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**3. What arguments can be brought against the concept of distributive (as opposed to retributive) justice? Are they convincing?**

Many contemporary calls for social reform rest philosophically on an account of distributive justice. Can justice be understood in terms of distribution? In this essay, I will argue that a modest account of distributive justice is possible. In order to do so, I will (1) briefly describe the concept of distributive justice in contrast to retributive justice, (2) raise three objections to such a concept, and (3) reply to these objections, which in some cases will require incorporating the objector's insights.

(1)

What is justice? Although pursuing an abstract definition of justice is an impossible and unhelpful pursuit, a working understanding of justice can emerge through the observation of everyday human activities. Appeals to justice are made when someone claims that an action, situation or intention is right or wrong. One need not appeal to an absolute standard to speak of an action being correct or incorrect. Such a claim speaks of a relationship between the action in question and some sort of standard by which the action can be judged. Such standards of rightness are the requirements of justice.

Traditionally, justice has been contrasted with goodness. Both are moral categories. Both goodness and justice speak of what *should be* over against what *is*. But goodness speaks of what is better and worse, whereas justice speaks of what is right and wrong. Whether a hard-and-fast distinction between goodness and justice can be

meaningfully sustained is an important question. But this initial distinction is sufficient for understanding what is meant by talk of justice.

The concept of justice itself can be understood in at least two distinct senses. On the one hand, retributive justice addresses what is the right response to wrongdoing. Different theories regarding the purpose of retribution (deterrence, punishment, reform, etc.) are united by approaching justice in terms of responding rightly to what has been done wrong.

On the other hand, distributive justice addresses the right response to a wrong situation. Certain circumstances can be deemed unjust. Specifically, the justice of a circumstance is measured in accordance with the distribution of goods. Notice that the category of the good must be incorporated in order to speak meaningfully of distributive justice. When applied broadly, distributive justice addresses the concerns of social justice: the way in which a society should be structured with regard to its cumulative goods.

One such broad application of distributive justice can be seen in the work of John Rawls. Rawls argues that, by going behind a veil of ignorance concerning the contingencies of one's situation, persons would abide by certain rational principles of fairness that would protect their own interests and serve the common good. Rawls abstracts two principles of distributive justice from this theoretical social agreement. The first is the principle of liberty, whereby each person is given as much liberty as possible without overstepping the boundaries of another's liberty. The second is the principle of difference, whereby the only permitted inequalities in the distribution of goods are those that serve the common good, especially those with the least goods. On the basis of such

principles, Rawls can support a theory of justice as fairness, which can be used to support policies of the just redistribution of goods.

(2)

Is such an understanding of justice as distributive (in addition to or perhaps instead of retributive) warranted? A number of philosophical objections can be raised against the very idea of distributive justice. I will outline three such objections, drawing more or less on the work of Robert Nozick.

First, the notion of distributive justice *confuses justice with equality*. By identifying differences between persons concerning the goods they have at their disposal, distributive concepts of justice assume inequality is inherently unjust. Although it is difficult enough to defend, such an assumption is the result of a conceptual confusion. If the problem were inequality, then it would be clearer to appeal to the principles of equality independent of the concept of justice. Perhaps equality could be defended as a good toward which to strive, thus making the appeal to justice unnecessary.

Second, concepts of justice as distributive *conflict with liberty*. Appeals to distributive justice inevitably come into conflict with the freedom of the individual to make use of one's goods as one sees fit. Either liberty will be subordinated to distributive justice, or distributive justice will be limited by liberty, or both will be controlled by a third principle. One could even argue that justice demands certain individual liberties by appealing to basic human rights. Thus the concept of justice as a defender of liberty severely limits a distributive concept of justice.

Third, distributive concepts of justice *ignore history*. By focusing on an end-state situation in which goods are unfairly distributed, concepts of social justice as distributive

fail to account for the historical process of such distribution. Attention to the contingencies of history would reveal that there is more to justice than the distribution of goods. Some persons could in fact be entitled to certain goods in terms of inherent ownership (e.g., the products of musical creativity). Some persons could in fact have goods at their disposal which do in fact serve the common good yet were acquired through an unjust process (e.g., donation to charity of fraudulent assets). Furthermore, in some cases the history behind a situation of distribution is so complex that the rightness of the process and result is too difficult to ascertain.

(3)

Can the notion of justice as distributive respond adequately to these objections? The first objection is easily answered. The second objection calls for some adaptation. The third objection is serious enough that any viable concept of distributive justice must adapt significantly. However, none of these objections require a wholesale rejection of the concept of distributive justice.

First, distributive justice properly understood does not confuse justice with equality. In the case of Rawls, inequalities are permitted. The purpose of his theory is to indicate how such inequalities can be justified, which he does so on the basis of the principle of difference. It is not that inequality is inherently unjust, but rather that *arbitrary* inequalities are unjust.

Second, distributive justice does not necessarily conflict with liberty. In Rawls' case, liberty is clearly subordinated to social justice. However, this need not be the only option. One could develop an understanding of the good society as one which seeks after *both* distributive justice *and* freedom. Protections for each could be advanced by

principles that account for the demands of the other. So, although a subordination of liberty to justice is problematic, it is not a necessary move to make when developing an understanding of distributive justice.

Third, inasmuch as a theory of distributive justice focuses a-historically on end-state distribution of goods, it will be inadequate. The significance of historical contingencies must be acknowledged. In attempting to rid society of arbitrary distribution of goods, Rawls' veil of ignorance in fact undermines some forms of rightful inherent ownership. Contingency is not the same as arbitrariness. However, history cannot explain everything. Some principles of justice are appropriate for assessing the rightness of an end-state situation. So, a theory of distributive justice that takes into account historical factors may continue also to seek after principles of just distribution.

So, the concept of justice as distributive can be upheld, provided it be appropriately modified in view of some important objections.

**4. Set out in premises and conclusion one of the traditional arguments for the existence of God and critically examine its validity.**

Of the many traditional arguments for the existence of God, one of the clearest is the argument from design. In this essay, I will (1) summarize this argument by putting it in logical form, (2) raise some objections to it that can be successfully answered, and (3) raise some objections that cannot be successfully answered. It will be shown through the course of this discussion that, despite its strengths, the design argument is ultimately unsuccessful as an argument for the existence of God.

(1)

The argument for God's existence from evidence of design in nature is popularly

associated with the so-called watchmaker argument used by William Paley. The importance of this parable is that it displays the analogical character of the argument from design. Suppose one was walking in the woods and found a watch. By observing its intricate design, wherein each part serves a function and all the parts together work toward a clear purpose, one could rationally infer that an intelligent being is responsible for fashioning the watch (a.k.a., the watchmaker). The existence of such a watchmaker can be inferred from the watch without having ever directly encountered the watchmaker. This example provides the first premise of the argument: (a) the existence of an intelligent being may be inferred from evidence of design.

The next step in the argument comes by way of analogy. Just as there is evidence of design in the watch, so there is evidence of design in the world. One can directly observe the patterns of the world that together form an intricate and purposive whole. The marshaling of this evidence from nature provides the second premise of the argument: (b) there is evidence of design in nature.

The conclusion drawn from these two premises is that, since (a) the existence of an intelligent being may be inferred from evidence of design and (b) there is evidence of design in nature, therefore (c) there exists an intelligent being that designed nature, i.e., God. These are the basic components in syllogistic form of the argument for the existence of God from design.

(2)

A number of objections have been raised against this argument. In his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, David Hume gives sustained attention to this argument and its problems. Drawing on and developing from Hume's discussion, I will raise three

objections to this argument and respond to each in turn.

First, concerning premise (a), one could be skeptical concerning the ability to infer the existence of an intelligent being from supposed evidence of design. The emergence of modern science shows that much can be explained without recourse to supposed minds and wills hidden behind the operations of nature. Such beings are unnecessary for understanding the way the universe works. Therefore, the move from design to design is unnecessary.

Although it is right to question appeals to imaginary substances underline the operations of nature, modern science does not require a thoroughgoing skepticism with regard to minds, causation, and logical relationships. One could speak of enduring mental realities without appeal to imaginary substances. Such minds would interact and overlap with physical realities without being reduced to materialistic explanations. And so the first premise holds in the face of this objection

Second, concerning premise (b), one could argue that there is not evidence of design in nature. Hume in fact challenges whether there is sufficient evidence of design. There may be design in this part of the universe, but we do not have evidence of design for the rest of the universe. Furthermore, the apparent design may be temporary. Therefore, the lack of evidence for design in nature undermines the argument.

Such an objection has not withstood the test of time. Scientists have in fact found much evidence of intricate design throughout space and across time. So the second premise stands in the face of empirical inquiry.

Third, concerning the conclusion (c), one could object that the inferred designer is not much of a God. For instance, the supposed designer may lack benevolence or

omnipotence, and so would not be a good candidate for “God” as usually described.

Hume grants that the *existence* of a designer might be inferred from evidence in nature, but that the *nature* of such a designer is rendered problematic or even remains unknown.

So, even if the premises stand, the conclusion fails to achieve the purpose of the argument.

This objection raises an important matter to which we will return in a moment, but as it stands it does not undermine the argument from design. The design argument aims only to prove *that* God exists, not *what* God is like. The existence and essence of God have been traditionally distinguished. One can follow a certain line of argument for proving the existence of God, and then follow different lines of argument for determining the character of this God. And so, even though it does not answer the question of the nature of this inferred intelligent being, the conclusion stands as proving the existence of this being.

(3)

Despite its capacity to withstand these objections leveled at its premises and conclusion, the design argument for God’s existence does not succeed. A number of objections can be raised against the validity of its logic that cannot be adequately answered.

First, it is questionable whether the design analogy can be extended to God’s creation of the world. Hume raises this objection by noting that, although we have analogous experience observing the process of watch-making, we do not have experience observing world-making. Now Hume may not be right in thinking that we must have analogous experience of any inference, but he is right to distinguish the making of a part

from the making of the whole. It would seem appropriate to think of the design the whole of nature as an utterly different kind of activity from the purposive action of human ingenuity within that whole. So the analogy between evidence in nature supplied in premise (b) and the kind of inference proposed by premise (a) is questionable.

Second, the very character of the analogy employed is problematic. Although it may be possible to infer the existence of minds from trails of physical evidence, it is certainly an odd way for one mind to encounter another mind. Usually, minds interact with other minds *mentally*. In other words, if I want to know about you, I would not follow a trail of evidence, but rather would start up a conversation with you. Such mental conversation does not necessarily rule out physical processes (e.g., brain activity, vocal sounds, etc.), but it is not reducible to or exhausted by such physical traces. So, to infer the existence of God from evidence of design is a rather odd way of encountering a supreme intelligent being.

Third, an additional yet unsubstantiated premise has been smuggled into the conclusion of the argument. Although not always explicitly stated, the design argument presupposes the identity between the inferred designer of the world and God. Such identification is explicitly laid out in Thomas Aquinas' five ways (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q. 2, a. 3). At the end of each of his five arguments (which include the argument from design), Aquinas states some version of the phrase "and this is what all call God." But is it? Is the conclusion of this argument immediately identifiable with the notion of God? There are other concepts of God that do not understand God as the designer of the world (e.g., demigod theories, some forms of pantheism, etc.). It is not a coincidence that these concepts are inclined to use other kinds of arguments for God's existence. This raises

again the question of the relationship between existence and essence of God. Although these can be distinguished, they cannot be separated. One's mode of proving God's existence does relate to one's the understanding of God's nature. Design arguments presuppose a certain concept of God that must be defended. By smuggling in an unacknowledged premise, the argument for design is rendered invalid.

In view of these problems concerning its validity, the argument for God's existence from evidence of design in nature is ultimately not successful.

### **7. Critically examine materialism as a philosophy of mind.**

Materialism in both its classical and contemporary forms presents a major alternative philosophy of mind. In this essay, I will critically examine materialism by (1) briefly describing the claims of philosophical materialism and their appeal in contrast with dualism, (2) reply to the objection that such an account is necessarily reductionistic, and (3) argue that, despite its strengths, materialism remains an inadequate account of the nature of mental realities.

#### (1)

The basic claim of materialism as a philosophy of mind is that mental realities can be adequately explained by observable phenomena. In other words, minds are to be understood fully as an aspect of bodies, or, more specifically, brains. The category "mental" is an appropriate concept for discussing the activities of thinking bodies. We are not merely embodied souls, but rather we *are* our bodies.

Although present in the ancient period, philosophical materialism has gained support in the modern period because of its association with modern science. Scientific inquiry has rendered unnecessary a number of traditional explanations for phenomena.

An older, more “enchanted” world-view tended to see natural processes as a result of the direct willing of spiritual realities. Science has shown that in many cases, the opposite is true, so that so-called spiritual realities are in fact the result of natural laws. The technical success of science has been taken by some to imply that in principle all such spiritual realities can and should be explained by natural processes. Once such a principled assertion is taken up, one has moved from the material orientation of science to a materialistic presupposition of philosophy.

Such a philosophy of mind has particular appeal in contrast with dualism. Dualism, whether of a Platonic or Cartesian variety, runs into serious problems. Although scientific evidence alone does not automatically undermine dualism, some contemporary brain research is considerably easier to account for from a materialistic rather than dualistic point of view. More importantly, dualism runs into serious internal philosophical problems. For instance, once one has posited two substances (mental and physical), one is required to explain the relationship between the two -- a requirement that has yet to be adequately supplied. Dualism also can be used to fund a dismissive attitude toward the body. In view of these weaknesses of dualism, materialism is offered as a more simple and coherent understanding of mental realities.

(2)

However, the superiority of materialism over dualism as a philosophy of mind does not mean it has no problems of its own. A particularly important objection to philosophical materialism is that it is reductionistic. By explaining the mind by direct reference to the processes of the brain, the mind is in fact explained *away* by the brain. The result is that there is no such thing as the mind. Only the brain remains, and thus one

does not have a philosophy of mind at all.

Such an objection is not merely a verbal game, but a substantive problem that must be addressed. The category of mental should open up avenues of reflection concerning identity, freedom, and creativity. If the mental is merely another way of speaking about bodily processes then these questions are cut short. One need not be committed to certain answers to these questions to be opposed to assumptions that bar them from even being asked. So, if in fact materialism is reductionistic then it is inadequate as a philosophy of mind.

Although some forms of materialism may be quite reductionistic, philosophical materialism is not necessary so. Some forms of materialism speak of the mind as an *epiphenomenon*. Within such theories, the emergence and continuation of the mind is immediately linked to the brain, but it nevertheless can be spoken of with a certain measure of integrity as something “more” than mere brain waves. The mind can be a *result* of the brain without being *reduced* to the brain. One can follow the evidence of brain research into a certain understanding of what minds can and cannot do, and within these limits go on to ask philosophical questions about mental reality. Such an epiphenomenal approach avoids the reductionist tendency of some forms of materialism and therefore stands as the most philosophically viable sort of materialistic philosophy of mind.

(3)

Although materialism is not necessarily reductionistic, is it in fact the best possible alternative philosophy of mind? As seen above, a major argument for philosophical materialism is the inadequacy of its dualistic alternatives. However,

dualism and materialism are not the only other options. A full-scale comparison with other types of philosophy of mind is neither appropriate nor necessary to show that certain philosophical questions can be answered with equal if not greater adequacy by a non-materialistic philosophy of mind.

For instance, what about emotions? Can these be adequately explained by starting with bodily activities? It is certainly true that psychological states of sadness or happiness are influenced by bodily factors. However, some emotions are striking precisely because they contradict the impact of physical factors. For instance, someone could be in a state of sadness even while doing a favorite activity, because it is an activity that she used to do with a close friend who died. The impulses of this activity release endorphins into the brain that usually promote happiness. Yet, despite the endorphins, the person is sad. In fact, the more fun she has, the greater the sadness, because of the increased sense of loss. Emotions cannot be explained fully by material factors. The relation of influence is not only from the body to the mind, but can work the other direction or even be found in conflict. The mind is not merely a result of bodily influence.

However, the importance of bodily influence on the mind need not be set-aside in a dualistic manner to answer this question. The mind could be understood as a primary reality that is not explained primarily by the body, yet nevertheless overlaps with bodily influences. Minds for the most part engage with material objects seamlessly. Materiality can serve the purposes of mentality. However, at times material objects resist the purposes of minds. In such cases, the mental comes to be seen in its contrast with the material. But such a contrast need not be an unresolved diastasis, for the mental finds ways of fashioning the material to its purposes. And so the mental and the material are

united (not dualism) and yet may conflict (not materialism) as they move toward reconciliation. Such an approach can be referred to as objective idealism. One need not be committed to this approach to see how it can account for the conflict between emotions and physical impulses without regressing into dualism. Such emotions are instances of the mind seeking after something other than what the body is creating. The mind is not trapped by these bodily impulses, nor must it stay in perpetual conflict, but rather presses toward bodily activities that serve the mind's purpose.

In addition to dealing with the question of emotions, such an alternative approach is able to address other important concerns in the philosophy of mind. For instance, a focus on mental purposiveness it can better account for human uniqueness. Although it may not be the only other or even best type of philosophy of mind, this brief foray into an alternative approach shows that materialism is not the only plausible option. So the failure of dualism does not require a commitment to materialism. Perhaps it may be a simple and clear explanation of some mental realities, but materialism is a philosophically inadequate account of the mind.

**10. "Rationalism is sympathetic to theology; empiricism is antithetical to it." Discuss this assertion with reference to the history of philosophy.**

It is often asserted that rationalism is sympathetic to theology while empiricism is antithetical to it. In this essay, I will argue that this assertion is neither entirely accurate historically nor necessarily the case philosophically. I will support this thesis by (1) identifying examples of both sympathy and antithesis within the rationalistic tradition, (2) identifying examples of both antithesis and sympathy within the empirical tradition, and (3) reply to an important objection to this historical argument.

(1)

The first half of this assertion is not entirely accurate historically. There are certainly instances of rationalism that were intended to aid and in fact did aid theological inquiry. There are also instances of rationalism that instigated serious conflict with theology. I will briefly summarize and explain one instance of each.

Descartes, in the preface to his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, explicitly states his intention to offer a new foundation for theological inquiry. His attempt to secure an indubitable starting-point for thinking and believing is offered as a response to the irresolvable conflicts of the post-reformation period. He begins with radical doubt in order to find something that cannot be doubted. What cannot be doubted is the existence of the doubter. From this first-person point of view, Descartes goes on to argue for the existence of God in response to the possibility that he may be deceived in his self-knowledge. God as a trustworthy and omnipotent being is a clear and distinct idea that can be believed by reason alone. From the existence of the self and God, Descartes moves to the existence of external objects.

Although some were threatened by his starting-point in radical doubt, others found Descartes' philosophy to be theologically fruitful. Even if his ideas were never used theologically, Descartes' theological intention should be taken seriously. However, Descartes' rehabilitation of the ontological argument for the existence of God in more modern dress was quite useful to theological discussions. So, Descartes can serve as an instance of sympathy between rationalism and theology.

However, there are also historical instances of antithesis between rationalism and theology. In the case of Spinoza, such antithesis was only partially intended, but certainly

proved highly controversial. Spinoza himself rejected much of his own received theological heritage. Yet the notion of God was not entirely expunged from his thought. Rather, the idea of God, along with the self and external world, was folded into a monistic vision of reality. Spinoza, following Descartes' rational procedure, aimed to overcome the solipsism of Descartes' method. Instead of beginning from the self, Spinoza aimed to think of the whole of reality as a necessary whole analogous to a geometric proof. He offered a distinctly third-person perspective that views everything simultaneously as a whole (*sub species aeternitatis* [under the aspect of eternity]). Such a third-person perspective provided a systematic account of reality into which the notion of God could be fit.

Spinoza does not ignore theology, and in that sense could be seen as "sympathetic" to it. However, Spinoza's very attention to God within his monistic system is precisely what created controversy surrounding his work. The reception of Spinoza in some circles became the basis for a modern form of pantheism. The German discussion in the late 18th century surrounding these ideas was referred to as "The Atheistic Controversy" in light of the impersonal character of the pantheism inspired by Spinozian monism. Such extreme controversy calls into question the historical accuracy of the assertion that rationalism is sympathetic to theology. Clearly, there is some truth to this statement, in that some streams of the rationalist tradition were well received by theologians and that controversial streams at least attended to theological questions. But the substantive antitheses created between certain rationalist schools and theology shows claims of presumed sympathy to be historically inaccurate.

(2)

The second half of the assertion under investigation is also not entirely accurate historically. There are certainly instances of empiricism antithetical to theology. There are also instances of empiricism that are positively disposed toward theology. I will briefly summarize and explain one instance of each.

A classic instance of empirical philosophy at odds with theology is David Hume. By his attacks on the traditional arguments for the existence of God, on miracles, on immortality, and a host of other topics, Hume created serious theological controversy during his life and especially after his death. His radical skepticism with regard to causal links in reality made it difficult to speak meaningfully about either God or the human person before God. The significant historical influence of Hume is a contributing factor to the presumption of an antithesis between empiricism and theology.

However, Hume is not the sole representative of the empirical stance. Another major early contributor to the development of empiricism is Bishop Berkeley. Berkeley is most well known for his subjective idealism, where the existence of objects is only guaranteed by their perception by subjects. What is easily forgotten is that Berkeley comes to this conclusion from an empirical starting point. His ontology is driven by his epistemology, as is usually the case for empiricists. He asks whether one can argue for the existence of objects in a room one has just left. Since in his mind no satisfactory argument can be supplied, the existence of external objects must rest on their perception. This need not, in his mind, result in radical skepticism, for Berkeley argues that the existence of a supreme mind who perceives all things grounds the existence of things unobserved by lesser minds. This supreme mind is God. Such subjective idealism was positively received among a number of contemporaneous and subsequent theologians. So,

Berkeley is a striking instance that empiricism has in fact been historically sympathetic to theology. Therefore, the presumption of antithesis is unwarranted historically.

(3)

Given this historical evidence, one can see that the slogan “rationalism is sympathetic to theology while empiricism is antithetical to it,” while containing a grain of truth, is not wholly accurate. However, one may object that such historical counterexamples do not undermine this assertion because they ignore the necessary philosophical relationship between each tradition and theology. Perhaps the assertion is not suggesting that *all* instances of rationalism are sympathetic to theology or that *all* instances of empiricism are antithetical to theology. Rather, it could be understood as claiming that the basic assumptions and overall trajectory of each tradition leads to a certain stance towards theology. Accordingly, counterexamples are simply instances of underdeveloped forms of the tradition that can be normatively critiqued for not following through on the tradition’s basic principles.

Although the logic of such an objection would be valid, one not only would have to directly engage each counterexample but also would have to defend the presumption that the basic character of rationalism and empiricism lead to certain dispositions toward theology. Such a defense is hard to come by, because it requires a certain understanding of both the philosophical schools and of theology itself.

With regard to the first half of the assertion, one might argue that rationalism is characterized by system-building, which in turn serves theology. But this connection fails both as an understanding of rationalism and as an understanding of theology. On the one hand, some rationalist streams work from a radical first-person perspective and do not

move toward the kind of system-building found in some rationalist figures. On the other hand, not all theologies require the kind of system-building found in some forms of rationalism. Therefore, the presumed sympathy between rationalism and theology is contingent, not necessary.

With regard to the second half of the assertion, one might argue that empiricism is skeptical toward inferences drawn from nature to unseen beings, which in turn undermines theological claims regarding God's existence. But this connection fails both as an understanding of empiricism and as an understanding of theology. On the one hand, not all empiricists take a strongly skeptical stance toward inferences along a chain of causation to unobservable realities. On the other hand, not all theologies rest on such arguments for the existence for God. Therefore, the presumed antithesis between empiricism and theology is contingent, not necessary.

So, the assertion that rationalism is sympathetic to theology while empiricism is antithetical to it is neither entirely accurate historically nor necessarily the case philosophically.