

Hume on the Teleological Argument

by Max Andrews

Below is a brief outline of David Hume's criticisms of the teleological argument found in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and responses to them.

1. The argument doesn't get us to God, at most it just gets to a designer.
 1. This is not arguing for God, just an extremely intelligent mind, which exists apart from the universe.
 2. Constructive empiricism^[1]
2. You can only use analogy to argue for things that are similar, but the universe is unique.
 1. As long as the two things being compared are relevantly similar in the properties under consideration, they can be analogized. Everything is *unique* in some way; however, we can still compare things where they *are* similar. The universe is not unique in all its properties for it shares some properties with other things (design).
3. You can only use analogy about things you have empirically experienced, but no one experienced the origin of the universe.
 1. Scientists infer the existence and operations of empirically inexperienced entities on the basis of analogizing from what they do know from experience (i.e. particles)
4. The designer needs a designer and so on to an infinite regress.
 1. One need not explain the design of the designer in order to conclude that something has been designed by that designer.
 2. In order to recognize an explanation as the best explanation you don't have to have an explanation of the explanation.
5. All known designers are corporeal human beings; therefore the most one can infer is a super human being.
 1. No, refer back to objection 1, not all properties have to be similar in using analogy.
6. Why not postulate more than one designer, there is no evidence of a single designer.
 1. Occam's Razor, the principle of simplicity argues for one unless there is evidence for more. The objection doesn't even defeat the need for at least one.
7. The universe may be more like an organism than a machine.
 1. Organisms still show evidence of design.
8. It is still possible that order in the universe was brought about by chance and randomness.
 1. The point isn't what is possible, but given the evidence, it is what is the best or most probable explanation; the order we do experience and continue to experience calls for some sort of explanation.
9. There are many signs of disorder in the universe.
 1. One can only infer disorder if there is *supposed* to be order and one only need one piece of evidence of order to argue for a designer.

[1] Constructive Empiricism regards the theoretical entities of science pragmatically rather than realistically. Accordingly, the legitimacy of a scientific entity is tied not to its ultimate reality but to its utility in promoting scientific research and insight.

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