"Hume on Evil"
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1. Introduction: Hume on Evil, Then and Now

In his posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Hume offers powerful and influential criticisms of traditional arguments for God's existence. As part of this critical project in the *Dialogues*, Hume examines the relationship between the traditional concept of God as a morally good, providential agent and the evil we observe in our world, and he presents several versions of what is known as "the problem of evil." As with his critiques of arguments for God's existence, Hume's discussion of evil has transcended the dialogical and historical context in which it was imbedded, presenting ideas that philosophers continue to discuss today. In this essay, I will examine Hume's claims about evil, both as Hume presented them in dialogue form in the 18th century and as contemporary philosophers might read them independently of that form and context.

Because the bulk of Hume's writing on evil occurs in the *Dialogues*, it is worth addressing a long-standing interpretative question up front. How closely do Hume's own views match those of his characters, Philo, Cleanthes, and Demea? In the early dialogues, Philo frequently voices claims that Hume himself endorses in other writings, but Hume rarely discusses the problem of evil in his own voice. Even where Hume says the most about the problem of evil in his published work (EU §11), he presents it as a recollection of a conversation he once had in which he and a friend constructed an imaginary dialogue and in which his friend (as best as Hume can recall) offered opinions similar to those Philo offers – a structure that thrice-distances Hume from the main critical claims.[1] So although it is surely the case that Hume was sympathetic with Philo's claims about evil,

we should be somewhat cautious in assuming that Hume's own position is exactly identical to Philo's. In what follows, I will indicate those places where it is less clear whether Hume is committed to Philo's claims by ascribing the views to the character, rather than to their author.

The immediate intellectual context of Hume's discussion of evil is Hume's own mid-18th century Scotland, an intellectual context dominated by feuds between moderate and conservative Calvinists. During the Scottish Enlightenment, the problem of evil received considerably less attention than it had in previous centuries. British philosophers and theologians continued to devote entire volumes to the topic in the 18th century; see, for example, William King's *De Malo* (1702) and Soame Jenyns' *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (1756). But on the whole, the topic had faded in importance and complexity among leading intellectuals of Hume's day, certainly by comparison to its treatment in the last half of the 17th century in Continental Europe.

Hume's more thorough discussion of evil thus represents something of an anomaly among his peers. Hume is most like a mid-18th century version of Pierre Bayle, the great gadfly to 17th century theodicies – only without Bayle's interlocutors: Malebranche, Leibniz, Jacquelot. In the *Dialogues*, Leibniz, the great 17th century defender of God's goodness in the face of evil, has been reduced to a caricature, an 18th century punch line (D X.6). Malebranche, from whom Hume borrowed much in other contexts, is given shallow and oblique treatment when it comes to the problem of evil. In fact, Hume's *Dialogues* contains no point of view from anything like a 17th century rationalist: that perspective has been rejected from the outset. Hume, in effect, follows

Bayle's strategy on evil, only having first dismissed Bayle's fiercest combatants from participating. I will return to this point in the concluding section.

In what follows, I discuss Hume claims about evil with an eye towards both contemporary discussions and Hume's early modern context. In section two, I discuss the wide variety of problems of evil one finds in Hume, which involves extracting Hume's claims from their original setting. In the third section, I return to the unfolding discussion of the *Dialogues* and present what Hume himself took to be the most important claims concerning evil. In the final section, I offer some evaluations of Hume's discussion from both contemporary and historical perspectives.

2. The Problems of Evil in Hume

It is customary to refer to "*the* problem of evil," just as one might refer to "the problem of universals" or "the problem of skepticism." Although useful, this label obscures the fact that there are many different problems of evil, united mostly by the fact that they all have "God" and "evil" occurring somewhere in their formulations. In general, problems of evil concern whether the existence of a perfect, divine creator can be reconciled with the facts about evil in our world. The issue is commonly put in the form of a question: If God is all good and all-powerful, whence evil? Philo provides an especially memorable version: "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" (D X.11).

Hume was well aware that the relationship between God and evil raises a variety of philosophical problems. In fact, Hume's display of this variety in the *Dialogues* is one

of his most important legacies for contemporary discussions on evil, even though the characters themselves sometimes blur distinctions together in the heat of discussion.

In this section, I will present four major axes in Hume's discussions of evil: force, scope, kinds, and perspective. Hume offers multiple ways of filling out each dimension, which means that, strictly speaking, Hume provides us with hundreds of problems of evil. Though it is tempting to work through each of them one by one, I will conclude this section by indicating the three versions on which Hume himself focuses.

2.1 Force

If we think of problems of evil as objections to the existence of God as commonly conceived by the major monotheistic faiths, Hume notices that one can assign different *forces* to the strength of the objection. Evil might be *logically inconsistent* with God's existence, which means that facts about evil could be used to deductively prove that God does not exist. For 150 years after Hume, the objection from evil was most commonly presented in this very strong, deductive manner, known as the "logical problem of evil."

However, one could object using a weaker force. Facts about evil might make God's existence *less likely,* without giving us reason to assign it a probability of zero. On this formulation, facts about evil provide some evidence against God's existence, even though it does not deductively prove that God doesn't exist. Versions of this problem are known as *evidential* or *probabilistic* problems of evil. Contemporary discussions of this family of problems have become highly sophisticated as theories of probability and evidence have become correspondingly more nuanced. But Hume's basic point still holds: even if evil doesn't outright disprove God's existence, it might still be the case that we shouldn't believe in God's existence due to facts about evil.

A third kind of force that Hume discusses is what we might call *defensive*. The logical and evidential versions attempt to use facts about evil to conclude something about God's non-existence. By contrast, the defensive force uses facts about evil to *block* inferences from the character of our world to the existence of a perfectly good God. Evil, in other words, might prevent us from reading the goodness of the world's original cause off of the empirically observable facts about our world. This might sound a little funny at first: who would have thought that facts about evil *do* provide a good basis from which to infer a morally good creator? Isn't the theist already committed to claiming that God exists *in spite of* – surely not *because of* – evil?

Hume employs this defensive force because it had become increasingly popular in his day to argue that the empirically observable facts about the world *by themselves* license us to infer the existence of a morally good, providential creator.[2] This brand of empirically-minded theism was increasingly popular during the Scottish Enlightenment, and many took recent developments in the natural sciences to confirm the existence of a intelligent, powerful, benevolent creator (e.g., D 4.13). Hume's Philo argues against this inference from the observable world throughout the *Dialogues*, and in Parts X and XI, he argues that facts about evil provide an additional reason to block the inference: "But there is no view of human life or of the condition of mankind, from which, without the greatest violence, we can infer the moral attributes, or learn that infinite benevolence, conjoined with infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover by the eyes of faith alone" (D X.36). In other words, facts about evil prove that inferences to God's moral goodness from what we observe about the human condition are invalid, in which case evil can also be used *defensively* to try to undermine arguments for God's existence.

2.2 Scope

Although Hume doesn't make this axis as explicit, we can also discern different *scopes* to the problems of evil in Hume's discussions. Sometimes Hume appeals to the bare fact of evil, any evil at all, in his arguments. "Why is there any misery at all in the world?" Philo asks (D X.34; see also D XI.17). According to this formulation, that any evil of any kind or amount exists is the relevant fact about evil. In contemporary discussions, this is sometimes called the *abstract* or *bare* problem of evil.

Hume discusses more than just the bare existence of evil, however. Philo sometimes uses the *amount* of evil in our world (D X.8) to raise a problem. Sometimes he focuses on the *extent* of evil, the fact that suffering is so thoroughly widespread throughout the animal and human populations and present through the most of the lifespan of individual organisms (D X.8-9; D XI.13). At other points, Hume suggests that especially intensive forms of suffering occasion forceful problems of evil: "But pain often – good God how often! – rises to torture and agony, and the longer it continues, it becomes still more genuine agony and torture. Patience is exhausted; courage languishes; melancholy seizes us; and nothing terminates our misery but the removal of its cause" (D X.32; see also D X.11-14).

Hume has the most to say about another possible scope: the *distribution* of evil. This scope itself admits of variants. One kind of distribution problem that Hume mentions only in passing is the seemingly *haphazard* distribution of pain and suffering, one that resists clear correlation with other moral traits like virtue and vice. As he notes in his own voice, "Pains and pleasures seem to be scattered indifferently through life, as

heat and cold, moist and dry are dispersed through the universe" (D 112; see also EU 11.20).

More often, Hume focuses on the *global* distribution of evil, the overall balance of good to evil (understood by Hume as the overall balance of pleasure to pain (e.g., D X.31-32)). In his "Fragment on evil," Hume claims that facts about the global distribution of evil, if known, would allow us to determine whether or not the cause of the universe is morally good:

> Whether the author of nature be benevolent or not can only be proved by the effects, and by the predominancy either of good or evil, of happiness or misery, in the universe. If good prevail much above evil, we may, perhaps, presume that the author of the universe, if an intelligent, is also a benevolent principle. If evil prevail much above good, we may draw a contrary inference (D 110).

However, Hume admits that this line of inquiry faces an insurmountable problem: we do not, and probably will not ever know all the facts about the global distribution of happiness and misery in the universe:

> This is a standard by which we may decide such a question, with some appearance of certainty; but when the question is brought to that standard, and we would willingly determine the facts upon which we must proceed in our reasoning, we find that it is very difficult, if not absolutely impossible, ever to ascertain them. For who is able to form an exact computation of all the happiness and misery that are in the world, and to compare them exactly with each other (D 110)?[3]

So although the global distribution scope would decisively settle the issue, we cannot employ it, according to Hume. Of course, as Philo points out to Cleanthes at the end of Part X, this ignorance cuts both ways: it also prevents us from inferring the moral attributes of the cause of the universe from known facts about the global distribution of happiness and suffering (D X.34). Here we see an instance of Hume combining the

defensive force with the *global distribution* scope to formulate a distinctive version of the problem of evil.

2.3 Kinds of evil

I've been discussing evil in fairly general terms so far, but Hume distinguishes different kinds of evil, which means that one could combine different forces and scopes with different kinds of evil to formulate a huge range of conceptually distinct problems of evil. By the start of the 18th century, it had become standard to distinguish three kinds of evil: moral, physical (or "natural"), and metaphysical (or "evils of imperfection"). Here, for example, is Samuel Clarke's version of the distinction: "All that we call evil is either an evil of imperfection, as the want of certain faculties and excellencies which other creatures have, or natural evil, as pain death and the like, or moral evil, as all kinds of vice."[4]

In Hume's *Dialogues*, the rich metaphysical backdrop of this taxonomy is either neglected or ignored. Instead, Hume is content to distinguish only moral evil from natural evil in passing. This is a rare instance in which Hume shrinks the range of interesting problems of evil, rather than expands them. Hume even claims that with respect to at least one family of arguments from evil, the difference between moral and natural evils is not terribly important: "What I have said concerning natural evil will apply to moral, with little or no variation" (D XI.16; see also EU 8.34-35), although he does allow that problems of evil focusing on the data of moral evil will be more compelling "since moral evil, in the opinion of many, is much more predominant above moral good than natural evil above natural good" (D XI.16). That is, the distinction between moral and natural evils is relevant mostly when we focus on the global distribution scope.

Although he doesn't say very much about the problem of moral evils, Hume indicates his dissatisfaction with the most common response from theists to this form of the problem, the so-called "freewill theodicy." The basic idea of the freewill theodicy is that the exercise of creaturely freedom is incompatible with God's prevention of all moral evil, and such exercises of freedom are more valuable than God's prevention of all moral evil would be. In his early reading notes, Hume closely echoes Bayle in challenging this line of reasoning: "Liberty not a proper solution of moral ill: Because it might have been bound down, by motives like those of saints and angels" (D 107.23; see also D 107.24-25 and 32).

Most of Hume's discussion in the *Dialogues* focuses on natural evils, which he equates with pain and suffering (D X.31-32; D XI.5-12). We might wonder whether this hedonistic framework for natural goods and evils, assumed throughout Hume's discussion of evil in the *Dialogues*, is an adequate theory of value. Certainly there appears to be a vast range of goods and evils whose value greatly outstrips their contributions to our feelings of pleasure and pain: friendship, courage, honor, humiliation and shame, to name just a few. However, although Hume assumes a hedonistic framework in presenting the data of natural evils, there is no necessary connection here. One could present different forms of the problem of natural evils using very different axiological theories.

2.4 Perspectives

Philo and Demea illustrate the dismal state of the world by drawing on a variety of sources and perspectives. They refer to evils from the perspective of biology (D X.8-9), sociology and anthropology (D X.10-12), physiology and psychology (D X.13-14),

history (D X.21-22), literature (D X.4-5, 13, 23), personal testimony (D X.7), and one's own feelings and experiences (D X.33). Hume doesn't intend these to be exhaustive catalogues of what these sources tell us about the scope of pain and suffering, but his presentation reminds us that the sources of information about evil are quite wide-ranging. The natural sciences, the humanities, anecdotal testimony, and our own lived experience are distinct sources of data about evil that can occasion distinct forms of the problem of evil. More defensively, these sources might also provide counter-examples to theistic explanations of evil. For instance, facts from contemporary evolutionary biology about the extent of animal pain and death prior to the existence of human beings might defeat theistic attempts to explain all evil as the result of human freedom gone afoul.

Hume's *Dialogues* also brings to light a distinction among personal perspectives on evil that plays a prominent role in more recent discussions of evil.[5] Demea proclaims that everyone acknowledges the wretched misery of human life. "And who can doubt of what all men declare from their own immediate feeling and experience?" (D X.3) Several paragraphs later, Cleanthes objects, "I can observe something like what you mention in some others…But I confess, I feel little or nothing of it in myself" (D X.20). Predictably, Demea immediately attacks Cleanthes and offers more testimony and anecdotal evidence to support his universal claim. Unfortunately, Hume never gives Cleanthes the chance to reflect on whether Cleanthes' own personal experience of natural goods might give him resources to respond to at least some problems of evil. Hume does, however, indicate that first person perspectives on evil can provide indefeasible authority: "But this is contrary to everyone's feeling and experience: It is contrary to an authority so established as

nothing can subvert: No decisive proofs can ever be produced against this authority" (D X.33).

More often, first person perspectives on evil are thought to make the problem of evil *harder* for traditional theists. Victims of some evils may have perspectives on their own suffering that elude adequate characterization and explanation by independent observers. Indeed, experiences of some truly horrific evils might be so transformative for the participants that projection from those who haven't experienced something similar is psychologically impossible. These sorts of considerations – evil from the first-person experience of the victim – provide novel versions of the problem of evil and might also be a defensive stumbling block to theodicies that focus solely on compensatory goods enjoyed by the perpetrators (such as the freedom to abuse another person) or by the world as a whole (such as the overall favorable balance of natural goods to natural evils).

2.5 Hume's Preferred Versions

Although one can mine Hume's *Dialogues* for these variations on the general problem of evil, Hume's own focus is mainly on a problem of evil that is (a) defensive in force; (b) distributive in scope; (c) natural in kind; (d) and third-person in perspective. His overarching claim is that observable facts about the distribution of pain and suffering block inferences to God's goodness from what we know about the world. This focus in the *Dialogues* mirrors Hume's own earlier ruminations on evil. His conclusion in his "Fragment on evil" is that what we know about the distribution of natural evils and natural goods (including the complex interworking of nature, the occasional delights of human life, beauty, joy, pleasure, love, and so on) can "never afford any proof" of the

moral goodness of the source of those natural goods (D 112; see also EU 11.20-21, D X.35, D XI.2, D XI.8, D XI.12).

At several points in the *Dialogues*, Hume also discusses a problem of evil that is (a) logical in force and (b) bare or abstract in scope, the aforementioned logical problem of evil that rose to prominence in the first half of the 20th century (D X.34; D XI.1). Hume's Philo concedes in several places that this version of the problem of evil is not wholly successful (D X.35, D XI.2; D XI.4, D XI.8, D XI.12), and it is not the main focus of the discussion.[6] Hume also presents what is best understood as a version of the problem of evil that is probabilistic in force. Philo asks, "Is the world, considered in general and as it appears to us in this life, different from what a man or such a limited being would, *beforehand*, expect from a very powerful, wise, and benevolent deity?" (D XI.4; see also D X.15 and D XI.2).[7] According to a more developed version of this type of argument, the prior probability of the existence (and/or distribution) of evil is much lower on the hypothesis of theism than on the hypothesis of a morally indifferent cause of the universe.[8]

3. Hume's discussion of evil

3.1 Dialogue X: The setup

Hume's discussion of evil in the *Dialogues* is as rich as it is compressed. Due to space limitations, I will have to pass over many of the wonderful gems Hume sprinkles into the text, such as his suggestions that laziness is the root of most human evil (D XI.10), that fear of death alone prevents us all from committing mass suicide (D X.17[9]), and that what is now described as the "fine-tuning" of our universe for life may actually be evidence *against* the existence of a wise and benevolent creator (D XI.9). I will focus

instead on the most prominent philosophical claims Hume makes concerning evil, following the main thread of discussion in Parts X and XI to do so.

Leading up to Part X, the discussion has focused on whether the workings of the natural world provide sufficient evidence to justify the belief that the original cause of the world has the attributes traditionally ascribed to God, such as unity, intelligence, love, wisdom, and perfection. Philo has repeatedly argued that it does not. Philo instead advocates agnosticism about the nature of the original cause of the universe and uses the tools of Pyrrhonian skepticism to undermine Cleanthes' attempts to infer such properties from the empirically accessible properties of the natural world. In this critical project, Philo is often joined by Demea, who usually plays the role of an apophatic or "negative" theologian (i.e., someone who thinks that predications of attributes to God and created things are always equivocal). Part of Hume's point in linking Philo the agnostic and Demea the theologian is to show that these positions ultimately amount to affirming and denying (roughly) the same propositions (D IV.1; IV.12; VI.13; XII.7), in which case Philo's proposed agnosticism about the nature of the source of the universe is not as threatening as Hume's readers might have initially believed. By the conclusion of the *Dialogues*, Hume even argues that such epistemic modesty about the nature of the origin of the universe can actually pave the way for religious civility and toleration, while remaining compatible with central tenets of revealed religion (D XII.7; see also D XII.33).[10]

In Part IX, the alliance between Philo and Demea shows signs of weakening. Having sided with Philo against Cleanthes' a posteriori arguments about the nature of the original cause, Demea suggests that *a priori* arguments might yield additional knowledge

of God's nature. Cleanthes and Philo briefly join forces and raise objections to some of these arguments. Philo concludes the section by claiming that, even if these criticisms fail, this sort of a priori, abstract reasoning is not the true source of religious beliefs and practices; other sources must be sought (D IX.11).

As Part X opens, Demea proposes an alternative source of religion: every person "feels, in a manner, the truth of religion in his breast; and from a consciousness of his imbecility and misery, rather than from any reasoning, is led to seek protection from that being, on whom he and all nature is dependent" (D X.1). More fully, religious beliefs and practices spring not from careful reasoning but from a natural belief-forming mechanism that helps us cope with our feelings of threat, weakness, and misery.[11] Philo agrees with Demea, and he suggests that "the best and indeed the only method of bringing everyone to a due sense of religion is by just representations of the misery and wickedness of men" (D X.2). What follows is a tag-team effort by Demea and Philo to evoke such feelings.

From a literary perspective, the opening pages of Part X are the finest written passages in the *Dialogues*, and come close to the best of Hume's entire corpus. It is unsurprising that these passages are regularly cited as a basis from which one might argue from evil against the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God. But the context of Philo and Demea's lament should not be forgotten: they are trying to stir up a particular sentiment via rhetoric. They are not offering straightforward premises in an argument, a point Philo explicitly notes at the outset:

> And for that purpose [of bringing everyone to a due sense of religion] a talent of eloquence and strong imagery is more requisite than that of reasoning and argument. For is it necessary to prove what everyone feels within himself? It is only necessary to make us feel it, if possible, more intimately and sensibly (D X.2).

It is important to remember that the goal in these opening passages is to stir up sentiments and not offer actual arguments. Otherwise, after reading several pages describing the utter and thorough misery of life, one might be tempted to object that Hume has surely exaggerated the data. Is it really the case that, for all of us, "The first entrance into life gives anguish to the newborn infant and its wretched parent: Weakness, impotence, and distress attend each stage of that life: And it is at last finished in agony and horror" (D X.8)? Similarly, it might otherwise be tempting to respond that citing a few juicy passages from ancient and modern Western literature is hardly the best method for determining the "united testimony of mankind" (D X.7) about the distribution of happiness and misery throughout the known universe. This method *would* be patently ridiculous if the goal was to establish facts for use in a premise, but it might be a wonderfully effective method to arouse the emotions of Western readers. Or one might worry, as Leibniz objected to Bayle, that this rhetorical tour-de-force of pain and suffering tells us more about the dispositions of the observer than the facts of the matter.[12] To his credit, Hume acknowledges the possibility of observational bias in his "Fragment on evil":

> When I consider the subject with the utmost impartiality and take the most comprehensive view of it, I find myself more inclined to think that evil predominates in the world, and am apt to regard human life as a scene of misery…I am sensible, however, that there are many circumstances which are apt to pervert my judgment in this particular, and make me entertain melancholy views of things (D 111).

But it would miss the point to chide Philo and Demea for getting some of the empirical facts about evil wrong in this part of the dialogue; their goal does not require perfect accuracy.

Hume's actual goal in the first half of Part X is subtler and, in a way, more difficult. Speaking as a representative of 18th century Scottish Calvinism, Demea claims that religious affection for God is best stirred up by an awareness of our own shortcomings and subsequent misery. Philo slyly agrees with Demea that stirring up our feelings of misery can have a powerful effect on religious believers, but he doesn't think it will always be towards greater piety. In the hands of Philo, the dramatic cataloguing of pain and suffering is supposed to help undermine our natural tendency to ascribe goodness and wisdom to the cause of the universe.

Philo has to be careful, however. He admits that, in the past, these sentiments of misery and weakness have naturally tended *towards* religious conviction, not agnosticism. Hence Philo must stir up the reader's sense of misery, while also redirecting it away from its natural belief-forming tendencies. In the second half of Part X and most of Part XI, Philo uses reasoning and arguments to help overpower, as it were, this natural tendency.[13]

Interestingly, in his earlier "Fragment on Evil," Hume admits that it would be underhanded to rely on the kinds of rhetorical ploys he uses in Part X of the *Dialogues* to win over his readers:

> Should I enumerate all the evils, incident to human life, and display them, with eloquence, in their proper colours, I should certainly gain the cause with most readers…But I take no advantage of this circumstance, and shall not employ any rhetoric in a philosophical argument, where reason alone ought to be harkened to (D 111).

Hume then offers the beginnings of an argument that is similar to one Philo offers in Part XI, which suggests that the discussion of evil in the *Dialogues* isn't *entirely* a matter of enflaming people's sentiments.

Around the midpoint of Part X, the discussion shifts away from presenting the horrors of existence to what look more like traditional philosophical arguments (D X.24). At first, Philo avoids using anything like the data of suffering he's just eloquently presented and instead offers variants on the abstract, logical problem of evil (see section 2 above). He concludes that "Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered" (D X.25). These arguments are not made without rhetorical flourishes, of course. Philo claims that "through the whole compass of human knowledge, there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these" (D X.24) and that "nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive" (D X.34), which harkens back to the sort of grand, sentiment-stirring claims with which Part X began. So perhaps the appearance of deductive reasoning isn't as entirely cool-headed and independent of the sentimentalist goal of the first half of Part X. In any case, Philo concedes for the sake of discussion that "I will allow that pain or misery in man is *compatible* with infinite power and goodness in the deity" (D X.35), and does not rest his case on the stronger, logical problem of evil.

A central point of dispute between Philo (and sometimes Demea) and Cleanthes in the second half of Part X is whether the source of the universe – call it "God" – is morally good in the sense in which humans can be called morally good. Is goodness univocal to both God and humans? Cleanthes, the "anthropomorphite," claims that "if we abandon all human analogy [between God's nature and ours]…we abandon all religion" (D XI.1) This is a topic with a very long and rich theological and philosophical history which had become a flash point for disputes in the last half of the 17th century on continental Europe. Philo ultimately concludes that the evil in our world shows that if the original cause of the universe is good, it is not good in the way in which humans are

good. Given the facts of evil, the deity is, at best, beyond good and evil – a conclusion with which both agnostics and mystics can agree.

More narrowly, the discussion focuses on whether God's (non-equivocal) goodness can be inferred from the natural world, given the aforementioned facts about evil. This puts the *defensive* family of problems of evil front and center for Hume. Cleanthes purports to validly infer the goodness (and other attributes) of God from the empirically accessible world, but Philo objects, "How then does the divine benevolence display itself, in the sense of you anthropomorphites?" (D X.28). Cleanthes acknowledges that his religious convictions rest on this inference, and that the non-equivocal goodness of God must be established if theism is to be tenable. "For to what purpose establish the natural attributes of the deity, which the moral are still doubtful and uncertain?" (D X.28).

Lest we be tempted to point to a different source of justification for the belief that God is morally good (as Demea pitifully tries to do), Cleanthes drives home the empiricist framework of the entire investigation: "Whence can any cause be known but from its known effects? Whence can any hypothesis be proved but from the apparent phenomena?" (D X.30) Philo then concludes by laying out the main challenge to be taken up in Part XI: "You [Cleanthes] must *prove* these pure, unmixed, uncontrollable attributes [i.e., infinite power and goodness] from the present mixed and confused phenomena, and from these alone" (D X.35). If Cleanthes cannot, then Philo thinks he will have succeeded in showing that the moral character of the deity cannot be validly inferred from observing the natural world. Furthermore, if Cleanthes' empirical framework is correct, Philo will also have shown that moral character of the deity is

entirely unknowable. Hence, the overarching use to which evil is put in the *Dialogues* is to restrict what we can know about the nature of the cause of the universe, not to outright deny the existence of a deity. Agnosticism, not atheism, is the desired conclusion of Hume's defensive argument from evil. (Admittedly, as we will see in the next section, Hume is not always consistent about this more modest goal.)

3.2 Dialogue XI: The challenge

At the start of Part XI, Cleanthes suggests a way to wiggle out of the problem: perhaps God isn't *infinitely* powerful after all, just much more powerful than we are. This concession might explain evil, Cleanthes thinks: maybe God *is* trying to prevent all evil, and this world is just the best a limited God can do! This sounds like a significant departure from traditional theism, but when Cleanthes summarizes his alternative conception of God, it turns out to be a form of the most prominent concept of God in the 17th century, one advocated by the likes of Malebranche and Leibniz: "benevolence, regulated by wisdom, and limited by necessity, may produce just such a world as the present" (D XI.1).[14] That is, Cleanthes is imagining that there might be some outweighing goods that God cannot, as a matter of necessity, bring about without allowing some moral evil or causing some natural evil. He reasons that if there were such greater goods that even God can't realize without allowing evil, then perhaps God's pursuit of those goods explains the facts of evil in our world. Philo later challenges such "greater goods" appeals for natural evils. But independent of that, notice that Cleanthes' opening concession is hardly a relief to most theists; if evil still poses a problem for theists using Cleanthes' concept of a "limited" God, it still poses a problem for the vast majority of theists who think God's power ranges only over what is possible.

Philo spends the bulk of Part XI arguing that a problem indeed remains, even for the theist whose God must act in conformity with wisdom and necessity. The discussion has three main sections. In the first, Philo argues that the facts of evil are antecedently unlikely, given even Cleanthes' proposed form of theism (D XI.2-4). In the second, Philo points to four circumstances that give rise to most evils in our world, and he argues that it is highly improbable that all (or even any) of them were unavoidable or necessary for God to bring about the goods that exist in our world (D XI.5-12). Or, at the very least, for all we know about the world these circumstances were avoidable, in which case the resulting evils prevent us from inferring God's goodness from the known world (D XI.12). In the third part, Philo cranks the rhetoric back up and concludes that, given the known facts about evil, the origin of the universe is most likely by far to be amoral (D XI.13-15). In the end, the discussion breaks down completely and Demea hastily departs the scene.

I will focus in this section on Philo's four circumstances. The four circumstances are really four greater goods theists might point to in order to justify God's creation of a world as full of pain and suffering as ours seems to be. For each proposed justification, Philo points out that the relevant greater good could probably have been obtained by a deity without the corresponding evils.

First, perhaps the fact that pain contributes to our self-preservation justifies its institution by a benevolent creator. Pain very effectively prompts us to seek food, warns us not to touch hot objects, and so forth. Philo replies that it seems likely that God could have achieved the same good of self-preservation through lesser degrees of pleasure

instead: “Pleasure alone, in its various degrees, seems to human understanding sufficient for this purpose” (D XI.6).

The second and fourth circumstances work in tandem. Perhaps pain and suffering is the result of simple, regular laws of nature, and the goodness of those laws outweighs the pain and suffering they sometimes occasion. (This seems to be a crude version of Malebranche’s theodicy.) Philo offers three replies. First, it seems likely that God could, in fact, create a perfectly lawful world without occasioning suffering. Second, it seems likely that God could achieve the same goods associated with a perfectly lawful universe by creating a universe that *looked* perfectly lawful to creatures, even though it involved lots of hidden tinkering by God to prevent suffering. Third, it isn’t at all clear that our world *is* regulated in a perfectly lawful fashion in the first place. “The irregularity is never, perhaps, so great as to destroy any species; but is often sufficient to involve the individuals in ruin and misery” (D XI.11).

The remaining circumstance mimics another popular greater good appeal: perhaps the great good of a plentiful and diverse cosmos can explain the existence of so much weakness and suffering (see also D 107.18). In such a plentiful world, someone has to play the role of the weak, the infirmed, the miserable wretch near the bottom of the great chain of being. Philo replies that such plenitude comes at an unreasonably high cost: animals generally have just enough ability to meet basic needs, and that for only a short while, and even that is only for the lucky few. Instead of acting like a generous, “indulgent parent,” nature appears to be “a rigid master” who gives her children the bare necessities to eek out a meager existence. Furthermore, there is no necessary connection between the good of diversity and the crowded, scarce conditions of our world: it seems

likely that God could have settled for fewer individuals or could have endowed us all with just a few more powers (D XI.10). Variety by itself doesn't require that the happiness scale be populated *all the way down*, as it were.

Of course, the prior philosophers and theologians who had defended these greater goods appeals anticipated these sort of quick, off-the-cuff objections, and offered pre-emptive replies. But demolishing traditional theodicies beyond the pale of reply isn't Hume's main goal here. Philo concedes that there are levelheaded, albeit speculative responses available to everything he's said in this section. Indeed, given Philo's own modestly skeptical position, it follows that his own speculative objections *cannot* be decisive:

> What then shall we pronounce on this occasion? Shall we say that these circumstances are not necessary and that they might easily have been altered in the contrivance of the universe? This decision seems too presumptuous for creatures, so blind and ignorant. Let us be more modest in our conclusions (D XI.12).

Hume does, however, provide a much-needed reminder in this section that it is insufficient for theists to explain the justification of evil by merely pointing out a great good that accompanies the evils. One must also show that (a) the good could not have been otherwise had; (b) the good is sufficiently great to outweigh the evil; and (c) that the constraints mentioned in (a) and (b) are consistent with God's other attributes, such as omnipotence.

Consider an extreme and obvious example. Peter decides to hike up a mountain, where he becomes trapped, suffers alone in agony for days, and then dies in terrible pain as wild animals slowly devour him. We can readily imagine Philo asking, "If God exists and is all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing, why did this happen to Peter?" Suppose

someone replies, "Yes, it is terrible, but just before dying, Peter saw a truly beautiful sunset that he wouldn't have seen if he hadn't been trapped up on the mountain, and God wanted Peter to enjoy that beautiful sunset." This would be a terrible reply to Philo for reasons that Hume's discussion highlights. First, it fails condition (a): surely God could have arranged for Peter to see the sunset without all the other horrific events. It also fails condition (b): however beautiful a sunset may be, its goodness surely does not outweigh the pain and suffering Peter endured. And, depending on how one responds to these concerns, it may also violate (c): why couldn't God have simply given Peter a vision of the lovely sunset as he sits in paradise? Why couldn't God have created non-organic matter for the wild animals to consume the instant they approached Peter? Why not give Peter the ability to climb mountains without getting trapped in the first place? Again, there may be answers to all these questions, but part of Hume's point is that it is incumbent upon the theist to provide them if she wants someone who isn't already convinced that God is good to find her account of evil compelling. Naming an attendant good isn't sufficient.

In summary, the main focus in the first two sections of Part XI, as it had been in Part X, is the defensive problem of evil. Philo repeatedly concedes that his arguments from evil establish that God is not morally good (in the sense in which humans are good) only if that property of God must be inferred exclusively from the observable world:

> Let us allow that if the goodness of the deity (I mean a goodness like the human) could be established on any tolerable reasons *a priori*, these phenomena [i.e., evils] however untoward, would not be sufficient to subvert that principle…But let us still assert that as this goodness is not antecedently established, but must be inferred from the phenomena, there can be no grounds for such an inference" (D XI.12, see also D XI.2, D XI.4, D XI.8).[15]

However, Cleanthes himself has agreed that an empirical inference is needed to establish God's goodness, so Philo rests content with a hypothetical, agnostic conclusion: the benevolence of God cannot be inferred from what we know about the observable world. Though speculations about greater goods may "be sufficient to *save* the conclusion concerning the divine attributes, yet surely [they] can never be sufficient to *establish* that conclusion" (D XI.8).

3.3 Dialogue XI: The breakdown

Just when everything seems to be going Philo's way, the dialogue breaks down. After discussing the four circumstances, Philo reiterates his modest, conditional conclusion that "the bad appearances…may be compatible with such attributes as you suppose," even though "they can never prove these attributes" (D XI.12). The discussion then takes an odd turn as Philo abruptly returns to his edgy, over-the-top rhetoric from Part X. And as Philo's rhetoric builds, his epistemic modesty is quickly forgotten: "Look round this universe…the whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children" (D XI.13). The switch from the conditional to the declarative continues in the next paragraph: "The true conclusion is that the original source of all things is entirely indifferent to all these principles and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold, or to drought above moisture, or to light above heavy" (D XI.14). Philo then tosses out four possible views on the goodness of the "first causes of the universe," and quickly declares that the fourth option, "that they have neither goodness nor malice…therefore seems by far the most probable" (D XI.15).[16]

Philo's sudden shift has prompted a veritable field day of interpretative speculation. It is extremely difficult to see how Philo's claims here are consistent with his professed agnosticism throughout the rest of the dialogue. He is no longer playing defense. He's now claiming that not only do we have access to a view of "the whole" universe – a point he earlier denied (D VII.8) – but we can also form a "true conclusion" about the moral character of its cause, namely that its amorality is "by far the most probable". Just a few paragraphs earlier, Philo himself had reminded Cleanthes that "we know so little beyond common life, or even of common life, that, with regard to the economy of the universe, there is no conjecture, however wild, which may not be just; nor any one, however plausible, which may not be erroneous" (D XI.5). So how does Philo suddenly know so much?

Some interpreters have bent over backwards to save this portion of the dialogue from the charge of internal inconsistency, even going so far as to argue that Philo is actually offering a *parody* of Cleanthes' earlier arguments in these paragraphs and never intended to advocate any of these claims for himself.[17] Philo's seemingly straightforward inference to "the true conclusion" is made tongue-in-cheek, as it were. Talk about the hermeneutics of charity! Suffice it to say that if parody was Hume's intended goal, the joke is him, since not only do neither of his other characters pick up on the farce, it has eluded virtually every other reader of Hume's *Dialogues* for over 200 years.

Another option, one I find more convincing even if less satisfying, is that the dialogue simply got away from Hume at this point. This could be a faint way of praising Hume's realism in dialogue writing: in actual philosophical conversation, discussion partners often contradict their earlier claims. But that won't do here, as Hume's loss of

control over his characters has been steadily building since the discussion turned to evil. Philo's speech in Part XI is the longest uninterrupted monologue in the entire *Dialogues.* Were Hume not such a good writer of a dialogue, we might excuse the harangue. But independent of the content of what Philo says, it is deeply out of character for Philo to play this verbose, didactic role at all; he is the gadfly in the dialogues, the critic, the Pyrrhonian skeptic. He's the Socrates, not the Plato. Philo begins to lose his modesty in Part X when he claims his arguments are among the most certain and insurmountable in all of human history, but there he hesistates and backs off. His arguments appear to be based on certain and infallible inference unless "we assert that these subjects exceed all human capacity" (D X.34). But by the end of Part XI, Hume's Philo has entirely forgotten the modesty "which I have all along insisted on" (D X.34).

Hume has also lost some of his grip on Cleanthes and Demea. In Part X, Cleanthes is made to assert that the only legitimate response to Philo is to "deny absolutely the misery and wickedness of man" (D X.31) and that "if you can make out the present point, and prove mankind to be unhappy or corrupted, there is an end at once of all religion" (D X.28) – claims that even Philo recognizes are unnecessarily strong (D X.33). Even more unevenly, Cleanthes uncharacteristically urges Philo to speak "at length, without interruption" (D XI.1) about Philo's views on evil, a rather heavy-handed way for an author to justify the lengthy, unbroken speech that follows. Although Demea's role in the *Dialogues* has always been a bit uneven and awkward, he is almost entirely absent in Part XI, piping up briefly at the very end just before leaving in a huff.

Even more tellingly, the point on which Philo heads off message is very similar to the unfinished conclusion of Hume's earlier "Fragment on evil." There, Hume begins to

compare the distribution of pain and suffering to the way "heat and cold, moist and dry are dispersed through the universe; and if the one prevails a little above the other, this is what will naturally happen in any mixture of principles…on every occasion, nature seems to employ either" (D 112), a comparison Philo asserts in this problematic section. Perhaps one source of the derailment involves Hume inserting his own opinion on what readers should conclude from the facts of evil, even though it isn't a view that naturally fits what any of his characters would say. Such speculation of authorial intrusion is impossible to confirm, of course, but I distinctly hear a new voice speaking in D XI.13-15, one that is far more convinced and dogmatic about the "true conclusion" from evil. Unfortunately, few if any arguments for this much stronger conclusion are offered in this section, and even Hume's own characters seem aware that none of the earlier ones they discussed entail such a strong conclusion. So if it is an intrusion by an outsider, it is a philosophically disappointing one.

When at last someone breaks into Philo's rant at D XI.18, it is Demea. He seems deeply troubled by Philo's suggestion that if God is the "original principle" of all things, then God is the author of sin (D XI.17), despite the fact that this charge had been leveled at (and rebuffed by) Calvinists throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.[18] Once again, the absence of reference to the prior century's discussion is keenly felt, as no hint is given to readers that figures like Leibniz had devoted a good portion of their career to sorting through these matters with considerable care and ingenuity (even if not cogency). Instead, Cleanthes jumps on the anti-Demea bandwagon, implying that Demea's initial strategy in Part X of invoking the feeling of misery worked safely "in ages of stupidity and

ignorance" (D XI.19) – but no longer. Frankly, I sympathize with Demea's decision to quit the discussion; it was no longer a genuine inquiry.

4. Evaluating Hume on evil

I will conclude with some ways to think about what Hume has and hasn't achieved in his discussion of evil. Before evaluating Hume on evil, we need to decide which Hume is going to be evaluated: Hume for us or Hume in his own time and place? We might, for instance, try to extract, formalize, and evaluate arguments found in scattered passages, thereby mining Hume's texts for philosophical ideas relevant to contemporary interests. The danger of this approach is that we might easily misrepresent Hume's own views if we take some of his characters' claims about evil out of the context of the *Dialogues* itself, much less out of the historical context in which it was written. Nonetheless, contemporary interpreters and teachers often perform such extractions, and it is undoubtedly true that many of Hume's claims in the *Dialogues* have achieved a philosophical significance that far exceeds their immediate dialogical and historical contexts.

Alternatively, we might focus in on the historical context and/or genre of the *Dialogues*, and evaluate Hume's discussion of evil in light of those contextualized goals. The danger of this more historicizing approach is that it can obscure how Hume's discussions may be relevant for our own time. I am not going to adjudicate this methodological issue here; both approaches can provide philosophical insights. Instead, I will offer an example of how critical evaluations might go for each approach. I'll start with an extracted claim, and then turn to a more historically-sensitive point of evaluation. I'll conclude with a brief note on Hume's legacy for subsequent discussions of evil.

Although I've outlined the major foci of Hume's discussions of evil, the *Dialogues* are extremely rich. Alongside the main points of contention, Hume's Philo offers numerous quick arguments about evil in passing. In this, Hume wonderfully evokes the spirit of Bayle, Montaigne, and other self-styled Pyrrhonian skeptics, who tend to throw out lots of undeveloped arguments at a quick pace, perhaps hoping that the sheer multiplicity of arguments for the same conclusion will by itself offer a kind of meta-support the conclusion.

For 21st century readers of Hume, it is difficult to know what to do with this approach. On the one hand, Hume is sometimes thought to have presented one of the most decisive cases from evil against the existence of God. This reputation invites us to critically analyze and evaluate each argument carefully, laying out its assumptions, inferences, and conclusions far more fully than Hume himself ever does. At the same time, doing this for many of the arguments often reveals glaring holes or very contentious assumptions that greatly limit the scope of his conclusion. After running through a series of such analyses, it is hard to shake the feeling that Hume's intended point is somehow being missed.

I'll illustrate with an example. Consider the following argument made by Philo near the middle of Part X: "[God's] power we allow infinite: Whatever he wills is executed: But neither man nor any other animal is happy: Therefore, he does not will happiness…Through the whole compass of human knowledge, there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these" (D X.24; see also D X.34). Sticking with the human case, Philo's argument is as follows:

(1) If God wills that people are happy, then people are happy.
(2) People aren't happy.

(3) Therefore, God doesn't will that people are happy.

Philo claims that this is among the most certain and infallible inferences in human knowledge. Certainly it is, if by that he means only that it is an instance of *modus tollens*. He means more than this, of course, advocating it as an obviously and indisputably *sound* argument as well. As a general rule, I recommend becoming highly suspicious whenever philosophers invoke terms like "clearly" or "obviously" in stating their conclusions, much less when they claim that their argument is among the most certain and unassailable in the history of human thought. Hyperbole can easily blind us to questionable reasoning, and this argument is no exception. As a little reflection will show, there is an equivocation in the sense of "willing" between (1) and (3) that undermines the force of its conclusion.

According to the sense of willing in (1), God's willing a state of affairs suffices for the obtaining of that state of affairs. This is true when "God wills" is taken in a strong sense, akin to "God determines." For if God *determines* that state of affairs α obtains, then α obtains. However, if we apply that strong sense of willing to the conclusion of (3), the conclusion no longer appears worrisome for the traditional theist. The conclusion states that God doesn't fully *determine* that people are happy, or that God's actions aren't sufficient for bringing about human happiness. However, a long-standing Christian tradition holds that people have the sort of freedom and characters that make it impossible or at least highly undesirable for God to determine them to be happy. Although Hume himself rejects the underlying account of human freedom in this response, the necessary conditions on freedom is a controversial issue that surely falls short of his "certain and infallible" criteria.

The reason that (3) initially appears so worrisome for theism is that we naturally understand "will" in (3) in a much weaker sense, something like "prefers" or "wants it to be the case." Read in this weaker sense, (3) does seem like a troubling conclusions for theists: what sort of morally good deity doesn't want its rational creatures to be happy? However, if we apply this weaker, merely preferential sense of "will" to (1), (1) is no longer obviously true. If God prefers that state of affairs α obtain, does it follow that α obtains? Not necessarily. Perhaps there are bad consequences associated with α such that, necessarily, were α to obtain, those bad consequences would also occur. Suppose further that those bad consequences are so bad that they greatly outweigh the good involved in α. In that case, God might prefer α, but still refrain from bringing about α.

To use a silly example, suppose the only way in which I can stop the pain from the paper cut in Sally's pinky is by cutting off her hand. (Feel welcome to concoct the needed details: we're on a deserted island, we have very little medical knowledge, etc.) I might reasonably desire or prefer that Sally doesn't suffer from the paper cut without thereby desiring or preferring to bring it about that she doesn't suffer from the cut, on the grounds that I don't desire to bring about the associated suffering involved in cutting off of her hand. In this case, although I prefer that Sally doesn't suffer from the cut, considered in itself, I don't prefer Sally's non-suffering, all things considered.[19]

This little thought experiment shows that for some agents, willing in favor of a state of affairs, in the sense of preferring or desiring it, doesn't entail willing in favor of bringing that state of affairs about. If God were ever in a situation in which, necessarily, bringing about a good would thereby also bring about some vastly greater evil, God's preferring or desiring that good wouldn't entail that God brings about that good. If so,

then when "willing" is taken in the weaker sense that makes (3) troublesome, (1) is false. Hume might respond (as Bayle did) that an omnipotent being could never be in such a situation, but here again, his position would be in the small minority in the history of philosophical theology. At the very least, that God can do the impossible is surely not among the most certain and infallible of human beliefs.

In short, Philo's argument seems to contain an equivocation on "willing": the sense of "wills" used in (1) renders (3) harmless, whereas the sense used in (3) renders (1) false. Although there are replies to be made on behalf of Hume, they will involve controversial premises about human freedom, human happiness, and divine power that move us well beyond the most "certain and infallible" deliverances.

Although it is not part of the inference itself, we might also wonder about the truth of premise (2), the empirical claim that people are not happy. Hume himself has already shown us that empirically determining overall human happiness is a difficult, if not impossible affair. If happiness is taken in a first-person, subjective way based on a report of perceived well-being, then it is outright false that no person is happy. If the generic statement in (2) isn't meant to be interpreted a universally quantified statement (i.e., "No person is happy"), then what range of cases should we consider? People living in 18th century Scotland? People throughout a broader range of history who have recorded their self-assessed happiness and passed it on to us? Or more broadly, people across all human history and cultures? Although the scope of happiness has been studied recently by sociologists, psychologists, economists, historians, and neuroscientists, the sort of data-gathering required is vastly trickier than Hume's breezy survey of Western

literature can even begin to approximate, and (so far at least) the current research disconfirms Hume's claim in (2).[20]

This is just the tip of the iceberg. It is easy to find problems in many of Philo's arguments as Hume states them in the text, to the point where this way of evaluating Hume on evil becomes a glum homuncular exercise in refutation. At the very least, engaging Hume's arguments on evil fruitfully will require readers to develop his claims in ways that the texts don't supply. Numerous attempts to do just this have been made by later philosophers, and providing such inspiration is one way Hume's discussions have greatly influenced further work on the problem of evil.

As noted previously, one might complain that these nitpicky objections to Philo's arguments overlook the dialogical and historical framework of Hume's discussion of evil. Philo is a character in a philosophical discussion, and like many of us in oral philosophical discussions, he sometimes exaggerate the strength of his views or the firmness with which he holds them. We sometimes let our conversation partners pull us away from our claims before we have a chance to develop them fully, and so forth. Hume didn't write a treatise on evil, after all; he wrote a dialogue that discusses the problem of evil in the versions most relevant to his own context.

For those persuaded by such concerns, let me offer another avenue for critical reflection that takes the genre and historical context of the *Dialogues* more seriously. Hume presents three characters in the dialogues: a moderate Pyrrhonian skeptic, an empirical theist, and an apophatic-style theologian. Missing from the discussion is a metaphysically-savvy theist, the sort of philosopher one commonly finds among Scholastics and 17th century rationalists. These were the philosophers and theologians

who set the framework for discussing evil in the Latin west for centuries, a framework that was imbedded in a host of metaphysical and axiological commitments. Indeed, many of the most animating questions in previous centuries about God's relation to evil were ineliminably metaphysical in character, such as the ontology of good and evil and the metaphysics of Divine action. Theodician questions about God's moral justification for evil are raised only within this broader set of topics.[21] However, Hume excludes those frameworks, theories, and perspectives at the outset of the discussion, a luxury that critics of religion in previous centuries didn't have.

That Hume leaves out historically important voices isn't a devastating criticism. We all begin with particular philosophical assumptions, and to Hume's credit, he defends his anti-metaphysic, noncognitivist stance in other works. For the first half of the 20th century in Anglo-American philosophy, the antecedent rejection of metaphysical speculation in addressing questions about God and evil seemed not only justified, but natural. However, new readers of Hume on evil need to be aware that Hume's discussion of evil presupposes a set of restrictions on possible questions and replies that have not always been accepted, and are no longer widely accepted today. Even more, as the century before Hume and the last half of the 20th century both demonstrated, a metaphysically loaded philosophical theism has much to contribute to discussions of evil. Its absence invites readers to speculate on how Hume's dialogues on evil might have unfolded, had he been willing to address theists on their terms.

Although Hume's discussion of evil is not without internal and external concerns, it cannot be denied that Hume has had a tremendous influence on nearly every subsequent discussion of the problem of evil. Hume's *Dialogues* provides many of the

main questions about evil taken up by later philosophers of religion. Even where contemporary discussions have moved beyond Hume, traces can still be found in Hume's texts. The first half of Dialogue X also presents some of the most memorable and forceful presentations of the widespread character of evil. It is difficult to read it and not feel some of the sentiments Demea and Philo intended to stir up in us. Furthermore, while the sort of inferential claims to God's goodness made by Cleanthes and challenged by Philo aren't very common today, undoubtedly some of that eclipse is due to Hume's probing challenges.

For quite some time, Hume's discussion of evil largely shifted the focus of evil in philosophy of religion from metaphysics to epistemology. It also helped turn the primary question about evil for theists into one of justification (rather than, say, ontology or causation). Hume's work also ushered in a greater focus on natural evils like pain and suffering (as opposed to sins and metaphysical evils), even though he imbedded his claims within a hedonist value theory that is now widely rejected. And for many today, Hume's forceful presentations of various arguments from evil represents a progressive, 18th century heralding of the winnowing of traditional theism and the rebirth of a more modest, empirically-respectable naturalism.

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[1] The two main exceptions are a few sentences in Hume's early reading notes on Bayle and King and in a recently discovered, unpublished fragment on evil, likely written during the 1740s.

[2] Leading examples include Samuel Clarke and Joseph Butler, as well as Hume's own character, Cleanthes.

[3] This marks a rare point of agreement between Hume and Leibniz. Bayle had made claims about the vast scope of suffering in our world that were very similar to what Hume's Philo and Demea assert in the first half of Part X (Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, "Manicheans"). Leibniz replied, as Hume concedes in this passage, that we are too ignorant of the global distribution of happiness and suffering in the universe to use it in an argument against God's goodness (Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §13-19).

[4] Clarke, *Demonstration*, 78-9; see also King, *De Origine Mali*, 37; and Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §21. For Hume's awareness of this tri-fold distinction, see D 107.18. For a discussion of this classification and its historical development, see Newlands, "The Problem of Evil" and Newlands, "Evils, Privations, and the Early Moderns."

[5] For recent work on distinctively first person perspective on evil, see Marilyn Adams, *Horrendous Evil and the Goodness of God*. For discussion of second person perspectives as related to evil, see Eleanor Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*.

[6] For this concession in Hume's own voice, see EU 11.21; Cleanthes suggests that this version of the problem may actually be successful (D XI.1).

[7] Hume's formulation blurs two distinct scopes here: is it the evil of world in general or as we have experienced it? Furthermore, Hume can't mean by "in general" something like "on the whole", since he concedes we don't have access to that kind of global data. His earlier formulation (D X.34) puts it in terms of "any misery at all," suggesting he intends an abstract or bare scope here.

[8] I have only provided the most salient step; for a carefully developed version that takes its inspiration from this passage in Hume, see Paul Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists."

[9] A striking contrast: Leibniz suggests that only concerns of boredom would prevent everyone from willingly reliving their life over again (Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §13).

[10] This paragraph, which concludes with an exhortation to "consideration then where the real point of controversy lies, and if you cannot lay aside your disputes, endeavour at least to cure yourselves of your animosity" (D XII.7) was added to the manuscript in the final year of Hume's life. It echoes the call for a kind of civility and ecumenicalism among religious partisans that is repeated in the *Dialogues'* final paragraphs. The dangerous sort of religious person, for Hume, is not the pious but the enthusiast (D XII.16-30; EU 11.29). This overarching goal of Humean ecumenicalism – demonstrating that moderate skeptics, pious devotees, mystics and even some dogmatists engage mostly in merely verbal disputes – helps us understand the otherwise puzzling concession of Philo at the end of Part 12: "to be a philosophical skeptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian" (D XII.33; see also D X.36).

[11] This account of the origin of religion echoes part of Hume's own account (see esp. NHR 3.1-6, though it is a bit surprising that Demea would voice it.

[12] Leibniz writes, "it is only people of a malicious disposition or those who have become somewhat misanthropic through misfortunes…who find wickedness everywhere" (Leibniz, *Theodicy*, §220).

[13] Philo suggests that this shift is reflected in the rhetoric of religious leaders themselves, who realized that "as men now have learned to form principles and to draw consequences," they need to employ arguments to achieve what fear-mongering once sufficed to accomplish (D XI.20). (It is unclear how well Philo's strategy of pitting reason and arguments against sentiments and natural mechanisms fits into Hume's larger theory about the impotence of reason in the face of the passions.)

[14] Only the likes of Descartes and Arnauld would deny that God's goodness is regulated by God's wisdom and that God's power is "limited by" necessity.

[15] On the basis of what Hume has and hasn't tried to demonstrate in the *Dialogues,* we should probably replace his "as" with an "if": "*if* this goodness is not antecedently established…"

[16] As numerous commentators have pointed out, the four options Philo presents aren't actually mutually exhaustive, though I don't take Philo to be any more concerned with that than he is that the four circumstances are mutually exhaustive or that the cataloguing of the kinds of evils in Part X is exhaustive.

[17] Klaas J. Kraay, "Philo's Argument for Divine Amorality Reconsidered" and Thomas Holden, *Spectres of False Divinity*, 175-78.

[18] Hume had claimed in his own voice that showing how God is not the author of sin, given other standard theistic commitments, "has been found hitherto to exceed all the power of philosophy" and involves a "boundless ocean of doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction" (EU 8.36).

[19] A different way to reject the inference is to deny that willing is closed under known entailment, and to argue that human misery is a known, but unintended entailment of the object of God's will (say, that humans have morally significant freedom). For a 17th century version of this tactic, see Leibniz, *Confessio Philosophi,* 63-65.

[20] Two highly readable starting points are Richard Laylard, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* and Tali Sharot, *The Optimism Bias*.

[21] For an example from Leibniz, who was certainly very interested in questions of divine justification as well, see Newlands, "Leibniz on Privations, Limitations, and the Metaphysics of Evil."