

Paley's Argument from Design

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I. William Paley: You are walking across a meadow when you inadvertently kick a stone and find a watch. The stone, you think, might have been there forever; or at some point come together purely by chance. The watch, though, is different. You see how intricate it is—how many distinct parts there are and how well fitted they are to work together for the purpose of telling time. You'd inevitably think it had a designer.

II. Even if:

1. we had never seen a watch made—we might find in the ruins of some civilization an object that clearly is made to measure distance, say, even though we don't know how to construct such a thing ourselves
2. the watch didn't keep perfect time
3. there were a few parts whose function we can't determine or even if we can't determine if they had any function at all
4. we know that for any object at all, there will be some 'internal configuration' of its parts and that it is just so happens that this is the configuration of this entity.
5. we consider the possibility that there is some abstract principle of order (rather than an orderer) that accounts for the watch
6. we consider the possibility that the watch is no evidence of a designer but only a 'motive to induce the mind to think so'
7. we consider the watch might have its structure because of its metallic nature
8. we acknowledge that we don't know much about much—this doesn't mean we don't know what we know which in this case is the 'utility of the end' and the 'subserviency and adaptation of the means to the end.'

Application of the argument:

"Every indication of contrivance, of design, that exists in the watch exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation" (p 56, column 2).

III. Paley's Argument

- P1. Human artifacts are products of intelligent design.
- P2. The universe resembles these human artifacts.
- C1 Therefore, (probably) the universe is a product of intelligent design.
- P3. The universe is vastly larger and more complex than any human artifact.
- C2. Therefore, (probably) the universe is the product of a powerful and vastly intelligent designer.

David Hume from *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*:

IV. Cleanthes gives his argument from design on page 57

- P1. The Universe is nothing but a great machine subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines (and these lesser machines can be subdivided into still smaller machines, etc).
- P2. These machines and their minute parts are adjusted to each other with great accuracy; there is an adaptation of means to ends (that is, the various machines and their parts are interconnected in such a way that they work together for a purpose).
- P3. The curious adapting of means to ends that one finds in nature resembles exactly (although it exceeds) the products of human intelligence.
- P4. From similar effects one should infer similar causes.
- C. Therefore the cause of the universe must also be intelligent (although considerably more so, given 'the grandeur of the work').

V. Demea objects that this is not a certain, *a priori* proof but only an *a posteriori*, inductive one. Not good enough, he says.

VI. Philo: it's not only inductive but not a very good inductive argument at that. We have only inductive evidence that a stone will fall but because our evidence for this is past experience of a great many instances of exactly the same kind of thing, and stones have fallen *every* time, our evidence is excellent. But the more the evidence is of something dissimilar, the worse it is. We are only arguing from analogy in Cleanthes' case.

When we see a house, we know it had a designer because of our experience. Now the universe doesn't resemble a house so much as for us to have the same certainty of a designer.

VII. Demea finds the whole enterprise of trying to show that God exists by 'pseudo-scientific' reasoning religiously troubling. Believes in the mysterious nature of god and very concerned about anthropomorphizing.

VIII. Philo: thinks there is nothing wrong in principle with arguing *a posteriori* for the existence of God. Even shows how such thinking should go: page 58-9.

IX. Hume's Objections:

1. Only one universe objection: All inferences concerning fact (i.e., *a posteriori* matters) are founded on the supposition that from similar causes come similar effects and similar effects are produced by similar causes. But such inferences are only legitimate when we have experiences of just those sorts of effects being brought about by just those sort of causes. But there is only a single universe, and so it isn't as though we have experience knowing that when there are universes that are apparently designed, mostly of the time they have designers. Here there seems to be a large gap between what we are trying to explain (the apparent design in the universe) and the design in things like clocks.
2. The argument infers design from too small: We are inferring that the cause of the universe is a mind from the fact that a few of the entities we experience (or have experienced in our brief experience) in our small corner of the universe appear to be

designed. But we shouldn't draw major conclusions about a whole the size of the universe from such a small sample. See page 56

3. Bad consequences of *a posteriori* theology objection.
 - a. If you use this argument you must think of God as finite since our own experience is experience of finite minds and there is nothing, even in this vast universe, to suggest that it took infinite intelligence to make the world.
 - b. No reason to ascribe perfection.
 - c. No reason to think that God is one.
 - d. No reason to think that God is spirit.