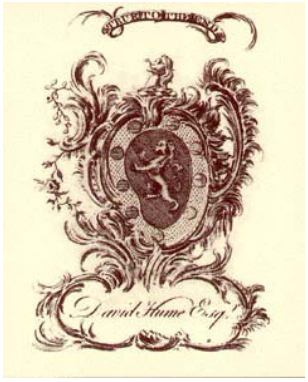

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A book familiar to many of us, *Hume, Newton and the Design Argument*, originally published in 1965, was recently reissued.[1] The original work traces natural theology and the design argument from antiquity to the present. It analyses Hume's critique in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, and shows one of his main targets to be the Newtonian formulation of the design argument and its effort to exploit science for religious purposes. In the reissued edition, a supplementary essay is added, "The *Dialogues* as a Work of Art." In this essay, Hurlbutt argues that Hume used the dialogue form because he believed it to be an effective way to explore and expressively reveal the dialectical structure of certain kinds of philosophical and religious belief.

In my own work on Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,[2] I acknowledge the importance of the dramatic components present in this work: that Pamphilus is a student of Cleanthes; that the initial assessment of the three speakers is provided by Hermippus (of whom we know nothing); that Pamphilus tells us that Philo was "a little embarrassed and confounded" after hearing Cleanthes' illustrative analogies in part 3; that Philo distances himself at the end of part 8 from the sceptic's attack on all religious systems, and, in particular, from the attack in parts 2-8 in regard to Cleanthes' Argument from Design; that Demea's a priori argument in part 9 is criticized largely by Cleanthes rather than, as we might have expected, by Philo; that Demea takes leave of the discussion at the end of part 11; that Philo speaks of his "unfeigned sentiments" on the subject of natural religion in part 12; that the final pronouncement on the whole of natural theology (spoken by Philo) is regarded as the position which "some people seem to maintain"; that it is Pamphilus who, at the end of the *Dialogues*, assesses the 'principles' of the three main speakers; and that Hume speaks in his own person only once in this work, and then only in a footnote—these matters and several others were viewed as relevant to understanding the work as a whole and, therefore, were dealt with at great length.

In his essay, Hurlbutt treats a familiar theme in a novel way. He supports the view, popularized largely by Norman Kemp Smith, that the literature on the *Dialogues* does not ordinarily take seriously the

fact that Hume chose to produce the *Dialogues* as a work of art. Hurlbutt therefore insists that he will not analyse the *Dialogues* as an argumentative essay "that is in an external fashion rhetorically embellished, and thus made more 'artful', in order to manipulate the reader and to hide or distance the author from the opinions therein" (p. 213). Such views, he urges, impoverish both Hume and the *Dialogues* by implying that he is deceitful, and by severely limiting the rich character of the *Dialogues*: "I assume that Hume's decision to set the religious and theological arguments out in dialogue form was a rational act in a deeper sense, a sense tied to the things a successful work of art can do; things that a scientific essay, or even an 'artful essay', cannot do, or do so well" (ibid.).

The main theme of Hurlbutt's essay—also its most original feature—is that by focusing on the *Dialogues* as a work of art, we will come to see that "a set of explicit arguments and beliefs are set out, in a series of linked episodes, by a group of explicit speakers. By processes of abstraction we can discover an implicit argument that is not wholly identical with any explicit ones, and an implicit speaker not identical with any one of the explicit speakers" (p. 215). Hurlbutt concludes by asserting that he "hopes to identify both the implicit argument and the implicit speaker with David Hume" (ibid.). Accordingly, Hurlbutt urges that Hume's thoughts and attitudes toward theology and religion cannot be identified with those of any one of the explicit speakers, such as Philo or Cleanthes: "Rather, they must be identified with those of an implicit speaker, and the concept of an implicit speaker is a function of suggested or implicit meaning. And this last, of course, is a concept of art and aesthetics" (p. 216).

Hurlbutt interprets Cleanthes' Argument from Design along the following lines. In all instances human machines have been observed to exhibit x order and y means-ends adjustment, and have z intelligence as a cause. Therefore, it is probable that any object that has x and y will have intelligence z as a cause. The world and its parts have x and y, and therefore probably have z. Hurlbutt sees Philo in part 2 as offering two main criticisms: (a) the similarities between human contrivances and the world and its parts are quite weak, and (b) the presupposed general causal laws, which require the repeated observation of the conjunction of the objects, are lacking. Now, it is at this point that Hurlbutt's argument takes a strange turn. Since we have not observed the origin of worlds (Philo's point in part 2 being that *only* in this way can we have causal knowledge of the origin of our world), Hurlbutt concludes that Cleanthes' argument cannot be regarded as "'regular' Newtonian experimental reasoning about causes and effects, as designated by Hume," but rather "the argument must be considered to be an 'irregular' causal argument, in which only resemblance, but

not constant conjunction, holds" (p. 220). He admits that the term 'irregular' does not appear in part 2, and maintains as well that the absence of constant conjunction establishes that "the claim the design argument is an instance of scientific method is completely refuted" (ibid.). Nevertheless, "since this critical argument is later accepted by Cleanthes, it can be conceived, in the abstract, as one part of the view of the implicit speaker. It is, of course, part of the abstracted argument" (ibid.).

I have a number of difficulties with Hurlbutt's analysis on this point. First, in part 2, Cleanthes never acknowledges that any of Philo's criticisms have relevance, and therefore he never acknowledges that they weaken the Argument from Design: Cleanthes' insistence that the noted similarities between machines and the design of the world consist in means to ends relations and a coherence of parts is held by him to establish *an exact resemblance* between the world and machines. Hence, for Cleanthes, if an exact resemblance is established between the world and machines, and the causal connection between intelligence (as cause) and means to ends relations and coherence of parts (as effect) has been established through observed regularities, then the Argument from Design has met all the rules of analogy. There is no evidence in part 2 that Cleanthes has been moved by any of the criticisms Philo has offered. In other words, in part 2, Cleanthes has only offered a 'regular' causal argument. At the beginning of part 3, Cleanthes accuses Philo of intellectual blindness, which would, indeed, be strange, if he considers that his 'regular' Argument from Design—the only argument he offers in part 2—has been refuted. In fact, in the opening paragraph of part 3, Cleanthes insists that the similarity between the works of nature and of art is self-evident and undeniable. He urges, therefore, 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." Again, these comments would be somewhat strange coming from Cleanthes, if he considered the 'regular' Argument from Design to have been refuted.

I conclude that there is no basis for holding, as Hurlbutt claims, that there is an implicit argument and an implicit speaker, both of which are to be identified with Hume, in part 2 of the *Dialogues*. Since Hurlbutt regards Cleanthes as conceding at the end of part 2 that he has "lost the major elements of his argument—that is, both the proof of a Designer-Cause, and the claim to a Newtonian scientific methodology" (p. 220), he interprets part 3 as providing a reformulated argument in the two illustrative analogies (the Articulate Voice and Living Vegetable Library). Hurlbutt indicates (p. 222) that it is of great importance that we see that the dramatic as well as the logical or

cognitive sequence of the *Dialogues* requires that this formulation of the design argument by Cleanthes in part 3 be different and not just a repetition of that of part 2. He continues: "It must be of such a logical nature that it (a) responds in some way or ways to Philo's critique; and it (b) should explain Philo's embarrassment and confusion; and finally, (c) it should set the stage for the following cognitive and dramatic sequence." He argues that the illustrative analogies provide a reformulated argument which involves an appeal to natural propensity, or natural instinct (we move immediately to the inference of an intelligent cause for the Articulate Voice and Vegetables Volumes, even if the argument is contrary to the principles of logic); and does so in a way analogous to the views found in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (p. 222) when Hume deals with our belief in the continued and independent existence of objects.

What I now want to address is whether the instinctive account satisfies the three points mentioned by Hurlbutt. Does it, then, respond in some way or ways to Philo's critique (Hurlbutt's first point)? Now, Hurlbutt holds that it does counter Philo's criticisms of the first formulation,[3] because the two illustrations show that we may be instinctively led to believe in an intelligent, original cause (of the articulate voice heard from the clouds, of the organic volumes) without experiencing constant conjunction between the effect and the cause. While not in any way seeking to deny that the instinctive account is *part of* these two illustrations, I believe that it is important to understand that if, as I have argued elsewhere,[4] Cleanthes, in part 2, is not actually moved to give up the analogical Argument from Design, then the instinctive account of the illustrative analogies in part 3 does not show anything about Cleanthes' resistance to Philo's criticisms in part 2. Accordingly, if at least part of the intention behind the two illustrations is to reply to the analogical Argument from Design, then the two illustrations must also contain analogical arguments which Cleanthes thinks can be used to help Philo appreciate the analogical Argument from Design. Since Hurlbutt regards the analogical argument as devastated in part 2, he misses entirely the analogical reasoning involved in these illustrations. Also, of course, since Philo's attack in parts 4-8 of the *Dialogues* concentrates exclusively on the analogical Argument from Design, Hurlbutt's instinctive account of the illustrations, and insistence that Philo's attack on Cleanthes' analogical argument in part 2 has been devastating, leaves the reader bewildered as to why parts 4-8 are included in the *Dialogues*.

Does the instinctive account of the illustrative analogies explain Philo's embarrassment and confusion (Hurlbutt's second point)? Now, Hurlbutt takes it for granted, and, therefore, never defends the view, that when Pamphilus tells us at the end of Cleanthes' presentation of

the two illustrative analogies that he could observe that "Philo was a little embarrassed and confounded," this is to be regarded as an admission of failure or losing on the part of Philo. Hurlbutt gives no weight to the view (variously discussed by Norman Kemp Smith, myself, and others) that Philo may be embarrassed and confounded because of the weakness of Cleanthes' illustrations in strengthening the Argument from Design. In any case, Hurlbutt's rationale for Philo's embarrassment and confusion is this: Philo realizes that he cannot, through sceptical arguments, refute the instinctive account or natural propensity version of the Design Argument developed in the two illustrations in part 3. As Hurlbutt puts it: "Philo, in that he does not (and will not) respond to the second formulation of the argument, recognizes that his sceptical arguments are not convincing in the face of natural propensities" (p. 228). The problem with Hurlbutt's account at this stage is actually quite elementary, namely, even granting that the instinctive account of a belief in an Intelligent Designer is the sole view proposed in the two illustrative analogies, this, in itself, does not establish that he has succeeded in showing that an instinctive account also works in the case of the design of the world and an intelligent cause of design. What Hurlbutt must establish, but does not in any way address, is how the Articulate Voice and Vegetable Library shed any light on the case of God and the design of the world. Unfortunately, Hurlbutt accepts the success of these illustrations without raising and without answering questions as to their relevance to the main point of contention between Philo and Cleanthes—is there any reason or evidence to hold that the cause of the design of the world is an intelligent being?

Does the instinctive account explain the following cognitive and dramatic sequences of the *Dialogues*—parts 4-11 (Hurlbutt's third point)? Hurlbutt writes on this: "Philo, in that he does not (and will not) respond to the second formulation of the argument, recognizes that his sceptical arguments are not convincing in the face of natural propensities, and he changes the direction of the argument to the nature, as distinct from the existence, of God" (p. 228). Several pages later, he follows up on this by urging that when Philo re-enters the debate, "a series of argument ensues in which Philo makes use of the same methods employed by Cleanthes in the design argument (in Part 2) in order to deduce a series of conclusions inimical to some of the basic tenets of traditional Christianity" (p. 231). With the exception of part 4 of the *Dialogues* with respect to which he is silent, Hurlbutt offers a brief summary of parts 5-11 culminating in his claim, culled from part 11, that "even if we assume the existence of a Designer-God, *it* may be nonmoral, or partly moral, or even morally malevolent. ... While it is still admitted that there is a low probability that the cause of the world

is analogous to the mind of man, this affords practically no support to traditional Christianity" (p. 232).

Hurlbutt makes a number of errors here. First, the illustrations in part 3 do not move Philo to change the direction of the argument to the nature as distinct from the existence of God. All three speakers agree, as early as part 1, that the existence of God is not the issue among them—only the nature of God will be debated. Furthermore, Philo's criticisms in part 2 centre around his concern that Cleanthes (in his opinion) has failed to show that only thought or intelligence could have designed this world. Philo's criticisms in parts 4-8 are designed to show Cleanthes either that the intelligence hypothesis runs into difficulties or 'inconveniences' (in part 4, the infinite regress difficulty is presented; in part 5, Cleanthes is shown absurdities which follow from the intelligence hypothesis) or that (as parts 6-8 show) an endless list of competing hypotheses can be generated if the only data employed are means to ends relations and a coherence of parts. Nothing in all of this appears to single out Christianity, as Hurlbutt suggests. The attack is directed against employing natural religion to seek knowledge of the Designer of the world. However, of greater concern is the fact that Hurlbutt fails to understand that Philo 'makes use of the same methods employed by Cleanthes in the design argument' because it is the analogical Argument from Design which continues to be under attack, and as Philo had explained to Demea in part 2, he is arguing with Cleanthes "in his own way" (D 111). It is because Cleanthes continues to hold to the analogical argument that Philo, in parts 4-8, turns the methods employed by Cleanthes in the analogical argument against Cleanthes. On Hurlbutt's account, no sense can be given as to why Philo offers his criticisms in parts 4-8. His account offers no explanation for the inclusion of part 9 (Demea's priori argument); but even more damaging to Hurlbutt's position, he fails to explain the inclusion of parts 10 and 11. Parts 10 and 11—those sections which investigate whether the design of the world supports the hypothesis of the benevolence of the Designer, and which conclude with the hypothesis of indifference of the designer—are not an attack on Christianity. These sections show the failure of natural religion to establish the benevolence of the Designer of the world. In other words, these sections are additions to the discussion of natural religion begun in part 2. In part 2, the concern is with whether, given the design of the world, we can reason to the intelligence of the designer of the world; in parts 10 and 11, the concern is with whether, given the design of the world, we can reason to the benevolence of the Designer of the world.

Philo's entire critique, from parts 4-11, focuses on the single most important claim of natural theology, namely, that the design of the world provides a basis for reasoning analogically to the nature of its

Designer. Although Hurlbutt recognizes that Philo makes use of the same analogical methods employed by Cleanthes in part 2, his insistence that the analogical argument has been devastated in part 2 and only the instinctive account remains after part 3, leaves the reader without any justification for the inclusion of parts 4-11, other than to say that these sections show that the design argument offers practically no support to traditional Christianity. However, if the analogical argument has been refuted in part 2, as Hurlbutt claims, then that argument can offer no support to Christianity. Why, then, should Hume bother to offer multiple parts of the book showing that an argument, which has already been refuted, offers no support to Christianity?

In the final part of his discussion, Hurlbutt addresses the exchange in part 12. He indicates that three conclusions are drawn:

> (a) There is a belief in the remote probability of the existence of a cause of the world bearing a similarity to human intelligence that is so potentially limited as to be shared with a rotting turnip or the generation of an animal; (b) The cause believed in has neither moral features nor moral implications; (c) Religious beliefs that go beyond this minimal level, such as traditional orthodox superstitions and enthusiasms, are evil in their consequences, not the least of which is the tendency to interfere with the natural sentiments that support reasonable human morality. (p. 236)

Now, because Hurlbutt fails to understand that even in part 12, both the analogical Argument from Design and the irregular Argument from Design are to be finally assessed, and neither has been finally refuted, he regards Philo's comments in paragraphs 2 and 3 of part 12 (Philo's discussion of how science leads us insensibly to acknowledge a first intelligent author) as identical to his claim in the penultimate paragraph where he says that the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, "resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, *that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*." He fails to note, therefore, that paragraphs 2 and 3 are addressing the irregular argument, whereas the penultimate paragraph gives Hume's final word on the analogical argument.[5] The conclusions are neither identical, nor are they of equal practical value. The irregular view of the Designer as intelligent is the foundation of science and of rational inquiry into nature; the conclusion of the analogical argument stated in the penultimate paragraph is the position which is shown to have no practical or moral significance.

The main point behind Hurlbutt's analysis of the *Dialogues* as a work of art is to discern the views of the implicit speaker—in this case, Hume himself—through the views and dramatic elements revealed in the text. Toward the end of his analysis, he writes:

> Who is Hume in the *Dialogues*? Hume is the implicit speaker, the person who expresses the beliefs and emotions (indicated above) related to the explicit speakers. And so we can make a fresh, but not completely original, attempt to settle an old problem. If in the *Dialogues* Hume is the implicit speaker who asserts the implicit arguments and expresses the emotions characteristic of the related images, ironies, ways of speaking, etc., *then he cannot be identified with any one of the explicit speakers*. He is the "persona" who sets out the abstracted argument; and thus he is all the characters insofar as the frustrations and dissatisfactions are concerned, and at the same time he is the ambivalent person who is one "self" holds the conflicting beliefs and attitudes of both Cleanthes and Philo. The *Dialogues* may also be viewed as the autobiography, or the history, through characterization, of the arguments and emotions attendant on Hume's frustrating and often despairing efforts to make theological progress—as the march toward their ambivalent conclusion. (p. 240-41)

The general difficulty with Hurlbutt's position of an implicit speaker and an implicit or abstracted argument is that throughout the discussion, the ownership of an argument or position is not in question. Whether we are dealing with the analogical Argument from Design, or the irregular argument, whatever is said, argued, or urged, is easily identified with one or more of the speakers. There is no abstract or implicit argument which is implied by the statements of the explicit speakers. The only passage in the *Dialogues* which cannot be attributed explicitly or implicitly to any of the speakers in the work is the footnote in part 12 (D 177), in which *Hume* analyses the dispute as a dispute between the sceptics and the dogmatists. Unfortunately, Professor Hurlbutt does not refer to this passage, nor does he see that when Hume is intent on making his own views known, he has a clear means of doing so.

That the *Dialogues* is filled with dramatic and literary elements is beyond question. However, that these elements can be so construed as to reveal that, in addition to Demea, Cleanthes, and Philo, there is a fourth main speaker, Hume, is extremely doubtful.

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1. Robert H. Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument*, rev. ed. (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1985). References to this work will be made in the body of the paper.
2. See, for example, my *Scepticism and Belief in Hume's "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion"* (The Hague, 1986); and the introduction to my new edition of the *Dialogues* (London and New York, 1991) (hereafter cited as "D").
3. Hurlbutt writes: "Philo has won in that he has forced Cleanthes to give up scientific pretensions of the design argument, and to appeal in their place to a kind of irresistible impulse" (p. 227).
4. See my *Scepticism and Belief* (above, n. 2), chaps. 3 and 4.
5. See the last chapter of my *Scepticism and Belief* (above, n. 2).