



Natural Theology

William Paley, *David M. Knight (Editor)*, *Matthew D. Eddy (Editor)*

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In *Natural Theology* William Paley set out to prove the existence of God from the evidence of the beauty and order of the natural world. Famously beginning by comparing the world to a watch, whose design is self-evident, he goes on to provide examples from biology, anatomy, and astronomy in order to demonstrate the intricacy and ingenuity of design that could only come from a wise and benevolent deity.

This new edition, which coincides with the bicentennial of Paley's death, reprints the original text of 1802, which was very influential in its day, and still controversial in ours as we see a resurgence in the debate between "intelligent design" and "creationism." The introduction explains how the book built on the early modern natural theology tradition and why it was so influential. The book also contains two appendixes on Paley's courses, an extended bibliography, and full notes offering further background on the key figures of the day.

Natural Theology Details

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From Reader Review Natural Theology for online ebook

Y.Z. says

It's sad that more than two hundred years later, intelligent design proponents are still using an argument that opens Paley's book ("watch-watchmaker"), which was published in 1802.

Perhaps, as my punny friend Jimmy says, I.D. does not evolve.

Manny says

My name is William Paley; I was born into this world in 1743, and I departed it in 1805. How I come to be writing these lines on your *website*, I am not at liberty to relate; but I have now been a visitor in the 21st century for several months, and there are matters I have been ruminating almost since my arrival, that I feel, after mature consideration of the circumstances, that I am not without justification in wishing to divulge to a wider audience.

You may have heard mention of a book I wrote, some two hundred years ago, with the title *Natural Theology*. I understand that the opening passage is still on occasion cited today: I beg the reader to consider his answer should he pitch his foot against a stone while walking across a heath, and wonder how it came to be there; and then compare it with his different answer, should he instead have found a *watch*. A stone may, for all one knows, have lain there forever; but a watch, every reasonable man will agree, implies the existence of a watchmaker. From this beginning, I argued that the case of living creatures is in all respects exactly analogous; that they are all possessed of contrivances as clearly mechanical as the spring, gears, chain, fusee &c of any watch, and as clearly the product of an Artificer.

I well understand that, with the advantage of two centuries' more learning, some of you may smile and wink at my honest misunderstanding; it will be within the compass of a diligent schoolboy's powers to correct my error, and explain that the adaptation of each living creature to its environment, which I marvelled at and named as evidence of Divine Contrivance, is in fact result of the process of Natural Selection so well described by Mr. Darwin. But does this mean that I repent of my attempt to demonstrate the existence of the Creator from the evidence of His handiwork? To the question, I give a resounding no! I regret, merely, that when I wrote my book I had available but the meager resources afforded me by the natural philosophy of my day; had I (as I have now,) been granted access to the stores of modern knowledge, which treat of phenomena undreamed of in my 18th century, I could have couched the argument in terms a hundred, nay, a thousand times more apt to convince the sceptical reader.

In 1802, when I completed my book, the notion of contrivance was but a poor and simple one, and amounted to little more than the art of the watchmaker and the plumber: and thus, the examples of natural contrivances which I furnished, the joints, ligaments, valves &c, of the human body were no more than clockwork and plumbing. But now, any citizen of your age who is habituated to the ways of the *Internet*, has an understanding immeasurably deeper of what contrivances may be devised even by human art. It can happen that an uninstructed person, faced for the first time with that marvel of artifice called *Google Translate*, notes that the device allows for the translation, albeit imperfect, from Icelandic to Indonesian, and wonders at the difficulty of locating persons conversant with both these languages, and also familiar with the means of creating mechanical dictionaries and grammars; yet any man who but has a little acquaintance with the methods of *software engineering* will tell him, that no such persons are required. The engine of *Google Translate* needs merely a good stock of examples which associate sentences of Icelandic to their Indonesian

counterparts; and, of its own accord, it will *adapt* itself to the peculiarities of this pair of languages. The skill of the artificer is at one remove from the result; it resides not in the production of the contrivance itself, but in the production of utensils, more general in form, which have the power of adapting themselves to new circumstances.

Now if the human enterprise of Messrs. Page and Brin can create such an engine, how much more subtle an engine may not be created by the Divine Power! On perusing the learned articles of Francis Crick and James Watson, I was awed and humbled to discover that the Creator had no more to devise multiple species of animal and plant, than the artificers of *Google Translate* to devise multiple engines of translation. One single engine, the *DNA molecule*, sufficed; and Mr. Darwin's process of Natural Selection then performed the whole of the remaining task, of painstakingly achieving the adaptation of each species to its particular environment.

I am aware that there be men who argue, that the *DNA molecule* itself be the product of chance, not artifice: and to these I say, shew me the sufficient reasons, that explain how such a thing may arise. Were it necessary to inquire into the *motives* of these men's opinions, I mean their motives separate from their arguments; I should almost suspect, that, because the proof of a Deity drawn from the constitution of nature is not only popular but vulgar (which may arise from the cogency of the proof, and be indeed its highest recommendation), and because it is a species almost of puerility to take up with it; for these reasons, minds, which are habitually in search of invention and originality, feel a resistless inclination to strike off into other solutions and other expositions. The truth is, that many minds are not so indisposed to any thing which can be offered to them, as they are to the flatness of being content with common reasons: and, what is most to be lamented, minds conscious of superiority, are the most liable to this repugnancy.

In my book, I briefly alluded moreover to proofs drawn from the realm of Astronomy, though I noted, that in my opinion such proofs were less convincing than those based on Anatomy; here, too, I discover that I was mistaken, and that new learning has shewn the Heavens to even greater extent the work of Artifice than is the fabric of life. But to adduce such proofs to an article intended as brief, would be wearisome; rather, I should prefer to revise my book in the light of this new science, a project I most earnestly wish to attempt, can my sojourn in the 21st century be but adequately prolonged.

I remain, your very faithful and humble servant,

William Paley

G.R. Reader says

Over 90% of the people who call themselves creationists have not read this book. And they wonder why everyone thinks they're idiots.

David says

I thought it was too long but Paley needed to really prove to us that there was a Designer to the function of nature. He was a great influence for Charles Darwin so it is an important book to read to get a better understanding of the development of the Darwin's evolution by natural selection.

Richard Dawkin's responds to this work through the Blind Watchmaker using the watchmaker analogy as well. I also did not enjoy Dawkin's book and I'm a biologist.

B0nnie says

<http://archive.org/details/naturalthe...>

Cynthia Egbert says

While this is a bit dry in places, his use of analogy and even allegory is delightful and I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I do want to read it again in the future while reading *The Origin of Species* at the same time, I think they need to be experienced together as these two books are the foundation of the debate that occurred when Darwin produced his work.

Allan Williams says

I planned to read Richard Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker*, and decided that I owed it to the good Archdeacon to read his long ago treatise containing the analogy from which Dawkin drew his title. I'm glad I did, but the entire book, a lengthy exposition of the Argument from Design, can be summed up in the opening paragraph. "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, for anything I knew to the contrary it had lain there forever: nor would it perhaps be easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that, for anything I knew, the watch might always have been there. . . . When we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that it's several parts are framed and put together for a purpose . . . 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 who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer; who comprehended its construction and designed its use." Paley's *Natural Theology* is still in print more than 200 years later, so it's worth reading the whole thing if you're so inclined, but that's pretty much all you need to know about this book. AW.

Christopher Ballew says

Read an original 2nd edition from the UK. It was a good book for its time.

Fayçal says

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