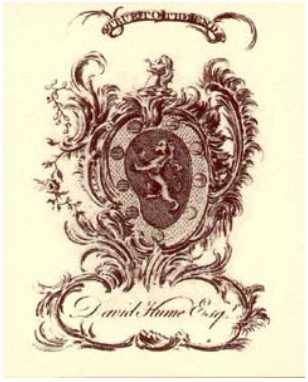

The 'Naturalness' of Natural Religion

H. S. Harris

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THE 'NATURALNESS' OF NATURAL RELIGION

Among Hume's philosophical works the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion is unquestionably the easiest to read.[1] One can easily imagine a precocious fifteen-year-old like Miss Jane Austen -- who set herself to write her own History of England only a decade or so after Hume's death -- coming upon the little volume that nephew David published, reading it with great excitement (and a steadily rising intellectual fury), and recording the same verdict that Pamphilus offers us, but in much more trenchant terms.[2] We can also imagine her reading it again twenty years later, armed with an explanatory commentary like the one that Stanley Tweyman has now given us,[3] and maintaining her position (this time in the more temperate terms of Pamphilus himself). For Miss Jane Austen at thirty-five had one of the most critically commonsensical minds of her time; and she was also a person of deep religious feeling. It is in defence of her feelings, rather than of my own, that this essay is written. For she was close enough to what I take to have been Hume's position to have agreed with it once she had understood it; I, on the other hand, am not.

To claim that a meeting of minds between the Rector of Steventon's daughter and the Scottish apostle of infidelity is even conceivable may seem ridiculous. Hume himself would never have thought it likely. But even if my estimate is unduly optimistic, it serves at least to underline the importance of Tweyman's constructive commentary. For without Tweyman's commentary, Jane Austen's reaction to the Dialogues would have been one of morally indignant, and quite categorical rejection at any age. With it to guide her, she would have been

appreciative and sympathetic, even if she was still ultimately dissatisfied.[4] (I hope to persuade those who admire them both, as I do, that David Hume and Jane Austen belonged to the same 'invisible Church').

To read the Dialogues is still relatively easy. We only have to know that we are listening to a conversation between educated men in a society where everyone professes (at least) to believe that the world they were born into was created by a God who is all-knowing and all-powerful, infinitely wise, infinitely just and good, and, above all, infinitely loving towards the only creatures in his world who are capable of recognizing what he has done for them. The Rector of Steventon's daughter would have had difficulty in appreciating the discussion properly, because she had some further, more specific, beliefs about God's relations with his beloved children. We have some (smaller) difficulties now, because we are far from believing so much (and many of us believe nothing of the sort at all). But to grasp what we are supposed to believe is not difficult; and once we know that, the conversation itself is easy to follow. Only once does it seem to get out of hand to the point of actual implausibility; and there are only three things about it that are genuinely puzzling.

The conversation does not reach any conclusion -- at least none that convinces us. We are not convinced because the obvious solution for the most pervasive of our three puzzles is the assumption that Philo, the speaker who appears to state an agreed conclusion, is only pretending. That he should pretend is quite right and proper for a modern philosophical dialogue. Augustine may have written straightforward expository (or 'dogmatic') dialogues; and Berkeley, following in the wake of some of Augustine's medieval imitators, may have

managed to raise this form into the best imitation of a live discussion that has been achieved for the dogmatic dialogue in English. But the religious doctrine of these 'dogmatists' was orthodox. One glance at the fortunes of the great Italian dialogue writers -- Bruno, Galileo, Campanella -- is enough to teach us that it was not prudent to let one's own doctrine win openly when one was teaching against the Church.[5]

Jane Austen would certainly have adopted the hypothesis that Philo's professions of religious feeling are hypocritical throughout the discussion. She would have assumed that Cleanthes knows that his old friend is playing a part all the time; and if her sense of decorum could allow religious orthodoxy to be laughed at -- which is doubtful but not quite unthinkable[6] -- her own satiric gift could not but make her smile over Demea's discomfiture when Philo drops his mask, even though all of her pious sympathies would be with Demea.

This interpretive hypothesis resolves the most fundamental and obvious difficulty in the running interpretation of the Dialogues; but it does so in a quite mistaken way. There is a smaller, more strictly localized, puzzle about Philo's attitude which remains quite insoluble upon this view of his character. If Philo is only playing at piety, why should he be momentarily nonplussed at the suggestion that God might reveal himself to us through a voice "in the clouds" which speaks to every nation in its own tongue -- or again through books that grow like plants? This second puzzle is the one place where the conversation seems to leave the solid earth of common sense, and take off into fantasy. Why should Cleanthes, who seems as soberly sensible as he is pious -- and about as unlikely to be a devotee of

science fiction, were he transported to our century, as le bon David himself -- introduce such fantastic 'possibilities' as the Cheshire Cat[7] and the talking Tiger Lilies of Lewis Carroll into a serious discussion about the use of the order of Nature as evidence for an intelligent Creator? And why does no one else react as if he has gone off his head? Finally why does Pamphilus report that he could clearly see that at this point Philo was "embarrassed and confounded"?

Since Pamphilus is a serious young man, who seems to take everyone seriously and not to suspect Philo of leg-pulling, we -- who claim to see the joke -- might fairly suspect that he has mistaken the social cause of the 'embarrassment.' Philo might be embarrassed by his friend's momentary lapse from sanity. But if Pamphilus can take Philo to be "confounded" too under those circumstances, then Pamphilus is about as complacently stupid as Jane Austen's Mr. Collins. Anyone who accepts that view of our fictional reporter must take it that Hume is playing with us, just as much as Philo is playing with his audience. (One could perhaps believe this of Voltaire; but not even Voltaire, I think, ever studied and strove for twenty-five years merely to elaborate a joke).[8]

Jane Austen, knowing nothing of that twenty-five year labour, could have adopted the joke theory readily enough. But she would not have needed it, because the 'confusion' of Philo would have appeared as natural to her as it does to his fictional audience. She would have known intuitively that in affecting to speak of what God might do, Cleanthes was actually making a perfectly orthodox claim about what God has done. In the case of the voice speaking to all in their own language, her sure clue would be

the transparent reference to the miracle of Pentecost.[9] The suggestion that the same Holy Spirit which first descended upon the Christian community at Pentecost was speaking to us, always and everywhere, as the Logos or 'Word' which first created and still sustains the whole order of nature, would not seem strange or outlandish to her. As the poet says, the pious mind "Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,/ Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."[10]

To think of Nature like this was not Jane Austen's natural bent, however, for she by no means shared the sentiments expressed by her own Elizabeth Bennet at the prospect of an excursion to the Lake District: "What are men, to rocks and mountains?"[11] Jane Austen was more interested in exercising her remarkable capacity for 'sympathy' than she was in theological speculations about nature. The poet whom she actually quotes is that religious melancholiac, William Cowper: "Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited."[12] But since we are pretending, for the nonce, that she was as much interested in moral philosophy as she was in history, let us suppose that, having picked up the trail of Berkeley's immaterialism from Boswell's Life of Johnson (which she loved) she was led on to read the Alciphron. There, in the fourth dialogue, she would have recognized instantly the original of Cleanthes' "articulate voice." But since she shared Sam Johnson's 'natural' conviction about the large stone which he kicked so vigorously to refute Berkeley's theory, she would have to regard the view that God's creation is only one universal language, out of which we have built all of our native dialects (so that God necessarily speaks to everyone in his own tongue), as

a remarkable and uplifting speculative view, but not as the sober truth of this fallen world.

She was a country child in a world where girls of her class pressed flowers and leaves in order to mount them in albums. Convention may have kept her from the direct practice of horticulture (I am not sure how much she could freely do in her garden beyond looking at it, and cutting or picking blooms). But some of her heroines love their gardens, so she would be ready enough to see a developing plant, progressing through the season from the green shoot to the dry stalk from which the seeds must be collected, as one of 'God's books' steadily turning its own pages. After discovering "the minute philosopher,"[13] however, she could return to the Dialogues and find a deeper significance in Cleanthes' second analogy in addition to the one that was plain to her at the first glance. For she might well notice that, just as Cleanthes has metaphorically transposed Alciphron's 'divine language' of perception into the active speech of the miracle of Pentecost, so he has also transposed the actively self-expressive form of animate self-consciousness into the passively perceptual mode of a 'vegetable book.' 'If we could read the language of the flowers,' runs Cleanthes' analogical enthymeme, 'we should not doubt that there is a mind behind what we were reading, which transcends the plants themselves. So how can we doubt that there is a transcendent mind behind all of the walking and talking books which actively demand to be attended to in languages with which we are perfectly familiar? How can we fail to see that natural growth is no more satisfactory as an adequate explanation of our human sign-making capacity, than it would be if the sign-makers were plants?'

Jane Austen would be puzzled, therefore, not by the 'embarrassment and confusion' of Philo, but rather by the fact that he is able to recover from it. She would have to believe that he is 'religious' only on the surface.

She could get no further without the aid that has come only two hundred years later. What Tweyman's commentary has shown us all is the relation between Philo's 'careless' scepticism[14] and his 'cautious' or 'mitigated' scepticism. At the beginning, Philo denies the character of a 'careless' sceptic put upon him by Cleanthes, and firmly proclaims his belief in the "adorably mysterious and incomprehensible nature of the supreme Being."[15] His own 'mitigated' scepticism he takes to be the most appropriate form of rational reverence for the 'mystery.' But this 'mitigated' position is the 'result' of testing every belief and every argument against the 'careless' extremes of doubt. What emerges from the sceptical fire is the 'natural' belief.

Through this cautious process of 'mitigation' we can learn, for instance, that the 'immaterialism' of the pious Bishop of Cloyne is an unconscious form of careless doubt; while Doctor Johnson's response to it reveals the unshakable natural belief against which all of Berkeley's irrefutable arguments are dashed in pieces. But Berkeley, as we all know, was no sceptic. He is only an object lesson in one-sidedness. Far from being 'careless,' he cared all too much for one thing. No matter of 'faith' can be demonstrated either positively or by reductio, as Berkeley thought; it must rather be tested from every side by sceptical arguments. What survives this test are the indispensable beliefs which mitigate the

'carelessness' of critical reason itself into a still-cautious commitment.

The natural belief in the stable persistence of the material world is not mentioned by anyone involved in Mr. Hume's imaginary conversation. Cleanthes takes the focal point of 'careless' sceptical doubt to be the existence of causal necessity; and he well knows how to mitigate that doubt. "We shall then see," he says, "whether you go out at the door or the window" (Part I). He thinks that the existence of God is a matter of rational inference, based upon our natural conviction that everything has a 'cause.' Philo has to show him that this is not the case; and further, that belief in the 'infinite' Creator of Cleanthes' personal faith cannot possibly be based upon the sceptically-bounded concept of causal necessity as we employ it in ordinary life. (We should all understand Hume better, if we spoke less about 'mitigated scepticism' and more about 'sceptically-bounded belief'; for then we should remember that they are opposite faces of the same coin).

Demea, Philo and Cleanthes agree at the outset that the existence of 'God' is "unquestionable and self-evident" as the "original cause of this universe (whatever it be)." (D 142) The words are Philo's; and we might think that the sceptical proviso, "whatever it be," makes the consensus a merely formal one, were it not for Philo's 'embarrassment and confusion' in Part III. This is the earnest that he is sincere in his commitment to the traditional negative theology which he espouses in Part II (according to which it is proper to extol God's Wisdom, etc., in order to express our adoration, but more accurate to say that God is not-wise, etc., because he is beyond our wisdom).

Philo does believe in this transcendent 'cause'; and he does so because he cannot help it. But he must not confess that fact too quickly, lest his confession be misunderstood. His task is to show that this religious belief (which he himself shares) is not founded upon a normal causal inference. He does this by arguing that, according to the ordinary usage of causal reasoning, we ought to say that the 'cause' of organic life in general is a 'vegetative' principle, and the 'cause' of rational intelligence is an 'animate' level of life; and by adding finally that, since the defining character of organic life is self-preservation, any organic system that happened to arise by chance must preserve itself -- so that the organic world-order might (for all that our empirical concept of causality can tell us) have arisen through the motions of inorganic matter. (The argument is presented conversationally, as a series of analogies, but it is easy to thread together -- Tweyman does not put it together, but it was his commentary (97-120) that enabled me to see how it should be done).

If we were able to accept this way of reasoning, we could arrive quite plausibly at a form of natural pantheism. God would be for us the organizing 'soul' of the world at all levels. But it is exactly here that Scepticism comes to the rescue of orthodoxy. In a case that is unique, we have no warrant for assuming that the cause is exactly proportioned to the effect. (Why we do not want to make this assumption in religion will be seen when we come to the problem of evil in Parts X and XI; the rain of this World Soul falls indifferently upon the just and the unjust. Natural religion cannot rest upon ordinary causal reasoning because this

undeniable indifference of the natural order to our fate is abhorrent to all religious feeling.)

It is for this still-undisclosed reason that even before he lays out the dismembered elements of this classical pantheism -- and just as soon as his momentary 'embarrassment and confusion' is over -- Philo sets to work to support Demea's orthodox position. He argues that it would be better to have no system at all, than one so "wild and unsettled" as that of the pagans. (D 169)

But why should he care about that? If we look again at the analogies offered by Cleanthes which embarrassed Philo, we can see that the natural root of religious belief (as Hume understood it) is the conviction of rational mortals that the 'cause' of their own sign-using capacity must be as rational as they empirically know the capacity itself to be in their highest causal employment of it. We comprehend the causation of human rational expression in a way in which we do not comprehend the fact that fire causes smoke. So our 'natural' religion evolves culturally, step by step, as the community develops higher ways of exercising the sign-using capacity to create what we now call 'values.' Reason demands a 'cause' for itself that is equal to its own comprehensive range.

This 'postulational' attitude of reason -- as it will come to be called after Hume wakens Kant from his dogmatic slumbers -- is a new mode of the older rational theology that depended on the assumption that the cause must contain at least as much 'actuality' as the effect. So after Philo has overthrown the 'anthropomorphism' of Cleanthes -- first by pointing out its essentially pagan character as a 'system,' and then by showing that each lower element in the 'system' (animation, vegetation,

mechanical interaction) has a better empirical right than reason itself to be considered the 'cause' of reason -- Hume proceeds to consider the latest version of the a priori proof of the existence of God as 'first cause.' Here (Part IX) Demea becomes the protagonist, and Cleanthes the sceptical critic.

Tweyman notices this (83), but his assumption that Hume uses only the categories 'dogmatist,' 'extreme sceptic,' and 'mitigated sceptic,' causes him to be unjust to Cleanthes. If he had considered the original Cleanthes (who was the most religious of the Old Stoics), he would have seen that Hume's Cleanthes is already a 'Middle' stoic -- although he still cherishes the beliefs and goals of the Old Stoa. Just as Philo (whether the ancient original or his modern namesake) is a 'mitigated' Sceptic, so the modern Cleanthes (unlike his ancient namesake) is a 'mitigated' Stoic (like most of the Stoic speakers in Cicero's dialogues). Tweyman rightly says (in his second chapter) that Cleanthes sees no positive function for scepticism; but he does not pay proper attention to the fact that Cleanthes has accepted its negative lessons. This is what emerges most clearly in Part IX (though it is clear enough already from the comments of Cleanthes in Part I about both Stoics and Sceptics of the unmitigated type).

The unifying thesis of Hume's Dialogues is that religious belief is 'natural.' That is to say, it does not rest on an argument of any kind. Parts II-VIII reduce the only respectable semblance of an empirical 'argument' (the Stoic 'argument from design') to the status of a very "irregular" inference indeed[16] -- with many similarly irregular but equally plausible competitors. Part IX denies the validity of the only principle that could properly regularize the Stoic argument against all of

its "irregular" rivals. But at the end of Part IX, the irregular semblance of an argument is still there. The natural human conviction can still array itself in the tattered rags which are all that remains of those robes of glory which inspired the 'Hymn to Zeus' of the original Cleanthes. No matter how many difficulties he may make, or how many alternatives he may offer, Philo must still "tug the labouring oar" as long as we are considering the theoretical orderliness of nature. The classical cosmology, in spite of its pagan parentage, is in harmony with natural religious sentiment.

This situation changes dramatically when we come to Parts X and XI. Now religion needs the support of the sceptic, and it is the natural theologian (using 'theology' to designate the argumentative form of religious belief) who has to row against the tide. This is where the last rags of the rational argument are torn off. Cleanthes is driven to suggest that 'infinity' is only an honorific epithet when applied to God. But this attempted return to a position from which he has already been driven in Part V will not help him in the least, for it is precisely the finite order, the unity, achieved by the supposed divine cause (whether finite or infinite) which shows itself to be blind and indifferent to the goals and values of our finite rationality.

Tweyman's exposition of this 'inconvenience' of Cleanthes' anthropomorphism (89-95) is especially good. Even interpreters as acute as Nelson Pike have failed to understand why Cleanthes cannot adopt the hypothesis of 'limited Deity' which William James proposed over a hundred years later. Thus, when Cleanthes contradicts his own basic position and begins toying with finite (and dualistic) conceptions

of the cosmic cause again in Part XI, it becomes undeniably obvious, at last, that religious belief is not the possible conclusion of any argument. Religion is, rather (as Jane Austen, who never argued about her faith, would have agreed), the premiss of our efforts to make sense of our experience. What Philo disagrees with Cleanthes about, is precisely the latter's belief (which Jane Austen probably shared) that the old argument of the Stoics "tends to the confirmation of true religion." If "true religion" is a natural conviction, then adopting arguments that 'confirm it' is not a prejudice from which we should free ourselves before we start philosophizing -- as Tweyman (27) suggests. That would be an artificial or Cartesian type of 'impartiality.' But the desire to confirm "true religion" is an error from which we can be freed by philosophizing, because we are then forced to recognize that there are no arguments by which we can confirm a natural belief. Cleanthes shows himself quite 'prepared' for this liberation, while Demea is not ready for it. True religion does not need "confirmation," any more than the external existence of 'things' needs it, or any more than causal reasoning by empirical induction needs 'justification.' Yet I hardly think that Tweyman would say that a student is 'prejudiced' because he admits that he is pleased to discover arguments and positions which help him to 'justify' induction. Being 'prepared' for the reception of the truth of Scepticism is not the same as being a Sceptic already.

At the beginning of Part XII Philo acknowledges the natural belief which made him tongue-tied with embarrassment about the 'Voice in the Clouds' and the 'Vegetable Library' in Part III. He admits

that the mechanism of the human body (which we partly understand) and its organic and intelligent functions (which are beyond our grasp), repeated with variations in all the lower species, obliges us to postulate an intelligent author. As Tweyman points out, "the maxims which stem from the Design Hypothesis are, in fact, the ones which science employs" (130); and it is the fact that the order of nature is teleological which forces the most resolute atheist to concede that there is a positive analogy (however remote) between the order of nature and human designs.

But Philo underlines the fact that the "analogy to the effects of our art and contrivance" is much greater "than to those of our benevolence and justice." The conclusion which he now draws -- "that the moral qualities of man are more defective in their kind than his natural abilities" (D 219) -- can only be understood as ironical, because the natural belief that is articulated in the Design Hypothesis is a practical commitment by definition. Philo says very emphatically, at this point, that he has stated his "unfeigned sentiments"; but since we know that he is in complete agreement with Cleanthes that "The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct" (D 220), the real 'consequence' of this disanalogy between the order of nature and human moral ideals, is that "natural theology" has nothing to do with "the proper office of religion." This conclusion Philo duly states, as soon as he has shown clearly that when the natural belief in God is articulated as the belief in an almighty Author it produces all the forms of superstition and priestcraft. The universal consensus of religious belief is a continuum of social folly.

When we reach an honest and realistic understanding of how religious sentiment actually works in the motivation of human behaviour, we realize that all of Cleanthes' traditional arguments about the social utility of the belief in the rewards and punishments of a future life are mistaken; and we shall then comprehend that the "philosophical and rational kind" of religion (D 220) must rest on quite different foundations. The articulation of "natural theology" does demonstrate that religious belief is universal, and therefore 'natural' -- Tweyman (136-142) expounds Hume's view on this question very clearly. But "natural theology" is so completely useless for the guidance of human action that it makes a recourse to 'revelation' necessary. This is the final paradox with which Philo presents us. Careless scepticism 'makes room for faith'; but it is the mitigated scepticism which acknowledges the existence of a natural belief that results from the testing, that shows us why faith is necessary. Belief in the Author of Nature is of no use to "true religion," because the moral analogy fails completely.

What Tweyman (155) calls "the final pronouncement on the topic under discussion" is neither Philo's last pronouncement, nor the last pronouncement upon Hume's topic. It is only the last pronouncement about the topic which (in spite of all Philo's arguments) Tweyman foolishly continues to be interested in. And even in that connection Philo's conclusion is couched in a way which clearly implies that it is not at all "final." For Philo begins "If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain..." (D 227, my emphasis). The conditional if indicates that an alternative view is at least plausible; and the attribution of this view to some

people, and then only in appearance, rigorously implies that some other view is correct. For the true sense of what is "natural" cannot belong only to some people; and a false sense of it must necessarily be a 'seeming' -- an illusion from which adequate consideration and discussion would free their minds. Hume's view about 'theology' in this traditional sense is that the discussion, although it remains logically and scientifically interesting, is necessarily inconclusive. Perfect agreement as to the facts will always leave open the opposite alternatives of a 'theist' and an 'atheist' conception of them (D 218-9).

The final outcome of the critique of 'anthropomorphism' is that the inquisitive mind (Philo), the contemplative mind (Cleanthes) and the religious mind (Demea) must all assent to the proposition that "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence" whenever they hear or read it (D 227). None of them will ever be tempted to utter this proposition, however, since they all know how pointless it is. Demea insisted that it was pointless, and almost irreligious, from the start; and he has been proved right. For the assertion does not rule out the polytheistic plural ('causes'); and the analogy of which it speaks may be as remote as that between the operation of free-falling bodies operating according to necessary laws, and the operation of rational will.

There is an analogy here, because both have been shown to be capable of producing a self-maintaining system. And if anyone believes that this is beyond the limits of what is meant by Philo (s)he has only to consider carefully the very rigorous restrictions which Philo places upon the employment

of the proposition. It "afford[s] no inference that affects human life" and cannot "be the source of any action or forbearance" (D 227). It is only the fact that D'Holbach's materialism[17] cannot be ruled out that makes it legitimate for Philo to insist on this. For if we knew that the world-system is at least a living vegetable, we should have grounds for a certain religious reverence towards life in general, and this would be the rational source of action and forbearance in a very general sense.

The investment of 'truly religious' feeling in this topic can only produce 'animosity'; and that is contrary to "true religion" itself. 'Religion' is a natural belief which ought to guide our conduct with the same reliability and the same absence of controversy as the natural beliefs in material substance and causality. Nothing that produces controversy -- least of all a topic which is demonstrably controversial in its essence -- can be conducive to the establishment of true religion, for the mark of 'truth' here is what is non-controversial in practice. Reason can help us to identify this 'truth,' and to purify it from superstition -- just as the rational analysis of our belief in matter relieves us of the Sun God, and the understanding of 'causality' frees us from soothsaying and miracles. But reason cannot be the source of religious 'truth.' The truth must be 'revealed.'

'True' religion (i.e., a natural belief that has been rationalized to the point where all the controversies that cluster round it are recognized to be either incredible or demonstrably mistaken) is essentially directed towards the practically reliable guidance of human life. It must therefore be concerned with the analogy between the human will, its desires and its goals, and the will of the divine

author of our being. Just as it is a natural belief which directs Philo to go out by the door, and to forbear from stepping out of the open window, so his natural faith tells him that the Author of Nature is just and merciful, as well as wise. Hence Philo ends with the remarkable proposition which he "willingly recommend[s] to the attention of Pamphilus": "To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian" (D 228).

This is comforting language for the ears of Jane Austen. But it is the third puzzle in the book -- and until we have understood why Philo supported Demea it remains the hardest to solve. Hume certainly did not suppose that a rational man of letters -- for whom his model is Cleanthes -- would subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles, or even to the Apostle's Creed, just because scepticism has released him from the futile effort to construct a "natural theology" on the finite basis of science and civilized practical experience. According to Hume's own declaration, Cleanthes is the "hero" of the Dialogues;[18] but the conversations end when Philo has done his work; and Philo's last act, having completed the negative discipline of the teacher, is to make this positive recommendation of 'Christianity' to the pupil. Why does he interpose "so far in the education and instruction" of Pamphilus when Cleanthes ought by now to be both ready and able to fulfil his educational responsibilities in the new spirit? Pamphilus himself thinks Cleanthes can do the job; his faith in his teacher is quite unshaken by what he has heard and witnessed. And through the mouth of Pamphilus Hume confirms that Cleanthes is, indeed, the hero of his story.

Kemp Smith (D 61) thinks that Cleanthes is only "the hero" for Pamphilus as narrator. But there is a deeper reason. Philo teaches, Cleanthes learns. Cleanthes is the hero because he is the one who changes. His name tells us who he is at the beginning: the great Stoic contemplative, 'mitigated' into a good Scottish enlightened "man of letters." But it is the name of his pupil that tells us who he is at the end -- and that is why Philo's apparently superfluous intervention is functionally necessary to the aim of the Dialogues. Pamphilus means 'All-Friend.'[19] This can be taken in every way: Friend of the All, Beloved of the All, Friend to all, Beloved by all. But as a symbol of Hume's 'sound Christianity' it means that God loves all of us, and all of us must love one another. This is the universal gospel that Hume accepts as "true religion" from the Jewish prophet who was crucified for the sake of it. It appears to be flatly contradicted by much of our experience (whereas the existence of the Divine Architect is only not supportable by experience). But since sceptical philosophy teaches us that no truly religious (i.e., 'infinite') proposition can be either properly supported, or properly contradicted, by experience, all that matters is that every humane "man of letters" whose mind has been enlightened by the fire of 'careless scepticism' will see that it is what he both does and must believe.

Universal friendship (and indeed the harmony of all life) is a Stoic moral ideal. The moral ideal of humanitas in the Enlightenment (and our own educational concept of 'the humanities') came, through Cicero, from the great founder of the Middle (or 'mitigated') Stoic school, Panaetius.[20] So it is perfectly logical for Hume's Cleanthes to move from his attempt to defend the Hymn to Zeus scientifically

to a more accurate understanding of his finite humanity and of its sceptically-bounded religious vocation. But if we call that vocation 'Christianity' (which is a just tribute to its first great mouthpiece in our literary record), then the rector of Steventon's daughter can come into the fold (bringing with her for her private comfort the Thirty-Nine Articles, and all three of the Creeds that they authorize, since she will never let any of that theological baggage lead her into acting against the gospel of universal friendship and toleration); Pascal can come in (with his 'wager' which we can now recognize as an anticipation of Hume's sceptical religion); Voltaire and the Deists can come in; and finally D'Holbach and Helvétius with their overt materialism and their explicit 'religion of humanity' can come in also. The 'Christianity' appropriate to Pamphilus really is the religion of every enlightened "man of letters."[21]

Here we must pause, however. For like Cleanthes in the Dialogues, the enlightened 'humanists' want to liquidate the infinity of God altogether, in favour of a new form of 'anthropomorphism.' They are thus the rational heretics of the Pamphilian natural religion; for Hume's 'Christianity' is not Feuerbach's 'essence of Christianity.' Careless scepticism teaches us that all rationalizations of religion are theoretically vicious. The theoretical recognition of God's transcendence is the ever-present reminder of our empirical limitations and consequent ignorance. This has the practical implication that we must be tolerant of disagreement about God's nature; and that, in turn, is the great bulwark of the intellectual freedom which makes it possible for our science to progress. The progress of science leads

in turn to the evolution of our natural religious beliefs; and so the circle closes upon itself. (For instance, as soon as the 'argument from design' leaves its Newtonian moorings in favour of its classical organic foundations -- which is just when Philo becomes "embarrassed and confounded" -- the pagan spectre of a permanently embodied God can be used to terrify Cleanthes. But, for us, in the natural world which our Baconian technology visibly threatens to make uninhabitable, Blake's dictum that "everything that lives is holy" is a religious insight once again, just as it was in the Hymn of Zeus. This is an object-lesson to teach us that a dogmatic, pseudo-scientific 'atheism' is just as humanly dangerous as any other mode of religious dogmatism).

It may seem that I have gone far beyond what Hume's text authorizes in ascribing this natural 'Christianity' to him, with nothing more to go on than one puzzling sentence and the name of the person to whom it is addressed. But the Dialogues do end with a riddle which we are invited to solve as best we can. I have tried to read the riddle, using only the Dialogues themselves, and my general knowledge of the cultured audience for which they were intended.[22] I am not myself a reader of Hume's History for example; and the Second Enquiry, the Essays, the third book of the Treatise, are all misty in my memory. But like Philo I will conclude by counselling any Pamphilus among my readers to go to these sources (and especially the History) to see whether I am right. If I am on the wrong track, then Hume is indeed the 'sceptic and atheist' he was quite generally taken to be in his own time, and has been widely touted as ever since (the only difference being that many of his later readers were in full

sympathy with the author that they pictured). I take this image of Hume to be quite mistaken, and gravely unjust. He was, I think, more 'naturally religious' than Voltaire, quite near to Pascal, and far closer to Miss Jane Austen than she could ever have managed to grasp, if she had been lucky enough to own his little book.

* * * • •

By way of epilogue, I will offer an extremely speculative hypothesis about Hermippus, the mysterious friend to whom Pamphilus' report of the Dialogues is addressed. The name is a combination of 'Hermes' with the common noun, hippos, a horse. Hermes was the messenger of Zeus, and the conductor of the souls of the dead to the Underworld. He was also, more primitively, a fertility god of archaic times whose rough-hewn statue stood, with erect phallus, at every major street corner in Athens.[23] My hypothesis is that the name Herm is a distorted form of the name Hume; and that 'Herm's horse' is that very tricky creature, the book itself -- a veritable Trojan horse, deceitfully foisted upon the citadel of orthodoxy by the conscious philosophical Ulysses of our intellectual tradition.

The distortion of the name Hume was inevitable if it was to Hellenized. But the distortion is also symbolically appropriate because Hume is the author of this book about the ambiguous shapes and names of the Author of Nature. The ambiguities created by Hume's identifying himself with Hermes are indefinitely multipliable in the same way. For instance, 'the Hermetic books' (ascribed to Thrice Greatest Hermes himself) are perhaps the most famous repository of occult wisdom and magic; and Swift had

already used the moral reputation of the horse (as recorded in the medieval bestiaries) as the foundation for one of the great myths of Hume's 'Pamphilian Christianity.' So 'Hume's horse' may in fact be a Houyhnhnm.

The only evidence to support this cloud-castle of mine is the curious fact that Pamphilus says that Hermippus has already "opposed the accurate philosophical turn of Cleanthes to the careless scepticism of Philo, or compared either of their dispositions with the rigid inflexible orthodoxy of Demea" (D 128). Hume makes it apparent that Hermippus already has a deeper insight (on the basis of their previous conversation) than the written report of the Dialogues will give him.[24] Apparently Pamphilus is only writing to confirm what his friend has already prophesied to him. This is odd and puzzling; but to infer from it that Hermippus is the author himself under a mask, is almost as irregular as the supposed 'argument from design' itself. Hume, if I am right, has related himself to his book in the way that Cleanthes relates God to the world. Cleanthes may be right or he may not; and so may I. But if my analogy between 'Hume' and 'Hermes' is indeed 'very remote,' it must still be conceded that -- unlike the argument of Cleanthes -- it is not without a properly religious (or practical, action-guiding) import!

H.S. Harris
Glendon College
York University, Toronto

1. Contrast the opening sentence of Stanley Tweyman's Scepticism and Belief in Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1986): "Of all Hume's philosophical writings, the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion is perhaps the most difficult to read." I agree with his view that the argument is harder to grasp than that of the Treatise. But only a philosophical student already acquainted with those other works could find the Dialogues 'difficult to read.' Such a one has too many dogmatic expectations about how philosophical arguments should be framed and presented.

2. Jane Austen completed her "History of England" when she was barely sixteen (see Volume the Second, ed. B.C. Southam, Oxford, Clarendon, 1963, pp. 128-64). But that little work itself makes it plain that she was not then actually interested either in religious faith, or in history, in any philosophical sense. Thus, she admits to a strong prejudice in favour of the Catholics, and treats the persecution of Protestants under Mary as a subject for her humour. But this prejudice, which appears remarkable in the daughter of a Rector of the Established Church, is only a reflection of her adolescent admiration and sympathy for her beautiful Catholic cousin, the French emigrée, Eliza de Feuillide.

   Thus the precocious Jane was not a likely reader of Hume's Dialogues at sixteen. But it is clear, all the same, that at any age she would have preferred the Dialogues to the volume of Fordyce's Sermons with which she allows Mr. Collins to bore his Bennet cousins (in Pride and Prejudice, I, chapter XIV). For she would have recognized that Hume had no pompous contempt for the readers of novels; and she would certainly have applauded his effort to write about the most serious subjects in an entertaining way.

3. Scepticism and Belief in Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1986).

4. Being a Rector's daughter, she might very probably have rated the claims of Demea above those of Philo at fifteen; I must leave those of her many admirers who are also Hume readers to decide whether at thirty-five she would in fact

have agreed with my Pamphilus after they have read my defence of his verdict.

5. The further possibility that Hume was following his great classical models, Plato and Cicero, and that as a good sceptic he intended to leave the discussion without any definite conclusion, should never be altogether forgotten. We must admit that it is difficult to reconcile this hypothesis with the way the main conversation is framed by an epistolary exchange between members of the next generation who express their own views quite dogmatically. But I shall argue in the end that this dogmatic frame itself indicates the need for a further progression of the argument.

Of course, the frame does point to the fact that the 'accurate philosophical turn' of Cleanthes must be repeated in every new generation. But in that aspect the main conversation contains one complete cycle from which a definite conclusion can be inferred. On my 'progressive' view of the argument the Dialogues are just one phase in an endless conversation of the Platonic type; and the permanently essential mediating function of Philo -- the 'mitigated' sceptic who uses Pyrrhonian doubts to 'turn' the rationalist away from his theologizing, and back towards "true religion" -- is a Ciceronian heritage, as Philo's very name is meant to tell us.

6. Her comments on religion in the "History" are very light-minded. In maturity she was more decorous, but she could always see the funny side of things. Thus, although she places the British Navy only about one rung below her religion as a "serious subject," she is quite prepared to let us smile at Mrs. Musgrove's tears for her scapegrace son Dick (in Persuasion, chapter VIII); and I think this is partly because Mrs. Musgrove is deceiving herself in a conventional way about what she ought to feel for her son at sea. So if, like me, Jane Austen recognized Demea as a whited sepulchre she might be ready to smile (as Hume surely intends us to smile at this point).

7. Actually (as James Dye has pointed out in an unpublished paper, "Superhuman Speech and Biological Books," read at the Edinburgh Hume Conference, August 1986), the divine Articulate Voice of Cleanthes is a more difficult concept

than the Cheshire Cat who continues talking after he has faded away. But if we start from the Cheshire Cat we can soon see that the difficulties are not as serious as Dye supposes. Once the Cheshire Cat has ceased to be visible, there is no reason why his voice should not come from anywhere, or from everywhere at once; and the Cheshire Cat can speak in many tongues, just as Alice can be translated into many languages without ceasing to be Lewis Carroll's. The problem of whether the voice is really 'in the clouds' or 'in my head' will arise only for native speakers of different tongues who hear it when they are together (and what they decide about that will depend upon the interpretation of the solidly empirical phenomenon of 'hearing voices' that is generally accepted in their culture(s)). That it is one 'voice' -- whether outer or inner -- is determined by the identity of what it says. Except in certain musical uses, the "articulate voice" is not a sound-making but a sense-making instrument. That is precisely what Cleanthes' analogy derives its force from.

8. If it is a joke, it must be the most elaborate one in the history of literature; and Hume must be the most straight-faced and self-contained comedian in the history of the world. For in his letter to Gilbert Elliot (of March 10, 1751) he reinforces and underwrites the opinion of Pamphilus saying that "the Instances I have chosen ... are ... tolerably happy, & the Confusion in which I represent the Sceptic seems natural;" and we have no record that he ever said or wrote to anyone that he was joking (The Letters of David Hume, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), Vol. I, p. 155). The joke is in fact on those who cannot grasp the 'happiness' of the instances and the consequent 'naturalness' of the confusion. Jane Austen, who knew how the religious mind works, was not one of these.

9. James Dye has caught this reference; and, although I can hardly believe this, he seems to be the first to have suggested publicly that it is somehow important. But Hume's well-known attitude toward miracles (I suppose) sends Dye off on quite the wrong track. I am sure that Kemp Smith (who must surely have been properly drilled in the reading of the Scriptures as a boy) caught the echo too. So the same psych-

ology of miracle-rejection probably operated upon him also.

10. As You Like It, Act II, Scene 1, lines 16-17. The speaker is Rosalind's father, the exiled Duke -- another apt exemplar of the 'contemplative' mind.

11. Pride and Prejudice, II, chapter IV. (Even in Elizabeth this was only a momentary excess -- an exaggeration of romantic enthusiasm caused partly by the blighting of an incipient love affair).

12. Mansfield Park, I, chapter VI. In the "Biographical Notice" published with Northanger Abbey (1818), Henry Austen wrote: "Her favourite moral writers were Johnson in prose, and Cowper in verse."

13. Berkeley, Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher, London, 1731.

14. I use 'careless' here in the only sense in which Pamphilus can be taken to apply it to Philo. In the mouth of Pamphilus it means simply that Philo goes where his sceptical arguments take him recklessly, without any care for the beliefs that must be sacrificed. It is also possible that Hume (or Philo himself) would say that he seems to be 'careless' only because he knows that no care is needed. Nature can take care of herself, and the 'natural' beliefs will reassert themselves as soon as the Sceptic stops arguing. This is something that Hume makes Cleanthes thrust under our nose from the first. But the famous passage from the Treatise to which Tweyman refers (in which 'carelessness and inattention' are offered as the only cure for Pyrrhonian doubt) is not good evidence for this interpretation. 'Carelessness' is there opposed to 'scepticism,' not combined with it. Even Hegel was too much a child of the Enlightenment, I think, to use 'careless scepticism' to mean 'scepticism that sublates itself in carelessness.' Only in such post-Hegelian lovers of paradox as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are semantic surprises of that kind to be anticipated. A 'careless sceptic' is a Pyrrhonian; and (as I have learned from Tweyman himself) a Pyrrhonian is what Philo is when he is teaching philosophical carefulness to those who are not as sceptical as they should be. (The 'carelessness' of the Treatise has no more

to do with philosophy, whether 'sceptical' or 'dogmatic,' than backgammon does.

15. David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), p. 143. All page references to the Dialogues are to the Kemp-Smith edition and will be cited as 'D' followed by the relevant page number(s).

16. The qualification "irregular" comes initially from the mouth of Hume's Cleanthes (D 155).

17. That D'Holbach is in Hume's mind is powerfully suggested by the glancing reference to "priest-craft" (Part I, last paragraph, D 140). Why materialism is in fact dangerous to Hume's "true religion" is discussed further below.

18. Letter to Gilbert Elliott, 10 March 1751; Letters, I, 155.

19. In Cicero the name Pamphilus occurs as that of a Platonist whom Epicurus acknowledged he had 'heard' as a youth in Samos (De Natura Deorum, I, 73). This seems hardly likely to have influenced Hume's choice!

20. It must have delighted Hume that Pan-aitios means All-Cause! (His ethical philosophy forms the main substance of Cicero's De Officiis).

21. If Jane Austen took Article XVIII (which says that the name of Christ is the only gateway to salvation) seriously in her conduct toward the unbaptized, she would not in fact be a 'Christian' in the sense I ascribe to Hume; and those whose piety involves the acceptance of a church authority (those who practise, or willingly subject themselves to, "priestcraft") are self-excluded from the 'republic of letters.' In this respect Demea is an interesting borderline case. His name comes from demos, and hence it indicates his commitment to the popular tradition in some sense. But he is a very learned divine (not a representative of 'the vulgar'); and Part IX shows him to be a highly intelligent one. His conduct in withdrawing at the end of Part XI also shows him to be something of a bigot, however. There is no doubt that he would affirm Article XVIII -- and all the others -- quite fervently. But his participation up to the critical point of his departure shows that he

typifies that limit of the world of letters, where the shadow of social censorship looms -- the shadow of the criminal prosecution which Hume deliberately risked, but was still anxious to avoid.

22. It was only after I had written out what I take to be the implicit concept of 'Pamphilian Christianity' that I realized that Hume could have found it stated explicitly, and at some length, in the "Confession of a Savoyard Vicar" in Rousseau's Emile. Whether this will be as persuasive to others as it seems to me I cannot forecast.

23. In order to know of this more primitive persona of Hermes, Hume had only to be a reader of Thucydides (as I am sure he was). The other data -- and many more, such as the fact that Hermes was from infancy onwards both a clever trickster and an inveterate thief -- would be familiar to every "man of letters" in his time.

24. Tweyman (23-4) has explicated the deep insight of Hermippus very well. It is only if Pamphilus can be assumed to share his friend's understanding of the 'accurate philosophical turn' which Philo produces in Cleanthes that we are justified in accepting his final verdict as Hume's real belief; and the fact that this concluding verdict is directly modelled on Cicero's final sentence in The Nature of the Gods strongly suggests that Hume does mean the verdict of Pamphilus to be taken as the author's conclusion. Cicero, like Hume, was a professed adherent of 'mitigated scepticism.' But he takes advantage of the fiction that he is only a junior listener to the conversation of his elders, in order not to side with Cotta (the official proponent of the Sceptical view) at the end of the conversation. He comes down on the side of the Stoic, Balbus. His verdict is stated thus: "This then was the end of our discussion and we went our ways, Velleius [the Epicurean 'atheist'] thinking that Cotta had the best of the argument, while to me it seemed that the reasoning of Balbus brought us nearer to an image of the truth." Hume uses the fiction of previous discussion with the older and wiser Hermippus in order to give the final verdict of his youthful and fictional author, the same weight which Cicero's own verdict must naturally possess (in spite of the fiction of his 'youth').