

# Argument from Design

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

David Hume

- *Dialogues* published posthumously and anonymously (1779)
- Three Characters
  - **Demea**: theism, dogmatism, some philosophical arguments for theism
  - **Cleanthes**: theism, empiricism + philosophical defense (design argument)
  - **Philo**: agnostic/atheism, skepticism against theism
- Hume's views represent mostly Philo's views

# Examples of Theistic Dogmatism

1. I know that God exists

1. I believe that God exists

2. So, he does exist

1. That God exists is basic common-sense

2. So, God exists

1. God is too mysterious and much too complex, great for us to even comprehend, but I know that some God-like thing exists

# The Design Argument

- Observation 1. Watch is complex, finely tuned
  - Hypothesis 1: Watch was created by intelligent designer
  - Hypothesis 2: Watch was created by chance process
  - Best Explanation: Hypothesis 1
- Observation 2. Eye is complex, finely tuned
  - Hypothesis 1: Eye was created by intelligent designer
  - Hypothesis 2: Eye was created by chance
  - Best Explanation: Hypothesis 1
- Analogy between the two inferences; if we can infer that the watch was created by a designer then we should be equally sure that the eye was created by a designer

# Evolution: A modern objection

- Discovery of evolution was a novel explanation of how complex biological organisms develop without a designer
- By a process of survival of the fittest, over millions of years, those animal & plant species best suited to their environments live to pass on their characteristics to their offspring

# Requirements for Evolution

- 1. Genetic connection through the generations
- 2. Unbroken lines of descent from one species to the next
- 3. Mechanisms to create new variations in each generation
- 4. Survival and reproduction of the fittest variations in each generation
- 5. A lot of time for variations to accumulate and new species to form

# Design Argument after Evolution

O1. Watch is finely tuned, etc.

H1. Watch created by designer

H2. Watch created by chance process

Still, it seems that H1 is the best explanation

O2. Eye is finely tuned, ...

H1. Eye created by designer

H2. Eye created by chance

H3. Eye created by process of evolution

- Now it seems that H3 is the best explanation
- Why H3?
  - overwhelming evidence for evolution
  - fits other biological processes, including fossil evidence
  - simplest hypothesis?

# Limits of Evolution

- Evolution gives us the best theory for how biological organisms evolve
- Does evolution explain every finely tuned feature of the universe? No.
  - the development of the organic from the inorganic
  - placement of earth in relation to sun: adequate temperatures, which allows life
  - atmosphere containing sufficient oxygen for life; existence of ozone layer
- These finely tuned features necessary for life cannot be explained by evolution; they are explained by other scientific laws; laws of physics, astrophysics
- Physics explains most of these phenomena, so where does God come in?
- We can ask what explains how finely tuned the laws themselves are; in other words, what explains how the world from the beginning was formed i.e. that the universe as a whole is finely tuned



# Design Argument for the Universe

- O1. Watch is finely tuned
  - H1. Watch created by designer
  - H2. Watch created by chance
  - Best Explanation: H1
- O2. The Universe is finely tuned
  - H1. The Universe created by designer
  - H2. The Universe created by chance
  - Best Explanation: H1
- Note: evolution, or even physics won't do here as hypotheses

- So, the design argument can still be put forth, even if the theory of evolution is correct.
- The idea would be to observe how finely tuned the universe is. So, imagine if hydrogen molecules were slightly different, so that they couldn't bond with oxygen molecules. No water could arise. Or worse if the physical laws that govern the universe were slightly different, the planets wouldn't be where they are, and life could not form
- There is the still question, does the argument work?

# Hume's Objection

- The watch and universe argument depends on an analogy: if we legitimately infer from observation of fine-tuning that the watch was designed, we should make the same inference for the creation of the universe as a whole, given that the universe is finely tuned.
- But, Hume says that this is not a good analogy: a finely-tuned watch is a very different kind of thing compared to the Universe as a whole, so we can't make this comparison
  - From evidence about circulatory systems of fish can legitimately infer that the same circulatory system is present in similar fish
  - But we are not able to make an inference that the same circulatory system is present in humans or plants, because these are very different kinds of things
- Lesson: when we make an analogy, the evidence that we produce has to be about similar kinds of things
- The design argument jumps from evidence about watches to the universe as a whole!!

## Hume's second objection

- Even if we agree that the universe must have some designer, it doesn't have to be anything like the God of monotheistic religion. Hume's alternatives:
  - several Gods
  - a stupid God who copied from others
  - a sequence of Gods who learned to make good worlds by trial & error
  - an inferior God; other Gods make better worlds
  - an elderly God who has since died
- Moreover, if God designed the universe, who designed God? Isn't God a highly complex being, that is highly fine-tuned. So, should we expect that a higher God designed him?

# Hume's Agnosticism

- “All religious systems...are subject to great and insuperable difficulties...but all of them, on a whole, prepare a complete triumph for the sceptic...a total suspense of judgment is here our only reasonable resource” (p. 236).
- So, is the world created by chance?
- Hume: Can't say that either; for the same reason. We would have to have evidence of causes similar to those of causes of a universe. But, we don't have that evidence, so we just don't know.