

The dialogue, theaetetus and the arguments of plato

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



In 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion' Hume argues whether religion can be explored by reason. While his main concern is connected to God's nature, God's mere existence is not at all questioned by him or by any of the three characters in whose mouths he puts his words: Demea, Philo and Cleanthes. Their dialogue represents different views on God's nature and ways to learn it.

The second part introduces several profound arguments about the existence of God and both in favor and against the claim of incomprehensibility of his nature. Demea's argument about the idea of a mysterious creator, Philo's arguments about God's existence and his uniqueness together with Cleanthes's idea from design represent the main views on the subject that Hume tries to demolish later on. The first two agree that God is too perfect for ordinary people to get to know more about him than just the fact that he exists. Philo's thought can be expressed as follows: people get ideas empirically, that is '[o]ur ideas reach no farther than our experience' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 934), there is no actual experience of God, therefore people have no idea about what he is like. To support his idea, he also concludes that God in fact exists by stating that there is a cause for every effect and the ultimate cause is God. Cleanthes is the last to speak, providing a somewhat confusing analogy of the universe to a compound device, or a machine. According to him, the universe was made by the most perfect creator, in the same way as any device is a creation of a designer. This is how argument from design arises. Cleanthes relies on effects to prove the cause: '[s]ince therefore the effects resemble each

other, [...] the causes also resemble' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 934).

After Cleanthes draws his conclusion about nature's resemblance of a machine, Demea and Philo criticized his view, examining his argument. Firstly, Demea point out the absence of argument concerning God's existence that makes the later argument weaker. This is the case because Cleanthes makes conclusions from experience, 'posteriori' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 934), and such arguments can prove something to be more likely, but not certainly true. Philo's critique includes two arguments: one about inconsistent form for it to be inductive and another about weakness of the analogy of omnipotent God with something as simple, as a machine. His opinion is that it is wrong to 'allow any one part to form a rule for another part if the latter be very remote from the former' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 934).

The third part, being the continuation of the discussion, contains Cleanthes's response to criticism of his ideas. Cleanthes's beliefs are the source of his tranquility as he takes Philo's critique for the acceptance of rationality of his findings: 'this religious argument [...] rather acquires force from it [criticism] and becomes more firm and undisputed' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 940). The example of the occurrence of an 'articulate voice heard in the clouds' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 939) serves to demolish a part of Philo's doubt about universe's similarity to a machine which would prevent him from identifying this voice as of God's, which would be ridiculous. Second example of experiencing a books author's

participation in the process of it being created as one reads it destroys Philo's line about necessity of direct experience to be able to comprehend and make conclusions, which would also make Philo look absurd not being able to identify that there was some author to a book just because he has not had the chance to have immediate experience with him. Hence, if both of Philo's counterarguments sound laughable in these situations, they must be as ridiculous when applied to the universe, which would make Cleanthes's argument true. Basically, Cleanthes uses analogical arguments to prove his previous argument by analogy to be sound.

This chapter ends with another argument presented by Demea upon how different people are from God, as '[a]ll our ideas derived from the senses [...] cannot be supposed to have place in a supreme intelligence' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 941), because sentiments rely on what happens to us, the people, in the world of other human beings and therefore are 'fluctuating, uncertain, fleeting, successive and compounded' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 941).

Both of these parts contribute to Hume's idea of incomprehensibility of God's nature both by arguments for this position and by the ones claiming it wrong. To elaborate on this, analyses of Cleanthes's arguments demands to be made as he is the one disputing over it against other characters. As a matter of fact, there are several mistakes or fallacies in his arguments which make one believe that what Hume was trying to reach by writing these two parts of the book was to hint his personal view that 'Divine attributes' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 941) are indeed too perfect for

ordinary people to be able to 'reach any ideas which in the least correspond to [its] ineffable sublimity' (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 941).