

Examine the main strengths and weaknesses of the design argument for the existence of God.
(21 marks)

The design argument, otherwise known as the teleological argument, for many people provides a strong basis for belief in the existence of God. It is an a posteriori argument as it is based on experience and observation. The argument demands that there are certain features within our universe that display strong, deliberate design that could not be the result of mere coincidence. The teleological argument believes that this conscious and almost calculated design can only be explained by the presence of an intelligent and personal designer. For countless people, this is God. There are various well-known forms of the teleological argument and I will touch upon what I consider to be the most vital, in order to examine the main strengths and weakness of this argument as a claim for God's existence.

To begin with I will look to the works of Thomas Aquinas in order to strengthen the teleological argument as a proof of God's existence. In his most famous work, "Summa Theologica" he provides five ways for the existence of God, in which he believes God is revealing true qualities. To summarise, Aquinas points to God as the "first mover", the "first cause", a "necessary being" and as the "source of all values". His final argument; "God is the Divine Designer of everything", refers to the instinctively useful order in all natural things. He suggests that unintelligent things produce beneficial order and therefore require an intelligent being to bring this about. This is a very convincing argument as things in nature do seem to work towards a certain goal, subconsciously of course because they do not possess that conscious power to do so themselves. For example, photosynthesis is vital for our existence and plants do not fail to follow this cycle, furthermore many animals migrate to hotter or colder climates or to breeding grounds at the same time annually or monthly in order to ensure survival. Yet plants and animals are non-rational beings, something or someone must be directing them to their goal. To summarise, Aquinas demonstrates how the design argument is strong because, there is clear undoubted, beneficial order in the world which could not be by chance or intelligence of that being, the being must be directed by something of intelligence. The source of intelligence must be God, as he is the only rational explanation of beneficial order.

Secondly, in 1802 William Paley proposed his well- renowned version of the teleological argument; in which a watch is compared to the world. Just as the discovery of a watch on a heath cannot be explained satisfactorily by saying that it had "always existed", so too does the order in our universe demand an explanation. For Paley, God is this explanation. Paley's design argument holds strength in that a watch can be seen as an analogy of the world, seeing as both possess clear signs of design, intricacy and purpose. Upon stumbling across a watch, built with such complex and calculated design, you would have to infer that it had a designer- Paley maintains that we must also infer that our intricate world must have a designer. Paley explains how the world is made up of such detailed parts, all of which work towards a goal for the benefit of the whole. William Paley's theory is a strong one as it demonstrates how all of the small adaptations in nature are proof of an intelligent designer.

Expanding on William Paley's theory; even the atheist philosopher David Hume acknowledged that "A purpose, an intention, a design, strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker". We must acknowledge the immense design and order in our universe, and this is the strongest proof of God's existence. F R Tennant would have agreed as he said that the rules and natural laws of science and maths, show the world to be orderly and not chaotic. Tennant explained that things appear so precisely that they suggest deliberate design, "fluke or fortuitous events can be ruled out". Also, any signs of chaos are simply consequences of a rule maker ensuring that everything in the universe can be explained rationally.

Linking back to the themes of science and mathematics, it is very possible that these principles only strengthen the design argument as proof of a God. Because scientific explanations of the universe and the teleological argument are compatible since evolution or the "Big Bang" theory could simply be the means with which the designer (God) achieved his creation.

Furthermore and more generally, the design argument shows great strengths for the existence of God when the principle of Ockham's Razor is applied. Which quite simply maintains that "the simplest explanation is often the best". "Entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity" and so the classical belief in God as one, omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent being is possible.

Albeit, contrasting to both Paley and Aquinas, David Hume is very critical of the design argument. Hume criticised the entire teleological argument by inferring anthropomorphism. This is a fatal flaw in the argument, as by referring to God as a designer we are in fact reducing him to human capability. Hume suggested that the teleological argument disproved God as a divine being. Furthermore, Hume views Paley's argument as inadequate as the analogy between a man-made, material object (the watch) and an biologically, living organism (the world) is weak. Hume believes that we cannot compare the universe with a mechanical object because the universe is persistently developing and decaying, it is organic. Finally Hume shows weaknesses of the argument as he draws upon a epicurean hypothesis. It is possible that the order in the universe could easily be the gradual movement of natural forces evolving into an ordered system. It could be nothing more than the result of chance, unconnected to any 'intelligent designer'.

In agreement with Hume's critics of the design argument, Immanuel Kant also challenged the view that the order in our universe owes itself to a designer God. He argued that we are driven by emotions rather than reason. Therefore religious beliefs about the existence of God arise from a natural desire to blame natural problems on invisible forces, instead of examining them scientifically or at least rationally. To expand, Kant argued that it is human nature to impose order upon things. As humans we try to look for order and regularity, we would impose order on whatever universe we were in, be it orderly or chaotic. A main weakness of the design argument is the acknowledgement of universal design but the dismissal of a God-imposed design.

Aside from all else mentioned, it is so very obvious that the design argument can only be seen as flawed when considering Darwin's theory of evolution. Evolution, science and natural selection outweigh any possibility of a designer of any kind. Evolution provides us with a much more verifiable and rational account of how the universe and all species within it display order and purpose. Science provides a more logical account of creation compared to the design argument because it holds no responsibility of the imperfections in the world. Whereas the design argument is contrary to the classical theistic view of God; if there is a conscious designer of our universe (God) then He cannot be omniscient and benevolent. He cannot be classical theistic God.