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# Religion and Moral Prohibition in Hume’s “Of Suicide”

THOMAS HOLDEN

*Abstract:* This paper presents a new analysis of the logical structure of Hume’s attack on the theological objection to suicide. I suggest that Hume intends his reasoning in “Of Suicide” to generalize, covering not just suicide but any arbitrary action: his implied conclusion is that no human action can violate a duty to God. I contrast my reading with a series of recent interpretations, and argue that the various criticisms of Hume’s reasoning are based on a misunderstanding of what he is about. Finally, I also show the integration of Hume’s discussion of suicide with his broader critique of attempts to generate moral conclusions by way of natural religion.

## Introduction

The centerpiece of Hume’s “Of Suicide” is his attack on the view that we owe a duty to God not to kill ourselves.<sup>1</sup> Hume clearly regards this theological prohibition as the leading challenge to the justification of suicide, and devotes three quarters of the essay to countering it. However, assessments of his performance here have varied since the essay’s posthumous publication in 1777.<sup>2</sup> Hume’s eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century reviewers mauled this part of the essay.<sup>3</sup> Twentieth-century commentators were generally more approving, though their wide citation of and praise for Hume’s critique has something of a detached character to it: there is little in the way of sustained examination or analysis of Hume’s actual arguments, at least in print.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, however, Hume’s

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handling of the theological objection has been the focus of renewed scrutiny. These latest commentators break with the received assessment: they are each sharply critical of Hume's attempt to disarm the theological objection, and have even revived some of the original eighteenth-century attacks on his reasoning.<sup>5</sup> Hume, they argue, commits a series of logical blunders that, taken together, are really quite disturbing.

We can summarize the main criticisms here. First, Hume presents arguments for the moral permissibility of suicide that could readily be generalized to license any action, murder not excepted. But no one thinks that that murder is permissible, so we have a clear *reductio* of Hume's reasoning. Second, he argues from deterministic premises to the absence of all moral responsibility, thereby begging the question against compatibilist accounts of responsibility in general, and contradicting his own commitment to compatibilism (in the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*) in particular. Third, Hume's arguments run from descriptive, non-normative premises to a normative, moralized conclusion. They therefore violate his own famous embargo on inferring an "ought" from an "is," and are of dubious validity by anyone's standards.<sup>6</sup>

These criticisms are based on a misunderstanding of what Hume is about, or so I will argue. They show a misapprehension of both the logical structure of his engagement with the theological objection, and of the way in which this part of the essay relates to his overall defense of suicide. The arguments Hume mobilizes in response to the theological objection can indeed be generalized, not to prove (absurdly) the moral permissibility of any arbitrary action, but rather to prove that no action is prohibited out of a duty *owed to God*. This result is not a *reductio* for Hume, but rather something he would welcome and likely intends. Nor do his arguments (properly understood) contradict either compatibilism, or the assertion of a logical gap between "is" and "ought." Hume's treatment of the theological objection avoids each of these logical offenses (I will argue), leaving us with a serious challenge to the theological prohibition on suicide.

My first main goal in this paper is to exhibit the logical structure of Hume's attack on the theological objection. I situate Hume's discussion within the overall argument of "Of Suicide," identify his framework of assumptions about the dialectical situation, and offer an interpretation of his attack on the theological objection. Along the way, I hope to show that Hume is not guilty of the various blunders with which he has been charged. My aim is not simply to counter the recent critics, however. Going beyond the issue of suicide, I relate Hume's arguments in the essay to his secular approach to moral theory in general. Thus, my second main goal: to show the integration of Hume's arguments in "Of Suicide" with his broader critique of the pretensions of natural religion to generate implications for practice or conduct.

## 1. Hume's Thesis and Master Argument in "Of Suicide"

Before examining Hume's critique of the theological objection, we need to consider the overall agenda of "Of Suicide" and locate Hume's discussion within the master argument of the essay. First, however, there is the prior question of whether the essay is intended as a serious work of philosophy at all, or whether it is simply so much propagandist pamphleteering.

"Of Suicide" is a work of arresting eloquence, forcefully maintaining the moral innocence of the "fatal remedy" to misfortune and calamity (ss 2). But although Hume explicitly presents the essay as an exercise in "true philosophy" (ss 1), and while its overall structure undeniably indicates the broad outlines of an argumentative strategy, the text is not particularly clear, systematic, or precise in its details. Certain sub-arguments appear to interweave in the text, others are simply partial or inchoate, and at times Hume's conclusions are clearly overstated. Since Hume's day, various commentators have gone so far as to suggest that the essay is not so much a work of philosophy as it is an exercise in rhetoric, propagandist suasion, or mere cleric-baiting—successful in its own dramatic terms, perhaps, but scarcely belonging in Hume's philosophical corpus proper. This reading is presumably driven by the thought that the essay's arguments are simply so weak when considered logically (and perhaps also contradict canonical doctrines in Hume's more precise philosophical works) that Hume simply cannot have intended them as compelling reasoning *sub specie philosophiae*. One of my purposes in this paper is to obviate the need for this interpretation by showing that "Of Suicide" is (at least in part) a *philosophical* polemic. The essay hardly presents Hume at his most exact, but serious lines of argument can be retrieved from the essay without excessive rationalization, as I hope to demonstrate. (Nor do these arguments contradict Hume's other works.) Hume's recent critics have certainly assessed the essay as if it is intended as a serious work of philosophy, and while I disagree with the specifics of their interpretations, I concur that the work does present genuine philosophical argumentation amidst its flamboyant literary flourishes, rhetorical grandstanding and the occasional undeniable hyperbole.

What then is the thesis and master argument of the overall essay? Hume aims to establish the moral innocence of suicide—to prove that "that action may be free from every imputation of blame or guilt" (ss 3). He sets out the strategy of his overall apology for suicide in opening remarks that frame the agenda for the master argument: "If suicide be criminal, it must be a transgression of our duty, either to God, our neighbour, or ourselves" (ss 4). So there are three putative bases of the "criminality" (i.e., moral impermissibility) of suicide, each of which Hume proceeds to attack. Assuming that the threefold division exhausts all the possible sources of a moral prohibition on suicide, and granting that Hume succeeds in ruling out each in turn, he will then be entitled to his conclusion that we have

a right to commit suicide, at least in the negative sense that there is no moral prohibition against it.

Two points should be registered concerning the scope of Hume's conclusion in the master argument. First, there is its negative character. Although Hume does characterize his thesis in quite positive terms in one opening rhetorical flight (where he states that his intention is "to restore men to their native liberty [to commit suicide]" (ss 3)), his thesis should not be understood as the affirmation of a positive, moralized right to kill oneself, but rather the denial of any moral duty not to. This can be seen in the overall structure of his reasoning: Hume aims to show that none of the three supposed bases of a prohibition on suicide does in fact provide one, and thus that there is no duty not to perform that act. The negative character of his thesis is also revealed in the careful language Hume uses to summarize his overall argumentative strategy: "[B]y examining all the common arguments against Suicide, [I will show] that that action *may be free from* every imputation of guilt or blame" (ss 3; my emphasis). The point is that Hume hopes to establish a right to commit suicide only in the sense of establishing that there is no duty not to—and this, notice, is a "right" that even a global skeptic about any moral order whatsoever could accept. The point will prove important, not because Hume is himself a global moral skeptic (he isn't), but because much misguided criticism of Hume's arguments in "Of Suicide" rests on a misunderstanding of the negative character of his conclusion and the argumentative strategy this mandates.

The second point to emphasize concerning Hume's overall conclusion is that he is arguing simply that there is no general moral prohibition on suicide: that there is nothing essential to the act of suicide that renders it morally impermissible. Of course, a particular act of suicide may be wrong for some other reason (perhaps because, in such and such a particular case, the act would have appalling consequences for others). But the same is true of any class of actions, from eating one's breakfast to dancing the hornpipe. Hume's goal in the master argument is simply to show that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the act of killing oneself, not that it is never wrong to do so in any circumstance.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The Theological Objection to Suicide

The first and most contentious part of Hume's tripartite strategy is his engagement with the theological objection to suicide. The theological objection asserts that we owe a duty to God to reject suicide; suicide is morally impermissible since it breaches this duty. (This is quite consistent with suicide being a violation of other duties as well. The prohibition could be overdetermined.) The objection is typically expressed with reference to the rights of the Creator, and suicide's status as a violation of those rights. To kill oneself is said to infringe on the sovereignty of the

Maker: we do not have the right to dispose of our lives, for that prerogative belongs to God alone. This view is captured in the familiar analogy between the passage of our earthly lives and the watch duty of sentinels, bound to stay at their posts through good times and bad. The analogy is traditional, and had been revisited in the early modern period by writers such as Montaigne, Pufendorf, Locke, and Clarke.<sup>8</sup> Kant provides a particularly vivid statement of it in his lectures from the 1780s (some decades after Hume composed his essay):

We have been placed in this world for certain destinies and purposes; but a suicide flouts the intention of his Creator. He arrives in the next world as one who has deserted his post; and must therefore be seen as a rebel against God. . . . [The responsibility to resist suicide] lies upon us until such time as God gives us His express command to depart this world.

Men are stationed here like sentries, and so we must not leave our posts until relieved by the beneficent hand of another.<sup>9</sup>

Stated this baldly, the theological objection is of course incomplete. The sentinel analogy is evocative, but amounts more to a restatement of the thesis that suicide violates a duty to God than it does to an argument for that thesis. We have yet to be told why we should think that we have such a duty. (Why think that "a suicide flouts the intention of his Creator," for instance?) So why should we think that our situation is analogous with that of a sentinel or night watchman, rather than, say, that of a guest at a hotel? As we shall see, this is Hume's understanding of the dialectic. The burden of proof is on those who accept a theologically based prohibition to explain their positive reasons for thinking that we owe this sort of duty to God. If Hume can undermine these putative reasons (or even demonstrate categorically that there is no such duty), then he establishes the negative conclusion he wants from this discussion: we have no reason to think there is a moral prohibition on suicide out of a duty owed to God; the theological objection fails; and he can proceed to the remaining two parts of the tripartite master argument.

By my count, "Of Suicide" provides two main lines of argument against the theological objection. While they interweave in the text somewhat, each is logically independent of the other.

### 3. Hume's Argument from Determinism

Hume's first argument considers human actions as part of the overall natural causal order. (This argument is set out in paragraphs 5–8, revisited in 16, and touched on in brief in 14, 18, and 20.) As in the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*, Hume maintains

that all our behavior falls under deterministic causal laws. Natural laws govern all human thought and activity, just as natural laws govern the motions of inanimate material bodies. In this sense, our actions and attitudes are “impelled and regulated in that course of life to which they are destined” by the prior state of the world and the various causal laws (ss 5). In “Of Suicide,” Hume simply asserts that some such version of determinism is true, though he does of course provide arguments for the “doctrine of necessity” in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*.

Assuming that the Creator is responsible for these laws and for the original state of the universe, it follows that everything that happens is a result of *general* divine providence—all events, including all human actions, fall out according to the causal system fixed by God.

The providence of the deity appears not immediately in any operation, but governs everything by those general laws, which have been established since the beginning of time. All events, in one sense, may be pronounced the action of the almighty. . . . When the passions play, when the judgment dictates, when the limbs obey; this is all the operation of God, and upon these animate principles, as well as upon the inanimate, he has established the government of the universe. (ss 6)

There is no event, however important to us, which he has exempted from the general laws that govern the universe, or which he has peculiarly reserved for his own immediate action or operation. (ss 7)

This result can then be applied to the particular case of suicide. Acts of suicide (like all human acts) fall under the general deterministic laws governing nature, and so are not disruptions but rather manifestations of those laws. They do not break in on the overall causal system, but are part of it. It therefore makes no sense to say that suicide encroaches on the divinely fixed order, or (adopting the theist’s own language of divine purposes) to speak of suicide as if it frustrates God’s plans or disturbs his intentions.<sup>10</sup>

There is no being, which possesses any power or faculty, that it receives not from its creator, nor is there any one, which by ever so irregular an action can encroach upon the plan of his providence, or disorder the universe. . . . When the horror of pain prevails over the love of life: When a voluntary action anticipates the effects of blind causes; it is only in consequence of those powers and principles, which he has implanted in his creatures. Divine providence is still inviolate and placed far beyond the reach of human injuries. (ss 16)

"Injuries" here has a double sense, indicating the final move Hume needs in order to make the transition to his conclusion that suicide does not violate a duty to God. It is not merely that suicide fails to "injure" divine providence in the sense of materially damaging or disrupting God's unfolding plans. It is further that that action fails to "injure" divine providence in the sense of invading his *rights* or *prerogatives*. Since our actions are fixed and predetermined by God, it makes no sense (Hume is suggesting) to speak of those actions as moral offenses against him. "What is the meaning then of that principle, that a [suicide incurs] the indignation of his creator by encroaching on the office of divine providence, and disturbing the order of the universe?" (ss 8). If God foreordained and predetermined a particular act of self-slaughter, it makes no sense to say that that act is any sort of offense against God's sovereign prerogatives over our lives. The underlying principle Hume is relying on here, then, is that if X's behavior is completely orchestrated by Y, then X's behavior cannot be a moral offense against Y. The claim that Jack's action wronged Jill simply loses all traction if we discover that Jill was pulling the strings all along. But God is always pulling the strings ("All events, in one sense, may be pronounced the action of the almighty"). So Hume's argument can be summarized as follows: the fact that God is responsible for the entire deterministic causal order precludes any possibility that our actions are moral offenses against him; it precludes the possibility that they invade his rights, and it precludes the possibility that we owe him a duty not to act as we actually do.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to be clear about Hume's results here. As one would expect given the negative character of Hume's final conclusion in the overall master argument, this first sub-argument also concludes negatively, with the (subsidiary) thesis that we have no duty *to God* to resist suicide. Of course, this is not yet sufficient to show that suicide is morally permissible. Hume has yet to canvass the other sorts of duties we might have (duties to our neighbors, perhaps, or to ourselves), which might in the end render suicide impermissible. But the current argument does show (if it is successful) that acts of suicide cannot morally offend against the Creator. Moreover, since the argument can clearly be generalized, it will equally show that *no* human action can offend against the Creator: we have no duty to God to resist *any* action. (This extension of the argument is something Hume would welcome, as I show in the following sections.)

My claim is that, according to Hume, a deterministic divine providence precludes the possibility that any of our actions are moral offenses against God. But at the same time, nothing Hume has said is supposed to tell against the possibility that certain actions are moral offenses against other humans. This interpretation is at least consistent with Hume's account of the moral implications of determinism and divine providence in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*,<sup>12</sup> which (as we shall see) cannot be said for the rival interpretations of the argument. In the

first *Enquiry* (in section 8, “Of Liberty and Necessity”), Hume considers the moral consequences of the view that

there is a continued chain of necessary causes, pre-ordained and pre-determined, reaching from the original cause of all, to every single volition of every human creature. . . . The ultimate Author of all our volitions is the Creator of the world, who first bestowed motion on this immense machine, and placed all beings in that particular position, whence every subsequent event, by an inevitable necessity, must result. (EHU 8.32; SBN 99–100)

Hume assesses the moral implications of this picture in two ways. First, he reports the charge that God is ultimately accountable for all our actions, and thus that insofar as those actions “have any turpitude, they must involve our Creator in the same guilt, while he is acknowledged to be their ultimate cause and author” (EHU 8.32; SBN 100). Such an argument clearly has seriously irreligious consequences, but Hume’s reply to it in the *Enquiry* is simply that he is unable to disarm the problem, pleading (not without irony) that this is one of the “sublime mysteries.”

[It is not] possible to explain distinctly, how the Deity can be the mediate cause of all the actions of men, without being the author of sin. . . . [T]o defend absolute decrees, and yet free the Deity from being the author of sin, has been found hitherto to exceed all the power of philosophy. (EHU 8.36; SBN 103)

So, while the *Enquiry* does not go so far as to explicitly state that our actions cannot be moral offenses against the Creator, Hume does imply that God is at least accountable for all our actions, “as a man, who fired a mine, is answerable for all the consequences” (EHU 8.32; SBN 100).<sup>13</sup> This is at least consistent with—and perhaps suggestive of—the result in “Of Suicide” that our actions cannot be moral offenses against God since he is their ultimate author.

The second point Hume makes in the *Enquiry* is that such a deterministic universal providence does not jeopardize the thesis that our behavior toward other humans is sometimes virtuous or vicious. The distinction between “vice and virtue” (he says) is “founded in the natural sentiments of the human mind,” which react to the immediate tendencies of human behavior and character, and “are not to be controuled or altered by any philosophical theory or speculation whatsoever” (EHU 8.35; SBN 103). Once again, this is consistent with and perhaps suggestive of the position in “Of Suicide”: a divinely ordained deterministic order entails that our actions cannot violate duties to God, though they may still violate duties owed to other humans.

Hume's recent critics interpret his invocation of determinism in "Of Suicide" quite differently. Here I distinguish between two (equally hostile) lines of interpretation in the recent literature. First, Kenneth R. Merrill has suggested that the appeal to determinism is meant to take Hume to the conclusion that humans cannot be morally responsible for acts of suicide, since any such acts are foreordained by a causal order beyond their ultimate control (Merrill, 402–3). (Here Merrill is following a line of interpretation suggested previously by Tom L. Beauchamp (Beauchamp, 82–3).) On this view, Hume's argument depends upon incompatibilist assumptions about moral responsibility: since a suicide is causally predetermined to kill himself, he cannot be morally responsible for this action. And given this interpretation, Hume is not arguing from determinism to conclude merely that we do not owe a duty *to the Creator* to resist suicide. Rather, he is arguing from determinism to conclude that no human can be morally responsible for the act of killing themselves, and in this sense the act cannot violate *any* moral duty.

However, read this way, Hume's argument from determinism is seriously problematic. As Merrill observes, it could clearly be generalized to show that *no* human action can violate a moral duty, murder not excepted. But this surely proves too much: it looks like a *reductio ad absurdum* of Hume's reasoning (Merrill, 403). Further, as Beauchamp and Merrill each note, the appeal to incompatibilism is entirely out of character for Hume and would contradict his familiar, carefully developed compatibilist positions in the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry* (Beauchamp, 82; Merrill, 403). Beauchamp and Merrill raise these points as objections to Hume's argument, rather than as problems for their incompatibilist interpretation of that argument. But one might wonder if this reading can be correct, generating as it does such surprisingly un-Humean results. Moreover, such an interpretation clearly makes the overall tripartite structure of Hume's master argument quite redundant, for it has Hume concluding here (under the official rubric of engaging the theological objection to suicide, in this first part of the overall three-part argument) that it is not morally wrong to commit suicide, period. One would not expect Hume to establish the master thesis of the essay so soon; nor does he announce that he has done so. Fortunately, however, the text simply does not substantiate the incompatibilist reading of Hume's argument. (The passages Beauchamp and Merrill cite merely confirm that Hume's argument relies on determinism; no part of the text mandates a peculiarly *incompatibilist* determinist reading.) And given the absence of textual motivation for this interpretation, I think we can take the various problems it generates to rule it out. Hume is not arguing that determinism precludes all moral responsibility; he is simply arguing that it precludes the possibility of moral offense *against the architect of the causal order*.

Two other recent critics offer a rival interpretation of Hume's argument at this point. Keith E. Yandell and G. R. McLean each suggest that Hume invokes

determinism in order to argue that, since any act of suicide is predetermined by God, and God does no wrong, it follows that whenever an act of suicide occurs it is not wrong (Yandell, 290; McLean, 106). (Hume was also read this way by certain of his eighteenth-century reviewers.<sup>14</sup>) Yandell and McLean each go on to criticize the argument, so construed. This argument could (once again) be generalized to license any action, murder included—so we have the familiar charge of *reductio ad absurdum* (McLean, 106). Furthermore, in making the “grossly fallacious” inference from the fact that God causes everything to happen to the moral permissibility of whatever actually occurs, Hume is in danger of violating the prohibition on inferring an “ought” from an “is” (McLean, 106). These are serious objections, and in my view they make this an interpretation of last resort. And in fact there are further problems with the Yandell-McLean reading. As with the Beauchamp-Merrill interpretation, it pre-empts the overall tripartite structure of the master argument, making a mockery of Hume’s strategy of examining each of the three kinds of duty in turn in order to establish that none of them prohibits suicide. Moreover, the argument seems distinctly un-Humean in one other respect. Yandell and McLean each credit Hume with the implicit assumption that God is morally infallible. But Hume’s usual position is that God is most likely indifferent to our moral categories, and that if the natural theologian insists on drawing inferences from the nature of the creation to the moral character of God, those inferences will not be particularly flattering.<sup>15</sup> So the Yandell-McLean interpretation is unlikely on these grounds too, at least if Hume is supposed to be reasoning in earnest rather than *ad hominem*.<sup>16</sup>

While the Beauchamp-Merrill interpretation lacked textual motivation, Yandell and McLean can cite a passage in *prima facie* support of their reading. Here Hume writes that, since God predetermined any act that actually occurs, “we may for that very reason conclude it to be most favoured by him” (ss 16). (The other texts Yandell and McLean cite merely show that Hume is presupposing a form of determinism that traces all events back to God; but this is agreed among all rival interpretations.) But this passage does not yet show that there is any correlation between what God favors and what is morally correct. And in speaking of divine preferences, Hume may of course simply be indulging an anthropomorphic trope he does not himself literally intend. Read in context, this passage is best understood as simply a somewhat loose and metaphorical restatement of the central point that actions completely predetermined by God cannot be moral offenses against him. Finally, while I agree that this passage is part of a paragraph summarizing the argument from determinism, it should be stressed that it occurs eight paragraphs after Hume’s first and most detailed statement of that argument (at ss 5–8). This earlier, most extended statement seems to me to provide a complete argument, and nothing here appeals to God’s moral rectitude or otherwise suggests the Yandell-McLean interpretation. So at least we can say

that this original argument warrants a different analysis than that provided by Yandell and McLean.

#### 4. Hume's Burden-of-Proof Challenge

Hume's second main argument against the theological objection occurs in a series of brief, rapid-fire paragraphs (ss 8–13, 17). The text here is choppy, and Hume's style largely rhetorical and aphoristic rather than methodical. (It should be confessed that more rationalization is required to reconstruct this second argument.) Nevertheless, it is quite clear that here Hume is attacking a series of putative grounds for a duty to God to resist suicide. And it is also clear that the discussion takes place against a broader assumption that Hume's opponents are responsible for showing why there is supposed to be a duty to God in the first place. I think that Hume's various mini-arguments here can then be integrated into one broader argumentative strategy, with Hume locating the burden of proof with his dialectical foes, and then preemptively attacking the leading candidate bases for a theological prohibition on suicide. (This second main argument is quite compatible with Hume's initial argument from determinism. It does not conflict with determinism, or with the lessons Hume drew from his deterministic premises. But it does not *depend* on determinism, and may for this reason have a wider appeal.)

Hume's second argument is then simply a challenge to the proponent of the theological objection to produce their positive reasons for thinking that there is such a duty owed to God, coupled with various attempts to interdict possible lines of theological argument. (As Hume says elsewhere of this form of argument, "This defiance we are oblig'd frequently to make use of, as being the only means of proving a negative in philosophy."<sup>17</sup>) Hume thinks that the challenge simply cannot be met, at least without appeal to special revelation. Obviously this type of argument has its limitations: it is the nature of this sort of challenge to be open-ended, rather than provably decisive. Nevertheless, it will be telling if Hume succeeds in undermining the leading traditional arguments for such a duty.

To reconstruct Hume's argument, we need, first, to motivate his assumption that the burden of proof rests with his dialectical opponents, and second, to understand his restriction of the issue to the sphere of natural religion. Finally, we need to examine his reasons for thinking that the burden of proof has not yet been met.

Hume's operative assumption is that the burden of proof rests with the proponent of the theological objection. He treats his own thesis that there is no duty to God to resist suicide as the default position in the dialectic: to overthrow the presumption that there is no such duty, his opponents "must shew a reason why this particular case is excepted" (ss 9). This way of framing the issue is (presumably)

motivated by the negative character of his own position. Were Hume attempting to establish the existence of a positive, moralized right to suicide, it is far from clear that this would qualify as the default view. But since he is merely maintaining the *absence* of a duty to God to refrain from suicide, his methodological assumption does seem reasonable. Those who assert the positive existence of a duty to God outlawing such and such an act owe us reasons for thinking that there is some such duty. In moral theory as in general ontology, parsimony is the rule: duties are not to be postulated without adequate reasons.

A second point needs to be made in order to situate the burden-of-proof argument. On the face of it, the thesis that we owe such and such a duty to God could be driven by arguments drawn from natural religion or from revealed religion. But as is evident from the actual reasoning he employs, Hume's critique of the putative duty owed to God to resist suicide operates purely within the parameters of natural religion. It concerns arguments that depend on universally available reason and experience (broadly speaking, the methods of philosophy and scientific reasoning) without relying on any special revelation from God. So (at least in the body of the text) Hume simply sets aside doctrine drawn from revelation and assesses the objection simply in terms of natural religion.<sup>18</sup> This limits the scope of Hume's conclusion in the current argument, since this attack on the theological objection does not rule out duties derived from scripture.<sup>19</sup> But as we well know, Hume believes that he has already undermined the supposed authority of revealed religion elsewhere.<sup>20</sup>

With Hume's dialectical framework in place, we can turn to his series of preemptive attacks on possible arguments in favor of there being a duty to God to reject suicide. The essay addresses three possible arguments: (i) that suicide interferes with the natural order (and hence with God's preferences or prerogatives); (ii) that suicide offends God since human lives have some special value or significance to him; and (iii) that suicide violates a duty to show appropriate gratitude to the Creator. In addition to Hume's responses to these three particular lines of argument, we can also draw on the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues* to see Hume's more general grounds for skepticism about the prospects for establishing the existence of duties owed to God by means of philosophical argument.

### ***(i) Suicide as a Disruption of the Natural Order***

Perhaps the most popular argument for a duty to God to resist suicide asserts that taking one's life before its natural end disrupts the natural order of things, and is therefore an affront to God's preferences or prerogatives. One way to try to counter this is of course to appeal to determinism, and argue that acts of self-killing are part of the natural order rather than intrusions upon it. ("When I fall upon my own sword . . . I receive my death equally from the hands of the

Deity as if it had proceeded from a lion, a precipice, or a fever" (ss 14).) But Hume's current response does not rely on determinism. Rather, he concedes that there *is* a perfectly good sense in which our actions qualify as disruptions of the natural order.

Our actions do alter or disturb the course of nature in the sense that we make things happen that would not otherwise have occurred. We divert rivers, inoculate against disease, and dodge falling stones (ss 10, 17): all actions that interfere in the natural order, not in the grandiose metaphysical sense of breaching causal laws, but in the sense that *they have an effect*, and therefore support counterfactual truths about the ongoing system of events. ("If I had not shut the door, the leaves would have blown in." "If you had not put up your umbrella, you would have gotten wet.") As Hume puts it, "Every action, every motion of a man, innovates in the order of some parts of matter, and diverts from their ordinary course the general laws of motion" (ss 8). So here is a perfectly intelligible, unpretentious sense in which our actions *do* disrupt the ongoing natural order. (And notice, it is a sense that is perfectly compatible with Hume's determinism—or for that matter, with rival libertarian conceptions of human action.) However, it is quite clear that this sense in which our actions are disturbances of the natural order will not sustain any version of the theological objection. When I shut the door, when you put up your umbrella, we are not usually thought to be violating a duty to God. Similarly, no-one thinks it offends God "to build houses, to cultivate the ground, or sail on the ocean," and only the irredeemably superstitious recoil from the diverting of rivers or programs of inoculation as impious usurpations of divine prerogatives (ss 17). There is no *general* problem with actions that interrupt the natural order.

Since therefore the lives of men are for ever dependent on the general laws of matter and motion, is a man's disposing of his life criminal, because in every case it is criminal to encroach upon these laws? But this seems absurd. All animals are entrusted to their own prudence and skill for their conduct in the world, and have full authority, as far as their power extends, to alter all the operations of nature . . . it is no encroachment on the office of providence to disturb or alter these general laws. (ss 8)

So there is no general duty to God not to interfere in the natural order.<sup>21</sup> It follows that suicide cannot violate a duty to God simply *because* it disrupts that natural order: there must be some special further reason why suicide particularly offends God.<sup>22</sup> This is where Hume frames the burden-of-proof challenge most explicitly. Having pointed out that interventions in the natural order are not in the usual case thought to offend against God, he then asserts that (in the absence of further argument) suicide is presumptively licit:

Has not everyone, of consequence, the free disposal of his own life?  
And may he not lawfully employ that power with which nature has  
endowed him?

In order to destroy the evidence of this conclusion, [the proponent of the  
theological objection to suicide] must shew a reason, why this particular  
case is excepted. (ss 8–9)

This is certainly a (rhetorical) overstatement, for Hume has at best upheld the thesis that (in the absence of further argument) we are entitled to presume that there is no duty *owed to God* to resist suicide. He has not shown that there is no duty *of any sort* to reject that action. But his overall strategy should be clear. The most familiar grounds for asserting that we should refrain from suicide out of a duty to God fail (Hume claims), and the question is whether the proponent of the theological objection can do any better than this.

### *(ii) Suicide as the Destruction of Something of Value to God*

Hume next considers the suggestion that human lives have some special value or significance to God, and hence that it is a “presumption” for us to dispose of them (ss 9). On such a view, the destruction of one’s life violates a duty to God in a way that the destruction of a cabbage or sandcastle does not, by offending against the special importance God places on human life.

Hume’s reply is abrupt and notoriously provocative: “[T]he life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe than that of an oyster” (ss 9). He is not to be understood here as performing some sort of improbable prophetic accountancy, presuming to specify the precise value of oysters and humans in the eyes of the Creator. Rather we can understand him as emphasizing (with an absurdist flourish) that a clear-eyed inspection of the natural order does not support the thesis that we have any special importance to God. Humans are just another part of the vast cosmos, and while they may be of particular interest to one another, there seems no reason to think them of any special significance in the eyes of God. Here a series of the essay’s more infamous assertions fall into place. First there is the opening salvo about the status of humanity vis-à-vis the oyster, a rebuke to anthropocentric self-importance about our place in the order of creation. Second, there is the comment that God has certainly left us the ability to kill ourselves at our own whim (ss 9). Third, there is the point that man (“this mighty being”) is in fact delicate to the point of being prone to destruction from “[a] hair, a fly, an insect” (ss 11). In each case Hume should be seen as attempting to puncture any aspiration that we might infer a special importance of human lives to the Creator from observation of our place in the world. (Similarly, Philo in the *Dialogues* casts doubt on the suggestion that the evidence of the creation indicates that God has any particular concern for us (DNR

11.2–17; 67–75).) Hume is then best understood as attempting to undermine any confidence that we can infer from the natural order that human life has any special value or significance for God. This is not the same thing, notice, as arguing from such observations (concerning our ability to kill ourselves, or our vulnerability to death from trivial causes) to conclude that human life has a particularly *low* value in God's eyes. For all his mordant barbs at anthropocentric wishful thinking, Hume is (I think) simply skeptical of the idea that *any* inference from nature to a conclusion about God's valuation of us is supportable one way or the other.

Hume's recent critics read him differently, however, as if his observations concerning the fragility of human life are intended to show (positively) that we have a low value in God's eyes. Thus, Yandell attributes to Hume the view that "if something is easy to kill, it cannot be of significant moral worth," and Merrill writes similarly that Hume is assuming "that the lability or delicacy of a creature signifies the indifference of the creator to its continued existence" (Yandell, 292; Merrill, 406). But this leaves Hume with a perfectly terrible argument, since the inference from the fragility of human life to the low value of that life in the eyes of God is a flagrant non sequitur. Yandell and Merrill present this point as a fatal objection to Hume's reasoning, and add for good measure the charge that such an argument would license murder as much as it would license suicide.<sup>23</sup> In a somewhat similar interpretation, G. R. McLean charges Hume with claiming (in his aphorism about the oyster) to positively know, quite implausibly, that humans have no special worth in the eyes of God (McLean, 107). But while these readings are indeed consistent with the text, they seem to me uncharitable and somewhat literal minded. This line of interpretation has Hume committing a series of obvious fallacies, and has him straying dangerously close to inferring an evaluative, normative conclusion from purely descriptive, non-normative premises (an "ought" from an "is"). It is better to understand Hume as simply denying that one can argue from observations of the natural order to conclude that human lives have a high value in God's eyes, rather than to read him as positively asserting that they have a low value. The reading I am suggesting is indeed charitable, since it takes Hume to be pointing to the absurdities of the human condition simply in order to deflate the case for anthropocentric optimism about our worth to God, rather than to argue—quite invalidly—for a rival pessimistic conclusion about that worth. But it is not (I think) unduly indulgent when one considers Hume's usual rejection of theological speculation about the nature and purposes of God—speculation that, Philo tells us, takes us "quite beyond the reach of our faculties."<sup>24</sup>

### *(iii) Suicide as an Expression of Ingratitude*

The last line of argument Hume considers has it that the act of suicide violates a duty to show gratitude to God. Rather than challenge the idea that God is an

appropriate object for an interpersonal sentiment like gratitude,<sup>25</sup> or question the assumption that gratitude to the Creator is fitting even in bad times, Hume simply denies that a suicide need take his life in a spirit of thanklessness.

Do you imagine that I repine at providence or curse at my creation, because I go out of life, and put a period to a being, which were it to continue, would render me miserable? Far be such sentiments from me. I am only convinced of a matter of fact, which you yourself acknowledge possible, that human life may be unhappy, and that my existence, if further prolonged, would become uneligible. But I thank providence, both for the good which I have already enjoyed, and for the power with which I am endowed of escaping the ill that threatens me. (ss 13)

Here Hume is following a strategy outlined previously by Montaigne: the act of suicide can be brought on by many different motives, and need not always be performed in a spirit of dissatisfaction or frustrated anger.<sup>26</sup> So it is not plausible that it *essentially* expresses ingratitude toward God, however much this sentiment may be tied up with many actual suicides.

In elaborating the burden-of-proof challenge in “Of Suicide,” Hume simply attacks these three leading lines of theological argument (the appeal to the natural order, the appeal to the value of human lives to God, and the appeal to considerations of gratitude) one by one. But in the first *Enquiry* and *Dialogues* (both of which were drafted in broadly the same period as “Of Suicide,” the mid-1740s to mid-1750s) Hume also suggests more general grounds for skepticism about the attempt to establish moral duties by means of natural religion. Thus in section 11 of the *Enquiry* Hume argues that the methods of natural religion can never generate moral principles beyond those that are already available to secular reason. (This section is now generally known as “Of a Particular Providence and a Future State,” but in the first (1748) edition Hume gave it the more pointed title “Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion.”)

While we argue from the course of nature, and infer a particular intelligent cause, which first bestowed, and still preserves the order of the universe, we embrace a principle, which is both uncertain and useless. It is uncertain; because the subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience. It is useless; because our knowledge of this cause being derived entirely from the course of nature, we can never, according to the rules of just reasoning, return back from the cause with any new inference, or making any addition to the common and experienced course of human nature, establish any new principles of conduct and behaviour. (EHU 11.23; SBN 142)

All the philosophy . . . in the world, and all the religion, which is nothing but a species of philosophy, will never be able to carry us beyond the usual course of experience, or give us measures of conduct and behaviour different from those which are furnished by reflections on common life. (EHU 11.27; SBN 146)

Similarly, in the *Dialogues*, Philo famously concludes that "the whole of natural theology . . . resolves itself into one . . . proposition, *That the cause or causes of the order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.*" But this meager result (which is the only conclusion Philo will allow the natural theologian) is "not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication"; in particular, "it affords no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance" (DNR 12.33; 88). So here again Hume holds that the methods of natural religion cannot establish any new moral maxims over and above those knowable simply from "common life." All this suggests a broader context to Hume's burden-of-proof challenge and his various attacks on the particular lines of theological argument considered in "Of Suicide": for Hume, these individual critiques play out against a general skepticism about the possibility of reaching any moral conclusions by way of natural religion.<sup>27</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

My leading goals in this paper were to bring out the logical structure of Hume's attack on the theological objection to suicide, and to set that attack against the background context of his broader assessment of the poverty of natural religion. Along the way I have suggested that the recent criticisms of Hume's logic all miss their target. (Of course, this is not to say that Hume's arguments against the theological objection are one and all sound. But the recent charges of logical blundering each misfire, or so I have argued.)

A clear understanding of the structure of Hume's reasoning makes its connection to the broader critique of natural religion inescapable. To bring this out, consider again the central criticism pressed against Hume's argumentation by each of the recent commentators, and also earlier in the backlash of his eighteenth-century reviewers. According to these critics, Hume presents reasoning in defense of suicide that could be generalized to justify any action. If his arguments legitimize suicide, they would equally legitimize murder. Since this result is outrageous, Hume's critics declare that the generalization amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum*. But such a charge misses a crucial feature of Hume's engagement with the theological objection. His arguments against that theological objection are merely the first plank in a three-part master argument: they purport to show that we have no duty *to God* to resist suicide, not that there is no duty to resist suicide simpliciter.

Once this is understood, we can see that Hume would have no problem in allowing that his arguments are generalizable, for then they will show only that we have no duty to God to resist any action—and this decoupling of morality from religion is not something unpalatable for Hume, but rather a central doctrine of his philosophy. Moreover, since it is quite obvious that much of his attack on the theological objection to suicide can be extended to apply to any arbitrary action, it is highly unlikely that Hume himself failed to notice this point. While his critics present the charge of generalizability as if it were an exposé of flawed reasoning, Hume may all along have intended his discerning readers to see that his critique of the theological objection to suicide extends to a general critique of all theologically motivated moral prohibitions.

Whether or not Hume had such wide strategic intentions in “Of Suicide,” it should be clear that the essay squares nicely with his broader critique of the pretensions of natural religion. In addition, it should (I hope) be clear that the recent charges of logical blundering are misplaced. Hume’s main arguments against the theological objection cannot be generalized to legitimate any arbitrary action, nor do they trade on un-Humean incompatibilist assumptions about moral responsibility, nor do they advance invalidly from purely descriptive premises to a normative conclusion. Finally, while no one could claim that “Of Suicide” is a model of systematic argumentation or logical rigor *in more geometrico*, I also hope to have shown that the essay does contain some genuine philosophy amidst all the rhetorical fireworks.

## NOTES

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1 David Hume, “Of Suicide,” in Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the posthumous essays Of the Immortality of the Soul and Of Suicide*, ed. R. H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 97–105. I cite this version with references to paragraph (“ss”) number.

2 Hume aborted an early plan to publish “Of Suicide” in 1756 (though a few copies did slip out), but lobbied from his deathbed for posthumous publication. The essay eventually appeared in unauthorized editions in 1777 and again in 1783. For details of the essay’s suppression and its eventual publication, see E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 322–31.

3 See the various reviews collected in *Early Responses to Hume's Writings on Religion*, ed. James Fieser, 2 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2001), 2:289–314, 2:319–25, 2:360–70.

4 An important exception is Tom L. Beauchamp's nuanced assessment in his "An Analysis of Hume's Essay 'On Suicide'" [sic], *Review of Metaphysics* 30 (1976): 73–95, to my knowledge the only sustained study of "Of Suicide" in this period. For more characteristic examples of the literature of this era, see the brief positive reports of Hume's performance in R. B. Brandt, "The Morality and Rationality of Suicide," in *A Handbook for the Study of Suicide*, ed. Seymour Perlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 66. Jonathan Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 170–71. Peter Singer, introduction to *Applied Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 5.

5 Keith E. Yandell, *Hume's "Inexplicable Mystery": His Views on Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 286–95; Kenneth R. Merrill, "Hume on Suicide," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 16 (1999): 395–412; G. R. McLean, "Hume and the Theistic Objection to Suicide," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (2001): 99–111.

6 For the first objection, see Yandell, *Hume's "Inexplicable Mystery,"* 289, 291, 292–3; Merrill, "Hume on Suicide," 403, 405; and McLean, "Theistic Objection to Suicide," 104–5. On the second objection, see Yandell, *Hume's "Inexplicable Mystery,"* 289–90, and Merrill, "Hume on Suicide," 403. On the third objection, see McLean, "Theistic Objection to Suicide," 106. We shall see these criticisms in detail below.

7 This last point is widely accepted in the secondary literature. But see Merrill's somewhat uncharitable interpretation (Merrill, 401).

8 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M. A. Screech (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 394; Samuel Pufendorf, *On the Whole Duty of Man and Citizen*, trans. Michael Silverthorne, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 47; John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 271 (bk. 2, section 6); Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, in Clarke, *The Works*, 4 vols. (London, 1738; reprint New York, Garland Publishing Co., 1978), 2:623.

9 Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, ed. Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 27:367. (Here I cite the pagination of the standard edition, *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by the Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Sciences (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1900–), which is given in the margins of the Cambridge edition.)

10 Hume presents an interestingly related argument in his essay "Of the Original Contract." While "Of Suicide" argues from the premise that God causes everything to happen deterministically to conclude that no event disturbs divine providence, in "Of the Original Contract" Hume argues from this same premise to conclude that, since all events are part of the unfolding deterministic plan, no event particularly reflects divine providence more than any other. This is meant to embarrass the special pleading of divine right theories of political authority: "Whatever actually happens is comprehended in the general plan or intention of providence; nor has the greatest and most lawful prince any more reason, upon that account to plead a peculiar or inviolable authority,

than an inferior magistrate, or even a usurper, a robber and a pyrate." David Hume, *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1985), 467.

11 Compare to the following throw-away argument in Hume's essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul": "As every effect implies a cause, and that another, till we reach the first cause of all, which is the *Deity*; every thing that happens, is ordained by him; and nothing can be the object of his punishment or vengeance." "Of the Immortality of the Soul," in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. R.H. Popkin, 91–7, 93.

12 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999). (Hereafter references are abbreviated "EHU" with section and paragraph number inserted parenthetically in the text.) The Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition is *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed., revised and with notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). (Hereafter references abbreviated "SBN" give the corresponding page number in this edition.)

13 For commentary on Hume's discussion in the *Enquiry*, see Paul Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment: Hume's Way of Naturalizing Responsibility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 161–3. Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 131–4.

14 George Horne, "Letters on Infidelity. By the Author of a Letter to Doctor Adam Smith" (1784), in Fieser, *Early Responses*, 2:367. Johann Georg Heinrich Feder's review of "Of Suicide" in *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen*, December 31 1784, No. 210, 2100–2103, translated by Curtis Bowman and anthologized in Fieser, *Early Responses*, 2:324.

15 EHU 8.36; SBN 103. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (hereafter "DNR"), in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. R. H. Popkin, 3.13, 11.15–17; 27, 74–5. (Here and hereafter I cite by dialogue and paragraph number, as well as by page number.)

16 It might be argued that, since Hume adopts the traditional theistic conception of God as the ultimate cause of everything (at least for the sake of the argument), he seems to invite Yandell and McLean's assumption that he is also accepting that God is morally perfect (again for the sake of the argument), on pain of misrepresenting the traditional theist's overall position. But the view that God is the ultimate cause of everything is certainly consistent with Hume's usual refusal to ascribe moral characteristics to God. Nor need we suppose that Hume is granting that God is the ultimate cause of everything only in order to subvert the theological objection on its own terms. In fact the conception of God as the (largely unknowable and presumptively amoral) ultimate cause of everything is arguably the tendency of Hume's writings on religion in general. (For this interpretation of Hume's "attenuated deism," see J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. [Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1988], 219–25.)

17 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1.3.14.7 (reference is to Book, part, section, and paragraph number). The corresponding reference in the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch version is David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, second edition with text revised and notes by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 159.

18 At the close of the essay, Hume does append a footnote examining the question of whether Christian scripture prohibits suicide. But it is clear that this brief exercise in biblical exegesis is separate from the arguments in the body of the text. Indeed the footnote makes this explicit. Having asserted that scripture says nothing against suicide, Hume immediately adds "But were [a] commandment ever so express against Suicide, it would now have no authority, for all the law of *Moses* is abolished, except so far as it is established by the law of Nature. And we have already endeavoured to prove, that Suicide is not prohibited by that law" (note 3, appended to ss 27). Hume's opponents are unlikely to accept the rather unorthodox principles of scriptural interpretation in play here, but the point of present interest is simply Hume's express declaration that the arguments in the body of his essay address "the law of Nature": those maxims we can establish independently of revelation, without relying on the authority of any particular historically situated religious tradition. (The exclusion of revealed religion is also signaled by the encomium to "true philosophy" introducing Hume's methodological approach at the opening of the essay (ss 1), and by his claim that in establishing the right to suicide, he will thereby vindicate "the sentiments of all the ancient philosophers"—i.e., pre-Christian thinkers working without the benefit of God's revealed word (ss 3).)

19 Since Hume's arguments operate within the sphere of natural religion, they are not properly criticized by the citation of scripture. This tells against McLean, "Theistic Objection to Suicide," 107 (esp. note 29). Christian scripture may well assert that humans are more valuable than sheep, but this hardly contradicts Hume's thesis that natural religion delivers no such evaluative rank ordering.

20 See his attack on the credibility of miracles that supposedly substantiate the authority of scripture and church tradition (EHU 10; SBN 109–31).

21 Hume drives the point home by noting that an action that preserves one's life can interfere in the natural order as much as an action that takes it: "If I turn aside a stone which is falling upon my head, I disturb the course of nature, and I invade the peculiar province of the almighty by lengthening out my life beyond the period which by the general laws of matter and motion he had assigned to it" (ss 10).

22 This argument is prefigured in Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, trans. John Ozwell, 2 vols. (London, 1722), 2: 24 (letter 74).

23 This last charge again seems to neglect the fact that Hume's arguments here simply concern the question of whether we have a duty *to God* to resist suicide, not the broader question of whether suicide is morally permissible when all types of duty are considered. Once the limited scope of the argument is borne in mind, the extension of the argument from suicide to murder is no longer a *reductio ad absurdum* for Hume.

24 Hume, DNR 1.10; 7. See also DNR 12.33; 88; and EHU 11.23, 12.25; SBN 142, 162.

25 Hume outlines this first strategy in his letter to William Mure of 30 June 1743. *New Letters of David Hume*, ed. R. Klibansky and E. C. Mossner (Oxford, 1954), 13 (letter 6).

26 Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 402–6.

27 For commentary on this broader context and Hume's thesis of the inert nature of natural religion for questions of morality, see J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 219–25. Simon Blackburn, "Playing Hume's Hand," in *Religion and Hume's Legacy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 3–16.