

Order not to be confused with design

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When religious adherents are asked why they believe in God, they often respond with some version of the “argument from design”. According to this view, it is easy to observe order and structure in the universe, and thus its proponents conclude there must be a master designer, God, creating and sustaining the universe. There are other arguments in support of God’s existence, but let’s consider this most common one which goes back to the 13th century and Thomas Aquinas’ teleological argument from design and even earlier in the pre-Christian era of Aristotle.

Order and design are not synonymous ideas. Whatever exists, of necessity, will be organized and structured in some fashion. Even chaotic-looking things and events such as rotting piles of garbage, rusting iron, automobile accidents, and earthquakes, are in fact working according to natural tendencies and could not do otherwise.

To speak of a theistic designer is misleading because it introduces the notion of possible intervention in a cause and effect universe sometimes prompted by prayer, worship, etc. Such intervention would break the chain of events that normally follows from natural tendencies such as chemical and physical forces like gravity, centrifugal force, and biological events.

Consider the difference between order and design in the following example: An intoxicated driver gets into his unfit vehicle and drives rapidly on a congested highway. His plan or design is simple. He wishes to travel quickly from point A to point B. All the ingredients are present leading to his predictable accident, although the driver is both uncaring and unaware of them. He has not mentally designed such an unfortunate event. No one has planned the accident, yet the natural tendencies and order leading up to the accident are present.

Even if we were to agree that there is a grand designer, we could not know God's intentions. Hence the prolific number of more than 4000 world religions indicates our lack of knowledge and lack of agreement concerning a single creator's designs or plans.

Change should not be confused with creation. Within religious circles the word "creation" is usually meant to imply some brand new thing or new event. For example, many adherents of religion believe new species such as humans or other animals came into existence as a one-time creation event designed by God. This belief offers sketchy, although apparently comforting answers for religious apologists to the two following questions: a) How did the universe originate? b) Why did God create things as He has? To the first question, adherents say that everything needs a cause except God who is the first cause. To the second question, religious followers are usually content to say that the world is as it is because God willed it so. It is according to His plan and we need think no further on this matter.

To say on the one hand that God always existed opens the door to the secular notion that the universe could also have existed in some form, albeit different from the present. Perhaps long ago the universe was still in the form of energy or matter, but with basic organizational structure which in time caused it to change to its present form.

For the non-religious believer it is more rational to look upon the universe as a changing, evolving phenomenon in which higher forms of life gradually emerged to the present state and to accept the idea that the universe will continue to evolve in the future.

Geologically speaking, the sub-continent of India was formed fifty million years ago by force exerted through the movement of tectonic plates. The formation of India from a large island mass to a large sub-continent as it pushed up the Himalayan Mountains in its union with Asia was, and still is, an on-going natural geological event rather than a one-time "created" event.

In summary, order should not be confused with design. Secondly, God's designs are unknowable, as in the case of why would a benevolent omnipotent God create a method of causing the recent deaths in April, 2015, of more than seven thousand humans by one of many enormous Himalayan earthquakes in Nepal? For the secularist there is neither comfort nor understanding in such a belief.