

**Richard Swinburne's Teleological Argument**  
**Philosophy of Religion**  
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**Professor Senor**

1. Distinguish: spatial order (regularities of co-presence) and temporal order (regularities of succession).
2. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, arguments from natural regularities of co-presence had a great deal of plausibility. After all, regarding the origins of the universe it would seem that there are three options: either things are now as they had always been (i.e., there was no beginning and things have always been as they are) or some natural process had brought about the world that we see (and that the world we see was brought about by unguided, natural processes would have seemed akin to throwing the parts of an airplane in the air and having them come down by chance as a 747) or the world was brought about by a designer. Given that some objects in the natural world resemble in important ways machines made by humans and that artifactual machines are the products of intelligent design, it was argued that plants and animals had a similar cause.
3. But Darwin (together with the discovery that the universe is much older than had been thought) showed how we could give an account of the apparent design in plants and animals given purely naturalistic causes. Thus Darwin is generally credited with showing that the traditional teleological argument has little force.
4. But Swinburne thinks that it can be recast, still as an argument from spatial order. This argument will begin with the recognition that the sort of natural objects that impressed Paley are produced by natural processes. Given this, "the laws of nature are such as to give rise to striking examples of spatial order similar to the machines which men make" (p. 65) In short, the universe is a machine-producing machine. But the only sort of machine-producing machines we know of produce their machines via intelligence. However, Swinburne doesn't think this is a very good argument because we don't know of that many machines the universe produces—that is, there seem to be relatively few such machines in the universe.
5. Swinburne thinks that the key to producing a good argument from design is to couch it in terms of temporal rather than spatial succession. What strikes Swinburne is a combination of two features of the universe: its orderliness and its fundamental simplicity. The universe might have been chaotic but it is not; not only is it not chaotic, it is remarkably orderly. This orderliness is all the more remarkable because it is brought about by relatively simple fundamental laws that are largely understandable by humans. According to Swinburne, this is all surprising and in need of explanation. (Notice that we don't yet have an argument for a designer.)
6. Objections:
  - a. The order we notice is what we've imposed. But the premise is not that we've noticed order but that the order is there for us to be noticed; it would be there even if we weren't. It is independent of our noticing.
  - b. Even if the order is independent and non-imposed, still it isn't surprising that we find order since if there universe were not ordered, we'd not be here to begin with. So of course the universe is ordered if we are here. Big deal. Response: even though the main point (if the universe weren't ordered we wouldn't be here) is true, this doesn't take away from how remarkable it is that the universe is ordered. Read from page 66.
7. So the universe is orderly and that it needn't be so orderly is a fact in need of explanation. Clearly, science can't explain this. Science explains phenomena in virtue of low-level laws, and the low-level laws in terms of high-level laws. But the highest level scientific

- laws can't be explained by yet other scientific laws since, by hypothesis, we are thinking of the highest-level laws.
8. So the argument is that the orderliness of nature is a matter of the vast uniformity in the powers and liabilities of the bodies, and also on the paucity of kinds of components of bodies (i.e, there appear to be rather few fundamental particles). This orderliness holds across great distances in time and space. And the fundamental principles of this orderliness can't be explained by science (see page 68). So either the orderliness of the universe is where explanation stops and it is just a brute fact, or else there is some other kind of explanation.
  9. Here is a sense of the line of reasoning that Swinburne is putting together. Keep in mind that his argument isn't meant to be deductive.
    - P1. The universe is immensely uniform, complex, and at bottom, relatively simple.
    - P2. Science can't explain P1
    - P3. Either P1 expresses a brute fact or its truth is explained by the existence of a powerful creator.
    - P4. The probability of theism given P1 together with our general background knowledge is considerably higher than the probability of atheism given P1 together with our general background knowledge.
    - C. Therefore, the existence of an immensely uniform, complex, and at bottom relatively simple universe increases significantly the probability of the existence of a powerful creator.
  10. Swinburne claims both that (a) the existence of a uniform universe is *a priori* very improbable (with the assumption of the nonexistence of God) and (b) *a priori* quite probable on the assumption that there is a being that has the attributes typically ascribed to God—indeed, on page 72 he claims that it “looks as if” the probability is 1! A very quick version of the case for each:
    - a. We not only have only a relatively few fundamental properties, but we have a great, amazing complexity at the other levels. That the universe should contain so many amazingly complex things that, in the end, are built from a relatively few kinds of fundamental properties cries out for some explanation. And this is so across all time and space. Without God, there would be no explanation.
    - b. The moral character of God: order is produced for two reasons—beauty and to allow agents to use the order as a means to ends. Beauty is a good thing, and God would want to create a beautiful rather than an ugly universe, so God would create an orderly world. Also, it is good that God create rational beings who are capable of growing in knowledge and power, and they will need order for that.
  11. Swinburne concludes that this argument doesn't show that theism is true, neither does it show that theism is more probable than not. Rather it “tends to confirm” theism or to provide some weight of evidence for it.