

Key concepts

- The teleological argument uses the evidence of the existing and contingent universe as the basis for its argument that suggests that the universe exhibits both order and regularity, and, purpose towards an end (telos). As such this requires an explanation of design.
- A designed universe necessitates a designer; this designer is God.
- Thomas Aquinas used the analogy of an archer to illustrate the notion of guiding intelligence and governance. The archer (intelligence) directs and governs the arrow (object without intelligence) towards its end purpose (the target). In a similar way, natural laws have no intelligence but display order and regularity that are directed towards an end purpose; this also requires the explanation of intelligent guidance and governance. This intelligent being must be God.
- William Paley used an analogy of the complexity of a watch to illustrate the notion of purposeful design. Paley argued that a watch found on a heath is not a product of nature nor chance. Why? Because the parts are assembled intricately to achieve the purpose of telling time. Therefore, the watch must have a watchmaker to make it do what it does. Paley compared a watch to the universe in terms of complex order, regularity and purpose and concluded that it too must have a universe-maker or designer, namely, God.

This conclusion would also work (a) if we had never seen a watch before, (b) even if the watch did not work properly or was broken, and, (c) we did not understand the specific purpose of either its parts or the whole.

- Frederick Tennant proposed two teleological arguments:
 1. The Anthropic argument holds that for life on earth to flourish nature provides in advance for such needs; however, the precise conditions for this specific anthropic purpose are so immensely complex and highly improbable (any slight variation in minute measure would mean we did not exist). Therefore, as Paul Davies later added, the 'Goldilocks Enigma' (the universe being 'just right' for life to flourish) suggest more than mere physical laws are responsible for this. An ultimate intelligence, such as God, is a viable explanation.
 2. The Aesthetic argument points out that evolutionary theory suggests that life perpetuates according to survival values. Since human beings appreciate beauty, literature, music and art, which have no survival value, this suggests there is no naturalistic explanation for such values. It provides clear evidence for God and even directs the enquiring mind towards this conclusion.

Key words

AQUINAS
TELOS
ORDER
REGULARITY
PURPOSE
ARCHER
INTELLIGENCE
ARROW
GOVERNANCE
GUIDANCE
PALEY
WATCH
HEATH
INTRICATE PARTS
COMPLEXITY
TENNANT
ANTHROPIC
PRECISE CONDITIONS
GOLDSLOCKS
AESTHETIC
SURVIVAL VALUE
ENQUIRING MIND

Key quotes

'Whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence.' (Thomas Aquinas)

'Paley states that we could draw this conclusion even if we were unaware of the purpose of the watch; if the watch went wrong or even if we didn't understand what some of the parts of the watch actually did.' (Karl Lawson)

'So either the orderliness of nature is where all explanation stops, or we must postulate an agent of such great power and knowledge...the simplest such agent ...God.' (Richard Swinburne)

'The aesthetic argument for theism becomes more persuasive when it renounces all claims to proof and appeals to a logical probability.' (F. R. Tennant)

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Richard Swinburne acknowledges the obvious limits to the conclusions drawn by the evidence but argues that the design arguments are of cumulative value.

Some would argue that the teleological arguments just serve to shore up the 'God of the Gaps' accusation.

Key questions

Are the analogies used sound enough?

Does the universe really exhibit order or is it chaotic?