

1 Arguments for the existence of God: the Design Argument

Presentation: William Paley's analogical argument

Exam tip

There are many versions of the Design Argument, but you need to focus on Paley's version only. If you do choose to refer to other arguments, it should be in the context of A02 only. Likewise, the only criticisms that you need to consider are those from Hume. (See also what is said about Hume in the Typical mistakes box on page 3.)

Type of argument and technical terms

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Paley's argument is:

- **a posteriori:**
 - it is **empirical** in nature
 - it is based on sense experience
- **inductive:**
 - it is based on probability and not on knock-down proof
 - the conclusion is not necessarily true; the stronger the evidence for it, the more likely it is to be true
- **analogical:**
 - it is based on a comparison between the features of two different things.

Paley's argument uses the approach of **natural theology**:

- It makes no appeal to any form of **special revelation**, such as the Bible or religious experience.
- It uses reason, the latest scientific knowledge and observation.

Hence the name of Paley's book: *Natural Theology*. The reference to Genesis 1:1 at the end of the analogy is just pointing out that natural and revealed theology agree on the conclusion.

Paley's argument is based on three observations of the world:

- complexity
- purpose (hence Paley's argument is also referred to as the Teleological Argument)
- regularity.

A posteriori Arguments that depend on sense experience.

Empirical An argument that is based on the experience of the senses (touch, taste, hearing, smell and sight).

Inductive When used of arguments, refers to those based on probability.

Analogical An analogy is an attempt to explain the meaning of something which is difficult to understand by comparing it with something that is more securely within our reference-frame.

Natural theology The view that questions about God's existence, nature and attributes can be answered by reasoning, science, history and observation rather than by appeal to special revelation.

Special revelation Refers to scripture or some form of religious experience.

Criticisms of design arguments

David Hume

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Hume made a number of arguments in his challenge to design theory. Two of his main approaches in challenging design arguments are covered here.

Typical mistake

You need to show awareness of chronology when referring to philosophers. Rather than saying 'Hume criticised Paley's assumption that ...', it would be more appropriate to say 'Hume's criticisms of design arguments may be applied to Paley's argument by ...' since Hume died several years before Paley's *Natural Theology* was published.

Rejection of the idea of design

Mechanistic analogies are inappropriate:

- Such analogies are deliberately chosen because they encourage the idea of a designer.
- Living organisms would be more appropriate, e.g. a vegetable, which does not require explanation in terms of a designer.

The apparent order could be due to chance:

- Hume suggested that given the constantly changing arrangements of its atoms over an infinite period of time, it was inevitable that order would eventually emerge.
- He also suggested the possibility that the universe alternates between periods of chaos and periods of order, and by sheer chance, existence currently is in a period of order.

Little can be said about any designer

The mechanistic analogy is **anthropomorphic**:

- Humans have no knowledge of how universes are made.
- This means we can know nothing about the capacities or nature of any universe designer.
- The mechanistic analogy is in effect creating a universe designer in our image.
- The designer is not necessarily the God of Christian theism:
 - A cause must be proportional to its effects.
 - The traditional Christian understanding of God is not required by what is known of the universe.
 - Intelligent minds are attached to physical bodies, so the designer could be mortal and may be long dead.
 - Teamwork is often behind design, so a number of deities of different skills, both male and female, could be responsible for the universe.

Anthropomorphic Language that attributes human characteristics or ideas to non-human entities.

The problem of evil:

- The existence of so much natural and moral evil in the world is evidence of a flawed design.
- Hume considered God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence to be incompatible with the existence of evil. Thus, the existence of evil calls into question the character of a creator God.

The relationship between reason and faith

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What follows applies to all three arguments set for study: design, ontological and cosmological.

In Price's view, both 'belief that' and 'belief in' are necessary to faith.

- Without belief that, 'belief in' has no substance.
- Without belief in, 'belief that' has no personal significance.

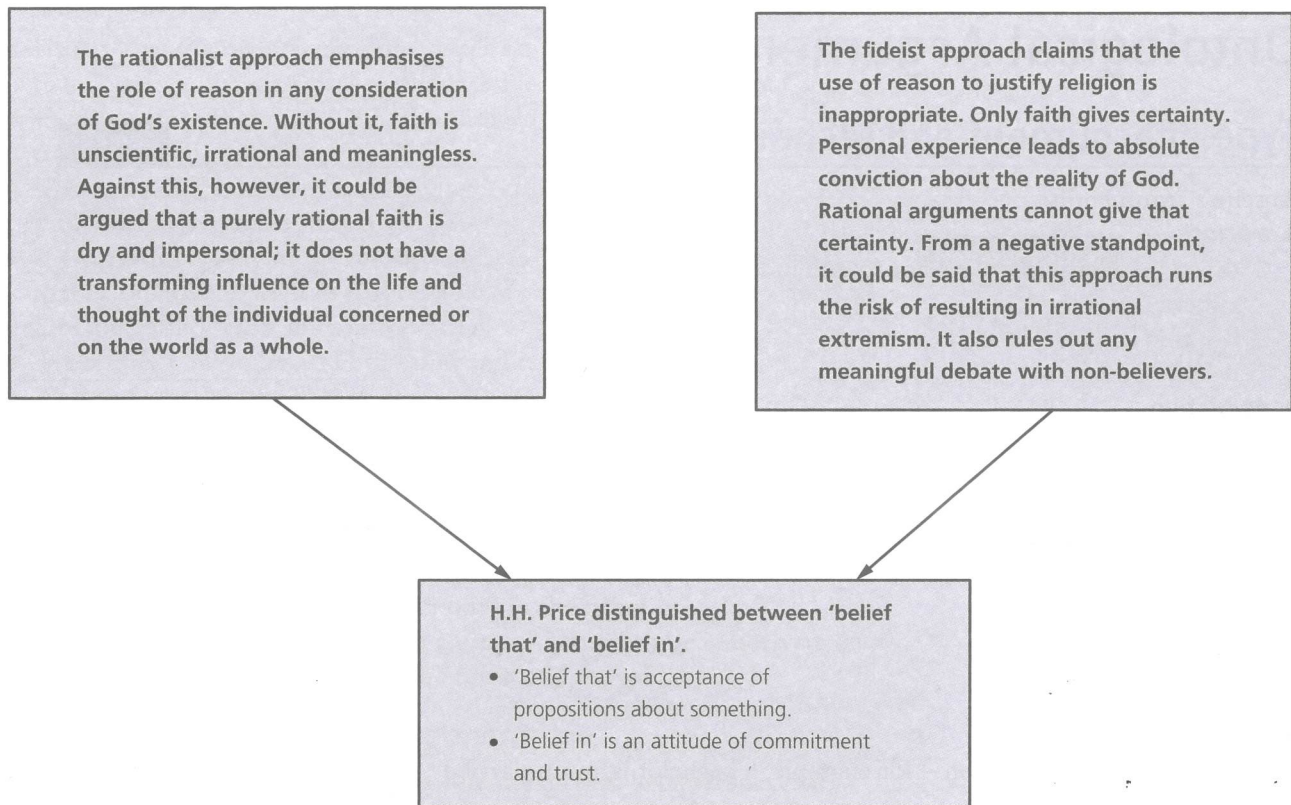


Figure 2 The relationship between reason and faith

Now test yourself

TESTED

- 1 Give three ways in which Hume criticised design arguments and show how these could be applied to Paley's Design Argument.
- 2 Explain Price's distinction between 'belief that' and 'belief in'.

Key quotation

'Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.'

Fides et ratio (On the relationship between faith and reason),
Pope John Paul II