

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

OF THE LEADING ARGUMENT OF NATURAL THEO-
LOGY ; THAT DESIGN, OR THE ADAPTATION OF
MEANS TO AN END, EXISTS IN NATURE.

A FULL exposition of the argument of design does not belong to this Treatise. In these introductory observations, we shall, therefore, confine ourselves to a statement of the argument, as deducible from a simple instance of the adaptation of means to an end, among the objects of nature: we shall then enquire into the validity of the argument of design; and shall show the conclusions to which that argument leads.

The instance of adaptation of means to an end which we select among the objects of nature; and the argument which may be deduced from that instance of adaptation, are the following :

P.

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Animals in cold climates have been provided with a covering of fur. Men in such climates cover themselves with that fur. In both cases, whatever may have been the end, or intention; no one can deny that the *effect*, at least, is precisely the same: the animal and the man are alike protected from the cold. Now, since the animal did not clothe itself, but must have been clothed by another; it follows, that whoever clothed the animal, apparently knew what the man knows, and reasoned like the man; that is to say, the clother of the animal knew that the climate in which the animal is placed, is a cold climate; and that a covering of fur, is one of the best means of warding off the cold: he therefore clothed his creature in this very appropriate material.

The man who clothes himself in fur to keep off the cold, performs an act directed to a certain end; in short, an act of *design*. So, whoever, directly or indirectly, caused the animal to be clothed with fur, to keep off the cold, must likewise have performed an act of *design*.

But, under the circumstances, the clother of the animal, must be admitted to have been also the *Creator* of the animal; and, by extending the argument, the Creator of man himself—of the universe. Moreover, the intelligence the Creator has displayed in clothing the animal,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

3

He has deigned to impart to man ; who is thus enabled to recognise his Creator's design.

Such is an instance of those varied adaptations of means to an end, which we behold in the world ; and such the train of reasoning, which, to common understandings, appears to show, that these adaptations are the effect of design. There are, however, some men, whose minds are so obtuse, or so singularly constituted, that they maintain all these appearances of design to be unreal ; and a brief examination of the pretexts which they have urged for their incredulity, may not be deemed irrelevant.

The opposers of the argument of design may be divided into two classes : those who, denying a First Cause, affect to believe, that all the beautiful adaptations and arrangements we witness in creation, arise from what they term, "the necessary and eternal laws of nature ;" and who, in fact, are Atheists, or rather Pantheists, "to whom the laws of nature are as gods : " and those who, without denying the existence of a First Cause, contend, that the adaptations among the objects of nature, cannot be *proved* to be the effect of design ; that these objects appear to us well adapted to each other, because we have nothing, besides our own intellects, with which we can compare them ; and that the limited powers of the human mind, are a standard altogether inapplicable to the Deity.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

INTRODUCTION.

The opposers of the argument of design, who assert the existence of “necessary and eternal laws of nature,” need no other refutation, than the facts detailed throughout these Treatises. Those who allege that design cannot be *proved*, may be thus answered :

We have been gifted with mental faculties, by which we recognise certain abstract truths, or necessary existences ; which abstract truths, or necessary existences, we cannot doubt, without doubting the existence of ourselves. We have been gifted with other faculties, by which we recognise the existence, and compare the properties, of things *external* to ourselves : but, so far as we can discover, neither the existence of these external things, or the existence of their properties, is *necessary* ; they might have existed quite otherwise than they are,—they even might never have had any existence. Now our knowledge of the manifestations of design, among the objects of nature, is derived entirely from those faculties, by which we recognise the existence, and compare the properties, of objects external, to ourselves. Hence nothing can be proved, either for, or against, what we term design in nature, by any argument founded on *necessity* ; that is to say, by any *à priori* reasoning, founded on mere abstract truths, or necessary existences ; and all such attempts must be not only unsatisfactory, but absurd.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

5

At the commencement of this Introduction, we have given a simple statement of the train of reasoning, on which we found our belief of the agency of an intelligent Creator.

An act, performed by ourselves, when directed to a certain end, we term an act of design. Among the objects of nature, we see the *same* end, attained by the employment of the *same* means, we ourselves employ. We are conscious of the will and the power which are requisite for the accomplishment of our own act; and are satisfied regarding the impossibility of that act, without our own, or similar agency. We thence infer, that without some external agency, (implying a will and a power, similar to the will and the power exerted by ourselves), an act, similar to our own act, could not have been accomplished. Our belief then, in the agency of an intelligent Creator, is founded,—

On our recognition of the identity of effects produced in external nature, with effects produced by ourselves; from which identity of effect, we immediately infer identity of purpose, —the *existence of design*, without reference to a designer :

On our consciousness that the purpose effected by us proceeded from ourselves, the designers; whence we conclude, that the design manifested in external nature must have had a like origin,—

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

INTRODUCTION.

that the manifestation of design, is demonstrative of the *existence of a designer* :

On the pervading character of the design shown among the objects of nature; in which design, man recognises the *creation* of the objects designed; and is thus led to infer the existence of a *Creator*. Now the faculty of reason, which enables man to recognise the Creator of the objects around him; enables him to recognise in that Creator, the *Creator of himself, and of his faculties*. In reasoning, therefore, from his own acts, to those of the Creator of the Universe, though conscious that he is reasoning from the finite to the Infinite; from weakness to Almighty Power;—yet, when he reflects, from whom he has derived his faculty of reason, man feels assured that his own reasoning, when it coincides with the reasoning evinced by his Creator, *can be no other than the same*. Nor founded, as that assurance is, on the constitution of the human mind, can such assurance be impugned; without impugning Him, by whom the human mind has been so constituted.

Thus the argument of design, though not based on necessity, in the strict sense of the term, is of a *validity equal to that of our knowledge of the existence of, and of our connexion with, an external world*. Speculative men may

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

7

deny the existence of all things external to themselves; may even deny their own existence; but while they continue to act like other men, it is not easy to imagine them sincere. We at least, discard all such speculations, as worthless fallacies, and contend for the *common-sense* view of the existence and origin of things;—that design is design, whether exemplified in the works of man, or in those of his Maker; a view which has been adopted by the wise and good in all ages; which has all the probabilities on its side; and which alone, of all others, points out to man his true and natural position, among created beings. When man, indeed, compares himself with the universe, his own insignificance appears quite overwhelming; but the argument of design assures him that, insignificant as he is, while he investigates and approves of the order and harmony around him, he is exerting faculties truly god-like—that his reason, though limited in degree, must be immortal in kind, and thus differ from that of the great Architect of all, only in not being infinite. And hence the proud relationship in which man justly considers himself to stand with respect to his Maker! hence the grand source of that longing after a future state, where his knowledge will be consummated, and where he will no longer “see through a glass darkly”—notions at once the result and reward

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

of his reason, and which raise him far above all other animals.

We have endeavoured to illustrate the argument of design, by one of those obvious examples of the adaptation of means to an end among the objects of nature, which impress on man a belief in the existence of design, and of a Designer. Compared, however, with the extent of creation, the instances, numerous as they appear, in which man is thus able to trace the designs of his Creator, are really few. Man not only sees means directed to certain ends, but ends accomplished by means, which he is totally unable to understand. He also sees, every where, things, the nature, and the end, of which, are utterly beyond his comprehension; and respecting which, he is obliged to content himself, with simply inferring the existence of design.

The argument of design, therefore, in its general sense, embraces at least three classes of objects:—

1. Those objects, regarding which, the reasoning of man coincides with the reasoning evinced by his Creator; as in the simple adaptation of clothing above mentioned: or those objects, in which, man is able to trace, to a certain extent, his Creator's designs; as in various phenomena amenable to the laws of quantity; viz. mechanics, &c.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

9

2. Those objects, in which, man sees no more than the preliminaries and the results, or the end and design accomplished ; without being able to trace, through their details, the means of that accomplishment ; as in all the phenomena and operations of chemistry.

3. Those objects, in which, design is inferred, but in which the design, as well as the means by which it is accomplished, are alike concealed ; as in the existence of fixed stars ; of comets ; of organic life : and indeed in all the great and more recondite phenomena of nature.

The intention of these Treatises, is to point out the various evidences of design, among the objects of creation ; and to deduce from them, the existence, and the attributes of the Creator. The following pages are occupied, more particularly, with the illustration of the evidences of design, in objects belonging to the second, of the three classes, above mentioned ; with those, namely, in which design is apparent, though we cannot trace the means by which that design is accomplished.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00066-6 - Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion
Considered with Reference to Natural Theology

William Prout

Excerpt

[More information](#)

BOOK I.

OF CHEMISTRY.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE RANK OF CHEMISTRY AS A SCIENCE ; AND ON ITS APPLICATION TO THE ARGUMENT OF DESIGN.

“CHEMISTRY does not afford the same species of argument (in favour of design) that mechanism affords, and yet may afford an argument in a high degree satisfactory.”* This remark of the excellent Paley, has been made by him with reference only to a particular subject ; but the following sketch, pointing out the grounds upon which chemistry as a science is founded, and the rank which it holds among the departments of human knowledge, will at the same time, show the general truth of the remark.

An elaborate enquiry into the origin and nature of human knowledge, would be quite

* Natural Theology, chap. vii.