

Chapter 14

The Design Argument and its inconsistencies

14.1 Readings and Homework

- Readings: Hume, Parts 4 and 5.
- Homework:
 1. Cleanthes accuses Demea and Philo of "mysticism". Explain what mysticism is according to Cleanthes and why he thinks that Philo and Demea are a kind of mystics. Why is it insulting to Demea and Philo?
 2. Philo and Demea accuses Cleanthes of anthropomorphism. Explain.
 3. What is the main objection that Philo raises in part 4 against the design argument?
 4. What is the argument in the last paragraph of p.31 (paragraph before he mentions the Peripatetics)?
 5. In part 5, Philo draws the consequences of the design argument about the nature of God(s). What are they? Why do these consequences amount to objections against the design argument?

14.2 The Design Argument

14.2.1 The argument

- Cleanthes states the design argument (15, q.v.)
 1. Observation: adaptation of means to ends in nature "resembles exactly" products of human design
 2. Rule of inference: since effects resemble, causes resemble
 3. Conclusion: God exists and is like the human mind
- The kind of resemblance:
 - "adjustment of means to ends"
 - "the economy of final causes"
- He provides illustrations in part III:
 - the voice
 - the vegetative library
 - eye
 - correspondence of male and female

14.2.2 Characteristics of the design argument

- **Based on experience**

Based on the observation of natural objects and human artifacts – this is a good point in the empiricist view. This is why the discussion is mainly between Cleanthes and Philo, who both claim to base their knowledge on experience and observation.

The challenge is for Philo to deny that Cleanthes' argument is acceptable from the empiricist's point of view.

- **Argument by analogy**

This is what Philo is going to attack. There are many ways in which an analogy can be flawed. How?

- **What is an analogy?** similarity of structure. Analogy is not a simple similarity or comparison. Two elements are said to bear to each other the same **relationship** as two others do.
- **Examples of (bad?) analogies:**
 - The solar system reminds me of an atom, with planets orbiting the sun like electrons orbiting the nucleus. We know that electrons can jump from orbit to orbit; so we must look to ancient records for sightings of planets jumping from orbit to orbit also.
 - The members of a society are like parts of one organism. Now, if for some reason my leg is infected by gangrene, I should get rid of it. Therefore, if some members of a society threatens to infect the society, the society should get rid of him.
 - From Jim Prior's web site:

These sorts of arguments often raise issues about the burden of proof, because they are hostage to the discovery of unnoticed disanalogies. For example, here's a common argument against the death penalty. Suppose Lefty argues:

Imposing the death penalty for murder is hypocritical and inconsistent. You only punish people for murder because you believe killing to be wrong. But then the death penalty itself must be wrong, because it too involves killing someone. And two wrongs don't make a right. So imposing the death penalty is just as bad as killing someone in cold blood.

Lefty is trying to convince us that we have to take the same view of murder and of capital punishment, else we're being inconsistent.

Now suppose Righty comes along, and criticizes Lefty's argument as follows:

You say capital punishment is supposed to be analogous to murder. Well, then, you should also count other activities committed by the state as analogous to those same activities when committed by criminals. In particular, since kidnapping—confining

someone against their will—is wrong when committed by criminals, so too must it be wrong for the state to confine people against their will (in jails). Hence, if your argument that capital punishment is inconsistent is successful, then by the same reasoning, it would also be inconsistent to jail kidnappers. That is clearly an unacceptable result. So there must be something wrong with your analogy. Murder and capital punishment are similar in some respects. But there are important differences between them, too. And these differences are morally important.

Of course, Righty hasn't established here that the death penalty is morally acceptable; he's only criticized Lefty's argument that the death penalty is unacceptable. There might be other arguments against the death penalty, which are better than Lefty's.

14.3 Objections to the Design Argument

14.3.1 Philo's critics of the Design Argument from the empiricist point of view

Natural Philosophy vs. Natural Religion – part 2

- The main criticism that Philo levels at Cleanthes' argument is that, contrary to what Cleanthes says, it does go beyond the realm of experience, and as such, it is not acceptable for the empiricist.

Indeed, we have no experience of the creation of the world.

- That said, you remember Cleanthes' challenge, having natural religion and natural philosophy (physics) on a equal footing
- Philo answers here to the challenge:
 - we do have experience of other planets
 - one of the most important achievement in modern physics is not so much to have put the sun in the middle of the universe than *to have reunified the mundane and celestial physics, in claiming that the earth*

and the heavenly bodies are made of the same matter and ruled by the same laws. A planet is not a perfect, god-like body made of a fifth element: it is but a very big stone. The Universal Law of Gravitation has not been called universal for nothing.

SO: Philo's answer against Cleanthes' challenge is here to say that we do have enough experience to support natural philosophy, while we do not have such empirical support for natural religion.

Does the mind fall into order by itself? – part 4

- **Uselessness of a priori consideration:**

IF reason can say anything about causes, then...Infinite Regress: *Minds needs a cause just as much as any tool or machine.*

- Cause of the cause: the world, the elephant and the tortoise

- Note that Cleanthes made fun of the "peasants" who fall into the fallacy of infinite regress p.26

Hence: Equality of possibility of two hypotheses (that matter / mind fall into order all by themselves).

- **A posteriori:** experience cannot be called to help to prove that minds and ideas "fall into order by themselves and by their own nature" (31). Indeed, we have:

- as much experience of auto-organized matter as of auto-organized minds

- as much experience of non ordered matter as non ordered mind

Thus, experience cannot help us decide which should be considered as an ordering principle. If experience is the only legitimate basis of knowledge, we have no way to choose. The controversy is simply pointless.

- Charge against occult qualities and faculties as "learned and elaborated ways of confessing our ignorance" (32)

- Cleanthes: inexplicable causes are postulated all the time and accepted in the sciences. Think of Newton's gravity !!!

- Philo: distinction between general causes and particular causes: the former is acceptable while the latter is not.

14.3.2 Philo's criticisms over the weakness of the analogy – part 2 sq.

- dissimilarities between the universe and the human-made machines: human artifacts and the springs and principles of nature are dramatically different objects. He goes on in part V:

- About the principle: "like effects provoke like cause"

- Philo argues that what the progress of science makes us discover everyday is that the universe is precisely nothing like an effect that one can attribute to humans.

This is turning Cleanthes' argument completely upside down. Observation and experience, on which the argument is supposedly based, in fact let us conclude that the analogy is very weak. That is to say, Philo rejects the first premise that the effects are similar.

- weakness of an analogy that goes from parts to the whole
- weakness of an analogy that infers from the operation processes to the creation processes
- weakness of an analogy that infers from the processes in a mature entity to the processes in the same entity at the embryo stage
- weakness of an analogy that infers in the base of a partial point of view (the human one).

Find examples of bad analogies along these lines! The next parts are going to show what kinds of conclusions about the universe one can draw from Cleanthes' argument.

14.3.3 Anthropomorphism and the dilemma

Philo has argued in part 2 that the analogy is weak. That said, the examples given by Cleanthes seem to have put him in a uncomfortable position. The fact that it is Demea who answers is significant. And Demea introduces the second problem with the Design argument: the issue of anthropomorphism.

Demea: denunciation of anthropomorphism

Demea does not so much deny meaning in nature as argue that it is presumptuous for us to pretend to understand God's meaning

1. when one reads a book, one understands the author
2. nature, however, is not an open book for Demea – its author is incomprehensible

Demea then turns to explain his position (27)

1. human *sentiments* cannot be transferred to God, since they all relate to a being concerned with preserving its existence

2. human *ideas* derived from the senses like ours are illusory, and cannot be transferred to God either

3. since there are only two sources of ideas for human beings, internal sentiments and external senses, God does not have ideas like ours (27)

4. nor can we say that God reasons like we do, since our thinking is fleeting and uncertain

5. hence, we cannot describe God with the same words we use to talk about human beings

- a. If we do, we do not understand their meaning

- b. God is ineffable

[Demea and Cleanthes: the problem of God and time]

So, “mystic” or “anthropomorphite”: who is the atheist??

- Cleanthes and Demea call each other names...

- allusion to neo-platonism (Plotinus etc.): God is one, thought is two

Philo leads the discussion back to argumentation. He is again the smart guy here.

The dilemma

Philo is going to set up a dilemma from there for Cleanthes. Here is the dilemma:

- EITHER the analogy is weak, but then the argument itself is weak
- OR the analogy is strong, but then we fall into anthropomorphism

In both cases, Cleanthes seems to be in trouble.

Philo: consequences of anthropomorphism for the nature of God – part 5

- Shows that all the traditional attributes of God are denied through the argument
 - infinity
 - perfection
 - unity
 - eternity
 - immaterial and not corporeal
- Finally, very provocative statements as being a possible conclusion of the design argument. Cleanthes' mode of argument lets one conjecture that the universe arose "from something like design" but tells us nothing more and is compatible with all sorts of wild suppositions:
 - a. created by infant god on a first try
 - b. or by one of the more inept gods who is laughed at by the others (37)
 - c. or by an old, senile god who has since died