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

This question is asking you to discuss <u>teleological arguments</u> (arguments that say certain features of our universe cannot be explained without a designer, and that God is this designer) and argue either that they succeed in proving God's existence or fail to prove God's existence.

Similar questions:

- Assess teleological arguments. (25 marks)
- Do spatial and temporal order prove God's existence? (25 marks)

Essay plan:

- Introduction: I will argue teleological arguments <u>**do not**</u> prove God's existence.
  - Define key terms:
- Teleological argument #1: Paley's watch analogy (weaker argument).
  - Response: Darwin's theory of evolution.
- Teleological argument #2: Swinburne's argument from temporal order (stronger argument).
  - Response: Multiple universes (adapting Hume's Epicurean hypothesis).
- Argument against teleological arguments in general: Even if these arguments prove a *designer*, they don't necessarily prove that *God* exists.
- Conclusion: Both Paley's and Swinburne's teleological arguments fail to prove God's existence.

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. Spatial order is order that 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.

The 21-25 mark grade boundary requires you to argue *"with clear intent throughout".* So, in your introduction, demonstrate intent by clearly stating which side you are arguing for.

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 this property of many parts organised to serve a purpose. The human eye, for example, is a very complex natural object that has a very clear purpose: to see. And so, 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. What's more, the designs in nature are far more complex and grand than man-made designs, so Paley argues that this designer must be God and therefore that God exists.

However, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution provides an alternative explanation of complexity within nature without the need for a designer. Mutations in genes can occur randomly. And competition to survive and breed in nature means random genetic mutations that provide an advantage (either for survival or reproduction) become more common. Over time, this process repeats, creating the *appearance* of design even though there is no intelligent mind behind it.

For example:

- A fish that randomly evolves a gene for detecting shadows overhead is able to sense predators before a fish without this gene.
- So when a predator approaches, the fish with this gene is more likely to escape and survive than the blind fish.
- Because this fish has survived, it 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 that they may *appear* to be designed. However, this complexity is the result of random mutations and the environment, rather than design. So, Darwin's theory shows that Paley's claim that anything that has multiple parts organised to serve a purpose must be designed. This shows that order within nature does not necessarily prove God's existence.

A stronger version of the teleological argument comes from Richard Swinburne. Swinburne's argument distinguishes between order and complexity *within* nature (*spatial* order) and the order of the *laws* of nature (*temporal* order). Swinburne accepts that scientific laws, such as evolution, can explain spatial order such as the fish eye example above. However, he argues that *temporal* order cannot be explained in this same way. For example, the law of gravity and the strong nuclear force didn't evolve – they just are. So Swinburne argues that although science can explain and predict things by *assuming* scientific laws, these scientific laws can't explain the existence of the laws themselves. In the absence of a scientific explanation of the laws of nature, Swinburne argues (abductively) that the best explanation of temporal order is a personal explanation: That somebody – God – designed the laws of nature this way.

However, David Hume's 'Epicurean hypothesis' response to teleological arguments from spatial order can be adapted to respond to Swinburne's teleological argument from temporal order. 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 the case, then it is inevitable that some of these universes will have laws of nature (temporal order) that are perfectly suited for life. However, this temporal order isn't the result of intelligent design, it's just luck. For every universe with temporal order like ours, there may be millions of other universes where gravity repels objects or is too weak or strong to sustain life. So, if there are multiple universes, the chance of one having temporal order becomes increasingly likely – even without a designer.

Further, even if the multiverse theory is not true, Swinburne's argument still does not successfully prove that *God* exists. God is traditionally defined 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. And 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 suggests the designer – whoever they are – is not omnibenevolent. Finally, we may argue that while the universe is enormous, there is no evidence to suggest it is infinite. And so, although the scale of the universe may be evidence that the designer of the universe is *very* powerful, we cannot prove he is infinitely powerful (omnipotent).

In conclusion, neither Paley's nor Swinburne's teleological argument proves that God exists. Darwin's theory shows that the appearance of design in nature can emerge randomly in response to environmental conditions, removing the need for a designer. And although order in the laws of nature cannot be explained in the same way, temporal order can nonetheless be explained without intelligent design if there are multiple universes. Finally, even if either of these teleological arguments do succeed in proving the existence of a *designer,* they do not necessarily prove that this designer is an omnipotent and omnibenevolent creator (God). Therefore, the order of the universe is not sufficient to prove that God exists.

Don't introduce any new ideas in your conclusion. It should just be a 'summing up' of what your argument shows and why. If done correctly, your conclusion should follow logically and be consistent with what you set out to argue for in your introduction.