Phil Religion: Paley’s Argument from Design

The watchmaker

When we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose … The inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker. (Paley, pp. 1 and 3)

Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more … (p. 18)

Could we attribute design to a law of nature?

It is a perversion of language to assign any law, as the efficient, operative cause of any thing. A law presupposes an agent; for it is only the mode, according to which an agent proceeds: it implies a power; for it is the order, according to which that power acts. Without this agent, without this power, which are both distinct from itself, the law does nothing, is nothing. (p. 7)

Would it help if the watch were descended from other watch ancestors?

Arrangement, disposition of parts, subserviency of means to an end, relation of instruments to a use, imply the presence of intelligence and mind. (pp. 11–12)

Cosmological Arguments vs. Arguments from Design

The question is not simply, How came the first watch into existence? which question, it may be pretended, is done away by supposing the series of watches thus produced from one another to have been infinite, and consequently to have had no such first, for which it was necessary to provide a cause. ... But that is not the question now. To suppose it to be so, is to suppose that it made no difference whether he had found a watch or a stone. As it is, the metaphysics of that question have no place; for, in the watch which we are examining, are seen contrivance, design; an end, a purpose; means for the end, adaption to the purpose. (pp. 15–16)

An analysis of Paley’s argument

1. If something is organized toward a purpose (or purposes), then it is made by a purposeful being (or beings?).
2. The natural world is organized toward a purpose (or purposes).
3. So the natural world is made by a purposeful being (or beings?).