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The whole earth, believe me, Philo, is cursed and polluted.

—Demea

I

David Hume, in his philosophical writings on religion, is often guarded and ambiguous about his own religious beliefs. There is dispute over which if any of the characters in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* speaks for Hume.[1] To further complicate things, Hume's published remarks about religion sometimes directly contradict his recorded pronouncements in private conversations with some of his contemporaries.[2]

But whether Hume was a deist, fideist, atheist, or agnostic, it is generally agreed that his empiricist philosophy of religion precludes the probability that an intelligent designer or designers of the universe could have human-like moral qualities.[3] Hume's God, if he exists, is demonstrably amoral, or at least amoral with respect to the welfare and happiness of his human creations. It is in part for this reason that Philo, the religious skeptic of the *Dialogues*, concludes that an intelligent designer of the universe would not be worthy of worship, but that the proper religious attitude is at most to be prepared to give a 'plain, philosophical assent to the proposition' that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.[4]

II

The cause of order in human inventions is the activity of an intelligent designer. Cleanthes, described by Pamphilus in the narrative introduction to Hume's dialogues as a thinker of 'accurate philosophical turn', appeals to the principle that like effects have like causes in order to support a version of the argument from design for the existence of God. The principle may be formulated schematically.

(P1) For any events x and y, if x is an effect produced by causes $c_1,\ldots,c_n$
($n \geq 1$), and y is an effect produced by causes $c'_1,\ldots,c'_n$, then if x is
similar to y, then $c_1,\ldots,c_n$ is probably proportionately similar to
$c'_1,\ldots,c'_n$.

If the order in man-made devices is like the order in nature, then by this principle
of analogical inference it follows that the order in the universe is also probably
caused by the activity of a more perfect intelligent designer.[5] Cleanthes says to
Philo and Demea:

> Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You
> will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an
> infinite number of lesser machines…The curious adapting of means to
> ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds,
> the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wis-
> dom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other,
> we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also
> resemble, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the
> mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned
> to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By this argument
> *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the
> existence of a Deity and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.[6]

But as Philo observes immediately thereafter, an analogical inference is weakened
by every disanalogy. He maintains: "…wherever you depart, in the least, from
the similarity of the cases, you diminish proportionably the evidence; and may
at last bring it to a very weak *analogy*, which is confessedly liable to error and
uncertainty."[7] The remaining dialogues are concerned in large part with a consid-
eration of disanalogies, and with the significance and limits of analogical inference
in the argument from design. Philo concludes that an important disanalogy
between man and the intelligent designer of the universe is that the latter probably
does not have moral psychological properties.

This result depends on empirical evidence about the seemingly needless suf-
fering and injustice in the world. It is related to what has traditionally been called
the problem of evil. But in this particular application of the problem, Philo does
not attempt to demonstrate an incompatibility in the divine properties of omnipo-
tence and perfect benevolence, but instead challenges the possibility of producing
a valid analogical inference to the effect that the omnipotent intelligent designer
of the universe could be perfectly benevolent, or, indeed, that the designer could
have any moral qualities at all.[8]

According to Philo, there are just four possibilities to be considered. The
intelligent designer or designers causally responsible for order in the universe

may be (i) perfectly good; (ii) perfectly evil; (iii) both good and evil; (iv) neither good nor evil. But (i) and (ii) are contradicted by what Philo calls the mixed phenomena that there is both good and evil in the world. The third possibility in (iii) is also discounted, though for a somewhat unsatisfactory reason. Philo claims that if the intelligent designer or designers of the universe were both good and evil, then there would be an 'unsteadiness' or lack of uniformity in the natural or scientific laws by which the universe is governed, reflecting the battle between good and evil forces. But since this is not observed, the proposition that the intelligent designer or designers may be both good and evil is rejected. The only alternative is (iv), which states that the intelligent designer or designers are neither good nor evil but amoral.[9]

Here it is important to see that Philo's rejection of (iii) is premature and improperly motivated. Philo remarks: "...if we consider...the perfect uniformity and agreement of the parts of the universe, we shall not discover in it any marks of a combat of malevolent with a benevolent being."[10] But why should Hume or Philo assume that an opposition of good and evil moral natures in the intelligent designer or designers of the universe would necessarily manifest itself in a discordance of natural laws? Why should good and evil fight each other in the first place? And if they do, why not in the souls of men, where something like a conflict of good and evil is often experienced anyway? Philo might argue that if God or a committee of gods were both good and evil, then he or they would be unworthy of worship, and that only a perfectly benevolent intelligent designer of the universe could be an appropriate object of prayer, love and trust, or righteous fear. But this need not be because the designer is amoral. On the contrary, the possibility presented in (iii) seems more clearly to correspond to the expected result of the analogical inference involved in the argument from design. If like effects have like causes, then the cause of order in the universe ought to have a moral nature relevantly similar to the moral nature of the cause of order in human inventions—a mixture of good and evil. Hume's or Philo's attempt to refute the proposition is unsatisfactory, and reveals a surprising inconsistency in the application of the principles of analogical inference.

III

In addition to Cleanthes' principle that like effects have like causes, Philo offers the following rule:

> When two *species* of objects have always been observed to be conjoined together, I can *infer*, by custom, the existence of one wherever I *see* the existence of the other: And this I call an argument from experience.[11]

Later, in Part VI of the *Dialogues*, he adds:

...there occurs to me another hypothesis, which must acquire an air of probability from the method of reasoning so much insisted on by Cleanthes. That like effects arise from like causes: This principle he supposes the foundation of all religion. But there is another principle of the same kind, no less certain, and derived from the same source of experience; that where several known circumstances are *observed* to be similar, the unknown will also be *found* similar. Thus, if we see the limbs of a human body, we conclude, that it is also attended with a human head, though hid from us. Thus, if we see, through a chink in a wall, a small part of the sun, we conclude, that were the wall removed, we should see the whole body. In short, this method of reasoning is so obvious and familiar, that no scruple can ever be made with regard to its solidity.[12]

Cleanthes' analogical inference principle (P1) can now be supplemented by Philo's analogical inference principle (P2).

(P2) For any events or objects *x* and *y*, and any properties P and Q, if *x* is ordinarily observed to have property Q whenever it is observed to have property P, then if *x* is similar to *y* and *y* is observed to have property P, then probably *y* also has property Q.

The degree of probability that may attach to analogical inferences supported by either (P1) or (P2) will be determined for the most part by the degree of similarity or relevant similarity between objects or events *x* and *y*. As Philo maintains, an analogical inference is only as strong as its weakest disanalogy. Hume in the person of Cleanthes or Philo does not elaborate further on the nebulous concept of similarity, which for present purposes may be regarded as undefined. (It is undoubtedly the least satisfactory element in the two principles, but also in a sense the most important.)

If (P2) is assumed, then the following arguments involving Philo's principle can be advanced. They are presented together for the sake of comparison.

(A) 1. Most every other time we have seen a pair of human limbs, it was accompanied by a human head.
2. Here, then, is a pair of human limbs.
_____
3. Therefore, it is highly probable that these limbs are also accompanied by a human head.

(B) 1. Most every other time we have seen the work of an intelligent designer, it was the work of a being who also had a moral nature.
2. Here, then (indicating ostensively the universe as a whole or

some well-ordered, machine-like natural part of it), is the work of an intelligent designer.

3. Therefore, it is highly probable that the universe is also the work of a being who has a moral nature.

Argument (A) is supposed to establish the probable existence of a human head accompanying a pair of human limbs, which alone are seen when the head is hidden from inspection. Argument (B) is offered with equal apparent justification as establishing the probable existence of some kind of moral nature accompanying any intelligence capable of causing order in the universe, where the psychological properties of the intelligent designer or designers are similarly hidden from inspection.

The causes of machine-like artifacts in empirical experience are always beings that have both intelligence *and* moral attributes. From this, by an application of Philo's analogical inference principle (P2), in agreement with Cleanthes' analogical inference principle (P1), it may be concluded that the cause of order in the universe if probably an intelligent being with some sort of moral nature. The burden of proof accordingly lies with Hume to demonstrate that the moral nature of man is part of the *dis*analogy with the intelligent designer or designers.

The problem of evil in Parts X and XI of the *Dialogues* may appear to provide the required disanalogy, but in fact it is inconclusive. The data of natural evil have no evidential priority over the data that intelligence capable of designing machinery is always accompanied by a moral psychology, and is never totally amoral. The problem of evil is alternatively resolved by admitting that although the intelligent designer probably has a moral nature, the intelligent designer is probably not both omnipotent and perfectly benevolent. The existence of evil does not entail that the intelligent designer is probably amoral, but only that the intelligent designer is probably not worthy of worship. But this could be true even (and especially) if the designer has human-like moral qualities. The problem of evil therefore cannot overturn the conclusion that the designer is probably moral. The consistent application of Hume's principles of analogical inference suggest as a corollary to the argument from design that the intelligent designer or designers of the universe would also probably have a moral psychology.

IV

Philo, Cleanthes, and Demea agree to critically examine the argument from design, but only with the explicit understanding that the nature, not the existence, of God is open to dispute.[13] Even here Hume is careful to cast Philo's skepticism not as doubt about whether perfect benevolence is logically compatible with the presumed omnipotence of the intelligent designer in light of natural evil, but

instead as reluctance to concede that any moral properties of the designer can be inferred from the empirical evidence by the principles of analogical inference authorized in the argument from design.[14] Within these constraints, Hume attempts to undermine Enlightenment confidence in the argument as a relevantly significant foundation for religious practice and belief.[15]

It is easy to see why Hume might want to conclude that the intelligent designer is probably amoral rather than perfectly benevolent but not omnipotent, or partly good and partly evil. The philosophical theist described by Philo in the final sections of the dialogues is supposed to be dispassionate.[16] There is no particular difficulty in remaining dispassionate with respect to an intelligent omnipotent designer that has no human-like moral psychological qualities. But toward an intelligent designer or committee of designers that is good and evil, or perfectly benevolent but not omnipotent, the situation is very different. If the designer is moral, he may stand in ethical judgment of man. The possibilities of moral inter-relationships, duties, and obligations which then arise contradict Philo's implied rationale for the dispassionate attitude. God or the committee of gods might find the sins of man morally reprehensible, and punish or reward individuals for their conduct. It would make sense to pray to God or the gods for forgiveness or guidance in matters of ethical choice. The dispassionate attitude of the philosophical theist who merely nods assent to the proposition that there is probably an intelligent designer of the universe would be unjustified.

Hume's philosophy of religion therefore depends essentially on the moral disanalogy between human designers and the divine designer or designers. The inference version of the problem of evil is supposed to show that man cannot know whether God or the gods have any moral properties. But Philo's treatment of the problem does not establish the required moral disanalogy between God and man. The principles of analogical inference adduced by Cleanthes and Philo uphold instead the contrary conclusion that if there is an intelligent designer of the universe, then most probably the designer is not amoral, but has good, evil, or some combination of good and evil human-like moral psychological qualities.[17]

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NOTES

1. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, edited by Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1947), Editor's "Introduction", pp. 58-59. J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1978), pp. 159-66. James Noxon, "Hume's Agnosticism", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXXIII, 1964; rpt., *Hume: A*

Collection of Critical Essays, edited by V. C. Chappell (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 361-83. Thomas H. Huxley, *Hume: With Helps to the Study of Berkeley* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), pp. 170-71.

2. Hume makes an apparent gesture of prudential acquiescence in *The Natural History of Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 45: "Nothing indeed would prove more strongly the divine origin of any religion, than to find (and happily this is the case with Christianity) that it is free from a contradiction, so incident in human nature." But it was known by Hume's personal acquaintances that Hume positively rejected Christianity. Richard H. Popkin, "Editor's Introduction," David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Posthumous Essays Of the Immortality of the Soul and Of Suicide* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1980), p. viii: "His close friend, the economist Adam Smith, said in his account of Hume's last illness that Hume had stated that the only reason he had for wanting to remain alive was to see the elimination of that strange superstition, Christianity." James Boswell confuses Hume's attitude toward religious belief in general with his skepticism about immortality in particular. But in a report of his deathbed interview with Hume, he appears to reach much the same conclusion. He records in his journal, "An Account of My Last Interview With David Hume, Esq.", *Private Papers of James Boswell*, edited by Geoffrey Scott and Frederick A. Pottle, Vol. XII, 1931, entry for 3 March 1777 (quoted in Smith, p. 76): "I know not how I contrived to get the subject of Immortality introduced. He said he never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke." See A. J. Ayer, *Hume* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), p. 21. Gaskin, p. 102. But if Hume had *no* religious beliefs, then Philo in the *Dialogues* does not accurately represent Hume's thoroughgoing radical skepticism.

3. Smith, pp. 72-73.

4. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 227.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 142; 204-13.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 212: "There may *four* hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: *that* they are endowed with perfect goodness; *that* they have perfect malice; *that* they are opposite and have both goodness and malice; *that* they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles; and the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable." Philo maintains, *ibid.*: "The true conclusion is that the source of all things is entirely indifferent to all these principles, and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold, or to drought above moisture, or to light above heavy...What I have said concerning natural evil will apply to moral with little or no variation; and we have no more reason to infer that the rectitude of the Supreme Being resembles human rectitude than that his benevolence resembles the human. Nay, it will be thought that we have still greater cause to exclude from him moral sentiments, such as we feel them; since moral evil, in the opinion of many, is much more predominant above moral good than natural evil above natural good."

10. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 170. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge (London: Oxford University Press, 1888), Appendix, p. 626: "Suppose I see the legs and thighs of

a person in motion, while some interpos'd object conceals the rest of his body. Here 'tis certain, the imagination spreads out the whole figure. I give him a head and shoulders, and breast and neck. These members I conceive and believe him to be possess'd of."

13. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 142.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 211: "But let us still assert that, as this [supposed] goodness [of the Deity] is not antecedently established but must be inferred from the phenomena, there can be no grounds for such an inference while there are so many ills in the universe, and while these ills might so easily have been remedied, as far as human understanding can be allowed to judge on such a subject. I am skeptic enough to allow that the bad appearances, notwithstanding all my reasonings, may be compatible with such attributes as you suppose; but surely they can never prove these attributes."

15. Smith, pp. 52-54.

16. Gaskin, pp. 159-74.

17. This argument was originally presented before the Hume Society, Eleventh Annual Conference, York University, Toronto, Canada, August 24-27, 1982, in a paper titled, "Hume on the Immortality of the Soul". I would like to thank Philip L. Quinn for useful criticisms of a previous version of the essay.