

Chapter 9

The Design Argument and its Inconsistencies

9.1 Readings and Homework

- Readings: Hume, *Dialogues*, parts II to VIII
- Study questions: Give a short answer to the following questions on the basis of your readings:
 1. Give the structure of the Design Argument p. 15: what are the premises? What are the exact conclusions? What is the rule of inference?
 2. What are Philo's objections against the Design Argument in part 2?
 3. Explain Cleanthes' examples in part 4: do they escape Philo's objections?
 4. What is anthropomorphism? Why do Philo and Demea think that Cleanthes is guilty of anthropomorphism?
 5. In parts 6, 7 and 8, Philo proposes 3 alternative reasonings by analogy: What are the three things that Philo says the world bears a great resemblance to? What is "God" in each case?

9.2 The Design Argument

9.2.1 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

9.2.2 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 one of the aspects of the argument what Philo is going to attack. There are many ways in which an analogy can be flawed. How?

9.3 Natural Philosophy vs. Natural Religion

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.

That said, you remember Cleanthes' challenge, having natural religion and natural philosophy (physics) on a equal footing. Philo answers here to the challenge:

- **Experience**

We have no experience of the creation of the world, whereas 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.

- **Inference to the best explanation?**

Cleanthes: Gravity is postulated in physics, and no further explanation is required, *because it has huge explanatory and predictive power.* It does useful work for us. Now, is the situation similar with the Intelligent Designer? Do we gain anything in postulating an Intelligent Designer?

- **A priori:**

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)

Virtus dormitiva of the opium : middle age science

9.4 Dilemma: weak or strong, the argument by analogy does not work

9.4.1 Argument by analogy: an assessment

- **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.

9.4. DILEMMA: WEAK OR STRONG, THE ARGUMENT BY ANALOGY DOES NOT WORK 109

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.

9.4.2 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.

9.4.3 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

9.5 Rational systems of cosmogony all equally plausible: suspension of judgment

9.5.1 Alternative hypotheses

- Philo proposes various hypotheses for the origin and constitution of the world's order, that is, he proposes various **cosmogonies**:
 - (1) The world as an organism or animal – God is the soul
 - (2) The world as a vegetable – God is a vegetative or a generative principle

9.5. RATIONAL SYSTEMS OF COSMOGONY ALL EQUALLY PLAUSIBLE: SUSPENSION OF JUDGMENT

(3) matter and movement (Epicure) – God? “continual motion of matter” – we would say conservation of matter-energy

- He generalizes (46):
 - there are four principles : Reason, instinct, generation, vegetation
 - None is more intelligible than the others
 - Four corresponding cosmogonies...
- The claim here is that all these hypotheses are:
 - equally supported** because they are based on the same little evidence;
 - equally explanatory** because they all give as little understanding of the world as the others;
 - equally plausible** because we do not have any sufficient reason to choose between them.

What are our usual criteria to choose between hypotheses?

- The upshot is the “triumph” of skepticism

9.5.2 Equally supported and equal explanatory power

- Demea objects (45) that that such a great vegetative or generative principle cries out for an explanation, most probably in terms of design. His claim is thus that the explanation in terms of generation is not satisfactory for it does not make us understand the process of the organization of the world.
- Philo’s answer is that generation or vegetation is **just as much intelligible** as Design for a cause of the world order.
- That is to say:
 - experience gives us too little basis for understanding any of the causal processes, either by a mind or by mere generation;
 - therefore, we understand generation just as little as we understand design (as causes);

- the demand for a further cause, or a cause of the cause, either applies in both case, or does not apply in any of them.

	Philo	Cleanthes
What the world is like from experience	animal	machine
Principle of the world's order	generation	design
Further cause	design	generation

- That said, note Philo's last point about the advantage of his unexplained principle, generation: At least we have experience of design growing out of generation, not the other !!

9.5.3 Equal plausibility

- Philo argues that, because of the equal evidential support and their equal explanatory power, the hypotheses are **indifferent** (43-46)
 - Experience alone does not give the means to choose.
 - Experience only is the legitimate basis of the choice
 - Therefore: no choice is possible

BURIDAN'S ASS

- According to Philo (53), the whole discussion does between these different systems "prepare a complete triumph for the skeptics". Indeed, the simple fact that the controversy is endless is interpreted by Philo as a proof that reason, by itself, that is, without further help from experience, cannot help to reach any satisfactory conclusion: All hypotheses are equally CONCEIVABLE in the sense that **none imply contradiction**.

The skeptics answer to such controversies is to admit the limitation of knowledge and to opt for a "**total suspension of judgment**" in these matters.

That said, Philo's hypotheses, from the organism to matter in motion **gradually makes the hypothesis of God superfluous**. That is to say, his series of hypotheses leads to the hypothesis of materialism.