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# Was Hume An Atheist?

*Shane Andre*

Hume's philosophy of religion, as expressed in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the *Natural History of Religion*, and sections 10 and 11 of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*,<sup>1</sup> invites a number of diverse interpretations. At one extreme are those who see Hume as an "atheist"<sup>2</sup> or "anti-theist."<sup>3</sup> At the other extreme are those who see Hume as some kind of theist, though not a classical or orthodox one.<sup>4</sup> In between are others for whom Hume is an "agnostic"<sup>5</sup> or "ironic skeptic."<sup>6</sup> Still a fourth interpretation can be found, according to which Hume "seems to vacillate hopelessly" in his view of religion;<sup>7</sup> in other words, no coherent philosophy of religion can be found in his work and so it is futile to look for one.

Of the four alternatives, it seems to me that the fourth, being less interesting philosophically and less to Hume's credit as a major philosopher, should be rejected unless by default no coherent case can be made for one of the other three. Since I believe that Hume's views about the nature and existence of God are complex, somewhat unconventional, but still coherent, I will concentrate on the title question. Before tackling that question directly, however, we need to clarify the meaning of the term "atheist" and its cognates. While an atheist is popularly defined as one who does not believe in God, this definition is inadequate for two reasons. First, while the absence of belief is sometimes treated as a synonym for disbelief, it is clear that the two are not the same. An infant does not believe in God, but that does not make him an atheist,<sup>8</sup> for, as yet, he does not have the linguistic competence to reflect on the question, Does God exist? Neither is the agnostic an atheist, for, though he has reflected on the question, he has not found reason to answer it affirmatively, like the theist, or negatively, like the atheist. For this reason, the atheist must be characterized more strongly, as one who *disbelieves* that God exists.

But even this stronger characterization is insufficient, for, as is well-known but perhaps less widely taken into account, there are many different conceptions of God, ranging from monotheism to polytheism, from belief in a perfect being to belief in a being who shares some human limitations, from deism to pantheism, and so on. Accordingly, it has become commonplace in philosophy to recognize at least two senses of the term "God": a narrow sense, signifying "a supremely good being, creator of but separate from and independent of the world, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal and self-existent";<sup>9</sup> and a wide sense,

signifying one or more divine beings, personal or otherwise, manifesting extraordinary but perhaps not superlative properties. For short, we could call the narrow sense the standard concept of God, and belief in the existence of such a being *standard theism*.<sup>10</sup> And we could call the broad sense, applicable to any concept of the divine, the extended concept of God, and belief in the existence of such a being(s) *extended theism*. On this account, standard theists will also be extended theists, but of course someone could be an extended theist without being a standard theist. Let us call such a person (for example, Epicurus, who denied, not that the Gods exist, but that they intervene in human affairs) a *limited theist*. It is important to note that the limited theist rejects standard theism but is not an atheist *simpliciter*.

How does recognition of these different forms of theism affect our understanding of atheism? There seem to be two major possibilities. One is to characterize atheism in the narrow sense as disbelief in standard theism; the other is to characterize it in the broad sense as disbelief in any form of theism, including limited theism. While either option is open, it seems to me that the latter is preferable. For if we say that anyone who rejects standard theism is an atheist, we will end up with the paradoxical result that many distinguished theists will turn out to be atheists. For example, while Charles Hartshorne is not a standard theist, insofar as he rejects the claim that God is absolutely perfect, omnipotent, and omniscient as this claim is ordinarily understood, it would surely be an abuse of the term to call him an "atheist." This is not to deny that historical examples of another kind can be found. Spinoza, perhaps the best-known western exponent of pantheism, was often attacked in his own time as an "atheist," but this charge strikes most modern readers of Spinoza as absurd. However it was in the past, it now appears that, at least in philosophical circles, the term "atheist" is generally restricted to people who disbelieve any form of theism, and this is the sense in which I propose to enquire whether Hume was an atheist.

To answer this question I propose to concentrate on Hume's major work on religion, the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. I believe that his other important works on the subject will be found to complement the position that emerges from the *Dialogues* rather than to oppose it. Despite the interpretive difficulties it presents, the special place of the *Dialogues* in Hume's philosophy of religion can hardly be denied. Although Hume had not completed revising the work at the time of his death in 1776, that is not because it was a last-minute effort. Norman Kemp Smith suggests that the original version was completed some time in the period 1751-57 and that Hume postponed publishing it in deference to friends who had seen it and recommended against publication.<sup>11</sup> The *Dialogues*, therefore, both are the fruit of Hume's

mature years and express his long-held views on the subject. Moreover, Hume's anxiety to ensure publication of the work after his death argues that he regarded it as a worthy reflection of his views on the subject.<sup>12</sup> Since this work is a dialogue, however, there is the familiar difficulty of determining which (if any) of the three main characters—Philo, Cleanthes, or Demea—speaks for Hume. I shall take up this issue after a brief survey of the work's central argument.

The common impression that Hume was an atheist is not totally unfounded. The *Dialogues* itself puts forward three major objections to standard theism. First and most prominent is Philo's extensive and penetrating critique of the argument from design. This argument, along with its natural cousin, the cosmological argument, was a popular and scientific favourite in the eighteenth century, and a foundation for the whole enterprise of natural theology.<sup>13</sup> Hume qua Philo not only exposed the weaknesses of that argument, as popularly conceived at the time, but in doing so undermined confidence in the power of "reasoning from experience" to undertake so ambitious a task as deciphering the origin of worlds. Second, the cosmological argument also receives a bashing in the *Dialogues*, though the opponent this time is Cleanthes, using typical Hume-like arguments against the notion of necessary existence.

I shall begin with observing, that there is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a matter of fact, or to prove it by any arguments *a priori*. Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing, that is distinctly conceivable, implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no being, whose existence is demonstrable. (D 189)<sup>14</sup>

The work's third major objection to standard theism is once again delivered by Philo. Philo's critique of the argument from design develops into a version of the problem of evil. For the argument from design is supposed to show, not just that the world is the product of a superior intelligence, but that the Creator is, if not unlimited in power, wisdom, and goodness, at least "finitely perfect, though far exceeding mankind" (D 203). Against this claim Philo presses the point that, judging the properties of an unobserved object solely by reference to its observed effects, we can impute to the source of the world no more than the manifold imperfections experienced in this world. He challenges Cleanthes:

Did I show you a house or palace, where there was not one apartment convenient or agreeable; where the windows, doors, fires, passages, stairs, and the whole oeconomy of the building were the source of noise, confusion, fatigue, darkness, and the extremes of heat and cold; you would certainly blame the contrivance, without any farther examination. The architect would in vain display his subtilty, and prove to you, that if this door or that window were altered, greater ills would ensue. What he says, may be strictly true: The alteration of one particular, while the other parts of the building remain, may only augment the inconveniencies. But still you would assert in general, that, if the architect had had skill and good intentions, he might have formed such a plan of the whole, and might have adjusted the parts in such a manner, as would have remedied all or most of these inconveniencies. His ignorance, or even your own ignorance of such a plan, will never convince you of the impossibility of it. If you find many inconveniencies and deformities in the building, you will always, without entering into any detail, condemn the architect. (D 204-5)

Philo's version of the problem of evil threatens not only natural religion but revealed religion as well, at least those forms of the latter which claim that God the Creator is omniscient: that is, omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good. No wonder the orthodox Demea quits the field of battle "on some pretence or other" before the final round!

The apparently anti-theistic strains in the *Dialogues* can be found in Hume's other works on religion as well, including the *Natural History of Religion* and of course the famous essay "Of Miracles." The *Natural History* is one of the first major works to attempt to account for the phenomena of religious belief and practice in purely naturalistic terms, establishing a tradition which culminates in the psychologism of Nietzsche and Freud. Hume's polemical treatment of miracles not only suggests that belief in miracles is contrary to reason, but, since belief in miracles is one of the mainstays of belief in a divine revelation, also undercuts the claims of revealed religion. It is tempting to conclude from "Hume's three-pronged attack on religious orthodoxy" that Hume was a vigorous opponent of theism.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, there are passages in both the *Dialogues* and the *Natural History* which support a different interpretation of Hume's aims. Despite their other differences, none of the principals in the *Dialogues* questions whether there is a God. At the outset of part 2, Demea sets the stage by identifying the real issue. Speaking of "the Being of a God ... that fundamental principle of all religion," Demea

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proclaims, "But this, I hope, is not, by any means, a question among us. No man; no man, at least, of common sense, I am persuaded, ever entertained a serious doubt with regard to a truth, so certain and self-evident. The question is not concerning the BEING, but the NATURE of GOD" (D 141). Comments follow about "the infirmities of human understanding," the divine nature as "mysterious to men," and "the temerity of prying into his nature and essence, decrees and attributes." Philo, commonly regarded as Hume's alter ego, responds by echoing Demea's remarks:

But surely, where reasonable men treat these subjects, the question can never be concerning the *Being*, but only the *Nature* of the Deity. The former truth, as you well observe, is unquestionable and self-evident. ... But as all perfection is entirely relative, we ought never to imagine, that we comprehend the attributes of this divine Being, or to suppose, that his perfections have any analogy or likeness to the perfections of a human creature. ... He is infinitely superior to our limited view and comprehension; and is more the object of worship in the temple than of disputation in the schools. (D 142)

Cleanthes disagrees with Philo and Demea, but his disagreement concerns, not the existence of God, but the inscrutability of God's nature and the way in which his existence and nature can be known. There follows the famous analogy between the world and a machine:

Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work, which he has executed. By this argument *a posteriori*, and by this

argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence. (D 143)

The stage is set for a discussion of Cleanthes' version of the argument from design, and Philo and Demea join forces in attacking the argument, though for different reasons. Demea is dismayed because, as he correctly perceives, the argument at best establishes no more than the *probability* that God exists, and thus takes a step in the direction of atheism. (If the conclusion is only probable, how probable is it: extremely probable, like the probability that every man will eventually die, or only barely more probable than not, like the probability of throwing a seven or higher on the next throw of the dice?) Philo attacks the argument for more interesting reasons, such as the important dissimilarities between the world and a machine (pt. 2); the unfortunate consequences for belief in a perfect being if the original analogy is taken seriously (pt. 5); the possibility of accounting for order in the world by no less strong analogies between the world and an animal body (pt. 6) or even a vegetable (pt. 7); and the dispensability of all such analogies in favour of the Epicurean hypothesis of "eternal revolutions of unguided matter" (pt. 8). The multiplication of cosmological hypotheses, each of which is plausible in itself but implausible in the face of its rivals, leads Philo to proclaim the triumph of scepticism:

All religious systems, it is confessed, are subject to great and insuperable difficulties. Each disputant triumphs in his turn; while he carries on an offensive war, and exposes the absurdities, barbarities, and pernicious tenets of his antagonist. But all of them, on the whole, prepare a complete triumph for the *Sceptic*; who tells them, that no system ought ever to be embraced with regard to such subjects: For this plain reason, that no absurdity ought ever to be assented to with regard to any subject. A total suspense of judgement is here our only reasonable resource. And if every attack, as is commonly observed, and no defence, among Theologians, is successful; how complete must be *his* victory, who remains always, with all mankind, on the offensive, and has himself no fixed station or abiding city, which he is ever, on any occasion, obliged to defend? (D 186-87)

At this point the reader may begin to suspect that Philo was bluffing when he agreed with Demea that the question to be pursued was the nature, not the existence, of God. Is Philo's position not described by Pamphilus, the ostensible narrator of the *Dialogues*, as

that of “careless scepticism” (D 128)? Before Philo is dismissed as a sceptic, however, two considerations should be kept in mind. The first is that Philo’s scepticism may extend to views about the nature of God without extending to the belief that God exists. Of course, the two questions cannot be entirely separated. Whether one believes that God exists depends on what one takes God to be, but, as the tradition of the *via negativa* suggests, one can believe the former without claiming to know very much about the positive nature of God, and this may be Philo’s position, for it is entirely consonant with what he says elsewhere to his companions. The second point to keep in mind is that Philo’s sceptical outburst occurs well before the end of the work. Philo has yet to present his version of the problem of evil, and the others to respond to it. If Philo is truly sceptical about the existence of God, we can expect that fact to emerge from the ensuing discussion of the problem of evil.

The discussion begins in part 10. Once again, Philo and Demea form a curious alliance: in opposition to Cleanthes, they emphasize the misery of animal and human existence and the corruptibility of human nature. The world is not, in their view, a good place, but the moral they draw from this point of agreement is very different. For Philo, the abundance and diversity of suffering in the world is proof against God’s moral attributes:

His power we allow infinite: whatever he wills is executed: but neither man nor any other animal are happy: therefore he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite: he is never mistaken in chusing the means to any end: but the course of Nature tends not to human or animal felicity: therefore it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge, there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?  
(D 198)

Demea resolves the problem of reconciling divine benevolence and human suffering by appealing to the so-called “porch” view: what appears to us here and now to be evil will, in the future and from a more comprehensive view, be seen to be a necessary part of a universal moral harmony and greater good:

This world is but a point in comparison of the universe: this life but a moment in comparison of eternity. The present evil phenomena, therefore, are rectified in other regions, and in some future period of existence. And the eyes of men, being then opened to larger views of things, see the whole connection

of general laws, and trace, with adoration, the benevolence and rectitude of the Deity, through all the mazes and intricacies of his providence. (D 199)

Cleanthes responds to both arguments in a characteristic way. While siding with Demea against Philo on the question of divine benevolence, Cleanthes has no use for Demea's other-worldly theodicy and bursts out with the objection that his "arbitrary suppositions" have no experiential support, for a cause can be known only through its known effects, and the known effects in this case are the world's moral imperfections. Having rejected Demea's theodicy but retaining the traditional view of God's moral attributes, the empirical-minded Cleanthes sees no alternative but to deny his opponents' dark view of the world:

The only method of supporting divine benevolence (and it is what I willingly embrace) is to deny absolutely the misery and wickedness of man. Your representations are exaggerated: Your melancholy views mostly fictitious: Your inferences contrary to fact and experience. Health is more common than sickness: Pleasure than pain: Happiness than misery. And for one vexation, which we meet with, we attain, upon computation, a hundred enjoyments. (D 200)

Philo replies to Cleanthes with Hume's customary acuity. He scores three major points against the other's "method": (1) it undermines the foundation of religion by staking the claim to divine benevolence on the relative balance of human and animal pleasure over pain in this world—"a point which, from its very nature, must forever be uncertain"; (2) even if it could be shown that the world's stock of pleasure exceeds its stock of misery, "this is not, by any means, what we expect from infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness," and so we return to the question why there is *any* misery in the world; and (3) even granting the *compatibility* of human misery and divine perfection, this would not be sufficient for the empirical theist's case. Philo demands of Cleanthes:

You must *prove* these pure, unmixt, and uncontrollable attributes from the present mixt and confused phenomena, and from these alone. A hopeful undertaking! Were the phenomena ever so pure and unmixt, yet being finite, they would be insufficient for that purpose. How much more, where they are also so jarring and discordant? (D 201)

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At this point, Philo seems to be satisfied that he has refuted the claim of natural religion to trace in God's handiwork the hallmarks of perfection.

The measure of Philo's success is that, at the beginning of part 11, Cleanthes shifts his ground. Until now he has not disavowed standard theism, leaving it open to the reader to regard him as being, like Demea, a standard theist, but at this critical point in the discussion of the problem of evil, Cleanthes, like many another in the same position, falls back upon a form of limited theism. He admits the force of Philo's argument but invites him to consider an alternative conception of deity:

If we preserve human analogy, we must for ever find it impossible to reconcile any mixture of evil in the universe with infinite attributes; much less, can we ever prove the latter from the former. But supposing the Author of Nature to be finitely perfect, though far exceeding mankind; a satisfactory account may then be given of natural and moral evil, and every untoward phenomenon be explained and adjusted. A less evil may then be chosen, in order to avoid a greater: Inconveniencies be submitted to, in order to reach a desirable end: And in a word, benevolence, regulated by wisdom, and limited by necessity, may produce just such a world as the present. (D 203)

The God envisaged by Cleanthes at this point is not, of course, "that being than which none greater can be conceived," but may still be regarded as a kind of "supreme being," insofar as he is immeasurably more powerful, wise, and benevolent than any of his creatures.

Despite its more modest content, Philo finds little merit in the "supreme being" hypothesis. He attacks it by a series of moves, two of which are of special interest. First, he establishes a general framework in terms of which to evaluate the hypothesis, noting (1) that an intelligent being who accepted the hypothesis but was as yet unacquainted with the world would expect the world to be very different from what we actually find; (2) that, supposing this being to become acquainted with the world, he would be surprised at the discrepancy between what he expected and what he found, but not on that account prepared to jettison the hypothesis, provided it was originally based on "very solid argument" and he was aware of the limitations of his intelligence; and (3) that, supposing the being to become acquainted with the world but not antecedently convinced of the hypothesis and left to test its truth from the appearance of things (as in the typical human case), he would never, however aware of the limits of his understanding, find reason to conclude that the hypothesis

was true. Otherwise put, Philo maintains that, given the world as we experience it, the supreme being hypothesis has a low probability. This probability is not so low that it could not be countervailed by independent evidence conferring a very high degree of probability upon the supreme being hypothesis, but, in the absence of such evidence, the presumption against the hypothesis stands.

Philo's second interesting move in attacking Cleanthes' hypothesis is to focus attention on natural rather than on moral evil. If the intention of Philo's creator was to use the fact of evil to expose a fundamental weakness in the argument from design, he could not have chosen a more effective strategy. Moral evil, as evil done by men, invites the presumption that it is evil which deserves punishment, either as retribution for the evil done or as a means to reform the evildoer or to deter others from succumbing to similar temptation. But deserved evil, it might be said, is no real evil, only apparent evil. At face value, therefore, moral evil does not pose a problem for the theist's belief in the goodness and justice of God. But it is otherwise with certain forms of natural evil. Perhaps some natural evils can be regarded as the natural consequence of human wrongdoing (as land erosion and famine may result from irresponsible use of natural resources); others as "punishment" for wrongdoing (as venereal disease was once thought to be the natural punishment for sexual promiscuity); and still others as tests of faith (Job suffers through no fault of his own) and as ways of building character (Bunyan's pilgrim progresses only through meeting and overcoming obstacles), but human ingenuity is strained to account for the remainder of natural evil, especially that which has nothing to do with human agency or which befalls all sentient beings, including very young children and animals, normally considered to be moral "innocents." Not surprisingly, Philo dwells on natural evil of this kind—evil which does not appear to human reason to be, in the least degree, necessary or unavoidable. If Philo is correct in suggesting that such evil is avoidable, at least for a being equipped with exemplary power, wisdom, and goodness, the profusion of such evil in nature creates a presumption (though not a proof) that, if some being is responsible for the totality we call the world, that being is less than exemplary in some important respect.

Philo, for one, has no doubt that this world, taken as a whole, is deeply and avoidably flawed. "Look round this universe," he directs his companions.

What an immense profusion of beings, animated and organized, sensible and active! You admire this prodigious variety and fecundity. But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences, the only beings worth regarding. How hostile

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and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them for their own happiness! How contemptible or odious to the spectator! The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind Nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children. (D 211)

Philo's dark view leads him to frame four hypotheses regarding "the first causes of the universe": that they are endowed with perfect goodness, perfect malice, a mixture of goodness and malice, or none of these qualities. He dismisses the first two possibilities on the ground that the world's "mixed phenomena"—its apparent mixture of good and evil—cannot be accounted for by principles which, respectively, allow for either no evil or no goodness. And he dismisses the third possibility on the ground that it is opposed by "the uniformity and steadiness of general laws." Of the fourth possibility, he says only that it "seems by far the most probable," presumably because it alone allows both for the lawlikeness of nature and for the mixture of good and evil to be found in the world. While allowing that this conclusion may be rejected, he insists that, as long as any evil exists in the universe, it must be accounted for by natural religion. To the great dismay of his companions, who now suspect him of being a secret enemy of religion, Philo concludes with the admonition:

so long as there is any vice at all in the universe, it will very much puzzle you Anthropomorphites, how to account for it. You must assign a cause for it, without having recourse to the first cause. But as every effect must have a cause, and that cause another; you must either carry on the progression *in infinitum*, or rest on that original principle, who is the ultimate cause of all things. (D 212)

At this point, discussion of the problem of evil is broken off and Demea shortly departs, leaving Philo and Cleanthes to wrap up the discussion in part 12. And what a strange wrap-up it is! Up to now Philo's penetrating critique of the argument from design, his devastating treatment of the problem of evil and the "supreme being" hypothesis, and certainly his friends' suspicions as to the sincerity of his original proclamation regarding religion, have all combined to create the impression that Philo has emerged in his true colours as an opponent of theism. But this initial impression is not sustained in the final part of the *Dialogues*. On the contrary, we find that Philo appears to reverse himself and, *in agreement with Cleanthes*, to insist that some positive theistic conclusions can be drawn from the analogy between

the order of nature and the works of man. A string of claims concerning “design” flow this time from Philo, who calls them his “unfeigned sentiments on this subject.” Philo begins with a confession:

You in particular, CLEANTHES, with whom I live in unreserved intimacy; you are sensible, that, notwithstanding the freedom of my conversation, and my love of singular arguments, no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind, or pays more profound adoration to the divine Being, as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance and artifice of Nature. A purpose, an intention, a design strikes every where 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)

Philo goes on to suggest that the dispute between theists and atheists may be regarded as a *verbal* one. This surprising notion, new to the discussion so far, is supported by two observations: one, that some controversies are forever beyond resolution; and two, that these are “controversies concerning the degrees of any quality or circumstance.” A debate about whether Hannibal was a general or Cleopatra a Queen of Egypt can be settled, for there is a difference in *kind* between being and not being a general or between being and not being Queen of Egypt, but when it comes to the question whether Hannibal was a great general or Cleopatra very beautiful, the dispute is of another kind, for greatness and beauty are matters of degree, and the degree of either which satisfies one disputant may not satisfy another. Philo hypothesizes that the dispute between theists and atheists (as also that between dogmatists and sceptics) is of this nature, and that as a result the dispute is unresolvable and therefore “verbal” (D 216-18).

Superficially, it may look as if the theist and atheist are debating whether there is, or is not, a God, but as Philo sees it, the crux of the matter is the degree of difference between the human and the divine mind—a difference which tends to be maximized by the theist and minimized to the point of being whittled away by the atheist. Philo’s advice to both parties is, in effect, “to agree to disagree”—that is, to treat the matter as if it were a difference of taste or inclination. In other words, if you are overwhelmed by the difference between the world and what you presume to be its cause, call this source God; but if you consider the cause of the world, if it has a cause, to be very much like this world, call it nature rather than God. But in any case, recognize and respect the inclination of another to view the difference of which you are both aware in a different manner. “Consider then,” Philo says,

“where the real point of controversy lies, and if you cannot lay aside your disputes, endeavour, at least, to cure yourselves of your animosity” (D 218-19).

Philo’s ambivalent attitude toward the argument from design resurfaces in his final speech, where he both suggests that the arguments for the proposition, “*That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*” (D 227, Hume’s emphasis), exceed the objections against it, and at the same time draws attention to its limitations. For, in Philo’s view, unlike Cleanthes’, the proposition is too “undefined” to imply that the cause or causes of order in the universe have any specific attribute other than intelligence, or that human beings ought to conduct themselves in any particular way. Unless we dismiss Philo’s remarks in part 12 as pure posturing (making him a liar when he speaks of revealing his “unfeigned sentiments”), we are left with the conclusion that Philo is no atheist, at least in the wide sense of the term, but a limited theist. His is a more attenuated form of limited theism than we find in Cleanthes and certainly very different from the orthodox theism of Demea, but it is not for that reason the total rejection of theism. Philo, at least, is no atheist.

Philo’s arguments elsewhere in the *Dialogues* also point to that conclusion. The aim of his devastating critique of the argument from design is to show, not that there is no God, but that, if there is a God, we cannot infer from the empirical evidence alone that he is perfectly or even supremely powerful, wise, and good. Again, the proper conclusion of Philo’s version of the problem of evil is, not that there is no God, but that God, if he exists, is limited in some important respect—if not in power and intelligence, then in goodness. At no point does Philo maintain, as some later day atheists have done, that God and evil are incompatible. For this reason his position cannot be attacked, as theirs can, by proofs of their compatibility.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, if we compare Philo’s and Cleanthes’ conceptions of God, we will find that the chief point on which they differ has to do with the question of God’s moral attributes and their implications for human conduct. Cleanthes is prepared to allow that God is “finitely perfect” but still as benevolent as it is possible for such a being to be. As we saw in his critique of the supreme being hypothesis, however, Philo challenges the claim, not that God is supremely powerful or wise, but that he is benevolent to the same degree, at least as human beings understand benevolence. Indeed, Philo contemplates the possibility that the origin of the world (assuming it to have an origin) is morally neutral, being neither benevolent nor malevolent. It seems fair to say, therefore, that Philo and Cleanthes are both limited theists, though Philo advances a more minimal version of that position. On this

interpretation, the principal issue in the *Dialogues* turns out to be, as was affirmed at the beginning of part 2, the nature rather than the existence of God. The battle of wits is not between two theists and an atheist, so much as it is between three theists holding strikingly different conceptions of God and different conceptions of how that nature is to be known.

But what does this interpretation of the *Dialogues* tell us about Hume's own philosophy of religion? We cannot afford to assume that any one of the three principals is speaking for Hume. But there is evidence elsewhere in Hume's work that his position is probably closest to that of Philo. Three striking "parallels" may be noted. First and most obviously, Hume like Philo was a sceptic. Hume's scepticism was perhaps more general in that it extended to all manner of beliefs, including beliefs not questioned by Philo, such as belief in the external world, the uniformity of nature, and the continuity of the self; but scepticism with regard to the epistemic grounds of these beliefs did not lead Hume to disavow them, any more than scepticism with regard to the epistemic grounds of Demea's and Cleanthes' theistic beliefs led Philo to disavow theism completely. And further, just as Hume's scepticism as regards "common sense" beliefs led him to reconstrue these beliefs, to determine what could be salvaged from them, so Philo's scepticism led him, in a similar manner, to reconstrue more traditional forms of theism. The outcome of this strategy was for Hume a naturalistic theory of belief, and for Philo a minimalist version of theism. In any case, Philo's sceptical outlook is one of the hallmarks of his character.<sup>17</sup> Pamphilus' prologue contrasts the "careless scepticism" of Philo with the "accurate philosophical turn" of Cleanthes and the "rigid inflexible orthodoxy" of Demea. "Careless" is to be construed here, of course, not as sloppy but as carefree, since the sceptic traditionally achieves intellectual quietude (*ataraxia*) by recognizing that, as a general rule, as much can be said for, as against, any given philosophical proposition.

A second parallel can be found in the fact that several of Philo's objections to the argument from design can be found in another of Hume's works, the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, where Hume once again casts the matter in the form of an imaginary dialogue—this time between himself, who at one point pretends to be Epicurus addressing a group of Athenian citizens, and "a friend who loves sceptical paradoxes." Taken to task by the Athenians for denying "a providence and a future state," Hume-as-Epicurus once again points out the most serious limitation of the design argument: in inferring from the order in the world that, like the order to be found in human contrivances, it is probably the result of a designing intelligence, there

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is no reason to attribute to the hypothetical designer greater qualities of workmanship than we find in the work itself:

When we infer any particular cause from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other, and can never be allowed to ascribe to the cause any qualities, but what are exactly sufficient to produce the effect. A body of ten ounces raised in any scale may serve as a proof, that the counterbalancing weight exceeds ten ounces; but can never afford a reason that it exceeds a hundred.<sup>18</sup>

While exposing the limitations of this favourite argument for natural theology, however, Hume-as-Epicurus, like Philo, stops short of maintaining that the “religious hypothesis” is false.

A third parallel between Philo and Hume can be found in Hume’s second major work on the subject, the *Natural History of Religion*. While we may hesitate to identify any particular *persona* in the *Dialogues* with the author, Hume is speaking in *propria persona* in the former work, and his views bear a strong resemblance to Philo’s endorsement of a minimalist version of the argument from design. To give but two samples:

The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.<sup>19</sup>

*A little philosophy, says lord BACON, makes men atheists: A great deal reconciles them to religion.* For men, being taught, by superstitious prejudices, to lay the stress on a wrong place; when that fails them, and they discover, by a little reflection, that the course of nature is regular and uniform, their whole faith totters, and falls to ruin. But being taught, by more reflection, that this very regularity and uniformity is the strongest proof of design and of a supreme intelligence, they return to that belief, which they had deserted; and they are now able to establish it on a firmer and more durable foundation. (NHR 4:329, Hume’s emphasis)

While it is true that the *Natural History* ends on an agnostic note (“The whole is a riddle, an aenigma, an inexplicable mystery” [NHR 4:363]), it should be noted that agnosticism, understood as the view that we lack sufficient *evidence* to pass judgement on the issue dividing theists and atheists, is compatible both with certain forms of theism, such as

fideism and the rejection of evidentialism, and with the general Humean position that the source of certain basic beliefs, such as the belief that like causes have like effects (and vice versa?), is natural feeling or sentiment rather than reason. Hume was a limited theist in more than one respect: not only did he subscribe to a watered-down version of theism, but he subscribed to that in a tentative way, in sharp contrast to the full commitment generally associated with standard theism. Because of this doubly limited theism, it may seem that Hume's support for the "religious hypothesis" is too tenuous to warrant the label. Tenuous as it may be, however, it still shows that Hume was no atheist, as the term is being used in this paper.

In addition to the shared philosophical views of Hume and Philo, there is some biographical evidence that Hume associated himself most closely with Philo. Writing to his good friend Gilbert Elliot in 1751, to whom he sent a sample of the work, Hume said: "Had it been my good Fortune to live near you, I shou'd have taken on me the Character of Philo, in the Dialogue, which you'll own I could have supported naturally enough: And you would not have been averse to that of Cleanthes." <sup>20</sup> In the same letter, however, Hume claims "I make Cleanthes the Hero of the Dialogue," and requests his friend's assistance in strengthening Cleanthes' side of the argument. The juxtaposition of these two remarks is puzzling: if Philo is, so to speak, Hume's spokesman, why does Hume say that another character is the hero? Another puzzle for the Hume-Philo connection is Hume's remark, in a letter to the publisher William Strahan shortly before Hume's death, "I there [in the *Dialogues*] introduce a Sceptic, who is indeed refuted, and at last gives up the Argument, nay only confesses that he was only amusing himself by all these cavils" (*Letters*, 2:323). Can Philo be said to be speaking for his author if the latter confesses that Philo has been refuted?

The resolution of this perplexity may perhaps be found in distinguishing between the actual and the nominal hero of the *Dialogues*. The nominal hero of the work is Cleanthes, for Pamphilus, passing judgment upon the now completed discussion, awards the palm of victory to Cleanthes, second place to Philo, and third place to Demea. "I confess," he says, "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). Pamphilus' judgement is not remarkable; he is, after all, a pupil of Cleanthes and a younger philosopher, who, apart from his role as scribe, plays no part in the discussion he records. When Hume reported that Cleanthes was the hero and that the sceptic was refuted, he was, of course, reporting the situation from Pamphilus' point of view. But there is no need for us, or for Hume for that matter, to share this point

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of view. The delicious irony of the ending of the *Dialogues* is that a second-rate thinker is made to appear the victor, in the judgement of that thinker's pupil!

Whether or not these literary loose-ends can be tied up, they do not affect the main point of this paper: that Hume, however sceptical, playful, and ironic, did not totally disbelieve in some form of theism. Indeed, if Cleanthes is regarded as the actual victor in the *Dialogues*, the case for regarding Hume as a theist will be even more solid. Since part 12 reveals that Philo and Cleanthes share much common ground, in accepting some form of theism, though Philo's is clearly more attenuated than that of Cleanthes, it does not matter, for present purposes, which one is to be regarded as the real hero. There is in this work, however, a real loser. Demea, in abandoning the field to his opponents, suggests that the case for standard theism cannot be sustained. The *Dialogues*, therefore, leave no place for standard theism.

What about section 10 of the first *Enquiry*, the famous chapter "Of Miracles," originally written for the *Treatise of Human Nature* but suppressed out of fear of giving offense to the leading churchmen of Hume's early literary career? Though this piece is often regarded as an attack on a major bulwark of religious belief, it is not necessarily an attack on theism as such. The famous line, "We may conclude that the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one," is usually understood as an instance of Hume's celebrated irony. But Hume does not stop there. He goes on to add something upon which many theists would insist: "Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its [Christianity's] veracity: And whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience" (E 131). In other words, reason is opposed to belief in miracles and other Christian beliefs, but Hume does not go on to the further conclusion that therefore these beliefs are, or probably are, false. Is that because he regarded the conclusion as too obvious to be worth stating, or because he was unwilling or unable to go so far? While the essay itself remains ambivalent, Hume's other works on the philosophy of religion yield clues as to his intentions. Hume regarded standard theism with deep suspicion, but his belief in some form of theism was never entirely abandoned.

Despite the evidence we have considered, the conclusion that Hume was a theist will not go unchallenged. If the matter were so simple, it would hardly be a matter of debate among Hume scholars. Several objections to the theistic interpretation of Hume are certain to

be made. Without claiming that these are the only or the most important ones, I shall conclude by briefly considering and replying to four objections which come naturally to mind.

First, to begin with a biographical note, there is evidence that Hume disavowed any belief in religion. James Boswell, the great biographer of Dr. Samuel Johnson, reported the following conversation with Hume towards the end of Hume's life:

He said he never had entertained any beleif [*sic*] in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke. I asked him if he was not religious when he was young. He said he was. ... He then said flatly that the Morality of every Religion was bad, and, I really thought, was not jocular when he said 'that when he heard a man was religious, he concluded he was a rascal, though he had known some instances of very good men being religious.'<sup>21</sup>

Taking this account at face value, isn't it clear that Hume was no theist from youth onward? The answer is no, for the religious beliefs which Hume disavowed were very different from the minimal theism expressed in the *Dialogues* and the *Natural History*. Hume was brought up as a strict Calvinist, an interpretation of Christianity which emphasized the subservience of man to God and laid down demanding rules for every phase of conduct. In Locke and Clarke, Hume would have encountered a more liberal form of Christianity, but one which he could not bring himself to accept, for Locke had used an empirical argument and Clarke an a priori argument to demonstrate the existence of the God of standard theism, when Hume had come to conclude that no such argument could succeed. "And 'tis not long ago," Hume wrote Gilbert Elliot in 1751, "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. It began with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the common Opinion: Doubts 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" (*Letters*, 1:153). Hume did lose his religious beliefs, then, but these beliefs were so different from his later beliefs on the subject of a limited deity, that there is no need to suppose that he was talking about the same thing. Hume no doubt was aware that most theists of his day would regard his thought as irreligious.

Second, it may be asked: given Hume's penetrating critique of natural religion and his apparent animus toward revealed religion, why did Hume hang on to a *remnant* of theism? Why not go all the way and become, if not an atheist, at least an agnostic? Before suggesting

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an answer, I think we should note the tendentious nature of these questions. From the standpoint of standard theism, Hume could, of course, be described as hanging on to a remnant of that belief; but, having a regard to the rich and varied tapestry of extended theism, there is no call to describe Hume's position in that way. Hume's theory was not a "residue" of theism; it was another form of theism. As such some thinkers may find it intellectually unattractive and prefer a barer world-landscape, but that is not to say that Hume was unable to free himself from the grip of religious orthodoxy.

A partial explanation of Hume's limited theism may lie in the sceptical tradition of which Hume was a part.<sup>22</sup> Hume was sceptical not only of the dogmatic assurance of theologians like Dr. Samuel Clarke and Bishop Joseph Butler in his own time, but also of the equally dogmatic denials of the French *philosophes*. Reason, on his view, could not reach so far as the origin of worlds, having no experience of such a singular event. As he saw it, both orthodox religion and atheistic materialism outran the bounds of reason and experience. Such a view would seem to recommend suspension of belief—agnosticism—but here another element in traditional scepticism came into play. The ancient sceptics realized that, at least in the sphere of action, a man could not remain fixed in a state of indecision, and so they recommended that the sceptic guide his conduct by the customs of society and shape his beliefs by the appearances of things, but always without the dogmatism of the "true believer." Since Hume lived within a nominally Christian society and was evidently personally struck by the appearance of design in nature, at a time before this apparent design could be scientifically explained in nonteleological and nontheological terms, it is not surprising that he inclined toward a theistic worldview, even though he saw that there were no compelling rational grounds for this outlook. Neither did the ancient sceptics disavow everything they found no evidential reason to accept.

A third objection to the theistic interpretation of Hume may be put as follows: what is God-like about the being whose portrait emerges from the tatters of the design argument? For this is the portrait of a being who is limited in some important respect—if not in power and wisdom, then in goodness—and whose existence, while more probable than not, is far from certain. Needless to say, such a being is far removed from the God of standard theism, and to a lesser extent from the supreme being of Cleanthes and deists in general. In that case, one may object, would it warrant the attitude of worship, adoration, and devotion associated with more robust forms of theism? Indeed, if such a being existed, why call it "God"? Wouldn't it be just another extraordinary object—as amazing in its own way as perhaps Mozart was as a musical prodigy, but otherwise scarcely sacred or holy?

Dissatisfaction with Hume's form of theism has been expressed by a number of commentators. T. H. Huxley writes:

But, if we turn from the *Natural History of Religion*, to the *Treatise*, the *Enquiry*, and the *Dialogues*, the story of what happened to the ass laden with salt, who took to the water, irresistibly suggests itself. Hume's theism, such as it is, dissolves away in the dialectic river, until nothing is left but the verbal sack in which it was contained.<sup>23</sup>

Ernest C. Mossner, author of Hume's definitive biography and champion of the man and of the philosopher, is nevertheless not impressed by Hume's watered-down concept of God. As he sums it up:

The *a posteriori* argument from design proves only that the being of a God is faintly analogous to human intelligence and this analogy, faint as it is, cannot be transferred to the moral attributes of God. So the conduct of human life remains unaffected. The 'religious hypothesis' is impotent. There is no natural religion.<sup>24</sup>

Norman Kemp Smith, in a similar vein, writes:

Hume's attitude to true religion can therefore be summed up in the threefold thesis: (1) that it consists exclusively in *intellectual* assent to the "somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined" proposition, 'God exists'; (2) that the 'God' here affirmed is not God as ordinarily understood; and (3) as a corollary from (1) and (2), that religion ought not to have, and when 'true' and 'genuine' does not have, any influence on human conduct—beyond, that is to say, its intellectual effects, as rendering the mind immune to superstition and fanaticism.<sup>25</sup>

These and other comments express an understandable disappointment with Hume's version of theism, but the reason for the disappointment should be considered. We (Westerners?) are disappointed, perhaps, because historically we have come to think of theism as if it were synonymous with standard theism, and so any concept of the divine which falls short of the standard of perfection in all respects may well strike us as unworthy of its object. Transfixed by the notion of "that being than whom none greater can be conceived," the reader may feel that only such a being could be God, and that anything less does not deserve the name. By this standard, of course,

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even Cleanthes' "finitely perfect God" will fail to qualify, and even more so the God delineated by Hume's Philo. The fault may lie, however, not with the deists (of whom Hume may be counted a member), but with the exclusionary standard employed. Examine the multiplicity of concepts of God to be found in various cultures or devised by ingenious philosophers, and you will find that theism—theism in general—has never been committed exclusively to the concept of a perfect God, nor has worship of and devotion to divinity been restricted in such manner. To take but one famous example, the Lord's voice as the voice out of the whirlwind responds to Job's lamentations over his bitter fate by stressing, not God's justice and benevolence, but his power, majesty, and wisdom. And Job responds, not by saying, "Well, in that case, you aren't God" or, "You may be God, but you aren't just," but by acknowledging his own limitations:

I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. ... Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.<sup>26</sup>

The spirit of self-abasement is lacking in Philo, but he too stresses the "adorably mysterious and incomprehensible nature of the Supreme Being" (D 143).

Seen against the broad perspective of theism in general, Hume's concept of God will be seen not as an aberration in an otherwise uniform tradition, but as another variation on a rich theme running throughout the "religions of man." No doubt Hume's concept of God can be so watered down that little is left but the name, but does it have to be? God could be limited and still be, in comparison with humans, enormously more powerful and wise, and perhaps morally better, than the best of men. The notion that only an omniscient being can be worthy of worship, devotion, and reverence may only be a prejudice of perfection. If it is possible to revere someone like Socrates, Jesus, or Gandhi, who presumably were less than perfect but possessed certain powers and moral qualities far in excess of the ordinary, it is possible to revere a being who, compared to the greatest of human beings, may be like the sun to a candle. Hume's God, like Job's God, is not the God of standard theism, but for all that it is still a being in whom one can trace the lineaments of the divine.

A fourth and final objection to be considered here calls into question whether Hume's version of theism, as proposed in this paper, is consistent with his empiricist theory of knowledge and naturalistic

metaphysics. As every reader of Hume's first *Enquiry* knows, that work concludes with the famous passage:

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles [broadly, that matters of fact can be known only through experience and never through demonstrative reasoning], what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. (E 165, Hume's emphasis)

This passage anticipates the logical positivists' verification principle: a statement is literally meaningful if and only if it is either analytic (intuitively or demonstratively certain, for Hume) or empirically verifiable (testable by experimental reasoning, for Hume).<sup>27</sup> Given such a principle, how could Hume consistently believe in God, unless "God" was for him just another name for the presumptive original source of natural order? It seems that, to be consistent, Hume could be a theist in name only; or, if he was more than a nominal theist, that his philosophy of religion would be inconsistent with his empirical and naturalistic philosophy. Therefore, it may be argued, either Hume was not consistent in his overall philosophy or he was not, as I have maintained, a theist.

This objection raises a number of difficult issues, but I will concentrate here on the question of consistency. While it would be extravagant to insist that Hume's philosophy was through-and-through consistent,<sup>28</sup> there is no need to accuse Hume of *gross* inconsistency between his philosophy of religion and his epistemology and metaphysics. Nor is there a need to concede that he was a theist in name only. The dilemma "inconsistent or nontheist" is spurious, for it presumes, what is false, that a theist cannot be an empiricist or naturalist. No doubt many forms of theism are inconsistent with an empiricist epistemology or a naturalistic metaphysics, for they postulate a transcendent God who is different in kind from and independent of his creation and whose presence can be known directly only through self-revelation; but this is not true of all forms of theism. Perhaps the best-known example to the contrary is John Stuart Mill, who characterizes God in terms which are remarkably similar to Hume's Philo:

A being of great but limited power, how or by what limited we cannot even conjecture; of great, and perhaps unlimited, intelligence, but perhaps also more narrowly limited than his power; who desires and pays some regard to the happiness of his creatures, but who seems to have other motives of action which he cares more for, and who can hardly be supposed to have created the universe for that purpose alone. Such is the Deity whom natural religion points to; and any idea of God more captivating than this comes only from human wishes or from the teaching of either real or imaginary revelation.<sup>29</sup>

One may object, of course, that Mill himself was inconsistent in uniting theism with empiricism and naturalism, and so his example proves nothing with regard to Hume. Perhaps this objection can be sustained by construing "empiricism" and "naturalism" so narrowly as to exclude whatever goes beyond "immediate sense experience" or whatever is other than a "sense datum," but such a narrow construal of these terms invites the difficulties to which the verification principle in its more stringent formulation was early exposed. When "empiricism" is used more broadly to cover whatever can be known directly through observation or indirectly from observation through legitimated rules of inference, and "naturalism" to cover the content of whatever is accessible in either of these ways, there is no occasion to deny their compatibility with theism. A thought-experiment will, I think, confirm this. According to the Gospels, Jesus Christ was observed to do a number of remarkable things: to restore a dead man to life, to walk on water, to reappear to his disciples after his death, and so on. Suppose that all these things were true and, moreover, that we had personally observed them to be true: given only this and the information that Jesus was conceived by a virgin and claimed to have a special mission and to stand in a special relation to God, it would not be unreasonable for us to believe that Jesus was, if not God, at least a God or one who possessed divine powers. Yet in this story, our principal evidence for believing what we do is the "evidence of our senses" and the person about whom we have this belief is someone who, in other respects, resembles ourselves and other human beings.

If this story fails to be convincing, imagine that you know someone who can, at your request, restore the dead to life, the aged to the prime of life, and the sick to health; who can arrest hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters; who can bring life-giving rains to drought-stricken areas, temperate warmth to frigid wastes, and cooling breezes to sun-scorched lands; who can, for the benefit of human and other sentient beings, stay the tides, the motion of the moon and other heavenly bodies. Who would deny that such a being, if he existed and

we had no reason to think that we were dreaming or hallucinating, had God-like powers or was divine?<sup>30</sup> And in believing this, on the basis of our own observation, would we not be embracing a form of theism?

I conclude that Hume's theism is not inconsistent with his empiricist methodology and naturalistic worldview. If a different opinion has sometimes prevailed, that may be accounted for by the tendency, noted above, to assimilate theism to standard theism. Since opponents of standard theism are often regarded as atheists, it is not surprising that Hume should have been so regarded by many of his contemporaries and successors, despite the fact that he never identified himself with that group. And the reason he did not do so was not intellectual or social timidity, but the fact that, as he probably realized, he was not a member of that group. The story is told that, at a dinner party hosted by the Baron d'Holbach in Paris, Hume remarked that, "He did not believe in atheists, that he had never seen any," to which the Baron replied that, of the eighteen other persons present, fifteen were atheists and the other three hadn't made up their minds.<sup>31</sup> While this anecdote may tell something about the difference between English and French intellectual circles in the eighteenth century, it also, I think, tells us something about David Hume. He was not disingenuous when he spoke as he did.

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1. "Of Miracles," and "Of a particular Providence and of a future State." Other relevant works include the essays "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," "On Suicide," and "On the Immortality of the Soul."
2. See, for example, Antony Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism* (London, 1976), 52.
3. Timothy A. Mitchell, *David Hume's Anti-Theistic Views* (Lanham, MD, 1986).
4. Nelson Pike, ed., *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis, 1970), 222-38. Also J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2d ed. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1988), 130.

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5. James Noxon, "Hume's Agnosticism," in *Hume*, ed. V. C. Chappell (Garden City, N.Y., 1966), 361-83.
6. John Valdimir Price, *The Ironic Hume* (Austin, 1965), 152.
7. Keith E. Yandell, "Hume on Religious Belief," in *Hume: A Re-Evaluation*, ed. Donald W. Livingston and James T. King (New York, 1976), 109.
8. Except, possibly, for those who believe in original sin!
9. William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction* (Dickenson, 1978), 14.
10. The term is borrowed from William L. Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): 95. Rowe contrasts "standard theism" with "expanded theism" and "restricted theism," but the latter do not correspond to my distinction between "extended theism" and "limited theism."
11. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis, 1947), 57 (hereafter cited as "D"). Hume's friends were probably concerned lest the work's anti-religious tone alienate its readers and so set back the author's growing literary reputation.
12. For an account of the difficulties Hume encountered in arranging for its publication, see Ernest C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 2d ed. (Oxford, 1980), 592-93.
13. For an historical overview of the role of the argument from design in eighteenth century science, see Robert H. Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument*, rev. ed. (Lincoln, NB, 1985).
14. For Hume's own statement, see the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 12, pt. 3.
15. The phrase is quoted from Richard Wollheim, ed. *Hume on Religion* (Cleveland, 1969), 25. Wollheim insists, however, that "Hume never called himself an atheist, nor thought of himself as one."
16. See, for example, Alvin Plantinga's reply to J. L. Mackie in *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, 1977), 12-55.
17. John Valdimir Price maintains that the choice of the name "Philo" for the sceptic in the *Dialogues* was not accidental, since Philo (160-80 B.C.) was the founder of the so-called fourth Academy and academic philosophy had become synonymous with sceptical philosophy.
18. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 136 (hereafter cited as "E").
19. David Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, in *The Philosophical Works*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, 4 vols. (Darmstadt, 1964), 4:309 (hereafter cited as "NHR").

20. David Hume, *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Grieg, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1932), 1:154 (hereafter cited as *Letters*).
21. *Boswell Papers*, 12:227. Quoted in Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (above, n. 12), 517.
22. See Richard H. Popkin, "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism," in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, ed. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (San Diego, 1980), 103-31.
23. Quoted in Norman Kemp Smith, "Hume's Views Regarding Religion in General," in *Dialogues*, 22.
24. Ernest C. Mossner, "Hume and the Legacy of the Dialogues," in *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers* ed. G. P. Morice (Edinburgh, 1977), 18.
25. *Dialogues*, 24.
26. Job 42:2-6.
27. See A. J. Ayer, "Introduction," in *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2d ed. (New York, 1946).
28. What philosopher's thought does not undergo development and modification over time? I assume that Hume's thought is coherent if his central tenets, as expressed in his mature work, are not incoherent.
29. John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (AMS Press, 1970), 195.
30. So far this story leaves open the possibility that the being in question is only your amanuensis, and that you are the god ultimately responsible for these extraordinary events. To block this possibility we may need to incorporate the proviso that this being does not always obey your requests—notably, when they are destructive or perpetrated by you only as a means of self-aggrandizement.
31. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (above, n. 12), 483.