

Anthropocentrism and the design argument

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Abstract: The design argument for the existence of God is often criticized for resting on anthropocentrism. Some critics maintain that anthropocentrism explains the origin of the design argument. Such critics commit the genetic fallacy. Others say anthropocentrism explains the appeal of the belief that human beings are ends especially worthy of creation. They fail to appreciate that the design argument need not be framed in terms of the fitness of the universe for humanity. Lastly, some say the design argument requires a picture of value according to which it was true, prior to the coming-into-being of the universe, that our sort of universe is worthy of creation. Such a picture, they say, is mistaken, though our attraction to it can be explained in terms of anthropocentrism. This is a serious criticism. To respond to it, proponents of the design argument must either defend an objectivist conception of value or, if not, provide some independent reason for thinking an intelligent designer is likely to create our sort of universe.

Introduction

In the design argument it is claimed that there are felicitous features of the universe, the best explanation of which refers to the activity of an intelligent designer of great knowledge and power. Among the many objections that can be made to it, I will consider in this paper only those of which the thrust is that the design argument rests on the illicit projection of human values and interests. Due to the frequent use of the word ‘anthropocentrism’ in connection with this cluster of objections, I will speak throughout of the anthropocentrism objection.

As one might expect of any point relevant to our understanding of the design argument, David Hume touches upon the anthropocentrism objection in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Philo, Hume’s mouthpiece, complains that the version of the design argument given by Cleanthes, Hume’s voice for the cause of natural religion, exhibits ‘partiality in our own favour’.

... why select so minute, so weak, so bounded a principle as the reason and design of animals is found to be upon this planet? What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call *thought*, that we must thus make it the model of the whole universe? Our partiality in our own favour does indeed present it on

all occasions, but sound philosophy ought carefully to guard against so natural an illusion.¹

There is an ambiguity in this passage which recurs in contemporary presentations of the anthropocentrism objection. Does Hume think that there is, or could be, a ‘principle’ other than thought which it *would* be appropriate to take as the model of the whole universe? Or does he think there could be no such thing as a principle of this sort? In other words, does Hume fault proponents of the design argument for *misvaluing*, or simply *valuing*? His free use of quasi-evaluative terms such as ‘minute’, ‘weak’, and ‘bounded’ does not settle the issue, for he may employ them in an effort to disabuse us of the notion that evaluative concepts can be applied to the universe at all. Perhaps he is emulating the tactic of the drill sergeant who, in an effort to ‘break’ his recruits so that they develop a team mentality, berates them as ‘worthless and weak’. Unlike the drill sergeant, however, Hume may have no value system he wishes to substitute for the one he hopes to displace.

Hume’s words suggest that the anthropocentrism objection comes in both an egalitarian strain and a morally sceptical strain. In the egalitarian strain, value judgements comparing one world to another are treated as legitimate, with the complaint being that the design argument is faulty because the value judgement at work in it unfairly privileges human beings. This is at odds with the strain in which it is suggested that value judgements depend for their truth on humans, and so cannot even be applied in contexts such as the one given by the design argument. I will have more to say about these two strains of the anthropocentrism objection later in the paper. Before I get to them, however, I want to set aside two common vehicles for expressing the anthropocentrism objection. Though persuasive literary devices, I maintain that they are not substantive criticisms.

The caveman story

Proponents of the design argument are often cast as unable to rid themselves of the ancient tendency to allow into explanations of the physical world various notions that feature in explanations of human behaviour: intention, right and wrong, moral responsibility, and so forth. The design argument is portrayed as anthropocentric in that it models the operation of the physical world on man. Spinoza identifies this mindset in the Appendix to Part 1 of *Ethics* when discussing ‘the widespread belief among men that all things in Nature are like themselves in acting with an end in view’. Speaking of early humans, Spinoza says:

... they look on all things of Nature as means to their own advantage... they could not believe them to be self-created, but on the analogy of the means which they are accustomed to produce for themselves, they were bound to conclude that there was some governor or governors of Nature, endowed with human freedom, who have attended to all their needs and made everything for their use.... Thus it was that this misconception developed into superstition and became deep-rooted in the minds of men.²

The belief in deities is commonly portrayed as springing from primitive man's crude explanatory efforts. Wallace Matson goes so far as to suggest that this account is 'perhaps obvious *a priori*'.³ Modern critics often appeal to it when assailing the design argument. The following passage from Richard Dawkins is representative.

The desire to see purpose everywhere is a natural one in an animal that lives surrounded by machines, works of art, tools and other designed artifacts; an animal, moreover, whose waking thoughts are dominated by its own personal goals. A car, a tin opener, a screwdriver and a pitchfork all legitimately warrant the 'What is it for?' question. Our pagan forebears would have asked the same question about thunder, eclipses, rocks, and streams. Today we pride ourselves on having shaken off such primitive animism ... But the old temptation comes back with a vengeance when tragedy strikes – indeed, the very word 'strikes' is an animistic echo: 'Why, oh why, did the cancer/earthquake/hurricane have to strike *my* child?' And the same temptation is often positively relished when the topic is the origin of all things or the fundamental laws of physics, culminating in the vacuous existence question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'⁴

The picture evoked by it suggests designating this tale about the explanatory efforts of primitive humans 'The caveman story'. It is oft-repeated, and through it all forms of the design argument (and, presumably, the cosmological argument as well, if we take Dawkins at his word) get dismissed as embodying an ages-old intellectual error.

To an extent those telling the caveman story are engaged in simple bluster, insofar as they presume familiarity with the inner workings of long-dead people who left us no records of their mental lives. And of course proponents of the design argument will not take kindly to being labelled primitive and self-centred, to being psychoanalysed rather than debated. These points, however, fail to get to the heart of the problem with the caveman story, which is that the origins of the design argument are entirely irrelevant to an assessment of it. To think otherwise is to commit the genetic fallacy. If the design argument is to be criticized, it should be on the basis of its content, not on the basis of who came up with it or how it has been transmitted.

The notion of anthropocentrism may, of course, play a key role in naturalistic accounts of the design argument's origin, development, and transmission, but that there are such accounts is no reason to judge the design argument bad. Just compare it to the institution of marriage. Like the former, the latter traces back to humanity's hunter-gatherer phase and is esteemed more because of custom than because of critical reflection – not to mention that it holds out false hope and is responsible for untold human misery! Yet these historical and sociological points (or the first two, at any rate) are irrelevant to the question of whether marriage is a bad institution. They simply are not the sorts of things to fill the role of that which *makes* marriage bad. Or consider the hypothesis that phlebotomy (bloodletting) can have medical benefits. In evaluating it, is its history relevant? That history is

a tale of ignorance and superstition, yet for all that, the hypothesis should not be dismissed; just ask sufferers of hemochromatosis.

None of this is to say that the caveman story is not effective in generating disapprobation of the design argument. It is a neat trick not to argue that one's opponent believes something false, but just to assume so and set to analysing why. To help break the spell cast by the telling of the caveman story, I'd like to note that the design argument is not the only idea which traces back to the confused reasonings of our prehistoric ancestors. Its proponents can grant that the design argument was introduced into our collective consciousness by primitive people, has been passed on through countless generations more because of custom than critical reflection, takes on a startling variety of forms, and to this day exerts its appeal even on the most sophisticated and intelligent among us ... so long as it is admitted that the same things are true of *argumentum ad hominem*.

The Dr Doolittle story

Another vehicle for the anthropocentrism objection is the literary conceit whereby nonhuman things are endowed with thought and speech. We are presented with their judgements about their place in the universe; doing so is supposed to make us realize that we are projecting our preferences on to the world when we see the universe as designed. Since it is so often animals that are made to talk, I refer to this as 'The Dr Doolittle story'. Like the caveman story, the Dr Doolittle story traces to (and perhaps through) an early modern philosopher: Hume. In *Dialogues* he has Philo tell such a story in an attempt to undermine the suggestion, made by Cleanthes, that inspection of the world naturally suggests the efforts of an intelligent designer.

The Brahmins assert that the world arose from an infinite spider, who spun this whole complicated mass from his bowels, and annihilates afterwards the whole or any part of it, by absorbing it again and resolving it into his own essence. Here is a species of cosmogony which appears to us ridiculous because a spider is a little contemptible animal whose operations we are never likely to take for a model of the whole universe. But still here is a new species of analogy, even in our globe. And were there a planet wholly inhabited by spiders (which is very possible), this inference would there appear as natural and irrefragable as that which in our planet ascribes the origin of all things to design and intelligence.⁵

Philo insinuates that the spiderly cosmogony is arachnocentric. Yet he thinks there is no reason to find Cleanthes' cosmogony any better than that of the spiders. If we think the spiderly inference is absurd, Philo suggests, then we should regard Cleanthes' inference the same way.

In an important respect, however, Cleanthes' cosmogony is not analogous to the spiderly one. Philo asks us to imagine spiders capable of making inferences – that is, rational spiders. Yet these spiders draw an analogy between the cosmogenic process and their bodily functions, not their intellectual functions.

Cleanthes, defender of the design argument, could concede that Philo's spiderly cosmogony is silly, just as ancient cosmogonies which compared the origin of the universe to childbirth are silly. 'My cosmogony, however, is not of this sort', Cleanthes might say. 'Indeed, were there a planet filled with rational spiders, presumably the more advanced ones would reject web-spinning cosmogonies, instead arriving at a cosmogony much like mine, one in which the origin of the universe is attributed to design and intelligence – attributes presumably shared by all rational beings.'

The explanatory factors appealed to by Cleanthes – design and intelligence – are sufficiently detached from the particulars of human existence that talking and inferring spiders (or rotifers, or giraffes, or whatever) might very well endorse his cosmogony. The lesson, which will be considered in detail in the next section, is that there are many candidate features which might be specified in the design argument as felicitous or privileged (as 'model of the whole universe'). It is not a foregone conclusion that every such candidate will be ruled out on the grounds that to choose it is to display anthropocentrism, arachnocentrism, or some other sort of illicit bias.

Hume's story of rational spiders is not half as outlandish as the one Michael Scriven tells in his critique of the design argument.

If we decide to throw a die ten times, it is then guaranteed that a particular one of the 6¹⁰ possible combinations of ten throws is going to occur ... Now it would be pretty silly for the combination that happens to come up, to sit and look at itself and suggest that there had to be a designer who deliberately manipulated the fall of the die in order to bring about the particular combination that did occur.⁶

Again, the analogy here is misdirected. There is a strong disanalogy between a combination of results of throwing a die thinking a designer arranged for its existence and our thinking a designer arranged the universe to produce us. Presumably, if any combination of results of throwing a die were capable of thought, all of them would be, but not all possible universes are capable of producing human beings. If human beings could exist in worlds without carbon, or without physical laws, or with a mean temperature of a million degrees, it would be silly for us to infer that our universe was specially selected by a designer. Humans, however, are simply not that hardy.

Perhaps Scriven and like-minded critics of the design argument think their stories are artful ways of making the point that humans and intelligent beings are nothing special. While undeniably worth making, this point requires argumentation and evaluation. Fanciful stories of talking spiders and dice that sit up to look at themselves are rhetorical embellishments, not cogent reasons.

Egalitarianism

Suppose I were to introduce a lecture audience to the design argument by noting the peculiar suitability of the universe for my existence. Had its orbit been a bit greater or less in length, Earth would not have had a climate suitable for me. Had various fundamental physical parameters such as the rate of expansion of the early universe and the mass of the proton been the slightest bit different, the universe would not have been conducive to the formation of the stars in which the heavy elements essential to my biochemistry were formed. And so on. I doubt that my talk would go over well. However true my claims might be, my political and social insensitivities would leave me with an unpersuaded audience. ‘What makes *you* so special?’ they would rightly ask.

Many critics of the design argument say that it involves an equally grave, though more subtle, moral mistake. The design argument, they say, treats human beings as special, as ends uniquely worthy of creation. That it does so is explicable in terms of anthropocentrism (that bias which Hume calls ‘so natural an illusion’) but is not morally justifiable. Though I sympathize with those who think it is morally justifiable, I neither desire nor need to embroil myself in a debate about this point. Whether or not humans are ends uniquely worthy of creation is a question on which proponents of the design argument can afford to be silent. As I will argue in this section, they can specify fitness for life as the felicitous feature of the universe without weakening the support given to the claim that there is an intelligent designer.

For a start, let us consider the following passage from Bertrand Russell.

Is there not something a trifle absurd in the spectacle of human beings holding a mirror before themselves, and thinking what they behold so excellent as to prove that a Cosmic Purpose must have been aiming at it all along? Why, in any case, this glorification of Man? How about lions and tigers? They destroy fewer animal or human lives than we do, and they are much more beautiful than we are Would not a world of nightingales and larks and deer be better than our human world of cruelty and injustice and war?⁷

Now perhaps I am not the misanthrope Russell is, but I doubt humans are all that bad. As for tigers, I share William Blake’s ambivalence.⁸ Setting these quibbles aside, however, has Russell given a good reason for rejecting the design argument?

Before addressing this question, I would like to note that Russell cannot object to the idea of judging the relative worths of different worlds, for it is to that very idea that he appeals when he criticizes those who infer ‘Cosmic Purpose’ from our presence. He seems to think some value judgements are true independent of us. By ‘a world of nightingales and larks and deer’ presumably he means a world containing such things *and lacking humans*. Such a world, he says, would be an improvement, even though we would not be in it (a sentiment sometimes expressed by certain environmentalists). He thus puts himself (at least for the pur-

poses of making his point) in the same camp as G. E. Moore, who urges us to answer 'no' to the following question.

... imagine one world exceedingly beautiful And then imagine the ugliest world you can possibly conceive Such a pair of worlds we are entitled to compare The only thing we are not entitled to imagine is that any human being ever has or ever, by any possibility, *can*, live in either, can ever see and enjoy the beauty of the one or hate the foulness of the other. Well, even so, supposing them quite apart from any possible contemplation of human beings; still, is it irrational to hold that it is better that the beautiful world should exist, than the one which is ugly?⁹

Russell appears to be saying the same sort of thing, at least when he goes about criticizing the design argument. If so, then Russell (and, by extension, anyone else who complains of the unfairness or anthropocentric bias of the design argument) cannot, on pain of insincerity, also complain that proponents of the design argument speak as if some value judgements can be true independently of us.

Having said this, many defenders of the design argument would grant that it is unseemly to regard fitness for humanity *per se* as the felicitous feature of the universe. To sidestep the charge of partisanship, some have thought to switch the focus from *homo sapiens* to the qualities that supposedly set us apart: rationality and intelligence, creativity, the ability to love, and so forth. Even here, however, a derivative anthropocentrism will be seen by critics such as Hume, who thought it was partial to select thought ('this little agitation of the brain') as the model of the universe. Instead of anthropocentric bias, they will, like J. J. C. Smart, see 'psycho-centric hubris' in the design argument.¹⁰ Let us suppose they are right that humanity, rationality, intelligence, creativity, and the ability to love are none of them suited for the role of felicitous feature of the universe. What candidates remain?

Russell's reference to nightingales, larks, and deer suggests identifying a world of animal life as an end worthy of creation. Doing so should satisfy those who would see speciesism (surely a form of anthropocentrism) in singling out either humanity or our best attributes. Curiously, however, no version of the design argument has ever proposed fitness for animal life or fitness for sentience as the felicitous feature of the universe. And if there were such a version of the design argument, it would surely arouse the ire of 'deep ecologists'. They maintain that it is the biosphere as a whole which has intrinsic value, with the value of humans and animals deriving from their being parts of that whole. They would say that to specify humanity, rationality, creativity, or even sentience as ends uniquely worthy of creation would be to neglect much that is of value, and they urge us to adopt a 'biocentric' or 'ecocentric' moral stance. Consider the following statement from the Web page of the environmentalist group *EarthFirst!* (c. 1999).

Why Wilderness?

Is it because wilderness makes pretty picture postcards? Because it protects watersheds for downstream use by agriculture, industry, and homes? Because it cleans the cobwebs out of our heads after a long week in the auto factory or over

the video display terminal? Because it preserves resource extraction opportunities for future generations of humans? Because some unknown plant living in the wilds may hold a cure for cancer?

No. It is because wilderness *is*. Because it is the real world, the flow of life, the process of evolution, the repository of that three and a half billion years of shared travel.

All natural things have intrinsic worth, inherent worth.... They are. They exist. For their own sake. Without consideration for any real or imagined value to human civilization.

Note again the Moorean conception of value at work here. Deep ecologists think the value of the biosphere does not derive in any way from what it does for or how it is regarded by humans. Presumably they believe a world containing life would be better than a lifeless world, and that the truth of this value judgement does not require the presence of humans.

I will stop the inclusion-fest, for I think I have found a specification of the felicitous feature of the universe that inoculates the design argument from the charge of bias: fitness for life. This specification enables the proponent of the design argument to sidestep the complaints of and avoid arbitrating amongst the various parties mentioned above, all of whom presumably agree that a world without living beings would be a world far less valuable than ours. Such a world, after all, would lack humans, thinkers, creators, lovers, and animals. The critics who want to argue that the value judgement at work in the design argument is illegitimate will thus be forced to pursue the second strain of the anthropocentrism objection – unless they think specifying fitness for life is not inclusive enough.

Given that fitness for life is an inoffensive specification, is it one which any proponent of the design argument has actually given? Yes, though the design argument has been formulated in other ways as well. The most famous case for design, that of William Paley, appeals throughout to the intricacy of life and the ‘works of nature’, with nary a mention of intelligence or consciousness and with humanity mentioned only with respect to its anatomy.¹¹ The evidence for Paley’s argument would be just as good even if there were neither humans nor intelligent beings anywhere in the universe. Consider also that datum which currently is most often offered in support of the design argument: the fine-tuning of the cosmic parameters. Fine-tuning for what? Advocates of the design argument present a mixed message on this point. Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, and Peter van Inwagen identify intelligent life or rational life as that for which the universe is finely tuned.¹² On the other hand, John Leslie generally identifies mere life as that which a slightly different universe would have ruled out.¹³ Paul Davies does not even specify life, focusing instead on the restrictive conditions that must be met for the emergence of complex systems, with life being treated as a particular (and, perhaps, particularly interesting) case of complexity.¹⁴ It must also be acknowledged that many of the people writing on fine-tuning are simply not con-

sistent in their specifications, trumpeting life on one page, intelligence on the next, and complexity a few pages later.

Despite the range of opinion of its proponents, the design argument is almost always characterized by its critics as glorifying that which is distinctively human. This is how Hume's Philo and Demea construe Cleanthes, whom they say takes thought as the 'model of the whole universe'. Russell attributes the following answer to believers in 'Cosmic Purpose' who question why evolution happened: 'Because, in the end, something admirable was going to result – I am not quite sure what, but I believe it was scientific theologians and religiously-minded scientists'.¹⁵ It would be easy to criticize Russell for erecting a straw man, but in his defence it must be noted that many advocates of the design argument invite a sharp response of the sort Russell gives. I will not name names for a surfeit of names, but I am surely not the only one who has heard many a famous scientist publicly confess to being amazed at the capacity of the universe to produce beings who ... are capable of exploring fundamental questions about the universe! (And what of beings who pump gas, collect tolls, or remodel bathrooms?) An oft-heard phrase in discussions of the design argument – 'the anthropic principle' – only adds fuel to the fire. Patrick Wilson understandably claims that 'the thrust of the anthropic principle, as it is usually described, is to capitalize on our notions of the *significance* or *value* of human beings in order to explain the fundamental features of the universe'.¹⁶ If defenders of the design argument wish to mute such critics, they can, like Paley and Leslie, identify fitness for *life* as the felicitous feature of the universe.

But might doing so weaken the design argument? This is certainly the key point to address when evaluating the various possible specifications of the felicitous feature of the universe. For such a specification to be successful, it must make it highly unlikely, on the hypothesis that the universe is the way it is as a matter of chance, that the universe is of the specified sort. If not, then the intelligent design hypothesis would have no explanatory work to do. In other words, the region in the space of possible universes that this specification circumscribes must have two properties. First, the region must be small relative to the space of possible universes in which it is set. Second, the region must be such that, were one of the possible universes within it the actual one, this outcome would be far more likely on the hypothesis that there is an intelligent designer than on the hypothesis that the universe is the way it is as a matter of chance.

Does the region of universes fit for life have the right properties? Or is it far more likely that the world is fit for the existence of life than that it is fit for the existence of human beings, intelligent beings, or animals – so much more likely as to make fitness for life an ineffective specification of the felicitous feature of the universe? If we restrict ourselves to worlds that follow the same physical laws as this one, fitness for life appears to be an effective specification. The literature on fine-tuning indicates that, had any of the free cosmic parameters been the slightest

bit different, the universe would have been *radically* different, without stars and heavy elements, or with a duration of only a few seconds, or with a mass density far too low for any significant material structures to form.¹⁷ In such cases the universe would not have been suitable for *any* of the sorts of being under consideration.

Indeed, given that fine-tuning is framed in terms of what is permitted rather than what is existent, I doubt there could be a universe following the laws of this one which is fine-tuned for life but not for intelligent beings, sentient beings, loving beings, and so on. Otherwise there would have to be a natural factor which might forbid a life-permitting world from containing these particular forms of life. I am suggesting, in other words, that ‘a world that follows the laws of our universe and is fit for life’, ‘a world that follows the laws of our universe and is fit for sentience’, and ‘a world that follows the laws of our universe and is fit for intelligence’ are coextensive predicates. In that case advocates of the version of the design argument that is based on cosmic fine-tuning can make ‘a world that follows the laws of our universe and is fit for life’ their operative predicate without fearing that their argument lends any less support to the belief in an intelligent designer.

The dependence on us of the truth of value judgements

I showed in the previous section how to answer those who criticize the design argument on egalitarian grounds. To criticize the design argument on egalitarian grounds is to criticize it on moral grounds. Such a criticism does not sit well with another sort of attack on the design argument, one which faults it precisely for its reliance on value judgements according to which some sorts of universes are better than others. Many people, not all of whom are philosophers, think value judgements depend for their truth on facts about what we believe, what our communities are like, and how we live – or, if not, this is only because value judgements are not literally true at all, but rather express our emotions or indicate our (individual or group) preferences.¹⁸ Yet the design argument seems to presuppose not only that at least one value judgement is true, but that that value judgement was true at a time when (or, if one prefers, in a situation where) we were not around – namely, when the universe had yet to come into existence. Such a conception of value judgements is thought by some to be a reflection of our anthropocentrism, our propensity for projecting ourselves onto the world. The metaphysical and epistemic difficulties facing this conception are said to be so grave, however, that it cannot be right.¹⁹ If so, then the design argument is not a sound argument.

In response, defenders of the design argument are free to fight it out on the terms of their critics. They might agree with William Alston that ‘... insofar as it is impossible to give an objective criterion of value, it will not be an objective matter

of fact that teleological order is or is not exhibited in a given state of affairs', and so argue on behalf of objective criteria of value.²⁰ I am not concerned to take sides in this fight, but rather to understand whether the design argument hangs on the outcome. If so, that would be an important discovery about the design argument, for that would mean that its friends would have to battle on yet another philosophical front. If not, then any effort spent by its defenders fighting that battle would be wasted.

Here is a story which suggests that the metaphysical and epistemic status of value judgements has no bearing on inferences of the sort the design argument exemplifies. Suppose the leading aestheticians conclusively determine that the causal and historical properties of a work of art are irrelevant to its value. Specifically, they uncover the following truth: a perfect forgery of the *Mona Lisa* is just as valuable as the original. Now imagine that a warehouse containing the *Mona Lisa* along with a million perfect forgeries of it is burgled, with only the genuine *Mona Lisa* being stolen. Would it be appropriate to dismiss the theft of that *particular Mona Lisa* as unworthy of explanation, on the grounds that it is not *really* more valuable than any of the perfect forgeries? Of course not. Likewise, the design argument's defenders might say, the question of whether universes with life are *really* more valuable than ones without life is irrelevant to our assessment of the design argument. For the design argument to work, the value judgements it appeals to need not have some special metaphysical status. They need only be such that an intelligent designer is likely to endorse them.

The problem with this response is that our inferences regarding the theft of the original *Mona Lisa* are made with the help of considerable background knowledge of human beliefs and behaviours. Although the original is (as I have supposed) no more valuable than any one of the duplicates, we would not expect the typical thief to believe this. Unlike human thieves, however, we are in the dark regarding the motivations and psychology of intelligent designers. Let us put aside any qualms we might have about the notion of an intelligent designer and stipulate for the sake of argument that there existed or exists outside of the physical world a being with knowledge and power sufficient to bring into existence a physical universe of its choosing. Even granting this, the questions raised by paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould appear to be live ones.

If disembodied mind does exist (and I'll be damned if I know any source of scientific evidence for or against such an idea), must it prefer a universe that will generate our earth's style of life, rather than a cosmos filled with diprotons? What can we say against diprotons as markers of pre-existing intelligence except that such a universe would lack any chroniclers among its physical objects? Must all conceivable intelligence possess an uncontrollable desire to incarnate itself eventually in the universe of its choice?²¹

What is being questioned here is the assumption that the specification of the felicitous feature of the universe in the design argument meets the second

condition mentioned in the preceding section – namely, that the universe’s possessing the felicitous feature is far more likely on the hypothesis that there is an intelligent designer than on the hypothesis that the universe is the product of chance. Why think this? Even supposing there is an intelligent designer, why think that it is more likely to create a universe with the felicitous feature rather than some other sort of universe? Why think an intelligent designer is more likely to create, say, a universe with life rather than a universe full of diprotons?

Compare the proponent of the design argument to the poker player who accuses the dealer of having fixed the deck on a particular hand. For the allegation to stick, the player must attribute to the dealer more than just the *ability* to fix decks. The player must also attribute a *motive* for dealing that particular hand. Thus the accusation of card-fixing is credible when the dealer gets a Royal Flush, but not when the dealer gets a worthless hand (e.g. two of clubs, five of diamonds, seven of spades, nine of hearts, queen of clubs). In the latter case, it is useless to attribute to the dealer a motive for getting that particular hand (say, a fetish for the sequence two of clubs, five of diamonds, seven of spades, nine of hearts, queen of clubs). While doing so greatly raises the probability of the dealer’s getting that hand, it greatly lowers the probability of the dealer’s having just that motive. Just as the dealer must have a motive as well as card-fixing abilities for the cheating charge to stick, the intelligent designer must have a motive as well as world-creating abilities in order for the design argument to work.

Perhaps defenders of the design argument can account for this motive. They cannot do so by appealing to the nature of God, however, for almost all of them (Richard Swinburne being the exception) insist that the entity posited in the design argument might not be God.²² This point is emphasized by William Rowe, William Alston, and, as we see in the following passage, Peter van Inwagen.

... the conclusion of the teleological argument does not imply that the Designer has very many of the properties that have traditionally been ascribed to God. There is no reason to suppose – at least none that is supplied by the teleological argument – that the Designer would be all-powerful or would know everything or would recognize any moral obligations as regards the welfare of created rational beings. And because the Designer whose existence the teleological argument purports to prove need have few of these properties that have traditionally been ascribed to God, the Designer’s purposes might be entirely unlike the purposes that have traditionally been ascribed to God.²³

Depriving its adherents of theological accounts of the motive of the intelligent designer (e.g. that its desires flow from its perfect goodness and perfect love), this feature of the design argument provides room for Gould’s sort of scepticism.

What can the proponent of the design argument say at this point? ‘Given that the cosmos is a product of intelligent design’, van Inwagen finds it reasonable to believe ‘that among the Designer’s purposes in making the cosmos was to provide an abode for rational beings like ourselves’.²⁴ He thinks there is something in the

nature of intelligent designers which gives us reason to expect such a being to create a universe with the felicitous feature he has specified: fitness for rational beings. While such a judgement is no doubt abstract and speculative, it seems to me that it need not be relegated to the realm of mere philosophical intuition. Defenders of the design argument might argue that there is a conceptual connection between being an intelligent designer on the one hand and desiring to bring about worlds with the felicitous feature on the other. They might also try to argue that our experience with intelligent designers of lesser knowledge and power (namely, ourselves) gives us some inductive grounds, however weak, for expecting intelligent designers to bring about worlds with the felicitous feature. Yet these are mere proposals for arguments; the hard work is yet to be done.

The conclusion I reach is that advocates of the design argument face a dilemma (the horns of which they may or may not judge to be sharp). If they do not endorse some sort of objectivism with respect to value judgements, they will have to provide a special theory connecting being an intelligent designer with desiring to create a universe exhibiting the felicitous feature they identify. I cannot say what such a theory will look like, though I suspect it will in some way rest on (perhaps controversial) positions in the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of action, and ethics. On the other hand, if they do endorse objectivism, they can maintain that universes with the felicitous feature are better than universes without it, and that this was true before the universe came to be. Gould's sceptical question – 'Why expect an intelligent designer to think universes with life are preferable to universes filled with diprotons?' – then gets an easy answer: 'Because it is true'. The price of this position, however, is objectivism itself, which as already noted, is regarded by some as fraught with metaphysical and epistemological difficulties.

Conclusion

Its supposed anthropocentrism has been thought to tell against the design argument in several ways. According to the caveman story, anthropocentrism accounts for how the design argument got started. As I have noted, however, the design argument's origins are not relevant to a proper assessment of it. The Dr Doolittle story is an 'intuition pump' (to borrow a term from Daniel Dennett) that goads us into thinking our amazement at the evidence the design argument calls to our attention is simply the result of anthropocentrism. Tellers of the Dr Doolittle story, however, presuppose that it is us, and fitness for us, to which the design argument calls our attention. Those who complain that the design argument is insufficiently egalitarian make the same presupposition. Both these criticisms can effectively be rebutted by specifying a felicitous feature of the universe other than fitness for humanity. I suggest that advocates of the design argument specify fitness for life. Lastly, the design argument is said to require a picture of value according to which it was true prior to the coming-into-being of

the universe that our sort of universe is better than some other sort of universe. Such a picture, say the critics, is mistaken, though our attraction to it is understandable given our natural anthropocentrism. Unlike the other points, this one raises a serious challenge for advocates of the design argument. To respond to it, they must either defend an objectivist conception of value or, if not, provide some independent reason for thinking the existence of an intelligent designer makes the existence of our sort of universe more likely.²⁵

Notes

1. David Hume *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis IN: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1970), 28.
2. Baruch Spinoza *Ethics* in Samuel Shirley (transl.) and Seymour Feldman (ed.) *The Ethics and Selected Letters* (Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 1982), 58.
3. Wallace Matson *The Existence of God* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 90 (footnote text).
4. Richard Dawkins *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York NY: Basic Books, 1995), 96–97.
5. Hume *Dialogues*, 66–67.
6. Michael Scriven *Primary Philosophy* (New York NY: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 129.
7. Bertrand Russell *Religion and Science* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1961), 221.
8. William Blake 'The Tyger' in Richard Willmott (ed.) *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
9. G. E. Moore *Principia Ethica* (Buffalo NY: Prometheus Books, 1988), 83–84.
10. J. J. C. Smart (and J. J. Haldane) *Atheism and Theism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 26–27.
11. William Paley *Natural Theology* (London: Faulder, 1805).
12. Richard Swinburne 'Argument from the fine-tuning of the universe' in John Leslie (ed.) *Physical Cosmology and Philosophy* (New York NY: Macmillan, 1989); William Lane Craig 'The teleological argument and the anthropic principle' in W. L. Craig and M. S. McLeod (eds) *The Logic of Rational Theism: Exploratory Essays* (Lewiston NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990); Peter van Inwagen *Metaphysics* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1993), chs 7–8.
13. John Leslie *Universes* (New York NY: Routledge, 1989).
14. Paul Davies *The Mind of God* (New York NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992), ch. 8.
15. Russell *Religion and Science*, 190.
16. Patrick Wilson 'What is the explanandum of the anthropic principle?', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 28 (1991), 169.
17. For detailed accounts of the evidence of fine-tuning, see John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 1986), chs 4–6; and Leslie *Universes*, chs 2–3.
18. For a useful map of the relevant positions, see Geoffrey Sayre-McCord 'The many moral realisms' in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (ed.) *Essays in Moral Realism* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1–23.
19. For an indication of the sorts of metaphysical and epistemic problems mentioned, see J. L. Mackie *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), ch. 1.
20. William Alston 'Teleological argument for the existence of God' in Paul Edwards (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York NY: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 8, 84.
21. Stephen J. Gould 'Mind and supermind' in John Leslie (ed.) *Modern Cosmology and Philosophy* (Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 190.
22. See Swinburne 'Argument from the fine-tuning of the universe'.
23. William Rowe *The Cosmological Argument* (New York NY: Fordham University Press, 1988), 4–5; Alston 'Teleological argument for the existence of God', 86–87; and van Inwagen *Metaphysics*, 132–133.
24. van Inwagen *Metaphysics*, 139.
25. I would like to thank Peter van Inwagen, Jose Benardete, Robert Van Gulick, and Gordon Graham for their suggestions regarding the themes explored in this paper.