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Anglicanism, Scottish Presbyterianism, and the Irreligious Aim of Hume's *Treatise*

ANDERS KRAAL

Abstract: According to Paul Russell's irreligious interpretation of Hume's *Treatise*, the aim of the *Treatise* is to discredit "Christian theology" generically construed. In this paper, I argue that in seeking to discredit Christian theology in the *Treatise*, Hume uses an early eighteenth-century Anglican version of Christian theology rather than "Christian theology" in a generic sense as his theological paradigm. Taking Hume's attacks on "hidden powers" and "the liberty of indifference" as test-cases, I show that whereas Hume's views on these topics are subversive of the Anglican theology of his day, they are not subversive of other major forms of Christian theology that were current at the time, including the Calvinist theology of the Kirk of Scotland. If this is right, then the immediate theological target of Hume's *Treatise* should be deemed narrower than Russell's irreligious interpretation takes it to be.

Paul Russell's "irreligious interpretation" of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* concurs with the two main rival readings of the *Treatise*, the "skeptical" and "naturalistic" readings, in regarding Hume's skeptical and naturalistic commitments as deeply important to the project of the *Treatise*, but Russell maintains that there is an even more fundamental intention underlying and uniting these commitments—namely, an "anti-Christian" intention.¹ According to Russell, this anti-Christian intention is aimed at discrediting (what is variously described as) "Christian orthodoxy" (*Riddle*, 247), "Christian metaphysics and morals" (*Riddle*,

viii), “the metaphysics and morals of Christian theology” (*Riddle*, 143), and “the doctrines and dogmas of Christian philosophy and theology” (*Riddle*, 247; see also *Riddle* viii, 143, and 290). Russell says, “Hume’s philosophy in the *Treatise* . . . [is] fundamentally an effort to discredit the metaphysical and moral paraphernalia of orthodox religious systems (*Riddle*, 285), and later he refines this claim, saying that the “primary aim of Hume’s series of skeptical arguments, as developed and distributed throughout the *Treatise*, is to discredit the doctrines and dogmas of Christian philosophy and theology with a view to redirecting philosophical investigations to areas of “common life,” with the particular aim of advancing “the science of man” (*Riddle*, 290).

Although Russell’s irreligious interpretation is proposed mainly as an alternative to the skeptical and naturalistic readings, it is worth noting that it also contrasts with an earlier “irreligious reading” of the *Treatise*, according to which the *Treatise* is informed by anti-Presbyterian sentiments deriving from Hume’s negative experiences of Scottish Presbyterianism in his childhood and adolescence. This earlier irreligious reading can be traced back to Norman Kemp-Smith’s long introduction to Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1935), in which the *Treatise* is said to be the “outcome” of the young Hume’s struggles with Scottish Presbyterianism.² More recently this approach has been defended by Jennifer Herdt, who argues that “[t]he Evangelical Presbyterianism” of Hume’s upbringing “was to remain the archetype of all religion for Hume, no matter how apparently generic and general the claims he went on to make concerning ‘theism’ and ‘religion’ were,”³ that Hume’s attacks on “theism” should be understood as “responses to theism as he knew it, and most particularly to Scottish Evangelical Calvinism” (*Religion and Faction*, 217) and, more specifically, that “Hume’s discussions of property, fame, beauty, and pride in the *Treatise* were developed in direct opposition to Calvinist denunciations of worldly goods” (*Religion and Faction*, 13). Claims of this sort play no role in Russell’s irreligious interpretation, however.

Russell’s departure from this earlier irreligious reading of the *Treatise* is justified, for any clear evidence of specifically anti-Presbyterian hostility on Hume’s part during the years leading up to the publication of the *Treatise* or in the *Treatise* itself has not yet been marshalled,⁴ and the manifest anti-Presbyterian hostility of Hume’s later writings (from the *Inquiry concerning Human Understanding* of 1748 and onward) is—as M. A. Stewart and Terence Penelhum have pointed out—plausibly explained by reference to well-known altercations between Hume and the Scottish Presbyterian clergy from the mid-1740s to the mid-1750s.⁵ Moreover, a closer look at the evidence Russell mounts for the anti-Christian nature of the *Treatise* justifies an even more radical departure from this earlier “anti-Presbyterian approach.” This evidence, I shall argue, indicates that Hume’s immediate theological target in the *Treatise* is neither Scottish Calvinism nor, as Russell holds, “Christian theology” in a generic sense but, rather, the theological system of the most formidable ecclesi-

astical power in Britain in Hume's day: the Anglican Church. Thus, my aim in this paper is to show that the type of Christian theology that collides most significantly with the *Treatise* is that of the early eighteenth-century Anglican Church. The upshot of my argument will accordingly be that the immediate theological target of the *Treatise* is somewhat narrower than Russell supposes.

1. Two Distinct Theses about Hume's Intentions

Russell's claim that Hume's project in the *Treatise* is to discredit Christian theology could be divided into two subordinate claims. We have, first, what we could call the anti-apologetic thesis, according to which the *Treatise* is deeply concerned with undermining the sort of Christian apologetics urged by religious philosophers such as Samuel Clarke.⁶ Then we have a second claim, which we could call the anti-Christian thesis, according to which Hume's more fundamental aim in the *Treatise* is broader, namely, to discredit Christian theology as such.⁷ The anti-apologetic and anti-Christian theses are often merged in Russell's work, the assumption apparently being that arguments against Clarke-style apologetics are part of a more general attack on Christian theology. Thus, in discussing what Russell takes to be Hume's criticism of Clarke's cosmological argument, or "argument a priori," Russell says that this criticism "is part of a wider sweep of arguments that all *clearly* have the general aim of undermining and discrediting the basic doctrines and principles of the Christian religion" (*Riddle*, 127). Although the anti-apologetic and anti-Christian theses are often merged in Russell's work, reflection on the claims of well-known versions of "Christian orthodoxy" as set out in official creedal pronouncements of major historical Christian church-bodies mandates a distinction between these two things, for the relevant claims are concerned primarily with themes pertaining to the divine nature and human salvation and generally allow much room for disagreement on matters pertaining to apologetics (for example, specific theistic proofs).⁸ I will keep these theses apart and will consider the evidence Russell provides for each of them separately.

I begin by rehearsing very briefly the main evidence that Russell provides for the anti-apologetic and anti-Christian theses then proceed to make an initial case for the need to qualify the anti-Christian thesis.

As main evidence for the anti-apologetic thesis, Russell notes the following: that a major cultural debate in Britain at the time of the formation of the project of the *Treatise* was a debate waged between religious philosophers like Clarke and freethinkers like Anthony Collins (*Riddle*, 25–34); that in Hume's local context, the Scottish Borders, there was during this same time a fierce debate between the Clarkean Andrew Baxter and the freethinker William Dudgeon on some of the topics later dealt with in the *Treatise* (e.g., free-will), and hence that debates generated by Clarke-style apologetics were a core feature of Hume's intellectual

context (*Riddle*, 35–46); that the views defended by Hume on several key topics in the *Treatise* have a significant negative impact on various aspects of Clarke-style apologetics (for example, Hume’s idea that from the point of reason “[a]ny thing may produce any thing” (T 1.3.15.1; SBN 173)⁹ subverts one of the key premises of Clarke’s cosmological argument) (*Riddle*, 116–24); that the earliest reviewers of the *Treatise* viewed the book as an attack on Clarke-style apologetics, and in particular on Clarke’s cosmological argument (*Riddle*, 15–16);¹⁰ and that Hume, in defending the *Treatise* against charges of atheism in his 1745 pamphlet, *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend at Edinburgh*, concedes that the theory of causality in the *Treatise* subverts Clarke’s argument *a priori* and, indeed, that this had been part of Hume’s design (*Riddle*, 19). The above observations, when taken together, provide good evidence for the anti-apologetic thesis.

Russell’s evidence for the anti-Christian thesis is less straightforward. He cites a number of considerations to the effect that some of the positions defended in the *Treatise* undermine core Christian doctrines by rendering them either false or unintelligible. Among other things, Russell argues that Hume’s theory of causation, in particular his idea that meaningful talk of causation pertains to relations between things “in” the world, undermines the Christian doctrine of creation inasmuch as the intelligibility of this doctrine involves conceiving of a cause of “the world itself” (*Riddle*, 163–64); that Hume’s moral theory, in particular his idea that in order to hold someone responsible for his or her actions the person must possess moral passions, undermines the Christian doctrine of accountability to God in an afterlife inasmuch as the intelligibility of this doctrine would then require that God has moral passions, which Christian theology doesn’t allow (*Riddle*, 258–60); that Hume’s theory of ideas, in particular his view that “we have no idea of a being endow’d with any [hidden] power, much less of one endow’d with infinite power” (T 1.4.5.31; SBN 248), undermines the Christian doctrine of divine omnipotence inasmuch as the intelligibility of this doctrine requires that we can conceive of (hidden) powers (*Riddle*, 162); and that Hume’s view on free-will, in particular his view that people lack “the liberty of indifference,” that is, libertarian free-will, undermines what Christians in Hume’s day considered the foundation of Christian morality (*Riddle*, 229).

I believe it can be shown, contrary to Russell’s irreligious interpretation, that although some of the above targeted positions (for example, port-mortem accountability) are integral to any (traditional) form of Christian theology, *some* of the above positions fall short of being part of “Christian theology” in a generic sense. More specifically, I believe it can be shown that the consequences of Hume’s views on omnipotence and the foundations of morality are subversive of Christian theology only if we assume something like early eighteenth-century Anglican theology, as opposed to, for example, early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian theology, as our paradigm of Christian theology. Russell acknowl-

edges that at least with regard to Hume's views on free-will, one might question whether Hume's views threaten Christian theology in a generic sense, but he goes on to argue that, in the final analysis, Hume's views *do* have this effect (*Riddle*, 237–38). I argue that Russell's reasoning on this point is unsatisfactory and that we can make better sense of Hume's irreligious aims in the *Treatise* if we assume that in seeking to discredit Christian theology, Hume was assuming something like early eighteenth-century Anglicanism as his theological paradigm. In what follows I shall refer to this suggestion—the central thesis of this paper—as the Anglican paradigm thesis.

2. The Anglican Paradigm Thesis

Before I argue for the Anglican paradigm thesis, it may be helpful to make the thesis a bit clearer. The Anglican paradigm thesis is the claim that in seeking to discredit Christian theology in the *Treatise*, Hume used the Anglican theology of his day as his *paradigm* of Christian theology. To prevent misunderstandings, I shall make a few remarks about how this thesis *should not* be understood.

First, in saying that the *Treatise* aims at discrediting Christian theology, I am not suggesting that Hume was not concerned first and foremost with questions of truth or that the *Treatise* is not a serious philosophical inquiry but rather a piece of irreligious propaganda. A serious, truth-oriented philosophy can *also* aim at discrediting publically those systems of belief which one believes are false.

Second, the thesis is not intended to imply that Hume, in seeking to discredit Christian theology, was *exclusively* concerned with discrediting the Christian theology of the Anglican Church of his day. What is meant is rather that the Christian theology of the Anglican Church of Hume's day seems to have been at the forefront of Hume's thought in his attempts to discredit Christian theology. And this is compatible with Hume's having had a general desire to discredit not only the Anglican theology of his day but also other forms of Christian theology as well. Thus, although Hume may have desired to discredit Christian theology in a more generic sense in the *Treatise*, my claim is that Hume's attacks on religion are targeted more narrowly at the type of Christian theology represented by the Anglican Church of Hume's day.

Third, the thesis is not intended to imply that the Anglican Church of Hume's day was entirely unified theologically, in the sense that there were no theological differences or divisions internal to this church body. There were. However, there was at this time a general orientation amongst the ecclesiastical leadership of the Anglican Church towards Arminian theology (as I document further on), with a concomitant emphasis on libertarian free-will. When I argue that in seeking to discredit Christian theology, Hume took "Anglican theology" as his paradigm

of Christian theology, I am referring to the type of theology represented by this general consensus within the Anglican Church at this time.

Fourth, the thesis is not intended to imply that Hume's concerns in the *Treatise* were all and only related to what went on in England or amongst the English, as opposed to what went on in Scotland or amongst the Scots. The Anglican paradigm thesis is primarily a thesis about the relation between the *Treatise* and theological systems, not about the relation between the *Treatise* and geographical regions, nations, or national characters. Nevertheless, despite the endless complexities of British religious history, it remains an uncontroversial church-historical fact that the established church in England during the eighteenth century was the Anglican Church, that the established church of Scotland was the Kirk, and that these two church bodies endorsed two largely different versions of Christian theology.

Fifth, and related to the above point, the thesis is not intended to imply that the Kirk of Hume's day was entirely unified theologically either, although the available evidence from the first few decades of the eighteenth century suggests that the Kirk was strongly unified in its basic theological commitments. The Anglican paradigm thesis presupposes only that there was something like a general theological orientation amongst the ecclesiastical leadership of the Kirk at this time towards a version of Christian theology that differs on relevant points from the Anglican theology of the same time.

Sixth, the thesis is not intended to imply that there were no important non-British influences on Hume's thought. There certainly were, in particular French writers, such as Pierre Bayle, as is well-known.¹¹ I am not downplaying their influence on Hume's thought, but rather, in seeking to make sense of the irreligious dimension of the *Treatise*, I emphasize the importance of the theology of the Anglican Church.

Finally, the Anglican paradigm thesis pertains only to the aims of the *Treatise* not to the aims of later works by Hume that have an obvious bearing on religious belief (for example, the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*). I think that quite different stories need to be told as regards Hume's aims in these later works, but I shall not attempt to tell those stories here.

With these clarifications in place, I now seek to make the Anglican paradigm thesis plausible. I first give an account of some basic theological differences that had developed between the Anglican Church and the Kirk in the years leading up to the publication of the *Treatise* in 1739–1740 (section 3). I then show that some of the key ideas defended by Hume in the *Treatise* discredit an early eighteenth-century Anglican theology but not an early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian theology (section 4). I conclude by presenting a possible answer to the question: *why* would Hume use Anglicanism as his theological paradigm in seeking to discredit Christian theology in the *Treatise* (section 5).

3. Theological Differences

Although the early eighteenth-century Anglican church maintained the basically Calvinistic *Thirty-Nine Articles* as its official creed,¹² most intellectual historians now agree that during the seventeenth century, the Anglican church had, on the whole, turned from a Calvinistic to a basically Arminian theology and reread the creed accordingly.¹³

Arminianism had emerged in the United Provinces in the early seventeenth century in reaction to the then dominant Calvinism of the Dutch Reformed Church.¹⁴ Taking its name from the Dutch theologian James Arminius (1560–1609), Arminianism found succinct summary in the *Five Arminian Articles* of 1610, which affirmed, in opposition to Calvinism, that predestination is not unconditional but is instead directed at “those who . . . shall believe” (*qui . . . credituri*);¹⁵ and that regeneration, the means of predestination, is brought about by a “co-operative grace” (*cooperante gratia*), which both allows for the possibility and, indeed, requires that human beings cooperate in their salvation. The basic idea underlying Arminian theology and distinguishing it from Calvinism is, as Keith Stranglin points out, “that predestination is conditional on a person’s *free acceptance or rejection* of God’s saving grace” (*Arminius on Salvation*, 84; my emphasis) where the relevant sense of “free acceptance” presupposes libertarian free-will.¹⁶

The rise of Arminianism led the Calvinist majority in the United Provinces to endorse a more thoroughgoing Calvinistic statement that made the differences between Calvinistic necessitarianism and Arminian libertarianism more explicit. The Synod of Dort in 1618–1619 gathered Calvinist representatives not only from the United Provinces but also from other parts of Reformed Europe, including England, Scotland, and Switzerland. Condemning Arminianism as heretical, the Synod declared as official church dogma that “election was not founded upon foreseen faith” (“*electio facta est non ex praevisa fide*”)¹⁷ and that regeneration is “not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free-will” (*non est adscribendum homini, tanquam seipsum per liberum arbitrium*) (“*Canones Synodi Dordrechtanae*,” 589; see also 566). The synod also laid strong emphasis on a further doctrine underlying these soteriological articles, namely the doctrine of “God’s eternal decrees,” according to which “[t]hat some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree” (*[q]uod autem aliqui in tempore fide a Deo donantur, aliqui non donantur, id ab aeterno ipsius decreto provenit*) (“*Canones Synodi Dordrechtanae*,” 582; see also 552).

Though suppressed in the United Provinces, Arminianism made inroads into the Anglican Church at an early stage and by the 1620s had attracted a considerable following (Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 125–63).¹⁸ In 1633, Charles I, who had strong anti-Calvinist leanings, promoted William Laud, an Arminian stalwart, to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury, and in this capacity Laud set about

seeking to root out Calvinism from the Anglican Church by a series of important moves, including the promotion of Arminian clergy to positions of ecclesiastical power, the prohibition of attacks on Arminian theology from the pulpits, and the execution of swift punishment on those who opposed the new theological orientation (Tyacke, “Puritanism,” 132–43; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 181–247; and Carlton, *Archbishop William Laud*, 86–131).

Laud’s ecclesiastical policies led to deep societal tensions, which according to Nicholas Tyacke in turn contributed to the outbreak of the English Civil War of 1642–1651, between Royalists and Calvinist Puritans (“Puritanism,” 119–43; and *Anti-Calvinists*, 245–46). With the victory of the Puritans, there was a temporary Calvinist ascendancy in England, resulting in the convening of the Westminster Assembly of 1643–1652, one of the most important Calvinist assemblies of the seventeenth century alongside the earlier-mentioned Synod of Dort.

The Westminster Assembly aimed at providing a common doctrinal foundation for both England and Scotland, and the proposed foundation, the *Westminster Confession* of 1647, soon established itself as a paradigmatic statement of Calvinistic orthodoxy in the English language. The *Westminster Confession* not only gave clear articulation to characteristically Calvinistic articles, such as that of absolute predestination, but also elaborated on the underlying necessitarian doctrine of God’s absolute sovereignty as manifested in God’s eternal decrees, asserting that “God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”¹⁹ Although the new creed was endorsed in England in the late 1640s, the Restoration of 1660 and the consequent downfall of Puritanism as a major political power in England led to the nullification of the acts of the Westminster Assembly.

From the Restoration into the eighteenth century, Calvinistic theology was increasingly marginalized in the Anglican Church, with Arminianism once again providing the dominant theological framework for the church. G. R. Cragg notes that “the Restoration definitely marked the end of an era in English religious thought. It drove from power the exponents of Calvinism, and by the same token it restored to positions of influence men who on the whole were favourable to Arminianism” (*Puritanism to Reason*, 18). According to Cragg, “Within fifty years Calvinism in England fell from a position of immense authority to obscurity and insignificance (*Puritanism to Reason*, 30).²⁰ We thus find that in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England, the major ideological and cultural debate of the times is no longer a debate between Calvinists and Arminians but, instead, a debate between religious apologists and various groups of alleged “atheists,” that is, Hobbists, deists, and freethinkers.²¹ The triumph of Arminianism over Calvinism at this stage is abundantly clear from the fact that most of the major Anglican theologians and philosophers that took part in this debate—for example, Ralph Cudworth (1617–1689), Samuel Clarke (1675–1729), and the three bishops William

King (1650–1729), George Berkeley (1685–1753), and Joseph Butler (1692–1752)—concurred with the basic Arminian, anti-Calvinistic idea that libertarian free-will is essential to true religion.²²

Whereas the Anglican Church abandoned Calvinism in favour of Arminianism as the seventeenth century advanced, the Kirk moved in quite the opposite direction, holding the hyper-Calvinistic, anti-Arminian canons of the Synod of Dort in high regard throughout most of the century²³ and becoming the first church-body ever to endorse the *Westminster Confession* as its official creed (in 1647).²⁴ At the same time, strong Episcopalian pressure was exerted on the Kirk from London and Canterbury, resulting in deep English-Scottish tensions.²⁵ Although the Restoration of 1660 led to the nullification of the acts of the Westminster Assembly not only in England but also in Scotland, the accession of William III after the Revolution of 1688 resulted in Royal recognition of the Kirk as the “Established Church” in Scotland, with the *Westminster Confession* as its official creed.²⁶ This event—referred to by both eighteenth-century and modern writers as “the Re-establishment of Presbyterianism” or “the Triumph of Presbyterianism”²⁷—was followed by a process of confessionalization in Scotland, in which the General Assembly, the ruling body of the Kirk, passed a series of acts serving to reinforce the Calvinistic profile of Scotland.

This process went on for several decades, even after Scotland and England came together to form the United Kingdom in 1707. (Indeed, a Scottish requirement for the union was perpetual English recognition of the Kirk as the “Established Church” in Scotland with the *Westminster Confession* as its official creed (Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, 273–74).) This process involved a number of measures, amongst which the following are perhaps particularly noteworthy on account of their strong impact on the religious atmosphere of early eighteenth-century Scotland.

First, measures were introduced to ensure that ministers and teachers were firmly committed to Westminster Calvinism. In 1690 the General Assembly passed an act requiring “approbation” of the *Westminster Confession* on the part of ministers and teachers;²⁸ in 1694 “approbation” was replaced by the more heart-probing “sincerely own[ing] and declar[ing] . . . to be the confession of my faith”;²⁹ and in 1711 this requirement was made yet stricter by the phrase “sincerely own and believe *the whole doctrine* contained in the Confession of Faith . . . to be the truths of God and . . . the confession of my faith.”³⁰

Second, measures were introduced which aimed at bringing the universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrews, and Aberdeen into alignment with the mission of the Kirk. These measures included the “purging” of Episcopalians from the universities in the 1690s and the appointment of a new class of Presbyterian professors committed to the *Westminster Confession* (Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, 262–63, and Skoczylas, *Simson's Knotty Case*, 71–72). The result, as Richard

Sher notes, was that “in the eighteenth century moral and religious training were considered essential functions of the [Scottish] university,” and the Scottish university came to “reflect the values of the presbyterian burghers who governed it and the presbyterian churchmen who served as its administrators and supervised its curriculum with careful scrutiny.”³¹ Even those early eighteenth-century professors that are today usually associated with the beginnings of the Scottish Enlightenment, for example, the Glasgow professors Gershom Carmichael (1672–1729), John Simson (1668–1740), and Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), were, on crucial theological points dividing Calvinists and Arminians—such as the question whether true religion requires libertarian free-will—on the side of the Westminster Calvinism to which they had professed adherence.³²

Third, various measures were introduced to suppress ideological threats to the new religious order. For example, a blasphemy act introduced by the Scottish Parliament in 1695 mandated execution for thrice repeated blasphemy,³³ and a series of acts passed by the General Assembly in 1704, 1711, and 1736 forbade ministers and professors to “vent any Arminian or Socinian errors,”³⁴ requiring them instead to “disown all Popish, Arian, Socinian, Arminian, Bourignon, and other doctrines,”³⁵ and enjoining them to “warn their hearers against anything tending to Atheism, Deism, Arianism, Socinianism, Arminianism, Bourignonism, Popery, superstition, Antinomianism, or any other errors.”³⁶ That enactments of this sort were intended to be taken seriously is made clear by the trials of Thomas Aikenhead and John Simson. In 1697 Aikenhead, a young Edinburgh student, was put on trial, sentenced to death, and publicly hanged, on account of blasphemy, a sentence that was approved of by the most respected Scottish theologians of the day (Graham, *Blasphemies of Thomas Aikenhead*, 79–154). In the 1710s, Simson, the aforementioned Glasgow professor, was put on trial on suspicion of Arminianism, charges he vehemently denied (Skoczylas, *Simson’s Knotty Case*, 103–76).

In addition to the above measures, there was also strong religious control of social life. For example, church attendance was officially mandatory, and a series of strict Sabbath laws required people to abstain from any labor on Sundays and to stay indoors except when going to and from church services. Church elders had special rights to patrol the streets of cities and towns in order to see that these laws were not violated.³⁷

A survey of the writings and sermon manuscripts of popular Scottish preachers and religious writers of the day, such as Thomas Boston (1676–1732) and John Willison (1680–1750), makes it abundantly clear that Westminster Calvinism provided the unrivalled ideological content of the popular preaching and devotional literature of Scotland at this time.³⁸ Heard and read by large segments of the Scottish population, these preachers and writers were staunch Westminster Calvinists and generally very intolerant of doctrinal deviance. As Henry G. Graham notes in his still widely utilized study *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*

(1901), “the doctrines [in] these religious productions present few variations . . . , the style varies, the dogmas are ever the same (Graham, *Social Life*, 394). He adds, “Being all bound alike by the same [Westminster] Confession of Faith, which was interpreted in its most rigid sense, there could be allowed no diversity of opinion in the Church (Graham, *Social Life*, 394), noting that “[w]ith the exception of Professor Simson at Glasgow, there was no heretic—if indeed he was a heretic (Graham, *Social Life*, 413–14).³⁹ Religious productions were by far the most read publications in eighteenth-century Scotland. During the course of the eighteenth century, Boston’s writings went through 150 Scottish editions, more than any other Scottish writings and far more than any Scottish philosophical texts. (Hutcheson’s writings went through 31 Scottish editions, and Hume’s through 23.)⁴⁰

In the late 1740s a new and more tolerant style of thinking becomes manifest amongst a subclass of Scottish clergy centred in Edinburgh who came to be known as “moderates” and who after 1752 formed a distinct “Moderate Party” in the Kirk, in opposition to the more traditional “Evangelical” or “Popular” Party. The moderates were led by influential churchmen such as Hugh Blair (1718–1800) and William Robertson (1721–1793), who were, respectively, minister of the High Kirk of Edinburgh (“St. Giles”) and Principal of Edinburgh University throughout most of the second half of the century.⁴¹ Although the moderates did not challenge Westminster Calvinism directly, they were clearly connected to the broader European Enlightenment and lacked the more doctrinally intolerant mindset of the more traditional Scottish ministers of the day, as is clear, for example, from their design to maintain friendly relations with various “infidels” that had burst forth on the Scottish scene in the 1740s, amongst whom Hume was foremost.⁴² Indeed, it was on account of the moderates that the Popular Party failed in its endeavours to excommunicate and ostracize Hume in 1755–1756, in spite of serious efforts.⁴³ These moderates had not quite arrived on the scene in the 1720s and 30s, however, and so are of little relevance for an understanding of Hume’s anti-Christian agenda in the *Treatise*.

In sum, we see that the theologies of early eighteenth-century Anglicanism and Scottish Presbyterianism were importantly different. The Anglican Church had embraced an Arminian theology which emphasized the importance of libertarian free-will and consequently was committed to a non-necessitarian worldview. The Kirk, by contrast, rejected Arminian theology as heretical and had committed itself to the necessitarian and non-libertarian theology of Westminster Calvinism. In the next two sections, I argue that an appreciation of these differences in theological orientation is of importance in seeking to understand the irreligious dimension of the *Treatise*.

4. “Christian Theology” and Hume’s Views in the *Treatise*

Whereas Hume’s views on hidden powers and libertarian free-will in the *Treatise* are subversive of the theology of the early eighteenth-century Anglican Church, this is not obviously the case as regards early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism. I begin in this section with Hume’s views on hidden powers and then turn to his views on libertarian free-will.

Hume develops his view of power in T 1.3.14 (SBN 156–73) against the background of his theory of causality. This theory includes three important claims: first, that the philosophical thesis that causes give rise to effects by virtue of necessitating powers, qualities, or substances hidden in the causes is simply unintelligible, since we lack the prerequisite “impressions” from which “ideas” of such powers, qualities, or substances could be derived (T 1.3.14.11; SBN 161); second, that our knowledge of the workings of causality is confined to relations of contiguity, precedence, and constancy (T 1.3.14.1; SBN 155–56); and third, that the feeling we may have of necessitating powers, qualities or substances of the relevant sort results from a projection of our minds on the materials afforded by the senses (T 1.3.14.22: SBN 165–66).⁴⁴

As Hume recognizes, these claims may be considered relevant to the doctrine of omnipotence. After affirming that we have no idea of a force which operates in the case of either matter or the mind, Hume notes:

The same [lack of any idea of a necessitating power or force] attends our ideas of the deity; but this can have no effect either on religion or morals. The order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind; that is, a mind whose will is constantly attended with the obedience of every creature and being. Nothing more is requisite to give a foundation to all the articles of religion, nor is it necessary we shou’d form a distinct idea of the force and energy of the supreme being. (T 1.3.14.12n30; SBN 633)

In commenting on this passage, Russell takes Hume’s disavowal of any irreligious implications of his view of power to be just a “perfunctory disclaimer” (*Riddle*, 162), intended to cast a thin veil on the obvious fact that Hume’s view has “*irreligious significance*” (*Riddle*, 161). For, says Russell, Hume’s view forces us to

choose between his account of causation and necessity (i.e. understood in terms of constant conjunction and the inference of the mind) or a causal skepticism that implies that “there is no such thing in the universe as a cause”—which specifically includes God. . . . Either we have no idea of power or omnipotence as possessed and exercised by God, or we must

interpret God's power and omnipotence in terms of Hume's (regularity) theory of causation. (*Riddle*, 162)

Russell is clearly right in taking it to be inconsistent with Christian theology to regard the ascription of omnipotence to God as unintelligible; all traditional forms of Christian theology affirm, in line with the first article of the Nicene Creed, the most fundamental of Christian creeds, that God is omnipotent and in so doing assume that this affirmation is intelligible.

But what about the second horn of the dilemma? Why take it to be problematic to interpret God's omnipotence "in terms of Hume's (regularity) theory of causation," that is, to understand omnipotence in terms of a constant conjunction between the will of God and the obedience of every creature? Russell argues that "we have no reason whatsoever to conclude a priori that God's will—however we conceive it—is *always obeyed*. . . . It follows, therefore, that if we accept Hume's (radically attenuated) account of "omnipotence," as interpreted on his regularity theory of causation, we can never conclude that "omnipotence" can be properly attributed to God" (*Riddle*, 162). Russell seems here to be suggesting at least two problems with Hume's proposed account of omnipotence, one epistemological and the other conceptual. The epistemological problem is that this view will not afford us sufficient grounds for *inferring* God's omnipotence from the course of the world. The conceptual problem is that the view yields a "radically attenuated" doctrine of omnipotence. Both of these (alleged) consequences are, says Russell, "unacceptable" from "[a] theological point of view" (*Riddle*, 162).

Russell's reasoning on this point is problematic. I shall put the epistemological point to the side, since it is not an official doctrine of either Anglicanism or Scottish Presbyterianism that God's omnipotence can be inferred from the course of the world in the relevant way, even if particular members of these churches have held that this can be done. I concentrate instead on the conceptual point. What Russell says on this point needs qualification, for although Hume's proposed account of omnipotence would clearly have been unacceptable from the point of view of early eighteenth-century Anglicanism, it is not obvious that it is unacceptable from the point of view of early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism.

According to Westminster Calvinism, God exerts absolute control over all things, *including* the actions of human beings. We find this doctrine stated clearly in several places in the *Westminster Confession*. In the second chapter of the *Westminster Confession*, entitled "Of God, and of the Holy Trinity," it is affirmed that "There is but one only living and true God . . . , working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory" (*Westminster Confession*, 606). And again, "God . . . is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign

dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth" (*Westminster Confession*, 607).

The most well-known pronouncements on this doctrine occur in chapter 3 ("Of God's Eternal Decree") and chapter 5 ("Of Providence"), however. In chapter 3 it is affirmed that "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass . . . yet hath he not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future" (*Westminster Confession*, 608), and in chapter 5 that "God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence" (*Westminster Confession*, 612). In an important concession, it is explicitly conceded that God's omnipotence and providence extend "even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men" (*Westminster Confession*, 613). The message, then, is clear: God exerts total control over absolutely all things, be they great or small, good or evil. Nothing happens that is not subject to absolute divine control.

This doctrine of absolute divine sovereignty seems to have been widely disseminated in early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism. It finds emphatic and unequivocal expression in the writings of the popular preachers of the day. Thus Thomas Boston affirms that "God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass; and nothing comes to pass but what he has decreed to come to pass. . . . He is not only the general spring and origin of all motions and actions of the creatures, but he appoints and orders them all immediately. . . . Not only good things, but evil things fall within the compass of his holy decree."⁴⁵

We even find this doctrine in the writings of the early eighteenth century Glasgow professors associated with the beginnings of the Scottish Enlightenment, Carmichael, Simson, and Hutcheson. Carmichael says, "we must admit that all the changes which happen to things, no less than their actual substances, must be attributed to the efficacy of the divine will as first and adequate cause" ("Synopsis of Natural Theology," 274). Simson writes similarly, "as God had Eternally and Unchangeably Decreed. . . . So All Things come to pass Immutably and Infallibly, according to his Foreknowledg and Decree."⁴⁶ And Hutcheson writes:

[God] moves and rules [all things] by his own efficacious will. . . . Never does God fail to achieve his expectation or intention, . . . nothing can obstruct him when he wills or impede his intention when he has determined in himself to act in a certain way . . . ; nothing can occur contrary to his will; and he does not borrow his force from any eternal power or need its help when he wills to do something without the intervention of others. (*Synopsis of Metaphysics*, 180)

Now suppose we understand God's omnipotence to refer not to a hidden power or quality in God but to the actual conformity of all things to God's will. From the perspective of Westminster Calvinism, this supposition does not seem amiss. Calvin himself insists in the *Institutes* that God "is accounted omnipotent . . . because he governs heaven and earth by his providence, and regulates all things in such a manner that nothing happens but according to his counsel,"⁴⁷ rejecting the more scholastic view that God is accounted omnipotent by virtue of a possibly merely potential power. Moreover, in the *Westminster Confession*, while the "power of God" is taken to be understandable from "creation and providence" (*Westminster Confession*, 600), no hint is made of *a priori* apprehensions of hidden powers in the divine being. And popular preachers in the early eighteenth-century Kirk like Boston often explicate omnipotence along lines suggested by Calvin, for example, in terms of the claim that "all things fall out according to his [God's] decree," rather than in terms of hidden powers in God (*Illustration*, 192).

Now if we understand the Westminster doctrine of omnipotence in the suggested way, Hume's account of omnipotence in terms of a constant conjunction between the will of God and the obedience of every creature does not seem theologically heterodox. For the views concur on two basic ideas: (1) that the will of God is the cause of everything in the world and (2) that to say that God is omnipotent is just to say that the will of God is the cause of everything in the world. We can conclude that the account of omnipotence offered in the *Treatise* is not subversive of this tenet of early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian theology. Russell's claim that Hume's account of omnipotence yields a "radically attenuated" version of this attribute which is unacceptable from a theological point of view needs to be qualified.

If we take early eighteenth-century Anglican theology as our paradigm of Christian theology, Russell's claim is correct. For in contrast to Westminster Calvinism, Anglicans often denied, mostly implicitly but sometimes explicitly, that God exerts the relevant sort of absolute control over all things. This is, of course, a corollary of their Arminian commitment to libertarian free will, for if human beings act out of libertarian free will, the actions thus produced must be exempt from any necessitating power. In line with this, it is not surprising to find that leading Anglican thinkers of the early eighteenth century delimit the scope of omnipotence in order to make room for actions springing from libertarian free will (especially when evil actions are in view). Clarke, for example, says that God "cannot but be infinitely Removed" from evil actions that arise from a direct, free choice (*Being and Attributes of God*, 241; my emphasis). Similarly, King says that God "created Free Agents; which, being as it were *put out of his Power* and left to themselves, . . . act in a manner independent of his Will" (*Origin of Evil*, 249; my emphasis). While allowing that God "permits" evil actions, Anglicans like Clarke and King would not concede that God "causes" them.

It is true that Scottish Presbyterians also spoke of God as “permitting” evil actions.⁴⁸ The difference, however, is that for Scottish Presbyterians the notion of permission at play is taken to be consistent with God’s absolute sovereignty over all things *to the exclusion of libertarian free will*. Boston, for example, says that the relevant permission is not a “naked permission whereby the thing may come to pass or not,” but a permission whereby the thing “cannot but come to pass” (*Illustration*, 151). It was otherwise with Anglican talk of divine permission: in their case the relevant notion of permission was deliberately intended to make room for libertarian free will.

The Anglican delimitation of the scope of omnipotence renders Hume’s account of omnipotence theologically unacceptable. For Hume’s account requires a “constant conjunction” between the will of God and the occurrence of all events and so does not allow for events that are not caused by God but spring instead from human libertarian free will. Accordingly, it seems that Hume’s view of power in the *Treatise* is, as Russell says, subversive of Christian theology, but only if we take an early eighteenth-century Anglican theology as our paradigm of Christian theology.

I turn next to an examination of Russell’s claim that Hume’s rejection of libertarian free-will was intended to be subversive of Christian theology in general. In this case also, whereas Russell’s claim makes good sense if we assume something like early eighteenth-century Anglicanism as our paradigm of Christian theology, it appears mistaken if we instead take an early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian theology as our paradigm.

Hume puts forth his views on the will in Book 2 of the *Treatise*. There he distinguishes between two kinds of “liberty” which philosophers have ascribed to the will: “the liberty of spontaneity,” that is, a liberty “which is opposed to violence” (T 2.3.2.1; SBN 407); and “the liberty of indifference,” that is, a liberty “which means a negation of necessity and causes” (that is, libertarian free will) (T 2.3.2.1; SBN 407). Hume concedes to the will a liberty of spontaneity but rejects a liberty of indifference.

In repudiating libertarian free-will, Hume argues that our ordinary practice of assessing people’s moral characters on the basis of their actions presupposes a necessary, causal connection between their characters and actions (T 2.3.1.10–18; SBN 402–407). Hume also seeks to undermine three main arguments offered in favor of libertarian free-will: that without libertarian free-will we would act under compulsion rather than willingly, that we experience a contingency in our actions which requires libertarian free-will, and that the denial of libertarian free-will has “dangerous consequences to religion” (T 2.3.1.1–3; SBN 407–409). Hume holds that the first point confounds libertarian free-will with the liberty of spontaneity (T 2.3.2.1; SBN 407); that the second point is undermined by the fact that although we, from a first-person perspective, may think that our experience requires a liberty of indifference, “a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives

and character" (T 2.3.2.2; SBN 408); and that the third point fails inasmuch as the denial of libertarian free-will is, in fact, "advantageous to religion" (T 2.3.2.3; SBN 409). Hume supports this last claim by linking freedom to law and punishment. First, he describes libertarian free will as "entirely destructive to all laws both *divine* and *human*," because "'Tis indeed certain, that as all human laws are founded on rewards and punishments, 'tis supposed as a fundamental principle, that these motives have an influence on the mind, and both produce the good and prevent the evil actions" (T 2.3.2.5; SBN 410). He adds, "This reasoning is equally solid, when apply'd to divine laws, so far as the deity is considered as a legislator, and is suppos'd to inflict punishment and bestow rewards with a design to produce obedience" (T 2.3.2.6; SBN 410).

In Russell's view, Hume's disavowal of the irreligious significance of his attack on libertarianism is "less than sincere" (*Riddle*, 236), the plain truth being that Hume's attack is "systematically irreligious in character" (*Riddle*, 225). To make this evident, Russell notes that whereas major early eighteenth-century opponents of libertarian free-will, such as Collins, were atheists or free-thinkers, major proponents of libertarian free-will during this same time—for example, Clarke—were Christians who viewed libertarian free-will as the foundation of Christian morality and whose libertarianism was considered "entirely orthodox among the leading lights of the Anglican clergy at this time" (*Riddle*, 229). In spite of this explicit reference to the Anglican clergy, Russell holds that Hume's anti-libertarianism poses a serious challenge to the Scottish Presbyterians of Hume's day, too. In view of the necessitarian commitments of the Kirk, I think this assumption is problematic.

In an interesting discussion appended to his treatment of Hume's attack on libertarian free-will, Russell considers an objection similar to mine. The objection is that many necessitarians have been "orthodox Christian believers" (he mentions Luther, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Joseph Priestly), in which case construing Hume's necessitarianism as irreligiously motivated might seem unjustified (*Riddle*, 236–37). In response to this, Russell says that "from the perspective of Hume's contemporaries, and the generation that followed, the relationship between necessitarianism and 'atheism' was a close one" (*Riddle*, 237). In support of this, he quotes Priestly, who in the 1790s remarked that the "ablest defenders" of necessitarianism were "unbelievers in Christianity,"⁴⁹ James Beattie, who remarked, also in the 1790s, that the "most distinguished" defenders of necessitarianism were "enemies to our faith,"⁵⁰ and Dugald Stewart, who in the 1820s remarked that "every modern Atheist" appears to have been a necessitarian⁵¹ (*Riddle*, 237). On the basis of this close connection between atheism and necessitarianism, Russell proposes the following methodological rule for deciding whether a necessitarian author has "irreligious intentions":

Whether an author's necessitarianism is in fact irreligious must be judged, in the first place, by his explicit effort(s) to disown [irreligious] associations and intentions. . . . The sincerity of these efforts of this kind, however, must be judged in terms of the relations that hold between the author's necessitarianism and other themes and objectives in his work. (*Riddle*, 237)

Among the irreligious associations and intentions here referred to, Russell includes difficulties accounting for the origin of evil. Thus, applying this rule to Hume and noting that since there is "no effort in the *Treatise* to clear the doctrine of necessity of the significant difficulties that it presents for the theological view with respect to the issue of the origin of evil" (*Riddle*, 237), Russell concludes that Hume's necessitarianism should be viewed as irreligiously motivated.

The above reasoning is unsatisfactory. What is chiefly lacking is any recognition of the fact that the Westminster Calvinism of the Kirk of Hume's day had strong necessitarian commitments, which is clearly something that should have implications for the idea that Hume's necessitarianism aimed at undermining the theology of the Kirk. The quotations from Priestly, Beattie and Stewart do very little to suggest that Westminster Calvinism was not the dominant religious ideology of the Kirk in Hume's day, not only because these thinkers belong to later stages in Scottish religious and intellectual life, but also, and more importantly, because the fact that atheists have typically been necessitarians and libertarians typically Christians does not imply that necessitarians have typically been atheists or non-Christians. And it is clearly this latter point that needs to be established in order to provide a historical basis for the relevant methodological rule.

Moreover, that necessitarians were not typically atheists or non-Christians in Hume's day, at least not in Scotland, is clear from the fact that the *Westminster Confession*, with its endorsement of the divine necessitation of all things, functioned as the uncontested doctrinal standard of the Kirk at this time. It is true that the *Westminster Confession* allows "freedom" to the human will, but the kind of freedom in view is not a liberty of indifference, but a liberty which is opposed to "force" and a "necessity of nature" (*Westminster Confession*, 623; see also 608).⁵² That the necessitarian theology of Westminster Calvinism was not something that existed only on paper is confirmed by the popular Scottish preaching of the day. Boston, for example, asserts that "[i]t is sufficient unto human liberty, or the freedom of man's will, that a man act without all constraint, and out of choice" taking this sort of freedom as "very consistent with" a "necessity" flowing from God's "eternal decrees" (*Illustration*, 161). Not even amongst major philosophers of the early Scottish Enlightenment do we find libertarian views on free will. Quite the contrary: Carmichael, for example, says that "[t]hose who have insinuated into the doctrine of liberty the notion of indifference, which has nothing to do with it (and which, strictly understood, cannot occur in an agent), have introduced great

obscurity" (*Philosophical Theses*, 341); and Hutcheson holds similarly that free-will is not "a certain indifferent power of the mind to turn equally in any direction," but rather "a power of doing what we wish and of refraining when we do not wish" (*Synopsis of Metaphysics*, 129; italics removed).

We see, then, that although Russell's claim about the anti-Christian significance of Hume's anti-libertarianism makes sense if we assume an early eighteenth-century Anglican theology as our paradigm of Christian theology, this claim is problematic when advanced in the context of early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism. Thus, if the *Treatise* is to be regarded as attacking Christian theology, and if anti-libertarianism is taken to be a part of this attack, we should qualify Russell's claim by saying that Hume in the *Treatise* uses something like early eighteenth-century Anglican theology as his theological paradigm. Were we instead to take something like Westminster Calvinism as Hume's theological paradigm, Russell's claim would turn out false or at least deeply problematic.

5. Why Anglicanism?

In the preceding section I argued that Hume's views in the *Treatise* collide more obviously and forcefully with early eighteenth-century Anglicanism than with early eighteenth-century Scottish Presbyterianism and that this suggests that in seeking to discredit Christian theology in the *Treatise*, Hume used Anglicanism as his theological paradigm. The question as to *why* Hume would have used Anglicanism in this way has as yet not been addressed. In the present section, I offer some considerations which, I believe, shed some light on this question.

A first consideration is that Hume appears to have had a clear English intellectual orientation during the years leading up to the publication of the *Treatise*. We know from private letters that Hume wrote in the 1730s as well as from private reading notes (the so-called "Early Memoranda") from the late 1730s that the British philosophy books Hume studied during these years were written by English or Irish Anglican religious philosophers (Cudworth, Locke, King, and Clarke, for example), thus suggesting an English-Anglican intellectual orientation on the part of the young Hume.⁵³ It is also noteworthy that in his deathbed conversation with James Boswell, Hume attributed the negative shift in his views on religion to his reading of Locke and Clarke.⁵⁴ Clearly, this intellectual orientation goes some way in explaining why Anglicanism would have figured in the forefront of Hume's thought as he sought to discredit Christianity in the *Treatise*.

A second consideration along these lines is that the *Treatise* appears to have been intended primarily for an English, and hence predominantly Anglican, audience. One such reason is afforded already in the introduction to the *Treatise*, where Hume says:

[S]ome late philosophers in *England* . . . have begun to put the science of man on a new footing, and have engag'd the attention, and excited the curiosity of the public. So true it is, that however other nations may rival us in poetry . . . the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and of liberty.

Nor ought we to think, that this latter improvement in the science of man will do less honour to our native country than the former in natural philosophy. (T Intro 7–8; SBN xvii)

As Alasdair MacIntyre has noted, Hume's use of words like "us" and "we" in this passage along with the reference to England as his "native country" seem calculated to give his readers the impression that the author of the *Treatise* is an Englishman.⁵⁵ This interpretation receives some confirmation from the facts that Hume worked hard to rid his language of Scotticisms and published the *Treatise* anonymously (in which case his readers would not have had any reason to believe that he was anything but English).⁵⁶ Further on in the introduction, Hume makes reference to "Mr. *Locke*, my Lord *Shaftesbury*, Dr. *Mandeville*, Mr. *Hutchinson*, Dr. *Butler*, &c." (T Intro 7 n1; SBN xvii) as pioneers of the new "science of man" (T Intro 7; SBN xvii), all of whom were English with the exception of Mandeville, a Dutchman at work in England, and the Irish-Scottish Hutcheson, whose name Hume nevertheless misspells into an English name—which, in MacIntyre's view, was a deliberate attempt to convey the impression of being "an Englishman curiously insensitive to the very existence of Scotland" (*Whose Justice*, 284).

Another reason for taking the *Treatise* to have been intended primarily for an English audience is furnished by Hume's anonymous *Abstract*. He begins by placing the work in an English context, saying, "This book seems to be wrote upon the same plan with several other works that have had a great vogue of late years in *England*" (T *Abs.* 1; SBN 645). Speaking of the author of the *Treatise* in the third person, Hume says that he "talks with contempt of hypotheses; and insinuates, that such of our countrymen as have banished them from moral philosophy, have done a more signal service to the world, than *my Lord Bacon*, whom he considers as the father of experimental physicks" (T *Abs.* 2; SBN 646). Hume here refers to Englishmen as his "countrymen" and by the use of the word "our," is conveying the impression that he is assuming that his readers, too, are Englishmen. Once again, then, we find a clear indication that Hume intended the *Treatise* primarily for an English and hence predominantly Anglican audience.

Against the foregoing it might be objected that since England and Scotland had formed the United Kingdom in 1707, a Scotsman might have referred to Englishmen as well as Scotsmen as his "countrymen" and to England as well as Scotland as his "native country." This, however, does not cohere with Hume's way of expressing himself in his letters. For example, in his famous letter to an

unnamed physician—widely believed to have been George Cheyne—from March or April 1734, he says, “I am your countryman, a Scotchman” (*Letters* 1:12), and here “countryman” is clearly intended to exclude Englishmen.

The circumstance that the *Treatise* was intended primarily for an English, hence predominantly Anglican, audience, clearly goes some way in explaining why Anglicanism would have figured in the forefront of Hume’s thought if he was seeking to discredit Christianity in the *Treatise*. For Hume would have known that Anglicanism was the dominant form of Christianity amongst his intended readership. I turn next to a third consideration that may shed some light on why Hume would have taken Anglicanism as his theological paradigm in seeking to discredit Christianity in the *Treatise*: the threat of superstition.

A year after the publication of the third volume of the *Treatise*, Hume published his first text that deals explicitly with a religious topic, the essay “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” (1741). This essay strongly suggests that Hume at this time considered the Anglican Church a much greater threat than the Kirk to a societal value that Hume cherished dearly, namely *civil liberty*.⁵⁷

“Of Superstition and Enthusiasm” is concerned with two “Corruptions of true Religion” in Hume’s view. With regard to these corruptions, Hume observes first, that “[r]eligions, which partake of Enthusiasm are, on their first Rise, much more furious and violent than those which partake of Superstition; but in a little Time become much more gentle and moderate” (“Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” 144); and second, that “[s]uperstition is an Enemy of Civil Liberty, and Enthusiasm a friend of it” (“Of Superstition and Enthusiasm, 149),” Hume then classifies various religious groups, including Jews, Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Scottish Presbyterians, according to whether they partake more of superstition or of enthusiasm. Judaism and Roman Catholicism (or “Popery”), and “especially the latter,” are said to be “the most barbarous and absurd superstitions, that have yet been known in the World” (“Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” 146). But having said this, Hume goes on to say that the Church of England (that is, the Anglican Church) partakes of the same superstitious quality as these two religions: “As the Church of *England* has a strong Mixture of Popish Superstition, it partakes also, in its original Constitution, of a Propensity to Priestly Power and Dominion; particularly in the Respect it exacts to the Priest” (“Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” 146–47).⁵⁸ Hume goes on to say that “Presbyterians,” by contrast, are of the “Enthusiast” sort and support a greater degree of “Freedom from Priestly Bondage” (“Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” 147).

We see then that around the time of the publication of the *Treatise*, Hume is *explicit* in regarding the Anglican Church as closely associated with a vice that poses a dangerous threat to civil liberty (that is, “superstition”), and he is equally explicit in regarding the Kirk as closely associated with a contrary quality which is not hostile but friendly to civil liberty (i.e., “enthusiasm”). Furthermore, that

Hume would not have been indifferent to what he believed was a dangerous threat to civil liberty is evident from the fact that he singles out civil liberty for special praise on the very first page of the *Treatise*, saying that it is mainly on account of liberty and tolerance that there has been so much progress in philosophy in recent years (T Intro 7; SBN xvii).

In view of this third consideration, it would seem to make sense that if Hume was intent on discrediting Christian theology around the time of the publication of the *Treatise*, he would regard it as particularly important to seek to discredit the theology of the powerful Anglican Church (rather than that of the Kirk), since he believed that the Anglican Church (and not the Kirk) posed a serious threat to a societal value that he cherished dearly and had extolled at the beginning of the *Treatise* as a principal cause of philosophical progress.

6. Concluding Remarks

If I am right that Hume's views on free-will and hidden powers are subversive of Christian theology only if we assume something like an early eighteenth-century Anglican paradigm of Christian theology, then we could make better sense of the project of the *Treatise* by also holding that Hume was himself assuming something like an early eighteenth-century Anglican paradigm of Christian theology in pursuing the project of the *Treatise*. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that this is not the only way we could make better sense of the *Treatise* in view of the present result. On the contrary, there are at least two major alternative interpretations one could pursue, both of which seem to me to be live options worthy of serious consideration.

A first alternative reading would be to reject the very idea that Hume's *Treatise* aims at discrediting Christian theology, holding instead that Hume was just "doing philosophy" and was happy to let the theological chips fall wherever they fell. On this reading, it would be misguided to think that Hume was assuming an early eighteenth-century Anglican theological paradigm in seeking to discredit Christianity for the simple reason that Hume should then not be viewed as having been particularly concerned with discrediting Christian theology to begin with.

A second alternative reading, which goes in quite the opposite direction, would be to concede that Hume's *Treatise* aims at discrediting Christian theology but reject the idea that Hume's views on hidden powers and free-will were part of this project or were intended to contribute to this aim. On this response, our rationale for thinking that Hume was concerned only with discrediting an Anglican type of Christian theology would be undercut, for this rationale, as we have seen, derived from considerations pertaining to the impact of Hume's views on these specific topics.

These alternative responses should be regarded as serious rivals to Russell's view that Hume's *Treatise* is fundamentally concerned with discrediting Christian theology and that Hume's views on hidden powers and free-will were part of this project. Nevertheless, if Russell's view on these points is substantially correct, as I have assumed in this paper, then we do well to hold that Hume was indeed using something like early eighteenth-century Anglicanism as his theological paradigm in seeking to discredit Christian theology in the *Treatise*.

NOTES

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1 Paul Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), x, 270–72.

2 Norman Kemp-Smith, introduction to David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp-Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 1–96, 8; see also introduction, 10.

3 Jennifer Herdt, *Religion and Faction in Hume's Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

4 The main sources for Hume's pre-*Treatise* religious development are James Boswell's "An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq." (in Kemp-Smith, *Hume's Dialogues*, 97–100); a 1734 letter from Hume to an unnamed physician (see Hume to George Cheyne, March or April 1734, in *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932], 1: 12–18); and a 1751 letter from Hume to his friend Gilbert Eliot of Minto (see Hume to Gilbert Eliot of Minto, Ninewells, March or April 1751, in *Letters*, 1:153–57). None of these sources reveal any specific anti-Presbyterian hostility on the part of Hume.

5 M. A. Stewart, *The Kirk and the Infidel* (Lancaster: Lancaster University Publications Office, 2001), 22, and Terence Penelhum, "Hume's Views on Religion: Intellectual and Cultural Influences," in *A Companion to Hume*, ed. Elizabeth Radcliffe (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 324.

6 See, for example, Russell, *Riddle*, 19, 25, 28–30, 99–109, 116–24, 151–66, 226–38, and 241–60.

7 See, for example, Russell, *Riddle*, 10, 143, and 247.

8 Indeed, it was not until the First Vatican Council of 1870–1871 that a major version of “Christian orthodoxy” (in this case Roman Catholicism) officially incorporated, albeit only very moderately, dogmatic positions on theistic proofs; see “Decreta Dogmatica concilii vaticani de fide catholica et de ecclesia Christi,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 2:240–42. For an overview of the unstable position of apologetics throughout the history of major segments of Protestant theology, see Jaroslav Pelikan’s *From Luther to Kierkegaard: A Study in the History of Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950).

9 See also Hume, T 1.3.15.1 (SBN 173). References to the *Treatise* are to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), hereafter cited in the text as “T” followed by Book, part, section and paragraph numbers; and *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), hereafter cited in the text as “SBN” followed by page numbers.

10 Russell cites reviews from 1739 and 1740.

11 Richard Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, ed. Richard Watson and James E. Force (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1980), 149–60.

12 Wallace MacCaffrey, *Elizabeth I and Religion* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1993).

13 Rosalie L. Colie, *Light and Enlightenment: A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); G. R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Nicholas Tyacke, “Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Reformation,” in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. Conrad Russell (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1973), 119–43, and *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); and Charles Carlton, *Archbishop William Laud* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 86–131.

14 On the genesis and theological motivation for Arminianism, see Keith Stranglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603–1609* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2007).

15 “Articuli Arminiani sive Remonstrantia,” in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3: 545–49, 545.

16 For a clear Arminian endorsement of libertarian free will, see for example, Arminius’s “On the Free Will of Man and its Powers,” in *The Writings of James Arminius*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. James Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996, 523–31. See also Tyacke, “Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Reformation,” 119.

17 “Canones Synodi Dordrechtanae,” in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3: 581–97, 583; see also 553.

18 Around this time Arminian literature also starts to make inroads into English universities, as is evident, for example, from the popularity of Dutch Arminian Hugo Grotius’s *De veritate religionis christianae* at Oxford from the late 1620s and onwards throughout the eighteenth century; for more on this, see P. Quarrie, “The Christ Church Collection Books,” in *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 5, ed. L. S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1986), 503–504.

19 “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3: 600–73, 608. For further discussion, see Jan Rohl, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. John Hoffmeyer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 57–58.

20 Stephen Hampton has recently argued that Cragg's claims need some qualification, for there remained a Calvinist minority in the Anglican Church after the Restoration; see Hampton, *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–38.

21 For a succinct overview of this debate, see Russell, *Riddle*, 25–34.

22 Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, vol. 1 (London: J. Walthoe, 1743), xxvii; Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (London: W. Botham, 1705), 252–59; William King, *An Essay on the Origin of Evil* (London: W. Thurlbourne, 1732), 229–41; George Berkeley, *Alciphron, Or the Minute Philosopher* (Dublin: J. Tonson, 1732), 172–89; and Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion* (London: J. James, 1736), 104–20. Of these thinkers, Clarke and Butler have been singled out by Isabel Rivers as “the two most important Anglican theologians of the early part of the [eighteenth] century”; see her “Responses to Hume on Religion by Anglicans and Dissenters,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52 (2001): 675–95, 683.

23 Anne Skoczylas, *Mr Simson's Knotty Case: Divinity, Politics, and Due Process in Early Eighteenth Century Scotland* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 77.

24 M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985), 125.

25 David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution 1637–1644: The Triumph of the Covenanters* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), 48–87, 127–61.

26 J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 261–63.

27 See, for example, John Willison, *An Apology for the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1719), 48; Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters 1660–1688* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1976), 134–47; and J. H. S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 261–85.

28 *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1690), 15–16.

29 *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1694), 14–15.

30 *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1711), 20–21 (my emphasis). For discussion, see Ian Hamilton, *The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy: Seceders and Subscription in Scottish Presbyterianism* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990).

31 Richard Sher, “Professors of Virtue: The Social History of the Edinburgh Moral Philosophy Chair in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 91.

32 Gershom Carmichael, *Philosophical Theses* [1699], in *Natural Rights on the Threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment: The Writings of Gershom Charmichael*, ed. James Moore and Michael Silverthorne (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 340–41; and *Synopsis of Natural Theology* [1729], in *Natural Rights on the Threshold*, 274–80; Francis Hutcheson, *A Synopsis of Metaphysics Comprehending Ontology and Pneumatology* [1744], in *Logic, Metaphysics, and the Natural Sociability of Mankind*, ed. James Moore and Michael Silverthorne (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), 129–31; see also 180. On Simson’s Calvinism, see Skoczylas, *Simson’s Knotty Case*, 12, 14, 22, 58. Note that I am not here suggesting that early moderates like Hutcheson saw things the same way as did the mainstream of the Kirk on all points, nor am I denying that there were points on which the early moderates came closer in outlook to Anglican thinkers.

33 Michael Graham, *The Blasphemies of Thomas Aikenhead: Boundaries of Belief on the Eve of the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 33–52 and Skoczylas, *Simson’s Knotty Case*, 71–72.

34 *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1704), 13.

35 *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1711), 19.

36 *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: J. Davidson and R. Fleming, 1736), 13.

37 Henry G. Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1901), 315–47. See also Shirley Letwin, *The Pursuit of Certainty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 22–23.

38 Boston and Willison are often singled out as the most influential Scottish preachers and writers of the early eighteenth century; see, for example, Graham, *Social Life*, 400 and Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, 269.

39 See also A. T. B. McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1997).

40 Philip G. Ryken, *Thomas Boston as Preacher of the Fourfold State* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1995), 298.

41 For an overview of Moderatism, see Burleigh, *Church History of Scotland*, 286–308; for an in-depth study, see Richard Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

42 A few nineteenth-century historians promoted the idea that the moderates were, in fact, Arminians, but this idea has largely been discredited in modern scholarship. See Henry Sefton, “Neu-lights and Preachers Legall: Some Observations on the Beginnings of Moderatism in the Church of Scotland,” in *Church, Politics, and Society: Scotland 1408–1929*, ed. Norman MacDougall (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983), 187–88.

43 For more on this, see Ernest Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 336–69.

44 That Hume held the first of these three claims is contested by the so-called “New Hume Interpretation,” according to which Hume concedes—contrary to what he seems

to suggest in T 1.3.14—the conceivability of “hidden powers” and seems even to have been committed to their existence; see, for example, Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), chaps. 14–20. I sympathize with the so-called “Old Hume Interpretation” (as does, I believe, Russell), but the argument of this section does not hinge on this. For a recent defense of the Old Hume Interpretation, see Peter Millican, “Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science,” *Mind* 118 (2009): 647–712.

45 Thomas Boston, *An Illustration of the Doctrines of the Christian Religion*, in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, vol. 1, ed. Samuel MacMillan (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 150–51. (Boston's *Illustration* was originally published in 1773 on the basis of sermon manuscripts from the 1710s and 20s. It contains Boston's most systematic statement of his theology.)

46 John Simson, *Libel Mr James Webster, Against Mr John Simson Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow* (unpublished, 1716), 122. For discussion, see Skoczylas, *Simson's Knotty Case*, 140.

47 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1936), 220.

48 See, for example, Boston, *Illustration*, 151.

49 Joseph Priestly, preface to Anthony Collin, *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty*, ed. Joseph Priestly (Birmingham: J. Johnson, 1790), iii–xvi, xi.

50 James Beattie, *The Elements of Moral Science* (Edinburgh: W. Creech, 1790–1793), 207.

51 Dugald Stewart, *Dissertation: Exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical, and Political Philosophy* (1821), reprinted in *The Works of Dugald Stewart*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Hilliard and Brown, 1829) 6: 471.

52 I should here add that the real difference between religious and irreligious necessitarians, which Russell seeks to explain by appealing to disavowals of irreligious associations on the part of religious necessitarians, is more properly explained via reference to whether the necessity of all events originates in God, as the *Westminster Confession* affirms, or in nature, as irreligious necessitarians typically affirmed.

53 See, for example, Hume's letters to Michael Ramsay and an unnamed physician (Hume to Michael Ramsay, 4 July 1727, in *Letters*, 1: 9–11; and Hume to George Cheyne, March or April 1734, in *Letters* 1: 12–18), which mention “English” writers; and Ernest Mossner, “Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729–40: The Complete Text,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1948): 492–518. Hume mentions Cudworth and King at 500–503. I am assuming here that the early memoranda date from before or around the period of the publication of the *Treatise*. For an alternative and later dating, see Tatsuya Sakamoto, “Humes Early Memoranda and the Making of His Political Economy,” *Hume Studies* 37 (2011), 131–164.

54 James Boswell, “An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq.,” in Kemp-Smith, *Dialogues*, 97.

55 Alisdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 284.

56 In a letter to Henry Home written shortly after the publication of volume 1 of the *Treatise*, Hume says that he had “endeavoured all I could to conceal my name,” but he still worries that “I have not been so cautious in this respect as I ought to have been,” which indicates that he took his anonymity seriously; see Hume to Henry Home, London, 13 February 1739, in *Letters*, 1: 26–27.

57 Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” in *Essays, Moral and Political* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming and A. Alison, 1741), 141–52.

58 This passage was excised by Hume in his final revision of this essay, published in the 1777 edition of his essays. Modern republications of this essay—such as that of Richard Wollheim in *Hume on Religion* (London: Collins, 1963), 246–51, and of Eugene Miller in Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, Literary*, ed. E. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987), 73–79—reproduce the 1777 version of the essay.