

## SOME ATHEISTIC ARGUMENTS ANSWERED

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In establishing the case for the existence of God, we attempt to present clear reasoning that will lead to a rational conclusion, namely, that the Universe, mankind, etc., are not self-explanatory. Rather, logical minds must conclude that a Supreme Being exists. In our approach, we are affirming a proposition for which positive evidence exists. Atheism, on the other hand, is a totally negative system. It denies much and affirms nothing. It robs one of hope and offers emptiness in exchange, asserting that there is no transcendent Cause for the Universe, and that man is a fortuitous combination of molecules. Morality does not exist, or if it does, man, as his own “god,” determines its nature. Atheism is a philosophical system of contradiction and confusion. Atheists do, however, attempt to argue their case. In this article, I will analyze two of the popular arguments employed in defense of atheism.

### NON-DESIGN NEGATES GOD?

In contending for the existence of God, theists utilize the “design” argument, which postulates that **where there is purposeful design, there must be a designer**. That this type of reasoning is valid is not in doubt, especially for those who respect the authority of the Scriptures (which an atheist obviously would not), since it is employed by an inspired writer. Paul, in his epistle to the Roman saints, declared: “For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse” (1:20). Thus, we may argue logically:

1. If the Universe evinces purposeful design, there must be a designer.
2. But, the Universe does evince purposeful design.
3. Thus, the Universe must have had a designer.

The basic point of contention, from the atheistic vantage point, would be the minor premise. The infidel denies that the Universe reveals purposeful design. He feels that he can reverse the argument and make his point against the existence of God. He would reason (incorrectly) as follows:

1. If the Universe evinces the traits of non-design (i.e., chaos), there is no designer.
2. But, the Universe does evince non-design.
3. Thus, the Universe had no designer.

The atheist’s argument is invalid for several reasons. First, in arguing our case for design, we are not obligated to show **obvious** design in every single feature of the Universe. We need only a reasonable number of sufficient evidences to establish design, hence, a Designer. Here are two vital principles that must be kept in view: (1) It is possible that an object possesses purposeful design but that its **design is not recognized** by the observer; and (2) It is possible that an object once clearly reflected purposeful design, but that through **the process of degeneration**, its obvious design has been erased. Let us consider these two points as applied to some atheistic presuppositions.

### DESIGN UNRECOGNIZED

Suppose that a native, strolling through the jungle, should come across a watch. Examining it, he cannot perceive its function. Does the fact that he sees no practical purpose in the instrument prove that it has no design? Of course not. Keep this important concept in mind, for frequently atheists—unable to perceive design in various objects—argue (upon the basis of their own ignorance) against the existence of a Designer.

### THE UNIVERSE—AN EXAMPLE OF NON-DESIGN?

We live in a vast Universe, the diameter of which is estimated to be 20 billion light-years (i.e., the distance it would take light to travel across it at the rate of 186,000+ miles per second). There are billions of galaxies in the Universe, one of which is the Milky Way galaxy in which we live. If we drew a map of our galaxy, and represented the Earth and Sun as two dots one inch apart (thus a scale of one inch equals 93 million miles), we would need a map at least four miles wide to locate our next nearest star, and one 25,000 miles wide to reach the center of our galaxy! Indeed, this is a rather impressive Universe.

The atheist contends, however, that the enormity of the Universe, compared with our tiny planet, suggests wastefulness of space, hence, non-design. We deny such a premise. First of all, our vast Universe reveals a **theological** purpose; i.e., it demonstrates the power of the Creator. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). When Job questioned the wisdom of Jehovah’s operations in this world, the Lord humbled him with a series of questions about the measurements of the Earth, the purpose of which was to reveal how little the patriarch knew about this planet, hence, how unqualified he was to judge his Maker (Job 38:2ff.). If such is the case with reference to the Earth, how much more would it be true of the entire Cosmos? Is it not a fact that those things that we are able to explore thoroughly and examine minutely eventually become quite commonplace to us? As a child, a trip from one town to another nearby was an awesome experience. Later, however, as one travels from coast to coast, those earlier experiences seem mundane. But we never will cease to be awed by God’s great Universe, for we never will be able to explore its limits. His creative power forever will hold us breathless.

Second, the millions of stars and planets shining in the heavens above are an aesthetic delight beyond description. And there is certainly value in aesthetics. Atheist Paul Ricci has written: “Even objects of art have some **purpose**; to provide us with aesthetic enjoyment” (1986, p. 188, emp. added). Third, the scope of our amazing Universe has psychological value. When David reflected upon the jeweled canopy above, he was constrained to contemplate his own purpose: “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:3-4). Our Universe simply is not an example of non-design.

### THE EARTH—AN EXAMPLE OF NON-DESIGN?

Next, the atheist turns his attention to the Earth, and suggests that many of its features are evidence of non-design. For example, the Earth is about four-fifths water and one-fifth land. The atheist argues: “What builder would construct a house with five rooms, only one of which could be inhabited? Such argues for very poor design.” He fails to recognize that there may be purpose in such an arrangement. Consider the following. (a) The oceans provide a huge reservoir of moisture that constantly is evaporating and condensing, thus falling upon the land as refreshing rain. (b) It is a well-known fact that water heats and cools at a much slower rate than does a solid land mass. This explains why desert regions can be blistering hot in the daytime and freezing cold at night. Water holds its temperature longer, however, and provides a sort of natural heating/air-conditioning system for the land areas of the Earth. Our temperature extremes would be much more erratic than they are, were it not for this factor. (c) Humans and animals inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. Plants, however, take in carbon diox-

ide and give off oxygen. We depend upon the world of botany for some of our oxygen supply. What many fail to realize is that approximately 90% of our oxygen comes from microscopic plants in the **seas** (Asimov, 1975, 2:116). If our oceans were appreciably smaller, we soon would be out of breath! There is design in the land/water ratio.

### DESIGN DISTORTED

“But,” argues the infidel, “consider the land masses of the Earth. Much of this area is occupied by burning deserts, rugged mountains, and frozen wastelands. Surely an intelligent God would not have designed a planet for man with so much uninhabitable territory!” In the first place, we are not sure exactly how the Earth should be designed for optimum human facilitation. Thus, we should not argue out of ignorance. Furthermore, the objection is weak for it fails to consider the principle mentioned earlier—**degeneration**. Perhaps it would be helpful if we reasoned from analogy. Suppose a gardener, digging in a pile of rubbish, discovers an ancient book. Its cover is weathered, its pages are stuck together, the type has faded, etc. It is completely illegible. Does the **current** condition of the book mean that it never had a message or evinced design? Of course not. Though the message has faded with time, there is no denying that once it was quite communicative. Similarly, when the principle of “evil” was introduced upon this planet, a state of degeneration commenced. Scientifically speaking, we say the Second Law of Thermodynamics was operating (viz., things wear out, or degenerate, losing much of their apparent design). The Earth became subject to the “bondage of corruption” (Romans 8:20-21), and corruption effaces design. Too, one must consider the effects that the universal Flood of Noah’s day had upon this planet. Doubtless, many of Earth’s ideal features were altered drastically so that we do not now see this globe as it once was.

A former minister, turned agnostic, framed the problem in this fashion: “Why is it that examples of order in design arguments are always those things that appear beneficial? Genetic diseases like hemophilia and cystic fibrosis result from very orderly procedures, and the way that a brain tumor begins and grows until it kills the host organism is likewise orderly” (Till, 1988, p. 2). There are several observations that may be made regarding this quibble. First, the genetic order conceded in the examples cited, regardless of whether we like the outcome or not, points to an “orderer.” Someone designed the initial replicating mechanism; all of our experience forces us to the conclusion that where there is design there must be a designer (as Ricci acknowledged on p. 190). Second, the fact that the product of an orderly mechanism is flawed does not reflect necessarily upon the initial design or the designer. For example, if a machine that manufactures tin cans begins to turn out irregular cans, does this prove the machine had no designer? Must one postulate that the machine’s inventor intended for **muti-lated** cans to be produced, or that the machine was **imperfectly designed**? Surely the failure could be on the part of those who failed to follow correct procedures for maintaining the machine, or who abused it in some fashion. When man rebelled, the Lord allowed to begin, as a consequence of that disobedience, degenerative processes, eventually resulting in death (Romans 5:12). The fact that we have eye problems, heart failure, etc., does not negate the fact that the human body is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). We will not simply assume, therefore, that because our critic’s reasoning ability is flawed, this proves his brain was **not designed**.

### THE CHALLENGE

A less sophisticated tactic of atheism is the “I dare you” dramatic. The infidel arrogantly challenges God to strike him down; then, when no immediate response is received, the unbeliever confidently asserts that this “proves there is no God.” Some years ago, an atheist was lecturing in a small town in New Mexico. He concluded his presentation with a challenge: “If there is a God, I dare Him to strike me dead this instant.” When nothing happened, he triumphantly folded his arms and announced that God did not exist. The following morning, an article appeared in the local newspaper. It was titled simply, “The Parable of the Ants,” and went something like this. Two ants were crossing the desert when they came across two giant ribbons of steel spanning the countryside. Said one ant to the other, “What is this?” His friend replied, “This is a railroad track, and upon it runs a huge machine called a train. The train is dispatched by an operator in a distant city, who regulates its activity.” “Incredible!” protested the little unbelieving ant, as he crawled upon one of the rails. “If there is such an operator, I challenge him to send a train down here right now and run me over!”

Thus ended the short-but-powerful story. No one needed the parable interpreted. What railroad president in his right mind would send a train to New Mexico to answer the challenge of a mere ant? What sort of intelligence would that reflect? But let us consider the “challenge argument” from another angle. Suppose, upon issuing his challenge, the atheist should suddenly collapse and die. How many converts to theism would that make? Likely, very few. In the first place, other atheists probably would write it off as pure coincidence—a quirk of nature that no God had orchestrated. Or else, the complaint assuredly would be, “If that is the kind of being God is, I want no part of Him.” It would be virtually a no-win situation. The fact is, however, ultimately God has imposed the sentence of death upon rebellious man (Romans 5:12). Let the atheist who thinks He has not try to reverse the process!

The problem with the person who makes the “I-dare-you-to-kill-me” argument is that he underestimates the Creator. He expects God to respond as **he** dictates the terms of punishment for disobedience. He views the Lord as One Who, if He is God, should be constantly and immediately beating man into submission. That simply is not Jehovah’s way. He has given ample evidence of His existence for any honest person to see. He has shown, by means of objective revelation (i.e., the Bible) that we have disobeyed His will. He has offered pardon through the redemptive mission of His Son, Jesus Christ. And He has warned that there is a final price to pay if humanity continues its rebellious course. In other words, He is working His plan and is not under any obligation to respond to man’s ignorant and ill-conceived whims. The infidelic arguments considered above are without merit. Evidence for Jehovah’s existence absolutely is overwhelming; only the fool rejects it (Psalm 14:1).

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