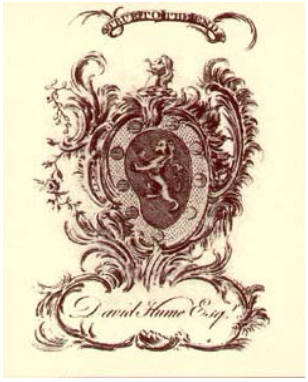

Hume and Barker on the Logic of Design
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HUME AND BARKER ON THE LOGIC OF DESIGN

I find myself in complete agreement with what I take to be the main thesis of Stephen Barker's paper. It is certainly a mistake to concentrate our attention on the negative critique which Hume directed at the modes of argument of his rationalist predecessors and contemporaries - and directed even more at the mode of certain conviction with which they presented conclusions arrived at by arguments that did not have a logically compelling force. Hume was very much concerned with the problem of just what kind of force an argument that was not logically compelling could have; and he was even more concerned (perhaps) with the problem of how the logical structure of non-compelling argument could best be exhibited so that the logic of the argument would not be confused with its force. He made significant contributions to both of these problems; and I think he knew what he was doing well enough not to deserve the charge of inconsistency which Barker seems inclined to bring against him. There are some questions which he did not address, for the very good reason that they could only arise, or at least they could only be formulated clearly, as a result of the clarification of our ideas and our situation that Hume himself achieved. His distinction between "relations of ideas" and "matters of fact" may be overly simplistic. But in all its simplicity this distinction is powerful enough to enable Hume to deal quite shortly with any claim that it is inconsistent to want to achieve this goal of knowing and saying what is true, just because we have shown that we have no logical guarantee that we shall achieve it. Christian orthodoxy has always maintained that we are all of us equally "sinners"; but no orthodox Christian moralist has ever maintained the Stoic paradox that all sins are equal. It is precisely because we know that we cannot achieve Stoic wisdom that we cannot possibly be tempted to

accept that paradox. Hume's achievement was to show that (in spite of the serpent's false promise) our situation with respect to knowledge has always been just as parlous as our situation with respect to action. But even in these unhappy circumstances it is not inconsistent to strive for whatever measure of truth we can achieve; and to strive at the same time for absolute logical clarity about the limits of our insight and about the comparative merits of all proposed approaches to the goal.

But I must not devote my time to an issue that Barker wisely asks us to keep an open mind about. I want to discuss the form and substance of the arguments with which Barker supports the thesis that I do agree with, rather than take up an aside of his that I happen not to agree with. So then, first, let us consider the fault that he finds in the "fifth way" of Thomas. He says that it "begs the question". It "obscures the nexus of controversy" because the first premiss of the syllogism makes a crucial assumption that needs to be proved. Now I deny that the "fifth way" obscures the nexus of controversy in that way. Thomas (and all of his competent hearers) knew perfectly well that his first premiss had not been universally accepted. He was stating the view of Aristotle about the generally purposive character of nature, and he knew that it had been doubted. But he did not think that a rational believer could hesitate about the choice between Aristotle's position and that of the atheist defenders of chance. Anyone who did hesitate was a fool, and arguments could not touch him. That some men were fools, and could "say in their heart, 'There is no God'", was part of the "problem of evil" which we must consign trustfully to the inscrutable wisdom of God (save in so far as Scripture reveals to us the origin of and reason for our fallen condition).

In Hume's world, Aristotle's conception of the orderliness of Nature had been supplanted by Newton's. Newton accepted the atomist view that "natural bodies" did

not act for an end; but he also exhibited the "system of the World" which the natural bodies constituted as a marvellous perpetual motion machine. Thus Newton did not make the first premiss of the argument less attractive, though it now had to be formulated in Paley's way. But he made the second premiss of the "fifth way" appear to be logically impregnable. Thomas was well aware that this was the premiss whose self-evidence must be admitted; and he was also aware that, upon the Aristotelian view of nature, some grave difficulties could arise in connection with it. He shows this by his decision that only two objections merit consideration when we ask "Whether God exists?". The first is the "problem of evil"; the second is the arguable self-sufficiency of the system of nature - or in its naked atheist form "the eternity of the world". Thomas replied to the second objection by simply restating the "fifth way" with emphasis on the second premiss "Since nature works for a determinate end under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must be traced back to God as to its first cause". (S.T. 1,2,3, ad2).

As I see it, Hume's greatness consists precisely in his recognition that it is at this point that the argument should be attacked. The syllogistic form of the argument - which Thomas certainly imposed upon it[1] does indeed "obscure the nexus of controversy". It leads to the concentration of attention upon the first premiss. But the so-called "argument from design" is not, and never was, a proper syllogism. It is an argument by analogy. Thomas was certainly aware of this, as any careful student of Aristotle would be. But in any case - as Barker points out - Bishop Butler recognized it. I agree with Mossner and Barker that Butler is a highly plausible model for Hume's Cleanthes. I do not know what the prevailing view about this historical question is, but I am myself much impressed by the fact that Hume accepts Butler's general context for his own attack upon the argument. Demea and Philo begin by agreeing with Butler

that it can be *taken for proved that there is an intelligent Author of nature.* We should note that Philo makes the concession in a peculiarly nominal way *(the original cause of this universe (whatever it be) we call God).* For since Philo has just commented on the double folly of denying God's existence not only in one's heart but with one's lips, we are bound to wonder what he is affirming in his heart. But his concession, verbal though it may be, has the important logical result that Cleanthes' argument is evaluated not as a "proof" that God exists, but as a means of insight into the nature of that first cause whose existence is said not to be in doubt. The course of the examination makes us see first how many plausible analogies can be drawn from experience to account for the orderliness (the apparent "design") of the world. This is the full deployment of what Thomas recognized as "Objection 2". Then the preferred analogy of faith itself is pressed to a logical conclusion (the full deployment of "Objection 1", the "problem of evil"). The fair conclusion is that the ordering principle of the world may be more like a plant or a spider than it is like the human mind; but that if it is indeed a mind with conscious purposes, those purposes are so far removed from our rational goals that the attitude of worship (if it includes moral respect) is quite inappropriate. The "divine nature" is as mysterious as Demea says it is; but it is not at all "adorable". Thus by taking the argument seriously Hume shows that it will not justify the second premiss of the "fifth way" in any theologically relevant way. Once we recognize that, we must ask whether there was any religious point in applying the concept of design to the world at all. What appeared to Thomas as a forced option between "design" and "chance" has become a distinction without a difference.

If I am right in thinking that Hume saw the reduction of the argument to a syllogism as misleading in quite a different way than Barker says it is misleading, and that by not treating the argument as a "proof" at all, he meant

to make us see more precisely how we are misled by it, then it cannot be the case that in wishing for a "quite formal and regular" analysis of Cleanthes' argument (in the letter to Gilbert Elliot which Barker quotes) Hume was "hankering after a deductive argument". In making this suggestion Barker is unjust to the strong case that he has made for Hume's "shrewd grasp of inductive reasoning". If we ask where the foundations of that "strong grasp of what acceptable inductive reasoning by analogy should be" were first laid, I think we shall soon light upon a more plausible hypothesis about what Hume wanted and why he wanted it. The language of Philo abounds with echoes of Newton's "Rules of Reasoning in Philosophy"; and Cleanthes explicitly appeals to the scientific achievements of Newton, Copernicus and Galileo in attacking Philo's supposedly hypocritical scepticism. Hume deserves less credit as a critical theorist of analogy than Barker is willing to accord him, because some of the points that Barker remarks upon are cited directly from the Principia; and the way Cleanthes associated his position with that of Copernicus, Galileo and Newton - all of whom were believers, and Newton (at least) a deeply concerned theologian both in the natural and in the revealed mode - is certainly not accidental. Hume (I infer) would like to see the "hypothesis" of the "Author of Nature" formulated rigorously in accordance with Newton's rules of method, so that its gratuitous or metaphysical character might be made plain. Behind "our face in the moon" the telescope reveals great ranges of long extinct volcanoes. The Dialogues gives us a closer look at the face of the "Author of Nature" and reveals something similar. All that Hume is wishing for, perhaps, is the freedom to say plainly what he believes that he can quite methodically show. But even in the letter he does not dare to speak of that.[2] For what was in fact not foolish when said "in one's heart" remained very evidently a foolish thing to say with one's lips. So all the bad reasoners (including Newton) who

think that Newton's science is a bulwark of theology because they do not apply Newton's method properly, continued to follow an "inclination which may and ought to be controlled" in view of the fact that it has actually been shown not to be "a legitimate Ground of Assent". Paley's general success confirms the wisdom of the wishes I have ascribed to Hume. Newton's metaphysical hypothesis of the "clockmaker" perished only after Darwin ceased "feigning hypotheses" and used the Newtonian method with just that clear awareness of its essentially hypothetical character which Hume had sought to inculcate.

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1. I think Paley did not, but since he is only part of the inertial system of human thought, not one of its great moments like Thomas and Hume, I shall not concern myself with this problem.

2. It is somewhat unjust to the author of the Dialogues to put it like this. For what is most clearly evident in the letter is Hume's consciousness that his own inclination to side with Philo weakens his capacity to present the case for Cleanthes. (The postscript to this letter is also important because it reveals Hume's uneasy feeling that the normal principles of analogical reasoning do not operate upon our belief in design. This uneasiness is a forerunner of Kant's view that there are questions which we cannot answer, but for which we are forced to postulate a reply. I do not think that Hume would find that he was still troubled by the "will to believe" in our post-Darwinian world. But I take this question to be irrelevant to the "logic of design" in any case).