

David Hume on the Deductive Proofs of the Divine Existence in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

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ABSTRACT*

The article aims at critically exploring David Hume's analysis of the divine being with respect to the widely accepted cosmological argument. Part IX of Hume's work in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* reflects the formulation of the cosmological argument in the form of a deductive proof through the voice of a character named Demea. The author then counters Demea's version of this argument through the voice of his next important character named Cleanthes. The main purpose of the paper is the reconstruction of the proofs in a form amenable to logical analysis in propositional logic which demonstrates that all of the proofs can be given a valid form. This reconstruction enables one to glean some of the similarities and differences between the arguments to obtain some insight into their workings. The paper does not concern the soundness of the arguments. Neither does it discuss the truth of the premises and the philosophical principles behind them.

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PART 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is devoted to a logical reconstruction of the cosmological proof in David Hume (1711–1776) and other historical authors who present versions of the proof in some way related to Hume. The question regarding the existence of God has been a burning topic of discussion for a very long time and several eminent scholars have expressed their deep interest in investigating the theistic proofs which tried to establish the existence of God. It is my goal to show the logical validity of various versions of the cosmological proof by presenting them in propositional logic (with one minor exception – a deduction of one premise based on the rules of predicate logic). To have a clear understanding on the way how I reconstructed

the argument refer Papineau (2012, 139–40).

In the history of modern western philosophy, Hume's philosophical approach towards the divine being is reflected through his skeptical attitude. Being one of the most recognized British scholars and a consistent empiricist, he employed the empirical method to evaluate the traditional proofs of God. The content of Hume's empirical approach to religion and theology is extensively reflected in his ground-breaking work, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, published shortly after his death in the year 1779. In that book the author put a great effort into critically analyzing and examining the classical proofs of God and simultaneously challenging the traditional views (Ayer 2000, 92–93).

The entire work is presented through the voices of three imaginary characters, namely,

- i. Demea – an orthodox Christian, who defends an a priori cosmological argument;
- ii. Cleanthes – a diligent scientific deist, who defends an a posteriori design argument;
- iii. Philo – a skeptic who undermines both of these a priori and a posteriori proofs of God’s existence. (Radcliffe 2008, 42)

In **Part IX** of his book, the author initially put forth the cosmological argument through the voice of Demea, with the intention of testing the strength and veracity of this argument. He then objected to this argument from several standpoints through the voice of Cleanthes. The cosmological argument has a long history dating back to Aristotle’s (c. 384–322 BC) *Physics*, Book VIII and his *Metaphysics*, Book XII. The argument was further developed in Neoplatonism and early Christianity. A similar version was originally interpreted by Avicenna (ca. 970–1037) in medieval Islamic theology. This was re-introduced to medieval Christian theology in the 13th century by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and then later reframed by Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) and then revised by Samuel Clarke (1675–1729); this traditional cosmological argument which was finally revised by Samuel Clarke is the source of Demea’s version of the cosmological argument.

Before focusing directly on Demea’s argument, I deem it essential to introduce Aquinas’ and Clarke’s version of

the cosmological argument, which will serve as a historical background and a point of comparison in terms of the similarities between Aquinas, Clarke, and Hume. Therefore, in Part 2 of the paper I shall take up Aquinas on the cosmological proof with a particular focus on his “Third Way”. Part 3 deals with Samuel Clarke’s cosmological argument. Hume’s arguments in Part IX of the *Dialogues* are the focus of Part 4. Finally, in Part 5, I attempt a brief comparison of the proofs.

— PART 2. THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Following Aristotle’s concept of science, Thomas Aquinas, arguably one of the most important Roman Catholic theologians in history, demonstrated the existence of God in his textbook of advanced theology, *Summa theologiae*, written between 1265 and 1273. In this book he gives five different proofs of the divine existence (Aquinas 1981, Iq2a3). The proofs are called “ways” (*Quinque Viae*) as Aquinas initiates the body of the article with the words

‘Respondeo dicendum quod Deum esse quinque viae probari potest’, which means that the fact that God does exist can be proved in five ways. While the first three ways amount to different versions of the cosmological argument, the Fourth Way is a Platonic type of argument as it uses the notion of participation, while the Fifth Way is a version of the teleological argument. The demonstration of God takes the form of deductive arguments in his work.

Aquinas' thought in each of the proofs begins with some general observations concerning the features of the world around us and conveys that unless there is an absolute, ultimate reality in some sense which is God, there cannot be a world with the aforementioned particular characteristics (Hick 2017, 20).

Out of the five ways, the Third way/Tertia via bears a strong resemblance to Demea's argument, and thus I will consider this argument in detail before focusing directly on Demea's argument. The first two ways are discussed in a nutshell.

- i. *The First Way* – *The first way argues from the fact of change to a prime mover.* The author points out that it is evident that everything that we perceive around us is in motion. Now, whatever is in motion is put in motion by another being, as nothing can be in motion by itself. From here it can be concluded that the chain of movers cannot be infinite – that there is something which is the first mover, itself unmoved, who, according to the author, is God.
- ii. *The Second Way* – This proof concerns the Aristotelian efficient cause. The argument states that everything that happens in the material world has a cause, and this cause in turn has another cause, and so on. However, there cannot be an infinite regression of causes. Thus the author identifies the initial cause of this series as the first uncaused cause, which is the divine being.
- iii. *The Third Way* – The third way is based on the concept of contingency and necessity. It is the cosmological

argument, which I will analyze in detail.

Now I will elucidate the 'Third Way' in particular.

— THE THIRD WAY/TERTIA VIA (SUMMA THEOLOGICA)

Aquinas' thought in this proof is based on his attempt to prove a unique necessary being from the existence of contingent beings. It runs as follows:

We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence---which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by

another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God. (Aquinas 1947, Iq2a3)

The author here claims that if all things that exist now were contingent then there would be a time in the past when no being existed. And if there was a time in the past when nothing existed, nothing would exist now. Since things exist now, not all things are contingent. In other words, something should have existed at every point in time and that is the necessary being, which is referred to as “God”.

The first part of this argument, which bears a strong resemblance to the first part of Demea’s argument, can be reconstructed in the following way in a deductive form.

1. What is contingent is that for which there is a time at which it did not exist. [definition]
2. If everything is contingent (there is a time at which it did not exist), then there was a time in the past at which nothing existed.
 - 3.1 If nothing exists at some time, nothing comes to exist at any later time. [out of nothing, nothing comes].
 - 3.2 If nothing comes to exist at any later time, nothing exists at any later time.
3. If there was a time in the past at

which nothing existed, then nothing exists now. [hypothetical syllogism 3.1 and 3.2]

4. Something now exists. [empirical truth about the world]
5. It is not the case that there was a time at which nothing existed. [modus tollens 4 and 3]
6. It is not the case that everything is contingent, i.e., something is necessary. [modus tollens 5 and 2]

PART 3. SAMUEL CLARKE ON THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Clarke presented a version of the cosmological argument in his book *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, where he appears to prove the infinity, omnipresence, and eternity of the divine being on the basis of the principles of sufficient reason, borrowing ideas from Leibniz. Demea’s presentation is based on Clarke’s argument and Hume challenged this version of the cosmological argument through the voice of Cleanthes.

The first three sections of the work intend to prove that from the fact that something exists now, something always was and, finally, this something which always existed is independent and unchangeable (Russell 2016, 608).

From here, it follows that the being is eternal, self-existent, and necessarily the necessary being. Demea’s argument is based on these three parts of Clarke’s work.

In Section I of his book, Clarke argues thus:

First, then, it is absolutely and undeniably certain that something has

existed from all eternity. This is so evident and undeniable a proposition, that no atheist in any age has ever presumed to assert the contrary, and therefore there is little need of being particular in the proof of it. For, since some-thing now is, it is evident that something always was, otherwise the things that now are must have been produced out of nothing, absolutely and without a cause, which is a plain contradiction in terms. (Clarke 2015, 8)

In Section II, he argues in the following way:

There has existed from eternity someone unchangeable and independent being. For, since something must needs have been from eternity, as has been already proved and is granted on all hands, either there has always existed someone unchangeable and independent being from which all other beings that are or ever were in the universe have received their original, or else there has been an infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings produced one from another in an endless progression without any original cause at all. (Clarke 2015, 10)

Finally, in Section III, he further says the following:

That unchangeable and independent being which has existed from eternity without any external cause of its existence, must be self-existent,

that is, necessarily exists. For whatever exists must either have come into being out of nothing, absolutely without cause, or it must have been produced by some external cause, or it must be self-existent. Now to arise out of nothing absolutely without any cause has been already shown to be a plain contradiction. To have been produced by some external cause cannot possibly be true of everything, but something must have existed eternally and independently, as has likewise been shown already. Which remains, therefore, [is] that that being which has existed independently from eternity must of necessity be self-existent. (Clarke 2015, 12)

Now, the first two sections of the author's argument as mentioned above can be regarded as deductive proofs which are reconstructed below.

RECONSTRUCTION OF CLARKE'S ARGUMENTS

The first two sections of Clarke's argument from his book can be reconstructed in the following ways:

Section I

- 1.1 There was a time when nothing existed. [assumption for reduction, start of the reduction sub-proof]
- 1.2 If there was a time when nothing existed, then if something exists now, it must have been produced out of nothing.
- 1.3 If something has been produced out of nothing, then there exists a

thing which can exist only by being produced which has not been produced.

- 1.4 There exists a thing which can exist only by being produced which has not been produced. [contradiction, derived by double application of modus ponens in the proof from 1.1 to 1.3]
- 1.5 There was not a time when nothing existed, i.e., something always was. [conclusion of the reduction sub-proof, negation of the assumption in based on the fact that contradiction was derived from it in 1.4]
1. If something exists now, then something always was. [derived from the indirect proof 1.1 through 1.5]
2. Something exists now.
3. Therefore, something always was. [derived by applying modus ponens to 1 and 2]

Section II

1. Something has existed from eternity. [Proved in Section I]
2. If something has existed from eternity, either there has always existed one unchangeable and independent cause of all other beings, or there has existed an infinite series of changeable and dependent causes and effects.

3.1 If there existed an infinite series of changeable and dependent causes, then it either would have an external cause, or it would have a reason for its existence in itself.

3.2.1 If all things are included in the series, the series does not have a cause external to it.

3.2.2 All things are included in the series.

3.2 It is not the case that the series has an external cause [derived by modus ponens from 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.]

3.3.1. If the series has a reason for its existence in itself, it would include at least one being which is self-existent and necessary.

Supporting arguments in predicate logic inserted into the argument at this point:¹

- A. For any whole, if the whole were to be necessary, then some of its parts would also be necessary.
- B. Therefore, if the series of changeable and dependent causes were necessary, then some of its parts would be necessary. [Universal instantiation of A].

Statement B is equivalent to 3.3.1 (because 'has a reason for its existence in itself' and 'necessary' and 'self-existent' are all equivalent).

3.3.2. The series does not include at least one being which is self-existent and necessary.

¹ This is the only exception mentioned at the outset: a move in the argument which cannot be captured using propositional logic.

3.3 It is not the case that the series has a reason for its existence in itself. [derived by modus tollens from 3.3.1 and 3.3.2]

3.4 It is not the case that either the series has an external cause, or it has a reason for its existence in itself. [conjunction of 3.2 and 3.3]

3. It is not the case that there has existed an infinite series of changeable and dependent causes and effects. [derived by modus tollens applied to 3.1 and 3.4]
4. Therefore, there has always existed one unchangeable and independent cause of all other beings. [derived by disjunctive syllogism applied to the statement “either there has always existed one unchangeable and independent cause of all other beings, or there has existed an infinite series of changeable and dependent causes and effects” (derived itself by modus ponens applied to 1 and 2) and premise 3].

There appears to be another version of the same argument presented in the same section (**Section II**) of Clarke’s book, where he argues:

Either there has always existed some unchangeable and independent being from which all other beings have received their original, or else there has been an infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings, produced one from another in an endless progression without any original cause at all. According to this latter

supposition there is nothing in the universe self-existent or necessarily existing. And if so, then it was originally equally possible that from eternity there should never have existed anything at all, as that there should from eternity have existed a succession of changeable and dependent beings. Which being supposed, then, what is it that has from eternity determined such a succession of beings to exist, rather than that from eternity there should never have existed anything at all? Necessity it was not because it was equally possible, in this supposition that they should not have existed at all. Chance is nothing but a mere word, without any signification. And other being it is supposed there was none, to determine the existence of these. Their existence, therefore, was determined by nothing; neither by any necessity in the nature of the things themselves, because it is supposed that none of them are self-existent, nor by any other being, because no other is supposed to exist. That is to say, of two equally possible things, viz., whether anything or nothing should from eternity have existed, the one is determined rather than the other absolutely by nothing, which is an express contradiction. And consequently, as before, there must on the contrary of necessity have existed from eternity some one immutable and independent being. (Clarke 2015, 11)

This version of the argument can be reconstructed in the following way:

1. Something has existed from eternity. [as proved in Section I]
2. If something has existed from eternity, either there has always existed one unchangeable and independent cause of all other beings, or there has existed an infinite series of changeable and dependent causes and effects.

3.1 If there exists a series of changeable and dependent beings, then it is possible that nothing exists from eternity.

3.2 If it is possible that nothing exists from eternity then there has to be a determining factor for the existence of the series.

3.3 If there is a determining factor for the existence of the series, then the series is either determined by a necessary cause or chance or some external dependent cause.

3.4.1. If the series is determined by a necessary cause, then such a cause exists. [by supposition that there exists only an infinite series of dependent causes].

3.4.2. A necessary cause does not exist.

3.4 The series is not determined by a necessary cause. [derived by modus tollens from the two premises 3.4.1 and 3.4.2.]

3.5.1. If the series is determined by chance, then there is something without a sufficient reason for its being.

3.5.2. There is nothing without a sufficient reason for its being. [the principle of sufficient reason holds].

3.5 It is not determined by chance. [derived by modus tollens from the two premises 3.5.1 and 3.5.2]

3.6.1. If it is determined by some external dependent cause, then such a cause exists.

3.6.2.1. If there exists an external dependent cause, then some dependent cause is not part of the series.

3.6.2.2. It is not the case that some dependent causes are not part of the series.

3.6.2. There does not exist an external dependent cause. [derived by modus tollens from the two premises 3.6.2.1 and 3.6.2.2]

3.6 It is not determined by some external dependent cause. [derived by modus tollens from the two premises 3.6.1 and 3.6.2.]

3.7 It is not the case that the existence of the series is determined either by a necessary cause, or chance or some external dependent cause. [conjunction of 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6]

3.8 There is no determining factor for the existence of the series. [derived by modus tollens applied to 3.3 and 3.7].

3. It is not the case that there has existed an infinite series of changeable and dependent causes and effects.

[proved by double application of modus tollens using premises 3.1., 3.2, and 3.8]

4. Therefore, there has always existed one unchangeable and independent cause of all other beings. [derived by disjunctive syllogism applied to a statement (derived itself by modus ponens applied to 1 and 2) and premise 3.]

PART 4. HUME'S ARGUMENTS IN PART IX OF THE DIALOGUES

4.1 DEMEA'S ARGUMENT IN THE DIALOGUES CONCERNING NATURAL RELIGION

I will now proceed to discuss **Part IX** of the *Dialogues*, where Hume interprets Clarke's version of the cosmological argument through the voice of the orthodox mystic, Demea. Demea develops his argument in a very precise manner, claiming that if a thing exists, it must have a reason for its existence. This reason can either be grounded in a necessary being or there is an infinite chain of causes and effects. And then, through a series of arguments, Demea further proves that it is not the case that there is an infinite series of causes and effects, which leads one to conclude that there is an ultimate being that is necessarily existent and Demea identifies this being as God.

The a priori cosmological argument of Demea

Demea says:

Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence; it being

absolutely impossible for any thing to produce itself, or be the cause of its own existence. In mounting up, therefore, from effects to causes, we must either go on in tracing an infinite succession, without any ultimate cause at all; or must at last have recourse to some ultimate cause, that is necessarily existent: Now, that the first supposition is absurd, may be thus proved. In the infinite chain or succession of causes and effects, each single effect is determined to exist by the power and efficacy of that cause which immediately preceded; but the whole eternal chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by anything; and yet it is evident that it requires a cause or reason, as much as any particular object which begins to exist in time. The question is still reasonable, why this particular succession of causes existed from eternity, and not any other succession, or no succession at all. If there be no necessarily existent being, any supposition which can be formed is equally possible; nor is there any more absurdity in Nothing's having existed from eternity, than there is in that succession of causes which constitutes the universe. What was it, then, which determined Something to exist rather than Nothing, and bestowed being on a particular possibility, exclusive of the rest? External causes, there are supposed to be none. Chance is a word without a meaning. Was it Nothing? But that can never produce any thing. We must, therefore, have

recourse to a necessarily existent Being, who carries the REASON of his existence in himself, and who cannot be supposed not to exist, without an express contradiction. There is, consequently, such a Being; that is, there is a Deity. (Hume, 1935, 57)

The content of Demea's thought can be reconstructed in the following way on the basis of propositional logic.

- 1.1 If something exists, it must have a reason for its existence.
- 1.2 If it has a reason for its existence, then it either has a cause or is a necessary being.
- 1.3 If something either has a cause or is a necessary being, then there either exists an infinite chain of causes and effects and no ultimate cause or there exists an ultimate cause which is necessarily existent.
- 1.4 Something exists.
1. Either there exists an infinite chain of causes and effects and no ultimate cause, or there exists an ultimate cause which is necessarily existent. [Three successive applications of modus ponens: modus ponens on 1.4 and 1.1, then modus ponens on the result of the first application and 1.2., then modus ponens on the result of the second application and 1.3.]

There are two alternative arguments for premise 2.1. Both seem to be compatible with the text, which thus contains some redundancy:

2.1.1. If there existed an infinite chain of causes and effects, then the chain would begin to exist in time.

2.1.2. If the chain began to exist in time, then there would be a cause of the chain.

* 2.1.1 If there existed an infinite chain of causes and effects, the question why it exists and no other chain or no chain at all is reasonable.²

* 2.1.2. If the question why it exists and no other chain or no chain at all is reasonable, then there would be a cause of the chain.

2.1. If there existed an infinite chain of causes and effects, then there would be a cause of the chain. [hypothetical syllogism 2.1.1. and 2.1.2, alternatively hypothetical syllogism 2.1.1. and 2.1.2]

2.2.1. If there is a cause of the chain, then the chain is caused by some external cause, or chance, or nothing.

2.2.2. It is not the case that the chain is caused by some external cause, or chance, or nothing.

2.2. There is no cause of the chain. [modus tollens 2.2.1. and 2.2]

2. It is not the case that there exists an infinite chain of causes and effects. [modus tollens 2.1 and 2.2]
3. Therefore, there exists an ultimate cause which is necessarily existent. [disjunctive syllogism 1 and 2.]

2 * (alternatively)

4.2. CLEANTHES' COUNTER-ARGUMENT IN THE *DIALOGUES CONCERNING NATURAL RELIGION*

At this point, in response to Demea's argument, Cleanthes identifies the weakness of Demea's metaphysical reasoning as being ill-grounded and controversial. According to Cleanthes, the existence of a deity is not demonstrable. The term 'demonstration', in a philosophical sense, means to prove something in the strictest possible sense, where it leaves no room for doubt. Thus a successful demonstration necessitates its conclusion and the contrary of this involves a contradiction (O'Connor 2001, 148).

Since there is no contradiction involved in the thought that the deity does not exist, it is a matter of fact. The demonstration of this fact, unlike in the case of a priori necessary truths, is not possible. Accordingly, Hume expresses his thoughts through Cleanthes, that reason cannot prove anything about the existence of God. This existence is a matter of fact, and an a posteriori truth. Moreover, since God's existence is not a self-evident idea, it cannot be demonstrated (Lavine 1984, 174–75).

The arguments run as follows:

Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing, that is distinctly conceivable, implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no being, whose existence is demonstrable. (Hume 1935, 58)

The content of Cleanthes' argument can be reconstructed in the following way:³

1. Either the existence of a deity is an a priori necessary truth whose existence is demonstrable or it is a matter of fact whose existence is not demonstrable.

2.1 If the existence of a deity is an a priori, necessary truth then the existence of that being is demonstrable.

2.2.1 If the existence of a being is demonstrable then conceiving the non-existence of the being is logically impossible.

2.2.2.1 If we conceive of something as existent, we can also conceive it as non-existent.

2.2.2.2 We conceive of the being as existent.

2.2.2 We can conceive of the being as non-existent. [modus ponens of 2.2.2.1 and 2.2.2.2]

2.2 The existence of any being is not demonstrable. [modus tollens of 2.2.1 and 2.2.2]

2. The existence of a deity is not an a priori, necessary truth. [modus tollens of 2.1 and 2.2]

3 My goal is to reconstruct the arguments in propositional logic as far as it is possible. Here, admittedly, Cleanthes' argument relies on predicate logic and so its reconstruction in propositional logic is a little cumbersome..

3. Consequently, the existence of a deity is a matter of fact. [disjunctive syllogism of 1 and 2]

In paragraph 6, Cleanthes argues that there is no necessarily existent being because if there is a necessarily existent being, then it is impossible to conceive the non-existence of that being, just like other necessary truths. The argument runs as follows:

1. If there is a necessarily existent being, the being must exist necessarily by its nature.
 - 2.1 If the being exists necessarily then by its nature or essence, it is impossible to conceive of the non-existence of that being, just like in the case of twice two not being equal to four.
 - 2.2 It is not impossible to conceive the non-existence of a being which formerly existed unlike the case of twice two not equal to four.
2. There is no being that exists necessarily by its nature. [modus tollens of 2.1 and 2.2]
3. Consequently, there is no necessarily existent being. [modus tollens of 1 and 2]

In paragraph 8, Cleanthes argues that it is easy to accept that there is an eternal succession of objects rather than accepting a general cause or a first author.

It can be reconstructed in this way:

1. Either there is a first author, or there

is an eternal succession of objects with no first author.

2.1.1 If there is a first author, then the first author exists prior to the eternal succession of objects.

2.1.2 If the first author exists prior to the eternal succession of objects, then the eternal succession of objects does not begin from eternity.

2.1 If there is a first author, then the eternal succession of objects does not exist from eternity. [hypothetical syllogism of 2.1.1 and 2.1.2]

2.2 The eternal succession of objects exists from eternity.

2. There is no first author. [modus tollens of 2.1 and 2.2]
3. Consequently, there is an eternal succession of objects. [disjunctive syllogism of 1 and 2]

Finally, in paragraph 9, Cleanthes concludes that in the chain or in the succession of objects, it is best to consider that each member of the whole chain is caused by that which preceded it, and causes that which succeeds it. He further claims that the entire series does not separately need a cause. The deductive form of the argument can be presented in this way:

1. If each cause in the chain of causes has its own cause, then there is a sufficient explanation of the being of the chain of causes.
2. If there is a sufficient explanation of the being of the chain of causes,

there is no need for an external cause of the chain.

3. Each cause in the chain of causes has its own cause.
4. Therefore, there is no need for an external cause of the chain. [modus ponens 1., 3. and modus ponens of the result of the later and 2.]

PART 5. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE ARGUMENTS OF DAVID HUME, THOMAS AQUINAS, AND SAMUEL CLARKE

Before coming to my final conclusion, I will summarize some interesting comparisons in terms of the differences and resemblances that one can find while contrasting the arguments of Demea and Cleanthes, which Hume put forward in the *Dialogues*, and also the analogy between the arguments of Demea, Thomas Aquinas, and Clarke in context.

A critical observation of the arguments put forward by Aquinas (the first part of *Tertia Via*), Clarke, and Demea shows the following:

In Section I, Clarke proves that something has always existed. For Clarke, this might mean that either there is an infinite chain of causes and effects, i.e., an infinite causal chain of contingent beings, or that there is a necessary being which has always existed. In Section II, he sets out to disprove the former option and affirms the latter one. The argument of Section I is clearly directly or indirectly inspired by the first part of Aquinas' Third Way. Both the proofs are based on the reasoning that something must have existed in the past, as there is something in existence now. But there

is an important difference that can be pointed out. Aquinas seems to be thinking that by proving that something has always existed, he is proving the existence of at least one omnitemporal being and he does not seem to be aware of the other possibility, namely that there existed an infinite chain of contingent beings. Hence, for Aquinas, there does not seem to be a need to exclude this chain, which is the kernel of the arguments put forward by Clarke in Section II and also that of Demea. Demea's argument starts with the dilemma of there being either a necessary being or an infinite chain, so this argument is based on Clarke's argument in Section II. Demea does not see the need to defend it as exhaustive. But as we can see from Aquinas' and Clarke's arguments, this dilemma might be false as there is, at least *prima facie*, a third option, that things have started to exist and thus it is not true that something has always existed. If this option was true, then the initial dilemma of Demea's argument would be false.

All of the arguments are modal in the sense that they use modal notions such as necessity. While Aquinas uses two senses of necessity, the arguments of Clarke and Hume through the voice of Demea use only one. The first part of Aquinas' argument defines modals in temporal terms when he states that that which did not exist at one time is contingent and that which exists always is necessary. The second part of Aquinas' Third Way (not analyzed in this paper) concludes that there exists a necessary being in a stronger sense, i.e., whose necessary existence depends

on its nature (which has a necessity for itself). And it is precisely this second notion of necessity which plays a crucial role in the arguments of Clarke and Hume. Clarke's and Demea's arguments conclude that there is a necessary being in this sense, i.e., which necessarily exists through its nature.

The arguments offered by Aquinas and Clarke form the tradition within which Hume constructs his argument in the *Dialogues* through the voice of Demea. This explains the need to compare all the arguments in general.

While objecting to the argument of Demea, Hume denies through the voice of Cleanthes the supposition that existential claims are provable. For him, the non-existence of any fact is possible. Therefore, its existence is not necessary and therefore it is not provable. Hume distinguishes between two areas of human study, since all objects of human reasoning are divided into two kinds: (a) relations of ideas and (b) matters of fact. This distinction is often called *Hume's fork* (Campbell 1996, 161–164). Statements about relations of ideas are a priori, analytic, and necessary, whereas statements about the empirical world (matters of fact) are synthetic, contingent, and a posteriori. The consequences of *Hume's fork* lead to the fact that according to Hume, a relation of ideas can be proved with certainty only by using other self-evident truths, again, relations of ideas. But relations of ideas cannot prove anything about the contingent world. If we accept *Hume's fork*, it is futile to prove the existence of God as a matter of fact. As existence is not an idea

according to Hume, it cannot be related to any idea in such a way that there is a relation of ideas between them. Consequently, it cannot be demonstrated. Thus *Hume's fork* undermines the cosmological argument (Fogelin 2017, 60–61).

Moreover, let it be noted in passing that it also weakens the traditional ontological argument. Once again, nothing can be proved to exist solely on the basis of a priori reasoning. This is evident from the argument of Cleanthes, which states that there is no being whose non-existence would imply a contradiction. Hume claims that since we have no abstract idea of existence, we cannot claim that from the mere idea of God, his existence can be inferred. Since existence is not a quality so, according to Hume, a perfect necessary being need not exist and there is no contradiction involved in conceiving the non-existence of a deity.⁴

— PART 6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research work is to analyze the deductive proofs of David Hume in the *Dialogues* in order to interpret his conclusion regarding the existence of the divine being, with regard to the renowned cosmological argument. The paper contributes to the reconstruction of his arguments from a logical standpoint. I consider it important to identify the central question in Hume's philosophy and his opinion about the cosmological argument. Before probing directly into Hume's deductive argument, I reviewed St. Thomas

4 I am grateful to one of the anonymous peer reviewers for his constructive comments.

Aquinas' cosmological proof which acted as a distant source for Hume's cosmological argument. In this context, I initially reconstructed Aquinas' 'Third Way', in particular from his book, *Summa theologiae*, as the 'Third Way' corresponds to Demea's version of the cosmological argument. Aquinas' version of the cosmological argument was later reformulated by Samuel Clarke and Hume's intention was to directly counter this version of the cosmological argument on the basis of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. This gave me a reason to reconstruct the cosmological proof of Clarke from an analytical stance. Hume's argument and the counter-argument which was

expressed through Demea and Cleanthes are both taken into account, and built up in the form of deductive arguments (Papineau 2012, 14–41).

Finally, the research brings into the limelight some interesting commonalities and contrasts between the arguments of Demea and Cleanthes in the *Dialogues* and also between the arguments of Demea and Aquinas, which I have included in the concluding part of this paper before closing the whole discussion. Overall, the study gives me an opportunity to rebuild all these versions of the cosmological argument in the form of deductive reasoning and incorporate them in my work.

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