

Candidate 2

Advanced Higher RMPS

To what extent does the teleological argument establish the existence of God?

The Teleological argument infers the existence of God from a particular aspect of character of the world, namely the presence of order, regularity and purpose. It concludes that God must be the source of that intelligent design. The Teleological Argument is based on a set of comprehensive and internally complex probability arguments. It is an *a posteriori* argument: meaning it is after experience. The word teleological is derived from Greek word telos meaning "end" or "purpose". This is relevant because many people look around them and wonder why it came to be and who created it. In this dissertation I aim to present the arguments trying to explain who created the universe or how the universe began. I also aim to state whether the teleological argument offers enough proof about the existence of God.

In the universe there is order. This means that everything looks to be following some sort of order. There is regularity meaning that the world seems to work according to laws of nature, which don't vary and make things seem predictable. Lastly, there is purpose. This means that the world appears to work towards an end goal. It is sufficiently complex to show evidence of design. This kind of design implies a designer. Therefore, the designer of the universe is God.

One argument comes from St. Thomas Aquinas¹ which is: everything operates to a design and that this design is from God. Something causes in all other things their being, their goodness, and whatever other perfections they have. This is what we call God. For example: The arrow requires an archer. Therefore, everything in nature is directed to its goal by someone with understanding and this is what we call God.

Firstly, Aquinas said: "*Everything operates a design. This design is from God.*"² This means that the universe must have been designed, and this designer must have had something in mind for the universe. The only being that can have such power to design the world is God. This raises the first weakness that in order to reach this conclusion, you need to make a huge assumption. Aquinas jumps to the conclusion that because everything operates to a design that it must have stemmed from somewhere and that this must be God. He doesn't provide sufficient evidence to show how he got to this place in his argument. This in turn makes the teleological argument weak at providing sufficient evidence into the existence of God. Furthermore, it is entirely possible that the universe

¹ Summa Theologica

² Aquinas

only exists through perfect timing this means that the universe, and everything within it might not have existed if it wasn't for everything happening in the way it did. There is modern evidence to prove such a theory, this is called the Big Bang Theory. The idea believes that before the big bang happened there was nothing. The universe was an expansion and it's still expanding today. This theory can give meaning to why the world has been created in the way that it has. The universe started off as nothing but through time everything that we see today has grown. Some people see this as the beginning of the universe and that there would be no need for the teleological argument. However, others believe that the big bang theory can work with the teleological argument.

A counter argument to Aquinas is proposed by David Hume is that there could have been a different designer, or the universe might not have a designer – in which it is entirely possible for one God to have created the universe then it would also be entirely possible that it is multiple Gods that designed it. Another issue with Aquinas' theory is that he is religious and already believes in the existence of one God. He makes a connection that God must be the designer of the universe on the grounds that He is the only being that has the complexity to design it. However, I see this as being biased because Aquinas assumes it was God without really giving it a thought. A strength of Aquinas' argument is that it makes sense that everything operates to a designer: that there cannot be an infinite regress of designers – an infinite regress means that there is a chain of reasoning, in which the evidence for each point relies upon the existence of something that came before it and then that also relies upon what came before that and so on and so forth without having a starting point – if something is created then there must have been a creator as something cannot come from nothing. When humans imagine how we got here and what created us, we always assume that there is a beginning, middle and eventually an end but why does the universe need to have a beginning? This could merely be humans looking for this because it inheritably makes sense to us. But the teleological argument doesn't establish a beginning it just emphasises that through limited human experience there potentially is one and that God is a possible answer to it. Given this, the universe should also have a creator. However, it doesn't mean it is God that is the initial designer. It is entirely possible that something else created the universe. The Teleological Argument of Aquinas does not establish the existence of God. It states that God must be the creator of the universe, but this argument doesn't provide the evidence for the claim in order to suggest that it was God.

Secondly, Thomas Aquinas said: *"Something causes in all other things their being, their goodness, and whatever other perfections they have. And this is what we call God."*³ This means that God created the universe because God is the only being that is fully good and perfect beyond human doubt. The only being that is perfect and good enough to design a universe that is equally perfect and intricate. I think this is a strong argument because the need to have a being that can create a universe in which there is so much good makes sense. The first issue with this argument is that it mentions that things in our universe are "perfection", but there are things in the world that aren't perfect. For example: If this world was perfect then why are there natural disasters? If this world was perfect, then they would not exist. More so, if this world was fully "good" then why would it have so many flaws within it? For example: murder. In order for murder to exist people within the world cannot be perfect. This is because murder causes suffering, and this is seen as the opposite of perfection. Furthermore, an imperfect world that is not good must have a flawed designer. God is argued as omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent: meaning God would not have created a world in which there was flaws. I think this makes the argument for the existence of God – as we know Him to be – flawed because humans believe Him to be perfect, but He evidently isn't, or He didn't design the universe. This would mean that the teleological argument doesn't provide the evidence to prove the existence of God. Another approach is that God created the universe and designed it the way he saw fit. But He is no longer invested in His creation now. But this isn't the type of God that humans imagine Him to be. How can He be omnibenevolent and also ignorant?

Thirdly, Thomas Aquinas said: *"The arrow, for example, requires an archer. Everything in nature, therefore, is directed to its goal by someone with understanding, this we call God."*⁴ This means that an arrow is only able to be fired if there is an archer to fire it. This in relation to the universe is that there must have been a creator to have created the universe. It is human understanding that this must be God. This strengthens his argument because it makes sense that the arrow must have been shot by someone or something, because it could not have happened in the first place if not. This is a weak argument because Aquinas is comparing an arrow and an archer to the universe and God. The problem with arguing by analogy is that what you compare might not have sufficient links – in this case the world and an arrow have hardly any link. This is an unrealistic comparison to make. It is too big of an assumption to jump to that conclusion. Therefore, this argument detracts from the Teleological Argument because it makes too many assumptions and jumps without explaining them

³ http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_%5B1%5D,_EN.pdf

⁴ Aquinas

or going into enough detail. It is not true to its statements as things in the universe aren't designed with perfection or goodness.

The next argument set out to prove the existence of God through the Teleological Argument is William Paley: "If I stumbled on a stone and asked how it came to be there, it would be difficult to show that the answer, it has lain there forever is absurd. Yet this is not true if the stone were to be a watch."⁵ This means that the watch must have had a designer. Imagine you are walking around in a deserted field and you happen upon a watch that is on the ground. As you examine it, you can see the intricately, complex invention of its parts. You wouldn't think this came about itself. The watch must have a creator. The watch seems to have been created perfectly to do the job it is meant to do. This is a strength of the argument because Paley uses something that humans would be able to experience to give a deeper understanding of the universe which can be seen as being too complex to understand. It is straightforward and simple to follow. In some ways so does nature to a much greater extent. Just look at the complexity of the human eyes. They are self-evident and conclude that they have been designed in a way that lets us use them to see. They have been made perfectly for this to happen. This we must conclude that nature has a maker too. Another strength is that the argument gives meaning to the universe that it isn't the case that we happened here by chance. There must be a chance during design, by which we mean, that events which are not designed necessarily arise from the pursuit of events which are designed. There cannot be design without a designer, continuance without a continuer. Kant argued that perhaps design is a trap that we try to look for design and its designer – we want to see a design and a designer because it makes sense to us as humans. This means that because the universe is complex and perfect, it must have been designed. This suggests that there must have been a designer. The only being capable of designing something as complex and perfect as the universe is God. Furthermore, in order to have designed such an intricate universe, it must have been thought of by someone who is all-knowing and the only being powerful enough to conceive such an idea is God. Kant⁶ said that the universe might not necessarily have any order or complexity and that it could be human perception to impose it in this way. A strength of this is that it makes sense that something-made as complex as this world would have a designer – because the complexity of the universe is beyond human creation as everything within it seems to be designed to suit it, and it works almost as if it goes together hand in hand. Thus, meaning that God would be the creator of the universe and everything within it. However, a weak point is that if God created the universe, then there must have been something that created

⁵ <https://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/paley.shtml>

⁶ <http://strangebeautiful.com/other-texts/kant-first-critique-cambridge.pdf>

God. If not, then we cannot guarantee that God exists. This is because something cannot come from nothing. If the universe has a cause, then why doesn't God? You cannot justify the need for the universe to have a creator if God doesn't need one. Another weak point is that it is unrealistic to compare something man-made (the watch) to something that is natural. The universe is constantly changing and developing but it does this on its own accord. Whereas, Man-made products are constantly being adapted by someone. The universe doesn't need somebody to change it. This analogy weakens this argument, as the watch and the universe are completely different and incomparable. You cannot compare two things that have very limited in common. If you were comparing the universe to something that it off equal value, then this would be justifiable. However, to compare the watch to the universe isn't fair – because the watch has a different purpose than what the universe does. As a result of this, the Teleological Argument does not establish the existence of God. This is because it states that the world is perfect and that a perfect being, God, created it but: the world is flawed and couldn't have been created by a God. Meaning it can't possibly establish the existence of God.

A counter argument to the teleological argument is proposed by David Hume in his book⁷ it states: "If experience and observation and analogy be, indeed, the only guides which we can reasonably follow in inference of this nature...to be the proof of a Deity, a cause no less singular and unparalleled." This means we should that we shouldn't take this universe as being created by God because we have intelligent design. To speak of "design" is to imply a designer. Great design, such as the universe, implies a great designer. There is great design in the world and therefore, there must be a great designer. This means that in order to have such a universe, with great design, there must be a great designer behind it to make said design. Hume argues that this implies a superhuman, anthropomorphic concept of God: which is very limited and inconsistent. The universe is imperfect and has many flaws and this in turn can imply an imperfect and flawed creator. This is a weak argument because it relies of an analogy to support it. This argument doesn't effectively establish a God, but rather a designer. It doesn't explicitly state that this designer is God.

Hume's second argument that arises within his book states that: "A very small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us; and do we thence pronounce decisively concerning the origin of the whole?" This means that the order that we see in front of us in the universe might arise from within nature. This removes the need for a God. In the world there

⁷ Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

is order. This is either because of chance or because of design. It is entirely possible that the world did come about through chance. This means that the world could've been random and everything in this world is here just but a fortunate number of events. However, it also argues that the world could've been through design and had a designer. But the argument does not argue that the designer is God. Instead, the argument states that it could've been down to luck. This is a strong argument because it doesn't rely on any analogies or have gaps. This is a weak argument because it doesn't have a definite end point. The conclusion relies on only probable premises, which hold too many ifs or maybes: without making it perfectly clear. It doesn't establish the existence of God at all. This is because it has a mixture of arguments and nothing indicating that God is the designer of the universe, and in turn everything within it.

A counter argument to the idea of a perfect God is the problem of evil. This is an argument against the existence of God. God is said to be omnipotent, omnibenevolent and omniscient. There cannot be a world that exists in which God can be all of these without causing problems. This argument is as follows:

1. God is all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful and the creator of everything.
2. Suffering exists in the world.
3. Therefore, God knows that there is evil: if he is all-knowing.
4. God could prevent evil: if he is all-powerful.
5. But He allows it to continue.

Therefore, either he wishes evil to continue or this means he cannot be all-loving or he cannot eliminate evil and this means he cannot be all-powerful. If the very existence of God causes problems, then how can it be said that God designed a world. According to Bishop Irenaeus, the reason why the world has so many flaws is that humans must overcome the challenges within life in order fully understand the complexity of God. It can be argued that suffering and evil are challenges in life that help us grow and expand opportunities. This is a strong argument because it makes sense that humans aren't capable of understanding the intricacy of God. We cannot assign human characteristics to a being that is beyond human understanding. The more modern version of this is described as the freewill defence. This is the argument that God gave humans freewill to choose what to do with your life. This means that people have the choice between doing what is wrong and what is right. This is a strong argument because it gives value to the good that you do. If there was no such thing as evil or sin in the world then all the good actions have no meaning. You need to have evil in the world in order to fully appreciate what is good. However, I also think this argument is

weak because this gives understanding as to the evil and suffering that is caused by us as humans. It does not give any indication as to why the world has natural evils and the problems caused without any interaction with people. For example: natural disasters: they cause so much suffering and problems and yet nobody has interfered with them causing it to happen. Freewill does not explain why natural suffering in the world happens. Furthermore, Augustine argued that this world sometimes has limitations. God might've had high hopes for what the world could be but they "fell short" and in turn caused greater suffering. Another way Augustine argued this was that humans pass down sin through the original sin. This is about the fall from Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. This means that suffering would be at the cost of humans rather than because of God. As well as this Augustine argued that natural sin is either a sin itself or is a cost of sin.

The Anthropic Principle is an argument by F. R. Tennant in his book⁸ where he argues that the universe has been created in a way that allows for human life to exist. It continues to say that if anything had changed and that the forces that had created the universe didn't happen then the universe wouldn't exist. Thus, meaning that human life wouldn't exist either. Tennant argued that we are able to imagine a universe which is chaotic and has no rules. However, we have a universe in which intelligent human life exists. A strength of this argument is that it seems like the universe was explicitly designed in order to support the purpose of human life – which in turn shows that there would be a designer for this to happen. On balance this is a weak argument because it gives the impression that if any part of universe was slightly different then, human life might not exist which is a huge assumption to make and it isn't verifiable.

Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection in his book⁹ challenges the idea of the teleological argument it revolutionised thinking about the way species have developed in this universe. Evolution is the idea that as species go through generations, they develop and change in order to adapt to the surroundings around them. He soon found that genes within the species would change and that it was a random mutation that occurred to help them survive. It was passed down to the offspring and any species which didn't adapt to the surroundings died. The teleological argument says that nothing is random, and that everything has a purpose. However, Darwin's theory contradicts this as it proves that the universe changes itself without anyone needing to change it. This is a strong argument because it is clear the universe and everything within it adapts itself without needing a designer.

⁸ Philosophy Theology (1930)

⁹ http://darwin-online.org.uk/converted/pdf/1861_OriginNY_F382.pdf

In conclusion, the teleological argument tries to prove the existence of God. I think that it does this to an extent because the argument offers supporting evidence: for example, the idea that where there is design, there must be a designer. However, I don't think that the designer is necessarily God, as it was a big assumption to make. I think that the big bang theory and the teleological together is how the existence of the universe came to be. That it was simply nature doing its course. The teleological argument, in my opinion, does not establish the existence of God.

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