

Paley's Teleological Argument

Below are some extracts from William Paley's 'Natural Theology.' Using the hints and notes, annotate them and summarise the key points he is making

1. In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone, and were asked how the stone came to be there; I might possibly answer that it had lain there forever. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? For this reason, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e. g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day. If the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size from what they are, or placed after any other manner, or in any other order, than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it.

HINT – The key is the difference between the watch and the stone

2. The inference, we think, is inevitable, **that the watch must have had a maker:** that there must have existed, at some time, and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers (**craftsmen. . .**) **who formed it for the purpose** which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction, and designed its use.

NOTE : Paley will apply the same logic to discussion of the world

3. A second examination presents us with a new discovery. The watch is found, in the course of its movement, to produce another watch, similar to itself; and not only so, but we perceive in it a system or organization, separately calculated for that purpose. **What effect would this discovery have, or ought it to have, upon our former inference?** What has already been said, but to increase, beyond measure, our admiration of the skill, which had been employed in the formation of such a machine?

NOTE : This is a thought experiment. Paley asks us to imagine what we would think if the watch were able to reproduce itself.

4. Shall it, instead of this, all at once turn us round to an opposite conclusion, viz. that no art or skill whatever has been concerned in the business, although all other evidences of art and skill remain as they were, and this last and supreme piece of art be now added to the rest? Can this be maintained without absurdity? Yet this is atheism.

THIS is atheism: for every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation.

NOTE – Paley argues that there is a contradiction in Atheism. The atheist allows that complex objects in the world require a designer yet cannot accept this point when applied to nature or the world as a whole

5. I know no better method of introducing so large a subject, than that of comparing a single thing with a single thing; an eye, for example, with a telescope. As far as the examination of the instrument goes, there is precisely the same proof that the eye was made for vision, as there is that the telescope was made for assisting it. They are made upon the same principles; both being adjusted to the laws by which the transmission and refraction of rays of light are regulated.

NOTE : the same argument as the watch, just less well known