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Hume Studies Volume XVIII, Number 2 (November, 1992) 483-500.

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The Irregular Argument in Hume's *Dialogues*¹

Beryl Logan

In the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,² Cleanthes advances the Argument from Design, which states that, from certain observable features of the world and machines, an inference can be made analogically to the intelligence of the designer of the world. In this paper I argue that Cleanthes formulates this Argument in two ways—as a 'regular' argument (part 2), and as an 'irregular' argument (part 3). As a regular analogical argument, the inference is considerably weakened by Philo's objections (that is, the Argument fails to meet the requirements of the rules of an argument by analogy); but as an irregular argument, the 'inference' is made in spite of the fact that it does not meet these requirements. Philo presents further objections (in parts 4-8) that show that the data in the world do not offer support for an analogical inference to the intelligence of the Deity, and a suspense of judgement is the only possible result. He then shows that drawing this analogy between human and divine intelligence can only offer a proposition that carries a very low degree of probability. However, we must then account for Philo's apparent profession of faith in part 12.³

J. C. A. Gaskin, who has written extensively on Hume's philosophy of religion, denies that there are two arguments in the *Dialogues*;⁴ his position is, rather, that while we have a propensity to acknowledge design in nature, "the feeling for design is not a new argument, irregular or otherwise ... It is something more like the sense of cosmic awe."⁵ I will return later in the paper to discuss Gaskin's argument.

In part 3, Cleanthes offers a discussion of irregular arguments.

Some beauties in writing we may meet with, which seem contrary to rules, and which gain the affections, and animate the imagination, in opposition to all the precepts of criticism, and to the authority of the established masters of art. And if the argument for Theism be, as you pretend, contradictory to the principles of logic; its universal, its irresistible influence proves clearly, that there may be arguments of a like irregular nature. Whatever cavils may be urged; an orderly world, as well as a coherent, articulate speech, will still be received as an incontestable proof of design and intention. (D 155/119)

These irregular arguments contravene established rules of argumentation; rather than appealing to reason, they appeal to the affections and stimulate the imagination. Their influence is universal and irresistible: the evidence strikes with such a force that only great violence, or "blind dogmatism," can prevent us from reaching the conclusion. We are compelled by a 'feeling' to assent immediately and spontaneously to the conclusion: "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" (D 154/119). No reflection or process of calculation is present. Objections as to the appropriateness, quality, etc. of the evidence do not prevent the 'inference'. The imagination is irresistibly and immediately drawn by the data in the world to acknowledge a designer. The rules for a reasoned argument are irrelevant to an irregular 'argument' as their influence is effected by the imagination and sentiment rather than by reason. The principles of rationality have no place—they are inapplicable and inappropriate, not ignored or contravened. (Due to the idiosyncratic nature of these argument forms, it is appropriate to place the words 'argument' and 'inference' in single quotes.)

Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart, writing soon after Hume, make use of a similar 'inference'. Reid argues in his *Essays on the Powers of the Human Mind*,⁶ that the principle that an *intelligent* first cause may be inferred from marks of wisdom in the effects is arrived at neither by reason (it is "too universal to be the effect of reasoning" and is only shown by "appealing to the common sense of mankind" [Reid, 323]), nor by experience (perceiving items in conjunction, "informs us only of what has been, but never of what must be" [Reid, 325]; it cannot help us learn of the connection between an intelligent cause and an intelligent effect when we can have no access to the intelligent cause). This judgement, by which we infer the presence of other minds, is "common to the whole human race that are endowed with understanding" (Reid, 323).⁷ To deny this principle in this case would "be to deny that we have any means of discerning a wise man from an idiot, or a man that is illiterate in the highest degree from a man of knowledge and learning," something "which no man has the effrontery to deny" (Reid, 326).

Thus I think it appears, that the principle we have been considering, to wit, that from certain signs or indications in the effect, we may infer that there must have been intelligence, wisdom, or other intellectual or moral qualities in the cause, is a principle which we get neither by reasoning nor by experience; and therefore, if it be a true principle, it must be a first principle. *There is in the human understanding*

a light, by which we see immediately the evidence of it, when there is occasion to apply it. (Reid, 326, emphasis added)

In *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, Stewart claims that we are "irresistibly led" to apply the results of past experience to the future, and that the existence of this principle is "universally acknowledged." Further, "that irresistible propensity to believe in the permanent order of physical events ... seems to form an original principle of the human constitution."⁸

A regular argument, on the other hand, is one that conforms to rules of argumentation and in which the conclusion is reached by a process of reflecting on the evidence and calculating its relevance to the conclusion to determine its acceptability. The regular analogical argument presented in this way in the *Dialogues*, that is, on the basis of the similarities between the terms of the analogy and the application of the principle, "*Like effects prove like causes*," must meet the rules for such arguments. Some rules for an analogical argument are given by Philo in part 2: the cases must be exactly similar or resembling—if there are dissimilarities they proportionately weaken the strength of the analogy; experience or observation of the conjunction of causes with effects must be regular and repeated—analogy cannot proceed from or be about one instance.

In part 2, Cleanthes offers the analogical Argument from Design as a regular argument, an instance of strong and obvious reason:

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. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. 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. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity,

and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.
(D 143/109)

From the observation of data that reduce to means to ends relations (that the correct means are employed to bring about a desired end), and coherence of parts (that, "The order, proportion, and arrangement of every part" [D 145/110] are directed to achieving the end) in the world and in machines, Cleanthes infers, by analogy, the machine-like nature of the world. In this version, Cleanthes argues that the world is a machine, and as machines of human contrivance have intelligent designers, so the world also has a designer whose intelligence is similar to that of humans. Philo offers a second version of the Argument, which Cleanthes accepts as a "fair representation" of his argument; it does not classify the world as a machine but rather refers to what the world and machines have in common—means to ends relations:

Throw several pieces of steel together, without shape or form; they will never arrange themselves so as to compose a watch: Stone, and mortar, and wood, without an architect, never erect a house. But the ideas in a human mind, we see, by an unknown, inexplicable oeconomy, arrange themselves so as to form the plan of a watch or house. Experience, therefore, proves, that there is an original principle of order in mind, not in matter. From similar effects we infer similar causes. The adjustment of means to ends is alike in the universe, as in a machine of human contrivance. The causes, therefore, must be resembling. (D 146/112)

Here, Philo claims (for Cleanthes) that as machines that exhibit means to ends relations require a mind to account for their order, so the world that exhibits means to ends relations requires a mind to account for its order. In both these versions, arguing for the intelligence of the Deity in the regular manner, the inference from the effect to the cause is made on the basis of the similarities in the effects and causes.

The Argument from Design, in either version, leads to the belief in intelligent design by the route of what Cleanthes regards as "strong and obvious reason" (D 216). It is a regular, analogical argument, and as such, it is subject to the rules of analogical argument, and may be criticized for its lack of adherence to such rules.

In *Treatise* 1.3.12, "Of the probability of causes," Hume writes that it is the degree of resemblance between the objects compared that determines the strength of the analogy—the greater the degree of resemblance, the more firm and certain the reasoning.⁹ In the first *Enquiry*, Hume writes: "It is only when two *species* of objects are found

to be constantly conjoined, that we can infer the one from the other; and were an effect presented, which was entirely singular, and could not be comprehended under any known *species*, I do not see, that we could form any conjecture or inference at all concerning its cause."¹⁰ Philo bases his objections to the Argument from Design in part 2 on the Argument's shortcomings with respect to such rules and requirements:

1. it compares objects with dissimilarities and with a disproportion between them (for example, houses and the universe);
2. it deals with unique items—God and the world—and thus the observance of constant conjunction is not applicable; the correct application of the principle, "*Like effects prove like causes*" requires the repeated observation of the effect conjoined with the cause; and
3. it regards reason as the only possible generative principle and ignores other generative principles (such as, "heat or cold, attraction or repulsion, and a hundred others" [D 147/113])—it assumes that we can know which cause is the original cause; it equates one particular situation with the whole ("What peculiar privilege has this little agitation of the brain which we call *thought*, that we must thus make it the model of the whole universe?" [D 148/113]).

In order to satisfy the rules of analogical argument, Cleanthes would be required to: show the "similarity between the fabric of a house, and the generation of a universe"; cite similar situations to nature first arranging the elements to infer that reason was the original generative principle; have had experience of the origin of worlds (see the final paragraph of part 2 [D 151/116]).

In part 3, Cleanthes answers Philo's objections. First, he claims that he does not need to *prove* that there is a similarity between the works of nature and of human contrivance, as such similarity is "self-evident and undeniable" (D 152/117). Second, he will offer two illustrative analogies which he thinks will assist Philo in seeing that an Argument from Design is supportable in spite of his objections.

The first analogy is the Voice heard in the Clouds:

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? (D 152/117)

Cleanthes is showing Philo that, even though there is a great dissimilarity and a lack of proportion between a human voice and the Articulate Voice, we instantly ascribe to the Articulate Voice a cause that is similar to the cause of the human voice. Even though there are great dissimilarities and a lack of proportion between machines and the world, we ought to immediately see that the world has a cause similar to the cause of machines—an intelligent designer. The ‘dissimilitudes do not weaken the argument’. This shows the irrelevance of Philo’s first objection.

With respect to Philo’s second objection, even though the Articulate Voice is a unique item, as is the world, we still ascribe a cause to it on the basis of its resemblance to human voices. Cleanthes’ statement, “The same matter, a like form” (D 152/117) with regard to the similarities between the works of human contrivance and those of nature is his reply. Applying the principle, “*Like effects prove like causes*” requires repeated observations. But the new claim is different: it says, if two items (ordinary human voices and the Articulate voice, ordinary rational volumes and living vegetable rational volumes, machines and the world) are similar, that is, are made of the same stuff, then they will have a similar form (an intelligent cause): no ‘proof’ is required; single and unique items may thus be compared. Even though the world is a unique item, we ought to ascribe a cause to it on the basis of its resemblance to machines.

Cleanthes second analogy is The Living Vegetable Library:

Suppose, that there is a natural, universal, invariable language, common to every individual of human race, and that books are natural productions, which perpetuate themselves in the same manner with animals and vegetables, by descent and propagation. ...

Suppose, therefore, that you enter into your library, thus peopled by natural volumes, containing the most refined reason and most exquisite beauty: could you possibly open one of them, and doubt, that its original cause bore the strongest analogy to mind and intelligence? When it reasons and discourses; when it expostulates, argues, and enforces its views and topics; when it applies sometimes to the pure intellect, sometimes to the affections; when it collects, disposes, and adorns every consideration suited to the subject: could you persist in asserting, that all this, at the bottom, had really no meaning, and that the first formation of this volume

in the loins of its original parent proceeded not from thought and design? (D 153/118)

Just as we ascribe an intelligent cause to ordinary rational volumes, we are drawn without hesitation to the irresistible conclusion that the original cause of the rational living books is a similar generative principle (intelligence), even though the immediate and known cause of the effect is the generative principle of descent and propagation. Thus, even though Philo may suggest that there are known alternative generative principles in the world, we must immediately draw the conclusion that the 'hidden' original cause of the world is intelligence when we are faced with a rational effect. This is Cleanthes' answer to Philo's third objection.

Thus, in these two illustrative analogies, Cleanthes thinks he has shown Philo that his objections are irrelevant—he has offered a formulation of the Argument from Design where the acknowledgement that the world is intelligently designed is made in spite of the objections raised by Philo. As Philo's objections were directed at a regular, rational argument, and as Cleanthes considers the analogies to be irregular and thus non-rational, such objections are inappropriate.

I regard the difference between the regular Argument from Design in part 2 and the irregular one in part 3 to lie in the manner in which the 'inferences' to the cause of the Voice and the original cause of the living books are made. The inference is made on the basis of a natural propensity, or irresistible and immediate influence, to instantly ascribe design where order and contrivance are found. Such ascription is non-rational, as it is made in spite of the fact that the items compared are dissimilar and disproportionate; Cleanthes' claim is that, as a non-rational inference, this asymmetry is irrelevant. This is the propensity that Gaskin claims we 'misread as the soundness of the design argument'; however, as will be shown below, it is Cleanthes who is misreading this propensity in presenting these illustrations in order to convince Philo to accept the design argument, as he continues to support an analogical argument. The dissimilarities do not prevent the inference, and constant conjunction is not required—one instance is sufficient to make the 'inference'. Cleanthes urges that we are similarly drawn to make the inference to an intelligent cause of the design of the world; that is, there are sufficient similarities between the irregular 'inference' in his illustrative analogies (from an articulate voice to a rational cause, and from living rational books and their original rational cause), and the position he is urging, between a rational effect (the world) and a rational cause (an intelligent designer), that if the imagination is drawn to make the 'inference' in the one case, it will similarly be drawn in the other. This shift in the manner of inference

is an additional persuasive tool by which Cleanthes can help Philo see the folly of his 'absurd argument' and 'abstruse' cavils, as these cavils apply only to a regular argument.

Even though the illustrations move analogically from observations in the world to an intelligent cause, the data presented (the voice speaking to all people and the books in the vegetable library and similarly, Cleanthes claims, the world) lead immediately to the striking and indisputable conclusion of an intelligent cause through an irresistible or unavoidable feeling, a non-rational *appeal* to the imagination and sentiment, rather than through a rational *process*.¹¹ About the voice in the clouds Cleanthes asks: "could you possibly hesitate a moment concerning the cause of this voice? and must you not instantly ascribe it to some design or purpose?" (D 152/117) With regard to the books in the vegetable library, he asks: "could you possibly open one of them, and doubt, that its original cause bore the strongest analogy to mind and intelligence?" (D 152/118) Cleanthes is claiming that if we make such an ascription in these cases, we ought also to make it in the case of machines and the world—when we are presented with a rational effect, we ought immediately to infer a rational cause.

Thus, these illustrations do not follow the rules of analogical arguments discussed earlier. In the first analogy, Cleanthes states that even though there is a great dissimilarity between the voice in the clouds and a human voice so that there is "no reason to suppose any analogy in their causes" (D 153), we still make the immediate ascription to the cause of the voice in the clouds. We make the 'inference' in spite of the dissimilarities. In the second analogy, which Cleanthes thinks is nearer the case of the universe—because it seeks to identify the original and not the immediate cause—the 'inference' is made from rational effects to a rational (and original) cause even though the original cause is not observable and must be inferred. The principle, "*Like effects prove like causes*" is not invoked to reach the conclusion, thus constant conjunction of causes with effects in order to justify the 'inference' is not required.¹²

Cleanthes states that Philo regards the Argument from Design as Cleanthes presented it in part 2 to be "contradictory to the principles of logic" (D 155), as Philo raises objections to this formulation of the Argument that are based on its failure as a regular argument, that is, its failure to conform to the rules. However, in the illustrations that Cleanthes presents in part 3, the conclusion is drawn in an irregular manner; the analogical illustrations do not utilize the principles of logic and thus Philo's objections have no place. They cannot be criticized on the same grounds. That Cleanthes regards religious belief to be held universally and irresistibly through the irregular argument leads him to claim that the argument for theism is like the kind of argument

sometimes found in writing and art, one whose 'conclusion' is held regardless of its lack of rational rigour. Cleanthes thinks that only one who is blinded by dogmatism and prejudice could possibly reject the irregular argument.

An objection to this interpretation may be the following. If Cleanthes is able to offer an irregular Argument from Design that seems to circumvent Philo's objections, against what is Philo arguing when he continues to present objections to the Argument from Design in parts 4-8? Cleanthes has tried to show, both by a regular and an irregular argument, that we ought to acknowledge the conclusion of the analogical Argument from Design.

I submit that in the remaining parts, Philo's purpose is to attack *any* form of the Argument from Design, whether argued in the regular or the irregular manner, that purports to establish *analogically* the intelligence of the Deity from the data in the world. Philo's original objections were directed towards the shortcomings of the Argument as a regular argument, but Cleanthes was able to show that these objections are not decisive—as an irregular argument, the Argument from Design survives the objections. However, what Philo must now show is that it is the *analogical* nature of the argument that is flawed.

Philo must refute Cleanthes' anthropomorphic conception of the Deity—his claim that the intelligence of the designer of the world, an intelligence similar to human intelligence, can be inferred from data in the world. His attack takes the form of denying that the data, the same in both argument forms, enable Cleanthes to maintain that God is intelligent.¹³ Philo argues that the data in the world support any number of alternative hypotheses with regard to the design of the world—not just the inference that the designer of the world has intelligence like the human as part of its nature—and that there is no procedure by which any one may be chosen above another. "A total suspense of judgement is here our only reasonable resource" (D 186-87/147).

If Philo is going to defeat decisively Cleanthes' position on religious belief, he must attack his anthropomorphism. The game is still afoot.

We can now show how these arguments offer some clarification of Philo's pronouncements of belief in part 12. In the second paragraph of part 12, Philo states,

no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind, or pays more profound adoration to the divine Being, as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance and artifice of Nature. A purpose, an intention, a design strikes every where the most careless, the most stupid thinker;

and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it. (D 214/172)

Further, at the end of part 12, Philo claims that once the imperfections of natural reason are taken into account, one "will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity" (D 227/185).

I would like to propose that Philo's confession of faith in the second paragraph of part 12 is arrived at by an irregular 'argument', but not an irregular argument that utilizes the data in the world analogically to infer the intelligence of the designer. Philo draws no analogies in order to show that the world, as a rational effect, has a rational cause. However, the *way* in which the 'inference' is made is the same: it is a natural inclination. Cleanthes says of the Articulate Voice: "could you possibly hesitate a moment ... must you not instantly ascribe" (D 152); of the living books: "could you possibly open one of them, and doubt" (D 152); of the plain instincts of nature: "to assent, where-ever any reasons strike him with so full a force, that he cannot, without the greatest violence, prevent it" (D 154); of the anatomization of the eye: "tell me ... if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation" (D 154).

Philo's comments in part 12 with regard to his belief are similar: "no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind ... A purpose, an intention, a design strikes every where" (D 214/172). Earlier, at the conclusion of part 10, Philo had declared that "the beauty and fitness of final causes strike us with such irresistible force, that all objections appear (what I believe they really are) mere cavils and sophisms" (D 202/160). One is struck, one cannot hesitate, the force is too great to reject—these are the influences the data have on the mind. Purpose and design strike everywhere. If nature does nothing in vain, then all the works of nature have a purpose, and the sciences, not resting until this purpose is found, lead us "almost lead us insensibly to acknowledge a first intelligent Author" (D 214-15/172). Given design and purpose in nature, we acknowledge an intelligent designer. What stronger proofs of his existence could God give other "than what appear on the whole face of Nature?" What more could God do than "copy the present oeconomy of things; render many of his artifices so plain, that no stupidity could mistake them" (D 215/173)? No analogical argument is required simply to 'see' what God has created in the world. God has placed all the signs or markers in the world for us; it is up to us merely to read them.¹⁴

In part 12, Cleanthes and Philo both agree that the suspense of judgement that results from Philo's sceptical attack in parts 4-8 cannot be maintained. In his *Scepticism and Belief*, Stanley Tweyman claims that Philo's sceptical attack on an analogical Argument from Design

concludes with the suspense of judgement at the end of part 8.¹⁵ However, my analysis below shows that Philo's attack continues in part 12: I maintain that Philo's so-called 'professions of faith' and his acknowledgements (at D 216-17/174-75 and D 227/185) that there is some analogy between the human and the divine are only steps in his attack on the analogical nature of Cleanthes' arguments. Philo's criticisms are directed at the weakness of the conclusion of the Argument from Design—that is, at the remoteness of the analogy that may be drawn between "the cause or causes of order in the universe" (D 227) and human intelligence—and continue until the middle of the penultimate paragraph of part 12, where he claims that the well-disposed mind will seek relief from the ignorance in which this conclusion leaves it.

Philo presented his case for belief in the second paragraph of this part; Cleanthes' position is that arguing analogically from the data in the world to an intelligent designer is the only system of cosmogony that should be endorsed. This analogical argument can only be weakened by "starting objections and difficulties" (as Philo has done [D 172]) as it cannot be shown that any other system of cosmogony is superior—there is no way to choose among competing hypotheses. He thus regards the Argument from Design to be supported by education (part 1), reason (part 2), and natural propensity (part 3).

It now falls to Philo to show Cleanthes the kind of proposition that results from drawing an analogy between human and divine intelligence. Philo admits that there is an analogy:

That the works of Nature bear a great analogy to the productions of art is evident; and according to all the rules of good reasoning, we ought to infer, if we argue at all concerning them, that their causes have a proportional analogy. ... Here then the existence of a DEITY is plainly ascertained by reason; ... No man can deny the analogies between the effects: To restrain ourselves from enquiring concerning the causes is scarcely possible: From this enquiry, the legitimate conclusion is, that the causes have also an analogy. (D 216-17/175)

The conclusion of the analogical argument is that the cause of the world is an intelligent Deity whose power and energy is analogous to that of human designers but far exceeds it. This argument is based on "rules of good reasoning"—if we consider the evidence presented, and identify and weigh the similarities and the dissimilarities between the world and human artifacts, then, according to the rules of analogy, we are entitled to draw this conclusion. This acceptance of the analogical Argument from Design is not, however, one of Philo's confessions of

faith, as some commentators have claimed.¹⁶ It is Philo's philosophical assent to a reasoned argument.

When Hume discusses analogical argument as a species of probable reasoning in the *Treatise* (see T 142), he writes that there may be many degrees of resemblance between the parts of the analogy, and that on this basis the analogical reasoning "becomes proportionably more or less firm and certain." Some probability remains as long as there is some resemblance. Philo's early objections regarding the lack of similarity, the utilization of an unique case, and the equally viable alternative hypotheses, weaken the analogy, such that only a highly qualified conclusion may be drawn:

That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence. (D 227/184)

This is all that may be concluded from the analogical Argument from Design, supported by the principle, "*Like effects prove like causes.*" All this proposition commands is "plain, philosophical assent ... as often as it occurs" (D 227/185) from one who recognizes that the arguments survive the objections. A conclusion has been drawn, given the evidence, and one is thus justified in assenting to the conclusion that results from the Argument.

However, this proposition has numerous shortcomings:

If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication: If it affords no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance: And if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no farther than to the human intelligence; and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the other qualities of the mind: If this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition, as often as it occurs; and believe that the arguments, on which it is established, exceed the objections, which lie against it? (D 227/185)

Utilizing data in the world to draw an analogical inference to the nature of the cause of the design of the world—that the Deity's intelligence is like the human—results only in a proposition with the above characteristics—highly qualified, tentative, with low probability and nothing to guide one's actions. Neither the regular reasoned argument nor the irregular irresistible one, as arguments by analogy

from the data in the world to the designer of the world, can provide more than a remote analogy.

I claim that this highly attenuated and hedged proposition that results from establishing an analogy between human and divine intelligence is not Philo's profession of religious belief, but is merely his assent to a probable proposition. It is this proposition that Gaskin regards as being Philo's statement of religious belief, prompting Gaskin to argue that the belief in an intelligent designer is a rational belief. If natural theology resolves itself into the 'remote analogy proposition' as some who support the analogical Argument from Design would maintain, then it commands only 'cool, philosophical assent' and not belief. However, contra Gaskin (and others), I assert that Philo is not assenting to this proposition as an item of belief. He is saying that this is the kind of proposition that can be drawn from the analogical argument from design, and by the rules of good reasoning we are entitled to draw it, and it deserves *philosophical assent*. But *if* natural theology consists only of this proposition, then it cannot be a foundation for *belief*. He is not saying that natural theology *does* consist of this proposition, only that *if* it does, and those who support the Argument from Design are committed to it, then it carries little in the way of belief for the well-disposed mind.¹⁷

Philo then shows this difficult state that results when that ambiguous and undefined proposition is all human reason can offer. It leaves the mind in a distressed state from which it seeks relief:

Some astonishment indeed will naturally arise from the greatness of the object: Some melancholy from its obscurity: Some contempt of human reason, that it can give no solution more satisfactory with regard to so extraordinary and magnificent a question. But believe me, CLEANTHES, the most natural sentiment, which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion, is a longing desire and expectation, that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate this profound ignorance, by affording some more particular revelation to mankind, and making the discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the divine object of our Faith. A person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity. (D 227/185)

Only a mind properly directed and disposed seeks for such resolution. Only when the mind recognizes "imperfections of natural reason" will it "fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity." Now this "revealed truth" is not the revelation of organized religion, which Hume despised,

but the revelation of nature of (i) its means to ends relations and coherence of parts, and (ii) its original and not immediate causes. Once these features are recognized, one is irresistibly and immediately drawn to the belief in an intelligent designer. A mind that recognizes these features is a "well-disposed" one and the belief in an intelligent designer is universal *only* for "well-disposed minds." In part 3, we find Cleanthes first claiming that the argument for theism has a universal, irresistible influence (first paragraph, D 152/117), but stating in the following paragraph that religious arguments are not *entirely* universal: "It sometimes happens, I own, that the religious arguments have not their due influence on an ignorant savage and barbarian" (D 152) as they tend to seek only immediate, and not original, causes. Also, in the *Natural History of Religion*, Hume claims that the "barbarous and uninstructed ... may not see a sovereign author in the more obvious works of nature ... yet it scarcely seems possible, that any one of good understanding should reject that idea, once it is suggested to him."¹⁸ Hume says there that "we must adopt, with the strongest conviction, the idea of some intelligent cause or author" when we attend to 'original causes' and not 'immediate causes' in nature.

It is Philo's comments with respect to his belief in design and God's signs in the world that are his confession of belief in an intelligent designer, a belief that is arrived at by an irregular argument and which relieves the distress in which the remote analogy proposition places the well-disposed mind.

However, we now need to ask: what kind of religious belief is contained in this belief in an intelligent designer, arrived at by the irregular argument? I do not think that the term 'religious belief' is even appropriate. In fact, Philo spends some time contrasting "natural inclination" with "religious motives" and defends the superiority of natural inclination in matters of morals and behaviour (see D 221-23/178-79). Philo shows Cleanthes in parts 10 and 11 that even the benevolence of the Deity cannot be retained—the Deity exhibits only indifference towards the world. The traditional roles of the Deity as commanding devotion, determining morality, and rewarding goodness, as being a God to whom one could 'bend the knee', are gone. Without a God to impose moral duties and obligations, traditional religious belief cannot be supported. All we are able to claim is that the world has an intelligent designer. However, this is not an unimportant claim; for example, science requires an orderly world, which an intelligent designer would bring about, for an organized investigation of that world. Such an investigation proceeds on the basis of finding causes for observed effects, possible only where the data are experienced in terms of means to ends relations and coherence of parts.

This kind of belief carries none of the "pernicious consequences" (D 223/179) of traditional or organized religion, what Hume calls "vulgar superstition" (D 222). Judgements of morality and justice are made on the basis of our own natural inclinations, sentiments and feelings. Such a belief would not give rise to the mischief and harm that often result from traditional religion. Adoration is paid to the divine being when one surveys the wondrous works of nature and contemplates their cause.

Let us return now to Gaskin's denial that there are two arguments in the *Dialogues*. He states that "we have a strong—but not irresistible—propensity to believe in god(s) from the fact of natural order: a propensity we misread as the soundness of the design argument" (Gaskin, 6), and later argues that "the feeling for design is not a new argument, irregular or otherwise, nor does it add any new ground of assent to the old design argument" (Gaskin, 129).

Gaskin makes this claim in the context of acknowledging the difficulty that is presented for his contention that "belief in god is a vestigial rational belief" by "the enthusiasm with which Philo ... abandons his sceptical case" in part 12 (Gaskin, 126). The wider context of this statement is Gaskin's contention that the belief in an intelligent designer is not a natural belief. However, Gaskin regards the statement of belief to be the remote analogy proposition and Philo's positions in part 12 to be the result of combining the weak rational probability of the Argument from Design as expressed in that proposition with the propensity or feeling to "'see' design in natural order—a propensity which surfaced as Cleanthes' 'irregular' argument" (Gaskin, 127). Thus, in presenting the irregular argument, Cleanthes is not adding any "rational weight" to his design argument but is simply "reaffirming the obviousness of its conclusion" (Gaskin, 128). The objections that Philo presents in the middle parts of the *Dialogues* do not show the Argument to be a failure, but indicate the very weak probable nature of its conclusion; as such, it attracts only plain, philosophical assent. In the end, though, it is accepted on the strength of the propensity to see design in nature.

There are some similarities between Gaskin's position and my own. The weakness of Cleanthes' Design Argument entitles it only to receive rational philosophical assent, and his irregular argument is the articulation of his propensity to see design in nature. Several points need to be made with regard to Gaskin's position. First, Gaskin is correct that Cleanthes' irregular argument does add rational weight to his Argument from Design—but it is not intended to do so, as it is not a rational argument. Second, it is only *Cleanthes'* irregular argument that Gaskin addresses. He does not acknowledge, as I have argued above, that *Philo* also offers an irregular argument for religious belief,

and that it is this belief that I regard to be the positive statement of belief in the *Dialogues*. In denying the presence of an irregular argument for Cleanthes, Gaskin has also denied it for Philo. Third, according to Gaskin's interpretation, Philo would be accepting in part 12 all that Cleanthes has argued for in the *Dialogues*—the Argument from Design (part 2) and strength of its (probable) conclusion reaffirmed by the feeling for design/irregular argument (part 3). Philo's objections in parts 2 and 4-11 consist only of "philosophical debate" (Gaskin, 128), of pointing out the probable nature of the conclusion. Part 12 contains his acceptance of the Argument, in spite of its weaknesses, on the basis of the design propensity. If this were the case, though, Philo could have accepted it after Cleanthes presents his irregular argument in part 3, as the objections Philo raises in part 2 (with respect to the lack of proportion and dissimilarities between the objects, the comparison of unique items, etc.) would have been sufficient to establish the probable nature of its conclusion (see above). But Philo is silent in part 3.

However, as I have argued above, the 'feeling for design' that Philo expresses in part 12 contains no reference to divine intelligence being like human intelligence—Philo's objections in parts 4-8 are directed towards Cleanthes' claims in his regular and irregular arguments that the data in the world allow an analogical inference to the intelligence of the designer of the world. The remote analogy proposition ("*that the cause or causes of order in the universe*") is the result of any argument that proceeds by means of analogy, whether regular or irregular. The irregular argument articulated by Philo that is the expression of the propensity to design contains no analogy, and is based on the acknowledgement and recognition of the signs God has placed in the world.

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1. I am greatly indebted to Stanley Tweyman for sparking my interest in this intriguing work. His suggestions and comments on earlier drafts of this paper were extremely valuable. I have also relied upon his book, *Scepticism and Belief in Hume's "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion"* (Dordrecht, 1986), and the Introduction to his edition of the *Dialogues* (London; New York, 1991).
2. References to David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* are given first to the Kemp Smith edition (Indianapolis, 1947), and second to the Tweyman edition (above, n. 1); for example, D 227/184.

3. The importance of the irregular argument is also emphasized by Tweyman (above, n. 1) in the Introduction to his new edition of the *Dialogues*. In his discussion of such arguments in his analysis of part 3, he states that "the task of the commentator is now also seen to be more complicated, inasmuch as an understanding of the *Dialogues* requires not only seeing the connection between the analogical argument presented in Part 2 and the final pronouncement in Part 12 'that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence' (D 227), but also determining the connection (if any) between the natural argument advocated in Part 3 and this final pronouncement." It is to this task that this paper is directed.
4. In the interpretive essay to his edition of the *Dialogues*, Nelson Pike states that the irregular argument is worthy of consideration, but he is not convinced it is correct. He regards both the regular and irregular arguments to be instances of rational activity, but a different kind of activity is involved in the two cases—the difference lies in the fact that the inference in the irregular argument is drawn directly from the data. However, according to Pike, Philo's 'confession of faith' occurs at D 217-18—the expression of the remote analogy proposition. *Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (London, 1985)
5. J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2d ed. (Atlantic Highland, N.J., 1988), 6.
6. Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Powers of the Human Mind* (London, 1827).
7. Reid then utilizes this principle to argue that since there are clear signs of wisdom and intelligence in the works of nature, they are the effect of an intelligent cause.
8. Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (London, 1853), 405-6.
9. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1987) (hereafter cited as "T").
10. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 148 (hereafter cited as "E").
11. One might see a parallel between regular and irregular arguments and ethical theories that proceed by means of the reasoned application of principles and emotivism.
12. Tweyman, *Scepticism and Belief* (above, n. 1), 52.
13. In parts 4 and 5 he disputes the rational nature of the world, and thus an inference to a rational cause, and points out the consequences of holding an anthropomorphic conception of God

(God's finitude); in part 6, he proposes that the nature of the world might be organic and not mechanical; in part 7, he offers principles of generation other than reason; and he claims in part 8 that the world need not have a designing principle. In parts 10 and 11, he shows Cleanthes that nothing can be said with respect to God's benevolence.

14. "The order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind" (T 633n).
15. Part 12 is devoted to the correction of the 'undistinguished' doubts, i.e., ones that do not differentiate between what is acceptable and unacceptable in an argument; see Tweyman, *Scepticism and Belief* (above, n. 1), 122. These doubts have been corrected by the end of the eighth paragraph of part 12: as "there is 'some remote inconceivable analogy' between God and human intelligence, it is obvious that no additional sceptical attack is either anticipated or offered" (ibid., 155).
16. See, for example, Pike's commentary in his edition of the *Dialogues* (above, n. 4), and Wm. Parent, "Philo's Confession," *Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1976): 63-68.
17. It is interesting to note that Hume added the word "probably" to the text, thus further moderating the strength of the analogy.
18. David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. H. E. Root (Stanford, California, 1967), 74.