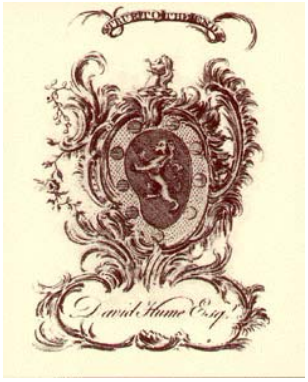

**Hume's Playful Metaphysics**
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# Hume's Playful Metaphysics

*Greg Moses*

> Let us revive the happy times, when Atticus and Cassius the Epicureans, Cicero the Academic, and Brutus the Stoic, could, all of them, live in unreserved friendship together, and were unsensible to all those distinctions, except so far as they furnished agreeable matter to discourse and conversation.[1]

This paper argues, firstly, that contrary to appearances, the mature Hume allows for engagement in a certain style of metaphysical reasoning in a rather strong sense of 'metaphysics'. The proviso is that this be done in a carefully defined playful 'Pyrrhonian' spirit (secs. 1-5). It argues, secondly, that engagement in metaphysics in such a Humean playful spirit might be available to us and of some value for us nowadays (secs. 6-7).

The strategy of the argument in sections 1-5 is that the character Philo in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* engages in just that kind of metaphysics that Hume rules out in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries*, but that he does so in such a playful fashion as to be able to get away with it.

(1)

The word 'metaphysics' is used in the Hume text interpretation part of this paper (secs. 1-5) to refer to enquiry concerning 'ultimate principles/causes'. These ultimate causes are more than just very general constant conjunctions the reality of which is supposed, given habit, on the basis of experience. They are characterized in Hume by the fact that: 1) there is a relations of ideas connection between the 'essence' or 'nature' of whatever it is we are talking about, the soul/mind/human nature, or external bodies, such that 2) could we know the 'nature' or 'essence' we could come to know the principle without consulting experience, and, consequently, 3) they are such that if and when we came to know them we could give a reason for them, beyond our experience of their reality, namely by showing them to follow from the 'essence' or 'nature' of the object in question.[2]

The search for these ultimate springs and causes motivates our researches. "This is our aim in all our studies and reflections" (T 266), to find the ultimate and operating principle, which resides in the object. We are not satisfied, we would not willingly stop until acquainted with them, or until we are convinced that such a goal is beyond us human

beings and despair has the same effect on us as enjoyment. Science, in fact, only "staves off our ignorance a little longer" (E 31). The most general and most refined principles we discover are as inexplicable to us as the phenomena themselves are to the vulgar; we have no idea even of what it is we are looking for when we search for them.[3] There is thus a kind of natural desire for insight into causes, which natural and moral science does not fully satisfy,[4] a sort of natural desire for the vision of, if possible, ultimate causes.

(2)

The attitude of the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* with respect to the search for ultimate principles is to stay away from it—as every first year philosophy student knows. This is Hume's position even antecedent to science and enquiry, taken over from the example of the natural philosophers whose empirical method he is adopting. Note that we are using the word 'metaphysics' here as a temporary convenience in a non-Humean sense: for Hume, 'metaphysics' = the more difficult parts of learning, profound reasonings of any kind (cf. E 11). Hume himself engages in such profound reasonings, for a variety of reasons (under five headings in E, sec. 1), including the idea that we "must cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate" (E 12). One of Hume's purposes in book 1 of the *Treatise* and in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* is to turn us away from "specious and agreeable" (T 272) hypotheses and towards those subjects where alone we can expect assurance and conviction (T 272-73), in order to live at ease ever after, having rejected, after deliberate enquiry, the most uncertain and disagreeable part of learning (E 12-13). This is accomplished by his investigation of belief in matters of fact beyond testimony of senses or memory; that is, relying on causal reasoning and our idea of cause and effect. Matters of fact and existence are incapable of demonstration. When we say we desire to know the ultimate and operating principle as something which resides in the objects, we either use the meaning we do have, "the determination of the mind, to pass from the idea of an object to that of its usual attendant" (T 167), and so contradict ourselves, or else talk without a meaning, since this latter is the only meaning we have (cf. T 267). Hume's antecedent position is thus confirmed by conclusions consequent on his own science and enquiry.

(3)

*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* indicates, I propose, a more complex position.[5] In respect of subjects narrowly adapted to the capacities of human understanding and what subjects these are, he continues with his Academic scepticism. In respect of subjects beyond

the capacity of human understanding, however, he reverts to a modified form of the 'careless' Pyrrhonism of the *Treatise*,[6] the major modification being that not only truth is beyond us in this realm, but even positions satisfactory to all human minds.

The *Dialogues* is a series of conversations concerning the original cause or causes of the universe, as well as, in typically Humean fashion, an enquiry in the form of a dialogue into the legitimacy of various ways of enquiring into original cause or causes of order in the universe. In respect of this latter, the demonstrative theology of the rigidly inflexible orthodox Demea is to be rejected for a variety of reasons. There are the general *Treatise-Enquiries* grounds having to do with reasoning concerning matters of fact and existence and the idea of necessary existence (cf. E 164). There is an *argumentum ad hominem* (Cleanthes' third argument: an atheist could as easily argue for a necessarily existent material world). And there are some points having to do with the particulars of Demea's alleged demonstration (D, pt. 9). All in all, Demea's position is not just wrong; his way of going about the task is entirely misguided.

The moderate philosophical Cleanthes stands rather for natural theology as an empirical science, working with the argument from design considered as a piece of would-be scientific argument. The character Philo, described as and behaving sometimes like a "careless sceptic" (D 128) but with a name indicating 'academic sceptic'[7] (as Hume in the *Enquiries*), sets vigorously to destroy this position. The argument from design, considered as an argument within science to be evaluated according to rules of evidence governing arguments in experimental science, proves very little (D, pts. 2-5). Indeed, it proves nothing at all. Any number of systems of cosmogony might be given a faint appearance of probability from the method of reasoning insisted on by Cleanthes. The lesson is that this is not one of those subjects adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding. A total suspense of judgement is here our only reasonable resource.[8]

This sceptical critique is Philo's main role and his fundamental position which he retains to the end. However, in the midst of the critique we find a fairly careful analysis[9] of available possibilities among 'systems of cosmogony'.[10] In addition, he does express and argue for some personal preferences[11] among these systems of cosmogony, eventually settling for systems which ascribe an eternal, inherent principle of order to the world, with God as this present material world supposed as containing its principle of order within itself.[12] While the expression of personal preference is often rather guarded, in the midst of argument, in typical Pyrrhonian fashion (cf. T 273-74), its mode of expression can become somewhat stronger.[13] In what might also be regarded as typical of a careless Pyrrhonian, it also changes, in line

with the impression of the present argument, and then changes back again.[14] Compare T 273: "Nor is it only proper ... that we shou'd yield to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*."

This does not interfere with his apparently more fundamental suspense of judgement: there is a distinction made between what is true, in the sense of what all reasonable people after critical examination might be expected to accept, and what for one reason or another a person may have a personal preference for to the point of arguing as best he can in favour of. The only position required of all reasonable people is the minimum requirement of natural good sense, the belief natural for philosophers, which even sceptical philosophers like Philo cannot avoid, that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear(s) some remote analogy with human intelligence (pt. 12). Indeed, the possibility of the naturalist/atheist/immanent theist personal preference enables the suspense of judgement in respect of anything further to be maintained. Were it not for this possibility, Philo would be pushed by natural propensity into the fully-fledged transcendent designer God, machine-like universe system of cosmogony of Cleanthes. This, I would suggest, is the strategic point of the verbal dispute passage, D 216ff.!

Philo's notion of 'inherence' in his cosmogonical speculations is interesting in the light of the commonly held, though by no means undisputed, opinion[15] that Philo is some kind of 'representative' of Hume in the *Dialogues*. Whether we like it or not, comparison of texts forces the interpretation of 'inherence' as logically necessary, relations of ideas connection between essence or nature of the thing in question[16] and the principle which is supposed as inherent. Compare

> How could things have been as they are, were there not an original, inherent principle of order somewhere, in thought or in matter? ... And were the inmost essence of things laid open to us (Philo, pt. 6, D 174)

> And instead of admiring the order of natural beings, may it not happen, that, could we penetrate into the intimate nature of bodies (Philo, pt. 9, D 191)

with

> For to me it seems evident, that the essence of the mind being equally unknown to us with that of external bodies, ... and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original

> qualities of human nature ...
>
> I do not think a philosopher, who would apply himself so earnestly to the explaining the ultimate principles of the soul (T xvii)
>
> [M]y intention never was to penetrate into the nature of bodies, or explain the secret causes of their operations. (T 64)

In contradistinction to Cleanthes (D 163), Philo's original, inherent principles are original in the sense of ultimate.

This is about as contrary as can be imagined to the Hume of the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* and as represented by Cleanthes in part 9 of the *Dialogues*. Philo's position makes it possible to demonstrate matters of fact and existence. Indeed, given an insight into the inmost essence of things, everything follows, down to the last detail (D 175). Philo supposes logically necessary connections in nature; but the only idea of necessity we have in respect of objects is constant conjunction and a determination of the mind to go from one to the other. Hume could well say of Philo what Cleanthes says of Demea: when he talks this way he talks without a meaning (cf. T 267).

Either Philo, in his speculative mood, is not to be regarded as in any sense a 'representative' of Hume, or else, as I myself believe, even this rather strange role can be justified in terms of Humean texts. If I can establish the latter, then I have my first point, that Hume does allow engagement in metaphysical reasoning in a rather strong sense of metaphysics.

(4)

Why doesn't Hume have Cleanthes say it? How does Philo get away with it? If indeed he does. Firstly, if "demonstrate" is taken to imply "prove the truth of some position whether to oneself or others," then Philo, unlike Demea, is not trying to demonstrate anything. His preferences are not positions to be clung to as the truth, nor imposed as such on others.

Secondly, unlike Demea, Philo's procedure in metaphysics is only partly a priori. It is only the general form of Philo's cosmogonies that is dictated by a rationalist notion of explanation. We suppose that there is an original inherent principle of order somewhere, and this on a priori grounds: "Nothing exists without a cause; and the original cause of this universe (whatever it be) we call GOD" (D 142).[17] This notion of 'original cause' in Philo's sense may have no clear meaning, but never mind. If we want to play the game, we have no alternative but to play it this way. On the other hand, where we suppose the original principle to be inherent is determined by considerations which are neither a

priori nor dictated by a rationalist notion of explanation. These considerations include the following:

(a) There is the question of what is least inconvenient for the cosmogonist, given our ignorance and the ambiguity of the experience we do have. In favour of opting for the 'mundane' system is the consideration of economy, in so far as all other cosmogonies involve the invention of a whole new world. Also in favour of the mundane system according to Philo is that as soon as we go beyond this world, parity of treatment given our equal ignorance requires an infinite regress: better stick with the present one.

(b) Secondly, there are a posteriori grounds, making the best of the shadow of experience that we do possess—a sort of loosened, informal version of empirical fit. Philo: we see mind arising from matter every day, never the opposite. Human reason itself is analogous to instinct, and appears to be just one among others of the operations of nature (esp. pt. 7, D 179-80).

(c) Finally, there are various non-rational factors at work, such as habit, caprice, inclination, and the influence of education. Philo is a man of sceptical dispositions, delighting in finding difficulties in the most accepted positions. Also, unlike Cleanthes, he has no great interest in religion, humane or otherwise. Such factors make for preferences (cf. esp. D 219n). An awareness of such factors at work in oneself does not change one's preferences, though it may serve to make for increased tolerance, particularly when put together with Philo's basic scepticism.

It is factors like these, rather than any a priori argument, which cause Philo to be a naturalist/materialist/whatever the right word is, though acknowledging that one could also be some kind of Cleanthes-like theist, and claiming a naturalism flexible enough to be adapted to what he regards as minimum demands of natural good sense in respect of the presence of design in the universe.

Thirdly, Philo may have a subtle way of evading the charge of meaninglessness. At least some of his speculations are in the form of a counter to fact conditional: "were the inmost essence of things laid open to us, we should then discover a scene, of which, at present, we can have

no idea" (D 174-75); "may it not happen, that, could we penetrate into the intimate nature of bodies, we should clearly see" (D 191). If we were capable of an insight into essences, as a matter of fact we are not, but if we were, this would give us both the good ideas and the evidence for accepting the application of the ideas. Philo's metaphysical speculations would then have to do with the question of what we would plausibly think was probable, were a certain matter of fact to be other than it is. This may correspond with a subtle change in the wording of Hume's doctrine on necessary existence, as it appears in part 11 of the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes against Demea: "But it is evident, that this can never happen, *while our faculties remain the same as at present*. It will still be possible for us" (D 189; my emphasis). Even the Hume of the *Enquiries*, however, appears to regard the impossibility of a demonstrative science of matters of fact as a consequence of human weakness.[18]

This way of evading the charge of meaninglessness is indeed subtle, to say the least, and perhaps it would not work as an argument in philosophy for twentieth century scholars. There is, however, something to be said for it in terms of some other parts of Hume's philosophy: it may work for Hume. The phrase, 'original, inherent principle of order', has no clear meaning. However, that the phrase 'original, inherent principle of order' has no clear meaning is a matter of fact contingent on the factual constitution of the human understanding.[19] The contrary of every matter of fact is both conceivable and possible (cf. E 25-26, for example). It is possible and conceivable therefore that 'original, inherent principle of order' could have clear meaning, and a statement to this effect is *meaningful*, even if false. It is open to us to suppose it as true in some other possible world, without knowing the relevant meaning here and now, and then go on to debate as to where, under such circumstances, the original principle might be supposed as inherent.

Finally, there is the very fact that natural theology or speculation about cosmogonies based on reason and experience (cf. E 165, par. 2) does not get us anywhere. Cleanthes in his speculations would like to go just one step beyond natural and moral science. His designer God is said to be "original" in the same sense as "original" is sometimes said in (Hume's) science, with the meaning of "as far as we need to go presently" (D 163; cf. T 280, and esp. E 220n). But, as Philo points out in part 4 of the *Dialogues*, to justify this step Cleanthes has to show at the very least that order is more essential to mind than to matter. Reason tells us nothing on the question, or at least does not decide it either way. Experience on the question is ambiguous. The scientific approach goes nowhere. If we want to speculate at all, playful

metaphysics is the only thing to do: if we want to go at all, we may as well go all the way.

(5)

If Philo in his speculative role is regarded as some kind of representative of Hume, there is opened up for us a second approach, also Humean, to the doing of metaphysics in a fairly strong sense of metaphysics: not to desist from it altogether, but to do it in a certain playful fashion. We do it no longer for the sake of attaining truth, but for the sake of an agreeable amusement and because we, or some of us, can hardly help it (Pamphilus, D 128; Philo, D 217, also D 213). As well as an agreeable amusement, this playful endeavour might provide a harmless way of filling a gap which might otherwise be taken up by harmful superstition, a way more in line with human weakness (cf. T 271) than the more ascetic recommendation of the first *Enquiry*. We have our preferences and argue for them as best we can, but neither 'embrace' them ourselves nor require them as the truth from others, adding flexibility and tolerance to the friendliness and civility, doubt, caution and modesty required of all reasoners in all subjects (cf. D 186, 219; reference being made also to E 162). The function of the *Dialogues*, then, would be not so much the closing up of a space, or the erecting of a no-go barrier,[20] as the making of a safe space for a certain kind of human activity, which we or some of us cannot help indulging in, to be carried on—a safe place for us to indulge ourselves for the sake of an amusement.

As harmless and innocent, as well as agreeable and even beneficial, doing metaphysics in such a mode qualifies within Hume's system as a perfectly good way of occupying time for those so inclined. Compare *Enquiries*, 11: "one accession to those few safe and harmless pleasures"; and *Dialogues*, 128: "Opposite sentiments, even without any decision, afford an agreeable amusement: and if the subject be curious and interesting, the book carries us, in a manner, into company, and unites the two greatest and purest pleasures of human life, study and society."

One proviso probably needs to be made, however, in order to be perfectly fair to Hume (even though it may detract a bit from the present thesis). The *Dialogues* is in the form of a dialogue, and the literary form of dialogue is not just to be ignored. The adoption of the literary form of dialogue is not only for the sake of prudence to better hide his own opinions. Nor is it just to better entertain the reader or for the sake of literary fame. This is one of those subjects to which the style of dialogue is naturally suited: "Reasonable men may be allowed to differ, where no one can reasonably be positive" (Pamphilus, D 128; but cf. also Philo, D 186). In such a subject, positions taken up will be determined as much by "habit, caprice or inclination" as by the

arguments (D 219n). The *Dialogues* are dialogues for epistemological as well as literary reasons; the form fits the content.[21]

This is to say that Hume is if anything even more a sceptic than his character Philo. Hume may be engaged in speculative metaphysics, and indeed when looked at closely, in a rather careful and, I think so far as he goes, insightful fashion;[22] but he is speculating at two removes, via a character in a dialogue in which the author himself does not appear, not even as narrator. Then again, not many of us are as intent on or, more to the point, probably as capable as Hume was of getting literary form and style of writing so perfectly into line with philosophical content.

(6)

If the Philo/Hume style of metaphysical reasoning is to be of value for us nowadays, it would probably be useful mainly, perhaps only, in respect of the *spirit* in which something called metaphysics is done, rather than in respect of the content of the doing. Among other things, Neo-Thomists and Transcendental Thomists, Heideggerians, Process thinkers, Descriptive Metaphysicians,[23] to mention some twentieth century varieties, differ from speculative Hume and from each other not only in metaphysical systems but also in the conception of the task of metaphysics. For example, Philo is interested only in the cause or causes of order in the universe; the question of existence, or why there is anything rather than nothing, is apparently not an issue for him. In respect of the Process thinkers, Philo is interested in discovering ultimate causal principles rather than in the wider task of framing "a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted."[24] Nor would any of the above, while still engaging in the enterprise, admit with Philo or at least Hume that their core metaphysical concepts were strictly speaking meaningless.[25]

All the above varieties of metaphysicians, of course, are interested in truth, each having their own characteristic conception(s) thereof. This would seem to be, quite by itself, enough to rule out the Humean playful spirit.

However, a follower of Hume in this regard might argue there is a need to come to terms with a certain factual situation in respect of metaphysical discussion nowadays, a situation which has two aspects. On the one hand, we can discuss with each other; we can argue, not only within traditions, but between one tradition and another. We can even borrow ideas from each other (for example, some 'transcendental Thomist' theologians with respect to Heidegger). So there probably are criteria. On the other hand, there does not seem to be reasonable prospect of coming up with agreed metaphysical schemes, substantial

positions which all reasonable people might see themselves, under pain of being irrational, obliged to accept. In addition to logical and empirical criteria, there would seem to be valuational criteria at work, or as Hume would have it, "habit, caprice, or inclination" (D 219n). Such factors determine not only what bias we give to each of the other criteria but, as with systems of religion, may also have an influence on the choice of theory itself.

(7)

In addition, even an enterprise according to a Humean pattern might have value for us nowadays beyond that of an agreeable amusement, and this in at least three ways.

Firstly, it may have the value of plugging up a gap which might otherwise be occupied by unreflected "harmful superstitions" of, in our case, a secular as well as a fundamentalist religious variety. To adapt Hume at the end of book 1 of the *Treatise*, philosophy, even if false, is better than superstition of every kind and denomination (T 271-72).

Secondly, there are values connected with the opportunity provided of exploring plausible, arguable metaphysical systems even if this is all we can say about them at the end of the task. For example, what if we could come up with a very general language game in which all the other language games we typically play and the forms of life attached to them, or some playable variants of them, might have a home? Such a system would not have to be shown to be true, in the sense of a system which everyone would find they have to accept under pain of being unreasonable. Indeed, it would not even have to be our own personal preference in order to draw the sting of the difficulty which something we are committed to in our lives, for example, science, poses for something else we feel committed towards, for example, ethics, the striving that our lives be meaningful or even certain kinds of religion. The very existence of such a metaphysical scheme as one among the plausible, arguable metaphysical systems should be enough to serve this purpose. To adapt another Humean (also Strawsonian) theme, we are in the job of protecting Nature, stopping the work that it is already doing and in which we have an interest from being undermined, rather than in necessarily doing some work ourselves.[26]

A renewed involvement in metaphysics, even of a Humean style, may thus help us to free ourselves and others as well from the power of, most crucially, those scientific and techno-economic mythologies that we now find threaten to destroy the earth and ourselves with it.

Thirdly, it may be that involvement in the project with an open mind will have the effect of re-enforcing the tolerant spirit with which we entered the enterprise in the first place (cf. D 186, 218-19).

What is ruled out in this Humean proposal is any dogmatic or crusading apologetic use of metaphysical reasoning. This latter would be no more legitimate for us than apologetic use of metaphysics in support of institutionalized religion was for Cleanthes. What prevents this is the very possibility of a Philo, other people of good sense who share our natural beliefs and practices but instead quite as reasonably as ourselves have rather different preferences in respect of metaphysical systems. I see this as an advantage for the Humean proposal rather than an objection in favour of more dogmatic proposals, however, in so far as, in this sphere of ultimate concerns, it breaks down the link between knowledge and power.

I conclude that, in spite of some difficulties, there does appear to be enough textual evidence to provide a reasonable case for the proposition that Hume in the *Dialogues* does allow for an engagement in metaphysics provided only that this be done in a playful 'Pyrrhonian' spirit (secs. 1-5). Even if I am wrong, and my proposal for metaphysics counts as Hume text-inspired rather than Hume, an engagement in metaphysics in one or other of its twentieth century variants in such a playful spirit might still be a good idea for us in our contemporary very worrying situation (secs. 6-7).

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1. David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Grieg, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1969), 1:173.
2. See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (1978; reprint, Oxford, 1987), xvii-xviii, 64, 266-67, 638 (hereafter cited as "T"); and David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 30 (hereafter cited as "E").

   These texts do not by themselves make it all that clear what the exact connection supposedly is between penetrating into essences or natures and having knowledge of ultimate springs and principles, except that they are very closely connected to the extent that if we could do one we would know the other. The clearest explanation I've come across is actually in David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. N. Kemp Smith (Indianapolis, 1947), pt. 9, 191 (hereafter cited as "D"), taken with D 174-75, where there does appear to be a mathematical-like, relations of ideas connection between insight into one and knowledge of the other: in our language, propositions expressing ultimate principles would be logically deducible from, if not included among,

propositions expressing the insight into the essence. This meaning would fit the other texts cited above. It would also fit in with two plausible backgrounds for understanding such texts: the likes of rationalists such as Descartes and Spinoza claiming to be able to logically deduce quite a deal of knowledge from the essence of body (= extension) or the essence of mind (= thinking) or the idea of God; and Aristotelians ascending to a knowledge of the essence or nature of different species of object and then explaining phenomena by deductive reasoning beginning with a knowledge of that essence or nature. And, of course, it does fit well with the general Humean rejection of demonstration of matters of fact and existence.

3. See T xvii-xviii, 64, 266-67; E 30-31.
4. We do not have a priori knowledge of the essence or nature of either mind or body (T xvii), nor do we ever develop a posteriori knowledge of these essences (T 64). Consequently, it seems, knowledge of ultimate springs and principles will always be beyond us. Indeed, it turns out that we have no clear idea of what such knowledge might mean. Beyond this, in addition to not giving us the kind of causes we are looking for, there are certain facts which Hume's science does not explain, even in the scientific sense of explanation. There is the unexplained harmony between mind and nature, "a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature" (E 54-55). More generally, there is the fact that the principles of human nature which are permanent, irresistible and universal are for the most part most of the time identically those which are necessary or useful in the conduct of life, such that upon their removal, human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin (T 225). A knowledge of the ultimate causal principles would presumably explain such facts, though it may not be necessary for Hume or other people to go that far in order to find an explanation for them.
5. As with any attempt at an authentic interpretation of Hume, this is primarily an attempt to come to terms with Hume texts, and is to be judged eventually by how well it does that. It is enlivened, however, by some of the secondary literature. In this respect, it is an endeavour to find a position in reference to, for example, on the one side, James Noxon, "Hume's Agnosticism," in *Hume*, ed. V. C. Chappell (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1966), 361-83; and, on the other side, George J. Nathan, "Hume's Immanent God," in *Hume*, ed. V. C. Chappell (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1966), 396-423. See also

Nathan's article, "The Existence and Nature of God in Hume's Theism," in *Hume: A Re-Evaluation*, ed. Donald W. Livingston and James T. King (New York, 1976), 126-49; and Noxon's "Hume's Concern With Religion," in *David Hume: Many-sided Genius*, ed. Kenneth R. Merrill and Robert W. Shahan (Norman, Oklahoma, 1976), 59-82. For an interesting position somewhere in between, which bears some resemblance to the one below in the text of the paper, see Gilles Deleuze, *Empirisme et Subjectivite* (Paris, 1973), 77-78, relying on a distinction between *connaître* and *penser* (77; 78: *pensée* and *connue*). There is also the emphasis on the rhetorical dimension serving to outflank all such above 'serious' positions, as sponsored by Richard White, "Hume's Dialogues and the Comedy of Religion," *Hume Studies* 14, no. 2 (November 1988): 390-407: Hume's intention in the *Dialogues* is to laugh religion off the stage, rather than to destroy it by reasoned argument, "destroying the religious hypothesis not so much by 'serious' calculated argument as by ridicule and excess" (White, 390). I'm not sure, however, that one excludes the other—why not both? There is ridicule and excess—talk about spiders (D 180-81) and vegetables and such, but there would also seem to be serious calculated argument. I also wonder whether all Hume is doing in the *Dialogues* is "destroying the religious hypothesis" (White, 390). Perhaps he has other fish to fry as well or in the process. This may be shown in a certain terminological distinction in the parts played by the various characters. For Demea and Cleanthes, the debate is about "natural theology" and different approaches to the same. Philo contextualizes this debate within the broader context of discussion about "system(s) of cosmogony" (D 177, 182, 186, etc.; cf. D 180, "species of cosmogony").

6. The reference is to *Treatise*, 272-74. The "careless manner" (T 273) applies to the doing of the science of human nature, when he happens to feel so inclined, in spite of his philosophical doubts. It also applies to his yielding "to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*" (T 273).
7. Relying on the determination (Norman Kemp Smith, John V. Price) that the reference is to Philo of Larissa, founder of the New Academy, one of the teachers of Cicero and also of 'Cotta', the Academic or Sceptic in the dialogue (of Cicero), *De natura deorum*, after which Hume's dialogue is modelled. Cf. Norman Kemp Smith, in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (above, n. 2), 60; John V. Price, "Sceptics in Cicero and Hume," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 25, no. 1 (January-March 1964): 98.
8. D, pts. 6-7; see esp. beginning and end of pt. 8.

9. Philo's metaphysical analysis, as far as I understand it, is as follows: there are three varieties of systems of cosmogony, those appealing to 'chance', those appealing to 'design', and those appealing to 'necessity' (cf. end of pt. 6). Chance has no place in any hypothesis sceptical or religious. 'Design', in line with Hume's idea of the compatibility of freedom and necessity and the elimination of indeterminism, "the same thing with chance," is no less necessary than 'necessity'. The difference between the two (design and 'necessity' properly so called) is in respect of where the principle of order is thought to be inherent. Advocates of 'necessity' suppose the principle of order to be inherent in that which is ordered, this present material world; advocates of design suppose the principle to be inherent in a Mind or Ideal World transcendent to this one. In parts 4 and 6, Philo opts for a principle of order inherent in this present material world. In part 8, he toys with various modifications of Epicurus, relying not on chance but on "the powers of infinite, in comparison with finite," in combination with principles which, like the principles we discover in natural science, such as gravity, electricity and magnetism, *are not* by themselves oriented to order. Some such combination is used in the first place to explain both the genesis and maintenance of order (modified Epicurus), in the second place to explain only the genesis of order, the order once achieved being naturally maintained (the "new hypothesis"). In parts 9 and 12, however, he reverts to his original preference of parts 4 and 6. It strikes me that such a careful analysis must be meant at least a little bit seriously, not just as a way of re-enforcing his scepticism, though it may have this latter as its primary motivation.
10. Cf., for the terminology, D 177, 182, 186.
11. Pt. 4, D 162: "It were better, therefore, never to look beyond the present material world. By supposing it to contain the principle of its order within itself"; pt. 6, D 174: "And were I obliged to defend any particular system of this nature (which I never willingly should do) I esteem none more plausible, than that which ascribes an eternal, inherent principle of order to the world"; pt. 8: with respect to "a new hypothesis of cosmogony" (D 183), "affords a plausible, if not a true solution of the difficulty" (D 185); pt. 9, D 191: "Is it not probable, I ask, that the whole oeconomy of the universe is conducted by a like necessity."
12. D 162, 174, taken with his contribution to pt. 9, D 191, and also the position of the 'atheist' in the verbal dispute passage in pt. 12.
13. Cf. esp. pt. 8: "a faint appearance of probability" (D 182), becomes "a plausible, if not a true solution of the difficulty" (D 185).

14. See above, n. 6. The difference is as to whether the original inherent principle is a principle of order or just a law or series of laws which, given infinite time, will eventually give rise to order and to a scheme of things which maintain the order. In parts 9 and 12, he apparently reverts to the more simple option of an inherent principle of order.
15. Cf. esp. the thought provoking article of H. S. Harris, "The 'Naturalness' of Natural Religion," *Hume Studies* 13, no. 1 (April 1987): 1-29. I personally still prefer a variation on the view proposed by John Bricke in "On the Interpretation of Hume's Dialogues," *Religious Studies* 2 (1975): 1-18. Hume has a number of tasks he wants to perform in the *Dialogues*; for example, to demolish demonstrative theism, to thoroughly undermine the design argument as a supposed scientific argument, to cut established, institutionalized religion off from any rational basis (in belief in the supposed attribute of divine benevolence of a kind like the human), (perhaps) to indulge a bit in more general speculation about possible cosmogonies, whatever. What these tasks are would be determined by a careful and detailed look at the arguments and by a taking account also of literary and rhetorical effects (cf. Richard White [above, n. 5], among others). Any character involved in such a task to that extent and while he is doing it is 'some kind of representative of Hume'. Cf. Bricke, 17-18: "To discover Hume's views the reader must follow the arguments propounded, no matter by whom, weigh their cogency, and draw the appropriate conclusions. In doing this, he may have to fill in the gaps, spot the equivocations, examine the unexamined premises. In short, he must attempt to discover what in fact is the upshot of the long argument in the *Dialogues* ... To look for his spokesman is to belittle Hume's achievement." Compare also Keith E. Yandell, "Hume on Religious Belief," in *Hume: A Re-Evaluation*, ed. D. W. Livingston and J. T. King (New York, 1976), 110-11: given that "no one of the three participants always succeeds or always fails in saying what Hume has said in his own name elsewhere ... it seems wisest to proceed on what is in any case surely the safest assumption, namely, that it is the *Dialogues* itself which serves as Hume's 'spokesman' and to inquire into the significance of the *Dialogues* in the context of the whole of Hume's writings on relevant matters."
16. Philo is probably referring to essence or nature of the parts of the thing in question, the perceptions composing the Mind or Ideal World or the individual parts of which the material world is composed; see D 160.

17. See also D 174. Hume does have a principle of causality, accepted on empirical grounds, not founding causal reasoning but founded on a bit of such reasoning. Cf. T 132; E 86-87, for possible texts relating to its empirical establishment. However, Hume's empirical principle requires only Humean type causes, i.e., constant conjunctions, and is incapable of delivering Philo's notion of original inherent cause. So Philo has to be taken as invoking a rationalist principle—another very unHumean feature of Philo in his speculative mood.
18. Cf. E 31, 159, 174. Is the impossibility of demonstration of matters of fact and existence to be regarded as a manifestation of the imperfection of human nature, or is it to be regarded as a consequence of the logic of propositions, something itself capable of being given a relations of ideas type demonstration (Anthony Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief* [London, 1961], 54)? The textual answer is that it has to be both, a fact about us which is a prime manifestation of "human blindness and weakness" (E 27-31), and a consequence of a piece of relations of ideas logic (E 25-26, 163-64). The problem is to understand how. One possible solution is that the human weakness in question is regarded as a weakness in respect of our stock of ideas or of the kind of ideas we have. It is a matter of fact that we have the kind of ideas we have, given which we have no recourse but to rely on experience in respect of matters of fact and existence. Cleanthes/Hume could then be read as a confirmation of such an interpretation.
19. See above, n. 18.
20. Cf. James Noxon, "Hume's Agnosticism," in *Hume*, ed. V. C. Chappell (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1966), 378-79.
21. Compare, for example, Christine Battersby, "The Dialogues as Original Imitation: Cicero and the Nature of Hume's Skepticism," in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. David Fate Norton, Nicholas Capaldi, and Wade L. Robison (Austin Hill, San Diego, 1977), 239-52; esp. 247: the dialogue form is not simply a device for hiding his own opinions nor just a literary technique, but itself an aspect of Hume's mitigated scepticism: where nothing is certain, it is appropriate to maintain that hesitation or balance that the dogmatist so much dislikes. "Hume's own stylistic and structural deviations from Cicero's model tend towards counterpoise, balance and concealment. This is the appropriate outer form for a work of mitigated scepticism."
22. See above, n. 7.
23. Cf. P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, rev. ed. (London, 1969); also Clifford Brown,

*Individuals: A New Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (Munchen, 1989).

24. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York, 1929), 5.
25. I am not claiming or acknowledging that their core concepts are meaningless. For people who believe such concepts are meaningful, I am mounting an a fortiori argument: if even Philo in Hume's *Dialogues* can get away with it, how much more can you. To the extent to which these people can show that their core concepts are meaningful, my problem, I feel, is to persuade them into the playful spirit rather than to persuade them into metaphysics. For myself, I will not even attempt in this paper to go to the other side, of endeavouring to justify the meaningfulness of these other endeavours or of the core concepts which they deploy, beyond a fairly provocative suggestion in regard to process thinkers. It appears to me that Whitehead's project as a whole (*Process and Reality*, pt. 5 as possible exception) is more like one of Hume's projects in the *Treatise* than anything to be found in the *Dialogues*: to come up with an overall interpretation of the world as we cannot but conceive it, given the totality of our experience and the kinds of understandings which we have. If so, then the kind of metaphysics would be as meaningful as Hume's *Treatise*. Even the results bear some superficial similarity. Hume's world, internal and external, consists eventually of perceptions, or at most something very like perceptions (T 216-17), united together by various (external) relations eventually reducible to Resemblance and Contiguity (cf. *Abstract*, T 662). Whitehead's world consists of events or 'actual entities' modelled by analogy with events of human feeling, perception and memory, united together by (internal) relations. The major disanalogy between the two enterprises is that Hume is treating of how things are *for us* (cf. *Appendix*, T 638-39; and *Abstract*, T 662). But then again, unlike Kant, Hume can have no reason to believe in the existence of a noumenal world, *Das Ding an Sich*, at least not officially (cf. T 172, fourth corollary).
26. This does not rule out another philosophical enterprise, whose purpose is to bring to reflection the various practices in which we are engaged, and even to some extent "to methodize and correct" them.