

Does the order of the universe prove that God exists? (25 marks)

This question is asking you to discuss the teleological argument (the argument that says that certain features of the world seem so perfect as to be designed by a God) and argue that it either does or doesn't successfully prove God exists.

Similar questions:

- Assess the teleological argument. (25 marks)
 - Do spatial and temporal order provide proof that God exists? (25 marks)
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Essay plan:

- Introduction: I will argue teleological arguments do not prove God exists
 - Define key terms
 - Teleological argument
 - Spatial order
 - Temporal order
 - Teleological argument 1: William Paley's watch analogy (spatial order)
 - Response: Darwin's theory of evolution
 - Teleological argument 2: Swinburne's temporal order
 - Response: Multiple universes
 - Argument *against* teleological argument: Even if the universe is designed, the designer might not be God
 - Conclusion: Order of the universe does not prove God exists
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Teleological arguments, also known as arguments from design, aim to prove the existence of God from examples of order in the universe. Examples of this order can be divided into two categories: *spatial* and *temporal*. Examples of spatial order can be found *within* nature, such as how the eye is perfectly adapted to see things. Temporal order is order of the universe itself, such as how forces, such as gravity, are perfectly suited to sustaining life. In this essay I will argue that neither type of order is sufficient to prove that God (the God as typically understood by the main monotheistic religions) exists.

William Paley's teleological argument compares properties of a watch with properties of nature to argue that God exists. If you saw a watch on the ground, he argues, you would not believe the watch had simply always been there. Its existence would need to be explained by

some sort of intelligent design. A pebble, in contrast, does not require the same explanation of its existence. Paley argues that the difference is that a watch (unlike a pebble) is composed of many parts organised for a purpose. This, he says, is the hallmark of design. Paley then goes on to argue that there are many examples in nature of things that have many parts organised to serve a purpose. The eye, for example, is a very complex natural object that has a very clear purpose: *to see*. Just as the existence of the watch can only be explained in terms of a designer, so too can the eye only be explained with reference to a designer. Paley argues that this designer is God.

However, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution provides an alternative explanation of complexity within nature without a designer. The competition to survive and breed in nature means that certain advantages, features, and genetic mutations become exaggerated to adapt to the environment. This creates the appearance of design even though there is no intelligent design behind it. For example:

- A fish that can see is able to sense predators before a blind fish.
- So when a predator approaches, the seeing fish is more likely to escape and survive than the blind fish
- Because it has survived, the seeing fish is able to breed and pass on its genes for vision
- A fish that can see further than a fish that can see only a short range has an even bigger advantage
- So the fish with better vision is also more likely to survive and pass on its genes

Over hundreds of millions of years, these advantages get continually exaggerated in response to the competition of the environment. This eventually produces fish with very advanced eyes that are so complex as to appear to be designed. However, this complexity is borne of necessity, rather than design. Thus Darwin's theory refutes Paley's assumption that anything that has parts organised to serve a purpose is designed.

Swinburne accepts that evolution can explain how complexity can arise within nature without a designer. He calls this *spatial* order. However, he argues that *temporal* order – the order of the *laws* of nature – cannot be explained in this same way. For example, the force of gravity is strong enough such that it keeps the moon in orbit around the earth and the earth in orbit around the sun. But the laws of nature have not evolved the same way fish eyes have, *they just are*. But if gravity had the opposite effect – it repelled objects, say – then planets would never be able to form and therefore life wouldn't be able to form. Swinburne argues that this

cannot be explained in a *scientific* way: science can explain why things happen by assuming these laws, but it cannot explain why the laws exist as they do. Swinburne argues that the only available explanation of why the laws of nature are the way they are is a *personal* one: the laws of nature exist as they do because someone designed them that way. This designer is God.

David Hume's objection to the original teleological argument can be adapted to accommodate Swinburne's objection. Hume argued that given an infinity of time and a finite amount of matter, the matter would combine in ways that appear to be designed just through sheer chance. Today, multiple universes is a popular idea in modern physics, with many scientists arguing that there is an *infinite* number of these universes. If this is true, then it is inevitable that some of these universes will have laws of nature (temporal order) that are perfectly suited for life. However, this isn't intelligent design, it's just luck. For every universe like ours, there may be millions of other universes where gravity does repel objects or is too weak or strong. So, if there are multiple universes, the chance of one having perfect temporal order becomes increasingly likely – even without a designer.

Even if the multiverse theory is not true, Swinburne's argument still does not successfully prove that God exists. God is traditionally thought of as omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and the *creator* of the universe. But none of these attributes is evident in the design of the universe. Firstly, designers and creators are often separate. The woman who designs a car, say, is not necessarily on the production line building each one. So even if Swinburne's argument does succeed in proving that God designed the universe, it does not prove that God created the universe. Secondly, the existence of evil within the universe may suggest that the designer – whoever he is – is not omnibenevolent. Finally, we may argue that while the universe is enormous, there is no evidence to suggest it is infinite. So whilst this may be evidence that the designer of the universe is very powerful, we cannot prove he is infinitely powerful (omnipotent).

In conclusion, neither spatial nor temporal order necessarily prove that God exists. Darwin's theory shows that spatial order can emerge in response to environment, removing the need for a designer. Temporal order cannot be explained in the same way but can nonetheless be explained without intelligent design if there are multiple universes. Finally, even if Swinburne does succeed in proving the existence of a designer, his argument from temporal order does not necessarily prove that this designer is an omnipotent creator (God). Therefore, the order of the universe is not sufficient to prove that God exists.