Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

DAVID HUME
1711–1776

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion

The 1779 text

Rendered into modern English with AI (Claude) and edited



FORAGE
forage.com

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion · David Hume (1711–1776)

Rendered into modern English with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/hume/dialogues

Original text: the first edition (London, 1779), via Project Gutenberg (www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4583) (public domain). Modern version: rewritten from Hume's English with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are part and paragraph. Where the original uses a term now considered offensive, a neutral term is shown in brackets instead.

The original text is in the public domain. This translation is free to share and adapt under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0): creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

Set in Source Serif 4.

CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Pamphilus to Hermippus 1

Part I 5
- Philo praises doubt 6
- Cleanthes answers the skeptic 7
- Skepticism in the service of religion 14

Part II 17
- The argument from design 19
- Philo tests the analogy 20
- The Copernican comparison 27

Part III 31
- The voice and the living library 31

Part IV 37
- A mind needs a cause too 39

Part V 45
- What the analogy costs 47

Part VI 51
- The world as an animal 52
- Is the world young? 54

Part VII 59
- Worlds from seeds 60
- Myths of generation and the spider 64

Part VIII 67
- Order from unguided matter 69
- Cleanthes objects 71

Part IX 75
Cleanthes refutes the proof 76
Necessity and the number nine 78

Part X 81
The misery of all living things 83
Epicurus's old questions 87
Cleanthes denies the misery 89

Part XI 93
What a stranger would expect 94
Four sources of evil 96
A blind nature 102

Part XII 107
Philo's concessions 107
A merely verbal dispute 110
Religion and morality 113
Comforts and terrors 118
Philo's conclusion 121

INTRODUCTION

Can we reason our way to God from the order of the world? In David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, three friends argue it out: Cleanthes, who holds that the universe is like a great machine and so must have a designer; Demea, a pious believer who prefers proofs that need no experience; and Philo, a sceptic who takes the design argument apart.

The dialogue is narrated by Cleanthes's young pupil Pamphilus. Along the way Philo offers rival hypotheses — the world as an animal, a vegetable, a chance arrangement of matter — and presses the problem of evil: if God is willing to prevent evil but not able, he is impotent; if able but not willing, malevolent.

Hume worked on the book for decades and left it to be published after his death; it appeared in 1779. The right-hand column is Hume in modern English; the left is his original text.

Pamphilus to Hermippus

Pamphilus explains why this subject suits the dialogue form and introduces the three speakers.

PAMPHILUS Intro.1 It has often been remarked, my dear Hermippus, that although the ancient philosophers gave most of their teaching in the form of dialogue, this way of writing has been little used in later ages, and has seldom succeeded for those who have tried it. Precise, systematic argument of the kind now expected from philosophers naturally pushes a writer into a methodical, instructional manner. He can state at once, without preamble, the point he is driving at, and then go on without interruption to set out the proofs that establish it. Delivering a *system* in conversation hardly seems natural. The dialogue writer leaves the direct style in order to give his work a freer air and avoid the look of Author and Reader, but he easily falls into something worse and gives the impression of Teacher and Pupil. Or, if he conducts the debate in the natural spirit of good company, bringing in a variety of topics and keeping a proper balance among the speakers, he often spends so much time on setting scenes and making transitions that the reader will hardly feel that all the charms of dialogue make up for the order, brevity, and precision that were sacrificed to them.

Intro.2 There are some subjects, however, for which dialogue is especially suited, and where it is still better than the direct, plain method of writing.

Intro.3 Take any point of doctrine that is so obvious it hardly admits of dispute, yet so important that it can never be taught too often. Such a point seems to call for this kind of treatment.

The novelty of the manner can make up for the familiarity of the subject; the liveliness of conversation can drive the lesson home; and the variety of angles offered by different people and characters need not seem tedious or repetitive.

Intro.4 On the other hand, take any philosophical question so *obscure* and *uncertain* that human reason can reach no settled answer to it. If it is to be treated at all, it seems naturally to lead us into dialogue and conversation. Reasonable people may be allowed to differ where no one can reasonably be sure. Opposing views, even when nothing is decided, make for pleasant entertainment. And if the subject is interesting and engaging, the book in a way puts us into company, uniting the two greatest and purest pleasures of human life: study and society.

Intro.5 Happily, all these features are found in the subject of *natural religion*. What truth is so obvious, so certain, as the existence of a God? The most ignorant ages have acknowledged it, and the most brilliant minds have competed to produce new proofs and arguments for it. What truth is so important? It is the ground of all our hopes, the surest foundation of morality, the firmest support of society, and the one principle that should never be absent from our thoughts and meditations for a moment. Yet in dealing with this obvious and important truth, what obscure questions arise about the nature of that divine Being—his attributes, his decrees, his plan of providence! These questions have always been disputed among men, and human reason has reached no certain answer to them. Yet they are so compelling that we cannot restrain our restless curiosity about them, even though our most careful research has so far produced nothing but doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction.

Intro.6 I recently had occasion to see this for myself, when I spent part of the summer, as usual, with Cleanthes and was present at those conversations of his with Philo and Demea of which I gave you a rough account not long ago. You told me then that your curiosity was so aroused that I simply had to give you a fuller report of their reasoning, and set out the various systems they put forward on so delicate a subject as natural reli-

gion. The striking contrast in their characters raised your expectations further, as you set the precise philosophical cast of Cleanthes's mind against the casual skepticism of Philo, or compared either of them with the rigid, unbending orthodoxy of Demea. Being young, I was a mere listener to their debates. But the curiosity natural to that early time of life has fixed the whole chain and connection of their arguments so deeply in my memory that I hope I will not leave out or confuse any significant part of them in the telling.

Part I

Demea's method of education; Philo's scepticism and Cleanthes's reply.

DEMEA 1.1 When I joined the company, whom I found sitting in Cleanthes's library, Demea complimented Cleanthes on the great care he took over my education and on his tireless loyalty and constancy in all his friendships. Pamphilus's father, he said, was your close friend. The son is your pupil, and might really be considered your adopted son, to judge by the trouble you take to teach him every useful branch of literature and science. I am sure you are no less sensible than you are diligent. So I will tell you a rule I have followed with my own children, to find out how far it agrees with your practice. The method I follow in educating them rests on the saying of an ancient writer: "Students of philosophy should first learn logic, then ethics, next physics, and last of all the nature of the gods."[1] This science of natural theology, in his view, being the deepest and most difficult of all, demanded the most mature judgment in its students; only a mind already enriched with all the other sciences can safely be trusted with it.

1.2 Do you leave it so late, said Philo, to teach your children the principles of religion? Isn't there a danger that they will neglect, or reject altogether, beliefs they have heard so little about during their whole education? It is only as a *science*, replied Demea, subject to human reasoning and debate, that I put off the study

1 HUME'S NOTE. Chrysippus, quoted in Plutarch, *On the Contradictions of the Stoics*. TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Chrysippus was the leading Stoic philosopher of the third century BC.

of natural theology. My chief concern is to steep their minds in piety early. By constant precept and instruction, and I hope by example too, I stamp deep into their tender minds a habitual reverence for all the principles of religion. As they pass through every other science, I keep pointing out how uncertain each part is, how endlessly people argue, how obscure all philosophy is, and what strange, ridiculous conclusions some of the greatest minds have drawn from the principles of mere human reason. Having in this way tamed their minds into proper submission and self-distrust, I no longer have any qualms about revealing to them the greatest mysteries of religion. Nor do I fear any danger from that presumptuous arrogance of philosophy which might lead them to reject the most established doctrines and beliefs.

PHILO PRAISES DOUBT

Philo welcomes Demea's method and dwells on the weakness and narrow limits of human reason.

PHILO [1.3] Your precaution, said Philo, of steeping your children's minds in piety early is certainly very reasonable, and no more than this profane and irreligious age requires. But what I chiefly admire in your plan of education is the way you turn to advantage the very principles of philosophy and learning—the principles that, by breeding pride and self-sufficiency, have generally been found in every age to be so destructive to religion. Ordinary people, it is true, who know nothing of science and deep inquiry, see the endless disputes of the learned and usually hold philosophy in complete contempt. That only fixes them more firmly in the great points of theology they have been taught. Those who dip a little into study and inquiry find what looks like evidence for the newest and strangest doctrines, and they conclude that nothing is too difficult for human reason. Presumptuously breaking through every fence, they desecrate the innermost sanctuaries of the temple. But Cleanthes will agree with me, I hope, that once we have given up ignorance, which is the surest remedy, there is still one expedient left for

preventing this profane freedom. Let Demea's principles be developed and cultivated. Let us become fully aware of the weakness, blindness, and narrow limits of human reason. Let us properly consider its uncertainty and its endless contradictions, even in matters of ordinary life and practice. Let us be shown the errors and deceptions of our very senses; the insurmountable difficulties that attend the first principles of every system; the contradictions that cling to the very ideas of matter, cause and effect, extension, space, time, motion—in a word, to quantity of every kind, the subject of the only science that can fairly claim any certainty or evidence. When these points are set out in their full force, as some philosophers and nearly all theologians set them out, who can keep enough confidence in this frail faculty of reason to pay any attention to its verdicts on questions so lofty, so abstruse, so remote from ordinary life and experience? When the cohesion of the parts of a stone, or even the arrangement of parts that makes it extended in space—when these familiar things, I say, are so inexplicable and involve features so inconsistent and contradictory—with what confidence can we decide about the origin of worlds, or trace their history from eternity to eternity?

PAMPHILUS 1.4 While Philo was saying this, I could see a smile on the faces of both Demea and Cleanthes. Demea's seemed to express wholehearted satisfaction with the doctrines being put forward. But in Cleanthes's expression I could make out a knowing look, as if he detected some teasing or mischievous cunning in Philo's reasoning.

CLEANTHES ANSWERS THE SKEPTIC

Cleanthes argues that no one can live by total skepticism, and that evidence should be weighed case by case.

CLEANTHES 1.5 So you propose, Philo, said Cleanthes, to build religious faith on philosophical skepticism. You think that if certainty and evidence are driven out of every other field of inquiry, they will all retreat into these theological doctrines and

gain superior force and authority there. Whether your skepticism is as complete and sincere as you claim, we will find out soon enough, when the company breaks up. We will see then whether you leave by the door or the window, and whether you really doubt that your body has weight or can be hurt by a fall—as popular opinion holds, on the strength of our deceptive senses and still more deceptive experience. And this consideration, Demea, may fairly help, I think, to soften our ill will toward this whimsical sect of the skeptics. If they are entirely in earnest, they will not trouble the world for long with their doubts, quibbles, and disputes. If they are only joking, they may be poor jokers, but they can never be very dangerous to the state, to philosophy, or to religion.

1.6 The truth is, Philo, he went on, that a man may, in a fit of mood, after intense reflection on the many contradictions and imperfections of human reason, give up all belief and opinion entirely. But it seems certain that he cannot keep up this total skepticism, or show it in his conduct, for even a few hours. External objects press in on him; his passions pull at him; his philosophical gloom lifts; and even the most violent effort against his own nature will not let him keep up the poor appearance of skepticism for any length of time. And why should he force himself so violently? That is a question he can never answer to his own satisfaction consistently with his skeptical principles. So, all things considered, nothing could be more ridiculous than the principles of the ancient Pyrrhonians—if they really tried, as people say they did, to carry into every part of life the same skepticism they had learned from the lectures of their schools, where it should have stayed.[2]

1.7 Seen this way, there is a strong resemblance between the Stoics and the Pyrrhonians, though they were perpetual opponents. Both seem founded on the same mistaken maxim: that what a man can do sometimes, and in some moods, he can do always, and in every mood. When the mind is raised by Stoic

2 The Pyrrhonians, followers of Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360–270 BC), sought to suspend judgment on all questions.

reflection to a sublime passion for virtue, and is deeply struck by some kind of honor or public good, the most extreme bodily pain and suffering will not overcome so high a sense of duty. It may even be possible, by its means, to smile and exult in the middle of torture. If this can sometimes really happen, a philosopher in his lecture hall, or even in his study, can all the more easily work himself up to such a passion and bear in imagination the sharpest pain or the worst disaster he can conceive. But how is he to sustain the passion itself? The tension of his mind slackens and cannot be restored at will. Distractions lead him astray; misfortunes catch him off guard; and the philosopher gradually sinks into the common man.

PHILO 1.8 I accept your comparison between the Stoics and the skeptics, replied Philo. But notice at the same time that although in Stoicism the mind cannot sustain the highest flights of philosophy, even when it sinks lower it still keeps something of its former disposition. The effects of the Stoic's reasoning will show in his conduct in ordinary life and throughout the whole course of his actions. The ancient schools, especially Zeno's, produced examples of virtue and steadfastness that seem astonishing today.[3]

1.9 Vain Wisdom all and false Philosophy.
Yet with a pleasing sorcery could charm
Pain, for a while, or anguish; and excite
Fallacious Hope, or arm the obdurate breast
With stubborn Patience, as with triple steel.[4]

1.10 In the same way, if a man has grown used to skeptical reflections on the uncertainty and narrow limits of reason, he will not entirely forget them when he turns his thoughts to other subjects. In all his philosophical principles and reasoning—I dare not say in his ordinary conduct—he will be found to differ from those who either never formed any opinion on the matter or who hold views more favorable to human reason.

3 Zeno of Citium (c. 334–262 BC) founded the Stoic school.
4 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book II, describing the philosophizing of the fallen angels.

1.11 However far anyone may push his theoretical skepticism, he must, I admit, act and live and talk like other people, and he need give no other reason for doing so than the absolute necessity he is under. If he ever carries his speculations further than this necessity compels him, and philosophizes about either the natural world or human affairs, he is drawn on by a certain pleasure and satisfaction he finds in occupying himself that way. He also considers that everyone, even in ordinary life, is forced to have more or less of this philosophy. From our earliest infancy we keep advancing toward more general principles of conduct and reasoning. The wider our experience and the stronger our reason, the more general and comprehensive we make our principles. And what we call philosophy is nothing but a more regular and methodical operation of the same kind. To philosophize on such subjects is not essentially different from reasoning about ordinary life. We can only expect our philosophy to be more stable, if not more true, because its method is more exact and more careful.

1.12 But when we look beyond human affairs and the properties of the bodies around us—when we carry our speculations into the two eternities, before and after the present state of things; into the creation and formation of the universe; the existence and properties of spirits; the powers and operations of one universal Spirit, existing without beginning and without end, omnipotent, omniscient, unchanging, infinite, and incomprehensible—then we would have to be very far from the slightest leaning toward skepticism not to fear that we have gone quite beyond the reach of our faculties. As long as we confine our speculations to commerce, ethics, politics, or criticism, we appeal at every moment to common sense and experience. These strengthen our philosophical conclusions and remove, at least in part, the suspicion we so rightly feel toward any very subtle and refined reasoning. In theological reasoning we lack this advantage. At the same time we are dealing with objects that, we must realize, are too large for our grasp, and that of all things most need to be made familiar to our understanding. We

are like foreigners in a strange country, to whom everything must seem suspicious, and who are in danger at every moment of breaking the laws and customs of the people they live and talk among. We do not know how far we should trust our ordinary methods of reasoning on such a subject, since even in ordinary life, the very province they are made for, we cannot account for them, and we are guided entirely by a kind of instinct or necessity in using them.

1.13 All skeptics claim that reason, considered in the abstract, supplies unanswerable arguments against itself. We could never keep any conviction or confidence on any subject, they say, if skeptical reasonings were not so refined and subtle that they cannot outweigh the more solid and more natural arguments drawn from the senses and experience. But whenever our arguments lose this advantage and stray far from ordinary life, the most refined skepticism clearly comes to stand on equal footing with them, and is able to oppose and counterbalance them. The one has no more weight than the other. The mind must stay suspended between them, and that very suspense, or balance, is the triumph of skepticism.

CLEANTHES 1.14 But I notice, said Cleanthes, that with you, Philo, and all theoretical skeptics, your doctrine and your practice are as much at odds in the most abstruse points of theory as in the conduct of ordinary life. Wherever evidence shows itself, you hold to it, despite your professed skepticism. And I notice that some of your sect are as decisive as those who claim far more certainty and confidence. Really, wouldn't a man be ridiculous if he claimed to reject Newton's explanation of that marvelous phenomenon, the rainbow, because that explanation gives a minute anatomy of rays of light—a subject, if you please, too refined for human understanding? And what would you say to someone who had no particular objection to the arguments of Copernicus and Galileo for the motion of the earth, yet withheld his assent on the general principle that these subjects were too vast and remote to be explained by the narrow and fallible reason of mankind?

1.15 There is, as you rightly observed, a crude and ignorant kind of skepticism that gives ordinary people a general prejudice against whatever they cannot easily understand, and makes them reject every principle that needs elaborate reasoning to prove it. This kind of skepticism is fatal to knowledge, not to religion. For we find that those who profess it most loudly often accept not only the great truths of theism and natural theology, but even the most absurd beliefs that a traditional superstition has handed them. They firmly believe in witches, yet they will not believe, or even listen to, the simplest proposition of Euclid. But the refined, philosophical skeptics fall into an inconsistency of the opposite kind. They push their research into the most abstruse corners of science, and at every step their assent goes along with them, in proportion to the evidence they find. They are even forced to admit that the most abstruse and remote objects are the ones philosophy explains best. Light has actually been dissected. The true system of the heavenly bodies has been discovered and established. Yet how food nourishes the body is still an inexplicable mystery. The cohesion of the parts of matter is still incomprehensible. So these skeptics are obliged, on every question, to weigh each particular piece of evidence separately and match their assent to exactly the degree of evidence they find. This is what they do in natural science, in mathematics, and in the study of human nature and politics. Why not the same, I ask, in theology and religion? Why should conclusions of this kind alone be rejected on the general presumption that human reason is inadequate, without any particular discussion of the evidence? Isn't such inconsistent behavior plain proof of prejudice and passion?

1.16 Our senses, you say, are deceptive; our understanding is prone to error; our ideas, even of the most familiar things—extension, duration, motion—are full of absurdities and contradictions. You challenge me to solve the difficulties or reconcile the inconsistencies you find in them. I have not the ability for so great an undertaking. I have not the time for it. I see that it is unnecessary. Your own conduct, in every situation, refutes your

principles, and shows the firmest reliance on all the accepted maxims of science, morals, prudence, and behavior.

1.17 I will never agree with so harsh an opinion as that of a celebrated writer[5] who says that the skeptics are not a sect of philosophers—they are only a sect of liars. I may, however, say (without offense, I hope) that they are a sect of jokers or teasers. But for my part, whenever I am in the mood for fun and amusement, I will certainly choose entertainment of a less perplexing and abstruse kind. A comedy, a novel, or at most a history seems a more natural recreation than such metaphysical subtleties and abstractions.

1.18 It is useless for the skeptic to draw a distinction between science and ordinary life, or between one science and another. The arguments used in all of them, if sound, are of a similar nature and carry the same force and evidence. Or if there is any difference among them, the advantage lies entirely with theology and natural religion. Many principles of mechanics rest on very abstruse reasoning, yet no one with any claim to science—not even a theoretical skeptic—pretends to have the slightest doubt about them. The Copernican system contains the most surprising paradox, the one most contrary to our natural conceptions, to appearances, and to our very senses. Yet even monks and inquisitors are now forced to drop their opposition to it. And shall Philo, a man of such broad intellect and wide knowledge, harbor some general, indiscriminate doubts about the religious hypothesis—a hypothesis founded on the simplest and most obvious arguments, and which, unless it meets with artificial obstacles, finds such easy entry and acceptance in the human mind?

5 HUME'S NOTE. *L'Art de penser* [*The Art of Thinking*].

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The so-called Port-Royal Logic (1662) of Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole.

SKEPTICISM IN THE SERVICE OF RELIGION

Cleanthes traces how churchmen first attacked reason and later embraced it; Philo sees priestcraft at work.

CLEANTHES 1.19 And here, he went on, turning toward Demea, we may note a rather curious fact in the history of the sciences. After philosophy was united with popular religion, when Christianity was first established, nothing was more common among religious teachers of every kind than tirades against reason, against the senses, against every principle derived merely from human research and inquiry. The Church Fathers took over all the arguments of the ancient Academic skeptics, and from there they spread for several centuries through every school and pulpit in Christendom. The Reformers adopted the same principles of reasoning—or rather of declamation—and every eulogy on the excellence of faith was sure to be sprinkled with some sharp satirical jabs at natural reason.[6] A celebrated prelate[7] of the Roman Catholic church, too, a man of the widest learning, who wrote a demonstration of Christianity, also composed a treatise containing all the objections of the boldest and most thoroughgoing Pyrrhonism. Locke seems to have been the first Christian who dared to say openly that faith was nothing but a kind of reason; that religion was only a branch of philosophy; and that a chain of arguments, like the one that established any truth in ethics, politics, or physics, was always used in discovering all the principles of theology, natural and revealed. The misuse that Bayle and other freethinkers made of the philosophical skepticism of the Fathers and the first Reformers spread Mr. Locke's sensible view still further. And it is now more or less openly declared by everyone with any claim to reasoning and

6 The Academic skeptics were the later members of Plato's Academy, such as Arcesilaus and Carneades, who argued that nothing can be known with certainty.

7 HUME'S NOTE. Monsieur Huet.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721), bishop of Avranches, author of both a *Demonstratio evangelica* and a skeptical *Treatise on the Weakness of the Human Mind*.

philosophy that *atheist* and *skeptic* are almost synonyms. And since it is certain that no one is in earnest when he professes the second, I would like to hope that there are just as few who seriously hold the first.[8]

PHILO 1.20 Don't you remember, said Philo, Lord Bacon's excellent saying on this subject? That a little philosophy, replied Cleanthes, makes a man an atheist, and a great deal converts him to religion. That is a very sensible remark too, said Philo. But what I have in mind is another passage. Having mentioned David's fool, who said in his heart that there is no God, this great philosopher observes that the atheists of today are twice as foolish: they are not content to say in their hearts that there is no God, but they also utter that impiety with their lips, and so are guilty of compounded indiscretion and imprudence.[9] Such people, however much in earnest they were, can hardly be very formidable, I think.

1.21 But even if you rank me among these fools, I cannot help sharing a thought that strikes me from the history of religious and irreligious skepticism you have just entertained us with. It seems to me that the whole course of this affair shows strong signs of priestcraft. In ignorant ages, such as those that followed the breakup of the ancient schools, the priests saw that atheism, deism, or heresy of any kind could only come from presumptuously questioning accepted opinions and from believing that human reason was equal to everything. Education then had enormous influence over people's minds, almost as strong as the promptings of the senses and common understanding, which even the most determined skeptic must admit he is governed by. But now that the influence of education has greatly declined, and people, through wider contact with the world, have learned to compare the popular beliefs of different nations and ages, our shrewd theologians have changed their whole system of philosophy. They talk the language of the Stoics, Platonists, and Aris-

8 Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), French skeptic whose *Historical and Critical Dictionary* was notorious for its attacks on rational theology.
9 Francis Bacon, "Of Atheism"; "David's fool" is Psalm 14:1.

totelians, not that of the Pyrrhonians and Academics. If we distrust human reason, we now have no other principle to lead us into religion. So: skeptics in one age, dogmatists in another. Whichever system best serves these reverend gentlemen's purpose of gaining ascendancy over mankind, they are sure to make it their favorite principle and established doctrine.

CLEANTHES 1.22 It is quite natural, said Cleanthes, for people to adopt the principles they find best suited to defending their doctrines; we need not appeal to priestcraft to explain so reasonable a course. And surely nothing gives stronger grounds for thinking that a set of principles is true and ought to be adopted than seeing that they tend to confirm true religion and serve to confound the objections of atheists, libertines, and freethinkers of every stripe.

Part II

Cleanthes states the argument from design; Philo attacks the analogy between the world and a machine.

DEMEA [2.1] I must confess, Cleanthes, said Demea, that nothing could surprise me more than the light in which you have been putting this argument all along. From the whole drift of your remarks, one would think you were defending the existence of a God against the objections of atheists and unbelievers, and were obliged to take up arms for that fundamental principle of all religion. But this, I hope, is not at all in question among us. No one—no one, at least, with common sense—has ever, I am convinced, seriously doubted a truth so certain and self-evident. The question is not about the *existence* but the *nature* of God. This nature, I maintain, is, because of the weakness of human understanding, altogether incomprehensible and unknown to us. The essence of that supreme Mind, his attributes, the manner of his existence, the very nature of his duration—these, and everything else concerning so divine a Being, are mysterious to human beings. Finite, weak, and blind creatures that we are, we ought to humble ourselves in his majestic presence and, conscious of our frailty, silently adore his infinite perfections, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive. They are hidden from human curiosity in a deep cloud. It is profane to try to penetrate these sacred obscurities. And next to the impiety of denying his existence comes the rashness of prying into his nature and essence, his decrees and attributes.

2.2 But in case you think my piety has got the better of my philosophy here, I will support my opinion, if it needs support, with a very great authority. I could cite almost every theologian since the founding of Christianity who has ever written on this or any other theological subject. But for now I will confine myself to one equally famous for piety and philosophy. It is Father Malebranche, who, I recall, puts it this way[1]: "We ought to call God a spirit," he says, "not so much to express positively what he is, as to indicate that he is not matter. He is an infinitely perfect Being; of this we cannot doubt.[2] But just as we ought not to imagine, even supposing him to be corporeal, that he is clothed in a human body, as the Anthropomorphites claimed, on the pretext that this shape was the most perfect of all, so neither ought we to imagine that the spirit of God has human ideas or bears any resemblance to our spirit, on the pretext that we know nothing more perfect than a human mind. We ought rather to believe that just as he contains the perfections of matter without being material....[3] he contains also the perfections of created spirits without being spirit in the way we conceive spirit; that his true name is *He that is*—or, in other words, Being without restriction, All Being, the infinite and universal Being."

PHILO 2.3 After so great an authority as the one you have produced, Demea, replied Philo, and the thousand more you could produce, it would look ridiculous for me to add my own opinion or express my approval of your doctrine. But surely, where reasonable people discuss these subjects, the question can never be about the *existence* of the Deity, only about his *nature*. The first truth, as you rightly say, is unquestionable and self-evident. Nothing exists without a cause; and the original cause of this universe, whatever it may be, we call God, and piously ascribe to him every kind of perfection. Anyone who doubts this fundamental truth deserves every punishment philosophers can

1 HUME'S NOTE. *Recherche de la vérité* [*The Search after Truth*], Book 3, Chapter 9.
2 Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), French priest and philosopher.
3 The Anthropomorphites were an early Christian sect who held that God has a human form.

inflict—namely, the greatest ridicule, contempt, and disapproval. But since all perfection is entirely relative, we should never imagine that we understand the attributes of this divine Being, or suppose that his perfections have any analogy or likeness to the perfections of a human creature. Wisdom, thought, design, knowledge—these we rightly ascribe to him, because these words are honorable among men, and we have no other language or conceptions with which to express our adoration of him. But let us beware of thinking that our ideas correspond in any way to his perfections, or that his attributes resemble these qualities in human beings. He is infinitely beyond our limited view and understanding, and is more the object of worship in the temple than of debate in the schools.

2.4 In fact, Cleanthes, he went on, there is no need to resort to that affected skepticism you so dislike in order to reach this conclusion. Our ideas reach no further than our experience. We have no experience of divine attributes and operations. I need not finish my syllogism; you can draw the conclusion yourself. And it is a pleasure to me (and I hope to you too) that sound reasoning and true piety here agree in the same conclusion, and both establish the adorably mysterious and incomprehensible nature of the Supreme Being.

THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN

Cleanthes argues that the world is like a great machine, so its cause must resemble a human mind.

CLEANTHES 2.5 Not to waste time on roundabout talk, said Cleanthes, addressing Demea, still less on answering Philo's pious declamations, I will explain briefly how I see this matter. Look around the world. Contemplate the whole of it and every part. You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of smaller machines, which in turn can be subdivided to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their tiniest parts, are fitted to one another with a pre-

cision that fills everyone who has ever studied them with rapturous admiration. The intricate fitting of means to ends throughout all of nature resembles exactly, though it far surpasses, the products of human contrivance—of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble each other, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much greater faculties, in proportion to the grandeur of the work he has carried out. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, we prove at once both the existence of a Deity and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.

DEMEA 2.6 I will take the liberty, Cleanthes, said Demea, of telling you that from the start I could not approve of your conclusion that the Deity is similar to men; still less can I approve of the means by which you try to establish it. What! No demonstration of the existence of God! No abstract arguments! No proofs *a priori*! Are these arguments, which philosophers have always insisted on so much, all fallacy, all sophistry? Can we get no further on this subject than experience and probability? I will not say that this is betraying the cause of the Deity. But surely, by this affected fair-mindedness, you hand the atheists advantages they could never have won by sheer force of argument and reasoning.

PHILO TESTS THE ANALOGY

Philo argues that the universe is too unlike a house to support a confident inference to a designer.

PHILO 2.7 What troubles me most in this matter, said Philo, is not so much that Cleanthes reduces all religious arguments to experience, as that they do not seem to be even the most certain and irrefutable of that inferior kind. That a stone will fall, that fire will burn, that the earth is solid—we have observed these things thousands upon thousands of times. When any new case of this sort comes up, we draw the usual inference without hes-

itation. The exact similarity of the cases gives us complete assurance of a similar outcome, and stronger evidence is never wanted or looked for. But wherever you depart in the slightest from the similarity of the cases, you weaken the evidence proportionally, and may in the end reduce it to a very weak analogy, which is admittedly open to error and uncertainty. Having observed the circulation of the blood in human beings, we have no doubt that it takes place in Titius and Maevius. But from its circulation in frogs and fish, it is only a presumption—though a strong one—from analogy, that it takes place in men and other animals.[4] The analogical reasoning is much weaker when we infer the circulation of sap in plants from our experience that blood circulates in animals; and those who hastily followed that imperfect analogy have been shown by more careful experiments to have been mistaken.

2.8 If we see a house, Cleanthes, we conclude with the greatest certainty that it had an architect or builder, because this is exactly the kind of effect that we have experienced to come from that kind of cause. But surely you won't claim that the universe resembles a house so closely that we can infer a similar cause with the same certainty, or that the analogy here is complete and perfect. The difference is so striking that the most you can claim is a guess, a conjecture, a presumption about a similar cause. And how that claim will be received in the world, I leave you to consider.

CLEANTHES 2.9 It would certainly be very badly received, replied Cleanthes, and I would deserve to be blamed and detested if I granted that the proofs of a Deity amounted to no more than a guess or a conjecture. But is the whole adjustment of means to ends in a house and in the universe so slight a resemblance? The economy of final causes? The order, proportion, and arrangement of every part? The steps of a staircase are plainly designed so that human legs can use them to climb, and

4 Titius and Maevius are stock Roman names for any two people, like "Tom and Dick."

this inference is certain and infallible. Human legs are also designed for walking and climbing. This inference, I grant, is not quite as certain, because of the difference you point out. But does it therefore deserve to be called merely a presumption or a conjecture?

DEMEA 2.10 Good God! cried Demea, interrupting him. Where are we? Zealous defenders of religion admit that the proofs of a Deity fall short of perfect evidence! And you, Philo, whose help I was counting on to prove the adorable mysteriousness of the divine nature—do you agree with all these extravagant opinions of Cleanthes? For what else can I call them? And why hold back my criticism when such principles are put forward, backed by such authority, in front of a young man like Pamphilus?

PHILO 2.11 You don't seem to understand, replied Philo, that I'm arguing with Cleanthes on his own terms, and that by showing him the dangerous consequences of his views I hope eventually to bring him around to our opinion. But what bothers you most, I notice, is the way Cleanthes has presented the argument *a posteriori*. You see that this argument is likely to slip out of your grasp and vanish into thin air, and so you think it has been so disguised that you can hardly believe it has been shown in its true light. Now, however much I may disagree in other respects with Cleanthes's dangerous principles, I have to admit that he has represented that argument fairly. And I will try to lay the matter out for you in such a way that you will have no further qualms about it.

2.12 Suppose a man set aside everything he knows or has seen. He would then be completely unable, from his own ideas alone, to determine what sort of scene the universe must be, or to prefer one state or arrangement of things over another. For since nothing he clearly conceives could be considered impossible or self-contradictory, every fantasy of his imagination would stand on an equal footing. He could give no good reason for sticking to one idea or system and rejecting the others, which are equally possible.

2.13 Next, suppose he opens his eyes and looks at the world as it really is. At first it would be impossible for him to identify the cause of any single event, much less of everything, of the universe as a whole. He might let his imagination wander, and it might bring him back an endless variety of stories and pictures. These would all be possible; but since they would all be equally possible, he could never on his own give a satisfactory reason for preferring one to the rest. Only experience can show him the true cause of any phenomenon.

2.14 Now, according to this way of reasoning, Demea, it follows (and Cleanthes himself tacitly admits it) that order, arrangement, or the adjustment of final causes is not in itself any proof of design. It is proof only insofar as we have experienced order to come from design. For all we can know *a priori*, matter may contain the source or spring of order originally within itself, just as mind does. It is no harder to conceive that the various elements, from some internal unknown cause, might fall into the most exquisite arrangement, than to conceive that the ideas in the great universal mind, from a similar internal unknown cause, fall into that arrangement. Both suppositions are admitted to be equally possible. But experience shows us (according to Cleanthes) that there is a difference between them. Throw several pieces of steel together, with no shape or form, and they will never arrange themselves into a watch. Stone and mortar and wood, without an architect, never put up a house. But the ideas in a human mind, we see, arrange themselves by some unknown, inexplicable economy into the plan of a watch or a house. Experience therefore proves that there is an original principle of order in mind, not in matter. From similar effects we infer similar causes. The adjustment of means to ends is the same in the universe as in a machine of human design. The causes, therefore, must resemble each other.

2.15 I must confess that from the beginning I was scandalized by this resemblance being asserted between the Deity and human beings. I can only think it implies such a degradation of the Supreme Being as no sound theist could stand. With your

help, then, Demea, I will try to defend what you rightly call the adorable mysteriousness of the divine nature, and I will refute this reasoning of Cleanthes—provided he agrees that I have represented it fairly.

PAMPHILUS 2.16 When Cleanthes had agreed, Philo paused briefly and then went on as follows.

PHILO 2.17 That all inferences about matters of fact, Cleanthes, are founded on experience, and that all reasoning from experience rests on the assumption that similar causes prove similar effects, and similar effects similar causes—I won't argue much with you about that for now. But notice, I beg you, how extremely cautious all good reasoners are in carrying their experiments over to similar cases. Unless the cases are exactly alike, they don't place complete confidence in applying their past observations to any particular phenomenon. Every change in the circumstances raises a doubt about the outcome, and new experiments are needed to prove for certain that the new circumstances make no difference. A change in size, position, arrangement, age, the state of the air, or the surrounding bodies—any one of these can bring the most unexpected consequences. Unless the objects are very familiar to us, it is the height of rashness to expect with confidence, after any such change, the same outcome we observed before. Here, if anywhere, the slow and deliberate steps of philosophers are distinguished from the headlong rush of ordinary people, who are carried along by the slightest resemblance and are incapable of any discernment or reflection.

2.18 But can you really think, Cleanthes, that your usual composure and philosophy held firm in so wide a leap as the one you took, when you compared houses, ships, furniture, and machines to the universe and, from their similarity in some respects, inferred a similarity in their causes? Thought, design, intelligence, such as we find in humans and other animals, is just one of the springs and principles of the universe, like heat or cold, attraction or repulsion, and a hundred others that we observe every day. It is an active cause, by which some particu-

lar parts of nature, we find, bring about changes in other parts. But can a conclusion properly be carried over from the parts to the whole? Doesn't the enormous disproportion rule out all comparison and inference? By watching a hair grow, can we learn anything about how a human being is conceived? Would knowing exactly how a leaf unfolds teach us anything about how a tree grows?

2.19 But suppose we granted that the way one part of nature acts on another could serve as the basis for our judgment about the origin of the whole (which can never be granted). Even so, why pick so tiny, so weak, so limited a principle as the reason and design of animals on this planet turn out to be? What special privilege does this little stirring of the brain that we call thought have, that we must make it the model of the whole universe? Our bias in our own favor does push it forward on every occasion, but sound philosophy ought to guard carefully against so natural an illusion.

2.20 Far from admitting, Philo continued, that the operations of a part can give us any sound conclusion about the origin of the whole, I won't even allow one part to serve as a rule for another part if the two are very remote from each other. Is there any reasonable ground for concluding that the inhabitants of other planets have thought, intelligence, reason, or anything like these human faculties? When nature has varied her way of working so enormously on this small globe, can we imagine that she endlessly copies herself throughout so vast a universe? And if thought, as we may well suppose, is confined to this narrow corner, and has only a limited sphere of action even here, what right have we to make it the original cause of all things? A peasant who takes the running of his household as the rule for governing kingdoms is narrow-minded; but by comparison his is a forgivable fallacy.

2.21 But suppose we were entirely sure that thought and reason like ours were to be found throughout the whole universe, and that elsewhere their activity was vastly greater and more commanding than it appears on this globe. Even so, I don't see how

the workings of a world already constituted, arranged, and adjusted can properly be extended to a world in its embryonic state, still advancing toward that constitution and arrangement. By observation we know something of the economy, activity, and nourishment of a fully formed animal. But we must be very careful in transferring that knowledge to the growth of a fetus in the womb, and still more to the formation of a sperm cell in the body of its male parent. Nature, we find even from our limited experience, has an infinite number of springs and principles, which constantly reveal themselves with every change in her position and circumstances. What new and unknown principles would drive her in a situation as new and unknown as the formation of a universe, we cannot claim to determine without the utmost rashness.

2.22 A very small part of this great system, over a very short time, is very imperfectly revealed to us. And from that do we pronounce decisively on the origin of the whole?

2.23 An admirable conclusion! Stone, wood, brick, iron, and brass do not, at present, on this tiny globe of earth, have any order or arrangement without human skill and design; therefore the universe could not originally have acquired its order and arrangement without something similar to human skill. But is one part of nature a rule for another part very different from it? Is it a rule for the whole? Is a very small part a rule for the universe? Is nature in one situation a reliable rule for nature in another situation vastly different from the first?

2.24 And can you blame me, Cleanthes, if I follow here the prudent reserve of Simonides? According to the well-known story, when Hiero asked him what God was, he asked for a day to think it over, then for two days more, and kept extending the deadline in the same way without ever producing his definition or description. Could you even blame me if I had answered from the start that I did not know, and was aware that this subject lay far beyond the reach of my faculties?[5] You could call me a skep-

5 Simonides of Ceos, Greek lyric poet, at the court of Hiero I, tyrant of Syracuse (5th century BC); the story is told in Cicero, On the Nature of the Gods.

tic and a scoffer as much as you liked. But having found the imperfections and even contradictions of human reason in so many other, much more familiar subjects, I would never expect its feeble conjectures to succeed on a subject so sublime and so remote from the sphere of our observation. When two kinds of objects have always been observed to go together, I can infer, by custom, the existence of one wherever I see the existence of the other; and this I call an argument from experience. But how this argument can apply where the objects, as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel or any resemblance in kind, may be hard to explain. And will anyone tell me with a straight face that an orderly universe must arise from some thought and skill like ours, because we have experience of it? To make this reasoning sound, we would need to have experience of the origin of worlds. It is surely not enough that we have seen ships and cities arise from human skill and design...

THE COPERNICAN COMPARISON

Cleanthes likens his argument to proofs of the earth's motion; Philo replies with Galileo's careful analogies.

CLEANTHES 2.25 Philo was going on in this vehement way, half joking and half in earnest as it seemed to me, when he noticed some signs of impatience in Cleanthes and immediately stopped short. All I wanted to suggest, said Cleanthes, is that you not misuse terms, or use popular expressions to undermine philosophical reasoning. You know that ordinary people often distinguish reason from experience, even where the question concerns only matters of fact and existence—though when that reason is properly analyzed, it turns out to be nothing but a kind of experience. To prove from experience that the universe originated in a mind is no more contrary to ordinary usage than to prove the motion of the earth on the same principle. And a quibbler could raise all the same objections to the Copernican system that you have pressed against my reasoning. Have you seen other earths move, he might say? Have...

PHILO 2.26 Yes! cried Philo, interrupting him. We do have other earths. Isn't the moon another earth, which we see turning on its axis? Isn't Venus another earth, where we observe the same thing? Aren't the revolutions of the sun also a confirmation, by analogy, of the same theory? Aren't all the planets earths that revolve around the sun? Aren't the satellites moons that move around Jupiter and Saturn, and along with those primary planets around the sun? These analogies and resemblances, along with others I haven't mentioned, are the only proofs of the Copernican system. It is up to you to consider whether you have any analogies of the same kind to support your theory.

2.27 In fact, Cleanthes, he went on, the modern system of astronomy is now so universally accepted by inquirers, and has become so essential a part even of our earliest education, that we are not usually very careful in examining the reasons it rests on. Studying the first writers on the subject has become a matter of mere curiosity. Yet they had the full force of prejudice to contend with, and had to turn their arguments every which way to make them popular and convincing. But if we read Galileo's famous *Dialogues* on the system of the world, we find that this great genius, one of the most sublime who ever lived, first bent all his efforts toward proving that there was no basis for the usual distinction between elementary and celestial substances. The schools, misled by the illusions of the senses, had pushed this distinction very far. They had declared the celestial substances to be ungenerated, incorruptible, unalterable, and incapable of being acted upon, and had assigned all the opposite qualities to the elementary ones.[6] But Galileo, beginning with the moon, proved that it was like the earth in every respect: its convex shape, its natural darkness when not lit up, its density, its division into solid and liquid, the changes in its phases, the way earth and moon light each other and eclipse each other, the unevenness of the lunar surface, and so on. After many

6 Galileo's Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems (1632). "The schools" are the scholastic, Aristotelian philosophers, who held that the heavens were made of a different, changeless substance from the four earthly elements.

examples of this kind, covering all the planets, people plainly saw that these bodies had become proper objects of experience, and that the similarity of their nature allowed us to extend the same arguments and phenomena from one to the other.

2.28 In this cautious procedure of the astronomers, Cleanthes, you can read your own condemnation—or rather you can see that the subject you are engaged in exceeds all human reason and inquiry. Can you claim to show any such similarity between the construction of a house and the generation of a universe? Have you ever seen nature in any situation resembling the first arrangement of the elements? Have worlds ever been formed before your eyes, and have you had the leisure to observe the whole course of the process, from the first appearance of order to its final completion? If you have, then cite your experience and present your theory.

Part III

Cleanthes answers with the voice from the clouds and the living library.

CLEANTHES 3.1 How even the most absurd argument, replied Cleanthes, can take on an air of probability in the hands of a clever and inventive man! Don't you realize, Philo, that Copernicus and his first followers had to prove the similarity of earthly and celestial matter because several philosophers, blinded by old systems and supported by some perceptible appearances, had denied it? But there is no need at all for theists to prove that the works of nature are similar to those of human art, because this similarity is self-evident and undeniable. The same matter, a similar form: what more is needed to show an analogy between their causes, and to establish that all things originate in a divine purpose and intention? Your objections, I must tell you frankly, are no better than the abstruse quibbles of those philosophers who denied motion, and they should be refuted in the same way—with illustrations, examples, and instances, rather than with serious argument and philosophy.[1]

THE VOICE AND THE LIVING LIBRARY

Cleanthes imagines a voice from the clouds and self-propagating books to show design is undeniable.

CLEANTHES 3.2 Suppose, then, that a clear voice were heard in the clouds, much louder and more melodious than any human

1 Zeno of Elea offered famous paradoxes against motion; Diogenes the Cynic is said to have refuted them simply by getting up and walking.

art could ever produce. Suppose that this voice reached all nations at the same instant and spoke to each in its own language and dialect. Suppose that its words not only made good sense but conveyed some teaching entirely worthy of a benevolent being superior to humankind. Could you possibly hesitate for a moment about the cause of this voice? Wouldn't you have to attribute it immediately to some design or purpose? Yet as far as I can see, all the same objections (if they deserve that name) that are raised against the system of theism could also be raised against this inference.

3.3 Couldn't you say that all conclusions about matters of fact are founded on experience? That when we hear a clear voice in the dark and infer that a person is there, it is only the resemblance of the effects that leads us to conclude that the cause is similar too? But that this extraordinary voice, with its loudness, its reach, and its fluency in every language, bears so little analogy to any human voice that we have no reason to suppose any analogy in their causes? And so that a rational, wise, coherent speech came, you know not how, from some accidental whistling of the winds, and not from any divine reason or intelligence? You clearly see your own objections in these quibbles. And I hope you also clearly see that they cannot possibly carry more weight in the one case than in the other.

3.4 But to bring the case still closer to the present one of the universe, I will make two suppositions that involve no absurdity or impossibility. Suppose there is a natural, universal, unchanging language, common to every member of the human race. And suppose that books are natural products, which perpetuate themselves the same way animals and plants do, by descent and reproduction. Some of the ways we express our passions do amount to a universal language, and all animals have a natural speech which, however limited, is perfectly intelligible to their own species. And since even the finest piece of eloquence has infinitely fewer parts and less design than the crudest organized body, the reproduction of an *Iliad* or an *Aeneid* is an easier supposition than that of any plant or animal.

3.5 Suppose, then, that you walk into your library, populated in this way by natural volumes containing the most refined reasoning and the most exquisite beauty. Could you possibly open one of them and doubt that its original cause bore the strongest analogy to mind and intelligence? When it reasons and discourses; when it remonstrates, argues, and presses its views and themes; when it appeals sometimes to pure intellect and sometimes to the feelings; when it gathers, arranges, and adorns every consideration suited to the subject—could you keep insisting that at bottom all this really had no meaning, and that the first formation of this volume in the loins of its original parent did not come from thought and design? Your obstinacy, I know, doesn't go that far. Even your skeptical playfulness and mischief would be abashed by so glaring an absurdity.

3.6 But if there is any difference, Philo, between this imagined case and the real one of the universe, it is all in favor of the universe. The anatomy of an animal offers many stronger signs of design than reading Livy or Tacitus. And any objection you raise in the real case, by taking me back to so unusual and extraordinary a scene as the first formation of worlds, applies just as well to the supposition of our self-propagating library. So choose your side, Philo, without ambiguity or evasion: either assert that a rational book is no proof of a rational cause, or admit a similar cause for all the works of nature.

3.7 Let me also point out here, Cleanthes continued, that this religious argument, far from being weakened by the skepticism you are so fond of putting on, actually gains strength from it and becomes firmer and less disputable. To rule out all argument or reasoning of every kind is either affectation or madness. The stated position of every reasonable skeptic is simply to reject abstruse, remote, and overly subtle arguments; to stick to common sense and the plain instincts of nature; and to assent wherever reasons strike him with such force that he could not hold back without the greatest violence to himself. Now, the arguments for natural religion are plainly of this kind, and nothing but the most perverse, stubborn metaphysics can reject

them. Consider the eye; dissect it; examine its structure and design; and tell me, from your own feeling, whether the idea of a designer doesn't immediately flood in on you with a force like that of sensation. The most obvious conclusion is surely in favor of design. It takes time, reflection, and study to muster those frivolous, though abstruse, objections that can support unbelief. Who can look at the male and female of each species—the way their parts and instincts correspond, their passions, and the whole course of their lives before and after mating—without realizing that nature intends the propagation of the species? Millions and millions of such examples present themselves in every part of the universe, and no language can convey a more intelligible, irresistible meaning than the intricate adjustment of final causes. What degree of blind dogmatism must a person have reached, then, to reject such natural and such convincing arguments?

3.8 We sometimes come across beauties in writing that seem to break the rules—that win our feelings and stir our imagination in defiance of all the precepts of criticism and the authority of the established masters of the art. And if the argument for theism is, as you claim, contrary to the principles of logic, its universal and irresistible influence clearly proves that there can be arguments of a similarly irregular kind. Whatever quibbles may be raised, an orderly world, like a coherent, articulate speech, will still be accepted as indisputable proof of design and intention.

3.9 It sometimes happens, I admit, that the religious arguments don't have their proper influence on an uneducated person from a preliterate society—not because they are obscure and difficult, but because he never asks himself any questions about them. Where does the intricate structure of an animal come from? From the mating of its parents. And where do they come from? From their parents. A few steps back put the objects at such a distance that for him they are lost in darkness and confusion, and he feels no curiosity to trace them any further. But this is neither dogmatism nor skepticism; it is dullness—a state of

mind very different from your probing, inquisitive disposition, my ingenious friend. You can trace causes from effects; you can compare the most distant and remote objects. Your greatest errors come not from a poverty of thought and invention, but from too luxuriant a fertility, which smothers your natural good sense under a profusion of unnecessary doubts and objections.

PAMPHILUS 3.10 At this point, Hermippus, I could see that Philo was a little embarrassed and at a loss. But while he hesitated over his answer, Demea luckily for him broke into the conversation and saved his face.

DEMEA 3.11 Your example, Cleanthes, he said, drawn from books and language, is familiar, and I admit it has all the more force for that. But isn't there some danger in this very fact? Mightn't it make us presumptuous, by leading us to imagine that we understand the Deity and have some adequate idea of his nature and attributes? When I read a book, I enter into the mind and intention of the author. For the moment I become him, in a way, and have an immediate feeling and conception of the ideas that were turning over in his imagination while he wrote it. But we can surely never come that close to the Deity. His ways are not our ways. His attributes are perfect but incomprehensible. And this book of nature contains a great and inexplicable riddle, more than any intelligible discourse or reasoning.

3.12 The ancient Platonists, as you know, were the most religious and devout of all the pagan philosophers. Yet many of them, especially Plotinus, explicitly declare that intellect or understanding is not to be attributed to the Deity, and that our most perfect worship of him consists not in acts of veneration, reverence, gratitude, or love, but in a certain mysterious self-annihilation, a total extinction of all our faculties. These ideas are perhaps stretched too far. But it must still be acknowledged that by representing the Deity as so intelligible and comprehensible, and so similar to a human mind, we are guilty of the

crudest and narrowest bias, and make ourselves the model of the whole universe.[2]

3.13 All the feelings of the human mind—gratitude, resentment, love, friendship, approval, blame, pity, rivalry, envy—plainly relate to the state and situation of human beings, and are designed to preserve the existence and promote the activity of such a being in such circumstances. It therefore seems unreasonable to transfer such feelings to a supreme being, or to suppose that he is moved by them. Besides, the phenomena of the universe will not support us in such a theory. All our ideas derived from the senses are admittedly false and illusory, and so cannot be supposed to exist in a supreme intelligence. And since the ideas of inner feeling, added to those of the external senses, make up the whole furniture of the human understanding, we may conclude that none of the materials of thought are in any way similar in the human and the divine intelligence. Now, as to the manner of thinking: how can we make any comparison between the two, or suppose them in any way alike? Our thought is fluctuating, uncertain, fleeting, successive, and composite. If we were to remove these features, we would utterly destroy its essence, and it would then be a misuse of terms to call it thought or reason. Or at least, if it seems more pious and respectful (as it really is) to keep using these terms when we speak of the Supreme Being, we should acknowledge that in that case their meaning is completely incomprehensible, and that the weaknesses of our nature do not allow us to reach any ideas that correspond in the slightest to the ineffable sublimity of the divine attributes.

2 Plotinus (c. 204–270), founder of Neoplatonism, taught that the highest principle, the One, is beyond thought and is reached only in mystical union.

Part IV

Can God's mind resemble ours? Philo raises the regress of ideas.

CLEANTHES 4.1 It seems strange to me, Demea, said Cleanthes, that you, who are so sincere in the cause of religion, should still maintain the mysterious, incomprehensible nature of the Deity, and insist so strenuously that he has no likeness or resemblance of any kind to human beings. I readily grant that the Deity has many powers and attributes of which we can have no comprehension. But if our ideas, as far as they go, are not true and adequate and faithful to his real nature, I don't know what in this subject is worth insisting on. Is the name, without any meaning, so very important? Or how do you mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from skeptics or atheists, who assert that the first cause of everything is unknown and unintelligible? Their rashness must be very great if, after rejecting production by a mind—I mean a mind resembling the human, for I know of no other—they claim to identify with certainty some other specific, intelligible cause. And their conscience must be very delicate indeed if they refuse to call the universal unknown cause God or the Deity, and to heap on him as many sublime praises and meaningless epithets as you care to demand of them.

DEMEA 4.2 Who could have imagined, replied Demea, that Cleanthes, the calm, philosophical Cleanthes, would try to refute his opponents by pinning a nickname on them—that, like the common bigots and inquisitors of the day, he would resort to invective and rhetoric instead of reasoning? Or doesn't he see that

such tactics are easily turned back on him, and that "Anthropomorphite" is a label just as invidious, with consequences just as dangerous, as the epithet "Mystic" with which he has honored us? Really, Cleanthes, consider what you are asserting when you represent the Deity as similar to a human mind and understanding. What is the human soul?[1] A composite of various faculties, passions, feelings, and ideas—united, it is true, into one self or person, but still distinct from one another. When it reasons, the ideas that make up its train of thought arrange themselves in a certain form or order, which does not stay intact for a moment but immediately gives way to another arrangement. New opinions, new passions, new affections, new feelings arise, which continually change the mental scene and produce in it the greatest variety and the most rapid succession imaginable. How is this compatible with the perfect immutability and simplicity that all true theists ascribe to the Deity? By one and the same act, they say, he sees past, present, and future. His love and hatred, his mercy and justice, are a single operation. He is entire at every point of space and complete at every instant of time. No succession, no change, no gain, no loss. What he is contains not the slightest shadow of distinction or diversity. And what he is at this moment he always has been and always will be, without any new judgment, feeling, or act. He stands fixed in one simple, perfect state. You can never properly say that this act of his is different from that one, or that this judgment or idea has recently been formed and will give way in turn to some different judgment or idea.

CLEANTHES 4.3 I readily grant, said Cleanthes, that those who maintain the perfect simplicity of the Supreme Being to the extent you have described are complete mystics, and open to all the consequences I have drawn from their opinion. They are, in a word, atheists without knowing it. For although it is granted that the Deity has attributes we cannot comprehend, we should

1 An Anthropomorphite was, strictly, a member of an early heretical sect that ascribed a human form to God.

never ascribe to him any attributes that are absolutely incompatible with the intelligent nature that is essential to him. A mind whose acts and feelings and ideas are not distinct and successive—one that is wholly simple and totally unchangeable—is a mind that has no thought, no reason, no will, no feeling, no love, no hatred. In a word, it is no mind at all. It is a misuse of terms to call it a mind; we might as well speak of limited extension without shape, or of number without composition.

A MIND NEEDS A CAUSE TOO

Philo argues that a divine mind full of ordered ideas needs explaining as much as the material world.

PHILO 4.4 Please consider, said Philo, whom you are now attacking. You are honoring with the title of atheist almost all the sound, orthodox theologians who have written on this subject. By your reckoning, you will end up being the only sound theist in the world. But if idolaters are atheists, as I think can fairly be said, and Christian theologians are too, what becomes of that much-celebrated argument from the universal consent of humankind?

4.5 But since I know you are not much swayed by names and authorities, I will try to show you a little more clearly the drawbacks of the anthropomorphism you have embraced. I will prove that there is no reason to suppose that a plan of the world is formed in the divine mind, made up of distinct ideas arranged in various ways, in the same way that an architect forms in his head the plan of a house he intends to build.

4.6 It isn't easy, I admit, to see what is gained by this supposition, whether we judge the matter by reason or by experience. We are still obliged to climb higher, to find the cause of this cause that you had offered as satisfactory and conclusive.

4.7 If reason (I mean abstract reason, derived from *a priori* inquiry) is not equally silent on all questions of cause and effect, it will at least venture to pronounce this verdict: that a mental world, or universe of ideas, requires a cause just as much as a

material world, or universe of objects, does; and that if it is similar in its arrangement, it must require a similar cause. For what is there in this subject that should lead to a different conclusion or inference? Viewed abstractly, they are exactly alike, and no difficulty attends the one supposition that does not also attend the other.

4.8 Next, if we insist on forcing experience to pronounce some verdict, even on these subjects that lie beyond her sphere, she cannot see any significant difference in this respect between these two kinds of worlds either. She finds them governed by similar principles, and dependent on an equal variety of causes in their operations. We have miniature samples of both. Our own mind resembles the one; a plant or animal body resembles the other. Let experience, then, judge from these samples. Nothing seems more delicate in its causes than thought. And since these causes never work the same way in two people, we never find two people who think exactly alike. Indeed, the same person never thinks exactly alike at two different times. A difference in age, in bodily condition, in weather, food, company, books, or passions—any of these, or others still more minute, is enough to alter the intricate machinery of thought and set it moving and operating in very different ways. As far as we can tell, plant and animal bodies are no more delicate in their motions, and depend on no greater variety or more intricate adjustment of springs and principles.

4.9 How, then, are we to satisfy ourselves about the cause of that Being you suppose to be the author of nature—or, on your system of anthropomorphism, about the ideal world into which you trace the material one? Don't we have the same reason to trace that ideal world back to yet another ideal world, or a new intelligent principle? And if we stop there and go no further, why go even that far? Why not stop at the material world? How can we satisfy ourselves without going on *in infinitum* [to infinity]? And in the end, what satisfaction is there in that infinite regress? Remember the story of the Indian philosopher and his

elephant. It never fit anything better than the present subject.[2] If the material world rests on a similar ideal world, that ideal world must rest on another, and so on without end. It would be better, then, never to look beyond the present material world. By supposing that it contains the principle of its order within itself, we are really declaring it to be God—and the sooner we arrive at that divine being, the better. Once you take one step beyond the world system, you merely stir up a curiosity that can never be satisfied.

4.10 To say that the different ideas making up the reason of the Supreme Being fall into order of themselves, by their own nature, is really to talk without any precise meaning. And if it does have a meaning, I would like to know why it isn't just as sensible to say that the parts of the material world fall into order of themselves, by their own nature. Can one opinion be intelligible when the other isn't?

4.11 We do, indeed, have experience of ideas that fall into order of themselves, with no known cause. But I am sure we have far more experience of matter doing the same—in every instance of reproduction and growth, where an exact analysis of the cause lies wholly beyond human understanding. We also have experience of particular systems of thought and of matter that have no order: of the first in madness, of the second in decay. Why, then, should we think order more essential to one than to the other? And if it requires a cause in both, what do we gain by your system of tracing the universe of objects back to a similar universe of ideas? The first step we take commits us to going on forever. It would therefore be wise to confine all our inquiries to the present world and look no further. These speculations, which so far exceed the narrow limits of human understanding, can never yield any satisfaction.

4.12 The Peripatetics, as you know, Cleanthes, when asked for the cause of some phenomenon, used to fall back on their "fac-

2 In the story (as told by Locke), an Indian philosopher says the world rests on an elephant, the elephant on a tortoise, and the tortoise on "something, he knew not what."

ulties" or "occult qualities." They would say, for instance, that bread nourishes by its nutritive faculty and senna purges by its purgative faculty. But it has since been discovered that this dodge was nothing but ignorance in disguise—that these philosophers, though less candid, were really saying the same thing as the skeptics or ordinary people, who frankly admitted that they didn't know the cause of these phenomena.[3] In the same way, when someone asks what cause produces order in the ideas of the Supreme Being, can you Anthropomorphites give any other reason than that it is a rational faculty, and that such is the nature of the Deity? Yet it is hard to say why a similar answer shouldn't do just as well to account for the order of the world, without appealing to any such intelligent creator as you insist on. We need only say that such is the nature of material objects, and that they are all originally endowed with a faculty of order and proportion. These are just more learned and elaborate ways of confessing our ignorance. Neither hypothesis has any real advantage over the other, except that yours fits better with popular prejudice.

CLEANTHES 4.13 You have laid out this argument very forcefully, replied Cleanthes, but you don't seem to see how easy it is to answer. Even in everyday life, if I give the cause of some event, is it any objection, Philo, that I can't give the cause of that cause, and answer every new question that might be raised without end? And what philosophers could possibly submit to so strict a rule? Philosophers admit that ultimate causes are completely unknown. They know that the most refined principles to which they trace the phenomena are still as inexplicable to them as the phenomena themselves are to ordinary people. The order and arrangement of nature, the intricate fitting of means to ends, the evident use and purpose of every part and organ—all these declare, in the plainest language, an intelligent cause or author. The heavens and the earth give the same testimony. The whole

3 The Peripatetics were the followers of Aristotle, whose scholastic heirs explained effects by "faculties" and hidden ("occult") qualities. Senna is a plant long used as a laxative.

chorus of nature raises one hymn in praise of its Creator. You alone, or nearly alone, disturb this universal harmony. You raise obscure doubts, quibbles, and objections. You ask me what the cause of this cause is. I don't know; I don't care; it's no concern of mine. I have found a Deity, and here I stop my inquiry. Let those go further who are wiser or more adventurous.

PHILO 4.14 I claim to be neither, replied Philo. And for that very reason I would perhaps never have tried to go so far—especially since I know I must finally settle for the same answer that, without any further trouble, could have satisfied me from the start. If I am still to remain in complete ignorance of causes, and can explain absolutely nothing, I will never count it any gain to push off for a moment a difficulty which, as you admit, must immediately come back on me in full force. Scientists, it is true, quite rightly explain particular effects by more general causes, even though those general causes may in the end remain completely inexplicable. But surely they never thought it satisfactory to explain a particular effect by a particular cause that could no more be accounted for than the effect itself. An ideal system that arranges itself, without any prior design, is not one bit more explicable than a material system that achieves its order in the same way. Nor is the second supposition any harder than the first.

Part V

How far the analogy takes us: a finite, imperfect, perhaps plural deity.

PHILO 5.1 But to show you still more drawbacks in your anthropomorphism, Philo went on, please take a fresh look at your principles. Like effects prove like causes. This is the argument from experience, and this, you also say, is the only theological argument. Now it is certain that the more alike the observed effects are, and the more alike the inferred causes, the stronger the argument. Every departure on either side lowers the probability and makes the experiment less conclusive. You cannot doubt the principle, and you shouldn't reject its consequences.

5.2 All the new discoveries in astronomy, which prove the immense grandeur and magnificence of the works of nature, are so many additional arguments for a Deity on the true system of theism. But on your hypothesis of experimental theism they become so many objections, by moving the effect still further from any resemblance to the products of human skill and design. For if Lucretius[1], even working with the old picture of the world, could exclaim,

1 HUME'S NOTE. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, Book 2, line 1094.

5.3 Quis regere immensi summam, quis habere profundi
Indu manu validas potis est moderanter habenas?
Quis pariter coelos omnes convertere? et omnes
Ignibus aetheriis terras suffire feraces?
Omnibus inque locis esse omni tempore praesto? [Who is able to rule the sum of the immeasurable, who to hold in his hand, with control, the strong reins of the deep? Who can turn all the heavens at once, and warm all the fruitful earths with fires from the sky, and be present in all places at all times?]

If Tully[2] thought this reasoning so natural that he put it into the mouth of his Epicurean:[3]

5.5 "Quibus enim oculis animi intueri potuit vester Plato fabricam illam tanti operis, qua construi a Deo atque aedificari mundum facit? quae molitio? quae ferramenta? qui vectes? quae machinae? qui ministri tanti muneris fuerunt? quemadmodum autem obedire et parere voluntati architecti aer, ignis, aqua, terra potuerunt?" [For with what eyes of the mind could your Plato have seen the workshop of so great a work, in which he has God build and construct the world? What engineering was there? What tools? What levers? What machines? Who were the laborers on so vast a job? And how could air, fire, water, and earth obey and submit to the architect's will?]

5.6 If this argument, I say, had any force in earlier ages, how much more must it have now, when the bounds of nature have been so immeasurably enlarged and so magnificent a scene has opened before us? It is even less reasonable to form our idea of so unlimited a cause from our experience of the narrow products of human design and invention.

5.7 The discoveries made with microscopes, which open up a new universe in miniature, are likewise objections on your view and arguments on mine. The further we push research of this kind, the more we are led to infer that the universal cause of

2 HUME'S NOTE. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, Book 1.
3 "Tully" is Cicero (Marcus Tullius Cicero).

everything is vastly different from mankind, or from any object of human experience and observation.

CLEANTHES 5.8 And what do you say to the discoveries in anatomy, chemistry, botany...? These are surely no objections, replied Cleanthes. They only reveal new instances of skill and design. It is still the image of mind reflected back to us from countless objects. Add: a mind like the human, said Philo. I know of no other, replied Cleanthes. And the more alike the better, Philo pressed. Certainly, said Cleanthes.

WHAT THE ANALOGY COSTS

Philo shows that reasoning from experience gives no infinite, perfect, or single deity.

PHILO 5.9 Now, Cleanthes, said Philo, with an air of eagerness and triumph, note the consequences. First, by this method of reasoning you give up any claim to infinity in any of the Deity's attributes. For since the cause should be proportioned only to the effect, and the effect, so far as it comes within our knowledge, is not infinite, what grounds do we have, on your assumptions, for ascribing that attribute to the divine being? You will still insist that by removing him so far from any likeness to human creatures, we fall into the most arbitrary hypothesis, and at the same time weaken every proof of his existence.

5.10 Second, on your theory you have no reason to ascribe perfection to the Deity, even within his finite capacity, or to suppose him free of every error, mistake, or inconsistency in what he undertakes. There are many inexplicable difficulties in the works of nature which, if we grant that a perfect author has been proved *a priori*, are easily resolved: they become merely apparent difficulties, arising from the narrow capacity of man, who cannot trace infinite relations. But on your method of reasoning, all these difficulties become real—and may even be pressed as new instances of likeness to human skill and design. At the very least you must admit that, from our limited vantage point, we cannot possibly tell whether this system contains any

great faults or deserves any considerable praise, compared with other possible—and even actual—systems. If the *Aeneid* were read to a peasant, could he declare that poem absolutely flawless, or even assign it its proper rank among the works of human genius—he who had never encountered any other such work?

5.11 But however perfect a production this world might be, it would still remain uncertain whether all the excellences of the work can rightly be credited to the workman. When we examine a ship, what an exalted idea we must form of the ingenuity of the carpenter who built so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine! And how surprised we would be to find him a dull tradesman who imitated others and copied an art that had been gradually improving over a long succession of ages, through countless trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and disputes! Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, before this system was hit upon: much labor lost, many fruitless trials made, and a slow but steady improvement carried on over infinite ages in the art of world-making. In such matters, who can determine where the truth lies—indeed, who can even guess where the probability lies—amid the great number of hypotheses that might be proposed, and the still greater number that might be imagined?

5.12 And what shadow of an argument, Philo continued, can you produce from your hypothesis to prove that the Deity is one? A great number of people join together to build a house or a ship, to raise a city, to frame a commonwealth. Why couldn't several deities combine to design and make a world? That would only be all the more like human affairs. By dividing the work among several, we can limit the attributes of each still further, and get rid of the vast power and knowledge that must be supposed in a single deity—which, according to you, can only weaken the proof of his existence. And if creatures as foolish and vicious as human beings can still often unite in framing and carrying out a single plan, how much more could those deities or spirits, whom we may suppose several degrees more perfect!

5.13 To multiply causes unnecessarily is, indeed, contrary to sound philosophy—but that principle doesn't apply to the present case. If your theory had first proved one deity possessing every attribute needed to produce the universe, it would be unnecessary, I admit (though not absurd), to suppose any other deity existed. But as long as it remains an open question whether all these attributes are united in one subject or spread among several independent beings, what phenomena in nature can we claim settle the dispute? When we see a body raised on one side of a scale, we are sure that there is some counterweight equal to it in the opposite pan, however hidden from view. But we may still doubt whether that weight is a collection of several distinct bodies or one uniform, solid mass. And if the weight required far exceeds anything we have ever seen combined in a single body, the first supposition becomes all the more probable and natural. An intelligent being of such vast power and capacity as is needed to produce the universe—or, to use the language of ancient philosophy, so prodigious an animal—exceeds all analogy, and even all comprehension.

5.14 But more than that, Cleanthes: men are mortal and renew their species by reproduction, and this is true of all living creatures. The two great sexes of male and female, says Milton, animate the world. Why should this feature, so universal and so essential, be excluded from those numerous and limited deities? Behold, then, the theogony of ancient times brought back upon us.[4]

5.15 And why not become a thoroughgoing Anthropomorphite? Why not assert that the deity or deities are physical, with eyes, a nose, mouth, ears, and so on? Epicurus maintained that no one had ever seen reason except in a human form, and that the gods must therefore have human form. And this argument, so deservedly ridiculed by Cicero, becomes on your view solid and philosophical.

5.16 In a word, Cleanthes, someone who follows your hypothesis may perhaps be able to assert, or guess, that the universe

at some point arose from something like design. But beyond that he cannot establish a single detail. He is left to settle every point of his theology by the wildest freedom of fancy and hypothesis. For all he knows, this world is very faulty and imperfect compared with some higher standard. Perhaps it was only the first crude attempt of some infant deity, who later abandoned it, ashamed of his botched performance. Perhaps it is the work of some dependent, inferior deity, and the laughingstock of his superiors. Perhaps it is the product of old age and senility in some superannuated deity, and has run on haphazardly ever since his death, on the first impulse and active force it received from him. You rightly show signs of horror, Demea, at these strange suppositions. But these, and a thousand more like them, are Cleanthes's suppositions, not mine. From the moment the Deity's attributes are supposed to be finite, all these become possible. And for my part, I cannot think so wild and unsettled a system of theology in any way preferable to none at all.

CLEANTHES 5.17 I absolutely disown these suppositions, cried Cleanthes. Still, they strike me with no horror, especially offered in the rambling way in which they fall from your lips. On the contrary, they give me pleasure when I see that, for all the free rein you give your imagination, you never get rid of the hypothesis of design in the universe, but are forced at every turn to fall back on it. To this concession I hold firmly, and I regard it as a sufficient foundation for religion.

4 A theogony is an account of the births and genealogies of the gods, like Hesiod's poem of that name.

Part VI

Philo proposes that the world is an animal, with God as its soul.

DEMEA 6.1 It must be a flimsy structure indeed, said Demea, that can be built on so shaky a foundation. While we are uncertain whether there is one deity or many—whether the deity or deities to whom we owe our existence are perfect or imperfect, subordinate or supreme, dead or alive—what trust or confidence can we place in them? What devotion or worship can we address to them? What reverence or obedience can we pay them? For all the purposes of life, the theory of religion becomes entirely useless. And even as regards its theoretical consequences, its uncertainty, on your account, must make it utterly precarious and unsatisfying.

PHILO 6.2 To make it still more unsatisfying, said Philo, another hypothesis occurs to me, one that must gain an air of probability from the method of reasoning Cleanthes insists on so much. That like effects arise from like causes—this principle he takes to be the foundation of all religion. But there is another principle of the same kind, no less certain and drawn from the same source of experience: that where several known features are observed to be similar, the unknown ones will be found similar too. So if we see the limbs of a human body, we conclude that a human head goes with them, even though it is hidden from us. So, too, if we see a small part of the sun through a crack in a wall, we conclude that if the wall were removed we would see the whole of it. In short, this method of reasoning is so obvious and familiar that no one can ever question its soundness.

THE WORLD AS AN ANIMAL

Philo proposes that the world is an animal body with the Deity as its soul.

PHILO 6.3 Now if we survey the universe, so far as it comes within our knowledge, it bears a great resemblance to an animal or organized body, and seems driven by a similar principle of life and motion. A continual circulation of matter through it produces no disorder. A continual wearing away in every part is constantly repaired. The closest interconnection is seen throughout the entire system, and each part or member, in performing its proper functions, works both for its own preservation and for that of the whole. The world, therefore, I infer, is an animal, and the Deity is the *soul* of the world, moving it and moved by it.

6.4 You are too learned, Cleanthes, to be at all surprised at this opinion. As you know, it was held by nearly all the theists of antiquity, and it predominates in their discussions and arguments. For although the ancient philosophers sometimes reason from final causes, as if they thought the world the handiwork of God, their favorite notion seems rather to have been that it is his body, whose organization makes it subject to him. And it must be admitted that, since the universe resembles a human body more than it does the products of human skill and design, if our limited analogy could ever properly be extended to the whole of nature, the inference seems to favor the ancient theory over the modern one.

6.5 The ancient theory has many other advantages too, which recommended it to the ancient theologians. Nothing ran more contrary to all their notions—because nothing runs more contrary to common experience—than mind without body: a purely spiritual substance, which neither their senses nor their understanding could grasp, and of which they had not observed a single instance anywhere in nature. Mind and body they knew, because they felt both. They likewise knew, in the same way,

that both have an order, arrangement, organization, or internal machinery. It could hardly fail to seem reasonable to carry this experience over to the universe, and to suppose that the divine mind and body were likewise of the same age, and that both had order and arrangement naturally inherent in them and inseparable from them.

6.6 Here, then, Cleanthes, is a new kind of anthropomorphism for you to consider, and a theory that seems open to no serious difficulties. Surely you are too far above systematic prejudice to find it any harder to suppose that an animal body possesses order and organization originally, of itself, or from unknown causes, than to suppose that a similar order belongs to mind. But the popular prejudice that body and mind should always go together ought not, one would think, to be wholly ignored—since it rests on ordinary experience, the only guide you claim to follow in all these theological inquiries. And if you assert that our limited experience is an inadequate standard for judging the unlimited extent of nature, you abandon your own hypothesis entirely, and must from then on adopt our mysticism, as you call it, and admit the absolute incomprehensibility of the divine nature.

6.7 This theory, I admit, replied Cleanthes, has never occurred to me before, though it is a fairly natural one, and I can't readily give an opinion on it after so brief an examination and reflection. You are very scrupulous indeed, said Philo. If I were examining any system of yours, I wouldn't have shown half that caution and reserve in raising objections and difficulties. Still, if anything occurs to you, you will oblige us by putting it forward.

CLEANTHES 6.8 Well then, replied Cleanthes, it seems to me that although the world does resemble an animal body in many respects, the analogy also breaks down in many of the most important ones: no sense organs, no seat of thought or reason, no single definite source of motion and action. In short, it seems to bear a stronger resemblance to a plant than to an animal, and to that extent your inference in favor of a soul of the world would be inconclusive.

IS THE WORLD YOUNG?

Cleanthes argues from the late spread of plants and crafts that the world is not eternal; Philo disagrees.

CLEANTHES 6.9 But next, your theory seems to imply that the world is eternal, and that is a principle which, I think, can be refuted by the strongest reasons and probabilities. I will suggest an argument to this effect which I believe no writer has pressed before. Those who argue from the recent origin of the arts and sciences have an inference that is not without force. Yet they might perhaps be answered by considerations drawn from the nature of human society, which swings continually between ignorance and knowledge, liberty and slavery, wealth and poverty—so that from our limited experience we cannot predict with confidence what events may or may not be expected. Ancient learning and history seem to have been in great danger of perishing entirely after the invasions that overran the Roman Empire. Had those upheavals lasted a little longer, or been a little more violent, we would probably not now know what happened in the world a few centuries before us. Indeed, had it not been for the superstition of the popes, who preserved a little jargon of Latin to keep up the appearance of an ancient and universal church, that language would have been completely lost. In that case the Western world, having lost all learning, would not have been in a fit state to receive the Greek language and learning that reached it after the sack of Constantinople.[1] Once learning and books had been wiped out, even the practical crafts would have fallen into serious decline, and it is easy to imagine that legend or tradition might assign them a much later origin than the true one. So this popular argument against the eternity of the world seems a bit shaky.

6.10 But here there seems to be the basis of a better argument. Lucullus was the first to bring cherry trees from Asia to Europe,

1 Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453; Greek scholars who fled to Italy helped spread Greek learning in the West.

though that tree does so well in many European climates that it grows wild in the woods without any cultivation. Is it possible that throughout a whole eternity no European ever went to Asia and thought of transplanting so delicious a fruit to his own country? Or if the tree was once transplanted and propagated, how could it ever have died out afterward?[2] Empires may rise and fall, liberty and slavery may take turns, ignorance and knowledge may give way to each other—but the cherry tree will still remain in the woods of Greece, Spain, and Italy, untouched by the upheavals of human society.

6.11 It is not two thousand years since vines were transplanted into France, though no climate in the world suits them better. It is not three centuries since horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, dogs, and grain became known in America. Is it possible that over the course of a whole eternity no Columbus ever arose to open communication between Europe and that continent? We might as well imagine that everyone wore stockings for ten thousand years and never had the sense to think of garters to hold them up. All these seem convincing proofs of the youth—or rather the infancy—of the world, since they rest on the operation of principles more constant and steady than those that govern and direct human society. Nothing short of a total upheaval of the elements will ever destroy all the European animals and plants now found in the Western world.

PHILO 6.12 And what argument do you have against such upheavals? replied Philo. Strong and nearly incontestable evidence can be found all over the earth that every part of this globe was once entirely covered with water for many ages. And even if order were supposed to be inseparable from matter and inherent in it, matter might still be subject to many great revolutions through the endless periods of eternal time. The constant changes to which every part of it is subject seem to hint at some such general transformations—though at the same time it is

2 Lucullus was a Roman general of the first century BC, famous for his wealth and lavish banquets.

worth noting that all the changes and decay we have ever experienced are merely transitions from one state of order to another. Matter can never rest in total formlessness and confusion. What we see in the parts, we may infer of the whole—at least that is the method of reasoning on which you rest your entire theory. And if I had to defend any particular system of this kind, which I would never willingly do, I think none more plausible than one that ascribes to the world an eternal, inherent principle of order, though accompanied by great and continual revolutions and alterations. This solves all difficulties at a stroke. And if the solution, by being so general, is not entirely complete and satisfying, it is at least a theory we must fall back on sooner or later, whatever system we adopt. How could things be as they are unless there were an original, inherent principle of order somewhere, in thought or in matter? And it makes no difference which of the two we prefer. Chance has no place on any hypothesis, skeptical or religious. Everything is surely governed by fixed, inviolable laws. And if the inmost essence of things were laid open to us, we would discover a scene of which we can at present have no idea. Instead of marveling at the order of natural beings, we would see clearly that it was absolutely impossible for them ever to be arranged in any other way, in the smallest detail.

6.13 Suppose someone wanted to revive the ancient pagan theology, which held, as we learn from Hesiod, that this globe was governed by 30,000 deities who arose from the unknown powers of nature. You would naturally object, Cleanthes, that nothing is gained by this hypothesis, and that it is just as easy to suppose that all men and animals—beings more numerous but less perfect—sprang directly from a similar origin. Push the same inference one step further, and you will find a numerous society of deities just as explicable as one universal deity who holds within himself the powers and perfections of the whole society. All these systems, then—skepticism, polytheism, and theism—you must admit, on your principles, stand on the same footing,

and none has any advantage over the others. From this you may learn the fallacy of your principles.

Part VII

The world as grown rather than designed, like a vegetable or an animal.

PHILO 7.1 But here, Philo continued, in examining the ancient system of the soul of the world, a new idea suddenly strikes me. If it is sound, it must come close to overturning all your reasoning, and destroying even the first inferences in which you place such confidence. If the universe bears a greater likeness to animal bodies and to plants than to the works of human art, then it is more probable that its cause resembles the cause of the former than that of the latter, and its origin should rather be ascribed to generation or vegetation than to reason or design. Your conclusion, then, even on your own principles, is lame and defective.[1]

DEMEA 7.2 Please unfold this argument a little further, said Demea, for I don't quite grasp it in the concise form in which you have put it.

PHILO 7.3 Our friend Cleanthes, replied Philo, as you have heard, asserts that since no question of fact can be proved except by experience, the existence of a Deity cannot be proved by any other means. The world, he says, resembles the products of human design; therefore its cause must also resemble theirs. Here we may note that the operation of one very small part of nature—namely man—on another very small part—namely the inanimate matter within his reach—is the rule by which Clean-

1 Hume uses "generation" for animal reproduction and "vegetation" for the growth and propagation of plants.

thes judges the origin of the whole. He measures objects so vastly out of proportion by one and the same standard. But setting aside all objections on this score, I claim that there are other parts of the universe (besides the machines of human invention) that bear an even greater resemblance to the structure of the world, and that therefore offer a better conjecture about the universal origin of this system. These parts are animals and plants. The world plainly resembles an animal or a plant more than it does a watch or a knitting machine. Its cause, therefore, more probably resembles the cause of the former. The cause of the former is generation or vegetation. The cause of the world, therefore, we may infer to be something similar or analogous to generation or vegetation.

DEMEA 7.4 But how is it conceivable, said Demea, that the world could arise from anything like vegetation or generation?

WORLDS FROM SEEDS

Philo suggests the world may have grown like a plant or animal, and that generation explains order as well as reason.

PHILO 7.5 Very easily, replied Philo. Just as a tree sheds its seeds into the neighboring fields and produces other trees, so the great plant, the world—or this planetary system—produces within itself certain seeds, which, scattered into the surrounding chaos, grow into new worlds. A comet, for instance, is the seed of a world. After it has fully ripened by passing from sun to sun and star to star, it is finally tossed into the unformed elements that surround this universe on every side, and immediately sprouts into a new system.

7.6 Or if, for the sake of variety (for I see no other advantage), we were to suppose this world to be an animal, a comet is the egg of this animal. And just as an ostrich lays its egg in the sand, which, without any further care, hatches the egg and produces a new animal, so...

DEMEA 7.7 I understand you, says Demea. But what wild, arbitrary suppositions these are! What data do you have for such

extraordinary conclusions? And is the slight, imaginary resemblance of the world to a plant or an animal enough to establish the same inference about both? Should objects that are in general so widely different be a standard for each other?

PHILO 7.8 Exactly, cries Philo. This is the very point I have been pressing all along. I have always maintained that we have no data to establish any system of cosmogony. Our experience, so imperfect in itself and so limited in both extent and duration, can give us no probable conjecture about the whole of things. But if we must settle on some hypothesis, by what rule, may I ask, should we make our choice? Is there any rule other than the greater similarity of the objects compared? And doesn't a plant or an animal, which arises from vegetation or generation, bear a stronger resemblance to the world than any artificial machine, which arises from reason and design?[2]

DEMEA 7.9 But what is this vegetation and generation you talk about? said Demea. Can you explain how they operate, and dissect the fine internal structure on which they depend?

PHILO 7.10 At least as well, replied Philo, as Cleanthes can explain the operations of reason, or dissect the internal structure on which it depends. But without any such elaborate investigations, when I see an animal I infer that it sprang from generation—and with as much certainty as you conclude that a house was built by design. These words, *generation* and *reason*, only mark certain powers and energies in nature whose effects are known but whose essence is incomprehensible. And neither of these principles has any more right than the other to be made the standard for the whole of nature.

7.11 In fact, Demea, we may reasonably expect that the wider the view we take of things, the better it will guide our conclusions on such extraordinary and magnificent subjects. In this little corner of the world alone there are four principles—reason, instinct, generation, vegetation—that are similar to one another and cause similar effects. How many other principles

2 A cosmogony is a theory of how the universe came into being.

may we naturally suppose exist in the immense extent and variety of the universe, if we could travel from planet to planet and from system to system to examine each part of this mighty structure? Any one of the four principles just mentioned (and a hundred others open to our conjecture) could give us a theory by which to judge the origin of the world. And it is an obvious and flagrant bias to confine our view entirely to the principle by which our own minds operate. If this principle were more intelligible for that reason, such a bias might be somewhat excusable. But reason, in its internal makeup and structure, is really as little known to us as instinct or vegetation. And perhaps even that vague, indefinite word *nature*, to which ordinary people refer everything, is at bottom no more inexplicable. The effects of these principles are all known to us from experience, but the principles themselves, and the way they operate, are entirely unknown. Nor is it any less intelligible, or less consistent with experience, to say that the world arose by vegetation from a seed shed by another world than to say that it arose from a divine reason or design, in the sense in which Cleanthes understands it.

DEMEA 7.12 But it seems to me, said Demea, that if the world had a vegetative quality and could sow the seeds of new worlds into the infinite chaos, this power would be yet another argument for design in its author. For where could so wonderful a faculty come from, if not from design? And how can order spring from anything that does not perceive the order it confers?

PHILO 7.13 You need only look around you, Philo replied, to settle that question. A tree gives order and organization to the tree that springs from it, without knowing that order. An animal does the same for its offspring, and a bird for its nest. Instances of this kind are even more common in the world than instances of order that arise from reason and contrivance. To say that all this order in animals and plants comes ultimately from design is to beg the question. And that great point can be settled only by proving, *a priori*, both that order is by its nature inseparable

from thought, and that it can never belong to matter on its own, or through original principles we do not know.

7.14 Besides, Demea, Cleanthes can never make use of this objection of yours without giving up a defense he has already made against one of my objections. When I asked about the cause of that supreme reason and intelligence to which he traces everything, he told me that our inability to answer such questions can never count as an objection in any branch of inquiry. "We must stop somewhere," he says. "It is never within human capacity to explain ultimate causes, or to show the final connections between things. It is enough if every step we take, as far as we go, is supported by experience and observation." Now it is undeniable that vegetation and generation, as well as reason, are known by experience to be principles of order in nature. If I choose to rest my cosmogony on the former rather than the latter, that is my choice. The matter seems entirely arbitrary. And when Cleanthes asks me the cause of my great vegetative or generative faculty, I am equally entitled to ask him the cause of his great reasoning principle. We have agreed to set these questions aside on both sides, and on this occasion it is chiefly in his interest to keep that agreement. Judging by our limited and imperfect experience, generation actually has some advantages over reason. Every day we see reason arise from generation; we never see generation arise from reason.

7.15 Compare, I beg you, the consequences on each side. The world, I say, resembles an animal; therefore it is an animal; therefore it arose from generation. The steps, I admit, are wide, yet there is some slight appearance of analogy at each one. The world, says Cleanthes, resembles a machine; therefore it is a machine; therefore it arose from design. Here the steps are just as wide, and the analogy less striking. And if he claims to carry my hypothesis a step further, inferring design or reason from the great principle of generation I rely on, I can with better warrant take the same liberty with his hypothesis, and infer a divine generation, or theogony, from his principle of reason. I have at least some faint shadow of experience on my side, which is the

most that can ever be had on this subject. Reason, in countless instances, is observed to arise from generation, and never from any other principle.

MYTHS OF GENERATION AND THE SPIDER

Philo cites ancient myths of divine birth and the Brahmins' world-spinning spider.

PHILO 7.16 Hesiod and all the ancient mythologists were so struck by this analogy that they uniformly explained the origin of nature by animal birth and copulation. Plato too, so far as he can be understood, seems to have adopted some such notion in his *Timaeus*.[3]

7.17 The Brahmins claim that the world arose from an infinite spider, who spun this whole complicated mass out of his bowels, and who later destroys all or any part of it by taking it back in and dissolving it into his own essence. To us this kind of cosmogony looks ridiculous, because a spider is a small, contemptible creature whose workings we are unlikely ever to take as a model for the whole universe. Still, here is a new kind of analogy, even on our own globe. And if there were a planet inhabited entirely by spiders (which is quite possible), this inference would seem as natural and irrefutable there as the one that, on our planet, ascribes the origin of all things to design and intelligence, as Cleanthes explains it. Why an orderly system could not be spun from the belly as well as from the brain, he will find it hard to give a satisfactory reason.

CLEANTHES 7.18 I must confess, Philo, Cleanthes replied, that of all men living, the task you have taken on, of raising doubts and objections, suits you best, and seems somehow natural and unavoidable to you. Your inventiveness is so fertile that I am not ashamed to admit I cannot, on the spot, give a proper answer to the out-of-the-way difficulties you keep throwing at me, though I see clearly, in general, that they are fallacious and wrong. And I

3 Hesiod (c. 700 BC) was the Greek poet whose *Theogony* tells of the births of the gods.

have no doubt that you are in the same position yourself right now, and do not have the answer as ready as the objection. Meanwhile you must be aware that common sense and reason are entirely against you, and that whims like the ones you have offered may puzzle us, but can never convince us.

Part VIII

Philo revives the Epicurean hypothesis: order arising from matter in random motion.

PHILO [8.1] What you put down to my fertile invention, Philo replied, is entirely due to the nature of the subject. On subjects suited to the narrow range of human reason, there is usually only one conclusion that carries probability or conviction with it, and to a person of sound judgment every other supposition looks utterly absurd and fanciful. But on questions like the present one, a hundred contradictory views may each keep a kind of imperfect analogy, and invention has full scope to exercise itself. Without much effort of thought, I believe I could instantly propose other systems of cosmogony that would have some faint appearance of truth, though the odds are a thousand, a million to one against either yours or any of mine being the true one.

[8.2] For instance, what if I were to revive the old Epicurean hypothesis? It is commonly, and I think rightly, considered the most absurd system yet proposed. Still, I am not sure that with a few changes it could not be given a faint appearance of probability. Instead of supposing matter infinite, as Epicurus did, let us suppose it finite. A finite number of particles can be arranged in only a finite number of ways, and in an eternal stretch of time every possible order or arrangement must be tried an infinite number of times. This world, then, with all its events, down to the smallest, has been produced and destroyed before, and will

be produced and destroyed again, without any bound or limit.[1] No one who grasps the powers of the infinite, compared with the finite, will ever hesitate over this conclusion.

DEMEA 8.3 But this assumes, said Demea, that matter can acquire motion without any voluntary agent or first mover.

PHILO 8.4 And what is the difficulty, Philo replied, in that assumption? Before experience, every event is equally difficult and incomprehensible; after experience, every event is equally easy and intelligible. In many cases—gravity, elasticity, electricity—motion begins in matter without any known voluntary agent. To suppose, in all these cases, an unknown voluntary agent is mere hypothesis, and a hypothesis that brings no advantages. That motion should begin in matter itself is as conceivable *a priori* as that it should be passed on to matter from mind and intelligence.

8.5 Besides, why could motion not have been passed along by impact through all eternity, with the same stock of it, or nearly the same, still maintained in the universe? As much is lost when motions combine as is gained when they separate. And whatever the causes, the fact is certain: matter is, and always has been, in continual agitation, as far back as human experience or tradition reaches. There is probably not one particle of matter in the whole universe at this moment that is absolutely at rest.

8.6 And this very point, Philo went on, which we have stumbled on in the course of the argument, suggests a new hypothesis of cosmogony that is not wholly absurd or improbable. Is there a system, an order, an economy of things, by which matter can keep up the perpetual agitation that seems essential to it, and yet maintain constancy in the forms it produces? There certainly is such an economy, for this is actually how the present world is. The continual motion of matter, then, in fewer than infinitely many rearrangements, must produce

1 Epicurus (341–270 BC) held that the world arose from the chance collisions of atoms moving in an infinite void.

this economy or order; and by its very nature that order, once established, sustains itself for many ages, if not forever. But wherever matter is so balanced, arranged and adjusted as to stay in perpetual motion and yet keep its forms constant, its condition must necessarily have the very same appearance of art and contrivance that we observe now. All the parts of each form must be related to each other and to the whole; and the whole itself must be related to the other parts of the universe—to the element in which the form lives, to the materials with which it repairs its waste and decay, and to every other form, hostile or friendly. A defect in any of these respects destroys the form, and the matter it is made of is set loose again and thrown into irregular motions and fermentations, until it joins some other regular form. If no such form is ready to receive it, and if there is a great quantity of this decaying matter in the universe, then the universe itself falls into complete disorder—whether what is destroyed is the feeble embryo of a world in its first beginnings, or the rotting carcass of one wasting away in old age and infirmity. Either way, chaos follows, until a finite though countless number of revolutions finally produces some forms whose parts and organs are so adjusted as to sustain those forms amid a continual turnover of matter.

ORDER FROM UNGUIDED MATTER

Philo sketches how matter in endless motion might settle into stable, apparently designed forms.

PHILO 8.7 Suppose (for we will try to put it another way) that matter were thrown into some arrangement by a blind, unguided force. Clearly this first arrangement would in all probability be the most confused and disorderly imaginable, with no resemblance to the works of human contrivance, which, along with a symmetry of parts, show an adjustment of means to ends and a tendency toward self-preservation. If the driving force stopped after this operation, matter would have to remain in disorder forever, one immense chaos, without proportion or

activity. But suppose the driving force, whatever it is, remains in matter. Then this first arrangement will immediately give way to a second, which in all probability will be just as disorderly as the first, and so on through many successive changes and revolutions. No particular order or arrangement lasts a moment unchanged. The original force, still active, keeps matter perpetually restless. Every possible situation is produced and instantly destroyed. If a glimpse or dawn of order appears for a moment, it is instantly swept away and confounded by the never-ceasing force that drives every part of matter.

8.8 So the universe goes on for many ages in a continual succession of chaos and disorder. But is it not possible that it might eventually settle down—not so as to lose its motion and active force (for we have assumed that to be inherent in it), but so as to keep a uniform appearance amid the continual motion and flux of its parts? This is just what we find in the universe now. Every individual thing is constantly changing, and so is every part of every individual thing, and yet the whole remains, to all appearance, the same. May we not hope for such an arrangement—or rather, be sure of it—from the eternal revolutions of unguided matter? And might this not account for all the apparent wisdom and contrivance in the universe? Let us think about it a little, and we will find that this adjustment, if matter arrived at it—a seeming stability in the forms, with a real and perpetual revolution or motion of the parts—offers a plausible, if not a true, solution to the difficulty.

8.9 It is useless, then, to insist on the uses of the parts of animals and plants, and on how intricately they are fitted to one another. I would very much like to know how an animal could survive unless its parts were so fitted. Don't we find that it dies the moment this adjustment fails, and that its decaying matter tries out some new form? It does happen that the parts of the world are so well adjusted that some regular form immediately claims this decaying matter. But if that were not so, could the world survive? Would it not have to dissolve, just like the animal, and pass through new arrangements and situations,

until, after a long but finite succession, it finally fell into the present order or some order like it?

CLEANTHES OBJECTS

Cleanthes points to benefits beyond survival; Philo concedes the gap and urges suspense of judgment.

CLEANTHES 8.10 It is just as well, Cleanthes replied, that you told us this hypothesis occurred to you on the spur of the moment, in the course of the argument. If you had had time to examine it, you would soon have seen the insurmountable objections it faces. No form, you say, can survive unless it has the powers and organs needed for its survival. Some new order or economy must be tried, and so on without pause, until at last an order is hit upon that can support and maintain itself. But on this hypothesis, where do all the conveniences and advantages come from that human beings and all animals possess? Two eyes and two ears are not strictly necessary for the survival of the species. The human race could have been propagated and preserved without horses, dogs, cows and sheep, and without the countless fruits and products that serve our satisfaction and enjoyment. If no camels had been created for human use in the sandy deserts of Africa and Arabia, would the world have dissolved? If no lodestone had been made to give the compass needle its wonderful and useful direction, would human society and the human species have been wiped out at once? Though nature's rules are in general very frugal, instances of this kind are far from rare, and any one of them is enough to prove design —and a benevolent design—behind the order and arrangement of the universe.[2]

PHILO 8.11 At least, said Philo, you can safely conclude that the hypothesis I just gave is to that extent incomplete and imperfect, which I will readily grant. But can we ever reasonably expect more success in any attempt of this kind? Can we ever hope to

2 A lodestone is naturally magnetized rock, used to magnetize compass needles.

build a system of cosmogony that is open to no objections, and contains nothing at odds with our limited and imperfect experience of the analogy of nature? Your own theory surely cannot claim any such advantage, even though you have resorted to anthropomorphism, the better to stay in line with common experience. Let us put it to the test once more. In every instance we have ever seen, ideas are copied from real objects; they are *ectypal*, not *archetypal*, to put it in learned terms. You reverse this order and give thought priority. In every instance we have ever seen, thought has no influence on matter except where that matter is so joined to it as to have an equal and reciprocal influence on it. No animal can directly move anything but the limbs of its own body; and indeed, the equality of action and reaction seems to be a universal law of nature. But your theory implies a contradiction of this experience.[3] These instances, and many more that would be easy to gather (especially the supposition of a mind or system of thought that is eternal—in other words, an animal that was never born and never dies)—these instances, I say, should teach us all restraint in condemning one another. They should show us that just as no system of this kind ought ever to be accepted on the strength of a slight analogy, so none ought to be rejected because of a small incongruity. For that is a drawback from which we can fairly say no system is exempt.

8.12 All religious systems, it is admitted, face great and insurmountable difficulties. Each disputant triumphs in turn, while he wages an offensive war and exposes the absurdities, barbarities and harmful doctrines of his opponent. But on the whole they all prepare a complete triumph for the skeptic, who tells them that no system should ever be embraced on such subjects, for the plain reason that no absurdity should ever be assented to on any subject. A total suspension of judgment is our only reasonable course here. And if, as is commonly observed, among theologians every attack succeeds and no defense does, how complete must be the victory of someone who stays always on

3 "Ectypal" means copied from an original; "archetypal" means serving as the original pattern.

the offensive, together with all mankind, and who has no fixed position or abiding city of his own that he is ever obliged to defend?[4]

4 "Abiding city" echoes Hebrews 13:14: "here have we no continuing city."

Part IX

Demea offers an a priori argument for a necessary being, and Cleanthes refutes it.

DEMEA 9.1 But if the argument *a posteriori* runs into so many difficulties, said Demea, wouldn't we do better to hold to that simple and sublime argument *a priori*, which offers us infallible demonstration and so cuts off all doubt and difficulty at a stroke? With this argument, too, we can prove that the divine attributes are infinite—which, I fear, can never be established with certainty on any other ground. For how can an effect that is finite, or for all we know may be finite—how can such an effect, I ask, prove an infinite cause? The unity of the divine nature, too, is very hard, if not flatly impossible, to deduce merely from contemplating the works of nature. Nor will the uniformity of the plan by itself, even if we grant it, give us any assurance of that attribute. Whereas the argument *a priori* . . .

CLEANTHES 9.2 You seem to reason, Demea, Cleanthes broke in, as if these advantages and conveniences of the abstract argument were full proof of its soundness. But in my view we should first settle which argument of this kind you choose to rely on. Then we can try to judge what value to put on it from the argument itself, rather than from its useful consequences.

DEMEA 9.3 The argument I would rely on, Demea replied, is the common one. Whatever exists must have a cause or reason for its existence, since it is absolutely impossible for anything to produce itself, or be the cause of its own existence. In moving up from effects to causes, then, we must either go on tracing an

infinite succession without any ultimate cause at all, or at last have recourse to some ultimate cause that exists necessarily. Now, that the first supposition is absurd can be proved as follows. In an infinite chain or succession of causes and effects, each single effect is made to exist by the power and efficacy of the cause immediately before it. But the whole eternal chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by anything—and yet it clearly requires a cause or reason, just as much as any particular object that begins to exist in time. It is still a reasonable question why this particular succession of causes existed from eternity, and not some other succession, or none at all. If there is no necessarily existent being, every supposition we can form is equally possible. There is no more absurdity in Nothing having existed from eternity than in the succession of causes that makes up the universe. What was it, then, that made Something exist rather than Nothing, and gave being to one particular possibility to the exclusion of all the rest? External causes, by hypothesis, there are none. Chance is a word without meaning. Was it Nothing? But that can never produce anything. We must therefore have recourse to a necessarily existent Being, who carries the *reason* for his existence in himself, and who cannot be supposed not to exist without an outright contradiction. Consequently there is such a Being—that is, there is a Deity.

CLEANTHES REFUTES THE PROOF

Cleanthes argues that no matter of fact, including God's existence, can be demonstrated a priori.

CLEANTHES 9.4 I will not leave it to Philo, said Cleanthes, to point out the weakness of this metaphysical reasoning, though I know that raising objections is his chief delight. It seems to me so obviously ill-founded, and at the same time of so little importance to the cause of true piety and religion, that I will venture to expose the fallacy myself.

9.5 I will begin by observing that there is an evident absurdity in claiming to demonstrate a matter of fact, or to prove it by any

arguments *a priori*. Nothing is demonstrable unless its contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing that is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existing, we can also conceive as not existing. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no being whose existence is demonstrable. I put this argument forward as entirely decisive, and am willing to rest the whole controversy on it.

9.6 It is claimed that the Deity is a necessarily existent being, and people try to explain this necessity of his existence by asserting that if we knew his whole essence or nature, we would see that it is as impossible for him not to exist as for twice two not to be four. But clearly this can never happen while our faculties remain as they are now. It will always be possible for us, at any time, to conceive the non-existence of what we previously conceived to exist. The mind can never be under a necessity of supposing any object to remain in existence forever, in the way we are under a necessity of always conceiving twice two to be four. The words "necessary existence," therefore, have no meaning—or, what comes to the same thing, none that is consistent.

9.7 Further, why could the material universe not be the necessarily existent Being, on this supposed explanation of necessity? We dare not claim to know all the qualities of matter, and for all we can tell it may have some qualities which, if known, would make its non-existence seem as great a contradiction as twice two making five. I find only one argument used to prove that the material world is not the necessarily existent Being, and it is drawn from the contingency of both the matter and the form of the world. "Any particle of matter," it is said[1], "may be conceived to be annihilated, and any form may be conceived to be altered. Such an annihilation or alteration, therefore, is not impossible."

1 HUME'S NOTE. Dr. Clarke.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), English theologian whose *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1705) gave the classic version of this argument.

But it seems very one-sided not to see that the same argument applies equally to the Deity, so far as we have any conception of him, and that the mind can at least imagine him not existing, or his attributes altered. It must be some unknown, inconceivable qualities that could make his non-existence seem impossible, or his attributes unalterable. And no reason can be given why these qualities might not belong to matter. Since they are altogether unknown and inconceivable, they can never be proved incompatible with it.

9.8 Add to this that when we trace an eternal succession of objects, it seems absurd to ask for a general cause or first author. How can anything that exists from eternity have a cause, when that relation implies priority in time and a beginning of existence?

9.9 In such a chain or succession of objects, too, each part is caused by the one before it and causes the one after it. Where, then, is the difficulty? But the whole, you say, needs a cause. I answer that uniting these parts into a whole—like uniting several separate countries into one kingdom, or several separate limbs into one body—is done merely by an arbitrary act of the mind, and has no effect on the nature of things. If I showed you the particular cause of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I would think it very unreasonable of you to ask me afterward what caused the whole twenty. That is sufficiently explained by explaining the causes of the parts.

NECESSITY AND THE NUMBER NINE

Philo suggests the universe's order may be necessary, like the digits of multiples of nine.

PHILO 9.10 Although the reasoning you have offered, Cleanthes, said Philo, may well excuse me from raising any further difficulties, I cannot resist pressing one more point. Arithmeticians have observed that the multiples of 9 always yield either 9 or some smaller multiple of 9 if you add together all the digits that make up any of them. Thus from 18, 27 and 36, which are mul-

tiples of 9, you get 9 by adding 1 to 8, 2 to 7, and 3 to 6. Again, 369 is also a multiple of 9, and if you add 3, 6 and 9 you get 18, a smaller multiple of 9. A superficial observer may admire so wonderful a regularity as the effect either of chance or of design. But a skilled algebraist immediately concludes that it is the work of necessity, and demonstrates that it must always follow from the nature of these numbers. Is it not probable, I ask, that the whole economy of the universe is governed by a similar necessity, though no human algebra can supply the key that solves the difficulty? And instead of marveling at the order of natural things, might it not turn out that, if we could see into the inner nature of bodies, we would clearly see why it was absolutely impossible for them ever to be arranged in any other way? So dangerous is it to bring this idea of necessity into the present question! And so naturally does it yield an inference directly opposed to the religious hypothesis!

9.11 But dropping all these abstractions, Philo continued, and keeping to more familiar topics, I will venture to add an observation. The argument *a priori* has rarely been found very convincing except by people with a metaphysical turn of mind, who have grown used to abstract reasoning. Having found in mathematics that the understanding often reaches truth through obscurity, and against first appearances, they have carried the same habit of thinking over to subjects where it has no place. Other people, even people of good sense who are strongly inclined to religion, always feel some deficiency in such arguments, though perhaps they cannot say exactly where it lies. This is a sure proof that people always have drawn, and always will draw, their religion from other sources than this kind of reasoning.

Part X

Demea and Philo describe the misery of life, and Philo presses the problem of evil.

DEMEA 10.1 It is my opinion, I admit, Demea replied, that each person feels the truth of religion, in a way, within his own heart, and is led to seek the protection of that Being on whom he and all nature depend, by a sense of his own weakness and misery rather than by any reasoning. Even the best scenes of life are so anxious or so tedious that the future is always the object of all our hopes and fears. We are forever looking ahead, and trying, through prayer, worship and sacrifice, to appease those unknown powers whom we find, by experience, so able to afflict and oppress us. Wretched creatures that we are! What refuge would we have amid the countless ills of life if religion did not offer some means of atonement, and calm the terrors that constantly agitate and torment us?

PHILO 10.2 I am indeed convinced, said Philo, that the best way—indeed the only way—to bring everyone to a proper sense of religion is by true depictions of human misery and wickedness. And for that purpose a gift for eloquence and vivid imagery is more needed than a gift for reasoning and argument. For is there any need to prove what everyone feels within himself? We need only be made to feel it, if possible, more intimately and keenly.

DEMEA 10.3 Ordinary people, Demea replied, are convinced enough of this great and melancholy truth. The miseries of life, the unhappiness of man, the general corruption of our nature,

the unsatisfying enjoyment of pleasures, riches and honors—these phrases have become almost proverbial in every language. And who can doubt what all people declare from their own direct feeling and experience?

PHILO 10.4 On this point, said Philo, the learned entirely agree with ordinary people. In all literature, sacred and secular, the theme of human misery has been pressed with the most moving eloquence that sorrow and melancholy could inspire. The poets, who speak from feeling rather than from a system, and whose testimony therefore carries more authority, are full of images of this kind. From Homer down to Dr. Young, the whole inspired tribe has always recognized that no other picture of things would match the feeling and observation of each individual.[1]

DEMEA 10.5 As for authorities, Demea replied, you need not go looking for them. Look around this library of Cleanthes'. I will venture to say that, apart from writers on particular sciences such as chemistry or botany, who have no occasion to deal with human life, there is hardly one of these countless authors from whom the sense of human misery has not, in some passage or other, wrung a complaint and an admission of it. At least the odds are entirely on that side, and no author, as far as I can remember, has ever been so extravagant as to deny it.

PHILO 10.6 There you must excuse me, said Philo. Leibniz has denied it, and he is perhaps the first[2] who ventured on so bold and paradoxical an opinion—at least the first to make it essential to his philosophical system.[3]

DEMEA 10.7 And by being the first, Demea replied, might he not have become aware of his error? For is this a subject on which

1 Edward Young (1683–1765), English poet of the gloomy and very popular *Night Thoughts*.

2 HUME'S NOTE. That view had been held by Dr. King and a few others before Leibniz, though by no one as famous as that German philosopher.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. William King (1650–1729), Archbishop of Dublin, author of *On the Origin of Evil* (1702).

3 Leibniz (1646–1716) argued in his *Theodicy* (1710) that this is the best of all possible worlds.

philosophers can expect to make discoveries, especially at so late an age of the world? And can anyone hope, by a simple denial (for the subject hardly admits of reasoning), to overturn the united testimony of mankind, founded on sensation and consciousness?

THE MISERY OF ALL LIVING THINGS

Demea and Philo describe the sufferings of animals and of human beings, in body and mind.

DEMEA [10.8] And why should man, he added, claim to be exempt from the lot of all other animals? The whole earth, believe me, Philo, is cursed and polluted. A perpetual war rages among all living creatures. Necessity, hunger and want drive the strong and brave; fear, anxiety and terror agitate the weak and infirm. The very entrance into life brings anguish to the newborn infant and to its wretched mother. Weakness, helplessness and distress attend every stage of that life, and it ends at last in agony and horror.

PHILO [10.9] Notice too, said Philo, nature's ingenious devices for embittering the life of every living being. The stronger prey on the weaker and keep them in perpetual terror and anxiety. The weaker, in their turn, often prey on the stronger, and harass and torment them without letup. Think of the countless race of insects that either breed on the body of each animal or fly about and plant their stings in it. These insects have still smaller ones that torment them. And so on every side, before and behind, above and below, every animal is surrounded by enemies that constantly seek its misery and destruction.

DEMEA [10.10] Man alone, said Demea, seems to be a partial exception to this rule. For by banding together in society he can easily master lions, tigers and bears, whose greater strength and agility would naturally let them prey on him.

PHILO [10.11] On the contrary, cried Philo, it is here above all that nature's uniform and even-handed rules are most evident. It is true that man, by banding together, can overcome all his real

enemies and become master of the whole animal creation. But does he not immediately raise up imaginary enemies for himself—the demons of his fancy, who haunt him with superstitious terrors and blight every enjoyment of life? His pleasure, as he imagines, becomes a crime in their eyes. His food and rest give them offense. His very sleep and dreams supply fresh material for anxious fear. And even death, his refuge from every other ill, offers only the dread of endless and countless torments. The wolf does not harry the timid flock more than superstition harries the anxious hearts of wretched mortals.

10.12 Besides, consider, Demea: this very society by which we overcome the wild beasts, our natural enemies—what new enemies does it not raise up against us? What woe and misery does it not cause? Man is the greatest enemy of man. Oppression, injustice, contempt, insult, violence, rebellion, war, slander, treachery, fraud—with these people torment one another. And they would soon dissolve the society they had formed, were it not for fear of the still greater ills that separation would bring.

DEMEA 10.13 But though these assaults from outside us, said Demea—from animals, from men, from all the elements—make up a frightful catalogue of woes, they are nothing compared with the ones that arise within us, from the diseased condition of our minds and bodies. How many people lie under the lingering torment of disease? Hear the moving list the great poet gives.

10.14 Intestine stone and ulcer, colic-pangs,
Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy,
And moon-struck madness, pining atrophy,
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence.
Dire was the tossing, deep the groans: despair
Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch.
And over them triumphant death his dart
Shook: but delay'd to strike, though oft invok'd
With vows, as their chief good and final hope.[4]

10.15 The disorders of the mind, Demea continued, though more hidden, are perhaps no less dismal and distressing. Remorse, shame, anguish, rage, disappointment, anxiety, fear, dejection, despair—who has ever gone through life without cruel attacks from these tormentors? How many have hardly ever felt anything better? Toil and poverty, so hated by everyone, are the certain lot of the vast majority; and the privileged few who enjoy ease and wealth never reach contentment or true happiness. All the goods of life put together would not make a very happy man, but all the ills put together would make a wretch indeed. And almost any one of them (and who can be free of every one?) —indeed, often the mere absence of one good (and who can have them all?)—is enough to make life not worth choosing.

10.16 If a stranger were suddenly dropped into this world, I would show him, as a sample of its ills, a hospital full of diseases, a prison crowded with criminals and debtors, a battlefield strewn with corpses, a fleet sinking in the ocean, a nation languishing under tyranny, famine or plague. To show him the cheerful side of life and give him an idea of its pleasures, where should I take him? To a ball, to an opera, to court? He might fairly think I was only showing him a different variety of distress and sorrow.

PHILO 10.17 There is no escaping such striking examples, said Philo, except by excuses that make the charge still worse. Why, I

ask, have all people in all ages complained incessantly of the miseries of life? . . . They have no real reason, says one; these complaints come only from their discontented, fretful, anxious disposition . . . And can there possibly be, I reply, a surer foundation of misery than so wretched a temperament?

But if they were really as unhappy as they claim, says my opponent, why do they stay alive? . . .

10.19 Not satisfied with life, afraid of death.

That, I say, is the secret chain that holds us. We are not bribed into going on living; we are terrified into it.

10.21 It is only a false delicacy, he may insist, indulged by a few refined spirits, that has spread these complaints through the whole human race. . . . And what is this delicacy you blame? I ask. Is it anything but a greater sensitivity to all the pleasures and pains of life? And if the person of delicate, refined temperament, by being so much more alive than everyone else, is only so much more unhappy, what verdict must we reach about human life in general?

10.22 Let people stay at rest, says our opponent, and they will be at ease. They are the willing architects of their own misery. . . . No! I reply. An anxious listlessness follows their rest; disappointment, frustration and trouble follow their activity and ambition.

CLEANTHES 10.23 I can see something like what you describe in some other people, replied Cleanthes, but I confess I feel little or nothing of it in myself, and I hope it is not as common as you make out.

DEMEA 10.24 If you don't feel human misery yourself, cried Demea, I congratulate you on so happy a peculiarity. Others, apparently the most prosperous of men, have not been ashamed to pour out their complaints in the most mournful tones. Consider the great, the fortunate emperor Charles V, who, weary of human grandeur, handed over all his vast dominions to his son.

4 Milton, *Paradise Lost* XI.484–93, quoted as written. "Marasmus" is a wasting away of the body.

In the last speech he made on that memorable occasion, he declared publicly that his greatest successes had been mixed with so many misfortunes that he could truly say he had never enjoyed any satisfaction or contentment. But did the retired life in which he sought refuge give him any greater happiness?[5] If we can believe his son's account, his regret began on the very day he abdicated.

10.25 Cicero's fortunes rose from small beginnings to the greatest brilliance and fame; yet what moving complaints about the ills of life fill his personal letters, as well as his philosophical works! And in keeping with his own experience, he introduces Cato—the great, the fortunate Cato—declaring in his old age that if he were offered a new life, he would turn it down.[6]

10.26 Ask yourself, ask any of your friends, whether they would live the last ten or twenty years of their lives over again. No! But the next twenty, they say, will be better:

And from the dregs of life, hope to receive / What the first sprightly running could not give.

So in the end they find themselves (such is the extent of human misery that it reconciles even contradictions) complaining at once that life is too short, and that it is empty and sorrowful.[7]

EPICURUS'S OLD QUESTIONS

Philo argues that the misery of the world cannot be squared with infinite power and goodness.

PHILO 10.29 And is it possible, Cleanthes, said Philo, that after all these reflections, and infinitely more that could be offered, you still persist in your anthropomorphism, and claim that the moral attributes of the Deity—his justice, benevolence, mercy and righteousness—are of the same nature as these virtues in

5 Charles V (1500–1558), Holy Roman Emperor and king of Spain, abdicated in 1555–56 in favor of his son Philip II and retired to a monastery.

6 The reference is to Cicero's dialogue *On Old Age* (*Cato Maior*), whose speaker is Cato the Elder.

7 The couplet is from Dryden's play *Aureng-Zebe* (1675).

human beings? His power, we grant, is infinite: whatever he wills is done. But neither humans nor any other animals are happy. Therefore he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite: he never mistakes the means to any end. But the course of nature does not tend toward human or animal happiness. Therefore it was not set up for that purpose. In the whole range of human knowledge there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of human beings?

10.30 Epicurus's old questions are still unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then where does evil come from?[8]

10.31 You ascribe a purpose and intention to nature, Cleanthes (and rightly, I think). But what, I ask you, is the object of all the intricate craftsmanship and machinery she has put on display in every animal? Simply the preservation of individuals and the propagation of the species. It seems enough for her purpose if each species just barely keeps its place in the universe, with no care or concern for the happiness of its members. No resources for that: no machinery designed merely to give pleasure or ease; no fund of pure joy and contentment; no indulgence without some want or need attached to it. At least, the few phenomena of this kind are outweighed by opposite phenomena of still greater importance.

10.32 Our sense of music, harmony and indeed beauty of every kind gives us satisfaction without being strictly necessary for preserving and propagating the species. But on the other side, what racking pains arise from gout, kidney stones, migraines, toothaches and rheumatism, where the damage to the animal machinery is either slight or incurable! Mirth, laughter, play and fun seem to be free extra satisfactions with no further purpose; but gloom, melancholy, discontent and superstition are

8 This formulation of the problem of evil is traditionally credited to Epicurus (341–270 BC); it survives through the Christian writer Lactantius.

pains of the same free-standing kind. How then does divine benevolence show itself, in the sense you anthropomorphites give it? Only we mystics, as you were pleased to call us, can account for this strange mixture of phenomena, by tracing it to attributes that are infinitely perfect but incomprehensible.

CLEANTHES DENIES THE MISERY

Cleanthes holds that happiness outweighs misery; Philo says even that would not prove divine goodness.

CLEANTHES 10.33 So, Philo, said Cleanthes with a smile, have you finally revealed what you were up to? Your long agreement with Demea did surprise me a little, but I see that all along you were building a hidden gun battery aimed at me. And I must admit you have now hit on a subject worthy of your noble spirit of opposition and controversy. If you can carry this point, and prove that humankind is unhappy or corrupt, that is the end of all religion at a stroke. For what is the use of establishing the natural attributes of the Deity while his moral attributes remain doubtful and uncertain?

DEMEA 10.34 You take offense very easily, replied Demea, at opinions that are perfectly innocent and are held by nearly everyone, even among the religious and devout themselves. Nothing could be more surprising than to find a theme like this—the wickedness and misery of humanity—accused of nothing less than atheism and irreverence. Haven't all the pious theologians and preachers who have exercised their eloquence on this rich subject—haven't they, I say, easily resolved any difficulties it may raise? This world is a mere point compared with the universe; this life a mere moment compared with eternity. The evils we see now, therefore, are set right in other regions, and in some future state of existence. And then human eyes, opened to wider views of things, will see the whole connection of general laws, and will trace with adoration the benevolence and righteousness of the Deity through all the mazes and intricacies of his providence.

CLEANTHES 10.35 No! replied Cleanthes. No! These arbitrary suppositions can never be admitted against plain, undisputed matters of fact. How can any cause be known except from its known effects? How can any hypothesis be proved except from the observable phenomena? To rest one hypothesis on another is to build entirely on air. The most we ever achieve with such conjectures and fictions is to establish that our opinion is barely possible; on those terms we can never establish that it is true.

10.36 The only way to defend divine benevolence—and it is one I gladly adopt—is to deny outright the misery and wickedness of humankind. Your descriptions are exaggerated, your gloomy views mostly fictitious, your inferences contrary to fact and experience. Health is more common than sickness, pleasure than pain, happiness than misery. And for every annoyance we meet, we gain, on a fair count, a hundred enjoyments.

PHILO 10.37 Granting your claim, replied Philo, though it is highly doubtful, you must also admit that if pain is less frequent than pleasure, it is infinitely more intense and lasting. One hour of it can often outweigh a day, a week, a month of our ordinary, bland enjoyments. And how many days, weeks and months do some people spend in the most acute torment? Pleasure hardly ever, in a single case, rises to ecstasy and rapture, and in no case can it stay at its highest pitch for any length of time. The spirits evaporate, the nerves slacken, the system falls into disorder, and the enjoyment quickly degenerates into fatigue and discomfort. But pain often—good God, how often!— rises to torture and agony, and the longer it lasts, the more truly it becomes agony and torture. Patience runs out, courage fails, melancholy takes hold of us, and nothing ends our misery except the removal of its cause—or another event, the one cure for every evil, which in our natural folly we regard with even greater horror and dread.

10.38 But let me not press these points, continued Philo, obvious, certain and important as they are. I must take the liberty of warning you, Cleanthes, that you have staked the whole dispute on a very dangerous issue, and are unwittingly introducing total skepticism into the most essential articles of both natural and

revealed theology. What! No way to give religion a sound foundation unless we grant that human life is happy, and hold that continuing to exist even in this world, with all our present pains, weaknesses, frustrations and follies, is worth choosing and desirable! But this goes against everyone's feeling and experience. It goes against an authority so firmly established that nothing can overturn it. No decisive proof can ever be brought against that authority. Nor can you possibly count, estimate and compare all the pains and all the pleasures in the lives of all people and all animals. So by resting the entire system of religion on a point that, by its very nature, must always remain uncertain, you tacitly admit that the system itself is just as uncertain.

10.39 But suppose I grant you what no one will ever believe—or at least what you can never possibly prove—that animal, or at any rate human, happiness in this life outweighs its misery. You have still achieved nothing. For this is by no means what we expect from infinite power, infinite wisdom and infinite goodness. Why is there any misery in the world at all? Not by chance, surely. Then from some cause. Is it by the Deity's intention? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it against his intention? But he is almighty. Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive—unless we claim that these subjects exceed all human capacity, and that our ordinary standards of truth and falsehood do not apply to them. That is a position I have insisted on all along, but which you have rejected from the start with scorn and indignation.

10.40 But I am content to fall back even from this entrenchment, for I deny that you could ever drive me out of it. I will grant that pain or misery in human beings is compatible with infinite power and goodness in the Deity, even in your sense of those attributes. How much further along are you after all these concessions? A mere possible compatibility is not enough. You must prove these pure, unmixed and unlimited attributes from the present mixed and confused phenomena, and from these alone. A promising undertaking! Even if the phenomena were

perfectly pure and unmixed, being finite they would still be insufficient for the purpose. How much more so when they are also so jarring and discordant!

10.41 Here, Cleanthes, I feel at ease in my argument. Here I triumph. Earlier, when we argued about the natural attributes of intelligence and design, I needed all my skeptical and metaphysical subtlety to slip out of your grasp. In many views of the universe and its parts—especially its parts—the beauty and fitness of final causes strike us with such irresistible force that all objections seem (as I believe they really are) mere quibbles and sophistries, and we cannot then imagine how we ever put any weight on them.[9] But there is no view of human life, or of the human condition, from which we can infer the moral attributes without doing the greatest violence to it—no view from which we can learn of that infinite benevolence, joined with infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover through the eyes of faith alone. Now it is your turn to pull the heavy oar, and to defend your philosophical subtleties against the dictates of plain reason and experience.

9 "Final causes" are the purposes or ends that things appear designed to serve.

Part XI

Philo argues that the world's mixture of good and ill points to an indifferent first cause.

CLEANTHES [11.1] I don't hesitate to admit, said Cleanthes, that I have tended to suspect that the constant repetition of the word *infinite*, which we meet in all theological writers, smacks more of flattery than of philosophy, and that the purposes of reasoning, and even of religion, would be better served if we contented ourselves with more precise and more moderate expressions. The terms *admirable, excellent, supremely great, wise and holy*—these amply fill people's imaginations. Anything beyond them not only leads to absurdities but has no effect on our feelings or sentiments. So in the present case, if we abandon all human analogy, as you seem to intend, Demea, I am afraid we abandon all religion and are left with no conception of the great object of our worship. If we keep human analogy, we will always find it impossible to reconcile any mixture of evil in the universe with infinite attributes—much less can we ever prove the latter from the former. But if we suppose the author of nature to be finitely perfect, though far superior to humankind, then a satisfactory account can be given of natural and moral evil, and every awkward phenomenon can be explained and fitted in. A lesser evil may then be chosen to avoid a greater; inconveniences may be accepted in order to reach a desirable end; in a word, benevolence guided by wisdom and limited by necessity may produce just such a world as this one. You, Philo, who are so quick at raising new views, reflections and analogies—I would be glad to hear your opinion of this new theory at length and without

interruption. If it deserves our attention, we can later, at more leisure, work it into proper shape.

WHAT A STRANGER WOULD EXPECT

Philo argues that no one judging from this world alone would infer a good and powerful author.

PHILO [11.2] My views, replied Philo, are not worth making a mystery of, so I will tell you without ceremony what occurs to me on this subject. It must be granted, I think, that if a very limited intelligence, whom we suppose entirely unacquainted with the universe, were assured that it was the work of a very good, wise and powerful being, however finite, he would form in advance, by conjecture, a different idea of it from what we find it to be by experience. From these attributes of the cause he has been told about, he would never imagine that the effect could be as full of vice, misery and disorder as it appears in this life. Suppose now that this person were brought into the world, still assured that it was the work of such a sublime and benevolent being. He might perhaps be surprised at the disappointment, but he would never retract his earlier belief, if it rested on some very solid argument. For so limited an intelligence must be aware of his own blindness and ignorance, and must admit that there may be many explanations of those phenomena that will forever escape his understanding. But suppose—and this is the actual situation of human beings—that this creature is not convinced beforehand of a supreme intelligence, benevolent and powerful, but is left to gather such a belief from the appearance of things. That changes everything, and he will never find any reason for such a conclusion. He may be fully convinced of the narrow limits of his understanding, but that will not help him infer the goodness of higher powers, since he must draw that inference from what he knows, not from what he does not know. The more you exaggerate his weakness and ignorance, the more diffident you make him, and the more you lead him to suspect that such subjects are beyond the reach of his faculties. You are obliged, therefore,

to reason with him purely from the known phenomena, and to drop every arbitrary supposition or conjecture.

11.3 If I showed you a house or palace in which not a single room was convenient or pleasant; in which the windows, doors, fireplaces, corridors, stairs and the whole layout of the building were a source of noise, confusion, fatigue, darkness and extremes of heat and cold—you would certainly condemn the design without any further examination. The architect would show off his ingenuity in vain, proving to you that if this door or that window were changed, worse problems would follow. What he says may be strictly true: changing one detail while the rest of the building stays as it is might only increase the inconveniences. But you would still insist, in general, that if the architect had had skill and good intentions, he could have drawn up a plan for the whole, and fitted the parts together in such a way, as to remedy all or most of these inconveniences. His ignorance of such a plan—or even your own—will never convince you that it is impossible. If you find inconveniences and defects in the building, you will always condemn the architect, without going into any detail.

11.4 In short, I repeat the question: Is the world, taken as a whole and as it appears to us in this life, different from what a person, or some such limited being, would expect in advance from a very powerful, wise and benevolent Deity? It would take strange prejudice to deny it. And from this I conclude that however consistent the world may be with the idea of such a Deity—given certain suppositions and conjectures—it can never give us grounds to infer his existence. The consistency is not flatly denied, only the inference. Conjectures, especially when infinity is excluded from the divine attributes, may perhaps be enough to prove consistency, but they can never be the foundation of any inference.

FOUR SOURCES OF EVIL

Philo names four circumstances behind natural evil, none of which seems necessary.

PHILO 11.5 There seem to be four circumstances on which all, or most, of the ills that afflict sentient creatures depend; and it is not impossible that all these circumstances are necessary and unavoidable. We know so little beyond ordinary life—or even about ordinary life—that where the arrangement of a universe is concerned, no conjecture is so wild that it may not be right, and none so plausible that it may not be wrong. All that befits human understanding, in this deep ignorance and obscurity, is to be skeptical, or at least cautious, and not to accept any hypothesis whatever—still less one that has no appearance of probability to support it. Now this, I claim, is the situation with all the causes of evil and the circumstances on which it depends. None of them appears to human reason in the least necessary or unavoidable, and we cannot suppose them to be so without the most extreme license of imagination.

11.6 The first circumstance that brings in evil is the design or arrangement of the animal creation by which pains, as well as pleasures, are used to spur all creatures to action and to keep them alert in the great work of self-preservation. Now pleasure alone, in its various degrees, seems to human understanding enough for this purpose. All animals could be in a constant state of enjoyment. When pressed by some natural need, such as thirst, hunger or tiredness, they could feel a lessening of pleasure instead of pain, which would prompt them to seek whatever they need to survive. People pursue pleasure as eagerly as they avoid pain—or at least they could have been made that way. It seems plainly possible, then, to carry on the business of life without any pain. Why, then, is any animal ever made capable of such a sensation? If animals can be free of it for an hour, they could be free of it forever; and producing that feeling required as special a design of their organs as giving them sight, hearing

or any other sense. Are we to conjecture, with no appearance of reason, that such a design was necessary? And are we to build on that conjecture as on the most certain truth?

11.7 But a capacity for pain would not by itself produce pain, were it not for the second circumstance, namely the running of the world by general laws; and this seems in no way necessary for a very perfect being. It is true that if everything were run by particular volitions, the course of nature would be constantly broken, and no one could use reason in the conduct of life. But couldn't other particular volitions remedy this inconvenience? In short, couldn't the Deity wipe out every ill wherever it was found, and produce every good without any preparation or long chain of causes and effects?[1]

11.8 Besides, we must bear in mind that under the present arrangement of the world, the course of nature, though assumed to be perfectly regular, does not seem so to us: many events are uncertain, and many disappoint our expectations. Health and sickness, calm and storm, and countless other accidents whose causes are unknown and variable, have a great influence both on the fortunes of individuals and on the prosperity of whole societies; indeed, all human life depends, in a way, on such accidents. A being who knows the hidden springs of the universe could therefore easily, by particular volitions, turn all these accidents to the good of humankind and make the whole world happy, without revealing himself in any operation. A fleet whose purposes were good for society might always meet a fair wind. Good rulers might enjoy sound health and long life. People born to power and authority might be given good tempers and virtuous dispositions. A few events like these, regularly and wisely managed, would change the face of the world, and yet would no more seem to disturb the course of nature or confound human conduct than the present order of things, where the causes are hidden, variable and complex. A few small touches to Caligula's

1 "Particular volitions" means individual acts of divine will, as opposed to the working of general laws.

brain in infancy might have turned him into a Trajan.[2] One wave a little higher than the rest, by burying Caesar and his fortunes at the bottom of the sea, might have restored liberty to a large part of humankind. There may, for all we know, be good reasons why Providence does not intervene in this way; but they are unknown to us. And though the mere supposition that such reasons exist may be enough to save the conclusion about the divine attributes, it can surely never be enough to establish that conclusion.

11.9 If everything in the universe is governed by general laws, and if animals are made capable of pain, it seems hardly possible that some ill should not arise from the various collisions of matter and the various combinations and conflicts of general laws. But this ill would be very rare, were it not for the third circumstance I proposed to mention, namely the great stinginess with which all powers and faculties are handed out to each particular being. The organs and capacities of all animals are so well adjusted, and so well suited to their preservation, that as far back as history or tradition reaches, not a single species seems ever to have become extinct. Every animal has the endowments it needs, but they are granted with such scrupulous economy that any significant reduction would destroy the creature altogether. Wherever one power is increased, there is a corresponding cut in the others. Animals that excel in speed are usually lacking in strength. Those that have both are either deficient in some of their senses or burdened with the most pressing needs. The human species, whose chief excellence is reason and shrewdness, is of all species the most needy and the worst supplied with bodily advantages: without clothes, without weapons, without food, without shelter, without any of life's conveniences except what it owes to its own skill and hard work. In short, nature seems to have made an exact calculation of her creatures' needs, and, like a strict master, to have given them scarcely more powers or endowments than are strictly enough

2 Caligula (reigned AD 37–41) was proverbial as a vicious emperor, Trajan (reigned 98–117) as a model one.

to meet those needs. An indulgent parent would have provided a generous supply, to guard against accidents and to secure the creature's happiness and welfare even in the most unlucky combination of circumstances. Every path of life would not have been so hemmed in by precipices that the slightest step off the true path, whether by mistake or necessity, must plunge us into misery and ruin. Some reserve, some fund, would have been set aside to ensure happiness, and powers and needs would not have been matched with such rigid economy. The author of nature is inconceivably powerful. His strength is supposed to be great, if not wholly inexhaustible, and there is no reason, so far as we can judge, why he should practice such strict thrift in dealing with his creatures. If his power were extremely limited, it would have been better to create fewer animals and give them more faculties for their happiness and preservation. A builder is never considered prudent who takes on a plan larger than his resources will let him finish.

11.10 To cure most of the ills of human life, I don't ask that man should have the wings of the eagle, the speed of the stag, the strength of the ox, the claws of the lion, the scales of the crocodile or rhinoceros—much less do I ask for the insight of an angel or cherub. I am content with an increase in one single power or faculty of his soul. Let him be given a greater inclination to industry and work, a more vigorous spring and energy of mind, a more steady commitment to business and application. Let the whole species naturally possess the same diligence that many individuals manage to acquire by habit and reflection, and the most beneficial consequences, without any admixture of ill, would be the immediate and necessary result. Almost all the moral as well as natural evils of human life arise from idleness. If our species were free of this vice or weakness by the original makeup of its nature, the perfect cultivation of the land, the improvement of arts and manufactures, and the exact performance of every office and duty would follow at once; and people could immediately reach the full state of society that even the best-run government achieves only imperfectly. But

since industry is a power—and the most valuable of all—nature seems determined, in keeping with her usual maxims, to give it to humankind with a very sparing hand, and to punish man severely for lacking it rather than reward him for having it. She has so arranged his makeup that nothing but the most pressing necessity can force him to work, and she uses all his other needs to overcome, at least in part, his lack of diligence, and so to give him some share of a faculty she has seen fit, by nature, to deny him. Here our demands may be granted to be very modest, and so all the more reasonable. If we asked for the gifts of deeper insight and judgment, a more refined taste for beauty, a keener sensitivity to kindness and friendship, we might be told that we were impiously presuming to break the order of nature; that we wanted to raise ourselves to a higher rank of being; that the gifts we were asking for, being unsuited to our station and condition, would only harm us. But it is hard—I dare to repeat it, it is hard—that, placed in a world so full of wants and needs, where almost every creature and element is either our enemy or refuses us its help … we should also have our own temperament to struggle with, and should be deprived of the one faculty that can defend us against these multiplied evils.

11.11 The fourth circumstance from which the misery and ill of the universe arise is the imprecise workmanship of all the springs and principles of the great machine of nature. It must be admitted that there are few parts of the universe that do not seem to serve some purpose, and whose removal would not produce a visible defect and disorder in the whole. The parts all hang together, and none can be touched without affecting the rest to a greater or lesser degree. But at the same time it must be noted that none of these parts or principles, however useful, is so precisely adjusted as to stay exactly within the limits where its usefulness lies. All of them are liable, on every occasion, to run to one extreme or the other. One would think this grand production had never received its maker's finishing touches, so unfinished is every part and so coarse the strokes with which it is done. Thus the winds are needed to carry vapors across the

surface of the globe and to help people navigate; but how often do they rise into storms and hurricanes and become destructive? Rain is needed to nourish all the plants and animals of the earth; but how often is there too little? How often too much? Heat is essential to all life and growth, but is not always found in the right proportion. The health and well-being of an animal depend on the mixing and secretion of the body's humors and fluids; but the parts do not perform their proper functions regularly. What is more useful than all the passions of the mind—ambition, vanity, love, anger? But how often do they break their bounds and cause the greatest upheavals in society?[3] There is nothing so beneficial in the universe that it does not often become harmful through excess or deficiency; nor has nature guarded against all disorder and confusion with the precision required. The irregularity is perhaps never great enough to destroy any species, but it is often enough to plunge individuals into ruin and misery.

11.12 On the combination of these four circumstances, then, all or most natural evil depends. If all living creatures were incapable of pain, or if the world were governed by particular volitions, evil could never have found its way into the universe. And if animals were given a large supply of powers and faculties beyond what strict necessity requires, or if the various springs and principles of the universe were so precisely made as always to keep the proper balance and mean, there would have been very little ill compared with what we feel now. What verdict, then, shall we give on this? Shall we say that these circumstances are not necessary, and that they could easily have been changed in the design of the universe? That judgment seems too presumptuous for creatures so blind and ignorant. Let us be more modest in our conclusions. Let us grant that if the goodness of the Deity (I mean a goodness like human goodness) could be established by any reasonably good arguments *a priori*, these phenomena, however awkward, would not be enough to overturn that prin-

3 "Humors": the bodily fluids (blood, phlegm, bile) that older medicine held responsible for health and temperament.

ciple, but might easily be reconciled with it in some unknown way. But let us still insist that, since this goodness is not established beforehand but must be inferred from the phenomena, there can be no grounds for such an inference while there are so many ills in the universe, and while these ills could so easily have been remedied—so far as human understanding can be allowed to judge on such a subject. I am skeptic enough to grant that the bad appearances, despite all my reasoning, may be compatible with such attributes as you suppose; but surely they can never prove those attributes. Such a conclusion cannot come from skepticism; it must come from the phenomena, and from our confidence in the reasoning we draw from them.

A BLIND NATURE

Philo concludes that the first cause is most probably indifferent to good and evil.

PHILO 11.13 Look around this universe. What an immense profusion of beings, living and organized, sentient and active! You marvel at this prodigious variety and fertility. But look a little more closely at these living beings, the only ones worth attending to. How hostile and destructive to one another! How incapable, all of them, of securing their own happiness! How contemptible or hateful to the onlooker! The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature, impregnated by a great life-giving principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and stillborn children!

11.14 Here the Manichaean system suggests itself as a fitting hypothesis to solve the difficulty. No doubt it is in some respects very plausible, and more probable than the common hypothesis, since it gives a believable account of the strange mixture of good and ill we see in life. But if we consider, on the other hand, the perfect uniformity and harmony of the parts of the universe, we will find in it no sign of a battle between a malevolent and a benevolent being. There is indeed an opposition of pains and pleasures in the feelings of sentient creatures; but

aren't all the operations of nature carried on by an opposition of principles—hot and cold, wet and dry, light and heavy?[4] The true conclusion is that the original source of all things is entirely indifferent to all these principles, and has no more regard for good over ill than for heat over cold, or dryness over moisture, or light over heavy.

11.15 Four hypotheses can be framed about the first causes of the universe: that they are endowed with perfect goodness; that they have perfect malice; that they are opposed to each other, and have both goodness and malice; or that they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the first two, unmixed principles; and the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to count against the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable.

11.16 What I have said about natural evil applies to moral evil with little or no change. We have no more reason to infer that the righteousness of the Supreme Being resembles human righteousness than that his benevolence resembles ours. Indeed, it will be thought that we have even more reason to exclude from him moral feelings as we experience them, since moral evil, in many people's opinion, outweighs moral good far more than natural evil outweighs natural good.

11.17 But even if this is not granted, and the virtue in humankind is admitted to be far greater than the vice, still, so long as there is any vice at all in the universe, you anthropomorphites will be hard put to account for it. You must assign it a cause without appealing to the first cause. But since every effect must have a cause, and that cause another, you must either carry the series back *in infinitum* [to infinity], or come to rest on that original principle who is the ultimate cause of all things...

DEMEA 11.18 Stop! Stop! cried Demea. Where is your imagination carrying you? I joined forces with you to prove that the divine being is beyond our comprehension, and to refute the principles

4 Manichaeism, a religion founded by Mani in the 3rd century AD, held that the world is the battleground of two opposed powers, one good and one evil.

of Cleanthes, who would measure everything by a human rule and standard. But now I find you running through all the favorite themes of the worst freethinkers and unbelievers, and betraying the holy cause you seemed to champion. Are you, then, secretly a more dangerous enemy than Cleanthes himself?

CLEANTHES 11.19 Are you only noticing that now? replied Cleanthes. Believe me, Demea, your friend Philo has been amusing himself at both our expense from the start. And we have to admit that the ill-judged reasoning of our popular theology has handed him all too fair a target for ridicule. The utter weakness of human reason, the absolute incomprehensibility of the divine nature, the vast and universal misery of human beings, and their still greater wickedness—these are strange themes, surely, for orthodox theologians and scholars to cherish so fondly. In ages of stupidity and ignorance, admittedly, these principles could be embraced safely enough; and perhaps no outlook is better suited to promote superstition than one that encourages the blind amazement, the self-distrust, and the melancholy of mankind. But at present—

PHILO 11.20 Don't blame the ignorance of these reverend gentlemen too much, Philo broke in. They know how to change their tune with the times. It used to be a very popular theological theme that human life is vanity and misery, and preachers would exaggerate every ill and pain that people are subject to. But in recent years, we find, theologians have begun to back away from this position. They now maintain, though still somewhat hesitantly, that even in this life there are more goods than evils, more pleasures than pains. When religion rested entirely on temperament and upbringing, it was thought fitting to encourage melancholy—and indeed people never turn to higher powers so readily as when they are in that mood. But now that people have learned to form principles and draw conclusions, it has become necessary to change the artillery, and to use arguments that can withstand at least some scrutiny and examination. This shift is the same one, and has the same causes, as the one I pointed out earlier regarding skepticism.

PAMPHILUS 11.21 So Philo kept up his spirit of opposition, and his criticism of established opinions, to the very end. But I could see that Demea did not at all enjoy the latter part of the discussion, and soon afterward, on some pretext or other, he took the opportunity to leave.

Part XII

Alone with Cleanthes, Philo makes his concessions and attacks popular superstition.

CLEANTHES [12.1] After Demea had gone, Cleanthes and Philo continued the conversation as follows. Our friend, I'm afraid, said Cleanthes, will have little desire to take up this subject again while you are around. And to tell the truth, Philo, on a topic so lofty and so important I would rather reason with each of you separately. Your love of controversy, together with your loathing of popular superstition, carries you to strange lengths once you are in the thick of an argument; and nothing is so sacred and venerable, even in your own eyes, that you will spare it then.

PHILO'S CONCESSIONS

Alone with Cleanthes, Philo affirms that design strikes every thinker and that nature points to intelligence.

PHILO [12.2] I admit, replied Philo, that I am less careful on the subject of natural religion than on any other. For one thing, I know that on this subject I can never corrupt the principles of any person of common sense. For another, I am confident that no one who regards me as a person of common sense will ever mistake my intentions. You in particular, Cleanthes, with whom I live on terms of complete openness—you know that, for all the freedom of my conversation and my fondness for unusual arguments, no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind, or pays more profound adoration to the divine being, as

he reveals himself to reason in the inexplicable contrivance and craftsmanship of nature. A purpose, an intention, a design strikes even the most careless, the most obtuse thinker everywhere; and no one can be so hardened in absurd systems as to reject it at all times. That "Nature does nothing in vain" is a maxim accepted in every school, arrived at simply by contemplating the works of nature, without any religious aim. And so firmly are people convinced of its truth that an anatomist who found a new organ or duct would never be satisfied until he had also discovered what it was for. One of the great foundations of the Copernican system is the maxim that nature acts by the simplest methods and chooses the most suitable means to any end. Astronomers often lay this strong foundation of piety and religion without even thinking about it. The same is true in other branches of science. And so almost all the sciences lead us, without our noticing, to acknowledge a first intelligent author; and their authority is often all the greater because they do not openly set out to do so.

12.3 It gives me pleasure to hear Galen reason about the structure of the human body. The anatomy of a human being, he says,[1] reveals more than 600 different muscles. Anyone who considers them properly will find that in each one nature must have adjusted at least ten different features to achieve the end she intended: the proper shape, the right size, the right placement of each end, the upper and lower position of the whole, the correct insertion of the various nerves, veins, and arteries. So in the muscles alone, more than 6,000 separate aims and intentions must have been formed and carried out. The bones he counts at 284, and the distinct purposes served by the structure of each at more than forty. What an astonishing display of craftsmanship, even in these simple, uniform parts! But if we consider the skin, ligaments, vessels, glands, and bodily fluids, and all the various limbs and members of the body, how our

1 HUME'S NOTE. *On the Formation of the Fetus*.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. A treatise attributed to Galen (2nd century AD), the Greek physician whose anatomy dominated medicine for over a thousand years.

amazement must grow in proportion to the number and intricacy of the parts so skillfully fitted together! The further we go in these investigations, the more new scenes of skill and wisdom we discover—and we still glimpse, in the distance, further scenes beyond our reach: in the fine internal structure of the parts, in the workings of the brain, in the makeup of the reproductive vessels. All these contrivances are repeated in every different species of animal, with wonderful variety and exact fitness, suited to nature's different intentions in forming each species. And if Galen's unbelief could not hold out against such striking evidence, even when these natural sciences were still undeveloped, what heights of stubborn obstinacy must a philosopher of our own age have reached who can still doubt that there is a supreme intelligence!

12.4 If I could meet one of this breed (who, thank God, are very rare), I would ask him: Suppose there were a God who did not reveal himself directly to our senses. Could he possibly give stronger proofs of his existence than those that appear across the whole face of nature? What, indeed, could such a divine being do except copy the present order of things: make many of his contrivances so plain that no stupidity could mistake them; offer glimpses of still greater contrivances, which show how immensely he surpasses our narrow understanding; and hide a great many altogether from such imperfect creatures? Now by all the rules of sound reasoning, any fact must be accepted as undisputed when it is supported by every kind of argument its nature allows, even if those arguments are not, in themselves, very numerous or forceful. How much more so in the present case, where no human imagination can count the arguments and no understanding can gauge their force!

CLEANTHES 12.5 I will add to what you have argued so well, said Cleanthes, that one great advantage of the principle of theism is that it is the only account of the world's origin that can be made intelligible and complete while keeping, throughout, a strong analogy to what we see and experience every day. The comparison of the universe to a machine of human contrivance is so

obvious and natural, and is borne out by so many instances of order and design in nature, that it must strike every unprejudiced mind at once and win universal approval. Whoever tries to weaken this theory cannot hope to succeed by putting some other precise and definite theory in its place. It is enough for him to raise doubts and difficulties, and, through remote and abstract ways of looking at things, to reach a suspension of judgment, which is the furthest limit of his hopes here. But apart from the fact that this state of mind is unsatisfying in itself, it can never be held steadily against the striking evidence that continually draws us toward the religious hypothesis. Human nature, under the force of prejudice, is capable of clinging stubbornly and persistently to a false, absurd system. But to hold *no* system at all, against a theory supported by strong and obvious reasons, by natural inclination, and by early education—that, I think, is absolutely impossible to maintain or defend.

A MERELY VERBAL DISPUTE

Philo argues that the quarrel between theist and atheist is only about degrees of analogy.

PHILO 12.6 So far am I from thinking that suspending judgment is possible in this case, replied Philo, that I suspect there is more of a dispute about words in this controversy than people usually imagine. That the works of nature bear a great analogy to the products of human skill is evident. And by all the rules of good reasoning we ought to infer, if we reason about them at all, that their causes bear a proportional analogy. But since there are also considerable differences, we have reason to suppose a proportional difference in the causes; and in particular, we ought to attribute to the supreme cause a far higher degree of power and energy than any we have ever observed in human beings. Here, then, the existence of a Deity is plainly established by reason. And if we raise the question whether, on account of these analogies, we can properly call him a mind or intelligence, despite the vast difference that may reasonably be supposed between him

and human minds—what is this but a merely verbal controversy? No one can deny the analogies between the effects, and it is scarcely possible to keep ourselves from inquiring into the causes. The legitimate conclusion of that inquiry is that the causes, too, bear an analogy. And if we are not content to call the first and supreme cause *God* or *the Deity*, but want to vary the expression, what can we call him but *mind* or *thought*, which he is rightly supposed to resemble considerably?

12.7 All reasonable people are disgusted by verbal disputes, which are so common in philosophical and theological inquiries. The only remedy for this abuse, it turns out, lies in clear definitions, in precise ideas entering into the argument, and in the strict and consistent use of the terms employed. But there is one kind of controversy that, by the very nature of language and of human ideas, is caught in perpetual ambiguity and can never, by any precaution or definition, reach reasonable certainty or precision. These are controversies about the *degree* of some quality or feature. People can argue for all eternity about whether Hannibal was a great man, a very great man, or a superlatively great man; how beautiful Cleopatra was; what term of praise Livy or Thucydides deserves—and never settle the matter. The disputants may agree in their meaning and differ in their words, or the other way around, yet never be able to define their terms well enough to grasp each other's meaning. For degrees of these qualities, unlike quantity or number, cannot be exactly measured, and so there is no measurement to serve as the standard in the dispute. That the dispute over theism is of this kind, and is therefore merely verbal—or perhaps, if possible, even more incurably ambiguous—will be clear on the slightest inquiry. I ask the theist whether he does not grant that there is a great and immeasurable difference, because an incomprehensible one, between the human mind and the divine. The more pious he is, the more readily he will say yes, and the more inclined he will be to magnify the difference. He will even insist that the difference is of a kind that cannot be magnified too much. Next I turn to the atheist—who, I maintain, is an atheist in

name only and can never really be in earnest—and I ask him whether, given the coherence and evident interconnection of all the parts of this world, there is not some degree of analogy among all the operations of nature, in every situation and every age; whether the rotting of a turnip, the generation of an animal, and the structure of human thought are not forces that probably bear some remote analogy to one another. He cannot possibly deny it. He will readily grant it. Having won this concession, I push him further in his retreat. I ask him whether it is not probable that the principle that first arranged, and still maintains, order in this universe also bears some remote, inconceivable analogy to the other operations of nature—and, among them, to the workings of the human mind and thought. However reluctantly, he must agree. Where, then, I cry to both these opponents, is the subject of your dispute? The theist grants that the original intelligence is very different from human reason. The atheist grants that the original principle of order bears some remote analogy to it. Will you quarrel, gentlemen, about degrees, and enter into a controversy that admits of no precise meaning, and therefore of no resolution? If you are that stubborn, I should not be surprised to see you gradually change sides: the theist on one side exaggerating the dissimilarity between the Supreme Being and frail, imperfect, changeable, fleeting, mortal creatures; and the atheist on the other magnifying the analogy among all the operations of nature, in every period, every situation, and every position. So consider where the real point of controversy lies; and if you cannot give up your disputes, at least try to cure yourselves of your hostility.

12.8 And here I must also admit, Cleanthes, that since the works of nature bear a much greater analogy to the effects of our skill and contrivance than to those of our benevolence and justice, we have reason to infer that the natural attributes of the Deity resemble those of human beings more closely than his moral attributes resemble human virtues. But what follows from this? Only that man's moral qualities are more defective of their kind than his natural abilities. For since the Supreme

Being is agreed to be absolutely and entirely perfect, whatever differs most from him falls furthest short of the supreme standard of rightness and perfection.

12.9 It seems evident that the dispute between the skeptics and the dogmatists is entirely verbal, or at least concerns only the degree of doubt and confidence we ought to allow ourselves about reasoning in general; and such disputes are usually verbal at bottom and admit of no precise resolution. No philosophical dogmatist denies that there are difficulties regarding both the senses and all knowledge, and that these difficulties are, by regular logical method, absolutely unsolvable. No skeptic denies that, despite these difficulties, we are under an absolute necessity of thinking, believing, and reasoning about all kinds of subjects, and even of often assenting with confidence and assurance. The only difference between these schools, then—if they deserve the name—is that the skeptic, from habit, whim, or inclination, dwells most on the difficulties, and the dogmatist, for similar reasons, on the necessity.

12.10 These, Cleanthes, are my genuine views on this subject, and they are views, as you know, that I have always held and maintained. But my loathing of popular superstitions is as great as my reverence for true religion. And I confess I take a particular pleasure in pushing such principles, sometimes into absurdity, sometimes into impiety. And you know that all bigots, though they detest impiety far more than absurdity, are usually equally guilty of both.

RELIGION AND MORALITY

Cleanthes defends religion as a support to morals; Philo recounts the harms of popular superstition.

CLEANTHES 12.11 My own inclination, I admit, replied Cleanthes, runs the opposite way. Religion, however corrupted, is still better than no religion at all. The doctrine of a future life is so strong and necessary a safeguard for morality that we ought never to abandon or neglect it. For if finite and temporary

rewards and punishments have as great an effect as we see every day, how much greater an effect must we expect from rewards and punishments that are infinite and eternal?

PHILO 12.12 Then how is it, said Philo, if popular superstition is so beneficial to society, that all of history is so full of accounts of its disastrous effects on public affairs? Factions, civil wars, persecutions, the overthrow of governments, oppression, slavery—these are the grim consequences that always follow when it gains sway over people's minds. Whenever the religious spirit is mentioned in any historical narrative, we can be sure of meeting, a little later, with a detailed account of the miseries that come with it. And no periods can be happier or more prosperous than those in which it is never taken into account or heard of.

CLEANTHES 12.13 The reason for that observation is obvious, replied Cleanthes. The proper function of religion is to regulate people's hearts, make their conduct more humane, and instill the spirit of self-control, order, and obedience. Since it works silently, and merely reinforces the motives of morality and justice, it is liable to be overlooked and confused with those other motives. When it makes itself conspicuous and acts on people as a separate principle, it has left its proper sphere and become merely a cover for faction and ambition.

PHILO 12.14 And so will all religion, said Philo, except the philosophical and rational kind. Your arguments are easier to evade than my facts. It does not follow that, because finite and temporary rewards and punishments have so great an influence, infinite and eternal ones must have a much greater. Consider, I beg you, how attached we are to present things, and how little concern we show for objects so remote and uncertain. When theologians are preaching against the ordinary behavior and conduct of the world, they always present this attachment to the present as the strongest principle imaginable (which indeed it is). They describe nearly all of humanity as under its sway, sunk in the deepest lethargy and indifference about their religious interests.

Yet these same theologians, when refuting their theoretical opponents, assume that the motives of religion are so powerful that civil society could not possibly survive without them—and they are not ashamed of so glaring a contradiction. Experience makes it certain that the smallest grain of natural honesty and kindness has more effect on people's conduct than the grandest visions offered by theological theories and systems. A person's natural inclination works on him constantly. It is always present to his mind and mixes itself into every view and consideration. Religious motives, by contrast, where they act at all, work only in fits and starts, and can hardly ever become fully habitual to the mind. The force of the greatest gravity, the physicists tell us, is infinitely small compared with that of the smallest impact. Yet it is certain that the smallest gravity will prevail in the end over a great impact, because no strokes or blows can be repeated with the constancy of attraction and gravitation.

12.15 Inclination has another advantage. It enlists on its side all the wit and ingenuity of the mind, and when it is set against religious principles, it looks for every method and trick for evading them—and almost always succeeds. Who can explain the human heart, or account for the strange loopholes and excuses people satisfy themselves with when they follow their inclinations against their religious duty? This is well understood in the world. Only fools trust a man any less because they hear that study and philosophy have led him to some theoretical doubts on theological matters. And when we have dealings with a man who makes a great show of religion and devotion, what effect does this have on many people who are thought prudent, except to put them on their guard in case he cheats and deceives them?

12.16 We must also consider that philosophers, who cultivate reason and reflection, have less need of such motives to keep them within the bounds of morality; and that ordinary people, who alone may need them, are completely incapable of a religion so pure as to represent the Deity as pleased by nothing but virtue in human behavior. What recommends people to the Divinity is generally thought to be either trivial rituals, or rap-

turous ecstasies, or bigoted credulity. We need not go back to antiquity or wander into distant lands to find examples of this degeneracy. Among ourselves, some have been guilty of an atrocity unknown to Egyptian and Greek superstition: preaching explicitly against morality, and declaring that anyone who places the least trust or reliance on it will surely forfeit the divine favor.[2]

12.17 But even if superstition or religious fanaticism does not set itself directly against morality, the mere diverting of attention, the creation of a new and trivial kind of merit, and the absurd way it hands out praise and blame must have the most harmful consequences, and greatly weaken people's attachment to the natural motives of justice and humanity.

12.18 Such a principle of action, moreover, not being one of the familiar motives of human conduct, acts on the temperament only at intervals. It has to be stirred up by constant effort for the pious zealot to feel satisfied with his own conduct and carry out his devotional duties. Many religious exercises are begun with apparent fervor while the heart, at that moment, feels cold and listless. A habit of pretense is gradually acquired, and fraud and falsehood become the ruling principle. Hence the common observation that the highest religious zeal and the deepest hypocrisy, far from being incompatible, are often, even usually, found together in the same person.

12.19 The bad effects of such habits, even in ordinary life, are easy to imagine. But where the interests of religion are at stake, no morality can be strong enough to bind the fanatical zealot. The sacredness of the cause sanctifies every means that can be used to advance it.

12.20 Simply keeping one's attention fixed on so important an interest as eternal salvation tends to extinguish the benevolent feelings and breed a narrow, shriveled selfishness. And when

2 Hume likely has in mind extreme Protestant preachers who taught that salvation comes by faith and grace alone, so that relying on good works is spiritually dangerous.

such a temperament is encouraged, it easily slips out of all the general precepts of charity and benevolence.

So the motives of popular superstition have no great influence on general conduct, and where they do dominate, their effect is not favorable to morality.

12.22 Is there any maxim in politics more certain and infallible than that both the number and the authority of priests should be kept within very narrow limits, and that the civil authorities should forever keep the instruments of state power out of such dangerous hands? Yet if the spirit of popular religion were so beneficial to society, the opposite maxim ought to prevail. A greater number of priests, with greater authority and wealth, will always strengthen the religious spirit.[3] And though the priests are in charge of this spirit, why should we not expect greater holiness of life, and more benevolence and moderation, from people who are set apart for religion, who are constantly urging it on others, and who must themselves absorb a larger share of it? How is it, then, that in fact the most a wise ruler can aim for with regard to popular religions is, as far as possible, to break even—to prevent their harmful effects on society? And every expedient he tries for so modest a purpose comes with its own drawbacks. If he permits only one religion among his subjects, he must sacrifice, for an uncertain prospect of peace, every consideration of public liberty, learning, reason, industry, and even his own independence. If he tolerates several sects, which is the wiser policy, he must maintain a thoroughly philosophical indifference toward all of them and carefully restrain the ambitions of the dominant sect; otherwise he can expect nothing but endless disputes, quarrels, factions, persecutions, and civil unrest.

12.23 True religion, I grant, has no such harmful consequences. But we must discuss religion as it has commonly been found in the world. I have nothing to do with that theoretical doctrine of theism which, being a kind of philosophy, must share in the

3 Hume's phrase is "fasces and axes," the bundled rods and axes carried before Roman magistrates as symbols of their power.

beneficial influence of philosophy—and at the same time must suffer from the same drawback, of always being confined to very few people.

12.24 Oaths are required in all courts of law, but it is questionable whether their authority comes from any popular religion. The main restraints on people are the solemnity and importance of the occasion, concern for their reputation, and reflection on the general interests of society. Customs oaths and political oaths are taken very lightly even by some who claim principles of honesty and religion; and in our country a Quaker's solemn affirmation is rightly given the same weight as anyone else's oath.[4] I know that Polybius[5] blames the notorious untrustworthiness of the Greeks on the spread of Epicurean philosophy. But I also know that the promises of one ancient people had as bad a reputation for treachery in ancient times as the testimony of one modern people has for unreliability today, though we cannot explain these popular prejudices by the same cause. Besides, Greek faith was notorious before Epicurean philosophy arose; and Euripides,[11] in a passage I will point out to you, has aimed a remarkable stroke of satire at his own nation on this very point.[6]

COMFORTS AND TERRORS

Cleanthes praises the consolations of true theism; Philo says terror dominates popular religion.

CLEANTHES 12.25 Careful, Philo, replied Cleanthes, careful. Don't push things too far. Don't let your zeal against false religion undermine your reverence for the true. Don't throw away this principle, the chief, the only great comfort in life, and our main

4 Quakers refused on religious grounds to swear oaths, and English law allowed them to make a solemn affirmation instead.

5 HUME'S NOTE. Book 6, chapter 54.

[11] *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

6 Hume's phrases name the Carthaginians and the Irish, echoing ethnic stereotypes of his day; they are rendered neutrally here. Philo's point is that such reputations owe nothing to philosophy.

support against all the blows of adverse fortune. The most pleasing thought that human imagination can possibly offer is that of genuine theism, which represents us as the handiwork of a being perfectly good, wise, and powerful; who created us for happiness; and who, having planted in us immeasurable desires for good, will prolong our existence for all eternity and move us through an infinite variety of scenes, so as to satisfy those desires and make our happiness complete and lasting. Next to being such a being oneself (if the comparison is permitted), the happiest lot we can imagine is to be under his guardianship and protection.

PHILO 12.26 These appearances, said Philo, are most attractive and appealing, and for the true philosopher they are more than appearances. But here, as in the previous case, it turns out that for most of mankind the appearances are deceptive, and the terrors of religion usually outweigh its comforts.

12.27 It is agreed that people never turn to devotion so readily as when they are cast down by grief or laid low by sickness. Doesn't this prove that the religious spirit is more closely allied to sorrow than to joy?

12.28 But people who are suffering find consolation in religion, replied Cleanthes. Sometimes, said Philo. But it is natural to expect that when they turn to contemplate those unknown beings, they will form a notion of them that fits the present gloom and melancholy of their mood. Accordingly, we find frightening images predominating in all religions. And we ourselves, after using the most exalted language in describing the Deity, fall into the flattest contradiction by declaring that the damned vastly outnumber the saved.

12.29 I will venture to say that there has never been a popular religion that portrayed the state of departed souls in such a light that it would be desirable for humankind that there should be such a state. These fine models of religion are purely the product of philosophy. For since death stands between our eye and the view of the future, and that event is so shocking to nature, it must cast a gloom over all the regions that lie beyond

it, and call up for most people the idea of Cerberus and the Furies, devils, and torrents of fire and brimstone.

12.30 It is true that both fear and hope enter into religion, because both these passions stir the human mind at different times, and each of them creates a kind of divinity to suit itself. But when a person is in a cheerful mood, he is fit for business, or company, or entertainment of any kind; he naturally turns to these and does not think about religion. When he is melancholy and dejected, he has nothing to do but brood on the terrors of the invisible world and plunge himself still deeper into distress. It may indeed happen that, after he has engraved religious opinions deep in his thought and imagination in this way, a change of health or circumstances restores his good spirits and, raising cheerful prospects of the future, drives him to the opposite extreme of joy and triumph. Still, it must be admitted that since terror is the primary principle of religion, it is the passion that always predominates in it, allowing only brief intervals of pleasure.

12.31 Not to mention that these fits of excessive, fanatical joy, by exhausting the spirits, always pave the way for equal fits of superstitious terror and dejection; and no state of mind is as happy as a calm and even one. But that state is impossible to sustain when a person believes he lies in such profound darkness and uncertainty, between an eternity of happiness and an eternity of misery. No wonder such a belief dislocates the ordinary frame of the mind and throws it into the utmost confusion. And though that belief is seldom steady enough in its operation to influence all of a person's actions, it tends to make a considerable breach in his temperament and to produce the gloom and melancholy so noticeable in all devout people.

12.32 It is contrary to common sense to feel apprehension or terror on account of any opinion whatever, or to imagine that we run any risk in the hereafter by the freest use of our reason. Such a feeling involves both an absurdity and an inconsistency. It is an absurdity to believe that the Deity has human passions—and one of the lowest of human passions, a restless craving for

applause. It is an inconsistency to believe that, since the Deity has this human passion, he does not have others as well—in particular, a disregard for the opinions of creatures so far beneath him.

12.33 To know God, says Seneca, is to worship him. All other worship is indeed absurd, superstitious, and even impious. It lowers him to the base condition of human beings, who are delighted by pleading, petitions, gifts, and flattery. Yet this impiety is the least of which superstition is guilty. More commonly, it lowers the Deity far *below* the condition of human beings, and represents him as a capricious demon who exercises his power without reason and without humanity! And if that divine being were inclined to take offense at the vices and follies of foolish mortals, who are his own handiwork, things would surely go badly for the devotees of most popular superstitions.[7] Nor would anyone in the human race deserve his favor except a very few—the philosophical theists, who hold, or rather try to hold, fitting notions of his divine perfections. Likewise, the only people entitled to his compassion and indulgence would be the philosophical skeptics, a school almost as rare, who, from a natural distrust of their own abilities, suspend, or try to suspend, all judgment on such lofty and extraordinary subjects.

PHILO'S CONCLUSION

Philo reduces natural theology to one modest proposition and recommends philosophical skepticism.

PHILO 12.34 Suppose the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, comes down to one simple, if somewhat ambiguous, or at least undefined, proposition: *that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.* Suppose this proposition cannot be extended, varied, or spelled out in more detail. Suppose it yields no inference that affects human life, and can be the source of no

7 Seneca (c. 4 BC–AD 65), Roman Stoic philosopher; the saying paraphrases his *Letters* 95.50.

action or restraint. And suppose the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no further than human intelligence, and cannot be extended with any appearance of probability to the other qualities of the mind. If this really is the case, what more can the most inquiring, contemplative, and religious person do than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition whenever it comes up, and believe that the arguments on which it rests outweigh the objections against it? Some astonishment, admittedly, will naturally arise from the greatness of the object; some melancholy from its obscurity; some contempt for human reason, that it can give no more satisfying answer to so extraordinary and magnificent a question. But believe me, Cleanthes, the most natural feeling a well-disposed mind will have on this occasion is a longing desire and hope that Heaven will be pleased to dispel, or at least relieve, this profound ignorance by granting mankind some more specific revelation, and disclosing the nature, attributes, and operations of the divine object of our faith. A person imbued with a proper sense of the imperfections of natural reason will rush to revealed truth with the greatest eagerness, while the haughty dogmatist, convinced that he can build a complete system of theology with the help of philosophy alone, scorns any further aid and rejects this outside teacher. To be a philosophical skeptic is, for an educated person, the first and most essential step toward being a sound, believing Christian—a proposition I would gladly commend to Pamphilus's attention. And I hope Cleanthes will forgive me for meddling this far in the education and instruction of his pupil.

PAMPHILUS [12.35] Cleanthes and Philo did not carry this conversation much further. And since nothing ever made a greater impression on me than all the reasoning of that day, I confess that, on a serious review of the whole, I cannot help thinking that Philo's principles are more probable than Demea's, but that those of Cleanthes come still nearer to the truth.