not be here either, so the argument could equally well be made that the universe is
designed for the existence of dung beetles – or even, that the universe is designed for the
existence of cancer.

4. It might be highly unlikely that the structure of the universe allows for our existence, but
everything that ever happens is highly unlikely, when considered alongside all the other
possibilities of what might have happened instead. Think of the odds stacked against you
being here reading this page. Of all the different people your parents might have met, they
happened to meet each other; of all the numerous sperm and eggs that could have
combined, it happened that you were conceived. Of all the different life choices you could
have made, you have chosen to study this subject, and so on. For many people, this does
not prove the existence of God, but is simply the random effect of chance.

When you throw dice, whatever score you achieve, the odds were against that
particular outcome. Does this show a supernatural intelligence at work,
making something happen against the odds? Or is it just the case that the dice
had to fall some way or another, and they have fallen this way by chance?

**Tennant’s aesthetic design argument**

Tennant also argued for the existence of an intelligent God who designed the universe,
on the basis of the beauty of the world. Beauty, he argued, is not necessary for survival
– it cannot be ‘explained away’ by Darwinist ideas – it is what he calls ‘a biologically
superfluous accompaniment of the cosmic process’. Nevertheless, the natural world is
full of beauty, on a scale which humans can never copy, however hard they try. Tennant
argued that when people try to make something beautiful, the best that they can
manage is never as good as the beauty which appears everywhere in the natural world.
Tennant argued that the beauty of the natural world cannot be explained by science. He thought the best explanation of beauty is that God made it, for his own enjoyment and for ours.

For Tennant, the beauty of the natural world provides evidence for the existence of God, because there is no scientific explanation to account for beauty. Beauty does not perform a utilitarian function, so there is no reason for there to be so much of it in the world, Tennant argues, unless it is put there by God, for the purposes of human enjoyment and for God himself to enjoy when he looks at his creation.

Of course, not everyone would agree that the beauty of the world points to the existence of God. Some argue that beauty is not an absolute quality, but is a matter of opinion, so that beauty does not ‘exist’ in the sense that Plato’s Form of Beauty might be said to exist, but is a value-judgement.

To think about

Do you think that beauty exists, in an objective way, or do you think that it is just a matter of opinion whether something is beautiful or not?

Key points

• Tennant’s writing was intended to support design arguments in spite of Darwinist criticisms.
• He argued for divine design on the basis of the anthropic principle.
• He also argued that the beauty of the natural world is best explained if we accept the existence of God.
Swinburne’s design argument

Richard Swinburne is a modern Christian philosopher of religion who supports teleological (and other) arguments for the existence of God. He believes that scientific discoveries provide good grounds for belief in God. In his book, *Is There a God?*, he argues that we need an explanation for the fact that the fundamental laws of nature operate with such regularity:

… not merely are there enormous numbers of things, but they all behave in exactly the same way. The same laws of nature govern the most distant galaxies we can observe through our telescopes as operate on earth, and the same laws govern the earliest events in time to which we can infer as operate today. Or, as I prefer to put it, every object, however distant in time and space from ourselves, has the same powers and the same liabilities to exercise those powers as do the electrons and protons from which our own bodies are made. If there is no cause of this, it would be a most extraordinary coincidence – too extraordinary for any rational person to believe. (*Is There a God?*, p. 49)

For Swinburne, it stretches our credibility if we are asked to believe that the regularity of the laws of physics is just a coincidence. In his view, it is far simpler and more rational to conclude that these laws must exist because of a divine intelligence. Swinburne is impressed not only by the laws of physics themselves, but by the fact that these laws are easy to observe by humans. These laws, he argues, have important consequences for us. We can observe that seeds grow when they are planted and nurtured, and we can use this observation to grow our own food. We can observe that objects fall when dropped, and we can use this knowledge to avoid accidents. Swinburne says that this availability of scientific knowledge shows that God does not only exist, but cares for us: God gives us the freedom to make choices for ourselves and for other people. He also gives us the freedom to decide how much knowledge we want to have, and gives us the ability to make advances in science and technology.

Swinburne believes that Paley’s argument is sound, in spite of the various criticisms made of it. He writes:

*Paley’s book is devoted to showing how well built in all their intricate detail are animals and humans, and so to concluding that they must have had God as their maker. The analogy of animals to complex machines seems to me correct, and its conclusion justified.* (*Is There a God?*, p. 58)
Develop your knowledge

Swinburne’s arguments for the existence of God can be found in many of his writings, for example in his books *Is there a God?* (Oxford University Press, 1996) and *The Existence of God* (Clarendon Press 2004).

Swinburne also argues in favour of Tennant’s view that the beauty of the natural world is evidence of the existence of God.

The main force of Swinburne’s argument is that it is good scientific practice to look for the most simple explanation when trying to solve a problem. In his view, alternative explanations offered for the order of the universe are more complicated than belief in God. Although other possibilities have been given, these often depend on us accepting the occurrence of very unlikely coincidences, which, he believes, require just as much of a ‘leap of faith’ as belief in God requires.

Develop your knowledge

There is a wide variety of material available to read about design arguments for the existence of God – some are more difficult than others. The following books are suggested as accessible:

*Philosophy of Religion* by Peter Cole (Hodder Arnold, 1999)
*Philosophy of Religion* by Brian Davies (Oxford University Press, 2003)
*Teach Yourself Philosophy of Religion* by Mel Thompson (Teach Yourself, 2003)
*The Puzzle of God* by Peter Vardy (Fount, 1999)

Practice exam question

(a) Explain why design arguments for the existence of God have been accepted by some thinkers but rejected by others.

For this answer, you need to show a clear understanding of design arguments, and for high marks, you need to be able to make reference to scholarly debate by referring to the views of well-known thinkers. Paley would be an obvious choice here, and so would Hume. You should show why some people have accepted design arguments – you could explore, for example, Swinburne’s or Tennant’s view that design in the world shows that it is probable that God exists. Explain the reasons they give in support of their position.