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Q) What are they key features of the design argument for the existence of God?

Design arguments seek to move from facts about the world to the existence of God. As such they are inductive, a posteriori arguments. The Design argument is actually a broad title under which a number of arguments fall. Swinburne in his book 'The Existence of God' suggests three different groupings of these arguments. There are Teleological arguments which argue from what is seen as a general pattern of order in the Universe. Arguments from providence are those which seek to argue in favour of God's existence from the provision for the needs of conscious beings. The third type of argument is known as The Argument from Beauty.

A clear distinction between these arguments can be drawn between those which argue from design and arguments to design. The former is close to the Teleological form of the argument whilst the latter is closer to the Arguments from Providence.

William Paley is thought to have produced the most famous form of the Teleological Argument. Paley uses an analogy between a watch and the world. Looking at a watch one can see it has been designed for an intelligent purpose, it is suggested that design suggests a designer. Paley transferred this to the world claiming it showed the marks of design for an intelligent purpose, thus implying a designer, God. Isaac Newton also used analogy. Newton sited an eyeball, claiming that it had been designed for a purpose, which again implies a designer, God. In arguing along these lines both Newton and Paley are giving interpretation perceived evidence of purposeful features.

The idea of purpose was one shared by Thomas Aquinas. In his 'Fifth Way' Aquinas uses an analogy of a bow and arrow. The arrow has a direction and a goal. Aquinas also cited an acorn which has a goal of becoming an oak tree. The acorn behaves in such a way as to achieve its goal, however, it posses no intelligence of its own and so must have been designed in order to behave in such a manner. This designer is God.

Swinburne is a contemporary supporter of the argument. Using the analogy with a kidnapper and an explosive card-shuffling machine, Swinburne argues that because of the exacting conditions needed for the existence of the universe the Teleologist's basic point that the existence of the universe is extraordinary is still valid in today's world of science.

Whilst the Teleological Argument is derived from the general pattern of order in the universe, the argument from Providence, by contrast, argues from the provision of the needs of intelligent beings within the universe.

A.E. Taylor put forward the classical form of the Argument from Providence, although it should be noted that Swinburne also has such an argument. Taylor argues that Nature seems to plan in advance for the needs of animals and humans. Such planning cannot be accounted for by physical laws alone as there are inumberable ways that electrons could run. Therefore there must be more than physical laws to account for the tremendously high improbability of life. Taylor maintains that mind or intelligence is required in order to explain how this improbable state of affairs could arise. Human beings plan ahead and nature gives evidence of similar planning. It is then argued that mind cannot be explained by evolution, as evolution itself requires a mind in order to impose it. Therefore humans cannot be explained simply

by evolution, since humans do not just adopt to the environment, they transform it. Taylor's argument can be seen as attempt to restore the Teleological Argument, taking Darwin into account.

The Argument from Beauty states that beauty has no survival value (except when males and females find each other attractive and procreate) nor does it have a real value in helping humans to live together. Therefore the ability to appreciate beauty could perhaps be suggested as a pointer towards God, which God implanted in human beings to make them indirectly aware of God's presence.

F.R Tennant put this argument forward, arguing that there is no particular reason to expect a beautiful as opposed to an ugly world and that the presence of beauty and the human ability to appreciate it could be seen as signs that God wishes to draw us towards the divine.

The Franciscan tradition in particular, stemming from St. Francis of Assisi and St. Bonaventure, maintains that God is beautiful and the beauty of the world attracts us to God.

Q) Identify the strengths of this argument. To what extent are these more convincing than the weaknesses?

The Teleological Argument was described by Immanuel Kant as the oldest, clearest and most reasonable argument for the existence of God though he himself admitted to finding it personally unconvincing.

Part of the argument's strength lies in its simplicity, it is a very simple argument to understand. One can relate to the argument as humans are by themselves designers by nature, take the watch for example, so it is natural for humans to think of things as having a purpose.

The argument also makes use of analogy. Whether this is using a watch, an eye, or an acorn using concrete images to explain abstract ideas aids understanding of the argument by placing it within a context that can be easily understood. If the argument is easily understood as it follows its inductive course, it stands to reason that it will become a more convincing line of argument.

Some have also cited that the argument's strength comes from its relation with scripture such as Rom 1:20 "For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." This extract can be seen to have much in common with the Teleological argument which suggests that we can see design in the world which infers a designer, God.

This leads to the argument's next strength, visibility of evidence. The argument is based on the way in which the world appears to be designed and so therefore the evidence for this is all around us. This wealth of what some maintain to be evidence of design would therefore give considerable strength to the argument, assuming of course one accepts that one really is being confronted with design in the first place.

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There is a danger of turning the argument from design on its head, for example, one must realise that human arms were not divinely designed to be at the exact level of door handles, it was in fact the other way round.

The advances in science has seen significant question marks raised against the design argument. The world revealed to us by Darwin's studies in evolution is not as benign and providential as we may have naively imagined at a time when the creation story in Genesis was taken literally. The alternative offered by Darwin is a 'nature red in tooth and claw', which is product of chance forced across millions of painful years, which is still evolving into new and unknown forms.

Science has also challenged Newton's claim that the universe can be likened to a predictable machine. According to the Chaos theory, the universe is not in fact made up of building blocks which obey 'laws of nature', but instead a combination of waves and impulses whose activity is unpredictable, even when they continue to provide a coherent whole.

Even if a pattern should eventually emerge in the future it does not necessarily mean it would bolster the strength of the design argument for any pattern could simply be nature's way of surviving. Perhaps those who fit this pattern survive, whilst the rest perish. It could even be that human race is the survivor of a million failed worlds.

A major problem with the design argument is the fact that whilst some of the universe may seem well designed there is much that could be considered bad design, natural disasters for example. This creates a whole host of problems with the main thrust being that with all of the features of bad design that we find, any designer or 'blind watchmaker' as Richard Dawkins put it, would possibly have to be either not wholly good or not wholly powerful. Mill chose to maintain God's goodness, thus accepting that God was limited in some way, although Mill said he could not tell by what or by whom. If one of the aforementioned flaws in the designer is not the case then it is difficult to argue a case for the existence of a designer of a world, which exhibits so many elements of 'bad design'.

One may also question the use of analogy which can be found in many forms of the Design Argument. It is quite right to say that we are not comparing like with like and so one could conclude that the use of analogy fails as a result.

The Scottish philosopher David Hume put forward the thought that if it could be proved that there is design in our world, who is to say whether the Designer is not in fact referring to more than one designer, in other words designers. Hume also suggested that the designer(s) could be stupid or even downright evil, whatever the case may be it is hard to think of any of these properties could be proven. He also asked whether the order we see is imposed upon the chaos in which we live by humans, who insist upon finding a pattern and a meaning where non may exist.

Indeed, in light of such considerations and criticisms, the recent forms of the Teleological Argument put forward by F.R Tennant and Richard Swinburne are less absolute than those proposed in the past.

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In short the success of the Design Argument rests upon probability and individual judgement. The Design Argument, as illustrated by the various criticisms of it, is by no means conclusive, if it was then everyone would know that God exists, as opposed to now when a significant number believe that God exists. If one believes that the universe is a product of blind chance then the Design Argument will not prove successful, as what it suggests as elements of design would instead be assigned as a product of chance. However, the idea of the universe just being here, a brute fact, a product of blind chance and nothing more is a personally unsatisfactory one due to the extraordinary nature of the universe and so whilst the Design Argument may not conclusively prove the existence of God it suggests that the existence of a Designer, who we know as God, is a more probable likelihood than not.