

# Outline of Hume's *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, Parts X & XI

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58. Demea begins by saying that the best way to arrive at the truth of religion is by reflecting on the evils of life on earth.

58-62. Demea and Philo talk about some of the evils of life on earth. They mention war, hunger, poverty, fear, and the sufferings of animals.

62. Cleanthes enters the debate, and suggests that they've overstated the evils of the world.

63. Philo argues that there is a conflict between the evil we see in the world and the idea that there is a God who displays "justice, benevolence, mercy" in anything like the sense that we use these words. His argument seems to be that since if God were omnipotent (able to do anything) then he could prevent evil, and if he really were perfectly just and benevolent, he would prevent evil; so, since there's evil in the world, God must either be limited in power or not be all-good.

64-5. Cleanthes concedes the point that if it is true that mankind is unhappy, "there is an end at once of all religion." But, he says, there is not as much evil in the world as Demea and Philo say. For each evil, there are a hundred good things.

65-6. Philo disagrees. But he says that even if Cleanthes is right, and there is more good in the world than evil, it can't be denied that there is still some evil. And how could any evil be compatible with a God who is really all-powerful and all-good?

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67. Cleanthes suggests that we can solve the problem by thinking of God as finite, in the sense that his goodness might be limited by 'necessity.'

67-69. Philo makes two points in reply. First, God is like an architect, in that God is responsible for the design of the universe. So we can't explain evil by saying that it had to be that way, given how the universe is. Second, he says that even if an extremely wise and good God is compatible with evil, nothing in the world would give us evidence to believe in such a God.

69-74. Philo lists four features of the world that give rise to most evil: (1) creatures are designed so that they feel pain; (2) the world for the most part follows general laws, rather than having God intervene regularly to prevent bad things from happening; (3) creatures could have been made better — for example, human beings could have been made more industrious; (4) natural disasters happen.

74-76. Reflecting on this list, Philo suggests that even if it is compatible with a good God, the natural explanation of these evils is that the original cause of the universe "has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold."