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HUME'S SCEPTICISM VS. SWINBURNE'S INFERENCE

How Hume's Scepticism Regarding the Design Inference is still Applicable Today

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1. INTRODUCTION

I recently logged into a social networking site to find that a friend had posted a humorous picture for my consideration. Before me, a young man was gleefully engaged in an act of nasal exploration with his index finger. The caption read: "Your finger fits perfectly into your nostril. Checkmate, atheists". This satirical picture is referring to the Argument from Design, one of the classic approaches to arguing for God's existence via an analogous comparison of intentional and ordered objects created by man, to the apparent intentionality and order of the universe; which, it is argued, must likewise have an intelligent creator. In the example of our friend above, the assumption is that it is no accident that one's finger conforms to the size of one's nostril, but rather, that the convenience of this arrangement was thought out beforehand by a god who made man in such a way that objects could be removed with ease from one's nose.

In his *Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*, the Scottish philosopher David Hume began what many consider to be the most devastating philosophical attack on the argument from design.² His remarks here, combined with his post-humously published attack on the design argument in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, are considered by many

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² Hume published this paper in 1757.

to have greatly reduced its philosophical importance.³ However, despite Hume's attacks, the argument has persisted and evolved over the centuries and arguably remains the single most compelling argument for god's existence. In his 2004 edition of *The Existence of God*, the esteemed Oxford philosopher and theologian Richard Swinburne advances a probabilistic form of the Argument from Design, building a case that the design inference leads us to believe that the existence of god is more likely than the alternative. His argument connects with human intuitions in a compelling way. However, he does not succeed in his project. This paper will argue that Hume's 250 year old scepticism regarding the design inference cannot be bypassed by Swinburne's probabilistic attempt at dodging its conclusions. I will begin by reviewing how Hume's epistemological commitments lead him to conclude the irrationality of the design argument. Next, we will examine how Swinburne goes about trying to dodge the problems presented by Hume. Finally, if Hume's epistemology, or something like it, is correct, then I will show that Swinburne's dodge fails to carry his conclusion clear of Hume's scepticism.

2. HUME'S SCEPTICAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

The design argument is certainly not new. In the 4th century BC, Plato wrote that one of the main reasons for men's belief in the gods was "the order of the motion of the stars, and of all things under the dominion of the mind which ordered the universe" (Plato, 12.966e). Aristotle too believed that the beauty of nature was what first caused men to wonder about how the universe had come to be. He argues in *On Philosophy* that anyone who observes the scope and beauty of nature would "judge both that there exist gods and that all these marvelous works are the handiwork of the gods" (Aristotle). In the middle ages, Thomas Aquinas propelled the argument to lasting fame through his inclusion of it in his five ways of knowing that God exists. Aquinas argues that any non-conscious object, which exhibits purpose in its design, must be under the direction of a conscious and intelligent being. In the same way that arrows do not head towards a bulls-eye without intelligent direction, neither do acorns grow into oaks without intelligent direction. Therefore, everything in nature must be directed towards its goal by someone with intelligence; e.g. God (Aquinas).

³ This paper was published twenty-two years later, in 1779.

The Argument from Design really hit its stride in 1804, when William Paley published his book, *Natural Theology*. In Paley's defense of the rationality of belief, he says that if a man were to find a watch while walking along a beach, and were to observe its intricate parts and ordered operations, even if he had never before seen a watch, that man would surely infer that some intelligence had designed it. Furthermore, if the ordered contrivance of the watch leads us to infer that it must be the product of an intelligent design, then observation of the natural world should lead us to a similar conclusion regarding its origins. This is because, says Paley, "every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature", and what's more, "that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtlety, and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety" (Paley, 1804: 13). If this is true, then we cannot help but be drawn from our observations of a world, which exhibits all the marks of design, to the inference that there must be a designer.

3. HUME'S SCEPTICISM

Hume's attack on this classic argument follows from his epistemological stance on how humans acquire knowledge, and what the limits of our knowledge are. Writing in the same philosophical tradition as John Locke and René Descartes, Hume ascribed what is often called the 'Idea Theory' of human cognition. In brief, Hume's version of the Idea Theory holds that "all the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward or inward sentiment", meaning that every thought which we are capable of, is produced either by impressions from external stimuli (via our five senses) or through the recombination of those impressions in our minds (1778, EHU: 2.5).⁴ Ultimately, the entirety of our ideas are derived, directly or indirectly, from sense data which we receive through our physical senses. Therefore, all we can *know* is that which we are able to acquire either from sense data, or derive through a composition of sensory impressions in the mind.

Of central importance is how we are able to form inferences regarding cause and effect. Hume says that we cannot know the fundamental principles behind causation, because this realm of inquiry is entirely closed off to us (1778, EHU: 4.12). Having never before seen a billiard ball, Hume asks the reader to consider how, by simply observing the ball, a person could discover what its effects on other objects might be. It is

⁴ EHU will refer to *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

only through the experience of watching how the billiard ball interacts with other balls that we are able to discover what its effects on other balls are (1778, EHU: 4.9). No reasonable inferences can be made from the observation of one object towards what its effects might be. Our limited human minds are simply incapable of delivering this kind of knowledge to us *a priori*. Hume, thus, says that it is "in vain" that we should "pretend to determine any single event, or infer any cause or effect, without the assistance of observation and experience" (1778, EHU: 4.11).

The foundation of all our inferences is experience, and these inferences are not founded on any rational processes or reasoning (1778, EHU: 4.14). If our inferences regarding cause and effect were *rational*, then we could observe the billiard ball and deductively reason our way forward to what its effects must be without needing to see it in action (1778, EHU: 4.15). However, since this is not the case, our inferences must be considered *irrational*. All our conclusions regarding 'cause and effect' are based on an expectation that similar causes will follow from similar effects (1778, EHU: 4.20), and this expectation is only the result of the brain becoming accustomed, through constant exposure to the conjunction of two objects or events. In other words, to expect the one to follow from the other, or to expect similar events to follow from similar causes (1778, EHU: 5.4-5.5).

We shall see that it is this expectation of like events, following from like causes, which gives rise to the design inference. Humans have become deeply accustomed to the constant conjunction of machines, which exhibit order, regularity, and purposefulness being created by an intelligent human mind. Therefore, when we see purpose, regularity, and order in nature, our minds are drawn by habit to a similar conclusion regarding the universe as a whole. The fallacy is understandable, but a fallacy, nonetheless.

4. APPLICATION TO THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

After presenting the argument above, Hume begins to follow its consequences to their logical conclusions. In chapter 11 of the *Enquiry*, he advances his doubts as to whether, in light of his version of the Idea Theory, the design inference can be rationally made at all. Hume presents the design argument as an argument from analogy. Complex objects like houses and watches are created by designers. The universe itself seems

to be a complex object analogous to a house or a watch. Therefore, the universe itself must have a designer.

In his later work, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume allows the assumption that God really is the designer of the universe and goes on to level five arguments against the soundness of the design inference, based on the logical fallout which such an inference leads to. Firstly, he says that the analogy is weak. It is not at all clear that the universe so closely resembles a man-made machine that it always appears ordered or designed. Many inexplicable and seemingly random events occur around us all the time. Next, Hume argues that the argument is also underdetermined. We have no reason to believe that order and complexity only arise from intelligence. "For all we know", says Hume, "matter may have a source of order within it, just as mind does, having it inherently, basically, not acquired from somewhere" (1779, DCNR: 2).⁵ Further, Hume argues that if we posit an intelligent designer, that designer must also possess the properties of order and complexity, because causes must contain sufficient properties to produce their effects, and must be alike in enough ways such that the correlation is rational. If God is comprised of order and complexity, then we are simply pushing the query back one stage, and are then, left to wonder what caused an ordered god?

Hume's final two critiques in the *Dialogues* deal with the properties of God which men have ascribed to him. It seems contradictory that a perfect god should create a manifestly imperfect world. It also seems impossible that we could reasonably infer from the universe's creation, any other quality about god, beyond those qualities absolutely necessary to instantiate the universe.

However, Hume also shows that the design inference itself should never be allowed off the ground in the first place. In *Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument*, Robert Hurlbutt nicely summarises this argument:

The design argument is *not* scientific in that it offers no evidence for the causes of the world order. The world is one particular, not a member of a species, whose members have been observed. In order to demonstrate a cause for any effect it is necessary to have observed the cause and effect in conjunction, indeed, in constant conjunction. And no one has seen the origin of one world, let alone "worlds" (Hurlbutt, 1965: 151).

⁵ DCNR will refer to *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Hume's comments on this point are almost prophetic. The later development of the theory of evolution, both biological and stellar, would later reinforce this point of his very strongly. In many ways, matter *does* seem to organise itself, at least sufficiently, and for long enough, to produce beings with the kind of complexity which we exhibit.

On Hume's understanding of cognition, causal inferences only arise from cases where we have observed a constant conjunction between objects, such that the mind becomes accustomed to expect one object to follow upon observation of the first. Every time we see a house being built, we have also observed people actively building such things. The conjunction of the two objects is very firmly fixed in our minds: intelligent purpose and designed object. This is the case with all the objects of human contrivance. Since our minds come to expect this conjunction, whenever we see what appear to be objects, or systems, which seem to exhibit order, complexity, and intent, we are naturally drawn to infer that a designer must be the cause.

However, while it may be psychologically understandable why we make the inference, this does not justify our application of this inference to the universe as a whole. It is only "when two *species* of objects are found to be constantly conjoined, that we can infer the one from the other" (1778, EHU: 11.30). In the case of the instantiation of the universe, we have only observed one instance of an effect without even observing its cause. Therefore, we cannot make any rational conclusions about what the cause of the universe must be.

5. SWINBURNE'S BAYESIAN APPROACH

In his influential book *Inference to the Best Explanation*, Peter Lipton describes how these inferences work. When we find ourselves wanting to explain a certain phenomenon, but insufficient data exists to deductively describe the event, "given our data and our background beliefs, we infer what would, if true, provide the best of the competing explanations we can generate of those data", so long as the best is good enough for us to make any inference at all (1999: 58). Given competing explanations for some event *a*, we compare and contrast rival explanations and determine which one is more likely to be true based on its ability to account for the phenomena.⁶

Since Hume's 18th century attack on the design argument, and in light of the purchase his thought has gained in the intellectual community, many of the more respected attempts to salvage the design inference have adapted by making IBE claims.⁷ In 2004, the distinguished Oxford philosopher and theologian Dr. Richard Swinburne published an updated edition of his book, *The Existence of God*. In this book Swinburne argues that although there are no good deductive arguments for

⁶ We also see if it has good fit with other observed phenomena and general rules.

⁷ Hereafter, let 'IBE' stand for 'Inference to the Best Explanation'.

the existence of God, a successful "P-inductive" argument can be built to show that the existence of God is more likely than the alternative, and therefore, is the best possible explanation for the universe (2004: 12-13).⁸

Acknowledging that the traditional starting points of the Argument from Design are problematic, in light of both Hume's scepticism and the development of Evolutionary Theory, he instead sets out to simply argue that it is more *probable* that a designer god exists than not, due to the evident existence of 'spatial order' and 'temporal order'. By spatial order, Swinburne is referring to the apparent arrangement of nature in orderly and purposeful ways, such as the structure of the human eye. The character Cleanthes in Hume's *Dialogues* sums up the idea of spatial order nicely.

Consider, anatomise the eye; survey its structure and contrivance, and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation (1779: DCNR.3).

Not only does Swinburne see spatial order in the arrangements of objects, but he considers nature to be like a 'machine-making machine,' in that it is constructed so as to give rise to the order which we see in the eye. He supposes that the theory of evolution can be fully incorporated into the design inference as a part of the intricate and ordered operations of the universe, and argues that it is highly improbable that humans would have evolved without an intelligent creator, god, to set up the universe-machine to produce them.

A key supporting point for this argument is Swinburne's supposition that the universe has been 'fine-tuned' to allow for the development of life. In brief, there are several fundamental forces in the universe which govern the interaction of matter, and if the relative strengths of those forces had been different by the smallest degree from what they are now, then cosmic evolution would have followed a different path, and human life would never have been able to evolve (Swinburne, 2004: 172-190). In light of the great number of alternative ways the universe could have been, Swinburne proposes that it is more likely than not that there is an

8 A 'P-inductive' argument is one in which the premises add to the probability of the conclusion, and a *correct* P-inductive argument is one in which the premises make the conclusion more probable than its negation (Swinburne, 2004: 6). Swinburne examines the probability of the conclusions of several arguments, for and against, the existence of god. He measures their relative strength in terms of the extent they confirm the hypothesis that God exists. Swinburne intends to show that if *h* is the hypothesis that God exists, and *eb* is the evidence from a particular argument for God's existence, then $P(h \mid b_1 + b_2 + b_3 \dots b_n) > P(\neg h \mid b_1 + b_2 + b_3 \dots b_n)$. Therefore, it is more likely than not that God does exist.

explanation that *this* universe exists, and not another. The most likely explanation is a theistic god.

Swinburne thinks that his second argument, from temporal order, is the strongest of the two. By temporal order, he is referring to "regularities of succession", or "patterns of behavior of objects", such as the perceived passage of time, the laws of physics, and the 'physical laws', by which we are able to predict that certain future events will follow from certain causes (2004: 151). Swinburne argues that even more than spatial order, the idea that the world is characterised by a "vast pervasive order" lies at the core of the design inference (2004: 155). It seems very unlikely that we could exist at all without the universe being characterised by these pervasive regularities. Cognition seems to require it, as does our day to day survival. Even the fundamental laws which give rise to evolutionary development seem to require this kind of temporal order (2004: 158).

Swinburne rejects two objections to his claim that the apparent temporal order is significant. The first objection is that it is the human mind which imposes order on the universe in order to meet the human need for prediction and control. The second objection is that it should not seem remarkable to us that the universe evinces order, because we would not be here to question it if the right kind of order did not exist in the first place (2004: 156).

In response to the first objection, Swinburne argues that it is the order of the universe itself which is a necessary condition for our minds to have evolved to their present state. If this is true, then even if human minds do impose some order on the universe, there must first have been certain fundamental regularities already operating to have allowed minds, which recognise order, to arise at all (2004: 156).

In response to the second objection, Swinburne appeals by analogy to our ability to recognise when any given event is improbable. If you were to flip a coin fifty times and see a head come up on every toss, the barest knowledge of probability would inform you that you had just observed an extremely improbable event. Now, if someone were to say to you, "I will flip this coin fifty times and the moment a tail is flipped, I will shoot you dead". Upon seeing the fiftieth heads come up, you should not be surprised because you could not have seen anything else and still be conscious of it. Swinburne says that it is absurd to maintain that we should *not* still think the situation highly improbable. Following the analogy, it is therefore, perfectly rational to be surprised that we exist in a universe like ours, given how many fortuitous roles of the cosmic were needed for us to be here at all.

Swinburne's move here is an interesting twist on an old line of reasoning known as the Anthropic Principle. The Anthropic Principle states

that we should not be surprised to find ourselves existing, because if things had been much different in the universe, we would not be here at all to reflect upon the improbability of our existence. This line of reasoning is often deployed against the theistic assertion that our surprise at finding ourselves here should lead us to infer that someone purposely designed the universe to allow for our existence. Swinburne argues that his alternate interpretation should be the preferred one because there appears to be far more order in the universe than would merely be required for the existence of humans (2004: 156).

In summary, the phenomena of temporal order makes the existence of god more probable because, of all the ways the universe could have turned out, it happens that there do exist laws and regularities that explain how we could have developed, and how we are able to then “extrapolate from past to future events with normal success” (2004: 164). It is more probable that a proper explanation exists to account for this than not.⁹

In essence, what Swinburne proposes is that there are two possibilities: (1.) There is order and regularity in the world because there is a god with all the sufficient properties to make it so. (2.) There is order and regularity in the world and this is simply where the explanation stops. Swinburne concludes that from both, the properties of spatial and temporal order, (which we observe) that it is more probable for (1) to be true; as opposed to the universe being simply, a brute fact.

6. BAYES'S THEOREM MISAPPLIED

While well constructed and intuitively appealing, Swinburne's argument is flawed. In this final section I will demonstrate how his probabilistic side-step fails to take the design inference clear of Hume's sceptical attack, by showing how the key analogy as to how we might draw inferences regarding god, cannot be reasonably accepted.

To begin with, Swinburne's overarching case for the existence of god is a Bayesian approach, meaning that it makes use of Bayes's Theorem to calculate and compare conditional probabilities; which serve, to render a judgment as to which condition is more likely to have produced the observed effect. Bayes's Theorem is used to render as true, any hypothesis which a certain body of evidence confirms as probable, or more likely than alternative hypotheses (Joyce). So, if we have a hypothesis (h), then given certain evidence (e), the probability of (h) given (e) is greater than (h) given (e). This is commonly expressed in the following way:

⁹ The proper explanation being god.

$$P(h \mid e) > P(\bar{h} \mid e)$$

In order to judge whether or not the design inference adds or detracts from his overarching case, Swinburne needs to decide if the probability of god's existence, given the evidence from design, is greater or less than 0.5. This figure is then incorporated into the overall evidence for his cumulative case. As we have seen, Swinburne concludes that the probability of god existing, given the evidence we have that spatial and temporal order exist, is greater than the probability that temporal and spatial order could exist without god existing. Is he justified in reaching this conclusion?

Swinburne's approach may seem very subjective, but this is precisely what the Bayesian approach is meant to address. The approach allows one to make intuitive and general claims about the relative probabilities of various causes. Thus, we can make a claim about which is likely to be the actual 'explanation', out of a pool of competing explanations. So long as one's conclusions are reasonable enough for most people to accept them, then general probabilities can be assigned to cases. Subsequently, these general probabilities can be added together to build a strong evidential case for whatever hypothesis is the most likely candidate.

For example, take Swinburne's discussion of the fine-tuning of the universe. Naturally, there is no way to calculate how many possible calibrations of the fundamental forces of the universe would have allowed cosmic evolution to give rise to life. However, it does seem reasonable to assume that there are a great many more ways in which the cosmic forces could have been arranged, such that human life never could have arisen. If the number of situations which would have *not* given rise to human life is judged to be greater than the number of situations which *would* have, then we should conclude that the possibility of human life *not* arising is statistically more probable. Given that we find ourselves in the less likely state of being alive (in an apparently ordered universe), then we are justified in thinking that it is probable that some explanatory hypothesis (which explains our current state) is true; in contrast to just assume that we have simply beat the odds.

Think back to the example of the coin toss. If we find ourselves alive after the 50th toss, we might reasonably presume that the coin itself was not fair. Perhaps both sides of the coin were imprinted with a head. It seems more probable that there is some further explanation, which might account for the unlikely series of coin tosses, other than dumb luck. In thinking of the unlikely scenario in which we find ourselves in the universe, the god hypothesis explains why we find ourselves here in much the same way as the unfair coin hypothesis explains why the man with the gun did not shoot me dead. The point is simply that, if one was

asked to make an educated guess based on the data available, one will either bet in favor, or against, the existence of god. For Swinburne, the unlikelihood of finding ourselves here means that we ought to allot the balance of probability in favor of the existence of god. If the probability is only a fraction more convincing in favor of the god hypothesis than not, then, we are justified in reasonably inferring that god really does exist.

7. THE PROBLEM WITH SWINBURNE'S APPLICATION

No scientist would object to occasional uses of Bayesian calculations, in fact such calculations are part of our day to day life, and can even be descriptive of the foundations of very successful science. Mackie admits that "we are justified in arguing inductively, in extrapolating observed regularities to unobserved cases" (1990: 147). A beautiful example of such successful reasoning was the discovery of the planet Neptune by German astronomer Johann Gottfried Galle. Galle discovered Neptune after several other astronomers had independantly predicted its existence based on irregularities in the orbit of Uranus. Galle theorised that these irregularities were best accounted for by the gravitational influence of a postulated, yet undiscovered, eighth planet. The prediction that Neptune existed before it was discovered can be couched in Bayesian terms as:

The probability that Neptune exists, given the evidence of Uranus's orbit and our understanding of gravitation, is greater than the probability that Neptune does not exist.

There is a key difference between this example of a very successful IBE and Swinburne's argument for god's existence. In the case of Neptune, there was a probable cause, which fell within the realm of normal science, which could potentially be investigated. If I am allowed to employ a bit of my own probabilistic reasoning here, it seems that it is far more probable that an unobserved cause which operates *within* our universe can be discovered, than that we could discover a cause *of* the universe itself.

I might propose, for example, that the cause of the current universe was a trans-dimensional, super-alien sneezing, and that the sneezing of such aliens always produces explosions of space-time that have ordered regularities as one of their inherent features. Now, it seems unlikely that we would ever be able to investigate if my sneezing-alien theory is cor-

rect, or rather, if the god hypothesis is correct. Since the conditions of these possible causes are beyond the physical universe, then, the truth of these matters lies beyond our ability to investigate them as well. However, this is simply an *ad ignorantiam*, and there is more we can say on this issue.

When building an IBE argument, what makes an explanation 'best', "is always relative to the available competitors it faces, meaning that IBEs always involve comparative evaluations of evidential support among competing hypotheses" (Ratzsh). Swinburne argues that what makes god the best explanation is that the god hypothesis provides the simplest explanation for the observed phenomenon (the universe); while, it provides the greatest explanatory power when compared to other hypotheses (2004: 82). We are justified in believing that this hypothesis is probably correct if "any gain of explanatory power would be outweighed by a corresponding loss of prior probability", and if "any gain in prior probability would be outweighed by a corresponding loss of explanatory power" (Swinburne, 2004: 82). The god hypotheses, argues Swinburne, is the simplest hypotheses available, because all of the conditions necessary for the instantiation of the universe are available in one explanatory step; the actions of God. Positing any further beings beyond God gains us no explanatory power. Nonetheless, why this hypothesis has greater simplicity and explanatory power than competing explanations such as the sneezing super-alien theory, is very puzzling.

In both theories, we have a practical end to investigation. We do not possess the proper investigatory tools to look beyond the proposed entity, in either case. It is not possible to discover any information about whether or not there is an explanation of god or the super-sneezing alien, and thus, our investigations must end with the postulation of some such being as an explanation for the universe. The sneeze of the alien has all the conditions necessary to create our universe, just like the proposed properties of God. Both theories postulate only one being with sufficient properties to create the current universe, and any other properties of such a being are things which we can only speculate at.

Swinburne might argue that the infinite attributes of God, his omnipotence and omniscience for example, would count as more simple properties than a super-alien with some definable set of finite properties. Nevertheless, I suggest that the burden of proof rests on Swinburne's shoulders to show how some infinite set of properties that are sufficient to create an ordered universe are any more simplistic than some undefined set of finite properties, which are equally sufficient for creating an ordered universe. If both are fully sufficient for instantiating the universe, how can we, from our limited perspective within the universe, pass judgment on which scenario is more likely? The properties of the

alien's sneeze are sufficient for creating the universe, but we can not reasonably infer anything else about these properties except their sufficiency. By the exact same reasoning, although we might speculate that God's properties are infinite, all we can reasonably infer is that they are equally sufficient for the instantiation of the universe. Beyond this limit, we are at a loss, and the possible simpler infinity of god's characteristics will not help us adjudicate which theory is correct.

It seems that we cannot rationally adjudicate which theory has either, greater explanatory power, or prior probability based on our current evidence. The only advantage that the design hypothesis has over the sneezing alien theory is that it connects well by analogy with our intuitions regarding purposeful design. But if something like Hume's point regarding our inability to make inferences where we have no experience is correct, then we have no rational basis for judging which of these two causes is more likely. We cannot know, then, if the analogy holds at all. Thus, the analogy should not influence our adjudication of the issue. For it to count in his favor, Swinburne would need to first show us that knowledge of the domain beyond the physical universe can somehow be accessed.

As a final point, I wish to point to the evidence of stellar and biological evolution, which Swinburne himself does not reject, as a counterexample to Swinburne's desire to extend the intelligent design analogy to account for the universe as a whole. At this point in our scientific understanding of the world, we have a very good picture of how selective processes can lead to the refinement of matter into intricate systems. From the evolution of the solar system down to the adaptations of white and black moths in Great Britain to avoid predation, we see many examples of natural processes mimicking intelligent processes. It is not clear at all that the apparent order of nature really is order. John Mackie argues that although we associate the products of human invention with human intelligence, "we have no good *empirical* reason for taking the 'marks of design' as marks of design" (Mackie, 1990: 144). In fact, we have no empirical evidence at all, since the realm of which we wish to make causal claims of, is forever beyond our ability to observe. The intuitive drive for why we should consider the design theory a better explanation than its competitors is, therefore, not intuitive at all, but actually a presumptuous mistake.

8. BRINGING IT BACK TO HUME

In Hume's *Dialogues*, the character Philo, (speaking for Hume himself) argues: "Our ideas reach no further than our experience. We have no

experience of divine attributes and operations" (1779, DCNR.2). Therefore, Hume asserts that we can have no ideas regarding divine attributes and operations, including ideas about the origin or design of the universe. For Swinburne's argument to side-step Hume's scepticism, he would have to show, not only that the god-hypothesis is the most probable cause of a universe that appears to be ordered, but also that we are justified in:

- (1) Identify what the causes of the universe might be.
- (2) Assign relative probability values to these causes.
- (3) Export our inferences from the physical realm (in which such processes of reasoning are useful), to a realm which we are not justified in believing. And, see if this has any resemblance or commensurability with the rules and regularities of the observed universe.

Swinburne entirely fails to do any of these and his Bayesian instincts are, thus, unjustified.

9. CONCLUSION

If belief in the design hypothesis is so irrational, why is it that so many people choose to believe it? Hume offers his error theory through the lips of Philo, saying that people choose to accept the design argument because it fits in nicely with their already existing web of beliefs. Moreover, they wish to continue holding those beliefs. Given the harshness of life, the idea that there exists a perfect, eternal, and good creator who will give humankind eternal happiness in an eternal 'hereafter' makes the trials of this current life more bearable. Hume admits that the arguments in favor of the design hypothesis are psychologically compelling, but they are not in themselves, numerous or forcible (Hurlbutt, 2012: 165). Hume prescribes modesty to sooth the nerves of those who must abandon the design hypothesis in light of his scepticism, saying that by discovering our own limitations in these sorts of investigations, "we may make a kind of merit of our very ignorance" (1778, EHU: 4.14). Swinburne's probabilistic attempt at doing an end-run around Hume's scepticism simply does not dodge far enough.

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