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THE ROLE OF PART XII IN HUME'S
DIALOGUES CONCERNING NATURAL RELIGION

Anyone appreciative of Hume's greatness as a philosopher will want to suppose that the Dialogues both form¹ a coherent whole and express Hume's own views on natural religion or religion based on reason (as opposed to religion based on revelation). In the last connection, given what we know of Hume's epistemology, life, and correspondence, one would be inclined to suppose that he would reject out of hand the claims of revealed religion and contend that if there existed an acceptable religion it would have to be some form of natural religion. But insofar as natural religion claimed to establish scientifically the existence and nature of God one would envisage Hume dissenting.

Now as long as we restrict our gaze to Parts I-XI of the Dialogues we seem to be able, easily enough, to satisfy all these suppositions. In Part IV, under the name of 'mysticism,' revealed religion is summarily and facetiously dismissed as indistinguishable from atheism.² Demea's apparently permanent departure from the discussion at the conclusion of Part XI as much as says, symbolically, that revealed religion is not a serious contender for one's belief. Its a priori arguments -- the argument from sufficient reason and the ontological argument -- are almost as shortly attacked and dismissed (D 188-192). Also quite in keeping with Hume's philosophical view on knowledge of matters of fact is, on the other hand, the lengthy and detailed examination he bestows on the empiricist argument from design. That Philo, ostensibly his spokesman, is however able to uncover all kinds of logical short-comings in its claims to scientifically

establish the existence and nature of God does not surprise us; it coheres perfectly with our pre-conceived picture of Hume the skeptic, and his system as restricting science to numbers and quantities or, in the term's looser sense, to human nature and its more immediate surroundings. In short, Parts I-XI seem to be all of one Humean whole.

But at first and even second glance Part XII notoriously seems to tear our hopes to find coherence and a plausible representation of Hume to tatters. There are, for one thing, those mocking sentences that seem to paint Hume in the colors of a devout, believing Christian, 'avid' for revelation. Thus, at the end of Part XII, apparently expressing Hume's deepest convictions, Philo says that "a person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity" and immediately afterwards, "To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian" (D 227, 228).

For another thing, in Part XII Hume seems to be completely reversing his refutations in Parts I-XI of the argument from design's claims to establish the existence and nature of God. Thus, where in Part II he had Philo reject the use of causal reasoning in the establishment of a Mind as the first cause of the universe on the relevantly Humean grounds that, to do so, "it were requisite, that we had experience of the origin of worlds" (D 150), in Part XII he has Philo, apparently speaking for himself (Hume), argue that "as there are also considerable differences, we have reason to suppose a proportional difference in the causes; and in particular ought to attribute a much higher degree of power and energy to the supreme cause than any we have ever observed in mankind.

Here then the existence of a DEITY is plainly ascertained by reason" (D 217). Indeed, all forms of the argument of design, purely analogical as well as causal, seem resurrected in Part XII, although they were one and all hanged and buried in Parts I-XI. Moreover, it seems that in Part XII Hume via Philo is saying that science itself leads us "to acknowledge a first intelligent Author" (D 214-215).

Before proceeding to deal with certain other incoherencies with which Part XII seems to confront us let us address ourselves to the two that I have so far abstracted: what I have called the 'mocking sentences' and Hume's apparent reversal of his previous refutations of the argument from design's claims to establish the existence and nature of God. In resolving these two 'incoherencies' we shall begin to make out the nature of the essential role that Part XII plays in the Dialogues.

Take, first of all, Philo's 'mocking' sentence "To be a philosophical skeptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian." In this assertion, made at the very conclusion of Part XII, Philo seems to be expressing Hume's own conviction; that (or we have to suppose that Hume is trying to disingenuously persuade his readers) the skeptical theses of the Dialogues are not so religiously hateful as they might have thought them; and with this assertion smooth the path of the Dialogues' publication and general acceptance. But if the latter were the case Hume would certainly not have had Philo deliver the blistering attack upon the religious spirit and popular religion in the latter pages of Part XII (a matter that we shall subsequently take up). An ounce of sweet mystification does not cure a pound of bitter truth-

speaking. Hume had to know that from past experience and besides, if ever he was in fact concerned to placate his religious opponents, he had long since ceased to be.³

On the other hand, to suppose that Philo is expressing Hume's own conviction seems on the face of it to contradict everything we know of Hume as a man and as a philosopher. Hume attended church regularly, to be sure. To his clerical friends he espoused orthodoxy. But to those with whom he could dare be frank he made it clear that he did so as an "innocent dissimulation," necessitated by prudence; a hypocrisy that he was finding it difficult to continue. This hypocrisy extended even to the worship of a God. Presumably, he engaged in such worship "for the good of the state." I quote from his letter of April 1764 to Colonel Edmonstone:

It is putting too great a respect on the vulgar, and on their superstitions, to pique one's self on sincerity with respect to them. Did ever one make it a point of honour to speak truth to children or madmen? If the thing were worthy of being treated gravely, I should tell him, that the Pythian oracle, with the approbation of Xenophon, advised everyone to worship the gods -- [here the Greek for "for the good of the state"]. I wish it were still in my power to be a hypocrite in this particular. The common duties of society usually require it; and the ecclesiastical profession only adds a little more to an innocent dissimulation, or rather simulation, without which it is impossible to pass through the world. Am I a liar, because I order my servant to say, I am not at home, when I do not desire to see company? (G 439-440)

But if these are Hume's sentiments what could we possibly mean by claiming that he is expressing his

own conviction when he says that "To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian"? Surely we must suppose that this utterance is, after all, only more dissimulation and its tone -- as we originally felt -- one of mere mockery. But then no philosophical reason can be given for its appearing where it does. Its only raison d'être will have to be prudence and we have already noted the shortcomings of that answer. Besides, if the Dialogues are entirely coherent, this identification of Hume's of skepticism with Christianity must have a philosophic reason for being.

En route to a satisfactory answer to the present problem we shall want to disambiguate Hume's seemingly very un-Humean profession that "to be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian" as follows. In referring to a man of letters we are referring to a theorist, not a man of practice. What being a Christian essentially comes to, in one view and indubitably in Hume's, is living up to the Christian code of ethics and that, in one view and indubitably in Hume's, is being benevolent. In the realm of ideas the necessary condition of benevolence is tolerance, and the necessary condition of that is not being too cocksure of one's own speculative opinions; in short, being philosophically skeptical. Precisely in line with Hume's deepest convictions it follows, therefore, that "to be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a Christian." And certainly this same intellectual benevolence or tolerance would approve one's flying "to revealed truth with the greatest

avidity" were there such truth. As far as one can tell (in Hume's view) there is not, but that does not mean that of a certainty there might not be, and if there were, it would have to be a species of intolerance and fanaticism to refuse to 'fly' to it.

What we called Part XII's 'mocking sentences' can, then, be accommodated to what we know of Hume's religious and philosophical views, taking the two quoted sentences as being representative of their genre. To show this does not, of course, amount to explaining why these sentences appear where they do and what philosophical end they serve, but it does make such an explanation, which in due course we shall come to, possible.

Turning first to Philo's seemingly incoherent reversal of opinion on the validity of the argument from design in Part XII, we might note that what has been shown in Parts I-XI by Philo is that the argument from design is not scientifically capable of proving the existence and nature of God, either because it appeals to illicit applications of causal or strict analogical reasoning or because, insofar as it attempts to rest itself on weaker analogical reasonings, it proves too much: one can, on such bases, as reasonably argue that the first cause is vegetable growth and so on. Thus, the thrust of Philo's argumentation throughout Parts I-XI is purely negative; indeed, even to the point that at the conclusion of Part XI Pamphilus can describe Philo as continuing "to the last his spirit of opposition and his censure of established opinions" (D 213). But this opposition and censure has to be, in Hume's considered judgment, as unwarranted as the intellectual intolerance of the religious fanatic, illustrated by Demea's heated departure from the

mise-en-scène, once he is aware of Philo's true argumentative intentions ((D 213).

If, though, the dogmatic opposition and censure of Philo in Parts I-XI is to be replaced with something like benevolent tolerance it will have to be shown; and should Hume mean Philo to be his spokesman, it ought to be Philo who is doing the showing, both that the argument from design does with some claim to rationality support its theistic conclusion and yet in so doing it provides no ground for speculative intolerance. And precisely these are the tasks that Philo sets himself in the first pages of Part XII, and on the face of it accomplishes.

Skirting -- let me grant -- the more subtle points of Philo's argumentation, we find him first conceding that the data over which the argument from design operates are genuine data and hence not deserving of dogmatic rejection, as in I-XI. Thus, he concedes that "a purpose, an intention, or design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it" (D 214).⁴ Presumably, a less careless or less stupid thinker might want to substitute for "a purpose, an intention," an order,⁵ but any such purported correction, we shall soon see, can amount to nothing more, according to Philo, and thus Hume, than a matter of mere taste and fancy. For Philo, using quantities and numbers themselves, next scientifically demonstrates that the reasoning involved in the argument from design is not -- as required by strict science -- reasoning over quantities or numbers (D 217).⁶ What it is, he points out, is reasoning over degrees of quality (D 217-218). But as long as that is understood, we can rightfully maintain that the argument from design does support its theistic

conclusion. Says Philo: "That the works of nature bear a great analogy to the productions of art is evident; and according to all the rules of good reasoning, we ought to infer, if we argue at all concerning them, that their causes have a proportional analogy.... Here then the existence of a DEITY is plainly ascertained by reason..." (D 216-217).

Almost simultaneously, however, Philo argues that to the extent that causal or analogical reasoning is applied to the qualitative data of the argument from design, the theist can only, and the atheist must, arrive at conclusions that are so problematic and nebulous that neither the one nor the other can serve the purpose of real opposition and thus speculative intolerance. All that the theist is justified in concluding is that "the original intelligence is very different from human reason"; what the atheist must conclude is something like: "the original principle of order bear some remote analogy to [intelligence]" (D 218).

As already indicated, these nebulous and indeterminate conclusions are imposed by the fact that the argument from design operates over degrees of qualities (and very gappy and amorphous ones at that) and not quantities or numbers. Indeed, demonstrating that both the censure of theists by atheists and the censure of atheists by theists are therefore unjustified, Philo points out that the above conclusion of the theist and the conclusion of the atheist are not really distinguishable except as a matter of mere "verbal disputes." In short, Philo, patently the spokesman here for Hume, reduces one's rationally opting for theism instead of its denial, atheism, or, vice-versa, to a case of mere inconsequential taste and fancy.

Once this is made clear each side of the issue can with equanimity argue on the other side, displaying thereby true intellectual benevolence. And so we find Philo in Part XII speculatively reversing himself and using causal argument in seeming proof of an intelligent God's existence; but why not, when any such argument and conclusion have to be the hobby-horse of mere taste and fancy? And if it pleases one, why not even harness arguments from analogy to the attribution of moral qualities to God, however meagre may be the basis for doing so (D 219); that is, just as long as we realize that what we are engaging in is fancy, like reading different figures into the passing clouds,⁷ and not science and categorical truth. And here it should be noted that it is only carelessness that can make it seem that in Part XII Philo is claiming that science in fact supports the argument from design. Philo, for instance, does not say, "...thus all the sciences lead us to acknowledge a first, intelligent Author." What he does say is, "...all the sciences almost lead us insensibly to acknowledge a first, intelligent Author" (D 214-215, emphasis mine) -- an all-important difference indeed.

If our exegeses have so far been correct Part XII serves the purpose of counter-balancing the purely negative and too dogmatic critique of the claims of natural religion which was advanced in Parts I-XI. In doing this Part XII shows that both advocacy of, and opposition to, the argument from design can be united with the desideratum of all theorizing: tolerance. Thus, in no way can Part XII be dismissed as incoherent or supererogatory. Its role is crucial. At least so much is manifestly the case with respect to Philo's seeming reversal there of his refutations in Parts I-XI of the design

argument's claims. But what we called Philo's 'mocking sentences' may still seem irrelevant to the proceedings, however closely they may, when parsed, fit in with Hume's general views; and in much the same connection, what are we to make of those last sections of Part XII in which Philo, with some vehemence, attacks, and Cleanthes defends, on practical and social grounds, popular religion. The Dialogues have as their stated topic, natural religion. They have been restricted to a critique of the intellectual bases and claims of natural religion. Why then this sudden excursion into the beneficial or pernicious practical and social effects of popular religion? Surely we have here a form of incoherency: an uncalled for digression that, however it may, like the 'mocking' sentences, express Hume's convictions, has no pertinent role to play in Part XII. Such are the appearances.

In reality, though, this discussion of popular religion unites with the almost final sentence of the Dialogues, "To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian," to add an essential capstone to Hume's critique of natural religion. Just prior to Philo's demonstration that the argument from design's conclusion that a Mind is the first cause has to do with degrees of quality and therefore fancy and not science, Cleanthes proposes and Philo agrees that a suspense of judgment concerning the argumentation and conclusion of the argument from design is not possible (D 216). We may suppose that this is also Hume's conviction, in keeping with his consistent rejection of Pyrrhonic skepticism. But what this means in terms of Hume's overall views is that some credence, however moderate, must be given to that

argumentation and to what it seems, more likely than not, to show. And this is the following proposition, which is not capable "of extension, variation, or more particular explication ... [which can] afford no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance," namely, the "one simple, though somewhat ambiguous ... undefined proposition that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence. This is what "the whole of natural theology resolves itself into" (D 227).⁸

The entertainment of this proposition and the benevolent code of Christian conduct is what Hume refers to as "philosophic" and "true" religion.⁹ Being true and philosophic, as far as a religion can be those things, is what natural religion most credibly amounts to. But if this is natural religion in its most credible form and thus the religion that a man of letters seemingly ought to adopt, what he adopts is hardly anything at all, theologically speaking, but an obscure, ambiguous proposition about first causes which, as already noted, has no practical or social implications. Compare, then, this weak cup of tea (one might be inclined to object) to the good strong liquor of popular religion with its doctrines of eternal salvation, rewards and punishments, and so on. Whatever the defects of the latter, it serves with these doctrines to console people in their misery, to enforce law and order -- indeed to be indispensable to the existence of society and the state. And so Cleanthes argues in these last sections of Part XII, his thesis being that what Philo has proposed as the most credible conclusion of the argument from design amounts really to no religion at all and that, for the social and practical reasons given, "Religion, however corrupted

[or popular religion], is still better than no religion at all" (D 219). In short, the challenge that is addressed to Philo and presumably Hume's "philosophic and true religion" is that in the practical and social realm it fails utterly to accomplish certain essential functions of a religion, and that in contrast, the popular religion, for all its hateful superstitions and pernicious effects, does not.

This is a final challenge that -- surely in Hume's mind and any defender of Hume's conclusions -- must be met. If the Pythian oracle is correct in saying that the gods must be worshipped for the good of the state then one would have to say that if the doctrines and practices of popular religion are necessary for the survival of society and the state, not to mention one's peace of mind, and that Philo's true and philosophic religion cannot provide these services to society and the state, then the latter must be rejected in favor of popular religion. Not surprisingly, Philo counters each of Cleanthes' social and practical claims by arguing that popular religion does not, on the whole, provide the social and practical benefits claimed for it but rather the opposite. Thus, concerning the purported benefits of the doctrine of eternal salvation Philo argues: "The steady attention alone to so important an interest as that of eternal salvation is apt to extinguish the benevolent affections, and beget a narrow, contracted selfishness. And when such a temper is encouraged, it easily eludes all the general precepts of charity and benevolence" (D 222) or, sotto voce, true Christianity.

In all its obvious appearances of incoherency, then, Part XII turns out, on close examination, to be -- as one should a priori suppose

it to be considering Hume's greatness as a philosopher -- all of one whole cloth, both with what has gone on before in Parts I-XI and Hume's traditionally recognized religious and philosophical opinions. In other words, it suffers not a bit from incoherency. On the contrary, it is a very marvel of subtle consistency and essential elaboration, lacking which the Dialogues would comprise only a half-critique of natural religion and a half-representation of Hume's own views. Nevertheless, at least one, though perhaps trivial-seeming, discrepancy in its utterances remains to puzzle us. I refer to Pamphilus' parting comment at the conclusion of Part XII that "...as nothing ever made greater impression on me than all the reasonings of that day; so I confess, that, upon a serious review of the whole, I cannot but think, that PHILO'S principles are more probable than DEMEA'S; but that those of CLEANTHES approach still nearer to the truth" (D 228).

So at variance with the plain argumentative triumphs of Philo over Cleanthes almost everywhere in the Dialogues is this judgment that at least one commentator, Aiken, has called Pamphilus, with an appreciable tone of outrage in his voice, "obtuse"¹⁰ -- as if Pamphilus were a living character and not a mere fiction of an author's imagination.

Since Hume in a letter to the religiously rather prickly Gilbert Elliot of Minto refers to himself as making "Cleanthes the Hero of the Dialogue"¹¹ one might be tempted to read Pamphilus' evaluation as a piece of obfuscation, meant disingenuously to ease the minds of his theologically liberal friends. And perhaps to some extent this was Hume's intention in having Pamphilus rate Cleanthes' principles as closer to the truth than Philo

Although Hume quite often and publicly expressed his indifference and even disdain of what his Calvinist "old guard" and other "bigoted" opponents might do or think,¹² he was always careful to remain or try to remain on friendly terms with the circle of liberal churchmen who, more than once, had protected him from the wrath of the "zealots." These churchmen would naturally identify themselves and their views with Cleanthes and his views. If they thought that Hume himself took Cleanthes to be the hero of the dialogues and thus closer to the truth than not only Demea but Philo, they would and could look with favor on this soon-to-be orphaned work of his and, to the benevolent enhancement of life in England and Scotland, insensibly be led to adopt its message of toleration as their own. This speculation makes sense and is plausible.

It also makes sense to suppose that Pamphilus in his remark is providing a sort of lesson in human nature, a lesson that might help us to not take too seriously the critical evaluations of persons when having to do with degrees of quality. Pamphilus is the as-if adopted son of Cleanthes and is being educated by Cleanthes (D 130). Naturally, therefore, he thinks, like Cleanthes, that the dispute that has taken place has to do with truth and strict probabilities and not mere fancy; and naturally, also, he will reflect his educational bias in his evaluations. If we realize that this is the general condition of human-kind (we can imagine Hume saying) we shall, knowing whence they come, take such evaluations for what they are and not be excited unduly by them when they seem to reflect adversely upon us or our opinions. And this will make for beneficent tolerance.

But while these may plausibly have been Hume's intentions in having Pamphilus make the seemingly 'obtuse' judgment that Aiken complains of, they have that remark lying on the very periphery of coherency, as we have been conceiving that property, if even there. Above all, they endow it with no central place in an understanding of what is taking place in Part XII. But why then should the entire Dialogues be concluded by it? One should think its unique position in that work promised something more. But that could only be if Cleanthes is in fact the hero of the Dialogues. A misleading way of saying that he is the hero of the Dialogues would be to say that his principles or theses are closer to the truth than Demea's or Philo's. That is precisely the way that his student, Pamphilus, given his (and his teacher, Cleanthes') failure to recognize the difference between true demonstrations over quantities and numbers and pseudo-demonstrations over degrees of quality, might be expected to put the matter. Yet, how could Cleanthes in truth possibly be the hero of the Dialogues? Is he not 'put down' by Philo even in the concluding sections of Part XII? How can the loser in every match in truth be the hero of a tournament?¹³

To see how, we need to turn to the opening of Part XII. At the end of Part XI, it will be remembered, Demea has departed in apparent dudgeon, leaving Philo and Cleanthes, with Pamphilus in the background, to carry on the discussion. And now at the commencement of Part XII Philo makes a very strange assertion. He addresses Cleanthes as one "with whom I live in unreserved intimacy" (D 214). It is patently strange for him to say this because at the commencement of Part I Pamphilus, who is spending the summer with his teacher Cleanthes, refers to both

Demea and Philo as "company" (D 130). One would infer from the term "company" that both Demea and Philo were mere visitors and thus that Philo was hardly one with whom Cleanthes lived in unreserved intimacy. And this inference is confirmed throughout Parts I-XI by the rather formal character of the argumentative exchanges of the three disputants.

How are we to account for this sea-change in reported relations? One could, of course, say that Hume, like Homer, has nodded. But that, philosophically, gets us nowhere and besides a perfectly good explanation can be advanced; an explanation, moreover, that preserves both consistency and the truth of Pamphilus' assertion that Cleanthes is the hero.

Consider, first of all, Pamphilus. He is evidently about the same age Hume was at that pivotal time around his eighteenth year just before there opened up to him that "new Scene of Thought, which transported [him] beyond measure" and which was followed, after some months of great application and happiness, suddenly, in September 1729, by great lassitude, vapors, scurvy, spots, and Ptyalism in the mouth, among other things. In short, we might identify Pamphilus with the adolescent Hume when he was reading "many Books of Morality, such as Cicero, Seneca & Plutarch" and "being smit with their beautiful Representations of Virtue & Philosophy ... undertook the Improvement of [his] Temper and Will, along with [his] Reason and Understanding."¹⁴ The religious ideas and understanding of this adolescent Hume would have already broken with the harsh Calvinism of pre-election and eternal damnation and the sabbath morality of The Virtue of Man on which he had been brought up as a child but they would not have as yet advanced to religious skepticism. In his

religious views and attitudes he would be somewhere close to the liberal Protestantism and theology of his time; thus, receptive to the argument from design and its claim to establish scientifically the existence and nature of God.

In turn, we might plausibly say that Cleanthes, in parts I-XI, personifies either that same liberal theology and Protestantism or some proponent of it (for example, Butler) or even Hume himself (say, from sometime in his early teens while attending college up until his eighteenth year and the opening up of that "new Scene of Thought").

Following the same scheme, we should say that Demea personifies either the orthodox, Calvinist theology and religion or some proponent of it (perhaps no concrete individual but almost any Scotch preacher, taken at random) or perhaps even Hume himself before his evidently reasoned conversion to liberal theology.

Philo, we could then say, personifies in Parts I-XI a position close to Pyrrhonic skepticism or some proponent of it (say, Bayle as popularly viewed) or even Hume himself in his first elaborations of that "new Scene of Thought." It is, for instance, not implausible to suppose that Hume was for a time swept overboard by the arguments of Bayle into Pyrrhonic skepticism and that he only later managed, through the doctrine of moderate or 'careless' skepticism, to extricate himself from it.

Leaving aside Pamphilus, who we might view as fixing symbolically the pivotal time and nature of the intellectual transitions taking place both in the Dialogues and in the world of Hume's youth with respect to religion, we might expound Parts I-XI as representing the following such transitions: the passage of the old religious orthodoxy with its

dedication to revelation and a priori proofs into the new religious liberalism with its dedication or seeming dedication to the methods of science and the argument from design in particular. Then, as projected into the future, the passage of that religious liberalism first into religious skepticism of a more moderate or careless cast. (For Philo in Parts I-XI varies in his appearance between the two, seeming, for instance, to Cleanthes to be a Pyrrhonic skeptic (D 132-133) but not to Pamphilus, who refers to Philo's "careless scepticism" (D 128).) Or Parts I-XI may represent the passage of Hume himself from childhood orthodoxy into adolescent liberalism and, as projected into the future, Pyrrhonic skepticism and then moderate or careless skepticism. As performing these or similar representations Demea, Cleanthes, and Philo are all in effect visitors or company to one another.

Now in Hume's view natural religion in part and morals, criticism, and logic as a whole are branches of the science of man or human nature.¹⁵ In the non-mathematical or non-analytic sense of 'science' science deals with causes and effects according to Hume, as everyone acquainted with his works knows. Presumably the Dialogues fall under the science (in the loose sense of the word) of man, dealing as they do with natural religion, morals, criticism, and logic as it treats of argumentation. We have depicted in terms of the argumentation and personal relationships of Parts I-XI the transitions and passages noted above. What has so far been left out is the crucial question of any science concerning matters of fact and change: "What is the cause of these changes?"

What I now want to maintain is that in Part XII the answer is given to this question. Or, more

accurately, the answer is given to the narrower question, "What is the cause of the transition from religious liberalism to moderate religious skepticism?" Presumably Hume thinks the answer to the question, "What is the cause of the transition from the old religious orthodoxy to the new religious liberalism?" has already been given, or is too obvious to need to be given, as indicated by the departure of Demea at the conclusion of Part XI. And it is here that we have occasion to return to Philo's superficially strange and even contradictory assertion that he and Cleanthes live in unreserved intimacy. This assertion can only refer to an episode in Hume's youth which he describes as follows in an already noticed letter to Gilbert Elliot: "And tis not long ago that I burn'd an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty; which contain'd, Page after Page, the gradual Progress of my Thoughts on that head [Philo's arguments versus Cleanthes']. It begun with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the common opinion [patently, Cleanthes' religious liberalism]: Doubts patently, [Philo's religious skepticism] stole in, dissipated, return'd, were again dissipated, return'd again; and it was a perpetual Struggle of a restless Imagination against Inclination, perhaps against Reason."¹⁶

It will be remarked that the course of argument in Part XII typically proceeds in this manner: the religiously liberal position of Cleanthes is proposed, first on the argument from design and its scientific validity and later on the practical and social benefits of popular religion; Philo seems to be at first seconding Cleanthes' position but then it turns out, on closer inspection or subsequent comment, that he really is disagreeing and espousing some position connected with religious skepticism.

Thus what we have in essence is the internal argument for and against the common opinion that Hume engaged in at some point before his twentieth year and which might be described as taking place between Hume-Cleanthes and Hume-Philo. Now Hume-Cleanthes precedes both in time and in the statement of positions Hume-Philo. In Hume's system causes precede effects. Extrapolating, one might therefore say that Cleanthes or religious liberalism is the cause of Philo or the true religion, religious moderate skepticism. And therefore in a quite literal sense Cleanthes is the hero of the Dialogues.

At the same time, as providing the causal account of the religious transitions depicted in Parts I-XI, Part XII plays the indispensable role of transforming the Dialogues into the scientific treatise they were intended to be as a study in human nature or the science of man.

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1. Following Norman Kemp Smith I shall treat 'Dialogues' as having a plural syntax; see, Norman Kemp Smith, Preface to Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Library of Liberal Arts, p.v., "...the stages by which the Dialogues were later brought into their final form"; Introduction, p. 28, "The Dialogues are a criticism...."
2. David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), pp. 158-160. Further references will be cited as 'D' followed by the relevant page number(s).
3. See, Letters of David Hume, ed. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), vol. I (this edition and

volume, henceforth 'G'), letter to Henry Home, April 1748, p. 111.

4. By 'subtle points of argumentation' I refer to those ambiguities or seeming ambiguities of Hume's discussion which have led some philosophers, e.g., Norman Kemp Smith, to gloss the passage cited here as a piece of Humean irony and others, e.g., Nelson Pike (see Pike (ed.), Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970, (henceforth, 'NP'), pp. 209ff.) as a piece of perfectly straightforward Humean subscription. Again, the question is raised whether the belief in 'an orderly universe stemming from an agent designer' is, according to Hume, a 'natural belief' or not. (Denying that it is, for instance, we find Penelhum, "Natural Belief and Religious Belief in Hume's Philosophy," PQ, vol. 33, no. 131, April 1983, p. 171; see also, J.C.A. Gaskin, Hume's Philosophy of Religion, (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 132, 137-138, for another treatment of this topic.) These further questions and problems all patently deserve study, but since their resolutions, whatever they might be, leave untouched the theses being proposed in this paper and since their adequate treatment can only unduly complicate an already complicated discussion, I shall leave them to be dealt with elsewhere.

5. Cleanthes, for instance (D 216), speaks of "order and design in nature" as if one might treat 'order' and 'design' on a par. And so, it will turn out, one may, as Hume is conceiving the nature of theological arguments from design. For while, as strictly viewed, order is the analogical basis for the inference to design, at the level of fancy, design can be as much the first appearance of things, where there is order, as order itself. Hence, as I have observed in the same place, we are not somehow being more accurate or less careless when we insist that 'order' replace 'design,' thinking thereby to be 'more scientific.'

6. The amusing 'scientific demonstration' which precedes Philo's straightforward identification of the argument from design as an argument having to do with degrees of qualities and not quantities or numbers is as follows (D 214-215): if (he argues in effect) the argument from design is viewed as operating over numbers and quantities then, since God is One, omnipotent,

omniscient, and all-benevolent, and since it is agreed by scientists that nature "acts by the [quantitatively] simplest methods" natural causes and effects should be quantitatively simple. But, witness the findings of Galen, we discover the very opposite to be the case: 600 different muscles rather than 1 or 2 in the anatomy of a man, etc. By modus tollens it follows that the argument from design cannot be viewed as an argument operating over quantities or numbers or, in short, as scientific demonstration.

7. See G, letter to Gilbert Elliot, March 1751, p. 155.
8. Nelson Pike points out that this proposition, "the cause of causes or order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence," is presented, not as Philo's own statement (or Hume's), but as being "what some people seem to maintain" (NP, p. 218: emphasis is Pike's). Pike then identifies the same "some people" with those atheists who conclude, on the basis of the argument from design, that "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence." On these grounds Pike maintains (NP, p. 218) that what Penelhum has called Hume's "minimal deism" must not be taken to represent Philo's (and presumably, therefore, Hume's) complete view. Hume's true view is not so negative, says Pike. Instead of being to the effect that the cause of the universe bears only a "remote analogy" to human intelligence it is to the effect that it bears a "considerable resemblance" (here Pike refers to Philo's statement in paragraph six of Part XII). Now Pike is certainly correct in pointing out that the proposition in question is said by Philo to be what some people seem to maintain and that these people are presumably the atheists who arrive at just this very proposition in their application of the argument from design (D 218). It might parenthetically be noted that Philo, after initially espousing the Cleanthes-like position in paragraph six that the resemblance between divine and human intelligence is considerable, on further analysis has even the theist arriving at the conclusion that "the original intelligence is very different from human reason" (D 218). But ignoring this presumed correction in the theist's thinking, one might still want to ask why, at the end of

his discussion in Part XII, Philo opts for the atheist's version of the proposition of true religion rather than the theist's and what is the point of his reference to the former's being entertained by "some nameless people."

As answer to both these questions it might be observed that what Hume is doing here is the following: in subtle agreement with the general view of the time that he (Hume) is an atheist, in having Philo propose the atheistic version of the argument from design as the philosophic basis of true religion he is identifying Philo as his spokesman; but since the atheist's version has been shown to be essentially indistinguishable from the theist's version, he is in effect saying to the reader, "There is no significant religious difference between a reasonable atheist and a reasonable theist's conclusions; between (here addressing the liberal churchmen) your conclusion and mine. So let us be tolerant of each other." It might also be added that Hume could not seriously want to maintain that a "considerable resemblance" existed because that could lead one, by way of the baser parts of human nature, right to the old-guard Calvinists' vengeful, flattery-lusting God who elects the eternal torment of most of mankind -- a view that Hume was always at pains to relegate to the limbo of mere superstition.

9. Philo clearly means by "true religion" (D 223) what Hume has Cleanthes (in the role of rational theist) mean when he says (D 220), "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 [in D 220, Norman Kemp Smith here has 'mortality' but surely Pike is right where in NP, p. 114 he instead has 'morality,' for the companion of 'justice' is not mortality but morality; hence] morality [correcting Smith] 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." In other words, true religion boils down simply to practical benevolence + what is philosophically or rationally allowable; the two propositions previously quoted. These + practical benevolence have to result in theoretic

benevolence, and that is to say, theoretic tolerance.

10. See David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ed. Aiken, (New York: The Hafner Library of Classics, 1967), Aiken's introduction, p. xiii.
11. G, letter to Gilbert Elliot, February 1751, p. 153.
12. See, for instance, G, letter to Ramsay, June 1755, p. 153; G, letter to Adam Smith, March 1757, p. 246.
13. Pike (NP p. 238) takes Cleanthes and Philo to "share honors" in this respect, each triumphing in argument when appealing to immediate 'irregular' inference. Let it suffice for the moment to say that I am here presenting my own impression of the dispute's winner and loser. My final resolution of the present question will be found, I think, to do justice to both Pike's view that Cleanthes is sometimes victorious and is the real hero of the Dialogues and Norman Kemp Smith's opposed view that Philo is everywhere victorious (see Smith, D 62) and so is the real hero of the Dialogues (Smith's peculiar claim being, D 62, that it is for dramatic reasons only that Hume sometimes makes Cleanthes appear to be the victor or hero in argument). As for the actual epistemic standing of Cleanthes' immediate, 'irregular' inferences in Hume's system (for an instance of these inferences frequently referred to by Pike, see Part III, D 154, Cleanthes: "...anatomize the eye ... and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation"), I should want to take issue with Pike, who seems to suppose that Hume is, like Pike himself, their advocate. This is not the time or place to treat the matter in anything like the detail and depth it deserves. Let me only point out here, as I am sure that Hume would point out, that one might with equal force argue on the basis of such immediate, sensation-like inferences, "On a dark, stormy night in a strange forest, consider the darkness and sounds around you and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of goblins or aliens or monsters does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation." Is it therefore rational to suppose that these goblins

or aliens or monsters exist? Surely not. Would Hume want us to? Surely not.

14. G, letter to "Dr. George Cheyne" (as Greig has it), March 1734, pp. 13-14.
15. See, David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, p. xix.
16. G, letter to Gilbert Elliot, March 1751, p. 154.