

ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

- Sometimes called the Teleological Argument – from the Greek ‘telos’, meaning purpose or goal
- An ancient argument that surfaces in different ways in different philosophy and belief systems

“What could be more clear or obvious when we look up to the sky and contemplate the heavens, than that there is some divinity or superior intelligence?”
(Cicero, Roman Orator, 106-43 BC)

- Aquinas’ fifth argument in the *Quinque Viae* (Five Ways)

*“Goal directed behaviour is observed in all bodies obeying natural laws, even when they lack awareness.... But nothing lacking awareness can tend to a goal except it be directed by someone with awareness and understanding; the arrow, for example, requires an archer. Everything in nature, therefore, is directed to its goal by someone with understanding, and this we call **God**”*

- Most popular of the theistic arguments
- William Paley (1743-1805), an Anglican clergyman, explained it in a memorable way...

“In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer, that, for anything I knew to be the contrary, it had lain there for ever; nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that, for anything I knew, the watch might always have been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch, as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz., that, when we came to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we would not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, if a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order than that in which they are placed either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered these that is now served by it....”

- The argument is in two stages.
 - It tries to establish that there is order and purpose in the universe.
 - It then makes the step to the conclusion that there is something divine behind this order and purpose.

Suppose I should find a *35mm Automatic Camera*. It has infrared focussing, automatic exposure control and automatic film advance. It is completely self-contained - a true “point-and-shoot” camera. Teleological thinking rejects the notion that the camera happened “by accident”. The camera shows obvious signs of having been designed. Why then, the thinking goes, shouldn’t we come to the same conclusion about the *human eye*, with its automatic focus and exposure – i.e. that it is the result of an intelligent design?

Discuss

Is the strength of Paley’s argument altered

- a) if the finder of the watch had never seen a watch before?
- b) if the mechanism did not always work perfectly?
- c) if there were parts of the mechanism whose function we could not understand?

Anthropic Principle

- A modern version of the Teleological Argument
- The universe seems to have been ‘tuned very finely’ to allow the emergence of self-conscious beings. The laws of physics are so finely tuned that even tiny differences would have disallowed the kind of cosmos we have.

Some examples used by those supporting the Anthropic Principle

1. If the strong force which binds together the nucleus of atoms were just five percent weaker, only hydrogen would be stable and we would have a universe with a periodic chart of one element, which is a universe incapable of providing the necessary molecular complexity to provide minimal life functions of processing energy, storing information, and replicating.
2. On the other hand, if the strong force were just two percent stronger, very massive nuclei would form, which are unsuitable for the chemistry of living systems. Furthermore, there would be no stable hydrogen, no long-lived stars, and no hydrogen containing compounds.
3. If the relationship between the strong force and the electromagnetic force were to vary only slightly, we would not have the quantum energy levels which allow the remarkable conversion of beryllium to carbon (nearly 100% efficient) and the partial conversion of carbon to oxygen. With slight changes in either of these constants, we would have had a universe either rich in beryllium and little, if any, carbon or alternatively, a universe rich in oxygen with no carbon. Since carbon is unique in its ability to chemically bond with almost all other elements in bonds that are stable but not too difficult to break, it is remarkable that these forces are so precisely tuned to provide carbon in abundance, along with oxygen which is critical in its own right.

- *“The current scenario of the origin of life is about as likely as a tornado passing through a junkyard beside Boeing airplane company accidentally producing a 747 airplane”*
Sir Fred Hoyle, Astronomer

Critique of the Teleological Argument

- One of the fiercest critics of the Teleological Argument was the Scottish Philosopher, David Hume (1711-1776)
- He rejected Design Arguments because:
 - the universe is bound to have the appearance of being designed since there could not be a universe at all in which the parts were not adapted to one another to a considerable degree. Hume suggested a theory first mooted by Epicurus, a Greek philosopher, which put it that the universe consists of particles in motion. In unlimited time these go through every combination possible to them. If one of these combinations produces a stable order (temporary or permanent) this order will come about and may be the orderly cosmos in which we find ourselves. Many modern critics use this probability argument.
 - the analogy between the world and a human artefact is weak. The universe is not particularly like a vast machine; you could equally well compare it to, say, some kind of giant crustacean or vegetable. Then, of course, the design argument fails, because whether crustaceans and vegetables are or are not consciously designed is precisely the question at issue. Only if the world is shown to strikingly analogous to a human artefact, is there a real basis for the intelligent designer theory
 - even if we could validly infer a divine designer of the world, we would still not be entitled to postulate the infinitely wise, good, and powerful God of Christian tradition. From a given effect we can only infer a cause sufficient to produce the effect – and so from a finite world we cannot infer an infinite creator. If I can see only one side of a pair of scales, and observe that ten ounces is outweighed by something on the other side, I have good evidence that the unseen object weighs more than ten ounces – but not to presume that it is infinitely heavy. Why not say the universe is the product of many lesser gods – rather as humans combine to build a house or a ship, or to establish a city?

Discuss

- Would Hume's criticisms also apply to the Anthropic Principle?
- What do you think of this writer's view?

The Ozone gas layer is a mighty proof of the Creator's forethought. Could anyone possibly attribute this device to a chance evolutionary process? A wall which prevents death to every living thing, just the right thickness, and exactly the correct defence, gives every evidence of plan.
(Arthur Brown, Footprints of God, 1943)