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Rich Foley

Hume Studies Volume 32, Number 1, (2006) 83-112.

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Unnatural Religion: Indoctrination and Philo's Reversal in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

RICH FOLEY

Abstract: Many interpretations of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* have labored under the assumption that one of the characters represents Hume's view on the Design Argument, and Philo is often selected for this role. I reject this opinion by showing that Philo is inconsistent. He offers a decisive refutation of the Design Argument, yet later endorses this very argument. I then dismiss two prominent ways of handling Philo's reversal: first, I show that Philo is not ironic either in his skepticism or in his theistic reversal. Second, I reject the suggestion that the Design Argument is a natural belief, since it differs significantly from causal and external world beliefs. Finally, I argue that the control the Design Argument exerts is the product of a youthful indoctrination that prevents Philo from consistently maintaining his skeptical position.

Philo's reversal on the merits of the Design Argument has generated such controversy and confusion that there is currently no satisfying interpretation of this character's role in Hume's *Dialogues*. I believe that this lack is the result of an incorrect approach that has governed many recent interpretations of this work, extending back to a pair of questions initially raised by Norman Kemp Smith. First, which of the three main characters speaks for Hume? If one opts for Philo, as Kemp

Smith and most others do, then secondly, what is the significance of his reversal in part 12 on the Design Argument? Philo initially claims that the probability of an intelligent designer is vanishingly small because there are too many alternate analogies that can be drawn between the cosmos and objects that are *not* the product of intelligent design. Then in part 12, Philo asserts that no one would ever deny that the creator is an intelligent designer because the analogy between the cosmos and objects produced by human designers is the only analogy it is rational to draw.¹ The most common view is that there is at least an apparent inconsistency between these two positions. Confronted with an apparent inconsistency in the mouth of Hume's putative spokesperson, partisans seek to deny genuine inconsistency by either defending the claim that Philo is consistently skeptical, or, less commonly, that Philo is a consistent deist. Often the selection of one of Philo's personae as Hume's spokesperson involves attributing irony either to the reversal in part 12, or occasionally (yet with greater textual warrant) to the initial skeptical attack on the Design Argument. Since each side rejects Philo's genuineness in the passages that support the other side's position, the result has been a highly polarized dispute with scant common ground for resolution. One of my primary objectives will be to show that this unproductive disagreement can be circumvented once we see that this appeal to irony should be rejected as largely ad hoc.

I believe that Kemp Smith's spokesperson question should also be rejected. Hume's views on the Design Argument should not be identified with any single character, nor even with multiple characters.² Once the role of spokesperson is banished from the *Dialogues*, it becomes far easier to handle Philo's inconsistency: the philosophical flaw is Philo's, not Hume's. Still, the significance of Philo's inconsistency requires an explanation. Why would Hume allow such a major character to be inconsistent on the fundamental question of the book? Currently the most popular theory, what I call the "naturalistic interpretation," claims that religious belief, specifically the belief that the Design Argument confers some evidence in favor of the hypothesis of intelligent design, is a universal and inevitable feature of human nature.³ Although I will show that the naturalistic interpretation fails because belief in the Design Argument is neither universal, nor does the *Dialogues* claim it to be universal, I will use aspects of this interpretation to develop a superior explanation for Philo's reversal. The *Dialogues* advances a complex thesis about the way in which people evaluate theological arguments on the basis of their antecedent convictions. Understanding how the characters arrive at their beliefs involves an analysis of how their individual psychology undermines the rationality of their arguments. This conflict between rationality and psychology offers a satisfying explanation for Philo's reversal on the Design Argument: when speaking philosophically, rationally, and skeptically, he rejects it; when controlled by common, yet non-universal psychological factors, he endorses it. Recognition of the difficulty of an impartial analysis of the Design Argument is thus one of

the greatest insights of the *Dialogues*. The literary aspects of this masterpiece of the dialogue form demand attention, particularly the clarity with which Hume depicts the psychology of his characters. Hume's efforts in this area manifest his attempt to go beyond a strict philosophical analysis of the Design Argument to a more complicated analysis of the underlying causes that generate belief in the argument despite its philosophical failures. Careful attention to part 1 of the *Dialogues* reveals that early education is the most important factor exerting an irrational control over belief in the Design Argument, and it is this education that explains Philo's reversal in part 12. The elegance of Hume's work is striking: the key to the philosophical confusion at the end of the *Dialogues* is the theory of belief formation presented at its outset.

I. The Dialogue Form

Norman Kemp Smith famously addressed the question of which character speaks for Hume in the *Dialogues*, and the question has exerted a powerful yet inappropriate influence over the literature for decades. To be accurate, Kemp Smith doesn't ask the question of which character speaks for Hume so much as offer an answer with a stridency that guarantees error: "I shall contend that Philo, from start to finish, represents Hume."⁴ Kemp Smith's question is particularly apt to mislead when attempting to understand Philo's reversal in part 12, a reversal from critic to proponent of the Design Argument. There is a tendency to claim that Philo is Hume's representative because philosophical analysis shows him to have the best arguments. Yet Philo's final endorsement of the Design Argument leaves one wondering how an inconsistent character can represent the author. The result is a profusion of interpretations defending various stances on the relation between Hume and his characters.⁵

The proper place to begin an interpretation of Hume's *Dialogues* is with a theory of the dialogue form itself. I contend that the way to resolve the dispute surrounding Philo's inconsistency involves exposing the inappropriate nature of Kemp Smith's initial question. Asking which character speaks for Hume manifests an inadequate literary theory, or at least a failure to recognize important literary aspects of the *Dialogues*.⁶ Thinking like a philosopher instead of a good reader, Kemp Smith seeks a doctrine from the mouth of one of the characters, and simply wants to attribute this doctrine to the author. This approach works well for philosophical monographs, where clarity and consistency are the primary virtues, but it is wholly inappropriate for a dialogue. Pamphilus opens the *Dialogues* by explaining the suitability of the dialogue form when discussing natural religion, and these comments about the genre should not be ignored. Pamphilus articulates an explanation of the dialogue that actually stands in stark contrast to how the genre has typically been used in the history of philosophy. For example, in a Pla-

tonic dialogue, it is often painfully obvious who speaks for Plato.⁷ Berkeley's *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* is even more skewed toward one character exclusively. Yet Pamphilus asserts that the dialogue is suited to any topic that is either obvious and important, or obscure and important. Different aspects of the *Dialogues* satisfy different parts of this disjunction. The being of god, that is, the claim that there is a god, is allegedly obvious and important.⁸ The nature of god is obscure and important. The Design Argument satisfies the second part of the disjunction, since the point of the argument is to prove that the design of the cosmos is evidence for the *intelligence* of the creator. This point means that according to Pamphilus' criteria, the dialogue format is appropriate for the Design Argument because it is a topic over which "reasonable men may be allowed to differ where no one can reasonably be positive" (DNR Intro.4; 1). This pronouncement is borne out by the fact that all three main characters in Hume's *Dialogues* make important, correct philosophical claims *and* significant philosophical mistakes. There is, in contrast to other works in the dialogue genre, no obvious way of identifying one character with the views of the author.

But there is also no need to identify Hume's spokesperson, and the attempt to do so is really little more than a veiled argument from authority. Imagine that it could be shown that one of Hume's characters had an ideal philosophical system, maximally correct and consistent. Imagine one discovered in Hume's personal writings a misestimation of this fact, with an assertion that one of the other characters really speaks for him. Nothing would be gained philosophically or interpretively by insisting on Hume's preferred reading of his own work. This mistake becomes far more serious by the apparent inconsistency of Philo's position, and by the fact that Cleanthes and Demea make important contributions to the discussion.⁹ But even once the views of all characters have been synthesized into what might be called the philosophical position of the book, nothing is gained by trying to match the book to the author. Any lack of fit between book and author does not make the book wrong or the interpretation of the book wrong. I do not actually mean to claim that I think that Hume's book has somehow escaped from his own intentions. I merely want to claim that seeking a harmony between Hume's other writings and the *Dialogues* is otiose.¹⁰ A satisfying interpretation of the book is a sufficient philosophical goal. Now of course when there are difficulties of interpretation, it might be helpful to consult other writings to determine the field of most plausible interpretations. It is highly unlikely that Hume, believing one thing about the Design Argument, would work over the course of decades crafting a work that was substantially at odds with his beliefs. But this point only confers instrumental value on the other writings of an author. Such writings might help discover or establish the best interpretation of the *Dialogues*, but they can never supplant the best interpretation. The best hermeneutic involves an appreciation of the arguments of all of the characters, and should also be sensitive to the ways

that the characters fall short of ideal rationality. Some explanation needs to be provided for Philo's curious reversal on the Design Argument, but this question need not be answered by assuming that Philo everywhere represents Hume. There should be no presumption that Philo is consistent, or that everything he says conforms to Hume's other writings on religion. Hume gives us a genuine dialogue, so one would expect consistency on religious issues no more often than we tend to find it in ordinary life.

II. The Design Argument

My claim that Philo is inconsistent partly rests upon a demonstration that a skeptical Philo shows that the Design Argument fails to confer any evidence on the hypothesis that the cosmos was created by an intelligent designer.¹¹ Philo's strategy involves revealing that the Design Argument really is not an argument at all. Although Philo readily admits that the hypothesis of an intelligent designer is compatible with much of what is known about the cosmos, the Design Argument amounts to nothing more than a story, sprung from Cleanthes' anthropocentric imagination.¹² This point is seen when Philo argues that the plausibility of the intelligent design hypothesis is vanishingly small:

But in such questions as the present, a hundred contradictory views may preserve a kind of imperfect analogy, and invention has here full scope to exert itself. Without any great effort of thought, I believe that I could, in an instant, propose other systems of cosmogony which would have some faint appearance of truth; though it is a thousand, a million to one if either yours or any one of mine be the true system. (DNR 8.1: 49)

Philo somewhat incautiously rests his objection on the Principle of Indifference: where n is the number of cosmological stories, Philo asserts that the probability of any one story is equal to $1/n$. If we have a million stories, all equally compatible with the observable cosmos, then Philo would claim that the probability of any one of them is a million to one. If only one of these stories involves an intelligent designer, then the probability of an intelligent designer is one in a million.¹³ Since the Principle of Indifference is often contested today, it is preferable to restate Philo's point in terms of what it is reasonable to believe, rather than in terms of actual probabilities. With a million stories of creation equally compatible with what we know of the cosmos, Philo could reach the more cautious but equally devastating claim that the Design Argument does not make it more reasonable to believe that the creator of the cosmos is an intelligent designer. The progression of Philo's probabilities from a "hundred contradictory views," through a thousand to one odds, ending at a million to one, is also

significant. The implication is that the belief in an intelligent designer on the basis of the Design Argument can be made negligibly rational.¹⁴ In fact, the exact claim is that he can tell a million non-design stories “without any great effort of thought” (DNR 8.1: 49), bolstering the ease with which Philo can diminish the reasonableness of any one story.

The success of Philo’s objection depends upon the equal plausibility of the stories, so the characters spend some time discussing this issue.¹⁵ The ensuing discussion not only establishes the equal plausibility, it also pokes fun at the absurdity of the design hypothesis, and lampoons the proponents of this hypothesis for their prejudice by showing how willing they are to attack alternate hypotheses that are formally indistinguishable from their own. Philo claims that the cosmos resembles an animal: “A continual circulation of matter in it produces no disorder; a continual waste in every part is incessantly repaired: The closest sympathy is perceived throughout the entire system: And each part or member, in performing its proper offices, operates both to its own preservation and to that of the whole” (DNR 6.3: 39). When Cleanthes points out dissimilarities, Philo cleverly uses these as an opportunity to draw a further analogy. Unlike an animal the cosmos has “[n]o organs of sense; no seat of thought or reason; no one precise origin of motion and action” (DNR 6.8: 41). What initially is characterized as an objection ultimately just provides more fodder for Philo’s inventiveness: the cosmos bears a strong analogy to a vegetable. The number of analogies and stories of origin increase continually through parts 6–8. Philo readily grants that these comparisons are silly, but he carefully points out that two objections that leap to mind should not provide any consolation to Cleanthes. First, where did the cosmic animal or vegetable come from? Philo points out that this question is a problem only if the corresponding question of where Cleanthes’ intelligent designer came from is a problem. If Cleanthes can say that his god is necessary, self-caused, or outside the temporal order, so can Philo. If Cleanthes boldly admits that he finds it unproblematic that he has not only not resolved, he has not even investigated this question (DNR 4.13: 32–33), then so can Philo.¹⁶ Second, Demea objects that since all vegetables were designed by god, this cosmic vegetable must also have been designed by god. This objection is question begging, and Philo could just as easily say that since all intelligence results from cosmic vegetation, Cleanthes’ god must be the result of cosmic vegetation.¹⁷ Since the origin of design is the very point at issue, Demea’s assertion that all vegetables come from intelligent design simply begs the question. Ultimately, Cleanthes retorts that the stories that Philo tells are absurdly implausible, but this claim is not to the point. Philo grants this objection, but correctly points out that the objection is consistent with his attack on Cleanthes: *all* stories about the origin of the design found in the cosmos are roughly equally compatible with what we know of the cosmos. They all bear some similarity to the cosmos, but they are all also imperfect in significant ways.

The result is that Cleanthes' favored story is lost amid a flood of limitless equally plausible stories that do not invoke intelligent design. If Cleanthes could overcome his anthropomorphic prejudice, he would see that he should view his intelligent design story as being just as absurd as he views Philo's infinite spider spinning the world out of its bowels. Cleanthes is unable to assess the relative plausibility of these two stories correctly, which reveals the extent to which an empirical theist allows her empiricism to be corrupted by her prejudice that the creator is intelligent. But as regards Philo's argument, he has shown that experience makes the design hypothesis more probable only to an arbitrarily small amount, which is to say that it doesn't make it more probable at all.¹⁸

III. Philo's Reversal

Philo's refutation of the Design Argument is inconsistent with his later endorsement of this very argument. Several commentators have attempted to solve the problem generated by this inconsistency by minimizing Philo's concession in part 12, but many such efforts seem to succeed only because they avoid the most difficult passages. For example, Noxon claims that Philo "commits himself only to 'the somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, *that the cause, or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.*'"¹⁹ It is false that this is the "only" proposition Philo commits himself to in his reversal. In fact, Noxon's omission of Philo's more extensive concessions is characteristic of many writers who claim that Philo is neither inconsistent nor a deist.²⁰ To show the extent of Philo's reversal, I will provide some of Philo's most explicit endorsements of the Design Argument, and show how they are incompatible with the skeptical position that I presented in the previous section. After recapitulating a catalogue of the complexity of human anatomy from Galen, Philo remarks:

And if the infidelity of *Galen*, even when these natural sciences were still imperfect, could not withstand such striking appearances, to what pitch of pertinacious obstinacy must a philosopher in this age have attained who can now doubt of a Supreme Intelligence!

Could I meet with one of this species (who, I thank God, are very rare), I would ask him: Supposing there were a God who did not discover himself immediately to our senses, were it possible for him to give stronger proofs of his existence than what appear on the whole face of nature? (DNR12.3–4: 78)

The skeptical Philo would have had no difficulty doubting that the origin of the cosmos is intelligence, because there are so many alternatives to intelligent

design. Now Philo asserts that anyone with such doubts (which should include Philo himself, based upon his earlier skepticism) does so only from “pertinacious obstinacy.” In fact, Philo now makes the extraordinary claim that the whole of nature offers the strongest possible evidence for design, short of a direct manifestation of god to our senses.²¹ This claim is not only inconsistent with Philo’s skepticism, it is absurd. The vast tracts of empty space in the cosmos, the number of barren planets, all these imperfections or incompleteness leave ample room for a god to have given us a much greater evidence of design. Whatever one might think about the evidence for design, it is preposterous to claim that the evidence for design could not be stronger.

The continuation of this passage offers further evidence of Philo’s reversal: “What indeed could such a Divine Being do but copy the present economy of things; render many of his artifices so plain that no stupidity could mistake them; afford glimpses of still greater artifices which demonstrate his prodigious superiority above our narrow apprehensions?” (DNR 12.4: 78–9). Philo affirms that the cosmos provides such strong evidence of design that “no stupidity could mistake them.” Philo has not merely reversed himself on whether the Design Argument confers evidence on the hypothesis of an intelligent designer; he is now claiming that anyone who fails to see an intelligence is stupid and obstinate because a powerful designing god has maximized the evidence of design. In fact, Philo is now also claiming on the basis of the Design Argument that we can even see that the creator is not merely intelligent, but that this intelligence possesses a “prodigious superiority” relative to human intelligence, and that it is impossible to imagine a greater degree of evidence of god’s character as a designer than what we find in nature.

Another aspect of Philo’s reversal involves how he handles the disparity between human and divine capacities:

That the works of nature bear a great analogy to the productions of art is evident; and according to all the rules of good reasoning, we ought to infer, if we argue at all concerning them, that their causes have a proportional analogy. But as there are also considerable differences, we have reason to suppose a proportional difference in the causes, and, in particular, ought to attribute a much higher degree of power and energy to the Supreme Cause than any we have ever observed in mankind. Here, then, the existence of a DEITY is plainly ascertained by reason. (DNR 12.6: 79)²²

Now it is true that Philo is explicitly acknowledging “considerable differences” between nature and artifice, and correct analogical reasoning requires a “proportional difference” between the causes of these two types of things. But it is a mistake to assert that Philo is therefore drawing a difference between humans and god as

regards the property of intelligence. On the contrary, the proportional difference in causes leads Philo to attribute a *much greater* amount of power and energy to god, proportional to the much greater artifice exhibited by the cosmos than by any product of human design, while preserving his belief in the intelligence of this "supreme cause" by treating this phrase as synonymous with "deity." In fact the term deity is just the continuation of Philo's earlier claim that the Design Argument assures us of a "supreme intelligence." Philo is therefore not appealing to his earlier critical principle that "whenever you depart, in the least, from the similarity of the cases, you diminish proportionably the evidence" (DNR 2.7: 16). On the contrary, Philo is arguing just as *Cleanthes* did earlier: "Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed" (DNR 2.5: 15). A disanalogy between the effects can be handled either by denying that the causes are similar, or by saying that the two causes are similar, but that one has a much greater quantity of the property that makes them similar. Philo's initial skeptical stance involves pointing out the extensive dissimilarity in effects, and adopting the first line of thought against Cleanthes' adoption of the second. Yet in part 12, Philo points out the dissimilarity of the effects only to magnify god's intelligence, power, and energy to a degree far beyond the human scale. Perhaps Hume even intends Philo's reference to "all the rules of good reasoning" to remind us of Cleanthes' initial "all the rules of analogy." But now Philo is not only endorsing the Design Argument to make an intelligent designer more probable, he is using the differences in the effects to magnify the attributes of this creator.

Perhaps the most misunderstood and misread passage in the *Dialogues* involves the assertion that the dispute between atheism and theism really amounts to nothing more than a "verbal controversy":

Here, then, the existence of a DEITY is plainly ascertained by reason; and if we make it a question whether, on account of these analogies, we can properly call him a *mind* or *intelligence*, notwithstanding the vast difference which may reasonably be supposed between him and human minds; what is this but a mere verbal controversy? No man can deny the analogies between the effects: to restrain ourselves from inquiring concerning the causes is scarcely possible. From this inquiry the legitimate conclusion is that the causes have also an analogy: And if we are not contented with calling the first and supreme cause a GOD or DEITY, but desire to vary the expression, what can we call him but MIND or THOUGHT, to which he is justly supposed to bear a considerable resemblance? (DNR 12.6: 79–80)

Confident on the basis of the first eleven parts that there is a difference between Philo and Cleanthes, many commentators assert that this “mere verbal controversy” is the best way of understanding the differences between Philo and Cleanthes (although Philo himself actually claims that the verbal dispute is between atheists and theists, not between him and Cleanthes). Philo argues that both positions are substantively identical, and only verbally distinct, and he is taken to mean that his earlier skepticism is only verbally distinct from Cleanthes’ empirical theism. The result of this interpretive strategy is a confusion where what had originally been a serious philosophical dispute gets misinterpreted as a mere dispute about what words are to be used to describe the creator.²³

I believe that this passage is more properly understood within the ambit of Philo’s reversal. The verbal controversy is a controversy between Cleanthes and Philo only *after* the latter has reversed himself. Trying to understand the relation between Philo’s earlier skeptical position and Cleanthes’ view as a merely verbal controversy makes nonsense of their earlier disagreement. But assume that Philo has reversed himself on the Design Argument, and this passage becomes clear. Though Cleanthes and the new deistic Philo agree that the Design Argument makes an intelligent cause of the cosmos plausible, they disagree about the right words to describe this being. As we have seen, Philo has been emphasizing the dissimilarity between god and humans not as a way of undermining the Design Argument, but as a way to maximize god’s magnificence.²⁴ The cosmos is so superior to any human artifact, he argues, that god must be vastly superior to humans in point of intelligence, power, and energy. Emphasize the extent of superiority, and you arrive at a position barely distinguishable from atheism, where the existence of a creator is admitted, yet any ascription of intelligible attributes is denied. Emphasize that the superiority regards intelligence specifically, and you arrive at empirical theism. The verbal dispute does not involve whether the creator has a mind, but whether the divine mind is sufficiently similar to human minds to merit using the same word. Cleanthes is comfortable with “mind” or “thought,” but he is hesitant to embrace magnifying these attributes without limit, fearing such a position involves mysticism scarcely distinguishable from atheism. In contrast, Philo has not only reversed himself on the Design Argument, he is now willing to use this argument to magnify god’s intelligence beyond the degree where even Cleanthes becomes uncomfortable. Philo asserts that the creator of the cosmos “justly bears a considerable resemblance” to mind or thought (DNR 12.6: 80), and his rhetorical question asserts that we cannot call the creator anything other than mind or thought. Now this is a clear and important *philosophical* reversal from Philo’s main skeptical attack on the Design Argument. There should be no necessity to call the creator a mind or thought any more than there is to call it Fido or Spot on the basis of the animal analogy, Spud on the cosmic vegetable analogy, or deny god’s existence altogether on the neo-Empedoclean story.²⁵

Although Philo does not explain how he has reversed himself, part 12 does offer a subtle hint at the dialectical contortions transforming his position. Ask the skeptic whether any process in nature bears an analogy to any other, and her desire to liken the creation of the cosmos to the “rotting of a turnip” or the “generation of an animal” will force her to concede an analogy to “the structure of human thought.” Once this concession is obtained, the skeptic can be forced to retreat further, admitting that the causes of any such processes must also bear some “remote inconceivable analogy . . . to the economy of human mind and thought” (DNR 12.7: 81). Philo then triumphantly claims that the skeptic and theist really do not disagree, because both admit that the creator of the cosmos resembles a human intelligence. Philo’s assessment of this debate seriously misrepresents his own earlier skeptical argument, indicating the remarkable extent of his reversal—Philo cannot even correctly state his earlier position. There should be no reason to force the skeptic to any of these concessions, since they are the core of his argument against Cleanthes’ analogy. The problem with such analogies is that there are too many equally plausible ones that can be drawn. The skeptic should readily grant that the cosmos resembles any object as a way of diminishing our confidence in any one specific analogy. Philo’s earlier claims about the fertility of his imagination should have allowed him to see that the skeptic would resist none of these analogies, even the analogy to the products of human contrivance. Moreover, the skeptical conclusion has evaporated: the vast number of analogies should undermine the reasonableness of belief in an intelligent designer, yet now Philo has the skeptic grudgingly admit that her position is indistinguishable from theism merely because she admits that one of a limitless number of analogies that can be drawn is between the cosmos and the product of human intelligence. Philo’s comparison to the rotting of a turnip is quite funny, and perhaps involves Hume’s signaling the reader that he is himself still contemptuous of the Design Argument, Philo’s reversal notwithstanding. However, Philo himself is far from using it to parody the Design Argument; to him it is a way of forcing the skeptic to *relinquish* her emphasis on troubling analogies and accept that her position does not differ from theism. Philo’s powerful skeptical attack on the Design Argument has been transformed into a perverse endorsement of this very argument.

It is possible to try to minimize Philo’s inconsistency by paying careful attention to the caveats, qualifications, and limitations of both his skeptical objections and his subsequent profession of belief. There are many ways that commentators have minimized this inconsistency. The reversal includes a caveat that the concession made to the Design Argument offers no support for religion, nor does it provide evidence for any moral properties of the creator of the cosmos. On these points then, the reversal is actually perfectly consistent with the skeptical objections—a skeptical rejection that the Design Argument constitutes evidence of an intelligent designer *a fortiori* rejects this argument as the basis for a benevolent

intelligent designer who wishes us to practice a particular religion. But it is useless to claim that the two positions are consistent merely because they agree that there are some things that the Design Argument cannot do; the initial skeptical position asserted that the Design Argument does not show anything at all about the creator, so it is no surprise that any subsequent limitations of the argument would agree on the point being limited. The inconsistency remains that now the argument is taken to be successful in making an intelligent designer more probable, and to an enormous degree—to such a degree that Philo even starts using words like “must” which really have no place in probabilistic arguments, and in showing that this designer is maximally intelligent, deserving honorifics like “supreme intelligence.”

IV. Irony

One way of avoiding Philo’s inconsistency involves ascribing irony to him, but this interpretive trick has done significant damage to any hope of reaching a scholarly consensus on the meaning of the *Dialogues*.²⁶ I argue that this attribution of irony is ad hoc, and therefore inappropriate.²⁷ For most sets of inconsistent statements, the set can be rendered consistent merely by declaring a sufficient subset ironic.²⁸ The extraordinary flexibility involved in using assertions of irony to make a character consistent means that such assertions need to be grounded in something more than the fact of inconsistency.²⁹ There needs to be textual evidence that the character intends the statement to be ironic. In particular there needs to be some principled reason for preferring the elimination of one set of statements as ironic over the other set of statements with which they are inconsistent.³⁰ So when Philo first rejects, then later endorses the Design Argument, how are we to decide which position is the ironic one?

By far the more popular alternative is to claim that Philo is a consistent skeptic, and that it is the reversal in part 12 that is ironic.³¹ However, there is only one meager general consideration to support this claim, and significant textual evidence to reject it. I think that this alternative has been more popular because, in a work of philosophy, when a character asserts P and not P, there is a *prima facie* preference for the claim that is philosophically superior. This support is even stronger when the character offers reasons that reflect this philosophical superiority.³² Philo’s reversal is therefore dismissed as ironic because he earlier offered strong philosophically correct reasons in favor of skepticism, and he offers nothing in support of deism. Yet this *prima facie* case receives no support in part 12. Though irony can go unnoticed, its usual function is to belittle the view being ironized by making it appear foolish. But Philo does no such thing. On the contrary, there is strong textual support for the claim that Philo is *not* speaking ironically. He calls his endorsement of the Design Argument his “unfeigned sentiments on this subject”

(DNR 12.9: 82). More tellingly, he says, “and these sentiments, you know, I have ever cherished and maintained” (DNR 12.9: 82). So Philo does not ironize the Design Argument; he endorses it as a cherished belief of long-standing.³³ Though these statements directly contradict the attribution of irony, it is of course possible to claim that these statements are also ironic, so it would be false that Philo endorses the Design Argument, false that he has ever cherished these unfeigned sentiments, and false that Cleanthes believes that Philo endorses the Design Argument. When confronted with such irony, Cleanthes would recognize that his leg is being pulled, that Philo has not been a steadfast, life-long proponent of the Design Argument. Yet Cleanthes does not in any way suggest that Philo is being ironic. Instead Cleanthes takes Philo at his word, and the two of them earnestly discuss, given their agreement about the Design Argument, whether a religious system should be built upon this foundation. Add that Philo and Cleanthes “live in unreserved intimacy” (DNR 12.2: 77), and there is strong evidence that Philo’s endorsement of the Design Argument is justifiably taken as genuine by Cleanthes. Of course, it is possible to claim that the seriousness with which Cleanthes takes Philo is itself ironic, though doing so just reveals the ad hoc nature of this ascription of irony. Since part 12 offers no textual evidence of irony, indeed, all of the signs point to an earnest discussion between two close friends who understand each other well, the mere logical possibility that Philo’s endorsement of the Design Argument could be ironic should carry no interpretive weight.

Michael Morrisroe and Robert J. S. Manning (421–3) offer an interpretation that is formally similar to the use of ad hoc irony, though they provide a justification for preserving Philo’s skeptical arguments as genuine while rejecting his reversal as spurious. Following Kemp Smith, they stress that Hume was writing in a time when atheism was dangerous, and argue that the reversal is nothing more than cover to enable the publication of the *Dialogues* while preventing harm to Hume and his associates. They infer that this caution warrants dismissing any claim in the *Dialogues* that endorses the Design Argument. Nelson Pike and William Austin have undermined this justification for Philo’s reversal. Clearly Hume is often cautious in his writings, but he printed a similarly offensive discussion of the Design Argument in section 10 of the first *Enquiry*, and a more incendiary attack on miracles is in section 11 (Pike, *Dialogues*, 223). The latter has only the extraordinarily flimsy cover of being recorded as a conversation with a “friend who loves sceptical paradoxes.” Moreover, Hume knew that he was dying as he readied the *Dialogues* for publication, mitigating the need for such caution. Pike and Austin also point out that part 12 is so hostile to religion that Philo’s reversal cannot possibly involve Hume’s desire to protect himself from retribution from organized religion (Pike, *Dialogues*, 223; Austin, 104). There is therefore strong evidence that Morrisroe and Manning have substantially overstated Hume’s caution, and some other explanation needs to be provided for Philo’s extraordinary reversal.

There is also a minority opinion that the reversal in part 12 is genuine and the skepticism ironic.³⁴ This interpretation has less cause to be labeled ad hoc, since there is significant textual evidence for it, not just in the professions that his deism is genuine, which we saw in part 12, but even as early as part 1. After Philo comments on the weakness of human reason, Pamphilus notes that the countenance “of *Demea* seemed to imply an unreserved satisfaction in the doctrines delivered; but in *Cleanthes*’ features I could distinguish an air of finesse, as if he perceived some raillery or artificial malice in the reasonings of *Philo*” (DNR 1.4: 5). Right from the outset, Philo is acknowledged to be disingenuous, and this trait is finally noticed by *Demea* in an explosive scene that leads to *Demea*’s departure: “Are you secretly, then, a more dangerous enemy than *Cleanthes* himself? And are you so late in perceiving it? replied *Cleanthes*. Believe me, *Demea*, your friend *Philo*, from the beginning, has been amusing himself at both our expense; and it must be confessed that the injudicious reasoning of our vulgar theology has given him but too just a handle of ridicule” (DNR 11.18–19: 75). The location of these two claims offer a neat pair of bookends bracketing Philo’s skeptical attack on *Cleanthes*’ Design Argument and *Demea*’s version of the cosmological argument.³⁵ Unfortunately, the scope covered by this explicit statement of irony is enormous—the entirety of Philo’s assertions from part 1 through part 11. Of course, part 12 is exempted, precisely what one wants if Philo is to be a genuine deist and ironic skeptic. Yet one is left wondering just how much of what Philo has said is to be viewed as ironic. Is Philo’s part 9 attack on *Demea*’s cosmological argument ironic? Is his statement of the problem of evil in part 10 ironic? Some help is offered by Philo’s admission in part 12 that, “I am less cautious on the subject of Natural Religion than on any other; both because I know that I can never, on that head, corrupt the principles of any man of common sense and because no one, I am confident, in whose eyes I appear a man of common sense will ever mistake my intentions” (DNR 12.2: 77). Perhaps Philo’s irony should be confined to his skeptical attack on the Design Argument, which is, after all, all that is needed to render him consistent. Yet there is something seriously wrong with making the skepticism ironic. The difficulty is that many of the skeptical arguments are sound. Moreover, the reversal in part 12 does not offer any suggestions for why these skeptical arguments are believed to be bad or how the Design Argument has been rehabilitated. We would be left with a solid refutation of the Design Argument ironically dismissed, and a genuine endorsement of the argument with no explanation or reasoning behind it.

V. Naturalism

With no way of rejecting either the skepticism or the deism, and with no way of making them philosophically consistent, the next task is to provide some explanation for this inconsistency. Hume elsewhere asserts that humans possess natural

beliefs—beliefs that are the causal result of human nature. In the case of natural belief, the proper explanation of why S believes P, is not that S has reasons for P, but that human nature *causes* S to believe P. Rational scrutiny of natural beliefs can show them to be unjustified, perhaps unjustifiable, or worse, just false. The correct philosophical conclusion of such an examination might seem to be suspense of judgment or even the rejection of the belief. However, here Hume's naturalism takes over. Since these beliefs are natural, they cannot be overcome, even by philosophically impeccable skeptical refutation.³⁶ Indeed, at one point Hume implies that skeptical arguments can be identified as skeptical simply because "they admit of no answer and produce no conviction" (EHU 12.15n; SBN 154–5). Hume never lists criteria for natural belief, but from an examination of the *Treatise* and *First Enquiry*, particularly regarding the problem of the external world and the problem of induction, combined with a survey of the extensive literature on Hume's naturalism, I've extrapolated the following rough list of properties:³⁷

1. **Universality:** all humans have the belief.³⁸
2. **Inevitability:** nature causes every human to have the belief.³⁹
3. **Necessity for survival:** any human lacking the belief would perish.⁴⁰
4. **Irrationality:** skeptical arguments show the belief to be unjustifiable.⁴¹

The first, second, and fourth properties of natural beliefs have encouraged some commentators to link the *Dialogues* to Hume's naturalism.⁴² Penelhum nicely expresses the peculiarity of the Design Argument, when viewed as a natural belief: "I suggest that the minimal deism of part XII is accepted by Philo as the inescapable conclusion of an argument which he has shown, and knows he has shown, to be a complete philosophical failure—except in the one respect that when we encounter it we cannot help assenting to its conclusion!" ("Natural Belief," 171). I agree that an assertion of the irrationality of the Design Argument is a key claim of the *Dialogues*, although ultimately I aim to show that belief in the argument fails to satisfy the first, and therefore the second and third criteria of natural beliefs.

There is also a dynamic aspect shared by both natural beliefs and Philo's stand on the Design Argument. Regarding natural beliefs, in a pattern characteristic of the *Treatise*, Hume presents a philosophical attack on the belief, then concludes with the reassertion of the natural belief despite the refutation. This same dynamic is found in the *Dialogues*. Early in part 2, all of the characters assent to belief in the existence of a creator. Next, Philo effectively shows that no rational person should think that the Design Argument confers any probability upon the hypothesis of intelligent design. This skeptical conquest is short-lived because Philo concludes the book by *affirming* that the Design Argument increases the likelihood of intelligent design. What we find in the *Treatise* is a third person description of the trajectory of natural belief through skeptical refutation to re-affirmation. What we find in the *Dialogues* is a similar trajectory, only depicted

in the first person, when Philo ultimately (and irrationally) affirms belief in the Design Argument.

The naturalistic interpretation would explain the resilience of the Design Argument, particularly given the strength of Philo's skeptical refutation. However, I don't believe that this interpretation is defensible, either as a matter of interpretation of Hume's *Dialogues*, or as a matter of philosophy. Proponents of the naturalistic interpretation tend to cite a passage from the *Natural History of Religion* in support of their position: "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."⁴³ This statement mirrors the progression of the *Dialogues* by suggesting that any serious inquiry into nature will end with a profession of theism. However, there are very important differences. Philo's reversal in part 12 involves an endorsement of deism, not theism, since Philo explicitly rejects any beliefs about the moral properties of the creator. More significantly, natural beliefs are supposed to be restored after skeptical attack despite their irrationality, whereas in the *Natural History*, Hume is arguing that *reason* leads one to endorse theism on the basis of a rational investigation of nature. In fact, a more thorough examination of the introduction to the *Natural History* makes it very clear that Hume actually rejects universality, and with it, inevitability and necessity for survival:

The belief of invisible, intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places and in all ages; but it has neither perhaps been so universal as to admit of no exception, nor has it been, in any degree, uniform in the ideas which it has suggested. Some nations have been discovered, who entertained no sentiments of Religion, if travelers and historians may be credited. (*Natural History*, 21)

The merely widespread belief in at least one intelligent creator contrasts with the absolutely exceptionless, and thereby genuinely natural sentiments like self-love, gratitude, and resentment, and contrasts equally with the natural beliefs involving causal connections and external objects. Hume therefore denies that belief in the Design Argument possesses one of the key criteria of any natural belief,⁴⁴ viz. universality.

The property of universality is also denied to belief in the Design Argument within the *Dialogues*. By implication, inevitability and necessity for survival are also rejected, since a belief that is not universal cannot be either inevitable (some people lack it) or necessary for survival (atheists don't spontaneously drop dead). Since both Philo and Cleanthes endorse the Design Argument, Demea is the character who provides the counter-example to the universality condition. Demea rejects not only the conclusion of Cleanthes' argument, he rejects the very

empiricist methodology underlying the Design Argument. Unlike Philo, Demea's hostility to the Design Argument is never retracted, so belief in the argument is not a natural belief. Even Cleanthes admits that the Design Argument fails to be universal because savages and barbarians are too stupid to enquire far enough back in the chain of causation (DNR 3.9: 26). They claim that animals derive their order from their parents, who derive their order from their parents, at which point the savage is too stupid to see the regress or lacks sufficient curiosity to see how the looming regress leads to the Design Argument.

Universality needs to be handled carefully, because some attention will need to be paid to *ceteris paribus* clauses. After Locke's attack on the rationalist doctrine of innate ideas, it is clear that no idea is possessed by every human being all of the time. Universality therefore can be weakened by specifying the conditions under which the belief will be universal. A minimum level of cognitive ability is necessary, so humans lacking this ability do not count as counter-examples against the universality of the belief.⁴⁵ Hence Cleanthes' admission that savages and barbarians do not endorse the Design Argument could be reconciled with the naturalness of this belief by noting that savages and barbarians have merely never considered the argument. Spelling out these *ceteris paribus* clauses is sure to be extremely difficult for beliefs in external objects and causal inferences, though presumably every human with some minimal cognitive ability will form such beliefs in just about any possible real world situation. No anthropologist will discover evidence of savages or barbarians who lacked all causal and external world beliefs. But here there is a major contrast with religious belief, since there are a substantial number of people in diverse circumstances who do not have the belief. The lack of belief cannot be eliminated by appeal to *ceteris paribus* clauses in any non-question-begging way. There is no causal factor that serves to unify all people who reject the Design Argument, which means that the belief is not universal, *ceteris paribus*. The lack of universality, even *ceteris paribus*, is well-attested in the *Dialogues*. Philo ends up a strong partisan of the Design Argument, but even at his most dogmatic, he concedes the existence of counter-examples: "Could I meet with one of this species [who doubt of a Supreme Intelligence] (who, I thank God, are very rare), I would ask him . . ." (DNR 12.4: 78). So people who doubt the existence of god are rare, but not non-existent. Part 1 also begins with a discussion about the importance of religious instruction that makes it clear that religious beliefs are not natural. Philo initially worries that Demea's postponement of theological instruction will generate the danger of "neglecting or rejecting [it] altogether" (DNR 1.2: 3). Demea has no such worry not because religious belief is natural; on the contrary, he has labored to *instill* religious belief in children. Such labor would be otiose in the case of a natural belief, which is universal and inevitable. So religious beliefs are not natural because neither universal nor inevitable. Imagine how silly it would be to spend time theorizing on the best way to inculcate belief in the external world

in children. And of course, Demea again constitutes a counter-example to any attempt to construct a *ceteris paribus* version of universality. He is not a savage, nor cognitively impaired. He has heard the argument from an able proponent, yet he rejects it.

VI. Education

Something more than human nature must be involved in belief in the Design Argument. However, there is an important way that Philo's belief in the argument resembles a natural belief, and this similarity points to a satisfying explanation of Philo's reversal. Just like natural beliefs, the belief in the Design Argument returns despite lack of justification, because the believer has been "educated" (in the eighteenth century sense meaning "indoctrinated"). If the education is sufficiently powerful, belief will return even when there is substantial evidence that the belief is wrong. Most commentators have failed to pay sufficient attention to the impetus for the dialogues, but following Penelhum, "I will concentrate instead on Part I, which none of us seems to have read, and on Part XII, which none of us seems to understand."⁴⁶ Though unlike Penelhum, who views the key contained in part 1 to be Cleanthes' discussion of skepticism, I take the key to be Demea and Philo's discussion of education. Pamphilus begins part 1 by saying: "After I joined the company, whom I found sitting in *Cleanthes'* library, *Demea* paid *Cleanthes* some compliments on the great care which he took of my education" (DNR 1.1: 3).⁴⁷ The vast majority of the *Dialogues* is a serious philosophical discussion of the nature of god, yet the work's opening comments involve education. The references to education do nothing to illuminate the subsequent arguments about natural religion. Instead, Hume gives us a framing story involving the transmission of the dialogues, a story in which Pamphilus plays a substantial role. Though Pamphilus is virtually absent in the philosophical core of the *Dialogues*, he is the main character at the beginning of the work: he heard the dialogues, talked about them to Hermippus, wrote them down, and sent them to Hermippus. It is odd that Pamphilus could be essential for the transcription of the dialogues, yet irrelevant to the way the arguments in these dialogues unfolded. The link between these two sections of the *Dialogues* is education. The transition from Pamphilus the narrator to the philosophical argument about natural religion, is a discussion about how someone of Pamphilus' young age should be instructed regarding religious matters. A correct interpretation of the *Dialogues* should explain why Hume places education in religious instruction in this pivotal location.

Philo and Demea initially disagree about whether religious instruction should be among the first or the last subjects taught. The ensuing discussion quickly reveals that the disagreement is merely apparent, since there are two ways of providing religious instruction, one appropriate immediately, the other appropriate

only later. Philo and Demea agree on a distinction between natural theology as a science and the principles of religion. It is the latter that is associated with "early piety." Piety needs to be instilled early to obviate two potential worries: neglecting or rejecting theology at a later age due to its unfamiliarity. Piety is "imprinted deeply" on "tender minds." Demea seeks to "season their minds with early piety." The language Demea uses here indicates that this training in piety amounts to indoctrination. The educator has a virtually limitless and nearly diabolical control over the minds of the impressionable youth.⁴⁸

This emphasis on education is not limited to Demea's rather rigorous theological perspective. Philo largely agrees with Demea, and Demea's position is a description of how Cleanthes has raised Pamphilus. Even Pamphilus describes himself in terms that match this theory: "My youth rendered me a mere auditor of their disputes; and that curiosity, natural to the early season of life, has so deeply imprinted in my memory the whole chain and connection of their arguments" (DNR Intro.6: 2). Pamphilus illustrates the very pedagogical theory agreed upon by the three main interlocutors. Remarkably, he even describes the point in the same terms as Demea: "deeply imprinted." So Hume argues that early instruction in piety imprints itself upon the mind, and causes anyone so imprinted to maintain their religious beliefs despite scientific and skeptical challenges to these beliefs.

The *Dialogues* closes with an assessment, made by Pamphilus, that Cleanthes' arguments are "nearer to the truth." This point has caused problems ever since Kemp Smith contended that Philo speaks for Hume. Why would Hume allow the narrator to award victory to the wrong character? The point is usually dismissed by saying that Pamphilus, as Cleanthes' ward, can't help but side with the person who has educated him. This dismissal is correct, but simply raises a more significant question, namely, why would Hume allow Pamphilus to give a spurious endorsement of Cleanthes' superiority? Hume is stressing the extent to which education is able to corrupt the impressionable young mind of Pamphilus. Perhaps one day Pamphilus will mature enough to see the flaws of the Design Argument, though it seems unlikely that he will be able to overcome this indoctrination, given that his belief persists even after hearing, then transcribing, an effective refutation of the argument.

This point about the connection between early education and religious belief is easily extended to offer an explanation of the most controversial issue of the *Dialogues*, Philo's reversal. Philo offers a devastating criticism of the Design Argument, only to conclude that this argument not only offers evidence for an intelligent designer, it does so to an extent that all other analogies pale, and we simply must call the creator "mind" or "thought." Philo's early education has simply reasserted itself so that even the arch-skeptic is not able to resist the force of the bad argument, not because the belief is natural, but because Philo has been

indoctrinated.⁴⁹ Immediately before presenting his baffling reversal in part 12, Philo explains himself by saying “no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind” (DNR 12.2: 77). The similarity between this assertion and Demea’s—“I imprint deeply on their tender minds” (DNR 1.2: 3)—shows that the same force of indoctrination is operating on Philo, preserving his belief in the Design Argument despite compelling skeptical challenges to it. Cleanthes confirms the importance of indoctrination by insisting that it is impossible to maintain an allegiance to no theory of cosmogony “in opposition to a theory supported by strong and obvious reason, by natural propensity, and by *early education*” (DNR 12.5: 79; my emphasis). Cleanthes’ appeal to reason is unconvincing, given the strength of Philo’s skeptical position, and Cleanthes’ appeal to natural propensity is overly generous, given atheists. Philo’s reversal must therefore be ascribed primarily to the third option, early education.

The difficult question of why Hume allows Philo to reverse himself remains, but it is now possible to speculate with greater confidence. Most significantly, Philo’s reversal displays Hume’s point that belief in the Design Argument is the result of indoctrination. More generally, Philo’s reversal illustrates how psychology can overpower reason and argument, a classically Humean emphasis on the importance of psychological factors in belief formation. Philo’s part 12 deism also enables Hume to disguise the philosophical atheism of a work that he knew would be difficult to publish. This camouflage allows Hume to be strident in his criticism of “vulgar superstition,” harshly criticizing religion for the civic miseries it causes, while feigning that such a critique is compatible with a pious veneration of “true religion.” Lastly, the reversal is primarily responsible for the enduring literary appeal of the *Dialogues*, creating a character so intricate and puzzling that understanding him becomes its own reward.

NOTES

I am grateful to several people for their comments on an earlier version of this paper: Brian Beakley, Teresa Britton, Peter Loftson, Peter Millican, Grant Sterling, and two anonymous referees from *Hume Studies*.

1 Should one prefer Cleanthes as the correct answer to the first question, then one needs to explain how this answer is compatible with Philo’s powerful criticisms of Cleanthes’ argument. Jeffrey Wieand, “Pamphilus in Hume’s *Dialogues*,” *The Journal of Religion* 65 (1985): 33–45, has even suggested that Pamphilus represents Hume, but Wieand seems to reach this conclusion merely from the fact that Pamphilus says some things with which Hume would have agreed. It is a mistake to infer exclusive identity of Hume with Pamphilus merely because of this small overlap. Pamphilus is too minor a character to represent Hume in a work as complex as the *Dialogues*.

2 Anders Jeffner makes the compelling suggestion that Hume's view is to be identified by noticing when two of the participants unite against the third. Jeffner, *Butler and Hume on Religion* (Stockholm: Diakonistyrelsens Bokförlag, 1966), 207. Still, Jeffner merely attempts to dismiss Philo's reversal by claiming that, "Cleanthes and Demea are also in agreement on one point, namely that one cannot accept faith in God without reason" (208). The difficulty for Jeffner's reading is that Philo's reversal involves the merits of the Design Argument. There are significant passages in part 12 where Philo agrees with Cleanthes that nature provides evidence of an intelligent designer.

3 Stanley Tweyman, "An 'Inconvenience' of Anthropomorphism," *Hume Studies* 8 (1982): 19–42, 26, and Terence Penelhum, "Natural Belief and Religious Belief in Hume's Philosophy," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 33 (1983): 160–81, are among the more influential proponents of this view.

4 *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1947), 59.

5 Kemp Smith identifies Hume with the skeptical Philo. Following him are Ernest Mossner, "The Enigma of Hume," *Mind* (1936): 334–49, 334; T. E. Jessop, "Symposium: The Present-Day Relevance of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*," *Aristotelian Society Supplemental Volume* 18 (1939): 179–228; J. V. Price, "Empirical Theists in Cicero and Hume," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 5 (1963): 255–64; J. V. Price, *David Hume* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1968), 131; Michael Morrisroe, "Hume's Rhetorical Strategy: A Solution to the Riddle of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 11 (1969): 963–74; J. C. A. Gaskin, "Hume's Critique of Religion," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14 (1976): 301–11, 301; Ernest Mossner, "Hume and the Legacy of the *Dialogues*," in *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, ed. G. P. Morice (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1977), 4; Dilip Basu, "Who is the Real Hume in the *Dialogues*?" *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1978): 21–8, 21; Wesley Salmon, "Religion and Science: A New Look at Hume's *Dialogues*," *Philosophical Studies* 33 (1978): 143–76; Deborah Soles, "Hume, Language and God," *Philosophical Topics* 12 (1981): 109–20, 116; Penelhum, "Natural Belief," 167–8; Graham Priest, "Hume's Final Argument," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985): 349–51, 349; Pheroze Wadia, "Commentary on Professor Tweyman's 'Hume on Evil,'" *Hume Studies* 13 (1987): 104–11, 105; Robert J. S. Manning, "David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: Otherness in History and in Text," *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 415–26; and Shane Andre, "Was Hume an Atheist?" *Hume Studies* 19 (1993): 141–66, 154. Proponents of the skeptical Philo also tend to disparage Cleanthes. Jessop explicitly calls Cleanthes a "puppet" who has had religious feeling grafted onto Humean empiricism. Price also agrees with Kemp Smith, and dismisses the famous letter to Gilbert Eliot, where Hume asks for help in improving the arguments of the "Hero of the Dialogue," Cleanthes. This is a "put-up job," where Eliot's help is solicited under the false pretense of claiming that Cleanthes represents Hume (Price, "Empirical Theists in Cicero and Hume," 262). Manning agrees (418). The help was needed because Hume *could not* succeed in making his presentation of the Design Argument credible. J. Laird argues that the inconsistency generated by part 12 means that Philo need not be taken seriously. Laird, "Symposium: The Present-Day Relevance of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*," *Aristotelian Society Supplemental Volume* 18 (1939): 179–228, 185. Basu simply ignores part 12 entirely. Surprisingly, Morrisroe, who shifts the discussion to an analysis of the importance of the dialogue form, cannot resist giving the preference to Philo in the end (974). Some,

including Martin Andic, "'Experimental Theism' and the Verbal Dispute in Hume's *Dialogues*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 56 (1974): 239–56, 244; W. A. Parent, "Philo's Confession" *Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1976): 63–8; and W. A. Parent, "An Interpretation of Hume's *Dialogues*," *Review of Metaphysics* 30 (1976): 96–114, opt for the deistic Philo of part 12 by denying that the earlier skeptical arguments are intended as a complete refutation of the Design Argument. They merely diminish the probability and the extent of the similarity between the cause of the cosmos and human design. As we will see in section 2, this strategy fails because Philo's skeptical arguments do in fact successfully refute the Design Argument. Some commentators correctly claim that all of the characters say things with which Hume would agree. Ronald Butler, "Natural Belief and the Enigma of Hume," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 42 (1960): 73–100, 73. But this obvious claim does not help us understand the relation between the three disparate philosophies of the main characters, nor does it guide us regarding which character to believe when they disagree. Allowing for Cleanthes to say true things is consistent with the claim that Philo is Hume's spokesperson if Philo is always to be preferred in any disagreement with Cleanthes.

6 John Bricke offers the most articulate and thorough rejection of Kemp Smith's question. Bricke, "On the Interpretation of Hume's *Dialogues*," *Religious Studies* 11 (1975): 1–18. He correctly asserts that the extraordinary diversity of inconsistent interpretations is the product of naively picking one character as Hume's spokesperson. He also stresses the importance of the dialogue genre in developing a hermeneutic. Unfortunately, Bricke does not employ these general hermeneutic principles, so his article ends without offering an interpretation of the significance of the *Dialogues* as a whole, or Philo's reversal in particular. Others who reject Kemp Smith's question include Jeffner, *Butler and Hume on Religion*; Keith Yandell, "Hume on Religious Belief," in *Hume: A Re-evaluation*, ed. Donald Livingston and James King (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976), 109–25; David Simpson, "Intimate Voices and the Method of Dialogue," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21 (1979): 68–92; Dennis Rohatyn, "Hume's Dialectical Conceits," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43 (1983): 519–32, 526; and Terrence Tilley, "Hume on God and Evil," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 56 (1988): 703–26, 715. Michael Prince, "Hume and the End of Religious Dialogue," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 25 (1992): 283–308, 283n2, also has a useful list of authors who emphasize the literary aspects of the *Dialogues*.

7 The *Symposium* is the major exception to this tendency in Plato. No successful interpretation of this work can fail to give roughly equal weight to the speeches of Aristophanes, Socrates, and Alcibiades.

8 Numerous commentators uncritically accept the assertion that god's existence is treated as beyond question in the *Dialogues*. Yet there is something odd about claiming that the existence of god is obvious. All characters agree that they will not dispute the issue, yet all three offer arguments that bear directly on this existential issue. Demea is perhaps the worst offender, since he's responsible for raising the issue in part 2, then immediately berates Cleanthes, "What! No demonstration of the Being of God! No abstract arguments! No proofs *a priori*!" David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Posthumous Essays*, ed. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), DNR 2.6: 15. All citations to this work will be given parenthetically in text with "DNR" preceding the part, paragraph, and page number. One should at least expect that the being of god will be at issue right from the outset, the explicit stipulation to

the contrary notwithstanding. Regarding the issue of whether and to what extent the existence of god is in question, see Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil," *Philosophical Review* 72 (1963): 180–97; Parent, "Philo's Confession," 66; Wieand, "Pamphilus in Hume's *Dialogues*," 37; and Robert Hurlbutt, "The Careless Skeptic—The 'Pamphilian' Ironies in Hume's *Dialogues*," *Hume Studies* 14 (1988): 207–50, 211–13. I think that this issue has been needlessly confused by a general failure to explain what is meant by "god." If defined as intelligent or even transcendent, then clearly existence is in question. If defined as the causal explanation of the origin of the cosmos, regardless of what this might look like, then perhaps existence is not in question. Beryl Logan, "Why Hume Wasn't an Atheist," *Hume Studies* 22 (1996): 193–202, 194–7, has an excellent discussion of this issue.

9 Kemp Smith explicitly allows for an overlapping position in which Cleanthes is allowed to utter authorially sanctioned propositions. Yet Kemp Smith offers no explanation for why Hume would allow Cleanthes to do so. If an author were to have a spokesperson, then it would seem odd and confusing to allow a second character to be right as well, except when contradicted by the main character. Why not rather always allow Philo to take the philosophical lead, and confine Cleanthes and Demea to the role of dialectical foils?

10 Donald Livingston, "The Hume Literature of the 1970s," *Philosophical Topics* 12 (1981): 183–92, 189, appears to believe that Philo's profession of theism is genuine on the basis of an unargued assertion that Hume was himself a theist. Gaskin offers a similar type of argument for the claim that Hume was a deist. Gaskin, "Hume's Attenuated Deism," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 65 (1983): 160–73. Others who emphasize what Hume himself believed include Andre, "Was Hume an Atheist?" and Logan, "Why Hume Wasn't an Atheist." Both agree that Hume was not an atheist, though they offer competing arguments for this belief. I believe that it would be better to begin by finding a consistent interpretation of the meaning of the *Dialogues* before attempting to reconcile the interpretation with other bits of evidence for what Hume actually believed. Given the inherent uncertainty of the dialogue form and the equivocal evidence of Hume's other writings, both published and personal, throwing all of these variables in together to solve for Hume's own beliefs seems bound to lead to innumerable incompatible interpretations.

11 It is important to distinguish two different types of probabilistic arguments in examining whether the Design Argument makes an intelligent designer probable. The stronger argument (what Richard Swinburne calls a "P-inductive inference") elevates the likelihood of a designer above 50%. Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 5–7. The weaker "C-inductive inference" offers evidence of a designer without elevating the probability above 50 percent. Philo contends that the Design Argument fails even as a weak C-inductive inference, i.e., the hypothesis of an intelligent designer receives no evidence from looking at the natural world. Andre appears to misunderstand that it is the weaker type of inference that is operative in the *Dialogues* (146).

12 Although convinced by Philo's skeptical attack on the Design Argument, I do think that Philo's initial criticism in part 2 is ably deflected by Cleanthes' rejoinder in part 3. Instead, the main force of Philo's skepticism regarding an intelligent designer is found in parts 6–8.

13 My presentation of Philo's argument is substantially similar to Keith Yandell's, but he casts his presentation in a strangely hypothetical manner, speculating about a "new world" in which the Design Argument "can be resurrected." Yandell, *Hume's Inexplicable Mystery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 226. Such speculation seems irrelevant to Cleanthes' empirical argument, where we are forced to take the cosmos as we find it to determine the likelihood that it was produced by a designer. Within this empiricist framework, Philo conclusively shows that the intelligent designer hypothesis is not plausible.

14 Andic asserts that "[s]ome analogy between nature and a machine supports [a religious man] in this analogy to some likeness in their causes, and his belief in this analogy *cannot* be defeated by his awareness of disanalogies and of competing analogies between nature and animals, vegetables, insects, and the like" (244). Andic ignores the relevance of the rapidity, ease and number of stories which Philo tells. This point means that the slight analogy that Andic's religious man sees is useless for making belief in an intelligent designer more reasonable.

15 A. E. Taylor denies the equiprobability of Philo's stories: "Nature is, to be sure, not a gigantic 'knitting-loom,' but, when all is said, nature is more like a knitting-loom than it is like an animal or a vegetable." "Symposium: The Present-Day Relevance of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*," *Aristotelian Society Supplemental Volume* 18 (1939): 179–228, 204. Unfortunately, Taylor's justification for this relative assessment is the mere assertion that the cosmos is "instrumental to something" (205). One must wonder, instrumental to what, if not the manufacture of textiles?

16 I think that Hume is here indicating a basic lack of fairness that lurks behind Cleanthes' anthropocentric Design Argument.

17 Philo points out that if forced to pick a story, it would make most sense to opt for creation through animal generation, since we often see sex produce rational beings, but never see rational beings, through their rationality alone, produce wholly new reproducing animals (DNR 7.15: 47–8). Production through rationality therefore seems derivative, whereas sex has a greater claim to be primordial. Nelson Pike presents a convincing discussion of this point in *Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 173–5.

18 William Lad Sessions, "Natural Piety in the *Dialogues*," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 49 (2001): 49–62, 52–3, claims that reconciliation with Cleanthes in part 12 can be accomplished because Philo and Cleanthes agree that the Design Argument makes the existence of an intelligent designer more likely. They merely disagree about the extent to which the argument increases the probability. Sessions claims that the early disagreement between them is attributable to a dispute about the extent of probability of an intelligent designer, whereas the latter agreement merely expresses a consensus that the argument does make the nature of the creator more likely to be intelligent. But the difference between Philo and Cleanthes is not correctly viewed as a difference in degree. Initially Philo argues that the Design Argument offers no support for an intelligent designer, but in part 12 he agrees with Cleanthes that no one can deny this claim.

Stanley Tweyman argues that the reversal of part 12 is to be expected as the result of a shift from Pyrrhonian to mitigated skepticism. But Tweyman is incorrect to characterize the earlier doubts as Pyrrhonian, since they are squarely empiricist

in character. Philo offers a correct analysis of the implications of Cleanthes' empirical analogies; he is not spouting "undistinguished doubts." Tweyman, "An Enquiry Concerning Hume's *Dialogues*," in *Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Georges Moyal and Stanley Tweyman (New York: Caravan Books, 1985), 155–75, 164.

19 James Noxon, "Hume's Agnosticism," *The Philosophical Review* 73 (1964): 248–61, 255.

20 There are a number of writers who try to minimize or eliminate Philo's inconsistency, but many of these seem to work only through misreading or ignoring crucial passages. Mossner asserts that Philo's identification of philosophical skepticism with being a "sound, believing Christian" succeeds because both sides agree that an intelligent designer is possible, given the empirical evidence ("Enigma of Hume," 345). Parent, "Philo's Confession," and similarly Gaskin, "Hume's Critique of Religion," follow Noxon in generating a consistent Philo by asserting that his skeptical attack "serves to weaken rather than destroy the design argument," while his enthusiastic endorsement in part 12 is "dramatically overstated" (Gaskin, "Hume's Critique of Religion," 306). Gaskin's first claim is false because Philo has refuted the Design Argument, and the second claim is textually unmotivated. Gaskin continues this strategy in "Hume's Attenuated Deism" (170), where he lists qualifications that Philo places on his concession to Cleanthes. But to admit that the concession has been limited would seem to indicate that Philo has made a genuine concession from his earlier position, hence he is inconsistent. Parent deserves particular scorn when he minimizes the extent of Philo's skepticism by noting that in part 7 Philo characterizes the Design Argument as "natural and irrefragable" ("Philo's Confession," 64). The passage is in the context of saying that on a planet of spiders, the inference to an infinite spider spinning the cosmos out of its bowels "would there appear as natural and irrefragable" as a human inferring an anthropomorphic (i.e. intelligent) creator. The passage not only does not show that Philo supports the Design Argument, it is actually a statement of his strongest attack against it. Parent, "Interpretation of Hume's *Dialogues*" also makes Philo a consistent theist only by ignoring his more successful skeptical arguments. For example, Parent just does not understand how Philo attempts to make the rationality of belief in an intelligent designer vanishingly small by telling other stories about the origin of the cosmos. Instead, Parent thinks that the fact that Philo tells such stories means that he accepts analogical reasoning, hence he must agree with Cleanthes that the Design Argument is a success. Soles, on the other hand, tries to generate a consistent Philo by asserting that the concessions in part 12 are "more apparent than real" (119). Soles really needs the concession to be entirely apparent, absent any rational justification for it. But even the assertion of mere appearance still is false, as the quotations I assemble from Philo demonstrate. In particular, Soles asserts that Philo concedes the mere possibility of the deistic claim, whereas Philo actually asserts that deism is the conclusion that one *must* draw. Wieand claims that Philo is not inconsistent because he has merely agreed that there is a god, where "god" means "something (=x) caused the purposive order in the world" (39). But Philo of course concedes far more, including the claim that this creator is intelligent, and Philo even implicitly appears to concede monotheism. Morrisroe argues that Philo "most closely represents Hume's philosophical viewpoint" (974), but he never once mentions the part 12 reversal. Priest even construes the reversal as an objection to the Design Argument, since Philo allegedly concedes nothing more than that any two things resemble each other in some respect (351). Yet even a cursory look

at the passages I cite shows that Philo has conferred special status on the resemblance between cosmos and artifact, and therefore between god and mind. Others likewise limit the scope of Philo's reversal in a way that omits its most vexing aspects: Robert Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 167–8; Price, *David Hume*, 144; A. G. Vink, "The Literary and Dramatic Character of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 387–96, 395; Richard White, "Hume's *Dialogues* and the Comedy of Religion," *Hume Studies* 14 (1988): 390–407, 400; Prince, "Hume and the End of Religious Dialogue," 308n37; and Andre, "Was Hume an Atheist?" 153. Ignoring Philo's most significant concessions to the Design Argument does not make him consistent.

21 So Philo now views the Design Argument as a successful P-inductive argument, to use Swinburne's terminology again.

22 Andic tries to argue that Philo is not inconsistent because he draws a different analogy in part 12 (252). Where Cleanthes compares the cosmos to a machine to infer similar causes, Philo only compares the cosmos to a mind, so that the mentality of the universe acts as a cause of its order, vitiating the need for a transcendent designer. This interpretation is odd, and is contradicted by the text of part 12, as in this passage, where Philo quite explicitly compares nature to "the productions of art," not to mind.

23 James Duerlinger, "The Verbal Dispute in Hume's *Dialogues*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 53 (1971): 22–34, in his attempt to understand the nature of the verbal controversy between Philo and Cleanthes in part 12, fails to see that construing this dispute as merely about the degree to which god is intelligent will not in fact make Philo self-consistent. If Philo's position in part 12 really is an assertion that the creator is probably intelligent to some degree, this position is inconsistent with Philo's skeptical rejection of the Design Argument, even if Duerlinger were correct that the later position generates a merely verbal controversy with Cleanthes. Similarly, Stephen Barker claims that the verbal dispute means merely that Philo and Cleanthes are left in part 12 with "a comparatively minor matter of degree." Barker, "Reasoning by Analogy in Hume's *Dialogues*," *Informal Logic* 11 (1989): 173–84, 184. But the dispute of part 12 can only be a verbal dispute if Philo is read as agreeing with Cleanthes that the Design Argument makes an intelligent designer more likely, a view which is inconsistent with his earlier skeptical attack on the argument.

24 Butler claims that Philo and Hume endorse the position that "nothing can be said *about* God's intelligence as contrasted with man's, because that would be to say something about his nature. We cannot even *say* that God's intelligence resembles man's. All that can be said is that there is a designer" (90). This statement completely misunderstands the verbal dispute between Philo and Cleanthes, where Philo insists that we are entitled to make more statements about the magnitude of God's intelligence than even Cleanthes accepts.

25 So Gaskin is wrong to claim that Hume and Philo always consistently avow the claim "there is a god" ("Hume's Critique of Religion," 310).

26 For commentators who follow Kemp Smith in linking the skeptical Philo with Hume, Philo's statements in part 12 are dismissed as ironic. Mossner, "Enigma of Hume," 344; Jessop, "Symposium," 219; Mossner, "Legacy of the *Dialogues*," 1–2; Christine Battersby, "The *Dialogues* as Original Imitation: Cicero and the Nature of

Hume's Skepticism," in *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. David Norton et al. (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, Inc., 1979), 239–52, 251; Priest, "Hume's Final Argument," 349; Vink, "Literary and Dramatic Character," 390. Similarly, Gaskin's assertion that Philo's endorsement of the Design Argument is "dramatically overstated" ("Hume's Critique of Religion," 306). Such interpreters tend to have some difficulty explaining why Hume seems less committed to atheism in his personal life and some of his other writings, though it is also always possible to assert that these other writings must be ironic, as Price claims (262). Richard Dees is somewhat difficult to sort, since he first seems to claim that Philo does not actually contradict himself, but then claims that much of what Philo concedes in part 12 is exaggerated to the extent that it gets classified as a "white lie." Dees, "Morality above Metaphysics: Philo and the Duties of Friendship in *Dialogues* 12," *Hume Studies* 28 (2002): 131–47, 139, 144.

27 Bricke leads the way in claiming that much of the confusion surrounding the *Dialogues* results from a one-sided championing of one character, or even one part of one character's arguments, then dismissing all the countervailing text in a purely ad hoc way (11).

28 I say "most sets" because some sets of sentences, through pathological self-reference, have no truth values, e.g., "The next sentence is ironic. The previous sentence is not ironic."

29 Tilley nicely points out that dissimulation and irony are "two-edged hermeneutical swords" (717). I find that Mossner provides one of the best examples of this two-edged character. He strongly denounces commentators who fail to identify Hume with Philo, since this identification is explicitly made in the famous letter to Gilbert Elliot ("Legacy of the *Dialogues*," 4). Then Mossner turns around and claims that all explicit identifications of Hume with Cleanthes (including the same letter to Elliot and another to his printer) are mischievous dissimulation ("Legacy of the *Dialogues*," 6). One could just as easily reverse these assessments.

30 While I think that most commentators have not bothered to justify their attributions of irony, I disagree with Manning who believes that a "purely textual reading never can suffice to determine the extent to which the text is ironic" (420). Any well-written text will offer clues about which statements are ironic. Problems arise only when such clues are ignored.

31 Mossner asserts that part 12 shows that Hume agrees with Butler (i.e. Cleanthes), "though ironically" ("Enigma of Hume," 344). Mossner provides no evidence that Philo speaks ironically, though presumably his justification is his preference for Philo's skepticism and his noting the inconsistency of part 12. Jessop suggests that Philo's reversal might be ironic, and it "being disconnected from the argued content of the *Dialogues*, I shall ignore it" (220). Salmon also asserts that Philo's reversal is to be ignored as nothing other than Hume's attempt to protect himself from the authorities, though Salmon admits that he finds "it hard to believe that Hume expected his readers to miss" the point that the reversal has already been completely undercut by Philo's earlier successful skeptical arguments (171). Others who attribute Philo's part 12 concession to irony include Gary Shapiro, "The Man of Letters and the Author of *Nature: Hume on Philosophical Discourse*," *The Eighteenth Century* 26 (1985): 115–37, 118, and Barker, "Reasoning by Analogy," 184.

32 These conjectures about why people prefer diagnosing Philo's profession of deism as ironic are my own; surprisingly, although this is by far the more popular alternative, most commentators do not explain why they prefer rejecting the deism as ironic rather than rejecting the skepticism.

33 William Austin asserts that the reversal is merely *arguendo*, "a bit like that of counsel for the defense." Austin, "Philo's Reversal," *Philosophical Topics* 13 (1985): 103–12, 109. But this passage from the *Dialogues* clearly shows that Philo has not made the concession *arguendo*, and given that he does explicitly argue in this way in other places in the *Dialogues*, Austin is left with no evidence for his claim that Hume has made the concession merely for the sake of argument.

34 Laird claims that Philo's profession of belief in the Design Argument is genuine, and that he rejects all of the other comparisons he had been drawing between the cosmos and animals or vegetables (215). Laird offers no evidence for this rejection, however, so one is left with an unargued yet oddly confident rejection of what still seems a compelling objection.

35 Taylor points to a confusion about whether this should be called the cosmological or ontological argument (186). Because Demea claims that the argument is a priori, the latter would presumably be Demea's choice. Yet the argument has an obvious (though enthymematic) a posteriori premise, namely that something exists. Without this premise, it is impossible to generate a causal regress. The appeal to causation might also force an identification with the cosmological argument, but again, Demea thinks the principle of sufficient reason is an a priori, not empirical, principle. It is hard to believe that Hume would have genuinely classified this as an a priori argument, so he is probably setting up Demea to fall victim to Cleanthes' empiricist attack on any a priori version of a causal argument for god's existence. Kenneth Williford offers a remarkably thorough attempt to resolve this controversy in "Demea's *a priori* Theistic Proof," *Hume Studies* 29 (2003): 99–123.

36 Note that this sense of "natural" is different from the meaning of the word in the title of Hume's book, where it refers, not to a causal story about religious belief, but an argument for religion on the basis of the evidence found in nature, construed as god's creation.

37 Butler includes properties 1, 2, and 4, while omitting 3 (74). He asserts that belief in design is natural, then argues that to endorse a designer is what it means to believe that nature manifests design (97). This second claim seems a mistake, since Philo repeatedly questions the inference from apparent design to a designer. His skepticism is best understood as an attempt to imagine various ways that objects can look designed without having actually been designed. So the move from apparent design to designer is not analytic; a proponent of the naturalistic interpretation might do better to claim that this is also a natural belief, such that nature, not analyticity, compels us to move from design to designer. R.G. Swinburne sees that "it is not analytic that if anything evinces design, an agent designed it." Swinburne, "The Argument from Design," *Philosophy* 43 (1968): 199–212, 199.

38 "Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this *total* skepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist" (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183).

39 "Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel" (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). One who refutes skepticism has "endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable" (T 1.4.1.7; SBN 183). If one attributes a regularity analysis of causality to Hume, then the first and second properties of natural beliefs are the same.

40 "Even this resolution [of adhering exclusively to the understanding], if steadily executed, wou'd be dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267).

41 "The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another" (T 1.4.7.8; SBN 268).

42 Of course, many writers discuss Hume's naturalism. But the ones who use naturalism as a way of explaining Philo's inconsistency include Butler, "Natural Belief"; Livingston, "Hume Literature of the 1970s"; Tweyman, "'Inconvenience' of Anthropomorphism," 26; Penelhum, "Natural Belief"; Wieand, "Pamphilus in Hume's *Dialogues*," 37; Hurlbutt, "Careless Skeptic"; Tilley, "Hume on Good and Evil," 709; Scott Davis, "Irony and Argument in *Dialogues* XII," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 239–57; and Logan, "Why Hume Wasn't an Atheist," 200. Livingston (paraphrasing Yandell) claims that "Philo's 'philosophical theism' has an origin in human nature: a built-in propensity to have certain beliefs under certain conditions" (187). However, Livingston appears willing to loosen the first three criteria: religion is "virtually unavoidable," and humans "would not go to rack and ruin" without it. It seems a mistake to allow so much latitude in the definition of natural beliefs. Tweyman, "The Articulate Voice and God," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 20 (1982): 263–75, sees the difficulty that universality causes for the naturalistic interpretation, but is unable to resolve the problem. Tweyman also gives a slightly lengthier set of properties of natural beliefs, including their violating Hume's meaning empiricism—they cannot be decomposed into impressions and ideas in the correct way. I think Tweyman is wrong about this violation, particularly in the case of causation, where Hume does give a satisfactory set of impressions that yield a meaningful idea of necessity, though there is not room here to address this issue. Since Tweyman agrees that natural beliefs are also inevitable and universal, his adding an additional property will not affect my rejection of the claim that the Design Argument is a natural belief. Salmon claims that the dogmatist is unable to give up religion "because of his natural inclinations," though I suspect that Salmon rejects the universality of dogmatism, hence he is not endorsing the naturalistic interpretation (174). White also labels belief in god "natural," though he explicitly gives this term his own peculiar definition (406–7). John Immerwahr appears to claim that religious belief is natural, though which denomination one picks (particularly the important choice between "true theism" and its alternatives) is not the exclusive result of nature. Immerwahr, "Hume's Aesthetic Theism," *Hume Studies*, 22 (1996): 325–38, 327.

43 David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 21.

44 The universality of the Design Argument is immediately disproven by the existence of a single atheist. But Hume knew that there were atheists, as revealed by the famous

story about Hume's remarking to D'Holbach "that he did not believe in atheists, that he had never seen any. The Baron said to him: 'Count how many we are here.' We were eighteen. The Baron added: 'It isn't too bad a showing to be able to point out to you fifteen at once: the three others haven't made up their minds.'" Quoted in Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 483.

45 Penelhum requires this addition: "those who do not encounter such reasoning . . . do not believe in minimal deism" ("Natural Belief," 171). However, Penelhum is incorrect that this stipulation would distinguish the Design Argument from other natural beliefs. A person who lacked any experience of causal connections or external objects would lack these beliefs, just as a person who had never heard of the Design Argument would lack the belief in it.

46 Terence Penelhum, "Hume's Skepticism and the *Dialogues*," in Norton, *McGill Hume Studies*, 253–78, 270.

47 Shapiro emphasizes the role that education plays in the *Dialogues*, but he fails to note the connotation of indoctrination that this word carries.

48 Parenthetically, the truth of this point explains the widespread tendency to continue in the religious traditions of one's forebears.

49 Butler asserts that Hume "divides beliefs into two classes:" those that are rationally justified, and those that result from natural instinct (74). My argument is that this classification is not exhaustive, and that there are beliefs resulting from indoctrination that are neither rational nor natural.