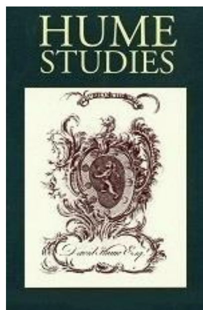

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The Political Lessons of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

JONATHAN HAROLD KRAUSE

Abstract: Much scholarship has traditionally treated David Hume's interest in religion as primarily theoretical in character. This theoretical treatment of Hume's engagement with religion neglects his marked concern with religion's relation to political life. In the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume is primarily concerned not with theory but with religion's practical effects. In this article, I build on recent scholarly attention to the connection between religion and politics in Hume's thought by examining the dialogical form of the *Dialogues*, and especially, the role of Pamphilus, the young student whose central place in the *Dialogues* is often overlooked. The consideration of the best approach to take to the religious education of Pamphilus throws into sharp relief the practical consequences of different theoretical approaches to religion. The question of religion's political consequences, and the ramifications of those consequences for the religious education of the young, is Hume's primary focus in the *Dialogues*.

I. The Role of Pamphilus

Understandably, given the interpretive challenges posed by the dialogue form, the focus of David Hume's interest in religion in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* can be difficult to pinpoint.[1] Much Hume scholarship on the *Dialogues* has traditionally suffered from two major shortcomings. First, its treatment of

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Hume's interest in religion is primarily theoretical or speculative, as though Hume were concerned above all to determine the nature of "true religion," say, or to dismiss religious belief altogether as simply irrational. Such scholarship regards the *Dialogues* as a vehicle for delivering a theoretical or epistemological treatment of questions concerning the nature and existence of God, and has little to say about Hume's marked concern with religion's relation to political life.

Recently, there has been a move to address this shortcoming by exploring the integral connection between religion and politics in Hume's thought.[2] This nexus has received intelligent treatment by Samuel Clark and John Danford, among others. Clark contends that the *Dialogues* can be viewed as a "political drama" that uses dialogue for the purpose of "dramatizing a political ideal," and that Hume's aim is "to transform our individual and collective self-understanding and action."[3] Danford has found a "general failing" of Hume scholarship to be its blindness to the political significance of the *Dialogues*, instead treating the work as "of exclusively philosophical or theological interest, rather than as an example of political philosophy."[4] In addition, Danford asserts that the *Dialogues* is "shadowed" throughout by the question of the kind of "education in piety and theology [deemed] appropriate to young men."[5] He tries to show that Hume was not attempting to "resolve a personal philosophical problem but to come to terms with a problem of vastly larger scope, a political problem."[6] In this article, I wish to draw the connections among religion, education, and political life in the *Dialogues* even more explicitly. I will argue that Hume's primary concern in the *Dialogues* is to suggest how a skeptical "religious" education may help to remedy the supposed damage to the body politic caused by religious belief, while at the same time allowing religion to maintain a presence, albeit a superficial one, in society.

A second shortcoming of much scholarship on the *Dialogues* is that, in mining the work for Hume's position on theoretical issues, it has tended to overlook the text's rhetorical and dramatic form. One traditional approach assumes that, to understand the text's meaning and Hume's position on the nature and existence of God, the reader can simply attribute any sound argument to Hume—regardless of the character providing the argument.[7] Another approach starts by trying to discern the character who is purportedly speaking for Hume, usually identified as Philo.[8]

In addition to exploring the nexus of religion and politics, recently scholars have begun to focus attention on the rhetorical and dramatic form of the *Dialogues*, holding that the dialogic form is critical to the text's meaning, not merely a frame for Hume's mouthpiece.[9] To be clear, I do not dismiss the traditional approaches altogether. Philo *is* a Humean avatar in the *Dialogues*. However, even more important is recognizing the circuit of identifications that Hume constructs in his text, linking Philo (the Humean avatar), Pamphilus, and Hermippus together in a way that suggests the transmission of influence forward. Grasping this network is key

to understanding Hume's core concerns in the *Dialogues*. Philo engages in back-and-forth conversation with Demea and Cleanthes, while Pamphilus, a student of Cleanthes, listens in. Yet, in a significant sense, Philo's target audience turns out to be Pamphilus, who (together with Hermippus) symbolizes an emerging generation of thinkers, carrying Philo's influence forward. While aspects of Philo's message are lost on Demea and Cleanthes, Hume repeatedly signals that Pamphilus, of all the characters, most fully appreciates Philo's teachings.

While Danford recognizes that Pamphilus, a young man, plays a significant part in the *Dialogues*,[10] I argue that Pamphilus plays a more central role than even Danford acknowledges. The character of Pamphilus *is* the issue for Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo precisely because, for them, the education of the young, particularly religious education, is politically significant. Cleanthes, the rational theist, is nominally the teacher of Pamphilus. But Philo, the skeptic, makes the strongest impression on the young man's religious and philosophical views. Philo may not make much headway in changing the views on religion of his fellow comrades, Demea and Cleanthes, yet his skeptical, ambiguous brand of piety evidently is a decisive influence on Pamphilus, to judge by the latter's skepticism toward religion in his introductory remarks.

In the next section, I will provide an analysis of Pamphilus's introductory remarks, in which he reveals his general approach to religion. Here, we see Pamphilus explaining to his friend, Hermippus, that dialogue is an appropriate vehicle for addressing difficult theological questions. In section III, I outline how Pamphilus's presence at the conversations among Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo leads each to diagnose what he considers the primary political problem of religion and what educational approach is best suited to address it. In the fourth and final section, I argue that it is politically significant that Pamphilus's remedy for religious issues is aligned much more closely with Philo's views than with the views of any of the other characters. My analysis of the text of the *Dialogues* will focus primarily on Pamphilus's introductory remarks and part 1, wherein the issue of education is first raised and discussed; and on part 12, in which the moral and political problems of religion are a major focus of conversation.

II. Pamphilus's Theory of Religious Dialogue

Despite his silence in the midst of the conversations taking place among Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo, Pamphilus's presence nonetheless pervades the *Dialogues*. In his introductory remarks, he speaks in his own voice, laying out his general thoughts on the usefulness of the dialogue form as a medium for theological discussion. Parts 1 through 12 are what Pamphilus calls his "recital" of the debates among Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo (DNR Intro.6; 129). In the last sentence of part 12, he again speaks in a summary fashion, this time expressing his judgment on

the "principles" of Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo (DNR 12.34; 228). Despite this structural prominence, however, most scholars have tended to view Pamphilus as marginal to the central themes of the *Dialogues*. For example, Samuel Clark states, "Pamphilus takes little part in the *Dialogues*, offering only a framing narrative at the beginning and a partisan summation at the end."[11] Richard Popkin dismisses Pamphilus as a "stupid bystander" with "no real role in the *Dialogues*."[12] Similarly, Scott Davis regards Pamphilus as "obtuse," while Michael Morrisroe refers to him as "a *naif*, a tool of Hume, who misunderstands both the issues and outcome of the argument."[13]

Such condescension misses the point. At the most basic level, the reader's knowledge of these "conversations" and "disputes" depends on Pamphilus (see DNR Intro.6; 128–29). The entire *Dialogues* is in a sense a monologue delivered by Pamphilus to his friend, Hermippus. If he were "stupid," "obtuse," or a "*naïf*," his ability to accurately present the debate would be open to question, yet Hume gives us no reason to doubt Pamphilus's capacity to serve as witness and narrator. Nowhere is he flagged as unreliable. On the contrary, while Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo may view Pamphilus as someone easily molded, Hume portrays Pamphilus as perspicacious. He is an acute observer of the emotional responses, body language, interruptions, and hesitations of the three interlocutors, which they often fail to notice themselves.[14] More than once, he observes Demea misunderstanding the significance of the conversations.[15] It is necessary, therefore, to examine carefully what Pamphilus says, how he says it, and any observations he makes along the way. The Pamphilus who emerges is a proponent of religious skepticism and, by extension, religious tolerance.

In his introductory remarks, Pamphilus displays considerable sophistication and great confidence of judgment. Here, he gives his views on the utility of religious dialogue. In the first sentence, he contrasts the method of "instruction" of the "ancient philosophers" with the method "now expected of philosophical enquirers" (DNR Intro.1; 127).[16] Pamphilus tells Hermippus that the ancient philosophers "conveyed most of their instruction in the form of dialogue," whereas "in later ages," this method has "seldom succeeded in the hands of those who have attempted it." The reason dialogue is not as successful as it once was, according to Pamphilus, is because philosophers now have a penchant for systems, and to "deliver a SYSTEM in conversation," he tells his friend, "scarcely appears natural." A "direct style of composition" that aims at "[a]ccurate and regular argument" is better suited to the presentation of a system. Such a "methodical and didactic manner" allows a person to "immediately, without preparation, explain the point at which he aims; and thence proceed, without interruption, to deduce proofs, on which it is established."

Nevertheless, Pamphilus continues, the dialogue form remains "peculiarly adapted" to particular kinds of discourse. First, when a "point of doctrine" is both

"so *obvious*, that it scarcely admits of dispute," and "so *important*, that it cannot be too often inculcated," the dialogue form may impart "novelty," "vivacity," and "variety" to what might otherwise be experienced as "triteness." Second, dialogue is preferable when a "question of philosophy . . . is so *obscure* and *uncertain*, that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it; if it should be treated at all." Thus dialogue, somewhat paradoxically, serves opposite purposes: it may usefully deal with subjects that are obvious and important, as well as with those that are obscure and uncertain.

In both cases, the dialogue form plays a palliative role, easing boredom or alleviating the stress of finding oneself in a state of bewilderment. Although Pamphilus implies that questions lacking determinate answers are best left alone, he acknowledges that such questions are often so fascinating that people cannot refrain from pursuing them. Our limitations in understanding need not lead us to abandon discussion about such topics altogether. Because dialogue does not aim at constructing systems, it allows discussions on difficult topics to take place in an entertaining manner, while guarding against their tendency to grow conflictual or overly taxing. The dialogue form lends itself to the creation of a convivial tone and atmosphere. Once we have adopted that tone and move within that atmosphere, we may discover we can entertain discourse on obscure and challenging topics without taking them too seriously. Pamphilus describes such conversations as "amusements": "Opposite sentiments, even without any decision, afford an agreeable amusement: And if the subject be curious and interesting, the book carries us, in a manner, into company; and unites the two greatest and purest pleasures of human life, study and society."

Pamphilus suggests the need for tolerance, at least in matters he considers "obscure and uncertain." "Reasonable men may be allowed to differ," he tells Hermippus, "where no one can reasonably be positive." Those with whom we associate and have discourse need not be people we agree with. Once people realize that the answers to obscure topics are beyond human understanding, disagreement need not lead to conflict. Indeed, conversations might be more lively and amusing if one's interlocutors do *not* agree. The play of perspectives can be a source of pleasure in itself.

As it happens, natural religion is a suitable subject for dialogue because it fulfills the criterion of being "obvious" and "important" *and* the criterion of being "obscure" and "uncertain":

> What truth so obvious, so certain, as the *being* of a God . . . ? What truth so important as this, which is the ground of all our hopes, the surest foundation of morality, the firmest support of society, and the only principle which ought never to be a moment absent from our thoughts and meditations? But in treating of this obvious and important truth; what

> obscure questions occur, concerning the *nature* of that divine Being; his attributes, his decrees, his plan of providence? . . . But these are topics so interesting, that we cannot restrain our restless enquiry with regard to them; though nothing but doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction, have, as yet, been the result of our most accurate researches.

The distinction Pamphilus makes here between the "being" and "nature" of God is significant. First of all, he says "the being of a God" is an "obvious and important truth," whereas consideration of the "nature of that divine Being" only leads to "obscure questions." Because the divine nature is so obscure, Pamphilus claims God's being alone, not his nature, can provide the "ground of all our hopes, the surest foundation of morality, [and] the firmest support of society." This should strike us as provocative. Pamphilus is suggesting that the very attributes, decrees, and providence of God—what Hume's Christian audience would have understood to be the basis of hope, morality, and society[17]—do not enter into the equation. How can the mere existence of a being—a being about whom we know nothing—provide a foundation for human hope, morals, or social order?

Pamphilus is no fool, but someone with subtle political and religious intentions. We can begin to make sense of the apparent oddity of his claim by regarding it as politically motivated. Although one might hope that a shared conception of God's nature would stabilize and sustain hope, morals, and the social order, Pamphilus insists that it is a mistake to try to impose agreement. Given his view of the incomprehensible nature of God, such agreement is not rationally possible anyway. Therefore, the demand for universal agreement on such an obscure issue is nonsensical and arbitrary. Moreover, such a demand leads not to good morals and stability but to persecution. Pamphilus suggests we focus on something people *can* supposedly universally agree on—the existence of an undefinable something they can call "God." The political import of this shift is clear. Religious differences ought to count for very little; by minimizing them, society can perhaps avoid the bitter squabbles of religious sects, while pursuing other, non-religious means of bringing about social stability, prosperity, and virtue.

Pamphilus clearly occupies a pedagogical position in relation to Hermippus, although he is wary of claiming the role of teacher and expresses a keen awareness of the challenges faced by the dialogue-writer.[18] He warns Hermippus that in the effort to "avoid the appearance of *author* and *reader*, [the dialogue-writer] is apt to run into a worse inconvenience, and convey the image of *pedagogue* and *pupil*." Pamphilus implies that in his own narration of the dialogues, he will try to avoid the appearance of "author and reader" and "pedagogue and pupil," instead encouraging Hermippus (and the reader) to take the ensuing dialogues in a spirit of amusement. But the playfulness serves a serious purpose. By calling for religious discussions to be regarded as amusements, Pamphilus radically reduces

their stakes as vehicles for arriving at religious truth, yet raises their stakes politically as environments for cultivating habits of tolerance.

Hume crystallizes Pamphilus's pedagogy as an act of transmission, carrying forward the pedagogy of Philo. Pamphilus's introductory remarks, spoken to Hermippus *after* the conversations among Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo have taken place, not only set the stage for the dialogues to come, but reveal the impact of the dialogues on Pamphilus: "[N]othing ever made greater impression on me, than all the reasonings of that day," he tells Hermippus (DNR 12.34; 228). Therefore, we can surmise that the views he states in the opening paragraphs of the *Dialogues* derive from his absorption of and reflection upon the conversations which took place among Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo. Although Pamphilus was a student of the same conversations when he first heard them in Cleanthes's library—"[m]y youth rendered me a mere auditor of their disputes"—he now teaches Hermippus, using the dialogues to show how "nothing but doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction" arises from questions concerning God's nature.

As we will see, Pamphilus's position most closely mirrors the skepticism and secularizing impulses of Philo. By building a circuit of identification and influence linking Philo, Pamphilus, Hermippus, and the discerning reader, Hume ultimately suggests that the transmission of a watered-down religious position fully consonant with the values and priorities of secular culture is the most ideal future possibility for religion. Pamphilus in his opening remarks reveals that his goal in presenting these dialogues on religion is not to provide an answer to the question of God's nature, but rather to suggest to Hermippus the uncertainty of arriving at *any* answer, and therefore to convey to him the philosophical soundness of an attitude of tolerant detachment, even indifference, toward competing opinions about God. Human reason's incapacity to fathom the divine therefore dovetails well with the goals and values of secular political society. So, what is the reader being instructed about in the *Dialogues*? The answer is not the nature of God, but the philosophical soundness *and* the political desirability of a thoroughgoing skepticism with regard to knowledge of God's nature.

III. The Problem of Religious Education and Political Life

The present section will look at the influence of Pamphilus's presence on Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo as each diagnoses what he considers the primary sociopolitical problem of religion, then proposes a method of instruction to address it.

Although Pamphilus does not participate directly in the conversations among Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo, his *presence* is the motivating cause of their discussions. As Danford observes, Pamphilus's presence "is one of the first indications of the political character of this work: it is not a discussion among philosophers only, since, to begin with, a young man is present."[19] We see Pamphilus's influence

from the very outset of part 1, when he enters the library where the three men are present. Immediately, Demea shifts the conversation to Cleanthes's "education" of Pamphilus (DNR 1.1; 130). He praises Cleanthes for his "prudence" and "industry" in teaching Pamphilus "every useful branch of literature and science" (DNR 1.1; 130). However, we soon learn that, for Demea, a restrictive piety is the most desirable outcome and the true measure of success of a young man's education. He mistakenly assumes that Cleanthes agrees, and, before Cleanthes can respond, goes on to propound the method which informs his education of his own children. In doing so, he reveals his idea of education to be a form of indoctrination, not a rational pursuit of truth.

On Demea's diagnosis, the primary political problem of religion is simply its declining influence. In the public sphere of an increasingly secular world, piety no longer exercises the influence it once did. For Demea, religion's influence on collective, political life is an unqualified good that must be reclaimed and reinforced, especially through appropriate education of the young. He aims to reattach people to religion by promoting skepticism toward reason and the sciences, and by habituating the young to a life of piety. The independence of mind and excessive self-confidence concomitant with the study of philosophy and science must be curtailed. The educator should draw on whatever rhetorical means are necessary, divorced from rational argument if need be, to instill in pupils the idea that science and the arts insufficiently satisfy men's needs and interests. It is to be hoped that, in this manner, pupils will submit to the authority and majesty of religious mysteries without ever feeling the need, or having the capacity, to turn upon those mysteries the scrutiny of natural reason. Demea regards such scrutiny as blasphemous, an encroachment on hallowed ground. In matters of God and religion, it "is profaneness to attempt penetrating through these sacred obscurities: And next to the impiety of denying his existence, is the temerity of prying into his nature and essence, decrees, and attributes" (DNR 2.1; 141). In order to elevate and ensure the ultimate authority of religious faith in social and ethical matters, Demea considers it necessary to undermine the confidence of young people to reflect rationally upon theological (and philosophical) issues.

To be sure, Demea does allow his students to learn the a priori argument. Such an argument is acceptable because it establishes the being of God with certainty, while leaving in total obscurity God's nature.[20] As such, the a priori argument is useful to Demea, who believes that professed ignorance of God's nature is necessary for a humble, genuine piety. However, he is made anxious by Pamphilus's presence when Cleanthes turns to discuss the a posteriori argument, a merely probabilistic argument that attempts to establish both the existence *and* the nature of God: "Good God! cried Demea, interrupting him, where are we? Zealous defenders of religion allow, that the proofs of a Deity fall short of perfect evidence! . . . [W]hy

spare my censure, when such principles are advanced, supported by such an authority, before so young a man as PAMPHILUS?" (DNR 2.10; 145).

Demea's main fear, it seems, is the effect Cleanthes's reasoning could have on Pamphilus. If the "proofs of a Deity fall short of perfect evidence," Pamphilus might question God's existence or, almost as impiously, attempt to penetrate the mysteries of God's nature. Implicit in Demea's method of education is the notion that if people are allowed to reason about God's nature, they are likely to be led astray, and may end up rejecting many of the traditional religious doctrines essential for piety, good morals, and social order.

Whereas Demea aims to mold a type of character that may be easily controlled by those in religious authority, Cleanthes takes quite a different approach, one that to Demea must appear risky. Cleanthes shows no signs of discomfort with Pamphilus's presence as the three men carry on their disputes. Although Cleanthes never directly acknowledges that Pamphilus is present, this lack of acknowledgement does not seem to be due to any indifference on his part, but rather to a familiarity between the two. The teacher-student relationship between himself and Pamphilus appears quite close. Demea refers to the father of Pamphilus as an "intimate friend" of Cleanthes (DNR 1.1; 130). Out of regard for his friend, Cleanthes has taken Pamphilus on as a "pupil" and treats him as an "adopted son" (DNR 1.1; 130). Cleanthes's tutelage must have been going on for some time, since Pamphilus notes it is his usual practice to spend part of the summer at Cleanthes's estate (DNR Intro.6; 128). If Pamphilus lives with Cleanthes during the summers, he must often be exposed to these sorts of conversations. Cleanthes's evident willingness to have Pamphilus be present indicates that, as a teacher, he thinks it beneficial to expose his pupil to lively disagreement and philosophical argument on matters of natural religion.

On Cleanthes's diagnosis, the political problem of religion is not a decrease in its influence due to excessive confidence in reason. Rather, the problem lies in the anti-rationalism which Demea and others like him promote. As Danford notes, Cleanthes may see himself as modeling for Pamphilus "a kind of middle ground between the abject and humble piety of Demea and the philosophical skepticism of Philo."[21] Cleanthes does not consider rational scrutiny to be hubristic and prying. He holds in high esteem the strength and probity of human reason vis-à-vis the divine. He has definite views on what rational reflection can meaningfully teach us about the divine nature and proposes a religion that is compatible both with the everyday experience of common life and with reason. Everyday experience, in his view, serves as a *starting point* for the rational inquiries of the philosopher, but does not (as both Philo and Demea, in different ways, propose) set the bounds of knowledge.[22] Like Philo, he describes himself as a philosophical skeptic, yet he considers himself to be more socially responsible than Philo, whom he appears to regard as a trickster and chides for playfully encouraging Demea's

anti-rationalism.[23] According to Cleanthes, a philosophical skeptic should neither abandon reason himself nor encourage others to do so. Instead, a philosophical skeptic ought to encourage enquirers to be more cautious in their researches. Ambitious to advance specific claims about God's nature, Cleanthes clearly does not regard religious dialogues as merely amusements.

Cleanthes is careful to distinguish between "vulgar" and "philosophical" approaches to the problem of religious knowledge. Demea's vulgar skepticism (irresponsibly spurred on by Philo) is potentially "dangerous to the state, to philosophy, or to religion" (DNR 1.5; 132). The rejection of reason undermines confidence in the more rational elements of political life—including the pursuit of science—and thus exacerbates either the license of religious enthusiasm or the tyranny of superstition.[24] Such skepticism, in Cleanthes's view, is "fatal to knowledge, not to religion" (DNR 1.12; 136). But one ought not to have to choose between the two. Ideally, religion and knowledge can coexist harmoniously. In important ways, Cleanthes embodies the optimism of the eighteenth-century enlightenment. Despite his strong critique of the vulgar approach, he does not lose hope that the philosophical approach is gaining ground. By proposing a rational religion suitable to a modern, enlightened age, Cleanthes aims to restore reason and argument to theology in order to sustain and safeguard both genuine religion and collective political life.

For Cleanthes, a viable, and viably accessible, rational theology is possible insofar as it succeeds in "preserv[ing] a conformity to common experience" (DNR 8.11; 186). He claims that the a posteriori argument fulfills this requirement, as it "prove[s] at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence" (DNR 2.5; 143). Religion as an abstract system retains a graspably human face: "[O]ne great advantage of the principle of theism, is, that it is the only system of cosmogony which can be rendered intelligible and complete, and yet can throughout preserve a strong analogy to what we every day see and experience in the world" (DNR 12.5; 216).[25]

These rational, theological beliefs need not be limited to the intellectual minority. Rather, with the growing enlightenment of the age, a rational religion can be embraced by those who, in past ages, would not have had the benefit of philosophy. With the increasing acceptance of rational religion by society, Cleanthes has hope that even vulgar religionists like Demea will become more moderate and rational in their sentiments and doctrines. Reason can gain a prominent place in both political life and religion, thereby securing peace and stability in society.). Thus, he gamely debates Demea despite the latter's vulgar skepticism.

Cleanthes's method of religious instruction encourages independent thinking while displaying a confidence in reason's ability to guide people to the truths of religion. He aims to teach his students both the right *process* of reasoning (from experience) and the *end* to which right reasoning leads (probable knowledge of the

existence and nature of God). As we have seen, this method bears an element of risk. The pupil is free to reject his teacher's findings in favor of a different conclusion, if so prompted by reason. In fact, Pamphilus does end up swerving from the path Cleanthes had mapped out for him. As we will see, Philo's, not Cleanthes's, influence is most visibly imprinted on the young man's views.

To start with, Philo and Cleanthes are not so very far apart. Philo essentially agrees with Cleanthes that the political problem of religion inheres in the threat of anti-rationalism posed by vulgar or popular religion. But Philo goes further in his diagnosis of popular religion as a corruptive force, and is far less optimistic than Cleanthes about the possibility that a philosophical strain of religion can supplant the vulgar strain.

On Philo's conception, the negative effects of vulgar or popular religion on social life are numerous, with far-reaching ethical, economic, educational, and political dimensions.[26] However, broadly speaking, he holds that religion negatively affects the ethos of a culture. Religious motives (for example, hope of heaven or fear of hell) are often so disconnected from human experience that people are "sunk into the deepest lethargy and unconcern about their religious interests" (DNR 12.13; 220–21). When religious fancies are so far removed from common life that they do not consistently move people, a religious paralysis, of sorts, occurs. At the same time, religion's emphasis on misery and suffering instills "melancholy" and leads men to "brood upon the terrors of the invisible world"—terror being the "primary principle of religion" (DNR 12.29; 225–26).[27] Thus, although religious motives fail to influence men in all their actions, when such ideas are hounding men's imaginations, these imagined terrors hinder their ability to pursue, much less enjoy, the natural virtues of common life.[28] People brood over the possibilities awaiting them in the afterlife. Any effort to turn their attention back to common life is stymied by nagging religious fears.

Although Philo might well find this deadlocked psychological condition preferable to the explosive dangers of religious fanaticism, he still considers such lethargy to be deplorable.[29] Philo regards idleness, in and of itself, as the source of "[a]lmost all the moral, as well as natural evils of human life, and the religious sloth or idleness conditioned by remote and unnatural religious motives is no exception" (DNR 11.10; 209). Furthermore, precisely because religious motives are so removed from daily human experience, people's interior life and actions may end up contradicting what they verbally profess. This is especially so when there is social pressure to conform to a certain profession or practice of faith. Such cognitive dissonance between artificial belief system and natural being does violence to the inner life of religious votaries, who must continually work at convincing themselves, as well as others, of their convictions. As a result, the habits of "falsehood" and "hypocrisy," not virtue, are ingrained in the religious character:

> Many religious exercises are entered into with seeming fervor, where the heart, at the time, feels cold and languid: A habit of dissimulation is by degrees contracted: And fraud and falsehood become the predominant principle. Hence the reason of that vulgar observation, that the highest zeal in religion and the deepest hypocrisy, so far from being inconsistent, are often or commonly united in the same individual character. (DNR 12.17; 222)

Despite his excoriating critique, Philo nonetheless argues that civil society can and must accommodate vulgar religion due to humankind's innate religious propensities. His approach to the dangers posed by vulgar religion is not to instill in people an idea of true religion in the manner of Cleanthes, but to contain the damaging effects. While his approach incorporates political, moral, economic, and educational aspects, I focus here on education, which plays a foundational role.

The aim of education, Philo suggests, is to shape a "calm and equable" mind, not one torn by dissonance (DNR 12.30; 226). Forming such a mind, as Philo understands it, calls for, first, cultivated attention to common life and, second, disinvestment or curtailment of interest in the otherworldly. Teachers should positively encourage pupils to attend to the natural affairs of daily experience. Philo tells Cleanthes that the "strongest" motive driving the "common behaviour and conduct of the world" is not the idea of an afterlife, which is "remote and uncertain," but rather "present things" representing "finite and temporary rewards and punishments" (DNR 12.13; 220). Simply put, Philo's view is that men are more apt to lead virtuous lives when pursuing their natural, temporal interests than when following the otherworldly dictates of religion. Appealing to people's shared humanity and common decency is the best way to mold virtuous characters:

> It is certain, from experience, that the smallest grain of natural honesty and benevolence has more effect on men's conduct, than the most pompous views suggested by theological theories and systems. A man's natural inclination works incessantly upon him; it is for ever present to the mind; and mingles itself with every view and consideration: Whereas religious motives, where they act at all, operate only by starts and bounds; and it is scarcely possible for them to become altogether habitual to the mind. (DNR 12.13; 221)

Even the civic virtues, which are not natural but learned, have no need of a religious grounding. Philo points to the example of oaths, regarded as reflections and guarantors of public trust and honesty: "Oaths are requisite in all courts of judicature; but it is a question, whether their authority arises from any popular religion. It is the solemnity and importance of the occasion, the regard

to reputation, and the reflecting on the general interests of society, which are the chief restraints upon mankind" (DNR 12.23; 224). As a motivating force inclining people toward *virtue*, religion is weak and ineffectual, as religious motives are often utterly detached from common life. Not so the present demands of public reputation and social adaptation.

However, encouraging people to invest their attention in daily concerns and common life is not sufficient to counter the magnetic appeal and distorting demands which vulgar religion will doubtless continue to make. Therefore, Philo advises the inculcation of religious doubt as a means of moderating religious investment. Such doubt does not aim at ridding society of religious belief altogether, an unrealistic endeavor in any case. Rather, the promotion of doubt and skepticism in religious matters aims to temper the disposition to take claims of religious truth with overzealous seriousness and commitment. Ideally, the inculcation of a healthy dose of skepticism will counterbalance the threat posed by religious disputes to social stability and cohesion. People will be more disposed to react with tolerance, if not indifference, toward divergent religious opinions. Furthermore, an infusion of skepticism into the body politic will help to alleviate maladaptive symptoms of paralysis and lethargy brought about by the dissonance between abstract belief system and everyday conduct of life.

For those whom his pedagogy reaches (first and foremost, Pamphilus), Philo's teachings represent a paradigm shift in how to view religion and its relation to political life. First, by evacuating the concept of true religion of its accustomed content and meaning, he places religious disagreements in a new light. As merely disputes over words, they come to acquire a game-like character, lacking real substance. Second, on Philo's conception, religion is no longer the foundation or guarantor of political order, but rather a handicap of human nature, with devastating consequences for the socio-cultural fabric and for socio-political cohesion and stability. It is something that needs to be managed, contained, and worked around.

Whereas both Demea's method of indoctrination and Cleanthes's method of rational argument rely, in their very different ways, on a notion of "true religion" to anchor themselves, Philo dismisses any notion of "true religion" as at best irrelevant to political life:

> True religion, I allow, has no pernicious consequences. But we must treat of religion, as it has commonly been found in the world; nor have I any thing to do with that speculative tenet of theism, which, as it is a species of philosophy, must partake of the beneficial influence of that principle, and at the same time must lie under a like inconvenience, of being always confined to very few persons. (DNR 12.22; 223)

Even if such a thing as "true religion" could be reasonably established, it would be beyond the comprehension of the majority. The "vulgar," according to Philo, are "utterly incapable of so pure a religion" (DNR 12.15; 221). The philosophical, reason-based religion championed by Cleanthes stands no chance of displacing vulgar religion and securing the peace and stability of the social order, since even if a rational religion were to be taught, most people would fail to grasp it or oppose it in favor of superstition. Reason has little influence on most people's actual religious propensities. Rather than attempting to promote what religion *ought* to be, Philo suggests that any viable approach to curbing the excesses of vulgar religion needs to take stock of human nature and religion *as they are*.

But while he dismisses its political utility, Philo is careful to preserve a notion of "true religion" between Cleanthes and himself (DNR 12.22; 223). He tells Cleanthes that "in proportion to my veneration for true religion, is my abhorrence of vulgar superstitions" (DNR 12.9; 219). He asserts that "no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind, or pays more profound adoration to the divine Being, as he discovers himself to reason" than he does himself (DNR 12.2; 214). He even claims to exempt "philosophical and rational" religion from his moral critique (DNR 12.13; 220). However, nowhere does Philo clearly state what he means by "true religion." Although he does not outright reject the idea of "true religion," he consistently appears to place it outside the realm of serious debate, which comes to much the same thing. Therefore, it makes sense to assume that his apparent fidelity to true religion is rhetorical rather than substantive, a means of flattering Cleanthes, a gesture of solidarity. Beneath this cover, Philo proceeds to significantly water down the potency of religious truth claims, with the ultimate aim of demonstrating that religious issues are hopelessly obscure and not worth disputing. Religious truth claims elude transparent articulation. As such, they fall outside the scope of serious philosophical discussion and cannot be adjudicated therein.

Arguably, then, Philo steers Cleanthes and Demea into debate with one another not to inch closer toward the truth in religious matters, but instead to stage-manage an educational spectacle for the benefit of Pamphilus. Philo is not really concerned to persuade Cleanthes or Demea of anything. Instead, by maneuvering Cleanthes and Demea into a discussion where they end up undermining each other's views, he hopes to persuade the discerning observer, Pamphilus, and by extension the reader, that all religious systems are "on a like footing, and that no one of them has any advantages over the others" (DNR 6.13; 175). In Part 8, he alludes to this:

> All religious systems, it is confessed, are subject to great and insuperable difficulties. Each disputant triumphs in his turn; while he carries on an offensive war, and exposes the absurdities, barbarities, and pernicious

> tenets of his antagonist. But all of them, on the whole, prepare a complete triumph for the sceptic; who tells them, that no system ought ever to be embraced with regard to such subjects. (DNR 8.12; 186)

Throughout the *Dialogues*, Philo has arguably been pulling strings to prepare precisely this triumph for himself. He wishes Pamphilus to notice the ways in which the respective principles of Cleanthes and Demea fail to add up to a fail-safe system. His own statements perform a framing function, drawing attention to how the theological principles of Cleanthes and Demea need not lead to conviction—how they are vulnerable to ambivalence, susceptible to doubt, and even impiety.

A playful element is at work here, recalling the spirit of amusement to which Pamphilus refers in his opening remarks (once again suggesting Philo's influence on Pamphilus). Philo toys with Demea almost openly, not even attempting to engage him rationally. In part 1, he appears to find common ground with Demea. They can agree that the essence of God is unknowable. However, Philo then pretends to go along when Demea endorses a vulgar notion of God on this basis. While Demea and Philo both can agree that ascribing perfections to God in no way captures the unknowable divine essence, for Demea, such ascriptions nonetheless are appropriate insofar as they signal a pious rejection of philosophy in favor of humble submission to the teachings of religious authority.[30] Of course, for Philo (and, we can infer, Pamphilus), the supposition of the incomprehensibility of the deity points in a quite different direction. Far from helping to place religious faith on a firmer foundation (glorifying the mystery of God, elevating it beyond rational dispute), positing the unknowability of God undermines religious faith by suggesting that it lacks a secure basis in reason. Philo thus shows how it is possible for the philosopher to assent nominally to the *words* of a religious creed, while at the same time emptying these words of their conventional, accustomed meaning and implication. Whereas Demea rejects philosophical investigation in his pursuit of religious indoctrination, Philo and Pamphilus turn toward philosophical dialogue as a means of inculcating religious skepticism. The fact that Demea is not amused when he discovers Philo's deception suggests his great distance from the position on religious dialogue that Pamphilus takes up in his introductory remarks.[31]

In Part 8, Cleanthes finally awakens to the fact that he, too, has been used by Philo: "And have you at last, said CLEANTHES smiling, betrayed your intentions, PHILO? Your long agreement with DEMEA did indeed a little surprise me; but I find you were all the while erecting a concealed battery against me" (DNR 10.28; 199). Yet Philo's slipperiness vis-à-vis Cleanthes does not end here. He continues to speak out of two sides of his mouth, as it were, until the end: on the one hand, claiming common ground with Cleanthes; on the other, signaling (to Pamphilus and the discerning reader) the scandalous ease with which Cleanthes's supposedly system-building claims can be countered. After Demea's departure at the

end of part 11, with Pamphilus still present, Hume has Philo discuss the moral and political effects of religion with Cleanthes. Some readers consider Demea's departure an opportunity for Philo to get down to brass tacks and openly discuss his social concerns about religion with Cleanthes, his intellectual peer. According to W. B. Carnochan, for instance, Demea's departure represents the "eviction of a disruptive presence" and a "reassert[ion] [of] social order."[32] This view suggests that Hume thinks it possible for the Philos of society to rationally persuade the learned (Cleanthes) and the learned-to-be (Pamphilus) of the best approach to the political problem of religion. Certainly, Philo asserts solidarity with Cleanthes, claiming that Cleanthes is a "man of common sense," "sensible" of his (that is, Philo's) "veneration for true religion" (DNR 12.2; 214 and 12.9; 219). Philo thereby suggests that the two men share the same religious sensibility.

However, I want to propose that Philo is not nearly as forthright with Cleanthes as he professes to be. One example is his so-called "reversal" in part 12 of the *Dialogues.*[33] Here, even as he appears to assent to Cleanthes's notion of "common sense," Philo works to subtly modify and subvert Cleanthes's argument. Cleanthes's notion of common sense allows him to enter into theological issues by way of proportional or analogical reasoning. For Philo, by contrast, common sense is limited to the practical affairs of common life, and although throughout the *Dialogues* he has been demurring from Cleanthes's a posteriori argument, Philo suddenly appears to assent to it fully: "A purpose, an intention, or design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it" (DNR 12.2; 214).

Yet despite his apparent agreement with Cleanthes's argument, is Philo's statement here actually any different from his earlier claims aimed at undermining Cleanthes's proof? Philo claims that people are "struck" by a purpose, intention, or design. He does not say people reason to these beliefs. His wording is odd, for if taken literally, Philo is saying design "strikes" those who are the "most careless" and "most stupid." Again, he is not saying that belief in design is the result of careful and rational analysis. Furthermore, he refers in the above passage to the rejection of belief in design by saying no one can reject the idea of design "at all times." This implies there *are* times when a person *can* reject such an idea.[34] Perhaps it is the person of reflection who, taking a step back from being struck by design, calmly realizes that one does not need to assent to such an impression.[35] Once again, Philo signals to Pamphilus (and, by extension, Hume signals to the discerning reader) that Cleanthes has failed to establish a secure basis for a system of religious thought.

Philo's statements on religion in part 12 continue his advocacy of a drastically watered-down strain of religion and further reveal the consequences of such a stance. He characterizes the disputes between atheists and theists as "merely verbal" and "incurably ambiguous" (DNR 12.7; 218). The theist will naturally

emphasize the similarity between art and nature, at the same time that his piety will lead him to affirm the "great," "immeasurable," and "incomprehensible, difference between the *human* and the *divine* mind" (DNR 12.7; 218). The atheist, on the other hand, will emphasize the dissimilarity between art and nature; yet even he can be brought to acknowledge that there is a "certain degree of analogy among all the operations of nature, in every situation and in every age; whether the rotting of a turnip, the generation of an animal, and the structure of human thought be not energies that probably bear some remote analogy to each other: It is impossible he can deny it: He will readily acknowledge it" (DNR 12.7; 218).

In the above passage, Philo makes it clear that the atheist does not commit himself to belief in a divinity at all. The atheist need only recognize that the operations *of nature* "probably bear some remote analogy" to human thinking. Presumably, then, insofar as the atheist can acknowledge that there is likely (leaving room for the possibility that there might not be) some remote resemblance between human intelligence and, say, a rotting turnip, he fulfills Philo's criterion for being a theist. Although Philo does say the atheist "is only nominally so" (DNR 12.7; 218), he fails to mention the reverse implication—the theist "is only nominally so" as well.

Philo's confession of faith near the end of part 12 allows him to claim fidelity to theism while at the same time emptying it of meaningful content:

> If the whole of natural theology . . . resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, *that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*: If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication: If it afford no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance. . . . If this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition, as often as it occurs? (DNR 12.33; 227)

Philo's confession, which he himself calls "ambiguous" and an "undefined proposition," is non-committal and vague to the point of meaninglessness. The ordering of the universe, he says, could be due to one cause or to multiple causes, furnishing equal justification for theism or polytheism. The criterion that qualifies the atheist to be a so-called theist does not even require belief that the divine cause(s) resembles human intelligence, only that there is "probably" some "remote analogy" between them. According to Philo's own confession, therefore, there might *not* be any such analogy at all. His "religion" is indeed one with which the atheist could agree. Making apparent concessions to orthodoxy while lowering the stakes of the discussion by watering down the potency of the theist's claims, Philo

deploys a strategic vagueness which ultimately effaces any meaningful distinction between theism and atheism.

An education inculcating the notion that religious statements are ultimately undefined or ambiguous predisposes its recipients to react with disinterest to what are believed to be insoluble religious disagreements, instilling an equable, detached attitude toward orthodox claims and religious disagreements alike, thereby redressing the supposedly destructive moral and political influence of religion on society. Paramount is the implication that religious language cannot be the basis of human community, which requires a mutually meaningful, public language among its members. As Keith Yandell states, religious language retains "no legitimate office"[36] in public life when it is no longer capable of expressing the shared, lived experience of a people. On Philo's account, the language of the public square can and ought to be restricted to the affairs of a secularized common life—trade, politics, morals, criticism.[37] Of course, the expression of religious belief need not be prohibited. Nevertheless, such belief ought to be understood as belonging to the private sphere of opinion and preference. Religious questions, while not overtly rejected by Philo as airy nothings, are nonetheless pushed outside the realm of common sense, knowledge, and political life.

IV. Philo's Final Instruction of Pamphilus

Philo's intention to instruct Pamphilus becomes evident near the end of part 12 of the *Dialogues*, where he recommends that Cleanthes (and Pamphilus) "fly to revealed truth" so as to better understand "the nature, attributes, and operations of the divine object of our Faith" (DNR 12.33; 227). He points to Christian revelation as a way around the fragility of human reason:

> To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian; a proposition which I would willingly recommend to the attention of PAMPHILUS: And I hope CLEANTHES will forgive me for interposing so far in the education and instruction of his pupil. (DNR 12.33; 228)

That Philo names Pamphilus here, in his final remarks, suggests he has been well aware all along of the young man listening in. He advises Pamphilus as one who is on his way to becoming a "man of letters" and a "philosophical sceptic." Philo's actions throughout the *Dialogues* have supplied Pamphilus with examples of how to *appear* to hold orthodox views, while using the very language of orthodoxy to undermine fundamental religious beliefs, thereby clearing the way for a purportedly more tolerant, less political, but drastically watered-down strain of religion. In time, and with effort, future generations (as already seen in Pamphilus's opening

statements) may push religion in this direction as they continue to frame disputes over religion as entertaining but basically frivolous, because inherently inconclusive, exercises.

Throughout the *Dialogues*, Pamphilus has shown signs of being aware of Philo's manner of handling Cleanthes and Demea. It is not such a stretch to suggest, then, that he closes the work in a similar manner—more diplomatically than sincerely: "[A]s nothing ever made greater impression on me, than all the reasonings of that day; so I confess, that, upon a serious review of the whole, I cannot but think, that PHILO's principles are more probable than DEMEA's; but that those of CLEANTHES approach still nearer to the truth" (DNR 12.34; 228). On the surface, Cleanthes appears to be the hero of the debates, as Pamphilus declares Cleanthes's principles to be "nearer to the truth." Pamphilus, however, does not say to which "principles" he refers. This failure to specify may be a mark of his unreflective agreement with his teacher, as some readers have considered,[38] but it could also signify his emulation of Philo's tactical vagueness. His declaration here, in part 12, championing Cleanthes's theological principles, stands in contradiction to the tenor of his opening remarks. Turning our attention back to the introduction, we see that in stark contrast to Cleanthes, Pamphilus, like Philo, holds that questions concerning the nature of God lead to "nothing but doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction" (DNR Intro.5; 128). It is precisely because the nature of God is unknowable that Pamphilus (again like Philo) claims "[r]easonable men may be allowed to differ, where no one can reasonably be positive" (DNR Intro.4; 128). Religious disputes, for both Philo and Pamphilus, may provide the occasion for "agreeable amusement" but they do not yield answers (DNR Intro.4; 128). The discrepancy between Pamphilus's final judgment in part 12 and his introductory statements raises questions about the sincerity of his concluding remarks: is he being sincere or diplomatic? His declaration carries an ambiguous charge because, as we have seen, for Pamphilus, truth is not really at issue in matters of religion: politics is. As I hope to have demonstrated, Hume himself is less interested in religion as truth than in religion as rhetoric, the moral and political consequences of different styles of God-talk.

None of this is contradicted by Hume's well-known statement in a letter to Gilbert Elliot that, "I make Cleanthes the Hero of the Dialogue."[39] For, in the same letter, Hume refers to Cleanthes's a posteriori argument as unsound—an odd thing to say about the argument of the supposed hero of one's work. According to Hume, Cleanthes's argument is based on the mind's "propensity" to believe in a divine design, and if this propensity is no different than "our Inclination to find our own Figures in the Clouds" (as Hume thinks it is), then such an inclination "ought to be controul'd & can never be a legitimate Ground of Assent."[40] Considering his critique of Cleanthes's position, Hume's designation of Cleanthes as the "hero" is arguably not free of irony. Hume pays lip-service to religious orthodoxy—ironic

or respectful, deceitful or diplomatic, depending on one's vantage point—while meanwhile preparing the ground for a secular social order he believes will be more harmonious and morally sound. Through the characters of Philo and Pamphilus, Hume promotes the idea of "true" religion, while simultaneously suggesting religious inquiry to be mere verbal fencing with words which are easily emptied of their customary signification and prone to ambiguity. Claiming fidelity to "true" religion provides a convenient cover for casting doubt on the doctrinal and moral legitimacy of religion in general and the public role of Christianity in particular. Many of Hume's contemporaries remained unwavering in their religious convictions and their sense of the foundational role that Christianity ought to play in promoting social virtues. Hume, however, suggests that his successors, as symbolized by Pamphilus, should embrace and promote a religious education with secularizing effects, one that encourages a nominal piety while associating the idea of the good life with strictly secular and temporal interests.

NOTES

For his beautiful insights and invaluable suggestions on earlier drafts of this article, I most sincerely thank David Openshaw.

1 *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (hereafter DNR), ed. and intro. Norman Kemp Smith, 2nd ed. Notations will refer to part, paragraph and page number (for example, "DNR 12.4; 228" means "DNR part 12, paragraph 4; page 228"). Pamphilus's introductory statements will be referenced by "Intro, paragraph and page number. (for example, "DNR Intro.1; 127" means "DNR introduction, paragraph 1; page 127").

2 To date, no full-length book has been dedicated to the subject. See Foster, "Different Religions and the Difference They Make"; Jordan, "Religion in the Public Square"; Penelhum, "Religion in the *Enquiry* and After," 240; Siebert, "Religion and the 'Peace of Society,'" 62–135; Stewart, "Governments and Religion," 256–87.

3 See Clark, "No Abiding City" 75 and "Hume's Uses of Dialogue," 61.

4 Danford, *David Hume and the Problem of Reason*, 172.

5 Danford, *David Hume and the Problem of Reason*, 175.

6 Danford, *David Hume and the Problem of Reason*, 169.

7 See, for instance, Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 13; Swinburne, "The Argument from Design" and "The Argument from Design: A Defence"; Olding, "The Argument from Design: A Reply to R. G. Swinburne" and "A Further Reply to R. G. Swinburne."

8 See, for instance, Kemp Smith, Introduction to Hume, *Dialogues*, 74; Basu, "Who is the Real Hume in the *Dialogues*?" 21; Butler, "Natural Belief and the Enigma of Hume," 73; Capaldi, "Hume's Philosophy of Religion"; Gaskin, "Hume's Critique of Religion,"

301; Hussain, "Hume on Religion"; Mossner, "Enigma of Hume"; Parent, "An Interpretation of Hume's *Dialogues*," 96.

9 See, for example, Carnochan, "The Comic Plot of Hume's *Dialogues*"; Rurak, "Hume's *Dialogues* as a Drama"; Tilley, "Hume on God and Evil"; Vink, "The Literary and Dramatic Character of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religions*."

10 For Danford's discussion of Pamphilus, see Danford, "The Surest Foundation of Morality," 144–47.

11 Clark, "No Abiding City," 82.

12 Popkin, Introduction to Hume, *Dialogues*, xvi.

13 Davis, "Irony and Argument in *Dialogues* XII," 254; Morrisroe, "Rhetorical Methods in Hume's Works on Religion," 134.

14 For Pamphilus's observations on the emotional states of Demea, Cleanthes and Philo, see DNR 2.10, 145; DNR 2.25, 150; DNR 3.10, 155; DNR 11.18–21, 212–13. For his observations on body language, interruptions, and facial expressions, see DNR 1.4, 132; DNR 2.26, 150; DNR 10.28, 199; DNR 11.21, 213. For his observations of when one of the men remains silent, hesitates, or pauses, see DNR 2.16, 147a6a2.

15 See DNR 2.11, 145; DNR 3.10–11, 155; DNR 7.2, 176 for those occasions when Pamphilus observes that Demea misunderstands the gist of what is being discussed.

16 All but the last of the remaining quotations from Pamphilus in section II of this article are from his introductory remarks; see DNR, Intro.1–6; 127–28.

17 The basis of Christianity is belief in specific features of God's nature—what Pamphilus calls God's providence, attributes, and decrees. Throughout its history, the Christian faith has provided believers with the basis for hope in the resurrection, social cohesion, and morality. Hope in the resurrection, for instance, is dependent on belief in God's goodness, power, and providence. In European intellectual life throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, concepts of morality, politics, metaphysics, and human nature remained closely tied to specific ideas of God and religion. Much of eighteenth-century Europe still reflected what Charles Taylor calls a "pre-modern" attitude which understood political order as "connected to, based on, guaranteed by some faith in, or adherence to God, or some notion of ultimate reality" (*A Secular Age*, 1). Many of the leading seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British intellectuals, for instance, viewed their scientific endeavors as intimately tied to the Bible and Christianity. James Force reminds us that the stated goals of the Royal Society in 1663 included "Improving Natural Knowledge" and to "illustrate the providential glory of God manifested in the works of His creation" ("Hume and the Relation of Science," 517). J. C. A. Gaskin observes that "the principle that morality depends upon religion was so strong in the eighteenth century that in those conspicuous cases that appeared to be at variance with the principle . . . [it was presumed that] . . . the speculative atheist could not *really* be an atheist if he were a good and honorable man" ("Hume, Atheism, and the 'Interested Obligation' of Morality," 149).

18 We lack conclusive evidence to determine whether Pamphilus is speaking or writing to Hermippus. Pamphilus's act of giving a "recital" connotes an oral presentation, but he also emphasizes the role of the "dialogue-writer" and "reader" in his opening remarks, which gives the sense that he is composing a written document. The latter scenario seems more likely given Hermippus's silence throughout the *Dialogues*.

19 Danford, "Surest Foundation of Morality," 144.

20 Like Demea, Pamphilus and Philo make the claim that the existence of God is certain whereas the nature of God remains unknowable. But Pamphilus and Philo use this claim to advance very different arguments from Demea's about piety and the place of religion in society, as I will explore.

21 Danford, *Problem of Reason*, 180.

22 Philo refers to Cleanthes's attempt to get theology and "common experience" to "conform" with one another, see DNR 8.11a; 186. For reference to Cleanthes's "founding" of theology on "vulgar experience," see DNR 6.6; 171–72.

23 Danford develops this point in *Problem of Reason*, 164–86.

24 On this point, see Danford, *Problem of Reason*, 183.

25 Thus Cleanthes tells Demea that "if we abandon all human analogy, . . . I am afraid we abandon all religion, and retain no conception of the great object of our adoration" (DNR 11.1; 203).

26 For Philo's diagnoses of the moral, economic, and political problems of religion and their corresponding remedies, see DNR 11.5–12; 205–11 and DNR 12.6–33; 216–82.

27 For Philo's remarks on how "misery," "melancholy," "fear," and "terror" are integral to the experience of popular religion, see a DNR 11.20; 213; DNR 12.25–32; 224–26.

28 In a marked understatement, Philo suggests that when vulgar religion does "predominate" at a social level, its "operation" is not "very favourable to morality" (DNR 12.20; 223). For Philo, religion's effect on morality produces seriously destructive consequences: "How happens it then, said PHILO, if vulgar superstition be so salutary to society, that all history abounds so much with accounts of its pernicious consequences on public affairs? Factions, civil wars, persecutions, subversions of government oppression, slavery; these are the dismal consequences which always attend its prevalency over the minds of men. If the religious spirit be ever mentioned in any historical narration, we are sure to meet afterwards with a detail of the miseries which attend it" (DNR 12.11; 220).

29 As Philo states in Part 12, "motives of vulgar superstition have no great influence on general conduct" (DNR 12.20; 222–23).

30 Philo further remarks on this matter: "Wisdom, thought, design, knowledge; these we justly ascribe to him; because these words are honorable among men, and we have no other language or other conceptions, by which we can express our adoration of him" (DNR 2.3; 142). For Demea's comments on ascribing pious names to God, see DNR 3.13; 156–57.

31 See a DNR 11.18–21; 212–13.

32 Carnochan, "Comic Plot of Hume's *Dialogues*," 515.

33 The issue of Philo's "reversal" has been a major theme in the Hume literature. See, for instance, Peter Dendle, "Reconciling Philo and Hume: Habits, Caprice, and Inclinations," 26–47; Paul Draper, "Hume's Reproduction Parody of the Design Argument," 135–48; Rich Foley, "Unnatural Religion," 83–112; John Immerwahr, "David Hume on Incompatible Religious Beliefs," 25–33.

34 Philo makes similar duplicitous comments in DNR 12.2–4, 6; 214–16. We do not have space to go over each comment in detail, but note the ambiguous nature of

the following statement: "And thus all the sciences almost lead us insensibly to acknowledge a first intelligent Author" (DNR 12.2; 214–15). If the sciences "almost" lead us to an "intelligent Author," could that not be another way of saying that the sciences do *not* lead us to an intelligent Author? This and similar questions and others are raised when we take a close look at other comments Philo makes during the course of his supposed reversal.

35 Hume makes this precise claim in his letter to Gilbert Elliot. See *Letters*, 1:155.

36 Keith E. Yandell, "Hume on Religious Belief," 119.

37 At DNR 1.10; 135, Philo names these as subjects on which people are capable of coherent discourse.

38 See, for instance, Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 160; Isabel Rivers, "'Galen's Muscles,'" 594.

39 Hume, *Letters*, 1:153.

40 Hume, *Letters*, 1:155.

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