

Introduction to Philosophy

Proving the Existence of God: Evolution and Intelligent Design

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Readings

- Stephen Jay Gould, “The Panda’s Thumb” and “Senseless Signs of History”.

Background

The most severe challenges to the teleological argument emerged after the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, which argued that biological adaptations are the result of chance variations and natural selection. In his essays, Stephen Jay Gould describes animal and plant adaptation as they appear to evolutionary biologists. These adaptations are not perfect, once-and-for-all “design”, but rather a kind of make-shift patchwork changing over time. The circumstances and needs of animals change continuously, so that the successful species are those that acquire new “designs” using the material at hand that they are “stuck with”.

Questions

1. According to Stephen Jay Gould, why is the theory of evolution supposed to provide a better explanation for the “design” of plants (like orchids) and animals (like pandas) than an intelligent designer?
2. Given that they reach different conclusions, Paley and Gould cannot both be right. Where exactly in their respective arguments do they disagree? Which position is supported by the strongest and most compelling argument?