



Butler and Hume

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BUTLER AND HUME*

There is not much direct evidence of connections between Hume's thought and that of Joseph Butler. We do know that Hume wanted to interest Butler in the Treatise of Human Nature at the time of its first publication, and took out material about miracles in order to assist in this.¹ Although this attempt came to nothing, we also know that in 1742 Butler was recommending Hume's Essays Moral and Political "everywhere."² There is no reason to doubt that Hume's wish to gain Butler's approbation was based in part on genuine respect; and he includes Butler's name in the Introduction to the Treatise when listing those students of human nature whose work has preceded his own.³ The late Professor Mossner argued that Cleanthes in the Dialogues is intended to represent Butler,⁴ and it would certainly be unreasonable to doubt that Butler was much in his mind as that work was composed over the years. In this paper, I have no startling discoveries to offer about connections between them, and any argument based on texts has to contend with the fact that Hume is master of non-citation. But if one assumes that Hume thought it important to include answers to Butler in his own theories, even as a secondary objective, one can, I think, see a little more deeply into the thought of both philosophers. I shall try to do this by making some comparisons between their ethical views, and then by pursuing some suggestions these comparisons generate about the way Hume tries to respond to Butler in the realm of natural theology.

To begin, some dates are in order. Butler's Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel was first published in 1726, and went into a second

edition in 1729. It will almost certainly have been the source of Hume's reference to Butler in the Introduction to the Treatise. Butler's Analogy of Religion appeared in 1736, and went into a second edition in the same year. Hume returned to England from France in 1737, and published the first two Books of the Treatise in 1739. Book III appeared in 1740. While it is possible that the excisions from the Treatise were due to an actual study of the Analogy (where there is considerable discussion of miracles), Butler's ecclesiastical status would have been enough reason for Hume to suppose his own reflections (at least as we know them now) to be unattractive to him. On the other hand, Hume would certainly have been able to absorb the Analogy by the time the first Enquiry appeared in 1748. In addition to this, by the time the ethical portions of the Treatise came out in 1740, Hume would have read the Dissertation "Of the Nature of Virtue," which was an appendix to the Analogy, as well as the Rolls Sermons, and would therefore have had all Butler's ethical teachings before him.

Hume is the greatest and most systematic philosopher to have written in English, and because he is systematic in a way that Butler was not, he responds to a wide range of influences of which many are only now coming to be recognised. But there are two reasons for thinking it worthwhile to examine, and to speculate about, the effects Butler's work may have had on him. The first is that in English at least, Hume is our best, and Butler is our second best, philosopher of religion. The other is that in English, Butler is our best, and Hume is our second best, moral philosopher.

I

Most of us are inclined to contrast Hume and Butler in moral theory, not to assimilate them. According to the received wisdom, Butler teaches that doing one's duty is natural, whereas Hume says it is primarily artificial. Butler emphasises the supremacy of conscience in human nature, whereas Hume's account of obligation seems to make the motive of duty derivative and secondary. Butler's ethics seems to be primarily an ethic of actions, whereas Hume's is a theory of the virtues. In general, C.D. Broad and others have won us over to the opinion that Butler is the plain man's Immanuel Kant; Hume is emerging as the eighteenth-century Rawls.

There indeed are fundamental differences in their orientation as moralists, but most of the above contrasts will not do at all. Butler is one of the five thinkers named by Hume in the Introduction to the Treatise as having "begun to put the science of man on a new footing" and extend "the application of experimental philosophy to moral subjects." There are many ways, in fact, in which his moral theories do not merely stand in the tradition that includes Butler, but parallel Butler's in their details. I shall confine myself to their views on conscience and obligation, and their opinions on benevolence and its relation to justice.

Butler does indeed hold, as the central doctrine of his ethics, that conscience has supreme authority in human nature. So when we act in violation of what conscience dictates, our actions are contrary to our natures. This can happen because we allow a passion or affection, or another principle like self-love, to determine our choices when conscience should override it by natural right. Not

only does Butler say this, but he also emphasises what we may call the intrusiveness of conscience -- he says that it is a principle which, "without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself."⁵ Whatever our prior inclinations, or even prior judgments, if we are about to do something it is against, conscience functions in our natures by inserting its claim to superiority, unmasked. Taken alone, this encourages a picture of Butler as holding that virtue consists in acting from what Kant called the good will -- that is, acting only for the sake of duty, or from conscientiousness. It is very obvious indeed that this is not Hume's view of virtue. He does, it is true, recognise that we act from time to time from a sense of duty alone, but sees this as a fact requiring special explanation. The special explanation, in brief, has two parts to it. The lesser part (lesser, that is, in terms of the space Hume gives to it) consists in an account of how the sense of duty arises: we get this account in Section I of Part II of Book III of the Treatise. Hume offers it in response to an imagined objection to his claim that "no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it distinct from the sense of its morality" (T 479). He says that someone who "feels his heart devoid" of a motive that he and we approve of, will disapprove of its absence in himself -- he will, as he puts it, "hate himself upon that account." he will then do the appropriate action without the motive, "from a certain sense of duty, in order to acquire, by practice, that virtuous principle, or at least to disguise to himself, as much as possible, his want of it" (T 479). So conscientiousness is an interim substitute, even a conscious substitute, for the natural motive that most people have for certain

approved actions, like the care of children, but which the self-disapproving agent does not have, and wishes to cultivate. The phrasing leaves Hume's exact intentions unclear, but he is certainly attempting to treat as special exceptions to natural behaviour, actions which Butler would offer as paradigms of our true nature asserting itself.

This is the lesser part of Hume's account of conscientiousness. The larger part of his theory is developed in relation to those occasions when we do things from duty, but there is no motive normally present in our natures for which it is a substitute. These are actions done from respect for justice. Hume makes much of the fact that such actions often run counter to our natural motives; although he follows Butler in rejecting psychological egoism, he insists that the benevolence we find in human nature is too partial, or 'interested,' to motivate the actions that justice requires. He denies that impartial benevolence is naturally available to us. So the sense of duty we undoubtedly have towards the requirements of justice has to be explained through human artifice. The institutions to which we adhere in just behavior are said by Hume to arise from interest, not from duty or benevolence. The moral status which they acquire, and which finds expression in our sense of obligation towards their observance and preservation, comes about through direct or sympathetic participation in the displeasingness of violations of them, which generates disapproval. Our sense of obligation to just action, even when it is against our perceived interests, is a psychological consequence of our disapproval of the unpleasant consequences of unjust actions. This account neatly catches the unlovableness of justice, and also the

sense of intrusiveness that goes with the recognition of an unwelcome obligation.

I cannot think it doubtful that Butler was one of those Hume had in mind in his theory of justice; and it is certainly true that his account of conscientious action makes it something largely artificial, rather than natural, in its origin. But let us look at some details.

II

What does Butler's doctrine of the supremacy of conscience in human nature amount to? In the first place, the notion of conscience that he uses is rather wider than the common sense notion of the independent voice that interrupts us when we are about to transgress. Butler's conscience does that, but also has wider functions. If we combine what he says in the Sermons with what he says about conscience in the "Dissertation on Virtue," conscience becomes our general faculty of moral reflection, and makes judgments about both actions and characters, our own and other people's; its judgments are said to express approval and disapproval. So Butler's official and considered view is that conscience is our power of moral judgment, though he often relapses into the common sense usage according to which it is our power of making judgments about our own actions exclusively. By contrast, Hume insists that approval and disapproval are directed not to actions, but to characters, both our own and others', but he is not (in my view) any more carefully observant of his official view than Butler is of his, using forms of words frequently which suggest we approve and disapprove of individual acts. The most common terms

that Hume offers as the expression of moral approval and disapproval are the terms 'virtuous' and 'vicious,' as we would expect; but these are also offered by Butler, along with the more natural 'right' and 'wrong.'⁶ This parallel inconstancy about the objects of approval and disapproval is matched by something else that Butler's readers overlook: that he has the same view as Hume about the desirability of non-moral motives for those actions of which conscience approves. He does not hold the Kantian view that conscientiousness is the motive which uniquely guarantees moral goodness. His view is that conscience normally functions by approving or disapproving the performance of actions which are for the most part already prompted by other motives, such as desires or fears; but that, on those occasions when conscience vetoes actions that other principles or affections incline us to do, or indicates the rightness of actions which those other principles incline us to avoid, it both can, and in the proper course of nature will, supply an independent motive of its own that overrides these principles and inclinations. That does not mean that he judges it to be best that we do the right thing from conscience alone without other inclinations. It does not even clearly mean that it is better to do the right thing from conscience alone than from desire alone. He clearly maintains that it is best to have both motives -- something Hume's view suggests is impossible. Butler identifies virtue with doing what conscience dictates, but this is not the same as identifying virtue with conscientiousness.⁷

What Butler does not do, of course, is suggest that the occurrence of actions done from duty alone is a puzzle that needs explanation: to urge that such behaviour is natural is to insist that

there is nothing puzzling about it, and that any puzzles philosophers may feel about such actions are theoretical obfuscations of what we all know perfectly well. No doubt he would have thought Hume's reason for puzzlement to be obfuscatory in this way. Hume's reason, it will be recalled, is that since moral approval and disapproval are passions that follow on our discernment of the character behind actions, they presuppose non-moral motives already to be present, so actions that seem to have morality alone as their motives are anomalous. With his usual concern to confine himself wholly to the practical, Butler sidesteps the question of whether conscience is a matter of reason or sentiment, but there can be no doubt that he believed it at least to include the former, and that its approval and disapproval of actions is due to an independent discernment of their being right or wrong; he insists, indeed, that it discerns them to be right or wrong in themselves, without regard to their consequences.⁸

This even leads him to emphasise that conscience must win out over benevolence. Here he says things that once again have unexpected resemblances to Hume's views. Hume agrees with Butler that we are not wholly selfish (T 486-7),⁹ and that we are often benevolent. But he insists that our benevolence is always interested -- directed, that is, towards our families or friends or fellow-citizens. He rejects the belief in the love of mankind in general:

In general, it may be affirm'd, that there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself (T 481).

I incline to think his doctrine of extensive sympathy compromises this rejection, but he never formally retracts it. This puts him at odds with Butler, who believed that his defence of benevolence served to establish not only that we have impulses that are good for others, but also that we have a general wish for the good of mankind. Butler calls it the love of one's neighbour. His account of it makes it more like what Hume says about extensive sympathy: for Butler, the limited scope of human emotions means that the love of mankind must express itself in a wish to benefit those with whom we have to do -- our neighbours. This gives benevolence what he calls a "less general and nearer object" than mankind as a whole.¹⁰ But he retains the core concept of a benevolence that is impartial, which Hume insists actual benevolence never is. Butler thinks that we do, sometimes, show benevolence towards people with whom we have to do, just because they are people, not because of some other relationship that binds us to them.

But whichever of them is right about this, they still agree that we need conscientious action because of the shortcomings of benevolence. Hume holds that because benevolence is partial, and therefore confined, a different motive is needed to make us act in the impartial way that justice requires. He says this special motive to justice would not be necessary if impartial benevolence were universal. It is strange and striking to see that Butler denies this, with passion, in the famous concluding section of the Dissertation. Here he insists that we need conscience because no mistake could be more terrible than to suppose that virtue could consist in unrestrained benevolence. His reason is that we do not know enough to tell the

consequences of our actions, even our wholly benevolent actions.

Hume says we need the sense of duty because the acts that a sense of duty dictates are the acts impartial benevolence would dictate, if we ever felt it. Dutifulness is a substitute for benevolence where the confinedness of the latter prevents it from operating. Butler does not think benevolence is always confined in this manner, but firmly rejects the suggestion that conscience is a mere substitute for it. What conscience provides is the identification of those right acts which benevolence itself is not able to determine with assurance, even when we seek the good of others.

So far, then, there are more similarities than traditional readings might lead us to expect, between what Butler and Hume say about conscientiousness and its relation to other motives, and about the limits of benevolence, even though the wider claims of their respective ethical teachings are very different. It is tempting to say that the detailed likenesses are due to a shared power of moral observation, and the differences are due to the fact that Butler was a Christian thinker and Hume was not. While this is obviously true, it is worth a deeper exploration.

III

I return first to the fact that Hume denies the reality of impartial benevolence and Butler asserts it, and to the fact that Hume's account of duty derives it from interest and Butler's does not. In spite of these things, it is Butler who is commonly criticised for his steady concern to prove that following conscience is to the agent's own

advantage -- that conscience and self-love point the same way.

There are two reasons for this. The first is that Butler is entirely a practical thinker. His aim in moral philosophy is to encourage the practice of virtue. He attacks psychological egoism because he sees it as a theory which has gained fashionable currency among his audience, and has thereby persuaded some of them not to practise the virtue which they know very well they should practise. As a Christian priest, he sees this self-deceiving confusion as a great spiritual danger, and wants to argue them out of it. But, for the same reason, he is quite willing to reinforce the supremacy of conscience by appealing, at the same time, to the very self-interest he has just shown not to be the only possible motive. He is not naive enough to think that by refuting a trendy excuse for not following the promptings of conscience and benevolence, he has necessarily strengthened them; and he believes that by doing what virtue would make us do, even for another reason, we are going some distance towards acquiring it. So he has no reason to refrain from arguing that doing our duty is to our advantage.

But his doing this has left his readers uncomfortable, because he seems so resolute about it. If following conscience is so natural, would showing its coincidence with self-love be as important to him as this? This brings us to his second, and deeper, reason for pressing this point: as a Christian theologian, anxious not only to persuade the readers of the ethical sermons to practise virtue, but to persuade the readers of the Analogy of Religion to practise the Christian religion, he believes that the justice and benevolence of God would not permit

virtue to be against the interests of those who practise it. This is both the explanation of his apparent appeal to the advantageousness of benevolence and conscience, and the explanation of his anxiety to deny the adequacy of benevolence alone as a guide in the moral life. Benevolence and conscience must be ultimately advantageous, because the goodness of God's purposes must ensure this, even if we cannot see how; but the fact that our knowledge of God's purposes is limited is the reason it is right to follow the law he has laid down in our conscience, even when it might appear better for mankind in general for us to do something else. The same Christian theology that leads him to hold that impartial benevolence is a possible motive, leads him to warn us of the risks of using it as the sole criterion of right choice. Butler's account of human nature is theological. I need hardly say that Hume's account is not.

IV

Hume likens his philosophical enquiries to those of a group of philosophers that includes Butler. Both he and Butler contrast their ethical enquiries with the a priori moral theorising into the eternal fitness of things that was propounded by Samuel Clarke. But the latter contrast is quite different in the two cases. Hume attacks Clarke's moral philosophy as an empty form of metaphysics that can do nothing to explain or justify moral choice. Butler does not only refrain from attacking it when he distinguishes his own exercises in moral psychology from it; he says that these two ways of treating the subject of morals "exceedingly strengthen and enforce each other."¹¹ In other

words, he approves of Clarke's supposed demonstrations that "vice is contrary to the nature and reason of things," and is merely seeking a complementary method of combating vice by showing it violates human nature. If we needed confirmation of this, we could find it in an important methodological passage near the close of the Analogy, where he emphasises that he has omitted a thing of the utmost importance in which he believes, namely "the moral fitness and unfitness of actions, prior to all will whatever" -- something which Clarke makes central, but Hume scornfully rejects.¹² So when he offers an account of the place of conscience, benevolence, and self-love in human nature the conception of human nature with which he is working reflects the theistic metaphysic that he shares with Clarke, as well as containing the empirical elements that enabled Hume to claim philosophical kinship with him.

Butler always argues from positions that he shares with his audience, or from positions he thinks they hold, even if he does not. In the moral sermons, he assumes a common knowledge of what conscience commands, and goes on from there to argue with his audience that they have no good reason to suppose that the blandishments of temptation, or the cynical muddles of psychological egoism, can supply overriding grounds to neglect these commands. In the course of his arguments, he assumes a view of human nature that he considers his audience to share with him. It is easier to see this in the Analogy than in the Sermons, but the same view of our nature is present in both. It is a view that he holds in common with the Deists who were his primary opponents in the later work. It is a teleological view. He does not appeal, in either work, to explicitly Christian doctrines. He does, however, take it for

granted that his audience would share with him the conviction that our natures are created by God, and that, although we may not know as much as we would like about the functions of the various principles within them, we can assume that they are there for a purpose. As free agents, we can act against that purpose, but it will exist, and the nature that we have will, accordingly, be attuned to it, so that such action will not be natural. It will be contrary to our real nature, that is, to the purposes for which we have the endowments we have, rather than to the purposes we may choose to follow instead. Our real nature is a nature we actually have, even if we often violate it: Broad is not quite right to say Butler is talking of ideal human nature.¹³ But he is not just giving an empirical description of the elements we find in ourselves either. He is giving a teleological description of them. This description enables him to say that if conscience makes us uneasy about following an inclination on some occasion, when it does not make us uneasy about following that same inclination at other times, this fact has a purpose -- that is, it is somehow for our good, however strong the competition might be. It is this teleological metaphysic that makes him worry about the dictates of conscience being in our interest when they may not appear to be. It is not that conscience has to be subordinated to self-love, which he denies: it is that when conscience wins out over self-love (or, for that matter, benevolence) it must be better for us, because the authoritativeness we can discern in the functioning of conscience, has to be there for a purpose. It follows from all this, of course, that self-love can make mistakes, and that benevolence can too. (Perhaps even conscience can make some, but it cannot make many.) For all this to come out right,

God must see to it that it ultimately does. In such circumstances we can expect to be able to see quite frequently that duty is advantageous, but not to see it every time. Butler is, as Schneewind has said, the classical exponent of the "Divine Corporation" view of ethics: that each of us ultimately benefits from the prosperity of the moral community, whose Manager alone sees the purpose of each order.¹⁴

Lacking any belief in the Divine Corporation, Hume has to give a quite different account of how duty has apparent authority over us, when it seems to conflict with self-interest and benevolence. It cannot be one in which it is the supreme moral motive, and it has to be one in which it serves to reinforce the practices put in place by other motives. His account is primarily an empirical description of how it comes to have the place in our conduct that it does, and it takes the form, as it must, of showing how the approval and disapproval we exhibit attach themselves to those characteristics which we find to have useful or agreeable consequences. It must take this form, because Hume discerns no creator's purposes in the nature he describes. The result is a much more detailed moral psychology than Butler's. It is also a moral psychology which I find more difficult to view as a plausible justification of moral choices, as distinct from an explanation of the fact that we attach approval to them. I shall return to this, briefly, in conclusion. It is not only Butler's teleology Hume is trying to avoid, but it will certainly have been one of his objectives to provide an alternative to it.

V

All this would seem to add weight to the common view that Hume has Butler in his sights in his philosophy of religion. Butler has even been identified by no less a scholar than Mossner, as the prototype of Cleanthes in the Dialogues. This view has been questioned -- by Nelson Pike, and in detail by Anders Jeffner.¹⁵ The rather complicated relationship between the ethics of the two thinkers suggests that the relationship will be complex in this case also.

I think a straightforward identification, of the sort suggested by Mossner, is impossible. If we look at Butler's position in The Analogy of Religion, the first thing that strikes one, because it is one of the first things Butler says, is that he is going to assume the existence of God to be common ground between himself and the Deists with whom he is debating.¹⁶ He makes it clear that he regards God's existence as having been proved both by a priori arguments and a posteriori arguments -- that is, both by the sort of Design argument Hume puts into the mouth of Cleanthes, and by the kind of Cosmological argument used by Samuel Clarke. Mossner identifies Clarke with Demea, who reproduces this argument in Part IX of the Dialogues.¹⁷

Here, then, are two major differences: unlike Cleanthes, Butler does not use any argument to prove God's existence, since he assumes it beforehand, and unlike Cleanthes, he accepts the cogency of arguments of both kinds, as he had accepted abstract arguments in favour of moral virtue as well as empirical ones, while only using the latter himself.

These differences are the result of the purpose of the Analogy. Butler wants, in that work,

to take the natural theology he shares with the Deists and then to show that there is no good reason for anyone who concedes this much to reject the special claims of the Christian Church which the Deists rejected. His argument proceeds by analogy: an analogy between certain observed features of the natural world we see around us, and the divine creation as a whole -- that is, this world and the Next taken together. I shall call this religious analogy, though Butler does not call it this, in order to distinguish it from the other sort of analogical argument to which he assimilates it, which is what we now call induction. In proceeding this way, Butler is doing what he always does, namely arguing with his target audience where they are. They think they have proved God's existence, but they also think that the God whose existence they have proved cannot be the self-revealing interventionist deity of the Christian tradition. Butler wants to refute this negative inference.

The analogical argument he uses to refute it leans heavily on what he and the Deists share in common, namely the supposed fact that the world is created by a rational and purposive Mind. From this common premiss, Butler is able to argue, with effectiveness, that the whole creation, seen and unseen, is quite likely to be a system, and that we will be able to discern some of the laws and character of that system, though only in a fragmentary way. Our ignorance of many of the details is enough to undermine the Deists' confidence in claiming what God would not do, yet our limited powers of discernment enable us to detect observable signs of the moral intent of what God has done, and to see that it might well embrace the specific intentions of which the Christian revelation speaks.

The contextual effectiveness of this analogical argument depends on the common Deistic premiss in two ways. First, only if this world and the next are both the handiwork of one consistent and rational Mind is there any reason to suppose the purposes at work in the one will be integrated with those ascribed to the other. Second, only if the world is the handiwork of such a Mind have we any reason to ascribe purposes to those regularities in it which we find remarkable, such as the (alleged) usefulness of acting virtuously, or the (allegedly) educative value of enduring evil. The argument Butler is engaged in here, like the one he uses for the advantageousness of following conscience, depends on the assumption of a systematic teleology. He makes no secret of this, but reminds his opponents (who are supposed to concede it) that he and they both believe it.

There is a further feature of Butler's argument that is of great importance, both in itself and in relation to Hume. Butler's critics on the theological right often feel he concedes too much to the Deists. They think that in order to refute their attacks on revelation, he ascribes too much power to our natural cognitive faculties. One place where this is noticeable is in his insistence on the continuity between natural and revealed religion, and between natural and revealed morality. In defending the credentials of Christian revelation, Butler maintains stoutly that much of it merely repeats the content of natural religion -- that is, it tells us over again truths about God that human reason can discover for itself, and has. This continuity extends to the ethical sphere. Butler believes, of course, that conscience is implanted in our natures by God. But in implanting it, God has given us natural knowledge of right and wrong. We do not need

revelation to make our daily moral decisions; and Butler has no trace of a Divine Command theory of morality.¹⁸ What revelation does do, however, besides repeating what conscience can tell us without it, is to tell us some further facts about our relation to God, from which our consciences can infer additional moral duties that would otherwise escape us -- namely those of worship, piety, and sacramental participation. But these are duties which we can discern once the theological truths on which they are based are available to us. There is no neo-orthodox nonsense about Christian faith demolishing secular morality: to Butler one is continuous with the other.

I have now said enough to offer some speculations about Butler's relationship to Cleanthes. I assume that in the Dialogues, Hume is, for the most part, to be identified with Philo, and also that Philo undergoes at least the appearance of a change of opinion in Part XII.

I begin with the fact that Butler seems to have accepted both a priori and a posteriori arguments for God's existence, but to have used neither. At the outset of Part II Demea says the forthcoming argument can only be about the nature of God, not his being, and Philo agrees, even mouthing some bits of the Cosmological Proof in support. Cleanthes, ignoring these "circumlocutions," immediately plunges into his opening statement of the Design argument, saying that it proves God's being and his nature at once. When the a priori argument is examined, and brusquely rejected, in Part X, it is Demea who offers it, and Cleanthes who refutes it. What are we to make of all this? Partly, I think, this: Mossner is probably right that one of Demea's roles is to represent Clarke (though it is only fair to say that Clarke was cleverer). Hume is happy to

dismiss Clarke's natural theology with general considerations from his own system about the impossibility of proving matters of fact a priori. What Cleanthes represents will then be Butler, minus the covert appeal to Clarke's a priori arguments for God. For Hume would say that if the apparently empirical appeals to observation that Butler makes against the Deists have no a priori proofs of God behind them, then the same method of observation that we make to discern the signs of the purposes of the God we presuppose have also to serve to prove his very being. This has many consequences, and I cannot explore the details here; but one obvious consequence is that the evils and obscurities which Butler was able to use against the Deists and in favour of Christianity, now have to be confronted before the being of God is admitted, so that Cleanthes emerges as the sort of facile optimist that the historical Butler was not. Even more importantly, religious analogy collapses. As Philo argues immediately Cleanthes concludes his first statement, analogies between phenomena we detect in the world and alleged features of the world as a whole are very shaky ones -- if, that is, the existence of the divine creative mind is not already taken for granted, but has itself to be established by a posteriori methods. If Hume intends to make any comment on Butler in creating the persona of Cleanthes, the comment would be that without the a priori case for God's being that Butler assumed, his a posteriori arguments about God's nature and purposes have to presuppose that His existence is established by natural, non-religious analogy. It is, of course, the burden of the Dialogues as a whole that this cannot be done.

At least, this is the burden of the first eleven Parts of the Dialogues. One returns, as

always, to Part XII. I have long ago decided that I have no settled view about it, but I now offer two suggestions on the limited question of what it shows us about Hume and Butler.

My first suggestion is this. Whether or not Hume follows him in this, Philo in Part XII seems to me to accept what John Gaskin has called attenuated Deism.¹⁹ He seems to accept, that is, that "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence." It is part of the minimal Deism that Philo seems to accept that we have no reason to believe that this cause, or these causes, of order in the universe bear any resemblance to other qualities of the human mind. So no evidence exists to justify ascribing moral qualities to the deity. Hence the end result of the Design argument is that there is probably a God or gods, but we cannot ascribe any qualities to him, or to them, that can connect his nature, or theirs, with our moral choices. This is the position from which Butler starts in the Analogy. Hume's verdict is that if one does not presuppose a priori arguments for God, this is also where one ends. I am not sure whether Hume really wants to concede even this much, but I am sure he wants to concede no more. Here Butler is represented in Cleanthes, and Philo has defeated him.

But the defeat is concealed within all those ambiguous remarks that suggest that Philo has just been playing Sceptical games until now, and is conceding victory to Cleanthes now that Demea is out of the way.²⁰ What are we to make of this? Here I think we have to place Cleanthes in the context of the lengthy and highly coded argument about "true religion." As we all know, Hume thought revealed religion, as he perceived it in the churches around

him, was a negative and not a positive moral force. In particular, it encouraged the "monkish virtues" of piety and mortification, which are useful and agreeable to no one. For all his orthodoxy, no one could cast the historical Joseph Butler, who was as much of an enemy of "enthusiasm," in his own quiet way, as Hume was, in this role of moral spoiler.²¹ But unfortunately, Butler's arguments were designed to defend the very revealed traditions that Hume saw in this way. His solution is to have Cleanthes, who, cruelly, does represent Butler here, offer a notorious account of true religion:

The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience; and as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives. When it distinguishes itself, and acts as a separate principle over men, it has departed from its proper sphere, and has become only a cover to faction and ambition.²²

Hume has taken conscience, our natural principle of moral discernment, and ensured its theological emptiness by destroying the theological bases on which, in Butler's view, its discernment of special religious duties would have to depend. He has made Cleanthes identify true religious morality with secular ethics. Butler is open to this treatment; but it is concealed from him, and from Cleanthes, by their belief in the continuity of natural and revealed religion. Hume leaves it to Philo to rail, in the face of Cleanthes' warnings, against the moral dangers of real (or 'false') religious morality. Put more simply, Hume is prepared to live with minimal Deism, and pay lip-

service to the reality of God, if the moral consequences of so doing are admitted by those who believe in God, to be zero.

So Cleanthes is not a literary reproduction of the historical Bishop Butler. But he represents Hume's judgment of the theological emptiness of rational theism, and Hume's willingness to live with rational theism if it remains morally unproductive in practice.

VI

I conclude with a further speculation. It is that Hume tacitly admits to a motive for welcoming "true religion" rather than merely tolerating it. In his account of its function he says it enforces the motives of morality and justice. 'Enforces' here has to mean 'reinforces,' for Cleanthes' point is that true religion does not add extra duties, but helps us to perform those we learn about without it. If that is right, then true religion will help to do something that Hume's ethics needs; namely, to provide a practical, if not a theoretical, response, to the "sensible knave" of Section IX of the moral Enquiry. The sensible knave is one who understands the sources of justice, but then decides that there are some occasions when he can follow his own interests by violating its requirements. If its conventions owe their very being to our interests, how is he to be answered? Hume concedes that if the knave is determined as well as sensible, he cannot be. The best we can do is to lecture him about the value of universality. But he knows that already. Butler could tell him that if his conscience says the action he proposes is wrong, he knows very well what he should do. Hume's knave has already rejected this

appeal, even if it is a sound one. In this situation, which is far from a mere theoretical fancy, there would be something to be said for "true religion," and therefore something to be said for the Cleanthes of this world who propound it.

For they represent an institution that, in the right hands, reinforces the conventions the sensible knave is preparing to flout. So Hume has a motive, quite near the surface, for leaving true religion alone, even if he does not believe in it himself. I do not suggest that Hume is one of those who think that if God did not exist, everything would be permitted. Most of his ethics is designed to prove just the opposite. But he may very well believe that the price of the death of God would be the birth of more sensible knaves. And how right he is!

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1. See Letter 1., to Henry Home, 1737, in New Letters to David Hume, ed. Klibansky and Mossner, Oxford, 1954, pp. 1-3.
2. See Letter 5., also to Henry Home, 1742; in Klibansky and Mossner, page 10.
3. David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Second Edition, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, page xvii. Further page references will be cited as 'T' followed by the relevant page number(s).

4. E.C. Mossner, "The Enigma of Hume," Mind, vol. 45, 1936, pp. 334-49. In view of Professor Mossner's recent death, I would like to pay tribute not only to his renowned Hume scholarship, but to his indispensable contributions to our understanding of Butler.
5. Joseph Butler, Sermons, ed. J.H. Bernard, Macmillan, 1900, and ed. W.E. Gladstone, Oxford, 1897. This quotation is from Sermon ii, paragraph 8 in Bernard, 10 in Gladstone.
6. See Dissertation II, "Of the Nature of Virtue," appended to The Analogy of Religion, paragraph 1 in Bernard's edition of Butler's works, 2 in Gladstone's.
7. Sermon i, 8/8.
8. Dissertation, paragraphs 2/4, 6/9.
9. See also David Hume, Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, Second Edition, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, pp. 218-219.
10. Sermon xii, 3/2.
11. Sermons, Preface 12/7.
12. Treatise, Book III, Part III, Section I; Analogy II viii 11/24.
13. C.D. Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory, Routledge, 1930, pp. 57-60.
14. J.B. Schneewind, "The Divine Corporation and the History of Ethics," in Philosophy in History, ed. Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner, Cambridge, 1984, pp. 173-192.
15. See Nelson Pike's edition of the Dialogues (Barnes and Noble, 1970) and Anders Jeffner, Butler and Hume on Religion, Diakonistyrelsens Bokforlag, 1966.
16. Analogy, Preface paragraphs 6/8.
17. See Analogy, Preface 8/10, and I vi 3/4.
18. See again Analogy II viii, 11/24; also Terence Penelhum, Butler, Routledge, 1985, pp. 77-78.

19. John Gaskin, Hume's Philosophy of Religion, Macmillan, 1978, pp. 166-68.
20. On all this, see T. Penelhum, "Natural Belief and Religious Belief in Hume's Philosophy," Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 33, 1983, pp. 166-81.
21. The most famous item of evidence is his conversation with Wesley. It is reproduced from Wesley's Journal by Gladstone in Volume II of his edition of Butler, p. 366 ff.
22. David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part XII, ed. N. Kemp Smith, Barnes and Noble, 1980, p. 220.