

## DESIGN ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Johari Dean-Lindsey '22

An “argument from design” for the existence of God is an argument for the existence of God or, more generally, for an intelligent creator based on perceived evidence of deliberate design in the natural world (Teleological Argument). Design arguments are popular and multi- conceptual arguments for the existence of God which, again, rely on complex features of the world to generate an inference for the existence of God or some intelligent creator/designer.

Philosopher William Paley has a famous example about a watchmaker, and Philosopher Michael Behe has one about flagellum and bacteria. However, Philip Kitcher gives us an argument against design arguments. Essentially, he has a response that opposes the argument, trying to disprove them basically. In this paper, I’m going to defend arguments from design and stand in my affirmation that Philip Kitcher is wrong in his response, because of the flaws in his perspective against design arguments, where he mistakenly only draws his reasoning from two specific examples to defame the entire concept.

One of the oldest arguments from design that gained popularity is Paley’s watchmaker argument. William Paley's watchmaker analogy is basically a teleological argument, and it played a prominent role in natural theology. Basically, it was the watchmaker analogy that was used, “To support the argument for the existence of God and for the intelligent design of the universe in both Christianity and Deism” (Abersold). Paley went on to argue that the complex structures of living things and the remarkable adaptations of plants and animals required an intelligent designer. He believed the natural world was the creation of God and showed the nature of the creator. Paley pointed out that if you found a watch on a heath, you would naturally assume it had a designer (Abersold). Paley also noted that the human eye was like a sophisticated piece of machinery, so just as you’d know any watch must have had a designer, so Paley argued you ought to recognize that the human eye, “a brilliant piece of biological machinery, must have had an intelligent designer too” (Abersold). One being that was clearly the supremely intelligent eye designer known as God, not just eyes, but human beings in every organism must also have been designed by God. Would we, in this case, believe that the watch

must have been designed by some intelligent watchmaker or other, or would we think that, for example, the watch simply came to be by chance? The answer, Paley thinks, is clear: we would conclude that it must have been designed by an intelligent watchmaker. We have found a whole world of well-designed creatures rather than just a single watch; so if it was reasonable to conclude that a watch must have been designed by an intelligent watchmaker, it is that much more reasonable to conclude that the natural world we find around us must have been designed by an intelligent creator.

In contemporary times, a version of the design argument that is much more popular involves the bacterium flagellum presented by Michael Behe discussed in Philip Kitcher's *At the Mercy of Chance*. In Philip Kitcher's *At the Mercy of Chance*, Kitcher presented a perspective from Michael Behe on the discussion of the bacterial flagellum representing an irreducibly complex piece of machinery that could not possibly have been created through random natural processes. Dr. Michael J. Behe, biochemistry professor and author of the 1996 blockbuster book *Darwin's Black Box*, challenged the reasoning stemming from the classic Darwin explanation that structures of cells arose randomly (Behe). Behe introduces the concept of "irreducible complexity through the example of the bacterial flagellum. "If a structure is so complex that all of its parts must initially be present in a suitably functioning manner, it is said to be irreducibly complex" (Kitcher 544). Because they represent an irreducible complexity, the bacterial flagellum has become an icon in the intelligent design movement. A system that needs multiple interconnected parts present concurrently, where if one fragment is destroyed or lost then the entire system is compromised, is known as an irreducibly complex system. Sever one part and the whole system collapses. The bacterial flagellum has been hailed as the "most efficient machine in the universe" with its self-assembly and repair, water-cooled rotary engine, proton motive-force drive system, forward-and-reverse gears, operating speeds of 6,000 to 17,000 rpm, direction-reversing capability, and hard-wired signal-transduction system with short-term memory" (Gillen). The complexity and coordination must attest to the work of an intelligent designer who designed and perfected flagella in a wondrously interconnected fashion. Truly a prokaryotic wonder is the bacterial flagellum. With there being some things that are overly complex, like the flagellum, that are unlikely to exist, if God does not exist, by natural forces alone. However, they are extremely likely to exist if God exists, therefore God is the best explanation for them and we should

believe the world to be the way our best explanation says it is, therefore God exists.

The argument from design continues to be compelling, and even after exploring an opposing perspective where this philosopher voices his concerns about the motivation and the methods of the intelligent designer argument. Philip Kitcher, a philosophy professor, discusses his complexity arguments at the beginning of his paper. In one section labeled the concrete case argument, he notes that you “do not have the novelty of choosing the intermediates of stages for the bacteria flagellum” (Kitcher 545). Let us play this out in a scenario. Say you have a bacterial cell at an earlier point in time that eventually evolved to a point where it currently possesses a flagellum. Behe argues that to get from the bacteria without a flagellum to one that has one, you need intermediaries, meaning the points in evolution where the flagellum was not as complex as the one used in the example. These intermediaries, as described, are unfavorable in terms of natural selection, and are unlikely to be selected for. Kitcher then says that’s a bad argument because there are all sorts of ways that bacteria can evolve a flagellum, for instance, it can evolve from some protein inside the cell that would perform some function and then in one generation, it moves from the interior to the exterior of the cell (Kitcher 545).

Overall, Kitcher’s concrete case argument objection is that you do not get to pick the intermediaries if you do not have data and then remark at the immense improbability for this condition. Kitcher attempts to explain why the argument from design fails, however, the fault in Kitcher’s objection stems from his focus solely on the flagellum and eye mechanisms, and turns out these were not the best examples, because the Fibonacci sequence, denoted as “nature’s universal design”, comprised of the countless spiral formations found across nature (Tennenhouse). Ranging from galaxy formations to flower formations, to snail shells, The Fibonacci sequence, concept, and theory represents a monumental complex that significantly exhibits a correlation and peculiarity far too precise and exact to occur by random processes, thereby advocating for the existence of an Intelligent Designer.

The presence of order and complexity in the universe is hard to deny. In this argument, the use of metaphor (the watchmaker) renders it understandable for us: this not only advances from something in our experience to try to explain something other than this (the creation of the universe); the logic is simple and concise to observe. Meshing with human logic, it promotes the study of nature, encourages purpose in the universe and ignites faith. Although

the argument is not necessarily incompatible with The Big Bang and evolution, both processes could be part of the design of the universe. The concept of God as a designer reciprocates the concept that God has a part in the universe's history and is therefore omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent.

The design argument increases the probability of the existence of God or some intelligent designer. Rather than remaining in a direction of limited chance/randomness, the design argument gives a purpose to the universe. The universe, in turn, is now given meaning.

### WORKS CITED

- Abersold, G.W. 2018. "William Paley Uses Watch Analogy to Argue Existence of God, Intelligent Design of Universe - Inland Empire Community News". *Inland Empire Community News*.
- Behe, Michael J., *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York:Touchstone Books, 1996)
- Gillen, Allen. 2019. "Bacterial Flagella—Icon of The Intelligent Design Movement". *Answers in Genesis*.
- Kitcher, Phillip. "At the Mercy of Chance?" in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*. Ed. M. Peterson, W. Hasker, B. Reichenbach, and D. Basinger. Oxford University Press, 2009. pp 542-550.
- Paley, William. *Natural Theology*, ch. 1-3. Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1839. pp 1-20 "Strengths And Weaknesses: Teleological Argument - Philosophical Investigations". 2019. *Philosophical Investigations*.
- Tennenhouse, Erica. "Sunflower Spirals: Complexity Beyond the Fibonacci Sequence." *The Science Explorer*, 2016, [thescienceexplorer.com/nature/sunflower-spirals-complexity-beyond-fibonacci-sequence](http://thescienceexplorer.com/nature/sunflower-spirals-complexity-beyond-fibonacci-sequence).