

Arguments based on Observation

Teleological Arguments

Cosmological Arguments

The teleological argument looks at the purpose of something and from that he reasons that God must exist. Aquinas (1224 – 1274) gave five 'ways' of proving God exists and this, his teleological argument, is the fifth of his five ways.

Aquinas, influenced by Aristotle, believed that **all things have a purpose**, but we cannot achieve that purpose without something to make it happen – some sort of guide, which is God.

Aquinas' Fifth Way

- Things that lack knowledge act for a purpose / end
- Anything that lacks knowledge needs something with knowledge to guide it – just like an arrow needs an archer
- Therefore, **there is an intelligent being that directs all natural things to their end**, i.e. God

Analogy of the Arrow and Archer: Aquinas' point is that in the same way that the **archer guides the arrow** to where it is meant to go, **God guides natural bodies** to where they are meant to go. The natural body needs to get to its purpose, just like the arrow needs to get to its target; the arrow needs an archer and the natural body needs something to direct it – and this is God.

Some people argue that arguments from analogy are weak. At best, they can only suggest something probably shares a characteristic. Others say they are useful ways to illustrate a complex argument but are on their own not sufficient. Is it valid to compare the relationship between humans and God to the relationship between an arrow and an archer?



Paley's Teleological Argument

William Paley (1742 – 1805) observed that complex objects work with **regularity**, (seasons, gravity, etc). This order seems to be the result of the work of a designer who has put this regularity and order into place deliberately and with **purpose**. For example, the eye is constructed perfectly to see. For Paley, all of this pointed to a designer, who is God.

The analogy of the watch

In '*Natural Theology*' (1802) Paley asks his readers to imagine walking in a heath:

- If I came across a rock, I could explain its origins referring to natural causes
- But if I came across a watch, there would be no explanation
- The watch is made up of cogs and spring, etc, and this design couldn't have come about by chance – there must be a watchmaker who designed it with the purpose of telling the time
- The world is even more complex than a watch in how it is put together, so there must be a creator, God.



Paley also said:

- Whether or not we had seen a watch before, it is clearly different to the rock in nature and origin
- Even if the watch is broken, there is enough design to suggest a watchmaker: he is not commenting on the quality of the design
- Even if we didn't fully understand the watch, we would still identify design

Second Way



Cosmological arguments start with observations about the way the universe works and from there these try to explain why the universe exists. Aquinas gives three versions of the cosmological arguments, starting with three different (although similar) observations: motion, causation and contingency.

The First Way: the unmoved mover **First Way**

Inspired by Aristotle, Aquinas noticed that the ways in which things move or change (changing state is a form of motion) must mean that something has made that motion take place.

1. Everything is both in a state of **actuality** (how it is) and **potentiality** (what it might become)
2. All things that are moved (the potentiality becomes the new actuality) are moved by something else – things cannot just move themselves
3. The mover is itself moved by something else, which in turn is moved by something else, and then something else again
4. This cannot go on to infinity because otherwise there would be no first mover and so nothing would have started moving at all
5. So, **there must be a first mover**
6. This first unmoved mover is what everyone understands as God

The Second Way: the uncaused causer

Using very similar logic, the Second Way talks about how everything we observe (an effect) is caused by something else. Using Aristotle's idea of an 'efficient cause', Aquinas is talking about makers of objects (or situation)

- Nothing can be its own efficient cause because it cannot have existed before itself
- Things that are causes must themselves be caused, otherwise the effect would be taken away
- We cannot go back to infinity because that would mean there was no first cause of everything and so all later effects and causes would never have happened
- Therefore, there must be a special case, **a first efficient cause that is not itself caused**
- The first uncaused cause is what everyone understands to be God

Other Arguments

Charles Darwin (1809 – 1882) in 'The Origin of the Species' proposed his Theory of Evolution - evolution by natural selection – things exist as they are because of natural methods, selectin what will survive and what will not; some suggest there seems to be no space for God in this approach.

"In the case of living machinery, the 'designer' is unconscious natural selection, the blind watchmaker." – **Richard Dawkins**

Teleological arguments have largely not continued in modern times; however, the **anthropic principle** suggests that there is too much that has gone right in the world in leading to the existence of humankind for it to have come about by chance. The **aesthetic principle** suggests that the ability to recognise beauty is not something that would have come about by evolution (because there is no evolutionary advantage to it) and so must suggest a divine creator.

The **medieval principle** of preferring the simplest option when there is more than one possible explanation (Ockham's Razor) has led some thinkers to suggest that a designer God is the easiest solution to how things have come about. Some **fundamentalist Christian groups** think that there are organisms that do not conform to the processes of natural selection and so there must be an intelligent designer behind the world. However, given the size of the universe, it is difficult to see how our earth can be anything other than the lucky planet.

The Third Way: contingency and necessity

Aquinas' point here is that **everything in the universe is contingent** – it relies on something to have brought it into existence and also things to let it continue to exist.

- In nature, there are things that are possible 'to be' and 'not to be' (contingent beings)
- These things could not always have existed because they must have not existed at some point because they rely on something for their existence
- If we trace this back, then we get to a point where nothing existed, but then nothing would have begun to exist as nothing can come from nothing
- Therefore, there must be a type of being that is not contingent – a necessary being
- Perhaps necessary beings could have their necessity come from another being
- You cannot go back infinitely with necessary beings given their necessity by other beings
- Therefore, **there must be a being that has of itself its own necessity** (its existence can be explained only by itself) which causes other beings.
- This is what people call God.

Third Way

Hume's Criticisms

Hume's Criticisms of the Teleological Argument

- It is not necessarily true that the world is like a watch
- It might be true that a watch looks as if it is designed, but it is harder to say that the world has these characteristics
- In fact, the world could be said to be more like a vegetable that has characteristic of intricacy (a complex natural object) rather than a machine like a watch
- Hume used the **Epicurean hypothesis** from about the year 200BCE, which said that, given an infinite amount of time, all the particular in the universe would be able to combine in every possible combination. Eventually, a stable environment would be created and that could be the world in which we live. Thus, randomness explains the universe, not a designer.

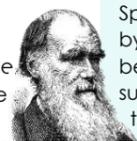
Finally, Hume makes some points about the nature of the God who is supposedly proven:

- Our world is finite and imperfect; why should God be infinite and perfect – why couldn't God be finite/or imperfect, too?
- Hume uses the example of a **pair of scales** where one side is hidden: just because we know one side of the scales is heavier than the other, we don't know the exact weight of the other side
- In the same way, just because we might see evidence of a designer, we do not know anything about the **nature of the designer**
- The designer could have created this world through a series of **trial and error experiments** (just like a watchmaker would, in fact)
- The world could even be the first attempt of an 'infant deity' who then abandoned the world
- Hume uses the example of a **shipbuilder** who makes a wonderful ship, but when we meet him turns out to be a **'stupid mechanic'** who has imitated others and copied an art-form that has been through many failed attempts
- There could be a **number of designers** – after all, a ship or house is created by a number of people; why should there only be one God?
- The **designer could be immoral** (after all, the creator(s) of a perfect ship aren't necessarily perfect people! Just because a watch is perfect, it doesn't mean the watchmaker is perfect – or a 'good' person!



Examining Hume

- Just because we cannot fully understand God, why should the logic of the arguments be dismissed?
- It is reasonable to look for total explanations of all events – so why not look for a reason for all 20 particles being grouped together?
- Modern science suggests that there is a definite beginning to the universe
- We need faith to make the final leap to understanding God
- A vegetable only grows because the laws of biology work – where do these laws come from?
- Just because we have no experience of something, it does not mean that our current understanding cannot explain it
- God does not have to share all the same characteristics as a human designer; for example, God does not have a body
- The creation of the world / universe is a unique event; why should there be a special case, such as God, to explain it
- God does not have to share all the same characteristics as a human designer; for example, God does not have a body
- The creation of the world/universe is a unique event; why shouldn't there be a special case, such as God, to explain it?



Hume's Criticisms

Hume's Criticisms of the Cosmological Argument

Hume questioned whether it is possible to make the **jump** from what Aquinas observed and the God that Christians believe in. Hume said that causation is a psychological concept and we cannot make links between cause and effect that is beyond experience.

Hume argued that we cannot make the **jump** from the idea that just because everything in the universe has a cause or reason to exist, then the entire universe must have a cause or reason to exist (this is called the Fallacy of Composition). He said that just because you can explain the cause of each of a collection of 20 particles of matter, it does not mean that you can explain the cause of the group of the particles.

Equally, why does it have to be God that is necessary: why can't the universe be necessary?

