

Intelligent Design, Aesthetics and Design Arguments – Peter S. Williams

In *The Wedge of Truth*, Phillip E. Johnson observes that with the rise of intelligent design theory: ‘We are talking about a fatal flaw in our culture’s creation myth, and therefore in the standard of reasoning that culture has applied to all questions of importance.’¹ He suggests: ‘Once we learn that nature does not really do its own creating, and we are not really products of mindless natural forces that care nothing about us, we will have to reexamine a great deal else. In particular, we will need to have a new discussion about. . . what we might mean by. . . the beautiful.’² While I agree with Johnson, I think that it would be a mistake for the Intelligent Design community to hold fire on the issue of beauty until the hoped for paradigm shift from naturalistic evolution to intelligent design theory has emerged. It would be a mistake because a discussion about ‘what we might mean by. . . the beautiful’ can actually contribute to intelligent design theory. William A. Dembski asserts: ‘The existence of design is distinct from the morality, aesthetics, goodness, optimality or perfection of design’, and affirms that: ‘specified complexity reliably signals design irrespective of whether design includes these additional features.’³ While agreeing with Dembski, I have two observations. The first is that the ‘additional features’ mentioned by Dembski are all related to questions about beauty. The second is that such aesthetic considerations can complement and strengthen the case for intelligent design. Several proponents of intelligent design (such as Phillip E. Johnson, William A. Dembski and J.P. Moreland) have highlighted the close relationship between design and aesthetics, but their observations constitute a ‘promissory note’ that remains largely unpaid. This paper seeks to make good on the aesthetic promissory notes of intelligent design theory. For example, Dembski notes that: ‘Contrary to popular accusations by critics, intelligent design theory suggests a number of questions that can be pursued as part of a research program.’⁴ He lists fourteen such questions, including: ‘Is the design beautiful?’⁵ Answering this question will require an account of beauty and aesthetic judgment, and prompts us to ask after the relationship between beauty, art and craft.

While a design paradigm has historically dominated cosmology and biology (from Aristotle to Paley), design arguments have traditionally been part of natural theology, the philosophical project of providing evidence for God’s existence. However, design arguments, as it is admitted on all sides, can at best only provide a part of the evidence for God. The Intelligent Design Movement recognizes this fact and clearly distinguishes between arguing for intelligent design and arguing for divine design. Failure to appreciate this distinction may have contributed to an increasingly atheistic scientific establishment throwing out the design paradigm as essentially tied to belief in God (and therefore ‘unscientific’) when it was not. After all, one could accept intelligent design and attribute it to the activity of aliens, Angels, demons, Plato’s Demigurge, and/or gods, rather than to God. Intelligent design theory is not natural theology; and while every design argument for God is an argument for intelligent design, not every argument for intelligent design need be viewed as an argument for God (at least, not without other considerations from outside the theory being brought to bear). This said, intelligent design obviously has much to contribute to natural theology; and natural

1 Phillip E. Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth*, (IVP, 2000), p159.

2 *ibid.*

3 William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design*, (IVP, 1999), p263.

4 William A. Dembski, ‘Design as a Research Program: 14 Questions to Ask About Design’ @

<http://www.leaderu.com/offices/dembski/docs/db-program.html>

5 *ibid.*

theology has much to contribute to intelligent design. On the one hand, intelligent design furnishes natural theology with material for powerful new versions of the design argument; while on the other hand, anyone who is impressed by the arguments of natural theology will be *a priori* more kindly predisposed towards intelligent design theory than might otherwise be the case.

This paper aims to map out the role that can be played in the fruitful interchange between intelligent design theory and natural theology by a specific class of design arguments, namely *aesthetic* design arguments. Aesthetic design arguments take us further towards theism than non-aesthetic design arguments because they infer the existence of an aesthetically aware artist (or deduce the existence of a wholly beautiful objective standard of beauty), and not merely an intelligent designer or craftsman. If the cosmos exhibits intelligent design, then it might literally be a *cosmos* – an example of intelligently ordered beauty. If so, perhaps aesthetics can help us to round out our understanding of the designer/s. A more specific profile of the designer/s takes us beyond the bare scientific assertion of intelligent design, but it may also strengthen the explanatory power of the design hypothesis. At the very least, aesthetic design arguments employ theoretical accounts of beauty, art and the criteria of aesthetic judgement that can be applied to intelligent design theory.

My first task is to lay the necessary groundwork for taking the aesthetic dimension of design seriously. To this end, I will offer a brief definition and defence of beauty in the classical tradition, explore the distinction between art and craft, and delineate the components of aesthetic judgment. I will round off this groundwork by enumerating four categories of aesthetic design argument. I will then apply this aesthetic groundwork by discussing intuitive and analogical design arguments from an aesthetic point of view, before examining the aesthetic dimension of contemporary intelligent design thinking and illustrating the remaining categories of aesthetic design argument.

Beauty

According to Thomas Dubay, ‘science and theology agree on the objectivity of beauty. While there is a subjective readiness in us, greater or lesser, for perceiving the splendid, both disciplines assume and insist that beauty is not merely in the eye of the beholder; it is primarily something “out there”.’⁶ Of course, not everyone would agree that beauty is objective. C.S. Lewis, in *The Abolition of Man*, relates how the authors of an English textbook, whom he names ‘Gaius’ and ‘Titus’, comment upon a story about Coleridge and a waterfall: Two tourists were present besides Coleridge, one called the waterfall ‘sublime’⁷, the other ‘pretty’. Coleridge ‘mentally endorsed the first judgement and rejected the second with disgust.’⁸ Gaius and Titus comment that: ‘When the man said *This is sublime*, he appeared to be making a remark about the waterfall. . . Actually. . . he was not making a remark about the waterfall, but a remark about his own feelings. What he was saying was really *I have feelings associated in my mind with the word “Sublime”*, or shortly, *I have sublime feelings*.’⁹

6 Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty*, (Ignatius), p16-17.

7 In the Romantic era, the ‘sublime’ replaced ‘beauty’ as the pre-eminent aesthetic term. It was contrasted with beauty in several ways: Sublime objects were “vast in their dimensions”, beautiful objects “comparatively small”; beautiful objects were “smooth and polished”, while sublime objects were “rugged”; whereas beautiful objects were “light and delicate”, sublime ones were “dark and gloomy.” (Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*.)

8 C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, (Fount), p7.

9 Quoted, *ibid*.

According to Gaius and Titus, this ‘confusion’ is common: ‘We appear to be saying something very important about something: and actually we are only saying something about our own feelings.’¹⁰ Gaius and Titus have adopted a philosophy of value, and in this instance of aesthetic value, which was well summarised by David Hume, who wrote that:

All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always right, whenever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, a real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. . . Beauty is no quality in things themselves: it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.¹¹

This is a common view of beauty; that beauty is a mere sentiment which is always right, which has no reference to any real, objective matter of fact beyond itself, and which is all in the mind. For Hume, ‘beauty is nothing but a form which produces pleasure.’¹² If masochistic acts produce in me a feeling of pleasure, then masochism is ‘beautiful’, *for me*. Beauty depends upon my pleasure, and is thus relative to the subject. No aesthetic judgements can be false, because no one can be mistaken about their own subjective aesthetic reactions: ‘Sublimity. . . does not reside in any of the things of nature, but only in our own mind.’¹³ Therefore, ‘the emotion, thus considered by itself, cannot be either in agreement or disagreement with reason. . . the world of facts, without one trace of value, and the world of feelings, without one trace of truth or falsehood, justice or injustice, confront each other, and no rapprochement is possible.’¹⁴

However, as John Haldane comments: ‘in *pre-modern* aesthetics. . . aesthetic objects and values are generally taken to be prior, with aesthetic responses and attitudes being held to be posterior to and explicable in terms of these. . .’¹⁵ The view adopted by Gaius and Titus looks very much like putting the cart before the horse. Aesthetic value, like moral value, is experienced as a reality beyond ourselves; as C.E.M. Joad wrote: ‘Beauty belongs, *prima facie*, to things. It is not emotions which are beautiful but that which arouses them.’¹⁶ Hence I find myself in agreement with G.E. Moore who wrote that: ‘the beautiful should be *defined* as that of which the admiring contemplation is good in itself. . . the question whether it is truly beautiful or not, depends upon the *objective* question whether the whole in question is or is not truly good.’¹⁷ Or as Alvin Plantinga writes: ‘To grasp the beauty of a Mozart D Minor piano concerto is to grasp something that is objectively there; *it is to appreciate what is objectively worthy of appreciation.*’¹⁸

To believe in objective beauty is to be philosophically orthodox: ‘the view that has been most strongly held by philosophers in the past, from Plato onwards, has been the objective one. . .

10 Quoted, *ibid*, p8.

11 David Hume, *On the Standard of Taste*.

12 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

13 *ibid*, p122.

14 C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p16.

15 John Haldane, ‘Admiring the High Mountains’.

16 C.E.M. Joad, *The Recovery of Belief*, p145.

17 G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p201.

18 Alvin Plantinga, ‘Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments’, my italics @ <http://www.homestead.com/philofreligion/files/Theisticarguments.html>

that whether an object is beautiful or not is a matter of fact and not a matter of opinion or taste, and that value judgements about beauty are true or false. . . .¹⁹ Despite the current fashion for abandoning this orthodoxy, there are many contemporary philosophers who hold to the objectivity of beauty (e.g. Winfried Corduan, Norman L. Geisler, Peter Kreeft, J.P. Moreland, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne and Keith E. Yandell).

Lewis begins his counterattack on subjective aesthetics by pointing out that: ‘the man who says *This is sublime* cannot mean *I have sublime feelings*. . . . The feelings which make a man call an object sublime are not sublime feelings, but feelings of veneration.’²⁰ The correct ‘translation’ of the tourist’s assertion, if a translation must take place, would be ‘I have humble feelings.’²¹ Otherwise we would end up translating assertions such as ‘You are contemptible’, as ‘I have contemptible feelings’, which is ludicrous. And if a humble feeling of veneration prompts Coleridge’s agreement that the waterfall is sublime, we may ask *whether that feeling was an appropriate response to its object*. In other words, *aesthetic delight may be appropriate or inappropriate relative to the nature of the object being appreciated*. As Lewis put it:

Until quite modern times all. . . men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be congruous or incongruous to it - believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could merit, our approval or disapproval. . . . The reason why Coleridge agreed with the tourist who called the cataract sublime and disagreed with the one who called it pretty was of course that he believed inanimate nature to be such that certain responses could be more ‘just’ or ‘appropriate’ to it than others. . . . the man who called the cataract sublime was not intending simply to describe his own emotions about it: he was also claiming that the object was one which merited those emotions.²²

Lewis draws upon Augustine’s definition of virtue as *ordo amoris* or appropriate love: ‘the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind and degree of love which is appropriate to it.’²³ Hence: ‘because our approvals and disapprovals are thus recognitions of objective value. . . . therefore emotional states can be in harmony with reason. . . . or out of harmony with reason. . . .’²⁴ Whether the appreciated fact is objective (e.g. a piece of biomolecular machinery) or subjective (e.g. a mathematical theorem in the mind), its intrinsic admirability or lack of admirability, and the moral merit attached to appreciating it, are matters of objective fact. Therefore, aesthetic judgements are judgements of objective matters of fact, and beauty is objective: ‘To say that the cataract is sublime means saying that our emotion of humility is appropriate or ordinate to

19 E.R. Emmet, *Learning to Philosophise*, p119.

20 C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p8.

21 *ibid*.

22 C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p14: ‘if our minds are totally alien to reality than all our thoughts, including this thought, are worthless. We must, then, grant logic to the reality; we must, if we are to have any moral standards, grant it moral standards too. And there is really no reason why we should not do the same about standards of beauty. There is no reason why our reaction to a beautiful landscape should not be the response, however humanly blurred and partial, to a something that is really there. The idea of a wholly mindless and valueless universe has to be abandoned at one point - i.e. as regards logic: after that, there is no telling at how many other points it will be defeated nor how great the reversal of our nineteenth-century philosophy must finally be.’ C.S. Lewis, ‘De Futilitate’, in *Christian Reflections*, (Fount)

23 *ibid*.

24 *ibid*, p16.

the reality, and thus to speak of something else besides the emotion. . . .²⁵ While aesthetic utterances certainly have a subjective aspect, assertions of the type ‘Rainbows are beautiful’ are matters of objective truth or falsehood; and this seems to me to be the most natural and common sense analysis of such utterances. This is an intention that I do not believe we should abandon or attempt to ‘explain away’. Instead, I think we should agree with Norman L. Geisler that: ‘Beauty is that which is admirable for its own sake. . . it has intrinsic admirability. . . . Not everything enjoyable is admirable. . . but everything that is admirable is enjoyable, even if you don’t enjoy it.’²⁶ As Jaques Maritain writes, ‘however beautiful a created thing may be, it can appear beautiful to some and not to others, because it is beautiful only under certain aspects, which some discern and others do not.’²⁷

To recap, I propose the following definition of beauty: *A fact is objectively beautiful if there is some ordinate degree of aesthetic pleasure that attaches to it.* An ‘aesthetic pleasure’ is a ‘disinterested’ pleasure in a fact as an end rather than a means, and is the ground of characteristic behaviour on the part of persons experiencing it (e.g. wanting to continue perceiving it, wanting others to perceive it, etc.) On this view, beauty is not constituted by the existence of any finite mental state or states; it is not a ‘sentimental gilding of reality’. The beauty of a thing does not depend in any way upon the perceiver. The beauty of a fact does not consist in its actually being perceived, but rather in the objective fact that an ordinate aesthetic pleasure derived from the perception of that fact would be objectively good, where this moral goodness is related to the intrinsic goodness of the aesthetic object.²⁸ To call something beautiful is to demand that other people allow that the aesthetic appreciation of the object in question is *morally good* (not morally obligatory). If something is aesthetically admirable, then it *can* be enjoyed; but that something is admirable does not guarantee that it will be admired, or impose any general moral obligation upon those who perceive it to admire it. The ‘can’ in the proposition that ‘If something is admirable then it can be enjoyed’ should be understood in the sense that it is morally good - and not morally obligatory - for an admirable fact to be so admired. That something is aesthetically admirable means that anyone who finds an ordinate amount of aesthetic pleasure in perceiving it is, all things being equal²⁹, within their moral rights (i.e. are not doing anything bad and so are doing a good thing); and they are within their moral rights because the object of their appreciation objectively merits such appreciation.

25 C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, p16.

26 Norman L. Geisler, *The Issue of Beauty*, Side One.

27 Jaques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, Chapter 5, p3.

28 If that is beauty, then ugliness must be the ‘morally-bad-to-appreciate-if-perceived’ (or the ‘obligatory-not-to-appreciate’). I think it clear that the vast majority of facts are at least beautiful overall. For, as Jaques Maritain says: ‘Like. . . the true and the good, the beautiful is being itself considered from a certain aspect; it is a property of being. . . Thus everything is beautiful, just as everything is good, at least in a certain relation. And as being is everywhere present and everywhere varied the beautiful likewise is diffused everywhere and is everywhere varied. . . each kind of being is in its own way, is good in its own way, is beautiful in its own way.’ This is *not* to say that absolutely everything is beautiful ‘through and through’ or in every aspect of its being. Rather, it is to say that everything is beautiful *in at least one aspect of its being*. Since goodness is beautiful, everything is beautiful, at least in that it exists, because existence *per se* is good. The relationship between beauty and ugliness is asymmetrical; facts can be beautiful without being ugly in any way, whereas nothing can be ugly without being beautiful in at least one way - although some things may be ugly overall.

29 I say ‘all things being equal’ because we can easily complicate matters by supposing, for example, that someone enjoys listening to Mozart’s *Requiem* rather than saving someone from drowning. Such an act is clearly bad, but this does not mean that Mozart’s *Requiem* is altered by the situation into something ugly!

Plato rhetorically asked: ‘Is not the good also the beautiful?’³⁰ In ancient Hebrew there seems to be a linguistically enshrined recognition that goodness and beauty have close truck one with another. For example, in the book of *Genesis*: ‘God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.’ (Genesis 1:31) The word translated here as ‘good’ can also mean beautiful. God’s affirmation of creation in *Genesis* might therefore be translated as: ‘God saw all that he had made, and it was very beautiful.’ This affirmation resonates with the suggestion that beauty is connected to goodness and the realisation that the cosmos is overwhelmingly beautiful. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word *kalos* is used for the word we can translate as ‘good’ or ‘beautiful’: ‘In classical Greek *Kalos*. . . referred to beauty of form. It could be applied to any person who was lovely or to anything that was beautiful.’³¹

Art and Craft

Mortimer J. Adler points out that the term ‘art’ comes from the Latin *ars*, and is ‘a translation of the Greek word *techne*, which is best rendered in English by the word “skill”.’³² The fundamental meaning of ‘art’ is therefore: ‘for the skills that human beings have in producing something or performing in a certain way.’³³ We still retain this meaning in the phrase ‘There must be an art to it’, said when trying to accomplish some trying task. Posing the question where the phrase ‘fine art’ comes from, Adler makes the reasonable guess: ‘that it comes from the derivation of the word “fine” from the word “final”’. Works of fine art are final in the sense that they are not intended as means to ends beyond themselves, but rather to be enjoyed as ends in themselves.’³⁴ Hence aesthetic pleasure is ‘disinterested’ pleasure, a pleasure that takes interest in its object as an end in itself. Objects of positive aesthetic value, that is, are never *merely* means to an end, but are always themselves ends: ‘when you see beautiful things [you] just want them to exist outside, in themselves, so that you can love them and understand them.’³⁵

Nicholas Wolterstorff defines art as: ‘*an entity made or presented in order to serve as an object of aesthetic contemplation.*’³⁶ By this definition a pile of bricks in the corner of a building site is not art, but a pile of bricks presented in an art gallery *is* art, because it is an entity ‘presented in order to serve as an object of aesthetic contemplation.’ The idea of ‘aesthetic contemplation’ is the idea ‘of *contemplating something for its own sake*’.³⁷ Art is thus the intended object of perception directed towards appreciating the objective, intrinsic value of things. C.S. Lewis put this well when he wrote that: ‘art can be either ‘received’ or ‘used.’ When we ‘receive’ it we exert our senses and imagination and various other powers according to a pattern invented by the artist. When we ‘use’ it we treat it as assistance for our own activities.’³⁸ Works of art are the intended *objects* of disinterested, aesthetic contemplation, such that the artist intends to present people with objective values to appreciate. It is therefore not so much the art-object as a physical entity that is the

30 Plato, *Symposium*.

31 *ibid*, p151.

32 Mortimer J. Adler, *Adler’s Philosophical Dictionary*, p33.

33 *ibid*, p32.

34 *ibid*, p33.

35 Iris Murdoch, *Acastos*, ‘A dialogue about religion’, p103.

36 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*.

37 *ibid*, p35.

38 C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, (Cambridge, 1961), p88.

intended ‘object’ of contemplation. Rather, it is *the values* that the physical art-entity embodies and communicates that are the intended focus of contemplation.

Art need not be *produced* for the purpose of aesthetic contemplation, although everything produced for that purpose is art. Art needs to be produced *or presented* (or both) for the purpose of aesthetic contemplation. Objects of craft, however beautiful, are neither produced nor presented for the purpose of aesthetic appreciation (at least, not primarily). This is what distinguished art from craft: the *intention* behind its creation and/or presentation is different. Anything created and/or presented with the intention that it serves as the focus of aesthetic contemplation is art; thus craft can become art but art cannot become craft. Works of craft may serve an aesthetic function, but the intention that forms them is not primarily artistic. Hence, while naturalists look upon creation as neither art nor craft, proponents of intelligent design see it as a work of art. Particular aspects of creation may be works of craft that are additionally presented for aesthetic contemplation as art, or works of art pure and simple.

A good kettle (as a work of craft) is a kettle that serves well the purpose of a kettle, which is to boil small amounts of water quickly and safely. If a kettle is beautiful, so much the better. Nevertheless, one would hardly choose a kettle that was beautiful to look at but which took three days to boil water over a kettle that was less beautiful to look at but which boiled in minutes! Conversely, one would not pick a painting *as a painting* purely because it was the right size to hide a crack on your wall, rather than a more beautiful painting of less utilitarian shape. Still, it is important to recognize that the realm of aesthetic value is not restricted to art, but also plays a crucial role in craft.

A carved wooden Welsh love-spoon can be used to fulfill the same function as a dessertspoon, but a dessertspoon will hardly fulfill the same function as the love-spoon! The primary function of a love-spoon is as an artistic expression of love, while the primary function of a dessertspoon is to aid in the eating of food. Now, a dessertspoon has some beauty. For example, it has the beauty of instrumental goodness that comes from contributing to a good and therefore beautiful end (i.e. human nutrition). However, the primary purpose of the dessertspoon is not to facilitate disinterested attention to beauty, but to help people eat. Similarly, a love-spoon could help someone to eat, but that is not its primary function. Rather, its function is to facilitate disinterested attention to beauty; for it is by drawing attention to beauty that the love-spoon acts as a symbol of the value the lover places on his beloved. From the intelligent design perspective, the universe is surely more analogous to a dessertspoon than to a love spoon; but it is a very beautiful desert spoon that has been presented as a work of art for our aesthetic contemplation and admiration.

Categories of Beauty and Aesthetic Judgment

Art critic Sir Herbert Read was surely correct when he said: ‘I do not believe that a person of real sensibilities ever stands before a picture and, after a long process of analysis, pronounces himself pleased. We either like it at first sight, or not at all.’³⁹ However, this does not mean that people do not evaluate art or that there are no criteria for evaluation; only that evaluation is often quickly and subconsciously made. Still, I suppose some people do not have what Sir Herbert would consider ‘real sensibilities’, and that they, or those who wish to check and understand their sensibilities, might

³⁹ Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art*, p29.

want to take greater care. Some people have a *nak* of producing the answers to sums without going through all the working-out; but even they may on occasion work through a sum step by step to double-check or to help someone else. The aesthetic equivalent of working through a sum step by step is paying close attention to the different aspects of an artwork. Objective beauty is dependent upon objective goodness, and there are three general categories of goodness:

- 1) Ontological goodness (instrumental goodness deriving some of its value from the intrinsic goodness of the end to which it is a means and including efficiency, simplicity and elegance, Causal goodness and the good of 'being' *per se*).
- 2) Moral or ethical goodness.
- 3) Epistemological goodness: Truth.

It follows from the fact that goodness is beautiful every reference to goodness carries a reference to beauty:

- 1) Ontological beauty: There is the beauty of instrumental goodness, deriving some of its value from the intrinsic beauty of the end to which it is a means and including such aesthetic factors as efficiency, simplicity and elegance.⁴⁰ As Dembski writes: 'God's intentions are intelligible. Moreover that intelligibility is as much moral and aesthetic as it is scientific.'⁴¹ There is the causal beauty of things that produce beautiful things (things like artists!). Under the maxim that one cannot give what one has not got, producers of beauty (including designers) must themselves be beautiful. There is the beauty of sheer existence, whether that existence is subjective or objective.
- 2) Moral or ethical beauty (the moral beauty of a things *telos* contributes to its instrumental beauty).
- 3) Epistemological beauty (the beauty of truth embodied or communicated by the object). As Winfried Corduan reminds us: 'A work of art is a piece of communication'⁴² William Dembski likewise picks up on the communicative nature of beauty: 'I look at a blade of grass and it speaks to me. In the light of the sun, it tells me that it is green. If I touch it, it tells me that it has a certain texture. It communicates something else to a chinch bug intent on devouring it. It communicates something else still to a particle physicist intent on reducing it to its particulate constituents. Which is not to say that the blade of grass does not communicate things about the particles that constitute it. But the blade of grass is more than any arrangement of particles and is capable of communicating more than is inherent in any such arrangement. Indeed, its reality derives not from its particle constituents, but from its capacity to communicate with other entities in creation and ultimately with God himself.'⁴³ In other words, because everything exists in relationships, whether conscious or unconscious, everything communicates truths about the relationships in which it stands.

40 'For contemporary science the first trait of beauty is an elegant simplicity.' – Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty*, (Ignatius, 1999), p39.

41 William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design*, (IVP, 1999), p229.

42 Winfried Corduan, *No Doubt About It*, (Broadman & Homan Publishers, 1997), p265.

43 William A. Dembski, 'The Act of Creation: Bridging Transcendence and Immanence.', p14 @ http://www.arn.org/docs/dembski/wd_actofcreation.htm

This communication of truth is both good and beautiful. According to Thomas Dubay: ‘The awareness that the universe is stunningly beautiful wherever we turn our eye is now so much a conviction of our most productive scientists that objective grandeur is considered a warrant of truth. . . Beauty has an immediately evidential power pointing to the discovery and pursuit of truth.’⁴⁴

These criteria relate to the traditional values of goodness, beauty and truth. They are founded in the belief that truth and goodness are beautiful, and in the recognition that the fundamental good and beauty is the goodness and beauty of being *per se*. To put it more simply, *to make an aesthetic judgment about an object it is necessary to delineate the different types and degrees of objective goodness that it possesses*. A work of art that possesses beauty in all of these aspects will be objectively more beautiful (more deserving of aesthetic appreciation and praise) than a work of art lacking beauty in one of these aspects. However, these aspects need to be placed in order of value: Ontological goodness (rooted in being) is the most fundamental value, followed by beauty *per se* (which is good) and truth (which is both good and beautiful). Thus moral beauty, as a subcategory of the beauty of goodness, is more important to the overall beauty of art than epistemological beauty (although the two are related). The beauty of instrumental goodness depends in part upon the end to which it is the means. Thus the goodness of the end takes priority in judgments of instrumental beauty, followed by the efficacy of the means as such. This rightly suggests that an instrumentally beautiful motorbike probably has greater instrumental beauty than an instrumentally beautiful bomb, even if the bomb is more efficient than the bike at fulfilling its purpose.

All of the previously mentioned categories of beauty are applicable to works of art and their evaluation. In this way a work of art has more than one aspect of beauty to be evaluated. A work of art, like a work of craft, might be beautiful in some of these aspects and ugly in others. Whether or not a piece of art is beautiful or ugly *overall* will depend upon the relative degrees of beauty (which is as much as to say the relative degrees of goodness) possessed by these aspects, and the relative value of those aspects for that work of art. To ensure that we pay attention to these different aspects is to ensure that an overall immediate impression of beauty does not overwhelm the importance of less immediately obvious, but nonetheless important, aesthetic details.

A beautiful machine is a machine that fulfils its function well, which means in as simple, elegant and reliable a manner as possible. Such a machine, be it a mouse-trap or a molecular motor, possesses instrumental beauty: “There is a beauty of form and function in a piece of delicate and complex machinery like a Rolls-Royce aero engine, as well as in a Bach Fugue; there can be ugliness or beauty in the design of a car, no less than in that of a cathedral.”⁴⁵ A truly beautiful machine also possesses causal goodness, in that it produces beautiful results. A beautiful kettle boils water quickly and safely (instrumental beauty) to produce water that is good for making hot drinks with (causal beauty). A truly beautiful machine is a beautiful means towards a beautiful end; which will often mean a *morally* good end (drinking tea is, all things being equal, a good thing to do!). Finally, a beautiful machine also possesses the beauty of being which is possessed by all facts. A biological machine like the cilium or flagellum clearly possesses instrumental beauty (including some value derived from the intrinsic goodness of the end to which it is a means, simplicity,

44 Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Truth*, (Ignatius, 1999), p39 & 339.

45 Donald Whittle, *Christianity and the Arts*, (Mowbrays, 1966), p145.

elegance and reliability), and causal beauty (including objective existence).

While an atomic bomb may be, at least in some of its aspects, a beautiful machine (it certainly possesses the beauties of being and efficiency), it is (deterrent value aside) the means to the end of killing people. The morality of this end may vary from circumstance to circumstance, but could certainly never rise above being the regrettable ‘lesser of two evils’. Thus, compared with a machine that is the equally efficient means to an undoubtedly better end (e.g. a baby-incubator), the atomic bomb will be objectively less beautiful. Indeed, if we rate moral goodness as more important than instrumental beauty (as I think it is intuitively obvious that we should), even a barely workable machine that is nonetheless the means to a good end will be more beautiful than the efficient means to a less valuable end.

Four Categories of Aesthetic Design Arguments

Aesthetic reality can be divided between our subjective awareness of beauty and the objective beauty (intrinsic aesthetic appreciability) of which we are aware. Aesthetic arguments may therefore focus either upon our ability to know beauty, or upon the existence of beauty itself. Aesthetic arguments that focus upon our knowledge of beauty are ‘epistemological’ arguments; those that focus upon the existence of beauty *per se* are ‘ontological’ arguments. Some of the epistemological arguments (call them ‘*subjective epistemological aesthetic arguments*’) begin with the particular nature of our subjective aesthetic experience, seeking to interpret this experience as revelatory of divinity. Other epistemological arguments (*objective epistemological aesthetic arguments*) begin with the mere fact that we have aesthetic awareness, seeking to show that design/theism gains credibility by providing the best understanding of this capacity. As William C. Davis writes, ‘Humans have numerous features that are more easily explained by theism than by metaphysical naturalism, if only because metaphysical naturalism currently explains all human capacities in terms of their ability to enhance survival. Among these features are. . . the appreciation of beauty. . .’⁴⁶ Some ontological aesthetic arguments (*inductive ontological aesthetic arguments*) ask how good an explanation it is that non-teleological natural laws should be said to have produced the objective beauty that we find around us. Given the categories of beauty delineated above, such arguments may focus on ontological (instrumental, causal), moral or epistemological beauties; or upon overall beauty. Other ontological aesthetic arguments (*deductive ontological aesthetic arguments*) propose the existence of God as the source and standard of objective aesthetic value, just as the moral argument proposes God’s existence as the necessary condition of objective moral value.

As far as the research program of intelligent design goes, the aesthetic arguments of most immediate relevance and interest are clearly ‘objective epistemological aesthetic arguments’ and ‘inductive ontological aesthetic arguments’. However, I begin with subjective epistemological arguments, and will conclude with deductive ontological aesthetic arguments.

Subjective Epistemological Aesthetic Design Arguments

‘What could be more clear or obvious when we look up to the sky and contemplate the heavens, than

46 William C. Davis, ‘Theistic Arguments’, *Reason for the Hope Within*, ed. Michael J. Murray, (Eerdmans, 1999), p37, my italics.

that there is some divinity of superior intelligence?’⁴⁷ So wrote Cicero, and the majority of humanity echoes this insight at one time or another. Even David Hume noted that: ‘A purpose, an intention, or design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it.’⁴⁸ Call this the ‘intuitive design argument’. I suggest that a major factor in the intuitive design argument is an appreciation of the aesthetic dimension of reality. As J.P. Moreland writes: ‘the beauty of the world and many of its aspects points to the existence of a grand Artist.’⁴⁹ Clark Pinnock, in *Reason Enough*, advances an epistemological aesthetic design argument that unpacks this intuitive impression and can be syllogised thus:

- 1) In our appreciation of works of human art we are familiar with the existence of beauty that has not been produced by accident or pure chance. Rather, we experience a ‘form of communication’⁵⁰ through which we perceive ‘intelligence, thought, and feeling’.⁵¹
- 2) We often have the same (or at least a similar) experience when we encounter the physical universe; we often find ourselves experiencing the universe ‘as a work of art’ that draws from us ‘gratitude to the unseen Artist’⁵²
- 3) Like causes (at least generally speaking) produce like effects.
- 4) Therefore, our experience of the physical universe as artistic beauty, being at least similar to our experience of human art, is reason to infer the existence of a human-like Artist with ‘intelligence, thought, and feeling’⁵³ behind the universe.

The rationality of holding to this conclusion is bolstered by the principle of credulity, for: ‘It is a basic principle of knowledge. . . that we ought to believe that things are as they seem to be, until we have evidence that we are mistaken. . . If you say the contrary – never trust appearances until it is proved that they were reliable – you will never have any beliefs at all. For what would show that appearances were reliable, except more appearances?’⁵⁴ It may also be interpreted as the intended result of properly functioning cognitive faculties aimed at truth, *a la* Plantinga.⁵⁵

The popular objection is to say that a naturalistic theory of evolution provides a simpler adequate explanation for the apparent artistry of nature, which should thus be preferred to theism (by an application of Occam’s razor). However, it is only *naturalistic* evolution that contradicts the intuitive inference to design, and the theist may simply argue that the *naturalistic* evolutionary explanation, although simpler, is not adequate enough to overturn the *overwhelming intuitive impression* that the universe is a work of art. Besides, there are several aspects of reality that *cannot* be explained by evolution *because they are necessary to the process of evolution itself*, and *these aspects of nature give the impression of design no less than does the whole of which they are such important parts*. The evolutionary challenge therefore actually fails to contradict the intuitive design

47 Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*.

48 David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946), p214.

49 J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, (Baker, 1987).

50 Clark Pinnock, *Reason Enough*, p64-65.

51 *ibid*.

52 *ibid*.

53 *ibid*.

54 Richard Swinburne, ‘Evidence for God’.

55 cf. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, (Oxford).

argument.⁵⁶

Secular philosopher Anthony O’Hear acknowledges that: ‘in experiencing beauty we feel ourselves to be in contact with a deeper reality than the everyday.’⁵⁷, and passes the following observations:

[Beauty] can seem revelatory, just as it does seem to answer to objective standards. It can seem to take us to the essence of reality, as if certain sensitivities in us. . . beat in tune with reality. It is as if our. . . appreciation of things external to us. . . are reflecting a deep and pre-conscious harmony between us and the world from which we spring. If this feeling is not simply an illusion. . . it may say something about the nature of reality itself, as responsive to human desires. . .

But how could we think of an aesthetic justification of experience. . . unless our aesthetic experience was sustained by a divine will revealed in the universe, and particularly in our experience of it as beautiful? It is precisely at this point that many or even most will draw back. Aesthetic experience *seems* to produce the harmony between us and the world that would have to point to a religious resolution were it not to be an illusion.⁵⁸

So far so good, but then O’Hear himself draws back: ‘But such a resolution is intellectually unsustainable, so aesthetic experience, however powerful, remains subjective and, in its full articulation, illusory. This is a dilemma I cannot solve or tackle head on.’⁵⁹ To summarily dismiss the ‘religious resolution’ as ‘intellectually unsustainable’ seems like an uncharitably off-handed failure to follow the evidence where it leads. What a strange, even absurd universe, in which the aesthetic experiences that seem to give life so much of its meaning are in fact meaningless illusions! Perhaps the universe is sane after all, in which case O’Hear’s dismissive attitude towards the divine is, literally speaking, insane.

O’Hear’s chapter on beauty in *Beyond Evolution* ends with the thought that, ‘despite the problems of alienation thrown up by science and morality’⁶⁰ we nevertheless have a sense that we are (to some extent) at home in the world, and that nowhere do we meet this intuition quite so strongly as in aesthetic experience: ‘From my point of view it is above all in aesthetic experience that we gain the fullest and most vividly lived sense that though we are creatures of Darwinian origin, our nature transcends our origin in tantalizing ways.’⁶¹ (This is only to say that naturalistic evolution is incapable of adequately accounting for our aesthetic faculties.) Aesthetic experience, says O’Hear, promises to reconcile our particular and embedded aesthetic experiences ‘to what might be thought of as our striving for some transcendent guarantee and consolation.’⁶² For O’Hear, this tantalization is literal. The aesthetic experience that calls us home is an illusion, a ‘whistling in

56 As Arthur J. Balfour wrote: ‘there is nothing in the mere idea of organic evolution which is incongruous with design.’ - *Theism and Humanism*, (Inkling Books, 2000), p30. On evolution and the Genesis origins story, cf. Roger Forster and Paul Marston, *Reason, Science & Faith*, (Monarch, 1999)/www.reason-science-and-faith.com

57 Antony O’Hear, *Beyond Evolution*, p195.

58 *ibid.*

59 *ibid.*

60 *ibid.*

61 *ibid.*, p202.

62 *ibid.*, p214.

the dark'⁶³ as he puts it (unless God is accepted after all), and this realization must leave us alone with our alienation. O'Hear thus finds himself in exactly the same position as the author of *Ecclesiastes* who saw that everything was 'meaningless . . . under the sun [i.e. without reference to a transcendent God].' This is an experiential, *existential* aesthetic argument that works by proposing an integrated and intellectually satisfying world-view: 'Another satisfying insight of Theology', says John Polkinghorne, 'is the way in which it can tie together the diverse layers of our multivalued experience. . . . We can see neither God nor electrons, but both make sense of the richness of reality.'⁶⁴

Aesthetic experience plays a significant role in the intuitive design argument as well as in religious experience generally speaking. Augustine lamented: 'my sin was this, that I looked for pleasure, *beauty*, and truth not in him but in myself and his other creatures, and the search led me instead to pain, confusion, and error.'⁶⁵ Augustine's search eventually led to the discovery that God was the true object of his need, the true fountain of beauty, and to the exclamation: 'Oh Beauty so old and so new! Too late have I loved thee!'⁶⁶ This same search for that transcendent something sensed within or through aesthetic experience was a golden-thread running through the life of C.S. Lewis. Lewis picked up on the Romantic term *Sehnsucht* to describe a family of emotional responses to the world which are linked by a sense of displacement or alienation from the object of desire. *Sehnsucht* is 'nostalgic longing', and it arises when experience of something within the world awakens a desire for something beyond what the natural world can offer as a corresponding object of desire. *Sehnsucht* directs our attention towards the transcendent, that which 'goes beyond' our present experience. The power of fairy tales lie in their ability to transport us into a world transparently imbued with *Sehnsucht*. However, says Lewis, 'The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. . . . Do what we will, then, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy.'⁶⁷ The rhetoric is overplayed here; there is beauty *in* books and music as there is in nature; but these things also stir within us a desire for a beauty greater than themselves that we seem to apprehend *through* their beauty. It is as if their finite beauty is a derived quality that draws our aesthetic attention into the heaven of un-derived and absolute beauty. In Christian theism this 'as if' finds fulfillment:

we want so much more – something the books on aesthetics take little notice of. But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to see beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see. . . . to receive it into ourselves. . . . to become part of it. . . . At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us feel fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get *in*.
When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation

63 *ibid*, p195.

64 John Polkinghorne, *Serious Talk*, p56 & 111.

65 Augustine, *Confessions*.

66 *ibid*.

67 C.S. Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory'.

is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch.⁶⁸

Lewis argues: ‘Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. . . . If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.’⁶⁹ A man’s hunger does not prove that he will get any food; he might die of starvation. But surely hunger proves that a man comes from a race which needs to eat and inhabits a world where edible substances exist: ‘In the same way,’ says Lewis, ‘though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will.’⁷⁰

Rudolph Otto’s book *The Idea of the Holy*, describes ‘the Numinous’ as that which causes in those who perceive it a sense of awe. The Numinous is not the subjective experience, but the transcendent object about which one feels this sense of awe. The principle of credulity encourages us to accept the straightforward interpretation that the Numinous is an objective reality truly perceived. Awe of the Numinous is one of the emotional states grouped together under the category of *Sehnsucht*. Moreover, a sense of the Numinous often accompanies aesthetic experiences of the ‘sublime’ variety (i.e. the beauty of the great and majestic), such as a mountain or thunderstorm (this explains why mountains and climatic events feature so widely in the religious experience of the Jewish nation). Neither the aesthetic experience itself, nor the immediate objects of that experience, can be termed ‘the Numinous’. The mind of a university educated prince turned shepherd is quite capable, for example, of distinguishing between a burning bush and the numinous presence of God mediated through that burning bush. Perception of the Numinous constitutes a whole new level or depth of experience: ‘When we are awed by the intolerable majesty of the Himalaya, when we look . . . at the lonely hostile beauty of the Eismeer. . . . we are merely receiving through symbols adapted to our size, intimations of the Absolute Beauty. . . . we are – if we receive a genuine aesthetic or religious impression – passing through and beyond this object, to the experience of an Absolute revealed in things.’⁷¹

Peter Kreeft distinguishes between a ‘conventional sign’, like letters in an alphabet that could have been different, and a ‘natural sign’ that ‘is a living example of what it signifies.’⁷² For example, ‘There is happiness in a smile, as there is not a curve ball in the catcher’s two fingers signaling it.’⁷³ Just as the smile is a ‘natural sign’ of the happiness it signifies, so nature can be seen as a ‘natural sign’ of the transcendent object of desire that makes itself immanent therein. Is this seeing a true insight into ultimate reality, or a delusion? In the absence of sufficient reason to doubt the existence of God, the principle of credulity would suggest that what seems to be the case is the case. One can easily explain how some people fail to ‘read the sign’, for we know that ‘we can look *at* a sign instead of looking along it’⁷⁴ to that which it signifies. Roger Scruton observes:

68 *ibid.*

69 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Fount).

70 *ibid.*

71 Evelyn Underhill, *Man and the Supernatural*, (Methuen, 1934), p170.

72 Peter Kreeft, *Heaven – the heart’s deepest longing*, (Ignatius), p115.

73 *ibid.*

74 *ibid.*, p112.

There is an attitude that we direct [or are naturally led to direct] towards the human person, and which leads us to see in the human form a perspective on the world that reaches from a point outside it. That is what we see in a smile. And the experience of the holy, the sacred and the miraculous arises in a similar way, when we direct [or are led to direct] this attitude not to other human beings, but to places, times, and objects. . . Such things have no subjectivity of their own. . . The experience of the sacred is therefore a revelation, a direct encounter with the divine, which eludes all explanation in natural terms. . .⁷⁵

Maybe it is due to a misplaced generalization of the scientific method, looking *at* the natural world rather than *along* it, that more people do not experience the world as a natural sign (of course, if the world is a sign, one must take into account its ‘fallen’ nature; we only see ‘through a glass, darkly’). Some set up scientific delectability as a criterion of objective existence that thereby excludes God from their world-view as a window excludes wind from a room. However, such a criterion cannot pass its own test (it cannot be scientifically proven that only scientifically knowable entities are objectively real). The person who declares that science disproves the existence of God is like a person who declares that windows disprove the existence of wind! Perhaps we need to open the window a bit.

I suggest that sensitivity to the Numinous functions as a variety of *Sehnsucht* because beauty acts as a link to the divine source and standard of beauty. On this hypothesis, it is unsurprising to read Roger Scruton affirming that: ‘in the sentiment of the sublime we seem to see beyond the world, to something overwhelming and inexpressible in which it is somehow grounded. . . it is in our feeling for beauty that the content, and even the truth, of religious doctrine is strangely and untranslatably intimated to us.’⁷⁶ Despite these observations, Scruton apparently remains an atheist (albeit a church going atheist), recommending a ‘let’s pretend’ philosophy of ‘as if’ to paper over the cracks of meaninglessness left in his secular world-view by the absence of God. High culture, says Scruton, ‘teaches us to live *as if* our lives mattered eternally.’⁷⁷ This speaks for itself.

The art-object of creation is a natural sign, and as such it requires us to pass beyond the mediating object to appreciate the beauty that, while imminent therein, is transcendent thereof. It is this transcendent beauty that is the ultimate ‘object’ of aesthetic appreciation, because transcendent beauty is the necessary source and standard of the imminent beauty that is the proximate subject of aesthetic contemplation. Just as the joy transcends the twinkle, so the beauty transcends the artwork. This means that *God is the ultimate objective locus of aesthetic appreciation*, whether people recognize this fact or not.

Beauty, Intuition, Analogy and Design

Intuitive, analogical and inductive aesthetic arguments are open to the same sorts of criticism leveled against the more common form of design argument. I will take a brief look at some criticisms of the traditional design argument, suggesting that they do not destroy it, and hence that they do not destroy aesthetic versions of it. Indeed, I will argue that the aesthetic version of the analogical

75 Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide To Philosophy*, (Duckworth, 1997), p95-96.

76 *ibid*, p29.

77 *ibid*, p14.

design argument may have the edge over, and provide support for, its apologetic cousin. I will also call upon the support of non-analogical design arguments, seeking to show how they can be considered from an aesthetic angle.

It is popularly thought that the theory of evolution by natural selection decimated the analogical design argument (e.g. The eye resembles a watch in the intricate interplay of parts assembled to fulfill a function, watches have designers, so the eye probably has a designer). The universe, or objects within the universe, may indeed resemble a watch; but the ‘watch’ (which stands for any complex object of inter-related parts), we now know (it is claimed), was made by a natural process without teleological direction. Pre-Darwinian apologists may be forgiven for mistaking eyes and such-like for the products of intelligent design, but now science has stepped into the explanatory gap, and swept away the ‘God-of-the-gaps’. So the critic might argue. But against this: The theist needn’t deny that a natural process made objects such as the eye, but they can easily deny that this process was non-teleological. Besides, evolution is incapable of explaining all examples of order, because, as Dallas Willard reminds us, evolution: ‘presupposes the *existence* of certain entities with specific potential behaviors and an *environment* of some specific kind that operates upon those entities in some specifically ordered fashion.’⁷⁸ That is, ‘*any sort of evolution of order of any kind will always presuppose preexisting order and preexisting entities governed by it.*’⁷⁹ If the universe produces ‘watches’ through a natural process, *then* it seems eminently reasonable to construe that process itself as the product of design. After all, humans can build automated watch-making factories, so perhaps God has built an automated life-making factory. Suppose evolution accounts for complex arrangements of matter like eyeballs; evolution is itself a complicated process involving raw materials being worked upon by the laws of natural selection (the mutation of genes, a changing environment, the survival of the fittest, etc.) Evolution, then, does not destroy the analogical design argument, it merely pushes it back a step, from the objects that make up the world, to the substances and processes that make the objects that make up the world. As Richard Swinburne says: ‘Nature. . . is a machine-making machine. . . men make not only machines, but machine making machines. They may therefore naturally infer from nature which produces animals and plants, to a creator of nature similar to men who make machine-making machines.’⁸⁰ Another possible rebuttal is of course to challenge the theory of naturalistic evolution.

A major charge leveled against the analogical design argument is that it does not provide warrant for the existence of a single designer. As David Hume put the objection, ‘A great number of men join in building a house or a ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth, why may not several deities combine in framing a world?’⁸¹ But against this: First, Occam’s razor compels us to postulate the least number of entities necessary to explain the available data, and in this instance that number is one. Second, this is a *cosmos*, a coherent structure of ‘ordered beauty’. This is a *universe*, a unified whole. As J.P. Moreland writes, ‘One God is a simpler explanation than the polytheistic one and it makes more intelligible the fact that we live in a *universe* and not a plurality

78 Dallas Willard, ‘The Three-Stage Argument for the Existence of God’, in *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*, p217. cf. ‘Language, Being, God, and the Three Stages of Theistic Evidence’ @

http://www.dwillard.org/Philosophy/Pubs/language_being.htm

79 *ibid.*

80 Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God.*, (Oxford, 1991).

81 David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p39.

of universes.⁸² Most Cathedrals (let alone cities) are a conglomeration of architectural styles, renovations, innovations, and re-building. The cosmos, on the other hand, possesses a unity in both its physical ‘engineering’, and *in its artistic facets*. Here we already begin to see the aesthetic design argument taking part in a mutually supportive ‘wider teleology’. Richard Swinburne argues: ‘If there were more than one deity responsible for the order [and beauty] of the universe, we should expect to see characteristic marks of the handiwork of different deities in different parts of the universe, just as we see different workmanship in the different houses of a city.’⁸³ The aesthetic analogical design argument may have an advantage over the common analogical design argument here, in that while machines and buildings generally do have several builders (although they also generally have only one designer or architect), the artistic creation of worlds is usually the work of one artist, both in inception *and* execution. A Middle-Earth, a Narnia, a Discworld, are the product of a Tolkein, a Lewis, a Pratchett. Our cosmos is perhaps more like a Middle-Earth, a Narnia, or a Discworld than it is a watch, or even an automated watch-making factory. Consequently, the aesthetic, artistic analogy is perhaps stronger than the industrial, engineering analogy; and points more clearly to a single Creator.

Objective Epistemological Aesthetic Design Arguments

In his 1914 Gifford lectures on *Theism and Humanism*, Arthur J. Balfour discussed ‘the incongruity between our feelings of beauty and a materialistic account of their origin.’⁸⁴ Balfour asserted that: ‘our aesthetic sensibilities must be regarded (from the naturalistic standpoint) as the work of chance. They form no part of the quasi-design which we attribute to selection; they are unexplained accidents of the evolutionary process.’ However, ‘This conclusion harmonizes ill with the importance which civilized man assigns to them in his scheme of values.’⁸⁵ The problem for naturalism, as Balfour observed, is that: ‘The noblest things in . . . art . . . possess small survival value, and, though the geniuses to whom we owe them have added greatly to the glory of their race, they have added but little to its animal success.’⁸⁶

Clark Pinnock develops the argument from the inability of evolution to adequately account for our aesthetic sensibilities along the following lines:

- 1) From a secular standpoint, our capacity to appreciate beauty: ‘must seem an unaccounted-for ‘extra’ thrown in by chance. . . lacking as it does any survival value in terms of our evolution.’⁸⁷
- 2) It would therefore be reasonable to accept any explanation of our capacity to appreciate beauty that made the existence of this capacity more likely than the secular explanation.
- 3) If our capacity to appreciate beauty derives from the creative activity of an un-evolved being with a capacity to appreciate beauty, then our possession of that capacity would be more likely than it is on the secular explanation.
- 4) Therefore, it is reasonable to think that our capacity to appreciate beauty derives from the creative

82 J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, (Baker, 1987), p65.

83 Richard Swinburne, ‘The Argument for Design’, in *Contemporary Perspective on Religious Epistemology*, p209-210.

84 Arthur J. Balfour, *Theism and Humanism*, (Inkling Books, 2000), p48.

85 *ibid*, p43.

86 *ibid*, p148.

87 Clark H. Pinnock, *op cit*.

(and therefore intelligent and purposive) activity of an un-evolved being with a capacity to appreciate beauty.

F.R. Tennant covered the same ground:

in so far as the mechanical stability and the analytic intelligibility of the inorganic world are concerned, beauty is a superfluity. Also that in the organic world aesthetic pleasingness of color, etc., seems to possess survival-value on but a limited scale, and then is not to be identified with the complex and intellectualized aesthetic sentiments of humanity, which apparently have no survival value. From the point of view of science, beauty. . . is, in both its subjective and its objective factors, but . . . a biologically superfluous accompaniment of the cosmic process. Once more then lucky accidents and coincidences bewilderingly accumulate until the idea of purposiveness, already lying to hand as indispensable within the sphere of human conduct, is applied to effect the substitution of reasonable, if alogical, probability for groundless contingency. If we do apply this category of design to the whole time-process, the beauty of Nature may not only be assigned a cause but also a meaning, or a revelational function. It may then be regarded as no mere by-product, like physical evil, in a teleologically ordered world whose *raison d'être* is the realization of other values - the moral and the religious.⁸⁸

This version of the evolutionary aesthetic argument is stronger than Pinnock's because it takes into account some measure of survival value attributed to our appreciation of beauty.

Professor H.E. Huntley in *The Divine Proportion - A Study In Mathematical Beauty*, poses the evolutionary puzzle of our aesthetic sense thus: 'we might begin by asking whether the universal human thirst for beauty serves a useful purpose. Physical hunger and thirst ensure our bodily survival. The sex drive takes care of the survival of the race. Fear has survival value. But - to put the question crudely - what is beauty for? What personal or evolutionary end is met by the appreciation of a rainbow, a flower or a symphony? At first sight, none.'⁸⁹ Huntley suggests that: 'a part of the answer is that [beauty] serves as a lure to induce the mind to embark on creative activity. Beauty is a bait. [However] This view seems to require the existence of 'absolute' beauty, to demand that specimens of beauty antedate the human perception of them, although beauty in its subjective sense is called into existence only at the moment of its appreciation.'⁹⁰ And this conclusion is fodder for the objective ontological aesthetic design argument. Of course, if our appreciation of beauty does have an evolutionary (efficient) explanation, this does not exclude the possibility that our appreciation is also the result of (teleological) intelligent design.

W.S. Rhodes agrees with Balfour and Pinnock: 'The sense of beauty in human beings. . . has no obvious survival value. Human sensitivity to beauty cannot be accounted for on materialist lines and the beauty of the world only partly so. Unless there is an intelligence sensitive to beauty in some way directing the course of things the facts must remain without full explanation.'⁹¹ Anthony O'Hear concurs that: 'from a Darwinian perspective, truth, goodness, and beauty and our care for

88 F.R. Tennant, *op cit*.

89 H.E. Huntley in *The Divine Proportion - A Study In Mathematical Beauty*.

90 *ibid*, p153.

91 W.S. Rhodes, *The Christian God*, (ISPCK).

them are very hard to explain.⁹² He goes on to say that, ‘For some, speculation about the origin of our non-Darwinian concerns would take a religious direction.’⁹³ O’Hear does not take this direction himself, but gives no reason for his refusal. William C. Davies follows the trail to its theistic conclusion:

consider the data of useless (nonutilitarian) beauty. Is God a better explanation of that feature of the world than metaphysical naturalism? To decide, you must ask whether useless beauty is more likely to exist if God exists or if metaphysical naturalism is true. This is by no means a simple or obvious estimate; but I’m convinced that an honest evaluation leads to the conclusion that God’s existence explains this and other features of the world far more successfully. . . Value, both moral and aesthetic, appears to be an objective feature of the world. . . a fact much more likely to have been the case if God exists than if the universe is a grand accident.⁹⁴

Inductive Ontological Aesthetic Arguments

F.R. Tennant argues from the obvious assertion that: ‘Nature is sublime or beautiful, and the exceptions do but prove the rule.’⁹⁵ Tennant’s next premise is that: ‘In general, man’s productions (other than professed works of art), and almost only they, are aesthetically vile [ugly]. . . We might almost say the one [human agency] never achieves, while the other [nature] never misses, the beautiful.’⁹⁶ This generalization applies, says Tennant, both to the products and productive processes of humanity and nature (thus Tennant’s argument includes both instrumental and causal beauty): ‘Compare, e.g., ‘the rattling looms and the hammering noise of human workshops’ with Nature’s silent or musical constructiveness; or the devastating stinks of chemical works with Nature’s fragrant distillations.’⁹⁷ Richard Swinburne would agree, for he writes that: ‘If one thinks of ugliness as a negative quality, as opposed to being the mere absence of beauty, one would be hard put to think of any part of the pre-human world which is ugly; ugliness in this sense seems to arrive with the arrival of humans, who, knowingly or unknowingly, make something which could be beautiful ugly instead.’⁹⁸ Then comes the conclusion: ‘If “God made the country” whereas man made the town. . . we have a possible explanation of these things; but if the theism contained in this saying be rejected, explanation does not seem to be forthcoming.’⁹⁹ The beauty of nature, argues Tennant, cannot be co-extensive with either nature’s ‘mechanicalness’, or its (supposed) lack of aesthetic design, ‘as man’s utilitarian productions shew.’¹⁰⁰ Concrete car parks, for example, are utilitarian, but ugly overall; for, as Balfour pointed out: ‘An ill-proportioned building might have been equally

92 Antony O’Hear, *Beyond Evolution*, p214.

93 *ibid.*

94 William C. Davis, *op cit*, p36-37.

95 F.R. Tennant, *op cit.*

96 *ibid.*

97 *ibid.*

98 Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, (Oxford).

99 F.R. Tennant, *op cit.*

100 *ibid.*

fitted for its purpose; a plain sword might have been equally lethal.’¹⁰¹ Tennant is certainly on to something here, for as W.S. Rhodes writes:

Beauty may be associated with fitness for function. . . Economy and precision in design gives one kind of aesthetic satisfaction. So it is with certain living things. . . Their form. . . has been developed to meet functional needs and we judge it beautiful. Yet things exactly suited to their function are not necessarily beautiful. . . It is only in certain cases that fitness for function is sufficient to account for the beauty of an object. And it is only in certain cases that the beauty of living things can be attributed to fitness for function.¹⁰²

Or as Tennant says: ‘we may still ask why *Nature*’s mechanism affects us in such wise that we deem her sublime and beautiful, since mere mechanism, as such, is under no universal necessity to do so, and what we may call human mechanisms [produced on purely utilitarian lines] usually fail to do so.’¹⁰³ Yet, ‘this potency, describable as the Objective factor in beauty, belongs to Nature’s very texture.’¹⁰⁴

Richard Swinburne takes up Tennant’s suggestion that beauty provides a motive, meaning, and purpose for creation. Swinburne argues that, if God exists, then He has: ‘apparently overriding reason, for making, not merely an orderly world. . . but a beautiful world - at any rate to the extent to which it lies outside the control of creatures. (And he has reason too, I would suggest, even in whatever respects the world does lie within the control of creatures, to give them experience of beauty to develop, and perhaps some ugliness to annihilate.)’¹⁰⁵ In other worlds, the world looks much as we should expect it to look if it were created by God, because ‘God has reason to make a basically beautiful world’, and because ‘he would seem to have overriding reason not to make a basically ugly world beyond the powers of creatures to improve.’¹⁰⁶ This remains true, says Swinburne, ‘whether or not anyone ever observes [the beauty of the world], but certainly if only one person ever observes it.’¹⁰⁷ Swinburne says that, ‘it is also good that people admire what is beautiful; but the beauty of the beautiful does not depend on being recognized.’¹⁰⁸ Even if this is not so, Swinburne argues that ‘God has a very good reason for making a beautiful Universe, namely that he himself will admire it (not admire it because he made it, of course; but because what he made is admirable.)’¹⁰⁹ Keith Ward agrees, saying ‘if God is the imaginative creator, the cosmic artist, then of course God will know and appreciate the whole cosmic process.’¹¹⁰ Moreover, the goodness of subjective, enjoyed beauty constitutes one reason for God to create creatures with an aesthetic sense. As Augustine wrote: ‘Then there is the beauty and utility of the natural creation, which the divine generosity has bestowed on man, for him to behold. . .’¹¹¹ So, there are two reason why God might

101 Arthur Balfour, *Theism and Humanism*, p41.

102 W.S. Rhodes, *op cit*.

103 F.R. Tennant, *op cit*, p92.

104 *ibid*.

105 Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, (Oxford, 1991), p150.

106 *ibid*.

107 Richard Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, (Oxford), p54.

108 Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, (Oxford), p52.

109 *ibid*.

110 Keith Ward, *God, Faith & the new Millennium*, (OneWorld).

111 Augustine, *City of God*, Bk XXII, chapter 24, p1075.

be expected to make a world such as ours: that He may appreciate its beauty, and that creatures such as ourselves may appreciate the beauty both of God and of God's Creation. God's reason for making a basically beautiful world is that 'beauty is a good thing.'¹¹² The conclusion Swinburne draws is that 'if there is a God there is more reason to expect a basically beautiful world than a basically ugly one. . .'¹¹³ The next step in Swinburne's argument is to assert that 'A priori. . . there is no particular reason for expecting a basically beautiful rather than a basically ugly world.'¹¹⁴ The conclusion to be drawn from this observation is that, 'if the world is [basically] beautiful, that fact would be evidence for God's existence.'¹¹⁵ It only remains for Swinburne to point out that the world is indeed basically beautiful to complete his argument. While the judgment whether or not that the world is basically beautiful is one that every individual must make for themselves, agreeing that it rounds off an apparently sound aesthetic argument for the existence of God.

Swinburne's best defence - or perhaps 'persuasive exemplification' would be a better description of his method - of the basic beauty of the world, and of the claim that the creation of beauty provides God with an overriding reason to make a world such as ours, comes in *Providence and the Problem of Evil*:

The existence of all concrete things. . . is good in itself. The more [things], the better. And better that they be arranged in a beautiful way. Could anyone who has come to admire sculpture possibly deny that? But better still is a moving sculpture - a process whereby trillions of concrete things emerge from simple beginnings. Could anyone who has come to admire dance possibly deny that? And good that they should come in kinds with marvelous patterns of color, new kinds emerging from old - a living painting. The goodness of the existence and beauty of the non-conscious world. . . is so obvious, and yet it needs a poet to bring it alive. . . But is it not obvious that a good God would seek to bring about such beauty?¹¹⁶

While this argument can only carry the strength appropriate to an argument to the best explanation, I agree that 'The argument surely works.'¹¹⁷

In *Scaling The Secular City*, J.P. Moreland affirms that features of the world such as 'a sunset, fall in Vermont, the human body, the Rocky Mountains [and] the singing of birds. . . all exhibit real, objective beauty.'¹¹⁸ He also says that 'if one denies the objectivity of beauty, then this sort of design will not be of use in arguing for a designer.'¹¹⁹ It is therefore rather disappointing that for Moreland, 'Space does not allow for a defence of the objectivity of beauty.'¹²⁰ However, I do not see why Moreland produces the conclusion that only objective beauty is of use to the apologist. For instance, F.R. Tennant contradicts Moreland:

112 Richard Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, (Oxford), p54.

113 Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, (Oxford, 1991), p150.

114 *ibid.*

115 *ibid.*

116 Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, (Oxford), p51.

117 Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, (Oxford, 1991), p151.

118 J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, (Baker, 1987).

119 *ibid*, p48-49.

120 *ibid*, p48.

Whether it be subjectively constituted. . . whether beauty be wholly Objective and literally intrinsic to Nature: these controversial questions are here immaterial. . . If we minimize phenomenal Nature's gift by denying that her beauty is intrinsic. . . we must allow to ontal Nature an intrinsic constitution such that minds can make beauty. . . out of it. And *the more we magnify man's part in this making. . . and appreciating, the more motivation have we to believe that Nature comes to herself in man, has a significance for man that exists not for herself, and without man is a broken circle. Theologically expressed, this is the belief that Nature is meaningless and valueless without God behind it and man in front.* . . .¹²¹

If beauty is not objective, then clearly it is either subjective or non-existent. Since beauty patently exists, the only choice is to give it objective or subjective characterization. However, Tennant seems to me to demonstrate that *inductive* forms of objective aesthetic argument operate independently of questions about the objectivity or subjectivity of beauty.

Moreland argues that: 'the beauty in the examples cannot be accounted for in terms of survival value, natural selection, and the like.'¹²² For this conclusion he gives the following reasons:

some of the examples (the Rocky Mountains) are not biological organisms. Further, even when one considers biological organisms (the human body) it is not clear that the beauty of those organisms is related to their survival. Since science does not deal with value qualities (aesthetic or moral) in its descriptions of the world, then beauty as an aesthetic property is not a part of evolutionary theory.¹²³

The thought underlying these comments, which Moreland leaves undeveloped, is this: Since naturalistic explanations of the world give no *a priori* reason to expect beauty to arise in either the biological or non-biological realm, a theistic explanation, which can invoke teleology to explain this fact, gains a measure of credibility. As W.S. Rhodes says, 'It is difficult to believe that so many beautiful things came into being without any kind of direction by a power sensitive to beauty.'¹²⁴ Attributing biological beauty to a *naturalistic* evolutionary process hardly accounts for the overwhelming amount and degree of beauty produced, since it doesn't explain why there should *be* a connection between beauty and survival value.

W.S. Rhodes argues from the beauty of flowers:

pollination by insects may be the means by which beautiful forms and colors are selected. We have then to suppose that the remarkable beauty of form and color has developed because insects are attracted to these characteristics. They can be shown to be attracted to bright colors. But the point here is not the brightness of the color, but its delicacy as compared. . . with the crudity of artificial ones. If insects are responsible for the exquisite beauty of form and color in so many flowers they must have great sensitivity to these qualities.¹²⁵

121 F.R. Tennant, *op cit*, p89, my italics.

122 J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, (Baker, 1987), p49.

123 *ibid*.

124 W.S. Rhodes, *op cit*, p77.

125 *ibid*.

It can hardly be imagined that insects appreciate *beauty* in the flowers whose evolution they have helped to shape. I doubt that bees, for instance, are conscious; let alone self-conscious. Rather, these insects are attracted to certain wavelengths of light, beyond those visible to the human eye, which are reflected by flowers. The naturalistic evolutionary explanation does not explain why the evolutionary pressure of insects unconcerned with beauty should lead to the existence of flowers which, *purely as a side-effect* of their insect-attracting ultra-violet coloring (as the naturalistic evolutionary story would have it) possess objectively beautiful colors in the very spectrum of light visible to the very creatures capable of appreciating that beauty; creatures *who played no role in the evolution of the beauty they appreciate*. As Norman L. Geisler notes: ‘all or most things in nature. . . move towards an end, be it staying alive or reproducing, and *they move toward secondary purposes that have nothing to do with themselves*. In the big picture *their existence and actions make the world. . . beautiful*’, and that implies a designer, because, as Aquinas argued, ‘These agents act in predictable. . . ways that seem to work towards the best results [and] whatever lacks knowledge must be directed toward an end.’¹²⁶ ‘God’ provides a more adequate explanation of nature’s propensity to produce beauty than does the simpler but less adequate explanation of ‘chance’, and is therefore to be preferred. It may be *possible* that the interplay of chance gene mutation and environmental pressure should produce such fortuitous aesthetic ‘side-effects’, but it does not seem a very likely, elegant, or neat explanation of the facts. It might be argued that though humans had no effect on the evolution of flowers, the flowers had some effect upon the evolution of humans such that humans naturally appreciate flowers because of some association with fertility, for example. Such an explanation does not exclude God working within evolution to obtain this effect. Then again, such a response fails to take seriously the fact that the flowers are *objectively* beautiful. Moreover, as Moreland says, the theory of evolution can hardly account for the beauty of objects, like the Rocky Mountains, which did not evolve. As Aristotle noted: ‘it is unlikely that fire, earth, or any such element [i.e. that any material cause or the efficient causes thereof] should be why things manifest goodness and beauty.’¹²⁷ Augustine’s remarks on this subject have lost none of their relevance:

And even if we take out of account the necessary functions of the parts, there is a harmonious congruence between them, a beauty in their equality and correspondence, so much so that *one would be at a loss to say whether utility or beauty is the major consideration in their creation. . .* There is no visible part of the body which is merely adapted to its function without being also of aesthetic value. . . Hence it can, I think, readily be inferred that in the design of the human body dignity was a more important consideration than utility.’¹²⁸

This is not a matter of arguing for a ‘God-of-the-gaps’, because the explanatory gap being referred to is one *inherent* to the structure of scientific explanation. As John Polkinghorne testifies, ‘Beauty slips through the scientist’s net.’¹²⁹ The metaphysical explanation for beauty available to the theist does not rule out scientific explanation, but rather subsumes it within a wider explanatory teleology that seems capable of providing a more adequate account of the place of beauty in the cosmos. The

126 Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Baker, 1999), p715, my italics.

127 Aristotle, quoted by John Leslie, *Value & Existence*, p205.

128 Augustine, *City of God*, Book XXII, Chapter 24, p1073-1074, my italics.

129 John Polkinghorne, *The Way The World Is*, p17.

theistic hypothesis, as Keith Ward argues, makes sense of the fact that: ‘scientists often do appeal to teleological reasons, to a sense of beauty and elegance, in choosing ultimate theories.’¹³⁰

Moreland argues that: ‘Beautiful theories or systems of thought which are mere inventions get their beauty from the superior human intellect which formed them. Similarly, beautiful theories, which are discovered and which accurately reflect the way the world is, get their beauty from the Mind which formed them.’¹³¹ In support of this contention Moreland notes that ‘Philosophers of science have often pointed out that one of the criteria for a true (or rational) scientific theory is its elegance or beauty’¹³² For example, ‘Albert Einstein and Erwin Shrodinger were guided by the conviction, borne out by previous scientific discoveries, that a good scientific theory would safeguard the beauty of nature and would itself be formally or mathematically beautiful.’¹³³ Paul Davies notes that: ‘It is widely believed among scientists that beauty is a reliable guide to truth, and many advances in theoretical physics have been made by the theorist demanding mathematical elegance of a new theory.’¹³⁴ He goes so far as to say that: ‘when laboratory tests are difficult, these aesthetic criteria are considered even more important than experiment.’¹³⁵ Responding to the proposal that our capacity to know beauty can be accounted for by natural selection, Davies seems to be on to something when he responds:

If beauty is entirely biologically programmed, selected for its survival value alone, it is all the more surprising to see it re-emerge in the esoteric world of fundamental physics, which has no direct connection with biology. On the other hand, if beauty is more than mere biology at work, if our aesthetic appreciation stems from contact with something firmer and more pervasive, then it is surely a fact of major significance that the fundamental laws of the universe seem to reflect this “something”.¹³⁶

Aesthetics and Intelligent Design: Dembski and Behe.

Proponents of intelligent design typically make use of objectively beautiful discoveries made in scientific fields such as cosmology and molecular biology; beauties that were simply unavailable to past champions of design. For example, Francis Crick, co-discoverer of DNA, writes of ‘the intrinsic beauty of the DNA helix. It is a molecule which has style.’¹³⁷; while the structure of DNA is ‘flawlessly beautiful’ according to Judson in *The Eight Day of Creation*.

William A. Dembski has provided an ‘Explanatory Filter’ that reliably identifies intelligent design by its trademark, specified complexity: ‘Roughly speaking the filter asks three questions in the following order: (1) Does a law explain it? (2) does chance explain it? (3) does design explain it?’¹³⁸ This follows Plato’s observation that ‘all things do become, have become, and will become, some by nature, some by art, and some by chance.’¹³⁹ Nancy Pearcey explains

130 Keith Ward, *God, Chance & Necessity*, (OneWorld), p22.

131 *ibid*.

132 *ibid*.

133 *ibid*.

134 Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*, p175.

135 *ibid*.

136 *ibid*.

137 Francis Crick, *Nature* magazine, 1974.

138 William A. Dembski, ‘The Explanatory Filter’ @ http://www.arn.org/docs/dembski/wd_expfilter.htm

139 Plato, *The Laws*, (Book X).

We detect design. . . by applying an ‘explanatory filter’ that first rules out chance and law. That is, scientists first determine if something is the product of merely random events by whether it is irregular, erratic, and unpredictable. If chance doesn’t explain it, they next determine if it is the result of natural forces by whether it is regular, repeatable, and predictable. If neither of these standard explanations works – if something is irregular and unpredictable, yet highly specified – then it bears the marks of design.¹⁴⁰

For example, the four president’s faces on Mt. Rushmore are irregular (not something generally to be expected from erosion!) and specified (they fit a particular independent pattern): ‘Applying the explanatory filter, the evidence clearly points to design.’¹⁴¹ As with Mt. Rushmore, so with DNA. Consider the analogy of discovering an open combination lock. Richard Dawkins writes: ‘Of all the unique and, with hindsight equally improbable, positions of the combination lock, only one opens the lock. . . The uniqueness of the arrangement. . . that opens the safe, [has] nothing to do with hindsight. It is *specified in advance*.’¹⁴² Hence the best explanation of an open safe is not that someone got lucky, but that someone knew the specific combination required to open it. Compare this with Richard Dawkins’ description of DNA:

at the bottom of my garden is a large willow tree, and it is pumping downy seeds into the air. . . Not just any DNA, but DNA who’s coded characters spell out specific instructions for building willow trees that will shed a new generation of downy seeds. Those fluffy specks are, literally, spreading instructions for making themselves. . . It is raining instructions out there; it’s raining programs; it’s raining tree-growing, fluff-spreading algorithms. That is not a metaphor, it is the plain truth. It couldn’t be plainer if it were raining floppy discs.¹⁴³

If it *was* raining floppy discs, and those floppy discs, like DNA, carried a program (for making other floppy discs), wouldn’t everyone agree that this information must have originated in some mind or minds? Following Dawkin’s usage, both the floppy disc and the willow seed are physical packets carrying complex, specified, encoded information. We know that computer programs come from minds; should we not also conclude that the information encoded by DNA comes from a mind?

Dembski’s Filter detects design because intelligent causes can easily achieve something that unintelligent causes (whether they be ‘chance’ and/or ‘necessity’) find all but impossible; that is, the creation of *specified complexity*. A long string of random letters drawn from a scrabble bag would be complex without being specified. A short sequence of letters (like ‘so’, or ‘the’) is specified without being complex. A sonnet by Shakespeare is both complex *and* specified: ‘Thus in general, given an event, object, or structure, to convince ourselves that it is designed we need to show that it is improbably (i.e. complex) and suitably patterned (i.e. specified).’¹⁴⁴ The ‘Explanatory Filter’ is

140 Nancy Pearcey, ‘Design and the Discriminating Public’, in William A. Dembski and James M. Kushner (ed.), *Signs of Intelligence*, (Brazos Press, 2001), p48-49.

141 *ibid*, p49.

142 Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*.

143 *ibid*, p111.

144 William A. Dembski, ‘Another Way to Detect Design?’ @ http://www.arn.org/docs/dembski/wd_responsetowiscu.htm

only a *positive* test for design. Suppose an ecologically minded artist carefully distributes leaves in a forest so as to mimic a natural leaf distribution. The Filter would be unable to *detect* the activity of intelligent causation in the distribution of these leaves. On the other hand, if the leaves were arranged to spell out the words ‘welcome to my forest’ the filter *would* detect design, for such an arrangement of leaves is both highly unlikely (complex) *and* specified. Again, consider a painting of the Jackson Pollock sort where paint has been randomly distributed on a canvas as if they had just fallen from a table and spilt on the floor. Dembski’s filter would be unable to decide whether this painting was in fact the result of chance and natural laws (gravity, etc.) or the deliberate creation of an artist. On the other hand, present the filter with the Mona Lisa and it would swiftly infer intelligent design. Intelligent Design (whether applied to determining cause of death in forensic science or design in nature) can be rigorously cast in terms of information theory: ‘the actualisation of a possibility (i.e. information) is specified if independently of the possibility’s actualisation, the possibility is identifiable by means of a [*non ad hoc*] pattern. . . Information that is both complex and specified [CSI] is what all the fuss over information has been about in recent years, not just in biology, but in science generally. . . ’¹⁴⁵

I want to float the suggestion that a high degree of objective beauty may be regarded as a specification that, in conjunction with contingent events of sufficiently high improbability, passes through Dembski’s explanatory filter to indicate design. For example, the fine-tuning of the universe discovered by cosmologists is an example of CSI because it constitutes an unlikely (complex) state of affairs that conforms to a specifiable (non *ad hoc*) pattern, the pattern of universal constants necessary for a life-permitting universe (in the case of cosmic fine-tuning, what calls out for explanation in terms of design is not merely the fact that a particular improbable set of physical laws exists, but the fact that this particular set of laws is *specified* as the set necessary for a life sustaining universe). These laws are not only specified considered as finely tuned preconditions of cosmic fruitfulness, but with respect to their beauty. For example, the fine-tuned laws obviously possess great instrumental and causal beauty. In other words, given that other sets of physical laws would have been less beautiful than the combination that in fact obtains, this combination constitutes an aesthetic specification, a particularly beautiful pattern. Hitting this aesthetic specification at low probability is an example of CSI. This bears out J.P. Moreland’s observation that beauty is an indicator of truth in theoretical physics, and his contention that: ‘beautiful theories, which are discovered and which accurately reflect the way the world is, get their beauty from the Mind which formed them.’¹⁴⁶ After all, cosmic ‘fine tuning’ is just as necessary to the existence of a universe as beautiful as ours, and to the existence of sentient beings capable of appreciating that beauty, as it is to the existence of sentient beings *per se*. This might suggest that one of the designer’s purposes in creating a ‘fine tuned’ universe was the production of beauty and beings able to enjoy it.

The most famous design argument is of course that propounded by William Paley, who argued thus: even if we had never seen a watch before, an inspection would lead us to conclude that it was designed and made for a purpose. Observe the world and we see once again an intricate interplay of parts and contingent, complex physical laws arranged together and achieving a collective end (intelligent life forms). The world is analogous to the watch. The watch had a designer, so it is reasonable to think that the world had a designer. Modern knowledge has only

145 *ibid.*

146 J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, (Baker, 1987).

increased the strength of this analogy: ‘Cells swim using machines, copy themselves with machinery, ingest food with machinery. . . highly sophisticated molecular machines control every cellular process.’¹⁴⁷ Popular summaries of Paley notwithstanding, his argument goes well beyond mere analogy. Although he didn’t employ this precise terminology, Paley pointed out that a watch is *irreducibly complex*. Not only is the purpose carried out by the sum of the watch’s parts, but that purpose could not be carried out: ‘if its different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, or placed after any other manner or in any other order than that in which they are placed. . .’¹⁴⁸ Irreducibly complex systems, like a watch, are composed of *a number of mutually interdependent parts, each of which is functionally useless on its own*. This means that such a system *cannot* evolve by natural selection, because until the whole system is functional *there is nothing of advantage in existence to be selected*. (Indeed, manufacturing individual components of irreducibly complex systems would be a drain on resources, therefore constituting an evolutionary disadvantage.) Darwin admitted that the existence of a single irreducibly complex system would falsify his hypothesis: ‘If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.’¹⁴⁹ Biochemist Michael J. Behe argues that the biomolecular level of life, unknown in Darwin’s day, is full of ‘irreducibly complex’ molecular machines

A system which meets Darwin’s criterion [for falsifying his theory] is one which exhibits irreducible complexity. . . An irreducibly complex system cannot be produced gradually by slight, successive modifications of a precursor system, since any precursor to an irreducibly complex system is by definition non-functional. . . Now, are any biochemical systems irreducibly complex? Yes, it turns out that many are . . . including aspects of protein transport, blood clotting, closed circular DNA, electron transport, the bacterial flagellum, telomeres, photosynthesis, transcription regulation, and much more.¹⁵⁰

Now, as Balfour said, ‘Nice adjustment and fitness exquisitely accomplished are without doubt agreeable objects of [aesthetic] contemplation.’¹⁵¹

Strictly speaking, the notion of irreducible complexity as stated by Behe appears to apply only to systems with the aesthetic qualities of maximal simplicity. This is because if *any* of the system’s parts were absent the system would not function *at all*. Hence the function in question is being achieved with the minimal number of parts possible, and such simplicity is a thing of beauty. However, there are biomolecular systems that are irreducibly complex *at core*, but less than maximally simple (Behe stretches the term irreducibly-complex to cover these systems as well). That is, there are systems where removing one or more parts *degrade* the causal efficacy of the system, but not fatally so; and yet where there are nevertheless a minimal number of parts required for the functioning of that system. A maximally simple irreducibly complex system may not perform its function as well as its less simple, but thereby more causally efficacious, rival. The more

147 Michael J. Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box*, (Free Press, 1996), p4-5.

148 William Paley, *Natural Theology*.

149 Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species*, (1872), 6th edition, (New York University Press, 1988), p154.

150 Michael J. Behe, ‘Molecular Machines: Experimental Support for the Design Inference’ @ http://www.arn.org/docs/behe/mb_mm92496.htm

151 Arthur J. Balfour, *Theism and Humanism*, (Inklings Books, 2000), p41.

efficacious system would have greater beauty *causally speaking*, but less beauty in terms of simplicity; whereas the less efficacious system would have less causal beauty, but greater beauty in terms of simplicity. Either way, such systems exhibit great instrumental and causal beauty.

Deductive Ontological Aesthetic Design Arguments

Many of the epistemological and ontological versions of aesthetic arguments point to an *instrumental* relationship between the existence and appreciation of objective beauty as a good fact. Because it is good that beauty be known, the designer has created creatures capable of such knowledge, and a cosmos of such beauty to be known. Because beauty is itself a good thing, the designer has created a beautiful cosmos. The existence of a cosmos that is beautiful, to the overwhelming extent that our cosmos displays this quality, is down to intelligent design. The existence of creatures capable of knowing and thus enjoying this beauty, is likewise down to intelligent design. However, these inductive arguments do not seek to uncover any closer ontological link between the designer and beauty. They do nothing to support the intuition that God is not merely the source of such beauty as there is in the cosmos, and of our capacity for knowledge of that beauty, but is also the ontological ground of beauty *per-se*. This closer link is something that only a deductive ontological aesthetic argument could demonstrate. In the *City of God*, Augustine provides the following deductive aesthetic argument:

beauty. . . can be appreciated only by the mind. This would be impossible, if this ‘idea’ of beauty were not found in the mind in a more perfect form. . . But even here, if this ‘idea’ of beauty were not subject to change, one person would not be a better judge of sensible beauty than another; the more intelligent would not be better than the slower, nor the experienced and skilled than the novice and the untrained; and the same person could not make progress towards better judgment than before. And it is obvious that anything which admits of increase or decrease is changeable.

This consideration has readily persuaded men of ability and learning. . . that *the original ‘idea’ is not to be found in this sphere*, where it is shown to be subject to change. . . And so they saw that *there must be some being in which the original form resides*, unchangeable, and therefore incomparable. And they rightly believed that it is there that the origin of things is to be found, in the uncreated, which is the source of all creation.¹⁵²

Given that beauty is objective, then our judgments about beauty must be measured against some objective standard which the human mind apprehends and employs. This standard of beauty cannot be constituted by any individual finite mental state, or collection thereof, or else it would of necessity be a subjective standard; and objective aesthetic judgments cannot depend upon a subjective aesthetic standard. Therefore, there must exist an objective standard of beauty that is independent of finite minds. However, an aesthetic standard or ideal is not the sort of thing that could possibly exist in the physical world. Therefore the standard of beauty must exist neither in finite minds, nor in the physical world, but in an infinite Mind. This argument, unlike the inductive aesthetic arguments given previously, depends upon an objective definition of beauty as that which it

152 Augustine, *City of God*, Bk VIII, Chapter 8, P308, my italics.

is intrinsically, objectively good to appreciate aesthetically. The link this argument forges between divinity and objective beauty is the same as the link proposed by the Moral argument between objective goodness and divinity: namely, that without divinity - which necessarily exemplifies total objective goodness (and hence total objective beauty, because goodness is beautiful) - there would be no objective good.¹⁵³ And without objective good, there would be no objective beauty, because nothing can be objectively beautiful that it is not objectively good to appreciate. This deductive aesthetic argument has no unique apologetic force, relying as it does upon the Moral argument. However, the fact that objective beauty - construed in the manner that I have advocated - is dependent upon God being the objective exemplification of goodness that the Moral argument aims at proving, is of intrinsic interest.

Conclusion

Intelligent design theory, as Phillip Johnson notes, encourages us to reclaim the concept of objective beauty, because it makes ultimate reality personal rather than the impersonal. However, the resurrection of objective beauty is logically independent of intelligent design, being defensible on philosophical grounds, and has something valuable to contribute to the research program of intelligent design theory. I have delineated four categories of aesthetic design argument. While some of these arguments do not depend upon an objective understanding of beauty, others do. The detection of design in nature establishes the existence (at least at one time) of one or more designing intelligences; intelligences independent of any material systems such as those that cannot be explained without reference to design, and therefore, in all probability, independent of material reality *per se*. A consideration of the aesthetic dimension of reality not only reinforces the conclusions of intelligent design; it also brings us closer to the God of theism than intelligent design theory ever can. As F.R. Tennant wrote:

Aesthetic values are closely associated, and often are inextricably interwoven, with ethico-religious values. God reveals Himself. . . in many ways; and some men enter His Temple by Gate Beautiful. Values alone can provide guidance as to the world's meaning, structure being unable to suggest more than intellectual power. And beauty may well be a meaning. That is the element of sense contained in the romanticist's paradox, beauty is truth, or truth is beauty. . . . If Nature's beauty embody a purpose *of* God, it would seem to be a purpose *for* man, and to bespeak that God "is mindful of him". Theistically regarded, Nature's beauty is of a piece with the world's intelligibility and with its being a theatre for moral life; and thus far the case for theism is strengthened by aesthetic considerations.¹⁵⁴

153 Copan, Paul, 'Can Michael Martin be a Moral Realist? *Sic et Non*' @ http://www.gospelcom.net/rzim/publications/essay_art2.php3?id=4; Craig, William Lane, 'The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality' @ <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/meta-eth.html>; Williams, Peter S., 'Terror From the Skies and the Existence of God' @ http://www.damaris.org/writing/articles/other_articles/worldtradecentre3.htm

154 F.R. Tennant, *op cit*.

Recommended Resources

- Access Research Network @: <http://www.arn.org>
- Swinburne, Richard, 'The Argument for Design' @ <http://www.faithquest.com/philosophers/swinburne/design.html>
- Genetic Music @ <http://www.whozoo.org/mac/Music/>
- Balfour, Arthur J., *Theism and Humanism*, (Inklings Books, 2000).
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