

Philosophy 110W - 3: Introduction to Philosophy, Hamilton College, Fall 2007  
Russell Marcus, Instructor  
email: [rmarcus1@hamilton.edu](mailto:rmarcus1@hamilton.edu)  
website: [http://thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Intro\\_F07/Course\\_Home.htm](http://thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Intro_F07/Course_Home.htm)  
Office phone: 859-4056

Lecture Notes, September 6

## I. Empirical arguments for the existence of God

We will consider two empirical arguments for God's existence:

### 1. The cosmological argument, from Aquinas.

In Part IX of Hume's *Dialogues*, Demea calls the cosmological argument a priori.

There are elements of the cosmological argument which are, plausibly, a priori.

For instance, the claim that every effect has a cause may be seen as an a priori definition of the concept of a cause.

So, it would be known a priori, as we know that bachelors are unmarried.

But, even the argument from first cause has to start with the claim that the world exists.

Our belief in the existence of the world is clearly empirical.

So, the cosmological argument is not as purely a priori as the ontological argument.

### 2. The argument from design, from Paley, but anticipated by Hume.

(Sometimes Aquinas's fifth way is called the argument from design, as well, but this is misleading.)

## II. Aquinas's cosmological argument

Aquinas's cosmological argument is instanced in five ways.

1. There must be an unchanged changer.

2. There must be a first cause.

3. Something must exist necessarily.

4. There must be something which has all perfections.

5. The arrow must be guided by the archer.

These five ways are more or less independent arguments.

The differences among Aquinas's five ways are subtle.

(You might write about them.)

We will, following Martin, focus on the general point, most clearly expressed in the second way, that there must be a first cause.

Aquinas's Cosmological Argument, as rendered by Martin:

1. Everything we know has a cause.

2. There can not be an infinite regress of causes.

So, there must be a first cause; call it God.

Martin points to two flaws:

First, premise two is unsupported.

Martin calls this premise non-empirical.

By nonempirical, he means that we are making an unsupported assumption.

For Aquinas, and all thinkers prior to Cantor in the mid-nineteenth century, the notion of an infinite series was uncomfortable.

Even the application of infinities in the calculus of Newton and Leibniz did not alleviate worries about infinity.

But, we now work quite effectively in mathematics, with infinite series.

We find the sum of an infinite sequence, for example.

Why can't there be an infinite chain of causes?

Second, the first cause may not have the attributes we normally attribute to God.

Martin repeats this complaint about the third way, too, blocking the inference from step 14 to step 15 of the argument, p 38.

But, if we establish the existence of an unchanged changer, or of a necessary being, we have established quite a bit.

So, Martin's second criticism is weaker than his first.

I will not spend any more class time on the cosmological arguments.

I leave them to you, unless there are questions.

### III. Hume, and the argument from design

In Hume's *Dialogues*, Cleanthes argues a posteriori, Demea argues a priori, in Part IX, and Philo is the skeptic, although aligns himself initially with Demea.

Hume considers a variety of arguments in his rich dialogues.

Some of these arguments concern the existence of God; some concern the attributes of God; some concern more general philosophical topics.

Hume also deals wonderfully with the problem of evil and the compatibility of a benevolent God with human suffering, especially in Parts IX and XI.

He specifies four causes of human suffering:

1. Our ability to feel pain.

2. The presence of general, inviolable physical laws.

(E.g., if a lightning bolt, or a train, is headed toward you, it will continue in its path.)

3. Our limited natural abilities.

“An indulgent parent would have bestowed a large stock in order to guard against accidents..”  
(69).

4. Unpredictability of nature, or “inaccurate workmanship of all the springs and principles of the great machine of nature” (70).

One solution, Hume notes, to the problems of evil and suffering is to propose a Manichean universe.

A Manichean universe is one in which two designers, one good and one evil, battle for control.

But, the uniformity of natural law, the second cause of human suffering, seems to undermine the Manichean view.

We are going to focus on the argument from design, which is a denial of Hume's fourth cause of human suffering, above.

Proponents of design argue that the world looks so well made that we are forced to posit a designer.

Often, credit for the argument from design is given to William Paley, who was a younger contemporary of Hume, and influenced the young Darwin.

Paley's argument:

...when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive...that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that if the different parts had been differently shaped from what they are, or placed after any other manner or in any other order than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it...the inference we think is inevitable, that the watch must have had a maker, that there must have existed, at some time and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer, who comprehended its construction and designed its use.

<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/paley.html/>

Cleanthes expresses a similar opinion on p 46:

Consider, anatomize the eye, survey its structure and contrivance, , and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation. The most obvious conclusion, surely, is in favor of design... Who can behold the male and female of each species, the correspondence of their parts and instincts, their passions and whole course of life before and after generation, but must be sensible that the propagation of the species is intended by nature?

Note the use of the word 'intended'.

The argument from design is an argument from analogy.

1. From like effects we infer like causes. (See Hume, p 42.)
  2. The workings of nature are like the workings of artifacts, like watches.
  3. Artifacts like watches demand thoughtful design.
- So, nature must have a designer.

Hume's central objection to the argument from design relies on the insufficiency of the similarities mentioned in premise 2.

We only have experience of a small corner of the universe, p 43.

And our explorations of the universe, both in the large and small, make it seem quite unlike any human artifact, Part V.

Also in Part V, Philo mentions the ship built by a "stupid mechanic"; there need not be an intelligent designer of human artifacts, like the watch.

The stupid mechanic argument is similar to the argument from order, in Part VII.

Demea argues that we only see order in the presence of thought.

Philo responds that we see it all the time in nature: trees, birds, etc.

It begs the question to assume that there has to be a designer of the trees and birds.

Because the similarities are weak, the design argument invites other, similar arguments.

Here is another argument from design:

1. From like effects we infer like causes.
  2. Every time we have seen thought, it has been connected with a human body.
  3. The designer has the capacity for thought.
- So, the designer must be human. (See p 52.)

And another one:

1. From like effects we infer like causes.
  2. The workings of nature are like the workings of the human body; see p 53.
  3. The human body is connected to a soul.
- So, the universe is the body connected to the designer's soul.  
That is, the universe is a giant animal; see p 56.

Since the universe seems more analogous to an animal (or even a vegetable), it is likely to have originated from generation (or vegetation): the world is like an animal, a comet is the egg of the animal, and, like an ostrich, hatches the egg and produces a new animal (55).

The point of these other arguments from analogy is that proponents of the argument from design emphasize only the similarities that support the conclusion they want.

Philo does not really intend to promote these deviant cosmological/cosmogonical theories.

His point, and Hume's point, is that a posteriori arguments about the existence of God are destined to fail.

They go beyond human experience, beyond our capacity to know.

We are merely speculating, and our choices are arbitrary, p 57.

There are other interesting cosmologies.

On the website, I have links to articles that urge that we may be living in a computer simulation, and that we live in a hollow/inverted earth.

We will put aside such speculation, after noting that such theories are often more difficult than one imagines to disprove.

One last problem with the argument from design is that it does not explain the origin of intelligence.

Philo complains that recourse to thought in design does not provide an answer to origins, since we still need an explanation of the origin of thought, in Part IV.

There are defenders of intelligent design who accept that the designers could be creatures from other planets, rather than God.

We would need an explanation of the origins of these creatures, and their superior intellects.

Be careful to distinguish the argument from design, which is compatible with evolution, from the use of the argument by proponents of intelligent design as an alternative explanation of human origins.

The proponent of the argument from design might marvel at the wonders of evolution and say that they themselves are evidence of a designer.

In fact, Darwin himself may have held such an opinion.

We will not spend time in class on other aspects of Hume's fecund work.

We discussed these arguments for the existence of God in order to make some fundamental distinctions which appear throughout philosophy, and which will appear through this course.

IV. Other topics to notice in Hume's *Dialogues*

In addition to the a priori/a posteriori distinction, Hume discusses:

the problem of induction: esp 42, 56, 69

“The effects of these principles [of nature] are all known to us from experience; but the principles themselves and their manner of operation are totally unknown... (56)”.

the relation between mind and body: p 52

“No man [has] ever seen reason but in a human figure; therefore, the gods must have a human figure (52)”.

matters of fact and relations of ideas, p 61

happiness and misery, good and evil, in Part X.

These topics should recur later in this course.