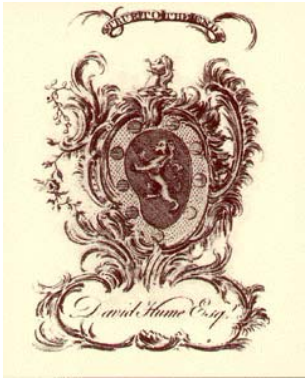

Hume's Aesthetic Theism

John Immerwahr

Hume Studies Volume XXII, Number 2 (November, 1996) 225-338.

HUME STUDIES
Volume XXII, Number 2, November 1996, pp. 325-337

Hume's Aesthetic Theism

JOHN IMMERWAHR

When it comes to religion, Hume's motto is *corruptio optimi pessima*, "the corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst" (NHR 338,339, S&E 73).[1] He warmly endorses what he calls "true religion" and strongly attacks false religion, superstition and priestcraft. Hume's distaste for false religion is obviously sincere, but scholars have sometimes wondered how seriously to take Hume's "veneration for true religion" (DNR 219). Are his favorable comments about true religion honest or is this just one more smokescreen?[2]

In fact, Hume tells us very little about what he calls "true religion," "true theism" or "genuine piety." At one point Hume even drafted an apology to readers of his *History of England* for the fact that "the Mischiefs which arise from the Abuses of Religion, are so often mentioned, while so little in comparison is said of the salutary Consequences which result from true & genuine piety."[3]

In what follows I look at a number of the passages where Hume does discuss true religion, in an attempt to ask what makes true religion true.[4] In brief, his answer is that the superiority of genuine theism results from its moral qualities rather than its epistemological warrant.[5] Unlike other forms of religion, true religion is based on the calm passions rather than the violent ones and as such it alone is able to perform "the proper Office of religion" which is to reinforce and support morality.[6] While Hume never wavers from his position that morality does not require any religious or theological commitment, he does feel that at least this one approach to religion has a positive moral contribution to make.

John Immerwahr is at the Department of Philosophy, Villanova University, Villanova PA 19085-1699 USA. Email: Immerwa@Email.Vill.Edu

True religion in Hume's writings

Scattered through Hume's writings are a number of references to a minimalistic religion that is immune from the usual Humean critiques. The exempted form of religion is what Gaskin describes as an "attenuated Deism," which includes a conviction of the existence of God as the cause of order in the universe, together with a commitment to a secular human morality.[7] Here are a few passages where this form of religion is mentioned:

> *The Natural History of Religion*: 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. (NHR 309)
>
> *History of England*: In every religion, except the true, [the diligence of the clergy] is highly pernicious, and it has even a natural tendency to pervert the true, by infusing into it a strong mixture of superstition, folly, and delusion. (HE III 135)
>
> *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*: Philo: All the new discoveries in astronomy, which prove the immense grandeur and magnificence of the works of Nature, are so many additional arguments for a Deity, according to the true system of Theism. (DNR 165)

It is, of course, dangerous to take anything Hume says about religion at face value. On the one hand, Hume's religious works, such as his essay on miracles, were a major force in attracting the kind of literary reputation which he so much desired. On the other hand, he lived with the constant possibility of persecution by the ultra-conservative wing of the Scottish church.[8] One of his self-protective techniques is to criticize one religious position only from the framework of another. This allows him a certain "deniability" in that he can always say that he was only criticizing a specific form of religion, not religion generally.[9] At least some of what he says about true religion can probably be written off as protective coloration. Nonetheless, if we take seriously what Hume says about the "suitable notions of [God's] divine perfections" (DNR 88) we come up with a model of true religion that is compatible with Hume's overall perspective.

The justifiability of true theism

What makes true religion true? Hume tells us that there is an "obvious and invincible argument" for the principles of pure theism (NHR 311), which he also describes as a "reasonable" theory (NHR 361). Nonetheless, many commentators agree that despite Hume's claim that "the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author," Hume actually believes that even the

most acceptable arguments for the existence of God are "irregular" and do not conform to the highest standards of empirical reasoning.[10] I assume, without argument here, that it is also unlikely that Hume felt that religious beliefs were unavoidable "natural beliefs" such as our belief in the existence of external objects.[11] Rather than being irresistible, the principles of pure theism are believed only by a "few persons" (NDR 223; 334).

Hume distinguishes between two questions about religion, "that concerning its foundation in reason, and that concerning its origin in human nature" (NHR 309). My hypothesis is that the truth of true theism has to do with its source in human nature, not its justification in reason. Strictly speaking, true religion is no more justified than false religion. But only true religion is grounded in the passions in such a way that it can actually perform the "proper Office of religion." Hume's understanding of "true" in this context is better captured by his alternative descriptions of this religious position as "genuine" or "pure."

The anatomy of religious experience

In order to see what makes pure theism so attractive, we must look at Hume's remarks on how religious belief is formed. In the *Natural History* and in his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" Hume sketches out a theory of the elements of religious belief. For Hume religious belief has at least five analytically interesting elements: religious belief starts in a review of a certain *domain* of events; it also rises from a certain way of *understanding* those events; it is driven by a *motivating passion*; it relies on a *propensity* to anthropomorphism; and religious beliefs also have serious *moral implications*.

These five elements help to differentiate three major types of religion: superstition (which comes in both monotheistic and polytheistic versions), enthusiasm (which appears to be invariably monotheistic) and pure religion. In Hume's writings about his own historical era, superstition usually refers to Catholicism, while enthusiasm evokes radical Protestantism. Pure theism refers to the views of Deists (for example, Cleanthes in the *Dialogues*). In what follows I compare and contrast superstition, enthusiasm and true religion in each of the five categories.

1. The domain: human events vs. natural events

Hume takes it as axiomatic that religious belief of any kind begins in the contemplation of some set of events. Superstitious polytheism, for example, begins in the contemplation of "the various and contrary events of human life" (NHR 314). A person who was not exposed to the contrary ebb and flow of human events would never be led into this form of religious belief.

Enthusiasm is based partially on observation of external events, such as "prosperous success" or "luxuriant health," but it also relies on a contempla-

tion of human emotions themselves such as "strong spirits" or a "bold and confident disposition" (S&E 74).

Whereas popular religions are based on our observation of human events, true theism is always described by Hume as being based on an observation of natural events. In the *Natural History*, Hume tells us that theism is based on our awareness of "the whole frame of nature" (NHR 309), "the order and frame of the universe" (NHR 311), the "works of nature," and "the anatomy of plants and animals" (NHR 317) and the "adjustment of final causes"(NHR 317), and the "contrivance of natural objects" (NHR 325). In the *Dialogues*, both Cleanthes and Philo take human anatomy (rather than human affairs) as their example of an observation that will lead to true theism (DNR 215).

It is thus the orderly pattern of nature that leads an observer to true theism, rather than the impact of natural events on human well-being. Indeed, human affairs are one of the biggest stumbling blocks for the pure theist.

2. The understanding: ignorance vs. knowledge

The second element that mixes into the production of religious belief is an understanding (or lack of understanding) of the domain that is being contemplated. In the case of both superstition and enthusiasm, the posture of the believer is one of ignorance. Hume tells us that superstition is driven by the fact that the events that so concern us are driven by "secret and unknown causes, whose operation is oft unexpected, and always unaccountable" (NHR 316). If people actually understood the causes of these events, they would not be attracted to their superstitions:

> Could men anatomize nature, according to the most probable, at least the most intelligible philosophy, they would find, that these causes are nothing but the particular fabric and structure of the minute parts of their own bodies and of external objects; and that, by a regular and constant machinery, all the events are produced, about which they are so much concerned. But this philosophy exceeds the comprehension of the ignorant multitude, who can only conceive the unknown causes in a general and confused manner. (NHR 316)

Enthusiasm is also created by a lack of understanding of the domain of events. In this case the problem is a lack of understanding of our own emotions or of the source of our successes. These changes are also "unaccountable" and they are "confused":

> [T]he mind of man is also subject to an unaccountable elevation and presumption, arising from prosperous success, from luxuriant health, from strong spirits, or from a bold and confident disposition. In such a state of mind, the imagination swells with great, but confused conceptions, to which no sublunary beauties or enjoyments can correspond. (S&E 74)

Both of these types of religion are thus rooted in ignorance and lack of understanding. If we understood human events or our own feelings, our observations would never produce religious belief.

Although popular religion is driven by our ignorance of the causes of the events we observe, pure theism is driven by our understanding of them. The more we understand the causes, the more we are drawn toward pure theism. Although Hume sometimes describes superstition as being based on an ignorance of "secret causes," it is clear that the causal understanding which is at the basis of pure theism is a Humean understanding of causality based on perceived regularities. It is precisely the "regularity and uniformity" of nature that is the "strongest proof of design and of a supreme intelligence" (DNR 329). Hume quotes with agreement Bacon's observation that *"a little philosophy...makes men atheists: A great deal reconciles them to religion"* (DNR 329). He interprets this to mean that as people learn more about the workings of the universe, their commitment to popular religion decreases, but their acceptance of pure theism increases.

3. The motivating passions: hope, pride and fear vs. aesthetic appreciation of beauty

Hume also holds that belief must be motivated by a passion. Religious belief, like any other, gets its force from an underlying feeling and cannot arise without it:

> In order to carry men's intention beyond the present course of things, or lead them into any inference concerning invisible intelligent power, they must be actuated by some passion, which prompts their thought and reflection; some motive, which urges their first enquiry. (NHR 315)

In theory, this could be any of the human passions; Hume writes that "any of the human affections may lead us into the notion of invisible, intelligent power" (NHR 318). In actual fact there are only a few passions that have this effect and the question of which passion is at work is central to differentiating forms of religion.

Superstition (both of the polytheistic and monotheistic varieties) is driven by hope and fear. As Hume tells us, superstitious belief arises "from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and fears, which

actuate the human mind." Enthusiasm, by contrast, is driven by more positive emotions such as "hope and pride," "confidence and presumption" (S&E 74). Presumably it is fear which creates the dark repressive quality of superstition, while pride creates the more positive quality of enthusiasm.

Pure theism is also based on an emotion; in pure theism the relevant passion is the sense of beauty rather than hope or fear. Almost all of Hume's descriptions of pure theism are couched in aesthetic terms. In the following examples, I have highlighted the aesthetic language in Hume's statements of pure theism:

> From the *beautiful* connection...and rigid observance of established rules, we draw the chief argument for theism. (NHR 329)

> Adam...would be astonished by the *glorious appearances* of nature...and would be led to ask, whence this *wonderful* scene arose. (NHR 311)

> Such a *magnificent* idea is too big for their narrow conceptions, which can neither observe the *beauty* of the work, nor comprehend the *grandeur* of its author. (NHR 317)

> Cleanthes: 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. (DNR 143)

> Philo: In many views of the universe and of its parts, particularly the latter, the *beauty* and fitness of final causes strike us with such irresistible force, that all objections appear (what I believe they really are) mere cavils and sophisms. (DNR 201)

Pure theism, then, grows out of an aesthetic appreciation of the natural world.

The fact that pure theism is based on an aesthetic appreciation of nature is one of the main factors that differentiates it from false religions which are based on fear, hope or pride. In Hume's schema, the sense of beauty is a "calm passion" while the motivating passions of popular religion—fear, hope, and pride—are all what he calls "violent passions":

> The reflective impressions may be divided into two kinds, *viz.* the *calm* and the *violent*. Of the first kind is the sense of beauty and deformity in action, composition, and external objects. Of the second are the passions of love and hatred, grief and joy, pride and humility. (T 276)

Pure theism is thus grounded in a totally different type of passion, a fact that has great significance for Hume when it comes to the moral implications of religious belief.

4. The propensity: anthropomorphism[12]

In superstition and enthusiasm, our passion and ignorance combine with a universal human propensity toward anthropomorphism. Our hopes, fears and pride about things we only partially understand lead us to assume that there is an invisible spirit which is somehow humanlike:

> There is an universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice or good-will to every thing, that hurts or pleases us. (NHR 317)

Both superstition and enthusiasm, then, are based on a human propensity to anthropomorphize nature and give it human qualities.

What about pure religion? Does it differ from false religion in this area also? In a remarkable letter to Gilbert Elliot, Hume asks for help in strengthening Cleanthes's argument in the *Dialogues*. The problem that concerns Hume is how to describe the propensity to move from observed order in nature to the existence of a designer. He observes again the propensity that causes us to make other anthropomorphic judgments such as seeing "human faces in the moon." In the letter, Hume stresses the need to find a stronger basis for pure theism if it is to be based on a formal argument.

> I cou'd wish that Cleanthes' Argument coud be so analys'd, as to be render'd quite formal & regular. The Propensity of the Mind towards it, unless that Propensity were as strong & universal as that to believe in our Senses & Experience, will still, I am afraid, be esteem'd a suspicious Foundation. Tis here I wish for your Assistance. We must endeavour to prove that this Propensity is somewhat different from our Inclination to find our own Figures in the Clouds, our Face in the Moon, our Passions & Sentiments even in inanimate Matter. Such an Inclination may, & ought to be controul'd, & can never be a legitimate Ground of Assent.[13]

Does Hume ever find an answer to his question? Does he eventually articulate a version of pure theism that is free of what he describes in the *Dialogues* as the "inconveniences" of anthropomorphism (DNR 160, 165)? The answer to this question would require a lengthy analysis of the *Dialogues*

which cannot be conducted here. My own reading is that whatever force pure theism does acquire, it remains infected by a crippling reliance on anthropomorphism. Hume says as much in a footnote in the *Dialogues*, where, presumably speaking in his own voice, he suggests that even the best arguments for theism are subject to difficulties which are "in a regular, logical method, absolutely insolveable" (DNR 219). My assumption is that he is referring here to the same problem that bothered him in the letter to Elliot. The difficulty is that it is impossible to find a more "regular" basis for pure theism than the anthropomorphic tendency that is at the basis of popular superstition. In this aspect, then, pure theism is identical to superstition and enthusiasm.

5. Moral implications: fanaticism and priestcraft vs. the "proper office of religion"

The four factors described above lead an individual to one form of religious belief or another. But these religious views themselves have implications, both for individuals who adhere to them and for the societies where they are prevalent.

Hume's views on the moral implications of superstition and enthusiasm evolved considerably over the course of his career.

Hume's initial position on superstition (in the 1741 essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm") is that superstition is invariably bad in that it encourages repression and priestcraft. By the time Hume came to write the *Natural History*, however, his view on superstition softens and he is willing to concede that polytheistic superstition has some positive moral influences; for all its other limitations, Hume believes that superstitious polytheism encourages tolerance and courage.

Initially, in "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," Hume took a more favorable view of enthusiasm. In the essay he argued that enthusiasm, after a brief period of dangerous frenzy, burns itself out and becomes benign.

> It is thus enthusiasm produces the most cruel disorders in human society; but its fury is like that of thunder and tempest, which exhaust themselves in a little time, and leave the air more calm and serene than before. (S&E 77)

In the *History of England*, however, we find a much more negative view of enthusiasm. Donald Siebert argues that Hume's preference for enthusiasm erodes as a result of his more detailed study of religious disputes in England.[14] At any rate, during the 1750s, when Hume was writing both the *History of England* and the *Natural History*, he ran into numerous difficulties from the Scottish church. This may have soured him on the benefits of enthusiastic Protestantism. Interestingly, Hume does not mention enthusiasm at all in the *Natural History*; all of his discussion of popular religion is confined to

a treatment of superstition (especially Catholicism).[15] Hume may have omitted discussing enthusiasm to avoid further offending Protestant religious sensibilities. Hume never retreats from his view that both forms of popular religion have negative moral implications, but he comes to feel that enthusiasm's long-term consequences are worse than he originally felt, while some forms of superstition come to appear more benign.

It is in the area of morality that true and false religion differ most dramatically. Unlike superstition and enthusiasm, true religion has an unqualifiedly benign influence on morality. This comes out most clearly in the unpublished draft introduction to Volume II of the *History of England*. Speaking of "true & genuine piety" Hume says:

> The proper Office of Religion is to reform Men's Lives, to purify their Hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, & to secure Obedience to the Laws & civil Magistrate. While it pursues these useful Purposes, its Operations, tho' infinitely valuable, are secret & silent; and seldom come under the Cognizance of History....That Principle is always the more pure & genuine, the less figure it makes in those Annals of Wars, & Politics, Intrigues, & Revolutions, Quarrels & Convulsions, which it is the Business of an Historian to record & transmit to Posterity. [16]

Although Hume eventually did not include this passage in the *History*, he adapted it for a speech by Cleanthes in the *Dialogues*:

> The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience; and as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives. When it distinguishes itself, and acts as a separate principle over men, it has departed from its proper sphere, and has become only a cover to faction and ambition. (DNR 220)

Although it is always risky to attribute something that Cleanthes says to Hume himself, the fact that the language so closely resembles Hume's own words from his draft introduction supports the view that here Cleanthes is echoing Hume's own views.

Why should true theism support morality while popular religion undercuts it? Hume does not spell this out in any great detail, but an answer suggests itself. Generally speaking, Hume believes that moral life is a struggle between the calm passions and the violent ones. Violent passions are associated with all of the targets of Hume's critiques: factions, fanaticism, and political and religious frenzy of all types. Calm passions are associated with individual happiness, moderation and civility in politics, and a focus on the long-term

good of the individual or the society.

Hume's essay "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion" is particularly helpful here.[17] Hume contrasts those who are dominated by "delicacy of taste" (the calm passions of aesthetic awareness) with those whose lives are dominated by "delicacy of passion" (the frenetic experience of the violent passions). The terms Hume uses here correspond precisely to the differences between popular and genuine religion. Delicacy of taste concerns itself with "beauty and deformity" while delicacy of passion focuses on "prosperity and adversity, obligations and injuries" (DTP 4). Hume argues that the aesthetic sensibilities are not only better in their own right, in that they are more likely to make us happy, but also preferable because they have a tendency to soften our violent passions. Aesthetic appreciation "rather improves our sensibility for all the tender and agreeable passions; at the same time that it renders the mind incapable of the rougher and more boisterous emotions" (DTP 6).

The following matrix summarizes the argument. Superstition and enthusiasm are revealed as close relatives, sharing many of the same elements. Pure theism differs from the other two in every way but one, its common reliance on a tendency to anthropomorphize. This defect undercuts its epistemological warrant, but does not infect its moral superiority.

	Superstition	Enthusiasm	True Religion
Domain	Human events	Human events and emotions	Natural world
Understanding	Ignorance of secret causes	Confusion	Understanding of causes
Passion	Direct and violent: fear and hope	Indirect and violent: pride Direct and violent: hope	Calm; aesthetic appreciation
Propensity	Anthropomorphism	Anthropomorphism	Anthropomorphism
Implications for Morality	Supports repression and priestcraft	Supports anarchy and frenzy	Softens the violent passions

We are now able to see what is true for Hume about "true theism." Society will be most successful, in Hume's view, if it is able to encourage the calm passions and their associated virtues, and if it is able to contain the violent passions and their associated vices. Popular religion has precisely the wrong effect. In superstitious religion, a fearful contemplation of unknown events

causes ignorant people to anthropomorphize a vengeful deity. Since superstitious people never imagine that their deity will be appeased by conformity with human morality, they are soon driven to some socially counterproductive activities that are intended to appease the deity.

In enthusiastic religion, unaccountable high spirits cause an "intoxicating" enthusiasm. In the *History of England,* Hume describes the effect of enthusiasm in one period of English history as follows:

> In every discourse or conversation, this mode of religion entered; in all business, it had a share; every elegant pleasure or amusement, it utterly annihilated; many vices or corruptions of mind, it promoted; even diseases and bodily distempers were not totally exempted from it; and it became requisite, we are told, for all physicians to be expert in the spiritual profession, and, by theological consideration, to allay those religious terrors, with which their patients were so generally haunted. Learning itself, which tends so much to enlarge the mind, and humanize the temper, rather served on this occasion to exalt that epidemical frenzy which prevailed. (HE V 348)

True theism has exactly the opposite effect. As we contemplate the natural world from the perspective of an appreciation of the beauty of its interworkings, our aesthetic sensibility is engaged. As always, aesthetic appreciation encourages the desirable calm passions, while helping us to control the violent ones. Faced with a natural disaster that impacts negatively on human life, a true theist will see the events in a larger view as part of an orderly plan for the universe. A rational understanding of the events will counter the fears and will help to "enlarge the mind" and "humanize the temper" (HE V 348). A society of true theists would be highly desirable. The problem, however, is that, as we have seen, true theism is extremely rare. So few people are attracted to this form of religion that it holdsd very little promise for social welfare. For Hume, then, morality must invariably be based on a secular foundation. While true religion would provide a strong foundation, it is so unusual that its practical impact is negligible.

The end product of this analysis is an attack on religion that takes the form of a characteristically Humean "fork": religion either exists in a form which is as dangerous as it is common, or in a benign form which is confined to a few philosophers. In either case, religion can contribute little of value to society.

NOTES

1 All of the references to Hume's writings are taken from *The Complete Works and Correspondence of David Hume*, an electronic database published by The InteLex Corporation, 1995. The following abbreviations are used for works of David Hume that are cited within the text, and the page numbers given in the text correspond to the pages in the following print editions.

DNR *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1947)

DTP "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion" in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).

HE *The History of England*; page numbers correspond to the edition of 1778.

NHR *The Natural History of Religion*, from *Philosophical Works of David Hume*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London: Longmans, Green, 1882).

S&E "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987).

T *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edition with text revised and variant readings by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978)

2 For cautions about taking seriously Hume's positive remarks about religion in the *Natural History* (the source of much of what he says about true religion) see Mark Webb, "The Argument of the Natural History," *Hume Studies* 17.2 (1991): 141-160, and Christopher J. Wheatley, "Polemical Aspects of Hume's *Natural History of Religion*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 19 (1985-86): 502-514.

3 This draft introduction is quoted in Ernest C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1954), 306-307.

4 For a different approach to this question see Donald Livingston, "Hume's Conception of True Religion," in *Hume's Philosophy of Religion: The James Montgomery Hester Seminar* 6 (1986), 33-72. Livingston is particularly interested in the relationship between true religion and true philosophy, a problem that I do not discuss here.

5 This point is also made by Stephen Paul Foster in his article "Different Religions and the Difference They Make: Hume on the Political Effects of Religious Ideology," *The Modern Schoolman* 66 (1989): 253-274.

6 See the draft introduction in Mossner, p. 306.

7 J.C.A. Gaskin, "Hume's Attenuated Deism," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 65 (1983): 160-173.

8 Hume's trouble with the Scottish church peaked in the mid-1750s, precisely at the time Hume was publishing the *Natural History*. The details, including the attempt to excommunicate Hume, are detailed in Mossner, pp. 336 ff.

9 M. Jamie Ferreira, "Religion's 'Foundation in Reason': The Common Sense of Hume's *Natural History*," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 24 (1994): 565-582, p. 579.

10 The distinction between a regular and irregular argument for theism is discussed by Nelson Pike in his edition of *Hume: Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), pp. 229 ff.

11 For an extensive treatment of the analogies and disanalogies between religious belief and natural belief see J.C.A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1978; second edition 1988), chapters 6 and 7. For an example of a scholar who stresses the similarity between religious belief and natural belief see Ferreira, "Religion's 'Foundation in Reason'."

12 For detailed discussion of the propensity see Keith Yandell, *Hume's "Inexplicable Mystery": His Views on Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 90 ff.

13 The text of this letter is taken from the InteLex database; it corresponds to letter 72, 1751 in *The Letters of David Hume*, (ed.) J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), I 155.

14 Donald T. Seibert, "Hume on Idolatry and Incarnation," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984): 379-96.

15 The absence of any discussion of enthusiasm in the *Natural History* is also noted by Wheatley, who also sees in this decision an effort by Hume to blunt the edge of what he is saying, see "Polemical Aspects of Hume's *Natural History of Religion*" p. 510.

16 Quoted in Mossner, pp. 306-307.

17 For a discussion of the centrality of "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion" to Hume's overall project see John Immerwahr, "The Anatomist and the Painter: The Continuity of Hume's *Treatise* and *Essays*," *Hume Studies* 17.1(1991): 1-14.

Received March 1996
Revised September 1996