

# natural theology, argument from design, Wolfe, and other

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Jeremy Crampton — 06 Nov 1999, 10:09

Dan sez:

The "argument from design" is a much more modern theological supposition ...

and..

Natural theology, on the other hand, is a much older and more complex ideology

As I understand it, natural theology argues, among other things, that because the world was created by a supernatural being, that being can intervene in the affairs of the world, producing miracles.

Hm, interesting. Here is what I know about this, tho I'm no expert on it so invite comment:

Natural theology doesn't necessarily deal with miracles and is indeed based on the design argument (teleology). So I guess I'm disagreeing with you here.

Evidence: Encyclopedia Britannica WWW edition (which I swear I didn't read before my last post!):

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"Natural theology is generally characterized as the project of establishing religious truths by rational argument and without reliance upon alleged revelations, its two traditional topics being the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.

Arguments for the existence of God

The design (or teleological) argument

St. Paul, with many others in the Greco-Roman world, believed that the existence of God is evident from the appearances of nature: "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Romans 1:20). The most popular, because the most accessible, of the theistic arguments is that which identifies evidences of design in nature, inferring from them a divine designer. The argument was propounded by medieval Christian thinkers and was developed in great detail in 17th- and 18th-century Europe by such writers as Robert Boyle, John Ray, Samuel Clarke, and William Derham and at the beginning of the 19th century by William Paley. Such writers asked: Is not the eye as manifestly designed for seeing, and the ear for hearing, as a pen for writing or a clock for telling the time; and does not such design imply a designer? The fact that the universe as a whole is a coherent and efficiently functioning system likewise, in this view, indicates a divine intelligence behind it."

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In other words, traces of a Deity are found in the landscape and we can come to know that

Deity better by studying how the world works. So interestingly enough it has scientific pretensions. William Paley for eg was a cleric and geologist (IIRC) (and also creationist) who wrote "Natural Theology, or evidences of the existence and attributes of the Deity" which made the analogy of the universe as a watch (the divine watchmaker). This later influenced anti-teleologists such as Darwin and Dawkins (eg "Blind watchmaker : why evidence of evolution reveals a universe without design" 1986).

What Wolfe is doing with the tea-lady is to give us her view of science thru teleological eyes ie., that science destroys wonder (a common anti-evolutionist claim to this day). When the ballooning of the cathedral tent can be explained by the hot air from the fire which was started by Severian's crash, this for her, misses the point, which is to see the Hand (of God) in nature. She isn't calling for a miracle, but that the event should send us to God, not to the explanation. We modernists in turn reject her viewpoint, eg., viz. Dawkins last book "Unweaving the rainbow : science, delusion and the appetite for wonder" which I believe argues that scientific understanding is what truly leads to wonder and respect for evolutionary explanation.

(That's enough teleology: ed).

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