of current events).

Hume was correct in that people do demand more evidence to back up claims to have witness an extraordinary event than for an ordinary one. According to Hume, there could never be sufficiently strong evidence to establish the existence of something that is contrary to the laws of nature. But, is he right? To use Hume's words 'lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air' because we have repeatedly observed that it falls to the ground when we drop it. According to Hume himself, laws only apply to such events because of the way in which laws are established. By contrast, a miracle is a unique event and therefore cannot be judged by what we see in day-to-day life. We cannot make judgements about the probability of a unique event, i.e. God breaking into the laws of nature. Hume's argument could be used to discount events that have obviously already occurred. For example, how can we assert that Neil Armstrong did ever actually walk on the moon even though everybody knows that it must be true. Are miracles highly probable? Hume would say that they are unusual and rare but any unexpected event can be expected at certain times. It is rare for someone to climb to the top of Mt. Everest, but some people have still managed it. Hume does not even consider the extent to which belief affects one's assessment of the probability of a miracle occurring. Hume takes belief in miracles to be an expression of a rival description of how the world works. Hume asserts that a miracle is something in which God breaks into the natural order of nature and changes it's natural ways, which cause miracles to occur. So, in this way, the probability of them happening naturally is irrelevant. Hume is, after all, assuming that all religions claims to miracles should be given equal weighing. But what if one religions argument and evidence for the miraculous was much stronger than another's? Is there more historical evidence for the miracles of Buddha than of Jesus, for example? If we could establish this then Hume's criticism immediately collapses. Another thing that could be argued here is the idea that God could actually perform miracles in different religions and cultures so that everyone in the world turns to him and abides by his laws.

Hume does make some good challenges but there are still some fundamental questions left unanswered like 'who made God?' Evil is a problem in our world but we don't know if God deliberately let it into our world as a grand part of his design. Or perhaps the world was perfect at the start like the Garden of Eden but has fallen from the grace of His initial design. Hume criticises the conclusion to the argument being God of Christianity or Islam but why shouldn't there be a team of Gods? However, on the other hand, the idea of one God having made the whole world is integral to the Bible and Christian tradition whereas the idea of a team of Gods has no philosophical framework or support. The Anthropic principle (the fact that the

universe has been set up to produce us) seems to support the Design argument as well. You could say that the Design Argument is philosophically flawed as a proof but is still very good as a probability argument (Tennant). Hume shows that the argument isn't proof. It was never going to convince an atheist for the existence of God but, as part of all the cumulative evidence, it makes God's existence a lot more probable.

In conclusion, which is actually the bigger challenge science or philosophy? Darwin can't explain the goal of evolution so he doesn't get rid of the idea of the designer. So, in effect Darwin's theory can work in tandem with the Design argument. On the other hand, some say that Hume destroys the Design argument whereas others say that it is just there as evidence for people who already believe. However, should you need proof? All in all, science provides evidence against the argument whereas philosophy only provides ideas and arguments.