

In Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Cleanthes argues that the knowledge of the existence of an intelligent Deity follows, necessarily, from man's own nature and experience. He argues that man, by means of Reason, orders external objects to accomplish many good and desirable ends, e.g., a house. In examining a house, men recognize the signs of design and order, even beauty, and acknowledge that the house must be caused by something greater than the house itself. Man, Cleanthes argues, can see the same design, order and beauty in the world itself, and can reasonably conclude that the world must be caused by something greater than itself. This leads to a simple analogy: as the design observed in a house signifies the existence of an intelligent builder, so does the design observed in the world itself – whose dimensions and complexity are unsearchable – reveal the existence of a most intelligent Builder.

To this argument, Philo raises the following objection:

“If the material world rests upon a similar ideal world, this ideal world must rest upon some other; and so on, without end. It was better, therefore, never to look beyond the present material world. By supposing it to contain the principle of its order within itself, we really assert it to be God; and the sooner we arrive at that Divine Being, so much the better.”

Philo appears to make two assumptions in this objection: First, he assumes that the simplest possible explanation of the cause of an effect must be the best. Secondly, he assumes that Cleanthes' argument from design to intelligent cause, leads to an infinite progression of such causes.

Philo's objection presents four possible explanations:

1. The cause of the design of the material world is the nature of the material world itself.
2. The cause of the design of the material world is an intelligent "Deity".
3. The cause of the design of the material world is some superior world, which is caused by some superior world, *ad infinitum*.
4. The cause of the design of the material world is unknowable.

The first explanation attributes the cause of order in the world to chance, since, as Philo himself testifies, there is disorder occurring simultaneously in the material world. That the order in the material world might be the result of chance would provide a brief explanation, but it would be a more complex, inefficient and uncertain cause.

The third explanation would be destroyed by Philo's own principle of simplicity, since the assumption of an infinity of superior worlds to explain the origin of order in the material world would be a more inconvenient explanation than that of Cleanthes.

The fourth explanation would not be an explanation at all.

Granting Philo's complaints about disorder in the world, his approval of the most convenient explanation of a cause, and his practical agnosticism, his own suggestions are the least acceptable of those mentioned in Hume's *Dialogues*. Cleanthes' argument that the order in the world leads men to recognize the existence of an intelligent (and free) Deity can account for the disorder in the material world, is sufficiently simple, and actually answers the question.