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A STUDY OF DAVID HUME'S ACCOUNT OF THE RELATION

BETWEEN MORALS AND RELIGION

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Janie, who has helped me in everything.

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ABBREVIATIONS

T — A Treatise of Human Nature. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968.

E — Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals. 3rd ed. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and with notes by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

D — Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. Edited by Nelson Pike. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970.

NHR — The Natural History of Religion. Edited by H. E. Root. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956.

ST&OE — Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays. Edited by John W. Lenz. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Currently, there are at least two distinct approaches to the study of David Hume's philosophy. On the one hand, Hume's writings are a popular source for the examination of specific philosophical perplexities. For example, analysts find significant passages that merit their special attention on such topics as causality, induction, personal identity, the "is-ought" question, emotivism, the design argument, and the problem of evil. On the other hand, Hume remains a problematic philosopher for the expositor and historian. For example, contrary opinions divide the interpreters over whether Hume was advocating skepticism or naturalism, phenomenalism or realism, positivism or humanism, theism or atheism, etc. Further, at times it seems that the analyst (on the one hand) and the expositor (on the other) go their separate ways without giving serious consideration to the work of the other.

Although I shall work mainly in the second of these two traditions (i.e., the historical-expository), I hope my interpretation will show the importance of a careful exposition of the whole of Hume's philosophy to the analysis of specific problems. For example, I will argue that Hume's distinctive interpretation of the problem of evil is obscured when his passages on that topic are examined in relation to a traditional

logical puzzle. I am persuaded that the issues raised by Hume occur in a web of beliefs that cannot be isolated from one another without serious distortion of the arguments he intends to make.

The specific interwoven set of beliefs in Hume which I want to examine is commonly classed as belonging to the philosophy of religion. However, as I hope to make clear, I believe these sorts of problems are connected with Hume's moral philosophy as well as with his general philosophy of man. Part of the overlapping of beliefs in Hume is imposed by the way he puts his questions. Since Hume is primarily concerned with answering questions about human nature,[1] it is "man" rather than "God" that collects and meshes the various strands of thought which make up Hume's philosophy of religion. Further, since Hume's primary interest in man is practical in the British philosopher's broad sense of "moral,"[2] it is Hume's moral philosophy which provides the warp upon which the woof of his general philosophy is woven. The expositor who ignores the interlacing of Hume's beliefs will be misled as to the significance of Hume's solutions.

Since the question that underlies the issues regarding religion in Hume's philosophy is the moral or practical one, for purposes of exposition I will tentatively designate the question as the justification of morals. I will take Hume's core question to be one which inquires: Does religion provide a credible warrant for man's moral beliefs? This heuristic question is behind Nicholas Capaldi's suggestion that

> Hume's challenge may be put concisely. We cannot legitimately infer moral conclusions, that is, practical conclusions for guiding human behavior, from theological premisses. This challenge places in jeopardy one of the major institutions of Western civilization.[3]

In keeping with Capaldi's suggestion and the heuristic question behind

it, I will examine Hume's account of the relation between religion and morals on the basis of the following heuristic principle:

(HP) Practical conclusions for guiding human behavior cannot be legitimately inferred from theological premisses.

In order to establish that the heuristic principle (HP) just stated not only informs Hume's concerns regarding religion, but also sheds new light upon Hume's resolution of them, I will do the following things. In Chapter I, I will review the secular justification of morals set out in Hume's moral theory. In Chapter II, I will relate Hume's story of the origin and development of popular theism. In Chapter III, I will explore Hume's criticism of rational theology. In Chapter IV, I will collect Hume's scattered treatment of fideism. Together, the four chapters will comprise a first stage in the exposition and will demonstrate the relevance of reading Hume as a moralist defending the autonomy of secular morals against religious demands or theistic justifications.

The second stage of my use of the HP treats the contrast between recent treatments of the philosophical problems regarding religion and that found in Hume. In Chapter V, I will challenge the notion that a strong thesis of atheism is the most appropriate interpretation of Hume. The strong thesis is stated as follows:

(ST) The appeal to God as the warrant for moral beliefs fails in every case because no valid proof that a Deity exists can be made.

My first reason for rejecting the ST (as embodying Hume's position) arises from a contrast of Hume's stance with that of Antony Flew's "presumption of atheism." My second reason arises from a contrast between Hume's view of human suffering and Alvin Plantinga's treatment of the problem of evil. I will argue that Hume sees the problem of evil as

primarily a practical impasse between moral and religious attitudes instead of as a logical contradiction in the principles of theism. I believe these two reasons will prove sufficient for dismissing the ST as reflecting Hume's own view.

Following the discounting of the ST interpretation of Hume, I will shift in Chapter VI to the examination of a weak thesis. The weak thesis is as follows:

> (WT) The appeal to God as a warrant for moral beliefs fails because the nature of God is either morally indifferent or too ambiguous to serve this purpose.

In testing the WT, I will show how it resolves certain issues in Hume's analysis of religion along the lines of his general philosophy. First, I will show how Nelson Pike's effort to read Hume's argument from evil as atheistic collapses due to an oversight regarding the moral issue in constructing a theodicy (i.e., the HP). I will suggest that Pike's own suggestions about Hume's theistic arguments constitute a better exposition of Hume when organized around the WT. Second, I will use H. H. Price's study of Hume's doctrine of belief to show how the doctrine of assent separates Hume's understanding of theism from the more traditional account advanced by Plantinga. Consequently, I will be able to show how the "confession" passages in Hume's writings, which were wholly opaque under the ST, have become transparently clear under the WT. Thus, the second stage of testing the heuristic principle ends with the establishment of the WT as furnishing the expositor with the most consistent reading of Hume's philosophy.

To a limited extent, the results of my study of Hume's treatment of the relation between moral beliefs and religious attitudes turn upon

Hume's use of "God" as a name for the unknown cause or causes of the universe.[4] In Hume's philosophy all additional conditions regarding the use of "God" remain problematic. In my inquiry, I adopt Hume's minimal definition and hold that all other notions found in traditional theism are separable from a bare or minimal concept of "God." This use of "God" makes it possible for Hume to admit some notion of deity without committing himself to traditional theism. This is to say, I shall argue that Hume is a religious skeptic in the special sense of being both a minimal theist and a moralist who is concerned to show that a full-blown traditional theism is not a credible or workable ethical alternative to the social-moral order that arises within man's common life.

ENDNOTES

[1]T, p. xix.

[2]T, p. 455.

[3]Nicholas Capaldi, David Hume: The Newtonian Philosopher (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), p. 196.

[4]NHR, pp. 28-29; D, p. 142.

A STUDY OF DAVID HUME'S ACCOUNT OF THE RELATION BETWEEN MORALS AND RELIGION

CHAPTER I

A STUDY OF HUME'S JUSTIFICATION OF MORAL BELIEFS

My purpose in this chapter is to uncover Hume's answer to the question

> Can a sufficient warrant for moral judgments be discovered within man's common life, without any appeal to religious beliefs?

This particular question addresses an important set of problems which Hume treats in his writings, but the particular formulation of the problem is never separated by Hume from other matters as a specific issue to be dealt with directly. Nevertheless, as my exposition will show, the question is directed to a significant concern of Hume's and one for which he provides us an answer, if only obliquely. Consequently, it will be necessary for me to reconstruct Hume's response from his writings on morals and religion. I believe that such a reconstruction can be effected through the exploration of three clusters of Hume's notions, which may be identified generally as (1) nature, (2) reason, and (3) objectivity. Further, in laying out Hume's answer to my question, I shall do three

things in this chapter. First, I will clarify the formulation of the question regarding Hume's inclusion of "common life" within his refined and expanded understanding of "natural." In doing so, I hope to show how Hume undercuts a rather common jump from "nature" to the full-blown "religious hypothesis" of natural theology. Second, I will examine Hume's position that reason is unable to perform the task that is required of it by the "religious hypothesis." It is Hume's opinion that rational theism considers reason as both the motive for assent as well as the motive for moral actions. From Hume's perspective, a motive is an efficient cause which is able to bring about either a belief or an action. Hume contends that "reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will."[1] Once Hume's belief that reason lacks the power to function as a motive has been made clear, then I will be able to explain why Hume's limitation of morals to the demands of common life forecloses any further need for religious sanctions or explanations. Finally, I will examine Hume's arguments that a secular ethic can achieve objectivity apart from the "artificial life" proposed through the needless supernatural sanctions advocated by theists.

Naturalism

To begin with, it will be helpful to keep in mind that Hume intends to free himself from the entanglement of a tradition that resolves any question concerning the justification of morals by an appeal to nature. Hume believes that a great deal of the "religious hypothesis" is allowed to slip into moral philosophy surreptitiously through insufficient attention to the concept "nature." Since it is apparent that many understand nature as the artifice of the divine ruler, it is very easy

for these presuppositions to slip, without warrant, into the expanded notion that morals are detected in nature by "right reason" and founded on natural law. Hume undertakes a careful analysis of "nature" so as to stop any careless leakage of the "religious hypothesis" into what is perceived as "natural."

Therefore, it is necessary to examine Hume's analysis of the word "nature" as a means of nailing down what we are to understand by his repeated references to "common life," which is, so to speak, his alternative to the "religious hypothesis." Now, on the surface it might not appear to be very difficult to restate Hume's analysis of "nature," especially since he explicitly deals with the definition of the word both in A Treatise of Human Nature[2] and in An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals[3]. But any attempt to dispose of the matter quickly gets caught on at least three snags. First, Hume finds the definitions that have been proposed anything but straightforward and concludes about the word "nature" that "there is none more ambiguous and equivocal."[4] It is important that his reasons for this opinion be carefully assessed. Second, it is important to note Hume's move from "nature" to "natural" and determine whether the change suggests something significant. Finally, it is necessary to understand why Hume holds that "natural and unnatural" do not mark the same distinction as "virtuous and vicious." When we see how Hume frees the word "nature" from these entanglements, we shall have a valuable clue as to why Hume is not satisfied with a casual appeal to nature in moral philosophy.

To start with the first snag, the ambiguity that troubles Hume arises when philosophers fail to keep three different definitions of

"nature" distinct. Hume's analysis in the Treatise[5] formulates three negative definitions. In the first definition, Hume takes "nature" to be opposed to miracle. In such cases "nature" will include "every event which has ever happened in the world." Only "those miracles on which our religion is founded" are excluded. Finding something to be according to nature in this sense is "no extraordinary discovery." In fact, this sense includes any moral distinction that is made and offers us no illumination whatsoever. If it allows anything, it is the separation between morals and religion. In the second definition, Hume notes that "nature" is opposed to what is rare or unusual. This use functions contextually. That is to say, the degree to which something is usual or unusual is determined in the particular case by what is being compared. For example, it is more usual to find Scotsmen in Edinburgh than in Moscow. Apart from the context of use, this sense of "nature" can neither provide a warrant for all moral judgments nor guide us in making moral distinctions. Turning then to the third definition, we find "nature" opposed to artifice. Since this excludes "the designs and projects of men" from nature it is more likely to exclude morals from nature than men from morals. In summary, Hume believes that his analysis provides us with sufficient evidence to conclude, "'Tis impossible, therefore, that the character of natural and unnatural can ever, in any sense, mark the boundaries of vice and virtue."[6]

When Hume begins his account of the definitions, he uses the noun "nature." When he draws the conclusion about the relation to virtue and vice, he uses the adjective "natural." Hume's conclusion is that "natural" does not qualify an action or state of mind in the same way as

"virtuous." What the shift suggests about Hume's understanding of "nature" needs some clarification. Traditionally, the question of the reference of the term "nature" has arisen from the inquiry "What is there?" Hume, however, believes the moralist would be better advised to ask, "What is in accord with definite orderly processes or principles?" This suggestion about Hume's intention gains further confirmation in the passage in the Treatise that immediately follows the discussion of definitions and introduces a new and "simple question." The new question that Hume proposes is "Why any action or sentiment upon the general view or survey gives a certain satisfaction or uneasiness?"[7] Hume's reformulation has the distinct advantage of moving the problem from questions about definition and identity to matters subject to observation and testing. The new approach is Hume's basic "attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects." Thus, the move from "nature" to "natural," when fleshed out, relfects Hume's proposed change from a rationalistic moral theory dependent upon the teleological nature of things to a moral-sense theory dependent upon the causal appraisal of motives. It is the sort of transition the Treatise was written to effect.

An examination of the revised account in An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals tends further to strengthen my exposition of the two passages in the Treatise. By the time of the Enquiry, Hume has moved the discussion from a preliminary treatment of the elements "Of Morals" to an appendix and confined his treatment of alternate senses to a mere footnote.[8] However, by this time he also feels free to speak of the several senses of "natural" as a mere "verbal exercise," mistakenly thought by some to mark out the boundaries of virtue. Not only does Hume

use the adjective "natural," but the alternate exclusions are also stated as adjectives: "unusual, miraculous, and artificial."[9] Hume draws a further conclusion from the analysis at this point. He says that "what necessarily arises from the exertion of his [man's] intellectual faculties may justly be esteemed natural."[10] What I take Hume to be doing is offering a revised definition of what is included in the "natural" operations. His new term has two distinguishing marks: (1) the "natural" is that which causes belief through its usual and constant occurrence, and (2) the "natural" is inclusive of any public and common custom which arises "as necessitated by the operations of human faculties." What we need to explore further is how the refined notion of "natural" affects the conclusion that "nature" in any of the three senses cannot be used to mark the distinction between virtue and vice.

Hume believes that it is readily apparent from his analysis of "nature" that none of the ordinary senses of the word will serve the purposes required by an appeal to "the nature of things" as a justification for the distinction between virtue and vice. Rather, as he says, virtue and vice are equally natural in any of the ordinary senses of "natural." Given this state of affairs, Hume suggests we look elsewhere. What Hume proposes is that any artifice may be taken as natural to the degree it is necessary to human survival. It is "necessity" in the practical and not in the logical sense that Hume has in mind. Just those conventions and contrivances of human society that evolve as customs that benefit and perpetuate the "common life" of man are "natural to man." This interpretation would add to the natural virtues that result immediately from the passions, a whole class of artificial virtues (e.g., justice,

charity, promise-keeping, etc.), whose primary justification is their common utility. Virtues of this latter class are "natural" in the sense of being customary and useful, but they are nevertheless "artificial" in not having their origin in nature. However, it should be understood that Hume's use of "artificial" is not pejorative. An "artifact" or the "artificial" virtues are necessary extensions of human nature for physical survival and are natural institutions instigated by man for that purpose. It is in the extended and refined sense of "natural" that Hume speaks of the "common life" as natural.

In other words, Hume's refined concept of "natural" reveals that he is thinking in terms of "the operations of nature." Further, just as "the operations of nature" govern the attraction of planetary bodies, so they also direct the association of ideas. Relations of resemblance, contiguity, and cause-effect are the natural principles of association which are the grounds for the philosophical relation of ideas. Nature's operations are to be felt before they are judged of. The very "force" or "vivacity" evidenced in instinctive belief is the cement that joins our ideas with the operations of nature. Thus, although it is possible for the imagination to confuse fancy with fact, it cannot force stable belief. It is the instinctive inclination to believe, as well as the acquired habits in the natural associations of ideas, that gives force to the practical necessity of the "common life." The moral life is the ordinary, shared, and common arena where belief is of necessity limited to the utility that grows out of the repeated operations of habit and custom. The necessary and prudent practices of the common life are the court of last appeal in the ordinary distinctions between virtue and

vice. The habits of character that are useful to oneself or society are judged virtuous, and the ones which interfere with utility are deemed vices.

In addition to a technical sense, it should be noted that Hume uses "common life" in three less restrictive senses. In its broadest extension, Hume is speaking of the common opinions and conduct of men as distinguished from the narrow and specialized interests of theologians and other philosophers. In this looser use, the only criteria are that a particular use be general in scope and be known to originate from human faculties. This use would include fictions and the excesses of the imagination. I will call this the popular sense. The second sense refers to established social customs. The criteria require that a custom must be of public utility and that, though contingent, the custom must not be arbitrary. Examples of conventions of this sort are enumerated by Hume as follows:

> Thus, two men pull the oars of a boat by common convention for common interest, without any promise or contract: thus gold and silver are made the measures of exchange; thus speech and words and language are fixed by human convention and agreement. Whatever is advantageous to two or more persons, if all perform their part; but what loses all advantage if only one perform, can arise from no other principle. There would otherwise be no motive for any one of them to enter into that scheme of conduct.[11]

I will call this the public sense. The third sense deals only with individual conduct since it is motivated by the passions. Although singular in motivation and occurrence, the passions are common and are shared inter-personally through sympathy. However, there are no criteria; the passions are felt immediately. I will call this the private sense.

Now that Hume's three senses of "common life" are laid out, it is possible to understand the special function of philosophy. The task

of philosophy is to protect the ongoing processes of common experience from being undercut by the excesses of imaginative opinions. To prevent deception, philosophers should apply "the experimental method of reasoning to morals." In this way, philosophers can reduce the danger that artificial alternatives will divert man from his natural abilities and needs. Philosophy is most serviceable as a practical aid to the improvement of the "common life."

> Those who have a propensity to philosophy, will still continue their researches; because they reflect, that, besides the immediate pleasure, attending such an occupation, philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected. But they will never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfections of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations.[12]

In other words, philosophy is and ought to be restricted to conventions essential to the common life of man. Reason cannot become the motivating force in the selection of another aim for life or in the departure from the "common life" we already have. Hume is convinced that if our moral judgments have any warrant it will be found in our common life because there is no way any appeal to philosophy or theology can come up with any alternative that is not pejoratively artificial and thus without utility.

In summary, what we have discovered about Hume's concept of the "natural" boils down to five propositions. First, the word "nature" has no ordinary use that marks the same distinction as virtue and vice. Second, "natural" represents Hume's own understanding of nature as a system which operates according to principle. Third, the principles by which nature operates extend throughout all of nature and apply equally to human faculties and to the movement of planetary bodies. Fourth, the

necessary conventional extensions of the human faculties constitute the arena of "common life." Fifth, the restriction of philosophy to the improvement of the "common life" is formative for Hume's naturalism and excludes alternates to "common life" as amoral, simply because such alternatives are not rooted in the indispensable conditions of human survival.

Rationalism

A second cluster of notions gather around Hume's interpretation of the role of reason in moral philosophy. Hume gives a precise account of the relation between reason "in a strict and philosophical sense"[13] and the source of man's sense of morals. I will state what that relation is for Hume, delineate his reasons for thinking so, and sketch the consequences of Hume's position for theological accounts of moral beliefs.

Hume begins his comments with the following assertion: "The mind can never exert itself in any action, which we cannot comprehend under the term of perception."[14] Since perceptions are resolved into two kinds, viz., impressions and ideas, the question to be considered is: "Whether 'tis by means of our ideas or impressions we distinguish betwixt vice and virtue, and pronounce an action blameable or praiseworthy?"[15] From the start, the question is designed by Hume to deal with "those who affirm that virtue is nothing but a conformity to reason."[16] Hume believes that it is by means of impressions, specifically the passions, and not by means of the reason, that man is able to distinguish between moral good and evil.

> No one, I believe, will deny the justness of this inference; nor is there any other means of evading it, than by denying that principle, on which it is founded. As long as it is allow'd, that reason has no

> influence on our passions and actions, 'tis in vain to pretend, that morality is discover'd only by a deduction of reason. An active principle can never be founded on an inactive; and if reason be inactive in itself, it must remain so in all its shapes and appearances, whether it exerts itself in natural or moral subjects, whether it considers the powers of external bodies, or the actions of rational beings.[17]

That reason's function is not a practical but a speculative activity of the mind is evidenced by the coordinate relation between reason and beliefs that are subject to being true or false.

> Reason is the discovery of truth or falshood [sic]. Truth or falshood consists in an agreement or disagreement either to the real relations of ideas, or to real existence and matter of fact. Whatever, therefore, is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement, is incapable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. Now 'tis evident our passions, volitions, and actions, are not susceptible of any such agreement or disagreement; being original facts and realities, compleat in themselves, and implying no reference to other passions, volitions, and actions. 'Tis impossible, therefore, they can be pronounced either true or false, and be either contrary or conformable to reason.[18]

Because the objects of reason are subject to being judged either true or false, Hume concludes that reason cannot be the source of morals.

> Moral distinctions, therefore, are not the offspring of reason. Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals.[19]

However, reason is employed in moral deliberations, but in a much more restricted way than the rationalists claim.

> It has been observ'd, that reason, in a strict and philosophical sense, can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion. These are the only kinds of judgment, which can accompany our actions, or can be said to produce them in any manner; and it must be allow'd, that these judgments may often be false and erroneous.[20]

Hume defends his belief that the influence of reason in morals is subordinate to the passions with three basic arguments. The first

grows out of his account of the operations of the mind. Hume classes all actions of the mind, whether they be "actions of seeing, hearing, judging, loving, hating, and thinking," as in every case acts of perception.[21] Reasoning is restricted by Hume to comparing ideas and inferring matters of fact. In light of these limitations, Hume is able to say that

> Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular. The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason.[22]

Hume's case hinges upon his claim that the two activities of reason make it impotent in moral matters. Hume indicates that reason is morally indifferent in the comparing of ideas.

> 'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledg'd lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter. . . . In short, a passion must be accompany'd with some false judgment, in order to its being unreasonable; and even then 'tis not the passion, properly speaking, which is unreasonable, but the judgment.[23]

By the mere comparison of ideas, reason is unable to determine what is a "laudable or blameable" action in the common life. Hume concludes that given the two functions of reason and their limited operations it follows "that reason is perfectly inert, and can never either prevent or produce any action or affection."[24]

A second argument of Hume's is that the operations of reason are limited to judgments of relation. Briefly, Hume enumerates seven philosophical relations: resemblance, degrees of quality, contrariety, quantity or number, identity, space and time, and cause and effect. As a consequence, if moral distinctions are judgments concerning the relations between ideas, then they apply to any and everything, and "moral"

does not indicate a separate class of distinctions. Hume illustrates his argument with the following example:

> To put the affair, therefore, to this trial, let us chuse any inanimate object, such as an oak or elm; and let us suppose, that by the dropping of its seed, it produces a sapling below it, which springing up by degrees, at last overtops and destroys the parent tree: I ask, if in this instance there be wanting any relation, which is discoverable in parricide or ingratitude?[25]

Further, reason seems to be unable to mark a distinction as "moral" by any other relation than the seven enumerated. He says he knows of no other relation than the seven and is willing for anyone who does to name it.

A third argument advanced by Hume is that reason cannot invent ends for human actions. Hume states the matter as follows:

> It appears evident that the ultimate ends of human actions can never, in any case, be accounted for by reason, but recommend themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind. . . .[26]

Hume believes that reason can guide man in the selection or correction of any means employable in achieving a moral end. But reason, of itself, is unable to prescribe an end for which the means is selected. What Hume holds is that the necessity of survival underlies the common life of a society and the purposes for moral action. In the passions nature can and often does overrule reason for the welfare of the species. Reason cannot produce in itself a motive for living or another rationale as a replacement for the ordinary desires or aversions that prompt human conduct.

Hume's recital of reason's limitations in regard to moral judgments leads to serious difficulties for the promulgation of theistic moral systems. For example, rational theologies quite regularly propose different motives, ends, and/or norms for human action than the ones

which arise naturally from the human passions. Such modifications will prove difficult, and perhaps impossible, if "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."[27] Hume's conclusions suggest that religious grounds for moral principles are either unnecessary because they are not distinct from the normal workings of man's moral sense, or impossible because they conflict with the naturally induced operations of the mind. In the latter case reason pretends to another office than that of slave to the passions. Hume gives some examples of the "artificial life" that accompany the effort of reason to escape from the bonds of common life.

An illustration of Hume's understanding of what constitutes an "artificial life" occurs at the close of An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. In "A Dialogue," Hume contrasts common life with "artificial life and manners."[28] He offers two examples of artificial life. In the first case, he selects Diogenes as "the most celebrated model of extravagant philosophy," or Cynicism. Over against Diogenes is placed the fideist Pascal. The withdrawal from the common life as the moral arena is similar in either case. When men depart from "the maxims of common reason," and

> affect these artificial lives, as you call them, no one can answer for what will please or displease them. They are in a different element from the rest of mankind; and the natural principles of their mind play not with the same regularity, as if left to themselves, free from the illusions of religious superstition or philosophical enthusiasm.[29]

But the examples of cynicism and fideism only suggest the extremes and do not exhaust the potential types of artificial life. As we shall see, the moral impasse between what the passions endorse and what

the systems of theism propose in the name of reason provides Hume with his basic argument against all the forms of religion commonly practiced by men. From popular theism to scientific theology, the moral doctrines of religion are dependent upon the mistaken notion that "right reason" can be freed from bondage to the passions. However, as we shall see, Hume holds the contrary belief that morality is enhanced when these insidious reveries of the rational mind are spent and natural necessity draws men back into the conventional bonds of common affairs. For Hume, the danger in religion arises from its capricious interference with the regular demands of life.

In summary, what I have said about Hume's assessment of the office of reason in relation to moral sentiments may be gathered into three conclusions. First, reason can operate effectively only as the slave of the passions. Second, reason has limitations because it is inert, it is an instrument for relating ideas, and it is not the source of intrinsic values or ends. Third, whenever reason steps out of its servitude to the passions, it merely pretends an "artificial life."

Objectivism

I am now at a place in the development of Hume's account of moral judgment where it is essential to flesh out the correlation between morals and the common affairs of men. Up to this point I have done two things. First, I have shown how Hume has modified the traditional meanings of "natural" to include the requisite conditions for human survival which Hume speaks of as the common life. Second, I have reviewed Hume's arguments supporting the conclusion that reason is inert and therefore unable to construct a plausible, practical alternative to man's common life. It

remains to be seen whether a satisfactory account of moral judgments can be made within the context of common affairs. The question now to be answered is this: Does Hume think that an objective moral judgment can arise out of the subjective conditions of human experience? In order to answer the question, I intend to do two things. First, I will set forth Hume's account of the idiosyncratic nature of moral distinctions--idiosyncratic because of their origin in the individual. Second, I will describe two different strategies Hume offers as to how human society develops a means of offsetting the idiosyncratic origin or moral judgment. The completion of these two steps should provide an explication of how moral objectivity can be obtained within man's common life.

The task Hume takes on requires that he establish a correlation between the private feeling of morality and the public approval accorded certain actions. His theory of motive is the mediating instrument. As Hume puts it, "It appears, therefore, that all virtuous actions derive their merit only from virtuous motives, and are consider'd merely as signs of those motives."[30] This proposition, Hume declares, is not "merely a metaphysical subtility; but enters into all our reasonings in common life."[31] In other words, we have "an undoubted maxim, that no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality."[32] This "undoubted maxim" indicates the theoretical model of motivation at work in Hume's account of morals. The inner springs of human nature move the individual to act. In order to satisfy the instinctive drives of the individual, social conventions encourage individuals with sanctions reinforcing each "contrivance which arises from the circumstances and necessity of mankind."[33] Moreover, the task of reason is to serve the passions

which provide the inner motivating forces of human action that inert reason cannot provide. Hume's positive ethics is his development of an account of how the idiosyncratic nature of the "primary impulses" of human nature can be refined into the social achievement of objectivity in moral judgments. My task is to relate the story of Hume's success.

For Hume, the story begins with the force in human sentiments which emerges from the sensations of pain or pleasure. The impressions "operate upon us" so that a reflexive sentiment becomes the established propensity or habit of association that characterizes an individual and induces feelings of approval or disapproval as the case requires for human survival. These acquired propensities constitute an individual's character. The social utility of the dominant traits of character in an individual prompts the sympathetic approval of the social group or the pride of self-esteem in the individual himself. In other words, Hume defines virtue as "nothing but to <u>feel</u> a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character."[34]

The moral judgment originates in the passions. The lineage begins with an impression of pleasure or pain which gives birth in turn to joy or sorrow. When these latter passions become fixed, they prompt desire or aversion. Once solid sentiments are formed, they constitute an individual's character and function as the wellsprings of motivation. At this stage the moral judgment expresses the firm feelings of approval or disapproval that manifest the speaker's stable character as either virtuous or vicious. Hume's account of moral judgment would leave moral beliefs hopelessly subjective and merely the report of a personal state of mind were it not for three objectifying factors. First, the human constitution is universally similar and constant.

> The philosopher, if he be consistent, must apply the same reasoning to the actions and volitions of intelligent agents. The most irregular and unexpected resolutions of men may frequently be accounted for by those who know every particular circumstance of their character and situation. A person of an obliging disposition gives a peevish answer: But he has the toothache, or has not dined. A stupid fellow discovers an uncommon alacrity in his carriage: But he has met with a sudden piece of good fortune. Or even when an action, as sometimes happens, cannot be particularly accounted for, either by the person himself or by others; we know, in general, that the characters of men are, to a certain degree, inconstant and irregular. This is, in a manner, the constant character of human nature; though it be applicable, in a more particular manner, to some persons who have no fixed rule for their conduct, but proceed in a continued course of caprice and inconstancy. The internal principles and motives may operate in a uniform manner, notwithstanding these seeming irregularities; in the same manner as the winds, rain, clouds, and other variations of the weather are supposed to be governed by steady principles; though not easily discoverable by human sagacity and enquiry.[35]

The idiosyncratic character of the "primary impulses" that "operate upon us" and the practical necessity of "disinterested" employment of moral judgments in common life constitute a special problem requiring Hume's attention. Hume admits that it is absurd to require that every moral judgment should be traced so as to show "in every particular instance, these sentiments are produc'd by an <u>original</u> quality and <u>primary</u> constitution."[36] The infinite number of our duties in relation to the small number of human passions or sentiments makes such a reduction impractical. What Hume observes is that people ordinarily use some general principles to bridge the gap between the duties of the social world and the primary impulses of human nature. In other words, Hume believes that the subjective character of sentiment is overcome by a common humanity. Since the sentiments are common to human nature, it is necessary to establish only those principles of morals that prove meritorious to common life. The principles that Hume has in mind are pleasure and utility. But whatever the merits of these principles may be, the prior concern

must be to demonstrate that they do indeed bridge the gap between inner sentiment and social well-being.

Consequently, Hume's second objectifying factor is a mechanism of sympathy. Hume believes that a mechanism of sympathy accounts for the transfer of feeling between individuals. The transfer takes place in stages. First, the observer has an impression of a bodily movement or gesture. Next, the observer associates with this impression the idea that is customarily attached to it. Third, the idea is converted in the observer's reflexions into his own impression or passion, which matches the passion that motivated the original gesture in the other person. Each works on the principle of association. Hume thinks that the sameness of human nature restricts the degree of variance between minds and that the mechanism of sympathy overcomes the idiosyncratic origin of moral judgment.

In addition, Hume indicates a third objectifying factor in that "general rules" supplement the role of sympathy in moral judgments. General rules are needed as a safeguard against the bias and other limitations of fellow feeling that can occur in spite of a common human nature and the mechanism of sympathy. For example, feelings for near friends, fellow countrymen, and next of kin come more readily to the passions than the proper regard for the welfare of some distant acquaintance, a foreigner, or some transient. Immediate desires and local issues engage the passions more easily than long-range goals and distant troubles. To effect a balance of attention and a moderation of the immediate orientation of the passions, general rules are instituted by social convention as the correctives of limited perspective and the guidelines for consistent conduct.

In summary, Hume achieves an objectivity for his attitudinal ethics without appeals beyond human nature and man's necessary involvement in common life. For Hume, the objectivity of morals is grounded upon a common human nature, a mechanism of sympathy, and general rules expressing social conventions. In Hume's view, it is at least superfluous to make an appeal to Divine authority for the justification of moral-social principles.

Conclusion

Hume has shown that neither nature nor reason can contribute a clear alternative to the morals that evolve from the ordinary customs of human life. In addition, Hume has offered an account of how objectivity in moral judgments can arise from the necessary conditions of man's common life. This is his positive answer to the question, "Is a secular ethic possible?" Hume, however, is not content with a positive answer. He will continually show why religion can neither provide for objectivity in moral judgments, nor offer a substitute manner of life by means of the "religious hypothesis." In the next three chapters, I will look at Hume's negative response to the question "Is religion the only source of a warrant for moral judgments?"

ENDNOTES

[1]T, p. 413.

[2]T, pp. 473-475.

[3]E, pp. 307-308.

[4]T, p. 474.

[5]T, pp. 473-475.

[6]T, p. 475.

[7]T, p. 475.

[8]E, pp. 307-308.

[9]E, p. 307.

[10]E, p. 307.

[11]E, pp. 306-307.

[12]E, p. 162.

[13]T, p. 459.

[14]T, p. 456.

[15]T, p. 456.

[16]T, p. 456.

[17]T, p. 457.

[18]T, p. 458.

[19]T, p. 458.

[20]T, p. 459.

[21]T, p. 456.

[22]T, p. 457.

[23]T, p. 416.

[24]T, p. 458.

[25]T, p. 467.

[26]E, p. 293.

[27]T, p. 415.

[28]E, p. 341.

[29]E, p. 343.

[30]T, p. 478.

[31]T, p. 478.

[32]T, p. 479.

[33]T, p. 477.

[34]T, p. 471.

[35]E, p. 88.

[36]T, p. 473.

CHAPTER II

HUME'S STUDY OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION

In the preceding chapter I pointed out two things concerning the ethics of Hume that are of immediate significance for the problem to be explored in this chapter. First, I called attention to the fact that Hume's account of the justification of ordinary moral beliefs makes no appeal to the doctrines or beliefs of religion. Second, and of even more consequence, I noted that Hume's description of moral belief employs a procedure that is in marked contrast with the method used by natural theology. I showed that not only is Hume's procedure free from the need to appeal to religion; it proves to be totally incompatible with any appeal to religion. Further, I indicated that it is Hume's intention to establish just such a conclusion.

In this chapter I intend to explore Hume's understanding of the relation between religion and morals in light of the following question:

> Is it the case that the beliefs of popular religion not only fail to serve as a warrant for moral beliefs but are also incompatible with the natural expressions of morality within man's social life?

I shall concentrate on the relation between religious beliefs and human sentiments and leave the problems of a natural theology to the next chapter.

To answer the question I have proposed within the frame of Hume's own thought, I will need to explore the nature of religious sentiments independently of the "religious hypothesis" of scientific theology. For Hume, it is necessary to explore the origins of man's religious beliefs in order to be clear about their role and function in human experience. Hume treats the problem of origins explicitly in The Natural History of Religion. In addition to this special exposition, Hume refers to the matter in his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion as well as in An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding. However, in laying out Hume's position in these matters, I will depend primarily upon the first of these writings.

I intend to examine Hume's history of the relation between the beliefs of religion and the human sentiments along five lines in order to clarity Hume's account of the distinction between religious beliefs and moral attitudes. First, I will clarify the question Hume is answering in his natural history of religion. Second, I will assess Hume's arguments concerning the historical priority of certain notions about the plurality of gods. Third, I will recount Hume's story of the motive or cause for men's entertaining religious beliefs. Fourth, I will explore Hume's conclusions concerning the moral attitudes that result from the doctrines of the historical religions. Finally, I will describe the moral impasse Hume discovers between the religious sentiments and the explanations of scientific theology. These tasks, when completed, will satisfy the need for a survey of Hume's explanation of why man holds religious beliefs.

The Question of Origins

In examining the text of The Natural History of Religion, I will be interested in how Hume answers a question of the following type: What are the perceptual origins of the beliefs of popular religion? A second question will follow upon the first: What are the consequences of Hume's account of the origin of religious beliefs for their use as warrants for moral judgments? I believe these two questions will explicate Hume's major concerns and go a long way toward establishing the relationship between religion and morals in his philosophy as a whole.

Hume's own division of the task into two distinct operations is as follows:

> As every enquiry, which regards religion, is of the utmost importance, there are two questions in particular, which challenge our attention, to wit, that concerning its foundation in reason, and that concerning its origin in human nature.[1]

Hume gives the first question a positive and brief response at this time and then dismisses it from further consideration in The Natural History of Religion. Hume's brief dismissal is as follows:

> Happily, the first question, which is the most important, admits of the most obvious, at least, the clearest, solution. The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.[2]

What is to be made of Hume's treatment of "the most important question" will be reserved until the next chapter. However, as for the second question, I believe it is sufficiently important in its own right to require the special consideration which it will be given in this chapter. Furthermore, as my subsequent analysis will make evident, I believe the second question is important to Hume's overall case for the independence of morals from religion.

To begin with Hume's own assessment of the second question, it may be noted that he calls attention to two preliminary considerations. First, Hume believes that, unlike the first question, which allows for an "obvious" and clear solution, the second question leads to some peculiar difficulties. A difficulty, on the one hand, arises from the evidence gathered from travelers and historians that some nations have "no sentiments of religion." On the other hand, a difficulty emerges because there is no precise agreement concerning the "sentiments of religion" among the great variety of religions that are available for observation. Hume concludes on the grounds of those two difficulties that "the first principles of religion" are secondary to the primary sentiments of man. In addition, Hume concludes that his investigation will need to relate "the first principles of religion" to the primary sentiments from which they arise. Hume puts it thus:

> What those principles are, which give rise to the original belief, and what those accidents and causes are, which direct its operation, is the subject of our present inquiry.[3]

Hume thinks the task may be broken down into three steps. First, one should trace the natural sentiments of religion to the original passion from which they evolve. Second, one should assess the significance of the original passion for the processes of its refinement into the sentiments by which popular religion flourishes. Third, one should evaluate the consequences of these sentiments for "the primary principles of religion."

Although Hume construes the problem as being concerned with the relation between "the first principles of religion" and the primary sentiments, the direction he takes in his inquiry is narrowed by a specific

limitation he places on the relevance of religion to morals. Hume takes it for granted that the intelligibility and relevance of religion hinges upon the nature of God. He either overlooks or considers it of little interest that there might be a religion of some sort emerging from the primary sentiments of man and engendering no notion of God. Similarly he believes that the doctrines and rites of a particular religion are in some sense to be explained by a prior understanding of the nature of God. In other words, from Hume's perspective, everything about a religion turns on the formulation of a concept of God and on any valid assertions that might emerge from the correct and justified use of that concept.

If Hume intends to give a comprehensive account of all the possible expressions of religious sentiments, then he unduly restricts his inquiry to the examination of the causes of theistic belief. However, if Hume's major concern is the careful examination of the merits of an appeal to God as a warrant for moral beliefs, then his analysis is obliquely on target and has a much greater chance of success. It is a common practice for those who assent to Western theism to justify claims of moral obligation by appeal to the nature and authority of God. I believe my analysis will show that it is this Western concern with the nature of God and the consequences of belief in His moral goodness that occupies Hume's attention. Further, my analysis should make it clear that Hume's primary concern is with the relation of religion and morals and that his prior concern with morality leaves him ambivalent about the possibility of atheism. Certainly, if Hume felt he could establish atheism, then any discussion concerning the relation of morals and religion would be a futile and empty exercise. Especially is this the case when Hume's

assumption about the priority of theism and the nature of God is kept in mind.

The Question Concerning Historical Priority

Hume believes that a moral relationship between God and man requires some attributes in common between them. Therefore, Hume argues that the relation between human sentiment and God is contingent upon the solution of the problems dealing with the nature of God. Further, a definite understanding of divine nature is contingent upon the examination of the historical origins of religion for some hint whether it is more natural to believe that there is only one God instead of many. For these reasons, Hume considers it crucial to his whole enterprise to determine whether polytheism or monotheism is the earlier notion of God. And, in determining which is the earlier notion of divinity, Hume is interested in much more than which is first historically. He wants to determine which is the original idea surfacing from the instinctive operations of the mind. There are two historical reasons for Hume's concern with this particular aspect of the problem. First, there were arguments floating about that the idea of God advanced by scientific theology was innate to the operations of the mind.[4] Second, there were the claims of the Deists that the scientific concept of God was the natural belief of man and as old as creation.[5] In addition, there is a significant reason arising from his own philosophy of belief for Hume's conception of the problem. Since Hume held that legitimate beliefs are caused by either an impression of sense or a reflexion of the mind, Hume needed to connect the historically primitive idea of God with how that idea has its natural origin in the operations of the mind. Hume's position in this matter is as follows:

> . . . if we consider the improvement of human society, from rude beginnings to a state of greater perfection, polytheism or idolatry was, and necessarily must have been, the first and most ancient religion of mankind.[6]

This formulation by Hume suggests that the problem is to be confirmed at two levels. It is established historically as "was" and causally as "necessarily must have been." Both of these levels of confirmation require further clarification, and I will begin with the first.

Hume provides two general pieces of evidence to confirm the contingent or historical proposition. First, without any known exceptions, a survey of less developed peoples reveals that they hold a form of polytheism. Second, without any clear exceptions, the historical records provide ample evidence that man's earliest forms of religion are polytheistic. Of course, it could be that both of the statements have exceptions. However, Hume believes the weight of the evidence supports the general historical priority of polytheism.

Hume is aware of the weakness of the historical evidence as well as of the vulnerability of an argument from the evidence of history. Therefore, he tries to bolster an inconclusive case with tighter arguments. First, Hume argues that polytheism is psychogenetically prior to monotheism because of the natural progress of thought. Hume says:

> It seems certain, that, according to the natural progress of human thought, the ignorant multitude must first entertain some groveling and familiar notion of superior powers, before they stretch their conception to that perfect Being, who bestowed order on the whole frame of nature.[7]

This manner of weighing the historical evidence is further explained:

> The mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior: By abstracting from what is imperfect, it forms an idea of perfection: And slowly distinguishing the nobler parts of its own frame from the grosser, it learns to transfer only the former, much elevated and refined, to its divinity. Nothing could disturb this natural progress of thought, but some obvious and invincible argument, which might immediately lead

> the mind into the pure principles of theism, and make it overleap, at one bound, the vast interval which is interposed between the human and the divine nature.[8]

Hume believes there is a correlation between the manner in which the mind operates, which is the source of necessity in his account of causality, and a historical progression from an earlier polytheism to a later monotheism. Basic to Hume's effort is his uncritical acceptance of a doctrine that the "original" ideas are always simple and are subsequently conjoined into complex ones. Hume seems to argue that since it is a necessity of the mind that its manner of operation be from the simple to the complex, then monotheism must be a later form of theism than polytheism.

An argument of this sort is far from satisfactory. The "necessity" that Hume establishes is wholly dependent upon his sensationist account of perception and a highly suspect notion that "simple" primarily refers to an atomistic datum of perception. Since this "way of ideas" has ceased to have the status of a final account of perception, Hume's argument has fallen upon evil days. However, there is something for the expositor of Hume to learn from the argument regardless of its weakness.

For example, there is a confusion in Hume's terms in addition to the questionable correlation. The movement from simple to complex (or, as Hume says, from inferior to superior) can mark two distinct sorts of appraisals. On the one hand, it suggests a move from the easy to the difficult. On the other hand, it suggests a move from the inadequate to the adequate. For example, someone might say: "Now that you have done the simple ones (i.e., the easy ones) you are ready to take up more complex problems (i.e., the difficult ones)." On the other hand, someone might say: "You have given me a simple (i.e., inadequate) answer while the problem requires a more complex (i.e., adequate) one. In addition

to these two uses, Hume uses "simple" and "complex" in a technical or philosophical sense. For example, something is a simple entity because it cannot be reduced into component parts in the manner one is able to divide a complex entity. Hume seems to need all three senses for his argument, but I am not so sure he has earned the right to use any of them.

Hume's second argument may be called the regularity case. It is made up of two component arguments. Hume points out that cases of early theism are built upon the rare and exceptional events in life and not upon a general hypothesis about the cause of design in the universe. As Hume says, "There is a great difference between historical facts and speculative opinions."[9] The "necessitous animal" will be forced to deal with issues "pressed by numerous wants and passions" and leave the grand inquiry for societies with leisure. In other words, the operations of the mind originate in the necessity of survival and must be tested by their utility to the common life. It is the regularity of practical necessity that governs the habit and customs of the mind. Hume believes that polytheism is psychogenetically prior to monotheism because it reflects the simply everyday needs of survival. Polytheism reflects a response to the pressing demands of life while monotheism is the by-product of leisure. In addition, Hume says that there is an economy in an explanation that shows how monotheism can replace polytheism that is not available in the reverse order since the regular operations of the mind cannot account for the move from monotheism to polytheism.

> But further, if men were at first led into the belief of one supreme Being, by reasoning from the frame of nature, they could never possibly leave that belief, in order to embrace polytheism; but the same principles of reason, which at first produced and

> diffused over mankind, so magnificent an opinion, must be able, with greater facility, to preserve it. The first invention and proof of any doctrine is made more difficult than the supporting and retaining of it.[10]

Thus, Hume is able to make a better case against the priority of monotheism than he is able to make for the necessity of the priority of polytheism.

Again Hume's argument is dependent upon his account of the operations of the mind. The regular order of experience evolves into habit and custom. This manner of the operation of the mind gives the "necessity" to cause and effect arguments. Hume believes that the polytheistic accounts record the operations of practical necessity while the monotheistic accounts draw a speculative analogy on the grounds of the operation. Hume seems to argue that, if the necessity in cause and effect arises from habits in the operations of the mind, then the ideas closer to that necessity occur first to the mind.

To summarize, David Hume makes three efforts to establish the priority of polytheism. First, the weight of the evidence supports its antiquity and the probability that polytheism is prior to monotheism. Second, if monotheism is the more adequate principle of religion, then it is most likely that the natural progression of the mind was from polytheism to monotheism. Third, the difficulty of explaining the movement from monotheism to polytheism is far greater than that of the reverse order of development. Although these three arguments are dependent upon Hume's theory of the mind and make up something less than an airtight case, the conclusion seems to survive because of the difficulty of making a counterclaim rather than because of the inherent merit of the supporting arguments.

Before leaving this topic, I should make a further clarification. Hume wishes to classify theisms as inferior and superior on the basis of their primitive origins in human feeling and their logical adequacy as the foundation for human science and morals. The result is four types of theism. First, there is a pagan theism that is both pluralistic and incohesive. It is the original and popular type of theism. It may be spoken of as polytheism. Second, there is a refined type of popular theism. It is the outgrowth of the human needs in civil society for a consistent and cohesive supreme Being as a principle of unity, order, and power. It is popular in the sense that it emerges out of the motives in the human passions and is only accidentally in agreement with a scientific theism. Third, there is a natural theism in which the nature of God is arrived at by rational proof. This scientific theism is limited to what can be established by reason. Fourth, there is fideistic theism, which is founded upon special Divine revelation and exceeds what man can know or appropriate for his common life.

Hume's purpose in The Natural History of Religion is to explain how various types of theism arise from human instincts. He concludes that polytheism is the most primitive type and that the other types are merely refinements. Renovated theisms flourish in a society as a result of careful indoctrination. A secondary type of theism never overcomes its earlier origin. This is not to overlook the fact that polytheism is not an automatic response to the passions, but is itself a learned social custom.

When Hume's arguments for the priority of polytheism are considered in relation to the four types of theism which are found in his

treatment of religion, his case for the primal origin of polytheism is more plausible. For example, neither scientific theism nor revealed theism is fitly judged to be original in Hume's sense of the term. This judgment is based on the fact that neither can arise out of the human sentiments and passions. It will be remembered that scientific theism is based on reason and fideistic theism on faith. There remain only two types of vulgar or popular theism, and Hume has for all practical purposes shown polytheism to be the more primitive of these two. With this in mind, I will turn next to examine the account Hume gives of the relation between both forms of popular theism and the sentiments that motivate or cause religious belief.

The Motives Behind Popular Theism

Hume contends that popular theism is secondary in its origin in that it arises in the human understanding from the human sentiments. Further, he holds that the more original and primitive expression of religious sentiment is polytheistic, in contrast with the scientific theism of his own day. To further this account of theism, Hume seeks to clarify two things. First, he describes how polytheism emerges from human feeling and designates the distinct passions that give it birth. Second, he shows how monotheism emerges as a corrective of the human sentiments latent in polytheism. I will now proceed to develop each of these positions.

Hume begins with an inquiry into "the primitive religion of uninstructed mankind." He is sure that its origin does not lie in the contemplation of the design in nature but in a natural concern of man with the unwonted events of life. The "invisible powers" behind "the

contrary events of life" are the arena in which popular religious beliefs originate. Hume states the situation as follows:

> Storms and tempests ruin what is nourished by the sun. The sun destroys what is fostered by the moisture of dews and rains. War may be favourable to a nation, whom the inclemency of the seasons afflicts with famine, Sickness and pestilence may depopulate a kingdom, amidst the most profuse plenty. The same nation is not, at the same time, equally successful by sea and by land. And a nation, which now triumphs over its enemies, may anon submit to their more prosperous arms. In short, the conduct of events, or what we call the plan of a particular providence, is so full of variety and uncertainty, that, if we suppose it immediately ordered by any intelligent beings, we must acknowledge a contrariety in their designs and intentions, a constant combat of opposite powers, and a repentance or change of intention in the same power, from impotence or levity.[11]

For Hume, primitive religion is a response to life's vicissitudes. The individual projects his feelings of fear or hope into an imaginary story that tells how the gods create a particular threat or how the gods will deliver him from apparent disaster.

> There is an universal tendency among mankind to conceive all being like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice or good-will to every thing, that hurts or pleases us.[12]

When the events of the day are seen as "a constant combat of opposite powers," the religious man without the instruction of science will account for these events with polytheistic myths. The very motives which cause the bizarre tales will alternate between fear and hope as the conditions require.

> It must necessarily, indeed, be allowed, that, in order to carry men's intention beyond the present course of things, or lead them into any inference concerning invisible intelligent power, they must be actuated by some passion, which prompts their thought and reflection; some motive, which urges their first enquiry. But what passion shall we here have recourse to, for explaining an effect of such mighty consequences? Not speculative curiosity, surely, or the

> pure love of truth. That motive is too refined for such gross apprehensions; and would lead men into enquiries concerning the frame of nature, a subject too large and comprehensive for their narrow capacities. No passions, therefore, can be supposed to work upon such barbarians, but the ordinary affections of human life; the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries. Agitated by hopes and fears of this nature, especially the latter, men scrutinize, with a trembling curiosity, the course of future causes, and examine the various and contrary events of human life. And in this disordered scene, with eyes still more disordered and astonished, they see the first obscure traces of divinity.[13]

The merit of polytheistic cultic practice is that it has a vital function within the ordinary realm of human conduct. At this level, religion participates in the common life. But unlike the moral sense, it is expressive of the sentiments of fear and hope and reflects an attitude toward the prospects of life. Moral sentiments reflect an attitude of approval or disapproval toward things, oneself, or others. Thus, although the two types of sentiment function within the same realm of common life, they are not the same attitudes, and need not coalesce. However, the possible harmony of the two will be greatest in the early stages of primitive religion because polytheism is least removed from the regular needs of human society. Once the refinement process begins, the ratiocination about religious concepts tends to remove them from their social roots. The systematic improvement of the teaching of religions places a wedge between the human sentiments that give rise to religion and the moral sentiments natural to man.

At its primal source in the passions, religion is an effort on man's part to appease the secret powers of the universe that lie outside his understanding or control. Without fully understanding the situations in which his passions are excited, man engages in cultic acts to pacify his anxieties. His feelings of expiation moderate his attitudes between

fear and hope. The cultic rites of popular religions are the endorsed social responses toward the vicissitudes of life. The local gods are the masks for the "secret powers" at work in the strange happenings of nature. In this manner polytheism emerges out of man's fear that the forces of life are not beneficent. Primitive religion is a collective effort to regulate and tutor human fears and to offset every evil threat to society possible. It has the merit of providing some stability to a primitive society bound by ignorance.

In like manner, Hume argues, the doctrine of one supreme deity arises from the human sentiments and is itself not the result of rational argument or scientific observation. Rather, it comes upon the vulgar, Hume says, "by a certain train of thinking, more suitable to their genius and capacity."[14] However, popular monotheism is the result of the social process in which a particular god is elevated to a supreme status. Thus, monotheism is the by-product of social custom and human habit. It is the outgrowth of the accidental success of a cult whose triumph means the exaltation of its deity to a supreme position of authority and adoration. The process involves the reformulation of a concept by worshipers who enlarge a notion to infinity through "pompous epithets of praise." The change is due solely to an excess of zeal growing either from fear or hope and is in no sense a resolution of rational insight. There is a distinct difference in origins between popular theism and scientific theism. Hume makes this clear in the following passage:

> While they confine themselves to the notion of a perfect being, the creator of the world, they coincide, by chance, with the principles of reason and true philosophy; though they are guided to that notion, not by reason, of which they are in a great measure incapable, but by the adulation and fears of the most vulgar superstition.[15]

To summarize, Hume's position is that polytheism and monotheism emerge from the fear of the vulgar and reflect man's struggle to cope emotionally with the flux of fortune in the events of daily life. Therefore, the original human sentiment underlying religion and theism is fear. Such a passion as fear can hardly serve as an adequate motive of action in moral conduct. Moral conduct, according to Hume, is action motivated by the character of an individual. The character is constituted by the individual's propensity to respond favorably in cases of pleasure and unfavorably in cases of pain. The passions of fear and pleasure are distinct in kind because, while those of a moral type are sure and fixed by general rules and customs, those of a religious kind are uncertain and not subject to general rules or stable customs. I will have occasion to say more about this later. Suffice it for now to note that Hume holds that the moral sentiments are distinct in kind from the religious sentiments. Therefore, if religion retains its original association with fear or hope, it can hardly provide a warrant for moral judgment. In truth, it will most likely be an obstacle.

The Moral Ambiguity in Popular Theism

Since Hume argues that both types of popular theism rest upon the same passions, he sees the natural history of religion as "the flux and reflux" of polytheism and monotheism. "The vulgar, that is, indeed all mankind, a few excepted," do not discover a supreme mind in nature. "They consider these admirable works in a more confined and selfish view."[16] As a result, the common masses are subject to changes of mood and degree of confidence in the unknown causes they adulate in their notion of God. Men fluctuate between the particular and local power in

polytheistic religions and the absolute and universal force in monotheistic religions. As a result of the alternation, the devotee is caught in a dilemma. His fear can be relieved by an emotionally available and local deity, or it can be allayed by an exaulted absolute power which is greatly removed in passion from man. If the Deity gains availability, He is subject to the loss of power; and if He gains infinite power, He is subject to the loss of immediacy. The religious feelings are never at peace in this flux and reflux of human sentiment. Furthermore, the very nature of the mood in which a selection is made has an adverse effect upon moral conduct. The satisfaction of the religious sentiments disrupts the moral conditions they inspire.

First, there is the resulting flux between persecution and toleration. In the practice of polytheism there is a normal state of tolerance of other cults and notions of the gods so that there is a common respect for the space and time allotted by society to the different devotees. Quite a contrary practice emerges from the elevation of one God above all others. The gain in emotional security is purchased at the dangerous price of an intolerance of any detraction (real or imagined) from the exalted God's honor. The sad result for morals is in the fanatic acts such a religion is prone to engender.

A second result of the flux between notions of God is seen in the alternation between courage and abasement. With the elevation of the Deity to infinity, everything else is brought into mortification and submission. The natural sentiments of pride and courage are downgraded. Monkish values of penance and humility replace the necessary qualities that enrich a society.

A third result is the exaltation of absurdity over reasonableness. Since the elevation of the Deity is achieved by the extension of attributes to the extreme, the devotee develops an appetite for absurdity and contradiction as a means of exalting the Deity above the familiar. Mystery, amazement, and obscurity become the tools of the devout votaries. The outcome is that the usual merit of reasonableness within the common life is subverted.

Finally, Hume lists a fourth result of the flux. There is a new significance in doubt and conviction. What begins with the story and tradition and an evolving mythology is transformed into unquestioned authority to drive away any semblance of doubt. The desired result in the notion of God is gained through an excess of dogmatism and positive bigotry.

The Impasse between Popular Religion and Morals

Of course Hume has not established a logically necessary relation between the improvement in the notion of God and a decline in the moral effectiveness of theism. All he can do is point to an all-too-common pathology that accompanies popular religion's struggle with the vicissitudes of life. The very vulnerability of popular theism is enough to raise reasonable doubts about the reliability of religion as either a source or warrant for moral conduct. The degree of flux in the flux in the religious response is governed by unknown and secret causes. Hume uses the simile of a theater to describe the helpless ignorance of man:

> We are placed in this world, as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event are entirely concealed from us; nor have we either sufficient wisdom to foresee, or power to

> prevent those ills, with which we are continually threatened. We hang in perpetual suspence between life and death, health and sickness, plenty and want; which are distributed amongst the human species by secret and unknown causes, whose operation is oft unexpected, and always unaccountable. These unknown causes, then, become the constant object of our hope and fear; and while the passions are kept in perpetual alarm by an anxious expectation of the events, the imagination is equally employed in forming ideas of those powers, on which we have so entire a dependence.[17]

Given the uncertain nature of the passions inherent in the sentiments of religion, Hume believes that man is caught on the horns of a dilemma.

The dilemma is a sort of moral impasse. Fear cannot be a moral motive although Hume believes it is the primal motive of popular religion. Polytheism is the primitive form in which the imagination personifies the fears of man in regard to life's uncertainties. Monotheism is hardly better. Although monotheistic doctrines coincide with scientific or rational theology, the motive for belief remains the same as that in polytheism. The outcome is a moral impasse because the motive for believing in popular theism discredits that belief as a motive for moral beliefs. Morals require a different passion, are motivated by a different attitude, and neither the requisite passion nor the requisite attitude is found in a religion of ignorant fear or unreasonable hope. The impasse is not the logical incoherence among belief assertions; it is the irresolvable conflict of the motives that give rise to those several beliefs. The cause of religious assent excludes it from morality.

To escape the horns of this dilemma, one of two things might be shown to undermine Hume's case. First, one might show that religion does not commonly arise from fear. Second, one might show that elevating the notion of God transforms the sentiments so as to provide new springs of action for moral conduct. The first of these alternatives is found

in scientific theism, the motive for which is taken to be reason rather than fear. I will explore Hume's examination of this option in the next chapter. The second alternative is developed by fideistic theism. It holds that the purification of the notion of God cleanses the soul of man as well, through the operation of faith. I will follow Hume's treatment of this position in Chapter IV.

Conclusion

I will conclude this chapter with a brief summary of Hume's account of the pathology of the religious sentiments. First, the origin of religions lies in the passions of fear or hope. Second, the most primitive notion of God is polytheistic. Third, the elevation of polytheism to monotheism is the by-product of the need of the passion of either fear or hope and is not the reasoned reform conceived by scientific theism. Therefore, the practical consequence is a dilemma that results from the motives that prompt belief in God. The motive for belief in God is in open conflict with the motive that causes approval of good. The conflicting motives not only have nothing in common, but they also cancel each other out. The conclusion is that Hume has effectively utilized his pathology of man's religious beliefs to establish the notion that popular religion and morals are incompatible.

ENDNOTES

[1]NHR, p. 21.

[2]NHR, p. 21.

[3]NHR, p. 21.

[4]Richard I. Aaron, John Locke, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 83-98.

[5]Robert H. Hurlbutt III, Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 65-78.

[6]NHR, p. 23.

[7]NHR, p. 24.

[8]NHR, p. 24.

[9]NHR, p. 25.

[10]NHR, p. 25.

[11]NHR, p. 27.

[12]NHR, p. 29.

[13]NHR, p. 28.

[14]NHR, p. 42.

[15]NHR, p. 43.

[16]NHR, p. 47.

[17]NHR, p. 28.

CHAPTER III

HUME'S CRITICISM OF SCIENTIFIC THEISM

In Chapter II, I looked at Hume's assessment of popular theism and the dilemma it creates for anyone who tries to appeal to the practice of religion in the justification of morals. In this chapter I intend to examine an alternative account of theism that might be able to avoid the dilemma and provide a theistic warrant for moral beliefs. I refer to that type of theism that seeks to establish the whole of the "religious hypothesis" upon human reason. It is spoken of as "natural theology" or "scientific theism."

My interest in the problems of scientific theism is not solely with the mere existence of God. Although the question of the existence of God is crucial, even its positive resolution may not be sufficient to settle the question of the relation of theism and moral judgment. The mere existence of God leaves unclear the question of the relation of God to morals. I want to ask the additional question, should human reason establish a proof of the existence of God or even the overwhelming probability of the existence of God, on what grounds consistent with that process of reasoning could an appeal to God be a warrant for moral judgments? If the strategy used to prove the existence of God can

establish nothing more than the moral neutrality of the Deity, then God is but one of those facts about the cosmos that may be a matter of moral indifference to man and his conduct within the bounds of the common life.

In this chapter I will pursue the question of moral relevance as a clue to the exposition of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. I will do four things. First, I will assess the significance a test of moral fruitfulness has in the interpretation of both the dramatic unity and the specific arguments of the Dialogues. Second, I will explore the importance of moral relevance to the empirical theism of Cleanthes. Third, I will do the same for Demea's rational theism. Finally, I will assess the importance of Philo's argument from evil in showing the centrality of the moral-relevance question to the exposition of the Dialogues. The results of these four tasks should be the resolution of the issues concerning the significance of moral relevance in Hume's Dialogues.

The Test of Moral Fruitfulness

I believe that a careful reading of the Dialogues will show that Hume considers the question of the moral relevance of scientific theism to be of primary significance. Indeed, his principal concern with the nature of God throughout the Dialogues is an important clue in this matter. Further, Hume's dramatic formulation of the Dialogues is also supportive of this interpretation in two ways. First, the dramatic scene with which the conversation begins is set in the context of three older men evaluating the effects of instruction in natural theology on the piety of Cleanthes' ward, Pamphilius. Second, the way in which the questions are formulated and evaluated shows that it is the relevance of

theism to man's social life that preoccupies the discussants. Because I take these literary characteristics to be of more significance than mere stage props for the packaging of a set of loosely related logical puzzles, I will look briefly at each.

As to the dramatic context at the beginning of the Dialogues, Hume sets the scene in a library where a friendly discussion over the consequences of certain pedagogic strategies for piety introduces a whole series of counter-arguments to skepticism. To start with, Cleanthes suggests that skepticism should be divided into two types. The first is a skepticism regarding knowledge that proves quite ineffectual against religion. In fact, he says, this rather "brutish and ignorant scepticism" becomes the companion very often of "a traditional superstition." On the other hand, "the refined and philosophical sceptic" requires only that beliefs be "proportioned to the evidence with which they meet." This second species of skepticism is governed both by the necessity of logical relations and by the necessity of acting in common society. For example, "so long as we confine our speculations to trade, or morals, or politics or criticism" it is within the test range of our common habits.[1] However, it is a specific characteristic of theological thinking that it does not have an immediate link with the tried habits that make up the customs of common life.

> We are like foreigners in a strange country to whom everything must seem suspicious, and who are in danger every moment of transgressing against the laws and customs of the people with whom they live and converse. We know not how far we ought to trust our vulgar methods of reasoning in such a subject, since even in common life and in that province which is peculiarly appropriated to them, we cannot account for them and are entirely guided by a kind of instinct or necessity in employing them.[2]

In short, Philo adopts a position of suspended belief, from which he can

examine the "religious hypothesis" in order to test what warrant, if any, there is for theistic appeals concerning moral conduct in the common life. The issues at stake are not merely theoretical or solely dependent upon rational proofs of God's existence. In addition to these, the justification of theistic belief must include its moral fruitfulness for social life. The test of Cleanthes' success in pedagogy lies with his success in the moral education of Pamphilius.

A test of the moral sort regarding theological inquiry leads naturally to a concern with how the question of the relevance of appeals to God might be formulated. The problem is addressed by all three speakers in the Dialogues. It is Demea who first sets out the specific subject under question, and his formulation is neither rejected, challenged, nor radically reformulated by either Cleanthes or Philo. Demea assesses the merits of Cleanthes' and Philo's exchange over skepticism and brings the major issue of the Dialogues into focus.

> By the whole tenor of your discourse, one would imagine that you were maintaining the Being of a God against the cavils of atheists and infidels, and were necessitated to become a champion for that fundamental principle of all religion. But this, I hope, is not by any means a question among us. No man; no man, at least, of common sense, I am persuaded, ever entertained a serious doubt with regard to a truth so certain and self-evident. The question is not concerning the being but the nature of God.[3]

Of course the smug overstatement one comes to expect of Demea will never go unnoticed. Both his claims of "self-evidence" and "certainty" are disputed. However, no challenge will ever arise over his assertion that it is the nature and not the being of a deity that is the principal matter for concern. In fact, Philo's reply restates Demea's formulation.

> But surely, where reasonable men treat these subjects, the question can never be concerning the being but only the nature of the Deity.[4]

And, to protect himself from the excesses of Demea while at the same time agreeing to the formulation of the problem, Philo continues:

> Nothing exists without a cause; and the original cause of this universe (whatever it be) we call God, and piously ascribe to him every species of perfection.[5]

It should be noted that the "self-evident" and "certain" of Demea are replaced by a definition. Philo designates the inferred object of reference for the term "God" as "the original cause of this universe (whatever it be)." Furthermore, Philo, while accepting the common-sense notion of an original cause of the universe, leaves open the basic issue with the parenthetical "whatever it be." Later in this chapter I shall return to this move of Philo's with a further examination of his definition. Suffice it, at this point, to draw the conclusion that what concerns the parties in the Dialogue is exactly that which concerns anyone who would determine the precise relation of theism and morality: "What is the nature of the deity to whom you appeal?"

The importance of the nature of the Deity for clear and explicit use of the "religious hypothesis" is made plain by Philo. According to Philo, the problem regarding the nature of the Deity is one of determining exactly what the divine attributes might be. "We piously ascribe to him every perfection"; but as Philo further states,

> . . . all perfection is entirely relative, we ought never to imagine that we comprehend the attributes of this divine Being, or to suppose that his perfections have any analogy or likeness to the perfections of a human creature.[6]

The claim that perfections are relative is for Philo based upon the usual context in which the normal practice of ascribing attributes arises. If the speaker ascribes attributes to ordinary and mundane objects, that is one matter; but if, out of adoration, he ascribes the same attributes to

an infinite being, that is an altogether different case. The "object of worship in the temple" cannot be held to correspond to any of the common objects spoken of in the streets. Thus Philo warns,

> But let us beware lest we think that our ideas anywise correspond to his perfections, or that his attributes have any resemblance to these qualities among men.[7]

Philo puts his warning into a syllogism by merely stating the two premises:

(1) "Our ideas reach no farther than our experience."
(2) "We have no experience of divine attributes and operations."
(3) Therefore, the unstated conclusion is: Our ideas do not reach as far as the divine attributes and operations.

In fact, Philo actually says, "I need not conclude my syllogism: You can draw the inference yourself."[8]

But the spur that goads the champion of theism is Philo's claim that both "sound reason" and "piety" lead to the common ground of "the adorably mysterious and incomprehensible nature of the Supreme Being." A common ground of this sort would allow scientific theism to fall prey to difficulties of moral irrelevance similar to those that Hume found to be the ordinary consequences of popular theism. What ensues in the Dialogues is the effort of both Cleanthes and Demea to overcome the moral impasse that such a conclusion places in the way of any appeal to the deity as

> . . . 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?[9]

Cleanthes attempts to bridge the gap by arguing from the analogy of experience; I will call his position "empirical theism." On the other hand, Demea makes a case for theism that bites the bullet of "difference," but which, nevertheless, seeks to demonstrate an effective relevance. I

will speak of his alternative as "rational theism." I will explore each in turn to determine what success either might have in establishing the nature of a deity who might serve as the ground for moral belief.

Cleanthes' Case for Empirical Theism

The case for empirical theism is introduced by Cleanthes with the following argument:

> Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy which ravishes into admiration all men who have contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance--of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble, and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man, though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By this argument a posteriori, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.[10]

Cleanthes, as is readily apparent in the last sentence, is willing to rest his case on "this argument alone" and makes no claim for it apart from its a posteriori nature. It would be expected, then, that any criticism internal to such an argument would arise from the skill with which he adheres to "all the rules of analogy." And it is here, indeed, that Philo offers three criticisms.

The first of Philo's criticisms of the use of analogy in Cleanthes' argument concerns the degree of certainty allowed by the proportion of likeness between the many cases of human contrivance and the single case of divine creation. In calling attention to the weakness of the analogy, Philo points out two types of strength or weakness

that may occur in any argument by analogy. The first of these types of weakness rests on the degree of likeness in the case under consideration. For example, Philo says:

> After having experienced the circulation of the blood in human creatures, we make no doubt that it takes place in Titius and Maevius; but from its circulation in frogs and fishes it is only a presumption, though a strong one, from analogy that it takes place in men and other animals. The analogical reasoning is much weaker when we infer the circulation of the sap in vegetables from our experience that the blood circulates in animals; and those who hastily followed that imperfect analogy are found, by more accurate experiments, to have been mistaken.[11]

The second type of weakness deals with the number of cases of the particular relation of cause and effect that can be observed as repeated occurrences of the analogy in question. Of this type Philo says:

> That a stone will fall, that fire will burn, that the earth has solidity, we have observed a thousand and a thousand times; and when any new instance of this nature is presented, we draw without hesitation the accustomed inference.[12]

In other words, an analogy is only as strong as the similarity between the related items and the number of repeated observations of the relation.

In his criticism of Cleanthes' argument Philo claims that the relation is merely contingent at best, but in the case of empirical theism, the use of analogy is "not to be even the most certain and irrefragable of that inferior kind." The design argument, at least as the means of establishing the "religious hypothesis," is weak in both senses. As for the first kind of weakness, either the difference between the human contriver and the divine designer is too great for the analogy to get a foothold, or God is so similar to man as to make the argument not only implausible but practically useless. As for the second kind of weakness, the singularity of the universe leaves no cases for comparison or conditions of repeatability.

The second major criticism of the dependence of the "religious hypothesis" upon an empirical theism grounded solely in an argument via analogy is an extension of the first. As can be seen in the assessment of the two kinds of weakness, analogy is stronger when it is based upon relations within a species related to a second species instead of mere singular cases. The analogy used in the design argument rests upon supposed similarities between human contrivances (houses, ships, furniture and machines) and the natural universe. If the universe is the whole, how is it to be compared to the human contrivances that make up but a part? Philo wants to know the answer to his question about this use of analogy: "Can a conclusion, with any propriety, be transferred from parts to the whole?"[13] Just how can a characteristic of a species as a part, the use of human intelligence in human contrivances, be analogous to a characteristic of the whole, the use of divine intelligence in creation? Despite the difference in magnitude and type, are these acts of a designer indeed in some sense members of a common species of intelligence? Philo thinks that the answers furnished by the theists go beyond the reliability of an argument from analogy.

> So far from admitting, continued Philo, that the operations of a part can afford us any just conclusion concerning the origin of the whole, I will not allow any one part to form a rule for another part if the latter be very remote from the former.[14]

In other words, the remoteness of such a similarity so greatly weakens the force of the analogy as to make the argument of little use. Whatever remote analogy may hold between human intelligence and the divine is so weak as to offer no support to the "religious hypothesis" in any of its ordinary forms. In making this point Philo concludes:

> When two species of objects have always been observed to be conjoined together, I can infer, by custom, the existence of one whenever I see the existence of the other; and this I call an argument from experience. But how this argument can have place where the objects, as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel or specific resemblance, may be difficult to explain.[15]

There remains the third of Philo's objections to Cleanthes' use of analogy. The argument via analogy seeks to explain a first-level order by reference to a second-level order (i.e., an order in nature by an order above nature). Philo asks why stop here (i.e., with a second-level order)? If the natural sequences in the species of houses, machines, and the like are utilized to offer an explanation of the universe as the creation of divine intelligence, why stop here? How are we to explain the cause of divine intelligence? Cleanthes replies that argument must stop somewhere, and the most reasonable stopping place is God. But indeed, considering the remoteness of the analogy, is it enough to pronounce the argument sufficient? Certainly, it will not sustain in and of itself the "religious hypothesis" as commonly interpreted. If we stop here, the additional hypothesis needed cannot be forthcoming. But if we try to go on, we are again without a principle that can generate a fruitful hypothesis. Cleanthes acknowledges the point:

> To establish one hypothesis upon another is building entirely in the air; and the utmost we ever attain by these conjectures and fictions is to ascertain the bare possibility of our opinion, but never can we, upon such terms, establish its reality.[16]

To say the least, the knowledge of the Deity that can be gained by the a posteriori argument via analogy is not nearly enough to ground the "religious hypothesis" and the consequent claims it makes concerning human morals.

Furthermore, Philo raises questions about the dependence of the argument upon the concept of mind as well as on the rules of analogy.

The argument of Cleanthes assumes a relation between the design of man and human thought, wisdom, and intelligence. In addition, he must show what the resemblance is between human design and the intelligence of the Author of Nature.

In his book Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument[17] Robert H. Hurlbutt suggests a distinction that is of great help in clarifying this issue. He distinguishes two formulations of the design argument: an argument from design and an argument to design. The argument from design begins with the presence of an order observed in nature. In this sense, intelligence is a condition of design. The order is a recognized aesthetic structure in the manner of perception rather than a teleological goal toward which things naturally move. In the latter formulation, the argument to design, the sense of order is that of a means-end linkage. In other words, design is intentional and realized through the fulfillment of purposes. If Cleanthes' argument is from design, there is no way he can conclude that there is an independent Divine purpose which serves as the warrant for moral responsibility. On the other hand, if Cleanthes' argument is to design, there is not enough evidence available to support the analogy and justify the conclusion that there is moral purpose in nature. In either case, the analogy in the design argument is not strong enough to sustain the alleged practical and moral consequences that are said to follow from theism.

The pertinence of this distinction between two types of design argument is apparent in the Dialogues when Cleanthes responds to Philo's criticisms by suggesting an irregular argument from design. Cleanthes describes three instances in which an irregular sort of argument is effective. In the first instance, Cleanthes narrates a freakish incident

in which an articulate voice speaks to everyone from out of the clouds so that each auditor hears and understands in his own language. Certainly, Cleanthes argues, there would be no difficulty in the immediate recognition of an intelligent cause. Likewise, in the second instance, Cleanthes tells of a fanciful situation in which a library of books like the Iliad or the Aeneid are propagated after the manner of plants and animals. Yet, Cleanthes concludes, in this case also there would be no doubt that it had an intelligent cause. Then, as a third instance, Cleanthes adds to his extraordinary tales the commonplace observance of the anatomy of an eye:

> Consider, anatomize the eye; survey its structure and contrivance, and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation. The most obvious conclusion, surely, is in favor of design; and it requires time, reflection, and study, to summon up those frivolous though abstruse objections which can support infidelity.[18]

If we consider this irregular argument from design separately, we find that Cleanthes gains only an aesthetic theism that cannot sustain the additional claims of the "religious hypothesis" concerning moral consequences. The argument establishes an instructive association between nature's order and God's existence. However, it cannot establish a divine purpose over and above the order observable in nature. The nature of God as knowable is limited to the intelligent structure or order observed in the universe.

At this point it will prove helpful to return to the regular design argument and formalize it. Fortunately, Leon Pearl has done this work for us as follows:

> (1) All objects possessing order in which the origin of order is known are human productions.

(2) The order in human products originates from intelligent design.
(3) The universe, its parts and sub parts possess order.
Therefore,
(4) Probably the order in the universe originated from intelligent design.

The reasoning from (4) to the second conclusion is no different from that employed in comparing two human products for the purpose of ascertaining the differences in knowledge and ability of the two men who constructed them. . .

(5) The order in the universe "much exceeds the productions of human contrivance."
Therefore,
(6) Probably the designer of the world "is somewhat similar to the mind of man: though possessed of much larger faculties."[19]

If the use of "intelligence" in (2) and (4) is correlated with "order" and does not imply "intention," then the extension of difference in (4) and (6) is simply a matter of degree and gives us no additional information about the nature of that "intelligence." As a consequence, human intelligence and divine intelligence are one in kind. Philo will use this consequence to draw an uncrossable line between the natural attribute of intelligence and such moral attributes as anyone may wish to infer. In fact, Philo employs the restricted consequences of the argument in three ways. First, Philo questions the consequences of holding a likeness-of-intelligence principle between God and man. Second, Philo explores alternate analogies to intelligence to determine what effect they might have on the strength of the design argument. And finally, Philo evaluates the nature of the superlative in designating the difference between God and man.

Before examining Philo's criticism, I believe it would help to clarify the position of the three disputants in the Dialogues. None of the three claims the position of atheism, although none of the three is ever sure that his opponent's view can be distinguished from atheism. The classifications that emerge in the Dialogues are anthropomorphic or

mystic. The anthropomorphic view, which is espoused by Cleanthes, holds that there are knowable attributes which differ only in degree and are common between God and man. The mystic view, which is held by the other two, is not so straitforward since Hume's use of "mystic" in the Dialogues involves more than the ordinary sense of the term. Hume takes a bit of poetic license with the word in order to enhance the irony and the dramatic effect of his work. The plot of the Dialogues acquires some of its dramatic unity from Demea's mistaken notion that he and Philo are fellow travelers under the rather broad umbrella of "mysticism." The common ground that makes Demea's confusion possible is the opinion shared with Philo that the divine attributes are both distinct in kind from human attributes and incomprehensible. The difference between his and Philo's use of "incomprehensible" becomes clear to Demea only as the plot of the Dialogues unfolds. Demea realizes that Philo has been working from the perspective of agnosticism or suspended belief (an ironic insight that Hume's readers are supposed to have caught from the first). There is a bit of spoof on Philo's part between mysticism and mere mystification. Demea's own position is the usual combination of rationalism and fideism.

Philo's criticisms of Cleanthes' regular design argument is an integral part of the dramatic plot. Philo's estimation of the practical consequences of the design argument is an aspect of his tongue-in-cheek play upon several of the mystifications in theism. First, if one allows a strict likeness or similarity between the "intelligence" of God and man, it would undercut the merits of the proposed appeal to God in justification of moral beliefs. That is, they may be of the same order, unless the attribute of omniscience is allowed some special significance.

Demea tries to support Philo's attack on Cleanthes in the following way:

> In reality, Cleanthes, consider what it is you assert when you represent the Deity as similar to a human mind and understanding. What is the soul of man? A composition of various faculties, passions, sentiments, ideas--united, indeed, into one self or person, but still distinct from each other. When it reasons, the ideas which are the parts of its discourse arrange themselves in a certain form or order which is not preserved entire for a moment, but immediately gives place to another arrangement. New opinions, new passions, new affections, new feelings arise which continually diversify the mental scene and produce in it the greatest variety and most rapid succession imaginable. How is this compatible with that perfect immutability and simplicity which all true theists ascribe to the Deity? By the same act, say they, he sees past, present, and future; his love and hatred, his mercy and justice, are one individual operation; he is entire in every point of space, and complete in every instant of duration. No succession, no change, no acquisition, no diminution. What he is implies not in it any shadow of distinction or diversity. And what he is this moment he ever has been and ever will be, without any new judgment, sentiment, or operation. He stands fixed in one simple, perfect state; nor can you ever say, with any propriety, that this act of his is different from that other, or that this judgment or idea has been lately formed and will give place, by succession, to any different judgment or idea.[20]

This long panegyric of Demea is an excellent example of the bold mystic who, from the highest adoration, but without sufficient empirical evidence, would ascribe an incomprehensible set of attributes to God. It should be evident from this example that theism as commonly expressed cannot be established by the strict analogy between the effect (natural order) and the cause (divine intelligence). On the basis of a strict analogy, Demea's panegyric is mere verbiage. If Cleanthes accepts Philo's criticism, the results sought in the argument <u>from</u> design are not forthcoming. That is to say, if "intelligence" and "order" are strictly correlated, then the resulting remote relation does allow for the possibility of a deity but grants no insight whatsoever about moral attributes over and above those found in common society.

The second of Philo's criticisms concerning the practical consequences of the design argument has to do with the possibility of using

a different analogy. This tactic of Philo serves three purposes. First, it points out the selectivity involved in the choice of "design," "intelligence," and "contrivance" as the bases for analogy. Second, it suggests the historic fact that alternative "resemblances" have been utilized; consequently, any selection is historically conditioned. Third, it calls attention to the fact that different consequences follow from the particular image on which an analogy is constructed. Further, since the development of the several alternatives need not detain us, it will suffice to note that Philo lists four alternative principles: reason, instinct, generation, and vegetation. Of these four he calls attention to the fact that two were used by ancient theists. The analogy of generation is an organic metaphor used by the Stoics. According to this metaphor the earth is a vital body and reproduces itself. The analogy of vegetation is of Epicurean origin and based on atomism. These two alternative accounts of the cosmos are not as useful to modern science, but they have in times past been used to describe the nature of the order in the universe and have done so without the entailment of the type of "religious hypothesis" advocated by either Cleanthes or Demea. Although these alternatives are not currently satisfactory to natural science, they continue to call attention to the remoteness, the limits, and the contingency with which one employs the analogy of design.

Finally, there is the third tactic of Philo in pointing out that no practical consequences follow from the design argument. Philo constantly advocates a natural economy of belief. The stance adopted by Philo, unlike that of Demea, may be understood as an effort "to erect religious faith on philosophical scepticism."[21] Hence, Philo's skepticism must be understood as different from the total rejection of all

religion. He agrees with Cleanthes that

> To whatever length anyone may push his speculative principles of scepticism, he must act, I own, and live, and converse like other men; and for this conduct he is not obliged to give any other reason than the absolute necessity he lies under of so doing.[22]

In other words, practical necessity forces the skeptic to act within the sphere of common life and in doing so sets limits upon skepticism. Philo clarifies further the nature of his particular type of skepticism as follows:

> So long as we confine our speculations to trade, or morals, or politics, or criticism, we make appeals, every moment, to common sense and experience, which strengthen our philosophical conclusions and remove (at least in part) the suspicion, which we so justly entertain with regard to every reasoning, that is very subtile and refined. But in theological reasonings, we have not this advantage: while at the same time we are employed upon objects which, we must be sensible, are too large for our grasp, and of all others, require most to be familiarized to our apprehension.[23]

The necessity placed upon thinking depends upon the needs of life within a common society. It is the nature of "instinct or necessity" that constrains natural belief.

Within the limits of natural belief Philo is led to make a cautious assent to the argument <u>from</u> design. But even this limited confession is hypothetical and contingent:

> If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined, proposition, <u>That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence</u>--if this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication; if it affords no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance; and if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no further than to human intelligence, and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the other qualities of the mind; 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, and believe that the arguments on which it is established exceed the objections which lie against it?[24]

From Philo's confession it is apparent that there can be very little difference between the skepticism he espouses and the theism that Cleanthes is entitled to advocate. Their difference over the strength of the analogy between divine and human intelligence is indicated in the way Cleanthes speaks of it as "somewhat similar" while Philo merely says that it "probably bears some remote analogy." They do not differ over the existence of God but over what can be affirmed about the nature of God from the analogy. Philo calls attention to this when he says,

> So little, replied Philo, do I esteem this suspense of judgment in the present case to be possible that I am apt to suspect there enters somewhat of a dispute of words into this controversy, more than is usually imagined. . . . Here, then, the existence of a Deity is plainly ascertained by reason; and if we make it a question whether, on account of these analogies, we can properly call him a mind or intelligence, not withstanding the vast difference which may reasonably be supposed between him and human minds; what is this but a mere verbal controversy? No man can deny the analogies between the effects: to restrain ourselves from inquiring concerning the causes is scarcely possible. From this inquiry the legitimate conclusion is that the causes have also an analogy; and if we are not contented with calling the first and supreme cause a God or Deity, but desire to vary the expression, what can we call him but Mind or Thought, to which he is justly supposed to bear a considerable resemblance?[25]

The verbal difficulty, according to Philo, occurs in ordinary conversation where men differ "concerning the degrees of any quality." For example, is Hannibal a merely great or a superlatively great man? Such disputes are difficult to resolve because there are no exact standards for the measurements of degrees of quality. Therefore, where the evidence is the same, the dispute about the modest and the superlative quality is quite likely nothing more than verbal. Concerning such disputes there is seldom either genuine disagreement or resolution.

> Where then, cry I to both these antagonists, is the subject of your dispute? The theist allows that the original intelligence is very different from human reason; the atheist allows that the original

> principle of order bears some remote analogy to it. Will you quarrel, Gentlemen, about the degrees, and enter into a controversy which admits not of any precise meaning, nor consequently of any determination?[26]

Is it a mere matter of temperament that separates Philo and Cleanthes? If the answer is yes, then Cleanthes' position dissolves into Philo's. While Cleanthes has proposed extending the use of "intellect" to show that God is "possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work which he has executed," Philo requests that the extension shall in no wise be allowed to differ in kind from the works of nature nor exceed them in grandeur. For Philo, the strength of the analogy arises in the human mind from instinct more than from intellect. Man is of necessity forced to act on the principle that "like effects prove like causes." Otherwise, man could not act with any degree of skill and confidence. Thus, Philo argues that the conclusion of the analogy reflects man's instinctive necessity to act according to conventions whenever he acts in an intelligent manner. In sum, the difference between Philo and Cleanthes is a matter of taste, and the two differ in the manner of feeling and not of reason.

However, the decisive consequence is that although the difference between Philo and Cleanthes is one of temperament and merely verbal, it still requires a concession on Cleanthes' part. If the attribute of "intelligence" is the sole one that survives scrutiny of the argument and is itself remote and unextendable, then it will follow that "it affords no inference that affects human life." It is Philo's conclusion that

> . . . we have reason to infer that the natural attributes of Deity have a greater resemblance to those of men than his morals have to human virtues. But what is the consequence? Nothing but this, that

> the moral qualities of man are more defective in their kind than his natural abilities. For, as the Supreme Being is allowed to be absolutely and entirely perfect, whatever differs most from him departs the farthest from the supreme standard of rectitude and perfection.[27]

Consequently, the moral attributes of God are not established by the design argument. The analogy with human intelligence cannot even suggest the moral perfection or infinity commonly ascribed to God. These limitations of the design argument constitute a formidable obstacle to those who would employ it as the sole justification of a full-blown theism.

Cleanthes first realizes the extent of this obstacle when he confronts Philo's emphasis upon the misery of man. Philo contends that any exactness of correlation between man's moral sentiments and the divine nature is precluded by their essentially different attitudes toward human suffering. It is at this juncture in the discussion that Cleanthes points out to Demea the direction of Philo's argument.

> 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. And I must confess that you have now fallen upon a subject worthy of your noble spirit of opposition and controversy. If you can make out the present point, and prove mankind to be unhappy or corrupted, there is an end at once of all religion. For to what purpose establish the natural attributes of the Deity, while the moral are still doubtful and uncertain?[28]

The result is that Cleanthes redefines religion so as to keep its moral value within the scope of the analogy used in his argument.

> The proper office of religion is to regulate the hearts of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience; and, as its operation is silent and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked and confounded with these other motives.[29]

From this definition of "true religion" several things are clear about the relationship of morals and religion. First, the role of religion is to be supportive of common morality instead of being the source and

sole foundation of all human morals. Second, the purpose of religion is to "humanize." Third, the area of concern is personal morality and justice. Fourth, religion is "silent" and unobtrusive in social life. Finally, religion is to regulate the human sentiments toward fulfillment in human society.

A summary of the discussion of empirical theism is in order. I believe there is sufficient evidence in the foregoing account of the Dialogues to conclude that Philo and Cleanthes, while differing in sentiment toward the deity, are in agreement concerning five propositions about the design argument. First, the argument is from design. Second, the argument can establish nothing about the nature of God that is not inferrable from the order of nature. Third, to conclude that a deity exists is merely to affirm the remote resemblance between the order in nature and the order in human artifacts. Fourth, it is impossible for the argument to offer grounds for morals other than those to be found in the natural order. Fifth, any disorder in nature that leads to man's unhappy condition will reduce the strength of the analogy.

Further, the significance of the discussion of theism between Cleanthes and Philo and their consequent agreements fits rather consistently with the case I am making about the position of David Hume. It will suffice at this point merely to note that empirical theism has no practical consequences for the moral beliefs of man and that the attitudes toward deity, to the degree that they have any effect at all, are due to the particular sentiment of an individual man and not to reason.

Demea's Case for Rational Theism

To return to the dramatic context of Hume's Dialogues, it is

important to examine Demea's alternative to empirical theism. Demea submits a rational theology that makes its way a priori so that a theism worthy of the "religious hypothesis" might be proven and the true foundation of faith and morals be established. I will now set out Demea's position.

Demea, as his character would lead us to expect, states the rational case in a rather involved and complex form. The whole argument is as follows:

> Whatever exists must have a cause or a reason of its existence, it being absolutely impossible for anything to produce itself or be the cause of its own existence. In mounting up, therefore, from effects to causes, we must either go on in tracing an infinite succession, without any ultimate cause at all, or must at last have recourse to some ultimate cause that is necessarily existent. Now, that the first supposition is absurd may be thus proved. In the infinite chain or succession of causes and effects, each single effect is determined to exist by the power and efficacy of that cause which immediately preceded; but the whole eternal chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by anything; and yet it is evident that it requires a cause or a reason, as much as any particular object which begins to exist in time. The question is still reasonable why this particular succession of causes existed from eternity, and not any other succession or no succession at all. If there be no necessarily existent being, any supposition which can be formed is equally possible; nor is there any more absurdity in nothing's having existed from eternity than there is in that succession of causes which constitute the universe. What was it, then, which determined something to exist rather than nothing, and bestowed being on a particular possibility, exclusive of the rest? External causes, there are supposed to be none. Chance is a word without a meaning. Was it nothing? But that can never produce anything. We must, therefore, have recourse to a necessarily existent Being who carries the reason of his existence in himself; and who cannot be supposed not to exist, without an express contradiction. There is, consequently, such a Being--that is, there is a Deity.[30]

In the context of the Dialogues, the whole of this argument of Demea has two purposes. It seeks to provide an "infallible demonstration" of the existence of a deity and to furnish an insight into "the infinity of the Divine attributes." Just as it was with Cleanthes' argument, the

criticism of the argument is primarily concerned with the nature and not the being of the Deity. Demea was the first in the Dialogue to assert that the crucial issue was the nature of the Deity, and he explicitly offers his a priori argument as a specific way of overcoming any failure of the a posteriori argument to achieve such an end. So, whatever may be the value of the argument in establishing the existence of a deity, the major concern is whether it can do so in such a manner as to give insight into God's nature. However, the criticism of the argument mounted by Cleanthes is directed at the notion of "existence" used in the argument and its fruitlessness as a means for knowing the nature of the deity in question. Cleanthes makes three telling criticisms.

First, Cleanthes questions the certainty of the demonstration. He argues as follows concerning the use of "existence:"

> Nothing is demonstrable unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing that is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we cal also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no being whose existence is demonstrable.[31]

In other words, "existence" is not a matter of logical demonstration because the principle of non-contradiction does not apply. Cleanthes' account goes no further than this.

Second, Cleanthes directs a related part of his criticism at Demea's use of "necessary being." It follows from Cleanthes' account of the use of "existence" that "necessity" in the strong and logical sense cannot be used of "existence." As he says, anything which we speak of as existing we can quite easily think of as not existing. There is nothing in the concept of "existence" that entails necessity.

Cleanthes' third objection also turns upon Demea's use of "necessary being." Cleanthes asks: Why assume that a necessary being is something in addition to the causal sequence itself? Philo supports this objection by calling attention to the role of necessity in mathematics. According to Philo, in mathematics "necessity" arises from the properties that inhere in the number or numbers involved. He then asks: If we know the nature of each of the parts, why should this not provide the full explanation of the order of the whole composed by those parts?

Hume considers these objections sufficient as a response to Demea. What he does is to use Philo to turn the direction of the conversation. Philo argues that even if these objections were met, it would satisfy only the speculative desires of the metaphysician. Such an account, even if true, could not function as a foundation for religious conduct. As I have shown in the first chapter, Hume believes that reason is passive and cannot move one to act. In this discussion, Philo becomes his spokesman and argues that a rational necessity cannot become the motive for conduct except as the slave of some passion. So, again the dialogue reaches an impasse. Should the argument of Demea succeed, a thing that is held impossible in the Dialogues, it would still be necessary to establish the relevance of the "religious hypothesis" to the practical conduct of man.

Furthermore, it is the very "difference" between the Deity and man that Demea wishes to maintain. As Demea conceives it, the very nature of the Deity so far exceeds that of man that there can be no analogy between them. As a result, even if Demea should succeed in establishing the nature of such a deity with full clarity, it is difficult to see how the

divine nature would prove relevant to matters of human society. A deity whose nature has little or no resemblance to man might not need or be inclined to impose moral duties similar to the usual social obligations or supportive of just those very moral beliefs necessitated by the common life. Should these moral duties prove identical, the appeal to God's nature would be unnecessary, and should they prove distinct, the appeal to God's nature would create a conflict between duty and natural inclination. In the latter case, there would be no happy way to resolve the conflict of feelings between loyalty to the (alleged) commands of God and the instinctive desires definitive of the requisite conditions that constitute the common life. As we shall see, Hume perceives a moral impasse of this sort as occurring between the popular notions of God and the theistic accounts of suffering (i.e., theodicies).

To draw these matters concerning both empirical and rational theology to a close, it should be apparent that the appeal to a natural theism fails in each case to provide a sure foundation for the usual moral beliefs of man. Demea holds dogmatically to a mystic certainty that the Deity is of a different nature from man and the world. As a result, he is unable to establish a relation between the Deity and the demands of ordinary moral belief.

Cleanthes' case also has little success. Although his argument is allowed to stand as a probable ground for theism, it is allowed to do so in such a manner as to remove any pretensions of support for anything not otherwise already available to our moral beliefs. As a result, the argument adds nothing to what is already available in man's social life.

As for Philo, he allows for the possibility of a minimal theism. But he will not accept the "religious hypothesis." He holds out as follows:

> 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; for this plain reason, that no absurdity ought ever to be assented to with regard to any subject. A total suspense of judgment is here our only reasonable resource. And if every attack, as is commonly observed, and no defense among theologians is successful, how complete must be his victory who remains always, with all mankind, on the offensive, and has himself no fixed station or abiding city which he is ever, on any occasion, obliged to defend?[32]

In other words, theology fails to establish any system that will not lead to absurdity. No theoretical system or practical application, other than skepticism, follows from the present state of theological discourse. The "religious hypothesis" as an account of the universe or as a guide to human conduct is of so minimal a merit as to provide no insight, internal or external, as a clue to the meaning or conduct of life.

Philo's Case for the Moral Neutrality of God

The conclusion concerning the irrelevance of religion as a justification of moral beliefs is further confirmed by the perplexity that arises for theism in regard to the problem of evil. If the nature of the Deity should be established so as to supply the popular religious desires for both omnipotence and omnibeneficience as a divine support against the vicissitudes of life, then it could not be reconciled with the world as we experience it. The problem of evil traditionally plays a crucial part in evaluating theism and casts a special doubt on the relevance of religion for morals. I will now explore the use Hume makes of it in the Dialogues.

All three participants in the Dialogues agree that the problem that divides them is the nature and not the mere existence of a deity.

Cleanthes and Philo agree that the reason for giving credence to the existence of a deity lies in an argument via analogy from design. They differ on the inference that can be made about the nature of the Deity due to the remote resemblance established by the analogy. Cleanthes argues for a nature like man's, but Philo rejects this anthropomorphism as an unsatisfactory overstatement of the evidence. Philo is thus in agreement with Demea about the assessment of our knowledge concerning the attributes of God, but disassociates himself from the rational method used by Demea to establish a certain proof of the existence and the infinite attributes of the Deity.

At this point in the discussion Philo declares the reason for his disagreement with Cleanthes and agreement with Demea concerning the status of the attributes of the Deity in the human understanding. First, he agrees with Demea that the common approach to religion depends primarily upon the feelings of the human heart. Instead of understanding religion from the design in nature, it would prove more fruitful to move directly from human feeling to the notion of the Deity. For example, Demea begins the discussion of evil with such a redirection of the issue:

> It is my opinion, I own, replied Demea, that each man feels, in a manner, the truth of religion within his own breast; and, from a consciousness of his imbecility and misery rather than from any reasoning, is led to seek protection from that Being on whom he and all nature are dependent. So anxious or so tedious are even the best scenes of life that futurity is still the object of all our hopes and fears. We incessantly look forward and endeavor, by prayers, adoration, and sacrifice, to appease those unknown powers whom we find, by experience so able to afflict and oppress us. Wretched creatures that we are! What resource for us amidst the innumerable ills of life did not religion suggest some methods of atonement, and appease those terrors with which we are incessantly agitated and tormented?[33]

I gather that Demea believes that a solution is available in religion, but whether his notions arise from a rational or fideistic

theology is not fully clear. It is over the point of finding "atonement" in religion that Demea and Philo part company. While Philo agrees with the estimate of religion's dependence upon the feelings, he does not agree that it is an effective instrument of hope. Just as in the notion of the Deity, so also in the matter of hope, Demea sees the answer in something beyond nature:

> This world is but a point in comparison of the universe; this life but a moment in comparison of eternity. The present evil phenomena, therefore, are rectified in other regions, and in some future period of existence.[34]

Thus, Demea combines the feelings of religion found in popular theism and his own rational theism. Philo would agree that these features of human hope are integral to the appeal of the "religious hypothesis." But the question is: Can one gain this combination if he restricts his conclusions to the merits of argument and evidence? It is over the limits of sound argument that Cleanthes challenges Demea:

> No! replied Cleanthes, no! These arbitrary suppositions can never be admitted, contrary to matter of fact, visible and uncontroverted. Whence can any cause be known but from its known effects? Whence can any hypothesis be proved but from the apparent phenomena? To establish one hypothesis upon another is building entirely in the air; and the utmost we ever attain by these conjectures and fictions is to ascertain the bare possibility of our opinion, but never can we, upon such terms, establish its reality.[35]

With this criticism Demea's view is dropped from the Dialogues. However, as I have shown in Chapter II, Hume explored the evidence of natural religion on its own. As for the Dialogues, Cleanthes' interjection returns the discussion to the examination of the problem within the limits of natural theology.

The point of continuity is the agreement between Demea and Philo about human misery. They both hold that suffering is the ordinary lot of man. Demea and Philo are in agreement that it goes against the grain of

any normal understanding of human life to propose any other conception of the human condition. Cleanthes is the exception, holding that man is, in his natural state, a very happy creature. How can Cleanthes hope to justify this view without violating his own strictures against "arbitrary suppositions," or the use of "fictions" that are contrary to fact? This question specifies the context in the Dialogues for the debate concerning the nature of the Deity and the presence of evil in the world.

However, given the very nature of Cleanthes' anthropomorphic view of the divine attributes, and the fact that these attributes are established by the strict analogy between the state of nature and the character of deity, he must make his case over against the ordinary experience of evil in human life. Philo will argue that men "remain in life" not because of their pleasure in it, nor because, as Demea argues, they are bribed by futurity's hope, but out of the sheer terror of death. Cleanthes' case requires that he show such fears to be psychopathic, non-occurrent, or misconceptions. Cleanthes concedes as much to Philo:

> If you can make out the present point, and prove mankind to be unhappy or corrupted, here is an end at once of all religion. For to what purpose establish the natural attributes of the Deity, while the moral are still doubtful and uncertain?[36]

It is to show the impossibility of Cleanthes' task that Philo introduces the old and unanswered questions of Epicurus:

> Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?[37]

As far as Philo is concerned, Cleanthes' theism cannot cross this impasse and establish the moral relevance of the position. Philo announces his triumph:

> Here, Cleanthes, I find myself at ease in my argument. Here I triumph. Formerly, when we argued concerning the natural attributes

> of intelligence and design, I needed all my sceptical and metaphysical subtilty to elude your grasp. In many views of the universe and of its parts, particularly the latter, the beauty and fitness of final causes strike us with such irresistible force that all objections appear (what I believe they really are) mere cavils and sophisms; nor can we then imagine how it was ever possible for us to repose any weight on them. But there is no view of human life or of the condition of mankind from which, without the greatest violence, we can infer the moral attributes or learn that infinite benevolence, conjoined with infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover by the eyes of faith alone.[38]

As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the difference between Cleanthes and Philo is not over the existence of the Deity but over what attributes that Deity might possess. Philo contends that the theodicy advocated in the "religious hypothesis" cannot be a proven extension of the analogical method. The fact of evil serves as a barrier to such reasoning.

Philo's feeling of triumph marks a dramatic change of attitude. The problem of evil involves Philo in the discussion in a new way. Instead of the careless antagonist, he now becomes the concerned investigator working toward an acceptable conclusion of the matter. He willingly joins Cleanthes in laying out the circumstances in the world that must be incorporated into any account of the causes of the universe. The four circumstances agreed upon are: (1) living creatures are motivated by pain or pleasure, (2) the world is administered according to general laws, (3) creatures have limited faculties, and (4) the workmanship in the springs and principles of nature is flawed.

In light of these circumstances Philo offers his own argument from suffering.

> Look round this universe. What an immense profusion of beings, animated and organized, sensible and active! You admire this prodigious variety and fecundity. But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences, the only beings worth regarding. How hostile and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them

> for their own happiness! How contemptible or odious to the spectator! The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children![39]

Philo next declares that there are only four possibilities concerning the moral character of the first causes of the universe:

> There may four hypotheses be framed concerning the first causes of the universe: that they are endowed with perfect goodness, that they have perfect malice; that they are opposite and have both goodness and malice; that they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two former unmixed principles; and the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable.[40]

Philo argues that only one of these meets the requirements of the four circumstances; consequently, the first causes of the universe are morally neutral. Since, as we saw earlier in this chapter, Philo designated the cause of the universe as "God," it follows that any appeal to God as a moral ground is futile and empty.

In the last part of the Dialogues, Philo gives a plain philosophical assent to the being of a God whose nature remains morally neutral. God can be identified with the order aesthetically present in perception, or God can be acknowledged as the intelligence inferred in the design argument. In either case the nature of God is far too ambiguous to be of moral consequence. Philo's conclusion concerning the moral relevance of theism is that a religion founded upon the evidence will be a silent companion of the common life.

Conclusion

At the close of Chapter II, I suggested that it is a common opinion that the moral impasse that arises from the motives of popular religion can be overcome in a scientific theology. The expectation

hinges upon a belief that rational theism can be founded upon evidence and rational arguments so as to be independent of the passions of fear and hope. It is also anticipated that the conclusions of rational theism will not only fulfill the needs that give birth to religion, but do so in a manner commensurate with the highest possible standards of moral intention and achievement. Unfortunately, the conclusion reached in Hume's analysis is that none of these expectations of rational theology can be realized.

In this chapter we have seen why Hume believes that the arguments for the existence of God can confirm precious little about the nature of God. Hume concludes that since the nature of God is left in an ambiguous and uncertain condition, no moral conclusions can be inferred as the direct and sure consequences of theistic belief. But to make matters worse, we have seen that Hume believes that the argument from human suffering leads to a conclusion supported by the general circumstances of the universe: the Deity is morally neutral. Hume concludes that when the nature of God is perceived to be morally neutral, the hope of meeting the needs of the human passions that leads to the popular belief in God are hopelessly unfulfilled.

It is Hume's position that the moral impasse cannot be removed by theism. Hume's position is supplemented by his claim that the vicissitudes of life lead men to religion <u>via</u> the passions of fear or hope. Rational theism can neither provide another motive nor guarantee the favorable resolution of man's fears or hopes. Consequently, Hume concludes that men are usually religious for quite different motives than the mere curiosity that rational theology is able to satisfy.

Further, Hume argues that rational theology is forced to reduce the role of "true religion" to an enthusiasm for the morals already present in the common life. Rational religion by itself cannot provide either the moral standards or the surety for moral beliefs commonly claimed by the pious. Hume has shown that rational religion is something quite distinct from the popularly practiced religions. Further, he has admitted that rational theology is so abstruse that it remains beyond the comprehension of the vulgar.

Hume's conclusions concerning natural theology set out in this chapter leave one further unexplored option which I mentioned at the close of the preceding chapter. Through some special revelation or insight a fideistic theology might be able to elude the horns of the moral dilemma in popular theism. I will explore Hume's appraisal of these claims for faith in the next chapter.

ENDNOTES

[1]D, p. 12.

[2]D, p. 12.

[3]D, p. 19.

[4]D, p. 21.

[5]D, p. 21.

[6]D, p. 21.

[7]D, p. 21.

[8]D, p. 21.

[9]D, p. 5.

[10]D, p. 22.

[11]D, p. 23.

[12]D, p. 23.

[13]D, p. 27.

[14]D, p. 28.

[15]D, p. 30.

[16]D, p. 90.

[17]Hurlbutt, Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument, pp. 8-16.

[18]D, p. 36.

[19]Leon Pearl, "Hume's Criticism of the Argument from Design," Monist, Vol. 54, 1970, pp. 270-284, p. 272.

[20]D, pp. 41-42.

[21]D, p. 9.

[22]D, p. 11.

[23]D, p. 12.

[24]D, pp. 122-123.

[25]D, pp. 110-111.

[26]D, pp. 112-113.

[27]D, p. 113.

[28]D, p. 89.

[29]D, p. 114.

[30]D, pp. 76-79.

[31]D, p. 77.

[32]D, p. 74.

[33]D, p. 81.

[34]D, p. 89.

[35]D, p. 90.

[36]D, p. 89.

[37]D, p. 88.

[38]D, p. 92.

[39]D, p. 103.

[40]D, p. 104.

CHAPTER IV

HUME'S CRITICISM OF FIDEISTIC THEISM

In the last two chapters I have examined first Hume's criticism of popular theism and second his account of scientific theism. A review of the consequences of my exposition may prove helpful before I turn to the specific problem of fideism. As I have shown in Chapter Two, Hume's inquiry into popular theism arrives at the conclusion that the original feelings from which the principles of religion emerge create adverse consequences in popular attitudes toward the deity and consequently cause the devotees of religion to be impaled upon the horns of a moral dilemma: either a superstitious polytheism or a dogmatic monotheism. In either case the dominant attitude that produces a particular popular notion of deity pollutes it to such a degree that popular religion is unable to function either as a wholesome motive or as a clear warrant for moral beliefs.

The moral effects of scientific theism prove equally disappointing. As I have shown in Chapter Three, Hume concludes that scientific reason is unable to determine just what attributes the deity might possess. As a direct consequence of its failure to attain knowledge of

any moral attribute of the Deity, scientific theism is impotent as a reformulation of popular religion. Moreover, if scientific theism should allow the attributes of omnipotence and omniscience found in religious monotheism to be incorporated into its rational theology, the conditions normally expected to result from such attributes conflict with the common experience of evil in this world. So, the result is that Hume again finds theism impaled upon the horns of a dilemma. Either the Deity is able but unwilling, or is willing but unable, to correct the conditions that give rise to the experience of evil in this world.

Thus, the outcome of my exposition of Hume's criticism of the religious hypothesis at this point is that both forms of theism examined so far prove to be unsuited to the establishment of a clear and useful warrant for moral beliefs. In this chapter I will look at the criticism Hume makes of yet one other form of the religious hypothesis, fideistic theism. I chose to refer to this third type as 'fideistic theism' because it is held to occur in human experience as an artifice of divine intervention. Because of its origin, fideism is commonly believed to be distinct from all other types of theism which might emerge from ordinary operations of natural belief. Fideism is a mode of theism that traces all belief to a unique origin in divine revelation. Surely, it is claimed, with such origins fideism should be able to achieve the well-being of man as nothing else can.

In his treatment of fideism, Hume does not reject outright the possibility of a revelation of this sort, but directs his own inquiry into the matter in the form of a particular question. Hume is to be

taken as asking the fideist, "Can the form of life produced as an artifice of divine revelation be other than artificial in the pejorative sense?" The question grows out of the general philosophy of Hume, in which he uses the word "artificial" in two ordinary but different senses. For example, Hume uses "artificial" to modify "virtue" in his theory of morals. Here his purpose is to point out that some virtues are human contrivances and not merely of instinctive origin. But Hume does not intend that the artificial virtues are to be judged as merely arbitrary because they are the result of human contrivances. They are identified as virtues specifically because they are actions requisite to common life. Artificial virtues are to be distinguished from natural virtues by the fact that they are based on customs governed by social conventions or rules.

In contrast with his positive use of "artificial," Hume also uses the term in a pejorative sense. For example, he speaks of an "artificial life." In this context "artificial" refers to a life that is feigned and superficial because it is neither requisite to common life nor governed by general rules.

It is easy to see that this strategy of artificial virtues might be taken as an open door for the claims of the religious hypothesis. One can readily imagine the religionist claiming that divinely sanctioned cultic rites and liturgical rules justify devotion and piety more than the pragmatic social conventions vindicate secular practices. Further, the fideist may confidently announce that the Deity sanctions religious acts not only for the common good of men in this present world, but provides a future state beyond this life which is conditioned on the present

faithful adherence to sacred duties. How is Hume to retain control of his notions of "common life" and "instinctive belief" in contradistinction to the claims of the fideists?

As I construe the questions that Hume directs to the fideists, they are designed to maintain the integrity of his philosophy against abuse. Hume's strategy is to clarify which of the two senses of "artificial" applies to the religious hypothesis submitted by the fideist. I believe that Hume is constrained by the counterclaims between himself and the fideist to clarify and justify his differences with them. First, Hume must show why the artificial virtues are admissible into the scope of the common life while the artificial devotions of piety are not. Second, he must achieve the first aim by showing how the same criteria include the one and exclude the other. Finally, Hume must make his distinction in a manner that is consistent with his policy that the confirmation of these matters arises out of instinctive belief. Once Hume's approach to the problem is seen in this light, the problem central to Hume's inquiry into fideism is recognized as practical rather than metaphysical.

Unfortunately, unlike the previous cases of popular theism and scientific theism, Hume never wrote a single work on fideism. As a result, I will need to collect his arguments from a variety of sources. These will include primarily his treatment of miracles in An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding[1] as well as his account of providence in the same work.[2] Special use will be made of at least three related essays: "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm";[3] "On Suicide";[4] and "On the Immortality of the Soul."[5] Together, these selections provide a rather

full and complete treatment of the issues between Hume and the fideist.

Suffice it as an entry into Hume's criticism of fideism to call attention to the conclusion he draws at the close of the discussion of miracles.

> . . . the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of its veracity: And whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience.[6]

Hume is obviously marking the distinction between one who is moved to action by instinctive belief and one who is both "reasonable" and "moved by Faith." Hume suggests at least three differences between natural belief and faith. First, faith originates from the miracles allegedly performed by the Deity and is perpetuated in the devotee by "a continued miracle in his own person." In a sense, faith is an artifice of the (supposed) divine intervention into the personal life of the believer. Second, faith lies outside the range of reason, custom, and experience and, unlike instinctive belief, is not tied to the requisite conditions of common life. Third, any check upon faith by the reasonable person would lie in such insights as miracles might furnish of a special purpose or future life for the person moved by faith. In other words, fideism would require that Hume replace the common life with the projected life of faith as the sure footing for moral beliefs and practices. In this context, the question directing Hume's inquiry into fideism would be of this sort: Can a religion founded upon such pretensions of personal faith provide the justification for the ordinary moral beliefs of man? This form of the question is consistent with Hume's normal

strategy of looking for an account of ordinary beliefs so as to make clear their relevance and utility. Hume's procedure in this particular inquiry is to weigh the evidence supporting the miracles of faith reported by fideists.

The sheer absurdity of the claims of faith can be overcome only if the occurrence of miracles can be confirmed by public evidence so that this whole approach to religion is shown to be more than self-deception emerging from sick men's dreams. For this reason, Hume's purpose is to determine for the wise man what it is to limit his belief to the evidence. It is allowed that fideism, like natural belief, need not be confined to the limits of theoretical and rational proofs. All that is required of fideism is that the evidence be capable of sustaining the "artificial life" that emerges from it. This is to say that Hume's check upon the credibility of faith is that the miracle of believing should not be greater than the miracle believed. On the basis of this check Hume believes that a careful weighing of the evidence will show "that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion."[7]

In these matters, Hume appears to be quite sensitive to the difficulties of proof or disproof when applied to testimony. Once the strategy required by his test of miracle is clear, I believe, the effectiveness of Hume's principle is devastating. I intend to show that this is the case by developing in this chapter Hume's appraisal of fideistic theism in three steps. First, I will make explicit why faith may be the basis of an artificial life only in the pejorative sense. Second, I will follow Hume's careful rejection of the evidential status of miracles.

Third, I will provide an account of the confusions Hume finds in the notions of providence and immortality. When these three steps have been set forth, it should be apparent why Hume contends that faith is impotent as a guide to life and undesirable as an option to the common life that emerges from man's instinctive beliefs.

The Distinction Between Belief and Faith

The distinction between natural belief and faith lies in the instinctive nature of ordinary belief. It is this aspect of Hume's notion of belief that is crucial in the distinction he continually makes between an authentic stability that emerges in the common life and the extraordinary pretentiousness of any "artificial life." Hume uses instinctive belief to mark off matters of fact from reveries of the imagination. In laying out the topography of belief, Hume takes it that he is answering a question about the fence between fact and fiction. As he puts it: "Wherein, therefore, consists the difference between such a fiction and belief?"[8]

The first step in understanding how belief performs the crucial role Hume demands of it is to realize that he regards belief as felt in perception. In a paragraph common to the Treatise and An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding Hume writes:

> . . . 'tis evident, that belief consists not in the nature and order of our ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind. I confess, that 'tis impossible to explain perfectly this feeling or manner of conception. We may make use of words, that express something near it. But its true and proper name is belief, which is a term that every one sufficiently understands in common life. And in philosophy we can go no further, than assert, that it is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination. It gives them more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind; and renders them the governing principles of all our actions.[9]

At least three things can be concluded from this passage. First, belief occurs in the mind as something felt in the manner of perception. Elsewhere Hume says that because belief is something felt it "depends not upon the will, nor can it be commanded at pleasure."[10] Second, belief is the force or influence of an idea that distinguishes it from a fiction. Third, belief makes certain ideas the motivating factors in our actions. I gather from this that instinctive belief emerges with the testimony of the senses and is the spring of action in the forming of habits and customs. It is the cement that holds the world of common life together.

In contrast with these characteristics of instinctive belief, the "mere reveries of the imagination" lack some or all of these or possess them in diminished degree. For example, a fiction is not felt with the same vivacity as belief. Rather a fiction is contrived, and the force or vivacity of feeling concomitant with it is contributed by an associated passion. To this extent a fiction does not retain an influence beyond the command of the will. Finally, a fiction becomes a spring of action only through the instrumentality of an attached passion and cannot indefinitely sustain itself in practical conflict with the more mundane requisite conditions of common life. But these differences are far more easily stated than applied.

When one considers with Hume that the distinguishing characteristic of belief is that it is felt in the manner of perception, the difficulty of application is obvious. How can Hume show any opinion to be mere fiction with such private criteria? I gather that Hume would conceive the strategy of correcting a false belief to be that of extensive exposure to the counter force of evidence contrary to the received false

opinion. A reasonable person, the only one Hume considers likely to change his mind for reasons of evidence, would be dissuaded by the force of the conflicting evidence. This is because the force of the evidence brings into play the very vivacity of instinctive belief. For this reason, repeated evidence to the contrary should undercut any inclination of habit or custom and allow the contrived force of the fiction to dissipate. However, the feigned force of a fiction can prove so disabling that only emotional distance and redirection of the attention of the mind will be effective in gaining release for the obsessed individual.

Some reveries of the mind are harmless, and it may be generally assumed that the impact of a fiction will be diffused by time and experience. However, it is possible for a fanciful notion to retain its influence, especially in cases where it is aided by the interests of popular opinions and social institutions. In these cases where a fiction persists in spite of the contrary evidence, the mind is judged to be under the influence of superstition. Where the fiction is fostered by vested interests in excess of the evidence, the result is enthusiasm or fanaticism. The social fabric is continually vulnerable to such pathological inventions of the imagination. Many social ills are merely the effects upon the common utility of allowing a destructive imagination to thwart the flow of natural belief. In these cases an artificial life may be said to prevail with devastating effects.

Hume believes that a major purpose of philosophy is to purge the common life of as much debilitating fancy as critical inquiry can accomplish. To do this, contrary evidence must be employed to expose a fiction as the trick of a runaway imagination, to break its acquired

force, and to allow the passions to return to more ordinary channels of expression. Hume cites two attitudes as the leading suspects to be dealt with. One is skepticism and the speculative impasse into which it leads. The other is the religious hypothesis and the flux between superstition and enthusiasm that religious systems perpetuate. Hume would disarm both by an appeal to the practical requisites of common life. Further, he would encourage such critical assessments of the evidence as are available so as to separate the artificial impact of faith from the natural vivacity of belief. The outcome of these operations of philosophy is to mark off three forms of life. There is the wise man, who refines his beliefs by the natural and pragmatic requirements of common life. In contrast, there is the skeptic, who is stymied by speculation to the extent that in his philosophizing he fails to be a man; that is to say, his doubts thwart his participation in the spirit of the common life. Finally, there is the enthusiast, who fails to restrain the excesses of the imagination to the extent that his life becomes but the living out of a fiction.

Hume sets out the contrasting forms of life in "A Dialogue," which is a "Supplement" to his An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.[11] In this piece of writing Hume gives rein to a kind of ironic playfulness in sketching the alternative extremes of life he has in mind. The contrast he draws is between "artificial lives and manners" and the naturalness of the common life.

> What do you understand by artificial lives and manners? said I. I explain myself, replied he. You know, that religion had, in ancient times, very little influence on common life, and that, after men had performed their duty in sacrifices and prayers at the temple, they thought, that the gods left the rest of their conduct to themselves, and were little pleased or offended with those virtues or

> vices, which only affected the peace and happiness of human society. In those ages, it was the business of philosophy alone to regulate men's ordinary behaviour and deportment; and accordingly, we may observe, that this being the sole principle, by which a man could elevate himself above his fellows, it acquired a mighty ascendant over many, and produced great singularities of maxims and of conduct. At present, when philosophy has lost the allurement of novelty, it has no such extensive influence; but seems to confine itself mostly to speculations in the closet; in the same manner, as the ancient religion was limited to sacrifices in the temple. Its place is now supplied by the modern religion, which inspects our whole conduct, and prescribes an universal rule to our actions, to our words, to our very thoughts and inclinations; a rule so much the more austere, as it is guarded by infinite, though distant, rewards and punishments; and no infraction of it can ever be concealed or disguised.[12]

The suggestions of Hume's that interest me in this passage deal with the exchange of functions of religion and philosophy between the ancient and modern societies. Originally philosophy began as a guide to the common life and was both practical and natural. It was the means by which a man might elevate himself in society. But unfortunately a change of roles has taken place between philosophy and religion. Philosophy has become a matter of speculation within the closet while religion has become the inspector of man's whole conduct. Hume wishes to restore religion to the temple and bring philosophy back into the common life. To do this he brings all the evidence to bear upon the artificiality of religious life.

To illustrate the artificial character of religious life, Hume draws a parallel in "A Dialogue" between the ancient cynic's claim that philosophy cannot guide life to a natural end within society and the similar claim of the religious enthusiast. To dramatize the parallel Hume focuses his comparison upon the personalities of the cynic Diogenes and the fideist Pascal.

> The foundation of Diogenes's conduct was an endeavour to render himself an independent being as much as possible, and to confine all his wants and desires and pleasures within himself and his own mind: The aim of Pascal was to keep a perpetual sense of his dependence before his eyes, and never to forget his numberless wants and infirmities. The ancient supported himself by magnanimity, ostentation, pride, and the idea of his own superiority above his fellow-creatures. The modern made constant profession of humility and abasement, of the contempt and hatred of himself; and endeavoured to attain these supposed virtues, as far as they are attainable. The austerities of the Greek were in order to inure himself to hardships, and prevent his ever suffering: Those of the Frenchman were embraced merely for their own sake, and in order to suffer as much as possible. The philosopher indulged himself in the most beastly pleasures, even in public: The saint refused himself the most innocent, even in private. The former thought it his duty to love his friends, and to rail at them, and reprove them, and scold them: The latter endeavoured to be absolutely indifferent towards his nearest relations, and to love and speak well of his enemies. The great object of Diogenes's wit was every kind of superstition, that is every kind of religion known in his time. The mortality of the soul was his standard principle; and even his sentiments of a divine providence seem to have been licentious. The most ridiculous superstitions directed Pascal's faith and practice; and an extreme contempt of this life, in comparison of the future, was the chief foundation of his conduct.[13]

Although he does not regard either as exemplary Hume's contrast between the cynic and the saint reflects considerably more sympathy for the ancient than the modern. The withdrawal by Diogenes is not the radical rejection of natural belief made by Pascal. Diogenes merely rejects the social distortions of natural belief while Pascal attempts to construct an alternate life based upon his extreme contempt for the natural feelings of the present life. The irony of the contrast is revealed in the fact that the saint outdoes the cynic in his skepticism. The ancient is skeptical about the human understanding and practice of social life while the modern is skeptical about the practice of life itself. If there is something in common between the skepticisms, it is that both withdraw from the requisite operations of the common life. It is this

common ego-centric aspect of the two that Hume brings into focus with his expression "artificial life."

It is Hume's judgment that the move from the common life of men to the ego-centric area of the artificial life sacrifices all the good to be found in the collective refinements of the common pleasures. In a sense it is to replace the vivacity of ordinary beliefs with a vacuum. Perhaps Hume is playing with the fact that Pascal refuted the ancient principle that nature abhors a vacuum. But Pascal goes too far when he would have us renounce the ordinary pleasures of social life for the mere vacuum of the future life of religion. As Hume puts it:

> An experiment, said I, which succeeds in the air, will not always succeed in a vacuum. When men depart from the maxims of common reason, and affect these artificial lives, as you call them, no one can answer for what will please or displease them. They are in a different element from the rest of mankind; and the natural principles of their mind play not with the same regularity, as if left to themselves, free from the illusions of religious superstition or philosophical enthusiasm.[14]

Hume's position may be summarized in a few assertions. First, the contrast between belief and faith is that the first is instinctive and constitutive of man's social life while the latter is an artifice of either superstition or divine intervention. Second, the only instrument for resolving the puzzle about the origin of faith is to weigh the evidence as to whether such a miracle of faith is possible. Third, it is important that the wise man inquire into these matters because the effects of faith upon the practice of life must be assessed as to whether they genuinely be the artifices of divine providence or the illusions of sick men's dreams.

In a sense, if Hume is to take Pascal's wager seriously, he cannot take at face value the projected benefits of faith. They are

neither common nor ordinary. They go against the ordinary influence of instinctive belief. They are and can only be the artifices of miracle. On this point he and Pascal are in agreement. If the wager is to be taken by the wise man, he must have some evidence for the reliability of the miracles of faith. I will turn then to examine Hume's account of miracles.

The Credibility of Miracles as Evidence for Fideistic Theism

Hume's view of the negative influence of the religious hypothesis arises from his judgment that the religious life is artificial in the pejorative sense. As he understands it, religion is perpetuated by debilitating fancies called miracles which entice the passions through superstition and enthusiasm to step outside the channels of natural belief to the devastating disruption of the usual requisites of common life. Thus, Hume's inquiry into the credibility of miracles is restricted by the nature of his questions about them. The aim of his treatment of miracles is to

> . . . establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.[15]

Further, he is interested in miracles in only one sense of the term. The evidential use of miracles as employed by the fideist requires that they be construed as contrived by some agent or power above and beyond the ordinary processes upon which natural beliefs are dependent. That this sense of "miracle" is the preferred one for Hume has been noted in his clarification of the term "natural."[16] In the Treatise Hume distinguishes between "natural" and "artificial" in three senses. The natural is opposed to the miraculous, the unusual, and the artificial. With

reference to miracles the passage reads:

> If nature be oppos'd to miracles, not only the distinction betwixt vice and virtue is natural, but also every event, which has ever happen'd in the world, excepting those miracles, on which our religion is founded. In saying, then, that the sentiments of vice and virtue are natural in this sense, we make no very extraordinary discovery.[17]

As can be seen in this passage, Hume allows that our religion is founded upon miracle, but he also distinguishes miracle from the mainstream of the natural, where the sentiments of vice and virtue arise. Thus, from the very start, Hume distinguishes not only between the miraculous and the natural but also between the system of religion and our natural sentiments of vice and virtue. From the very first, Hume is not so concerned to offer a knockdown argument against miracles as he is to provide an "everlasting check" against the possible abuse of the common life.

> I flatter myself, that I have discovered an argument of a like nature, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures.[18]

Hume's purpose is clear. First, his arguments are a check against the influence of the idea of the miraculous upon the human fancy. Second, the arguments are therapeutic in relation to the superstitious delusions. Third, the arguments are for the wise. In other words, Hume wants to make explicit his belief that miracles cannot provide sufficient evidence to establish any system of religion or furnish us with a warrant for the artificial life of faith.

The purpose of Hume's argument determines the manner of definition essential to the appeal to miracles. Some definitions neither depart from the order of common life nor furnish the evidence essential for the replacement of the instinctive beliefs with the artifice of

faith. For example, if the miraculous be identified with the marvelous, then a miracle is not necessarily an artifice created apart from and in addition to the ordinary customs of life. Instead, a miracle may be interpreted as a marvelous coincidence which provides no testimony for the supernatural power required as a foundation for fideism.

The only definition of "miracle" that proves of interest to Hume's inquiry is the one he gives: "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature."[19] If a miracle is not an intervention of a deity into the customary channels of natural process, it is not of sufficient merit to carry the weight of evidence which it must if it is to be the foundation of a religion of the fideistic sort. The characteristics of the definition emerge from the requirements of fideism and not from Hume's opinions concerning cause and effect or the natural order. It is not a definition required by Hume's account but the only one adequate to the fideist's cause.

There are at least two reasons why the definition given by Hume is the only one of interest to the fideist. First, if the fideist is going to argue for the supernatural, he must have some way of limiting the natural. Therefore the concept of "the laws of nature" is essential. The fideist must not only recognize that certain things follow the laws of nature, but that this particular event is a miracle because it does not come under the explanatory scope of any of those laws. Second, the fideist needs the otherwise emotive term "violation." The consequences he draws from the evidence of miracles is that a purposeful intervention of a spiritual being confirms the teachings of religion. A miracle must give evidence of personal involvement of the Deity in the affairs of men,

if the fideist is to gain the experiential evidence that his system of religion requires as its foundation. The definition of "miracle" offered by Hume reflects his sensitivity to the fideist's position and not the polemic overstatement of what his own philosophic position will allow.

Hume approaches the problem concerning the evidence for miracles from two directions. First, he lays out the critical procedures common to the judicious weighing of testimony. Second, he assesses the historical and empirical evidence available concerning miracles. Each of these merits careful exposition.

In laying out the critical procedures, Hume states that the evidence may be uniform and in full agreement that something is always the case. In such instances the evidence is taken to be a proof. This is not to say that the conclusion is infallible. It merely concedes that there is nothing to sustain a contrary opinion. Sometimes--as in the example of the Indian Prince who, never having experienced frost, declared water never freezes--the conclusion is drawn from too limited an exposure and must be revised in light of extended experience. However, we can and do accept the consistent testimony of the senses as providing sureties beyond practical doubt. Yet, on the other hand, there are numerous occasions where there is conflicting testimony. In such cases it is necessary to weigh the supporting evidence against the opposing evidence and draw the verdict on the grounds of the stronger of the two. The problem of miracles falls into this latter sort of procedure. Thus, the wise and prudent man must weigh the various merits of the evidence and be governed accordingly.

Hume believes that a wise and judicious examination of the evidence will be opposed to the testimony of miracles for two reasons. A miracle occurs to the senses. By definition a miracle is a rare occurrence. As a result, the standing it can have in perception would be weak, unclear, and insecure. The evidence for a miracle will naturally lack secure footing. Second, the testimony concerning any ordinary event is equally dependent upon the senses. But unlike miracles, ordinary experiences are repeated occurrences of like events and are made firm by habit and custom. The miracle must violate the common processes by which evidence accrues and yet count its testimony as validated by the same judicious process of reviewing and weighing the information in its behalf. The deviation of miracles occurs in two respects. The original experience of a miracle must depend upon the senses operating in a particular case contrary to their normal operations. Second, the testimony of one who reports a miracle must be evaluated in the light of the evidences of the senses of the one who received the testimony. Hume is puzzled as to how this might be possible.

> Our evidence, then, for the truth of the Christian religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses; because, even in the first authors of our religion, it was no greater; and it is evident it must diminish in passing from them to their disciples; nor can any one rest such confidence in their testimony, as in the immediate object of their senses.[20]

The point of this particular difficulty with miracles lies in the judicial norm that "a weaker evidence can never destroy a stronger." But our religion is founded upon the contradictory claim that a miracle is a fideistic notion in origin and at the same time a stronger evidence than ordinary experience. It claims that a miracle both overthrows our normal evidence and is self-confirming.

> It contradicts sense, though both the scripture and tradition, on which it is supposed to be built, carry not such evidence with them as sense; when they are considered merely as external evidences, and are not brought home to every one's breast, by the immediate operation of the Holy Spirit.[21]

The word miracle cannot be allowed to conceal the distinction between a "sign" of the deity and the evidences of the senses. In the first case it signifies to one who has prior knowledge of the deity that his God is doing something. In the latter case the concept of miracle is employed as empirical evidence that there is a God of a special sort. Hume argues that this second sense cannot be made clear or credible. Miracles are not self-affirming but self-destructive. Hume suggests a maxim regarding the credibility of miracles.

> The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), 'That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior.'[22]

It is highly unlikely that religious miracles now offered as evidence would prove more miraculous as false than as true. To this extent Hume has removed miracle from the category of evidence and in so doing has undercut the persuasive force of fideism for the wise man.

Having shown the difficulty of employing miracles as evidence, if not the impossibility of doing so, Hume proceeds in the second part of his treatment of miracles to show that at least none of the miracles historically available in the various religions measures up to the legal rules of evidence. He offers four reasons why the available miracles fail to qualify as evidence. This part of Hume's strategy is secondary to the first and only completes what the first suggests.

The first of Hume's disqualifications of the miracles of historical religion concerns the number, capacity, and integrity of the authorities upon whose testimony the appeal to miracles relies. In regard to number, the credibility of a given miracle is not resolved by a mere head count. The bare number of witnesses can be of no real consequence apart from the known character and skill of the observers. A thousand blind men are not usually considered the best source of testimony concerning the hues of color in a sunset. But even when the ordinary capacities of sense are present, many of the claims for a given miracle would require a special and acquired skill to detect and judge the circumstances in question. Of course, in addition to gullibility, there is the question of susceptibility where a sympathetic inclination creates doubts over the reliability of certain witnesses. There is also the possibility of fraud and deception on the part of the witnesses. Given these possible breakdowns of testimony, it is certainly important in every case where we would depart from the mundane and ordinary to have the most highly credited testimony possible. Now, as Hume easily shows, in the case of miracles highly credited testimony is missing. In fact, the accessibility of evidence and the presence of high standards of testimony seem to vary in inverse proportion to the number of appeals to miracle. This state of affairs is contrary to the usual precautions of careful inquiry.

The second disqualification taken up by Hume deals with the nature of human curiosity. A normal inquiry is occupied with the ordinary and useful.

> The maxim, by which we commonly conduct ourselves in our reasonings, is, that the objects, of which we have no experience, resemble those, of which we have . . . .[23]

In the case of miracles the attitude is quite different. The mood is one of surprise and wonder. Miracles prosper in a climate of excitement encouraged by "passion and a heated imagination." This is hardly the cool, reflective state of mind for the careful weighing of evidence. Hume feels that the climate in which the alleged miracles of the historic religions have thrived is more closely related to that of the village gossip than the wise man's judicial review of testimony.

A third disqualification introduced by Hume is that miracles decrease in number as a culture increases in scientific skill. "Prodigies, omens, oracles" and the like are less numerous in historical accounts as society advances "nearer the enlightened ages." The decline of the miracle stories with the growth of skill in observation suggests the questionable nature of the earlier testimony.

Hume's fourth disqualification is of a different order from the first three. The previous objections have questioned the nature of the testimony. In the fourth case, Hume tentatively assumes that all religions have valid testimony and reliable evidence for miracles. However, if miracles can be credited as a proof of a system of religion, then all religions would be forced to hold compatible accounts of the "religious hypothesis." They do not. Therefore, miracles, even if reliable, have failed to establish a system of religion. The historic variety of religions is evidence against the success of such testimony. Should one try to correct this impasse with the concept of a God common to all cases or some principle that allows the miracles of one religion but of no others, it would require prior knowledge of the merits of the religious hypotheses, and it would validate miracles, not be validated by

them. The fourth of Hume's arguments is logically flawed. The presence of conflicting claims is no evidence that the claims are equally good or bad. There is no reason why one of the claims should not be true and the others false. Psychologically, a number of incompatible claims may lead us to doubt them all; but logically, there is no reason why it should.

In summary, Hume offers two arguments as to why miracles cannot be the foundation of any system of religion. First, the very nature of the degree of evidence required to offset the normal evidence of the senses makes validity of miracles highly unlikely if not impossible. Second, such evidence as religion does submit is far from satisfying from the maxim of acceptance; and even if miracles should pass muster, they could be self-defeating as the foundation of religion because of the contradictory religious systems appealing to miracles.

The conclusion that follows from Hume's inquiry into the evidential status of miracles is that no system of religion can be founded on miracles. For fideism, especially "our religion" (i.e., Christianity), Hume feels this conclusion is devastating. This is true for Hume because he holds "that the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one."[24] Of course, under these circumstances it also follows that fideism cannot provide a warrant for moral beliefs.

The Possibility of a Fideist Hope in Immortality

There remains one more topic in our proposed examination of Hume's criticism of fideism. Fideism seems unperturbed by the absence of confirmation in present experience. It projects the validation of its

beliefs as something that will happen at a future time. The difficulties of religious knowledge and the dilemma concerning evil will all be fully resolved when the whole story is complete at some future date. To return to the case of Pascal, the justification of the artificial life of faith is construed as a wager. The prudent man will weigh the possibilities as to one's personal gain or loss should the projections of the fideist prove to be the case. As Pascal sees it, one has little to lose and everything to gain if he constructs his life on the expectation that the future will vindicate the risk of faith. In other words, Hume's judgment that the life of faith is artificial will prove unfounded because the devout wager will have its full recompense at some future date. To conceive of Pascal's wager as more than a shot in the dark, there would have to be some secure notions of what "survival of death" and "the divine purpose" may be taken to mean. Normally in demonstrating the likelihood of his proposals, the fideist uses some concept of personal survival of death and speaks of another and eternal existence in which the evils and shortcomings of this life are overcome in a final act of judgment by a benevolent deity. According to this formulation of the religious hypothesis, this world and this life are a brief and probationary prelude to an age to come in which the moral rectitude of God and man will achieve full consummation. Thus, the moral import of this schema is to live a life of obedience in expectation of the benefits to be gained when the ultimate destiny of man is realized. Thus, Pascal's "wager" and Hume's "common life" may be considered counterclaims. Fideism claims to be a legitimate artifice founded upon a careful assessment of the possibilities that emerge from the nature and destiny of man.

In contrast, Hume proceeds to show the futility of the wager and the necessity of the common life.

That Hume is aware of the fideist's proposed resolution of all the present problems with the religious hypothesis by the projection of a future state is fully apparent. Hume has Demea, the spokesman for a rational and natural theology in the Dialogues, put the case in the following manner:

> This world is but a point in comparison of the universe; this life but a moment in comparison of eternity. The present evil phenomena, therefore, are rectified in other regions, and in some future period of existence. And the eyes of men, being then opened to larger views of things, see the whole connection of general laws, and trace, with adoration, the benevolence and rectitude of the Deity through all the mazes and intricacies of his providence.[25]

This statement is in fact the end of the matter for Demea as he takes no further part in the discussions of the Dialogues and leaves at this point of the debate. His departure is somewhat governed by the direction of the exchange when Cleanthes discounts Demea's argument on the grounds that it presupposes knowledge that is beyond the range of natural theology. In the essay "On the Immortality of the Soul," Hume gives an even stronger rebuff to the natural theologian with reference to the questionable moral character of such a hypothesis.

> What cruelty, what iniquity, what injustice in nature, to confine all our concern, as well as all our knowledge, to the present life, if there be another scene still waiting us of infinitely greater consequence? Ought this barbarous deceit to be ascribed to a beneficent and wise Being?[26]

As can be seen throughout the treatment of miracles in An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Hume considers the whole issue of fideism to ride upon the evidence for resurrection or some form of survival of death that will shore up the risk of faith. What this brief survey of

Hume's position suggests is at least three things. First, Hume acknowledges the need, but insists on the unavailability, of the doctrines of providence and immortality to natural theology. Second, he is aware that the crux for fideism lies in the miracle of resurrection. Third, Hume questions the moral implications of the doctrine from its very inception.

In his essay "On Suicide"[27] Hume has several philosophically interesting things to say about the religious doctrine of providence. The purpose of the essay is to examine the grounds for the legal and moral condemnation of the practice of suicide. In doing so, Hume points out a number of weaknesses in the arguments that the matters of life and death of a human being should be left in the hands of divine providence. In his "An analysis of Hume's Essay 'On Suicide,'"[28] Tom Beauchamp develops Hume's position under three themes: (1) The Divine Ownership Interpretation, (2) The Natural Law Interpretation, and (3) The Divine Appointment Interpretation. I will follow these themes in setting out Hume's notion that the belief in providence has no practical consequences.

The first interpretation, that of Divine Ownership, rules against any act of suicide on the grounds that

> . . . the Almighty has reserved to himself . . . the disposal of the lives of men, and has not submitted that event . . . to the general laws by which the universe is governed.[29]

Hume questions this view because it suggests that in matters of birth and death the particular providence of the Deity comes into play apart from the natural laws which direct the regular processes of nature. First, Hume sees no need to assert that these events are a special act of God, and, furthermore, he knows of no evidence that such might be the

case. In light of these two points, Hume concludes that the notion of particular providence makes no sense in regard to these matters.

The second interpretation, the Natural Law Interpretation, deals with the nature of human disobedience of the Deity by the disruption of his law. "Law" can mean his specific command or the orderly processes by which nature operates. If the distinctions of particular providence are useless, as is argued in Hume's first point, then any restriction upon human conduct on the grounds that humans are not to disturb the ordinary processes of nature becomes absurd. Man is unable to live in a passive state toward nature. As Hume puts it:

> If I turn aside a stone which is falling upon my head, I disturb the course of nature; and I invade the peculiar province of the Almighty, by lengthening out my life beyond the period, which, by the general laws of matter and motion, he had assigned it.[30]

The very nature and merit of human life involves the use of the general laws of matter and motion as the means to intelligent livelihood. To make obedience to the will of God prohibitory of action is to make the preservation of life impossible. Either birth and death must be cases of particular providence, or suicide cannot be considered a violation of divine providence.

> A hair, a fly, an insect, is able to destroy this mighty being whose life is of such importance. Is it an absurdity to suppose that human prudence may lawfully dispose of what depends on such insignificant causes? It would be no crime in me to divert the Nile or Danube from its course, were I able to effect such purposes. Where then is the crime of turning a few ounces of blood from their natural channel?[31]

Hume's third and final interpretation is directed against the Divine Appointment Interpretation. The third interpretation holds that the purpose of the individual life is assigned it by the Deity and that the individual is on probation in this life, the outcome being governed

by how well he realizes the particular purpose of God for his life. Hume places the statement of this doctrine in italics:

> But you are placed by Providence, like a sentinel, in a particular station; and when you desert it without being recalled, you are equally guilty of rebellion against your Almighty Sovereign, and have incurred his displeasure. . . .[32]

Hume replies with a question: "Why do you conclude that providence has placed me in this station?" Hume reminds his opponent that the processes of birth and death can be accounted for by the relation of cause and effect and within the natural order. But there is no evidence for the belief that providence assigns each individual a special and unique station in life. Therefore, in view of the lack of evidence each person will of necessity fall back upon his duties to self and society in moral matters.

The importance of Hume's essay on suicide for the purposes of my inquiry does not lie in his successful resolution of the debate about suicide but in how he disallows any moral guidance or philosophic clarification to be found in the notion of providence. Hume's treatment of suicide helps to demonstrate his thesis that religion introduces confusion into the realm of morals. The religious hypothesis about the meaning of life does not aid man in deliberations over good and evil. Rather, moral judgments must rely on the straightforward demands of the common life.

Another example of Hume's criticism of the use of religious notions of destiny to resolve problems about the direction and manner of life is his essay "On the Immortality of the Soul."[33] In this essay Hume deals with three classes of arguments about (1) the metaphysical, (2) the moral, and (3) the physical.

The metaphysical problem is, for Hume, the question of the meaning of "substance." Hume finds the notion of substance to be "wholly confused and imperfect," allowing that at best there is "an aggregate of particular qualities inhering in an unknown something." Even if reality is divided into matter and spirit, these substances are "at bottom equally unknown" and "we cannot determine what qualities inhere in one or the other." They might be pictured by analogy as a clay or paste that is modified into various forms. Yet this analogy would not allow a distinct difference to be made between matter and spirit. Even if the knowledge that substance is that which is eternal could be arrived at by reason it would prove too much because "what is incorruptible must also be ingenerable." Furthermore, the eternality of substance would apply equally to animals, men, and all living things. For Hume it remains an unanswered question as to how the notion of soul can be the means of explaining the peculiar nature and destiny of man.

The second type of argument that interests Hume about the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is the moral one. Hume offers four puzzles concerning the relation between the doctrine of immortality and morals. First, the very moral nature of the Deity is unknowable. If God is understood to share the moral sentiments of man, then there seems to be some confusion in the supposition that the present problems can be resolved in a different place and time. The sentiments are the same. Second, Hume argues further, if all knowledge and sentiment is structured for the demands of this life, how can it be other than fraud to judge the performance of life on the basis of another world? And furthermore, if we say that the natural capacities of human nature need more time for

development to be fully realized, how does this distinguish man from any other thing in creation? Third, the divisions of labor that create our duties and goals in life can function only in the limited structure of place and time in this world. For example, the role of women as Hume knows it cannot be accounted for on the basis of a common destiny with man. The elysium of eternity would have to continue the social structures of this world if it is in any sense the realization of the persons known to human understanding. Finally, any ultimate judgment of the Deity cannot be analogous with earthly use and custom. Man as he is observed on earth is not divisible into two distinct species of "the good" and "the evil." The concept of a place of eternal punishment or reward is not proportionate to the crime or the character of men as we observe them.

Hume's third class of arguments is the physical. These are the only ones that Hume feels should carry weight in resolving the question. Hume offers two objections of this sort to personal immortality. First, the mind or spirit decays along with the body. There is no evidence for the notion that the soul is not subject to degeneration and destruction. Second, all known items in this world are in continual flux and change. There are no means available to clarify the concept "eternal."

In summary, my purpose in looking at Hume's treatment or providence and immortality is not to evaluate his particular analysis of the problem. It is rather to note the approach in Hume's attack upon the religious hypothesis. He continually comes to the same two conclusions. First, there is no basis in experience to hold any positive opinion in these matters at all. Second, statements of the doctrines of religion

which are in total violation of ordinary experience should not be accepted as revealed truths. The consequence of Hume's strategy is to reduce religious faith to absurdity and impracticality--in other words, to show that the religious life is hopelessly artificial in the pejorative sense.

The Conclusion of Hume's Inquiry into Fideism

Hume does not find the benefits that are reputed to accompany faith to be sufficiently clear and definite to justify the wager of one's life upon the religious hypothesis. Neither is there evidence available that can confirm that miracles can and do happen, nor can the projections of faith concerning human destiny be clarified to the extent necessary for their employment in prudent decision making. As a result, fideistic theism is unable to offer a clear warrant for the acceptance of the religious hypothesis. Further, faith cannot serve as a guide in the practice of life in distinction to instinctive belief. Consequently, man must rely upon the influence of his natural belief in the construction of a common life where it is alone possible for him to find a clear warrant for moral beliefs. Fideism can only create a vacuum in lieu of the vivacity that infuses the ordinary feelings of life.

A Summary of Hume's Criticism of the Religious Hypothesis

It is now possible to summarize Hume's account of the total failure of the religious hypothesis to furnish a warrant for moral beliefs.

First, religion originates in the passions of fear and adoration which are projected into the concept of a deity who is able to aid

man in times of distress. The very attitudes out of which popular theism emerges both limit and thwart the use of religion as a motive for human actions or as a reasonable guide for moral beliefs. Consequently, historical religions are constantly caught between the fears of superstition and the fanaticism of enthusiasm. Religion has not been able to rise above the passions that give it birth. Rather, the constant flux between the feelings which prompt it places religion in need of moral correction, instead of conferring on it the role of the perfector or corrector of man's ordinary moral beliefs.

Second, the combined resources of science and reason cannot elevate religion above the passions in which it originates. It is the function of natural belief to provide the cement of the universe. It achieves this role through habit and custom founding the natural relation of cause and effect. This most basic operation of instinctive belief allows the analogy from the artifacts of the human artisans to the artifice of a world, the cause of which may with minimal significance be spoken of as "God." But it is impossible on the basis of the analogy to ascribe those attributes to the Deity desired by popular theism, and even should anyone succeed in doing so, the result would be devastating. If the Deity is taken as both omnipotent and omniscient, the procedures employed by the scientific theist set him up for impalement upon the horns of the dilemma created by the existence of evil in this world. It is this impasse that destroys the hope of rational theology to establish a clear warrant for moral belief.

Third, the expectations of fideistic theism projected on a faith originating as an artifice of divine miracle fail also. Since

fideism by its very nature generates an artificial life, it requires the collaboration of evidence and the clear projection of man's future possibilities if it is to certify itself. But it lacks both the evidence and the clarity. Consequently, neither faith nor divine revelation can deliver the religious hypothesis from the impasse experienced by both popular and scientific theism. Fideism is unable to furnish a warrant for moral beliefs.

Finally, after examining the available and known forms of theism and finding in each case that the religious hypothesis cannot be established, Hume concludes that it is of no utility. The religious hypothesis is found to be empty and unable to supply the force and vivacity required by a life-shaping belief. In the light of his critical inquiry, Hume feels secure in concluding that there is no reason to look to religion for moral instruction.

ENDNOTES

[1]E, pp. 109-131.

[2]E, pp. 132-148.

[3]ST&OE, pp. 146-150.

[4]ST&OE, pp. 151-160.

[5]ST&OE, pp. 161-167.

[6]E, p. 131.

[7]E, p. 127.

[8]E, p. 47.

[9]T, p. 629; and E, pp. 49-50.

[10]E, p. 48.

[11]E, pp. 324-343.

[12]E, pp. 341-342.

[13]E, pp. 342-343.

[14]E, p. 343.

[15]E, p. 127.

[16]T, pp. 473-476.

[17]T, p. 474.

[18]E, p. 110.

[19]E, p. 114.

[20]E, p. 109.

[21]E, p. 109.

[22]E, pp. 115-116.

[23]E, p. 117.

[24]E, p. 131.

[25]D, p. 89.

[26]ST&OE, p. 163.

[27]ST&OE, pp. 151-160.

[28]Tom L. Beauchamp, "An Analysis of Hume's Essay 'On Suicide'," The Review of Metaphysics 30 (September 1976): 73-95.

[29]ST&OE, p. 154.

[30]ST&OE, p. 155.

[31]ST&OE, p. 155.

[32]ST&OE, p. 157.

[33]ST&OE, pp. 161-167.

CHAPTER V

THE STRONG THESIS

Two different strategies are commonly employed in questioning the belief that moral propositions can be inferred from theological propositions. One involves a frontal assault upon the factual credibility of theism. That is to say, the skeptic may attack the theistic principle advanced by the western religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as the classic paganism of Greece and Rome. In this case the skeptic claims there is no reason to believe that God exists. A second strategy is to disarm the religious claims about God. In this case the strategy is to show that the existence of God can make little positive difference to man's manner of life. These approaches advance what I will call respectively a strong and a weak thesis. The Strong Thesis may be stated as follows:

> (ST) Any appeal to God as a warrant for moral beliefs fails in every case because no valid proof that a Deity exists can be made.[1]

The Weak Thesis may be simply stated:

> (WT) The appeal to God as a warrant for moral beliefs fails because the nature of God is either morally indifferent or too ambiguous to serve this purpose.

In this chapter I shall examine those interpretations of David Hume that take him to be holding or advocating the ST. In the first part of this chapter, I will challenge the conclusion that, since Hume disallows any of the traditional proofs, he espouses an atheistic position. I intend to show that Hume does not hold the atheistic position by contrasting Hume's stance with the "presumption of atheism" advocated by Antony Flew. In the second part of this chapter, I will question the view that Hume uses the fact of evil to deny the existence of God. I will use the defense of theism provided by Alvin Plantinga in order to point out how his refutation of the atheist does not apply to the argument which Hume makes from the circumstance of human misery. I will leave it to the next chapter to show how Hume's distinctive insights fall within the WT.

The Presumption of Atheism

As I have already indicated, the distinctive characteristic of the strong thesis is that it goes for the jugular vein of the religious hypothesis. It concentrates its criticism upon the proof of the existence of a deity. Several reasons why this strategy appeals to philosophers may be listed. First, it is assumed that external criticisms of religion are spawned in the waters of skepticism. This approach to religious knowledge assumes that nothing is known to be the case unless it satisfies the skeptic's doubt. Second, such western religions as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism have commonly presented their systems of religion as dependent upon the existence and character of a singular deity. Naturally, should the existence of that particular deity be questionable, that would in turn call into question the whole system of religion

advocated in that deity's name. Fourth, the correlation between the predominance of a monotheistic religious system and the doctrine of a hierarchy of being in western metaphysics has lent its support to the notion of an intricate and interlocked logical whole. The influence of this notion is seen in the attitude that new ideas must proceed by means of a revolution against the assumptions upon which a closed system is founded. Finally, because western religions have had a formative force in the social structure of authority, it has been a common assumption that both moral and political authority resides in and is in some essential way dependent upon the authority of a supreme being or deity. The notion implies that to overthrow the top commander is to undermine the whole chain of command and obedience. This group of reasons is but a partial account of the attitude which is commonly brought to the question of natural religion and morality.

However, my major concern is not with the attitudes that lead to "the presumption of atheism" but rather with whether or not the presumption is legitimate in the first place. Fortunately for my inquiry, Antony Flew has provided us with both an excellent commentary on Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and a book that explores the presumption of atheism.[2] Further, I believe that in contrasting Flew's treatment of the presumption of atheism with his exposition of Sections X and XI of the Enquiry, I will be able to show at least one way in which Hume's approach to natural religion stands outside the strategy of the strong thesis. This can be accomplished first by stating Flew's formulation of the presumption of atheism and then by contrasting this stance with his own account of Hume.

Flew begins his case for the presumption of atheism with a clarification of the term "atheism." The use that Flew proposes for "atheism" is analogous with "amoral" and "atypical." The prefix "a" is read in the Greek sense of "non." As Flew puts it, "In this interpretation an atheist becomes: not someone who positively asserts the non-existence of God; but someone who is simply not a theist."[3] The reason for this explicit distinction is as follows:

> What the protagonist of my presumption of atheism wants to show is that the debate about the existence of God ought to be conducted in a particular way, and that the issue should be seen in a certain perspective. His thesis about the onus of proof involves that it is up to the theist: first, to introduce and to defend his proposed concept of God; and, second, to provide sufficient reason for believing that this concept of his does in fact have an application.[4]

Both of Flew's proposed steps are significant and not so very different from my three-fold division of natural theism stated earlier.[5] For Flew the first step deals with conceptual problems, and he refers to this step as an "absolute beginning." Flew's second step deals with what he calls "proof." In order to clarify what he means by "proof," Flew draws an analogy with the "legal presumption of innocence." By means of the analogy Flew hopes to reformulate a verification principle along the lines of a minimal requirement of "defeasibility" in the sense of defeatable. In this case Flew's use of "defeasibility" includes (1) that the assertions are the responsibility of the theist, and (2) that the theist's assertions must entail refutable evidence so as to make a verdict possible. According to Flew, this strategy offers us a rather broad sense of "proof":

> . . . the word 'proof' is being used in the ordinary wide sense in which it can embrace any and every variety of sufficient reason. It is, of course, in this and only this sense that the word is interpreted when the presumption of innocence is explained as laying the onus of proof on the prosecution.[6]

Flew draws an analogy between the method to be followed in disputes over the existence of God and the normal procedures in a court of law. The analogy holds for (1) a principle: "The onus of proof lies on the proposition, and not on the opposition"[7] and (2) a policy: the evidence is restricted to qualified witnesses who are in a position to know.[8]

Flew defends the appropriateness of his analogy by taking St. Thomas and "the five ways" as an example. According to Flew, St. Thomas is responding to Strato's naturalism, and therefore "the five ways" is a case against the presumption of atheism. By pointing to the case of St. Thomas and noting the possibility that the "five ways" are Aristotelian arguments against Strato, Flew believes that his picture of the conditions under which a proper case should be made is in the mainstream of the theistic tradition.

In summary, Flew construes the presumption of atheism as laying down the following conditions: (1) the concept of deity must be clearly and consistently defined, (2) the requirements for the justification of theistic beliefs are to be construed in analogy with the requirements for a case made in a court of law, and (3) evidence for a proof is to be restricted to witnesses who are in a position to know. Finally, Flew's proposal is not to be taken as something new; it follows the example of St. Thomas in offering proofs against the atheistic naturalism of Strato. It is Flew's intention that these steps be taken as normative for the practice of natural theology.

In a review of Flew's God and Philosophy, John Hick criticizes the former's strategy as being "in essentially the manner of Hume."[9] It is this identification of Hume with Flew's method which I wish to

challenge. I believe the best way to mark this distinction is to be found in Flew's exposition of "The Religious Hypothesis"--Chapter IX of his book Hume's Philosophy of Belief.[10] In that chapter Flew states Hume's purpose in Section XI of the first Enquiry to be as follows:

> He wants to indicate, as gently as is consonant with clarity, that it is impossible legitimately to derive from a natural theology any practically relevant conclusions; any such conclusions, that is, over and above whatever can be independently and directly supported by immediate study of the universe around us. At the end he even goes so far as to hint that the main sort of argument for such a system--the only sort he himself regards as seriously considerable--is perhaps in any case unsound.[11]

Flew is fully aware that Hume is concerned with the practical consequences of religion. But he fails to see that Hume regards providence and the divine government of the world as the practical consequences that fail to follow, because neither natural nor revealed theology is able to establish the nature of the deity by the extension of the processes used to establish the existence of a deity. Consequently, for Hume, natural theology is unable to furnish us with any practically relevant conclusions. Flew mistakenly assumes that Hume both accepts the traditional definition on "God" and concludes that since no impeccable proof of God's existence is available, no practical consequences follow from natural theology. In other words, Flew fits Hume into the mold of the presumption of atheism. That this is the tenor of Flew's reading is evidenced in his suggestion that Hume is content to work "as gently as is consonant with clarity." Further, he believes that Hume offers many hints of his more considered opinion.

In fact, Flew believes that Hume fails to be as forceful as he should have been because he attempts to be "extremely circumspect." To explicate how this is the case, Flew proceeds to list three "veils of

discretion" that cover Hume's true intentions. First, Flew says that Hume gives Section XI of the Enquiry a misleading title in the final edition of the work. Flew is exploiting the editorial fact that Hume used the title "Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Theology" in the first edition but changed it to "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State" in the last edition. Now I too wish that Hume had not changed the title, but I hardly see how the change serves to provide a cover-up of Hume's intentions. He is, in the later title, merely listing what are generally held to be the doctrines that follow as consequences from the nature and existence of a deity. Second, Flew argues that Hume structures the section in the style of a dialogue because he wishes to conceal his own position beneath the literary persona of "a friend who loves sceptical paradoxes." But this overlooks the fact that Hume states on several occasions that the dialogue was the proper instrument for the treatment of religious discourse. He gives as his reason that a dialogue allows for the matter to be stated as inconclusively as he felt the subject required. At least Hume's stated reason is consistent with the conclusion he reaches and requires no assumption of concealment. Third, Flew finds a veiled intention on Hume's part because he uses a pseudo-classical form. But why this need reveal more than compliance with a common practice of the Augustan Age by a man of letters escapes me. I rather believe that the whole "veils of discretion" interpretation represents Flew's reading of his own intentions into Hume's quite different motivation. What is otherwise in most respects an excellent commentary upon Hume's treatment of religion is in this instance colored by Flew's own presumption of atheism. I believe that Flew is mistaken to assume that Hume shares the same sentiments.

My reasons for thinking that Hume stands apart from what Flew calls the presumption of atheism require further elucidation. I will begin with some further considerations of Hume's use of the literary pattern of dialogue. First, Hume says that his reason for selecting the form of dialogue lies in the inconclusiveness of arguments in matters of religion.

> Any question of philosophy, on the other hand, which is so obscure and uncertain that human reason can reach no fixed determination with regard to it--if it should be treated at all--seems to lead naturally into the style of dialogue and conversation. Reasonable men may be allowed to differ where no one can reasonably be positive: 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.[12]

Hume avoided the role of advocate or defender and stayed out of personal exchanges over points of controversy. In his view the urbane and enlightened man of letters should seek to combine the fruits of study with the delights of society. Human wit should be allowed to surface in matters that admit of no fixed determination, through feelings of delicate taste and refined sentiments. For Hume, the polite society of the club rather than the contest of the court furnishes the ideal setting for religious discourse. Because in matters of religion no one can be reasonably positive, didactic prose, systematic formulation, or dogmatic attitudes are in bad taste. The issues can flourish only in genteel conversation. Hume's method and temperament lead him to picture the discussion of religious topics in a totally different frame from the court analogy of Flew. This is not to say that Hume lowers the standards of exact thought. What Hume insists upon is that discussions of religion should strive for agreeable amusement since the uncertainty of the

subject precludes a clear decision. One begins with the presumption of interest and curiosity and not with an onus of proof.

A second difference between Flew and Hume lies in the differing foci of interest. Hume selects "religion" instead of "theism" as his primary concern. Hume puts it this way: "the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous."[13] Because Hume is concerned with religion as a moralist, he acknowledges, as do many of his day, the inclination of men to believe in a deity, but denies that such a belief need have the undesirable consequences it so commonly has. Flew, on the other hand, draws a fixed strategy for the final victorious assault upon the citadel of religious belief:

> The first problem is so to delimit the subject that it becomes rather less unmanageably broad. This is the point of making it Christian theism rather than the Christian religion.[14]

An adversary role requires careful control of the material. In marked contrast, the "careless sceptic" of Hume's vintage prefers to inquire concerning natural religion wherever and however it is found to occur in human society. In his general appraisal Hume is often astute in his criticism but not always above bias. However, Hume's strong distaste for the practice of religion should not be mistaken for his working from the presumption of atheism.

A third difference between Hume and Flew can be discovered in the concept of "proof." Flew's analogy requires a legal proof. But Flew's explication seems to require more formal or logical tests than the court room does. Today's rules of evidence are far more flexible than Flew allows. The type of witness, the admission of evidence, the judge's direction of the court are too variable to sustain Flew's legal

analogy. Flew's analogy is but a thinly veiled assumption of verificationism. Whatever the merits of Flew's position may be, his position is not the same as Hume's. The picture at work in Hume's concept of proof is that of a serious conversation in which the mind of the wise man is swayed by the force of belief that arises from intelligent argument. Through social intercourse the evidence brought into play by intensive study and thought is given its inherent but gentle force, enabling the discussion to remove the obstacles acquired by habit and custom and permitting the mind to undergo a change of belief. The pursuit of clarity in perception, the employment of exact distinctions, and careful attention to the relations of ideas provide an ample force to overcome superstition or dampen enthusiasm. Hume approaches the art of social persuasion as a moralist and not as an academic logician or a legal advocate. He is not so concerned with a proof as with the shaping of belief. Evidence is useful in the force it provides in shaping the aristocratic life-form of the wise. Hume's philosophy of belief deals as much with the inclination to believe as with the right to believe.

A fourth distinction remains. As I have noted, Flew's judicial-process analogy places the weight of the evidence upon the testimony of one who is in a position to know. Flew's essay gives us little explication of just what this procedural rule includes. The courts themselves are constantly embroiled over questions regarding the admissibility of evidence. The judicial system relies heavily upon the discretion of the presiding judge. Flew's analogy is not nearly so instructive as he assumes. Hume relies in these matters upon common reasonableness. For Hume reasonableness consists in the governing of the imagination by

principles which have three definite characteristics.

> In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular. . . .[15]

For Hume the reasonable man is one who guides his beliefs by only such principles as are permanent, irresistible, and universal. An example of this sort of principle is the relation of cause and effect. Unreliable evidence would be any belief which is solely dependent upon principles which prove to be changeable, weak, and irregular. The proper function of intelligent social discourse among reasonable men is to provide the opportunity for the natural beliefs of such men to assert their intrinsic force. Since the beliefs of religion, when explored in open discussion, repeatedly fall short of the principles of reasonableness, one primarily benefits from the pleasure of the quest, while the hoped-for conclusions remain obscure and uncertain. There is no reasonable resolution or agreement concerning the opposite sentiments that arise from religion. Wise men cannot be positive and so must be allowed to differ. Further, they should base their practical actions on the permanent and irresistible beliefs of common life, which are universal to man.

In summary, my comparison has revealed a distinct contrast between Flew and Hume concerning the procedure each employs in the treatment of religious belief. Flew develops his strategy in analogy with the legal process for reaching a decision in court. Hume's approach reflects the delight of the Augustan Age in the gentleman's club. Further, while Flew believes the purpose of the operation is to reach a verdict, Hume is persuaded that the benefits to be gained from effective

religious discourse result from realizing that a verdict is neither possible nor needed. My intention in the comparison is to argue that it is a mistake to interpret Hume as adopting the presumption of atheism. This is not to deny that there are some arguments that lend support to atheism in Hume's Dialogues, but it must not be overlooked that Hume is primarily concerned to show that theistic arguments are inconclusive. What I want to deny is that the Dialogues should be construed as working within the limitations imposed by the presumption of atheism. Any attempt to read Hume along such lines seems to depend upon an exaggerated use of so-called "veiled hints," which can be accounted for more readily within Hume's stated and overt intentions. Further, the view that Hume is deliberately inconclusive is supported by his treatment of the problem of evil.

A careful examination of what Hume has to say about the problem of evil will go a long way toward obviating the confusion that would arise should one persist in viewing his account in accordance with the presumption of atheism. I believe a careful reading of the Dialogues shows that Hume is primarily concerned with the moral consequences of theism. I will turn to these matters in the next section of this chapter. Before doing so, however, I want to note a third reason for rejecting the claim that Hume works within the presumption of atheism. Throughout the Dialogues a whole cornucopia of diverse possibilities is poured out in the course of the discussion. Hume's constant consideration of alternate perspectives is in keeping with his belief that religion merely offers a diverse number of curious options which are beyond reasonable resolution. Because of the multiplicity of views about religion,

it cannot serve as a reliable or practical guide in the common affairs of man. I will return to this particular topic in the next chapter, after I have explored Hume's treatment of the problem of evil.

The Coherence of Theism

The advocates of the Strong Thesis (ST) generally attempt to undercut theistic claims in one of two ways. On the one hand, they charge that theological propositions do not correspond to any actual state of affairs. This line of approach is easily recognized in the writings of Antony Flew, and I have just explored the relevance of his sort of presumption of atheism for the understanding of David Hume's philosophy of religion. On the other hand, ST advocates often allege that theological propositions make up a logically incompatible set. The most pertinent formulation of this strategy arises from a set of difficulties generally spoken of as the problem of evil. The problem results from various attempts to answer a specific question: How can the common experience of human misery be related in a coherent and consistent way to the attributes the theist normally ascribes to the Deity?

The current philosophic practice regarding the question is to advance an argument to the effect that a logical contradiction results whenever one jointly affirms the classical attributes of God along with the assertion that there is evil. In other words, a contradictory triad is alleged to result from the joint affirmation of the following three propositions:

(1) God is omnipotent.
(2) God is perfectly good.
(3) There is evil.

The conclusion generally drawn on the strength of the alleged contradiction

is that the skeptic has adequate rational grounds for discounting the belief that there is a God.

The difficulty with this particular strategy is that the alleged logical contradiction is not explicit. Further, the efforts to make the contradiction explicit fall into at least two distinct formulations. First, some argue that God could have created a world in which no evil occurs. This Utopian Case may be stated as follows:

(UC) The occurrence of any instance of evil is in logical contradiction with the belief in a Creator who is both omnipotent and perfectly good.

Second, some argue that certain kinds of evil are irreconcilable with the Divine nature. This Incompatibility Case may be stated as follows:

(IC) Some types of evil found in the world cannot be made logically consistent with a Creator who is both omnipotent and perfectly good.

Of the many defenses offered, two are important for my purposes. First, there are those who argue that a greater good results from there being some evil in the world. This Greater Good Defense may be stated as follows:

(GGD) Some evil is a necessary condition for the realization of a higher good.

Second, some defend theism by insisting that a world that allows for free will is a better world than one that does not. The Free Will Defense may be stated as follows:

(FWD) Such evils as are found in the world are the necessary conditions for the possession of free will, which as a higher good is a sufficient reason for such evil as does occur.

My purpose does not require a full and detailed exposition of the controversy over the problem of evil suggested in these claims and counterclaims. Rather, my concern is limited to exploring the relevance

of these current formulations to Hume's assessment of the significance of human misery for the religious hypothesis. Consequently, I will offer a brief account of Alvin Plantinga's defense of the logical coherence of theism against the atheological arguments from evil. I have two definite reasons for this procedure. First, Plantinga's success against the accusation of logical incoherence does not appear to extend to dealing with the broader problems concerning human misery that disturb Hume. In other words, Plantinga's discrediting of one sort of atheistic argument helps to make clear just what sort of difficulty it is that troubles Hume. I believe Hume was not primarily concerned with conceptual coherence but with theism's lack of relevance to the common affairs of man. A comparison with Plantinga will help me make Hume's position clear. Second, the very argument employed by Plantinga introduces certain doctrines that Hume questions. These questionable doctrines prove to be the principles of a rationalistic ethics, which Hume rejects as contrary to the way we do in fact acquire moral beliefs. Consequently, a brief account of Plantinga's refutation of the charge of rational incoherence will prove useful in calling attention to the moral impasse which Hume says necessarily arises from the theistic explanation of evil.

Alvin Plantinga and Coherent Theism

Alvin Plantinga's purpose is to demonstrate the rationality of the "theistic principle." In order to achieve his goal, Plantinga is satisfied to demonstrate the logical non-contradictoriness of theism. For this reason, his argument seeks to demonstrate that all atheological proofs from evil not only fail to establish a knockdown refutation of theism but also fail to discredit the logical possibility of theism.

With this aim in mind, Plantinga examines the atheological argument from evil. The part of his assessment that is pertinent to my study of Hume may be summarized in the answers he provides to four questions.

Does the theist contradict himself? Plantinga's first step involves a request that the alleged contradiction be made explicit in relation to the triadic set A:

(Set A) (1) God is omnipotent.
(2) God is wholly good.
(3) Evil exists.

The alleged contradiction is certainly not of the form '*p* and not *p*.' Rather, the type of contradiction sought may be specified as follows:

> . . . a set S of propositions is implicitly contradictory if there is a necessary proposition p such that the result of adding p to S is a formally contradictory set.[16]

Therefore, the problem as interpreted by Plantinga boils down to whether or not a necessary proposition can be added to set A that permits the deduction of a proposition which is the contradictory of (3). Plantinga examines several candidates for such a proposition and arrives at the conclusion that the best conceivable one would have to be somewhat as follows: "If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then he can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs."[17] This proposition is what I have called the Utopian Case (UC). However, Plantinga points out that the UC is deficient as the required contradictory proposition because it is not necessarily true. For example, it is common practice to allow that a particular instance is a good state of affairs when the consequent good outweighs the evil that is the particular good's necessary condition (GGD).[18] Therefore, there is no necessary reason to believe the theist contradicts himself in holding Set A.

Could God have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil? Plantinga proceeds by pointing out that the UC assumes that God can create any logically possible world merely because He is omnipotent. Further, the UC also assumes that God could create a world where men are possessed of free will but always in fact choose the good. Accordingly, the UC leads to the conclusion that God is morally obliged in light of (2) to create the best of possible worlds. Consequently, any world in which evil occurs is not the best of possible worlds. Accordingly, the UC arrives at the conclusion that Set A is implicitly contradictory when the UC proposition is added. Quite to the contrary, Plantinga believes that by the GGD the theist successfully removes the threat of contradiction. Plantinga expands the GGD by means of the FWD. Free will is a greater good and is crucial for the Divine selection among possible worlds. In clarifying the FWD, Plantinga stipulates that free will can only mean that the choice is not otherwise determined. That is to say, Plantinga discounts the compatibilist notion that the same act can be both caused and free. Plantinga insists that without the actual choice of evil, a world would be without free will. Consequently, on God's part, the creation of a world with free will and evil is a greater good than a merely deterministic world without evil (FWD). This use of free will is an essential part of Plantinga's rebuttals of the charge of incoherence. I shall have reason to return to it when Hume's views concerning voluntary belief are recounted in the next chapter.

Is God's existence compatible with the amount of moral evil the world contains? Having dismissed the UC on the grounds of GGD,

Plantinga must protect his use of the FWD against the charge that it is not always the case that free will is a factor in a specific case of evil and the further charge that the degree of evil in the world is out of proportion to the good gained with free will (IC). Plantinga defends his use of the FWD against the first charge with the traditional appeal to the possibility of non-human persons, such as demons or fallen angels, whose acts of will may explain the occurrence of natural evil. As to the second demand, Plantinga argues that there is no necessary proposition that rules out a theodicy. I will examine the question of a possible theodicy in this chapter and the next. But I need to set down Plantinga's own conclusion first.

Does the existence of evil make it unlikely that God exists?

Plantinga concludes that the problem of evil does not undermine the proposition that God exists. A (plausible) necessary proposition creating a contradiction cannot be found. Further, Plantinga concludes that with the GGD and FWD he has been able to demonstrate "that the existence of God is compatible, both logically and probabilistically, with the existence of evil."[19] I believe Plantinga has overstated his achievement. He may be granted the logical consistency of the nature of God with the fact of evil. Hume allows as much but argues that this sort of resolution does not provide a solution to a more perplexing aspect of the problem of evil. Plantinga's argument at best can win only a Pyrrhic victory from the atheists. Hume diagnoses what he believes to be a more serious problem. It is man's nature to be repulsed by pain and misery. Consequently, Hume believes that the crucial question is: How can the attributes of God be reconciled with the natural disapprobation of human

sentiment at the presence of evil? Plantinga is not unaware of this element of human frustration, but feels it has been resolved in principle. I will next examine Hume's reasons for thinking such a resolution is effective.

Hume and the Relevance of Coherent Theism

As I have said, Hume and Plantinga find different problems for theism in the human experience of evil. Plantinga seeks to refute the claim that the occurrence of evil implies that traditional theism entails a logical contradiction. Once Plantinga has successfully demonstrated the logical possibility of theism, he is willing to leave the details of a particular theodicy to be filled in where possible and as the need arises. On the contrary, since Hume believes the experience of evil raises a question about the practical relevance of any theodicy founded upon classical or any other theism, he argues that whatever premises are submitted in a theodicy will eventually prove morally stultifying. Hume has Philo raise the question whether the logical compatibility of theism and evil is of any help in confirming the moral relevance of religious belief.[20]

The difference is not that the two men are merely working on the same problem from different perspectives. Hume's challenge is that any success gained from Plantinga's type of argument will be at the expense of the alleged fruitfulness of theism for moral beliefs. In other words, coherence can be gained only in ways that leave theism devoid of any positive practical significance.

In order to study the various distinctions between the two different understandings of what problem it is that evil poses for theism,

I plan to do three things. First, I will clarify the distinction Plantinga makes between a free will defense (FWD) and a theodicy. Second, I will sketch Hume's argument against theodicy in Parts X and XI of the Dialogues. Third, I will lay out the irreconcilable conflict of feeling that Hume sees as a moral impasse created by the attempts of the compatibilist to resolve the problem of evil. Once these three tasks are complete, I believe it will be evident that Hume does not hold or defend the atheological or strong thesis. Further, I believe I will have shown that Hume's skepticism concerning the religious hypothesis is of a moral and not of a theological sort.

Plantinga's distinction between a free will defense and a theodicy. Plantinga makes a distinction between a defense and a theodicy on the grounds of the different sorts of questions being answered. When the inquirer asks: "Does the theist contradict himself?" he is asking if there is a logical contradiction between the traditional attributes ascribed to God and the presence of evil. When the theist responds with the proposition that free will is a necessary condition for moral responsibility, he believes he has a necessary proposition that can supplement Set A and provide a FWD for theism. However, if the question under consideration is the quite different one, "Why does God permit evil?" then there is a request for a theodicy. Plantinga says that the failure of the theologian to furnish a satisfactory theodicy in no way invalidates the use of the FWD. The failure of any and all proposed theodicies "shows little or nothing relevant to the rationality of belief in God."[21] The rationality of the belief that there is a God can be defended as long as the logical possibility of a theodicy can be

demonstrated. In other words, Plantinga is persuaded that the free will proposition is a necessary proposition and serves to refute the usual claim, based on the fact of evil, that theism contains a logical contradiction. Further, by limiting his defense to the necessary truth of the free will premise, Plantinga resolves the philosophical quandary over evil without the additional burden of trying to develop a theodicy. The problem of theodicy can be put aside as a secondary task and remain an open but still unrealized possibility.

It will not be necessary for me to deal with the cogency of Plantinga's stance on free will. It is true that his stand is contrary to the soft determinism advanced by Hume. However, what is important for my inquiry is that Plantinga's appeal to free will is an argument contingent upon a necessary relation between an otherwise undetermined choice and moral obligation. In short, Plantinga's case rests upon the connection between morality and a theory of voluntary judgment. Since Hume argues that reason is the slave of the passions, he not only questions voluntarism, but I believe he would also argue that the unavailability of a specific theodicy is primarily due to a mistaken notion about the moral motivation which lies concealed under a faulty notion of free will.

Hume says that the problem of evil calls attention to the absence of practical consequences in theism. Hume suggests that there are two reasons why no practical consequences follow from theism. First, there is no strict correlation possible between the instincts and motives of human action and a religious theodicy. Second, there is a moral impasse that arises between the evidence that warrants a belief in the

existence of God and the desires of the passions that prompt a religious response to the existence of God.

In fairness to Plantinga, it should be noted that he acknowledges the limits of his inquiry. Plantinga has deliberately restricted his analysis to the dispute over the rational coherence of theism. Nevertheless, the sharp distinction Plantinga draws between the logical possibility of theism and the need for a relevant theodicy is useful in making Hume's position more explicit. Plantinga's stand on free will is not only what makes his distinction possible but also what marks off his ethical theory from Hume's. Plantinga's procedure requires that propositions added to Set A be necessarily true and not merely contingently true. Therefore, should the free will premise prove to be contingent, Plantinga's distinction would collapse, the FWD would not succeed, and the problem of evil would remain unresolved.

Hume's argument from evil. The reader of Hume's Dialogues will be frustrated if he expects to find either the presumption of atheism or the logical incoherence argument as the formative issue in Hume's treatment of the problem of evil. Instead, the careful reader will discover that Hume constructs his discussion around a conflict between human desire and the nature of things that arises with every effort to employ the religious hypothesis in a practical manner in the common affairs of man. A précis of Hume's discussion, in the Dialogues, of the occurrence of evil follows:

I. Demea's speech begins Part X, but its subject matter continues a topic introduced by Philo in the final paragraph of Part IX. Philo's point was that men derive their religion from sources other than a priori species of reasoning. Demea merely expands his agreement with Philo by suggesting that religion normally arises from individual passions in reaction to the misery or suffering that is part of human experience.

II. Demea and Philo join in pointing out how common is the notion that it is the miseries of life that drive men to religion. Philo notes that Leibniz is an unusual exception. The conversation continues in this way for the first twenty-four paragraphs of Part X. Cleanthes interrupts once to deny that he has the feelings being discussed.[22]

III. The outcome of the long account of human misery is a question about the impact of this rather common condition upon the human understanding of the moral nature of God. "In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?"[23] This question leads Philo to mention the as yet unanswered questions of Epicurus:

> Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?[24]

This reference to Epicurus' old questions introduces the problem of making a character assessment of the Deity from the evidence in the universe. The problem is not primarily one of logical consistency but one of moral coherence between the motive and the action. The issue is one of theodicy. How can the evident acts of God be linked with causal motives that resemble or are consistent with our normal criteria for connecting actions and motives? Until the criteria for assigning motives are clear, we cannot ascribe moral attributes to God with any cogency. Cleanthes acknowledges that this is a crucial issue for theism[25] because there can be little interest in establishing the natural attributes if the moral attributes remain in doubt. The consequence, he says, would be "an end at once of all religion."[26]

IV. As a reply to Cleanthes' consternation, Demea offers the traditional explanation that this world is but a preparation for another world in which these evils are resolved.[27] However, Cleanthes rejects this form of theodicy because it is built on arbitrary suppositions. He insists that the only way to support divine benevolence is to discount the evidence that leads us to believe man suffers so much or so universally as Philo and Demea claim.

V. The remainder of Part X[28] involves Philo's response to Cleanthes' rash claim. Philo takes the question under discussion to be: "Why is there any misery at all in the world?" Philo concludes Part X with a claim of triumph. Logical compatibility between the existence of God and the existence of evil is not enough to answer this question. The defender of the moral attributes of God or the customary hopes of religion would have to show cause for these conclusions on the grounds of the inadequate and mixed phenomena found in human experience.

VI. Cleanthes begins Part XI with a proposed modification of the Divine attributes and requests Philo to join him by

constructing an account of the evidence found in the world for making a new approach to the understanding of the Divine nature.

VII. Philo responds with a generalized account of what might be expected of a Deity beforehand from the nature of things. The revised concept of God would need to conform to four aspects of the evidence: (1) the function of pain and pleasure is an essential condition of human action, (2) the ordering of the processes of nature is along the lines of general laws, (3) individuals are possessed of only limited powers and faculties, and (4) "the inaccurate workmanship . . . of the great machine of nature."[29]

VIII. Philo concludes his requirement with an argument similar in form to that advanced by Cleanthes as the design argument in Part II. Both began with "Look round this universe . . ." Philo says, "the true conclusion is that the original source of all things is entirely indifferent. . . and has no more regard to good above ill than to heat above cold. . . ."[30]

IX. The new direction of the discussion exhausts the patience of Demea and he leaves.

X. In Part XII Philo and Cleanthes agree on what it is to assent to mitigated theism. They conclude that "true religion" is a passionate delight in the flourishing of natural virtues within the common affairs of man. They share in an aesthetic theism.

In summation, Hume's argument from evil is personified in Philo, who seeks to moderate the extremes represented by Demea and Cleanthes. The exchange of views reaches a climax when Philo submits an argument that resembles the design argument of Cleanthes and that draws the conclusion most compatible with the design argument (i.e., the author of nature is morally indifferent). Philo's triumph is set between the concluding remarks about Demea's a priori argument in Part IX and Demea's hasty departure in total frustration at the close of Part XI. Hume uses the dramatic plot of his Dialogues as well as careful argument to focus attention upon his own conclusion that there is no connection between the existence of God and the moral life of men that is of any practical consequence.[31]

The moral impasse between theism and the natural instincts. In

order to present Hume's account of the moral impasse between theism and the natural instincts, it will prove helpful to recount briefly the relation between the direct passions, the natural virtues, and the origin of religious ideas in the passions. Hume develops all three of these doctrines but never combines all three of them into one common exposition. By bringing them together, I will be able to shed some light on why Hume holds that there is a moral impasse that precludes religion from having individual or social utility.

Hume's story of the direct passions begins with the immediate experience of pleasure or pain.[32] The perceptions of pain or pleasure activate the mind in respect to the passions of desire or aversion. Whenever the gratification of either of these passions is certain, the resulting state of mind is either joy or sorrow. However, when the outcome of desire or aversion is uncertain, the consequent state of mind is either hope or fear.

The account of the natural virtues forms a sequel to the story of the direct passions.[33] Whenever the reflections of the mind are fixed through the reoccurrence of particular feelings which are uniformly and regularly accompanied by satisfaction or distress, these fixed inclinations may be characterized as virtues or vices. The actions motivated by these fixed inclinations are the outward signs of the inner character acquired by the particular individual from the regular operations of his mind. Because of their habitual character, these fixed operations in a particular mind are recognizable as the calm passions commonly spoken of as good or evil. This completes Hume's narrative concerning the origin of the natural virtues.

The history of the origin of religious ideas is more complex. Religious ideas arise either as a learned response to the passions or as a studied or a spontaneous assent to the order in the nature of things. Since religious ideas are of diverse origin, they tend to develop along the lines of their differing pedigrees. The ideas drawn from the passions tend to develop in the patterns of the historical but vulgar faiths. The ideas used in natural theology are refined by reason and tend to develop according to the limits of the understanding.

It is the inevitable impasse between the passions and the understanding that creates the block between sound theology and practical morals. For example, when religious ideas are the individual's response to the uncertain desires of the passions, religious faith serves as a pathological mechanism for the mind's expressions of uncertainty and anxiety. The religious rites, creeds, and dogmas reflect the oscillation of attitudes between hope and fear. The failure of religion lies in the fact that it can stabilize the anxiety of the passions only through a feigned certainty purchased at the expense of the understanding's faithfulness to the evidence. Thus, instead of pious attitudes eventuating in resolutions similar to those of the calm passions, religious actions become cases of either fanaticism or superstition.

On the other hand, when the mind of the religious believer is limited to the moderate conclusions warranted by the mixed phenomena of human experience, the desires that motivate vulgar religion remain unsatisfied. A religion restricted to the evidence has nothing to add to the mundane reasonableness provided for in the common affairs of men. For Hume, true religion occurs whenever one assents to living within the

scope of the customary utility of the common life. Beyond these limits religions are but sick men's dreams that corrupt and pervert the necessary conditions under which the calm passions can efficiently create the moral climate of the common life.

In conclusion, the religious act is without its own sentiment and acquires no social utility on its own. Unfortunately, the very desires that motivate the vulgar religions induce us to feign an escape from normal affairs which precludes their (i.e., the desires) gratification within the only moral circumstances available to man. When man assents to true religion, his philosophical reason has directed the desires which give birth to religion into the role of supporting what is already available to man in the common affairs of life. Any effort of religion to overstep these bounds will run into the impasse between our religious hopes or fears and those passions that govern the moral inclinations. Unfortunately for man, religious aspirations generally exceed their legitimate grounds, and the history of the vulgar faiths is one of superstition and fanaticism.

Conclusion

The strong thesis of atheology does not express Hume's actual position concerning religion. It is not Hume's strategy to discount the existence of God in order to do away with religion. As I have shown, Hume neither structures his criticism of theistic arguments from the presumption of atheism, nor does he seek a knockdown proof against the existence of God. In addition, I have shown that Hume does not construe the problem of evil as concerned with the existence of God but rather with the nature of God. Furthermore, unlike Plantinga, who interprets

the problem of evil as an atheological argument against coherent theism, I have shown that Hume's concern with the problem of evil is in respect of the lack of positive moral or practical consequences in theism. Since the strong thesis fails to convey Hume's position, I will examine the merits of the weak thesis in the next chapter.

ENDNOTES

[1]The ST might be stated in a stronger form:

(ST) Any appeal to God as a warrant for moral beliefs fails in every case because there are adequate grounds for denying all theistic propositions.

Since Hume does not defend or advocate this form of the ST, and since it does not have any relevance for my study, I will not pursue it either.

[2]Antony Flew, Hume's Philosophy of Belief (New York: Humanities Press, 1961); and Antony Flew, The Presumption of Atheism and Other Essays (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1976).

[3]Presumption, p. 14.

[4]Presumption, pp. 14-15.

[5]For a discussion of this matter see Chapter II, p. 39 above.

[6]Presumption, p. 17.

[7]Presumption, p. 20.

[8]Presumption, p. 22.

[9]John Hick, review of God and Philosophy, by Antony Flew, in Theology Today, April 1967, pp. 85-87.

[10]Hume's Philosophy of Belief, pp. 214-242.

[11]Hume's Philosophy of Belief, p. 215.

[12]D, p. 4.

[13]T, p. 272.

[14]Antony Flew, God and Philosophy (New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1966), p. 14.

[15]T, p. 225.

[16]Alvin Plantinga, God, Freedom, and Evil (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 16.

[17]God, Freedom, and Evil, p. 22.

[18]For a statement of the GGD see p. 132 above.

[19]God, Freedom, and Evil, p. 64.

[20]D, p. 92.

[21]God, Freedom, and Evil, p. 10.

[22]D, p. 86.

[23]D, p. 88.

[24]D, p. 88.

[25]D, p. 89.

[26]D, p. 89.

[27]D, p. 89.

[28]D, pp. 90-92.

[29]D, pp. 94-103.

[30]D, pp. 103-104.

[31]That this conclusion is distinctively Hume's can be established apart from the Dialogues. For example, an early addition of An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding gives the following title to Section XI: "Of the Practical Consequences of National Religion."

[32]T, p. 438.

[33]T, pp. 574-575.

CHAPTER VI

THE WEAK THESIS

In the last chapter I concluded that the strong thesis does not represent Hume's position on the relation between theism and morals. The strong thesis, it may be remembered, is as follows:

> (ST) The appeal to God as the warrant for moral beliefs fails in every case because no impeccable proof that a Deity exists can be made.

My procedure in showing that Hume does not espouse the ST involved two comparisons of Hume's stand with someone who was obviously working along the lines of the ST. First, I contrasted Hume's use of dialogue with Antony Flew's advocacy of a presumption of atheism. This comparison resulted in the conclusion that Hume maintains an open and flexible outlook instead of the firm assertive, and conclusive resolution demanded by Flew. Second, I contrasted Alvin Plantinga's resolution of the problem of evil with the interpretation of that problem by Hume. I concluded that while Plantinga decided that an atheological argument from evil was contingent upon a logical contradiction between the attributes of God and the fact of evil, Hume found a different difficulty for theism. Hume isolates a moral impasse between the motives for belief in the

moral attributes of God and the motives that govern man's ordinary moral attitudes. Hume contends that although theism can be made rationally consistent with the presence of evil, it cannot be done in such a way that morally fruitful consequences follow from the principle of theism. The outcome of both comparisons is that Hume does not organize his inquiry concerning natural religion around the ST.

In this chapter I will examine the weak thesis, which is as follows:

> (WT) The appeal to God as a warrant for moral beliefs fails because the nature of God is either morally indifferent or too ambiguous to serve this purpose.

I will employ the procedure of clarification by comparison and contrast that I used in the last chapter. First, I will discuss Nelson Pike's effort to resolve the problem of theodicy in relation to the problem of evil. When Pike's difficulties in these matters are explored, his struggle with the interpretation of Hume will offer distinct clues as to why Hume rejects theodicy as a morally fruitful exercise. Second, I will use H. H. Price's account of Hume's analysis of belief as an aid in pointing out Hume's reasons for rejecting the sort of free will defense employed by Plantinga. Again, I will arrive at Hume's conclusion that no important practical consequences can follow from the principle of theism. My feeling is that these two studies in contrast will provide sufficient reasons for the conclusion that Hume holds the WT.

Nelson Pike and the Problem of Theism

Recent literature on Hume's philosophy of religion includes two important writings by Nelson Pike. The first of these is an essay on Hume and the problem of evil,[1] while the second is a commentary on Hume's

Dialogues.[2] By tracing the changes that occur between the first and the second of these interpretations of Hume, one can gain a better insight into the problems involved in a careful exposition of Hume's thought. My narration of Pike's struggle to understand Hume will deal with four topics. First, I will set down Pike's earliest interpretation of Hume's account of the problem of evil. Second, I will examine the sort of difficulty over moral criteria that later troubles Pike about his earlier resolution of the problem of evil. Third, I will weigh the reasons Pike gives for rejecting the WT interpretation of Hume's Dialogues. Finally, I will evaluate Pike's suggestion that the Dialogues contains an irregular argument for the existence of God. These four topics will take me a long way into the critical evaluation of the WT as a defensible interpretation of Hume's philosophy of religion.

The Problem of Evil Again

In his essay "Hume on Evil," Nelson Pike construes Hume's purpose in the argument from human misery to be the refutation of theism.[3] Pike then states his own purpose: "I shall argue that the argument against the existence of God presented in Part X of the Dialogues is quite unconvincing."[4] The reason Pike believes the argument is unconvincing is the same as the objection raised by Plantinga: the premises that make up the argument are not logically incompatible and therefore are not prohibitive of the conclusion "God exists." Pike lists the alleged "inconsistent triad" of premises Philo is supposed to have used in making a knockdown refutation of theism:

(1) The world contains instances of suffering.
(2) God exists--and is omnipotent and omniscient.
(3) God exists--and is perfectly good.[5]

At this point there is no significant difference between Pike and Plantinga.

However, in contrast with Plantinga, Pike construes the force of the argument along the lines of the Utopian Case (UC).[6] This is evident from Pike's interpretation of the moral attributes in proposition (3): "to say of God that he is perfectly good is to say that God would prevent suffering if he could."[7] On the basis of the UC interpretation Pike proceeds to argue that the premises of the argument from evil are not sufficient for the conclusion Philo supposedly drew from them.

> It seems to me that this argument is deficient. I do not think it follows from the claim that a being is perfectly good that he would prevent suffering if he could.[8]

Pike's objection is that the claim of the UC is not true. As an argument by counter-example Pike mentions the case of a parent who causes momentary displeasure to a child by forcing it to take some unpleasant medicine in order that the child might suffer less in the long run. Pike argues that moral culpability does not arise where a case of provoked suffering occurs only as an appropriate means to a greater good (GGD). Pike applies this argument to theism with the following explication:

> As a general statement, a being who permits (or brings about) an instance of suffering might be perfectly good providing only that there is a morally sufficient reason for his action. Thus, it does not follow from the claim that God is perfectly good that he would prevent suffering if he could. God might fail to prevent suffering, or himself bring about suffering, while remaining perfectly good. It is required only that there be a morally sufficient reason for his action.[9]

To facilitate his criticism of the UC, Pike suggests that the moral proposition of the alleged inconsistent triad might be corrected as follows:

(4) The world contains instances of suffering.
(5) God exists--and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.
(6) An omnipotent and omniscient being would have no morally sufficient reason for allowing instances of suffering.[10]

But Pike is not satisfied with (6) for two reasons. First, the truth of (6) cannot be established by observation, because it is impossible to examine every instance. Second, given the inability to confirm the truth of (6) by observation, (6) would need to be necessarily true if the triad is to be a contradiction. But since (6) is not known to be true, no contradiction has been established in the triad (4) - (6). Further, if there is no contradiction, it is not a refutation of theism.

At this point there is little significant difference between the positions of Pike and Plantinga. There is an effort at economy on the part of the former in that he does not employ the FWD. Their common argument may be briefly stated as follows: Since it is impossible to establish a logical contradiction between the attributes of God and the existence of evil, both theism and a theodicy are logical possibilities. Of course the merit of Pike's criticism of Hume lies with the assumption that the significant issue at stake is the existence of God (ST). Further, if Hume's requirement that all concepts be cashable in terms of impressions is accepted, Pike's case requires a further assumption that the attributes of God can be known and fixed in keeping with Hume's challenge. Finally, Pike's position depends upon a third assumption that an adequate response to Hume's alleged atheological argument has been made if one is able to secure the possibility of theism and leave the door open to a possible theodicy, although a satisfactory one is not even suggested. These unresolved issues raise further questions about Pike's proposal that it suffices for a theodicy to be possible in

principle though not available in fact.

The Problem of an Unresolved Theodicy

Pike later acknowledges that his bare-bones defense of theism in "Hume on Evil" needs some amplification.[11] He says that his reason for a shaken confidence in the adequacy of his earlier argument comes from an essay by Terence Penelhum.[12] A brief summary of Penelhum's essay should make explicit the reasons for Pike's concern.

Penelhum says he is interested only in the traditional concept of God. He argues that he chooses to be finicky in this matter for two reasons. First, only the combined attributes of omnipotence and moral goodness meet the desired standard of being "worthy of reverence." Second, the absence of moral goodness as a divine attribute would allow for a moral rejection of theism. Consequently, it is a reasonable expectation not only that God have the character of moral goodness but furthermore that every aspect of the account of theism be relevant to and consistent with perfect moral goodness. Therefore, the mere logical possibility of a theodicy leaves too much up in the air. Penelhum makes his point as follows:

> There is something very odd about suggesting that although someone is morally good I have no idea what he would do in a wide range of situations; though it is quite possible for me to say that I do not know how he would handle some particularly knotty problem.[13]

The crux of the matter is that the attribution of moral goodness to God requires the use of some criteria that the calling of someone good satisfies. As a bare minimum the criteria must include those used by the speaker who affirms the goodness of God. Even though it is true that concepts of God, as well as the particular criteria employed, vary among

individuals, it is more important to observe that the requirement of criteria is not waived. Further, the mere requirement of criteria makes possible both the refinement and even the rejection of a particular view of God. In addition, it is the requirement of criteria which furnishes the requisite guidelines for detecting whether a certain concept of God signifies a God who meets the standards of being both morally satisfying and worthy of worship. The consequence of the requirement of criteria is the narrowing of the conditions in which the existence of a moral God can be affirmed. In other words, there are specified moral limits and conditions regarding the existence of a Deity who is perfectly good.

I will name these narrowing conditions inherent in the requirement of criteria for the ascription of moral attributes, the Requirement of Ethical Consistency (REC). The requirement may be formulated as follows:

> (REC) Any ascription of a moral attribute to God requires some prior criteria for calling someone good and accordingly narrows what might be the case concerning the character of God should He be called good.

Pike both acknowledges the merits of the REC and is puzzled as to the effect it might have upon his own conclusions. Whatever consequences the REC may have upon Pike's account, my interests will be limited to the effect the REC has upon Pike's understanding of Hume's argument from suffering.

It seems to me that it is quite possible within Hume's philosophy to conceive of God apart from the attribute of goodness. Consequently, it does not follow that to deny the moral attributes is the same thing as to deny that there is a God. Rather, since God's existence is independent of His goodness, one would need to weigh the evidence as

well as check the criteria to see if it is plausible to speak of God as being perfectly good. Plantinga and Pike differ from Hume in that while the former assume that any God worthy of the name is perfectly good, Hume is satisfied merely to identify God with whatever causes the universe and to infer what attributes he can from the observed state of the universe. The difference is decisive in how the problem of evil is formulated. The two distinctive sorts of arguments from human suffering may be specified as follows:

(A) The argument from evil fails to refute the existence of God because it does not establish a logical contradiction between the attributes of God and the occurrence of evil.
(B) The argument from evil raises the question whether we have adequate grounds for ascribing moral attributes to the cause of the universe.

The distinction between these two arguments is often ignored, and fatally so in the exposition of the philosophy of Hume. Since Hume employs an argument of the sort B, the outcome of his argument is not that God does not exist but rather that the God who is the cause of this universe is morally indifferent. Hume does mention an argument of the sort A within his case for B, but he allows that even if A were true the problem of B would remain. In other words, Hume's argument from evil is not so much an argument against the existence of God as it is an argument against the moral relevance of God. However, since Pike thinks that Hume advances an A argument, I will try to determine what his reasons are.

The Place of Theodicy in the Dialogues

In a "Postscript" to the topic "Evil and 'experimental theism,'" Pike replies to the suggestion of William Capitan that the argument in

Part X of the Dialogues deals with the nature and not the existence of God.[14] Pike sets out the distinction between his and Capitan's interpretation as a choice of one among three theses:

> (1) Given that God is to be understood as all-powerful, infinitely intelligent and perfectly good, and given that "powerful," "intelligent," and "good" are to be taken as carrying the full implications of their ordinary meanings, God does not exist.
> (2) Given that God exists, and given that the terms "powerful," "intelligent," and "good" are to be taken as carrying the full implications of their ordinary meanings, God is not all-powerful, infinitely intelligent and perfectly good.
> (3) Given that God exists, and given that God is all-powerful, infinitely intelligent and perfectly good, either "powerful," "intelligent," or "good" must be understood otherwise than as carrying the full implications of its ordinary meaning.[15]

Pike believes that (1) is the correct interpretation of Hume and that Capitan is mistaken in holding (3). Pike offers three reasons why he thinks (1) is correct. The first is an external reason. Pike says the first is better because "the logical issues underpinning the traditional problem of evil seem to emerge with greater clarity."[16] But this reason is of merit only if the traditional problem is the one perplexing Hume. Pike offers only two reasons why the text of the Dialogues requires (1). Pike believes that (1) gives the best sense of unity to Parts X and XI. Pike also claims that the conclusion of Part X supports (1). I believe that neither of these reasons will survive close scrutiny of the Dialogues.

The unity of Parts X and XI arises from a sequence of questions introduced in the process of the discussion and to which answers are advanced. The order may be outlined by listing the questions as they arise. The order of the questions may be classified as follows:

> I. The Due Sense of Religion is Ordinarily Caused by Misery.[17]
> A. "For is it necessary to prove what everyone feels within himself?"[18]

B. "And who can doubt of what all men declare from their own immediate feelings and experiences?"[19]

II. The Moral Attributes of God.[20]
   A. Is it possible to assert that the moral attributes of the Deity are of the same nature with virtue in human creatures?[21]
   B. How does the divine benevolence display itself in the sense of the anthropomorphites?[22]
   C. What is the purpose of establishing the natural attributes of the Deity while the moral are doubtful and uncertain?[23]

III. The Argument from Evil.[24]
   A. "Why is there any misery at all in the world?[25]
   B. If it be allowed that the concept of God is compatible with evil, what are you advanced by these concessions?[26]

IV. The Evidence from the Order in the World.[27]
   A. "Is the world, considered in general and as it appears to us in this life, different from what a man or such a limited being would, beforehand, expect from a very powerful, wise and benevolent Deity?"[28]
   B. Is Philo a more dangerous enemy of Demea than is Cleanthes?[29]

It seems to me that the questions which govern the direction of the discussions in Parts X and XI are the clue to the unity of those parts. Further, none of the questions concerns the existence of God but only his nature as observed through his effects. A careful reading of Parts X and XI as answers to these questions would go against Pike's position (1).

As for the second internal reason of Pike's concerning the conclusion of Part X, I can see no reason for concluding that it supports (1) in preference to (2) or (3). In fact, the "Triumph Passage," with which Part X ends, appears to me to support (2). In that passage, Philo suggests that a concession of the compatibility between the attributes of God and the existence of evil can be made for the sake of argument. Even with this concession, Philo argues, the problem of evil remains, because the real issue is the question how the moral attributes can be inferred from the mixed phenomena that make up the world.

My reading of the "Triumph Passage" is supported by the discussion of the non-inferrability of moral attributes that follows in Part XI.

First, Cleanthes suggests that the attributes of God should be modified so as to remove the aspect of "infinity" or "perfection." Second, Philo recounts how the order discovered within the universe can establish only the moral indifference of the secret powers that are the unknown cause of order in the universe. Third, in the narrative order of the Dialogues, when Demea discovers that his partner in the mystic attitude toward the divine attributes, Philo, is more an enemy of full-blown theism than the anthropomorphite Cleanthes, he leaves the party in a huff.

An additional factor should be noted. The word "existence" occurs only once in Hume's total argument from evil in Parts X and XI. The particular use occurs in Part XI. In paragraph four of Part XI[30] Philo argues that "such a deity" as the one proposed in the first paragraph by Cleanthes, where he replaces the metaphysical notion of "infinity" with religious attributes like "holy," cannot be inferred to exist in light of the order of the world any more than the traditionally conceived God. This merely says that the evidence does not support the belief that there are instances of either of these two types of concepts.

Since I can find no reasons internal to the text of Hume's Dialogues to support Pike's interpretation, the conclusion of the matter seems somewhat along these lines: Pike is mistaken in thinking that Hume holds (1). Pike is led into this mistake by two oversights. First, he tries to interpret Hume's argument from evil along traditional atheological lines. Second, he tries to set aside the usual concerns over a theodicy by concluding one is possible in principle if not available in fact. The combination of these two shortcomings leads Pike not only to miss Hume's point but to underestimate the consequences for the moral

relevance of theism when an explicit theodicy is not forthcoming. It is this latter problem which is dominant in Hume's Dialogues.

Pike's oversight is all the more inexcusable when seen in the light of a special suggestion he provides concerning an irregular argument for theism in Part III of the Dialogues. Pike's success in this matter, as well as his use of the irregular argument to account for the unity of Philo's position in Parts I-XI with Part X, makes the oversight about Hume's use of the argument from evil most unfortunate. I will clarify these accusations in the next section.

The Irregular Arguments for the Existence of God

Pike believes that there are two types of argument from design in Parts II through VIII of the Dialogues. The first version, the regular or scientific version, is presented by Cleanthes in Part II and consists in the argument that there is an order in the universe analogous to that found in a machine. It is the argument by analogy that Philo criticizes and rejects in Parts IV through VIII. The second is an irregular argument proposed by Cleanthes in Part III. Cleanthes points to the immediate awareness of order by means of his contrived examples of "the articulate speech from the clouds"[31] and "the self-propagating library,"[32] as well as the common observation of the operations of nature such as those found in an eye.[33] Cleanthes argues that each of these accounts specifies an incident where design or order is an immediate impression and not mediated through reason and logical inference. In other words, it is an instinctive awareness of order. Now, as Pike's account of Hume's story goes, it is this second version of belief in God that Philo assents to in Part XII. There Philo claims that the immediate

sense of order is irresistible and legitimate. It is an immediate inference of the sentiments and not mediated by rational proofs. It is not only of legitimate origin, but it is irresistible and instinctive. It is very similar to instinctive natural beliefs.

Now my conclusion concerning Pike and the problem of theodicy is this: First, Pike is representing his own concerns and not Hume's when he suggests that the issue at stake is the existence of God. Second, Pike tacitly concedes the weakness of his and Plantinga's case when he acknowledges that he is troubled by Penelhum's criticism. What this criticism amounts to is the requirement of continuity between the criteria of calling something good in common affairs and calling God good. The outcome is that some actual correlation must be established between ordinary experience and the divine attributes. Third, although Pike denies that Hume is concerned with the criteria problem regarding the attributes of God, he fails to make this case with a careful reading of the Dialogues. It is more likely that a thorough reading of Hume will show that he is concerned with the nature of God. Finally, Pike makes a helpful suggestion about the instinctive belief in God or order and shows how it is the common position of Cleanthes and Philo in the Dialogues. This exposition is more consistent with the Capitan reading of the problem of evil than with Pike's. Hence, I conclude that the issue in Hume is not atheology but theodicy and that Hume's primary aim is to show why natural theology has no practical consequences. In other words, the argument from evil in Hume follows an alternate strategy to that found in Pike and Plantinga. That this is indeed the direction in which Hume's account moves gains further credit when his analysis of the freedom of assent is considered.

The Problem of Belief in Regard to Theism

Indeterminists commonly argue that man has the ability to assent to any logical proposition and that rational beliefs can motivate human action. Indeterminism usually involves a belief that rational self-determinism is a necessary condition of moral responsibility. As we have seen, Plantinga uses a FWD to establish the compatibility of theism and evil. For Plantinga free will means "being free with respect to an action."[34] He explains "being free" as follows:

> If a person is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or that he won't.[35]

Plantinga adds that an action is morally significant when it is right to choose and wrong not to choose or vice versa.[36] In what follows, I will contrast this view of Plantinga's with that of Hume's in order to clarify the different consequences that follow from their respective notions of religious assent. I will rely to some extent upon H. H. Price's lectures "Hume's Analysis of Belief" and "The Freedom of Assent in Descartes and Hume" published in his book Belief.[37] My account will include three things. First, I will contrast the two different models of assent behind the self-determinism of Plantinga and the soft determinism of Hume. Second, I will briefly deal with Hume's account of belief as summarized by Price. Finally, I will lay out the consequences of Hume's doctrine of belief for his account of religion.

The Free Will Defense Again

As I pointed out, Plantinga establishes his case for theism on an appeal to the necessity of free choice as the requisite condition for

a moral universe. The FWD entails a necessary proposition of this sort: "It is not within God's power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil."[38] Plantinga believes the proposition is intuitively true because it states both the sufficient conditions for free assent and the necessary conditions for moral responsibility. Plantinga's whole case appears to be construed along the lines of a rationalistic model of assent (RMA). The crucial proposition in the RMA is that reason may be the motive of an action. The model may be constructed as follows:

(RMA) Step 1: Belief x is known to be a logical possibility.
Step 2: The grounds for believing x are appraised and reason finds person S is entitled to credit x as either true, or probable, and to act accordingly.
Step 3: Person S is motivated by reason (alone) to perform action A in light of the assured reliability of belief x.
Step 4: Person S is a free agent to the exact degree that his choice to do A is motivated by the reasonableness of x.

In contrast to the RMA, a different story of the motivation of human actions is spelled out by Hume. His account construes assent as determined by the passions. This alternative attitudinal model (AMA) may be sketched as follows:

(AMA) Step 1: Belief x is a feeling that occurs in person S.
Step 2: Belief x may be vindicated as probable in light of the evidence or found to be instinctive because x is universal, irresistible, and of utility to the common life.
Step 3: Belief x will of its own force and vivacity move person S to do action A unless a stronger belief y intervenes, or unless belief x, being neither instinctive nor empirically vindicated, is not associated with the strength of passion P.
Step 4: Person S is reasonable to the exact degree that his actions are motivated by vindicated or instinctive beliefs.

The decisive difference between RMA and AMA is the difference in the

mechanism of motive. The RMA envisions the motivating push to depend upon a free choice of reason between various possibilities. Quite to the contrary, the AMA views the motivating impetus as coming from the inherent force of a dominant passion. In the latter case the merits of an action depend upon the character of the passion that motivates the person to act. Reason is limited to the clarification of means or the elucidation of ends. In this sense, reason is the slave of the passions.

Plantinga has a larger range of alternatives in the use of RMA than Hume has with the AMA. For Plantinga, any set of beliefs that are rationally coherent are possible although they may not be of equal probability or of comparable ease of achievement. In Hume's case, only those beliefs that originate in impressions, or arise instinctively from the necessary conditions of life, or are contrived to promote the common utility are legitimate. However, the relative merit of these two divergent accounts of motivation turns on the resolution of the problem of assent.

Hume in fact warns against the rejection of the AMA on the ground that it might be destructive to religion and morals.[39] He is quite aware of the temptation to argue for the rationalistic view of free assent because of the alleged fringe benefits it is said to provide for some institutionalized beliefs and practices. Hume insists that the evidence alone can vindicate an answer to this problem. If there is any surface weakness in Hume's case, it is his reduction of the dispute to the mutually exclusive dichotomy between reason and passion, while leaving unquestioned the mechanical model of human motivation which gives rise to the problem. I will only mention this latter oversight and not

pursue it. Furthermore, since Plantinga seems to evince the same limited vision concerning these matters as Hume does, I will proceed by looking into Hume's doctrine of belief.

Hume's Doctrine of Belief

H. H. Price has an excellent lecture on Hume's doctrine of belief.[40] The lecture begins with three preliminary cautions to the interpreter of Hume's narration of the story of belief. First, one should keep in mind that Hume constructs his doctrine of belief within the context of an account of causality. The result is that Hume's "official" view of belief is severely limited to causal beliefs. Second, Hume was exploring new territory in his treatment of belief. Consequently, he has no ready-made terminology and stumbles about looking for adequate modifiers to amplify his characterization of belief. The interpreter is to be warned against an under-emphasis upon "lively" at the expense of other words like "firm," "steady," and "solid." Third, Hume's adoption of the language of "ideas" must not mislead the interpreter into a misunderstanding of the doctrine of belief. There is the danger that the interpreter might collapse the distinction between a "vivid image" and a "lively idea" at great expense to Hume's remarkable insights into belief.

With these precautions, H. H. Price submits the following brief but insightful summation of Hume's doctrine:

> 1. The difference between believing and not believing is a difference in the manner of conceiving an idea, and not in the content of the idea conceived.
> 2. We can roughly indicate what this manner of conceiving is, by saying that a believed idea is one which feels strong or forceful or lively or solid.

> 3. Except in the special case of madness, the forcefulness or liveliness of the idea arises from its relation to (its associative linkage with) a present impression; the idea gets its liveliness from its relation to something actually perceived (or introspected) at the moment.
> 4. In sensible or sober or sane belief, this associative link between idea and impression arises from past experiences of constant conjunctions. The impression A enlivens or strengthens the idea B, because A-like impressions and B-like impressions have been constantly conjoined in the past experience of the believer.
> 5. If, or to the extent that, the associative link between idea and impression is of another sort (if it is just association by resemblance or by contiguity), then or to that extent the belief is subnormal or silly or unjustifiable. And *a fortiori* the belief is subnormal or silly or unjustifiable if the liveliness or forcefulness of the idea does not arise from its relation to a present impression at all, but merely from purely physiological causes (or as Hume might have added, from the effects of hypnotic suggestion).[41]

The crux of the dispute between Plantinga and Hume lies in their different understandings of belief. An account of belief like that found in Hume undercuts the FWD of Plantinga. In Hume's story of belief there is no role for volition apart from the agent's awareness of the spontaneousness of his own motivation.

H. H. Price calls attention to the "Appendix" of the *Treatise*, where, he believes, Hume offers a *reductio ad absurdum* of the rationalist notion of the freedom of assent.[42] The passage in the *Treatise* is as follows:

> *First*, We have no abstract idea of existence, distinguishable and separable from the idea of particular objects. 'Tis impossible, therefore, that this idea of existence can be annex'd to the idea of any object, or form the difference betwixt a simple conception and belief.
> *Secondly*, The mind has the command over all its ideas, and can separate, unite, mix, and vary them, as it pleases: so that if belief consisted merely in a new idea, annex'd to the conception, it wou'd be in a man's power to believe what he pleas'd. We may, therefore, conclude, that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something, that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters.[43]

Hume's argument is designed to deny that assent is an act of free will,

and that it is in our power to assent to whatever we can imagine. In fact, Hume argues elsewhere that, when the propositions have the irresistible endorsement of instinct, nature is too strong for the human mind to withhold assent, except for short spells of philosophical inquiry.[44] The point Hume is making is that assent is involuntary. The mind may be induced in certain circumstances to believe a deception or fall for a belief through ignorance. Preferably the mind will be inclined to believe as a result of habitual association. However, the mind cannot of its own choice will the sentiment of belief.

Hume does not consider his soft determinism as in any way a problem for moral principles. In fact, he thinks a form of soft determinism is essential for any account of our moral actions.

> Actions are, by their very nature, temporary and perishing; and where they proceed not from some cause in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honor, if good; nor infamy if evil.[45]

The sum of Hume's analysis of belief is that man does not have free will in the sense used by Plantinga, nor is Plantinga's sense of free will a requisite condition of moral responsibility.

The difference between Hume and Plantinga over the nature of belief exposes two distinct views of reasonableness. Plantinga emphasizes logical consistency as the primary condition of reasonableness. In contrast, Hume emphasizes the conformity of the conclusion to the degree of evidence. Hume's reasonable man is one whose beliefs correspond to the evidence acquired in sense experience, reflection, memory, and from testimony. Assent is the consequence of the force transferred through the manner of perception into the fixed attitude of the mind. If the firmness of the evidence and the solidity of the conviction are

comparable, then the individual is able to feel a spontaneity in assent. If the choice of an action is the unobstructed expression of the fixed attitude of the mind, then the individual acts in spontaneous expression of his own character. Consequently, if Hume's notion of the reasonable man is correct, then Plantinga's FWD is stripped of all its apologetic significance.

Hume and the Reasonable Assent to Theism

In the Dialogues we have a piece to literary art as well as a collection of philosophical arguments. As the writer, Hume does not intrude into the discussion, but allows the drama as a whole to portray his thoughts about religion. As a non-participant, Hume depends upon the persons engaged in conversation to convey the progress of the action by their constancy of character and expression of attitudes. The plot narrates the struggle of three men to come to grips with the evidence for theism. It is Hume's medium for dramatizing how reasonable assent and dissent occur in regard to religion.

The plot of this intellectual and verbal drama turns on the attitudes of the conversants. The very manner in which Hume calls attention to the development of feeling in the Dialogues portrays his own doctrine that morals (and religion) "are more properly felt than judged of."[46] What Hume describes is how the evidence, when allowed to have its own weight, sways the feelings through its residual force and moves the mind to assent.

The Dialogues plots the course of assent in the following manner:

I. Act One (Parts I-IX).
   A. Scene One: Philo and Demea coalesce in a mystic attitude toward man's knowledge of the Divine attributes. The reason for the mystic attitude is that there is no analogy between the passionate nature of man and the intellectual nature of God. The consequence for Demea is that the agency of God is construed on the rationalistic model, while the consequence for Philo is that he suspends belief about what God is like. Cleanthes alone argues for the anthropomorphic attitude.
   B. Scene Two: Interlude about alternate cosmogonies to the rationalistic model.
   C. Scene Three: Demea affirms an a priori defense of theism. Cleanthes indicates the isolation of such arguments from the force of the evidence. Philo suggests that the rationalistic model does not correspond with the way people come to hold religious beliefs.

II. Act Two (Parts X-XII).
   A. Scene One: Philo and Demea diverge over the consequence of the sentiment of misery. Demea argues that the implication of evil is that this is a probationary world where man's free assent to good under duress prepares him for a better world. Cleanthes classes this notion as merely an abstract position without persuasive evidence. Philo abandons his position of suspended belief and argues that theism has no persuasive resolution for human suffering.
   B. Scene Two: Interlude about cosmic circumstances preventing a rationalistic theodicy.
   C. Scene Three: Following the departure of Demea, Philo and Cleanthes converge in an assent to a mitigated theism. They agree that no one can fully deny the inclination to believe prompted by the immediate sense of design or order. They further agree that theism has no practical consequence of its own.

When the expositor of Hume's Dialogues keeps this plot in mind, he is in a position to answer the difficulty T. E. Jessop raises as the primary problem: What is the connection between Philo's suspension of belief in the first eleven parts and his confession in the last?[47] The answer lies in the simple enumeration of the stages by which Philo is led to assent:

Step 1: Philo distinguishes between the nature and the existence of God in defining the matter under dispute. The debate concerns the nature of God.
Step 2: Philo dissents from any ascription of attributes to God because such knowledge is beyond the evidence. Philo suspends belief and challenges any claim to know on Cleanthes' part.

Step 3: Philo notes that the way men come to belief differs from that supposed in the a priori argument of Demea.
Step 4: Philo claims a triumph for his dissent from the attributes of God in light of the evidence of human misery.
Step 5: Philo abandons his attitude of suspended belief and lays out the circumstances that preclude a theodicy.
Step 6: Philo assents to the existence of a Deity whose nature does not exceed these circumstances.
Step 7: Philo allows for a "true religion" (i.e., a benign civil religion) that is a silent force supporting the natural inclination of the passions in moral belief.

Hume maintains the consistency of Philo's character. He is always a reasonable man led by the force of the evidence. The final impact of the evidence is felt by Philo in two senses. First, there is the limited proposition of mitigated theism (MT):

(MT) That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.[48]

This proposition expresses the attitude of Philo that stands in suspended belief to any inference from the nature of things to a substantial or full-blown theism. He admits only that there is some probability of a God of ambiguous nature. But there is another confession that stands in line with the irregular argument from the immediate sense of order suggested by Cleanthes in Part III. Since this type of evidence is not mediate but immediate to the manner of perception, Philo is moved to assent. This second type of assent is to an aesthetic theism (AT) of the following form:

(AT) A purpose, an intention, a 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.[49]

By combining these two forms of Philo's confession, Hume is able to account for two things. First, he has narrated the processes by which men are led to assent (AT). Second, he has defined the limits of reasonable assent. In doing so, Hume's Dialogues successfully portrays how theism

can be a part of man's legitimate and natural feelings. Thus, Hume can account for the general inclination of men to religious belief. At the same time he has the instruments to mark off sane from silly belief. He can consistently exclude superstitions and fanatic religions from "true religion." Hume has effectively isolated the moral sense from the sentiments of religion and has shown them to be independent and distinct. But he has also allowed that a benign civil religion may be a social support for polite society and, in this manner, a reinforcement of the moral fiber in common life.

Conclusion

In summary, I have argued for the WT against the two expositions of Hume which take him as both holding the ST and being mistaken in his arguments. In the first case, I looked at the exposition of Nelson Pike. He was seen to hold that Hume defends the logical inconsistency form of the argument from evil and fails to demonstrate the soundness of the position. I have shown how Pike misconstrues the significance of Hume's argument. I have argued that Pike's counter-argument leads to a perplexity over how one can use specific criteria to ascribe goodness to God and not use the same criteria to offer a relevant theodicy. I suggested that Pike's problem in this matter was the actual one found in Hume. Further, I sketched Pike's account of the irregular argument for the existence of God in Part III of the Dialogues. I suggested that this exposition of Hume provides further evidence from Pike himself that Hume is not concerned with atheology but theodicy in the argument from evil.

In the second case I looked again at Plantinga's FWD. With the

help of H. H. Price's account of Hume's doctrines of belief and involuntary assent, I pointed out why Hume would not be satisfied with Plantinga's rationalistic account of motivation. I then proceeded to show how Hume's account of belief and religious assent is a consistent whole without either the use of free will or the loss of moral responsibility. Further, I showed why natural belief and religious assent of the sort acknowledged by Hume lead to a confession of mitigated or aesthetic theism. In both cases, there is assent to the existence of a limited Deity who is morally indifferent or of too ambiguous a nature to serve as the warrant for moral beliefs. This is the WT.

ENDNOTES

[1]"Hume on Evil," The Philosophical Review 72 (1963): pp. 180-197, reprinted in Nelson Pike, ed., God and Evil (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), pp. 85-102. My references are to this later addition, hereafter, God and Evil.

[2]Nelson Pike, "Hume on the Argument from Design," Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ed. Nelson Pike (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1970), pp. 127-238. Hereafter cited as Commentary.

[3]God and Evil, p. 86.

[4]God and Evil, p. 87.

[5]God and Evil, p. 87.

[6]For a statement of the UC see p. 132 above.

[7]God and Evil, p. 87; and Commentary, p. 185.

[8]God and Evil, p. 88; and Commentary, p. 186.

[9]God and Evil, pp. 88-89; and Commentary, p. 187.

[10]God and Evil, p. 89; and Commentary, p. 187.

[11]Commentary, p. 193.

[12]Terence Penelhum, "Devine Goodness and the Problem of Evil," Religious Studies 2 (1976): 95-107.

[13]Religious Studies, p. 100.

[14]William Capitan, "Part X of Hume's Dialogues," in V. Chappell, ed., Hume (New York: Doubleday Anchor Series, 1966), pp. 384-395.

[15]Commentary, pp. 194-195.

[16]*Commentary*, p. 195.

[17]D, pp. 82-87.

[18]D, p. 82.

[19]D, p. 82.

[20]D, pp. 87-91.

[21]D, p. 87.

[22]D, p. 89.

[23]D, p. 89.

[24]D, pp. 91-92.

[25]D, p. 91.

[26]D, p. 92.

[27]D, pp. 93-106.

[28]D, p. 96.

[29]D, p. 105.

[30]*Commentary*, p. 96.

[31]D, p. 34.

[32]D, p. 35.

[33]D, p. 36.

[34]*God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 29.

[35]*God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 29.

[36]*God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 29.

[37]H. H. Price, *Belief* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1968).

[38]*God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 54.

[39]E, pp. 96-97.

[40]*Belief*, pp. 157-188.

[41]*Belief*, p. 175.

[42]*Belief*, p. 221.

[43]T, pp. 623-624.

[44]T, p. 183.

[45]E, p. 98.

[46]T, p. 470.

[47]T. E. Jessop, "The Present Day Relevance of Hume's *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*," *Aristotelian Society Supplement* 18 (1939): pp. 179-228.

[48]D, p. 122.

[49]D, p. 108.

CONCLUSION

The combined exercises of an exposition of Hume's writings and the comparison of Hume's position with some current philosophical accounts have led me to some important claims into the relation between morals and religion as they are set forth in Hume's philosophy of religion. I originally set out to examine Hume's interpretation of religion in light of a heuristic principle--that the core question of Hume's inquiry is: Does religion provide a credible warrant for man's moral beliefs? I can now summarize the results gained from using this core question in the examination of Hume's writings about religion. The summary will be divided into two distinct types of results. The first will consist of an enumeration of the conclusions reached in each chapter, which should add up to a consistent interpretation of Hume's account of religion. The second will be a summary of some suggestions scattered throughout my study where I have indicated that Hume was, in some things, going along with the accepted opinions of his times. Some examples of these shared beliefs are the way of ideas, the mechanistic model of motivation, and a universally common human nature. Wherever I have called attention to any of these notions that Hume shares uncritically with others of his day, I have not tried to amend or correct Hume's account.

Rather, I have indicated Hume's dependence upon such notions merely to suggest that Hume's conclusions are open to further consideration. With these preliminary remarks in mind, I will proceed to review respectively each of the two types of results.

In Chapter I, I concluded that Hume had a workable scheme for the justification of moral judgments (i.e., their origin in the passions and their utility to the common life) apart from any appeal to religious beliefs. Further, I suggested that as a consequence of his own ethical theory Hume considered the appeal to religion superfluous and vacuous. In Chapter II, I traced Hume's investigation into the origin of religious belief and saw that Hume concluded that religion begins in the uncertain passions of fear or hope. As I showed, Hume could discover no reason why the sure and calm passions of moral attitudes needed or might gain an added veracity from such an insecure source. More important, I noted Hume's conclusion that the moralist cannot afford to ignore the difference of origin in the passions because the difference of pedigree triggers a conflict of motives that eventuates in an impasse between moral attitudes and religious sentiments. In Chapter III, I related how Hume assessed the possibility that reason might perfect the religious hypothesis and avoid the moral impasse upon which, Hume says, popular theism is impaled. But, as I indicated, rational theology fails to overcome the impasse for two reasons. First, the human understanding of the nature of God is too ambiguous to serve as the ground or source of moral beliefs. Second, the problem of evil shows that the motive for belief in rational theism is as dependent upon the uncertain passions of fear or hope as popular theism and ends up in the same moral impasse.

Consequently, I concluded that Hume argues that no significant practical benefits follow from the adoption of rational theism. In Chapter IV, I recounted how Hume appraised the fideist claim that Divine intervention provides an escape from the limitations of the human passions. As I indicated, Hume found these claims wanting for two reasons. First, fideistic theism abandons the necessitous common life for the illusionary advantages of an artificial life. In other words, the wager of faith is taken on the basis of greater utility while at the same time it is rejecting the frame of reference that the principle of utility requires to be effective. Second, as was noted, Hume makes it clear that miracles are more a problem than a solution. That is to say, there is no motive for assenting to a miracle that does not fall back upon the very motives the notion of miracle is alleged to circumvent. Hume was observed to conclude that the belief in a miracle would be a greater miracle than any miracle believed. In sum, Chapters II, III, and IV have shown that the three forms of theism--popular, rational, and fideistic--are all hopelessly entangled in a conflict of motives that precludes theism's effective service as a ground of moral judgment. Throughout my inquiry, Hume has been interpreted as allowing for the possibility of the existence of God, but as showing that no practical utility could follow from the possibility. The core question may be credited with providing for a consistent reading of Hume's stance on religion.

A second stage in the testing of whether the core question is the key to Hume's philosophy of religion was introduced in Chapters V and VI. In these two chapters Hume's account of religion was tested in relation to a strong thesis and then in regard to a weak thesis in order

to determine if the heuristic principle employed in Chapters I through IV offers a better understanding of Hume's writings on religion. The ST is:

> (ST) The appeal to God as the warrant for moral beliefs fails in every case because no impeccable proof that a Deity exists can be made.

Two positions regarding the ST were engaged in the works of Antony Flew and Alvin Plantinga. In contrast to Flew, I found that Hume does not work from the presumption of atheism. In contrast to Plantinga, I showed that Hume understands the problem of evil as an assertion of the moral emptiness of theism and not as an effort of atheists to construct a knockdown refutation of theism. Having shown the ineptitude of the ST in expressing Hume's stance, I turned to the weak thesis, which is another form of the heuristic principle:

> (WT) The appeal to God as a warrant for moral beliefs fails because the nature of God is either morally indifferent or too ambiguous to serve this purpose.

Two positions interpreting Hume along the lines of the ST were used to test the WT. First, I indicated that Nelson Pike could not reconcile a view of Hume along the lines of the ST with the "irregular argument" for God he found in the Dialogues. In addition, I noted that Pike's refutation of the ST as the consequence of an argument from evil runs aground on the problem of determining God's moral nature. It was suggested that the WT might help Pike work out the inconsistencies in his own interpretation of Hume. Second, in comparison with Plantinga's "Free Will Defense," I indicated how Hume's theory of belief removes the possibility of the sort of assent required by either rational or fideistic theism. Hume argues that man is motivated to assent, as well as to approve,

solely on the basis of the motives generated in the passions. The outcome of both my exposition of Hume and my consideration of contrary interpretations is that Hume holds the WT and is best understood from the perspective of a core question: Does religion provide a credible warrant for man's moral beliefs?

I will now turn to review the other type of conclusion, which deals with the picture at work in Hume's analysis of the operations of the human mind. I may summarize what I have suggested throughout my inquiry under three heads: the way of ideas, the mechanistic model of motivation, and the science of human nature. I will review each of these briefly.

First, Hume's success rests to some extent upon "the way of ideas." His method of challenge is a procedure for testing ideas by their pedigree, or origin in impressions. As we have seen, Hume's account of the origin of moral attitudes, as well as the origin of religious sentiments, is shaped by his picture of how the contents of the mind are acquired. The picture is crucial to Hume's conclusions. Only by means of this picture is Hume able to restrict the original passions and consequent reflexions of the mind to the set patterns he describes. As I have had ample opportunity to mention, the picture is the source of the chasm between the Divine intellect and the human mind that carries so much weight in Hume's perspective on religion.

Second, it was repeatedly noted that Hume works from a point of view derived from a mechanical model of motivation. The model pictures human motives as causes that operate like springs upon the component parts of human nature. I found that Hume excludes reason from this

operation of the mind and designates all springs of actions as human passions. The by-product of Hume's model, when joined with the way of ideas, was seen to be the reduction of religion and morals to their own distinctive springs of action or passion. This reduction was seen to eventuate in a conflict of motives that produces a fixed moral impasse as an obstacle to any practical rapprochement between moral attitudes and religious piety. Again, the picture Hume uses to portray the operations of the mind is formative for his construction of the problem and in this case has a special influence upon the interpretation of motives.

Third, as I indicated, Hume correlates the way of ideas and the mechanical model of motivation into a science of human nature. The nature common to all men was found to be constitutive of the requisite conditions of common life. I have had repeated occasion to note Hume's remarkable confidence that human conventions arise collectively from the necessities of human nature and acquire their objectivity from a common utility. As I showed, this picture of a common human nature is essential to Hume's secular ethic and a major tool in his rejection of any practical merit for theism.

These three central notions are collated into a cohesive picture of the mind's operations, which Hume shared with the times in which he was writing. Because of the cohesiveness of these central notions, they should not be judged as either arbitrary or uncritical notions. They are, in a sense, the core propositions that constitute the central order of Hume's web of belief. Without them, Hume's philosophy as a whole, as well as his philosophy of religion, would require serious revision. I mention this to suggest that my heuristic principle cuts through to the

bedrock of Hume's philosophy. In other words, these notions that picture the operations of the human mind are the foundation upon which Hume builds.

If Hume's picture remains the most fruitful way to focus attention on the operations of the mind, then he has solid reasons for the conclusions he reaches. In that case, religion as commonly practiced by man is without positive moral and practical consequences. But the examination of these conditions imposed by the picture of the human mind is another story. However, if the picture from which Hume operates is allowed, I have recounted the fatal consequences for any appeal to religion as a warrant for moral beliefs.

In addition to the establishment of the WT, I have opened the way for the further study of Hume's philosophy of religion. I have been concerned to establish Hume's positive attitude toward a minimal theism. In short, I indicated that Hume's account of theism is distinctive in three ways. First, Hume concludes that the human knowledge of the Divine attributes is so severely limited that the analysis of religion must shift from the nature of God to the appraisal of man's inclination to believe. Second, Hume finds that the causes of man's inclination to believe lead to an irresolvable conflict in the human passions between the motives for believing in God and the nature traditionally imputed to God. Third, since the desired assurances of the "religious hypothesis" cannot be inferred from the "theistic principle," or realized by the human inclination to believe, Hume concludes that an account of credulity is the proper approach to the study of religion.

It is in his account of credulity that Hume makes a positive

contribution to the study of the relation between morals and religion. Hume's pathology of belief provides an insight into the popular but mistaken belief that there is some connection between theism and the warrant for moral belief. A full account of Hume's pathology of belief would, in the case of morals and religion, involve a study of Hume's notions of natural belief, the mechanism of sympathy, and the use of general rules. However, this further task does not fall within the scope of my present inquiry. It is sufficient for this study that I have done the necessary preparatory work for further investigation by establishing the WT.

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