

## What are the strengths of the design argument for the existence of God?

Philosophers have been trying to find evidence for or against the existence of a God, and one of the oldest arguments trying to prove/ disprove this is the design argument. The classical form of the argument looks at what we can see in the world. Philosophers look at the order and balance in the world and conclude that it must be designed. They also look at the complexity of animals and human beings.

Cicero is one of the oldest philosophers who used this argument to try and prove that there was a God. He believed that the fact we can predict future astronomical events from the movement of stars and planets meant that there must be design in the world. Aquinas also used the argument to try and show design in the world. In the fifth of his 'five ways' he argued that matter combines with other matter to make new things without any communication, and so the matter must have been designed to work that way, and a design needs a designer.

Later on, in 1713 William Derham wrote books that argued that a world where everything is mutually dependant on everything else suggests design and a designer. It also suggests that because everything works together, it must all be designed by the same single designer.

However, perhaps the most important form of the classic design argument is found in William Paley's *Natural theology*. His argument can be split into two sections: the argument in regards to purpose and the argument in regards to regularity. Paley used an analogy of a watch to show how the world seems to have purpose. He argued that if we found a watch, we would see its complexity and the way it's put together and assume it had been designed for a purpose. The idea that it was designed implies a designer.

**"When we come to inspect the watch, we perceive that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose...the inference, we think, is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker"**

To argue that the world must have been designed because of its regularity, Paley looked at astronomy, the planets and Newton's laws. He believed all these laws could not have just come about by chance, but are proof of an intelligent mind who designed the world.

The classical design argument has many main strengths, as it is a good A Posteriori argument, based on things we can see and experience around us. It was accepted because people had less scientific knowledge, and the argument for design was the only explanation around. Though Hume wrote his critique of the design argument before Paley, Paley's ideas could still be accepted. It was Darwin's theory of evolution that wrecked the design argument. However, Philosophers after Darwin came up with another convincing version of the design argument.

Tennant, Swinburne and Taylor all wrote design arguments that *included* evolution as evidence for a god. They all argue that evolution, as a complex and structured process, could easily have been engineered by God. The chances of the world developing like it has, and the chance of the Big Bang creating the conditions necessary for evolution to happen are so small that the design argument has been emphasized through its happening. Taylor also argues that Darwin's theory of natural selection doesn't account for our comprehension of beauty. This is not something needed to survive. The concept of natural selection is the 'survival of the fittest' and this would not explain why we look after our sick and disabled.

The modern design argument makes it possible for science to back up religion, and the concept of design makes the chance of the world developing as it has far more

probable. Because of this, the modern design argument is strong in trying to prove a divine being.

### **What are the weaknesses of this argument?**

The classic form of the argument had many loop holes and hidden assumptions that David Hume picked up on. Comparing his argument to Paley's (which was written *later* than Hume's works) we can see how it has been illogical in some places. Hume's first critique was that we cannot compare a watch to the world. The watch is something mechanical, not natural, and therefore they are not alike. He also pointed out that looking at the universe and concluding that order leads to design and a designer makes no sense, as a universe would have to contain order for it to be a universe (an A priori argument). He also pointed out that even if the world was designed, we cannot just assume it was the God of Christian theism. The world could have been a trial run, there could have been many God's designing the world and he/they may not necessarily fit the claims that Christianity makes of them. He/they may have been imperfect. He also said that if God was benevolent and omnipotent, how come there is natural evil in the world.

Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection makes the world possible without a designer. Around 1835, he wrote his book 'The origin of the species.' This book destroyed the ideas in the classic design argument. The big bang also did not seem to fit in with the classical design argument. The theories suggested that the universe could have just come about by chance, and that though the chance is small, it is still a chance.

Dawkins claimed everyone had a selfish gene, that we survived because we were the best equipped to do so, and so humans evolved naturally through natural selection.

Kant emphasized these ideas, and he also argued that human perspective sees things such as the universe to have order and stability, whereas in fact there could only be chaos in reality.

So from all this we can see that the design argument is only an idea, and can bring us to no certain assumption. Even the concept of beauty can be considered 'in the eye of the beholder' and therefore no proof of there being a God. Science does not disprove this theory, but we cannot be certain that there is a God, and we have no evidence to suggest the designer is the God of Christianity. Though it makes the chance of the world forming as it has larger, the world could still come about without any divine intervention. The fact that natural evil is in the world is the biggest criticism of the design argument and God because we have no explanation of how it could happen when God is supposed to be all loving and all powerful.

### **Comment on the view that the strengths and weaknesses are equally convincing.**

The arguments on either side are, perhaps equally convincing, because the conclusion is that either could be possible. One could say that you could not reach a conclusion from this argument as there is potential for a God to exist, but he is not necessary for the universe to come into being. Some may say that the chances of the universe forming as it has are greatly increased if there is a designer. This would tip the balance to the positive side: that there is a God. Others may look at the world and say that it could have occurred by chance, and that the problem of evil would tip the scale

to the negative side: there is no God, or God is imperfect. One could say that we simply cannot know if there is a God from this argument, because the universe could have happened either way. The modern arguments against the design argument have some assumptions, for example, in Kant's argument he assumes we have an incorrect sense of order. The suggestion that beauty is in the eye of the beholder also has no more proof than us having a natural sense of beauty. Because faults appear on both sides of the argument, the idea that they are equally convincing is probably sensible, and so people must make their own minds up about what to believe. When comparing the strengths and weaknesses we can see that both could be true, and so it depends on a person's perception of the reality of beauty and order. If we take the approach that we cannot know what reality is, we could find neither argument convincing, as they are based on our senses and emotions which potentially are incorrect...