

Introduction to Philosophy

Proving the Existence of God: The Teleological Proof of God's Existence

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

Background

Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* presents a conversation between Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo. Cleanthes and Demea are both religious, but Cleanthes believes the existence of God is rationally demonstrable whereas Demea believes that religious faith is not a matter of reason. Meanwhile, Philo is a skeptic who doubts that reason yields conclusive results in any field of inquiry, especially theology. In this excerpt, Cleanthes presents the teleological argument for God's existence (today this argument is more commonly known as the theory of intelligent design), an *a posteriori* argument proceeding from the premise of the world's magnificent order, which is like a great machine, to the conclusion that the world is the work of a Supreme Mind responsible for that order. Philo (presumably speaking for Hume himself) then tries to refute this argument. Interestingly, however, Philo also defends Cleanthes against Demea's claim that *a posteriori* arguments based on experience are inherently defective. In the end, Philo defends the value of *a posteriori* arguments while flatly rejecting the possibility of such an argument showing that God exists.

Questions

1. Cleanthes claims to prove the existence of God and His "similarity to human mind and intelligence". What is the structure of this argument? What objections (there are about three) does Philo make against this argument?
2. Given that they reach different conclusions, Cleanthes and Philo cannot both be right. Where exactly in their respective arguments do they disagree? Which position is supported by the strongest and most compelling argument?