The Failure of the First Illustrative Analogy in Part 3 of David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion**

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In Part 2 of David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Cleanthes puts forth the analogical Argument from Design, the argument intended to establish that the designer of the world possesses an intelligence similar to human intelligence, in light of Cleanthes' claim that the design of the world resembles machines of human contrivance. Philo argues that this argument fails, because the world does not bear a specific resemblance to any type of machine, and, therefore, there is no basis for reasoning analogically to an intelligent cause of design. In Part 3, Cleanthes attempts to strengthen his case through two illustrative analogies: I will examine the first of these—the Articulate Voice speaking from the clouds. Scholarship generally regards the Articulate Voice illustration to fail, precisely because nothing in this illustrative analogy assists Philo in understanding that the world is a machine. My paper/talk reveals that Philo provides additional criticisms of the Articulate Voice illustration in Parts 6 and 7 of the *Dialogues*, which make Philo's critique even stronger and more enlightening regarding his critical approach to the Design Argument than can be learned from Part 2 alone.

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Why Cleanthes Holds that Illustrative Analogies Are Needed for Philo

In Part 2 of David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Cleanthes presents the analogical Argument from Design in order to establish that the designer of the world possesses an intelligence similar to human intelligence:

> 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, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain…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, wisdom, 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. (Hume, 1991, p. 109)

Philo, the main critic of the Design Argument, insists that for the analogical argument to be successful in establishing the resemblance between the cause of the design of machines and the cause of the design of the

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world using the principle "like effects prove like causes", the resemblance between the design of machines and the design of the world must be such that the world can be shown to be a machine of a specific kind (e.g. houses, ships, furniture, machines, Hume, 1991, p. 113) And, Philo urges, since no such specific resemblance can be established between the world and any kind of machine, it follows that Cleanthes is unable to establish the resemblance between human intelligence and God.

In the opening paragraph of Part 3, Cleanthes urges that it is Philo's prejudice against religious belief which prevents him from grasping that the similarity in design between the works of nature and those of art "is self-evident and undeniable" (Hume, 1991, p. 117). He insists that Philo's objections "are no better than the abstruse cavils of those philosophers, who denied motion, and ought to be refuted in the same manner, by illustrations, examples, and instances, rather than by serious argument and philosophy" (Hume, 1991, p. 117). To persuade Philo of the machine—like nature of the design of the world, Cleanthes presents two illustrative analogies in Part 3—the Articulate Voice Speaking from the Clouds, and the Vegetable Library. I will confine myself here to the Articulate Voice analogy.

Cleanthes' Articulate Voice Analogy

> Suppose, therefore, that an articulate voice were heard in the clouds, much louder and more melodious than any which human art could ever reach: Suppose, that this voice were extended in the same instant over all nations, and spoke to each nation in its own language and dialect: Suppose, that the words delivered not only contain a just sense and meaning, but convey some instruction altogether worthy of a benevolent Being, superior to mankind: Could you possibly hesitate a moment concerning the cause of this voice? And must you not instantly ascribe it to some design or purpose? Yet I cannot see but all the same objections (if they merit that appellation) which lie against the system of theism, may also be produced against this inference. (Hume, 1991, p. 117)

Norman Kemp Smith follows Philo's critical approach in Part 2 and argues that the Articulate Voice analogy chiefly serves:

> to illustrate Cleanthes' entire failure to recognize the point and force of Philo's criticisms. The effect appealed to is an instance of a *species* familiar in experience, and as described maintains the degree of analogy required for concluding that it has the same *species* of previously experienced cause…But it does not even attempt to meet Philo's criticisms and is therefore both irrelevant and misleading. (Smith, 1947, p. 101)

While not disagreeing with Kemp Smith so far as his criticism goes, I intend to show where, in the *Dialogues*, Philo attacks this illustration with additional criticisms, which advance beyond what Philo had argued in Part 2. Philo's critique of Cleanthes' illustration is, therefore, even stronger and more enlightening than what Kemp Smith argues. Since Philo never criticizes the illustrative analogies directly, our task is to determine which of Philo's criticisms offered beyond Part 2 are applicable to the Articulate Voice illustrative analogy.

For an illustrative analogy to succeed, it must be the case that there are adequate resemblances between the items being compared to enable us to conclude, for the problematic relatum, what we know about the other relatum. Relating this to the Design Argument, it becomes clear that Cleanthes wants Philo to understand that, just as what is heard from the clouds is regarded as a voice, so when we contemplate the design of the world, we should regard it to be a machine. Further, once what is heard from the clouds is regarded as a voice, we will conclude that it has an intelligent cause; similarly, once the design of the world is regarded as a machine, we will conclude by analogy that it has an intelligent cause of design.

Cleanthes' claim refers to what is heard from the clouds as a "voice" in much the same way, and with the same confidence that, in Part 2, he referred to the world as a "machine". Now, that what is heard from the clouds is regarded as a "voice" appears reasonable, given that what is heard exhibits "rational, wise, coherent speech". The central issue is whether there are features in the design of the world, analogous or correspondent to "rational, wise, coherent speech" in what is heard from the clouds, which justify regarding the world as a machine. So far as Philo is concerned, the answer to this question is "no". In Parts 6 and 7, Philo insists that the very features of design which Cleanthes urges reveal that the world is a machine—"order, arrangement, and the adjustment of final causes"—can be used to show an even stronger resemblance between the design of the world and animals and vegetables, which have internal unintelligent principles of order:

> [T]here are other parts of the universe (besides the machines of human invention) which bear still a greater resemblance to the fabric of the world, and which therefore afford a better conjecture concerning the universal origin of this system. These parts are animals and vegetables. The world plainly resembles more an animal or vegetable than it does a watch or a knitting loom. Its cause, therefore, it is more probable, resembles the cause of the former. The cause of the former is generation or vegetation. The cause, therefore, of the world, we may infer to be something similar or analogous to generation or vegetation. (Hume, 1991, p. 138)

Philo then pushes this even further, arguing that:

> in this little corner of the world alone, there are four principles, *reason*, *instinct*, *generation*, *vegetation*, which are similar to each other, and are the causes of similar effects…Any one of these four principles above mentioned (and a hundred others which lie open to our conjecture) may afford us a theory by which to judge the origin of the world. (Hume, 1991, p. 140).

The important point that Philo is making, particularly in his comment that all principles of design "are the causes of similar effects", is that *all* design, regardless of its origin, has the same underlying structure, namely, that all design is made possible through the presence of means to ends relations and a coherence of parts. In short, all designing principles are bound by the same structure of design. And, since all design has the same underlying structure, we cannot use the underlying structure alone to learn the cause of design of any object, and this includes the design of the world.

Cleanthes failed to understand this from the outset. Notice this passage spoken by Cleanthes early in Part 2:

> It would surely be very ill received…did I allow that the proofs of a Deity amounted to no more than a guess or a conjecture. But is the whole adjustment of means to ends in a house and in the universe so slight a resemblance? The economy of final causes? The order, proportion, and arrangement of every part? (Hume, 1991, p. 110)

In fact, Cleanthes began the dialogue with the mistaken view that means to ends relations and a coherence of parts are features of design which enable us to classify any object, including the world, as a machine. On the other hand, Philo argues that since all design, regardless of its causal origin, requires means to ends relations and a coherence of parts, these features, in and of themselves, cannot reveal the cause of design of an object. Given that what is heard from the clouds can be classified as a voice in light of its resemblance to human voices, it is reasonable to conclude, by analogy, that the cause of the Articulate Voice is intelligence. However, because the design of the world does not bear a specific resemblance to any kind of machine, the Articulate Voice illustration cannot assist Cleanthes in convincing Philo that the world is a machine. Any of the manifold causes of design with which we are familiar, and those with which we have no familiarity, may be the cause of the design of the

world. No decision procedure exists for selecting one cause for the design of the world over any other cause for the design of the world.

The irony here is that while Cleanthes began Part 3 by accusing Philo of prejudice or blindness, which prevents him from seeing the similarity of the works of nature to those of art in terms of means to ends relations and a coherence of parts, it is actually Cleanthes, whose prejudice keeps him from understanding that since, all design involves means to ends relations and a coherence of parts, these features cannot be used *simpliciter* to prove that the world is a machine.

Toward the end of Part 3, Philo is characterized as "a little embarrassed and confounded" (Hume, 1991, p. 120). I suggest that the failure of the Articulate Voice analogy along the lines presented here has contributed to this reaction on Philo's part.

References

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