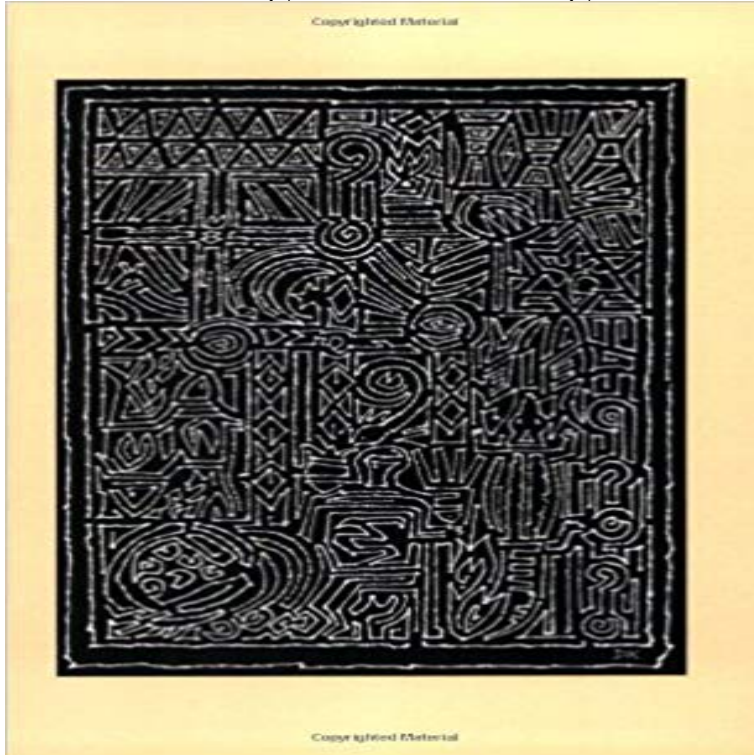


Humes Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion



What should we teach young people about religion? The characters Demea, Cleanthes, and Philo passionately present and defend three sharply different answers to that question. Demea opens the dialogue with a position derived from Rene Descartes and Father Malebranche. Gods nature is a mystery, but Gods existence can be proved logically. Cleanthes attacks that view, both because it leads to mysticism and because it attempts the impossible task of trying to establish existence on the basis pure reason, without appeal to sense experience. As an alternative, he offers a proof of both God s existence and God s nature based on the same kind of scientific reasoning established by Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. Taking a skeptical approach, Philo presents a series of arguments that question any attempt to use reason as a basis for religious faith. He suggests that human beings might be better off without religion. The dialogue ends without agreement among the characters, justifying Hume s choice of literary style for this topic. As Pamphilus, Cleanthes pupil, says in the prologue: Any philosophical question that is so obscure and uncertain that human reason can reach no agreement about it, if it is treated at all, seems to lead us naturally to the style of dialogue and conversation.

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