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Argument from Design - Can You Prove God Exists?

[Peter Kreeft](#)

The argument starts with the major premise that where there is design, there must be a designer. The minor premise is the existence of design throughout the universe. The conclusion is that there must be a universal designer.



Why must we believe the major premise, that all design implies a designer? Because everyone admits this principle in practice. For instance, suppose you came upon a deserted island and found "S.O.S." written in the sand on the beach. You would not think the wind or the waves had written it by mere chance but that someone had been there, someone intelligent enough to design and write the message. If you found a stone hut on the island with windows, doors, and a fireplace, you would not think a hurricane had piled up the stones that way by chance. You immediately infer a designer when you see design.

When the first moon rocket took off from Cape Canaveral, two U.S. scientists stood watching it, side by side. One was a believer, the other an unbeliever. The believer said, "Isn't it wonderful that our rocket is going to hit the moon by chance?" The unbeliever objected, "What do you mean, chance? We put millions of manhours of design into that rocket." "Oh," said the believer, "you don't think chance is a good explanation for the rocket? Then why do you think it's a good explanation for the universe? There's much more design in a universe than in a rocket. We can design a rocket, but we couldn't design a whole universe. I wonder who can?" Later that day the two were strolling down a street and passed an antique store. The atheist admired a picture in the window and asked, "I wonder who painted that picture?" "No one," joked the believer; "it just happened by chance."

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Is it possible that design happens by chance without a designer? There is perhaps one chance in a trillion that "S.O.S." could be written in the sand by the wind. But who would use a one-in-a-trillion explanation? Someone once said that if you sat a million monkeys at a million typewriters for a million years, one of them would eventually type out all of Hamlet by chance. But when we find the text of Hamlet, we don't wonder whether it came from chance and monkeys. Why then does the atheist use that incredibly improbable explanation for the universe? Clearly, because it is his only chance of remaining an atheist. At this point we need a psychological explanation of the atheist rather than a logical explanation of the universe. We have a logical explanation of the universe, but the atheist does not like it. It's called God.

There is one especially strong version of the argument from design that hits close to home because it's about the design of the very thing we use to think about design: our brains. The human brain is the most complex piece of design in the known universe. In many ways it is like a computer. Now just suppose there were a computer that was programmed only by chance. For instance, suppose you were in a plane and the public-address system announced that there was no pilot, but the plane was being flown by a computer that had been programmed by a random fall of hailstones on its keyboard or by a baseball player in spiked shoes dancing on computer cards. How much confidence would you have in that plane? But if our brain computer has no cosmic intelligence behind the heredity and environment that program it, why should we trust it when it tells us about anything, even about the brain?

Another specially strong aspect of the design argument is the so-called anthropic principle, according to which the universe seems to have been specially designed from the beginning for human life to evolve. If the temperature of the primal fireball that resulted from the Big Bang some fifteen to twenty billion years ago, which was the beginning of our universe, had been a trillionth of a degree colder or hotter, the carbon molecule that is the foundation of all organic life could never have developed. The number of possible universes is trillions of trillions; only one of them could support human life: this one. Sounds suspiciously like a plot. If the cosmic rays had bombarded the primordial slime at a slightly different angle or time or intensity, the hemoglobin molecule, necessary for all warm-blooded animals, could never have evolved. The chance of this molecule's evolving is something like one in a trillion trillion. Add together each of the chances and you have something far more unbelievable than a million monkeys writing Hamlet.

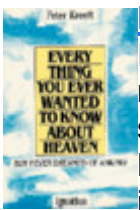
There are relatively few atheists among neurologists and brain surgeons and among astrophysicists, but many among psychologists, sociologists, and historians. The reason seems obvious: the first study divine design, the second study human undesign.

But doesn't evolution explain everything without a divine Designer? Just the opposite; evolution is a beautiful example of design, a great clue to God. There is very good scientific evidence for the evolving, ordered appearance of species, from simple to complex. But there is no scientific proof of natural selection as the

mechanism of evolution, Natural selection "explains" the emergence of higher forms without intelligent design by the survival-of-the-fittest principle. But this is sheer theory. There is no evidence that abstract, theoretical thinking or altruistic love make it easier for man to survive. How did they evolve then?

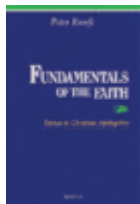
Furthermore, could the design that obviously now exists in man and in the human brain come from something with less or no design? Such an explanation violates the principle of causality, which states that you can't get more in the effect than you had in the cause. If there is intelligence in the effect (man), there must be intelligence in the cause. But a universe ruled by blind chance has no intelligence. Therefore there must be a cause for human intelligence that transcends the universe: a mind behind the physical universe. (Most great scientists have believed in such a mind, by the way, even those who did not accept any revealed religion.)

How much does this argument prove? Not all that the Christian means by God, of course—no argument can do that. But it proves a pretty thick slice of God: some designing intelligence great enough to account for all the design in the universe and the human mind. If that's not God, what is it? Steven Spielberg?



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