

LART602

Daily Statement

Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

10/30/13

Philo argues that we cannot from experience determine whether the only or primary form of order in the universe is rational order, nor whether some other form of order might not characterize the material order.

To say that all this order in animals and vegetables proceeds ultimately from design, is begging the question; nor can that great point be ascertained otherwise than by proving *a priori*, both that order is, from its nature, inseparably attached to thought; and that it can never of itself, or from original unknown principles, belong to matter. (64)

Philo suggests that this might be demonstrated *a priori*, but even such a rational demonstration would seem only to demonstrate that as far as human reason was concerned, there could be no other form of order but that deriving from a rational mind.

We encounter then two limits to human knowledge and understanding: first, empirically, we can only assign probabilities to assertions about the empirical world; we cannot determine universal or necessary truth. Second, rational inquiry would appear to be a self-contained system: it will tell us which concepts are related in what way to which others. But it seems unable to determine the relationship between such truths and the empirical world about us.

Thus, in a nut-shell, we cannot by sense determine whether the principles of reason apply to the world of experience and it remains unclear whether it is possible to demonstrate by reason such an application.