

**THE CHALLENGE OF THE  
UNIVERSE, A POPULAR  
RESTATEMENT OF THE  
ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN**

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The challenge of the universe, a popular restatement of the argument from design by Charles J. Shebbeare

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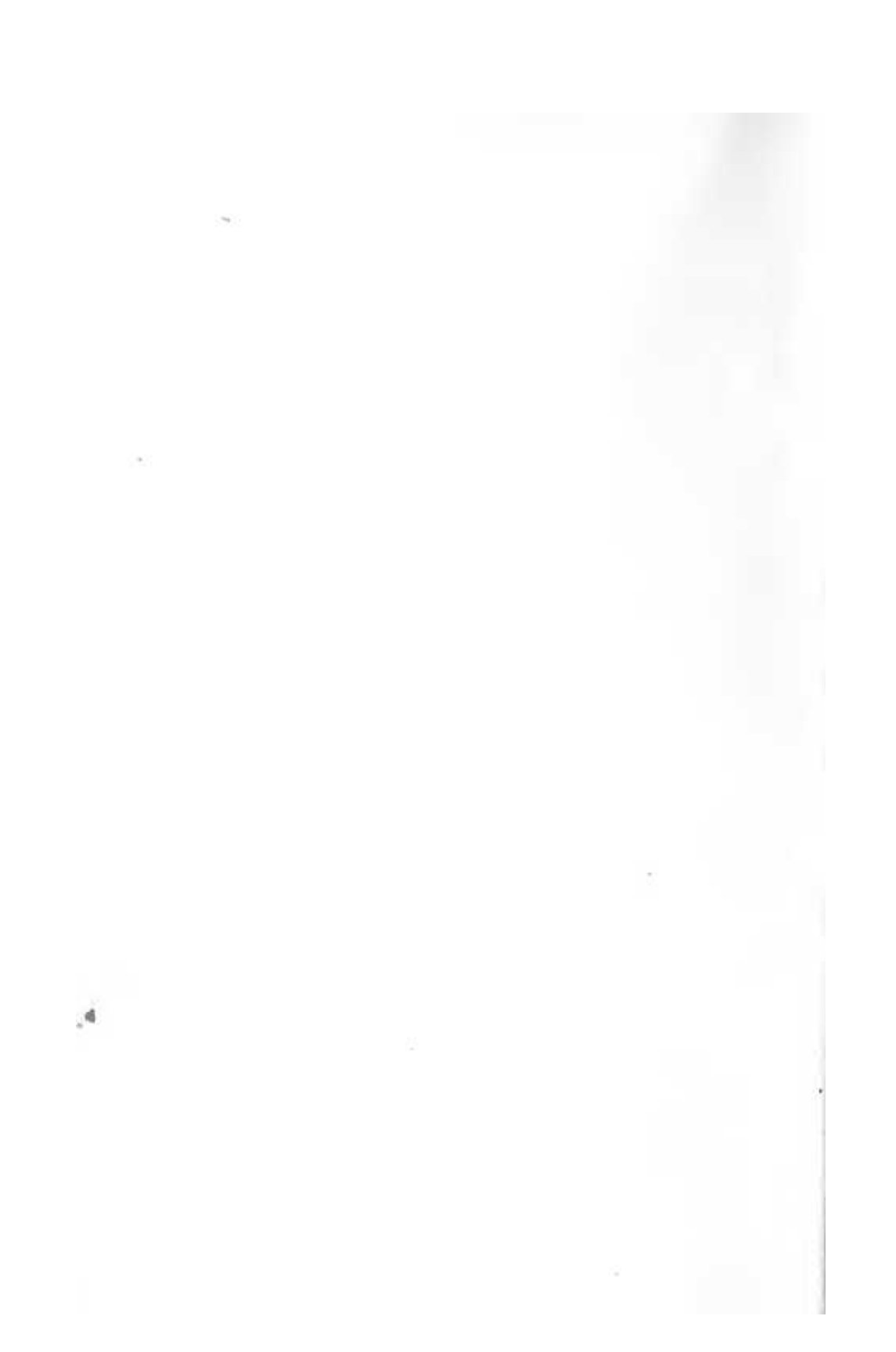
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## SYLLABUS OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	XV
CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL	1
<p>"If there were a God, no evil would be found in the world. But evil is found in the world. Therefore there is no God." This argument has seemed to some minds to gain new cogency from the events of the war. But is it really unanswerable? Perhaps not—if we reflect that the conquest of evil, through patience, courage, and other efforts of a rational will, is among the highest of rational acts; and thus that a Universe in which there was no evil to be conquered could not conceivably attain perfection.</p>	
CHAPTER II: THE FREE MAN'S WORSHIP	12
<p>If we once see that the existence of evil is not an obviously unanswerable objection to religious faith, then it is worth our while to inquire candidly whether "Naturalism" or Christianity best meets the intellectual challenge which the Universe presents to us. Mr. Bertrand Russell has written a noble description of a religion of freedom based upon Naturalism and an "unyielding despair." We must face the questions which his essay raises. Does the constitution of the Universe take any account of man as such, and of his moral and spiritual interests? Or is human life but the accidental outcome of purely mechanical forces? Is there, outside man and human efforts, any Power—personal or impersonal, conscious or unconscious—which "makes for righteousness" and spiritual progress?</p>	
CHAPTER III: THE PLAIN MAN'S ARGUMENT	21
<p>The favourite popular argument, in defence of religious hope, is that which is known as the "Argument from Design," or sometimes as the "Teleological Proof." This argument points to the orderliness of Nature. There are in Nature many qualities which, if we found them in the work of man, we should regard as results of intelligence: the same sort of qualities as distinguish the work of an adult from that of a child, the work of a sane man from that of a lunatic, the work of an artist from that of a mere craftsman. Nature exhibits uniformity even where there is no direct</p>	

v

## SYLLABUS OF CONTENTS

PAGE:

mechanical contact to explain this. Each sheep is physically separate from the other members of the flock: yet all are going through similar processes of nutrition. In every ear of corn matter is being collected and arranged in a similar complex structure. This uniformity cannot be taken as a matter of course, of which the explanation is obvious. Nor can it be a mere accident. Thus—it is argued—the world looks so *like* a plan or design that it must surely *be* one. But if the world is the result of design, does not this imply that it is the work of a Designer?

### CHAPTER IV: THE ARGUMENT EXAMINED 26

This popular argument seeks, in effect, to show that the world is governed (1) by general principles, and therefore (2) by a Conscious Mind in which those principles dwell. It is, however, an error to assume that government by principles necessarily implies government by a Mind. The example of Geometry would be enough by itself to disprove this assumption. Let us first ask, then—not "Is the world governed by a God?" nor "Is it governed by principles of wisdom?"—but "Is it governed by general principles at all?" The value of the popular argument lies in the fact that it points to certain phenomena which become highly significant if they are considered together: viz. (1) the pervading *regularity* of Nature; (2) the appearance of *co-operation* among the parts of plants and animals; (3) the delicate and complex schemes of *form* and *colour* which physical processes produce; and (4) certain facts which suggest that the Universe is a *single system*, a rationally ordered Whole. There are many cases in Nature where a large number of bodies or particles behave according to one single formula or rule of action. It is a common evasion to say that formulas, rules, laws, principles dwell in our minds only, and except in the case of human agency exercise no influence upon the outside world. Yet we all assume in our predictions—e.g. of eclipses, of the fall of a stone left without support, of the regular return of night and morning, winter and spring—that we are dealing in each case with a principle of regularity to which, in the future as in the past, events in the outside world *must* conform. Can we then deny that we regard the principles as really governing the phenomena? But granted that Nature is governed by principles, are the principles that govern Nature purely mechanical in character? Are the colour-schemes of the landscape beautiful by mere accident? Are they the mere by-product of mechanical uniformity? Or is Nature in some sense governed by specifically aesthetic principles? It is not unreasonable to ask questions of this sort, nor to maintain that to the unphilosophic mind—if to no other—the readiest explanation of the artistic appearance of the Universe is that the Universe is in truth the work of a divine architect.

# SYLLABUS OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER V: A CHAPTER OF HISTORY PAGE 44

Before we attempt to restate this argument in the light of the criticisms directed against it in modern times, it is well to recall how it has been formulated by distinguished thinkers in the past, e.g. Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Thomas Aquinas.

## CHAPTER VI: MORAL KNOWLEDGE 58

It is also well to recall the argument which Kant and others have sought to substitute for it, viz. the "Moral Proof" of God's Existence. This latter argument can be so stated as (1) to furnish in itself a direct refutation of "Naturalism"; (2) to form an important element in that very restatement of the Argument from Design of which we are in search. Naturalism denies that the laws of the Universe take account of the spiritual interests of man. We find, however, that there are laws relating directly to our most important spiritual interest of all, our knowledge of Right and Wrong. We find, first, that there are fundamental moral principles which we can all be made to see and accept if only they are put before us with sufficient clearness. Further, we find that the Moral Ideal is a connected Whole, and that our minds are so constituted that, if they are familiarized with certain of the leading principles of morality, they pass on from these by a natural sense of affinity to other elements in the Moral Ideal as occasion brings them to light. We trust the man of good feeling to act rightly in quite novel circumstances. The "Law" on which we rely is that familiarity with right moral principles breeds general sympathy with the true Moral Ideal. This is the law on which we base our educational methods; and this law cannot be successfully explained away by any naturalistic hypothesis. These hypotheses, if carried out consistently, have to treat our moral convictions as *illusion*, and we all know in our hearts that they are *not* illusion.

Again, an ideal for human conduct presupposes some ideal for the Universe at large. It is a law that the mind of man is so constituted as to recognize, in its main outlines, the true ideal for the Universe when this ideal is clearly set before us. To this truth the literature of all ages bears witness. The union of virtue and happiness in a setting of physical uniformity and resthetic beauty, has called forth the praises of poets from the days of the Jewish Psalmists to our own.

## CHAPTER VII: THE ARGUMENT RESTATED 70

The fundamental thought which the popular argument embodies may now be reformulated as follows:

(1) The basis both of our everyday predictions of natural events, and of those made by systematic science, is to be found in the belief that the world is in some sense a rational Whole governed by a rational system of laws, i.e. in the