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Hume Studies Volume XXVIX, Number 1 (April, 2003) 99-123.

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KENNETH WILLIFORD

I. Introductory

Hume's examination of the causal maxim in 1.3.3 of *A Treatise of Human Nature* (hereafter T) can be considered, at least in part, a thinly veiled critique of the cosmological argument, attacking as it does the privileged status of the principle upon which that proof rests (see T 1.3.3.1–9; SBN 78–82).¹ As well, Hume's remarks on the impossibility of demonstrating matters of fact *a priori* in part 3 of section 12 of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (hereafter EHU) clearly strike at the heart of the ontological argument, even if not explicitly (see EHU 12.24–34; SBN 161–5).² Unfortunately, it is only in the very brief part 9 of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (hereafter DNR) that Hume directly discusses, at any length, the attempt to demonstrate *a priori* the existence of a deity (see DNR 9.1–11; 188–92).³ The argument, put forward by Demea, and Cleanthes's criticism of that argument take up so little space that for ease of reference I will reproduce them before we proceed any further. Part 9 consists of eleven paragraphs, and in accordance with a now fairly common convention, I will refer to the paragraphs by number.⁴ I reproduce only those paragraphs that will be the focus of this paper. Demea's Argument (DNR 9.3; 188–9):

[3] The argument, replied DEMEA, which I would insist on is the common one. Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its

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existence; it being absolutely impossible for any thing to produce itself, or be the cause of its own existence. In mounting up, therefore, from effects to causes, we must either go on in tracing an infinite succession, without any ultimate cause at all, or must at last have recourse to some ultimate cause, that is *necessarily* existent: Now that the first supposition is absurd may be thus proved. In the infinite chain or succession of causes and effects, each single effect is determined to exist by the power and efficacy of that cause which immediately preceded; but the whole eternal chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by any thing: And yet it is evident that it requires a cause or reason, as much as any particular object, which begins to exist in time. The question is still reasonable, why this particular succession of causes existed from eternity, and not any other succession, or no succession at all. If there be no necessarily existent Being, any supposition, which can be formed, is equally possible; nor is there any more absurdity in nothing's having existed from eternity, than there is in that succession of causes, which constitutes the universe. What was it, then, which determined something to exist rather than nothing, and bestowed being on a particular possibility, exclusive of the rest? *External causes*, there are supposed to be none. *Chance* is a word without meaning. Was it *nothing*? But that can never produce anything. We must, therefore, have recourse to a necessarily existent Being, who carries the REASON of his existence in himself; and who cannot be supposed not to exist without an express contradiction. There is consequently such a Being, that is, there is a Deity.

Cleanthes's Core Response (DNR 9.5–6; 189–90):

[5] I shall begin with observing, that there is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a matter of fact, or to prove it by any arguments *a priori*. Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing, that is distinctly conceivable, implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no Being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no Being, whose existence is demonstrable. I propose this argument as entirely decisive, and am willing to rest the whole controversy upon it.

[6] It is pretended that the Deity is a necessarily existent Being; and this necessity of his existence is attempted to be explained by asserting, that, if we knew his whole essence or nature, we should perceive it to be as impossible for him not to exist as for twice two not to be four. But it is evident, this can never happen, while our faculties remain the same as at present. It will still be possible for us, at any time, to conceive the non-existence of what we formerly conceived to exist; nor can the mind ever lie under a necessity of supposing any object to remain always in being; in the same manner as we lie under a necessity of always conceiving twice two to be four. The words, therefore, *necessary existence*, have no meaning; or, which is the same thing, none that is consistent.

Since the 1978 publication of David Stove's uncharitable "Part IX of Hume's *Dialogues*" there has been a fairly steady, though not overwhelming, stream of commentary on this part of the DNR.⁵ Not all of part 9 is going to be relevant to my present concerns. In particular, I shall have next to nothing to say about the various formulations of the causal maxim (hereafter PSR) that some commentators have worried about,⁶ and next to nothing to say about the so-called "Hume-Edwards Principle."⁷ In what follows I will concentrate on the criticism of Demea's *a priori* proof contained in paragraphs 5 and 6 and reproduced above. Hume has Cleanthes say that he is "willing to rest the whole controversy" on the claim that there is no being the supposition of whose non-existence implies a contradiction, and I thus take it that this is the criticism Hume himself viewed as the most important.

I have argued elsewhere that many of the objections raised against Kant's criticism of the cosmological argument vaporize once that criticism is interpreted properly, once, that is, one understands the kind of argument Kant took himself to be criticizing.⁸ With the misunderstandings resolved, it becomes clear that, though Kant's arguments may not rule out every possible version of the cosmological proof, they are devastating to the version he had in mind. In this paper, I shall argue that similar misunderstandings beset the interpretation of Cleanthes's criticism of Demea's proof.⁹ And, likewise, once these misunderstandings are cleared up, Hume's philosophical reputation, at least relative to his historical context, emerges unscathed in this particular regard. Note that I do not take myself to be offering a full vindication of Hume's criticism of philosophical theology. I claim only to be showing that a historically informed understanding of the argument Hume took himself to be criticizing in Part 9 renders his criticism of that argument intelligible and quite to the point.

In section II I offer an interpretation of Demea's *a priori* theistic proof and clear up what I regard to be misinterpretations of it. In section III I offer an analysis of Cleanthes's "decisive" objection to the proof and clear up misinterpretations of it. In the concluding section IV I make some brief comments on the historical significance of the objection.

II. Demea's *a priori* Proof

There has been much disagreement about the *kind* of argument Demea is offering and about how its premises should be reconstructed. On the first head, some commentators find Demea to be offering a version of the cosmological argument while others identify it as a version of the ontological argument. James Dye, for example, claims:

Demea's *a priori* proof is not a version of the ontological argument, which *begins* with the concept of a necessarily existent being and proceeds to deduce the actual existence of that being. Demea's argument instead *concludes* with a necessarily existent being because it seems that such a being is required to provide a complete causal explanation of particular existences. This difference is crucial for assessing the relative significance of objections to the argument.

It is . . . important that Cleanthes' arguments in paragraphs 8 and 9 [the arguments that I shall not be considering here in any detail] succeed lest his previous *a priori* strictures on 'necessary existence' be overridden by the exigencies of explanatory completeness. (Dye, 125–6)

Presumably, then, Dye regards Demea's argument as a version of the cosmological proof, as do Rowe, Khamara, and Campbell (to name only three), and accordingly maintains that Cleanthes's criticism of the notion of necessary existence is, contrary to what Cleanthes says, not decisive.¹⁰ Thus, if Dye is right, then either Hume is having Cleanthes offer a weak or dependent criticism of the argument, or Hume himself was mistaken about the import of the "*a priori* strictures on 'necessary existence,'" or, as Dye himself seems to think, Hume has Cleanthes offer additional criticisms of Demea's proof in order to secure the claim that the notion of a necessarily existent being is not, despite its *prima facie* incoherence, an explanatorily necessary notion, one demanded "by the exigencies of explanatory completeness." It is, however, doubtful that such exigencies *could* either make a meaningless notion

meaningful or a logical falsehood an explanatory necessity. Rather, I suggest, we should regard the “decisive” objection as demonstrating, in *reductio* fashion, that at least one of the premises of the argument must be false. The ensuing consideration (in DNR 9.8–9; 190–1) of the “Hume-Edwards Principle,” according to which the PSR is fully satisfied by an infinite causal chain, is thus motivated by Cleanthes’s Core Response.

It should be clear, then, that I am driven by Cleanthes’s claim that he is willing to rest the whole of the controversy on his contention that no existence claim is demonstrable *a priori*. I am *assuming* that Cleanthes is here speaking for Hume.¹¹ Thus, if an independently plausible interpretation of Demea’s argument can be found that makes sense of Cleanthes’s contention, this will serve to support that interpretation and to defend Hume’s philosophical reputation—again, in this single regard and historical context.

On the way to such an interpretation, we must first note the other label that is placed on Demea’s argument. Keith Yandell, with no argument to speak of, identifies Demea’s proof as a version of the ontological argument (Yandell, 227). The problem with this easy identification is that it overlooks precisely what Dye points out. Demea does not *start* with the concept of a ontologically perfect or necessary being and deduce therefrom its actuality. Rather, Demea starts with a version of the causal maxim and the existence of a causal chain and eventually *arrives* at the conclusion that the ultimate cause is a (logically) necessarily existing being (cf. Stewart, 243–4). Does this mean that Dye is right in holding Cleanthes’s criticism of the notion of necessary existence, the notion crucial to the ontological argument, to be less than decisive? I think not.

The problem is that the argument Demea proffers is complex. Perhaps Kemp Smith’s discussion of part 9 of the DNR has been largely forgotten. He writes, “The argument which Demea has in view is a combination of the cosmological and ontological arguments, and is, in fact, a brief restatement of the argument formulated by Clarke”¹² If there has been confusion over the nature of Demea’s argument, it is, I suggest, because Kemp Smith is *close* to being right: the argument involves distinct elements usually restricted to one or the other of these two theistic proofs. Commentators, oblivious of the complex nature of the argument, have fastened upon one facet or the other to the detriment of their interpretations. If the “cosmological” part of the argument is ignored, then, as M.A. Stewart points out, it is not clear what we are to make of Demea’s use of the causal maxim, and it is not clear what we are to make of the portion of Cleanthes’s criticism that depends upon an appeal to the “Hume-Edwards Principle” (see Stewart, 243). But if Demea’s recourse to the notion of a (logically) necessary being is ignored (the “ontological” part of the argument), then it is not clear what to make of Cleanthes’s “decisive” criticism of the proof.

The contours of the argument are clear enough, and do follow the pattern of Samuel Clarke's version of the proof, as Kemp Smith points out.¹³ The most important point to notice, for our purposes, is that Demea's argument, like Clarke's has a two-tiered structure.¹⁴ First, the explanatory need for an ultimate cause is generated by an application of the PSR. Then, the nature of this ultimate cause is specified so that it can be seen that it does not itself need further causal explanation.

I (rather informally) reconstruct Demea's argument along the following lines, leaving some trivial steps to the reader:¹⁵

Stage 1: The explanatory need for an ultimate cause, P1–P9

P1: Whatever exists must have either an external cause of or an internal reason for its existence. (PSR)¹⁶

P2: Something now exists (call it E). (implicit premise)¹⁷

P3: If something (logically) might not be, then it does not have an internal reason for its existence. (implicit premise—note the non-epistemic sense of 'might')

P4: E (logically) might not be. (implicit premise)

P5: E does not have an internal reason for its existence. (from P3–P4)

P6: E has an external cause of its existence. (from P1 and P5)

P7: The external cause of E must itself have an external cause . . . and so on, *ad infinitum*, (i.e., there is *only* an infinite regress of causes and effects external to and distinct from each other) without any ultimate cause at all, or there must be an ultimate cause.

P8: There cannot be *only* an infinite regress of external causes.¹⁸

P9: Therefore, there is an ultimate cause (a cause that does not itself have a *distinct* external cause).¹⁹ (from P7 and P8)

Stage 2: The nature of the ultimate cause, P10–P19

(Demea, recall, asks "What was it, then, which determined something to exist rather than nothing, and bestowed being on a particular possibility, exclusive of the rest?" [DNR 9.3; 189])

P10: The ultimate cause is either the external cause of itself or it has an internal reason for its existence. (from P1 and P9)

P11: Nothing can be the external cause of itself. (So the ultimate cause is not the external cause of itself.)

P12: The ultimate cause has an internal reason for its existence. (from P10 and P11)

P13: It is not the case that the ultimate cause (logically) might not be (i.e., the ultimate cause [logically] *must* be). (from P12 and P3, *modus tollens*)

P14: The ultimate cause is a logically necessary being. (immediate from P13)

P15: The ultimate cause is to be identified with either chance, nothing(ness), or the Deity. (implicit premise)

P16: Chance could not be a logically necessary being and thus is not the ultimate cause.

P17: Nothing(ness) could not be ultimate cause because *ex nihilo nihil fit*.²⁰

P18: The ultimate cause/logically necessary being is thus the Deity. (from P15–P17)

P19: Therefore, the Deity exists. (from P9 and P18)

The first stage of the argument only brings us up to the claim that there is an ultimate cause. Though this ultimate cause is called “necessarily existent” in Demea’s actual presentation of the first stage of the argument, just what that amounts to is not explicated until the second stage of the argument. There we learn that the ultimate cause must be a certain kind of being. Though the reasoning, as Demea presents it, is highly compressed, the necessary being must be a being “who carries the reason of his existence within himself,” or, alternatively, who “cannot be supposed not to exist without an express contradiction.” This looks, for all the world, like a *logically necessary* being. That is to say, it seems as if we have moved almost imperceptibly from the causal, explanatory, or hypothetical necessity of the ultimate cause to its *logical* necessity. The idea seems to be that only the postulation of such a being as the ultimate cause does not violate the PSR *cum* P8; and this is so because the being is of such a nature that it does not require further *causal* explanation. It no more requires causal explanation than do the facts that ground the truths of logic and mathematics.

What we must attempt to ascertain as clearly as possible is the kind of necessity this being is supposed to have. Since Demea says no more on this head, we shall have to have recourse to the argument upon which Demea’s proof is based, viz. the one proffered by Samuel Clarke. Fortunately, we need not look at each step as it appears in Clarke, for our question is very well defined: What did Clarke claim is the nature of the necessity appropriate to the being whose existence is purportedly demonstrated in his argument? Alternatively, what is the contradiction generated if one denies the existence of this being?

These two questions are different formulations of the same worry. If the necessity of the divine being is simply causal, then the contradiction generated by denying its existence will have to do with the PSR *cum* P8. That is,

supposing that PSR is necessarily true (and that the rest of the argument succeeds), in denying the conclusion we would be asserting both that there must be and therefore is an ultimate cause *and* that there is not one. On the other hand, if the necessity of the divine being is logical, then, in denying its existence, we will be putting forward a direct contradiction in terms. We will be saying that this being, due to its nature, must and therefore does exist *and* that it does not. What does Clarke say?

First, consider Clarke's very explicit claims about the nature of divine necessity:

That unchangeable and independent being which has existed from eternity, without any external cause of its existence, must be self-existent, that is, necessarily existing. For whatever exists must either have come into being out of nothing, absolutely without cause, or it must have been produced by some external cause, or it must be self-existent. Now to arise out of nothing absolutely without any cause has been already shown to be a plain contradiction. To have been produced by some external cause cannot possibly be true of every thing,²¹ but something must have existed eternally and independently, as has likewise been shown already. Which remains, therefore, [is] that that being which has existed independently from eternity must of necessity be self-existent.²²

In accordance with my reconstruction of the second stage of Demea's argument, Clarke eliminates certain *prima facie* possibilities here. The ultimate cause cannot be nothing; not everything can be produced by an external cause, on pain of an impossible regress or an impossible causal circle. All of these would, it is thought, violate the PSR *cum* P8 or the nature of the causal relation; thus, Clarke refers here to the *contradiction* of supposing something to arise out of nothing without a cause. The only remaining possibility is that the necessary being is *self-existent*. But what does this mean?

Clarke goes on:

Now to be self-existent is not to be produced by itself, for that is an express contradiction, but it is (which is the only idea we can frame of self-existence, and without which the word seems to have no signification at all)—it is, I say, to exist by an absolute necessity originally in the nature of the thing itself. And this necessity must be antecedent, not indeed in time, to the existence of the being itself (because that is eternal), but it must be antecedent in the natural order of our ideas to

our supposition of its being. That is, this necessity must not barely be consequent upon our supposition of the existence of such a being (for then it would not be a necessity absolutely such in itself, nor be the ground or foundation of the existence of anything, being on the contrary only a consequent of it), but it must antecedently force itself upon us whether we will or no, even when we are endeavoring to suppose that no such being exists. For example, when we are endeavoring to suppose that there is no being in the universe that exists necessarily, we always find in our minds (*besides the foregoing demonstration of something being self-existent from the impossibility of every thing's being dependent*) [emphasis added]—we always find in our minds, I say, some ideas, as of infinity and eternity, which to remove (that is, to suppose that there is no being, no substance in the universe to which these attributes or modes of existence are necessarily inherent) is a contradiction in the very terms. For modes and attributes exist only by the existence of the substance to which they belong. Now he that can suppose eternity and immensity, and consequently the substance by whose existence these modes or attributes exist, removed out of the universe, may, if he please, as easily remove the relation of equality between twice two and four. (Clarke, 12–13)

This passage shows us two very important things. First, the emphasized sentence shows that when he claims that it is a contradiction to suppose that this self-existent being does not exist Clarke is claiming something more than just that such a supposition would contradict the PSR *cum* P8. Clearly, he *does* think that, but in the nature of the self-existent being there is, according to Clarke, a kind of absolute and unconditioned necessity. The second point is that this necessity is, according to Clarke, on a par with the necessity that characterizes the proposition that twice two is four. Thus, the contradiction in supposing that the necessary being does not exist does not *merely* stem from the fact that this would contradict what the PSR *cum* P8 shows us to be hypothetically necessary. Though that is true, it is *also* the case that the kind of necessity the self-existent being has is such that denying that the being exists is like denying that two and two make four; it is, as he says, “a contradiction in the very terms.”

In case there is any doubt about this, Clarke continues as follows:

[T]he only true idea of a self-existent or necessarily existing being is the idea of a being the supposition of whose not-existing is an express contradiction. For, since it is absolutely impossible but there

must be somewhat self-existing, that is, [something] which exists by the necessity of its own nature, it is plain that that necessity cannot be a necessity consequent upon any foregoing supposition (because nothing can be antecedent to that which is self-existent, no not its will, so as to be the cause or ground of its own existence), but it must be a necessity absolutely such in its own nature. Now a necessity not relatively or consequentially, but absolutely such in its own nature, *is nothing else but its being a plain impossibility or implying a contradiction to suppose the contrary*. For instance, the relation of equality between twice two and four is an absolute necessity only because it is an immediate contradiction in terms to suppose them unequal. *This is the only idea we can frame of an absolute necessity, and to use the word in any other sense seems to be using it without any signification at all.*²³ [emphasis added]

I suggest that the only kind of necessity the first stage of Demea's (Clarke's) argument wins for the ultimate cause is one that is "consequent upon a foregoing supposition." That is to say, it is true that a contradiction would be generated if we denied that there must be an ultimate cause, as we would, in effect, be denying the PSR (supposing, again, that "Hume-Edwards Principle" is false). But, this is not enough. We need a further explication of the nature of the necessary being to which the first stage of the argument leads us. What *kind* of being could possibly exist without the supposition of anything else, without any *causal* antecedents and without any further, more fundamental principles grounding its existence?²⁴ Clarke's answer is that this being must be absolutely necessary, and that the *only notion* of absolute necessity we have is, so to say, *logical*. The emphasized passages indicate quite clearly that Clarke thinks that the only concept adequate to the kind of necessity characteristic of the ultimate cause is the concept of logical necessity, to put it anachronistically. In other words, if a being "carries the reason of its existence within itself" then the being exists with logical necessity, and it is a contradiction in terms to suppose that the being does not exist. There is simply no other possible analysis of the notion of the absolute necessity characteristic of the ultimate cause, according to Clarke. To use the term in any other way is to use "... it without any signification at all." We may well accuse Clarke postulating a conceptually or epistemically opaque logical necessity here. This is, in fact, one way of putting Hume's criticism of this claim. But that this is what Clarke says, and that this claim is more than is contained in what I have labeled the "first stage" of Demea's argument, has, I think, been made clear.²⁵ Note that using the contemporary phrase 'logical necessity' is *indeed warranted* precisely

because Clarke explicates the notion in terms of the *immediate contradiction* that arises if one supposes the contrary.²⁶

So then, the kind of necessity that the self-existent being is supposed to have, according to Demea and Clarke, is, using our terminology, logical. To suppose that this being does not exist is to suppose an *immediate contradiction* in terms. If this is the case, then it does indeed look as though Kemp Smith was, at least, on the right track. The “cosmological” part, the part that depends upon the PSR *cum* P8, is the first stage; the “ontological” part comes in the second stage where we must explicate the nature of the ultimate cause. But now, one wonders, if recourse must be made to logical necessity to fix the identity and nature of the ultimate cause, why not simply begin with that notion, and avoid the appeal to the PSR, etc., in the first stage? If it really is an *immediate contradiction* in terms to suppose that that being does not exist, why not begin one's proof with that consideration? This would render the appeal to the cosmological argument unnecessary.

III. Cleanthes's Core Response to Demea's Argument

Clearly, if Demea is claiming that the necessary being must exist as a matter of *logical necessity*, then Cleanthes's counter-argument that “Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no Being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction”²⁷ has some real bite. That is to say, Cleanthes's response does not miss the point, *if* Demea is claiming that the divine being is a logically necessary being *and even if* Demea does not derive the existence of that being in the manner of Anselm or Descartes. That is, the *identification* of the ultimate cause with a logically necessary being *is enough* to make the criticism relevant. But, this criticism is, as well, a criticism of the ontological argument. If Demea intended to have recourse to the *ratio Anselmi* (in some form), why didn't he simply trot it out at first? Why is there a first stage of the argument, one that depends on the PSR *cum* P8?

To answer this question, we look once again to Clarke. Clarke does indeed claim that the ontological argument has an “obscurity and defect in it”, namely, “that it seems to extend only to the nominal idea or mere definition of a self-existent being . . .” (Clarke, 16). “The bare having an idea of the proposition ‘there is a self-existent being,’” Clarke continues:

proves indeed the thing not to be impossible, for of an impossible proposition there can be no idea. But that it actually is, cannot be proved from the idea *unless* the certainty of the actual existence of

such a being follows from the possibility of the existence of such a being, which that it does in this particular case many learned men have thought [emphasis added]

But it is a much clearer and more convincing way of arguing, to demonstrate that there does actually exist without us a being whose existence is necessary and of itself, by showing the evident contradiction contained in the contrary supposition . . . , and at the same time the absolute impossibility of destroying or removing some ideas, as of eternity and immensity, which therefore must needs be modes or attributes of a necessary being actually existing. For if I have in my mind an idea of a thing, and cannot possibly in my imagination take away the idea of that thing as actually existing any more than I can change or take away the idea of the equality of twice two to four, the certainty of the existence of that thing is the same, and stands on the same foundation, as the certainty of the other relation. (Clarke, 16–17)

Though Clarke expresses qualified reservations about the ontological argument, he does reiterate the claim, which indeed embodies the central notion of the proof, that God exists with logical necessity. Clarke's further argument (about the ineliminability of the ideas of eternity and immensity) may even be a version of the ontological proof, in spite of Clarke's denial.²⁸

I suspect that what is motivating Clarke is more a matter of epistemology than of metaphysics. It seems that the ontological argument leaves one suspecting that it is a bit of philosophical legerdemain. On the other hand, Clarke seems to think, his approach allows us to *know* more easily that the common conclusion of the arguments is true. Starting with the chain of causes and effects and the PSR *cum* P8 allows us to know more easily that we are not merely playing a game with nominal ideas. We thus use the first stage of the argument to deduce that there is an ultimate cause. In the second stage of the argument we deduce that the only kind of being that could *be* an ultimate cause is the kind of logically necessary being with the concept of which the ontological argument *begins*.

But note, finally, that the main reason Clarke does not endorse the ontological argument is that he thinks God's essence or substance is conceptually and epistemically opaque. He has argued that God must be a logically necessary being, but he also maintains that the specific form that necessity takes, in God's case, is not conceptually or epistemically *transparent*, as it is in simple logic and simple arithmetic. Thus, even if one ends with the claim that God

is a logically necessary being, one cannot begin with the ontological argument: it would demand the conceptual and epistemic transparency of the nature of God to be convincing.²⁹

I have gone to the trouble of showing that Demea and Clarke have in mind what we would call logical necessity when they claim that the divine being is a necessary or self-existent being for a reason. The reason is that unless this is the case, the objection upon which Cleanthes rests his case is irrelevant. It is time we look more closely at that objection.

I reconstruct Cleanthes's response as follows (again, rather informally and leaving some trivial steps to the reader):³⁰

O1: No proposition is demonstrable (*a priori*) unless its negation implies a contradiction.

O2: No proposition expressing a distinctly conceivable state of affairs implies a contradiction.³¹

O3: States of affairs expressed by existential propositions *and their negations* are all distinctly conceivable.

O4: No negation of an existential proposition implies a contradiction. (from O2 and O3)

O5: Therefore, no existential proposition is demonstrable (*a priori*). (from O1 and O4)

O6: There is no Being, therefore, (the supposition of) whose non-existence implies a contradiction. (from O4)

O7: Consequently, there is no Being, whose existence is demonstrable (*a priori*). (from O1 and O6)

Some commentators object that Cleanthes is begging the question against Demea (and Clarke).³² Khamara, for example, claims that "for Clarke (or Demea) the counter-argument will have no swaying power," as he might have replied "I agree that whatever exists might not have existed; but with only one exception which you do not allow: namely, God as the ultimate cause. And I make this exception for the reasons adduced in my argument. It is no use just rejecting my conclusion without telling me what . . . is wrong with my argument" (Khamara, 49). What Khamara does not acknowledge is that the first stage of Demea's argument simply does not have the resources within it to demonstrate the existence of a *logically* necessary being. That claim comes only in the second stage of the argument where the kind of necessity involved in the divine nature is further explicated. According to Khamara's reconstruction of the argument, the logical necessity of the divine being is deduced in the first stage of the argument.³³ But Khamara does not show how this can be done. The closest Khamara comes to explaining the difficulty is when he claims that Hume

failed to appreciate that “. . . Clarke’s own views on causality and the causal principle were very different from his” (Khamara, 35). Indeed, they are certainly different views, but the problem is not that Hume failed to recognize this fact.

Khamara’s claim that Cleanthes is begging the question is echoed in Yandell’s that “Hume’s mistake, in sum, is in supposing that the only concept of ‘necessary being’ relevant to . . . [Demea’s argument] is ‘logically necessary being,’ and it is a mistake in which Hume has plenty of company (including Kant)” (Yandell, 230). I submit that both Khamara and Yandell are mistaken. They are not wrong in thinking that Hume is criticizing the notion of a logically necessary being. They are wrong in thinking that Demea (and Clarke) could simply circumvent the criticism. Khamara does claim that Clarke is working with a conception of logically necessary existence but one that is somehow deduced from the considerations involved in the first stage of the argument alone. Yandell, on the other hand, claims, wrongly, that the Demea-Clarke argument makes no use of logical necessity. Their criticisms are misplaced.

Khamara and Yandell are no doubt correct in thinking that Clarke would have disagreed with Hume’s views concerning the causal maxim, causation, necessity, and existence. The objection Hume puts in Cleanthes’s mouth does indeed stem from Hume’s prior systematic investigations into those fundamental matters. But rather than read this as a bit of incomprehension or question begging on Hume’s part, it ought to be read in a much more charitable way. Hume, like Kant,³⁴ certainly thought that those who employed *a priori* arguments for the existence of the deity were confused about causation and necessity. His criticism of Demea’s argument can be viewed as an oblique way of showing the confusion of the theologians, not a direct way of showing his own supposed incomprehension of them.³⁵ We can see Cleanthes’s counter-argument not as a question-begging rejection of a logically necessary being, but as an independent consideration against Demea’s conclusion. Even as Demea ruled out Chance and Nothing(ness) as possible candidates for being the ultimate cause, so Cleanthes’s argument rules out a logically necessary being. But given that neither Cleanthes nor Demea (Hume nor Clarke) would be willing to consider that some other, non-logical form of necessity might characterize the ultimate cause, it follows that all of the options are exhausted: there is simply nothing left with which to identify the ultimate cause. And this is what then necessitates the reconsideration of the first stage of the argument (especially P8).

IV. Conclusion

No doubt, it will be felt that much more needs to be said about how Hume's accounts of the fundamental issues that Cleanthes's counter-argument presupposes figure into the story. The counter-argument is perhaps no more persuasive than those accounts. And any full interpretation of part 9 of the DNR must go into the other objections Cleanthes raises. But my primary aim in this paper has only been to uncover the rationale behind the "decisive" objection to Demea's argument and, thereby, to free Hume from certain objections.

I conclude with a brief historical note. Kant, as is well known, argued that the best way to defeat the cosmological argument was to defeat the ontological argument, as the former, he thought, presupposes the latter. Though Kant, like Hume, had independent arguments against the unrestricted applicability of the PSR, he claimed that without the ontological argument, the cosmological proved very little. In fact, the two stages of Demea's argument are precisely the two stages of the cosmological argument according to Kant. This is no accident. The kind of cosmological argument Kant criticized was, though a Leibnizian-Wolffian version, essentially the same kind espoused by Clarke.³⁶

My final claim then is that Hume, in part 9 of the DNR, criticizes the cosmological argument by, in effect, criticizing what Kant called its *nervus probandi*, which according to the latter is but the converse of the major premise of the ontological proof. Moreover, as Kant's criticism of the cosmological argument actually first appeared not in the *Critique of Pure Reason* but in the *Beweisgrund* of 1762, it is impossible to argue that his criticism of the argument was influenced by the DNR, as the latter was not published until 1779.³⁷ It would be unnecessary, of course, to look for a Kantian influence upon Hume. Thus, what we have here is a case of independent philosophical convergence. Though the Kant-Hume criticism of the cosmological argument does not apply to all versions of the proof, it does apply very well to the most famous versions of their time.

NOTES

I would like to thank Phillip Cummins, Lorne Falkenstein, Evan Fales, Todd Ryan, Ben Hill, Annemarie Peil, Kenneth Winkler, Elizabeth Radcliffe, Charles Nussbaum, Kevin Klement, and two anonymous referees for comments on earlier versions of this paper.

1 All references to T are to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); 'SBN' followed by Arabic numerals indicates a page reference to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

2 See also T 1.2.6.1–16 and 1.3.7.1–8; SBN 66–68 and SBN 94–98 (respectively). All references to EHU are to David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); 'SBN' followed by Arabic numerals indicates a page reference to David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed., revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

3 All references to DNR are to David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd ed. (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1947). (In, e.g., '9.1; 188' the first numeral indicates the part number, the second the paragraph number, and the third the page number in the 1947 Kemp Smith edition.) The "metaphysical argument *a priori*" is also very briefly discussed in *A Letter from a Gentleman to his friend in Edinburgh*. See *Letter*, 22–27. All references to the *Letter* are to the facsimile reprint of the 1745 edition; David Hume, *A Letter from a Gentleman to his friend in Edinburgh*, ed. Ernest C. Mossner and John V. Price (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1967).

4 See, e.g., D.C. Stove, "Part IX of Hume's *Dialogues*," *Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1978): 300–9; James Franklin, "More on Part IX of Hume's *Dialogues*," *Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1980): 69–71; Donald E. Stahl, "Hume's *Dialogue IX* Defended," *Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1984): 505–7; Edward J. Khamara, "Hume 'versus' Clarke on the Cosmological Argument," *Philosophical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 34–55; and Joseph Keim Campbell, "Hume's Refutation of the Cosmological Argument," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 40 (1996): 159–73.

5 See previous note. To that list may be added B. Calvert, "Another Problem about Part IX of Hume's *Dialogues*," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 14 (1983): 65–70; M.A. Stewart, "Hume and the 'Metaphysical Argument *a priori*,'" in *Philosophy, its History and Historiography*, ed. A. J. Holland (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 240–53; J.C.A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), 74–93; James Dye, "A Word on Behalf of Demea," *Hume Studies* 15 (1989): 120–40; Keith E. Yandell, *Hume's "Inexplicable Mystery"* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 227–42; Fred Wilson, "Hume on the Abstract Idea of Existence: Comments on Cummins' 'Hume on the Idea of Existence,'" *Hume Studies* 17 (1991): 167–201; Stanley Tweyman, "Some Reflections on Hume on Existence," *Hume Studies* 18 (1992): 137–49; Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall), 105–7; Robin Attfield, "Clarke, Independence and Necessity," *The British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 1 (1993): 67–82; James Cain, "The Hume-Edwards Principle," *Religious Studies* 31 (1995): 323–8; William F. Vallicella, "The Hume-Edwards Objection to the Cosmological Argument," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 22 (1997): 423–43; David O'Connor, *Hume on Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 147–62; and though they were written either before or at roughly the same time

as Stove's piece, one should also mention Nicholas Rescher, *Essays in Philosophical Analysis* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 171–9; James P. Ferguson, *The Philosophy of Dr. Samuel Clarke and its Critics* (New York: Vantage Press, 1974), 111–21; William Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 94–114, 151–9; Robin Attfield, *God and the Secular* (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1978), 163–97.

6 See e.g., Rowe, 94–114, E.J. Khamara and D.G.C. Macnabb, "Hume and his Predecessors on the Causal Maxim," in *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, ed. G. P. Morice (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 146–55, Calvert, Khamara, and Taylor, 105–7.

7 This is the principle that Cleanthes employs in criticizing Demea's claim that there must be a causal explanation for a whole infinite chain of causes and effects (DNR 9.9; 190). Cain (323) formulates it as follows: "HEP: Given a collection of parts which jointly compose a whole, an explanation which assigns a cause to each of these parts provides a causal explanation of the whole." See also Paul Edwards, "The Cosmological Argument," *The Rationalist Annual for the Year 1959*, 3–25, Franklin, and Vallicella. Campbell (164–70) analyzes this material, and the material in 9.7 and 9.10 having to do with the possible necessary existence of matter, admirably. Overall, his article is one of the best in the literature.

8 Kenneth Williford, "Kant's Criticism of the Cosmological Argument," unpublished manuscript.

9 In *that* respect, at least, my project here is similar to Stewart's; commentators have neglected his important paper to the detriment of their interpretations of part 9 of the DNR.

10 Rowe, 94–114, Khamara, and Campbell; see also Khamara and Macnabb, 53. Stewart (269) concurs with Khamara and Macnabb.

11 I think that EHU 12.24–34; SBN 163–5 may be adduced in support of this contention. Kemp Smith (in DNR 115 [Smith's "Appendix D"]) also claims that Cleanthes speaks for Hume (or Philo, as he would have it) in this place. I am therefore guilty of one "mistake" that Stewart imputes to Rescher, Stove, and others. He writes (257–8), "There is a . . . basic reason why . . . [they] . . . are not even beginning to make sense of what is going on. They are assuming without question that Cleanthes in part 9 is speaking for Hume." But it should be noted that Stewart does not claim that the "decisive" objection is one that Hume could not have consistently held.

12 In DNR 115 (Smith's "Appendix D"). Cf. Gaskin's (74) slightly harder to assess claim: "The terms 'ontological argument' and 'cosmological argument' are anachronistic when applied to Hume and tend to set one in search of more sharply differentiated subject-matter than is to be found in his work. As such he never discusses the ontological argument. But he has things to say, particularly of the sort 'Whatever *is* may *not be*' . . . [EHU 12–24–34; SBN 164; Gaskin also mentions DNR 9.5–7; 189] which are highly relevant to it. These convey the idea that he must have had in mind something like Descartes' ontological argument in *Meditations* V (if not actually Anselm's original in the *Proslogion*). It is, however much

more likely that in these passages he is concerned with the ‘necessarily existent being’ which *also* figures in the cosmological argument: that ‘simple and sublime argument *a priori*’ set out by Demea in *Dialogues IX*.” Stewart (245) concurs with Gaskin’s judgment that Hume never explicitly addresses the ontological argument. In the *Letter*, 23 after discussing his supposed denial of the causal maxim, Hume says “I say further, that even the metaphysical Arguments for a Deity are not affected by a Denial of the Proposition above-mentioned. It is only Dr. Clark’s Argument which can be supposed to be any way concerned. Many other Arguments of the same Kind [metaphysical and *a priori*] still remain; Des Cartes’s for Instance, which has always been esteemed as solid and convincing as the other.” Stewart (245) asserts that Hume must have been referring to the cosmological argument of the Third Meditation. However, that is doubtful, as it too depends upon a version of the causal maxim, Philo’s espousal of a version of the cosmological argument in Part 2 of DNR (2.3; 142) notwithstanding. Reasoning similarly, Eric Steinberg points out (in David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*, ed. Eric Steinberg [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977], 119, n.14), “. . . it would seem [then] that Hume is referring to the ontological argument formulated by Descartes in the *Fifth Meditation*. Hume’s own opinion of the argument may be inferred from . . . Cleanthes’ comment in Part IX of the *Dialogues* . . .” He then quotes what I have been calling the “decisive” objection.

13 As Kemp Smith notes (in DNR 26, 115 [Smith’s “Introduction” and “Appendix D,” respectively]), Hume mentions Clarke by name in a footnote (DNR 9.7; 190). Actually Hume appears to offer a direct quotation of Clarke in that place. However, I cannot find the passage that fits the quotation in the most likely place to look, viz. Clarke’s *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. Nevertheless, the claim made in that quotation is substantially made by Clarke in his demonstration of his proposition III of that work (Clarke, 18). (All references to the *Demonstration* are to Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, ed. Ezio Vailati [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998]). Of the commentators mentioned, I have found no one who disputes the claim that Hume’s target here is primarily Clarke. See Khamara for the most detailed, though, I shall argue, flawed, comparison of Demea’s argument and Clarke’s. See also Ferguson, 22–7, 111–21. Stewart (243) claims “McEwen [an earlier editor of the DNR], Kemp Smith and others have suggested that either Hume or Clarke combined together two distinct arguments, the ontological and the cosmological, and there were undoubtedly minor polemicists of the period who were guilty of some such conflation.” While it is true, as we shall see more clearly below, that Clarke does not think of himself as offering two *distinct* demonstrations, and does not endorse the ontological argument, he nonetheless arrives at the assertion that the deity is a logically necessary being; and this assertion is not simply derived from the “cosmological” part of his argument. Stewart does not deny that Hume’s target is Clarke, instead he claims (248) that “. . . though all the individual phrasing [of Demea’s presentation] is lifted from Clarke, the total argument bears no more relation to the historical Clarke’s argument than the ephemeral pamphlets which circulated in criticism of Hume’s philosophy during his lifetime bear to *his* philosophy.” I

maintain that this claim applies, at best, to Demea's highly compressed *presentation* of the argument, not to its substance.

14 Stewart (246–7) is right that Clarke's presentation includes more structure, but the two tiers I am here elucidating are the essential ones for the present purpose. Stewart notes that Clarke argues step-by-step for four propositions, while Demea compresses the argument almost beyond recognition. But it is too much, I think, to assert that “. . . he [Hume] is condensing the argument without a clear grasp of its structure” (247). Rather, I would maintain that Hume is simply refusing to waste time with what are really just artifacts of Clarke's tedious presentation. The essentials can still be ferreted out of Demea's version. Clarke's relevant propositions are these: I. Something has existed from all eternity. II. There has existed from eternity some one unchangeable and independent being. III. That unchangeable and independent being which has existed from eternity, without any external cause of its existence, must be self-existent, that is, necessarily existing. IV. What the substance or essence of that being which is self-existent or necessarily existing is, we have no idea, neither is it at all possible for us to comprehend it. (Clarke, 8, 10, 12, 29). Propositions I–II correspond, roughly, to the first tier of Demea's argument and proposition III to the second tier, though some of the argumentation in Demea's second tier occurs at the end of Clarke's proposition II. It is not important that Hume did not follow Clarke's presentation exactly. What is important is that there are two major elements of the overall argument. This Stewart does not really dispute, as can be inferred from Stewart, 243–4: “Kant was of course to argue later in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (B620–641) that the cosmological argument was incomplete unless topped out with the ontological argument, which was then invalid. The gap which Kant found in the cosmological argument was the same gap which Clarke had found before him, and which Clarke tried to plug by that section of his argument which has read to later commentators like the ontological argument”

15 One might wish to compare my reconstruction of Demea's argument with those of other commentators. See Ferguson, 111–15, Stewart, 245–9, Khamara, 39–48 and Campbell, 160–1. Khamara offers a fairly detailed reconstruction of Clarke's version of the argument and then identifies Demea's premises with Clarke's. Campbell divides Demea's argument into two stages which, however, are not the same as mine. Roughly, his first stage stops at my P7 and his second stage at my P9.

16 As presented by Demea, P1 is stated as if it follows from P11 (“Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence; it being absolutely impossible for anything to produce itself, or be the cause of its own existence.” [DNR 9.3; 188]). I am following Stewart (247) in treating these as logically independent premises. According to Khamara and Macnabb (153–5) Hume presents the premises in this way because he mistakenly thinks that Clarke takes the causal maxim to be demonstrable. I have no stake in this issue in the present paper. Notice that I am explicitly modifying Demea's “cause or reason” to “external cause or internal reason.” This quite explicit in Clarke but is only implicit in Demea's presentation. (See, once again, Stewart, 247). Much turns on this. The disjunction in Demea's

sentence must be taken to be logical and not ampliative. Otherwise, by the PSR, we would demand an external cause in order to explain the existence of the Deity. Clarke's version of the premise deserves reproduction: "Whatever exists has a cause, a reason, a ground of its existence, a foundation on which its existence relies, a ground or reason why it does exist rather than not exist, either in the necessity of its own nature (and then it must have been of itself eternal), or in the will of some other being (and then that other being must, at least in the order of nature and causality, have existed before it)." (Clarke, 8; this occurs in the proof of his first proposition).

17 Cf. Khamara, 49, n. 39: "... Stove . . . [Stove, 303–4, n. 5] interprets Hume's objection here [viz. that there can be no necessary being] as an argument for the principle that 'there can be no valid arguments from necessarily true premisses to a contingent conclusion', and concludes that this principle, 'though true, is entirely irrelevant as an objection to Demea's argument'. He takes Hume as saying that, since the premisses of the Demea-Clarke argument are all necessarily true, its conclusion cannot be contingent. Stove fails to notice that at least one of the argument's premisses is undoubtedly contingent, namely the premiss that something exists now." In addition to a number of other serious problems (see Stahl, who offers a fairly persuasive point by point refutation of Stove, and Campbell, 162), Stove's interpretation overlooks the fact pointed out by Khamara that one of the premisses of Demea's argument, implicit though it is, is arguably contingent. The premise is not implicit in Clarke (8). If Stove is right about his interpretation of Hume's use of 'demonstrate' etc., then it follows either that Hume neglected to note that the argument has a contingent premise, or that Hume would have regarded this as yet another flaw in the argument: it purports to be wholly *a priori* and demonstrative (in this special sense), but it has an *a posteriori* and contingent premise. But it must be understood that the sense in which the argument is "*a priori*" is, if our query takes the history of that terminology seriously, not a simple matter to determine. According to Ferguson (155), for example, "The argument which Demea puts forward is that given in the first three Propositions of the *Demonstration*. As such, it begins with a statement of the cosmological proof and then makes a transition to the ontological proof. The former, as we have seen, was considered at the time as *a posteriori*. Demea does not make the distinction between the two proofs, as Clarke himself does not make it, but it is necessary to remember that he is combining two separate arguments, only one of which would be considered *a priori* by the theologians of the period." See also Ferguson's discussion of "*a priori*" on 11–21. Compare this with Atfield, "Clarke, Independence and Necessity," 68: "Ferguson . . . ascribes to him [Clarke] a form of the ontological argument, but Clarke would have denied this ascription. Early critics claimed, however, that, despite his rejection of the argument of Anselm and Descartes, Clarke effectively resuscitated that argument in declaring necessity antecedently the cause, ground and foundation of God's existence. Critics such as Waterland and Law took up the related charge . . . that as God is the First Cause there can be no argument to God's existence *a priori*." Why, then, did Clarke insist upon calling his argument *a priori* if he (1) rejected the ontological argument and (2) included an *a posteriori* premise in its first stage? Clarke's recent editor, Vailati, has this to say (in Clarke, 112, n. f.): ". . . Clarke and his correspondents use 'a priori' and 'a posteriori' in their Scholastic sense, in

which 'a priori' refers to a type of argument moving from principles, reasons, or causes to their consequences or effects. By contrast, 'a posteriori' refers to a type of argument moving from consequences or effects to their principles or causes. Thus, an argument inferring God's existence from the divine nature, e.g., the ontological argument, is *a priori*, while one inferring God's existence from the effects of which God is the author, e.g., the argument from design, or Descartes' argument in the third Meditation from our idea of God, is *a posteriori*. Clarke considered his argument, or at least the part moving from the very nature of necessity to the existence of God, *a priori*." This is borne out by some of Clarke's comments in his *Answer* to the Sixth Letter and to the Seventh Letter. See Clarke, 113–14 and 118–21. Finally, Stewart (246) helpfully notes that "Hume was writing not only before the Kantian typology of arguments had displaced the traditional simple distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* reasoning, but at a time when the interpretation of that distinction was itself in flux. Hume was moving towards identifying apriority with demonstrability, of which in turn he had an unusually narrow conception. But as late as the 1730's Clarke's opponents Edmund Law and Daniel Waterland had been defending the traditional cosmological argument as demonstrative and *a posteriori*, rejecting only the *a priori* element introduced by Clarke; and they like Clarke still conceived apriority in its traditional sense of reasoning from cause to effect." It can be gleaned from these passages that Clarke calls his argument *a priori* because in its second tier (corresponding to his third proposition) the existence of God is grounded upon His conceptually antecedent logical necessity. This is why Ferguson and others have interpreted that portion of the argument as if it were a version of the ontological proof. The fact that the first stage of the argument contains an (arguably) contingent premise (that is *known*, as we would now say, *a posteriori*) is irrelevant. Moreover, there is little doubt that Clarke would have regarded the conditional "If something now (contingently) exists, then something necessarily exists" as knowable *a priori* (in the contemporary sense of the term). That the antecedent can be known only *a posteriori* (in our sense) does not make the argument *a posteriori* in Clarke's sense.

18 Demea, of course, has a sub-argument for this premise, but neither it nor Cleanthes's response to it will be of interest to me in this paper. See note 7 for work pertaining to this. I must point out, however, that nothing turns here on the distinction between hierarchical and linear causal chains; a contingent succession of either type, will be, by Demea's argument, contingent. Demea's argument can be used equally well for both types of chain. Cf. Stewart, 248–9. The qualification 'only' is important here. Like Clarke, Demea leaves open the possibility of infinite causal successions; the point is that that cannot be *all* there is; that would not be explanatorily adequate. Cf. Clarke, 10–11.

19 It is very important that Demea's "External causes, there are supposed to be none" (DNR 9.3; 189) be understood in the way it is presented here. Otherwise we will have Demea asserting that God is not the external cause of the universe. Cf. Stewart, 248. Clearly Demea's point is just that the ultimate cause of the succession (infinite or not) of events that constitutes the universe cannot itself have an external cause on pain of violating the PSR *cum* P8.

20 There are brief sub-arguments for claims P16 and P17: “*Chance* is a word without meaning. Was it *nothing*? But that can never produce anything” (DNR 9.3; 189). This, and what precedes and follows it, is a paraphrase of Clarke, 12: “[W]hat is it that has from eternity determined such a succession of beings to exist, rather than that from eternity there should never have existed anything at all? Necessity it was not because it was equally possible, in this supposition, that they should not have existed at all. Chance is nothing but a mere word, without any signification. And other being it is supposed there was none, to determine the existence of these. Their existence, therefore, was determined by nothing; neither by any necessity in the nature of the things themselves, because it is supposed none of them are self-existent, nor by any other being, because no other is supposed to exist. That is to say, of two equally possible things, viz. whether anything or nothing should from eternity have existed, the one is determined rather than the other absolutely by nothing, which is an express contradiction. And consequently, as before, there must on the contrary of necessity have existed from eternity some one immutable and independent being. Which, what it is, remains in the next place to be inquired.”

21 Cf. Demea’s “*External causes*, there are supposed to be none.” (DNR 9.3; 189)

22 Clarke, 12. Emphasis in original. The word in brackets is the editor’s. This is the beginning of the demonstration of Clarke’s proposition III in the *Demonstration*. It comes directly after the passage quoted in note 20.

23 Clarke, 13–14. Note that Cleanthes substantially *agrees* with this characterization of necessity; see DNR 9.6–7; 189.

24 But see note 17 above. There is a sense in which Clarke thought that the divine necessity was the conceptually antecedent ground or explanation of God’s existence.

25 It is clear from the *Demonstration* (see Clarke, 14–31) that Clarke took himself to be demonstrating the existence of a logically necessary being and that the *logical* necessity of the nature of this being could not be rendered epistemically transparent in the way that the simple truths of arithmetic can. This is, perhaps, the main reason why he consistently denied that he was employing the ontological argument. But Clarke also wanted to maintain that we could know, *pace* Spinoza, that the universe is not itself the logically necessary being. However, given the opacity of the logical necessity in question, Clarke’s arguments are inconclusive. In DNR 9.7; 190 and 9.10; 191, Cleanthes and Philo consider the what follows if we allow that there are conceptually and epistemically opaque logical necessities. The conclusion is that if we allow them, then we have no basis for choosing between a Clarkean theism that identifies the logically necessarily existent being with an intelligent, personal God and Spinozism. The reference to Spinoza in part 9 of the DNR is only implicit, but to Spinoza it surely is. This is clear not only from the content of the view Cleanthes and Philo consider, but also from the fact that Spinoza was one of Clarke’s expressly mentioned opponents in the *Demonstration*, and his views are discussed explicitly and at some length in the pages cited above. Thus, Hume’s overall criticism of Clarke’s argument can be put this way. Either there are no conceptually and epistemically

opaque logical necessities because the notion is either incoherent or necessarily empty (in which case the argument fails, because it ends with the postulation of such a necessity), or there are, but then, since they are conceptually and epistemically opaque, we cannot determine which putative logical necessity is actually so; i.e., we cannot, in this case and in principle, decide between Clarkean theism or Spinozism. Demea's argument either involves an incoherent or empty notion or is of absolutely no aid to the traditional theist.

26 Thus whether or not Clarke even had a notion of synthetic necessity or some other kind of necessity is *irrelevant* in this context; he indicates quite *explicitly and repeatedly* what he has in mind, viz. *immediate contradictions in terms*, his use of a mathematical example notwithstanding. His choice of example, if anything, indicates that he was something like a logicist about arithmetical truths. If he had had synthetic necessities in mind (or, for that matter, something approximating the (obscure) contemporary notion of "metaphysical" necessity), then he surely would *not* have couched his analysis in terms of immediate contradictions. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this point.) Note as well that there is no question of a (non-immediate) *inference* here from 'is a being who carries the reason of its existence within itself' to 'is a being the supposition of the non-existence of which implies a contradiction.' Clarke is offering something like an *analysis* of what the former property amounts to. The quotations supplied offer abundant evidence of this. If Clarke is wrong in this analysis, then, indeed, perhaps Hume's criticism of the argument may have less bite than Hume thought. (And perhaps Hume would have an even better philosophical reputation had he pointed this out.) But it is still a bite that Clarke and his admirers would have felt, and faulting Hume (or Clarke for that matter) for not dreaming up less pristine (though perhaps genuine) notions of necessity is certainly not called for. (Thanks to another anonymous referee for raising this point.)

27 DNR 9.5; 189. Cf. Ferguson, 115–17 and Attfield, "Clarke, Independence and Necessity," 76–81. Stewart (250) overlooks this point and attributes to Hume a hopeless confusion.

28 See Ferguson, 22–121 and Attfield, "Clarke, Independence and Necessity" for some discussion of that argument.

29 See Clarke, 28–31. This also makes much more sense of Cleanthes's and Philo's ensuing discussion of the possibility of hidden logical necessities. See note 25 above.

30 Every premise not marked 'implicit premise' can be found in DNR 9.5; 189.

31 I am going to bracket the problems raised concerning a conceivability criterion of possibility, but see Gaskin, 82–83 for some discussion of this matter as it relates to this argument.

32 Stewart (250) goes even further and attributes to Hume a hopeless confusion. He says of Cleanthes's "decisive" objection, "This over-rated argument confuses the plain truth that you cannot consistently reject the conclusion of a demonstration if you accept its premises, with the plain falsehood that you cannot consistently reject the conclusion independently of the premises." I submit that there is no such confusion here. As long as Hume has an independent argument

that a proposition asserting the necessary existence of something is either incoherent or necessarily false, it does not matter whether that proposition is taken in isolation or taken together with premises that imply it. Any argument for such a conclusion, Hume can be taken as saying, is reducible to an absurdity. Of course, this will entail (in the present case) either that the “Hume-Edwards Principle” is true and that we need not seek an ultimate cause of the causal chain in the first place or that the PSR is simply false. The independent argument in paragraph 5 does appeal to a psychological criterion—we always seem to be able to *conceive* of the nonexistence of anything the existence of which we can conceive; if contradictions are, in some sense, inconceivable, then no denial of something’s existence can be a contradiction—but, as indicated above, Hume’s point is that the price of giving up that criterion is the acceptance of our ignorance concerning just what the necessary being is; if we give it up, Spinoza’s view becomes no more and no less plausible than Clarke’s.

33 See Khamara, 34, 40–2. Cf. Wilson, 184–9. Wilson, too, is, I think, mistaken in his analysis of the notion of necessity involved; but I cannot argue this here.

34 See Kant’s criticism of the cosmological argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A603/B631–A620/B648; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965], 507–518—I do not believe Kemp Smith’s 1929 translation has been superseded).

35 That Hume either could not or did not bother to comprehend Clarke’s argument is one of Stewart’s main claims. It ought to be clear by now that Hume is guilty of no such incomprehension in part 9 of the DNR. A careful reading of Clarke’s *Demonstration* alongside part 9 bears this out. The following features of part 9 of the DNR make it clear that Hume had, in fact, a very good grasp of Clarke’s work. (1) Demea begins by noting the supposed advantages of the *a priori* argument over the design argument. It is not a piece of merely probable reasoning, as is the latter, and it allows us to demonstrate the infinity and unity of the deity (9.1; 188). Clarke says the same things. See Clarke, 7, 112–13, 118–22. (2) As has been pointed out numerous times in this paper, much of Demea’s wording is very close to Clarke’s. (3) The argument Demea presents can be seen, when properly interpreted, to preserve much of the structure of Clarke’s more drawn-out reasoning. (4) Cleanthes’s and Philo’s discussion of the Spinozistic possibility opened up by the acceptance of conceptually and epistemically opaque logical necessities is, so to speak, called for by Clarke’s text (Clarke, 18–24); the discussion in the DNR could only be thought a great coincidence if we deny that Hume had Clarke’s work well before his mind. Moreover, the objection cuts to the quick. (5) Relatedly, Cleanthes’s claim in 9.6; 189 that “. . . it is evident, that this can never happen, while our faculties remain the same as at present” (i.e., that if we could grasp the whole essence of the Deity we would see that it is logically impossible for the Deity not to exist) is closely related to Clarke’s contention that the substance or essence of the Deity is incomprehensible to us. Just before his putative demonstration of that proposition (Clarke’s proposition V), he likens our lack of comprehension of essence to the lack of comprehension a blind person has of colors—the lacking of a faculty. See Clarke, 30–1. Finally, (6) Philo’s comments

about those attracted by the mathematical method (9.11; 191–192) certainly apply to Clarke in this regard.

36 See J.W. Forgie, "Kant on the Relation Between the Cosmological and Ontological Arguments," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 34 (1993): 1–12.

37 See Immanuel Kant, *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, trans. Gordon Treash (New York: Abaris Books, Inc., 1979).

