The Riddle of Hume's *Treatise*

SKEPTICISM, NATURALISM, AND IRRELIGION

Paul Russell

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For
Joel and Kirstie

…the strongest tie the mind is capable of…
Hume, A *Treatise of Human Nature* (2.2.4.2/352)

There are many questions in philosophy to which no satisfactory answer has yet been given. But the question of the nature of the gods is the darkest and most difficult of all. . . . So various and so contradictory are the opinions of the most learned men on this matter as to persuade one of the truth of the saying that philosophy is the child of ignorance.

Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*

Preface

The whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery.

Hume, *Natural History of Religion*

A *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40) is widely regarded as the greatest and most influential of David Hume's philosophical works and perhaps the greatest and most influential work in English-speaking philosophy. Ironically enough, however, despite Hume's considerable reputation as one of the most important philosophical critics of religion, it is also generally agreed that the *Treatise* has little or nothing of a direct or substantial nature to do with problems of religion. According to the orthodox view, Hume originally intended to include some irreligious material in the *Treatise* but decided to "castrate" his work before it was published, removing a number of sections that might cause "offence." Hume's major contributions to issues of religion, it is said, are all to be found in his later writings—most notably his posthumous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779). Contrary to this view, I argue in this book that it is *irreligious* aims and objectives that are fundamental to the *Treatise* and account for its underlying unity and coherence.

Almost all commentators over the past two and a half centuries have agreed that Hume's intentions in the *Treatise* should be interpreted in terms of two general themes: *skepticism* and *naturalism*. Although both these themes are relevant to issues of religion in ways Hume subsequently developed and brought to light in his later works, neither the skepticism nor the naturalism of the *Treatise* are understood to have any particular relevance for issues of religion. With respect to skepticism, Hume is understood to advance a variety of radical, Pyrrhonian principles and doctrines throughout his work. These are supposed to undermine and discredit *systematically* our common sense beliefs about the world. On the other hand, with respect to naturalism, Hume is understood to aim at being "the Newton of the moral sciences" by way of introducing the "experimental method" to the study of human nature. It is evident, however, that although both these themes surface in various ways throughout the *Treatise*, they stand in considerable tension in relation to each other. More specifically, Hume's strong skeptical commitments appear to discredit and undercut his naturalist ambitions with respect to the project of "the science of man." This core tension constitutes a deep riddle lying at the heart of the *Treatise*. Any acceptable interpretation of this work must aim to solve it.

The key to solving the riddle of Hume's *Treatise* rests with Hume's fundamental irreligious aims and objectives. Contrary to the orthodox view, it is problems of religion, broadly conceived, that hold the contents of the *Treatise* together as a unified work. More specifically, the direction and structure of Hume's thought in the *Treatise* is shaped on one side by his attack on the Christian metaphysics and morals and on the other by his efforts to construct in its place a secular, scientific account of morality. The constructive or positive side of Hume's thought—his "science of man"—begins with a detailed examination of human thought and motivation based on a naturalistic and necessitarian conception of humankind. The model for this project—after which it was both planned and structured—was the work of Thomas Hobbes, the most infamous "atheist" thinker of the seventeenth century. The destructive or critical side of the philosophy of the *Treatise* is simply the other side of the same anti-Christian coin. That is to say, in order to clear the ground to build the edifice of a secular morality, Hume had to undertake a systematic skeptical attack on those theological doctrines and principles that threatened such a project. The varied and apparently disparate skeptical arguments that Hume advances in the *Treatise* are in fact very largely held together by his overarching concern to discredit and refute Christian metaphysics and morals. Among the most obvious and prominent of Hume's skeptical targets in the *Treatise* was Samuel Clarke, an influential Christian rationalist who aimed to refute demonstratively the "atheistic" philosophy of Hobbes.

The irreligious account of Hume's aims and objectives, I maintain, provides a framework for solving the most fundamental problems of interpretation throughout the *Treatise*. In the first place, only from within the framework of the irreligious interpretation is it possible to understand the specific arguments and positions Hume takes up on a variety of *particular* issues and topics (e.g. causation, induction, external world, personal identity, etc.). Moreover, the irreligious framework also gives us a way of explaining how Hume's more radical skeptical arguments are supposed to cohere with his ambition to contribute to the "science of man" (i.e. it serves to solve the riddle). In this way, the irreligious interpretation enables us to account for both the unity and the coherence of Hume's entire project in the *Treatise*—something the traditional skeptical and naturalist interpretations have failed to achieve. Finally, with these irreligious elements of Hume's intentions properly in view, it is evident, from a *philosophical* perspective, that the *Treatise* makes a major contribution to the philosophy of religion—this being a core feature of this work that has been almost entirely overlooked. From a *historical* point of view, the significance of the irreligious interpretation is that Hume's aims and objectives in the *Treatise* must be placed in the context of the battle between "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists"—with Hume coming down decisively on the side of the latter. From this perspective, *A Treatise of Human Nature* must be judged as one the great works of the Radical Enlightenment, deserving a prominent place within an anti-Christian philosophical tradition that includes works by Hobbes, Spinoza, and their freethinking followers in early eighteenth-century Britain. In this way, from both a philosophical and historical perspective, the irreligious interpretation provides a fundamentally different account of the nature and character of Hume's aims and intentions in the *Treatise* and thereby alters our understanding of the significance of this work for our own contemporaries.

Acknowledgments

> *But there is not one among us historians of philosophy who does not have his own little holy history, to wit a certain idea of historical continuity peculiar to him and definable in its rhythm, sense, and direction.... We need these little holy histories of ours, for they allow us to erect an ordered structure from a garbage-heap of discontinuous events. Robbed of all continuity and direction, history would be useless; but our culture, in order to exist, must render it useful, must carve out its own identity from its past and assimilate that past, appropriate it as a past endowed with meaning and a continuous identity, so that it resembles the subjective past of a human being.*
>
> Leszek Kolakowski, "*Fabula Mundi* and Cleopatra's Nose"

Given Hume's well-known hostility to the clergy, he would, I am sure, have been amused by the irony of his own legacy. As we all know, Hume's admirers regularly assemble in various places around the globe to worship and praise their chosen Deity and pore over the sacred texts that He has left us. The result of all these theological debates is perpetual schism among the "Humeans." New sects appear every few years, each aiming to discredit the old orthodoxies of their brethren. I am not sure if Hume would have found the academic clergy who pore over his own texts any more to his taste than the clergy he was acquainted with in Scotland in the eighteenth century. Be this as it may, it is worth remembering that among Hume's closest friends were members of the Christian clergy—some of whom he admired as gifted, cultured, and virtuous.

My work in this book has been encouraged and supported by a number of friends and colleagues over the years. I have special debts of gratitude to Annette Baier, Robert Bunn, Don Garrett, Peter Millican, Terence Penelhum, and Bernard Williams—all of whom in different ways were sources of support when my work most needed it. I have also benefited greatly from their own accounts and understanding of Hume's philosophy. For further help with various aspects of the preparation of this book I would also like to thank, Páll Árdal, Don Baxter, David Berman, Joe Campbell, George Davie, Terry Dobroslavic, Jim Dybikowski, Antony Flew, Jim Force, Istvan Hont, Doug Jesseph, Peter Jones, James Kelleher, Heiner Klemme, David Owen, D. D. Raphael, David Raynor, Peter Remnant, Ian Ross, Walter Ross, Don Rutherford, Jorge Secada, Alistair Sinclair, Luigi Turco, Stanley Tweyman,

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The early roots of this work date back to a time when I was a student at Queen's (Kingston), Edinburgh, and Cambridge. Conversations with my fellow students at this time concerning problems of religion and Hume's philosophy shaped my interests and the specific way this book has developed. I am not able to mention all those friends who were involved in this process, but I would like to mention two, because they were especially important and because they never lived to see this work in its final form. Daniel Garrad (1954–1979) was a student with me at both Queen's and Edinburgh. We spent countless hours hiking, drinking, and solving fundamental problems of philosophy—most successfully in various pubs all around Edinburgh. Daniel was killed in a climbing accident on the west coast of Scotland while he was finishing his Ph.D. in philosophy of science at Edinburgh University. Matthew Buncombe (1958–1993), who was a student with me at Cambridge, was not only a fine philosopher—his work was on the philosophy of mind—he was also a witty, generous and entertaining friend. Matthew was diagnosed with brain cancer at an age when most people are just beginning to see their lives develop and open up. He bore this lingering and debilitating illness with remarkable fortitude and without the crutch of any religion. Both Daniel and Matthew displayed, in striking form, the possibility of virtuous atheism and the happiness that is derived from true friendship.

Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose;
But young men think it is, and we were young.

There is no doubt in my mind that my general interest in Hume's philosophy, and my particular sympathy with his irreligious aims and objectives, reflects my background and upbringing. Both my mother and father encouraged a deep interest in Scottish culture and its traditions of learning and independence of mind. The influence of my father, Joseph Russell (1923–1975), is especially present in this book. Not only was he for many years a lecturer in philosophy at Glasgow University (and later at Queen's), he was also raised in the bosom of Scottish Calvinism—an outlook he managed, through considerable intellectual effort, to free himself of. If this book is of any merit, then this reflects on the character and contributions of my parents, and how much I owe them.

Parts of this book have already appeared in "Hume's *Treatise* and Hobbes's *The Elements of Law*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1985); "Skepticism and Natural Religion in Hume's *Treatise*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1988); "Epigram, Pantheists and Freethought in Hume's *Treatise*: A Study in Esoteric Communication," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1993); "'Atheism' and the Title-Page of Hume's *Treatise*," *Hume Studies* (1988); "Hume's *Treatise* and the Clarke–Collins Controversy," *Hume Studies* (1995); "Wishart, Baxter and Hume's *Letter from a Gentleman*," *Hume Studies* (1997); "Clarke's 'Almighty Space' and Hume's *Treatise*," *Enlightenment and Dissent* (1997); "The Material World and Natural Religion in Hume's *Treatise*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (2003); review of Rupert Read and Kenneth Richman, eds., *The New Hume Debate*, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (2002); "Butler's 'Future State' and Hume's 'Guide of Life,'" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (2004); "Hume on Religion," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2005); "Hume's Lucretian Mission: Is It Self-Refuting? *Monist* (2007): Hume's *Treatise* and the Problem of Virtuous Atheism," *Nowa Krytyka* (2007); and "Free Will and Irreligion in Hume's *Treatise*," in Donald Ainslie, ed., *Hume's "Treatise": A Critical Guide* (Cambridge University Press: forthcoming). I am grateful to the editors of these works for permission to use this material.

I would like to thank the Masters and Fellows of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge University for electing me to a Junior Research Fellowship (1984–1987) that allowed me to get this project underway. I would also like to thank the University of British Columbia for research support in the form of sabbatical leaves and a Hampton Research Grant. The several British and American universities and philosophy departments cited above (Edinburgh, Cambridge, Virginia, Stanford, Pittsburgh, and North Carolina) have provided considerable support and encouragement for my work. Indeed, without their support and encouragement this book would have neither been begun nor completed. Finally, I would like to thank Peter Ohlin and his colleagues at Oxford University Press, including Brian Hurley, Bob Milks, and Martha Ramsey, for their help, patience and encouragement while this book was being prepared.

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Abbreviations of Hume's Writings Used in Citations

Throughout the text I cite the *Treatise* and *Enquiries* following the conventions given in the Nortons' *Treatise* and Beauchamp's *Enquiries*. References to the *Treatise* cite book, part, section, and paragraph number; and references to the *Enquiries* cite section and paragraph number. I also cite page references to the Selby-Bigge editions of the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*. These follow the references to the Nortons' and Beauchamp editions. Thus T, 1.2.3.4/34 indicates *Treatise*, bk. 1, pt. 2, sec. 3, para. 4; Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition p. 34. Similarly, EU, 12.1/149 indicates *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec. 12., para. 1; Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition p. 149.

D — *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*, edited by J. A. C. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

EM — *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd rev. ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

ESY — *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, rev. ed., edited by E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985).

EU — *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by T. L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, in *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd rev. ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

HE — *The History of England*, 6 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1983).

LET *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols., edited by J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932). Cited by volume, page number, and letter number: LET, 1:24–5, no. 6.

LG *A Letter from a Gentleman to his friend in Edinburgh*, edited by E. C. Mossner and J. V. Price (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967).

MEM *Hume's Early Memoranda,* 1729–1740: *The Complete Text*, edited with a foreword by E. C. Mossner, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1948), 492–518.

NHL *New Letters of David Hume,* edited by R. Klibansky and E. C. Mossner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).

NHR *Natural History of Religion, in Dialogues and Natural History of Religion, edited by J. A. C. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).*

T *A Treatise of Human Nature, edited by D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).*

A Treatise of Human Nature, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd rev. ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

TA *An Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature*, reprinted in T.

RIDDLES, CRITICS, AND MONSTERS: TEXT AND CONTEXT

It must be extreme hard to find out the opinions and meanings of those men that are gone from us long ago, and have left us no other signification thereof but their books.

Hobbes, *The Elements of Law*

A lack of historical sense is the congenital defect of all philosophers.

Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

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The Riddle

The work, of which I here present the Reader with an abstract, has been complained of as obscure and difficult to be comprehended.

Hume, *An Abstract of* A *Treatise of Human Nature*

The constant stream of radical reinterpretations of Hume . . . gives witness to the existence of a Humesproblem*. . . . Problems are solved at one point, only to be declared insoluble elsewhere. And so we have a genuine philosophical mystery on our hands.*

Richard Popkin, "Hume's Intentions"

Most accounts of Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise* concentrate their attention on two key themes: skepticism and naturalism. One important question that arises in relation to the first theme is what is the *extent* of Hume's skeptical commitments in this work? More specifically, is Hume committed to some form of radical, extreme Pyrrhonism or is he committed only to a weaker form of academic skepticism? The way we answer this question will shape our answer to a second, more fundamental question: is it possible to *reconcile* Hume's (extreme) skeptical principles and conclusions with his aim to advance the "science of man"? It is this question that I will describe as "the riddle of the *Treatise*." The fundamental worry lying behind this riddle is that the philosophy in the *Treatise* is not just Janus-faced but that it is actually *broken-backed*. That is to say, there is, according to Hume's critics, an inescapable conflict between his naturalist ambitions to advance human knowledge in the area of "the science of man" and his extreme skeptical (Pyrrhonist) principles. In this chapter I will consider various approaches that have been taken to the general interpretation of Hume's *Treatise* and the way this difficulty arises in relation to them. I begin with the work of Norman Kemp Smith, which has done much to frame our present-day understanding of the "Humesproblem."

1

Hume scholarship in the previous century was profoundly influenced by Kemp Smith's book *The Philosophy of David Hume*.[1] Indeed, despite its relative age,

present-day Hume scholars continue to use this study to define and identify their own positions on this subject. Moreover, even Kemp Smith's critics generally accept the view that he adequately characterized the relevant terms of debate about the *Treatise*—that is, in terms of the fundamental skepticism/naturalism dichotomy.[2] Kemp Smith's study begins with an account of the interpretation of the *Treatise* that was dominant from the end of the eighteenth century until well into the twentieth century. He refers to this as the "Reid-Beattie interpretation," attributing its origins to Hume's most prominent early Scottish critics. From the perspective of the Reid-Beattie view, the teachings of the *Treatise* are essentially "destructive" in character. Hume is read as a systematic skeptic, whose principal aim is to show that our "common sense beliefs" (e.g. belief in causality, independent existence of bodies, in the self, etc.) lack any foundation in reason. Hume, on this view, begins with the "theory of ideas," inherited from Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley, and proceeds to show the skeptical consequences of adopting this scheme.[3]

Kemp Smith points out that the (Reid-Beattie) skeptical interpretation was endorsed by a number of later commentators, including T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, who edited Hume's philosophical works in the middle of the nineteenth century. Grose claimed "the *Treatise* from beginning to end is the work of a solitary Scotchman, who devoted himself to the critical study of Locke and Berkeley." Moreover, according to Grose, Hume's stay in France, while he was working on the *Treatise*, "left no trace either in tone or in the matter of the book."[4] To this extent, therefore, the skeptical interpretation became closely associated with the view of Hume as fitting neatly into the Locke-Berkeley mold of "British empiricism." This view, which was dominant during the first half of the twentieth century, continues to enjoy considerable currency, despite the fact that it has been thoroughly discredited.[5]

It is important to point out, however, that many other nineteenth-century defenders of the skeptical interpretation took a much less crude view of Hume's sources and context. For example, early in the nineteenth century Dugald Stewart, although he accepted that Hume's aim was to establish "universal skepticism," placed Hume's arguments in a rich context that includes not only Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley but also Gassendi, Malebranche, and Bayle.[6] Stewart also observes that Hume's "universal skepticism" has a "mischievous tendency," and suggests that his conclusions "are often so extravagant and dangerous, that he ought to have regarded them as a proof of the unsoundness of his data."[7] Other nineteenth-century critics, such as James MacIntosh and Leslie Stephen, were more explicit about the precise nature of the "mischievous tendency" of Hume's skepticism—namely, its antireligious implications. MacIntosh suggests that while Hume's "universal skepticism" may have little influence on our ordinary "opinion and convictions," it does have "practical consequences of a very mischievous nature":

> [I]n practice, it is an armoury from which weapons are taken to be employed against *some opinions*, while it is hidden from notice that the same weapon would equally cut down every other conviction. It is thus that Mr. Hume's theory of causation is used as an answer to arguments for the existence of the Deity, without warning the reader that it would equally lead him not to expect that the sun will rise to-morrow.[8]

These remarks suggest that while Hume's skepticism is intended to discredit (narrow) claims concerning "the existence of the Deity," its implications are nevertheless of a wider or more "universal" character. This is an important point to which I will return. For now, suffice it to note that Kemp Smith's gloss on the "Reid-Beattie interpretation" entirely obscures these issues.

The skeptical reading of Hume's *Treatise* tends to place heavy emphasis on epistemology and metaphysics, at the expense of Hume's concerns as a moral philosopher. From Kemp Smith's point of view, this is a fatal mistake when it comes to understanding the evolution of Hume's thought in the *Treatise*. Kemp Smith maintains that what is central to the *Treatise* "is not Locke's or Berkeley's 'ideal' theory and the negative consequences ... but the doctrine that the determining influence in human, as in other forms of animal life, is feeling, not reason."[9] The "main thesis" of Hume's *Treatise* is, on this view, captured in the claim "that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cognitive part of our natures."[10] The human situation is "one in which feeling, not reason, holds the primary position."[11] It is, then, Kemp Smith's "contention that Hume's philosophy can be more adequately described as naturalistic than as sceptical, and that its main governing principle is the thorough subordination ... of reason to the feelings and instincts."[12] The naturalistic interpretation presents Hume's general philosophy as essentially an extension of his views on the subject of morals and aesthetics. The unity and development of Hume's thought rests with this effort to apply the principles of "naturalism" to the spheres of epistemology and metaphysics. To this extent, Hume's morals and metaphysics are all of one piece.

The naturalistic interpretation has its own distinct account of Hume's relevant sources and context.

> To come now to the question of the primary sources of Hume's teaching, the thesis for which I shall argue is that it was under the direct influence of Francis Hutcheson that he was led to recognise that judgments of moral approval and disapproval ... are based not on rational insight or on evidence, but solely on feeling; and that what then "open'd up to [him] a new Scene of Thought, which transported [him] beyond Measure" (giving birth in due course to the *Treatise*), was the discovery that this point of view could be carried over to the theoretical domain, and could there be employed in the solution of several of the chief problems to which Locke and Berkeley had drawn attention, but to which they had not been able to give a satisfactory answer.[13]

On Kemp Smith's view, then, Hume "entered into his philosophy through the gateway of [Hutcheson's] morals." To this extent the evolution of Hume's thought is actually the reverse of the order of exposition (and publication) in the *Treatise*.

Kemp Smith also notes, in addition to the influence of Hutcheson, the importance of "Newton's teaching in regard to the [empirical] methods proper to scientific enquiry."[14] Another aspect of Newton's teaching that influenced Hume, Kemp Smith claims, is the "proposal to develop a statics and dynamics of the mind [i.e. the theory of association], modeled on the pattern of Newtonian physics [i.e. the theory of gravitation]."[15] Kemp Smith argues that there are several conflicts between Hume's Hutchesonian and Newtonian commitments, particularly in connection

with the nature of the self and belief.[16] However, according to Kemp Smith, "the Newtonian influence is a recessive, not a dominant factor in Hume's total philosophy," and it is Hume's Hutchesonian naturalism that remains central to understanding the project of the *Treatise*.[17]

A significant corollary of Kemp Smith's account of Hume's basic naturalistic intentions is that the primary interest of Hume's *Treatise* lies with the relationship between books 1 and 3, and that book 2, the discussion of the passions, is of less importance for understanding Hume's project.

> For several reasons Book II, as regards sequence and mode of exposition, is the least satisfactory of the three Books which constitute the *Treatise*. In the first place, the reader has been led, by the order in which Hume has chosen to expound his teaching, to expect that in passing to Book II the central doctrines of Book I will be illustrated and enforced. Instead he finds himself faced by a quite new set of problems, with but little direct bearing on the problems of knowledge, and with their ethical bearings treated only in an incidental and somewhat casual manner.[18]

Kemp Smith goes on to claim that more than "a third of Book II is employed in the treatment of four passions [pride and humility, love and hate] which have no very direct bearing upon Hume's ethical problems, and play indeed no really distinctive part in his system."[19] These claims plainly suggest that the three-part structure of the *Treatise*—(1) understanding, (2) passions, (3) morals—obscures, rather than illuminates, Hume's central doctrines and purposes.

2

Kemp Smith's analysis of the history of Hume scholarship, in which he opposes his "naturalistic" reading to the traditional skeptical view, oversimplifies and distorts several important interpretive issues. Although nineteenth-century Hume scholarship was dominated by the skeptical account, Thomas Huxley defended an alternative "naturalistic" (i.e. nonskeptical) account of Hume's intentions.[20] The naturalism of Hume's philosophy that Huxley emphasizes, however, is not the role of feeling as opposed to reason in human life, but rather the project of "a science of man." It is, in other words, Hume's effort to construct a philosophy on the basis of a (scientific) psychology that Huxley considers to be his central concern. Huxley reads Hume not so much as a skeptic but rather as a philosopher whose aim in the *Treatise* is, much like Kant's aim in the first *Critique*, to show "the limits of all knowledge of reality to the world of phenomena revealed to us by experience."[21] Hume's project of a "science of man," on this account, is fundamentally a project of epistemology.

While Huxley connects Hume's "science of man" with Kant, most twentieth-century scholars have seen this aspect of Hume's project in terms of "Hume's ambitions to be the Newton of the moral sciences."[22] John Passmore argues, for example, that it is a mistake to attempt "to describe Hume's work by any single philosophical epithet [e.g. skepticism, naturalism, etc.]. . . . Yet for all that, there is a unity in his work; it is dominated by a single over-riding intention."[23] This intention, he says, is

made plain enough by the subtitle of the *Treatise*, which describes Hume's work as "An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects."[24]

> it was Hume's ambition to be the Newton of the moral sciences. And this in two respects: first, by making out a bold general theory of the mind—his associationism—comparable to Newton's theory of attraction, and, secondly, what is our more immediate concern, by extending the Newtonian method to the moral sciences.[25]

According to Passmore, book 1 of the *Treatise* aims to provide "the logic of the moral sciences," which Hume interprets in terms of "Newtonian 'methods of philosophizing,'" proceeding to show that they "are as applicable in the moral as they are in the physical sciences."[26]

The general claim that the project of the *Treatise* should be understood in terms of "Hume's ambition to be the Newton of the moral sciences" is now a commonplace in introductory textbooks and general histories of philosophy.[27] Moreover, Hume's "Newtonian" project in the *Treatise* has produced several studies that are devoted to a detailed analysis and exegesis of this aspect of his thought.[28] Even those who accept Kemp Smith's (Hutchesonian) naturalistic interpretation are generally willing to place equal emphasis on Hume's "science of man" as inspired (supposedly) by Newton.[29] There is, however, a fundamental difficulty for views of this kind. How do we reconcile Hume's ambitions to be the Newton of the moral sciences, not only with his skeptical principles, but with a form of "naturalism" that teaches "that reason, as traditionally understood, has no role in human life"—a claim that, on the face of it, sits uncomfortably with Hume's (Newtonian) "scientific" ambitions.[30]

The skeptical/naturalism divide in Hume's intentions gives his whole project a Janus-faced appearance. Indeed, the situation is more problematic than this, since it may be argued that the whole project in the *Treatise* is actually *broken-backed*. That is to say, both the skeptical and naturalistic dimensions of Hume's thought seem to be equally essential to what he is trying to achieve but are nevertheless inherently opposed and irreconcilable.[31] It is this issue that lies at the heart of the riddle of the *Treatise*, as was clearly understood by Hume's most distinguished early critic.

> It seems to be a peculiar strain of humour in this author, to set out in his introduction by promising, with a grave face, no less than a complete system of the sciences, upon a foundation entirely new—to wit, that of human nature—when the intention of the whole work is to show, that there is neither human nature nor science in the world.[32]

The progress of contemporary Hume scholarship must be measured by its ability to resolve this riddle. At one level, this may be done by showing that these (apparently) conflicting themes are each an essential aspect or component of some deeper purpose or objective. The aim, in this case, is to show that we can reconcile the *intent*—if not the *content*—of Hume's skepticism and naturalism by identifying a more fundamental and consistent set of motivations lying behind Hume's various commitments. A solution at this level provides what we may call an *interpretive* solution. At another level, however, the aim is to go beyond this and provide a solution that shows not only what Hume's motivations are but also that the fundamental

philosophical "tensions" in his thought can be eliminated. In this case, the objective is to find a *philosophical* solution to the riddle, one that preserves the coherence and credibility of Hume's project in the *Treatise* (i.e. insofar as this is possible).

3

Recent work on this subject, while it has shed considerable light on various particular aspects of Hume's thought, has not, in my view, succeeded in providing a satisfactory solution to the riddle of the *Treatise* as described above. The root problem, as I will show, is that the alternative interpretations on offer fail to identify both the core motivation and underlying structure of Hume's skeptical and naturalistic commitments. It is not possible to comment on all the recent material relating to Hume's intentions in the *Treatise*, but I do want to make a few observations about Hume's historical context as discussed in some of this literature.

Both the "skeptical" and "naturalistic" interpretations continue to find prominent defenders. Kemp Smith's most notable follower is Barry Stroud, who claims that his own aims are essentially "to present a more systematic and more consistent naturalistic interpretation."[33] The traditional skeptical account, on the other hand, has been given rigorous defense by Robert Fogelin, who expresses "deep disagreement" with Kemp Smith and his followers because they give a "one-sided emphasis to Hume's naturalism at the expense of his scepticism."[34] It is a striking fact about both Stroud's and Fogelin's work that they have little interest in the details of Hume's context.[35] In this respect, their work contrasts sharply with several other recent studies that have placed heavy emphasis on contextual matters.

Two of these "contextual" studies are especially relevant to the discussion in this book. In *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, John Wright argues that we can better understand the nature of Hume's project in the *Treatise* when it is "understood in the context of the Cartesian conception of man"—particularly the writings of Descartes, Malebranche, and Bayle.[36] "Hume's aim," says Wright, "was to understand the central principles of the human imagination and the way that they provide the basis for empirical science and civilised human life."[37] When this project is considered with reference to the Cartesian philosophers, we are better placed to appreciate the limits of his skepticism and the nature of his "realism."[38] A significant corollary of this view is Wright's claim that the Newtonian philosophy was not important to Hume until "after he had completed his *Treatise of Human Nature*."[39]

Wright's account of Hume's intentions is largely concerned with issues of epistemology and metaphysics—an emphasis that is found in many other studies of Hume's philosophy. In contrast with this, David Norton's *David Hume: Common Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* is primarily concerned with the contrast between Hume's views on morals and metaphysics. More specifically, Norton argues that Hume's philosophy involves two quite separate elements, each of which is a response to two different "philosophical crises," one "speculative" and the other "moral."[40] Hume's metaphysics, Norton argues, is a response to the "*crise pyrrhonienne* and the ensuing epistemological battle waged between dogmatics and sceptics."[41] The force of Norton's position on this side of things, contrary to Kemp

Smith's account, is that Hume did not endorse the view that reason is "subordinate" to feeling, but rather adopted an "intermediate account" that balanced the (conflicting) claims of reason and the imagination.[42] With respect to Hume's metaphysics, then, Norton rejects both the traditional skeptical view and Kemp Smith's "totally naturalistic interpretation of him," in favor of the view that in this sphere Hume is a "mitigated sceptic."[43] Norton also argues, however, that Hume held "that morals and metaphysics have essentially different standards of truth." In the sphere of morals, Hume's main goal, Norton maintains, is to refute the "moral scepticism" associated primarily with Thomas Hobbes. On this account, therefore, Hume should be understood as a "common sense moralist" who believes we have "moral knowledge" and we can "distinguish different forms of moral reality."[44] The upshot of Norton's analysis of Hume's intentions is that the project of the *Treatise* lacks any essential unity, and it is a mistake to look for it. Hume's philosophical system divides sharply into two distinct components, with respect to which Hume's "skeptical" commitments are very different.

4

The interpretations described above clearly vary a great deal both in terms of what they take Hume's primary aims and objectives in the *Treatise* to be and in their accounts of his context and principal sources. This leaves us with what Popkin has called a "Humesproblem."

> Hume is sometimes the new Newton, at others a facetious critic of everything, at others a latter-day Lockean, at still other moments the Scottish Malebranche, or the Pyrrho of Scotland, etc. Problems are solved at one point, only to be declared insoluble elsewhere. And so we have a genuine philosophical mystery on our hands.[45]

Although commentators disagree about many points of interpretation concerning Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*, they are nevertheless almost all agreed about one fundamental point: namely, that the *Treatise* is not in any significant or substantial way concerned with problems of *religion*. Several commentators make this point implicitly rather than explicitly—by simply ignoring or overlooking issues of religion as they relate to the *Treatise*. Stroud, for example, although he begins his study by saying that he will "try to provide a comprehensive interpretation of Hume's philosophy and to expound and discuss his central problems against the background of that general interpretation," goes on to observe that he will say "nothing" about religion, even though this topic "was of life-long importance to Hume."[46] What this implies is that religion, however important to Hume, is not essential for understanding the "central problems of [his] philosophy." Fogelin, in his book-length study of Hume's skepticism in the *Treatise*, also has little or nothing to say about religion as it relates to Hume's arguments and concerns. Similarly, Annette Baier, in a study devoted entirely to the *Treatise*, makes only incidental reference to the relevance of religion to Hume's basic concerns and objectives.[47]

Many other scholars have been *explicit* in denying that the *Treatise* has any substantial concern with problems of religion. John Laird, for example, refers to

Hume's "castration" of the *Treatise* before it was published, and he takes this as evidence that Hume performed a radical "debilitating operation upon the *Treatise*" and removed almost all its theological content.[48] The only exceptions to this, according to Laird, are the passages concerning the soul (1.4.5 and 6) and some brief remarks concerning the theological implications of the thesis of determinism (2.3.2.3–8/409).[49] Apart from these passages Hume was, Laird maintains, "very prudent indeed" and avoided making any substantial contribution to the subject of "experimental theism."[50] Mossner also argues that Hume was careful to purge the *Treatise* of anything that could be taken as a contribution to the theological debates that were raging at the time. In particular, his decision to withdraw the discussion of miracles from the *Treatise* indicates, Mossner says, that, "what he was counting on was serious consideration of his philosophy as philosophy, rather than as religious controversy."[51] Antony Flew takes a similar view in his highly influential study of Hume's first *Enquiry*. According to Flew, in the *Treatise* there is "no hint at all" of any "aggressive polemical purpose" directed against religion (in contrast with the *Enquiry*).[52] Popkin endorses the same view, saying that in the *Treatise* "religion and theology are rarely discussed."[53] Finally, even scholars specifically concerned with Hume's philosophy of religion have downplayed the importance of religion for his central aims in the *Treatise*. According to Gaskin, for example, the *Treatise* "is not overtly concerned with religion." Gaskin also accepts the view of earlier commentators that Hume removed those passages and sections that he believed would "involve him in religious controversy."[54] He goes on to say that a "few brief and apparently inoffensive references to the existence of God and to religion remain, but with the exception of the section called 'Of the Immortality of the Soul' they occur only incidentally in sections dealing with other subjects."[55]

Clearly, then, it is (now) a point of near orthodoxy among Hume scholars that problems of religion are not central to Hume's concerns in the *Treatise*. There is, however, one notable exception to this. According to Charles Hendel, Hume's early philosophical development was deeply influenced by problems of religion and the "deist controversy," and this is manifest in core features of the *Treatise* (e.g. in Hume's account of causation).[56] Hendel is almost unique, among twentieth-century Hume scholars, in holding this view. Ironically, however, Hendel also maintains that Hume's views on the subject of religion bring him close to the views of religious apologists such as Berkeley, Butler, and "Cleanthes" (the character in Hume's *Dialogues* who defends the argument from design).[57] This is also a minority view, since it is widely accepted by most Hume scholars at work today that *in his later works* Hume advanced arguments that are *irreligious* and anti-Christian in character, although intentions of this kind are not regarded as having an important place in the *Treatise*—much less as the fundamental or unifying theme of this work.[58]

The situation with respect to Hendel's views about the relevance of religion for Hume's concerns in the *Treatise* is, therefore, doubly ironic. As noted, almost all Hume scholars are agreed that problems of religion are, at most, only of incidental or indirect concern for Hume in the *Treatise*. Hendel is a clear (and unique) exception to this. At the same time, however, Hendel *rejects* the view that Hume should be interpreted as advancing *irreligious* or "atheistic" arguments in *any* of his works—much less in the *Treatise*. The further irony here is that *both* these

views are deeply at odds with the reception the *Treatise* received from Hume's own contemporaries. The early reactions to the *Treatise* indicate that Hume's contemporary critics (consistently) perceived his work as having direct and important consequences for matters of religion and that they interpreted Hume as being fundamentally and systematically *hostile* to religious doctrine and theology. From their perspective, therefore, Hume's *Treatise* can be correctly described as (overtly) "irreligious" or "atheistic" in character. In the chapters that follow, I will show not only that Hume's contemporaries were generally right about the irreligious nature of Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise* but also that this perspective on Hume's aims and objectives is crucial for solving the riddle of the *Treatise*.

"Atheism" and Hume's Early Critics

When men die it does not mean that their opinions are also dead, although they may now lack the living light which their first discoverers could shed upon them.

Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*

The accusation of Heresy, Deism, Skepticism, Atheism &c &c &c. was started against me.

Hume, letter to William Mure (4 August 1744)

According to Kemp Smith, Reid and Beattie viewed Hume's teaching in the *Treatise* as "sheerly negative, being in effect little more than a *reductio ad absurdum* of the principles which Hume's predecessors, and Hume himself, have followed in their enquiries."[1] The relevant "predecessors," as already noted, are understood to be Descartes, Locke, and Berkeley. In this chapter I criticize Kemp Smith's account of the "Reid-Beattie interpretation of Hume's teaching" from two perspectives. First, I argue that Kemp Smith distorts and oversimplifies what Reid and (especially) Beattie have to say on this subject. Second, and relatedly, I argue that the reactions to the *Treatise* that followed immediately after its publication contain important evidence relating to Hume's intentions in the *Treatise*, which should not be overlooked or dismissed. The reactions of Hume's earliest critics, I argue, show that they believed that there was an intimate connection between his skeptical and "atheistic" intentions. This material also shows that Hume's early critics regarded his opposition to the dogmatic principles of Samuel Clarke as central to understanding the relationship between the skeptical and "atheistic" aspects of the *Treatise*.

1

Among Hume's own contemporaries, Reid was one of his most civil and constructive critics. In 1763, the year before Reid published his *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, which contains extended criticism of Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*, Hume

and Reid corresponded about Reid's work.[2] The *Inquiry* lacks any personal venom toward Hume, and it refers to him as an "ingenious author" who can be ranked with some of the most gifted philosophers in the history of the subject.[3] Reid, nevertheless, firmly rejects Hume's doctrines. He interprets Hume as aiming to "build a system of scepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather than the contrary." This "system of scepticism," Reid maintains, is erected on the foundation of the principles of the "ideal system," taken over from Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, and Berkeley.[4] All this is consistent with Kemp Smith's presentation of Reid's view of Hume. A closer reading, however, suggests that Reid's view of Hume was more complex than this.

In the *Inquiry*, Reid is careful to note that Hume's skeptical intentions cannot be attributed to his predecessors in the "ideal system" (namely, Descartes et al.). Considered from this perspective, Reid suggests, Hume belongs in the company of other skeptics, such as Pyrrho, Zeno, and Hobbes.[5] Reid is especially concerned with the contrast between Hume and Berkeley. Berkeley, he points out, "was no friend to scepticism, but had that warm concern for religion and moral principles which became his order."[6] Berkeley hoped that by "giving up the material world, which he thought might be spared without loss, and even with advantage, he . . . [could] secure the world of spirits. But alas! the 'Treatise of Human Nature' wantonly sapped the foundation of this partition, and drowned all in one universal deluge."[7] The implication of this, although presented in an oblique manner, is clear enough. Whereas Berkeley was no skeptic, and aimed to be a "friend" to religion and morality, this cannot be said of Hume. Reid also relates the project of Hume's *Treatise* with the work of other philosophers who have aimed to provide a "system of human nature." Hume's predecessors with respect to this project, according to Reid, are Descartes and Hobbes. Reid expresses some general doubts about any project of this kind, since such "an undertaking is too vast for any one man, how great soever his genius and abilities may be." He suggests that Hobbes's system, in particular, falls short of a "perfect imitation" of nature.[8]

More than two decades later, and long after Hume's death, Reid published two further works that devote considerable attention to the refutation of Hume's skepticism and its associated "ideal system." In both the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers* (1785) and the *Essays on the Active Powers* (1788) Reid returns to many of the same themes that were raised in the *Inquiry*, including Hume's evident hostility to fundamental doctrines of natural religion. In *Intellectual Powers*, for example, Reid notes that Hume's doctrines discredit not only our knowledge of our own existence, and the existence of the material world, but also our knowledge of the existence of the Deity—a consequence, Reid suggests, Hume was not blind to.[9] In *Active Powers* Reid describes Hume's views on causation as the "main pillar of his system" and argues that it has a number of (skeptical) consequences that "extend to the Deity," and are "fondly embraced" by Hume.[10] With respect to Hume's moral doctrine, Reid suggests that Hume's views on justice are (with some qualifications) close to Hobbes's "Epicurean," skeptical position on this subject.[11] Finally, on the issue of free will—a matter of central importance for Reid—Hume is presented as a "defender of necessity," in the tradition of prominent "atheists," such as Hobbes, Spinoza, and Collins.[12]

Clearly, then, while it is true, as Kemp Smith suggests, that Reid interprets Hume as a skeptic, this is by no means a complete account of Reid's general understanding of the significance of Hume's philosophy. On the contrary, Reid is careful to point out (1) that the *Treatise* should be viewed not only as a system of skepticism but also as a "system of human nature," a project that has its roots in the work of Hobbes and Descartes, and (2) that Hume's skeptical intentions show that he "fondly embraces" doctrines that are destructive of the principles of natural religion. So considered, Hume's philosophical intentions suggest that he belongs in the company of like-minded thinkers, such as Hobbes, rather than with the "friends of religion and morality." These are considerations that are by no means peripheral to Reid's understanding of Hume's philosophy, and his efforts to refute it.

2

Although Reid and Beattie are closely associated when it comes to their views on Hume's philosophy, there are important differences between them. While Reid's criticisms of Hume's system are presented in a moderate and diplomatic manner, Beattie's observations are hostile and severe in both tone and substance.[13] It is not surprising, therefore, that Hume's attitude to Beattie's *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (1770) was less than favorable.[14] Beattie made clear that he disapproved of Reid's more measured way of replying to Hume. In a letter written in 1788, Beattie says: "If I were not personally acquainted with the doctor, I should conclude, from his books, that he was rather too warm an admirer of Mr. Hume. He confutes, it is true, some of his opinions; but pays them much more respect than they are entitled to."[15] It is evident, then, that Beattie's opposition to Hume runs deeper, and is more highly charged, than anything we find in Reid. This divergence is important, since Beattie's work was more "popular" in its style, and less disposed to conceal its central concerns in the camouflage of polite restraint.

Beattie shares Reid's view that Hume's intellectual lineage can be traced through Berkeley, back to Locke, Malebranche, and Descartes. He also argues, in line with Reid, that none of these predecessors can be understood as having skeptical intentions (although they have laid the foundations for this in the way that Reid indicates).[16] It is Beattie's particular concern, however, to show not simply that Hume's intentions are skeptical in character but, more important, that he embraces principles that "undermine the foundations of virtue" and "recommend Atheism."[17] This basic charge—linking Hume's skepticism with "atheistic" intent—is repeated throughout Beattie's *Essay on Truth*. Indeed, on nearly every issue Beattie touches on—causation, matter, mind, liberty, morals, and so on—he is at pains to point out the ("harmful," "dangerous") consequences of Hume's doctrines for religion and society.[18]

In the final chapter of his *Essay*, Beattie describes Hume's philosophy as an "apology for Atheism," and he makes clear that this includes the *Treatise* as well as the *Essays* (i.e. *Enquiries*).[19] He also remarks, in this context, that it would be unnecessary to refute the doctrines contained in the *Treatise*, since they are so "obscure and uninteresting," had they not been presented in "a more elegant and sprightly manner"

in the *Enquiries*.[20] Beattie summarizes his criticisms of Hume by observing that his philosophical objectives, throughout his writings, have been "to persuade the world, that the fundamental doctrines of natural religion are irrational, the proofs of revealed religion such as ought not to satisfy an impartial mind, and that there is not in any science an evidence of truth sufficient to produce certainty."[21] In sum, Beattie leaves his readers in no doubt that Hume's skeptical intentions in the *Treatise*, and the works that followed, should be understood as nothing other than an "apology for Atheism."

One further point about Beattie's interpretation of Hume should be noted. Beattie follows Reid in presenting Hume as the (skeptical) product of the doctrines and principles advanced by Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, and Berkeley, although these thinkers do not share either Hume's skeptical or atheistic objectives. Beattie suggests, however, that Hume, along with other "modern skeptics," are "more obliged than they seem willing to acknowledge" to Hobbes.[22] Elsewhere in his *Essay on Truth* Beattie indicates the specific affinities between Hume and Hobbes on the subject of morals (a view he shares with Reid).[23] In several other contexts Beattie links Hume with Hobbes as the principle representatives of skepticism and atheism.[24] Considered from this perspective, Hume belongs not so much in the tradition of Descartes and Malebranche, or Locke and Berkeley, as in the "freethinking" or "atheistic" tradition that has Hobbes at its head. This is, as I discuss later, a view of Hume that is entirely consistent with earlier reactions to the *Treatise*, written by critics decades before the works of Beattie and Reid were in print.

3

Considered as an account of early reactions to the *Treatise*, the work of Reid and Beattie arrives on the scene relatively late. Reid's *Inquiry*, for example, came twenty-five years after the *Treatise* was published, and his *Essays* were published twenty or more years after that (i.e. long after Hume was dead). Beattie's *Essay on Truth* was published thirty years after the *Treatise*, near the end of Hume's life. A whole generation (or more) of philosophical activity had come and gone in the intervening period. To get an accurate understanding of how the *Treatise* was read at the time of its publication—when the arguments and controversies it was embedded in were still familiar and fresh—we need to turn to earlier reviews and criticism. The work here, although less substantial than the work of Reid and Beattie, is more illuminating about Hume's immediate context and the issues that shape the philosophy of the *Treatise*.

In November and December of 1739, the journal *History of the Works of the Learned* reviewed the first two books of the *Treatise*, which had been published of January of that year.[25] Although the review ends with some complimentary remarks, the general tone is sarcastic and critical.[26] The sharpest criticism directed against Hume appears in the discussion of his views on causation, specifically as it relates to the "argument a priori."

> All manner of Persons, that have any Antipathy to the Argument *a Priori* for the Existence of God, may repair to this latter Section [T, 1.3.3], where they will have the Satisfaction of seeing it utterly demolished. This Writer has there destroy'd the Foundation of it, and so there's an End of the whole Fabrick. *Dr. Clarke*, and

> one *John Lock*, Esq., whom he particularly names, two of the most superficial Reasoners, were, as well as many others, so weak as to fancy, that *whatever begins to exist, must have a Cause of Existence*; nay, *Hobbes* himself, as much an Atheist as we believe him, was of this Opinion.[27]

The reviewer goes on to speculate that while Hume "has quite erased the Argument a Priori for the Divine Existence, I would willingly hope, he has no Intention of weakening this fundamental Truth, that There is some one necessary, eternal, independent Being."[28]

Further on, the reviewer suggests that these concerns about Hume's (antireligious) intentions are justified. He cites, in particular, passages where Hume argues that the "efficacy or energy of causes is neither plac'd in the causes themselves, nor in the deity" (T, 1.3.14.23/166), and that "any thing may produce any thing" (T, 1.3.15.1/173); the reviewer hints darkly at "the different purposes" these claims may serve.[29] He returns to this theme in his account of Hume's views on the "immateriality of the soul."

> Alas! will they exclaim, Poor *Dr. Clarke*, is it thy Fate to be branded as a true Atheist? Thou illustrious, thou most learned, judicious, sincere, zealous, and yet candid Advocate for Natural and Revealed Religion; thou immortal Defender of the Immateriality and natural Immortality of thinking Substances! Shall all thy strong, thy clear, and unanswerable Arguments, as so many of the best Judges have esteemed them, be now levelled with the Dust, and trampled on with Abhorrence! This is indeed a lamentable Case; but such is the absolute Pleasure of our Author, and we must submit: Neither *Locke*, nor *Clarke*, nor the most venerable Names, shall usurp the Place of Truth in his Affections.[30]

Throughout these passages, the reviewer presents Locke and especially Clarke as the most obvious and immediate target of Hume's (skeptical) arguments. In fact, as John Laird observes, the reviewer "seems to have considered any criticism of Locke or of Clarke as the most shameless effrontery."[31]

The only other substantial review of the *Treatise* was published in the *Bibliotheque Raisonée* in 1740. This review, as Mossner points out, is similar to the review in the *History of the Works of the Learned*, although "without its arrogant tone."[32] The reviewer takes note of Hume's "spirit of Pyrrhonism" and notes the "pernicious consequences that we could draw from [Hume's] principles."[33]

> Never have I seen a more dogmatic Pyrrhonism. He is not in doubt when he dares to substitute his speculations for the opinions of the greatest philosophers on the most abstract matters. . . . He is not in doubt when he advances the argument, for example, that it is false that everything that exists must necessarily have a cause of its existence; that we have *a priori* no proof of the existence of the Deity; . . . On every point the author is as decisive as he can be. In comparison with himself, the Lockes and Clarkes are often in his eyes but poor and superficial reasoners.[34]

In a second installment of the review that appeared the following year, the reviewer turns to Hume's views on morals. It is first observed that Hume is like Hutcheson, insofar as he bases principles of morality on sentiment. With respect to justice, however, the review suggests that Hume's views are simply "Hobbes's system presented in a new form" (a point others would repeat).[35]

One further feature of these early reviews should also be noted. Hume (i.e. the anonymous author of the *Treatise*) is referred to in the *Works of the Learned* as a "minute philosopher."[36] In a notice of the *Treatise* that appears in the German periodical *Neuen Zeitungen* (May 1739) he is described as "a new freethinker."[37] Both these labels are significant and merit some comment. The reference to Hume as a "minute philosopher" is a phrase taken from Berkeley's *Alciphron*. Berkeley understood the "minute philosophers" to be atheistic freethinkers (in the tradition of Hobbes and Spinoza) who, he says, wrote "against the dignity, freedom, and immortality of the Human Soul, [and] may so far forth be justly said to unhinge the principles of morality, and destroy the means of making men reasonably virtuous."[38] Later in the dialogue Berkeley identifies the "minute philosophers" with "modern freethinkers."

> Right, said Crito, the modern free-thinkers are the very same with those Cicero called minute philosophers; which name admirably suits them, they being a sort of sect which diminish all the most valuable things, the thoughts, views, and hopes of men; all the knowledge, notions, and theories of the mind they reduce to sense; human nature they contract and degrade to the narrow low standard of animal life, and assign us only a small pittance of time instead of immortality.[39]

Among the most prominent of the freethinkers and minute philosophers Berkeley has in mind is Anthony Collins, who was a prominent opponent of Clarke and was widely regarded as an "atheistic" follower of Hobbes and Spinoza. The references to Hume as a "minute philosopher" and "freethinker" would, therefore, place him in the company of atheistic thinkers of this kind. This feature is consistent with a number of other responses to the *Treatise*.[40]

4

Perhaps the most important document we have relating to the early reactions to the *Treatise* is *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend at Edinburgh*, a pamphlet Hume wrote in 1745 in reply to certain accusations that were made against him when he applied for the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University.[41] The pamphlet that Hume's *Letter* is a reply to, *A Specimen of the Principles concerning Religion and Morality &c.*, is generally thought to have been written by Reverend William Wishart, then principal of Edinburgh University, and a leading opponent of Hume's candidacy. Six "charges" were leveled against Hume, as follows (in abbreviated form): (1) "universal scepticism"; (2) "downright atheism"; (3) "Errors concerning the very Being and Existence of a God"; (4) "Errors concerning God's being the first Cause"; (5) "denying the immateriality of the Soul"; and (6) "denying the natural and essential Difference betwixt Right and Wrong" (LG, 17–8). The substance of the charges made corresponds closely to the basic duties of "the professor of pneumatology and ethical philosophy," and this may explain, in part, their general scope and nature. However, the charges are plainly weighted heavily on the side of metaphysical issues, with a particular emphasis on the issue of causation as it relates to the being and activity of God (i.e. charges 2 and 4) and the immateriality of the soul (charge 5).

The most fundamental and comprehensive accusations are that Hume maintains "universal scepticism" and "downright atheism." These two charges are closely linked together in the accuser's presentation. Hume's skeptical commitments are characterized in terms of "the Folly of pretending to believe any Thing with Certainty" (LG, 17). Hume's "atheism" rests on his "denying the Doctrine of Causes and Effects"—an objection that touches on issues raised throughout much of the *Specimen* (LG, 6–14). Hume's accuser particularly objects to two related positions Hume takes up on this subject: (1) Hume denies that the principle "Whatever begins to exist must have a Cause of Existence" is either intuitively or demonstratively certain (LG, 11), and (2) he asserts (instead) the "curious *Nostrum*" "That any Thing may produce any Thing" (LG, 10, citing T, 1.3.15.1, 1.4.5.30, 1.4.5.32/173, 247, 249–50). The critic claims that it is Hume's objective to "explode" what is "the first step in the Argument for the Being of a Supreme Cause" (LG, 11). Hume's "curious *Nostrum*" is cited a second time in the context of the fifth charge that he denies the immateriality of the soul, "from which the Argument is taken for its natural immortality" (LG, 13). Hume, his critic says, asserts that

> Motion may be and actually is the Cause of Thought and Perception: And no wonder, for any Thing may be the Cause or Effect of *any Thing*; which evidently gives the Advantage to the Materialists above their Adversaries. (LG, 13—a "maim'd" citation from T, 1.4.5.32/249–50)

Hume is also accused of bringing into doubt the doctrine that God "first created Matter, and gave it its original impulse, and likewise supports its Existence" (LG, 18). The passage from the *Treatise* cited (at LG, 12–3) to support this charge is one in which Hume questions the view of the "Cartesians," who, he says, maintain that matter is "itself entirely unactive" and consider God "the only active being in the universe, and as the immediate cause of every alteration in matter." (T,1.3.14.10/160). Hume maintains against this view that "we have no idea of a being endow'd with any power, much less of one endow'd with infinite power" (T, 1.3.14.10; 1.4.5.31/160, 248; as cited at LG, 12–3). It was this issue, as debated by Hume and his accuser, that gave rise to the well-known footnote in the first *Enquiry* concerning "our modern metaphysicians" and the *vis inertiae* of matter (which I discuss in more detail later).

Hume's critic concludes with the charge that Hume saps "the Foundation of Morality, by denying the natural and essential Difference betwixt Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, Justice and Injustice" (LG, 18). This charge is supported by citing passages in which Hume denies that actions can be judged "reasonable or unreasonable" and in which he argues that justice is an artificial, not a natural virtue. With respect to Hume's views on justice, the author of the *Specimen* draws attention to the similarities with the account of Hobbes, particularly with respect to the selfish motive to justice and its dependence on human conventions (LG, 14–7).

Hume's reply to his accuser may be characterized in the following general terms. First, Hume is concerned to discredit both the (related) accusations of "universal scepticism" and "downright atheism." His skeptical principles, he maintains, do not commit him to any form of "universal doubt" (LG, 19). His more limited objective is simply to "abate the Pride of *mere human Reasoners*, by showing them, that even

with regard to Principles which seem the clearest, and which they are necessitated from the strongest Instincts of Nature to embrace, they are not able to attain full Consistence and absolute Certainty" (LG, 19). In other words, Hume is concerned to repudiate the dogmatic pretensions of some philosophers, but this does not commit him to "universal doubt." He goes on to point out that it is "a service to Piety" to show the limits of human reason in the face of the "great Mysteries" of the Christian religion. He suggests, moreover, that "too great a Confidence in mere human reason" has led to "the various Tribes of Hereticks, the Arians, Socinians, and Deists" (LG, 21). The most celebrated thinker associated with the charge of "Arianism, Socinianism, Deism etc." at this time was Samuel Clarke, whose *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) had led to an extended controversy that was strongly felt in the Scottish church and universities.[42]

In the pages of the *Letter* that follow, Hume is careful to present himself as advancing arguments that have already been advanced by philosophers who can in no way be suspected of anti-Christian intentions. Hume does make plain, however, that the (dogmatic) rationalism of Samuel Clarke is a particularly prominent target of his critical arguments. More specifically, Hume acknowledges that both Clarke's "metaphysical argument a priori" for the existence of God (LG, 23) and Clarke's moral rationalism (LG, 30) are rejected by the principles that are advanced in the *Treatise*. Nevertheless, Hume points out that there are other "metaphysical arguments" for God's existence ("Des Cartes's for Instance, which has always been esteemed as solid and convincing as the other"; LG, 23), and that other moralists—such as "Mr. Hutchison"—share his doubts about Clarke's and Wollaston's moral rationalism (LG, 30–1).[43]

One of the most striking features of Hume's reply to his accuser is that he represents the accusations as coming from a (dogmatic) philosopher of the school of Clarke. For example, as explained, the fact that in this context Hume links his dismissive remarks concerning those who aspire to secure "absolute certainty" and "place too great a Confidence on mere human Reason" with a reference to "Arians, Socinians and Deists" strongly suggests that he identifies the criticism as coming from a Clarkean orientation of some general kind. Moreover, the specific content of the "charges" made against Hume—especially the remarks concerning "the Argument for the Being of a Supreme Cause" (LG, 11)—suggests that Hume is right about this matter.

In his replies to his accuser, Hume cites Clarke more often than any other thinker. Apart from the two citations already discussed relating to Clarke's "metaphysical argument a priori" and moral rationalism, Hume also mentions Clarke in relation to the issue of the inactivity of matter (LG, 28–9). Note also that Hume's accuser in the *Specimen* cites only two philosophers, Hobbes and Spinoza—celebrated "atheists" and the particular targets of Clarke's demonstrative arguments in defense of the Christian religion. Hume does not refer to either Hobbes or Spinoza, or any of their freethinking followers. His strategy is to refer to a series of (orthodox) thinkers who anticipate his own opposition to various specific aspects of Clarke's philosophy (e.g. Descartes, Berkeley, and Hutcheson). By this means he hopes to discredit the more serious "charges" leveled against him.

The general point Hume wants to establish is that to oppose Clarke's brand of dogmatic Christian rationalism is not to be committed to "scepticism" and

"atheism." Moreover, as Hume points out, the skeptic, such as Bishop Huet, need not be an "atheist" (LG, 21).[44] In this way, the general approach that Hume follows throughout the *Letter* is to oppose the various schools of Christian apologists against each other. This method—as I will show in more detail—was employed by Hume in a systematic way throughout much of the *Treatise*.

5

The identity of the author of the *Specimen* is of some importance in understanding the *Treatise*, since this will tell us something about the philosophical commitments of Hume's early critics and what motivated their hostility to Hume's doctrines. The immediate difficulty is that the *Specimen* is presented anonymously, and thus conjectures must be made about the author in light of available evidence. When Mossner and Price published Hume's *Letter* in 1967, they suggested that the author of the *Specimen* was Wishart, and their account of this matter has been widely accepted.[45] The primary evidence in support of this conjecture comes from remarks Hume made in a letter written in June 1745 to Kames that suggests that Hume believed Wishart was the source of the accusations made against him.[46]

There are some significant difficulties associated with the suggestion that Wishart is the author of the *Specimen*. The content of the charges against Hume, and his replies to them, strongly suggests that the author of the *Specimen* was a follower of Clarke's philosophy, and was especially interested in issues of metaphysics and natural religion (particularly the issue of causation). Wishart's own writings, however, suggest a moralist in the school of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. This view is endorsed in the relevant secondary literature, which presents Wishart as a "disciple" and "devotee" of Shaftesbury's "moral sense philosophy," but not as a follower of Clarke.[47]

There are two possible ways of dealing with the difficulties involved in attributing the *Specimen* to Wishart, and both should be carefully and fully considered. First, it may be argued that the received view of Wishart is incomplete or mistaken, on the ground that Wishart had significant philosophical commitments of a Clarkean character. Alternatively, it may be argued that, while Wishart used the *Specimen* against Hume (i.e. at the meeting of Edinburgh ministers who gathered to advise the town council about this appointment), its author was nevertheless someone other than Wishart. A good case can be made for both these claims, and the relevant evidence relating to each draws our attention to the significance of the work of Andrew Baxter in Hume's immediate (Scottish) philosophical context.

Wishart's writings make clear that he embraced views that were akin to the moral sense doctrine of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Butler, and for this reason his philosophical outlook would seem to be opposed to Clarkean (moral) rationalism.[48] It is not impossible, however, that Wishart combined Clarkean and Shaftesburyean philosophical commitments. A number of considerations lend some support to this. During the 1720s, Wishart played an important part in the controversy surrounding John Simson, professor of divinity at Glasgow University. Simson's close allegiance to the philosophy of Clarke led to charges of heresy, primarily on the ground of

Arianism and Socinianism. Wishart was one of Simson's most prominent defenders, which made him an object of much criticism from the evangelical Calvinists who objected to "liberal" teachings of this kind.[49] Among other figures who were close to Simson was Francis Hutcheson, Scotland's most prominent follower of Shaftesbury's moral sense doctrine.[50] The evidence suggests, then, that "Neu Light" thinkers based at Glasgow at this time drew on the philosophy of both Clarke and Shaftesbury, and this may well have included Wishart.

During the 1730s, Wishart was based in London and was closely connected with the dissenting community there. His friends and colleagues in these circles included several influential and distinguished followers of Clarke's philosophy.[51] Wishart, like many others in the dissenting community in England, was on good terms with Bishop Hoadley, who was one of Clarke's closest friends and colleagues. Indeed, one of Wishart's works is dedicated to Hoadley.[52] The most important and philosophically significant consideration, however, is that Wishart was a subscriber to an important work by Andrew Baxter, Scotland's most distinguished champion of the principles and doctrines of Clarke's philosophy.

This work, *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*, was published in 1733 and came out in a second edition in 1737 and in a third in 1745.[53] It is a systematic defense of Clarke's basic project in the *Discourse*, sharing Clarke's aim to provide a (dogmatic) defense of the Christian religion and refutation of the atheism of Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers. Much of the detail, both of the charges and Hume's replies in the *Letter*, suggests that Hume's critic was drawing directly on the specific doctrines of Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul*—which is consistent with the obvious Clarkean content of this debate. Since Wishart was a subscriber to *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, and perhaps had (substantial) Clarkean sympathies, it is not impossible that he drew directly from this work for the purpose of attacking and discrediting Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*. These general considerations do much to explain the content and character of the issues raised in the *Letter*, consistent with the view that Wishart was the author of the *Specimen*.[54]

Although a strong case can be made for Wishart being the author of the *Specimen*, significant difficulties remain. For example, the evidence of Wishart's own writings do not suggest that he had any Clarkean commitments, and some of his remarks tell against it. It also remains unclear how Wishart combined the (divergent) Clarkean and Shaftesburyean elements in his philosophy. Moreover, while the evidence of Hume's letters written in June 1745 may indicate that Hume believed (at the time) that Wishart was the author of the *Specimen*, it is possible that he was mistaken about this. It is also possible that Hume believed only that Wishart *used* the charges contained in the *Specimen* against him, but did not believe that Wishart was the *author* of the pamphlet written against him.

Given that there are difficulties involved in attributing the *Specimen* to Wishart, the question arises if it is possible that someone other than Wishart wrote the *Specimen*. I believe that a reasonable case can be made that Andrew Baxter was the author of the *Specimen*. The first consideration in favor of this hypothesis is that both the content and style of the "charges" laid out against Hume fit (very) neatly with what we know about Baxter—whereas this is not true in the case of Wishart. The claim, for example, that Hume embraces "Principles leading to downright

Atheism—by denying the Doctrine of Causes and Effects" (LG, 17)—and discredits "the Argument [a priori] for the being of a Supreme Cause" (LG, 11; and 23) focuses on specific issues that were of central concern for Baxter and that he presents in *Enquiry into the Human Soul* in language that closely resembles what we find in the *Specimen*.[55] Moreover, one of the passages Hume uses in the *Letter* to refute his critic (LG, 28–9) he used again in the first *Enquiry*, in only a slightly modified form, and directed it against those "modern metaphysicians" who ascribe a "*vis inertiae*" to matter (EU, 7.25 n/73 n). It is widely accepted that Baxter was one of the most obvious and prominent targets of Hume's specific criticisms against "the modern metaphysicians."[56] This suggests that Hume likely had Baxter's philosophy in mind when he originally wrote these remarks in the context of the *Letter*. In general, then, while the substance and style of the *Specimen* is not particularly consistent with what we know about Wishart's philosophical orientation, it is strikingly close to Baxter's principal concerns and doctrines.

Other points should also be briefly noted. Baxter knew (personally) Hume's most active opponents relating to his candidacy for the Edinburgh chair. This includes not only Wishart, who subscribed to Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, but also Gavin Hamilton, who published Baxter's book in 1733.[57] Hamilton was the leader of the opposition to Hume on the Edinburgh town council, the body that was ultimately responsible for making this appointment. Beyond this, William Warburton, arguably Hume's most celebrated enemy, was among Baxter's closest friends.[58] Another associate of Baxter, Sir David Dalrymple (Lord Hailes), later in life tried to bring Hume's critic James Beattie to Edinburgh University.[59] A letter Dalrymple wrote in 1778 says that he "knew Andrew Baxter as well as a lad could know an old man." Dalrymple also says that "Mr. Baxter had a high respect for the Mosaical History of ye Creation: he could not speak with patience of those who made light of the Priori argument." Both these points are central to the "charges" made against Hume in the *Specimen* (i.e. charges 3 and 4). Dalrymple closes his letter by saying that Baxter "abhorred the early work of Mr. Hume."[60]

Another important consideration regarding the relevance of Baxter to the events around Hume's application to the Edinburgh chair in 1745 is evidence of antagonism between Baxter and Henry Home (Lord Kames). Kames was a close friend of Hume and his chief supporter in the campaign for the chair. The source of the antagonism between Baxter and Kames was a philosophical correspondence in 1723 concerning the philosophy of Clarke and related issues.[61] This correspondence rapidly degenerated into an acrimonious exchange involving sharp disagreement regarding the *vis inertiae* of matter—an issue that was fundamental to Baxter's subsequent effort to "confute Atheists."[62] Finally, it should also be noted that not only would Baxter have been highly motivated to defend the basic principles of Clarkean philosophy against Hume's skeptical onslaught in the *Treatise*—as well as having the relevant (personal) contacts to become involved—but also he had ample opportunity to provide Hume's opponents in Edinburgh with the material presented in the *Specimen*. Hume's candidacy for the chair was launched in the summer of 1744, and it met with strong opposition early on. Although Baxter was residing in Holland throughout this period, there was plenty of time for his numerous correspondents to engage his services in the effort to put an end to Hume's ambitions.[63]

It is important to remind the reader that the hypothesis that Baxter was the author of the *Specimen* is not the only way of dealing with the difficulties we face regarding the interpretation of Hume's *Letter* and the circumstances in which it was written. The other way, as I have explained, is to continue to regard Wishart as its author, but to assign appropriate weight to the evidence concerning Wishart's Clarkean commitments and associations (e.g. with Simson, Hoadley, Benson, Baxter, et al.). The hypothesis that ought to be rejected, however, is the view that Wishart was the author of the *Specimen* and also a moralist belonging to the school of Shaftesbury, without any significant attachment to the philosophy of Clarke and Baxter. This hypothesis, I maintain, is directly at odds with both the internal and external evidence regarding Hume's *Letter*. What matters, in any case, for our understanding of Hume's *Letter*, is not so much whether Wishart or Baxter was the author of the *Specimen*, as that the philosophy of Clarke and his Scottish followers is central to the "charges" that were leveled against the *Treatise*. This feature of Hume's *Letter* is entirely consistent with our observations regarding other early reviews of the *Treatise*, particularly those in the *History of the Works of the Learned* and the *Bibliotheque Raisonée*.[64]

FIGURE 3.1 Ralph Cudworth (1617–1688), *The true intellectual system of the universe; the first part, wherein all the reason and philosophy of atheism is confuted and its impossibility demonstrated* (London, 1678). By courtesy of the National Library of Scotland.

Religious Philosophers and Speculative Atheists

There is not a greater number of philosophical reasonings, displayed upon any subject, than those, which prove the existence of a deity, and refute the fallacies of Atheists; and yet the most religious philosophers still dispute whether any man can be so blinded as to be a speculative atheist. How shall we reconcile these contradictions?

Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

The early reactions to Hume's *Treatise* show that his critics at the time closely associated his various skeptical arguments with "atheistic" or anti-Christian intentions.[1] These critics paid particular attention to Hume's arguments concerning causation, and routinely noted that his views on this subject served to discredit a number of fundamental doctrines of natural religion, especially the argument a priori. The most prominent defender of the argument a priori in the eighteenth-century context was Clarke, who was also regularly cited as one of Hume's primary targets throughout the *Treatise*. These features of the *Treatise* encouraged Hume's early critics to present his work as belonging in the tradition of "freethinkers" and "minute philosophers," such as Hobbes, Spinoza, and Collins. Given these observations, we require a more detailed picture of the background controversies that inform the perspective the early critics had on Hume's arguments and aims. As I will explain, the particularly significant features of this background are "the battle against Hobbist atheism" and, related to this, the philosophical literature of the Radical Enlightenment.

1

During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, British philosophy gave rise to two powerful but conflicting philosophical outlooks. On the one hand, this era has been described as "the golden period of English theology" because of the spontaneous alliance between reason and Christian theology."[2] More specifically, it was a major concern of a number of divines at this time to show that theology could be exhibited as a body of necessary truth. However, a skeptical

tradition, of which the great representative was Hobbes, existed in opposition to this Christian rationalism.[3]

Hobbes's reputation at this time has been well summed up as follows.

> Hobbes was the *bête noire* of his age. The principal objection to him, the one to which all other criticisms of him can ultimately be reduced, was that he was an atheist. He was the "Monster of Malmesbury," the arch-atheist, the apostle of infidelity, the "bug-bear of the nation." His doctrines were cited by Parliament as a probable cause of the great Fire of 1666. His books were banned and publicly burnt, and...[his ideas] were the object of more or less continuous hostile criticism from 1650–1700.[4]

Mintz relates this general criticism of Hobbes to the interlocking character of his more specific doctrines.

> To uphold belief in God. That was the fundamental motive behind all the attacks on Hobbes's materialism. The question was not merely philosophical; it was a matter of faith and public morals. Materialism was a dangerous doctrine as well as an invalid one, because it undermined the spiritual basis of religious belief. It led naturally to a determinist position, and determinism made a mockery of moral responsibility. Robbed of his freedom to choose between good and evil, man would deserve neither reward nor punishment; his piety, his prayers, the whole apparatus of worship would then become meaningless; justice, heaven, hell would then be empty words; and the whole edifice of religion must tumble down.[5]

Generally speaking, then, criticism of Hobbes was motivated by a desire to defend the fundamental tenets of the Christian Religion. From the perspective of Hobbes's critics, the doctrines that lay at the heart of his atheism were materialism, necessitarianism, ethical relativism, and skepticism about natural and revealed religion. These doctrines, it was argued, served to discredit the most fundamental articles of the Christian religion. Any thinker who endorsed doctrines of this kind, therefore, was liable to be read as a follower of Hobbes and branded an "atheist."

Hobbes's influence at this time was not simply destructive, and he had a number of followers. In a work written near the close of the seventeenth century, John Edwards, a Cartesian critic of Locke, makes the following claim concerning the existence of atheists in England.

> It is an unquestionable Truth, that there are in this great City of the Kingdom [i.e. London] constant Cabals and Assemblies of Profess'd Atheists, where they debate the Great Point of the Existence of an Infinite Spirit that governs the World, and in the close determine in the Negative....Mr. Hobbes is their Great Master and Lawgiver. I find that they pay a huge reverence to him. If they acknowledge any Divine Thing, it is He. If they own any Scripture, they are his Writings.[6]

Leland provides the following general perspective on Hobbes's reputation in the middle of the eighteenth century:

> There have been few persons, whose writings have had a more pernicious influence in spreading irreligion and infidelity than [Hobbes]....It will hardly be thought too severe a censure to say, that *Mr. Hobbes's* scheme strikes at the foundation of all religion, both natural and revealed...but the manifold absurdities and inconsistencies

> of his scheme, and the pernicious consequences of it to religion, morality, and the civil government, have been so well exposed, and set in a clear light, that there are not many of our modern Deists that would be thought openly to espouse his system in its full extent. And yet it cannot be denied, that there are not a few things in their writings borrowed from his . . . particularly in asserting the materiality and mortality of the human soul, and denying man's free agency.[7]

While Hobbes clearly had a number of followers and disciples based in England, the most important thinker to become closely associated with him was Benedict Spinoza.[8] In the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), Spinoza pursued a number of Hobbist themes, including biblical criticism, skepticism about miracles, and strong anticlericalism. In the *Ethics* (1677) Spinoza's materialism or naturalism, as well as his necessitarianism, were also identified as Hobbist views that led directly to atheism.[9] Given these important points of resemblance, Hobbes's English critics were quick to link the names of Hobbes and Spinoza, and they viewed "Spinozism" as little more than a variant of the prevalent disease of "Hobbist atheism."[10]

Among the many works attacking Hobbes's philosophy, the most important came from the flourishing school of Anglican latitudinarian thought, most notably from the Cambridge Platonists Henry More and Ralph Cudworth.[11] Cudworth's work *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678) was especially influential in this regard. Its subtitle—"Wherein All the Reasons and Philosophy of Atheism Is Confuted; And Its Impossibility Demonstrated"—conveys its substance and aims. Cudworth's book supplied later polemicists such as Bentley and Clarke with most of their arguments, and has been described as the "high-water mark" of the battle against Hobbist atheism.[12] However, as Robertson notes, Cudworth's work also had the effect of "encouraging Atheists and embarrassing Christians." Shaftesbury's remarks support this view:

> What was that pious and learned man's case who wrote *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*. I confess it was pleasant enough to consider that though the whole world were no less satisfied with his capacity and learning than with his sincerity in the cause of the Deity, yet he was accused of giving the upper hand to the atheists for having only stated their reasons and those of their adversaries fairly together.[13]

Warburton, writing over thirty years later, returns to this issue:

> The Philosopher of Malmesbury [i.e. Hobbes] was the Terror of the last Age, as Tindal and Collins are of this. The Press sweat with Controversy: and every young Church-man militant would needs try his Arms in thundering upon Hobbes' Steel Cap. The Mischief his Writings had done to Religion set Cudworth upon projecting its Defence. . . . [He] launched out into the Immensity of the *Intellectual System*: and, at his first Essay, penetrated the very darkest Recesses of Antiquity, to strip *Atheism* of its Disguises, and drag up the lurking Monster into day.[14]

The result of this, Warburton observes, was that Cudworth was accused of being a disguised atheist—searching for atheistical arguments that he never intended to answer.[15] In this way, the evidence suggests that Cudworth's *System of the Universe* enjoyed considerable influence well into the eighteenth century, not only it was also used as a *source* of arguments for atheism no less than as a refutation of them.[16]

The most important development in the late seventeenth century relating to the war against the atheism of Hobbes and his followers was the establishment of the Boyle Lectures. By the early eighteenth century, these lectures had become the focus for the debate between the Newtonians (the intellectual heirs of Hobbes's early critics) and the radical freethinkers in the tradition of Hobbes.[17] Robert Boyle, the distinguished scientist and prominent member of the Royal Society, founded the lectures for the purpose of "proving the Christian Religion, against notorious Infidels, viz. Atheists, Theists, Pagans."[18] The importance of the Boyle Lectures for the development of British thought in the eighteenth century is described by Margaret Jacob:

> The lecture series . . . set the content and tone of English natural religion during the eighteenth century. By 1711 the reading of the Boyle lectures formed a part of an educated man's knowledge. . . . The lecturers were carefully chosen by the trustees, and they marshalled their arguments in defence of natural and revealed religion with the conviction that their efforts were critically important to the maintenance of the church's moral leadership and political influence in a society threatened at every turn by atheism.[19]

The first Boyle lecturer was Richard Bentley, the eminent classicist and colleague of Newton. Bentley used the occasion of his sermons, published as *A Confutation of Atheism* (1693), to carry on the battle against Hobbism, and he followed the same general tracks laid out by Cudworth.[20] The lecturers who followed Bentley, for example Francis Gastrell (1697) and John Harris (1698), also concentrated their attacks on Hobbes, whom they placed in the company of other "late atheistical writers," including Machiavelli, Spinoza, and Blount.[21] Without any doubt, however, the greatest and most influential of the Boyle lecturers was Samuel Clarke.

2

From the perspective of the late twentieth century, Clarke is not a thinker of the first rank. Now he is remembered primarily for his famous correspondence with Leibniz, which was a particularly significant exchange in the wider "war" between Leibniz and Newton. The *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence* is generally regarded as "one of the most interesting and most important documents in eighteenth-century intellectual history."[22] Clarke was, like Bentley, a close friend of Newton, and throughout the eighteenth century he was recognized as the most able defender of the Newtonian philosophy and its theology.[23] After the death of Locke, he was widely regarded as the foremost living English philosopher. Among his own contemporaries, Clarke's reputation was based, first and foremost, on his Boyle Lectures of 1704–5.

His lectures of 1704 were published as *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. In this work he endeavors, on the basis of what he says in his preface is "as near to Mathematical [method] as the nature of such a discourse would allow," to demonstrate—by "one clear and plain series of propositions necessarily connected and following one from another"—the "certainty of the Being of God, and to deduce in order the necessary attributes of his Nature, so far as by our

finite reason we are enabled to discover and apprehend them."[24] In his second series (1705), entitled *A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion and the Truth and Certainty of Christian Revelation*, he uses the same "mathematical" method to demonstrate "the unalterable Obligations of Natural religion, and the certainty of Divine Revelation." The two series of lectures, as Leslie Stephen points out, "form a supernatural edifice of pure theology, resting on the immovable basis of intuitive truths, cemented and dovetailed together by unrefragable demonstration." "Like the Tower of Babel," says Stephen, "it was intended to reach heaven from earth, in defiance of any future deluge of infidelity."[25] Both series were eventually published together under the title *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God*. Clarke's subtitle to both the *Demonstration* and the complete *Discourse* describes his work as an "Answer to Mr. Hobbes, Spinoza and Their Followers."

Clarke says that his objective in the *Discourse* is, quite simply, to prove or establish "the Truth and Excellency of the whole superstructure of our most Holy Religion."[26] He regards each link in his chain of reasoning as dependent on the previous links he has already forged. Clarke's concern, as Ezio Vailati explains it, was "that natural religion was under attack by naturalism (the view that nature constitutes a self-sufficient system of which we are but a part), which had been revived by Hobbes, and especially, Spinoza."[27] Vailati notes "five connected points" that outline Clarke's "attack against naturalism":

> First, God is a necessarily existent omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, omnipresent, and supremely benevolent person. Second, nature and its laws are radically contingent. God, endowed with a libertarian free will, chose to create the world and operate in it by a reasonable but uncaused fiat. Third, although space and time are infinite, matter is spacio-temporally finite, and being endowed only with *vis inertiae* it has no power of self-motion. Fourth, God is substantially present in nature (or, better, nature is literally in God, since space and time are divine attributes) and constantly exercises his power by applying attractive and repulsive forces to bodies.... Fifth, although the soul is extended and interacts with the body, it is necessarily immaterial... moreover, the soul has been endowed by God with libertarian free will.[28]

In his introduction to his second series of the Boyle Lectures (i.e. *Unchangeable Obligations*), Clarke summarizes the argument of this part of the *Discourse:*

> He who believes the *Being and natural Attributes* of God, must of necessity... confess his *moral Attributes* also. Next; he who owns and has just notions of the *moral* Attributes of God, cannot avoid acknowledging the *Obligations of Morality and natural Religion*. In like manner; he who owns the Obligations of Morality and natural Religion, must needs, to support these Obligations and make them effectual in practice, to believe *a future state of Rewards and Punishments*; And finally; he who believes both the Obligations of natural Religion, and the certainty of a future State of Rewards and Punishments; has no manner of reason left, why he should reject the *Christian Revelation*.[29]

Clearly, then, Clarke's fundamental philosophical intentions are twofold. On the one hand he seeks to defend Christian metaphysical and moral doctrine, while on the other he seeks to refute the opposing doctrines of the atheist (i.e. materialism,

necessitarianism, moral relativism, etc.). These ends are achieved, he claims, by employing demonstrative reason in the spheres of both metaphysics and morals. This is the essence of Clarke's project in the *Discourse*.

The extent of Clarke's reputation among his contemporaries can be gauged from Voltaire's remarks about "the illustrious Dr. Clarke" in his *Letters on England*. Voltaire says that Clarke, Newton, Locke, and Leclerc are "the greatest thinkers and finest writers of their age." He describes Clarke as "a real reasoning machine" and notes that he is "the strongest upholder of the Arian doctrine."[30] Another useful piece of evidence relating to Clarke's reputation and the influence of the *Discourse* appears in the article on Clarke in the *Biographia Britannica*, published half a century later.

> Dr. Clarke's Treatise on the Being and Attributes of God, and on the Evidences of natural and revealed Religion, is a production of great importance in the annals of English literature. It is of great importance on account of its intrinsic excellence, the receptions it hath met with, the influence it hath had on the opinions of men, and the strictures, remarks, and disquisitions to which it has given occasion.[31]

In the same paragraph the writer (Kippis) goes on to praise Clarke's argument a priori in the strongest terms, but notes that it has critics as well as admirers. He points out, for example, that the "late Mr. Andrew Baxter could not bear to have the argument a priori treated with contempt" and that Hume, in the *Treatise of Human Nature*, tried to pervert Clarke's language in the *Demonstration* "to atheistical purpose."[32] This article makes plain, therefore, that even well after Hume's death, Clarke's reputation was still enormous, and that it rested to a great extent with the argument a priori—over the merits of which Baxter and Hume strongly disagreed.

Apart from the Boyle lecturers, another eminent representative of English theological rationalism at this time was John Locke. Locke was never a Boyle lecturer, but he shared their Anglican latitudinarian outlook, and he also aimed to provide a dogmatic philosophical defense of the basic tenets of the Christian religion. As one commentator notes, "the similarity of Locke and the Boyle lecturers is striking: they were the new elite, the new logicians of the clergy and theology, the new natural philosophers with the enlightenment of anti-atheism in their pens and minds."[33]

Although there were some specific and important differences between Locke and Clarke (e.g. concerning the possibility of demonstrating the immateriality of the soul), their philosophies were nevertheless closely identified by their own contemporaries. Some of Clarke's critics, like William Carroll, for example, accused him of simply "borrowing" his arguments from Locke.[34] Clarke also took care to make it clear, in the context of his debate with Leibniz, that neither he nor Newton "wishes to be thought a follower of Mr. Locke."[35] This reveals that there were (significant) points of disagreement between these two thinkers, but it equally suggests that Clarke's contemporaries (and Hume's) recognized significant affinities in their philosophical aims and arguments.

Whatever their differences, both Locke and Clarke were committed to the fundamental project of defending the rational credentials of the Christian religion against skeptics and atheists (e.g. Hobbes). This was, moreover, a central concern of Locke's philosophical intentions in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.[36] In the *Essay* Locke anticipates Clarke's effort to extend demonstrative reasoning into

the spheres of metaphysics and morals in defense of Christianity.[37] The most notable aspect of this is their shared and similar effort to articulate a satisfactory version of the cosmological argument, or argument a priori for the existence of God. Those involved in the philosophical controversies of the early eighteenth century would certainly appreciate this point (as the reactions to Hume's *Treatise* attest).

3

Although Locke's intentions in the *Essay* are generally close to those of Clarke in the *Discourse*, his epistemological doctrines were put to use by several thinkers who drew more radical and subversive consequences from them. One of the most important of these thinkers was John Toland, whom Jonathan Swift described as "the great oracle of the anti-Christians."[38] Toland's first and most influential work was *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696). This generated enormous controversy, especially in Ireland, where Parliament condemned the book, and Toland had to flee the country to avoid arrest and imprisonment.[39] The aim of *Christianity Not Mysterious* is to show, as Toland's subtitle has it, "that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it: And that no Christian doctrine can properly be called a Mystery." What Toland does in this work is to apply Locke's epistemological principles to show, by implication, that if the claims of revealed religion contradict human reason they must be untrue.[40] Locke was so alarmed by Toland's use of his philosophical principles that it seems that, having seen Toland's work in manuscript, he wrote his *Reasonableness of Christianity* in reply.[41] The fundamental concern about Toland's book, from the perspective of the orthodox, was that under the pretense of trying to *rationalize* Christianity, Toland's real aim was to *discredit* its basic doctrines.[42]

Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* was followed by several other works that became increasingly (overtly) unorthodox. His *Amyntor* (1698) cast doubt on the authority of the New Testament, and generated replies from Clarke and others.[43] Toland's philosophically most interesting work, however, is contained in his *Letters to Serena* (1704) and *Pantheisticon* (1720), which show his admiration for "the Pantheistic philosophy, i.e. that of Spinoza, which acknowledgeth no other God but the universe."[44] Both these works are deeply anti-Newtonian in their doctrine.[45] Among the doctrines defended in *Serena* that were deemed most dangerous to Newtonian philosophy and theology are Toland's thesis that motion is essential to matter (a doctrine that strikes at the heart of the view that matter is essentially inert, and that God is the "author of motion") and the view that there is no vacuum (which undermines the Newtonian defense of absolute space and time, and its associated proof of God's existence).[46] Clarke and his associates replied directly to Toland on these and related matters.[47]

Toland's philosophical works and activity must be understood in relation to his connections and involvement with a circle of anti-Newtonian, radical freethinkers that arose in England during the first three decades of the eighteenth century.[48] This circle included, along with Toland, Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindal, and John Trenchard, who were, according to Margaret Jacob, "the intellectual heart" of this circle and its "leading philosophical spokesmen."[49] Jacob maintains that this

group galvanized into a "college" or secret society called "The Knights of Jubilation." Jacob has linked this society with the "Socratic-brotherhood" that is described in Toland's *Pantheisticon*, a work that contains, she claims, an account of the rituals performed at their meetings.

The leading members of this circle were all active and hostile critics of Newtonian philosophy and theology, in general, and particularly critical of the philosophy of Clarke. For their part, Clarke and his associates regarded thinkers such as Toland and Collins as nothing more than followers of Hobbes and Spinoza. That is to say, from the perspective of the Newtonians, the writings produced by this freethinking circle were simply concealed "atheism"—a view that was, generally speaking, well justified. The philosophy of this circle was thoroughly anticlerical and critical of established religious dogma in both tone and substance. Moreover, thinkers such as Toland and Collins were closely attached to what may be described as pantheistic materialism, and it was primarily over metaphysical issues of this nature that they engaged with Clarke and his associates. In more general terms, it would not be incorrect to describe the historical importance of this extended conflict as one between defenders and critics of the Christian religion. Nor can the historical importance of this debate be doubted. On the contrary, as Jacob points out, "the antagonism between the freethinkers and the Newtonians stands as one of the main themes in the intellectual history of the early eighteenth century."[50] The most important controversy between Clarke and the freethinkers was the debate with Collins on issues of materialism and necessity (1707–17).[51] Among Collins's other influential works was his *Discourse of Freethinking* (1713), which had considerable impact and attracted hostile criticism from a number of distinguished critics, including prominent Newtonians such as Bentley and Hoadley (who were both close friends of Clarke).[52] Collins's other writings include several works that advance Toland's critique of the principles of natural and revealed religion.[53]

Along with the works of Toland and Collins, Tindal's *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1730) is another work of particular importance coming from this circle of radical freethinkers.[54] Stephen says that Tindal's book could be said to "have marked the culminating point of the whole deist controversy."[55] He also points out that Tindal's significance is that "he was to Clarke what Toland was to Locke."[56] What is essential to Tindal's position are two claims: (1) that the laws of morality are known to all humankind by means of human reason, and are judged by their contribution to human happiness, and (2) we do not require, therefore, any revealed religion for knowledge of our moral duties. In this way, according to Tindal, all we require is natural religion, and natural religion is reducible to the principles of morality.[57] Tindal's final chapter is devoted to a critique of Clarke's position, which was that moral practice requires the support of revealed religion.[58] Stephen summarizes the argument: "The general line of argument is the same as that which precedes. Tindal vigorously presses Clarke with his assertions of the clearness and sufficiency of the Law of Nature, in order to show the inconsistency of his attempt to escape on the ground of a necessity of certain supplementary revelations."[59] The "great noise" created by this work can be gauged from the fact that more than thirty replies appeared after its publication, many of them coming from prominent associates and disciples of Clarke (e.g. Jackson, Balguy, et al.).[60]

One of the most important and active members of the Toland-Collins circle (i.e. "Socratic-brotherhood") was Pierre Desmaizeaux.[61] Desmaizeaux was, as Jacob notes, "a great friend of the Commonwealth men, Toland and Collins, and one who rightly deserves a place in the early history of the Radical Enlightenment."[62] Although Stephen described Desmaizeaux as a "careful and industrious literary drudge," this is wholly misleading.[63] Desmaizeaux was, on the contrary, a very active and well-connected publisher, translator, biographer, and editor of philosophical literature. He is probably best known today for his English translation of Bayle's *Dictionary* (1734–39).[64] Also of great significance is his role in editing and publishing the (important) 1720 edition of the Leibniz–Clarke correspondence.[65] Apart from these works, however, Desmaizeaux also collaborated closely with both Toland and Collins, helping in the production and publication of their freethinking, anti-Newtonian works and ideas.[66]

Through his friendship and collaborations with Bayle, Desmaizeaux was introduced to Shaftesbury, with whom he was also on friendly terms. Shaftesbury was also on good terms with Collins and Toland.[67] Toland greatly respected Shaftesbury, and was involved in the (premature) publication of Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Virtue* (1699), which was subsequently published as part of the *Characteristics* (1711).[68] Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* was, of course, another highly influential work in the eighteenth-century context. Among other things, it stood flatly opposed to the basic doctrines of Clarke's Christian rationalism, and it was attacked by a variety of critics (including Balguy, Berkeley, and Warburton) as an anti-Christian work.[69] Desmaizeaux's personal and philosophical association with Shaftesbury and Bayle is, then, entirely of a piece with his friendships and activities on behalf of Toland and Collins.

Desmaizeaux was a central figure in this circle of freethinking opponents of Clarke and the Newtonians and his significance in Hume's context should not be treated lightly. It is especially significant, therefore, that when Hume was staying in London in 1737–39, and preparing the *Treatise* for publication, he was in direct contact with Desmaizeaux. Furthermore, during this period Hume stayed at the "Rainbow" coffeehouse, which only a few years before had served as an important meeting place for the circle to which Desmaizeaux, Collins, and Toland all belonged.[70] Before he left London for Scotland in February 1739, he gave Desmaizeaux a copy of the *Treatise*, and wrote to him the following April to ask for his opinion of this work.[71] Clearly, then, at this critical time, while preparing the *Treatise* for publication, Hume was in (close?) contact with some of the surviving members of the Toland-Collins circle. All this is entirely consistent with the characterization of Hume, in the early reviews, as a "new freethinker" and "minute philosopher."

4

Hume's early critics, as we have seen, strongly associated the skepticism of the *Treatise* with "atheistic" or anti-Christian intentions. They took Clarke's philosophy to be a particularly obvious and prominent target of Hume's battery of skeptical arguments, and present Hume as a freethinking, "minute philosopher" in the school of Hobbes, Spinoza, and Collins (i.e. Clarke's "atheistic" opponents). Scholars have generally

dismissed these reactions and responses to the *Treatise* as coming from bigoted and narrow-minded critics who lacked either the ability or the will to understand Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* (i.e. echoing some of Hume's own comments and attitudes).[72] The truth is, however, that these early reactions to the *Treatise* are entirely consistent with a proper understanding of the wider debate between the "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists" that was the dominant philosophical debate throughout the century that preceded the publication of the *Treatise*.[73]

In the British context, the central figures in this debate were on one side Hobbes and his freethinking followers, such as Toland, Collins, and Tindal, and on the other side Cudworth, Clarke, and the school of Newtonian philosophers and theologians who had set their sights squarely on "Hobbist atheism" and its associated doctrines (materialism, necessitarianism, etc.). This debate was still at full boil in the early decades of the eighteenth century, and it continued this way all through the period when Hume was planning and writing the *Treatise* (i.e. late 1720s–late 1730s).[74] For Hume and his contemporaries, it was impossible to seal off the various specific issues and problems they were discussing from this central debate between religious philosophers and speculative atheists. Clearly, then, from this perspective, the arguments of the *Treatise*, as well as its overall plan, must be understood with reference to the main debate concerning atheism and religion. Any effort to make sense of the *Treatise* outside this framework involves cutting off Hume's thought from its *deepest* philosophical roots. This is something that Hume's contemporaries—although not our own—fully understood. The task that lies ahead, therefore, is to work our way back through the *Treatise* with this old/new perspective clearly in mind.

4

Newtonianism, Freethought, and Hume's Scottish Context

There was another thing which at this time had no small influence—the philosophical writings of Mr. Hobbs, Spinoza, and some others of the same kidney, got, one way or other, a great vogue amongst our young gentry and students, whereby many were poisoned with principles destructive of all true religion and morality.

Thomas Halyburton, *Natural Religion Insufficient*

Hume's *Treatise* has its origins in the distinct climate and environment of Scottish intellectual life. The question arises, therefore, whether the main debate concerning religion and atheism—specifically as it concerns Clarke's (Newtonian) philosophy and the "atheism" of Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers—was of any particular significance in Scotland at this time. As I will show, not only did these debates and controversies have a high profile in Scotland during this period, they were (hotly) debated and discussed in Hume's immediate context in the Borders area throughout the 1720s and 1730s—at the very time Hume was planning the *Treatise* and laying its foundations.

1

In "My Own Life," written in 1776, shortly before he died, Hume says that the *Treatise* was composed during his "Retreat in France."[1] It is clear, nevertheless, that the preparation and planning for this work began much earlier. Letters Hume wrote in 1751 and 1754 suggest that the *Treatise* was "plann'd before [he] was one and twenty, & composed before twenty five" (LET, 1:158, no. 73; 1:187, no. 91).[2] In a letter he wrote in 1734, when he was in London on his way to Bristol, Hume describes the current state of his studies, and reports that after leaving university he pursued his reading in philosophy until, when he was "about 18 Years of Age, there seem'd to be open'd up to [him] a new scene of thought" (LET, 1:13, no. 3). This "new scene of thought" gave rise to intense work and activity (which resulted in something of a mental crisis or breakdown). In the same letter, Hume says that his "philosophical

enquiries" were guided by his discovery that earlier systems of moral philosophy lacked any adequate "experimental" basis in study of human nature. With this shortcoming in view he resolved to make this his "principal study," and he says that his reasonings on this subject had "multiply'd to such a degree" that he had "collected the rude Materials for many Volumes" (LET, 1:16, no. 3).

Mossner suggests, in light of this evidence, that the work of the *Treatise* developed in three stages. During the first stage, 1726–29, the *Treatise* was first projected; then, during 1729–33, it "was planned, and, in part, attempted"; and in the final stage, 1733–36, it was completed.[3] What is significant about this is that the origins of the project of the *Treatise* obviously date back to the period when Hume resided in Scotland, prior to the years when he was resident in France.[4] A plausible interpretation of Hume's intentions must, therefore, give some due weight to these considerations about the distinctively Scottish origins of Hume's project. Some efforts have been made, of course, to explain how Hume's intentions in the *Treatise* relate to the specifics of his Scottish context. On Kemp Smith's account, for example, as noted, the "new Scene of thought" that animates Hume's project is the influence of Hutcheson's moral philosophy.[5] Whatever the merits of this claim (and I will argue that they are not great), it is certainly true that Hutcheson was an important and influential thinker in Hume's Scottish context, and this, in turn, reflects a wider and deeper interest in the moral sense teachings of Shaftesbury in Scotland at this time.[6] Most notably, several members of the "Rankenian club," which was founded in Edinburgh in 1717, and included a number of individuals who were to become prominent figures in Scottish intellectual and cultural life in the middle years of the eighteenth century, shared this interest in Shaftesbury's philosophy.[7] Clearly, then, it is entirely reasonable to suggest that the moral sense of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson were an important part of the fabric of Hume's Scottish context, and played a significant role in his thinking on the subject of morals.

Kemp Smith aims to show how Hume's early interest in Hutcheson's moral theory became fused with his thinking about problems of metaphysics and the achievements of Newtonian science. Kemp Smith has, nevertheless, little or nothing to say about the distinctively Scottish dimension of these problems and issues.[8] "It is well known," said Ramsay of Ochtetyre, "that between 1723 and 1740, nothing was in more request with the Edinburgh *literati*, clerical and laical, than metaphysical disquisitions. These they regarded as more pleasant themes than either theological or political controversies, of which, by that time, people were surfeited."[9] The authors Ramsay goes on to cite as the subjects of particular interest and debate are Locke, Clarke, Butler, and Berkeley. The considerable interest in Berkeley's doctrines is something that was very pronounced in Scotland during this period, and it distinguishes Scottish and English intellectual life at this time.[10]

One dimension of the interest in these metaphysical issues was their obvious relevance to the foundations of Newtonian science—something Edinburgh University had acquired considerable distinction in during the first half of the eighteenth century.[11] The most distinguished Newtonian at this time was Colin Maclaurin, a Rankenian, and professor of mathematics from 1725 until his death in 1746. Maclaurin's major work was his *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, which was published posthumously in 1748.[12] The immediate purpose of Maclaurin's *Account* is to introduce

and defend Newton's natural philosophy, and to show its relevance to many of the scientific problems of the day. In this work, Maclaurin presupposes a broadly Lockean metaphysics, and his work offers lengthy criticism of rival metaphysical positions, including those of "continental thinkers," such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, as well as Berkeley and Hume (although they are not mentioned by name).[13]

One of the most striking features of Maclaurin's *Account* is its (explicit) *theological* objectives and ambitions. Maclaurin makes this clear from the opening passage:

> But natural philosophy is subservient to purposes of a higher kind, and is chiefly to be valued as it lays a sure foundation for natural religion and moral philosophy; by leading us, in a satisfactory manner, to knowledge of the Author and Governor of the universe.[14]

Maclaurin also concludes his *Account* by drawing out the theological implications of Newton's system.

> The plain argument for the existence of the Deity, obvious to all and carrying irresistible conviction with it, is from the evident contrivance and fitness of things for one another, which we meet throughout all parts of the universe. There is no need of nice or subtle reasonings in this matter: a manifest contrivance immediately suggests a contriver. It strikes us like a sensation; and artful reasonings against it may puzzle us, but it is without shaking our belief.[15]

Further on, Maclaurin argues that our knowledge of God and his attributes depends on reasonings a posteriori from the sensible evidence of God's creation.[16] Maclaurin is, however, especially careful to dissociate himself from certain arguments concerning God's immediate activity in all the workings of matter, a view that other Newtonian thinkers (e.g. Clarke, Cheyne, and Baxter) had advanced.[17]

It is evident, then, that Maclaurin, along with other associates of his at Edinburgh, was actively debating the relationship between Newtonian science and issues of theology at this time. Prominent Newtonians in Scotland, no less than their counterparts in England, used Newton's advances in science to serve the "higher" end of rooting out and refuting "false schemes of natural philosophy [that] may lead to atheism."[18] For Hume and his contemporaries, therefore, any effort to separate issues of science, metaphysics, and morals from the main debate about religion and atheism would be entirely impossible—as the works and teachings of the Scottish "literati" (Hutcheson, Maclaurin, et al.) make clear.

2

The evidence relating to the early reception of Hume's *Treatise* in Scotland (i.e. as discussed in chapter 2) suggests that there is an intimate, but complex, relationship between English and Scottish theological debates in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Scottish situation must be understood with reference to what was happening south of the border, but it had, nevertheless, its own distinct personalities and movements. Among the important questions that need to be asked in relation to

this are the following. (1) What significance did Clarke's philosophy have in Hume's Scottish context? Was it of peripheral interest or, as in England, central to the dominant debates of the time? (2) Is there any evidence of "freethinking" activity in Scotland in the early eighteenth century? In particular, were the "atheistic" ideas of Hobbes and Spinoza much discussed or debated? (3) What was the context or environment in which "atheism" was debated in Scotland? Was there, for example, as much tolerance of "freethinking" north of the border as there was in England? All these matters must be properly considered if we are to understand the specific forces that shaped Hume's *Treatise* and how they relate to the (distinct) dynamics of the Scottish debate about atheism.

It may be argued that to a considerable extent the early Scottish Enlightenment was a product of the "liberal" influence of John Simson at Glasgow and William Hamilton at Edinburgh. Both Simson and Hamilton were professors of divinity, and it was their students who went on to make notable advances in the cause of tolerance, reason, and taste in the Scottish church and universities.[19] This was also, however, a period plagued with a number of prosecutions for heresy of various kinds—including not only Simson, but also several other "Neu-Lights."[20] The positions taken by Hutcheson and the leading lights among the Rankenians indicate that they aimed at a "middle course" between on one side old-style Calvinism, which they sought to overturn, and on the other the "atheistic" doctrines of Hobbes and his freethinking followers (e.g. Mandeville, Tindal, et al.).[21] Beyond this, a casual glance at the philosophical literature being produced at this time makes clear, as McCosh observes, that this was an age when Scottish intellectuals were thoroughly immersed in the literature attacking and defending the Christian religion.[22] So the evidence suggests that at all levels of intellectual life the (main) debate concerning religion and atheism was just as active and vigorous in Scotland as it was in England.

What, then, of the particular significance of Clarke's philosophy? As already explained, the prosecution of Simson at Glasgow gave Clarke's philosophy a high profile. Simson was, however, by no means an isolated figure, since others shared his interest in (if not his sympathies with) Clarke. This includes Hutcheson, who corresponded with Clarke in 1717.[23] It is also clear, as the remarks of Ramsay of Ochtetyre indicate, that among the Edinburgh literati Clarke was a figure of major interest—on a footing with Locke, Butler, and Berkeley. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that any Edinburgh student at this time would be well versed in the aims and objectives of Clarke's philosophy and the details of his system, as Hume clearly was.

On the other side of this coin is the question of the influence in Scotland of Hobbes and Spinoza and their (radical) freethinking followers. As early as 1686, Lord Stair, the great Scottish lawyer and statesman, made objection to the tolerance allowed for Hobbes and Spinoza.[24] In 1685, George Sinclair, a Scottish professor, was complaining in his work *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* that there "are a monstrous rable of men, who following the *Hobbesian* and *Spinosian* principles, slight religion and undervalue Scripture."[25] It is evident that by the late seventeenth century there was considerable concern among religious and political authorities regarding the spread of "deism" and "atheism" in Scotland. In 1696, the Scottish General Assembly passed an Act "against the Atheistical opinions of the Deists."

The specific opinions prohibited included "denying of all revealed religion, the grand mysteries of the gospels... [and] the certainty and authority of Scripture revelation; as also, their asserting that there must be a mathematical evidence for each purpose."[26]

In the same year, Thomas Aikenhead, a twenty-year-old student at Edinburgh, was tried and convicted of blasphemy. The charges laid against him were that he had ridiculed the Bible (e.g. the doctrine of the Trinity), which he described as "so stuffed with maddness, nonsense, and contradiction, that you admired the stupidity of the world in being so long deluded by them."[27] Aikenhead was executed for these crimes on 8 January 1697.[28] One of the most interesting contemporary commentaries on the Aikenhead case comes from Thomas Halyburton, who was professor of divinity at St. Andrew's University (d. 1712). Halyburton's book *Natural Religion Insufficient* (published posthumously in 1714), a work that McCosh describes as "representative of the age," was written to refute the doctrines of deism and atheism, and to defend the principles of revealed religion. Halyburton analyzes the limits of human reason with respect to the fundamental truths of religion and morality, and argues for the suppression of all ideas that are dangerous to the Christian religion (i.e. as he understands it). He complains, in particular, that the philosophical writings of Hobbes, Spinoza, and "some others of the same kidney" have had "no small influence" and have acquired " a great vogue amongst our young gentry and students, whereby many were poisoned with principles destructive of all true religion and morality." In the same context, he also observes that the "infection spreads, and many are daily carried off by it, both in England and Scotland. Though it must be owned that Scotland, as yet, is less tainted with that poison: but those of this nation have no reason to be secure, since many are infected, and more are in a forwardness to it than is commonly thought."[29] Further on, Halyburton criticizes some writings of Aikenhead, and closely associates his "blasphemies" with the views of Hobbes and Spinoza.[30]

It is clear that the "Neu-light" movement that shaped the early years of the Scottish Enlightenment drew strength from the doctrines of Locke and Clarke, as well as the Newtonian thinkers who followed them.[31] It is also clear that during the same period more radical ideas associated with Hobbes, Spinoza, and "atheism" were at work in Scotland. The general significance of this is that a Scottish student of Hume's generation would certainly have been exposed to and familiar with these debates and doctrines, and the philosophical literature containing them. Moreover, any Scottish thinker of this era would naturally exercise some degree of caution when it came to openly embracing doctrines or principles of a "Hobbist" or "Spinozist" character, since this would be widely interpreted as endorsing "atheism."[32]

3

The evidence presented suggests that the "atheistic" reading of Hume's aims and objectives in the *Treatise* is entirely consistent with the general temper in Scotland at this time. When we consider Hume's immediate circumstances in the Borders area around Chirnside during the late 1720s and early 1730s, we find even more

compelling evidence of this nature. This was, as I have explained, a crucial time in Hume's intellectual development, since it was in this specific context that he laid down the foundations for the *Treatise*. The irony, however, is that Hume scholars and commentators have neglected, if not entirely ignored, this specific aspect of Hume's Scottish context.[33]

Henry Home (Lord Kames) was one of Hume's closest friends in his early years, particularly during the years 1725–34, when Hume lived with his own family at Chirnside.[34] Hume and Kames shared general philosophical and literary interests, and when Hume was preparing the *Treatise* for publication he was in regular contact with Kames about this work. Hume looked to Kames, more than anyone else, for guidance and criticism (LET, 1:23–7, 31–2, nos. 6, 7, 8, 11; and also NHL, 14–8/no. 7). Among other things, Kames seems to have made some effort to put Hume in contact with Butler, with whom Kames had been in personal contact and had corresponded. Hume's and Kames's shared interests included problems of religion, particularly as they related to the philosophies of Locke and Clarke. Just as the dying Hume reported to Boswell that he "never had entertained any belief in religion since he had begun to read Locke and Clarke," so, too, the aging Kames told Boswell stories of struggling in his youth with the ideas of Locke and Clarke.[35] In general, it is clear that Hume had an early interest in Locke's and Clarke's (similar) views on the subject of religion, and Kames, one of Hume's closest friends at the time, likely had some role to play in this.

Kames's active interest in Clarke's philosophy led him into correspondence with Clarke in 1723 concerning certain "difficulties" he found with Clarke's doctrines in the *Discourse*.[36] This correspondence came after seven years of reflection on Clarke's philosophy, and it is indicative of a (critical) interest in Clarke's doctrines that lasted throughout Kames's life.[37] At the same time that Kames was corresponding with Clarke he was corresponding with Andrew Baxter, who was also a resident of Duns (only a few miles from Hume's home at Chirnside). The Kames-Baxter correspondence concerned the philosophy of Clarke and, as already noted, it rapidly degenerated into sharp disagreement.[38] The issue primarily under debate concerned the *vis inertiae* of matter (i.e. its inactivity)—a doctrine that makes up the whole foundation of Baxter's project in his *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, published a decade later (while Hume was still residing in Chirnside).

Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul* enjoyed considerable success and influence from the time that it was published until near the end of the eighteenth century (as the subsequent editions of 1737 and 1745 indicate).[39] John Jackson, Clarke's most active and prominent disciple in England, was among those who praised this work.[40] In his *Dissertation on Matter and Spirit* Jackson describes Baxter as an "ingenious author" and "a judicious and fine reasoner."[41] Jackson says that the "Force of the main design" of Baxter's work

> is to confute *Atheism* by a Demonstration of the *universal* Providence of an Omnipotent and All-wise Agent distinct from, and independent of *Matter*, and who is the *Creator*, *Preserver* and *Director* of it. This Argument he hath handled with great Judgment and Learning; and has so demonstratively confuted the Scheme of *Atheism*, that his Book is highly worthy of the serious and careful perusal of all Lovers of Truth and Religion.[42]

These comments give us a clear picture of the nature of Baxter's most basic philosophical objective: *to refute atheism by means of demonstrative argument*.

Baxter summarizes his own position by arguing that, since matter lacks any active powers (as proved in his first chapter), "the first and chief consequence" of this is

> *the necessity of an immaterial powerful Being, who first made this dead substance matter, originally impressed, and still continues to impress motion upon it*. The first thing that appears in his nature, as he is thus discovered, is his *immateriality*, being the powerful *Creator* and *Mover* of matter; for it is already evident...that such a *powerless, dead, substance*, as matter, must owe its existence to *something else*.[43]

Baxter directs these observations against, specifically, Spinoza and Hobbes, and notes that "as every other kind of atheism asserts matter to be endowed with certain *original powers*, which may supply the absence of a deity, or of immaterial Being, in the world; this sort of reasoning concludes equally against them all, by showing the impossibility of all their *hypotheses* at once: and this is obvious to any person, without farther arguing."[44] The principal model for Baxter's (thoroughly dogmatic) theorizing is Clarke, whose footsteps, as Baxter makes clear, he closely follows.[45]

Baxter's effort to refute the "scheme of atheism" in the manner of Clarke is the most fundamental feature of his *Enquiry into the Human Soul*. In this century, little has been written about Baxter, and most of it has either ignored or downplayed this dimension of his thought. Interest in Baxter's philosophy has been very largely confined to his effort to refute Berkeley's immaterialism.[46] Baxter is, indeed, of some importance in this regard, because he is generally credited with being "the author of the first extended criticism in English of Berkeley's philosophy."[47] Baxter's general perspective on Berkeley's doctrine of immaterialism is that while it aims to refute skepticism and atheism, it achieves the opposite result. Berkeley's arguments, Baxter says, not only give rise to skeptical doubts about the existence of material substance but also raise similar doubts about the existence of *immaterial* substance, including God.[48] In general, Baxter is clear that Berkeley's doctrine strikes at the very foundations of his own (and Clarke's) alternative effort to confute atheism—since it presupposes the existence of matter.[49] For this reason, an effective response to the principles of immaterialism is essential, if Baxter is to succeed in defending his own Newtonian scheme of theology.

Baxter was not a Rankenian, but he did have an important debate with Maclaurin concerning the *vis inertiae* of matter. In his *Account*, Maclaurin argued against the view—prominently defended by Baxter—that denies the existence of all "second causes" in nature, and attributes all causal activity of this kind to "the immediate volitions" of God.[50] Maclaurin assimilates this view to other systems of "false philosophy" (e.g. those of Berkeley and Hume) and suggests that "they hurt those very interests which they appear so sanguine to promote." Maclaurin, in other words, views Baxter's skepticism about the existence of secondary causes in much the same way Baxter views Berkeley's skepticism about the existence of matter: it defeats its own objective of promoting the ends of religion against skeptics and atheists. In 1750, Baxter published *An Appendix to the First Part of the Enquiry into the Human Soul*, which contains a vigorous defense of his own position and criticism of Maclaurin.

Maclaurin's doctrine, Baxter argues, "restrains" God's activity and "removes" him from the world.[51]

Further evidence of the impact of Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul* among his own contemporaries can be found in William Warburton's references to Baxter in several different works. In *Divine Legation* (1738), which was itself an influential and much debated work, Warburton refers to Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul* in terms of the highest praise:

> we have lately seen a Book, intitled, *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul, &c.* so well reasoned on the Principles of [Newton's] Philosophy, as everlastingly to dispel the impious Phantasm of *Spinozism*. He who would see the justest and precisest Notions of *God* and the *Soul*, may read that Book; one of the most finished of the Kind, in my humble Opinion, that the present Times, greatly advanced in true Philosophy, have produced.[52]

This is only one of *many* citations to Baxter in Warburton's writings, where Baxter is mentioned in the same company with other great thinkers of the age, and most often with Clarke.[53] It is especially significant that Warburton—a notoriously hostile critic of Hume—not only enormously admired Baxter's philosophy but also was one of his closest friends and correspondents.[54] More than anything else, what Baxter and Warburton were in agreement about was the importance of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul for morality and society and that it was an essential article of religion.[55] Warburton also shared Baxter's admiration for Clarke's philosophy, especially the argument a priori.[56]

Warburton's praise for Baxter is usually made with a view to his defense of the immateriality (and immortality) of the soul. Baxter's reputation was, however, more widely based than this. As already mentioned, an article on Clarke, published in the *Biographia Britannica* in 1784, points out that Baxter was one of the most highly regarded defenders of Clarke's argument a priori. The author of the article, Kippis, notes that "several able divines and philosophers have thought, and still think, that this argument for the being and attributes of God, will stand the test of the strictest scrutiny; and, therefore, they cannot be blamed for endeavouring to set it in a convincing light to others."[57] As examples of this, Kippis refers to Moses Lowman and Samuel Chandler (both dissenting ministers and prominent critics of Collins) as well as Baxter.[58] Baxter, Kippis says, "could not bear to have the argument *a priori* treated with contempt."[59] He goes on to note that Clarke's most notable critic on this subject was Hume, who had, in his *Treatise*, "perverted" Clarke's wording "to atheistical purpose."[60] These observations made clear that Baxter's contemporaries, and the generation who followed them, viewed him as one of Clarke's most eminent and influential defenders, and that he was, in particular, closely associated with the argument a priori.[61]

Baxter was not the only philosopher actively publishing in the Borders area around Chirnside at this time (i.e. 1730s). William Dudgeon was another local philosopher whose works were attracting attention and comment, both in Scotland and England.[62] Dudgeon's philosophical views represent almost everything that Baxter was (dogmatically) opposed to. Dudgeon was an immaterialist (the first Scottish thinker to embrace this position in print), a pantheist, a necessitarian, a proponent of

moral sense, and an anticlerical freethinker. His doctrines are a blend of ideas drawn from the works of Collins, Tindal, Shaftesbury, Leibniz, Berkeley, and Spinoza—all of whom are, in their various ways, opponents of Newtonian philosophy and theology. While Baxter has obvious claim to be Scotland's principal champion of the philosophy of Clarke, Dudgeon has equal claim to be, prior to Hume, Scotland's most active defender and proponent of radical freethinking doctrines. This, as already noted, brought Dudgeon into conflict with the local clergy, whom Baxter encouraged and assisted in their charges against Dudgeon.

Dudgeon's first work, *The Necessity of some of the Positive Institutions of Ch—ty Considered* (1731) was a defense of Tindal's doctrines in *Christianity as Old as Creation*, which had been criticized by Robert Wallace, a Rankenian who was at this time a minister in nearby Moffat.[63] Dudgeon's freethinking themes in his first work reappear in his work *The State of the Moral World Considered* (1732), in which he argues for the "optimistic" view that there is no real evil in this world and that every feature of it, moral as well as natural, "is the best that can be made, to make up the best whole, according to the design of the most perfect Being."[64] He argues, more specifically, that man is governed by necessity, and he rejects the view that man is accountable to "positive" punishment in a future state (i.e. punishment that is wholly retributive in character). His general view on this subject owes much to the work of Collins and Leibniz.[65]

Dudgeon's *Moral World* was criticized, and condemned in the strongest terms, by Baxter in his *Reflections on a Late Pamphlet* (1732).[66] Baxter argues that Dudgeon's work denies any real distinction between "just and unjust, right and wrong, good and evil" (a view he associates with the moral skepticism of Mandeville), and he describes Dudgeon as defending a "philosophy of unaccountableness."[67] In opposition to Dudgeon, Baxter defends the free will position of Clarke (whom he calls "the best Defender of Liberty"), and he uses this view to show that God is not the source of the (real) moral evil we find in this world.[68] The scope and severity of Baxter's reply is manifest in his characterization of Dudgeon's views as "scepticizing in natural Religion and morality," and tending to promote "down right Anarchy and Atheism."[69]

Baxter's attack on Dudgeon in *Reflections* is intimately connected with the prosecution that the ministers of the Presbytery of Chirnside launched against Dudgeon in 1732. The "lybel" issued against Dudgeon accuses him, as author of *The Moral World*, of "gross errors," and makes two specific charges, both of which are prominent in Baxter's *Reflections*.[70] The first is that Dudgeon denies "all distinction between moral good and evil or else [makes] God the author of sin," and the second is that he denies "the punishments of another life, or that God punishes men for sin in this life." The lybel concludes by saying that by these "and many other gross errors [Dudgeon has] given gross offence and ought to be prosecuted with the highest censures of the church." In a petition written in reply to these charges, Dudgeon argued that he denied only that "man is accountable in the sense that Arminians or freewill-men had"—a view, he claims, that is contrary to scripture.[71] The ministers, nevertheless, judged his answers unsatisfactory and upheld their sentence of "contumacy." Dudgeon appealed this decision, and the case dragged on for several years, working its way through the Synod (Merse and Teviotdale), and then on to the Commission of the General Assembly, where it was eventually dropped.[72]

There is independent evidence that Baxter was on good terms with the local clergy involved in the prosecution of Dudgeon. Among the list of subscribers to Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul* there are many members of the clergy, and this includes three ministers from the Presbytery of Chirnside.[73] Dudgeon's replies to Baxter also make plain that he believed that Baxter aimed not simply to refute his philosophy but also to bring him to the attention of the authorities.[74] It seems clear, then, that one way or the other, Baxter was an important figure in the Chirnside prosecution of Dudgeon. It is also highly likely that this case would be (well) known to Hume, since his uncle, Rev. George Home, was minister at Chirnside, and directly involved in the proceedings against Dudgeon.

The efforts of Baxter and the clergy to silence Dudgeon were unsuccessful. A few years after *The Moral World* appeared, Dudgeon's philosophical correspondence with John Jackson—who had recently published a reply to Baxter—was published under the title *Philosophical Letters Concerning the Being and Attributes of God* (1737).[75] Dudgeon initiated this correspondence, responding to two recent works by Jackson that defended Clarke's argument a priori: *The Existence and Unity of God* (1734) and *A Defence of Existence and Unity of God* (1735). The Dudgeon–Jackson exchange was reviewed in *The History of the Works of the Learned* (the same journal that would review Hume's *Treatise* shortly after this), where Dudgeon's views were summarized:

> Mr. *Dudgeon*, who seems to be a Person of very good Sense, and great Ingenuity of Temper, had imbided some of *Spinoza's* Notions concerning the Deity; and agreed with Bishop *Berkley* in supposing Matter to have no Existence distinct from its Idea in the Mind; he looked upon all things as necessarily what they are, and entertained some incoherent Opinions of Liberty, Virtue and Vice, Good and Evil; very different from what the Generality of Christians think to be consistent with Religion, and to terminate in downright Atheism.[76]

As these remarks suggest, one of the most striking features of Dudgeon's philosophical system is that he defends not only necessitarian doctrine, but a form of "pantheistic immaterialism" (as one recent commentator has described it).[77] Much of Dudgeon's discussion is devoted to the issue of substance. He denies the possibility of distinguishing between material and immaterial substance, and he also denies that "the term I" denotes any distinct substance.[78] Dudgeon also discusses a number of other topics (space, liberty, morals), on all of which he is systematically opposed to the views of Clarke and his followers (e.g. Jackson and Baxter).[79]

Dudgeon produced a number of other works that attracted attention and (critical) comment. In 1739 he published *A Catechism*, which appeared in three editions, and contains an introductory letter on natural religion. This work argues, in line with Tindal, that natural religion is reducible to morality, and it contains strong anticlericalism. It is especially critical of "persecutions" encouraged by established religions. In the same year, Dudgeon published *A View of the Necessitarian or Best Scheme*, a work written in "defence" of Pope's ("Leibnizian") necessitarian doctrine in *An Essay on Man*, which J. P. Crousaz had criticized. This controversy also involved Warburton, who defended Pope in very different terms. Both Warburton and Dudgeon published letters on this subject in *The History of the Works of the*

Learned, where Dudgeon deals with Warburton in sharp terms.[80] Warburton's evident hostility to Dudgeon is made plain in his preface to his *Commentary on Pope's Essay on Man* (1742)—this being a collection of his letters on this subject—in which Warburton refers to "the tribe of Free-thinkers, Toland, Tindal, Collins, Coward, Blount, Strutt, Chub, Dudgeon, Morgan, Tillard and their fellows, the mortal foes of both reason and religion."[81]

A number of years later, Dudgeon's reputation as a freethinker surfaces again in John Witherspoon's *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (1753), a highly influential satire on the Moderate Party in the Church of Scotland. Witherspoon refers to Dudgeon's *Best Scheme* and places it in the company of works by Shaftesbury, Collins, Hutcheson, Tindal, and Kames, all of which constitute "a short catalogue of the most necessary and useful books" for the "truly learned moderate man."[82] By 1765 there was still enough interest in Dudgeon's philosophy that his most important works were gathered together and published (without a publisher's name attached) in one volume.

4

The works and activities of Kames, Baxter, and Dudgeon make very clear that Clarke's philosophy, and the controversies it generated with freethinking opponents and others, were a *core* feature of Hume's intellectual circumstances at Chirnside, when the project of the *Treatise* began to evolve and take shape. All these thinkers (including Hume) were *deeply* concerned with Clarke's philosophy. Baxter ranks among Clarke's most eminent disciples, and he was certainly Clarke's greatest champion in Scotland. On the other side, Dudgeon has equal claim to be Scotland's most active and prolific radical freethinker at this time. This brought him into direct opposition to both Baxter and Warburton, as well as the local Chirnside clergy. While Kames was not a freethinker in the style of Dudgeon, he shared both his necessitarian and moral sense doctrine. Kames also opposed Baxter's particular brand of Clarkean metaphysics, which put him into some degree of personal conflict with Baxter.[83]

The relevance of all this for Hume seems plain enough. In the first place, Hume was on intimate terms with Kames, and shared his interests in philosophy, including his particular interest in problems of causation, especially as they relate to the metaphysics of Locke and Clarke. Hume shared, moreover, Kames's doubts about the argument a priori, as well as his more specific doubts about Baxter's efforts to explain all natural causes in the world in terms of the immediate influence of the Deity.[84] None of this can have fostered good relations between Hume and Baxter, who was a dogmatist by disposition, and quick to persecute his adversaries (in defense of religion and morality). Hume must also have been (well) aware of the Dudgeon prosecution, since his uncle, also resident in Chirnside, was directly involved in these proceedings. Given the obvious points of resemblance between Hume's (freethinking) philosophical interests and commitments and Dudgeon's, the proceedings against Dudgeon must have caused Hume considerable concern, and they may have played some role in Hume's departure from Scotland in 1734.[85]

Hume's remarks to Boswell (cited earlier) make clear that early on in his life he had a critical interest in the philosophies of Locke and Clarke as they relate to

questions of religion. Hume's philosophical notes in the "Early Memoranda" also indicate his significant interests in religion. Mossner dates the notes on "Philosophy" as belonging to the years 1730–34, and he suggests that "they are part of that 'new Scene of Thought' which opened up to him in 1729."[86] The philosophical notes in the "Memoranda" show considerable interest in the question of atheism and problems of natural religion, which dominates his concerns. (The works and authors cited reflect this: e.g. Cudworth, Bayle, King, Fenelon, etc.) In the early 1730s, Baxter and Dudgeon were preparing their (directly opposed) philosophical works for publication, and they were preoccupied with issues of (moral) evil, human liberty, punishment in a future state, moral sense, the argument a priori, and atheism. These are topics that Hume also gave attention to in the "Memoranda" and that feature prominently in the *Treatise*.

The *Treatise* emerged, as we have seen, from the general context of the main debate between "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists," within which Clarke's effort to refute demonstrably the "atheistic" doctrines of Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers was especially influential. The "infection" of Hobbist and Spinozist ideas had evidently spread to Scotland by the late seventeenth century. After this, in the early eighteenth century, the impact of Clarke's philosophy was also strongly felt in Scotland, no less than in England. The flames of the controversy surrounding Clarke's dogmatic assault on "atheism" ignited the Borders area of Scotland at the very time that Hume began to plan and prepare his project. This local philosophical firestorm took the specific form on one side of Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul* and on the other of Dudgeon's various freethinking pamphlets. These observations concerning Hume's immediate and specific Scottish context are entirely consistent with the early reactions to the *Treatise*. The author of the *Treatise*, as his critics saw it, was evidently a freethinking follower of Hobbes and Spinoza, who was writing directly in opposition to Clarke's philosophy (and those who were defending it). Clearly, then, any adequate interpretation of the *Treatise* must read Hume's work not only with a view to the main debate between "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists" but also with a clear sense of the immediate and specific developments and events in the Borders area in Scotland where the project of the *Treatise* came to life.

The Monster of Atheism

Its Being and Attributes

Perhaps it will be asked, what I mean by the word Atheist? I answer, A reasonable creature, who disbelieves the being of God, or thinks it inconsistent with sound reason, to believe, that the Great First Cause is perfect in holiness, power, wisdom, justice, and beneficence,—is a speculative Atheist; and he who endeavours to instil the same unbelief into others, is a practical Atheist.

James Beattie, *Essay on the Nature of Truth*

The early responses to the *Treatise* show that the issue of "atheism" was neither peripheral nor irrelevant to the way Hume's own contemporaries understood his aims and objectives. Most contemporary Hume scholars take a very different view. They maintain that this label not only misrepresents Hume's intentions in the *Treatise* but also misrepresents his position on the subject of religion as presented in his *later* writings (which are understood to be more "directly" or "explicitly" concerned with religion). The reasons given for this are various, but two arguments stand out. First, it has been argued that Hume was a *skeptic*, whereas an atheist, strictly understood, is a "negative dogmatist" who denies the existence of (any) God.[1] From this perspective Hume may be considered an "agnostic," who was "content to remain in a total suspension-of-judgment position" on the issue of religion and atheism.[2] According to another set of commentators, however, Hume's (positive) religious commitments are more substantial than this. More specifically, it is argued that Hume "gives some sort of genuine assent to the proposition that *there is a god*."[3] On this account, as Gaskin explains it, we should distinguish between an "absolute atheist," who "believes in no gods whatsoever," and a "relative atheist," who believes only "in a more contracted or radically different idea of god from that which prevails in their society."[4] Gaskin argues that Hume should be described as an "attenuated deist" since he "gives explicit or implicit assent to the proposition that there is a god"—although this does not commit him to belief in a *Christian* god.[5] Hume is not, on this view, an "absolute atheist," but it seems clear that "attenuated deism" qualifies him as a "relative atheist" (although Gaskin does not say this).[6]

One response to this general debate is to dismiss it as merely a "verbal dispute"—much as Hume suggests himself in the final section of the *Dialogues* (D, 119). Some want to label Hume an "(attenuated) deist," or a "(limited) theist," and others want to label him a "(relative) atheist." The labels may vary, but the points of qualification show that there is little *real* disagreement about the substance of Hume's position. As Bernard Williams puts it, Hume "was certainly an atheist by, say, Christian standards: about the non-existence of the Christian God, it seems clear that he felt no doubts."[7] Most commentators (although not all) would accept this claim. It would be a mistake, nevertheless, to drop our investigation into the question of Hume's "atheism" at this point, for two reasons. First, most commentators, including those cited above, are primarily concerned with the question of Hume's atheism by way of interpreting his *later* writings, especially in the *Dialogues*. The *Treatise* is generally set aside as having little or no direct bearing on this question. My approach is the opposite of this, since I am specifically concerned with the question of the (supposed) "atheistic" content of the *Treatise*. Second, most commentators have considered the question of Hume's "atheism" not in terms of the eighteenth-century debate but rather against a standard suggested by contemporary philosophical discussion.[8] This approach, obviously, invites anachronism when it comes to assessing the accuracy of the early responses to Hume's *Treatise*.

In order to get a clear understanding of the debate concerning "atheism" that Hume participated in, we need to be able to explain why Hobbes and Spinoza were widely regarded as the leading representatives of "atheism" at the time. Among the key texts here are Bayle's philosophical writings, especially his *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, which contains a number of articles that cover the problem of atheism (e.g. articles on "Hobbes," "Pyrrho," "Spinoza"). Other relevant texts are Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, and the works by the Boyle lecturers, especially Clarke's *Discourse*. These are the essential sources for making sense of the early eighteenth-century debate concerning "speculative atheism." The immediate aim of this chapter, therefore, is to develop a clearer understanding of the way Hume's contemporaries interpreted "atheism" and the specific doctrines that were associated with it. Once this standard is (back) in place, we will be in a position to determine the extent to which the charge of "atheism" fits the actual content of the *Treatise*.

1

A number of Hume's own remarks make clear that he was well aware that his own contemporaries closely associated skepticism and atheism. In the *Enquiry*, for example, he says that apart from the atheist, "the skeptic is another enemy of religion, who naturally provokes the indignation of all divines and graver philosophers" (EU, 12.2/149). Similarly, in the *Dialogues*, Hume observes that almost "all pretenders to reason and philosophy [hold] that atheist and skeptic are almost synonymous" (D, 41). In this context he is careful to explain why skepticism is generally regarded as *irreligious* in character. The reason is, he suggests, that Christians of his own age (e.g. Locke) aspire to make religion a "branch of philosophy," and

it is to this project that skepticism poses a threat (D, 40–1).[9] Hume's notes in his "Early Memoranda" show that he was thinking about the relationship between skepticism and atheism during the period when he was planning and working on the *Treatise*. In the section "Philosophy," in a comment that is included among a number of observations concerning atheists and atheism, Hume refers to Cudworth's account of atheism:

> Four kinds of Atheists according to Cudworth, the Democritic or Atomical, the Anaximandrian or Hylopathian, the Stratonic or Hylozoic, the Stoic or Cosmo-plastic. To which he might have added the Pyrrhonian or Sceptic. And the Spinozist or Metaphysical. (MEM, 2.40)[10]

It is significant that the additions Hume suggests are "the Pyrrhonian or Sceptic" and "the Spinozist." These two suggestions are consistent with the views of Bayle, whose writings are also frequently cited in the "Early Memoranda."[11]

Although Bayle identifies Spinoza as "the first who reduced Atheism to a system," he also argues that the skepticism of Pyrrho—as contained in the writings of Sextus Empiricus—is a dangerous enemy to all schools of theology.[12] According to Bayle, however, the destructive power of Pyrrhonianism is limited in its scope and does not extend to the natural sciences or moral and social life. In his article "Pyrrho," Bayle describes the skeptical method of opposing arguments and how it is supposed to lead to suspending judgment. He then observes that this philosophy "is rightly detested in the schools of theology."

> Pyrrhonism is dangerous in relation to this divine science, but it hardly seems so with regard to the natural sciences or to the state. It does not matter much if one says that the mind of man is too limited to discover anything concerning natural truths, concerning the causes producing heat, cold, the tides and the like. It is enough for us that we employ ourselves in looking for probable hypotheses and collecting data. I am quite sure that there are very few good scientists of this century who are not convinced that nature is an impenetrable abyss and that its springs are known only to Him who made and directs them. Thus, all these philosophers are Academics and Pyrrhonists in this regard. Society has no reason to be afraid of skepticism; for skeptics do not deny that one should conform to the customs of one's country, practice one moral duties, and act upon matters on the basis of probabilities without waiting for certainty. . . . *It is therefore only religion that has anything to fear from Pyrrhonism.* Religion ought to be based on certainty. Its aims, its effects, its usages collapse as soon as the firm conviction of its truths is erased from the mind.[13]

In another article Bayle returns to the methodology of Pyrrhonism:

> [T]he Pyrrhonists, under the pretext of only combatting the reasons offered by the dogmatists for proving the existence of God, effectively undermine the doctrine itself. They declared at the outset that they followed the common opinion, without adhering to any particular sect, that they agreed that there are gods, that they honoured them; that they attributed a providence to them, but that they could not bear to have the dogmatists rashly reasoning about this. Then they propounded objections to them, which by overthrowing providence tended to overthrow the existence of God.[14]

In his "Third Clarification," Bayle returns to the subject of Pyrrhonism, and the way it brings out the fundamental opposition between philosophy and the Christian religion:

> One must necessarily choose between philosophy and the Gospel. If you do not want to believe anything but what is evident and in conformity with the common notions, choose philosophy and leave Christianity. If you are willing to believe the incomprehensible mysteries of religion, choose Christianity and leave philosophy. For to have together self-evidence and incomprehensibility is something that cannot be. . . . [A] true Christian, well versed in the characteristics of supernatural truths and firm on the principles that are peculiar to the Gospels, will only laugh at the subtleties of the philosophers, and especially those of the Pyrrhonists. Faith will place him above the regions where the tempests of disputation reign.[15]

The general force of all Bayle's observations is that Pyrrhonism is the most effective (philosophical) technique for exposing the weaknesses and limits of human reason when it attempts to defend the Christian religion. With respect to the "mysteries" of the Christian religion, we must submit to the authority of God's revelation, since reason is incapable of supporting these claims.[16]

Hume's suggestion in the "Early Memoranda" that we might add the "Pyrrhonian or Sceptic" to the other kinds of atheist was not unusual or idiosyncratic.[17] On the contrary, Bayle's observation that "scepticism" is widely associated with "atheism" was common among Hume's immediate predecessors and contemporaries.[18] In Harris's Boyle Lectures, for example, the principles and doctrines of Sextus are associated in a systematic fashion with the views of modern atheists—most notably Hobbes. Harris makes particular note of the strong affinities that hold between Sextus and Hobbes with respect to their theological skepticism.[19] In a passage devoted to showing that "God is capable of being known to us by his Attributes," Harris remarks on the theological skepticism of Sextus and Hobbes:

> But this some are pleased to deny, and say, That nothing at all can be known of God, but only, that he is; for his Nature is perfectly incomprehensible; that we do but dishonour God, by pretending to understand, and to talk about his Attributes; about which we can say nothing, but only what serves to express our Astonishment, Ignorance, and Rusticity.[20]

Harris cites several passages from Hobbes, as well as a passage from Sextus, and comments on them:

> Now, from these passages, I think it appears plain enough, that though these Men did in Words pretend to own and acknowledge a God, yet in Fact they were Atheists, and had no true Belief of any such Being. For a Deity without the Attributes of *Understanding* and *Wisdom*, without *Ends* or *Designs*, none of which Mr. *Hobbes* asserts expressly, *can be in God*, is a ridiculous stupid Being, an Idol that every rational Agent must despise. . . . To assert, therefore, that the Attributes of God *are not discoverable by Reason, nor agreeable to philosophical Truth*, but may be *declared to be any* Thing, which the *sovereign Power* pleases to make them; this is designedly to expose the Belief and Notion of a Deity, and render it so precarious, that it can be the Object of no rational Man's Faith.

Harris argues that Hobbes's (skeptical) way of treating this matter is in fact more dangerous than a direct denial of God's existence.

> *Professed Atheists* can do no great Harm; for all Persons are aware of them, and will justly abhor the Writings and Conversation of Men that say boldly there is no God: But there are but few such; they have found a Way to pass undiscovered under a fairer Dress and a softer Name: They pretend to be true *Deists* and *sincere Cultivators* of natural Religion; and to have a *most profound Respect for the Supreme and Almighty Being:* But when this *profound Respect* comes to be thoroughly examined and duly understood, it will appear to be the most abominable Abuse that can be, and a most wicked and blasphemous Idea of the Deity.[21]

The message of all this is that thinkers such as Sextus and Hobbes, while they may *appear* to endorse some form of natural religion, are really skeptical thinkers who deny all knowledge of God, and disfigure the (true) Idea of God. At the root of all this, Harris suggests, are the principles and suppositions of empiricism.[22]

Clearly Hobbes's skeptical views on theology, and how they relate to his empiricist commitments, are a matter of considerable importance for understanding the background to Hume's philosophy and the question of "atheism." For this reason, some account of Hobbes's views on this subject is called for.[23] The most striking aspect of Hobbes's position on this subject is his claim that we have no image or conception of God, and so he is incomprehensible to us.

> Whatever we imagine is *finite*. Therefore there is no idea or conception of anything we call *infinite*. No man can have in his mind an image of infinite magnitude, nor conceive infinite swiftness, infinite time, or infinite force, or infinite power. . . . And therefore the name of *God* is used, not to make us conceive him (for he is *incomprehensible*, and his greatness and power are unconceivable), but that we may honour him. Also because whatsoever . . . we conceive has been perceived first by sense, either all at once or by parts, a man can have no thought representing anything not subject to sense.[24]

Consistent with this view, Hobbes provides a minimalist and negative theology. The human situation, with respect to our *idea* of God, is like that of a blind man trying to frame some idea of fire. It is not possible for this person, Hobbes says, "to have any imagination what kind of thing fire is; yet he cannot but know that somewhat there is that men call fire, because it warmeth him."[25] All we can understand by the word *God*, therefore, is "the cause of the World."[26] Since God is the cause of the world, this implies both existence and omnipotence. Beyond this, however, we can say only what God is not. Hobbes places particular emphasis on the need to avoid any anthropomorphic conception of God, since any such attributes (i.e. passions, will, senses, etc.) are "unworthy" of God and fail to honor him.[27]

According to Hobbes, then, philosophy is incapable of providing us with any knowledge of God's attributes beyond this minimalist account.

> And therefore, when men, out of the principles of natural reason, dispute of the attributes of God, they but dishonour him; for in the attributes which we give to God, we are not to consider the signification of philosophical truth, but the signification of pious intention, to do him the greatest honour we are able. From the want of which consideration, have proceeded the volumes of disputation about the nature

> of God, that tend not to his honour, but to the honour of our own wits, and learning; and are nothing else but inconsiderate, and vain abuses of his sacred name.[28]

In general, Hobbes makes clear that *philosophy excludes theology*. By philosophy he understands "knowledge of effects or appearances, as we acquire by true ratiocination from the knowledge we have of their causes or generation: And again, of such causes or generations as may be from knowing first their effects."[29] Philosophy, therefore, is concerned to "search out the properties of bodies from their generation, or their generation from their properties," and so "where there is no generation or property there is no philosophy."[30] In the case of God, who has no parts, motions, or place, it follows that there is nothing to divide or compound, and so he is beyond the scope of philosophy.[31]

Arguably, Hobbes's most radical application of his empiricist principles in support of his brand of theological skepticism is his denial of incorporeal or immaterial substance on the ground that it is insignificant or meaningless.[32] This position commits Hobbes to the view—although it is not explicitly asserted—that God is a *material* being.[33] Hobbes, moreover, explains the origins of the (incoherent) notion of "incorporeal substance" in terms of human fears and ignorance, which give rise to belief in "invisible powers."[34] In this same context, Hobbes provides a detailed account of the various *natural causes* of religion, which he has earlier defined as "fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or tales publically allowed," and when not allowed, as "superstition."[35]

It is evident, then, that Hobbes employs his empiricist principles to emphasize the "narrow limits of our phantasy," and thus places issues of natural religion beyond the scope of human reason.[36] In this sphere, Hobbes is deeply, and systematically, skeptical.[37] It is no exaggeration to say that many of the greatest systems of English philosophy in the century that followed—including the contributions of More, Cudworth, Locke, Clarke, and Berkeley—were advanced with a direct view to discrediting the skeptical implications of Hobbes's philosophy in relation to the ambitions of natural religion.[38]

2

Among Hume's several references to Bayle in the "Early Memoranda," there is one to Bayle's view, in the *Continuation des pensees diverses* (1705), that "Strato's Atheism is the most dangerous of the Ancient, holding the Origins of the World from Nature, or a Matter endu'd with Activity."(MEM, 2.14)[39] "The Stratonians," says Bayle, "had the deadly advantage of being able to confront their opponents with the agreed assumptions, *ex nihilo nihil fit*, that nothing is made from nothing, and that matter is consequently uncreated."[40] In the *Dictionary*, Bayle draws attention to the close resemblance between Strato's atheism and the doctrines of Spinoza. Spinoza, Bayle says, was "the first who reduced Atheism into a system, and formed it into a body of doctrine…otherwise his opinion is not new. It has been believed long ago, that the whole universe is but one substance, and that God and the world are but one Being."[41] Clearly, then, Bayle (like Clarke) regarded Spinoza as the chief

representative of modern atheism, and argued his doctrine should be viewed as a variant of "Stratonic atheism."[42]

Another passage in Bayle's *Continuation des pensées diverses* summarizes the atheist's position:

> One may reduce atheism to this general *tenet*, that nature is the cause of every thing; that it is eternal and self-existent; and that it always acts to the utmost extent of its power, and according to unchangable laws of which it knows nothing. From which it follows, that nothing is possible but what it doth, and that it produces every thing that is possible; that no human effort can alter the least thing, or break its chain of causes and effects; that every thing comes to pass by fatal and unavoidable necessity; that no one thing is more natural than another, and that neither more nor less convenient to the perfection of the universe; that, in whatever condition, the world is always such as it ought to be, and can be; that nature, being a mother that knows none of her children, hath no predilection for any of them, and favours none to the prejudice of others... and, finally, that nature appoints and enacts no punishment for what is called immoralities, and no recompence for morality or virtue, that is, such as are future.[43]

On this view of things, the central tenets of atheism are clear: nature is self-existent, self-ordering, and self-moving. Human beings are part of the natural order and, as such, are governed by necessity. The natural order is not designed or created with any particular view to the ends and needs of human beings, nor does it promise any future state where the virtuous are rewarded and the vicious punished. Among the ("horrid") consequences that flow from this, Bayle claims, is that all that ought to concern us are "the pleasures of this life."

In his *Dictionary*, Bayle used the discussion of Spinoza as an occasion to explain his views on the subject of religion and morality (a topic that was, for Bayle, of particular interest).

> All the religions of the world... turn on this great pivot, that there is an invisible judge who, after this life, punishes and rewards the actions of mankind.... It is from this that the principal value of religion is supposed to flow.... This is the stratagem that the freethinkers attribute to those that they claim were the first authors of religion. This is what Spinoza should have thought, and it is doubtless what he did think.[44]

Bayle goes on:

> Observe that those who deny the immortality of the soul and Providence, as the Epicureans did, are those who maintain that men should apply themselves to virtue on account of its excellence and because one finds enough advantage in the practice of morality in this life not to have anything to complain about. This is undoubtedly the doctrine Spinoza would have put forth if he had dared to dogmatize publicly.[45]

The "atheist" and "freethinker" also maintains, according to Bayle, that religion—that is, belief that there is an "invisible judge," and so on—has been "invented" to encourage moral practice, but it is unnecessary, since moral life does not require the support of doctrines of this kind. These are claims that Bayle elaborates on, at

length, in various parts of the *Dictionary*, as well as in his *Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet* (1683).[46]

Hume's notes in the "Early Memoranda" show that Bayle was not alone in his interest in "Stratonic Atheism." Cudworth's "four kinds of atheist," as we noted, include the "Stratonic" or "Hylozoic." Stratonical atheism is distinguished by the view that "attributes to all Matter, as such, a certain *living* or *Energetic nature*."[47] Nevertheless, according to Cudworth, all forms of atheism, including the Stratonic, should be understood in terms of the "madness" that involves an "irrational [and] desperate Abhorrence from Spirits, or Incorporeal Substances."[48] Cudworth expands on this distinction between atheists and theists:

> But that *notion* or *idea* of *God*, according to which some are *Atheists* and others *Theists*, is in the strictest sense of it, what we have already declared, "a perfect mind, or consciously understanding nature, self-existent from eternity, and the cause of all other things." The *genuine Theists* being those, who make the First Original of all things Universally, to be a *consciously understanding nature* (or *perfect mind*); but the Atheists properly, such as derive all things from *matter*, either perfectly dead and stupid, or else devoid of all *conscious* and *animalish Life*.[49]

Clearly, then, according to Cudworth, the divide between the "genuine theist" and "atheist" boils down to rival hypotheses about the first cause of all things, whether it be (immaterial, intelligent) Mind or (dead, unconscious) Matter.[50]

Cudworth's account of the distinction between "genuine theists" and "atheists" provides us with an understanding of why Hobbes and Spinoza were regarded as (paradigmatic) "atheists" and "enemies of religion." The "genuine theist" believes that the origin of the world must be attributed to some *thinking*, *intelligent*, *invisible Mind*. Strato and Spinoza, as Bayle explains, advanced the alternative hypothesis that the "first cause" is self-existing, self-ordering, self-moving *matter*.[51] Another position that can be taken is to refuse to endorse *any* hypothesis, on the ground that all this is beyond the "narrow scope of human understanding." This is the position of the skeptic or Pyrrhonian. Although not committed to "Spinozism" or any other hypothesis, the skeptic is, nevertheless, an *unbeliever* (i.e. does not believe or accept the theist's hypothesis).[52] It is within the framework this contrast between "genuine theism" and the two dominant modes of "atheism"—as identified and described by Bayle and Hume (in the "Early Memoranda")—that the issue of Hume's "atheistic" commitments in the *Treatise* must be considered and assessed.

3

Clarke is not among the authors cited in Hume's notes in the "Early Memoranda." He is, nevertheless, as noted, a central figure in the main debate concerning religion and atheism, and he features prominently in the early reactions to the *Treatise*. The question arises, therefore, how Clarke (and his followers) understood the issue of "atheism," and what they took this term to *mean*. Clarke, agrees, of course, that the "main question" between the (Christian) theist and atheist is whether or not "the self-existent and original cause of all things, must be an Intelligent Being."[53] Atheists

"either disbelieve the Being of God, or would be thought to do so; or (which is all the one), who deny the Principal Attributes of the Divine Nature, and suppose God to be an Unintelligent Being, which acts merely by Necessity."[54] What is essential to the theist position—and denied or disbelieved by the atheist—is that the world is "the Effect and Work of an Eternal, All-Wise, and All-Powerful Mind."[55] Atheism, as Clarke understands it, is committed to the view that matter is capable not only of "self-existence" but also of producing motion, thought, action, beauty, and order in the world.[56] The theist denies this, and holds that only an immaterial, intelligent, and infinitely powerful being can account for these features of the world we live in.[57] In his Preface to *Unchangeable Obligations,* Clarke summarizes his refutation of (materialistic) atheism, and says that he has proved "God to be a Being absolutely distinct from the Material World, Self-Existent, Intelligent, Free, All-powerful, Wise and Good." He takes all this to prove that "God is a spirit."[58]

A fundamental aspect of Clarke's defense of the Christian religion is his view that God is not only the *creator* of all things but also the *preserver*, *mover*, and *governor* of the whole order of nature.[59] The issue here concerns God's *providence*—his immediate presence, activity, and design—in the world. Clarke's position on this subject may be explained with reference to his refutation of "deism," as asserted in the opening sections of *Unchangeable Obligations*. Clarke describes four different forms of deism, all of which terminate, he claims, in "downright atheism."[60] The first form of deism that he sets out to refute is simply "epicurean atheism" under a different name.[61] These deists, although "they pretend to believe the Existence of an Eternal, Infinite, Independent, Intelligent Being" who made the world, nevertheless "agree with the Epicureans… [that] God does not at all concern himself in the Government of the World." It is fundamental to Clarke's (Newtonian) view that God is continually and constantly present and active in the world, and that all the effects of matter, gravitation, and attraction are a manifestation of God's immediate agency and power.[62] Clarke's conception of God as the "preserver and governor" of all things was, of course, a central point of contention in his famous controversy with Leibniz. The world is not, Clarke maintains, "a great machine, going on without the interposition of God, as a clock continues to go without the assistance of the clockmaker."[63] A view of that kind, he says, is "the notion of materialism and fate, and tends… to exclude God out of the world."[64]

The second sort of deist, although they believe in the Being and Providence of God, does not allow "any difference between moral Good and Evil," and supposes that this distinction depends on "the arbitrary Constitution of Humane Laws."[65] Such a view, Clarke argues, leads to denying God's essential moral attributes (i.e. justice and goodness), which also leads to "downright Atheism."[66] The third sort of deist has a right understanding of God's natural and moral attributes, and his Providence, but rejects the notion of the immortality of human souls.[67] Deists of this kind suppose that we are not in a position to judge the justice and goodness of God as it relates to the "distribution of rewards and Punishments in this present Life." Clarke argues that this view, in reality, also takes away God's moral attributes, and falls into "absolute Atheism." Finally, the last sort of deist believes in the Being and Attributes of God, and his Providence, the real distinction between good and evil, and that there is a future state of rewards and punishments, but nevertheless believes in all

this "without believing any Divine Revelation."[68] According to Clarke, these are "the only True Deists," but there are few of them "among modern Deniers of revelation."[69] The reason for this is that once a person accepts the obligations of morality and natural religion, and the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, he must accept the Christian revelation.[70] Those "modern deists," therefore, who reject revelation "are not really Deists, but mere Atheists."[71] According to Clarke, then, in the final analysis, *all* forms of deism collapse into "downright Atheism."

The view that the deist was little more than an atheist in disguise was a commonplace among the Boyle lecturers. Harris's remarks are representative of their view:

> [Deists]...though in *Words* they may profess to believe and honour a God, yet in *Reality* they deny him, and have no Manner of Notion of his true Nature and Perfections. But it is not the *Name* only, nor the empty Sound of the Word *Deity*, but the *Thing*, that is wanting in the World; it is the true Knowledge and Belief of *this* only, that can clear a Man from the Imputation of Atheism: If he be not right in this Point, i.e. if he have not such a Belief of God, as implies in it a Knowledge of the Perfections of his Nature, he may call himself by as *fine* and *fashionable* Names as he pleases, and pretend to *Deism* and *natural Religion*; but in reality he is an *Atheist*, and so ought to be esteemed by all Mankind.[72]

Superficially, of course, the deist claims to accept the principles of natural religion, while rejecting revelation—something that allows him to evade the odious title of "atheism."[73] Nevertheless, the point Harris, Gastrell, and others insisted on was that the views of these thinkers on *natural* religion were generally nothing better than atheism, since either (like Hobbes) they suggested that we know little or nothing of God's attributes beyond his existence or (like Spinoza) they identified God with the material world.[74] In general, there was broad agreement among the major representatives of Christian orthodoxy (i.e. the leading intellectual figures of the Anglican and Dissenting clergy) that "Deism," of the kind described, is nothing more than "downright atheism." To insist, therefore, that the "deist" and "atheist" be sharply distinguished, with respect to Hume's philosophy, is really to misrepresent the issue as his contemporaries would have generally understood it.[75]

The scope of Clarke's concerns in the *Discourse* is indicative of the fact that his defense of the Christian religion is by no means limited to demonstrating the being and attributes of God. On the contrary, as Clarke makes clear, it is impossible to "vindicate" God's moral attributes unless we can show that the *whole* order of things is consistent with them.[76] To do this, however, we must suppose the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and a future state of rewards and punishments. "The principal argument for the Natural Immortality of the Soul," Clarke says, "is founded on the supposition of its Immateriality."[77] The doctrine of a future state also presupposes that human beings are "accountable creatures," to God as well as each other. To be accountable, however, human beings must possess a power of "liberty of will."[78] God's moral government, as noted, is founded not on "arbitrary constitution of human laws" but on eternal and unchanging moral obligations that attest to a "real difference" between right and wrong, just and unjust.[79] Clearly, then,

from the perspective of Clarke and other leading Anglican and Dissenting thinkers at this time, the defense of the Christian religion was by no means a matter simply of proving the existence of God. The doctrines of a future state, the soul, free will, and the reality of moral distinctions are also, on their account, essential Christian doctrines. *All* these doctrines, as they saw it, were threatened by the (systematic) atheistic philosophy of materialism and necessitarianism, as advanced by Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers.

4

In the context I am concerned with, the meaning of "atheism" is obviously multifaceted and layered.[80] It certainly cannot be equated with our own contemporary understanding of "*absolute* atheism"—which is both simpler and narrower than the eighteenth-century use of this term. (The narrow contemporary sense of this term would imply, for example, that neither Hobbes nor Spinoza were "atheists," when in fact, as I have documented, they were both widely regarded as the chief representatives of "atheism" at this time.) I have identified two forms of atheism that were particularly important in the context in which the *Treatise* was written. These two forms correspond to Hume's own suggestions in his "Early Memoranda," where he comments on Cudworth's classification of various kinds of "atheism." The first of these is "the Pyrrhonian or Sceptic." This mode of atheism is particularly associated with Sextus, Hobbes, and Bayle and insists on the limits to human understanding and philosophy in relation to theology. In contrast with this form of skeptical atheism, the second form of atheism is closely associated with naturalism and is more constructive in its commitments. Hume refers to this form of atheism as "Spinozism," although it also resembles what Bayle calls "Stratonic atheism." The key features of this form of atheism are that nature is self-existent, self-ordering, and self-moving. Human beings are part of this natural order of things, and our lives fall entirely within it and are governed by the same laws that regulate all its operations. Finally, beyond these two dominant forms of atheism, I have also noted the *broad* and *complex* character of "atheism" and the wide range of debates that were associated with it. It is within this framework that Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*, as it relates to the question of atheism, must be considered.[81]

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THE FORM AND FACE OF HUME'S SYSTEM

[M]any have asserted, that there are no Speculative Atheists, yet, My Lord, I cannot agree with those Gentlemen, because my Conversation has frequently afforded me Proofs of the contrary in the Hobbists of the Times; the very Foundation of whose System is Atheism in Speculation.

Charles Gildon, *Deist's Manual*

If he [Hume] is any thing, he is a Hobbist.

Samuel Johnson (quoted by Boswell)

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6

A Hobbist Plan

Mr. Hobbes is their Great Master and Lawgiver. I find that they [atheists] pay a huge reverence to him. If they acknowledge any Divine Thing, it is He. If they own any Scriptures, they are his Writings.

John Edwards, *Thoughts Concerning Atheism*

This book seems to be wrote upon the same plan with several other works that have had a great vogue of late years in England.

Hume, *An Abstract of* A Treatise of Human Nature

The central thesis of this chapter is that the scope and structure of Hume's *Treatise* is modeled or planned after that of Hobbes's *The Elements of Law* and that in this respect there exists an important and unique relationship between these two works. This relationship is important for a number of reasons. First, it is indicative of a fundamental similarity between Hobbes's and Hume's project of the study of man. Second, and more important, by recognizing the significance of this relationship between Hobbes's and Hume's work we can come to appreciate the underlying unity and coherence of Hume's project. Moreover, once we recognize the nature and significance of Hume's Hobbist plan in the *Treatise*, we are in a position to begin to excavate and systematically uncover Hume's fundamental irreligious intentions throughout the *Treatise*.

1

Hume's *Abstract* begins as follows: "This book [i.e. the *Treatise*] seems to be wrote upon the same plan with several other works that have had a great vogue of late years in *England*" (TA, 1/645). It would seem reasonable to assume that the works Hume has in mind are those produced by the "late philosophers" whom he proceeds to name in the following paragraph: Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Butler. These are the same philosophers whom he refers to in the introduction to the *Treatise* as putting "the science of man on a new footing" (namely, the experimental method; T, intro. 8/xvii). This conjecture seems particularly plausible, given that all these authors have an obvious role in shaping specific aspects of Hume's

discussion of various topics and issues in the *Treatise*. However, when we turn to the works of these authors, it is immediately apparent that there is no obvious similarity between their various "plans" and the "plan" of the *Treatise*.

There is, nevertheless, on closer examination, one author whom Hume does not mention in this context but whose work is an obvious model for the plan of the *Treatise*. Few scholars, if any, would contest the claim that Hume was familiar with Hobbes's works and greatly influenced by them (although it must be said that many Hume scholars write as if this was not the case). A great deal of evidence internal to Hume's writings can be cited to support this view. Hume explicitly refers to the *Leviathan* at *Treatise*, 2.3.1.10 (402).[1] He refers at *Treatise*, 1.3.3.4 (80) to an argument of Hobbes that can be found in *Of Liberty and Necessity*, and he uses the title of this treatise for the appropriate sections of the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*.[2] Somewhat more detailed evidence can also be found. For example, very early on in the *Treatise*, Hume uses an example taken from Hobbes (Hume's examples are usually "borrowed" in this way): "I have seen Paris; but shall I affirm I can form such an idea of that city, as will perfectly represent all its streets and houses in their real and just proportions?" (T, 1.1.1.4/3). Compare this with Hobbes's example in *Human Nature* (i.e. the first part of the *Elements of Law*): "a man that is present in a foreign city, seeth not only whole streets, but can also distinguish particular houses, and parts of houses; but departed thence, he cannot distinguish them so particularly in his mind as he did."[3] Some of the most important of those observations that Hume uses in his account of the influence of experience on the vivacity and association of our ideas can be found in Hobbes's discussion of sense, the imagination, and the "train of imaginations."[4] Many other passages can be found that would serve to confirm Hume's close reading of Hobbes's works.[5]

Hobbes had written *The Elements of Law* by 1640, and this work was published in 1650 in the form of the treatises *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*.[6] These two treatises, along with *Of Liberty and Necessity*, were eventually published together in the form of Hobbes's *Tripos*.[7] The whole of *Human Nature* and the first of the two parts of *De Corpore Politico* together formed the first of the two parts of *The Elements of Law*. The first part of *The Elements of Law* was concerned with men as "persons natural," and the second was concerned with men as a "body politic." The first of the four parts of *Leviathan*, entitled "Of Man," covers much the same ground as part 1 of *The Elements of Law*. Most of the important features of the second part of *Leviathan* are anticipated in the second part of *The Elements of Law*.[8]

At the beginning of the second part of *De Corpore Politico*, Hobbes summarizes the scope and structure of his two treatises (i.e. *The Elements of Law*):

> That *Treatise of Human Nature*, which was formerly printed, hath been wholly spent in the consideration of the natural power, and the natural estate of man, namely, of his cognition and passions in the first eleven chapters, and how from thence proceed his actions; in the twelfth, how men know one another's minds: in the last, in what estate men's passions set them. In the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth chapters of the former Part of this Treatise [i.e. *De Corpore Politico*] is showed, what estate they are directed unto by the dictates of reason, that is to say, what be the principal articles of the law of nature. And lastly, how a multitude of persons natural, are united by covenants into one person civil, or body politic. In

> this part therefore shall be considered, the nature of a body politic, and the laws thereof, otherwise called civil laws.[9]

What is striking about this passage is not only that it contains the very title of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* but also that it would serve as a reasonable outline of the salient features of that work.[10] This suggests that the resemblance between these works is no coincidence and that the passage just quoted describes the "plan" after which Hume's *Treatise* is modeled.[11]

The parallels between *The Elements of Law* and Hume's *Treatise* suggest that in scope and structure books 1 and 2 correspond to *Human Nature* and that book 3 corresponds to *De Corpore Politico*. In the "Advertisement to Books I and II" of the *Treatise*, Hume says that "the subject of the understanding and the passions make a complete chain of reasoning themselves." Hume published books 1 and 2 separately, in two volumes in 1739, from book 3, which was published in 1740. This "natural division" in his works follows that which separates *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*.

Figure 6.1 makes clear how the general scope and structure of these two works correspond to one another.

We find that Hume's major concerns in book 1—that is, sensation, imagination, and knowledge (these being the parts of book 1that are largely preserved in the first *Enquiry*)—are Hobbes's major concern in the first part of *Human Nature*.[12] Similarly, Hume's discussion of the passions in book 2—that is, his account of the different types of passions (how they arise from our primary impressions, how they give rise to action, how we know one another's minds, etc.)—generally corresponds with Hobbes's major concerns in the second part of *Human Nature*. Finally, what concerns Hume in book 3 of the *Treatise* is equally in line with Hobbes's major interests in *De Corpore Politico*. In that work,

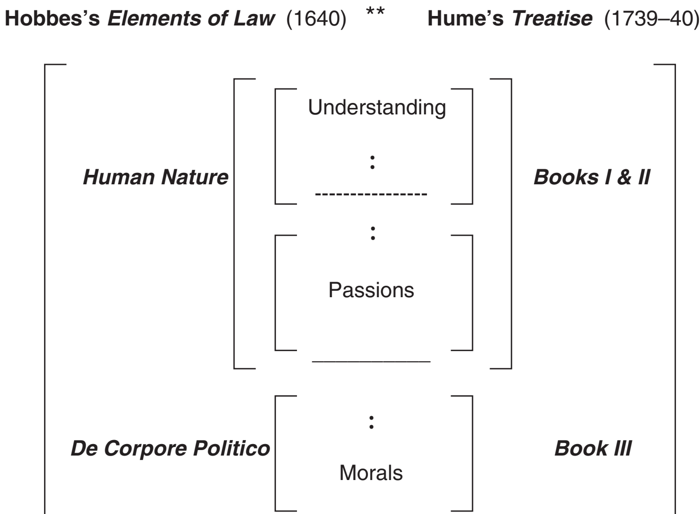

FIGURE 6.1. Similarity between Hume's *Treatise* and Hobbes's works

Hobbes discusses in what estate men's passions put them, what the principal laws of nature are, how "a multitude of persons natural" are united into "one person civil," and the nature of the body politic. Hume, of course, distinguishes between the natural and artificial virtues and vices and therefore offers a more complex account of the foundations of morals than Hobbes does. Nevertheless, his discussion of artificial virtues and vices (e.g. justice and injustice), which is in many respects quite Hobbesian, clearly accords with the subject matter of *De Corpore Politico*.[13] Thus Hume covers such topics as property, promises (i.e. "contracts"), the origin of government, the right of rebellion, and so on—thereby following the general plan of Hobbes's works.

Clearly, then, the overall scope and structure of Hume's *Treatise* is very similar to that found in Hobbes's works. The *Treatise* follows the general "plan" of *The Elements of Law* and the first two parts of the *Leviathan* more closely than it does any work by those "late philosophers in England" mentioned by Hume in the *Abstract* and the introduction to his *Treatise*. It would seem, therefore, that in this respect the *Treatise* has a *unique* relationship with Hobbes's works. While the works of the "late philosophers"—along with many others—certainly had a significant influence on the content and central doctrines of the *Treatise*, the broad *plan* of Hobbes's works is nevertheless that which the *Treatise* follows most closely. It is not, therefore, entirely surprising that Hume's work "borrows" its very title from Hobbes.

2

In the first *Enquiry*, Hume makes a number of remarks about how "all compositions of genius"—he has works of history and literature primarily in mind—ought to be written. It is essential, he says, that the author "have some plan or object; and though he may be hurried from this plan by the vehemence of thought…there must appear some aim or intention, in his first setting out, if not in the composition of the whole work" (EU, 3.5).[14] Any composition of this kind, Hume maintains, must "form a kind of *Unity*, which may bring them under one plan or view, and which may be the object or end of the writer in his first undertaking" (EU, 3.6). In light of these remarks, it is not surprising to find that Hume's "plan" in the *Treatise* aims to satisfy this standard by way of following the same (unified and coherent) plan found in Hobbes's works. Nor is Hume's use of models for the composition of his own works unique to the case of the *Treatise*. It is widely recognized, for example, that Hume's *Dialogues* are modeled after Cicero's *On the Nature of the Gods*.[15] The entrenched skeptic may, nevertheless, remain unconvinced. While the similarities in scope and structure between Hume's *Treatise* and Hobbes's *Elements* are obvious enough, one might argue, this does not prove that Hume *consciously* modeled his work after this plan.

In reply to this, it is important to note that the case for Hume modeling his work after Hobbes's plan in the *Elements* (and the first two parts of *Leviathan*) does not rest on the mere fact of the relevant similarities in their scope and structure. On the contrary, much more than this has been established. Let us review the argument:

1. There are clear and evident parallels in the scope and structure of Hume's *Treatise* and Hobbes's *The Elements of Law* (and the first two parts of *Leviathan*). In other words, the plans of these works are *similar* in these respects.
2. Hume was clearly *familiar* with Hobbes's work and regarded him as an important thinker—one whose work could be mentioned alongside Plato's *Republic* (T, 2.3.10/402) and whose views could be referred to along with those of Locke and Clarke (T, 1.3.3.4–7/80–1).
3. Hume *explicitly* asserts that the plan of the *Treatise* is not unique and that it has been (consciously) modeled after other works.
4. Hume's work shares the relevant *title* with Hobbes's work.
5. In these circumstances, it is implausible to suggest that these parallels between the plan of Hume's *Treatise* and Hobbes's *Elements* should be viewed as mere coincidence.
6. The only further evidence, it seems, that would satisfy the demands of the entrenched skeptic would be explicit acknowledgment by Hume that the *Treatise* was modeled after Hobbes's works. Hume had, however, as I will explain below, good reason to *avoid* any such explicit acknowledgment of debt to Hobbes.
7. It follows from points 1–6 that we have every reason to conclude that Hume modeled or planned the project of the *Treatise* after Hobbes's (similar) project in *The Elements of Law*.

In face of this, our critic may suggest another difficulty. One might argue that, while the plans of these works are obviously similar, and that Hume must have been well aware of this, it does not follow that there is a *unique* relationship between them. To make this challenge complete, however, one must find an *alternative* candidate—one that has a plan that resembles the *Treatise as much or more* than Hobbes's works. (Clearly no responsible or credible critic can refuse to suggest an alternative candidate while at the same time holding that the relevant relationship is not unique.) Given the standard set, finding other work(s) to fit this role is going to prove very difficult. In the first place, even if some other plausible candidate is identified, this does not itself show that Hobbes's work is not among the relevant works that Hume was using as a model—only that Hobbes's work is not unique in this respect. Beyond this, any alternative candidate must fit the description of being a work that was "of great vogue of late years in England." Hobbes's work fits this description very well. The huge impact of Hobbes's philosophy in Britain throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries has already been described (chapters 3 and 4). His *Leviathan* and other writings were routinely described as the "Bible" or "Scripture" of "atheists" and "freethinkers."[16] Furthermore, the impact of Hobbes's philosophy, and the controversies surrounding it, extended well into the eighteenth century.[17] Not only did this reach to Scotland and Edinburgh University, it was also felt in the immediate vicinity of Chirnside, at the very time that Hume was residing there and planning his own *Treatise of Human Nature* (i.e. during the period around 1730). Clearly, then, from every point of view, Hobbes's work was of "great vogue in late years in England [and Scotland]." Finally, even if we identify some other work that satisfies the conditions mentioned, we must still take into consideration

the fact that Hume's work takes its very title from Hobbes. Unless *all* these conditions are met, we must conclude that there is indeed a unique and important relationship between Hobbes and Hume with respect to the "plan" of the *Treatise*.[18]

3

Given that Hobbes and Hume are two of the greatest philosophers in the British tradition, how is it that the similarities between their projects—which are as obvious as they are unique and important—were overlooked for so long?[19] There is, I think, no single answer to this question. Some of the factors have to do with the presentation and reception of Hobbes's philosophy. For example, philosophers, at least in the twentieth century, have tended to focus their attention primarily upon Hobbes's *magnum opus*, *Leviathan*. While there are, as I have noted, similarities between the plan of the first two parts of the *Leviathan* and the plan of Hume's *Treatise*, these similarities are certainly obscured by the larger scope of the *Leviathan* (namely, the lengthy discussion of religion in the third and fourth parts). Moreover, as already briefly noted, discrepancies between the various editions of *The Elements of Law* may also have obscured the relationship between Hobbes's and Hume's works. Since Tönies's unified edition of *The Elements of Law* first appeared in 1927, many scholars have referred to it rather than to the separate editions of *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*. Hume would have been familiar with *The Elements of Law* in the form of the two treatises, and the similarities between Hobbes's work and his own are more obvious if one looks to the separate editions rather than to Tönies's unified one.

It is, nevertheless, possible to find other, more fundamental explanations for the fact that Hume scholars have failed to notice the origins of the plan of Hume's *Treatise*. One of these is, quite simply, that most scholars have been looking for these origins elsewhere. As Hume makes no explicit acknowledgment that the plan of the *Treatise* is modeled after that of Hobbes's works, there seems to be little reason to turn to them. Given that Hume does acknowledge his debt to the "late philosophers"—among whom Hobbes is not mentioned—and that Hume had in the context of the introduction and the *Abstract* a suitable opportunity to acknowledge any important debts to Hobbes, it is quite understandable why Hume scholars have tended, on the basis of this prima facie evidence, to bypass Hobbes's works. Clearly, however, we still need some explanation of why Hume avoided any explicit acknowledgment of this debt to Hobbes.[20]

I believe that the most plausible reason Hume avoided any explicit acknowledgment of Hobbesian influence is that while he no doubt sought "literary fame," he had no desire for "controversy, notoriety, nor martyrdom."[21] Any acknowledged link between the *Treatise* and Hobbes's philosophy would certainly have spelled serious trouble for Hume. Quentin Skinner has shown that although there were many writers in the seventeenth century "who might have felt Hobbes worthy of citation as an authority," they generally refrained from citing him because they had to take into consideration "Hobbes's dangerous reputation."[22] It was, Skinner suggests, "certainly regarded at the time as beyond dispute that amongst those prudent men, who would 'scarce simper in favour or allowance' for Hobbes, there were many who were none the less 'Hobbists' for that." Peter Gay has also commented on Hobbes's reputation

and intellectual influence at that time. Hobbes, he says, "was as notorious in his time as it is possible for a philosopher to be and still escape hanging."[23] At this time, Gay suggests, Hobbes's work "was too great to be ignored but...[his] name was too disreputable to be praised."[24] Clearly, then, it was not unusual for philosophers at this time to refrain from acknowledging Hobbes as a source for their own philosophy.

The climate of intolerance toward Hobbes had not sufficiently receded by the time Hume came to publish the *Treatise* that favorable references to Hobbes's philosophy could go by without incurring the wrath of influential sections of society. Many of the details of Hume's life can be cited in support of this claim.[25] For example, his lifelong caution about publishing his views on religion and the various controversies his philosophical doctrines involved him in attest to the fact that "prudence" in these matters was required.[26] Furthermore, his adversaries and critics were very quick to note the similarities between his *Treatise* and Hobbes's philosophy. This is apparent not only in the "charges" leveled against Hume by the author of the *Specimen* (i.e. Wishart or Baxter) in 1745 but also in the commentary of later critics such as James Beattie. Beattie, as Peter Gay points out, believed that "he could demolish Hume by putting him in the same company as such infidels as Hobbbes and Spinoza."[27] In a similar manner, Samuel Johnson, another influential adversary, sneered at Hume by dismissing him as "a Hobbist."[28] In short, Hume's most acrimonious enemies were quite content to paint him as a Hobbist, and they believed that any implied connection of this sort served to discredit Hume's philosophy. It is little wonder, therefore, that Hume chose not to mention Hobbes in his introduction to the *Treatise*.

In spite of these adverse circumstances, Hume made plain in his *History of England* his very high esteem for Hobbes and his philosophy. In describing "manners and arts" in the age of the Commonwealth, Hume mentions Hobbes's achievements along with those of Milton, Harvey, Clarendon, and a few others. This alone is, obviously, high praise. Hume's remarks are clearly guarded but his respect for Hobbes nevertheless comes through.

> No English author in that age was more celebrated both abroad and at home than Hobbes: In our time, he is much neglected: A lively instance how precarious all reputations, founded on reasoning and philosophy!...Hobbes' politics are fi tted only to promote tyranny; and his ethics to encourage licentiousness....In his own person he is represented to have been a man of virtue; a character no wise surprising, notwithstanding his libertine system of ethics. (HE, 6:153).[29]

There can be little doubt that this philosopher, whom the middle-aged Hume recognized as one of the great minds of the Commonwealth era and still of contemporary interest, was a major source of inspiration for the young Hume's project of *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

4

Once the Hobbist plan of Hume's *Treatise* is properly identified, the question arises of what the significance of this is for the general interpretation of this work. Clearly, in the first place, consideration of the structural parallels between the *Treatise* and

Hobbes's works brings into much sharper focus the unity and coherence of Hume's project. Both Hobbes and Hume held that moral and political philosophy, if they are to advance beyond mere rhetoric, must proceed on a proper methodology. Moral and political philosophy, they agreed, must employ the same methodology as that which is appropriate to the natural sciences.[30] As to the exact nature of that methodology, of course, they disagreed. Whereas Hobbes's conception of scientific methodology is "rationalistic" in character, Hume aims to "introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects" (as he famously puts it in the subtitle to the *Treatise*).[31] It is, however, important that we clearly distinguish the *project* of "a science of man" (T, intro. 7/xiv) from the particular *method* by which it was carried out. These two aspects of Hume's thought are frequently confused.[32] While it is arguable that the subtitle of the *Treatise* indicates the important role Newton's method plays in Hume's work, this does not show that the project was itself "inspired by Newton."[33] On the contrary, the project, as we have seen, is essentially Hobbist, even though it was carried out using the "experimental method."

Apart from the claim that moral and political philosophy ought to be based on the same methodology as the natural sciences, there are several other important methodological presuppositions that Hobbes and Hume share. They are agreed, for example, that moral and political philosophy must begin with an examination of human thought and motivation. Beyond this, they share the further assumption that human nature, despite its variable circumstances and conditions, is essentially uniform. In this way, Hobbes claims that "whosoever looketh into himself…he shall thereby read and know, what are the thoughts, and passions of all other men, upon the like occasions."[34] Hume makes much the same point by noting that "the minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations" (T, 3.3.1.7/575). All these methodological presuppositions are common to both Hobbes's and Hume's projects, which further indicates the deep philosophical connections between them.

Do these observations concerning the significance of the Hobbist plan of Hume's *Treatise* show that Hobbes can provide a "comprehensive key" to Hume's thought? Clearly this suggestion must be rejected if it is taken to imply that Hume was not "an independent intellect struggling to come to grips with a wide range of complex philosophical problems and systems."[35] Any "historical reductivism" of this kind inevitably oversimplifies and distorts Hume's thought. However, it would be no less an error to deny (a priori) that some thinkers are *especially important* for understanding the nature and structure of Hume's project in the *Treatise*. Having identified the Hobbist plan of the *Treatise*, it is evident that Hobbes is indeed an especially important figure for understanding Hume's thought. We need to be careful, therefore, not to confuse the claim that Hobbes is especially important for understanding Hume's work with the different, and wholly implausible, claim that we can understand (all the details of) Hume's thought in the *Treatise exclusively* in terms of the influence of Hobbes.[36] Similarly, we should not infer that there are no significant issues where Hobbes and Hume diverge simply because Hume's project in the *Treatise* is modeled after Hobbes's work. On the contrary, there are (several) significant issues on which Hobbes and Hume do indeed diverge—an observation that is in no way inconsistent with the fact that Hume's project is modeled after Hobbes's similar project of a "science of man."[37]

Identifying the Hobbist nature of Hume's project in the *Treatise* is only the *beginning*, not the end, of our efforts to make sense of the details and specifics of Hume's intentions throughout the *Treatise*.[38] What it does do, however, which is especially important, is to reorient our perspective on this work, pointing all further investigation in an entirely new direction.[39] Among the more fundamental problems we still need to address is how Hume's Hobbist project of "a science of man" can be integrated with the strong skeptical arguments that appear throughout the *Treatise*—that is, as per the "riddle" problem. Beyond this, we also need to consider the possibility that Hume's Hobbist project, viewed in its relevant historical context, is laden with *irreligious* significance. It is evident, after all, that the *Treatise* is modeled after the work of an author whom Hume's own contemporaries universally regarded as a leading representative of the philosophy of "atheism."[40] Considering the *Treatise* in this light means, however, overturning the established dogma that the *Treatise* has little or nothing to do with problems of religion.

Atheism under Cover

Esoteric Communication on Hume's Title Pages

And as Epicurus so other Atheists in a like manner, have commonly had their Vizards and Disguises; Atheism for the most part prudently chusing to walk abroad in Masquerade. And though some over-credulous Persons have been so far imposed upon hereby, as to conclude that there was hardly any such thing as an Atheist any where in the World, yet they that are Sagacious, may easily look through these thin Veils and Disguises.

Cudworth, *System of the Universe*

It may be necessary, as well now as heretofore, for wise men to speak in parables, and with double meaning, that the enemy may be amused, and they only who have ears to hear may hear.

Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*

The feature of Hume's title pages in the *Treatise* that has attracted the most attention over the years is the subtitle: "An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into MORAL SUBJECTS." Many commentators, as noted, have suggested that the significance of this subtitle should be interpreted in terms of Hume's ambition "to become the Newton of the human mind."[1] What these commentators have generally overlooked, however, is that the very title of Hume's work is taken from Hobbes's *Treatise of Human Nature* and that this reflects the fundamental similarity in their projects of "a science of man." Another important feature of Hume's title pages is his use of epigrams from Tacitus and Lucan. The epigram from Tacitus appears on the title page of the first two books of the *Treatise*: *Rara temporum felicitas, ubi sentire, quae velis; & quae sentias, dicere licet* ("The rare good fortune of an age in which we may feel what we wish and say what we feel").[2] On the title page of the third book, this epigram is replaced by one taken from the ninth book of Lucan's *Pharsalia*: *Durae semper virtutis amator, Quaere quid est virtus, et posce exemplar honesti*. "Thou that to virtue ever wer't inclined, / learn what it is, how certainly defin'd, and leave some perfect Rule to guide Mankind."[3] Given the context and prominence of these epigrams, it is a curious fact that they have attracted so little attention and comment from Hume scholars.

There are three general questions we should, I suggest, ask about these epigrams. (1) Do they have any relevance of significance for Hume's general or fundamental intentions in the *Treatise*? (2) Have other philosophers or thinkers employed them in a way that might shed light on Hume's allegiances and objectives in that work? (3) Do the epigrams bear any important or interesting relationship to each other? Clearly the last question may be addressed with reference to the first two.

1

What, then, is the significance of Hume's citation of Tacitus in this context? In the first place, the significance of the epigram lies with its content. That is to say, the epigram clearly signals Hume's intention to express unorthodox and controversial doctrines. Beyond this, the epigram may also be taken to signal to the reader that Hume has exercised some degree of caution or "prudence" when presenting his views. This interpretation certainly accords well with the Hobbist nature of Hume's title and the overall plan of the *Treatise*. However, these observations do not capture the full significance of Hume's use of this epigram in this context.[4]

By the end of the seventeenth century, Spinoza, as noted, was widely regarded as an atheistic disciple of Hobbes.[5] At this time, the best known work by Spinoza—and the one that was especially influential among radical freethinkers—was the *Theological-Political Treatise*.[6] Spinoza's subtitle for this work says that it is his intention to establish "that freedom of thought and speech not only may, without prejudice to piety and the public peace, be granted; but also may not, without danger to piety and the public peace, be withheld."[7] The title of the final chapter of the *Theological-Political Treatise* sums up a central theme of this work:[8] *Ostenditur, in Libera Republica unicuique & sentire, quae velit, & quae sentiat, dicere licere*: "That in a free state every man *may think what he likes, and say what he thinks*" (following Elwes; my emphasis). Given the historical context, it seems clear that the epigram on the title page of Hume's *Treatise* is a direct and unambiguous reaffirmation of a major theme of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*.[9]

In light of these considerations, it is hardly surprising to find that the significance of this epigram did not escape the notice of Hume's contemporaries. In May 1739, shortly after the first two books of the *Treatise* were published, a brief notice of Hume's work appeared in the German journal *Neuen Zeitungen*. As already pointed out, this notice begins by describing the author of the *Treatise* as "a new freethinker." It goes on to say that the author of the *Treatise*

> attempts to introduce the correct method of philosophizing into moral matters, examining and explaining, first of all, the characteristics of the human understanding and then the effects. The author's evil intentions are sufficiently betrayed in the subtitle of the work, taken from Tacitus: *Rara temporum felicitas, ubi sentire, quae velis; & quae sentias, dicere licet*.[10]

Given the historical circumstances, it seems perfectly reasonable to suppose that the reviewer in question recognized Hume's allusion to Spinoza and interpreted it as being pregnant with significance for a proper understanding of the nature of

Hume's intentions in the *Treatise* (i.e. as is consistent with the description of Hume as "a new freethinker").

A more important and detailed response to Hume's *Treatise*, during the period following its publication, came in the form of the *Specimen* that was written against Hume when he applied for the chair in philosophy at Edinburgh University in 1745. The principal charges leveled against Hume, we noted, were "atheism" and "scepticism." In presenting these accusations, Hume's critic mentions the names of only Hobbes and Spinoza—both of whom are the particular targets of Clarke's effort to refute demonstrably the philosophy of atheism. It is significant, therefore, that Hume's critic begins the *Specimen* by pointing out that the author of the *Treatise* [namely, Hume] "put on his Title-page (Vol. I. Printed for J. Noon, 1739) a Passage of Tacitus to this Purpose; 'Rare Happiness of our Times, that you may think as you will, and speak as you think.'" All this is entirely consistent with the fact that this critic (i.e. Wishart or Baxter)—much like his predecessor in the *Neuen Zeitungen*—presents Hume as an "atheist," "sceptic," and follower of Hobbes and Spinoza.

Many readers will greet the claim that Hume's citation of Tacitus involves covert reference to Spinoza and the *Theological-Political Treatise* with some skepticism. One particular source for their doubts is the widely accepted claim that Hume was not directly familiar with Spinoza's writings. This supposition can be traced back at least as far as T. H. Grose's introduction to Hume's *Essays*. Grose claims, more specifically, that Hume's "knowledge of Spinoza was derived from Bayle's dictionary"—a claim several other influential Hume scholars have repeated.[11] To my knowledge, however, the only commentator who has made any effort to substantiate this claim is John Laird.[12] It is important to note, therefore, that the points Laird makes touch only on Hume's familiarity with the *Ethics*. Clearly it does not follow from the fact that Hume was unfamiliar with Spinoza's *Ethics* that he must also have been unfamiliar with the *Theological-Political Treatise*.

A number of considerations strongly suggest that it is unlikely that Hume did not (carefully) read Spinoza and the *Theological-Political Treatise*:[13]

1. In the century following Spinoza's death, the *Theological-Political Treatise* was better known than the *Ethics*. In 1689, the former work was translated into English, and it received considerable attention and comment in British philosophical circles—particularly from those who were already engaged in the battle against Hobbes's "atheism" (e.g. More, Cudworth, Boyle, Bentley, Clarke, et al.).
2. While writing the *Treatise*, Hume was in close personal contact with Chevalier Andrew Ramsay—a cousin of Hume's boyhood friend Michael Ramsay.[14] Spinoza, as Ramsay's biographer puts it, was Ramsay's "particular aversion," and he regarded him as "the very worst of atheists."[15] In both his works *Les Voyages de Cyrus* (1727) and *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1748–49), Ramsay sets out to refute Spinoza's doctrines (especially necessitarianism). Clearly, then, while Hume was at work on the *Treatise*, he was in close personal contact with at least one philosopher who had a deep interest in Spinoza's writings, and so he likely had easy access to these writings. Moreover,

given Hume's interests, it hardly seems credible that he would, in these circumstances, have failed to examine Spinoza's writings for himself.

3. Hume's *Treatise*, as the early responses to it make clear, manifests a deep and systematic interest in the philosophy of Samuel Clarke. In his *Discourse*, Clarke describes Spinoza as "the most celebrated Patron of Atheism in our Time."[16] It is, again, hardly credible, given Hume's interest in Clarke's philosophy, that he would have regarded Spinoza as anything other than a major thinker in this context whose work required careful examination. Hume's familiarity with Bayle's *Dictionary* article on "Spinoza," which is specifically mentioned in the *Treatise* (T, 1.4.5.22n/243n), reinforces this point.
4. Thomas Halyburton observed in his *Natural Religion Insufficient* (1714) that the writings of Hobbes and Spinoza were "of great vogue among [Scottish] young gentry and students" in the early eighteenth century.[17] There is no reason to believe, therefore, that Hume's use of Spinoza's writings was improbable at this time.
5. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Spinoza's doctrines generated vigorous controversy in Holland.[18] At this time, many Scottish lawyers—a social group that played a particularly prominent role in the foundations of the Scottish Enlightenment—were receiving their legal training in Holland.[19] Indeed, the number of Scottish lawyers training in Holland reached its peak at the time that the controversy over Spinoza's philosophy was raging in Holland (i.e. the late seventeenth century). It seems likely that this controversy would have filtered back to Scotland through this route. It may well be, therefore, that the controversy over Spinoza's doctrines had an especially strong impact in Scotland.
7. Finally, Hume's hostile references to Spinoza in the *Treatise* are plainly laced with sarcasm and irony (T, 1.4.5.17–23/240–4). Indeed, in this context Hume appeals to Spinoza's "hideous hypothesis" only in order to show that the principles of immaterialism lead to atheism!The fact that Hume superficially presents himself as being hostile to Spinoza's "atheism" is simply indicative of a modicum of prudence on his part.

Taken together, these points strongly suggest that it is most unlikely that Hume was not familiar with Spinoza's writings. More specifically, in the absence of any concrete evidence to the contrary, we have every reason to conclude that at the very least Hume would have been familiar with the central doctrines of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* (and would, therefore, have been well aware of the significance of his epigram).

2

Hume's personal contact with Pierre Desmaizeaux while he was living in London (1737–39) and preparing the *Treatise* for publication suggests that his use of Tacitus's epigram has significance that extends beyond its allusions to Spinoza's defense of

freedom of thought. More specifically, there is interesting evidence that indicates that Tacitus (and Spinoza) had special significance for the circle of freethinking anti-Christian pantheists to which Desmaizeaux belonged. This circle, as already noted, included not only Anthony Collins and John Toland but also John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon. Trenchard and Gordon were the authors of the influential series of letters first published in the *London Journal* between 1720 and 1723 under the signature "Cato" and subsequently reprinted as *Cato's Letters* in six different editions between 1724 and 1755.[20] Trenchard and Gordon used the pseudonym "Cato" to indicate their own allegiance to the ideals of liberty as associated with the name of Cato the Younger, who defended the Roman republic against the rising tyranny of Julius Caesar. The two most notable themes of *Cato's Letters* are their defense of freedom of thought and their anticlericalism. One letter (no. 15), written by Gordon in February 1720, is entitled "Of Freedom of Speech: That the Same Is Inseparable from Public Liberty." The epigram from Tacitus features prominently in this letter, which provides further evidence of the significance of that epigram in this context.[21] (It also links the epigram with the name "Cato," which, as I will explain, is relevant to the Lucan epigram that appears on the title page of book 3.)

Along with Collins, the most prominent member of the circle of anti-Newtonian freethinking pantheists was John Toland. Toland had a strong and sympathetic interest in the philosophy of Spinoza, as indicated in his *Letters to Serena* (1704) and, more overtly, in his *Pantheisticon* (1720).[22] It is, as noted, *Pantheisticon* that Jacob believes describes the meetings and "ritual" of the Toland-Collins circle. In *Pantheisticon*, Toland introduces the distinction between "exoteric" and "esoteric" doctrine.[23] Exoteric doctrine is "external," public meaning that will not arouse the hatred and hostility of the clerics, the mob, and the superstitious. Esoteric doctrine is the private or secret meaning that is available or accessible only to the learned members of the "Pantheistic" society or "brotherhood."[24] Out of considerations of prudence, it is necessary for the brotherhood to be able to communicate with each other in such a way that they do not endanger their own lives and well-being. Clearly, the selective use of an epigram might be one such obvious form of esoteric communication.

There are interesting and overlapping themes between Toland's *Pantheisticon* and Collins's influential *Discourse on Freethinking* (1713). For present purposes, however, the most interesting feature of *Pantheisticon* is the reappearance of the epigram from Tacitus. It is fundamental to the practice of the pantheists, Toland suggests, to exercise due caution when expressing their views. With this in mind, he points out that "the Pantheists shall not be more open 'till they are in full liberty to think as they please, and speak as they think."[25] The epigram from Tacitus, therefore, appears at the very heart of Toland's description of the principles and practices of the "Pantheists."

It seems evident that Hume's use of the epigram from Tacitus, considered as an esoteric method of presenting his own Hobbist project of the *Treatise*, is entirely consistent with the use this epigram was put to by anti-Christian freethinkers such as Spinoza, Toland, and Gordon. We have good reason to believe that Hume would have been entirely familiar with most, if not all, the relevant works in which the epigram appears.[26] All these thinkers were concerned to defend the principle of

freedom of thought and speech with a view to publishing their anti-Christian philosophy. Given the evident "Spinozist" connotations of Hume's use of the epigram from Tacitus, the question we now must consider is how this relates to Hume's use of the epigram from Lucan on the title page of book 3.

3

The subject matter of Lucan's *Pharsalia* is the civil war that marked the end of the Roman republic. In the ninth book of *Pharsalia*, Lucan is concerned with the struggle of Cato the Younger, who is defending the republic against the rising tyranny of Julius Caesar. Lucan presents Cato, unambiguously, as a model or exemplar of Stoic virtue in the face of hardship and misfortune, and he is clearly the hero of this work.[27] The epigram Hume uses comes from an especially significant passage (9.544–605) that has as its centerpiece a speech by Cato at one of the great oracles of antiquity, that of Jupiter Ammon. Cato's lieutenant Labienus encourages him to consult the oracle to find out whether the conflict is to end in victory or defeat for the forces of liberty. The lines of the epigram are delivered by Labienus and addressed to Cato. Cato is described as a man of virtue and asked to consult the oracle regarding the nature of virtue and the pattern or model of virtue by which we should live. The narrator prefaces this speech with the assertion that Cato, possessed of "the God that dwelt within his Breast," becomes himself a worthy oracle. At the conclusion of the speech, the narrator suggests that Cato is God-like and worthy of worship. In general, it is evident from the design of the passage that it is Cato who is to serve as our pattern or model of virtue and goodness.[28]

The doctrines Cato defends can be summarized under the following headings: pantheism, mortalism, necessitarianism, rejection of superstition, and love of liberty. Cato makes plain that no oracle is required to tell us those truths that are required for the conduct of life. Man already knows through his own lights that liberty is worth dying for, that virtue is impervious to fortune, and that virtue depends on the will and not the success of the agent. Moreover, we should not look for God anywhere other than in nature and within the virtuous mind. God, therefore, is all about us and not transcendent and beyond man and nature.[29]

Is there a place that God would chuse to love
Beyond this Earth, the Seas, yon Heaven above,
And virtuous Minds, the noblest Throne of
JOVE?
Why seek we farther then? Behold around,
How all thou seest does with God abound,
JOVE is alike in all, and always to be found!

Those who depend on oracles are weak and anxious about the future. Consequently they live in doubt and fear. The only knowledge of the future that is certain, and all that we require, is that all men must die.

Let those weak Minds that live in Doubt and Fear,
To juggling Priests for Oracles repair;

One certain Hour of Death to each decreed,
My fix'd, my certain Soul from Doubt has freed:
The Coward and the Brave are doom'd to fall;
And when JOVE told this Truth, he told us all.

It is this knowledge about God and man's condition that each person must find within himself. We can, therefore, leave the prophecies of priests to those weak and fearful individuals who rely on them. The course of events is guided by nature itself, to which man is inescapably joined.

From God deriv'd, to God by Nature join'd,
We act the Dictates of his mighty Mind:
And tho the Priests are mute and Temples still,
God never wants a Voice to speak his Will:

These, in summary, are the central themes of Cato's speech. (For Cato's speech in full, see the appendix.)

Given that the epigram from Lucan introduces Cato's speech at the oracle, the obvious question is whether there is any relationship between the content of Cato's speech and Hume's overall intentions in the *Treatise*. In light of Cato's speech, it is clear what we ought to expect. Cato manifests aloof disdain and hostility to any philosophical system or morality that depends on superstition and prophecy (e.g. Christianity). Related to this, he embraces a moral outlook that rejects a transcendent God and the immortality of the soul as the basis of our moral and social practice. Moral practice, for Cato, is founded not in belief in a future state, in which virtue is supposed to secure reward from God, but rather on a conception of virtue and honor that attaches to our human condition in the world (i.e. the world of nature of which human beings are a part). In general, the pantheistic philosophy of Cato, as presented by Lucan, places emphasis on divine qualities in nature, and especially in the virtuous person. Finally, Cato's Stoic necessitarianism is combined with an unshakable commitment to the cause of liberty. More than anything else, Cato represents and personifies the cause of liberty and opposition to tyranny.[30]

Hume's use of Lucan's epigram on the title page of book 3 of the *Treatise* plainly suggests that he regarded Cato as a God-like man who serves as a model of virtue after whom we may pattern our own character and conduct.[31] It is, above all, to the wise words of the Roman hero that he is concerned to draw our attention. We may assume, therefore, that Hume shares Cato's deepest values as encapsulated in the speech at the oracle. It is also reasonable to suppose, on this basis, that it is these doctrines and values that we can expect Hume to advance and defend in the *Treatise*.

4

The foregoing account of Hume's use of the Lucan epigram suggests that its principal significance and interest lies with its reference or allusion to Cato's speech at the oracle. With this in mind, we may ask: was the name and character of Cato of any particular significance to Hume's contemporaries? More specifically, does any

of the literature relevant to Hume's objectives and concerns in the *Treatise* suggest that his contemporaries may have seen some further significance in his reference or allusion to Cato's speech at the oracle? In Britain in the early eighteenth century there was, quite simply, tremendous interest in Cato.[32] Addison's *Cato* (first performed in 1713) was especially popular and influential, and it established Cato as a symbol of political liberty, as well as a paragon of Stoic virtue. Clearly, then, to this extent, Hume's allusion to Cato, by means of the epigram from Lucan, was entirely in keeping with the spirit of his own times.[33]

Things, however, are not as straightforward as they appear. During the early decades of the eighteenth century, a number of important philosophical controversies were fought between the radical freethinkers in the Collins-Toland circle and their Newtonian philosophical opponents. As already noted (chapter 3), one of the most important of these exchanges occurred when Collins published his *Discourse on Freethinking* in 1713.[34] This work had considerable impact, and it attracted the attention and fire of a number of distinguished critics, including Jonathan Swift, Benjamin Hoadley, George Berkeley, and Richard Bentley. An epigram taken from Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, which appears on the title page, briefly summarizes the work's content: "Fain would they confound *Licentiousness in Morals* with *Liberty of Thought*, and make the Libertine resemble his direct Opposite.[35] Collins sought to show that, pertaining primarily to matters of religion, freedom of thought neither corrupted men's morals nor society. Freethinking, he maintains, is a force for reason, progress, and the discovery of truth. Coercion and repression, by contrast, produce irrationality, deceit, and, worst of all, superstition and the various evils that come in its wake.

In the closing parts of the third and final section of *Freethinking*, Collins cites a whole range of thinkers who questioned or challenged the orthodoxies of their time but who were, nevertheless, men of unquestioned virtue and good character. The names range from Socrates and Plato to Hobbes and Tillotson. In the middle of this list (ninth among nineteen) appears the name of Cato of Utica.[36] More space is devoted to Cato than any of the others; and almost the entire section on him is devoted to Nicholas Rowe's standard early eighteenth-century translation of the passage in Lucan's *Pharsalia* book 9 describing Cato's speech at the oracle.[37] Collins prefaces the speech with the observation that "the inimitable Lucan has rais'd a noble monument, not only to his Wisdom and Virtue, but to his Freethinking."[38] Collins supplies both the Latin original and the English translation. In this way, we find that Cato's speech at the oracle, introduced by the words of the epigram uttered by Labienus, constitutes the very heart of Collins's catalogue of virtuous freethinkers. Cato's speech also delivers, in a pungent form, the pantheistic materialist doctrine that Collins also embraced.[39]

Collins not only quotes Cato's speech at length in the closing argument of *Freethinking* but also explicitly refers to it earlier in this work, in another context. In the second section of *Freethinking*, Collins argues that the enemies of freethinking deny men the right to think on those very subjects all men have a duty to think on—specifically, subjects such as "the nature and Attributes of the Eternal Being or God, of the Truth and Authority of Books esteem'd Sacred, and of the Sense and Meaning of those Books; or, in one word, of Religious Questions."[40] Collins defends the right and duty of freethinking on such matters with a variety of arguments. One

particularly important argument (his third) is that superstition is an evil and that "there is no just remedy to this immoral Evil but Freethinking." By freethinking alone, Collins continues, can we "understand the Causes of things, and by consequence the unreasonableness of all superstitious fears."[41] Collins proceeds to mock the useless actions and speculations of superstitious individuals and to point out the evil consequences of their beliefs and practices. He continues:

> These Men [i.e. the Superstitious] have no quiet in their own Minds; they rove about in search of *saving* Truth thro the dark Corners of the Earth, and are so foolish as to hope to find it...hid under the sands of *Africa*, where *Cato* scorn'd to look for it: and neglecting what God speaks plainly to the whole World, take up with what they suppose he has communicated to a few; and thereby believe and practice such things in which they can never have Satisfaction....Here is foundation laid for nothing but endless Scruples, Doubts, and Fears. Wherefore I conclude, that every one, out of regard to his own Tranquillity of Mind, which must be disturb'd as long as he has any Seeds of Superstition, is oblig'd to *think freely on Matters of Religion*."[42]

Collins, then, following the example of Cato, as described, identifies superstition with vice and folly and suggests, similarly, that the virtuous man stands aloof from all beliefs and practices of a superstitious nature. Faith in priests, a future state, and other forms of superstition brings mankind only misery.

We have every reason for thinking that Collins's *Freethinking* is a book Hume would have been thoroughly familiar with. There are a number of factors to consider in this regard. For one thing, as already indicated, Collins's *Freethinking* was a book that had considerable impact and was widely discussed both in Britain and abroad. It was one of the most important works by an important thinker whose reputation and influence lasted well into the second half of the eighteenth century. Moreover, as indicated, Hume's *Treatise* was significantly concerned, if not preoccupied with, a skeptical attack on Clarke's Christian rationalism; and Hume adopted positions on the subjects of materialism and necessitarianism that closely accord with the position taken by Collins in direct opposition to Clarke. In more general terms, the anti-Christian and anti-Newtonian spirit and tone of Collins's works, and *Freethinking* in particular, are entirely in keeping with Hume's own anti-Christian and anti-Newtonian intentions in the *Treatise*. (I describe these themes in the *Treatise* in more detail in the chapters that follow.) Such considerations provide us with strong reasons for believing that Hume would have been familiar with Collins's major philosophical writings, including *Freethinking*.

The most important response to Collins's *Freethinking* came from Richard Bentley, a prominent Newtonian, a close colleague of Clarke, and the first Boyle lecturer. Bentley published his *Remarks* on Collins's *Freethinking* in 1713.[43] This work is of particular interest, insofar as it sheds light on the nature and activities of the Collins-Toland freethinking circle. More specifically, Bentley's comments suggest that he believes that he is dealing with an organized and active circle of thinkers whom he describes as "preachers of Atheism."[44] These atheists have, he suggests, an established "Set of Principles and Dogmata." He describes their dogma as follows.

> That the Soul is material and mortal, Christianity an imposture, the Scriptures a forgery, the Working of God superstition, hell a fable, and heaven a dream, our life

> without providence, and our death without hope like that of asses and dogs, are parts of the glorious gospel of these truly *idiot evangelists*. If all your *freethinking* does not centre in these opinions, you shall be none of their family.[45]

Bentley also notes that the circle employs an "interior" or "occult" meaning in their texts. There is, furthermore, some suggestion that *Freethinking* was written in close association with others in the "atheistic" circle.[46]

Bentley interprets Collins's attempt to defend freethinking as simply a thinly disguised assault on the Christian religion and the established church. Throughout this work, Bentley's criticism is directed very largely against the details of Collins's scholarship. Eight different editions of Bentley's *Remarks* had appeared by 1743. This is clear evidence of the contemporary interest aroused by this debate. In 1737, the seventh edition was printed. In this edition, the third and last part of Bentley's *Remarks* was printed for the first time, although in an incomplete form.[47] This third part is concerned entirely with a detailed analysis of Cato's speech at the oracle as presented by Collins. In the 1737 edition, Bentley's discussion ends abruptly in the middle of his commentary on the very epigram that Hume cites (i.e. the words of Labienus).[48] These considerations provide clear evidence that Hume's immediate contemporaries had an ongoing interest in the Collins-Bentley debate and that Cato's speech at the oracle was quite central to this controversy. The fact that Bentley's discussion actually concludes in the 1737 edition with the epigram Hume employs suggests one further reason for thinking that Hume's contemporaries would have recognized this epigram as having some direct relevance to the doctrines in Collins's *Freethinking*.

Finally, Hume's personal contact with Pierre Desmaizeaux at the time he was living in London and preparing the *Treatise* for publication is especially significant in this context. Desmaizeaux worked closely with both Collins and Toland, but he was particularly close to Collins as both a friend and collaborator. There is, moreover, some evidence that Desmaizeaux worked along with Collins on *Freethinking*.[49] In light of this, and given Hume's personal contact with Desmaizeaux, it would be quite extraordinary if he were anything other than familiar with this important work with which Desmaizeaux was so closely concerned.

In sum, Cato's speech at the oracle has a very high profile and a significant role to play in Collins's *Freethinking*, a book that was itself very influential and widely discussed among Hume's contemporaries. We have, therefore, every reason to suppose that both Hume and his contemporaries would have been familiar with Collins's *Freethinking* and that the epigram from Lucan plays a significant role in that work and the controversy surrounding it.

5

My observations in this chapter show that the very face of the *Treatise*—its title pages—reveals Hume's freethinking and irreligious aims and intentions. Both the epigrams he uses on the title pages are very significant. The epigram from Tacitus was used not only by Spinoza but also by his followers in the Collins-Toland circle

to proclaim their bold defense of freethinking. At the same time, the Lucan epigram appears prominently in Collins's *Freethinking* and carries the message of Cato; a model of Stoic virtue and the oracle of pantheism, freedom of thought, and rejection of superstition. Beyond this, these two epigrams are also intimately connected with Hume's Hobbist title and plan for the *Treatise*.[50] Clearly, then, Hume's use of epigrams on the title page of the *Treatise* is a notable and illuminating example of "esoteric" communication (*pace* Toland). With both Spinozist and Hobbist features prominently displayed on the face of his work, Hume (boldly) proclaims his intentions and allegiances. He does so, however, in a manner that is prudent enough that "they only who have the ears to hear may hear."

PART III

THE NATURE OF HUME'S UNIVERSE

Bear this well in mind, and you will immediately perceive that nature is free and uncontrolled by proud masters and runs the universe herself without the aid of gods.

Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*

One may reduce atheism to this general tenet, that nature is the cause of every thing; that it is eternal and self-existent; and that it always acts to the utmost extent of its power, and according to unchangeable laws of which it knows nothing.

Bayle, *Continuation des pensées diverses*

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Blind Men before a Fire

Empiricism and the Idea of God

It seems, then, that there is no idea of God in us. A man born blind who has often approached fire and felt hot, recognizes that there is something which makes him hot; and when he hears that this is called 'fire' he concludes that fire exists. But he does not know what shape or colour fire has, and has absolutely no idea or image of fire that comes before his mind.

Hobbes, *Objections to Descartes's Meditations*

And when [our author] suspects that any philosophical term has no idea annexed to it (as is too common) he always asks from what impression that pretended idea is derived? And if no impression can be produced, he concludes that the term is altogether insignificant.

Hume, *An Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature*

Hume's "theory of ideas" is widely regarded as "taken largely from Locke and assumed by Hume to be fairly uncontroversial."[1] This general perspective on the roots of Hume's theory is, to a large extent, a relic of the traditional interpretation of his intentions in the *Treatise* understood as an effort to work out the skeptical implications of the empiricist principles of Locke and Berkeley. In this chapter I argue for a different perspective on Hume's theory of ideas. Hume's theory, I maintain, has deep roots in Hobbes's account of the nature and origin of our ideas, as presented in both *Human Nature* and *Leviathan*. Although Hume modifies Hobbes's theory in various ways, using material taken from other thinkers, his theory employs the general framework Hobbes provided. The immediate and obvious significance of this, as Hume would well know, is that Hobbes employed his empiricist principles to defend (deep) skepticism about any knowledge of God. Considered from this perspective, I argue, Hume's near silence, throughout the *Treatise*, concerning our *idea* of God speaks loudly, not for his lack of interest in this subject, but for his (thinly veiled) irreligious intentions.

1

The basics of Hume's system of ideas are very familiar. Our objects of thought, what is present to the mind, are our *perceptions*.[2] Perceptions are divided by Hume into two kinds, which are distinguished by "the degrees of force or liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind" (T, 1.1.1.1/1). Our "lively and strong perceptions" are called *impressions*, and our "fainter and weaker" perceptions are called *ideas*. According to Hume, impressions and ideas are also related to each other by way of resemblance and causation. Although they vary in degrees of force, our ideas and impressions "appear always to correspond to each other" (T, 1.1.1.5/3). With respect to this relationship, Hume takes it as evident that impressions appear in the mind first, and that the ideas that resemble them are *copied* from them.

Hume explains the causal relationship between impressions and ideas in terms of a further distinction between simple and complex impressions and ideas. Simple perceptions "admit of no distinction or separation," whereas our complex perceptions "may be distinguished into parts." It is obvious that some complex ideas may not be derived from any prior, resembling complex impression. I may imagine, for example, a city like the New Jerusalem or a golden mountain even though I have never seen it (T, 1.1.1.3/3):[3]

> I perceive, therefore, that tho' there is in general a great resemblance betwixt our complex impressions and ideas, yet the rule is not universally true, that they are exact copies of each other. We may next consider how the case stands with our simple perceptions. . . . I venture to affirm, that *the rule here holds without any exception*, and that every simple idea has a simple impression, which resembles it; and every simple impression a correspondent idea. (T, 1.1.1.5/3; my emphasis)

As an example of this, Hume mentions "that idea of red, which we form in the dark, and that impression, which strikes our eyes in sun-shine, differ only in degree, not in nature" (T, 1.1.1.5/3). This example, and the accompanying example of our fading idea of a city (Paris), also appears in Hobbes's *Leviathan* in a context where Hobbes is describing the imagination as a "decaying sense."[4]

From these observations Hume derives a "general maxim" he regards as being of considerable importance to his philosophy. This principle says "that all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent" (T, 1.1.1.7/4). Following other commentators, I will refer to this as Hume's "copy principle." In the *Abstract*, Hume says of this principle that "no discovery cou'd have been made more happily for deciding all controversies concerning ideas, than this" (TA, 7/648). Whenever Hume suspects that "any philosophical term has no idea annexed to it (as is too common) he always asks, *from what impression that pretended idea is derived*? And if no impression can be produced, he [the author] concludes that the term is altogether insignificant" (TA, 7/648–9). Throughout the *Treatise*, Hume wields the copy principle to clarify our ideas and expose philosophical terms that are insignificant or without any determinate meaning—a practice that has a clear precedent in Hobbes's discussion of "the abuse of words" and "error and absurdity" in *Leviathan*.[5]

Hume employs his distinction between impressions and ideas to mark out other important features of his "theory of ideas." He indicates, for example, that his use of the term "perception" to cover both impressions and ideas is an improvement on Locke's "perverted" use of the term "idea" to cover both kinds of perception (T, 1.1.1n/2n; TA, 5/647–8; compare EU, 2.9n/22n). A particular benefit of this terminology, according to Hume, is that it enables us to deal more effectively with the problem of innate ideas. Hume rejects the doctrine of innate ideas if this is taken to mean that we derive some of our *ideas* from a source other than impressions (of sensation or reflection). However, on his account, our *impressions* are innate insofar as "they arise immediately from nature" (TA, 6/648; compare EU, 2.9n/22n).

The question that arises from this is what are the causes of our impressions? To explain this, Hume draws a further distinction between impressions of sensation and reflection. In *Treatise*, 1.1.2 Hume says that impressions of sensation "arise in the soul originally, from unknown causes." At the beginning of book 2, however, he puts his position more precisely.

> Original impressions or impressions of sensation are such as without any antecedent perception arise in the soul, from the constitution of the body, from the animal spirits, or from the application of the objects to the external organs. Secondary, or reflective impressions are such as proceed from some of these original ones, either immediately or by the interposition of its idea. Of the first kind are all the impressions of the senses, and all the bodily pains and pleasures: Of the second are the passions, and other emotions resembling them. (T, 2.1.1.1/275)

Hume's distinction between impressions of sensation and reflection generally corresponds with Locke's similar distinction between "ideas of sensation and reflection."[6] Nevertheless, although his terminology is different, Hobbes also distinguishes between our original sense experience, the pleasures and pains it produces, and the various particular passions that arise from this.[7] Hobbes's account of these features of our ideas resembles the details of Hume's system as much as anything that appears in Locke's discussion in his *Essay*.

An aspect of Hume's theory of ideas where he clearly diverges sharply from Locke is the subject of abstract ideas. Locke argued that humans, unlike animals, are capable of forming ideas that are entirely general or universal in nature, such that they can serve to represent all objects of a given kind (e.g. man, horse, animal, etc.)[8] A particular example Locke gives of this is "the general Idea of a Triangle . . . [which must be] neither Oblique, nor Rectangle, neither Equilateral, nor Scalenon; but all and none of these at once. In effect, it is something imperfect, that cannot exist; an Idea wherein some parts of several different and inconsistent Ideas are put together."[9] Locke's account of abstract ideas came under sharp attack, famously, from Berkeley, who argued that all our ideas are particular and determinate in their nature.[10] In the *Treatise*, Hume is careful to endorse Berkeley's view on this subject with exaggerated praise. He describes Berkeley as "a great philosopher" whose critique of abstract ideas is "one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that has been made of late years in the Republic of Letters" (T, 1.1.7.1/17; compare LG, 26). One good reason for taking this praise as sarcasm is that Berkeley's "discovery," as Hume would have

been well aware, is plainly anticipated by Hobbes. Moreover, Hume's own nominalist commitments are, if anything, closer to those of Hobbes.[11]

There are several other important features of Hume's "theory of ideas" that conform to Hobbes's account. One of the most pervasive of these is Hume's use of Hobbes's description of the imagination as a "decaying sense."[12] According to Hobbes, the "manner" in which we perceive our ideas varies in strength. In the case of memory, our ideas of objects are "weaker" and more "obscure" than the original "impression" of sense; and weaker again in the case of "fictions" of the imagination. These features of Hobbes's account are consistent with Hume's general distinction between impressions and ideas. Related to this, Hobbes's observations concerning the influence of experience in producing an order in "the train of imaginations," whereby we are able to form expectation about the future, become key elements in Hume's (similar) account of the association of ideas, belief, and causal inference (T, 1.1.4; 1.3.7).[13] The parallels involved here are very familiar, and a number of scholars have pointed them out.[14] According to Hume, causal inference is a process whereby our experience of constantly conjoined perceptions generates an association of ideas. In these circumstances, the mind moves from a present impression to the related lively idea (T, 1.3.7.5/96). The basics of Hume's system as it concerns this process are readily found in Hobbes's account of "prudence."

These observations concerning the Hobbist features of Hume's system of ideas should not surprise us, given that Hume's project in the *Treatise* is modeled or planned after Hobbes's work. This is not to deny, of course, that other philosophers (e.g. Locke, Berkeley, and Malebranche) also had an important role to play in shaping Hume's theory. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the essential elements of Hume's theory of ideas overlaps to a considerable extent with Hobbes's account of the origin and nature of our ideas. Indeed, Hume's "universe of the imagination" (T, 1.2.6.8/68) is more or less the same as that which Hobbes describes in the opening chapters of *Human Nature* and *Leviathan*. The question we need to ask, therefore, is whether the Hobbist character of Hume's theory of ideas is of any significance for understanding Hume's wider intentions in the *Treatise*. The best way to approach this issue is to consider, first, what lessons Hobbes drew from his own empiricist principles and the theory of ideas he built around them.

2

The lesson Hobbes drew from his empiricist principles, as I have already discussed (chapter 5), was a deep skepticism concerning knowledge of God. Since human understanding "can have no thought representing anything not subject to sense," and we can have "no idea or conception of anything we call infinite," we have no conception or idea of God—who is "incomprehensible" to us.[15] This is a skeptical theme Hobbes emphasizes throughout his writings.[16] In his *Objections to Descartes's Meditations,* he says:

> It seems, then, that there is no idea of God in us. A man born blind who has often approached fire and felt hot, recognizes that there is something which makes him

> hot; and when he hears that this is called "fire" he concludes that fire exists. But he does not know what shape or colour fire has, and has absolutely no idea or image of fire that comes before his mind. The same applies to a man who recognizes that there must be some cause of his images or ideas, and that this cause must have a prior cause, and so on; he is finally led to the supposition of some eternal cause which never began to exist.... But he has no idea which he can say is the idea of that eternal being; he merely gives the name of label "God" to the thing that he believes in, or acknowledges to exist.[17]

Hobbes repeatedly uses the simile of a blind man who can conclude only that fire exists but cannot frame any image or idea of its attributes.[18] This simile, with its deep skeptical implications for all natural and revealed religion, was one that haunted Hobbes's critics and that they returned to over and over again in their efforts to refute Hobbes's skeptical challenge. In essence, what Hobbes did was to employ his empiricist principles to reduce our idea of God to a "relative idea": God is simply "the world's cause."[19] Beyond this, there is nothing more that we can *meaningfully* say about God. All we can do is "worship," "honor," and "praise" him. Indeed, according to Hobbes, any effort to go beyond these limits of human understanding, and attribute to God the qualities of finite human beings (e.g. knowledge, will, passions, etc.), is really to dishonor him.[20]

The conclusion that Harris and other defenders of the Christian religion drew from Hobbes's discussion of the idea of God was that while in words Hobbes may "pretend to own and acknowledge a God," in actual fact he is an atheist who has "no true belief in any such being."[21] Nevertheless, while Hobbes's critics were generally agreed about his atheistic and skeptical intent, they were not agreed about how to meet his challenge to provide some account of the origin and nature of our idea of God. In general, Hobbes's simile, comparing the limits of human understanding with respect to God to that of a blind man who is unable to frame any idea of fire, had the effect of setting the cat among the theological pigeons—scattering them in all directions. From one corner, Descartes dismissed Hobbes's skepticism on the ground that it mistakenly presupposes that our idea of God must be derived from our sense experience of external things. Against this, Descartes maintains that we do have a "clear and distinct" innate idea of God as described in his "Third Meditation": "a substance that is infinite, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else."[22] This idea of God serves as the basis of Descartes's two proofs of God's existence.[23]

In England, Hobbes received a detailed reply to his skeptical challenge from Cudworth in his *True Intellectual System of the Universe*. Cudworth treats the claim that "there is no idea of God" as the first argument for atheism, and he attempts to refute this argument at considerable length in several different sections of his work.[24] Cudworth concedes that God is not known by our senses, but he denies that we have no idea of God's being and nature. "The existence of that God, whom no eye hath seen nor can see, is plainly proved by reason from his effects, in the visible phenomena of the universe, and from what we are conscious of within ourselves."[25] In his earlier response to "the first atheistic argument," Cudworth presents his core position:

> [There are] two most opposite opinions, concerning that which was self-existent from eternity, or unmade, and the cause of all other things made: one, that it was nothing but senseless matter, the most perfect of all things, the other, that it was something most perfect, and therefore consciously intellectual. The assertors of this latter opinion, Theists in a strict and proper sense; of the former, Atheists. So that the idea of God in general is a perfect consciously understanding being (or mind) self-existent from eternity, and the cause of all other things.[26]

It is Cudworth's view that "the generality of mankind have a natural prolepsis or 'anticipation' in their minds concerning the real and actual existence of such a Being." Atheists, he maintains, are "but monsters and anomalies of mankind."[27] Cudworth's (Platonist) way of understanding our idea of God, and its source in reason rather than the senses, is followed by Clarke in his *Demonstration*. Early in this work, Clarke directly addresses Hobbes's "blind man" simile and aims to show that "a blind or deaf man has infinitely more reason to deny the Being, or Possibility of the Being, of Light or Sounds; than any Atheist can have to deny, or doubt of, the Existence of God."[28] In particular, whereas the blind man must rely on "credible testimony" for the existence of things of which he cannot himself "frame any manner of Idea," we are all able to use our reason to "be assured of the existence of a supreme being, by undeniable demonstrations." We may also certainly know, Clarke continues, an "abundance of [God's] attributes," even though his substance or essence is "entirely incomprehensible."[29]

An empiricist alternative to Cudworth's and Clarke's (rationalist) reply to Hobbes's blind man challenge is presented in Locke's *Essay*. Locke accepts empiricist assumptions about the origin of our ideas in sensation and reflection, but he rejects the skeptical conclusion that we "do not have an idea of God." Indeed, much of Locke's *Essay*, especially in books 2 and 3, can be read as a way of trying to deal with this difficulty within empiricist assumptions. Our idea of God is a *complex* idea framed with simple ideas we have acquired through reflection on the operations of our own minds.

> For if we examine the Idea we have of the incomprehensible supreme Being, we shall find, that we come by it the same way; and that the complex *Ideas* we have both of God, and separate Spirits, are made up of the simple *Ideas* we receive from *Reflections*, v.g. having from what we experiment in our selves, got the *Ideas* of Existence and Duration; of Knowledge and Power; of Pleasure and Happiness; and several other Qualities and Powers, which it is better to have, than to be without; when we would frame an *Idea* of the most suitable we can to the supreme Being, we enlarge every one of these with our *Idea* of Infinity; and so putting them together, make our complex *Idea of God*.[30]

On Locke's account, therefore, our Idea of God is derived from ideas of reflection "on what we find in our selves, and which we conceive to have more Perfection in them, than would be in their absence, attributing . . . those simple Ideas to him in unlimited degree."[31]

In his influential work *Christianity Not Mysterious,* John Toland gave a more radical twist to Locke's effort to provide an intelligible (empiricist) account of the nature and origins of our idea of God.[32] The aim of Toland's book, as its title suggests, is to argue that the Christian religion contains no mysteries that are either contrary

to or above human reason.[33] Toland argues that while we may lack an "adequate" idea of God, or a distinct view of all his properties and attributes, this is also true of even the most ordinary objects we have experience of (e.g. tables, plants, etc.).[34]

> As for GOD, we comprehend nothing better than his Attributes. We know not, it's true, the Nature of that eternal *Subject* or *Essence* wherein Infinite Goodness, Love, Knowledge, Power and Wisdom coexist; but we are not better acquainted with the *real Essence* of any of his Creatures. As by the Idea and Name of GOD we understand his known Attributes and Properties, so we understand those of all things else by theirs; and we conceive the one as clearly as we do the other.[35]

By this means, Toland aims to eliminate "metaphysical nonsense" from religion. He argues, in particular, that God would not demand belief where we are unable to find any intelligible idea. It would be pointless, for example, for God's revelation to command that a person should believe "that something call'd *Blictri* had a Being in Nature, in the mean time knew not what this *Blictri* was."[36]

Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* gave rise to a series of replies from a group of eminent Irish theologians who viewed his work as an overt attack on the Christian religion. One important member of this group was Peter Browne, who argued that Toland's aim was to discredit "all religion both natural and revealed." Browne sums up his fundamental objection to Toland's views in these terms:

> The whole sum and substance of the Deist's and Freethinker's reasoning may be resolved into this. You must grant, say they, that we can neither know nor believe any thing but what we have some Idea of: And you must grant likewise, that the Christian Mysteries [e.g. Trinity, Incarnation, etc.] are incomprehensible, that is, that we have no Idea at all of them; therefore we can neither know nor believe them.[37]

In order to deal with this sort of skeptical challenge, Browne, along with his Irish associates Edward Synge and William King, advanced the "doctrine of analogy." In conceiving of God, they argued, we must represent God's being and attributes by analogy, using Ideas that "we have of our selves, and of all other things in Nature."[38] The point they particularly insisted on, however, is that attributes of God are not only different in *degree* but different in *kind* from those Ideas that we have of our own knowledge, power, consciousness, and so on.[39]

To explain his views on this matter, Browne also employs the simile of a man born blind trying to form an idea of light and colors (i.e. much along the same lines as Hobbes's example).

> And thus it is plain, that tho' we may be said to have Ideas of God and Divine things, yet they are not immediate or proper ones, but a sort of Composition we make up from our Ideas of worldly Objects; which at the utmost amounts to no more than a Type or Figure, by which something in another world is signified, of which we have no more notion than a blind man hath of Light.[40]

Similar criticism of Toland appears in Edward Synge's *Appendix* to his *Gentleman's Religion* (1698), which describes a man he met who was blind from birth. According to Synge, this blind man had "very good and unquestionable grounds to believe

some things that were altogether above his Reason; for what Sight, Light or Colours were he was utterly incapable of framing or receiving any Idea." Synge continues:

> although it was absolutely impossible for him to frame any direct Notion, or Conception, of the things themselves, yet by those analogous Representations which were made to him of them [e.g. through his sense of touch], he well might be, and was accordingly, not only fully convinced, that what was spoken concerning them, was not insignificant Nonsense; but also enabled to frame some sort of representative Conception of them, which is more than a Man can do of *Blictri*; of which he hears only the sound, but knows not the Signification.[41]

The conclusion to be drawn from all of this, according to the doctrine of analogy, is that although we have no "proper or immediate" idea of God as he exists in himself, we can nevertheless form a "representative idea" by means of analogy—in much the same way that a blind man can believe in the existence of light and colors even though he has no idea of them through his own senses.

In his *Sermon on Predestination and Foreknowledge* (1709), William King presents another defense of "theological representationalism." The simile of the blind man trying to frame a conception of light and colors also plays a prominent role in his work.[42] King's *Sermon* produced a reply from Anthony Collins in his *Vindication of the Divine Attributes* (1710). In this work, Collins (wryly) observes that analogical knowledge of God of the kind that King (along with Browne and Synge) defends leads to skepticism. All that can be truly said about God's nature on this account, Collins argues, is that God is "the general cause of the wonderful Effects of Nature," but this is something that even the atheist can accept.[43] In effect, what Collins shows is that the account of God suggested by the doctrine of analogy reduces to a "negative theology" that is indistinguishable from skepticism and atheism.[44]

Freethinkers such as Collins were happy to point out the skeptical implications of "theological representationalism" and the way the difficulties associated with it were indicative of systematic disagreement among the "priests" concerning the nature of God's attributes.[45] Collins returns to the problem of our idea of God in his highly influential and widely read *Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (1717). He introduces this work with a long discussion concerning the importance of being able to speak "clearly and distinctly" on matters of speculation.[46] He notes, in particular, that "men are very indulgent to, and pardon the unintelligible discourses of Theologers and Philosophers, which treat of the sublime points in theology and philosophy."[47] He then compares "obscure discourse" as it relates to the subject of liberty and necessity and as it relates to our thoughts about God.

> Since then we can think of nothing any further than we have Idea's, and can signify all the Idea's we have by words to one another. . . . When we use the term GOD, the Idea signify'd thereby, ought to be as distinct and determinate in us, as the Idea of a triangle or a square is, when we discourse of either of them; otherwise the term GOD is an empty sound.[48]

Collins goes on to make the point that if we really have an idea of God we should be able to "compare that Idea with another Idea." He continues:

> And since we ought to have a distinct and determinate Idea of the term God, whenever we use it . . . [w]hy should we not be able to range our thoughts about God in as clear a method, and with as great perspicuity as about figure and quantity.[49]

Comparison of ideas, he maintains, involves observing where ideas differ and where they agree, which presupposes that the ideas involved are distinct and determinate.

It may be objected to these claims that we are not able to form an "adequate idea" of God in the same way that we can of a triangle or a square because we face difficulties and obscurities in the case of God that we do not with geometric figures. To this Collins gives several replies. First, he argues that "an inadequate Idea is no less distinct, as such, than an adequate Idea, and no less true, as far as it goes; and therefore may be discours'd of with equal clearness and truth."[50] He argues, second, that the difficulties we face concerning our idea of God is reason either "for using a greater application, or for not writing at all."[51] Finally, Collins recommends that a writer on this subject should "take care not to exceed the bounds of these conceptions, nor endeavour to make his reader understand what he does not understand himself."[52] The implication of Collins's remarks on this subject are consistent with the arguments already advanced by Hobbes and Toland: talk about "God" is either meaningless "metaphysical nonsense" [e.g. "*Blictri*"] or must be stripped of all mysteries and obscurities so that its content is rendered intelligible to human understanding.[53]

The debate over "theological representationalism" or "the doctrine of analogy" carried on well into the 1730s, when it reached a peak. In 1731, Edmund Law published his translation, including his extensive notes, of King's *Origin of Evil*. In his notes, Law criticizes Browne's doctrine of analogy (as presented in his *Procedure*) and insists, in particular, that "we must not endeavour to conceive the several Attributes of God by substituting something of him of a quite different kind, and totally diverse from that which we find in ourselves."[54] When we attribute to God qualities such as knowledge or power, goodness or truth, Law says, these are real qualities that "we do perceive, are directly conscious of, and know, which gives us an Idea or Conception of him and a proper one too."[55] The year after this, Berkeley published *Alciphron* and devoted several sections of it to criticism of the analogical theory.[56] He received a reply to this from Browne in a work titled *Things Divine and Supernatural Conceived by Analogy* (1733), wherein the simile of the blind man trying to conceive of colors is once again discussed at some length.[57] John Jackson answered this work within the year, arguing that Browne's doctrine "under a weak pretence of defending religion" in fact leads to "universal ignorance, skepticism and atheism."[58]

> But can any thing be so monstrous and shocking, and even such an Insult upon the Sense and reason of Men, as for a Man (who has pretended too to treat of Human Understanding) gravely, as he seems, to tell us, that all our Knowledge of God and Religion is no more in effect than the Knowledge which a Man born blind has of Colours: for that a Man born blind does not know Colours is only owing to his not being able to form any Idea of them; and this Author says we have no more idea of God and Religion.[59]

In order to have knowledge of God, Jackson argues, we must be able to form some relevant idea or notion of God and his attributes; without this "we can neither give

assent to, or *profess* rationally, or *reason* about any Thing relating to God and Religion; and any Thing or every Thing may, in respect to us, be equally true or false in Matters of Religion."[60]

It is evident that the early 1730s was a period in which the debate concerning our idea of God, particularly as it relates to the doctrine of analogy and the simile of blind men framing an idea of color, was widely and prominently discussed by a number of leading philosophical and theological figures. Any philosopher writing at this time on the theory of ideas and the limits of human understanding would have well known that the debate concerning our idea of God lay at the heart of this issue. Clearly, then, Hume's theory must be considered in relation to this immediate controversy, as well as the background debate that gave rise to it.

3

There is general agreement that Hume was thoroughly familiar with most, if not all, the works discussed in the previous section.[61] It is certainly the case that Hume would have understood that Hobbes's empiricist principles were the basis of his skeptical claims concerning our (minimal) idea of God. With this in mind, we might expect Hume to have had something significant to say on this subject—especially since his later work (i.e. the first *Enquiry* and *Dialogues*) pays careful attention to this matter. What we find, however, is that in the *Treatise* Hume barely *mentions* our idea of God, much less provides any detailed account of his understanding of its nature and origins in terms of his own theory of ideas. The few references to "God" or the "Deity" that do appear are found in passages that concern our idea of *power* as it relates to God (T, 1.3.14.11–4; 1.4.5.31; 1.4.7.5/160–2, 248–9, 266, 632–3n). Insofar as Hume's near silence on this subject has been noted by commentators, it has usually been interpreted as indicating his general lack of interest in problems of religion.

In *Treatise*, 1.1.1 Hume presents his copy principle, and the "general maxim" that all our simple ideas are always deriv'd from simple impressions (TA, 6–7/647–8). He particularly relies on the example of our ideas of colors (e.g. scarlet, orange, blue, yellow) to illustrate this. A point Hume is especially concerned to emphasize is that we never do anything so "absurd" as to try and produce an impression of color by first "exciting the idea" (T, 1.1.1.8/5). To further illustrate this general point, he refers to the example of a person who "is born blind or deaf." In these circumstances, he points out, "not only the impressions are lost, but also their correspondent ideas; so that there never appear in the mind the least traces of either of them" (T, 1.1.1.9/5). He does allow, however, a single and specific exception to his "general maxim":

> Suppose therefore a person to have enjo'd his sight for thirty years, and to have become perfectly well acquainted with colours of all kinds, excepting one particular shade of blue, for instance, which it never has been his fortune to meet with. Let all the different shades of that colour, except that single one, be plac'd before him, descending gradually from the deepest to the lightest; 'tis plain, that he will perceive a blank, where that shade is wanting, and will be sensible, that there is a

> greater distance in that place betwixt the contiguous colours, than in any other. Now I ask, whether 'tis possible for him, from his own imagination, to supply this deficiency, and raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, tho' it had never been convey'd to him by his senses? I believe there are few but will be of the opinion that he can. (T, 1.1.1.10/6)

Hume grants that this is an exception to his general maxim, but maintains that "the instance is so particular and singular, that 'tis scarce worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we shou'd alter our general maxim" (T, 1.1.1.10/6).

It is important to note that the exception provided by the missing shade of blue is not a counterexample to the illustration of the blind man and the idea of colors. On the contrary, the counter-example, as Hume describes it, presupposes that this person was *not* born blind—otherwise he would have no idea of *any* color, much less the missing shade of blue.[62] Hume's example is entirely consistent with, and likely draws from, Descartes's similar example in *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. In this work Descartes points out that when we use the imagination as an aid to solve some problem,

> we should note that whenever we deduce something unknown from something already known, it does not follow that we are discovering some new kind of entity. . . . For example, if someone is blind from birth, we should not expect to be able by force of argument to get him to have true ideas of colours just like the ones we have, derived as they are from the senses. But if someone at some time has seen the primary colours, though not the secondary or mixed colours, then by means of a deduction of sorts it is possible for him to form images even of those he has not seen, in virtue of their similarity to those he has seen.[63]

These observations make clear that Hume's example serves to *support* the general claim that we cannot by any argument derive ideas of "any new kind of entity" that we have never had any experience of. Given that the blind man illustration is so strongly tied to the issue of our idea of God (i.e. by Hobbes and others), an obvious problem arises for us: from what impression(s) do we derive our idea of God? Everything Hume says in the opening section of the *Treatise* about the nature and origin of our ideas leads the reader (who is familiar with the relevant background debate) directly to this question. At no point in the *Treatise* does Hume even feign any effort to answer this question or show how it might be dealt with within the constraints of his theory of ideas.[64]

In reply to this, it may be argued that Hume's presentation of his theory of ideas in section 2 of the *Enquiry* shows that the skeptical reading is not so obvious. In this context, Hume actually uses the idea of God to *illustrate* his copy principle:

> [W]hen we analyze our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment. Even those ideas, which, at first view, seem the most wide of this origin, are found, upon a nearer scrutiny to be derived from it. The idea of God, as meaning an *infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being*, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom. (EU, 2.6/19; and compare TA, 26/656; EU, 7. 25/72)

Hume's account of our idea of God, as presented in this passage, plainly follows Locke's specific line of reasoning. God is a complex idea that is derived from simple ideas based on reflection on the operations of our own minds, which we then "augment without limit."[65] Immediately after giving this account of our idea of God, Hume goes on to discuss the blind man being unable to frame any idea of colors, as well as the "missing shade of blue" exception to the copy principle.

Hume's remarks in the *Enquiry* about the nature and origin of our idea of God may be taken to show that his theory of ideas, as presented in the *Treatise*, has no skeptical implications (i.e. along Hobbist lines). Contrary to this view, however, there is good reason to conclude that Hume's Lockean account of our idea of God is (plainly) less than sincere. In the first place, we need to consider Hume's remarks in a letter he wrote to William Mure in 1743 (i.e. in the period between the publication of the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*). In this letter, Hume is discussing the topic of prayer and our strong (human) passions of admiration for what is excellent and love of what is benevolent and beneficial.[66] Hume tells Mure that the Deity possesses these attributes (excellence, benevolence) "in the highest perfection"—

> yet I assert he is not the natural Object of *any* Passion or Affection, He is *no* Object either of the Senses or Imagination, & *very little* of the Understanding, without which it is impossible to excite any Affection. A remote Ancestor . . . is a great Benefactor, & yet 'tis impossible to bear him any Affection, because unknown to us; tho in general we know him to be a Man or human Creature, *which brings him vastly nearer our Comprehension than an invisible infinite Spirit*. (LET, 1:51, no. 21; my emphasis)

Hume goes on to point out that "enthusiasts," in face of these difficulties, "degrade [God] into a Resemblance with themselves, & by that means render him more comprehensible." Hume's views concerning our idea of God, as he presents them in this letter, differ little from those of Hobbes. We have, he suggests, little or no idea of God whatsoever, and this limits our capacity to regard God as either an object of belief or passion. These remarks to Mure were written well before Hume published the *Enquiry*, which gives us good reason to doubt the sincerity of his (Lockean) remarks about our idea of God at *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.6 (19).

Beyond this, Hume's discussion in *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, sec.11 of our "conjectures" about God's nature and attributes, based on evidence of design in this world, is directly aimed at *discrediting* any (Lockean) anthropomorphic conception of God. In this context, Hume emphasizes the point that God's being is "so different, and so much superior" to human nature that we are not able to form any clear or distinct idea of his nature and attributes, much less one based on our own qualities and characteristics. "The Deity is known to us only by his productions, and is a single being in the universe, not comprehended under any species or genus, from whose experienced attributes or qualities, we can, by analogy, infer any attribute or quality in him" (EU, 11.26/144). Further on, Hume continues:

> The great source of our mistake in this subject, and of the unbounded licence of conjecture, which we indulge, is, that we tacitly consider ourselves, as in the place of the Supreme Being, and conclude, that he will on every occasion, observe

> the same conduct, which we ourselves, in his situation, wou'd have embraced as reasonable and eligible.... But this method of reasoning can never have place with regard to a Being, so remote and incomprehensible, who bears much less analogy to any other being in the universe than the sun to a waxen taper, and who discovers himself only by some faint traces or outlines, beyond which we have no authority to ascribe to him any attribute or perfection. (EU, 11.27/145–6)

The same general theme is, of course, repeated at length in Hume's *Dialogues*, where Cleanthes' anthropomorphic idea of God is subject to sharp, systematic criticism.[67] Clearly, then, it is Hume's considered view that basing our idea of God on reflection on the operations of our own minds lacks any foundation in either reason or experience. We are no more justified in framing our idea of God in these terms than a blind man who supposes that the color scarlet is the same as the sound of a trumpet—such are the limits of human understanding with respect to our idea of God.

In response to these observations, it may be said that while it is true that in his *later* writings Hume makes clear that the nature and origins of our idea of God is highly problematic, there is little or no evidence of this in the *Treatise* (even though it may be there in some latent form). As I have already indicated, however, this way of looking at Hume's remarks concerning the origins and composition of our ideas underestimates the extent to which his use of the illustration of the blind man and our idea of colors points to specific theological difficulties in this area. The very fact that Hume does not *mention* our idea of God, much less *explain* its nature and origin (as he feigns to do in the *Enquiry*) may be read as an irreligious statement in itself—given the established orthodoxies at this time. More important, however, although Hume rarely mentions the term "God" anywhere in the *Treatise*, he nevertheless has a great deal to say about our *ideas* as they relate to God's most essential *attributes*.

According to Hume's theory of ideas, our knowledge of God is mediated by our ideas concerning the divine attributes. The relevant attributes include (necessary) existence, immateriality, simplicity (indivisibility), unity, consciousness, intelligence, omnipotence, freedom, goodness, and justice. A casual familiarity with the contents of the *Treatise* shows that on almost all these matters Hume has a great deal to say about the ideas involved. What he does have to say about them is, in almost every case, highly problematic for the orthodox theological view. To bring this out, let us consider one idea that Hume does discuss in the *Treatise* with specific reference to the idea of God: our idea of power.

The obvious importance of our idea of power as it relates to our idea of God is that it concerns the attribute of omnipotence—a divine attribute the orthodox regarded as especially significant since it concerns God's status as both *creator* and *governor* of the universe. In several different contexts in the *Treatise*, Hume points out that "we have no idea of a being endow'd with any power, much less of one endow'd with infinite power" (T, 1.4.5.31/248; and compare 1.4.7.5/266–7). This is, of course, a central theme of Hume's famous discussion of our "idea of necessary connection," as presented at T, 1.3.14 (especially 1.3.14.8–4/159–62, 632–3; see also EU, 7.21–25/69–73). In a passage that first appeared in the appendix to the *Treatise* (now inserted as T, 1.3.14.12) Hume discusses and dismisses Locke's suggestion that we can

discover an idea of power from reflection on the operations of our own mind or will. The obvious implication of this is that we cannot frame an idea of God's (infinite) power by way of first framing an idea of power based on our experience of our own mind and its willings. In a note to this passage Hume denies any impious intent:

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

In this passage, Hume is simply doing what he does in a number of different contexts: he advances an argument that plainly has irreligious significance (i.e. we have no idea of infinite power or the divine attribute of omnipotence) and he then disclaims these implications. Suffice it to say that disclaimers of this kind certainly did not persuade Hume's contemporaries.[68]

I will examine Hume's views as they relate to our idea of (infinite) power in further detail later. For present purposes, however, the important point to take note of is that it is a mistake to assume that Hume's various discussions in the *Treatise* that involve the application of his copy principle are irrelevant to the question concerning our idea of *God*. On the contrary, as I will document in the chapters that follow, Hume's views on space and time are relevant to the debate concerning the divine attributes of immensity and eternity, as well as unity and simplicity; his views about our idea of existence are relevant to the question of God's *necessary* existence; his views about our ideas of soul, self, and consciousness are relevant to the question concerning God's simplicity, unity, and immateriality; and his views about liberty and necessity are relevant to the question of God's freedom, goodness, and justice. Hume's account of the resemblance between the reason of animals and men is also clearly relevant to any effort to frame an idea of God's wisdom and intelligence on the basis of reflection on the operations of our own mind. Finally, Hume's account of moral distinctions and the way that they depend on (human) passions generates obvious problems for understanding the nature of God's moral attributes. Similarly, Hume's account of the basis of justice in "artificial" conventions, as they respond to human needs and circumstances, presents difficulties for any claims about the nature and foundation of *divine* justice.

In sum, as the catalogue provided indicates, the debate concerning our idea of God is implicated and involved in almost every aspect of Hume's project *throughout* the *Treatise*. The fact that Hume rarely mentions the term "God," and says little about the nature and origin of this idea, should not obscure the importance of all that he has to say as it relates to the divine attributes.

4

My general concern in this chapter has been to examine the relationship between Hume's "theory of ideas" and the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debate concerning the idea of God. It is widely assumed that Hume's theory of ideas, as

presented in the *Treatise*, has no particular relevance to the debate about our idea of God. Hume rarely mentions "God" or the "Deity" in the *Treatise*, and he says *nothing* about the nature and origin of our idea of God in *Treatise*, 1.1.1. Contrary to this view, however, I have argued that Hume's theory of ideas as presented in *Treatise*, 1.1.1 is directly relevant to this debate and that a number of Hume's discussions throughout the *Treatise* are of considerable significance for it as well. The following are the most important of the points that have been established:

1. Hume's theory of ideas employs the same general framework that is found in Hobbes's earlier account of the nature and origin of our ideas. It is, therefore, a matter of considerable significance that Hobbes used his empiricist principles to argue that we have "no idea of God in us" and that questions of theology lie beyond the narrow scope and limits of human understanding. This theme is, of course, developed in some detail in Hume's later writings (e.g. the first *Enquiry* and *Dialogues*). However, given the epistemological commitments and constraints of Hume's theory of ideas in the *Treatise*, we ought to consider carefully the implications of his theory as it relates to the contemporary debate about the scope and limits of human understanding and problems of theology.

2. It is true that Hume rarely mentions "God" in the *Treatise*, but it is a mistake to assume from this that theological problems as they concern our idea of God are far from Hume's mind. In particular, the fact that Hume is conspicuously silent about "God" should not be read as indicative of simple disinterest in this subject. On the contrary, his silence on this topic, in the face of the ongoing debate and its immediate relevance to his discussion, plainly conveys a *skeptical* message. In general, the fact that Hume makes no effort to provide any account of the nature and origin of our idea of God shows that his philosophical system has been self-consciously constructed to be *independent* of any theological commitments of this particular kind. Not even Hobbes or Spinoza was bold enough to purge their work of (almost) all mention of God in this manner.

3. Hume's presentation of his theory of ideas, as it concerns his copy principle, relies on the illustration of a blind man trying to frame an idea of colors. In the context in which Hume was writing, this example was heavily laden with philosophical significance concerning the idea of God. (More specifically, Hobbes used this example, repeatedly, when making his case for theological skepticism, and it was widely discussed and debated throughout the early eighteenth century in relation to the doctrine of analogical knowledge of God.) Hume makes clear that his copy principle can and should be applied to *all* our ideas. His use of the illustration of the blind man draws attention to the fact that this includes our idea of God. Hume makes no effort, in the *Treatise*, to indicate what (simple) impressions our idea of God can be derived from. Given that he draws attention to this problem, his silence is strongly suggestive of irreligious intentions of a broadly Hobbist character.

4. Although Hume rarely mentions the term "God" in the *Treatise*, the divine attributes are directly concerned in many of the specific topics that he discusses throughout this work. Our idea of God, on any orthodox account, involves our *ideas* about the divine *attributes*. Many of the ideas Hume examines and tries to account for in terms of his copy principle (i.e. where he seeks to identify some relevant simple impressions) are ideas of these divine attributes. The general significance of

Hume's examination of these ideas is that our idea of God, understood in terms of our ideas of these attributes, lacks any adequate or coherent content—which suggests that we are dealing with a term that "is altogether insignificant" (TA, 7/649). Insofar as we lack any relevant original impressions that can account for our idea of God, our epistemological predicament concerning the cause of the world is clear: we are like blind men trying to frame an idea of colors.

Making Nothing of "Almighty Space"

Others, whose Heads sublimer Notions trace,
Cunningly prove that thou'rt Almighty Space;
And Space w'are sure is nothing, ergo Thou:
These Men slip into Truth they know not how.

Toland, *Letters to Serena*

Hume's views on the subject of space and time are generally regarded as being of secondary importance when compared with other topics raised in the *Treatise* (e.g. causation, external world, etc.) and many commentators on Hume's philosophy have little or nothing to say about his views on this subject.[1] The most plausible explanation for this relative neglect of *Treatise* 1.2 is that Hume's views on this subject have not had the same (considerable) impact as his other contributions, and what he has to say is of limited critical interest today.[2] Nevertheless, whatever the influence or merits of his discussion, as judged from a critical perspective of today, it is evident that he gives this topic a prominent role to play in the *Treatise*. It is also clear that the topic of space and time was widely debated by Hume's own contemporaries, including several of the leading figures of the period.[3] In this chapter I argue that one of Hume's principal objectives in his discussion of space and time is to discredit the Newtonian doctrine of absolute space, which Clarke had recently given a prominent and influential defense in his famous correspondence with Leibniz. The significance of this, however, reaches well beyond the immediate issue of space and time. Clarke employed the Newtonian doctrine of absolute space and time as a key part of his "argument *a priori*." Considered from this perspective, Hume's critique of Clarke's Newtonian doctrine of absolute space and time serves the deeper purpose of discrediting core features of Clarke's (dogmatic) theological system.[4]

1

Clarke is now remembered primarily for his famous correspondence with Leibniz. The letters exchanged were written in 1715–16 and published in 1717. This

correspondence, which was a particularly significant exchange in the wider "war" between Leibniz and Newton, is generally regarded as "one of the most interesting and most important documents of eighteenth century intellectual history."[5] Clarke was a close friend and well-known follower of Newton, and his replies to Leibniz provide a vigorous defense of Newtonian philosophy. Among the major topics of debate between Clarke and Leibniz is the issue of space, with Clarke taking the position of "the great champion of void space."[6]

Among his own contemporaries, Clarke's reputation was already well established, particularly on the basis of his influential *Demonstration*. Clarke's concerns in the *Demonstration* and the *Correspondence* are intimately connected. There is, in particular, a close relationship between Clarke's defense of the (Newtonian) doctrine of absolute space as presented in the *Correspondence* and the general argument of the *Demonstration*. Clarke's own contemporaries were certainly well aware that the doctrine of absolute space was not only an integral part of Newtonian natural philosophy but also a key element of Clarke's attempt to confute "atheism" and (dogmatically) defend the Christian religion. They would well understand, therefore, that to reject Clarke's doctrine absolute space would also involve rejecting the influential theological ("*a priori*") argument that he had built around it.

Clarke's defense of absolute space belongs to a tradition of thought that had great influence in late seventeenth-century England. The work of the Cambridge Platonist Henry More was particularly important in this regard.[7] More's views on absolute space developed in criticism of Cartesian metaphysics. Descartes distinguishes between matter and mind in terms of extended and unextended substance, a fundamental claim that More rejects. If we accept the Cartesian identification of matter with extension, More says, then it follows that matter would be an infinite and necessary being—an implication that leads directly to (Hobbist) materialist atheism.[8] According to More, all substance, spiritual as well as material, is extended. Matter is distinguished from mere extension by the further properties of being impenetrable, or solid, and "discerptible," or divisible into separable parts. We can, therefore, conceive of extension void of all body. This extension is not nothing, however, but a real existent with its own qualities. So conceived, space is an infinite attribute that requires an infinite immaterial substance to support its existence, and this substance is God. More's general account of the space–matter–God relationship was enormously influential on the generation of English thinkers that followed. This included Newton, Locke, and, most notably, Clarke, who provided the clearest and most explicit account of the theological significance of More's doctrine.[9]

Clarke employs the doctrine of absolute space early in the *Demonstration* to refute the atheistic materialism of Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers. He argues that there has existed from eternity, an unchangeable and independent being, that *necessarily*-exists (propositions 1–3). The atheistic thesis that he seeks to refute is that this necessary-existing being is the "Material World."[10] The basic structure of Clarke's argument is: (1) matter is not a necessary-being; (2) there exists some necessary-being; therefore (3) this necessarily-existing Being is immaterial.[11]

With respect to point 1, Clarke argues that if the material world "Exists Necessarily by an Absolute Necessity in its own Nature," then it must be "an Express Contradiction to suppose it not to Exist."[12] It is manifest, however, that we can

conceive that the material world does not exist without contradiction.[13] This can be demonstrated, Clarke says, by way of showing that there must be a vacuum, which we know from considerations concerning motion and experiments with falling bodies and pendulums.[14] "Now if there be a Vacuum," says Clarke, "it follows plainly, that Matter is not a Necessary Being. For if a Vacuum actually be, then 'tis evidently more than possible for Matter not to Be."[15]

To prove that there is some being in the universe that exists necessarily, Clarke argues as follows.

> When we are endeavouring to suppose, that there is *no Being* in the Universe that exists Necessarily; we always have in our Minds…some Ideas, as of *Infinity* and *Eternity*; which to remove, that is, to suppose that there is no Being, no Substance in the Universe, to which these Attributes or Modes of Existence are necessarily inherent, is a Contradiction in the very Terms. For Modes and Attributes exist only by the Existence of the Substance to which they belong. Now he that can suppose Eternity and Immensity (and consequently the Substance by whose Existence these Modes and Attributes exist) removed out of the Universe; may, if he please, as easily remove the Relation of Equality between twice two and four.[16]

While we can conceive of the material world as not existing, we cannot conceive of Immensity or Eternity as not existing.[17] This shows that infinite space and time necessarily exist, and these necessary attributes "do necessarily and inseparably infer, or show to us a Necessary Substance."[18] Since this substance is not matter, it is an immaterial being, that is, God.[19]

Clarke agrees with Locke that the essence of all substances is unknown to us, but "this does not in the least diminish the Certainty of the Demonstration of the Existence" of necessarily-existing substance, nor our knowledge that this substance is not matter.[20] In the first place, he argues, space cannot be nothing, since it is absurd to suppose that nothing can nevertheless "have real qualities," such as dimension, figure, and so on.[21] Although space is something, however, it is not a substance, but rather a "Property or Mode of Self-Existent Substance."[22] Self-existent substance, therefore, is "the Substratum of Space, the Ground of the Existence of Space and Duration itself."[23] In response to Clarke, Joseph Butler grants that if it was evident that space is a property of a substance, then "we should have an easy way with the Atheists."[24] He is nevertheless unable to accept Clarke's "easy way" because he finds the claim that space is a property or mode, and not a substance, to be unargued and doubtful.[25]

In the *Correspondence*, Clarke returns to these problems. "Space is not a being, an eternal and infinite being," Clarke says, "but a property, or a consequence of the existence of a being infinite and eternal. Infinite space, is immensity: but immensity is not God: and therefore infinite space, is not God."[26] He goes on to clarify this view:

> Space is immense, and immutable, and eternal; and so also is duration. Yet it does not at all from hence follow, that any thing is eternal *hors de Dieu*. For space and duration are not *hors de Dieu*, but are caused by, and are immediate and necessary consequences of his existence. And without them, his eternity and ubiquity (or omnipresence) would be taken away.[27]

God, Clarke says in the fifth answer to Leibniz, "does not exist in space and time; but his existence causes space and time," and in that "space [and time] all other things exist."[28] Clarke's general position is, then, that space is a "property" or "mode" of God, and thus God must be an infinitely extended (spiritual) being.[29] Leibniz, however, pressed an obvious objection: "since space consists of parts, it is not a thing which can belong to God."[30] Clarke, however, rejects the assumption that space is divisible into parts. In the *Demonstration*, he emphasized the point that space is "absolutely indivisible and inseparable either really or mentally."[31] Matter, by contrast, is "a solid Substance, capable only of Division, Figure and Motion."[32] Divisibility, therefore, distinguishes matter from space. For Clarke, while God cannot be conceived as extended material substance, which is atheism, as that would make God divisible into parts, no implication of this kind follows if space is a property or mode of God.

In the *Correspondence*, Leibniz criticizes not only Clarke's "hypothesis" of "real absolute space" as "an impossible fiction" but also provides a clear alternative to it.[33] His alternative view is a "relational" account of space, which holds that space is "nothing at all without bodies."[34] Space is "neither substance, nor an accident," Leibniz claims, "so it must be a mere ideal thing."[35]

> As for my own opinion, I have said more than once, that I hold space to be something merely relative, as time is; that I hold it to be an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions. For space denotes, in terms of possibility, an order of things which exist at the same time, considered as existing together; without enquiring into their manner of existing.[36]

Clearly Leibniz holds that there is a "third way" to account for space, whereby space is understood not as a property, or a substance, but rather as "an ideal thing; containing a certain order, wherein the mind conceives the application of relations."[37] Clarke had already dismissed such a view in his reply to an "anonymous Gentleman." To accept a view of this kind, Clarke says, is to be "guilty of the absurdity of supposing that, which is Nothing, to have real Qualities."[38] Clarke repeats this point in his reply to Leibniz and makes the further point that the (very) possibility that the material universe can be finite proves that "space is manifestly independent upon matter."[39]

It is evident that Clarke and Leibniz disagree over a wide range of issues with respect to space (including some important issues not mentioned in this brief account).[40] Nevertheless, their general disagreement can be characterized succinctly in terms of their diverging attitude on the issue of the "reality" or "ideality" of space. Clarke claims that space has a real existence distinct from (all) matter or body, and that it should be understood as an infinite (boundless) and indivisible property or mode that is grounded in self-existing substance, or God. Leibniz maintains that space is not real but "ideal," and should be understood in terms of the order or relations among coexisting bodies. So conceived, Leibniz argues, space has parts and is divisible, and cannot be identified with God's being or attributes. For Clarke, the ontology of real space is an essential foundation for establishing God's omnipresence, unity, and simplicity.[41] Leibniz maintains that all arguments of natural religion built on these illusory foundations are worthless. In short, the fundamental

issue between Clarke and Leibniz concerns the doctrine of the vacuum or "real space," an essential ontological commitment of both Newtonian science and its associated theology.

2

A number of influential accounts of Hume's discussion of space ignore or overlook Clarke's philosophy, and argue that Hume's primary concerns lie with the arguments of other figures (such as Bayle).[42] Moreover, even those commentators who recognize the general relevance of Clarke's views on space have said little (or nothing) about the specific theological significance of this issue for Hume's philosophy.[43] It is necessary, therefore, to indicate in more detail why Clarke's philosophy cannot be regarded as peripheral to Hume's concerns, and how its wider theological significance should be understood.

There are a number of points that establish that Clarke's philosophy is central to Hume's discussion of space, as follows.

1. The textual detail of the *Treatise*, as well as comment and criticism of the time, shows that Clarke's philosophy was an especially prominent target of Hume's skeptical arguments throughout the *Treatise*.[44] In general, a critical interest in the doctrine of absolute space championed by Clarke is consistent with Hume's wider critical interest in the principles of Clarke's philosophy.

2. Clarke was universally recognized by Hume's contemporaries as one of Newton's most able and eminent defenders, and his close association with Newton was especially apparent in the specific context of the debate about space, where the *Correspondence* enjoyed such a high profile. Considered from this perspective, what is at stake with respect to Clarke's defense of absolute space is nothing less that the prestige of Newton's natural philosophy and the theology constructed around it.[45]

3. Although Leibniz suggested that the doctrine of "real absolute space" was "an idol of some modern Englishmen,"[46] there were nevertheless many distinguished English/British critics of this doctrine in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—the most obvious being Berkeley. Indeed, during the 1730s, while Hume was working on the *Treatise*, the British debate on space became especially active, and it centered very firmly around Clarke's views on this subject. Most of the principal figures involved at this time can be classified as either defenders of Clarke, such as John Jackson and John Clarke (Samuel's brother), or critics of Clarke, such as Edmund Law, Daniel Waterland, and Joseph Clarke (no relation).[47] In general, the relevant literature produced in Britain during the 1730s shows that Clarke's doctrines are the very pivot around which the British debate on space (and related theological issues) was turning.[48]

4. The details of Hume's Scottish context are by no means irrelevant to understanding his intentions on this subject. As noted (chapter 4), when Hume was a student at Edinburgh University in the 1720s it was a leading center of Newtonian thought, and this was reflected in Hume's education. There is also substantial evidence of a lively interest in Clarke's philosophy and theology in university and

clerical circles in Scotland between 1720 and 1740. This lively interest in Clarke's philosophy was particularly strong among a group of active philosophers who were based near Hume in Berwickshire while the project of the *Treatise* was taking shape. This is particularly apparent in the work of Andrew Baxter, who had a deep interest in the debate between Clarke and Leibniz and took his stand firmly on the side of Clarke's Newtonian position.[49]

5. In part 9 of Hume's *Dialogues* (which were written during the early 1750s and published posthumously in 1779), the character of Demea presents a brief statement of the "argument *a priori*." Hume presents the following criticism of this argument through Cleanthes.

> I find only one argument employed to prove, that the material world is not the necessarily existent Being; and this argument is derived from the contingency both of the matter and the form of the world. "Any particle of matter," it is said, "may be *conceived* to be annihilated; and any form may be *conceived* to be altered. Such an annihilation or alteration, therefore, is not impossible." [In a footnote Hume cites "Dr. Clarke."][50] But it seems a great partiality not to perceive, that the same argument extends equally to the Deity, so far as we have any conception of him; and that the mind can at least imagine [conceive] him to be non-existent, or his attributes to be altered. (D, 92)

Hume's discussion of this argument in the *Dialogues* shows that he regarded Clarke's "argument *a priori*" as philosophically important. When Hume wrote the *Treatise*, he was very familiar with the details of Clarke's philosophy, and would therefore understand the significance of his own account of space for the "argument *a priori*."[51]

6. Finally, before leaving London for Scotland in February 1739, Hume distributed several copies of the *Treatise* (i.e. books 1 and 2), which had been published just a few weeks before, to various individuals, including Joseph Butler and Pierre Desmaizeaux.[52] Both Butler and Desmaizeaux played prominent roles in the debate over Clarke's doctrine of space. In 1713, Butler began a correspondence with Clarke concerning issues raised in the *Demonstration*. Five letters and replies were sent, and these were eventually published in later editions of Clarke's work.[53] This correspondence centers around problems of self-existence and space and time. As already noted, Desmaizeaux was a very active and well-connected translator and editor of philosophical books. Among his most important projects was his 1720 French edition of the *Correspondence*.[54] It is not credible that Hume would have been unaware that both Desmaizeaux and Butler would naturally examine his own (lengthy) discussion of space and time with a keen eye to its obvious significance for the controversy arising out of the *Correspondence* and related doctrines in Clarke's *Demonstration*.

When these points are put together and taken into proper consideration, it is clear that Clarke's views on space lie at the heart of the debate about space that Hume participated in and contributed to. We have every reason to suppose, therefore, that Hume was well aware of the relevance and significance of his own position in relation to Clarke's defense of Newtonian absolute space viewed as a property or mode of God—and, indeed, as it relates to the entire "God-filled space" tradition of

thought, from More to John Jackson and John Clarke. Any commentary that fails to take this into full account simply fails to locate Hume's discussion of space in its relevant historical context.

3

The argument of *Treatise*, 1.2 is intricate and divides into several separate streams, making it easy for the reader to lose its main drift. In T, 1.2.4, however, Hume provides a summary of the salient points of his position. His "system concerning space and time," he says, "consists of two parts, which are intimately connected together" (T, 1.2.4.1/39). These parts correspond to two questions: (1) Is extension (or matter) finitely or infinitely divisible? and (2) Is it possible to conceive of a real vacuum or space without matter? On both issues, Hume stands in direct opposition to Clarke.

Hume summarizes his position on the first issue as follows.

> The capacity of the mind is not infinite; consequently no idea of extension or duration consists of an infinite number of parts or inferior ideas, but of a finite number, and these simple and indivisible: 'Tis therefore possible for space and time to exist conformable to this idea: And if it be possible, 'tis certain they actually do exist conformable to it; since their infinite divisibility is utterly impossible and contradictory. (T, 1.2.4.1/39)

Hume's refutation of the doctrine of infinite divisibility is unpacked in the first two sections of *Treatise*, 1.2. The human mind, he points out, is finite and we exceed the bounds of the imagination (and thus human understanding) when we reason about the infinite, since we "can never attain a full and adequate conception" of it (T, 1.2.1.2/26). If a finite extension is infinitely divisible, then a finite extension "must consist of an infinite number of parts" (T, 1.2.1.2/26). We know, however, that the mind is finite and thus *incapable* of any such idea. In accounting for our *idea* of extension, therefore, we must reach some *minimum* parts "which will be perfectly simple and indivisible" (T, 1.2.1.2–4/27–8).[55] We have "an idea of extension, which consists of parts of inferior ideas, that are perfectly indivisible: Consequently this idea implies no contradiction: Consequently 'tis possible for extension really to exist conformable to it" (T, 1.2.2.9/32). The idea of infinite divisibility of extension, however, "*appears* impossible and contradictory upon the comparison of these ideas [and must therefore] be *really* impossible and contradictory" (T, 1.2.2.1/29). It is impossible because "the idea of an infinite number of parts is individually the same idea with that of an infinite extension," and since "no finite extension is capable of containing an infinite number of parts," it follows that "no finite extension is infinitely divisible" (T, 1.2.2.2/30). Hume returns to the issue of infinite divisibility in *Treatise*, 1.2.4 in order to refute a series of objections that have been raised against "the finite divisibility of matter" (T, 1.2.4.3/40).

Hume's argument against the doctrine of infinite indivisibility is the first part of his system of space. The "other part of our system," Hume says, "is a consequence of this" (T, 1.2.4.2/39). He continues:

> The parts, into which the ideas of space and time resolve themselves, become at last indivisible; and these indivisible parts, being nothing in themselves, are inconceivable when not fill'd with something real and existent. *The ideas of space and time are therefore no separate or distinct ideas, but merely those of the manner or order, in which objects exist*; Or, in other words, 'tis impossible to conceive either a vacuum and extension without matter, or a time, when there was no succession or change in any real existence. (T, 1.2.4.2/39–40; my emphasis)

Hume's thesis is that our idea of space consists of colored or solid "indivisible points." Nothing ever appears extended that is not either visible or tangible. The "compound impression, which represents extension," he says, "consists of several lesser impressions, that are indivisible to the eye or feeling, and may be call'd impressions of atoms or corpuscles endow'd with colour and solidity" (T, 1.2.3.15/38). If we remove the sensible qualities of color or tangibility, then these "atoms" will be "utterly annihilated to the thought or imagination" and thus we remove all idea of space or extension (T, 1.2.3.15/38–9). On this view, we have no separate or independent idea of space distinct from our ideas of body (i.e. visible or tangible objects). When all idea of body is removed, so, too, is all idea of space.

The second part of Hume's system of space has a constructive and destructive aspect. The constructive aspect is his account of how our idea of space arises and what its elements are. The destructive aspect is his refutation of the *mistaken* view that we have some idea of a vacuum, understood as space without body. Hume's constructive theory of space is essentially "relational" and "ideal" in character (similar to Leibniz's view). For Hume, "the idea of space or extension is nothing but the idea of *visible* or *tangible points distributed in a certain order*" (T, 1.2.5.1/53; my emphasis). Hume also describes the important role that *abstraction* plays in forming this idea (T, 1.2.3.5–6/34–5). When we observe situations where bodies coexist and there is some "resemblance in the distribution of colour'd points, of which they are compos'd," we can abstract from the "particularities of colour, as far as possible, and found an abstract idea merely on that disposition of points, or manner of appearance, in which they agree" (T, 1.2.3.5/34). So conceived, however, the abstract idea of space or extension always involves particular visible or tangible ideas, and cannot arise in our thoughts in any other way.

Although Hume provides an account of our idea of space, he argues that we have "no idea of a *vacuum*, or space, where there is nothing visible or tangible" (i.e. no body; T, 1.2.5.1/53; my emphasis). There is, he acknowledges, a natural tendency for us to "falsely imagine we can form such an idea" (T, 1.2.5.14/58);[56] but we have nevertheless no idea of a vacuum or extension without matter (T, 1.2.5.7/56). Hume's basic position is that we have an *idea* of *space*, but *no idea* of a *vacuum* or of "any real extension without filling it with sensible objects, and conceiving its parts as visible or tangible" (T, 1.2.5.27/64). The notion of *real space* (void of all body) is without significance, and thus *nothing*. Hume explicitly gives the more general point when he says that "we can never have reason to believe that any object exists, of which we cannot form an idea" (T, 1.3.14.36/172; my emphasis). The obvious corollary of this is that we have *no reason to believe* in the existence of a "vacuum" or "real space."

The implications of the second part of Hume's system of space for Clarke's philosophy are obvious, so I will review them briefly.

1. Clarke maintains that space and time are necessary-existing properties or modes, and that they demonstrably imply the necessary-existence of an infinite, immaterial substance. This argument depends on the assumption that we can form some *idea* (or "conceive") of *space without body*. It is argued, more specifically, that we can establish God's necessary-existence by way of showing that we have an *idea* of *real space*, which it is an "express contradiction" to conceive as not (really) existing.[57] Hume's account of our idea of space plainly undermines this line of reasoning. If we deny that we have any *idea* of extension without matter or body, then we cannot reason to the *existence of real space* from such an idea. Since we cannot establish the (necessary) existence of *real* space, it follows that we cannot prove the existence of some necessary-existing being that supports this (real) infinite property or mode. Clearly, then, Hume's views discredit Clarke's *proof* of the existence, unity, and omnipresence of God from the ontology of absolute space.[58]

2. Hume holds that our idea of space is "compounded of parts" and "divisible" (although the ultimate constituent parts of this complex idea are themselves indivisible). He therefore rejects Clarke's claim that space is "absolutely uniform and essentially indivisible."[59] The obvious theological implication of this is that we cannot infer the existence of any "absolutely indivisible" being on the basis of our idea of space.[60]

3. We have, according to Hume, no idea of any *extended* being or existence that is not either visible or tangible (T, 1.2.3.15/38).[61] It follows that we know of no objects other than bodies that are extended beings. Hume therefore rejects the whole supposition of *extended immaterial* beings as lacking any foundation in experience. A more extensive criticism of the doctrine of immaterial substance (extended or unextended) is provided later in *Treatise*, 1.4.5 and 6, but the claim that everything extended is manifest in sight or touch evidently rules out any conception of God or souls as extended immaterial beings.

4. Clarke maintains that the finite nature of human understanding, and its inability to "form an adequate Idea of Infinity,"[62] is no obstacle to natural religion in general, much less to the certainty of the specific propositions he claims to have *proved*. It is significant, therefore, that Hume opens his discussion of space and time by observing that the capacity of the human mind is limited or finite in nature, and that we have no "adequate conception of infinity"(T, 1.2.1.2/26). Hume, however, rejects "the *error* of the common opinion, that the capacity of the mind is *limited* on *both sides*" (T, 1.2.1.5/28; my emphasis). While we have no adequate conception of infinity, "our ideas are adequate representations of the most minute parts of extension" (T, 1.2.2.1/29). Human understanding, Hume maintains, is limited to reasoning on the basis of its *ideas*, as provided by impressions.[63] It follows that all reasoning about the nature of the infinite and infinite being is beyond the scope of human capacity.[64] These observations about the "reach of human understanding" (T, 1.2.5.26/64), which Hume claims is confined to "the universe of the imagination" (T, 1.2.6.8/68), undermine Clarke's entire enterprise and all enterprises similar to it.[65]

Hume's refutation of the doctrine of infinite divisibility is no less significant for Clarke's Newtonian philosophy and theology.

1. While Clarke holds that space is "absolutely indivisible," matter, he claims, is infinitely divisible.[66] He defines matter as "Nothing but a Solid Substance, capable only of Division, Figure and Motion"[67] and argues that matter "is always a Compound, not a simple Substance."[68] Although Clarke rejects Descartes's definition of matter given in terms of extension alone, he agrees with Descartes that matter is infinitely divisible.[69] For Hume, infinite divisibility as it relates to *extension* leads to absurdity and contradiction, and the same reasoning applies to the supposed infinite divisibility of matter or body. Hume's view implies, therefore, that both the Cartesian and Newtonian accounts of matter involve absurdity and contradiction, and that matter, so conceived, *cannot* exist. It also follows, on Hume's view, that any effort to distinguish matter and mind in terms of the infinite divisibility of the former and the indivisibility of the latter cannot be sustained.[70] This relates directly to the issue of thinking matter and the immortal soul.

2. The claim that *matter* is infinitely divisible, common to Descartes and Clarke, is essential to the argument that a material being *cannot* think: often referred to as "the argument from the unity of consciousness." Collins summarizes Clarke's influential version of it as follows: "Matter is a Substance consisting always of actually separate and distinct Parts; Consciousness cannot reside in a Being which consists of actually separate and distinct parts; therefore matter cannot think, or be conscious."[71] The doctrine of infinite divisibility of matter is employed in the unity argument to establish that a material being is never "one substance, but a heap of substances."[72] Since what thinks must be a simple, indivisible substance, it must also be an immaterial being.[73] The immateriality of the soul, as Collins points out, is the "principal argument for the *Natural Immortality of the Soul*."[74] Clearly, then, Hume's criticism of the doctrine of infinite divisibility is directly relevant to Clarke's influential debate with Collins about the immortal soul and thinking matter—something Hume and his contemporaries would have been well aware of.[75]

3. Clarke and other Christian thinkers also employed infinite divisibility to defuse concerns about "difficulties" generated by the idea of God's infinite being and attributes, particularly the argument a priori.[76] Clarke presents this view early in the *Demonstration*:

> [I]n all Questions concerning the Nature and Perfections of God, or concerning any thing to which the idea of Eternity or Infinity is joined; tho' we can indeed Demonstrate certain Propositions to be true, yet 'tis impossible for us to comprehend or frame any adequate or compleat Ideas of the *Manner How* the Things so demonstrated can Be: Therefore when once any Proposition is clearly demonstrated to be true; *it ought not to disturb us, that there be perhaps perplexing Difficulties on the other side*.[77]

Clarke then argues that it is "in a like manner *Demonstrable*, that *Quantity is Infinitely Divisible*," although this, too, is subject to "Metaphysical Difficulties."[78] This issue became a significant point of dispute between Clarke and Collins.[79]

Hume's remarks on infinite divisibility are pertinent to Clarke's claims. For Hume, "whatever *appears* impossible and contradictory upon the comparison of... ideas, must be *really* impossible and contradictory, without any farther excuse or evasion" (T, 1.2.2.1/29). He leaves no scope, therefore, for metaphysical doctrines

leading to "contradiction" or "absurdity" and, accordingly, rejects the doctrine of infinite divisibility as "*really* impossible." The implications of this with regard to God's being and attributes would be obvious enough to an audience suitably informed about the relevant debate.

Hume speaks even more directly to Clarke's suggestion that we may be *certain* of a demonstration that nevertheless is attended with "difficult consequences."

> A *demonstration, if just, admits of no opposite difficulty; and if it is not just, 'tis a mere sophism*, and consequently can never be a difficulty.... To talk therefore of objections and replies, and ballancing of arguments in such a question as this, is to confess, either that human reason is nothing but a play of words, or that the person himself, who talks so, has not a capacity equal to such subjects. Demonstrations may be difficult to be comprehended, because of the abstractedness of the subject; but can never have any such difficulties as will weaken their authority, when once they are comprehended. (T, 1.2.2.6/31–2)

When this passage is read with a view to Clarke's philosophy and the controversy surrounding it, as I have suggested it must, then it is evident that it constitutes a sharp repudiation of Clarke's "demonstrative" strategy.

The significance of Hume's critique of infinite divisibility is plain. He strikes at a number of important arguments that are fundamental to the metaphysical systems of Clarke and other Christian apologists. In the *Enquiry*, he says that "no priestly *dogmas*, invented on purpose to tame and subdue the rebellious reason of mankind, ever shocked common sense more than the doctrine of the infinite divisibility of extension, with its consequences" (EU, 12.18/156). In formulating his system of space, Hume has "priestly dogmas" clearly in sight, and it is Clarke's "priestly dogmas" that are his particular concern.[80]

4

The most essential point to emerge from the foregoing discussion is that Hume's views on space must be read with particular reference to Clarke's philosophy. When this is done, it is evident that Hume opposes the doctrine of absolute space and thus rejects a key component of Clarke's "argument *a priori*." In more general terms, Hume's views on space are heavily laden with theological significance—something to which contemporary commentators have given insufficient attention.

This conclusion is important, but it allows for wide latitude of interpretation. For example, since a number of Clarke's critics on this subject—such as Leibniz, Berkeley, and Law—were obviously sincere Christians, Hume's general position is not inherently anti-Christian. It is not clear, therefore, whether or not Hume's discussion of space should be read as a more basic effort to discredit Christian metaphysics. To appreciate the anti-Christian significance of Hume's account of space, we need to widen the scope of our investigation and consider how his views on space relate to his fundamental intentions in the *Treatise*.

Let us begin with some further observations about Hume's sources. He draws from a variety of sources in his account of space, the most obvious being Leibniz,

Berkeley, and Bayle.[81] There are, however, other plausible sources that are not so widely recognized, and some of them are suggestive of anti-Christian intentions. A full list of important "plenist" opponents of the doctrine of the vacuum should include the three prominent "atheists" whom Clarke attacks by name in the *Demonstration*: namely, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Toland. A proper understanding of the motivation behind Hume's discussion of space in the *Treatise* requires more careful consideration of his relationship with this group of thinkers. Hobbes and Spinoza are rarely, if ever, associated with Hume's position on space—which is especially surprising in the case of Hobbes, as there are significant affinities between their views.[82] For our purposes, however, Toland's defense of the plenum and attack on the vacuum is especially relevant.[83]

Although Toland is now primarily remembered for *Christianity Not Mysterious*, the real substance of his philosophy is largely contained in his *Letters to Serena* and the more obscure *Pantheisticon*. In these works Toland, who had strong sympathies with the philosophy of Bruno, Hobbes, and Spinoza, develops his own "pantheistic" philosophy in direct opposition to Newtonianism.[84] The fifth letter of *Serena* is particularly important because in it, as Frederick Beiser notes, Toland sketches "a new cosmology whose purpose is to dispense with any need for supernatural intervention in the workings of 'the Machine that we call the Universe.'" Beiser continues:

> [Toland's] targets were the Newtonian concepts of space and matter, which had permitted Newton to postulate God's constant presence in the natural order. Rather than seeing space as the sensorium of God, as Newton did, Toland argues that it is only a relative concept, the sum total of distances between things.[85]

Although Toland's "naturalistic cosmology" follows the footsteps of Bruno and Hobbes, there is, as Beiser says, "something new and important" about Toland's naturalism because it pushes Newtonian physics "in the direction of complete naturalism." Beiser describes the resistance that Toland met as follows.

> Toland was again flying in the face of the latitudinarians. The Newtonian concepts of matter and space were essential elements in their program of reconciling natural philosophy and religion. Latitudinarian divines like Richard Bentley, Samuel Clarke, and Francis Gastrell argued that the Newtonian concepts gave evidence for the presence of some supernatural agency working within nature. But now Toland was questioning even these concepts.[86]

Beiser observes that it is not surprising that Toland found himself "singled out as a target of the Boyle lecturers whose purpose was to defend religion, natural and revealed, against freethinkers and atheists."[87]

The importance of Toland for Hume's views on space has gone *almost* unnoticed. The only exception I am aware of is Hendel, who notes the affinities between their views.[88] Hume, Hendel says, "would scarcely ignore the writings of this deist, Toland, who not only criticized Dr. Clarke but so hardily explored the possibilities of the naturalistic hypothesis."[89] Hume's connections with Desmaizeaux provide further weight to the suggestion that Hume likely had knowledge of Toland's philosophy in *Serena*, and would draw on it when developing his own views on space. As noted, Desmaizeaux and Toland were close friends and belonged to a circle

of radical freethinkers that included Collins.[90] Desmaizeaux, moreover, edited two volumes of Toland's work, for which he wrote a memoir of Toland. This memoir describes all Toland's important works, including *Serena*.[91]

Given these considerations, it is likely that Toland's *Serena* was another important source for Hume to use against Clarke's doctrine of absolute space. The considerable resemblances between Hume's and Toland's views on this subject certainly suggest this. Particularly notable parallels appear in Toland's lengthy account of the role of *abstraction* in accounting for our *idea* of space.

> YOU may now perceive how this Notion of absolute Space was form'd, partly by gratuitous Suppositions, as that Matter was finite, inactive, and divisible; partly, by abstracting Extension, the most obvious Property of Matter, without considering the other Propertys, or their absolute Connection in the same Subject, tho each of 'em may be mentally abstracted from the rest, which is of singular use to Mathematicians on several occasions: *provided such Abstractions be never taken for Realitys, and made to exist out of the Subjects from which they are abstracted, no more than plac'd in another Subject uncertain or unknown*.[92]

This passage touches on several of Hume's most basic concerns, and takes a stance on them very similar to his. With this in mind, we may proceed to ask how Hume's views on space relate to his wider and more fundamental intentions in the *Treatise*.

Clearly, we can make considerable sense of Hume's discussion of space within the framework of an irreligious or "atheistic" interpretation of his fundamental intentions. More specifically, Hume's critique of Clarke's doctrine of absolute space and its associated theology is of a piece with Hume's wider skeptical assault on Clarke's effort to vindicate the metaphysics and morals of the Christian religion. Hume's two-prong system of space, which repudiates the doctrines of infinite divisibility and the vacuum, discredits Clarke's most fundamental ambitions in the *Demonstration*. It is important, however, to point out that Hume's system of space has a constructive as well as a destructive role to play in the philosophy of the *Treatise*. Hume's system of space (and time) serves to establish a key component of his wider cosmological framework in the *Treatise*. These cosmological ambitions may well be characterized as "atheistic" in character, since they are closely related to the "atheistic" cosmologies of the thinkers Clarke set himself to refute (i.e. Hobbes and his followers). What these thinkers share, whatever their differences, is that they reject the fundamental tenet of Christian metaphysics: that there is (necessarily) an immaterial, intelligent agent distinct from, and ontologically (i.e. causally) prior to, the material world. According to the "atheist's" cosmology, the natural realm was self-existent (not a dependent being), self-ordering, and self-moving.[93] These "atheistic" thinkers, furthermore, developed an anthropology and moral system that reflected their thoroughly naturalistic cosmological commitments. It is within the framework of this "atheistic cosmology," so understood, that we should interpret Hume's constructive account of space (and time). Simply put, Hume's cosmology has no space for God and is wholly naturalistic in character.

Finally, the irreligious interpretation of Hume's views on this subject should restore interest in this aspect of his philosophy. A number of commentators have severely criticized Hume's discussion of space and time on the ground that the

arguments put forward are both confused and philosophically dated.[94] Although this assessment of the philosophical merits of Hume's arguments may be fair, it is a mistake to conclude that his views on space are unimportant to his philosophical system. On the contrary, his views on this subject have a significant role to play in the wider fabric of the *Treatise*, and illuminate important arguments in the *Dialogues* (i.e. part 9). We may conclude, therefore, that Hume's discussion of space, so interpreted, has intimate links with his general philosophical system and is an essential component of his wider irreligious intentions.

The Argument a Priori and Hume's "Curious *Nostrum*"

Nothing can be made out of nothing.

Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*

Any thing may produce any thing.

Hume, A *Treatise of Human Nature*

Most philosophers would agree with the suggestion that Hume's treatment of the problem of causation "is the center-piece of the *Treatise*" (or, at least, of book 1).[1] At the same time, most contemporary accounts of Hume's views on causation in the *Treatise* have little or nothing to say about the extent to which his views on this subject are directly relevant to problems of natural religion.[2] In contrast with this, Hume's own contemporaries viewed his treatment of causation in the *Treatise* as obviously relevant to fundamental problems of natural religion. More specifically, his early critics generally interpreted his views on causation as involving an "atheistic" or irreligious attack on the argument a priori (particularly as defended by Clarke). In order to assess this perspective on Hume's discussion of causation in the *Treatise*, we must first consider in more detail the evolution of the argument a priori in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

1

The origins of the cosmological argument reach back to Plato and Aristotle, and were more fully articulated and developed in the medieval period in the work of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus.[3] During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the reasoning involved in the cosmological argument was further developed and defended by a number of the leading theologians and philosophers of the time, with the specific aim of demonstrably confuting (Hobbist and Spinozist) atheism. The most notable versions of this came from Locke and Clarke, but much of their reasoning is anticipated in Ralph Cudworth's monumental *True Intellectual*

System of the Universe—a work, as noted, that was particularly influential at this time, and was carefully studied by the young Hume.[4]

Cudworth's *System* is a vast, detailed work whose thread of argument is easily lost in the tangle of scholarly asides and observations. However, his own demonstration of God's existence and attributes is stated clearly enough. It begins from the claim that "unquestionably something or other, did exist from all eternity without beginning. For it is certain," he continues,

> that every thing could not be made, because nothing could come from nothing, or be made by itself; and therefore if once there had been nothing, there could never have been any thing. Whence it is undeniable, that there always was something, and consequently that there was something unmade, which existed of itself from all eternity.[5]

Since atheists and theists are agreed that something or other has existed from all eternity, the issue that divides them is "whether that which existed of it self from all eternity, and was the cause of all other things, were a perfect being and God, or the most imperfect of all things whatsoever, inanimate and senseless matter."[6]

> The controversy being thus clearly stated betwixt theists and atheists, it may now with great ease . . . be determined; it being . . . utterly impossible, that greater perfections, and higher degrees of being, should rise and ascend out of lesser and lower, so as that, which is the most absolutely imperfect of all things, should be the first fountain and original of all; since no effect can possibly transcend the power of its cause. . . . This being undeniably demonstrable from that very principle of reason, which the Atheists are so fond of, but, misunderstanding abuse, . . . that nothing can come from nothing.[7]

Clearly, then, the very foundation of Cudworth's "demonstration of the impossibility of atheism" is the "principle of reason" that "*nothing can come from nothing*." Wielding this fundamental principle, Cudworth closes in on the enemy.

> And the controversy, as thus stated, may also be clearly and satisfactorily decided. For first, we say, that as it is certainly true, that if there had been once nothing at all, there could never have been any thing; so [it] is true likewise, that if once there had been no life, in the whole universe, but all had been dead, then could there never have been any life or motion in it. . . . Dead and senseless matter could never have created or generated mind and understanding, but a perfect omnipotent mind could create matter. Wherefore, because there is mind, we are certain, that there was some mind or other from eternity without beginning; though not because there is body, that therefore there was body or matter from eternity unmade.[8]

Cudworth's achievement, as he understands it, is to have turned the atheistic maxim "Nothing can come from nothing" against the atheists themselves. The atheist argument, first advanced by Lucretius, was that this principle led to the conclusion that matter is eternal and uncreated—since it is impossible to explain how God could create matter out of nothing.[9] Contrary to this view, Cudworth maintains that this argument is in fact "the Achilles of the Atheists."[10] In a lengthy discussion of this issue, Cudworth claims that there are "several senses wherein this axiom must be acknowledged to be undeniably true, that nothing can possibly be made out of nothing, or come from nothing; namely these three."

> First, that nothing which was not, could ever bring it self into being, or efficiently produce it self. Or, that nothing can possibly be made, without an efficient cause. Secondly, that nothing which was not, could be produced or brought into being, by any other efficient cause, than such, as hath at least, equal perfection in it, and a sufficient active or productive power. For if any thing were made by that, which hath not equal perfection, then must so much of the effect as transcendeth the cause, be indeed made without cause... or be created by it self, or by nothing.... But third and last sense is this; that nothing which is materially made out of things pre-existing, (as some are) can have any other real entity, than what was either before contained in, or resulteth from the things themselves so modified.... These, I say, are all the senses, wherein it is impossible, that any thing should be made out of nothing, or come from nothing; and they may be all reduced to this one general sense, that *Nothing can be made out of nothing, causally*; or, that *Nothing cannot cause any thing, either efficiently or materially*. Which as it is undeniably true; so it is so far from making any thing, against divine creation, or the existence of God, that the same may be demonstratively proved, and evinced from it.[11]

While it is true that nothing could be made without cause, it does not follow from this "that nothing could by any power whatsoever be brought out of non-existence into being."[12] Such a view would imply, Cudworth says, that each and every human soul existed "from eternity unmade."[13]

> All cogitative beings, especially human souls, and personalities, are unquestionably substantial things, and yet do the atheists bring these, and consequently themselves, out of nothing or non-existence, and reduce them to nothing again.... They who deny a God, because there can be no creative power belonging to any thing, do themselves notwithstanding attribute to matter (though a mere passive, sluggish and unactive thing) a creative power of things substantial, (as human souls and personalities) out of nothing. And thus is that formidable argument of the atheists, that there can be no God, because nothing can be made out of nothing; not only proved to be false, but also retorted upon these atheists themselves, they bringing all things besides senseless and unqualified matter, out of nothing.[14]

On the basis of these observations, Cudworth takes himself to have "demonstrated the impossibility and nonsense of all atheism" from the "very principle, by which atheists would assault theism." Since there is, he claims, "no middle betwixt atheism and theism," the impossibility of atheism demonstrates the truth of theism. That is to say, as "it is impossible, that all things should be made out of senseless matter: therefore there is a God."[15]

Cudworth proceeds to show that the being that did exist from all eternity is a "necessarily existent being." He argues that

> because something did certainly exist of itself from eternity unmade, therefore is there also actually, a necessarily existent Being.... When a thing therefore is said to be of itself, or the cause of itself, this is to be understood no otherwise, than either in a negative sense, as having nothing else for its cause; or because, its necessary eternal existence, is essential to the perfection of its own nature.[16]

The conclusion that follows from this, according to Cudworth, is that since "there is nothing, which includes necessity of existence in its very nature and essence, but

only an absolutely perfect being. The result of all which is, that God or a perfect being, doth certainly exist."[17]

Cudworth's use of demonstrative reasoning to prove the existence and attributes of God is also present in Locke's *Essay*.[18] One commentator on Locke has suggested that "all the roads of Lockean philosophy lead to the hallowed ground of Christianity."[19] This is especially apparent in book 4 of Locke's *Essay*, wherein the tenth chapter concerns "Our Knowledge of the Existence of God." One of the main objectives of Locke's essay is to establish that "we are capable of *knowing*, i.e. *being certain that there is a* GOD."[20] Locke, famously, denies that we have any innate idea of God.[21] All knowledge of the existence of things, he holds, is either intuitive, demonstrative, or sensitive.[22] We have knowledge of our own existence by intuition, and knowledge of the existence of particular things by sensation. In the case of God's existence, however, our knowledge depends on *demonstrative* reason. A central theme of Locke's *Essay* is to argue that it is a mistake to suppose "that Mathematics alone are capable of demonstrative certainty."[23] Contrary to this view, he maintains that we must include morality and the existence of God as being among "the Sciences capable of demonstration."[24]

Demonstrative reasoning involves perceiving the immediate agreement of ideas by way of intervening ideas or proofs.[25] Every step taken in the proof is intuitively certain. To demonstrate God's existence, Locke begins with our intuitive knowledge of our own existence. The next step in the argument proceeds on the principle "that bare nothing can no more produce any real Being, than it can be equal to two right Angles."[26] Using this principle, he argues that if we know there is some real being, and that no real being can be produced by nothing, "it is an evident demonstration that from eternity there has been something."[27] The next step in the argument turns on the principle "that what had its Being and Beginning from another, must also have all that which is in, and belongs to its Being from another too. All the Powers it has, must be owing to, and received from the same source."[28] Locke then applies the general principle that whatever comes into existence cannot be produced by something that lacks its own perfections:

> And whatsoever is first of all Things, must necessarily contain in it, and actually have, at least, all the Perfections that can ever after exist; nor can it ever give to another any perfection that it hath not, either actually in it self, or at least in a higher degree; It necessarily follows, that the first eternal Being cannot be Matter.[29]

Locke makes the same general point earlier when he says that "if we will suppose nothing first, or eternal; *Matter* can never begin to be: If we suppose bare Matter, without Motion, eternal; *Motion* can never begin to be; If we suppose only Matter and motion first, or eternal; *Thought* can never begin to be."[30] The basis of his whole line of reasoning, therefore, is the fundamental claim that "of all Absurdities is the greatest, to imagine that pure nothing . . . should ever produce any real Existence."[31]

Locke's version of the cosmological argument, although central to his own aims and ambitions in the *Essay*, has generally been regarded as one of the weaker components of his philosophy.[32] It is, certainly, widely agreed, today as well as in Hume's time, that Clarke's formulation of this argument is a more impressive contribution.[33] Clarke's *Demonstration* consists of twelve propositions, which can be divided into

two components.[34] The first, contained in the first three propositions, is an argument designed to establish the existence of a *necessary being*. The propositions that follow are designed to prove that this necessary being is, among other things, omnipotent, intelligent, free, and morally perfect.[35] The negative side of Clarke's argument, as with Cudworth and Locke before him, is to prove that this necessary-existing being is not (unintelligent and inactive) matter.

Clarke begins by trying to prove that "Something has existed from all Eternity." He argues:

> For since something now is, 'tis evident that something always was: otherwise the things that now are, *must have been produced out of nothing, absolutely and without cause: which is a plain contradiction in terms*. For, to say a thing is produced, and yet that there is no cause at all of that production, is to say something is effected, when it is effected by nothing; that is, at the same time it is not effected at all. Whatever exists, has a cause, a reason, a ground of its existence. . . . That something therefore has really existed from eternity, is one of the certainest and most evident truths in the world; acknowledged by all men. and disputed by none.[36]

The next proposition Clarke proceeds to demonstrate is that "there has existed from eternity, some one unchangeable and independent being." The proof of this is that "either there has always existed some one unchangeable and independent being . . . or else there has been an infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings produced one from another in an endless progression, without any original cause."[37] According to this view of things, there is nothing in the universe that is self-existing or necessary-existing. It was, therefore, "originally equally possible, that from eternity there should never have existed any thing at all; as that there should from eternity have existed a succession of changeable and dependent beings."[38] What, then, determined that such a succession of beings should exist? On the account suggested, its existence "was determined by nothing; neither by any necessity in the nature of things themselves, because 'tis supposed that none of them are self-existent; nor by any other being, because no other is supposed to exist."[39] The idea that the existence of such a series is determined by nothing is an "express contradiction," hence there must of necessity have existed from eternity "some one immutable and independent being."[40]

This immutable, independent being cannot "arise out of nothing, absolutely without any cause."[41] It follows, Clarke argues, that "that being which has existed independently from eternity must of necessity be self-existent."[42] What is it to say that this being is self-existent? It is not, Clarke says, to claim that something is "produced by itself; for that is an express contradiction."[43] To be self-existent is, rather, "to exist by an absolute necessity originally in the nature of the thing itself."[44] Absolute necessity is "nothing else, but its being a plain contradiction to suppose the contrary."[45]

Clarke believes that he can prove "the material world cannot possibly be the first and original being, uncreated, independent, and of itself eternal,"[46]

> unless the material world exists necessarily by an absolute necessity in its own nature, so as that it must be an express contradiction to suppose it not to exist; it cannot be independent, and of itself eternal. Now that the material world does not exist thus necessarily, is very evident. For absolute necessity of existing, and

> the possibility of not existing, being contradictory ideas; 'tis manifest the material world cannot exist necessarily, if without a contradiction we can conceive it either not to be, or to be in any respect otherwise than it now is. Than which nothing is more easy. For whether we consider the form of the world, with the disposition and motion of its parts; or whether we consider the matter of it, as such, without respect to its present form; every thing in it, both the whole and every one of its parts... are the most arbitrary and dependent things, and the farthest removed from necessity, that can possibly be imagined.[47]

By means of this reasoning, Clarke takes himself to have proved, with mathematical certainty, that the first and original being is necessarily an *immaterial* being, and so cannot be the material world. This still leaves him, however, needing to establish the further attributes of this self-existent, necessary being.[48]

According to Clarke, "the essence of atheism lies in making God either an unintelligent being [such as the material world] or at least a necessary agent void of all freedom, wisdom, power and goodness."[49] The proposition that the self-existent and original cause of all things "must be an intelligent being" (proposition 8) is, Clarke says, "the main question between us and the atheists."[50] It is not possible to prove that the self-existing being is "not such a blind and unintelligent necessity... by considerations *a priori*."[51] However, "*a posteriori*, almost everything in the World, demonstrates to us this great truth and upholds undeniable arguments to prove that the world and all things therein are the effects of an unintelligent and knowing cause."[52] To prove this point, Clarke argues as follows:

> [S]ince in general there are manifestly in things various kinds of powers, and very different excellencies and degrees of perfection; it must needs be, that, in the order of causes and effects, the cause must always be more excellent than the effect; And consequently, the self-existent being, whatever that be supposed to be, must of necessity (being the original of all things) contain in itself the sum and highest degree of all the perfections of all things. Not because that which is self-existent, must therefore have all possible perfections: (for this, though most certainly true in itself, yet cannot be so easily demonstrated a priori): But because 'tis impossible that any effect should have any perfection, which was not in the cause. *For if it had, then that perfection would be caused by nothing; which is a plain contradiction.*[53]

Having established this general line of reasoning, Clarke goes on to argue that since intelligence is one of these perfections, the original of all things cannot be unintelligent, and "consequently the self-existent being must of necessity be intelligent."[54]

Clarke's statement of the argument a priori enjoyed considerable prestige and influence during the first half of the eighteenth century. During this period, a number of theologians and philosophers revised and defended his demonstrative strategy. One of the most important of these was William Wollaston in his *Religion of Nature Delineated*.[55] By the middle of the 1730s, however, both Clarke and Wollaston were dead, and the most respected champion of the argument a priori still active was the Scottish philosopher Andrew Baxter.[56] In his *Enquiry into the Human Soul* (1733), Baxter discusses at some length the fundamental causal principle that underlies his own (Clarkean) philosophy—a principle he claims is forgotten "by the generality of sceptical Writers."[57]

> It is impossible the effect should be perfecter than its cause, either in *kind*, or in *degree*. For if the effect were perfecter in *degree* than the cause of it, all that degree, or excess of perfection in the effect, which is not in the cause, would be really uncaused; or it would be a perfection effected, without being effected by any thing: that is, effected and not effected: And if the effect were perfecter in *kind* than the cause that produced it, or contained, not only a greater degree of the same kind of perfection, but quite another and superior kind; then that whole *species* of perfection, and not any degree of it only, would be uncaused, or the effect of nothing; which is yet a greater contradiction than the former.[58]

The general principle Baxter relies on, therefore, to refute demonstrably "atheists" and "the generality of sceptical writers," is that a cause cannot be "less perfect" than its effect.

> If the cause could communicate to the effect what it had not itself, then *any cause might bring to pass any effect*.... And at last, all this would end in this; that in reality no cause was necessary to produce any effect: for one part of the effect might as well exist without a cause, as another.[59]

Baxter argues that if we reject the causal principle that he recommends (i.e. causes cannot be less perfect than their effects), and embrace the principle he rejects (i.e. that any thing can produce any thing), this would lead to "*a necessary absence of reason in nature*, an universal defect of truth!"[60] More important, its final result, Baxter maintains, would be "denying [the] eternal Mind itself."[61] He sums up this argument by concluding that "denying this [causal] principle leads to *downright Atheism*."[62]

Throughout both Clarke's *Demonstration* and Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, the pattern of reasoning is similar to that already laid down by Cudworth and Locke. The general principle that these thinkers all rely on is (ironically enough) the maxim derived from Lucretius: *Ex nihilo, nihil fit*. Whereas Lucretius and his atheistic followers used this maxim to argue for the impossibility that matter was created and must be eternal and uncreated, the defenders of the Christian religion employed this same maxim to the opposite end. The principle that "nothing can come from nothing" serves to ground two derived principles of causal reasoning. The first is the causal principle: *Whatever exists must have a cause or ground of its existence*. The second principle is that of causal adequacy or the order of causes: *No cause can produce or give rise to perfections or excellences that it does not itself possess*. With the maxim that nothing comes from nothing viewed as a self-evident truth, it is regarded as *absurd* to deny either of these causal principles. To deny these principles would involve us in "a contradiction" and "impossibility" that is no less absurd than denying that twice two is equal to four. As I have explained, these causal principles serve as the very foundations of the theological edifices that Cudworth, Locke, Clarke, and Baxter all erected. Any philosophical attack on this pair of causal principles, therefore, would have enormous theological significance at this time.

2

Hume's discussion of causation as presented in *Treatise* 1.3 weaves an intricate web of arguments and issues together. Nevertheless, as it concerns the argument a priori,

his position is clear. His analysis of causation and causal reasoning in the *Treatise* discredits all efforts to use demonstrative reasoning to prove the existence of God. In particular, Hume argues that (1) the proposition that "*whatever begins to exist must have a cause*" is neither intuitively nor demonstrably certain, and (2) if we reason a priori, "*any thing may produce any thing*." On the basis of these claims, Hume concludes that it is impossible to *demonstrate* the existence of *any* being—which includes God.

In order to show the necessity of a cause to every new existence, Hume argues, we must be able to show that it is impossible that "any thing can ever begin to exist without some productive principle" (T, 1.3.3.3/79). If the proposition were intuitively certain, then it would depend on one of four philosophical relations: resemblance, proportions in quantity and number, degrees of any quality, or contrariety (T, 1.3.1.2/70). These are, Hume claims, the only relations between ideas that ground our intuitions when we compare ideas. Since they have no application in this case, the causal maxim is not "intuitively certain" (T, 1.3.3.2/79). Nor is it possible to "demonstrate the necessity of a cause for every new existence" (T, 1.3.3.3/79). All distinct ideas are separable, he argues, "and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, 'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle (T, 1.3.3.3/79). In general, for Hume, impossibility depends on inconceivability. Nothing we can imagine is "absolutely impossible" (T, 1.2.2.8; 1.2.4.11; 1.3.7.3/32, 43, 95; TA, 18/652–3). It is, however, possible for us to imagine something to begin to exist without a cause. There is, therefore, no contradiction or absurdity in denying the causal maxim.

Hume proceeds to refute those who have defended the contrary view. In this context, he (uncharacteristically) names specific targets: Hobbes, Clarke, and Locke. It is not surprising that Hume couples criticism of Locke and Clarke in this context, given that the a priori certainty of the causal principle is so fundamental to their (similar) demonstrations of God's existence. Hume notes that Clarke and others have said that "if any thing wanted a cause, it would produce itself, that is exist before it existed; which is impossible" (T, 1.3.3.5/80).[63] Hume's refutation of this argument is brief but effective. This reasoning, he says, "is plainly inconclusive; because it supposes, that in our denial of a cause we still grant what we expressly deny, viz. that there must be a cause; which therefore is taken to be the object itself; and that no doubt, is an evident contradiction" (T, 1.3.3.5/80–1). Concerning the argument that "whatever is produc'd without any cause, is produc'd by nothing," which Hume attributes to Locke, it simply repeats the fallacy of the previous argument.[64] "'Tis sufficient only to observe," Hume says, "that when we exclude all causes we really do exclude them, and neither suppose nothing nor the object itself to be the cause of existence" (T, 1.3.3.7/80).

Another argument Hume considers is one he attributes to Hobbes:

> All the points of time and place, say some philosophers [Hume cites Hobbes], in which we can suppose any object to begin to exist, are in themselves equal; and unless there be some cause, which is peculiar to one time and to one place, and which by that means determined and fixes the existence, it remains in eternal suspense; and the object can never begin to be, for want of something to fix its beginning. (T, 1.3.3.4/80)[65]

The objection to this argument, according to Hume, is that before attempting to decide *when* and *where* a cause operates, it is necessary to first determine *whether* there is a cause. If there is no absurdity in supposing that an object may begin to exist without any cause, then there is no absurdity in supposing that when and where it exists is also without any cause.

On the face of it, Hume's reference to Hobbes in this context is puzzling, since Hobbes's philosophy was a prime target of the argument a priori as advanced by Locke and Clarke. One plausible explanation for this is that Hume is simply attempting to cover his irreligious intentions in this context by including the most notable representative of "modern atheism" alongside his criticism of Locke and Clarke. This is a rhetorical strategy that provides him with an avenue of escape, or at least evasion, if his views on this subject receive a hostile reception (e.g. accusations of "skepticism," "atheism," etc.). However, there is, I believe, a deeper philosophical significance to Hume's reference to Hobbes's argument in this context. Leibniz (famously) attacked the Newtonian doctrine of absolute space and time on the ground that on this view of things there would be no reason for God to place his creation in one location, or create at one time, rather than another (e.g. God might have created the world one year sooner or turned it around in the opposite direction).[66] On Leibniz's account, Clarke's commitment to the Newtonian metaphysics of absolute space and time conflicts with "the principle of sufficient reason, viz. that nothing happens without a reason why it should be so, rather than otherwise."[67] Clarke attempts to meet this objection: "'Tis very true, that nothing is, without a sufficient reason why it is, and why it is thus rather than otherwise. And therefore, where there is no cause, there can be no effect. But this sufficient reason is oft-times no other, than the mere will of God."[68] When Hume's account of Hobbes's argument for the causal maxim is considered with reference to this exchange between Leibniz and Clarke concerning where and when an effect (i.e. Creation) occurs, then the point being made would appear to be that Clarke's commitment to the principle of sufficient reason or the causal maxim is both selective and arbitrary. If this is correct, then Hume's reference to Hobbes's argument in this context is not simply to camouflage his critique of the argument a priori but also to expose internal inconsistencies in Clarke's use of the principle that "whatever begins to exist must have some cause of its existence."[69]

It may be argued in reply to these observations that although Hume aims to show only that the causal maxim is neither intuitively nor demonstratively certain, this does not show that he rejects this maxim, only that he takes it to be supported by "moral evidence" (compare LG, 22).[70] Moreover, Hume's remarks on this subject, in several different contexts, make clear that he denies the existence of any "chance" or "irregularities" in nature, since "things themselves" are always subject to causation and necessity (T, 1.3.12, 1–5; 1.3.15.8; 2.3.1.12/130–2, 174, 403–4). These considerations, however, do not help the defenders of the argument a priori. They maintain that we can *demonstrate* the existence of God by reasoning a priori from the fact that something now exists. Hume's arguments in criticism of the causal maxim aim to show that this cannot be done. The very first step in this chain of reasoning lacks any relevant intuitive or demonstrative support. That is to say, there is no "contradiction" or "absurdity" in supposing that something has come into existence without any cause. We cannot, therefore,

by use of a priori reasoning, prove (with certainty) the being and attributes of God. The implication of this is that we must rely on "moral evidence" and "experience" to prove the existence of God.[71]

3

According to Hume, of the seven different kinds of philosophical relation, only the relation of causation "produces such a connexion, as to give us assurance from the existence or action of one object, that 'twas follow'd or proceeded by any other existence or action" (T, 1.3.2.2/73–4). That is to say, as Hume puts it in the *Abstract*, it is only by means of the causal relation that we can "infer the existence of one object from that of another" (TA, 8/649). To understand all such causal reasoning, therefore, "we must be perfectly acquainted with the idea of a cause" (TA, 8/649). Consistent with his general method, Hume seeks to find the origin of our idea of causation, and to identify "the primary impression, from which it arises" (T, 1.3.2.4/75). There is, Hume maintains, no discoverable quality in objects that identifies them as causes or effects. Whatever quality in a cause we may observe, we can always find some other object that lacks this quality and is still considered a cause. Since our idea of cause and effect does not depend on any known quality of the object (T, 1.3.2.12/77) it must be derived from some relation that holds among the objects.

When we examine two objects that are causally related, all that we find is that they are *contiguous* in time and place and that the cause is *prior* in time to its effect. In the single instance, however, this is all that there is for us to discover. Nevertheless, we still need to account for the necessary connection, which is also supposed to be essential to the causal relation (as clearly an object may be contiguous and prior to another without being its cause). We are, however, unable to discover the relation of necessary connection in any single instance. When we reason a priori, there is, Hume says, "no object which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves" (T, 1.3.6.1/86). It is by *experience* alone that we can infer the existence of one object from another (T, 1.3.6.2/87).

> The nature of experience is this. We remember to have had frequent instances of the existence of one species of objects; and also remember, that the individuals of another species of objects have always attended them, and have existed in a regular order of contiguity and succession with regard to them. (T, 1.3.6.2/87)

All we discover, therefore, in the relation between cause and effect are "these three circumstances of contiguity, priority and constant conjunction" (TA, 9/649).

In light of this analysis of the causal relation, Hume draws the conclusion "*that there is nothing in any object, consider'd in itself, which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it*." (T, 1.3.12.20/139)

> The mind can always *conceive* any effect to follow from any cause, and indeed any event to follow upon another: Whatever we *conceive* is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense: But wherever a demonstration takes place, the contrary is impossible, and implies a contradiction. There is no demonstration, therefore, for any conjunction of cause and effect. (TA, 11/650–1; his emphasis)

It follows from all this, Hume says, that "any thing may produce any thing" (T, 1.3.15.1/173). His remarks concerning this fundamental causal maxim make its specific theological significance clear.

> Any thing may produce any thing. Creation, annihilation, motion, reason, volition; all these may arise from one another, or from any other object we can imagine. Nor will this appear strange, if we compare two principles explain'd above, *that the constant conjunction of objects determines their causation*, and *that properly speaking, no objects are contrary to each other, but existence and non-existence*. Where objects are not contrary, nothing hinders them from having that constant conjunction, on which the relation of cause and effect totally depends. (T, 1.3.15.1/173; his emphasis; compare EU, 12.29n/164n)

Further on, in the context of his discussion of the immateriality of the soul, Hume applies his observations concerning the nature of the causal relation directly to the question of whether matter could cause or produce thought.

> Now as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction, and as no real objects are contrary; I have inferr'd from these principles, that to consider the matter a priori, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be betwixt them. (T, 1.4.5.30/247; compare 1.4.5.32/249–50)

On this basis, Hume concludes that we must reject the suggestion that it is "impossible that motion can ever produce thought" (T, 1.4.5.20/248).[72] On the contrary, we find by experience that motion and thought are "constantly united; which being all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect, when appl'd to the operations of matter, we may conclude, that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception" (T, 1.4.5.20/248). As Hume observes, this is a conclusion "which evidently gives the advantage to the materialists above their antagonists" (T, 1.4.5.32/250).

The general significance of Hume's fundamental causal maxim that (a priori) "any thing may produce any thing" could hardly be clearer, given the context he was writing in. Hume's (alternative) causal maxim strikes a blow directly against the principle of causal adequacy or a hierarchy of causes. In rejecting the principle of causal adequacy, Hume removes the entire causal foundations of all attempts to demonstrate the being and attributes of God on the basis of the assumption "that nothing can be efficiently caused or produced by that which hath not in it at least equal (if not greater) perfection, as also sufficient power to produce the same."[73] In the century before the *Treatise* was published, many of the most distinguished British philosophers and theologians (i.e. Cudworth, Locke, Clarke, Baxter, et al.) used demonstrative reason to prove (a priori) the existence of God. Similarly, in the *Meditations* the principle of causal adequacy serves as the foundation of Descartes's first (demonstrative) proof of the existence of God.[74] All these proofs of God's existence, according to Hume, rely on flawed causal principles (and so must be rejected). The theological significance of Hume's alternative causal maxim, therefore, could not be greater or more obvious.

Plainly, Hume's critique of both the causal maxim and the principle of causal adequacy drives a stake directly through the heart of the argument a priori, which enjoyed such enormous prominence at this time. Hume completes this task by adding further observations concerning the nature of our idea of (necessary) existence. Proponents of the argument a priori take themselves to have established not only that God in fact exists but also that he *necessarily* exists. To say that God necessarily exists, on this account, is to say that it is impossible that he does not exist or that denying God's existence involves us in some form of "contradiction" or "absurdity."[75] In opposition to this, Hume argues not only that we have no idea of *necessary* existence, we have no "abstract idea of existence, distinguishable and separable from the idea of particular objects" (T, app., 2/623). "[W]hen after the simple conception of any thing we wou'd conceive it as existent, we in reality make no addition to or alteration on our first idea" (T, 1.3.7.2/94). Hume relates this observation directly to the question of God's existence.

> Thus when we affirm, that God is existent, we simply form the idea of such a being, as he is represented to us; nor is the existence, which we attribute to him, conceiv'd by a particular idea, which we join to the idea of his other qualities, and can again separate and distinguish from them.... When I think of God, when I think of him as existent, and when I believe him to be existent, my idea of him neither encreases nor diminishes. But as 'tis certain there is a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object, and the belief of it, and this difference lies not in the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive; it follows, that it must lie in the *manner*, in which we conceive it. (T, 1.3.7.2/94–5; his emphasis)

It follows from this that the difference between having a mere idea of God and believing that God exists is only a matter of the manner (i.e. force or vivacity) in which we conceive of this idea. More important, there is no contradiction or absurdity involved in conceiving of God as not existing—since whatever we can conceive as existing we can also conceive as not existing (T, 1.3.7.3/95; compare EU, 12.28/164). All this leads to the conclusion that the words "necessary existence" have no meaning, given that no distinct impression can be found for them (compare D, 91–2). Our idea of God, according to Hume, is no different from any other idea with respect to the issue of existence and nonexistence. Insofar as we are able to conceive of God as existing, so, too, we can conceive of him as not existing. All demonstrations that claim to prove that it is impossible for God not to exist should, therefore, be rejected.[76]

4

Hume returned to his criticisms of the argument a priori in both the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*. His discussion in *Dialogues*, part 9, where Demea presents (Clarke's) argument a priori (D, 90–1), is generally regarded as his most detailed account of this matter. It is important to remember, however, that Hume's earliest critics, writing well before either the first *Enquiry* or *Dialogues* came into print, were clear that in the *Treatise* Hume has the argument a priori as a primary target of his (skeptical) views concerning causation. (I have provided many of the details of this reception

in chapter 2.) This is, in fact, a consistent theme throughout the early responses to the *Treatise*. Moreover, in Kippis's *Biographia Britannica* article on "Clarke," which was published after the *Dialogues*, it is the *Treatise* that is specifically cited as containing an "atheistical" assault on Clarke's argument a priori.[77] All these observations make very clear that Hume's own contemporaries read his discussion of causation, as presented in the *Treatise*, as having a direct and significant bearing on the argument a priori.

In the century that proceeded the publication of Hume's *Treatise*, it was standard practice for many of the most prominent defenders of the Christian religion to turn Lucretius's maxim "Nothing can come from nothing" against atheism itself.[78] This mode of Christian rationalism was also (prominently) championed by Andrew Baxter, a neighbor of Hume in the Borders area of Scotland at the time that the project of *Treatise* first began to take shape. In his influential *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, Baxter specifically argues that if we accept the causal principle that "any cause might bring to pass any effect," this will lead us directly to "denying the eternal Mind itself" and thus to "downright atheism."[79] This is, of course, the very same causal principle that Hume (subsequently) embraces and defends in the *Treatise*.

I have already noted that the author of the *Specimen*, written in criticism of Hume in 1745, when he was applying for the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University, accuses him of "downright atheism" (LG, 17). The basis of this specific charge was that Hume was guilty of "denying the doctrine of Causes and Effects" by maintaining that "the Necessity of a Cause to every Beginning of Existence is not founded on any Arguments demonstrative or intuitive." According to Hume's critic, it is "well known that this principle . . . is the first Step in the Argument for the Being of a Supreme Cause; and that without it, 'tis impossible to go one Step further in that Argument" (LG, 11). In a similar manner, Hume's critic also objects to his repeated use of the "curious *nostrum*" that "any thing may produce any thing" (LG, 10). Hume attempts to defuse this criticism by replying that although "Dr. Clarke's arguments" may be discredited by his account of causation, this is only "one kind of argument for the Divine Existence" (LG, 24). Other arguments, he suggests, such as "the arguments *a posteriori* from the Order and Course of Nature," or Descartes's arguments, "remain still in their full force" (LG, 23). It is a further striking feature of Hume's reply to his accuser that he represents the author of the *Specimen* as a (dogmatic) philosopher in the school of Clarke.

The identity of the author of the *Specimen* is a matter I have already considered. It is worth noting again, however, that Baxter is a *natural fit* for the role of defending the argument a priori against Hume's "sceptical" and "atheistic" challenge. Moreover, some of the language Hume's attacker uses in the *Specimen* accords well with Baxter's own (harsh) rhetorical style, but is not consistent with Wishart's (more moderate) way of expressing himself. In particular, the (striking) phrase "downright atheism" appears not only in relevant work by Baxter (i.e. in his *Enquiry*) but also in a context that is directly relevant to the specific nature of the charges advanced in the *Specimen*.[80] Moreover, this phrase appears also in another work by Baxter that is, again, of direct relevance to the charges raised against Hume in the *Specimen*. Baxter's 1732 pamphlet attack on Dudgeon argues that Dudgeon's views as they concern punishment in a future state "would subvert all society" and lead "to

down right Anarchy and Atheism."[81] Given the evidence already cited for Baxter being the author of the *Specimen* (i.e. in chapter 2), it is a significant fact that the expression "downright atheism" appears in two of Baxter's (earlier) works, both of which are directly relevant to the specific charges advanced against Hume in the *Specimen*. The phrase "downright atheism" does not appear in any of Wishart's published work—much less in some (philosophically) relevant context. So considered, therefore, the appearance of this expression in the context of the *Specimen* serves as further (weighty) evidence in favor of the hypothesis that it was Baxter, not Wishart, who was the author of the *Specimen*.[82]

It is always possible, of course, to claim that it is simply a matter of "mere coincidence" that Wishart, in a context that is so obviously relevant to Baxter's influential contributions, used language that was characteristic of Baxter's manner of expression and uncharacteristic of his own. It is clear, however, that more than this must be said as an explanation for why Wishart would write in this way. As already observed, there is some evidence (contrary to the established picture of Wishart as an unalloyed disciple of Shaftesbury's moral sense philosophy) that Wishart had significant Clarkean interests and sympathies. More important, since Wishart was a subscriber to Baxter's *Enquiry*, he might well have drawn directly from this work when presenting his own criticism of Hume in the *Specimen*. Certainly, as I have argued, these general considerations help to explain the content and character of the issues raised in the *Letter*, consistent with the view that Wishart was the author of the *Specimen*.[83]

Whether the author of the *Specimen* was Wishart or Baxter is not, in the final analysis, what matters most for our understanding of the significance of the *Letter*. What matters most is that the author of the *Specimen* raises issues and criticisms that closely accord with core concerns that Baxter had already raised in his (Clarkean) *Enquiry into the Human Soul*. More specifically, Hume is accused of "denying the doctrine of causes and effects" and defending causal principles that lead directly to "downright atheism." In his reply to these charges, Hume openly and explicitly acknowledges that his causal principles do indeed discredit the (dogmatic) objectives of Clarke's argument a priori. This particular controversy predates all Hume's efforts in his later writings to criticize and discredit the cosmological argument. Clearly, then, both Hume and his early critics are agreed about one thing: the obvious (skeptical) relevance of Hume's views on causation for the project of using demonstrative reason in defense of the Christian religion. This core theme of *Treatise*, 1.3 aims to put an end to all attempts to demonstrate the existence of God with (dogmatic) mathematical certainty. Clearly any plausible interpretation of the *Treatise* must give appropriate weight to this significant irreligious theme and place it in the context of other irreligious themes in this work (several of which I have already described).

In response to the irreligious interpretation of Hume's views on causation as it relates to the argument a priori, it may be objected that we have moved beyond the evidence supplied. That is, while it is true that Hume and his early critics are agreed that his views on causation discredit Clarke's argument a priori, all this shows is that Hume's views on this subject are of *religious significance*. This is, no doubt, of some importance in its own right, in that it contradicts the general view that the *Treatise*

has little concern with problems of religion. However, it still falls short of showing that Hume's intentions on this subject may be characterized as *irreligious* or "atheistic" (i.e. in the manner of Hume's critics). Hume points out himself, in his reply to the author of the *Specimen*, that criticizing Clarke's argument a priori can hardly be construed as evidence of "atheism," since many sincerely religious philosophers and theologians such as Tillotson take the same view (LG, 23). If we do not label the likes of Hutcheson and Butler as irreligious because they reject the argument a priori, why should we read Hume's arguments in the *Treatise* this way?

The answer to this objection is that, like Hume's own contemporaries, we ought to consider Hume's critique of the argument a priori in the wider framework of what else he is doing (and not doing) in the *Treatise*. The following considerations seem especially relevant when considering this matter. (1) Contrary to what Hume suggests in the *Letter* (LG, 23), his arguments concerning causation and necessary existence also discredit Descartes's "metaphysical arguments" for the existence of God. It is not just Clarke's argument a priori that has to be rejected according to Hume's principles; it is any and all arguments that aim to *demonstrate* the existence of God. On Hume's account, the only (legitimate) *form* of argument for the existence of God is an argument based on *experience* (i.e. consistent with Hume's remarks at EU, 12.32/165). (2) In the *Treatise*, there is no attempt to show that the argument from design is a viable alternative to the discredited cosmological argument. On the contrary, when Hume does turn to evaluate the argument a posteriori in his later writings, particularly as defended by Cleanthes in the *Dialogues*, Hume's analysis serves to expose the weaknesses and limitations of this (alternative) form of argument for the existence of God. In any case, all that the reader of the *Treatise* is left with is a series of arguments that raise difficulties for various proofs of God's existence but suggest no way out of these difficulties.[84] (3) Hume's criticism of the argument a priori should not be considered in isolation from his (many) other irreligious arguments and positions. I have already described several of these (e.g. as they relate to his Hobbist project, the idea of God, space and time, etc.) and I will examine and describe many more. The important point here is that Hume's criticism of the argument a priori is part of a wider sweep of arguments that all clearly have the general aim of undermining and discrediting the basic doctrines and principles of the Christian religion. (4) Finally, it is not the case that the argument a posteriori is left untouched by Hume's skeptical arguments in the *Treatise*. On the contrary, as I explain in detail later (chapter 13), Hume's way of discrediting the argument a posteriori in the *Treatise* takes the form of a (skeptical) critique of our belief in the material world.[85] When this is factored into the package of arguments advanced by Hume, it is apparent that his critique of the argument a priori is just one side of a larger, *systematic assault* on all the major forms of proof for the existence of God. This makes clear why Hume's specific criticisms of the argument a priori cannot be properly understood in narrow isolation from his wider aims and objectives throughout the *Treatise*.

In sum, there can be no doubt that Hume's own contemporaries were generally correct in viewing his critique of the argument a priori in a very different light from similar criticism coming from theologians and philosophers who were (sincere) defenders and adherents of the argument a posteriori. Hume's critique of

the argument a priori is a central element in his wider skeptical assault on all efforts to provide the Christian religion with some form of philosophical defense or justification. Discrediting the argument a priori was an especially important objective on the wide front along which Hume battled against the philosophical pretensions and ambitions of numerous Christian apologists. He was well aware that many of his most distinguished adversaries had used Lucretius's (atheistic) maxim "Nothing can come from nothing" to defend the cause of "superstition." In these circumstances, he abandoned Lucretius's maxim and embraced its direct opposite: "Any thing may produce any thing." This "curious *nostrum*" served as Hume's principal weapon in his battle to discredit all efforts to use demonstrative reason to prove the existence of God.[86]

Induction, Analogy, and a Future State

Hume's "Guide of Life"

But it must be allowed just, to…argue from such facts as are known, to others that are like them; from that part of the Divine government over intelligent creatures which comes under our view, to that larger and more general government over them which is beyond it; and from what is present, to collect, what is likely, credible, or not incredible, will be hereafter.

Butler, *Analogy of Religion*

'[T]is not, therefore, reason, which is the guide of life, but custom. That alone determines the mind, in all instances, to suppose the future conformable to the past.

Hume, *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*

Hume's account of the limits of demonstrative reason, with respect to proving the existence of *any* object, is not the only important skeptical theme that appears in *Treatise*, 1.3. Another major skeptical theme is his account of induction and probable reasoning. Hume's views on this subject have, of course, been widely discussed and debated. Although there is considerable disagreement among commentators about the extent of his skeptical commitments on this subject, most are agreed that what he has to say has little or nothing of a specific nature to do with problems of religion. In this chapter I argue, contrary to this view, that Hume's account of the problem of induction, as originally presented in the *Treatise*, is significantly motivated by irreligious objectives.

1

In 1736, three years before Hume published the *Treatise* (i.e. books 1 and 2), Joseph Butler published his *Analogy of Religion*. The period in which these two works

appeared was one in which the philosophical controversy in Britain concerning "deism" reached a crescendo. According to Leslie Stephen, "the culminating point in the whole deist controversy" arrived with the publication in 1730 of Matthew Tindal's *Christianity as Old as Creation*.[1] Tindal argues in this work that revealed religion is, at best, useless and redundant and, at worst, a corruption of (true) natural religion. The practice of true religion comes to nothing more than benevolence, love, and friendship, all of which aim at human happiness. Just as there is no need for revelation to teach humankind our duties and obligations, so, too, moral practice does not require any support from the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. On the contrary, this doctrine is not only unnecessary, it relies on "servile motives" and presents God not as merciful and benevolent but as cruel and demonic.[2]

Tindal's book had an enormous impact, and scores of replies were published in response to it.[3] Without doubt, however, the most acute and sophisticated of these came from Butler in the form of the *Analogy*. Contrary to Tindal, Butler argues that there is nothing incredible or unreasonable about revealed religion, either in terms of the content of its teaching or its manner of communication.[4] He is especially concerned to impress on his readers the *practical* importance of and the interest we all have in considering the question of our happiness or misery in a future state.[5] Indeed, this question concerning our existence in a future state, Butler says, is "the most important question which can possibly be asked."[6] "As religion implies a future state," he argues, "any presumption against such a state, is a presumption against religion."[7] C. D. Broad describes Butler's *Analogy* as "perhaps the ablest and finest argument for theism that exists."[8] More recently, Terence Penelhum suggests that Butler's philosophy of religion should be ranked "second in English only to that of Hume."[9] Penelhum also notes, however, that for many years the *Analogy* has been neglected by philosophers, who generally pay much closer attention to Butler's ethics. Indeed, according to Penelhum, "the *Analogy* now ranks as the greatest unread classic in philosophical theology."[10] The situation was different in Butler's own day, when the *Analogy* was better known and widely regarded as his most important work.[11] Nevertheless, despite its considerable reputation and influence, Butler's *Analogy* attracted very little in the way of critical attention or commentary from his own contemporaries.[12] It may be argued, however, that Hume is an important exception to this.

A widely accepted view concerning the importance of Butler's *Analogy* for Hume's thought is that it (perhaps) has a significant role to play in the *Dialogues*, and (certainly) plays an important role in the parts of the first *Enquiry* that concern religion (i.e. secs. 10 and 11), but has little or no substantial importance for Hume's major concerns in the *Treatise*.[13] This is consistent, of course, with the fact that it is also widely accepted that other works by Butler are taken up in the *Treatise*—most notably, the *Two Brief Dissertations* and the *Fifteen Sermons*.[14] These other works are understood to account for the fact that Hume specifically mentions Butler in his introduction as among the "late philosophers in England, who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing"—a project Hume's *Treatise* is also engaged in.[15] It cannot be denied, however, that Hume had at least some knowledge of the *Analogy* by the time that he completed the first two books of the *Treatise*, since in book 2 he alludes to Butler as "a late eminent philosopher" and refers to a distinction

drawn in the *Analogy* between active and passive habits.[16] Nevertheless, with regard to Hume's core concerns in the *Treatise*, including his views on the subject of probability and induction, the accepted view is that Butler's *Analogy* is not of any obvious importance in this context.[17]

A number of claims have been made about the significance of the Butler–Hume relationship, especially as it concerns the *Analogy*, that are seriously misleading. According to Mossner, for example, Butler's *Analogy* was "the one theological work of the century that Hume was to deem worthy of serious consideration and whose author was to be highly respected by him."[18] The basis of this claim is that "the *Analogy*, though unnamed, is discernible in Cleanthes' empirical arguments in Hume's *Dialogues*."[19] This effort to identify closely Butler and Cleanthes has, I think, been convincingly criticized by several scholars.[20] The fundamental objection to identifying Butler with Cleanthes is that Cleanthes "devotes the main part of his discussion to the question of God's existence, while Butler in the *Analogy* regards this question as decided and bases his argument on the teleological proof of God, without explicitly stating it."[21] Beyond this, Mossner's claim also overlooks a number of other important "theological works of the century" that clearly received serious consideration from Hume. This includes (among others) Clarke's *Discourse*, a major target of Hume's skeptical arguments not only in the *Dialogues* (*pace* "Demea") but also in the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*. Related to these mistakes, Mossner also argues that in the *Treatise* Hume "was counting on ... serious consideration of his philosophy as philosophy, rather than as religious controversy."[22] Clearly, this claim has a direct bearing on the relevance of Butler's *Analogy* for Hume's concerns in the *Treatise*. On Mossner's account, when Hume published the *Treatise*, he carefully and self-consciously avoided any direct confrontation with religious arguments of the kind Butler had already advanced in the *Analogy*.

The evidence Mossner relies on to support his claim (i.e. that the *Treatise* contains little or nothing that relates to contemporary religious controversy) is based largely on the letter Hume wrote to his close friend and mentor Lord Kames (Henry Home) in early December 1737, in which Hume expresses an interest in meeting with "Dr. Butler" and showing him his work. Hume also tells Kames in this letter that he is enclosing "some Reasonings concerning Miracles, which [he] once thought of publishing with the rest [of the *Treatise*], but which [he is] afraid will give too much offence, even as the world is disposed at present." Hume continues further:

> Your thoughts and mine agree with respect to Dr. Butler, and I would be glad to be introduced to him. I am at present castrating my work, that is, cutting off its nobler parts; that is, endeavouring it shall give as little offence as possible, before which, I could not pretend to put it into the Doctor's hands. This is a piece of cowardice, for which I blame myself, though I believe that none of my friends will blame me. But I was resolved not to be an enthusiast in philosophy, while I was blaming other enthusiasms. (LET, 1:25, no. 6)[23]

Kames provided Hume with a letter of introduction, but Butler was not in London when Hume visited. A few months before all this, sometime during April or May 1737, Kames had met with Butler and discussed the *Analogy* with him.[24] This is indicative of the high opinion Kames had of Butler's philosophy.[25] As Mossner

points out, Hume shared Kames's high opinion of Butler, so it is no surprise that he was "a little anxious to have the Doctor's opinion" of the work he was preparing for publication (i.e. his draft of the *Treatise*; LET, 1:25, no. 7).[26]

The conclusion Mossner draws from this episode is that Hume "castrated" his work and removed most of its religious/irreligious content.[27] Contrary to what Mossner suggests, however, the evidence Hume's letter provides falls well short of showing that the *Treatise*, as published, lacks any significant religious interest or content. Indeed, as already argued, we have some weighty evidence that tells against this claim. All we can conclude from Hume's 1737 letter to Kames is that is that he had, at this time, some early draft of his discussion of miracles and that this work was left out of the *Treatise* (although it likely evolved into sec. 10 of the first *Enquiry*).[28] Everything else, however, is a matter of conjecture. For example, we do not know how many of the irreligious passages that later appeared in the *Enquiry*, but were not included in the *Treatise*, were specifically written for the earlier work or originally intended for it. Some of these passages may have been original "nobler parts" and others may not (we do not know). Nor do we know how the "castrated" draft of the *Treatise* Hume planned to show to Butler compares with the final published version. Hume certainly had plenty of time, in the interval before publication, to get over his "piece of cowardice" and restore some, many, or most of the passages he planned to cut off in December 1737. In the *Treatise*, as published in 1739, two entire sections of book 1 are devoted to the subjects of the immateriality of the soul and personal identity (1.4.5 and 6). In these sections, Hume refutes various arguments purporting to establish that the soul is a simple, indivisible, identical (immaterial) substance. Butler's arguments on this subject, as presented in his dissertation "Of Personal Identity," would certainly have been prominent among Hume's targets in this context.[29] It is not true, therefore, that the *Treatise* (as published) lacks any irreligious content that could cause "offence," since it includes substantial discussions that bear directly on arguments Butler had advanced in the *Analogy* and the accompanying dissertation on personal identity.[30]

What conclusions should we draw, then, about the significance of Hume's letter of December 1737? First, as already explained, it is a mistake to suppose that this letter proves that the *Treatise* lacks any significant religious/irreligious content. We know that this claim is false, since even a casual glance over the contents of the text reveals that there is a (substantial) attack on the "metaphysical arguments" for the immortality of the soul (i.e. of the very kind Butler had already advanced). Beyond this, Hume's critique of demonstrative reason—as presented in *Treatise*, 1.3—directly discredits the argument a priori, which Samuel Clarke and his followers prominently defended during the first half of the eighteenth century (a feature of the *Treatise* that was obvious to Hume's contemporaries). Many other similar sections and passages could be cited that indicate Hume's *systematic irreligious intentions* throughout the *Treatise*. (Some of these I have already discussed, and I will consider more.) It follows from all this that we have no reason to assume that Hume's discussion of probability and induction is irrelevant to the subject of religion in general, or to Butler's *Analogy* in particular. On the contrary, we have good reason to suppose, given Hume's wider irreligious intentions throughout the *Treatise*, that his discussion of probability and induction may well touch on topics

of this character. Any adequate interpretation of Hume's discussion of these issues must bear this in mind.

It may be argued, in reply to this, that all that has been shown is that Hume certainly knew about Butler's *Analogy*, read it, and was able to absorb enough of it to make a few brief and passing references to it in the *Treatise*. Nevertheless, given the relatively short interval of time between the publications of these two works, it is not obvious that Hume had *sufficient* opportunity to formulate any *substantial* reply to the *Analogy*. Contrary to this view, however, Hume had plenty of opportunity to work out a response to Butler's *Analogy* before the *Treatise* was published. As Mossner points out, Hume would have heard about the *Analogy*, at the latest, as soon as he returned to England in September 1737.[31] Assuming that Hume got hold of the *Analogy* no earlier than this, he still had well over a year to develop his thoughts on this subject before putting them into print.[32] The question we need to ask, therefore, is whether there is any evidence that Hume took this opportunity, when he was working on the *Treatise*, to respond directly to the core argument of the *Analogy* (i.e. using his reflections and observations on the subject of probability and induction). To answer this question, we need to examine carefully the specific arguments of both texts, beginning with Butler's *Analogy*.

2

One of the central aims of the *Analogy*, as noted, is to show that there is nothing in the teachings of revealed religion, particularly as concerns the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, that is impossible or inconsistent with natural religion.[33] On the contrary, our experience of God's moral government in this world serves to show that there is "a strong probability" that we shall be held accountable in a future state in the manner that we are taught through revelation. That is to say, insofar as God's moral government is visibly established in this world, it serves as a *guide* to tell us what we may reasonably expect in the next world (of which we have no experience).

Butler begins the *Analogy* by saying that he will rely on probable rather than demonstrative reasoning to establish "a really conclusive practical proof" of the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments.[34] The introduction to the *Analogy* is largely devoted to providing a general characterization of the method of probable reasoning Butler relies on. He observes that for human beings, "*probability is the very guide of life*"—a phrase Hume echoes in several different passages concerned with the issue of induction.[35] In order to determine what we ought to expect in the future, we must rely on our past experience and reason by way of analogy. "For when we determine a thing to be probably true, suppose an event has or will come to pass, it is from the mind's remarking in it a likeness to some other event, which we have observed has come to pass."[36] Butler also makes clear, however, that it is not his "design to inquire further into the nature, the foundation, and measure of probability."[37] It is enough for his purposes "to observe that this general way of arguing is evidently natural, just and conclusive."[38] According to Butler, therefore, it is an inescapable fact of human life that we rely on probable reasoning for our

everyday practical purposes, and the general reliability and importance of this form of reasoning is not in doubt.

When it comes to employing this method of reasoning to support the claims of the Christian religion, Butler makes it clear that there is one fundamental assumption that *all* probable reasoning rests on: we must assume "that all things will continue as we experience they are, in all respects, except those in which we have some reason to think they will be altered."[39] In other words, we assume that "the course of things, which comes within our view, is connected with somewhat, past, present, and future, beyond it."[40] It would be "infinitely unreasonable" to suppose that the course of nature is interrupted or discontinuous with respect to the order and regularities we observe. If this were the case, then clearly there would be no reliable, rational basis for *any* expectations we form on the basis of experience and analogy.

Butler's discussion emphasizes that his method of reasoning in the *Analogy* is based on the same principles we employ in everyday life when we ask if the food we eat will preserve our lives or if the sun will rise tomorrow.[41] There is, nevertheless, an important distinction to be drawn that Butler's discussion obscures. When we reason, by way of analogy, from what we have experience of to what we expect to happen in the future, there are two quite different "futures" that may be concerned. Ordinary inductive reasoning concerns the future (F) that is taken to be continuous with the course of things in this world (e.g. the sun rising tomorrow, food nourishing the body, etc.). Religious inductive reasoning, by contrast, must assume that a *future state* (F*) is also continuous with our experience in this world (P). That is to say, the ordinary course of nature, as we observe it, is assumed to be a reliable guide on which to base our expectations about a future life in a future state. It is the second principle that is crucial to Butler's method in the *Analogy*.[42] This contrast can be illustrated in figure 11.1.

According to Butler's model, in ordinary induction (*I*), we make inferences from P to F based on the assumption U that F is uniform or continuous with P. In religious induction (*I**), we make inferences from P to F* based on the assumption (U*) that F* is uniform or continuous with P. Central to Butler's whole line of argument in the *Analogy* is the general supposition that *I* and *I** are equally credible and reliable modes of reasoning and that if U is an acceptable principle of reasoning, then so, too, is U*. Granted that *I* is an effective and reliable mode of reasoning—"the guide of life"—we have no reason to question or doubt *I** when it comes to forming expectations about our happiness or misery in *F**.

In the case of both ordinary and religious induction, we observe certain regularities or patterns that enable us to form *beliefs* about the (unobserved) future (F/F*). When we discover, for example, that *x*s and *y*s are regularly experienced together (e.g. day follows night, food nourishes, etc.) then we form an expectation about what will happen in the future on this basis. When we have experience of an *x*-type event, it is reasonable to expect a *y*-type event to follow. In the *Analogy*, Butler undertakes to use this method of reasoning to show that there is nothing incredible or improbable in the teachings of revealed religion with respect to the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. Since the deist accepts that there is a God who is the creator and moral governor of this world, it follows that if it can be shown that the "whole Christian scheme" is consistent with (i.e. similar to) patterns and

Past . . .. /. . . . . . Future

Ordinary Induction *(I)*

* Inference via U to / ⟶ [F] *Future in this world*

(e.g. sun rise tomorrow)

[P] *Past*:

(i.e. our experience and

observation of this world)

Inference via U to / ⟶ [F*] *Future State*

(e.g. reward in Heaven;

punishment in Hell)

Religious Induction *(I*)*

FIGURE 11.1. The contrast between ordinary inductive reasoning and religious inductive reasoning

arrangements of things that we *already observe in this world* (i.e. in P), then there is no basis for objecting to or doubting the larger scheme of things that is proposed to us by revealed religion—indeed, we ought to expect it to be true.[43] If "this little scheme of human life" contains no difficulties that tell against the moral government of God, and "the much larger plan of things" that scripture informs us of is consistent with this, then there is no conflict between them or difficulties for the latter that we do not find in the former.[44]

The specific analogies Butler relies on are fairly straightforward.[45] In the first place, he argues that there is no basis in experience to suppose that bodily death implies the destruction of the living agent and all his powers.[46] On the contrary, death may remove a person or animal from our view, but this does not show that the individual has been deprived of all his living powers.[47] In the course of nature, we observe

> very great and astonishing changes . . . so great, that our existence in another state of life, of perception and of action, will be but according to a method of providential conduct, the like to which has been already exercised even with regard to ourselves; according to a course of nature, the like to which, we have already gone through.[48]

The change of condition we are told to expect between this world and the next is analogous to the sort of changes we already observe in this world when we see a fetus become an adult or a caterpillar become a butterfly—there is, therefore, nothing impossible or incredible about these claims.[49]

On the assumption that there is life after death (i.e. life in a future state) we may ask if it is reasonable to expect that we will be rewarded or punished in the future for our conduct in this life. Butler maintains that the evidence of God's moral government in this world suggests, by analogy, that this is highly probable. We observe in the constitution of this world that happiness and misery are generally the consequences of good or bad conduct.

> A moral scheme of government then is visibly established, and, in some degree, carried into execution: and this, together with the essential tendencies of virtue and vice duly considered, naturally raise in us an apprehension, that it will be carried on farther towards perfection in a future state, and that every one shall there receive according to his deserts.[50]

Our relation to a future state in this life is also analogous to a state of trial and discipline in our childhood and adolescence as it relates to adulthood. We may expect, therefore, to view this life as one that is a preparation for the next, and treat it as "a school of discipline" designed for our improvement and moral development.[51] Our happiness or misery in a future state depends on how we choose to use the opportunities given to us in this life in much the same way that the choices and decisions of a child will, at a much later stage, affect the happiness and misery of the adult.[52] Clearly, then, a future state of rewards and punishments is something we have every reason to *expect* if we consider it on analogy with the present constitution of this world as we observe and experience it.

3

In the *Abstract* of the *Treatise*, Hume begins by observing that it is

> a defect in the common systems of logic, that they are very copious when they explain the operations of the understanding in the forming of demonstrations, but are too concise when they treat of probability, and those other measures of evidence on which life and action entirely depend, and which are our guides even in most of our philosophical speculations.[53]

He goes on to say that the author of the *Treatise* "seems to have been sensible of this defect in these philosophers [i.e. Locke, Malebranche etc.], and has endeavoured, as much as he can, to supply it" (TA, 4/646–7). Although Hume does not mention Butler in this context, there is some evidence that Butler is among the thinkers he particularly has in mind, since he uses the phrase that probability "is the guide of life" both in this passage and in a later passage of the *Abstract* (TA, 16/652). This (striking) phrase comes straight from the pages of Butler's introduction to the *Analogy*.[54]

Hume's remarks in the *Abstract* suggest that the "defect" he aims to "supply" is to provide an account of the *foundations* of probable reasoning.[55] In taking up the

search for the foundations of probability, Hume sets out to provide something Butler explicitly acknowledges in his introduction to the *Analogy* he does *not* provide. "It is not my design to inquire further into the nature, the foundations, and measure of probability.... This belongs to the subject of Logic; and is a part of that subject which has not yet been thoroughly considered."[56] Butler makes clear, as noted, that despite this gap in the philosophical literature concerning probable reasoning, it is nevertheless still the case that "this general way of arguing is evidently natural, just and conclusive. For there is no man can make a question, but that the sun will rise to-morrow, and be seen, where it is seen at all, in the figure of a circle, and not in that of a square."[57] In the *Treatise*, *A Letter from a Gentleman*, and the *Enquiry*, Hume makes the point, consistent with Butler's observation, that no one *in practice* doubts that the sun will rise tomorrow (T, 1.3.11.2/124; LG, 22; EU, 4.2, 6.1n/25–6, 56n). However, this is not the issue that concerns Hume. The issue he raises—and Butler explicitly sets aside—is the question concerning the "foundation" of probable reasoning. Hume would have known, when he raised this issue, that Butler had highlighted the principle of the uniformity of nature as the basis of all his own reasoning concerning the (probable) existence of a future state of rewards and punishments.

What, then, is Hume's position on this subject? His discussion of probable reasoning involves two important stages of argument. The first (negative) stage presents his "sceptical doubts" about *reason* considered as the foundation of inductive inference, and the second presents his (positive) "naturalist" account of these foundations. The problem of induction, as Hume presents it in *Treatise*, 1.3.6, is the cornerstone of the first of these two stages of argument. According to Butler, all inductive reasoning rests on the assumption that the course of nature is uniform (i.e. on U or U*). The inferences we make commit us, on his account, to a process of reasoning whereby we rely on the principle of uniformity as a "medium" or "step" to reach *beliefs* about what to expect in the future (i.e. from P to F or F*). Expressed more formally:

(1) Past *x*-events have always been followed by *y*-events.
(2) The future (F/F*) will resemble the past (P).
(3) If there is an *x*-event, then it will be followed by a *y*-event. (From 1 and 2).
(4) There is an *x*-event. /
(5) Therefore, there will be a y-event in the future.

Premise 2 gives the principle of uniformity (U/U*). In the case of ordinary inductive inference, we are concerned with events that will occur in the future in *this world* (e.g. *y* = the sun rising tomorrow). In the case of religious inductive inference, we are concerned with events that will occur in the future in a *future state* (e.g. *y* = punishment in hell for our sins). As noted, Butler takes premise 2 (the uniformity principle) to refer to U and U*, without differentiating between them. According to this account, all our beliefs and expectations concerning the future, as based on past experience, depend on premise 2 (otherwise our reasoning is unjustified). That is to say, on Butler's account, the principle of uniformity serves as a *bridge* in our reasoning, allowing us to draw conclusions about what we have not experienced on the basis of what we have experienced. This principle is presented as a link required in all chains of probable reasoning—whether we are concerned with ordinary or

religious induction. Without it, no relevant *beliefs* would be generated, since we would be unable to *reason* our way to them. Hume's skeptical argument shows that this bridge cannot bear the weight Butler places on it.

Hume maintains that the proposition "The course of nature continues always uniformly the same" is not founded on *any* arguments. Any argument supporting this proposition, he says, must be either demonstrative or probable in nature. It is evident that there are no demonstrative arguments to support this proposition, since we can "at least conceive a change in the course of nature; which sufficiently proves, that such a change is not absolutely impossible" (T, 1.3.6.5/89; compare EU, 4.18/35). If we are relying on a probable argument to show that there is "a resemblance between those objects of which we have had experience and those of which we have had none," then this argument must itself be founded on experience. The difficulty here, however, is that all reasoning of this kind is itself "founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have had experience, and those, of which we have had none; and therefore 'tis impossible this presumption can arise from probability" (T, 1.3.6.7/90). Hume returns to this point in the *Abstract*:

> Nay, I will go further, and assert, that [Adam] could not so much as prove by any *probable* arguments, that the future must be conformable to the past. All probable arguments are built on the supposition, that there is this conformity betwixt the future and the past, and therefore can never prove it. This conformity is a *matter of fact*, and if it must be proved, will admit of no proof but from experience. But our experience in the past can be a proof of nothing for the future, but upon a supposition, that there is a resemblance betwixt them. This therefore is a point, which can admit of no proof at all, and which we take for granted without any proof. (TA, 4/651–2; compare EU, 4.19–21/35–8)

While it is an "easy step" for us to suppose the future will resemble the past, "reason would never, to all eternity, be able to make it" (TA, 16/652). If *reason* were the foundation of our expectations, we would be unable to form *any* beliefs or expectations about the future course of events.

What relevance, if any, does Hume's skeptical argument concerning the supposition that "*the course of nature continues always uniformly the same*" (T, 1.3.6.4/89) have for Butler's argument in the *Analogy*? With respect to our interest and expectations concerning life in a future state, we find ourselves, according to Butler, placed "in the middle of a scheme," whereby we must judge what lies beyond our view by what falls within it.[58]

> But it must be allowed just, to... *argue* from such facts as are known, to others that are like them; from that part of the Divine government over intelligent creatures which comes under our view, to that larger and more general government over them which is beyond it; and from what is present, to collect, what is likely, credible, or not incredible, will be hereafter.[59]

Hume's critique concerning the principle of the uniformity of nature highlights a *particular vulnerability* for this way of arguing. That is, Hume's analysis suggests a *double weakness* in religious inductive arguments concerning a future state. As noted, Butler needs to provide an argument not only for U but also for U*. When

Butler says "that the future must be comformable to the past," what he has in mind is that life in a future state must be relevantly similar to our life in this world (as we experience it)—otherwise our experience in this life cannot serve as a guide to frame our expectations about a life in a future state. The difficulty here is to provide some *argument* in support of this claim. Hume's skeptical challenge shows that not only are we unable to supply any rational foundations in support of *this* claim, we cannot even provide an argument to support the more mundane claim that the future *in this life* will resemble the past (e.g. as involved in ordinary inductive inferences concerning the sun rising, food nourishing us, etc.). In itself, therefore, Hume's skeptical critique concerning our assumption that "the future will resemble the past" draws sharp attention to a particular and distinct vulnerability in religious inductive arguments of the kind Butler advances.

In reply to this, it may be asked why Hume did not target his skepticism directly against U*, without challenging U. Surely it would better serve his purposes, if his specific aim were to discredit religious induction, not to raise skeptical doubts about *all* induction. The general difficulty here is that Hume's skeptical attack on the principle of the uniformity of nature appears to lead to skeptical conclusions that are too sweeping for any narrow irreligious purposes. More specifically, his skeptical argument leads to the conclusion that *none* of our probable reasoning can be justified.[60] Insofar as *religious* inductive reasoning is considered at all, it is just one instance of this general skeptical problem. That is to say, granted that U lacks any rational justification, there is no basis for *any* reasoning from P to F (or F*). All inferences of this kind, Hume's skepticism implies, are equally groundless and without any foundation in reason. So interpreted, Hume's final position on the subject of induction is that of extravagant skepticism, one that leaves us despairing of all efforts to reason on the basis of experience and observation (compare T, 1.4.7.8/268–9). This profoundly skeptical conclusion—which is deeply at odds with common sense—is presented as both entirely general in nature and wholly negative in character.[61]

4

What we ought to expect, if Hume was aiming to discredit (Butler's defense of) the doctrine of a future state, is a *distinction* between ordinary and religious induction—showing that the latter is vulnerable or ineffective in a way the former is not. As noted, Hume's skeptical argument concerning the principle of the uniformity of nature does not serve this purpose. It is his second stage of argument—the naturalist stage—that performs this function.

On the classical skeptical interpretation, Hume is presented as having the general aim of showing that none of our probable reasonings can be justified. His discussion is understood to terminate in this wholly negative conclusion. Throughout the twentieth century, a variety of rejoinders have been advanced against the classical skeptical reading of Hume on this subject.[62] Although these alternative interpretations—which we may broadly label "naturalist"—vary a great deal in their content, a few points are central to the case against the classical skeptical account. The principal objection is that the skeptical interpretation entirely overlooks Hume's alternative

account of the (natural) foundations of probable reasoning in the operations of the imagination. It is true that Hume reaches the "negative" conclusion that *reason* cannot be the foundation of our inferences based on experience, but it is incorrect to suggest that he leaves matters there—much less that his only aim is to make this (negative) point. On the contrary, he also plainly aims to *describe* the detailed mechanisms at work that enable us to draw the sorts of inferences that human life entirely depends on. The mechanisms he is concerned with are those that generate *belief*, and thereby engage our *passions* and guide our *conduct*. The human mind, Hume holds, *naturally and inescapably* forms beliefs about the future on the basis of past experience (e.g. that the sun will rise tomorrow), and to this extent our inductive inferences are immune to skeptical doubts of the very kind that he presents (see, e.g. T, 1.4.1.7/183; 1.4.7.10–5/269–73).

The essential elements of Hume's description of the mechanism involved in causal inference are very familiar.[63] It is, Hume says, *custom*, not reason, "which is the guide of life" (TA, 16/652). Belief in the existence of an object, Hume maintains, is simply a matter of having a vivid or lively perception. This is what we find in the case of sensation, when we feel the *force* with which an impression strikes the mind (T, 1.3.7.7/628–9; TA, 21/653–4; EU, 5.11–2/48–50). The way beliefs concerning future events are produced is through the operation of the association of ideas. When we have experience of an impression of an object *x* that is contiguous and prior to another object *y*, and objects resembling *x*s and *y*s are regularly conjoined in this way, then we also discover that on the appearance of one the mind *naturally* moves to the lively idea of the other (T, 1.3.8.2/98–9). It is this association of ideas that makes our beliefs about future events possible. It is these features of the human imagination—not any process of reasoning—that enable the mind to extend to "the future our experience in the past" (TA, 21/654). Without these natural operations of the human mind (i.e. the effects of custom) no *beliefs* about future events would be produced in us (T, 1.3.6.2/87: "'Tis therefore by *experience only*...").

Hume draws some basic distinctions in the *Treatise* that plainly indicate that he does not believe that all our inductive inferences are equally unjustified.[64] He points out, for example, that philosophers distinguish "unphilosophical probability" from reasoning that is based on the probability of chances and of causes. The latter forms of probability are "allow'd to be reasonable foundations of belief and opinion," whereas the former "have not had the good fortune to obtain the same sanction" (T, 1.3.13.1/143). In the case of unphilosophical probability, the operations of the imagination influence belief in ways we cannot reflectively endorse. Hume describes several instances of this kind, but the most important are cases where we fail to "distinguish the accidental circumstances from the efficacious causes" (T, 1.3.13.11/149). To remedy this problem, he suggests that we must "take notice of some general rules, by which we *ought to regulate our judgment* concerning causes and effects" (T, 1.3.13.11/149; my emphasis). Hume devotes an entire section of the *Treatise* (1.3.15) to a description and discussion of these rules that enable us to identify the *real* cause of an effect (T, 1.3.15.2/173). According to Hume, therefore, there is a "logic" to the inductive inferences we (naturally) make (T, 1.3.15.11/175).

In his discussion of the philosophical forms of probability (i.e. probability of chances and of causes: 1.3.11 and 12), Hume points out that, although the beliefs

produced in these circumstances are "allow'd to be reasonable," there is nevertheless an important distinction we make with regard to "the degrees of evidence" involved and the corresponding influence this has on the degree of "doubt and uncertainty" we experience (T, 1.3.11.2/124; compare LG, 22; EU, 6.1/56n).[65] Hume maintains that a person would "appear ridiculous, who wou'd say, that 'tis only probable the sun will rise to-morrow, or that all men must dye; tho' 'tis plain we have no further assurance of these facts, than what experience affords us" (T, 1.3.11.2/124). With respect to our beliefs based on experience, we must, he argues, distinguish "proofs from probabilities." "By proofs, [I mean,] those arguments, which are deriv'd from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty. By probability, that evidence, which is still attended with uncertainty" (T, 1.3.11.2/124). Consistent with this distinction, as explained in the *Treatise*, Hume points out in his *Letter from a Gentleman* that "a man must have lost all common sense" if he doubts that the sun will rise tomorrow (LG, 22). With respect to ordinary induction of this kind, we have no uncertainty due to "contrary experiments" (T, 1.3.12.1–22/130–40; LG, 22, EU, 6.4/57–9). It follows from this analysis that there are variable degrees of "moral evidence," and a given inductive inference may be considered "strong" or "weak," depending on the extent to which the experience it is based on is "entirely consistent and uniform" or involves "contrary experiments that produce an imperfect belief" (T, 1.3.12.5–13/132–5; EU, 6.4/57).

According to the naturalist account, if we read Hume as a radical skeptic on this subject we are mistaking his starting point for his final destination. Hume begins by noting that reason cannot serve as the foundation for our inferences based on experience, but he moves on to show that the actual foundation of these inferences rests with the principles of association that facilitate the transition among our ideas and generate the conditions of belief on which human life entirely depends. Hume's concern, therefore, is not so much to show that all probable reasoning lacks any "rational justification" as it is to show that this form of reasoning depends on the activity and operations of the imagination. It is custom, not reason, that is the *foundation* of the inferences we make and that serves as our "great guide in life." The distinction we make between reasonable and unreasonable inductive beliefs is one that itself rests on the natural foundations of custom. Clearly, then, Hume's intentions are primarily constructive or positive in character, which is consistent with his general aim to make a contribution to the "science of man."[66]

What is the relevance of Hume's naturalistic account of the foundations of probable reasoning for religious inductive arguments of the kind advanced by Butler in the *Analogy*? Hume argues that there is a significant difference between religious and ordinary induction with respect to the way these natural operations influence the mind and generate belief—and this difference is of *practical* consequence for us. He develops this point in *explicit* detail in *Treatise*, 1.3.9, where he discusses the influence of resemblance and contiguity on belief. He points out that the "pious" and "studious" frequently express regret concerning "the negligence of the bulk of mankind concerning their approaching condition" (i.e. in a future state).[67] A number of "eminent theologians," he says, "have not scrupled to affirm, that tho' the vulgar have no formal principles of infidelity, yet they are really infidels in their hearts, and have nothing like what we can call a belief of the eternal duration of their souls" (T, 1.3.9.13/113–4).

> A future state is so far remov'd from our comprehension, and we have so obscure an idea of the manner, in which we shall exist after the dissolution of the body, that all the reasons we can invent, however strong in themselves, and however assisted by education, are never able with slow imaginations to surmount this difficulty, or bestow a sufficient authority and force on the idea. (T, 1.3.9.13/114)[68]

Hume suggests that our "incredulity" with respect to this doctrine of a "future condition" is due more to "its want of resemblance to the present life, than to that deriv'd from its remoteness" (T, 1.3.9.13/114). This observation is consistent with his more general observations in *Treatise*, 1.3.12 about the variable influence of analogy on belief.

> Without some degree of resemblance, as well as union, 'tis impossible there can be any reasoning: But as this resemblance admits of many different degrees, the reasoning becomes proportionably more or less firm and certain. An experiment loses of its force, when transferr'd to instances, which are not exactly resembling; tho' 'tis evident it may still retain as much as may be the foundation of probability, as long as there is any resemblance remaining. (T, 1.3.13.25/142; and compare 1.3.13.8/147)

The implications of all this are applied by Hume to the specific case of arguments based on analogy as they relate to the doctrine of a future state. Any reasoning concerning a future state will suffer from *a lack of resemblance between this life and the next*, and this "entirely destroys belief" (T, 1.3.914/114).

Just as belief has causes of the general kind that Hume describes, so, too, it has its own effects. An important theme in *Treatise*, 1.3.10 is that belief is required to influence the will and passions, which in turn may influence our conduct. Mere ideas or "idle fictions" have no *practical* influence on us (T, 1.3.10.2/119). In the case of the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, the implication is clear. Since there are few if any "who believe the immortality of the soul with a true establish'd judgment," and we can form only "a faint idea of our future condition," this doctrine is of little or no practical consequence for us (T, 1.3.9.14/114–5). In particular, we continue to be more strongly influenced by considerations of "the pleasures and pains, the rewards and punishments of this life [than] with those of a future [state]" (T, 1.3.9.14/115).[69] Insofar as some individuals claim to believe in the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, and to be governed by it, Hume's account presents this as generally a matter of pretense.[70]

These observations about the relevance of belief in a future state for Hume's views about induction suggest a different way of understanding both the skeptical and naturalist aspects of his thought and the way they are related. Hume's skeptical arguments are designed to show that reason cannot be the basis of our *beliefs* about future events. Any process of reasoning that is supposed to terminate in beliefs about the future must rely on the assumption of the uniformity of nature, but there are *no arguments* to support this assumption. We require, therefore, some alternative *explanation* of the way our beliefs about the future are actually produced. According to Hume, these beliefs are the product of the operations of the human imagination, through the effects of custom. It is this natural process by which our experience of the past generates beliefs about the future. The crucial question, however, is whether both ordinary and religious induction are equally well served by these natural foundations in custom. Hume's answer to this question is unambiguously and explicitly negative.

Hume maintains that with respect to ordinary induction, custom operates in a reliable and effective manner. He readily agrees with Butler that it is "morally certain" that the sun will rise tomorrow and that our experience gives us "proof" of this (T, 1.3.11.2/124; LG, 22; EU, 4.20/36). Moreover, our degree of belief in future events of this ordinary kind reflects the degree of evidence that supports it, and consequently our passions and conduct reflect our beliefs in practice. Hume is also clear that skeptical worries of the kind he has raised concerning the absence of any arguments to support the principle of the uniformity of nature neither disrupt nor discredit these natural processes—since they do not depend on any reasoning through this "medium." The natural relations involved are strong enough to support the transfer of vivacity to our ideas, which produces belief, engages our passions, and guides our conduct. This is not, however, how we find things in the case of religious inductive arguments concerning a future state.

In the case of religious inductive arguments of the kind Butler defends, the analogies are weak and the ideas involved are obscure.[71] The immediate effect of this, according to Hume's analysis, is that our ideas concerning a future state lack any force or vivacity, which constitutes weak belief and consequently has little influence over our conduct. It is this *whole process*—beginning with the causes of belief (i.e. custom), and proceeding on to the effects of belief on the passions and conduct—that concerns Hume. This critical analysis of the credibility and practical significance of religious inductive arguments is of obvious relevance for Butler's principal aims in the *Analogy*. It was Butler's aim to show, on the basis of our experience of this world, that there is a future state of rewards and punishments, and that *prudence* requires that we guide our conduct in this life with a view to our expectations of happiness or misery in the next.[72] Our actual practice shows, Hume says, that few if any people are sincerely convinced by arguments of this kind. More important, Hume provides a detailed account of the psychological mechanisms that generate our beliefs concerning the future, and this account serves to explain why religious arguments concerning the doctrine of a future state inevitably fail to persuade us or influence our conduct. The significance of this is that Butler's inductive argument is without *practical* force and effect. This conclusion entirely defeats Butler's most basic aim and purposes in writing the *Analogy*. Whatever else Hume was aiming to establish through his discussion of probable reason and induction in the *Treatise*, it is clear from the passages I have examined that one important objective was to discredit religious arguments of this general kind.

5

Hume's discussion of induction and probability in the *Treatise*, I maintain, aims to discredit Butler's argument concerning the practical importance of the doctrine of a future state. These observations provide further evidence that the *Treatise* was not the subject of any process of "castration," if this is taken to mean that it is without any significant irreligious content or motivation. Moreover, as already indicated, this interpretation of Hume's intentions, as they concern probability and induction, is entirely consistent with a more general interpretation of the irreligious character of

Hume's fundamental intentions *throughout* the *Treatise* (i.e. as hostile to the metaphysics and morals of Christian theology). The question we must now consider is what significance this irreligious interpretation of Hume's arguments on probability and induction has for his discussion on these issues as presented in the *Enquiry*.

Alongside the standard view that the *Treatise* has little direct or substantial concern with problems of religion is the accompanying claim that the first *Enquiry* engages with these issues in a more serious and systematic way. From this perspective, we ought to expect that Hume's critique of Butler's doctrine of a future state would appear in a bolder and more developed form in the *Enquiry* (i.e. consistent with Hume's general change of attitude toward problems of religion). When we glance over the text of the *Enquiry*, it looks like this is exactly what we will get. A closer examination, however, reveals that this is not the case.

It is significant that the penultimate section of the *Enquiry* is entitled "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State." This section was originally entitled "Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion."[73] A number of commentators have observed that it is evident that in this section Hume has Butler's *Analogy* prominently in mind.[74] The irony about this, however, is that the title(s) Hume employs are rather misleading about the actual *content* of his discussion. As Kemp Smith and others have pointed out, "providence is barely referred to, and the after life is touched on only by implication."[75] Most of Hume's discussion in this section is devoted to the argument from design, which Hume (also) aims to discredit. Butler's argument in the *Analogy*, as we have seen, *begins* from the assumption that the argument from design is entirely sound and convincing, and he proceeds to build on this to argue for the practical importance of the doctrine of a future state.[76] In *Enquiry*, sec. 11, Hume does an effective job of raising doubts about any confidence Butler (and the deists) may have in supposing that we can infer God's moral attributes of perfect justice and benevolence from our experience of this world.[77] Nevertheless, this is a different concern from explaining why any *belief* that we form concerning a *future state* is inevitably *weak* and can have little *practical* influence over our conduct. This argument, with its practical and future-oriented concerns, simply does not surface in the context of *Enquiry*, sec. 11.[78]

It is particularly ironic—given the "castration" myth surrounding the *Treatise*—that it is in the *Treatise* and not the *Enquiry* that Hume presents his specific arguments against the practical importance of the doctrine of a future state. Hume's criticisms of this doctrine in *Treatise*, 1.3 are further supported, as already noted, by the accompanying set of arguments in *Treatise* 1.4.5–6, criticizing the "metaphysical arguments for the immortality of the soul" (T, 1.4.6.35/250). These sections of the *Treatise* are among those that were discarded when Hume "cast the first part of that work anew in the *Enquiry concerning human Understanding*."[79] With respect to all *these* arguments, therefore, it is the *Enquiry*—not the *Treatise*—that has been "castrated."

It would be a mistake to conclude from these observations that Hume's discussion of probability and induction in the *Enquiry* is unrelated to his earlier effort to discredit Butler's argument concerning the practical importance of belief in a future state. On the contrary, as noted, there are a number of evident signs in the text of the *Enquiry* of Hume's specific interest in Butler's argument (e.g. as manifest

in Hume's use of expressions and examples taken from the *Analogy*). More important, the skeptical argument concerning the principle of the uniformity of nature is presented in an even sharper form in the *Enquiry* (sec. 4), and Hume's naturalist observations describing the influence of custom as the foundation of our ability to extend our experience of the past into the future also reappear (sec. 5). Moreover, in the final section of the *Enquiry* (12) Hume draws on his skeptical reflections regarding the "weaknesses" and "narrow reach" of the human understanding to encourage us to limit our investigations to matters of "common life," and to abandon our speculations concerning "the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from and to eternity" (EU, 12.25/162). These epistemological constraints certainly apply to Butler's project in the *Analogy*. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it is only in the *Treatise* that Hume explains in any detail why arguments of the specific kind Butler advances fail to produce any conviction and do not have any significant practical effect.

It is evident, from these observations, that insofar as the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* differ with respect to their irreligious content, it is not because one and not the other contains irreligious themes. What differences exist concern only a *variation* in the particular irreligious arguments that are presented and advanced in these two works. Clearly, the *Treatise* contains some "nobler parts" that are missing from the *Enquiry*. Hume was selective in *both* works; not only about the "manner" in which he presented his irreligious arguments but also about their (irreligious) "matter," as it regards the particular arguments he chose to include or exclude. For present purposes, the important point is that one of Hume's most potent irreligious arguments is presented in the form of his critique of Butler's attempt in the *Analogy* to provide a "practical proof" of the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments. While this "nobler part" remains fully and securely attached to the *Treatise* it was radically reduced, if not entirely "cut-off," from the *Enquiry*.

A couple of final points should be noted about the irreligious interpretation of Hume's intentions concerning probability and induction as argued for in this chapter. First, although I have argued that the evidence strongly supports the view that Butler is a particularly obvious and prominent target of Hume's arguments in this context, this claim is not itself essential to the irreligious interpretation. On the contrary, even if Hume never read a page of the *Analogy* until after the *Treatise* was published, it is still evident that he is attacking arguments of this general kind—hence his arguments still *apply* to Butler's views on this subject.[80] Hume was well aware that Butler was not alone in claiming that the doctrine of a future state is both credible and of enormous practical importance to us, so there is no reason to suppose that Butler was his only target in this context. Apart from Pascal, there were many (near) contemporaries of Hume who would also fall within the range of his critique of the doctrine of a future state, including many of those who had formulated replies to Tindal.[81]

One final point to be noted is that it is no part of the interpretation I have provided to claim that Hume's *only* concern—or even his most prominent concern—in regard to his discussion of probability and induction is the doctrine of a future state. His aims and objectives on the subject of probable reason are not only diverse but also likely evolved and altered during the process of composing the *Treatise*. For example, alongside his critique of the doctrine of a future state, Hume makes a

number of other observations of a generally irreligious character. This includes his account of why people are liable to believe in testimony concerning miracles, when experience tells against such claims (T, 1.3.9.9, 1.3.9.12, 1.3.10.4, 1.3.13.5/110–1, 112–3, 120, 145). (This may have been part of a lengthier discussion of miracles that was eventually "cut-off" before publication.) Hume also discusses belief in historical evidence as it relates to books passed down to us over time, where his remarks clearly allude to unreliable features of the Bible (T, 1.3.8.8, 1.3.13.6/97–8, 146). In general, Hume's whole discussion in *Treatise* 1.3 is *laced* with irreligious ridicule and irony. It is likely that Hume's original interest in probability predates his reading of Butler. Locke's views on this subject, for example, would almost certainly have attracted his attention early on. Locke's discussion in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (see esp. 655–96 [4.15–8]) is significantly concerned with the reliability of testimony and belief in miracles. It is entirely possible, therefore, that Hume's earliest interest in the subject of probability originated not with an irreligious interest in refuting the doctrine of a future state but with an irreligious interest in refuting the doctrine concerning miracles. The point that matters, however, from the perspective of the irreligious interpretation of Hume's intentions on this subject, is that his discussion of induction—concerning our beliefs about the future based on past experience—is deeply and directly concerned with the claim (as defended by Butler) that the doctrine of a future state is both credible in itself and of great practical importance for us. Whatever else Hume aimed to do in this context, *discrediting* this religious doctrine was important to him.

Matter, Omnipotence, and Our Idea of Necessity

'[T]is sufficiently evident from Reason, that the Supreme Cause must of Necessity be Infinitely Powerful. The only Question is, what the true meaning of what we call Infinite Power is.

Clarke, *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*

So that to begin with examining the nature of matter, and shewing its inactivity, makes the shortest work with Atheists of all denominations.

Andrew Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*

Another important and influential component of Hume's discussion of causation in *Treatise*, 1.3 is his account of "the idea of necessary connexion" or "that concerning the power and efficacy of causes" (T, 1.3.14.2/156). The interpretation of Hume's intentions on this subject has been much debated in recent years.[1] Whatever interpretation we take, however, this is one aspect of Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* where the role of God is especially evident, since Hume is explicitly concerned to refute the hypothesis that the operations of matter may be accounted for "by the energy of the supreme Being" (TA, 26/656). Many of Hume's early critics understood his general motivation on this subject to be plainly irreligious or "atheistic" in character. Despite this, contemporary commentators generally pay little attention to this suggestion. In this chapter, I will show that Hume's arguments on this subject do indeed have considerable irreligious significance and that understanding his motivation in this respect is essential for a proper interpretation of the nature and extent of his skeptical commitments as they relate to causation and necessity.

1

The question concerning our idea of necessary connection or causal powers entered the main debate between theists and atheists in two closely related contexts. First, there was the question of whether or not we have any *idea* of God's omnipotence or "infinite power," understood as one of the essential attributes of his divine nature.

Second, there was the question of how we should understand divine omnipotence in relation to the activity and operations we observe in the universe. That is to say, is omnipotence exercised only in the *creation* of the material world, or does it also *immediately and directly govern* the motions and operations of matter? The importance of these two questions for the main debate is evident in Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (which aims to decisively confute the philosophy of atheism).

Early on in this work, Cudworth categorizes various forms of atheism and identifies two basic forms: "the atomical or democratic" and "the Hylozoic or Stratonical."[2] Both these systems of atheism agree that the first principle or original of all things in the universe is body or matter, but they differ about whether "life is essential to matter." Democritical atheism attributes no life at all to matter and holds that all life and understanding in animals and man is merely accidental and corruptible, arising out of some mixture or modification of it.[3] In contrast with this, Stratonical atheism maintains that all matter has "life and perception or understanding, natural or unconscious, essentially belonging to it."[4] Accordingly, in order to confute atheism, Cudworth claims, it will suffice to show that (1) life and understanding can never possibly arise from "dead and stupid matter," and (2) life and understanding are not essential to matter.[5]

Cudworth argues that although Stratonical atheism is "so prodigiously paradoxical, and so outrageously wild," the fact is, nevertheless, "that Strato's ghost [has begun] to walk of late."[6] In this way, Cudworth says, the hypothesis that life and understanding is essential to matter has begun "already to be looked upon as the rising sun of atheism."[7] While Cudworth aims to refute this atheistic hypothesis, he does not want to reject the suggestion that a "plastic life of nature" directs the order and motions of matter.[8] These "plastic natures" are not "occult qualities" of any kind, but a form of "vital energy" or "mental causality in the world" distinct from God's immediate activity. God uses "plastic natures" as an *instrument* to order and regulate the world.[9] On Cudworth's account, therefore, the material universe is neither mechanistic nor directly governed by God. It is, rather, animated by immaterial powers that God has placed in the world that serve as the instrument of his will.

Cudworth argues that there are only two other alternatives to accepting his doctrine of "plastic natures." Effects in nature must be produced either immediately by God, or there must be some material and mechanical necessity that fortuitously produces them. Cudworth rejects the mechanistic hypothesis on the ground that "it is utterly unconceivable and impossible, that such infinite regularity and artificialness, as is every where throughout the whole world, should constantly result out of the fortuitous motion of matter." Moreover, there are, he claims, phenomena in nature, such as the respiration of animals, that "plainly transcend the powers of mechanism."[10] Cudworth also points out that the mechanistic hypothesis reduces God to an "idle spectator of the various results of the fortuitous and necessary actions of bodies."[11] The alternative hypothesis that every thing in nature should be done immediately by God himself, although it avoids the errors of mechanism, is no more plausible. This would make God a "drudge" who is incapable of "making use of any inferior and subordinate instruments."[12]

> Moreover, it seems not so agreeable to reason neither, that nature, as a distinct thing from the Deity, should be quite superseded or made to signify nothing, God himself doing all things immediately and miraculously; from whence it would follow also, that they are all done either forcibly and violently, or else artificially only, and none of them by any inward principle of their own.[13]

Since neither of the alternative hypotheses Cudworth has described is acceptable, he concludes that "there is a plastic nature under [God], which, as an inferior and subordinate instrument, doth drudging execute that part of his providence, which consists in the regular and orderly motion of matter."[14]

Cudworth's discussion never identifies who he takes to be the principal proponents of the view that it is God who "immediately and miraculously" moves matter and bodies in the universe.[15] There is no doubt, however, that in its essentials this is the doctrine of "occasionalism," which was most prominently defended by Malebranche.[16] According to Malebranche, there are "no forces, powers, or true causes in the material sensible world."[17] Moreover, "not only are bodies incapable of being true causes of whatever exists... the will of minds is incapable of moving the smallest body in the world: for it is clear that there is no necessary connexion between our will to move our arm, for example, and the movement of our arms."[18]

> There are many reasons preventing me from attributing to *secondary* or *natural* causes a force, a power, an efficacy to produce anything. But the principal one is that this opinion does not even seem conceivable to me. Whatever effort I make in order to understand it, I cannot find in me any idea representing to me what might be the force or the power they attribute to creatures... whatever effort of mind I make, I can find force, efficacy, or power only in the will of the infinitely perfect Being.[19]

Malebranche maintains that a "true cause... is one such that the mind perceives a necessary connexion between it and its effect."[20] It is only in the case of the will of an infinitely perfect being and its effects that we perceive any necessary connection. It follows from this, Malebranche claims, that "*natural* causes are not true causes; they are only *occasional* causes that act only through the force and efficacy of the will of God."[21] In sum, Malebranche takes himself to have proved "that there is only one true cause because there is only one true God; that the nature and power of each thing is nothing but the will of God; [and] that all natural causes are not true causes but only *occasional* causes."[22]

According to Locke's system, in contrast with Malebranche's, powers constitute a great part of our complex idea of substances. We know substances in terms of their qualities, as when we speak of a body being "a *thing* that is extended, figured, and capable of Motion; and a spirit a *thing* capable of thinking."[23] In the case of bodies, these qualities are powers to produce *ideas* in us of (primary and secondary) qualities.[24] In general, however, our senses are not "acute enough" to discover the "minute particles of bodies, and the real constitution on which their sensible qualities depend."[25] Without any knowledge of "the real constitution of the minute parts" on which the qualities of a substance depend, we cannot discover "what other Ideas are to be found constantly conjoined with that of our complex idea of any substance."[26] In all enquiries of this kind, our knowledge "reaches very little farther than our experience."[27]

Locke's "corpuscularian hypothesis" is, he claims, the most "intelligible explication of the qualities of bodies," but it reveals only the limits and weaknesses of human understanding with respect to our inability to discover "what qualities and powers of bodies have a necessary connexion or repugnancy one with another."[28]

While Locke's "corpuscularian hypothesis" postulates the *existence* of hidden or secret powers in bodies, it leaves us with little or no *knowledge* of the nature of these powers. How, then, can Locke's account for our *idea* of power? Locke suggests two possible sources for our idea of power.

> The Mind, being every day informed by the Senses, of the alteration of those simple *Ideas*, it observes in things without; and taking notice how one comes to an end, and ceases to be, and another begins to exist, which was not before ... and concluding from what it has so constantly observed to have been, that like Changes will for the future be made, in the same things, by like Agents, and by the like ways, considers in one thing the possibility of having any of its simple *Ideas* changed, and in another the possibility of making that change; and so it comes by that *Idea* which we call *Power*.[29]

Locke goes on to argue, however, that our "observation of the operation of bodies by our senses, [gives] but a very imperfect obscure *Idea* of *active power*, since they afford us not any *Idea* in themselves of the *Power* to begin any action, either motion or thought."[30] "The idea of beginning motion," Locke maintains, "we have only from reflection on what passes in our selves, where we find by experience, that barely by willing it ... we can move the parts of our body which were before at rest."[31]

Locke's account of the origin of our idea of power is of obvious relevance for his account of our idea of God's omnipotence or infinite power. In general, our ideas of spirits are derived from the mind reflecting on its own operations.[32] We derive our idea of God's power, therefore, by "enlarging" the simple idea of (active) power we derive from reflection on our own willings.[33] It follows from this that if Malebranche is right, contrary to what Locke claims, and we no more discover an idea of power in our own will than we do in bodies, then Locke's account of how we can frame an idea of this principal attribute of the divine nature is without foundation.

The (theological) significance of this would be obvious to every careful reader of Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*. In dealing with the first atheistic argument that we are unable to frame any idea of God, Cudworth points out that atheists as far back as Lucretius have set about to "confute infinite power."[34] In arguing that the idea of omnipotence is "altogether unintelligible," atheists aim to discredit the very possibility of any philosophical understanding of God and his principal attributes.[35] This route, first taken by Lucretius, is advanced at the beginning of Hobbes's *Leviathan*—the particular target of much of Cudworth's philosophical polemics.[36] Clearly any philosopher, writing in this context, and expressing skepticism concerning our *idea* of infinite power, would likely find himself placed in the company of "atheists" such as Lucretius and Hobbes.

2

In *A Letter from a Gentleman* and the first *Enquiry*, Hume argues that it was "never the meaning of Sir Isaac Newton to rob second causes of all force and energy"

(EU, 7.25n/73n; LG, 28–9). He also points out, however, that some of Newton's "followers" have "taken a different turn of thinking" (LG, 29) In general, Hume argues, the "notion of occasional causes" that supposes the "universal and sole efficacy of the Deity" is a hypothesis that has had "no authority in England" (LG, 28–9; EU, 7.25n/73n). Occasionalism, he claims, is a doctrine that Cudworth, Locke, and Clarke never "take notice of... but suppose all along, that matter has a real, though subordinate and derived power" (EU, 7.25n/73n; LG, 28). In the *Enquiry*, however, he notes that this doctrine, as defended by Malebranche and other Cartesians, has become "prevalent among our modern metaphysicians." The "modern metaphysicians " in question, as Hume describes them, base their "new philosophy" on the notion of the *vis inertiae*, which they *ascribe to matter*. Since matter is inert, they claim, we must conclude that it is God's immediate volition and activity (not secondary causes) that governs and orders it. Hume's remarks plainly suggest that Clarke does not belong among "the followers of Newton" or "modern metaphysicians" who take this (occasionalist) view. The fact is, nevertheless, that with respect to the *vis inertiae* of matter, Clarke and his followers do indeed hold the occasionalist views that Hume attributes to the "modern metaphysicians."[37]

It is a fundamental tenet of Clarke's (Newtonian) system that matter is *inert* and *incapable* of any active powers. By matter Clarke understands "a solid substance, capable only of Division, Figure and Motion."[38] So considered, matter has no "real proper, distinct Positive Powers, but only Negative Qualities, Deficiencies or Imperfections."[39] In the second part of his *Discourse*, in the context of his discussion of miracles, Clarke explains his views concerning the motion and operations of the material world.

> All things that are *Done* in the World, are done either immediately by God himself, or by *created Intelligent Beings*: Matter being evidently not at all capable of any *Laws* or *Powers* whatsoever, anymore than it is capable of Intelligence; excepting only this One *Negative Power*, that every part of it will, of itself, always and necessarily continue in that State, whether of *Rest* or *Motion*, wherein it at present is. So that all those things we commonly say are the Effects of *Natural Powers of Matter*, and *Laws of Motion*; of *Gravitation*, *Attraction*, or the like; are indeed... the Effects of *God's* acting upon Matter continually and every moment, either immediately by himself, or immediately by some created intelligent Beings.[40]

In this way, it is Clarke's view that "the Course of Nature, truly and properly speaking, is nothing else but the Will of God producing certain Effects in a continued, regular, constant and uniform Manner."[41] Clearly, then, despite Hume's remarks to the contrary, Clarke's account of the Newtonian philosophy does indeed ascribe a *vis inertiae* to matter and maintains that its operations must necessarily be explained in terms of the immediate volitions of God (or finite immaterial agents who derive their powers from him). Clarke, therefore, plainly belongs among the "modern metaphysicians," and there is a significant strain of "occasionalism" in his Newtonian system of natural philosophy.

Clarke's views concerning the *vis inertiae* of matter, as well as the theological conclusions he drew from them, constitute the foundation and fabric of Andrew Baxter's whole project in his *Enquiry into the Human Soul*. In its first section, entitled "A *Vis Inertiae* Essential to Matter," Baxter argues that a resistance to any change of

its present state is essential to matter, and inconsistent with any active power in it."[42] In the section that follows, he draws out the consequences of the want of active powers in matter.[43] These consequences, he claims, "are of great weight both in *religion* and *philosophy*." He continues:

> [T]he chief consequence that offers to us from what hath been said hitherto is, *the necessity of an immaterial powerful Being, who first made this dead substance matter, originally impressed, and still continues to impress motion upon it*. The first thing that appears in his nature, as he is thus discovered, is his *immateriality*, being the powerful *Creator* and *Mover* of matter.[44]

Baxter applies this reasoning directly against the atheistic philosophy of Hobbes and Spinoza. Regarding Spinoza's hypothesis *"That everything in the world was God,"* Baxter argues that it is "absolutely impossible that the same being [God] should be both material and immaterial; or void of all power, as matter is, and at once the origin of all power, as an immaterial Being must be."[45] Hobbes's opinion that "*there is nothing but matter in the Universe*" is also refuted.[46]

> For if there were nothing in a Universe but a substance which resists all change of its present state of rest or motion, or to which a *vis inertiae* is essential, it is certain no change or state could ever have been effected, *nor would there have been a substance in nature to which active power could have belonged*.[47]

According to Baxter, "every other kind of atheism asserts matter to be endued with certain original powers, which may supply the absence of a Deity, or of immaterial being in the world."[48] Baxter claims that his reasoning concerning the *vis inertiae* of matter shows "the impossibility of all their atheistic hypotheses at once." His reasoning, then, turns on the following pair of claims:

1. Matter is incapable of activity (i.e. a *vis inertiae* is an essential property of matter).[49]
2. All effects commonly ascribed to certain natural powers residing in matter are immediately produced by the power of an *immaterial* being.

This reasoning from the *vis inertaie* of matter, Baxter maintains, "makes the shortest work with Atheists of all denominations."[50]

Baxter repeatedly emphasizes the point that the line of reasoning he pursues in this work is not original with him, but follows the argument as already laid down by Clarke.[51] Although this account of the Clarkean roots of his confutation of atheism is obviously justified, it is also clear that Baxter's views about God's immediate activity in the material world bears some resemblance to Malebranche's occasionalist doctrine—as several commentators have noted.[52] In general, occasionalist tendencies were very common among Newton's followers, and Clarke and Baxter were by no means unusual in this respect.[53] At the same time, however, other followers of Newton had a very different turn of mind. The most notable and distinguished of these was Colin Maclaurin, a prominent Rankenian and a professor at Edinburgh University.

Maclaurin's *Account*, as already explained (chapter 4), rejects the hypothesis of the operations of nature being governed by God's immediate volitions. "Tho' [God] is the source of all efficacy, yet we find that place is left for second causes to

act in subordination to him; and mechanism has its share in carrying on the great scheme of nature."[54] Maclaurin reminds his readers that Newton conjectured that "the most noble phenomena in nature [are] produced by a rare aetherial medium."[55] He continues:

> It is easy to see that this conjecture no way derogates from the government and influence of the Deity; while it leaves us at liberty to pursue our enquiries concerning the nature and operations of such a medium. Whereas they who hastily reduce those powers into immediate volitions of the supreme cause, without admitting any intermediate instruments, put an end to our enquiries at once; and deprive us of what is probably the most sublime part of philosophy, by representing it as imaginary and fictitious: by which means, as we observed above, they hurt those very interests which they appear to sanguine to promote.[56]

Maclaurin's criticisms of the doctrine that Baxter defended in his *Enquiry into the Human Soul* produced a reply from Baxter, his *Appendix to the Enquiry*, which was published in 1750.[57] Baxter answers Maclaurin by observing that he cannot see "how denying the powers of a dead substance, is impairing the beauty of nature."[58] He also suggests that Newton was "too cautious, in not ascribing the most noble phenomena in nature, to the immediate operation of the Deity, when he could find nothing else to ascribe them to, but a subtle elastic medium of the reality of which he owns he has no proof."[59] In general, Baxter argues, Maclaurin's account of the role of "second causes" has the consequence of excluding God from the operations of nature, which "would conceal the Deity from the knowledge of mortals for ever."[60]

These observations all make very clear that Newtonian natural philosophy was deeply divided on the related questions of active powers in matter and the immediate activity of God in nature. Moreover, this debate was flourishing in Scotland around the time the *Treatise* was first projected and beginning to take shape. The views of Baxter are entirely consistent with and representative of the views of some "followers of Newton" and "the modern metaphysicians" Hume refers to in the *Letter from a Gentleman* and the first *Enquiry*. Present-day scholars, such as Yolton and Winkler, have identified Baxter as being among the more obvious targets of Hume's criticisms in this context.[61] Nor is it surprising that Baxter's philosophical doctrines should be criticized in the context of Hume's remarks about "our modern metaphysicians." As noted, Hume's footnote at *Enquiry*, 7.25n (73n) follows very closely his reply to the fourth charge against him in the *Letter from a Gentleman*, where Hume notes that some followers of Newton have adopted the occasionalist views of Descartes and Malebranche (LG, 28–9). The implication of this is that the "modern metaphysicians" he particularly has in mind in the *Enquiry* are the followers of Newton he had earlier referred to in *Letter from a Gentleman*. Baxter was clearly prominent among this group.[62] Beyond this, I have already shown that Hume's other replies to the charges against him in the *Specimen* should be considered with particular reference to the philosophical principles of Clarke and Baxter. Finally, Hume can hardly have been unaware of Baxter's reputation as a champion of the doctrine of the *vis inertiae* of matter. Apart from anything else, his own intimate friend and mentor had a lengthy (and acrimonious) exchange with Baxter on precisely this subject a number of years before Baxter's *Enquiry* appeared in print.[63]

Two particularly important points emerge from our observations regarding the background debates that framed Hume's discussion of our idea of necessity. The first is that these debates were heavily weighted with theological implications and significance. In particular, the question concerning the activity/inactivity of matter was directly relevant to rival interpretations of the place and role of God in the operations of nature—a central point of controversy in the main debate. Second, Hume's discussion of this issue must be considered with a view not only to Locke and Malebranche, who he specifically mentions in *Treatise*, 1.3.14, but also to the contributions of Cudworth, Clarke, and the "followers of Newton" (or "modern metaphysicians") he refers to in his replies in *Letter from a Gentleman*. Among the most obvious and prominent thinkers in the latter group is Baxter, who championed the doctrine of the *vis inertiae* of matter as the foundation of his (Clarkean) "confutation of atheism."

3

Hume's discussion of the origin of our idea of necessity falls into the same pattern as many of his other discussions in the *Treatise*. His search for the impression from which our idea of necessity is derived begins with a critique of several proposals that have been made by other philosophers, followed by his own alternative (constructive) account of the nature and origin of this idea. The first suggestion he considers, concerning the efficacy of causes, comes from Locke's *Essay*. Locke's suggestion, as Hume presents it, is that "finding from experience, that there are several new productions in *matter*, such as the motions and variations of body, and concluding that there must somewhere be a power capable of producing them, we arrive at last by this reasoning at the idea of power and efficacy" (T, 1.3.14.5/157; my emphasis).[64] This account of the origin of our idea of necessity, Hume claims, is "the most general and most popular explication of this matter" (T, 1.3.14.5/157). In reply to this, he argues that if we examine the case of one billiard ball colliding into another, moving it from its original position of rest, all we discover are the relations of contiguity, priority and (when the experiment is repeated) constant conjunction (TA, 9, 26/649, 656). Beyond this, however, we cannot discover any quality or principle in bodies in which "force and agency" is placed. This lack of success in discovering any force or power in "the known qualities of matter" has led philosophers to conclude that "the ultimate force and efficacy of nature is perfectly unknown to us" (T, 1.3.14.8/159; compare 1.4.7.5/266–7). Clearly, then, however natural and popular the hypothesis that there exists some force or power in matter, this is not the origin or source of our *idea* of necessity.

Given that we are unable to derive our idea of necessity from the known qualities of matter, philosophers have been driven to form an alternative hypothesis. Hume describes the "Cartesian" view (T,1.3.14.8/159; LG,28–9)in the following terms:

> Matter, say they, is in itself entirely unactive, and depriv'd of any power, by which it may produce, or continue, or communicate motion: But since these effects are evident to our senses, and since the power, that produces them, must be plac'd somewhere, it must lie in the DEITY, or that divine being, who contains in his nature all

> excellency and perfection. 'Tis the deity, therefore, who is the prime mover of the universe, and who not only first created matter, and gave it its original impulse, but likewise by a continu'd exertion of omnipotence, supports its existence, and successively bestows on it all those motions, and configurations, and qualities, with which it is endow'd. (T, 1.3.14.9/159)

So described, this hypothesis is not obviously unique to the "Cartesians," since, as noted, the same views were defended by Newtonians such as Clarke and Baxter.[65] According to Hume, "this opinion is certainly very curious, and well worth our attention" (T, 1.3.14.10/160; see also LG, 12, where Hume's critic quotes this remark.) He does not, however, waste many words in refuting it. Cartesians cannot be allowed to rely on the principle of innate ideas, if this is understood as the claim that we have an idea of the deity that is not derived from an antecedent impression (i.e. as already argued in T, 1.1.1/7):

> [I]f every idea be deriv'd from an impression, the idea of a deity proceeds from the same origin; and if no impression, either of sensation or reflection, implies any force of efficacy, 'tis equally impossible to discover or even imagine any such active principle in the deity. Since these philosophers, therefore, have concluded, that matter cannot be endow'd with any efficacious principle, because 'tis impossible to discover in it such a principle; the same course of reasoning shou'd determine them to exclude it from the supreme being. Or if they esteem that opinion absurd and impious, as it really is, I shall tell them how they may avoid it; and that is, by concluding from the very first, that they have no adequate idea of power or efficacy in any object; since neither in body nor spirit, neither in superior nor inferior natures, are they able to discover one single instance of it. (T, 1.3.14.10/160)

In this way, the conclusion that Hume reaches is that the hypothesis that all the operations of matter "are perform'd merely by the energy of the supreme Being" is no better founded than the suggestion that there is a power or force to be discovered in matter. We are unable to discover any force or power in either of these ways. It would seem to follow, therefore, that since we have no *impression* of power or efficacy, we have no *idea* of it either.

After the first two books of the *Treatise* were published in 1739, Hume returned to his work to consider a third possible source of our idea of necessity. This was Locke's suggestion that we derived the idea of (active) power from reflection on our own will. Hume first considered this possibility, briefly, in his *Abstract* (TA, 27/656) and then at more length in the appendix published with book 3 (T, 1.3.14.12/632–3).[66] In the *Abstract*, Hume points out that

> our own minds afford us no more notion of energy than matter does. When we consider our will or volition *a priori*, abstracting from experience, we are never able to infer any effect from it. And when we take the assistance of experience, it only shows us objects contiguous, successive, and constantly conjoined. (TA, 26/656–7)

This argument is somewhat expanded in the appendix to the *Treatise*, where Hume argues again "that the will being here consider'd as a cause, has no more a discoverable connexion with its effects, than any material cause has with its proper effect" (T, 1.3.14.12/632). By the time the first *Enquiry* was published, eight years later (April 1748), Locke's suggestion had come to preoccupy Hume (EU, 7.9–20/64–9). However, even

up to the time of writing the Appendix, Hume retained his original view that the most natural and plausible place to look for the origin of our idea of necessity is in external objects or matter: "No internal impression has an apparent energy, more than external objects have. Since, therefore, matter is confess'd by philosophers to operate by an unknown force, we shou'd in vain hope to attain an idea of force by consulting our own minds" (T, 1.3.14.12/633).[67] In the *Abstract*, Hume points out that he confines most of his remarks "to the relation of cause and effect, as discovered in the motions and operations of matter" (TA, 25/655). This reflects the emphasis we find in book 1. Although he believes that "the same reasoning extends to the operations of mind" and that the causal relation remains the same between both internal and external objects, his attention is, at this time, firmly fixed on the case of matter.[68]

Having considered and rejected each of these suggestions concerning the origin of our idea of necessity, it appears that Hume has arrived at a deeply skeptical conclusion about our idea of causation—namely, that we have no such *idea*.

> Thus upon the whole we may infer, that when we talk of any being, whether of a superior or inferior nature, as endow'd with a power or force, proportion'd to any effect; when we speak of a necessary connexion betwixt objects, and suppose, that this connexion depends upon an efficacy or energy, with which any of these are endow'd; in all these expressions, *so apply'd*, we have really no distinct meaning, and make use only of common words, without any clear and determinate ideas. (T, 1.3.14.14/162)

Hume follows these remarks, however, with the suggestion that it is "more probable, that these expressions [power, force] do *here lose their true meaning by being wrong apply'd*, than that they never have any meaning" (T, 1.3.14.14/162; my emphasis). It is clearly his view, therefore, that these expressions *do* have some "distinct meaning." This meaning can be discovered, on his principles, only by way of identifying some *correct* source of our idea of necessity. Hume has already made clear that our situation is like that of "those, who being in search of any thing that lies conceal'd from them, and not finding it in the place they expected [i.e. in the objects themselves], beat about all the neighbouring fields" (T, 1.3.2.13/78). What we are looking for is a "new original idea, not to be found in any one instance, and which yet arises from the repetition of several instances" (T, 1.3.14.16/163). The "repetition of similar objects in similar situations *produces* nothing new either in these objects, or in any external body" (T, 1.3.14.18/164). What we must do, therefore, is "change the point of view, from the objects to the perceptions" (T, 1.3.14.29/169). That is to say, it is in *the mind of the observer*, not in the objects themselves, that we discover the origin of our idea of necessity or power.

> For after we have observ'd the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that relation. This determination is the only effect of the resemblance; and therefore must be the same with power or efficacy, whose idea is deriv'd from the resemblance.... Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another. (T, 1.3.14.20/165)

According to Hume, this customary transition of the mind is "the same with the power and necessity; which are consequently *qualities of perceptions, not of objects*, and are internally felt by the soul, and not perceiv'd externally in bodies" (T, 1.3.14.24/166; my emphasis).

The conclusion Hume draws from all this is that "upon the whole, necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects; nor is it possible for us ever to form the most distant idea of it, consider'd as a quality in bodies" (T, 1.3.14.22/165–6).

> The efficacy or energy of causes is neither plac'd in the causes themselves, not in the deity, nor in the concurrence of these two principles; but *belongs entirely to the soul*, which considers the union of two or more objects in all past circumstances. *'Tis here that the real power of causes is plac'd, along with their connexion and necessity*. (T, 1.3.14.23/166; my emphasis)

Hume's final position is evidently not the skeptical claim that our idea of necessity is somehow meaningless or unintelligible. On the contrary, we have an idea of necessity, and it "is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienc'd union" (T, 1.3.14.22/166).

Hume is aware that this conclusion—what we may refer to as his "causal subjectivism"—appears to be the "most violent" of all the "paradoxes" he advances in the *Treatise* (T, 1.3.14.24/166). In particular, any form of causal subjectivism of this kind seems to remove all causation and necessity from the objects themselves (i.e. denies us any "objective" account of causation and necessity). Hume puts the objection this way:

> What! The efficacy of causes lie in the determination of the mind! As if causes did not operate entirely independent of the mind, and wou'd not continue their operation, even tho' there was no mind existent to contemplate them, or reason concerning them. Thought may well depend on causes for its operations, but not causes on thought. (T, 1.3.14.26/167)

Hume's answer to this objection is that he does allow that "the operations of nature are independent of our thought and reasoning" (T, 1.3.14.28/168),

> and accordingly have observ'd, that objects bear to each other the relations of contiguity and succession; that like objects may be observ'd in several instances to have like relations; and that all this is independent of, and antecedent to the operations of the understanding. But if we go any farther, and ascribe a power or necessary connexion to these objects; this is what we can never observe in them, but must draw the idea of it from what we feel internally in contemplating them. (T, 1.3.14.28/168–9)

In other words, Hume's reply to the objection posed is that he *does* provide an account of "objective causation" (i.e. as it exists independent of our thought and reasoning), but this does not commit him to ascribing any (unintelligible) powers or necessity to the objects themselves.

Hume is now in a position to use his distinction between objects (i.e. bodies) and perceptions as the basis of "a precise definition of cause and effect" (T, 1.3.14.30/169). He offers "two definitions" of cause, the first of which is given in terms of

objects/bodies and the philosophical relations holding among them; and the second in terms of the ontology of perceptions and the natural relations that hold among them.[69] If we define "cause" from the first perspective, in terms of the operations of nature independent of our thought and reasoning, it is this: "An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac'd in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter" (T, 1.3.14.31/170). On the other hand, if we consider causation from the perspective of our *perceptions*, it is defined in these terms: "A cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the *idea* of the one determines the *mind* to form the *idea* of the other; and the *impression* of the one to form a more lively *idea* of the other" (T, 1.3.14.31/170; my emphasis). Further on, in his discussion of "liberty and necessity" in book 2, Hume provides two definitions of "necessity" that are, as with his two definitions of cause, founded on the ontological distinction between objects (bodies) and perceptions. "I define necessity in two ways, conformable to the two definitions of *cause*, of which it makes an essential part. I place it either in the constant union and conjunction of like objects, or in the inference of the mind from the one to the other" (T, 2.3.2.4/409). Throughout his discussion of liberty and necessity, Hume is especially concerned to show that when our *ideas* of causation and necessity are properly understood (i.e. as defined), then it is evident that the moral realm no less than the realm of physical objects or bodies is governed by causation and necessity. Whether we choose to use the words "causation" and "necessity" is entirely irrelevant, so long as the *meaning* contained in these ideas is properly understood (T, 2.3.1.16, 17/406, 407; and compare EU, 8.1–3/80–1).

Hume is well aware that his account of causation and necessity encounters resistance in the form of a *natural* "prejudice" or "bias" against the analysis he has provided. However, the source of this, he argues, is easily identified. It is, he says, "a common observation, that *the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects*, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion, and which always make their appearance at the same time that these objects discover themselves to the senses" (T, 1.3.14.25/167; my emphasis). Obvious examples of this, he suggests, are secondary qualities, such as sounds and smells, which we naturally (but mistakenly) attribute to objects themselves. The same propensity, Hume argues, "is the reason, why we suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them" (T, 1.3.14.25/167). This natural tendency to project the connection we *feel among perceptions* (in our mind) back onto objects/bodies themselves can be accounted for by our related natural tendency to "confound perceptions and objects" (T, 1.4.2.14/193). Clearly, then, we have a natural tendency to suppose that those connections that we feel in our minds have some objective correlate in the objects themselves (i.e. independent of our thought and reasoning about them). It is this natural "bias" or "prejudice" of the mind that is the greatest obstacle, on Hume's analysis, to identifying the true nature and origin of our idea of necessary connection.[70] In this way, Hume provides a *psychological explanation* for the (mistaken) "prejudice" that leads us to continue to search for connections in *matter*, "where 'tis impossible [they] can ever exist" (T, 1.4.3.9/223).[71]

Does it follow from these claims that Hume (dogmatically) denies there are any "unknown qualities" or powers in matter? He makes clear that this is not what he

is claiming, as he allows "that there may be several qualities both in material and immaterial objects, with which we are utterly unacquainted" (T, 1.3.14.27/168). It is his position, however, that even if we choose to call these "unknown qualities" by the *words* "power" or "efficacy," all this is of "little consequence to the world" (T, 1.3.14.27/168). The important point is that these words, so used, have no real meaning or significance, and are of no relevance or interest either for Hume's philosophy or our everyday practical life. Earlier in the *Treatise*, he considered the objection that his philosophy explains "only the manner in which objects affect the senses, without endeavouring to account for their real nature and operations" (T, 1.2.5.25/63). He answers this objection as follows:

> [B]y pleading guilty, and by confessing that my intention never was to penetrate into the nature of bodies, or explain the secret causes of their operations. For besides that this belongs not to my present purpose, I am afraid, that such an enterprise is beyond the reach of human understanding, and that we can never pretend to know body otherwise than by those external properties, which discover themselves to the senses. (T, 1.2.5.26/64)

According to Hume, the scope of his investigations, limited in this way, "suffices for the conduct of life; and this also suffices for my philosophy, which pretends only to explain the nature and causes of our perceptions" (T, 1.2.5.26/64). Hume repeatedly emphasizes the point that all efforts to reach beyond these limits and hypothesize about "the secret force and energy of causes" as it exists in bodies are both futile and liable to obscure the true nature and origin of our ideas of causation and necessity (T, 1.3.14.11; 1.3.14.27; 1.4.3.9; 1.4.7.5/161, 168, 223, 267).

Several commentators have argued in recent years that, contrary to the traditional view that Hume holds some form of the regularity view of causation, he is in fact a "causal realist" who "did not *question* the *existence* of real forces in nature any more than he questioned the existence of independent external objects themselves."[72] Perhaps the clearest and most succinct account of the "causal realist" interpretation is provided by Galen Strawson in his article "David Hume: Objects and Powers."[73] According to Strawson, the traditional regularity interpretation presents Hume as making a "positive ontological assertion about the ultimate nature of reality," which is "violently at odds with Hume's [epistemological] scepticism."[74] Strawson maintains that although Hume "does not make positive claims about what definitely (or knowably) does *not* exist," he also "never really questions the idea that there is Causation [i.e. causal powers in objects], something in virtue of which reality is regular in the way that it is."[75] On Strawson's account, therefore, Hume holds that real powers in objects exist (i.e. "Causation"), even though we have no positive, contentful conception of it.[76]

The account of Hume's commitments I have defended in this chapter rejects the causal realist interpretation. It goes astray at a number of points; the most important may be summarized as follows. As noted, it is no part of the interpretation I have provided to argue that Hume (dogmatically) *denies* the existence of unknown "secret powers" in bodies or external objects. On the contrary, he explicitly allows that powers of this kind *may* exist (T, 1.3.14.17/168) but also maintains that this is of "little consequence to the world," since we know nothing of them. On the other

hand, contrary to the causal realist account, Hume is no less concerned to argue that we *do* have a proper and full idea of causation and necessity (i.e. not a mere "relative idea"). This idea of causation and necessity is provided in the form of his "two definitions." The significance of his explanation of our natural "bias" or "prejudice" against these definitions is to expose the (psychological) *mistake* we make when we suppose that we have some *further idea* of causation as it exists in the objects/bodies themselves. The root of this mistake is our natural tendency to confuse perceptions and objects and transfer those connections that we feel among our constantly conjoined perceptions back onto the objects themselves.

The upshot of this is that the "causal realist" interpretation both understates and exaggerates Hume's skeptical commitments on this subject. It understates his skeptical commitments by suggesting that he (dogmatically) *affirms* the *existence* of "real causal powers" (i.e. "Causation" in objects)—something that would, indeed, be "violently at odds with Hume's [epistemological] scepticism."[77] At the same time, it exaggerates his skepticism by suggesting that on his account we have no "genuine conception" or "descriptively contentful" *idea* of causation and necessity. It is precisely this skeptical conclusion that Hume *aims to avoid* by way of identifying the *true* nature and origin of our *idea* of necessity. The fundamental obstacle to getting a clear understanding of this idea is our natural "bias" or "prejudice" whereby we tend to suppose that we have some *further* idea of causation and necessity as they exist in bodies. The irony is, therefore, that the causal realist interpretation manifests the very confusions Hume is seeking to overcome. From his perspective, the whole hypothesis of "real causal powers" in bodies or external objects is the root *obstacle* to making effective progress on this subject.[78]

My examination of Hume's commitments on the subject of the nature and origin of our idea of necessity or causal power suggests that there are two distinct sides to the position he takes up. A fundamental negative, skeptical theme is that "when we talk of any being, whether of a superior or inferior nature [i.e. God or matter], as endow'd with a power or force . . . *we have really no distinct meaning, and make use only of common words, without any clear and determinate ideas*" (T, 1.3.14.14/162; my emphasis). On the other side, Hume refuses to accept the skeptical conclusion that these words are "without any distinct meaning." It is his constructive solution to this problem to identify the origin of our idea of necessity by switching our attention to the *felt connections* that unite our *perceptions* in circumstances where we have observed a constant conjunction of objects. Hume concludes, on this basis, that insofar as our talk about "necessity" has *meaning*, what is involved is either "the constant union and conjunction of like objects, or [. . .] the inference of the mind from one to the other" (T, 2.3.2.4/409). Whether we choose to use the *word* "necessity" to refer to this idea is, however, of no consequence so long as his meaning is understood.

4

I have taken note of the considerable extent to which the question concerning the nature and origin of our idea of necessity or causal power entered into the main

debate between theists and atheists in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. I have also reviewed Hume's arguments on this subject, as they concern both his critique of other positions and his own (constructive) alternative account. What now needs to be done is to show the specific *irreligious* significance of these two parts of Hume's discussion.

It is a familiar point that Hume's discussion of the idea of necessity includes (sharp) criticism of the doctrine of occasionalism as advanced by "Malebranche and other Cartesians." For the most part, however, commentators have viewed the theological significance of Hume's discussion at *Treatise*, 1.3.14 as only incidental to his more specific concern with the metaphysical and epistemological issues arising from the problem of causation. That is to say, on this account Hume takes up the views of Malebranche and other Cartesians only because they touch on the problem of causation. Hume's critique of occasionalism, therefore, has no wider or deeper significance with respect to his irreligious aims and objectives in the *Treatise*.

It is clear, in light of my earlier observations, that this perspective on Hume's critique of occasionalism is misleading in a number of respects. In the first place, Hume's critique of occasionalism needs to be considered in relation to other irreligious themes and objectives throughout the *Treatise* (which commentators have generally neglected or ignored). In particular, Hume's series of arguments concerned with the general issue of causation are *systematically* framed to discredit the theological ambitions of various schools of philosophy. His critique of occasionalist doctrine fits into this pattern and is in no way an isolated or incidental example of theological interests on his part. Moreover, it is not the case that his arguments against occasionalism are targeted only against Malebranche and the Cartesians. On the contrary, as I have shown, Hume's arguments also apply to the similar doctrine that was embraced by a number of influential Newtonians. The most prominent of these was Clarke, whose specific arguments using the *vis inertiae* of matter as a way of "confuting atheism" were developed in detail and championed by his Scottish disciple Andrew Baxter. The reaction of Hume's own contemporaries shows that they were well aware that his critique of occasionalist doctrine had irreligious implications that reached well beyond the specific targets he mentions in the *Treatise* (i.e. Malebranche and other Cartesians). This is especially true in the Scottish context, where Baxter's Clarkean philosophy enjoyed considerable prestige and influence among many of Hume's contemporaries.[79]

In his discussion "Of the immateriality of the soul" (T, 1.4.5), Hume claims that we are forced into the following dilemma: either we must maintain "that nothing can be the cause of another, but where the mind can perceive the connexion in its idea of the objects: Or... maintain, that all objects which we find constantly conjoin'd, are upon that account to be regarded as causes and effects" (T, 1.4.5.31/248). It is evident, as explained, that Hume holds that we must accept the second claim. In this context, however, Hume explains "the consequences" of accepting "the first part of the dilemma."

> We in reality affirm, that *there is no such thing in the universe as a cause or productive principle, not even the deity himself*; since our idea of that supreme being is deriv'd from particular impressions, none of which contain any efficacy, nor seem to have *any* connexion with *any* other existence. As to what may be said, that the

> connexion betwixt the idea of an infinitely powerful being, and that of any effect, which he wills, is necessary and unavoidable; I answer, that *we have no idea of a being endow'd with any power, much less of one endow'd with infinite power.* (T, 14.5.31/248; my emphasis)

Hume goes on to make the further argument that if "the deity were the great and efficacious principle, which supplies the deficiency of all causes, this leads us into the grossest impieties and absurdities" (T, 1.4.5.31/249). More specifically, this view leads us to conclude that "the supreme being is the real cause of all our actions, bad as well as good, vicious as well as virtuous."[80]

As Hume presents this dilemma, the implication is clear: we must choose between his account of causation and necessity (i.e. understood in terms of constant conjunction and the inference of the mind) or a causal skepticism that implies that "there is no such thing in the universe as a cause"—which specifically includes God.[81] From the theological point of view, however, we are faced with a choice between two unacceptable alternatives. Either we have no idea of power or omnipotence as possessed and exercised by God, or we must interpret God's power and omnipotence in terms of Hume's (regularity) theory of causation.[82] Insofar as God's omnipotence is assumed to involve something more ("metaphysical") than mere regularity, the plain implication of Hume's analysis is that all talk of God's omnipotence is "unintelligible" and without any "distinct meaning" (T, 1.3.14.14/162). Hume does make a few perfunctory disclaimers of any "impious" intent and suggests, in the Appendix, that his views on this subject have "no effect either on religion or morals" (T, 1.3.14. 12n/633n). "The order of the universe," he says, "proves an omnipotent mind; that is, a mind whose will is *constantly attended* with the obedience of every creature and being" (T, 1.3.14.12n/633n; his emphasis). Is this interpretation of omnipotence as *innocent* as Hume suggests? According to his own principles, we have no reason whatsoever to conclude a priori that God's will—however we conceive of it—is *always* obeyed. (Indeed, we have no more reason to assume this than we have reason to suppose a priori that the will of any other being must always be obeyed.) Any evidence that we have for concluding that God is "omnipotent" (i.e. that his will is "always obeyed") must be based on *experience*. Clearly, however, human experience is too limited to ever provide adequate support for *this* conclusion.[83] It follows, therefore, that if we accept Hume's (radically attenuated) account of "omnipotence," as interpreted on his regularity theory of causation, we can never conclude that "omnipotence" may be properly attributed to God. In sum, Hume's analysis leaves theists in an impossible dilemma. They must choose between denying that we have an idea of causal power belonging to *any* being, including God; *or* accept Hume's alternative analysis of the nature of causation, which would strip God of *all metaphysical powers* and leave us unable to support the more limited (empirical) claim that God's will is "always obeyed."

It may be argued that this dilemma can be avoided if we follow Locke's way of approaching the general problem of accounting for the origin of our idea of omnipotence or infinite power. On Locke's account, our idea of omnipotence is derived from our reflections on our own will. When Hume returned to this problem, in the appendix, the *Abstract*, and the first *Enquiry*, he was careful to close off this avenue of retreat. He argues that our will and volitions are no more able to account for

the origin of our idea of necessity than external objects or bodies. We cannot, therefore, discover any idea of active power in our own will, much less use it as a way of giving *meaning* to words such as "power," "agency," "force," and so on when we apply them to God. Clearly, then, Hume's series of skeptical arguments concerning the origin of our idea of necessity serves the general purpose of discrediting the supposition that we are able to frame any intelligible or plausible *idea* of God's *omnipotence*. Either we have no idea of infinite power in God, or we must conceive of it simply in terms of a constant conjunction of objects. The theist encounters fundamental difficulties either way.

Hume's irreligious objectives are by no means confined to the skeptical or critical side of his discussion. On the contrary, his constructive account of causation, as given in his "two definitions," serves further irreligious ends. He makes two particularly important and related observations on the basis of his account of causation, both of which are fundamental to the "atheistic" philosophy that Clarke and other Christian apologists tried to (demonstrably) refute. Hume argues, in the first place, that "if nothing is active but what has an apparent power, thought is in no case any more active than matter" (T, 1.4.5.31/249). Put the other way, matter is no less active than thought—insofar as we must understand activity and power in terms of the constant conjunction of objects and the inference of the mind produced by our observation of this. If we deny that matter is active on the ground that we reject Hume's definitions, then we must conclude that we have no idea of any active being whatsoever—including God (T, 1.4.5.31/248). At the same time, Hume uses his "two definitions" to show that (human) motives and actions are no less governed by causation and necessity than the operations of matter (T, 2.3.1, 2; TA, 31/660).[84] It follows from these claims that there is no sense in which we may conclude that there is a fundamental distinction to be drawn between *active*, *immaterial* beings and *inactive*, *material* beings. This distinction was, however, fundamental to many of the most prominent defenders of the Christian religion, writing in opposition to the "atheistic" philosophies of Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers.[85]

Hume's way of defining causation also has profoundly irreligious implications for the doctrine of Creation. From the perspective of Christian theology, Creation is a uniquely important and significant causal event.[86] Hume makes explicit reference to the relevance of his views on causation for our understanding of this event (T, 1.3.15.1/173). As already noted, on Hume's account it is not a priori inconceivable or impossible that the world could simply come into existence without any cause—out of nothing. (See chapter 10.) Moreover, insofar as we assume some first cause does exist, we cannot infer a priori anything at all about the *nature* of this cause. In particular, we cannot infer that the cause of the world must be "omnipotent" or "infinitely powerful" (i.e. since "any thing may cause any thing"). The event of Creation must be understood, like all other causal events, on the basis of our experience. We must, in other words, use our experience of causal relations between constantly conjoined objects, as we experience them *within* this world, to form any judgment we make about the cause of the world itself (i.e. God). Hume's specific account of the nature of the causal relation, as defined in *Treatise*, 1.3.14.31/170, suggests fundamental doubts about the very *intelligibility* of any effort to explain Creation in these *causal* terms.

In *Treatise*, 1.3.15, Hume describes several "general rules" by which we may determine when objects are really related as cause and effect. The first three rules are (1) that "the cause and effect must be contiguous in space and time"; (2) "the cause must be prior to the effect"; and (3) there "must be a constant union betwixt the cause and effect." Hume claims that it is constant union that is the quality that "chiefly... constitutes the relation" (T, 1.3.15.5/173). However, the constant union must itself be understood in terms of the *repetition* of the priority and contiguity of the cause (i.e. rule 3 depends on rules 1 and 2). Clearly, therefore, on Hume's account, relations of cause and effect depend on a framework of space/time relations.

According to Hume's system, our idea of space depends on "the disposition of visible and tangible objects," and our idea of time depends on "a succession of changeable objects" (T, 1.2.7–10/35–7). An object that is unextended (i.e. neither visible nor tangible) cannot be *conjoined in space* with any object that is extended (T, 1.2.4.15, 1.4.5.9, 12/36, 235, 237). Similarly, in the complete absence of any succession or change of objects, we are unable to frame any idea of time or conceive of an object in time. These considerations raise the question of how we can frame any *idea* (i.e conceive) of God creating the world, insofar as this presupposes that God, *qua* cause of the world, must stand in some relevant space/time relations with his effect—the world.

On the standard theological account, as prominently defended in Clarke's *Demonstration*, God is not only an immaterial being (i.e. invisible and intangible), he is also unchanging and simple (without parts).[87] Granted this account of God's nature, it is not evident that we can conceive of God as the *cause* of the world. Consider the following points.

1. If God is neither visible nor tangible, then he cannot be contiguous in *space* with any other object (including the world itself).
2. It is only with Creation (i.e. the world of changing and successive objects coming into existence) that we can *begin* to frame an idea of time.
3. It follows from point 2 that we cannot form any idea of a cause of any object existing "prior" (in time) to the world itself, since that would require framing an idea of time independent of any idea of "a succession or change of objects" (which Hume claims is impossible).
4. Clearly, then, either Creation cannot be conceived in causal terms or we must abandon the assumption that God is a simple, unchanging being.[88]

The general problem that Hume's account of causation poses is the following. Once we interpret the causal relation in spatial/temporal terms (i.e. rules 1 and 2), the question arises about how our idea of spatial/temporal relations applies to God. On Hume's account, if God is neither visible nor tangible (*qua* immaterial being), then he cannot stand in *spatial* relations with any other object. If God is conceived as existing as a perfectly simple, unchanging being, then in the absence of any (created) succession of changing objects, he cannot be conceived as standing in any temporal relations with anything. That is to say, we cannot meaningfully speak of God existing "prior" to the world, or of God being "contiguous" with the world when it comes into existence. From the perspective of human understanding, the act of Creation, or the existence of the world of changing and successive objects, is

itself a *condition* of the *intelligibility* of any *experience* of the relation of cause and effect. The world of changing and successive objects cannot, therefore, be conceived as an effect standing in relation to some (prior and contiguous) *cause*, since the existence of the world is a condition of us being able to conceive of any causal relations of this kind.[89]

Hume's "rules" present at least one further major obstacle for the intelligibility of the theological doctrine of Creation. The eighth rule is "that an object, which exists for any time in its full perfection without any effect, is not the sole cause of that effect, but requires to be assisted by some other principle, which may forward its influence and operation" (T, 1.3.15.10/174). The skeptical relevance of this rule for the doctrine of Creation seems clear. On Hume's account, we cannot accept the suggestion that God could exist "for any time in [his] full perfection" without creating the world unless he is assisted by "some other principle." It follows from this that God cannot be the "complete cause" of the universe, since this would suppose, contrary to Hume's eighth rule governing cause and effect, that Creation occurs although its cause (God) exists in his full perfection without any assistance from some other principle to complete the cause. Closely related to this point, Hume denies the existence of any distinction between "power and the exercise of it" (T, 1.3.14.34; 2.1.10.5, 6/172, 312, 313). He rejects, therefore, any conception of God (or any other being) existing with "a power of acting or not acting."[90] The implication of this is that Hume's account of causation challenges not only the view that God is the "sole" or "complete" cause of the universe but also the assumption that God "*freely*" creates the world (i.e. could have exercised his infinite power differently). In this way, insofar as Hume's account of causation applies to God's activities and actions, it strips him of (the metaphysical power of) "liberty of indifference" with respect to these activities and actions—including Creation.[91]

5

Throughout this chapter, my particular concern has been to identify and describe the way Hume's discussion of our idea of necessity (T, 1.3.14) is intimately and intricately related to a number of theological issues and controversies that were of considerable interest and importance for him and his contemporaries. Unlike our own contemporaries, who have generally ignored or neglected these features, Hume's contemporaries were quick to spot the irreligious significance of his views on this subject.[92] I have argued that there are four particularly important dimensions of irreligious significance with respect to Hume's discussion at *Treatise* 1.3.14:

1. Hume's arguments on this subject serve to discredit all those systems of philosophy that aimed to prove the existence of an active, omnipotent, immaterial being on the basis of the doctrine of the inactivity or *vis inertiae* of matter. The targets of his skeptical arguments in this area include not just the occasionalism of "Malebranche and other Cartesians" but also (notably) the similar views of Clarke, Baxter, and several other prominent representatives of the Newtonian philosophy and theology.

2. Hume's arguments present a skeptical challenge to the assumption that we have any *idea* of infinite power or omnipotence, considered as a principal divine *attribute*. This form of skepticism is anticipated by Hume's predecessors in the "atheistic" tradition, such as Lucretius and Hobbes.
3. Hume's "two definitions" of cause serve to collapse the distinction between immaterial beings, viewed as the only *active* agents in the world, and material objects or bodies, viewed as *inert*, and incapable of agency. This way of drawing an ontological distinction between material and immaterial beings was fundamental to Clarke's Newtonian system of theology, which enjoyed considerable favor among many of Hume's own contemporaries. On Hume's alternative account, matter is no less active than thought (e.g. it is capable of causing thought and action), and human thought and action are no less governed by causation and necessity than the operations of bodies. In the context that Hume was writing in, these two (related) claims were widely regarded as capital doctrines of "atheism."
4. Hume's definitions of cause suggest fundamental difficulties concerning our ability to *conceive* of Creation in *causal* terms. His effort to challenge the *intelligibility* of God creating the material world is consistent with the efforts of other (earlier) "atheist" philosophers, such as Lucretius, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Collins.

It is important to note the *strength* of these irreligious themes and arguments. It is not simply that Hume makes little or no effort to deal with the various theological problems his account of necessity or causal power presents. This form of theological neglect would be significant enough in the context he was writing in. His arguments, however, go well beyond this. Not only does he present a skeptical challenge to the fundamental theological doctrines of omnipotence and Creation, he also suggests a comprehensive, integrated naturalism with respect to the causal relations governing matter and thought (doing away with the suggestion that spiritual agents are the only possible source of real activity in the world). In pursuing these various irreligious themes, Hume is following a tradition and pattern of "atheistic" thought that was readily identified by his own contemporaries. Moreover, these specific lines of argument are entirely consistent with the wider irreligious program Hume pursues throughout the *Treatise* as a whole.

Skepticism, Deception, and the Material World

So I do not see how God could be understood to be anything but a deceiver if the ideas were transmitted from a source other than corporeal things. It follows that corporeal things exist.

Descartes, *Meditations*

[I]f the external world be once called into question, we shall be at a loss to find arguments, by which we may prove the existence of the [supreme] Being or any of his attributes.

Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Among the various "sceptical topics" Hume raises in the *Treatise*, his discussion of the external world, as presented in the section entitled "Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses," has proved one of the most puzzling and perplexing for commentators.[1] In this chapter, I show that for Hume and his contemporaries, the problem of the existence of the material world was deeply embedded in wider problems of natural religion. When Hume's arguments are carefully considered from this perspective, I argue, it is evident that his fundamental aims and motivation on this subject are essentially *irreligious* in character, which is consistent with his more general intentions throughout the *Treatise*.

1

There is, of course, an enormous amount of secondary literature devoted to Hume's views on the material world. Almost all of it is framed in the context of the debate about Hume's skeptical and naturalistic intentions and how they are related.[2] While many of these studies contain valuable insights, it is nevertheless a striking fact that generally they say little or nothing about the close connection between the problem of the external world and issues of natural religion for understanding Hume's intentions on this subject.[3] This is not entirely surprising, given that it is a point of near orthodoxy among the leading commentators that in the *Treatise* Hume

has no substantial or specific interest in problems of religion. As I have explained, however, this view is fundamentally mistaken. It is necessary, therefore, to reconsider Hume's discussion of the material world as it relates to his more general irreligious intentions.

Whatever our interpretation of Hume's general intentions in the *Treatise*, there is overwhelming reason to believe that he would be *well* aware that the debate about the existence of the material world was directly relevant to the various theories of natural religion that were on offer in the early eighteenth century. In the first *Enquiry*, for example, where Hume presents a considerably compressed discussion of the problem of the "external world," he explicitly comments on the importance of this relationship.

> To have recourse to the veracity of the Supreme Being, in order to prove the veracity of our senses, is surely making a very unexpected circuit. If his veracity were at all concerned in this matter, our senses would be entirely infallible; because it is not possible that he can ever deceive. Not to mention, that, if the external world be once called in question, *we shall be at a loss to find arguments, by which we may prove the existence of that Being or any of his attributes*. (EU, 12.13/153; my emphasis)

The issue here, in its most fundamental terms, concerns the connection between proofs for the existence of God and proofs for the existence of the material world, and their priority with respect to each other.[4]

Although there is nothing corresponding to this passage in the *Treatise*, Hume is nevertheless flagging a very important set of problems—problems (he knew) his contemporaries were entirely familiar with. The principal figures in the background debate are, for the most part, familiar to us.[5] The list begins with Descartes and Malebranche, but also includes Bayle, Locke, and, most notably, Berkeley. In order to understand Hume's views on this subject, it is necessary to follow the general trajectory of this debate as Hume encountered it.[6]

In the *Meditations* Descartes argued, famously, that we can demonstrate that there exists a material world by proving that God exists and cannot be a deceiver. God, he observes, has given us "a great propensity to believe that [ideas] are produced by corporeal things."[7] From this Descartes concludes that "God could not be understood to be anything but a deceiver if the ideas were transmitted from a source other than corporeal things. It follows that corporeal things exist."[8] For Descartes, then, knowledge of the existence of the material world depends on prior proof of the existence of God. His demonstration of the existence of the material world stands or falls with the particular proofs of God's existence he advances.[9]

While Malebranche follows Descartes on many points, he nevertheless rejects his demonstration for the existence of material bodies. "To be fully convinced that there are bodies," Malebranche says, "we must have demonstrated for us not only that there is a God and He is no deceiver, but also that He has assured us that He has really created such a world, which proof I have not found in the works of Descartes."[10] Malebranche proceeds to argue that while "faith obliges us to believe there are bodies," we are "not invincibly led to believe there is something other than God and our own mind."[11] He agrees with Descartes, however, "that we have a strong propensity to believe that there are bodies surrounding us"—even though this "does not constrain our belief through evidence."[12]

Bayle, in his *Dictionary* article "Zeno of Elea," cites this passage from Malebranche and comments on it at some length. He indicates, in particular, that although Malebranche agreed with Descartes that we have a natural inclination to believe in body, he was also anxious to show "that God would in no way be a deceiver even though no bodies might exist in reality."[13] The point that Bayle draws his readers' attention to is that those who hold that we know (demonstrably) that the material world exists on the ground that God is no deceiver (e.g. Descartes and those who follow him) may have this argument reversed against them. That is, it follows from this position that if it can be demonstrated that the material world does not exist, then we must conclude, on the assumptions given, that God is a deceiver.[14] However, on the assumption that God *cannot* be a deceiver, it follows that God does not exist.

Descartes's argument for the existence of the material world has the following structure:

1. We naturally believe that there exists a material world.
2. If God exists, and the material world does not, then God is a deceiver.
3. God cannot be a deceiver.
4. God exists. /
5. Therefore, the material world exists.

Bayle simply observes that it follows from this argument that if we deny the conclusion (5) but accept (1) and (2), then we must deny (3) and/or (4), since the argument is valid. Malebranche accepted (3) and (4) but held, as I have indicated, that (1) and (2) can be challenged. He also argued that it is not possible to *demonstrate* the nonexistence of bodies.[15] Nevertheless, the obvious "danger," as Bayle's observations make plain, is that if we accept, with Descartes, premises (1) and (2), but have reason to conclude that our belief in the existence of the material world is "false" or "illusory" (i.e. deny (5)), then either we will (in Arnauld's words) be "forced to admit in God things that are completely contrary to the divine nature" (i.e. deny [3]); or we must deny (4) the existence of God.

Where, then, does Locke stand on this subject? Despite his detailed concern with the limits of human understanding with respect to our knowledge of the material world, he differs from Descartes insofar as he treats all skeptical worries about the existence of the material world as hardly worth taking seriously. The existence of material beings, he says, is supported by "the testimony of [our] eyes, which are the proper and sole judge of this thing."[16] He notes briefly, with Descartes, that ideas arise in our minds involuntarily and so must have some "cause without":[17]

> [I]f after all this, any one will be so sceptical, as to distrust his Senses, and to affirm, that all we see and hear, feel and taste, think and do, during our whole Being, is but the series and deluding appearances of a long Dream, whereof there is no reality…I make him this answer, That the certainty of Things existing in *rerum Naturâ*, when we have *the testimony of our Senses* for it, is not only as *great* as our frame can attain to, but *as our Condition needs*.[18]

In this way, for Locke, our knowledge of the existence of the material world is not capable of demonstration, but rather is grounded in the immediate evidence

of sensation.[19] Like Descartes, he is a dualist, but he rests his confidence in the existence of matter on the senses, not reason.

This brings us to Berkeley, the pivotal figure for any understanding of Hume's position and strategy on this subject. Berkeley's immaterialist philosophy, as T. E. Jessop suggests, is best understood "as a piece of religious apologetics."[20] In this regard, his system has both a negative and a positive aspect. At its most basic level, the negative aspect aims to refute demonstrably the atheistic materialism of Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers.[21] The positive aim is to defend "the great articles of religion," specifically the being and attributes of God and the immortality of the soul. The negative aspect of Berkeley's immaterialism turns on the claim that matter, understood as an "inert, senseless substance" that exists "without the mind," is impossible and has no existence.[22] The supposition of sensible things or objects existing unperceived, it is argued, is unintelligible, and the result of a mistaken attempt to abstract existence from perception.[23] Berkeley maintains, therefore, that there is no material substance that is the cause of our ideas, and it is a mistake to suppose that our ideas somehow represent (material) objects of this kind. According to Berkeley, these suppositions, which are the "very root" of skepticism and atheism, lack any foundation in either sense or reason.[24]

Berkeley makes clear that he does not intend his scheme of immaterialism to be a skeptical doctrine. On the contrary, he is careful to insist that the doctrine of matter is the invention of *philosophers*, and that their materialist commitments are no part of "vulgar" belief.[25] The world of (common sense) immaterialism, therefore, consists only of Ideas and Spirits. On this scheme, sensible objects or physical things are not hidden behind a veil of appearances, but rather consist of ideas of sense, and these exist only in minds. With respect to substance, therefore, Berkeley is a monist, since the only kind of substance that exists, on his account, is immaterial substance or spirits.

In sum, Berkeley's view is that although immaterialism is at odds with the dualism of "modern philosophy," it is nevertheless the common sense or vulgar view of the world. There are, moreover, "great advantages" to this scheme.[26] In particular, the doctrine of immaterialism eliminates the numerous "disputes and puzzling questions" generated by the hypothesis of matter.[27] These disputes and puzzles are especially relevant for natural religion, Berkeley maintains, insofar as the important truths that it seeks to vindicate have been discredited because they have been defended by means of the doctrine of materialism.[28] Berkeley's fundamental contention is, then, that the materialist hypothesis leads us "into the deepest and most deplorable scepticism," and it serves the purposes only of "Atheism and Irreligion."[29] This is not the case with immaterialism.[30] The principles of immaterialism, Berkeley maintains, are not only consistent with common sense, they constitute the most secure foundation for natural religion and prove beyond all doubt the being and attributes of God.

Berkeley is, of course, well aware that he is liable to be accused of embracing skeptical principles of a kind that will prove "dangerous" to religion.[31] Indeed, this objection is important enough to him that he addresses it in his final remarks in the *Dialogues*. In this context, Hylas says that, initially, he had taken Philonous to be advancing skeptical principles of the kind that the Academics and Cartesians

had advanced. Hylas has come to realize, however, that this view was mistaken and Philonous's "conclusions are directly opposite to theirs."[32] The general point here is that Berkeley firmly rejects the suggestion that he is a skeptic who denies any difference between "real things" and mere dreams, chimeras, or "illusions of the fancy."[33] This claim is essential for his defense of natural religion and his effort to insulate it from all skeptical doubts.[34] Plainly, Berkeley does not want to be read as suggesting that creation itself, considered as the immediate and most obvious evidence of God's being and attributes, is merely a "dream" or "illusion."[35] Despite his efforts to avoid these charges, however, this was precisely how Berkeley's early critics—including several prominent and influential Scottish Newtonians—responded to his work.[36]

It is crucial to Berkeley's entire position that he establish that immaterialism is not opposed to common sense but consistent with it. More specifically, Berkeley is aware that with respect to the doctrine of immaterialism, he must show that God is no deceiver.[37] This was an awkward issue for him to handle. In the *Principles*, for example, he acknowledges that we have some natural tendency to believe in the existence of matter, and he undertakes to *explain* the materialist "prejudice."[38] In the *Dialogues*, however, he is more careful to insist that the immaterialist doctrine is consistent with common sense or the vulgar view.[39] This claim is crucial if he is to avoid the sort of objections Descartes, Malebranche, Bayle, and others drew attention to: namely, given our natural inclination to believe in matter, it follows that God must be a deceiver. The combination of claims that must be avoided, therefore, is that (1) the material world has no existence (i.e. independent, external existence), and (2) we are constrained by our nature to believe that it exists. On the assumption that God exists, this leads to the conclusion that God is a deceiver.[40] However, given that the major parties involved in the debate (e.g. Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, and Berkeley) are all agreed that God *cannot* be a deceiver, the only alternative is to conclude that God does not exist. Clearly, then, none of the principals involved in the debate—including Berkeley—would welcome *this* combination of claims.

2

Hume's discussion "Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses" opens with the claim that the issue that interests him is what *causes* us to *believe* in the existence of body (T, 1.4.2.1/187; my emphasis). There is, Hume says, no point in asking if there is body or not, since this is something that we all believe (even the professed skeptic). To believe in body is, for Hume, to believe that objects continue to exist, distinct from the mind, even when they are not perceived (T, 1.4.2.2/188). The source of this belief in the continued and distinct existence of objects must either be the senses, reason, or imagination. Hume points out that the senses, since they present nothing to the mind but its own perceptions, can "never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond" (T, 1.4.2.3, 4, 10/188–9, 191; and compare 1.2.6.8/67–8). Nor can reason be the source of this opinion. In the first place, "whatever convincing arguments philosophers may fancy they can produce," it is obvious that these arguments are known to very few (T, 1.4.2.14/193). More important, even if we distinguish between our perceptions and objects (as philosophers do), all that is ever present to the mind

are our perceptions, and so we cannot draw any inference from perceptions to objects. It is impossible, therefore, to form any conclusion concerning the existence of objects on this basis (T, 1.4.2.14, 47/193, 212).

Having argued that our belief in body is due to neither the senses nor reason, Hume proceeds to show how the notion of distinct and continued existence arises from a "concurrence" between the qualities of some of our impressions and certain "trivial" qualities of the imagination (T, 1.4.2.15, 56/194, 217). The details and complexities of this account need not concern us here.[41] What is important, however, is the way in which some of our impressions influence the imagination and lead us into the "vulgar" belief in body (T, 1.4.2.12–6/192–4). The vulgar, Hume says, "confound perceptions and objects, and attribute a distinct continu'd existence to the very things they feel or see" (T, 1.4.2.14/193). Hume maintains that this is the view of "almost all mankind, and even philosophers themselves, for the greatest part of their lives" (T, 1.4.2.38/206). On this view of things, "our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they are not perceiv'd" (T, 1.4.2.48/213). These objects are, therefore, "neither to be annihilated by our absence, nor to be brought into existence by our presence" (T, 1.4.2.38/207). What is fundamental to the vulgar view, as opposed to the view of the "modern philosophers" (T, 1.4.2.13/192), is that it involves the ("fictional") belief that our perceptions themselves have a continued and distinct existence (T, 1.4.2.14, 29, 36, 43/193, 200–1, 205, 209).

A "very little reflection and philosophy," Hume says, will expose the "fallacy" of the vulgar view (T, 1.4.2.44/210). He suggests a "few experiments" by which we may "quickly perceive, that the doctrine of independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience" (T, 1.4.2.44/210). From this evidence, philosophers conclude that "every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind" (T, 1.4.2.14/193). For this reason, they distinguish between perceptions and objects, and take the former "to be interrupted, and perishing, and different at every different return; the latter to be uninterrupted, and to preserve a continu'd existence and identity" (T, 1.4.2.46/211). Hume describes the "new system" of philosophers as the "hypothesis… of double existence" (T, 1.4.2.52/215). It is, he says, the "monstrous offspring" of the opposing principles of the imagination and reason, "which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other" (T, 1.4.2.52/215).

The philosophical hypothesis of "double existence," while it sets the mind at ease, has "*no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination*" (T, 1.4.2.46/211). On the one hand, even the philosopher, in a relaxed state of mind, lapses back into the vulgar view, as conditioned by the imagination (T, 1.4.2.51, 53/214, 216). On the other hand, when we reflect on these considerations, and apply our philosophical principles, we will find ourselves losing all confidence in our senses (T, 1.4.2.56/217–8). Hume is clear, however, that this skeptical disposition cannot be maintained for long. Although reason alone would lead us to abandon our belief in continued and distinct existence, this view is embraced only by "a few extravagant sceptics; who after all maintain'd that opinion in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it" (T, 1.4.2.50/214; compare 1.4.2.1/187).

It is, then, a mistake to suggest that any *single* view represents Hume's (final) position on this subject. On the contrary, Hume's point is that our beliefs about

external existence are essentially *dynamic* (i.e. subject to change), depending on the relative influence of reason and the imagination over us. All of us, insofar as we reflect of this issue, will oscillate between "the intense view" that leads to skepticism and the "relaxed view," which is the view of the "vulgar" (compare T, 1.4.7.8, 9/268–9). The philosophical hypothesis of "double existence" is an "intermediate state" that puts us "at ease"; but Hume makes clear that this view is no more reasonable than it is natural or steady in its influence (T, 1.4.2.49, 52/213, 214–6). Hume's general aim, therefore, is not so much to "accept" or "reject" any specific position in preference its alternatives but rather to *explain* the principles operating in the human mind that lead us (inevitably) to move from one position to another as our situation changes.[42]

Hume's analysis suggests that the materialist hypothesis may take the form of either the vulgar view or the philosophical hypothesis of "double existence," both of which are subject to "contradictions and difficulties" (T, 1.4.5.1/232). The vulgar view is easily discredited with only a "few experiments," and so we are driven to the doctrine of double existence. This view, however, "contains all the difficulties of the vulgar system, with some others, that are peculiar to itself" (T, 1.4.2.46/211). Despite all this, we are incapable of rejecting the opinion of continued and distinct existence in the manner of the extravagant skeptic. Philosophy leaves us, therefore, marooned in an "intermediate situation" (T, 1.4.2.52/216), slipping back into the vulgar view when we relax, and (momentarily) losing all confidence in our senses when the philosophical difficulties of our suppositions about body are pressed upon us.

One of the most contested questions regarding Hume's views on the existence of the material world is whether or not he should be understood as "a skeptic" on this subject. Closely related to this, is the question of whether or not Hume is simply advancing and extending Berkeley's arguments, or suggesting an alternative (constructive, positive) one.[43] Hume asserts his own assessment of Berkeley, and his position on the question of skepticism, tersely, but clearly, in the first *Enquiry*. Berkeley's arguments, he says,

> form the best lessons of scepticism, which are to be found either among the ancient or modern philosophers, Bayle not excepted. He professes, however, in his title-page (and undoubtedly with great truth) to have composed his book against the sceptics as well as against the atheists and free-thinkers. But that all his arguments, though otherwise intended, are, in reality, merely sceptical, appears from this, *that they admit of no answer and produce no conviction*. Their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism. (EU, 12.15n32/155n; my emphasis)

In this passage, Hume makes plain that his position on the subject of the existence of the material world comes down to two fundamental theses, which are derived from the opposing and irreconcilable principles of reason and the imagination. The first, which I will call the "skeptical thesis," is that the skeptic's arguments "admit of no answer." This thesis needs careful formulation with respect to Hume's understanding of exactly what "admits of no answer."

Two different skeptical claims that are involved here should be distinguished. The first maintains only that our natural belief in body lacks any evidential support.

Hume argues for this skeptical claim by way of showing that neither reason nor the senses can *justify* our belief that the material world exists. By itself, however, this is not to claim that our natural belief in body is *false*. The second, stronger claim is that our natural belief in body is "*contrary* to reason" (EU, 12.16/155), since it involves "false suppositions" and "gross illusion" (T, 1.4.2.56/217; compare T, 1.4.2.29, 43, 48/200–1, 209, 213). The "gross illusion" Hume is specifically concerned with is that "our resembling perceptions are numerically the same," which leads us into "the opinion, that these perceptions are uninterrupted, and are still existent, even when they are not present to the senses" (T, 1.4.2.56/217). It is clear that he accepts the stronger skeptical thesis as it applies to the vulgar system, since he argues explicitly that it is false.

Hume maintains that the philosophical system of double existence is a "hypothesis" that has "no primary recommendation to reason" (T, 1.4.2.46/211) and that we arrive at it only "by passing thro' the common hypothesis of identity and the continuance of our interrupted perceptions" (T, 1.4.2.46, 48/211, 213). Beyond this, he also argues that the philosophical system contains not only "all the difficulties of the vulgar system" but also "some others, that are peculiar to itself" (T, 1.4.2.46; 1.4.5.1/211, 232). More specifically, the philosophical system requires that we create "a new fiction" by "feigning" a double existence of perceptions and objects, and then supposing that the former resemble the latter (T, 1.4.2.52/215–6). Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that the philosophical system is false simply on the ground that the vulgar system is false and that we are unable to justify our belief in the philosophical system. In the section "Of the Modern Philosophy" (1.4.4), Hume presents a further argument against the philosophical system. The particular argument he advances follows Berkeley's general line of reasoning closely.[44] As interpreted by the "modern philosophy," Hume observes, the philosophical system depends on a fundamental distinction between primary and secondary qualities (T, 1.4.4.3/226), but this distinction is subject to a "decisive" objection (T, 1.4.4.6/227).[45] Material objects or bodies, according to this account, must be understood in terms of their (real) primary qualities (T, 1.4.4.5/227).[46] However, any object we can conceive of as having primary qualities, he maintains, must also possess secondary qualities. That is, if we entirely remove the secondary qualities from an object, we in effect "utterly annihilate" it or reduce it to "nothing" (T, 1.4.4.6, 10/228, 229). The efforts of modern philosophers to represent material objects as possessing only primary qualities and no secondary qualities leaves only an absurd and unintelligible "abstraction" (EU, 12.15/154).[47] Hume returns to this point in the *Enquiry*:

> Bereave matter of all its intelligible qualities, both primary and secondary, you in a manner annihilate it, and leave only a certain unknown, inexplicable *something*, as the cause of our perceptions; a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it. (EU, 12.16/155; his emphasis)

The modern philosophy, therefore, because it removes secondary qualities from material objects, reduces these objects to *nothing*. In sum, it is Hume's view that the vulgar view is false, and the philosophical view, in an effort to avoid "all the difficulties of the vulgar system," collapses into an account of bodies that, if not

actually false, is nevertheless meaningless and absurd, and leaves us in the same position as "the most extravagant scepticism" (T, 1.4.4.6/228).[48]

The second thesis, which I will call the naturalist thesis, holds that skeptical arguments "produce no conviction." More specifically, Hume rejects Berkeley's claim that immaterialism is the common sense view of the ordinary person. On the contrary, it is the "vulgar system"—which takes our immediate objects of perception to have continued and distinct existence—that is the "common sense" view of the ordinary person (T, 1.4.2.48/213). The vulgar view is, indeed, one we are constrained to believe and about which we have no choice (T, 1.4.2.1/187). According to Hume, *all* of us are prone to the vulgar view most of the time, and this includes not only philosophers but even "extravagant sceptics" (T, 1.4.2.1, 36, 38, 50/187, 205, 206, 214). Given that the vulgar view is one that involves fallacy and illusion, the naturalist thesis implies that we are all constrained to believe in body even though "a very little reflection and philosophy is sufficient to make us perceive the *fallacy* of that opinion" (T, 1.4.2.44/210; my emphasis).

3

Hume's commitment to *both* the skeptical and naturalist theses has puzzled many commentators. Fogelin claims, for example, that Hume fails to explain why (natural) "belief in this palpable falsehood...should be esteemed of great importance."[49] The answer to this question, I suggest, lies with the way the two theses are relevant to problems of natural religion. Consider, first, the implications of the skeptical thesis for the various systems of natural religion. Clearly, not all proofs for the existence of God depend on (our knowledge of) the existence of the material world.[50] However, the systems of natural theology that were most influential in the context of early eighteenth-century British philosophy are generally of this kind. Strictly speaking, this is not true of Locke's version of the cosmological argument, as presented in the fourth book of his *Essay*.[51] Locke maintains that our knowledge of God depends on knowledge of our own existence, and that both of these are more certain than knowledge of the existence of the material world.[52] Nevertheless, Locke goes on to argue that we can use our knowledge of the material world to reason about God's being and attributes.[53] This is possible since we have "the greatest assurance we are capable of concerning the Existence of material Beings."[54] In general, on Locke's account, the material world—God's "first great piece of Workmanship, the Creation"—is an entirely secure foundation on which to advance our knowledge of God's being and attributes.[55]

The threat that skeptical arguments regarding the existence of the material world pose for established systems of natural religion is especially obvious when we turn to the principal arguments associated with the leading Newtonian thinkers at this time. Without doubt, the most influential of these was Clarke's statement of "argument *a priori*" as presented in his *Demonstration*.[56] Clarke's argument rests on an unquestioned belief that we know that the material world exists.[57] Nowhere in any of his writings, however, does Clarke take seriously "the Question Whether the World exists or no."

> There always remains a *bare Possibility*, that the Supreme Being may have so framed my Mind, as that I shall always necessarily be deceived in every one of my Perceptions as in a Dream, though possibly there be *no material World*, nor any other Creature whatsoever, existing besides myself.... And yet no Man in his Senses argues from thence, that *Experience* is no Proof to us of the *Existence of Things*.[58]

Nearly all the key steps in Clarke's chain of reasoning in the *Demonstration* simply presuppose our knowledge of the existence of matter and its properties (e.g. its *vis inertiae*). His general attitude to Berkeley's philosophy was that it led to "the total subversion of all knowledge as well as of all religion; of all that Sir I. Newton, Mr. Locke, he himself, and many others, had been endeavouring to bring into some reputation."[59] Although Clarke took this severe view of Berkeley's philosophy, he was nevertheless unable or unwilling to answer it. This task was left to his followers.[60]

The other major branch of Newtonian theology, the argument a posteriori, is plainly even more vulnerable to skeptical doubts concerning our knowledge of the existence of the material world. Advocates of this approach included a number of prominent and influential figures of the time, including John Ray, Thomas Burnet, George Cheyne, William Derham, William Whiston, and John Keill, as well as the distinguished Scottish Newtonian Colin Maclaurin.[61] The argument a posteriori, as Clarke acknowledges in correspondence arising out of his *Demonstration*, is the "most generally useful Argument, most easy to be understood, and in some degree suited to all Capacities."[62] The suggestion, as advanced by Hume's skeptical thesis, that belief in the existence of the material world involves "fallacy" and "illusion," can serve only to undermine and discredit the foundations of all reasoning of this kind. This was obvious, not only to Newtonian theologians and philosophers at this time but also to Berkeley (who was careful to disown any suggestion of "scepticism"), as well as to Hume, whose remarks in the *Enquiry* (EU, 12.13/153) make clear that he was well aware that skeptical difficulties of this sort pose a threat to these familiar proofs of God's existence and attributes.

It is important to note two points in relation to the threat Hume's skeptical thesis presents for these influential (Newtonian) arguments of natural religion. First, the weak version of the skeptical thesis—which claims only that our belief in the existence of the material world lacks justificatory support, but not that this belief is false—will suffice to discredit the ambitions of both the argument a priori and the argument a posteriori. This degree of skepticism is enough to cast doubt on any confidence we have in arguments that seek to move from our (supposed) *knowledge* of the material world to knowledge of God. Second, Hume's naturalist thesis cannot serve as an appropriate foundation for the theological arguments, nor can it insulate them effectively from skeptical challenge. The aim of these arguments, after all, is to show that our beliefs about God's being and attributes are *reasonable*, if not demonstrably certain. If the chain of reasoning involved depends on a belief that lacks (any) *rational* support, and actually involves "contradictions and difficulties" (T, 1.4.5.1/232), then clearly the arguments in question are discredited. It follows from this that whether we continue to *believe* in the existence of the material world or not, arguments that proceed from this belief have no credentials from the point of view of reason.[63]

What, then, is the general significance of Hume's naturalist thesis for the arguments of natural religion under consideration? The naturalist thesis suggests that we are constrained by our nature to believe in the existence of matter (i.e. primarily in the form of the vulgar system, but also the philosophical system that derives from it). As already noted, the major philosophers and theologians of this period are uniformly careful to avoid any suggestion that our natural beliefs are systematically deceptive. More specifically, Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, and Berkeley, in their different ways, all avoid the suggestion that we are naturally deceived about the existence of the material world (Descartes and Locke by claiming that the belief is clearly true; Berkeley by claiming that the belief is a meaningless abstraction and contrary to our "common sense" beliefs; and Malebranche by suggesting that while this belief is probably true, we are nevertheless capable of suspending judgment with respect to it). In contrast with this, Hume's naturalist thesis, combined with the (strong) skeptical thesis, leads directly to the conclusion that we are *systematically deceived* by the (natural) operation of the imagination. It follows from this, as Hume explicitly indicates in the *Enquiry*, that—unless God is a deceiver (which is absurd)—he cannot be "concerned in this matter" (EU, 12.13/153). When Hume's argument is read in this way, it leads to the conclusion that God does not exist.

The argument Hume is advancing depends on concealed or assumed premises. When made explicit, however, it has the following structure.

1. We naturally and inescapably believe in the existence of body (i.e. usually and primarily in the vulgar form).
2. Our belief in the existence of body is false and based on illusion (i.e. we are deceived about this).
3. If God exists, and we are naturally deceived about the existence of body, then God is a deceiver.
4. God cannot be a deceiver.
5. If we are deceived in our natural belief about body, then God does not exist. /
6. Therefore, God does not exist.

This argument begins with the naturalist thesis (1) and the strong form of the skeptical thesis (2). These claims, as I have explained, are central to Hume's discussion in the *Treatise*, and are reaffirmed in the *Enquiry*. Premises (3) and (4) are not given in the *Treatise*, but are noted in the *Enquiry* (EU, 12.13/153). Premise (5) is not asserted explicitly, but follows directly from (3) and (4). The conclusion (6) is not drawn openly in either the *Treatise* or the *Enquiry*, but it follows directly from (1), (2) and (5).

Since not all the premises of this argument are explicitly asserted, it is evident that it takes a concealed or hidden form in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*—although the *Enquiry* discussion alludes to it more openly. The character of this argument is obviously very different from the other irreligious argument I have described. The first irreligious argument—let us call it the "skeptical challenge"—relies on the *weak* version of the skeptical thesis and aims only to discredit those proofs of God's existence that proceed from our (assumed) knowledge of the existence of matter.

In contrast with this, the second irreligious argument—let us call it the "deception challenge"—depends on the combination of the stronger skeptical thesis and the naturalist thesis, and its aim is to prove that God does not exist. The proof in question relies, as noted, on the assumption that God cannot be a deceiver. Whereas the skeptical challenge is more or less evident in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, the deceiver challenge takes some probing to uncover, because it is concealed or hidden.

Critics will argue, of course, that neither the skeptical nor the deception challenge can be convincingly attributed to Hume. Let me begin, therefore, with the skeptical challenge and the sorts of objections that may be raised against it. It may be argued that Hume's skeptical doubts about the existence of the material world are taken from Berkeley, and plainly Berkeley's aim was not to discredit natural religion—as Hume points out himself (EU, 12.5n32/155n). How, then, the critic says, can it be claimed that Hume's position is irreligious but not Berkeley's? Several points should be noted here. First, Berkeley, as Hume notes in the same context, is careful to *deny* that his position is skeptical. Berkeley is particularly anxious to refute the suggestion that his immaterialist doctrine lends itself to the ends of "scepticism and atheism," and for this reason he insists that he does not deny the existence of anything that common sense or natural belief suggest to us. The immaterialist doctrine, he argues, not only does not discredit natural religion, it serves as its only secure foundation. In contrast with this, Hume shows no inclination to dissociate himself from the skeptical content of his claim (in either the weak or strong form), and he makes no effort to show how his position can be reconciled with the aims of natural religion. There is, in other words, no alternative system of natural religion on offer—we are left only with the skeptical critique of those systems that presuppose our knowledge of the material world (most notably, the Newtonian systems). Beyond this, any thinker who was familiar with the early reception of Berkeley's philosophy of immaterialism would be well aware that his critics argued that the skeptical doctrine involved could be put to use for irreligious ends. There is, as I will show in more detail later, every reason to believe that Hume was familiar with this line of criticism against Berkeley's doctrine. Hume shows little or no concern to distance himself from these implications. Finally, related to this, it should also be noted that Hume's early critics were careful to contrast Berkeley's unintended skepticism and its irreligious consequences with what they took to be Hume's *intentional* use of skeptical arguments for irreligious or "atheistic" ends.[64] All this is, of course, entirely consistent with the general pattern of argument throughout the *Treatise*.

Let us turn now to the deception challenge, which presents the irreligious interpretation with more serious difficulties. The obvious problem, in this case, is that the argument in question is not made explicit, in either the *Treatise* or the *Enquiry*. By the very nature of the case, therefore, we need to show that it is reasonable to assume that Hume was aware of the relevant hidden or "tacit" premises, and that he could assume that his readers were as well. I believe that the evidence for this is strong. In the first place, Hume does draw explicit attention to the relevant premises concerning God and deception (i.e. [3] and [4] earlier) in the *Enquiry*. It seems highly unlikely that when he published the *Treatise* he was not aware of these claims or of their obvious significance for his discussion of our natural belief in the

existence of matter. On the contrary, for this to be true, Hume would have to have failed to register the central arguments and debates of this problem as it appears in the work of Descartes, Malebranche, Bayle, and Berkeley. It was works by these specific thinkers, however, to whom Hume referred his friend Michael Ramsay, so Ramsay could "easily comprehend the metaphysical parts of [Hume's] Reasoning." The whole debate about the existence of the material world, as noted, was firmly embedded in worries about whether or not God was a deceiver. Hume's contemporary audience, therefore, would read his discussion with this context and framework clearly in mind. From this perspective, the position Hume carves out, although it does not explicitly articulate each step of the deception challenge, nevertheless leads the reader in exactly this direction. Suffice it to say that if all this was unintentional on Hume's part, it is a remarkable coincidence, given his obvious reputation and credentials as a hostile critic of all systems of natural religion.

Another line of criticism against the suggestion that Hume is advancing the deception challenge is based on the way the skeptical and naturalist theses (i.e. [1] and [2] earlier) have been interpreted and applied. The deception challenge, as I have interpreted it, depends on the strong skeptical thesis (2) and the naturalist thesis (1). It may be argued, however, that while Hume is obviously committed to the strong skeptical thesis as it applies to the "vulgar system," it is not obvious that he believes that the philosophical system of double-existence is actually false. It is possible to hold this view and still accept that Hume is committed to the weak skeptical claim as applied to the "philosophical system" (i.e. the doctrine of double existence cannot be justified, but has not been shown to be false). I have argued that the text does not support this view, insofar as Hume's criticisms of the philosophical system go well beyond the confines of weak skepticism (i.e. if not false, it is unintelligible). Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, let us grant that Hume is not committed to the view that the strong skeptical thesis can be applied to the philosophical system. Will this concession discredit our effort to attribute the *deception* challenge to him?

The first thing to be said in reply to this line of criticism is to remind ourselves that it is Hume's view that the philosophical system has no "primary recommendation to either reason or the imagination" (T, 1.4.2.46/211). While we may embrace the philosophical system to "set ourselves at ease" (T, 1.4.2.52/215), this disposition of the mind has no lasting or reliable influence over any person and is rarely found among ordinary people who are unexposed to philosophy (i.e. the "vulgar"). It is the vulgar system that is natural to all human beings, and it is this disposition of mind that governs all people most of the time and most people all of the time—even though it is easy to show that it is false (T, 1.4.2.44/210). It follows from this that, even if Hume is not committed to the view that the philosophical system is false or meaningless, he remains committed to the view that we are all naturally disposed to believe in the existence of body in the manner of the *vulgar*, and that we are (systematically) deceived about *this*. The deception challenge, therefore, survives in this form.

The interpretation of the naturalist thesis that has been suggested may also be criticized. It may be argued, for example, that although Hume is committed to the view that we have a natural tendency to believe in body, this belief is not inescapable or irresistible. Near the end of *Treatise*, 1.4.2, the critic points out, Hume confesses that he is "at the present of quite a contrary sentiment" and is "inclin'd to

repose no faith at all in [his] senses" (T, 1.4.2.56/217). Similarly, in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, he makes it clear that the "slightest philosophy" reveals the "fallacy" of the vulgar view (T, 1.4.2.44/210; EU, 12.9/152). Contrary to the interpretation suggested, therefore, deception of this kind is not inescapable or irresistible.

In reply to this, the first thing to note is that at *Treatise*, 1.4.2.56 (217) Hume emphasizes the point that his skeptical disposition is confined to the *present* moment. This is consistent with his observation in the *Enquiry* that skeptical reflections about the existence of body may cause us "momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion" (EU, 12.15n32/155n) but we cannot *continue* in this state (i.e. we inevitably fall back into the natural deception of our senses). This is a point Hume repeatedly and strongly emphasizes throughout *Treatise*, 1.4.2. The section begins with him pointing out that in regard to the skeptic's doubts about the existence of body, "nature has not left this to his choice" (T, 1.4.2.1/187). Whatever doubts may be presented, the skeptic still continues to believe in body. When extravagant skeptics have denied the continued and distinct existence of objects, Hume says, they have maintained this "opinion in words only, and *were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it*" (T, 1.4.2.50/214; my emphasis). Although "intense reflection" on this subject may induce some degree of doubt at the "present moment," an hour later even the skeptic, Hume argues, "will be perswaded that there is both an external and internal world" (T, 1.4.2.57/218).

Clearly, then, according to Hume, our belief in an independent and continued existence is an opinion that "has taken such deep root in the imagination, that 'tis impossible ever to eradicate it, nor will any strain'd metaphysical conclusion of the dependence of our perceptions be sufficient for that purpose" (T, 1.4.2.51/214). The most philosophical reflections can do to dislodge our natural, vulgar belief in body is to move us to frame the "monstrous" philosophical hypothesis of double existence (T, 1.4.2.52/215). Nevertheless, as Hume insists, "almost all mankind, and even philosophers themselves, for the greatest part of their lives," continue to embrace vulgar belief in body (T, 1.4.2.38/206; compare T, 1.4.2.36/205).

> Another advantage of the philosophical system is its similarity to the vulgar one; by which means we can humour our reason for a moment, when it becomes troublesome and solicitous; and yet upon its least negligence or inattention, can easily return to our vulgar and natural notions. Accordingly we find that philosophers neglect not this advantage; but immediately upon leaving their closets, mingle with the rest of mankind in those exploded opinions, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue identically and uninterruptedly the same in all their interrupted appearances. (T, 1.4.2.53/216)[65]

For all of us, including the philosopher, no less than "all the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind" (T, 1.4.2.36/205), vulgar belief in body is our normal and natural condition. By means of intense philosophical reflections, we may temporarily inhibit or alter this "blind and powerful instinct of nature" (EU, 12.8/151). Nevertheless, we all return to it as soon as these (passing) reflections are over. A false and deceptive belief in the continued and distinct existence of sensible perceptions is, therefore, an inescapable feature of the human condition.[66]

Hume's arguments in *Treatise*, 1.4.2 are finely crafted and positioned to frame both the skeptical and deception challenges. The skeptical challenge can be framed

relying only on the weak skeptical thesis. That is to say, even if we do not attribute the strong skeptical thesis to Hume, he is still committed to the skeptical challenge as described. Similarly, the deception challenge relies only on the strong skeptical thesis as applied to vulgar belief in body. I have made the case—consistent with the views of other commentators—that the strong skeptical thesis also applies to the philosophical system. Nevertheless, since vulgar belief in body is, according to Hume's account, inescapable for all of us (including philosophers and skeptics), the deception challenge does not *depend* on being able to extend the strong skeptical thesis to the philosophical system.[67]

4

When we examine the skeptical and deception challenge from the perspective of the relevant background debates, the evidence for the irreligious interpretation of Hume's arguments is strong. There are, however, two further sets of considerations that lend additional support to the irreligious interpretation. The first concerns Hume's familiarity with the early reception of Berkeley's philosophy in Scotland.

Although the early impact of Berkeley's immaterialist doctrine was not great in England, it attracted considerable interest in Scotland.[68] The members of the "Rankenian Club," for example, had a strong interest in Berkeley's philosophy, and had a correspondence with him during the 1720s.[69] The most prominent and distinguished of the Rankenians was Maclaurin, who is tersely critical of Berkeley's "system" in his *Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries*.[70] The first extended criticism of Berkeley's philosophy in English, however, came from Andrew Baxter, a Scottish philosopher who was not a Rankenian.[71] As noted, Baxter was by no means a minor figure in this context. He was, on the contrary, an influential and widely admired defender of Clarke's Newtonian philosophy, and he was known as a leading champion of the argument a priori. It is also significant that Baxter and Hume were near neighbors in the Borders area of Scotland during the 1720s and early 1730s (i.e. at the time the project of the *Treatise* began to take shape) and that they had a number of associations and connections that suggest a considerable degree of philosophical and personal opposition.[72] In any case, since Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul* was well received when it first appeared in 1733, it is not credible that Baxter's work did not command Hume's (critical) attention. It follows from this that no serious consideration of Hume's discussion of the material world can afford to ignore Baxter's extended criticism of Berkeley's immaterialism in *Enquiry into the Human Soul*.[73]

The questions that need to be asked, therefore, are these: (1) What is the nature of the specific criticisms Baxter puts forward against Berkeley? and (2) Do these criticisms shed any light on the (irreligious) interpretation of Hume's skeptical and naturalist theses? Baxter devotes an entire chapter of *Enquiry into the Human Soul* to criticism of Berkeley's immaterialism. This is necessary, he says, because Berkeley's scheme entirely discredits Baxter's alternative (Newtonian/Clarkean) effort to demonstrably "confute atheism."[74] All the arguments Baxter has offered "for the *Being* of a *God*…are drawn from the consideration of this *impossible thing*; viz.

from the *inertiae* of matter, the *motion* of matter, the *cohesion* of matter, &c."[75] Baxter goes on to observe that his own arguments "amount to nothing, if there be nothing but ideas instead of the objects of our ideas.... Thus there must either be no truth in what I have said, or in what this *Author* [Berkeley] advances; for *two such opposite accounts of nature* cannot both be true."[76] It is Baxter's general view that Berkeley's scheme constitutes the "wildest and most unbounded scepticism" and that it no more serves "as antidote to atheism" than "putting out the eyes is the best cure for dimness of sight."[77]

Baxter launches a number of arguments against Berkeley, but there are two that are particularly relevant to the irreligious interpretation of Hume's skeptical and naturalist theses. (1) As the remarks already cited suggest, Baxter believes that Berkeley's arguments destroy the very foundations of the argument a priori, as Baxter develops it in *Enquiry into the Human Soul* and Clarke in his *Demonstration*.[78] Baxter also maintains that immaterialism destroys the argument from design (a posteriori).

> I might also mention the direct tendency of this improvement to *Atheism*. Men will hardly allow the exciting illusory ideas in our minds, of *beauty* and *order*, which no where really exist, such a proof of the power and wisdom of God, as an actually existing frame of material nature, where the *grandeur*, *harmony*, and *proportion* is permanent and real, existing from without, as well when we turn our thoughts *from*, as *to it*. And indeed it is not; for take away the existence of the material Universe, and all the surprising scene of Providence discovered above... Where the God of nature by *real power*, constantly preserves the world, and influences every *particle* and *atom*, by incessant, various, wonderful impulse, ends in a dream and chimera.[79]

According to Baxter, therefore, the principles of immaterialism destroy the whole frame and fabric of (Newtonian) theology, and this serves the purpose only of skeptics and atheists.

(2) Baxter maintains that "knowledge of the existence of external material objects, by sense, is *certain knowledge*, and the evidence as great, as possibility, and the nature of things can admit of."[80] In the same passage, he argues that the existence of matter "should be known from the *effects* it produces, or the *perceptions* it excites in us, and the *perfections* of that Being, who constituted it and our nature such, that it should act, and we perceive it acting."[81] Baxter points out that this general argument—that we "cannot possibly be deceived in concluding that material substance really exists without the mind"—has the authority of Clarke in support of it.[82] For the details of Clarke's argument, however, Baxter refers the reader to an article on "body" in *Chambers' Cyclopedia*.[83] The relevant passage reads:

> [Clarke] adds, that all the Proof we have of [the existence of a *corporeal world*] is this; That God would not create us such, as that all the Judgments we make about *Things* existing without us, must necessarily be false. If there be no External *Bodies*, it follows, that 'tis God who represents the Appearances of *Bodies* to us; and that he does it in such a manner as to deceive us. Some think this has the Force of a Demonstration: 'Tis evident God can't deceive us; 'tis evident he does deceive and delude us every Moment, if there be no *Bodies*; 'tis evident therefore, there must be *Bodies*.[84]

If we "refuse the reason which Dr. Clarke assigned for believing the existence of *external objects*, and a *material world*," says Baxter, "there is in truth no stopping till a man has denied every thing that exists without his own mind, except it be perhaps the existence of some *delusory* Being who constantly cheats and imposes upon him."[85] With respect to this criticism, the crucial claim that divides Clarke and Baxter on one side from Berkeley on the other is whether it is true or not that human beings *naturally* believe in the existence of bodies.[86] If Clarke and Baxter are correct in thinking that belief in matter is a natural belief, then we are *deceived* if there is no material world.[87]

Baxter and Hume were not the only philosophers active in the Borders area at this time who took a lively interest in Berkeley's philosophy. Lord Kames, Hume's friend and mentor (and Baxter's critic), also shared this interest.[88] Kames is a defender of the argument a posteriori and, like Maclaurin, he relies on a Lockean ontology of double-existence to support it.[89] In his essay "Of our Knowledge of the Deity" he says:

> The Deity has not left his existence to be gathered from slippery and far-fetched arguments. We have but to open our eyes, to receive impressions of him from every thing we perceive. *We discover his being and attributes, in the same manner that we discover external objects. We have but to appeal to our own perceptions; and none but those, who are so stubbornly hypothetical, as to deny the existence of matter, against the evidence of their senses, can, seriously and deliberately, deny the existence of the Deity*.[90]

In another essay, "Of the Authority of Our Senses," Kames describes the significance of Berkeley's doctrine for his own line of theological reasoning.

> It is reported, that doctor Berkeley, the author of the abovementioned treatise [*Principles*], was moved to adopt this whimsical opinion, to get free of some arguments, urged by materialists against the existence of the Deity. If so, he has been unhappy in his experiment; for this doctrine, if it should not lead to universal scepticism, affords at least, *a shrewd argument in favours of Atheism*. If I can only be conscious of what passes in my own mind, and *if I cannot trust my senses*, when they give me notice of external and independent existences; it follows, that I am the only being in the world; at least, that I can have no evidence from my senses, of any other being, body or spirit. This is certainly an unwary concession; because *it deprives us of our principal, or only, inlet to the knowledge of the Deity*.[91]

The particular feature of Berkeley's philosophy that Kames objects to, in this context, is that it serves only to discredit trust in our senses with respect to the external world, which is the foundation of our most reliable and accessible knowledge of God's being and attributes.[92] To this extent, Kames is concerned more with the way Berkeley's philosophy can be used to formulate the skeptical challenge than he is with any threat coming from the deception challenge. Nevertheless, the concluding paragraph of Kames's essay deals with the specific issue of deception and denies that we are in any way deceived about "the reality of external objects."[93]

Kames's general perspective on Berkeley's immaterialist doctrine is not unlike the view Baxter advanced almost two decades earlier. Both Baxter and Kames not only had a strong interest in Berkeley's philosophy, they were clear that it could

be used as a "shrewd argument in favours of atheism." Since Hume was a near neighbor of both these thinkers, and an intimate friend of Kames, it is only reasonable to view the skeptical and naturalist theses that he advances in this light. From the perspective of the discussions that Baxter and Kames provide, the irreligious significance of both Hume's skeptical and naturalist theses is evident.

Although Kames's *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion* was not published until after Hume's *Treatise* and first *Enquiry* were published, Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul* was published in 1733, when Hume was still living in Scotland and in the early stages of writing the *Treatise* (i.e. more than five years before the *Treatise* was published). Baxter's work, as noted, enjoyed considerable influence and reputation in both England and Scotland during the 1730s and 1740s, and it was directly concerned with the same set of issues that concern Hume in the *Treatise*.[94] In order for Hume not to have understood the irreligious significance of his own skeptical and naturalist theses in the *Treatise*, one or other of the following suppositions must be true: either (1) Hume did not read Baxter's *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, or (2) he read it but failed to understand the plain meaning of its arguments. Both these suppositions are highly improbable. In response to this, it may be suggested that (3) Hume read Baxter's work but was not persuaded that his own position had any of the specific irreligious consequences Baxter describes. If this was the case, then Hume makes no effort to show that he can avoid objections of this kind—a striking omission, in the circumstances, for someone with no irreligious intent. Beyond all this, as already explained, Hume did not have to read Baxter's book in order to be aware of these concerns, since anyone familiar with the central themes in the works of Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley, and Bayle, and the debate surrounding them, would be in a position to identify the irreligious significance of the principles Hume defends. I conclude, therefore, that we have strong grounds for believing that Hume was aware of the irreligious significance of the arguments he advanced on this subject.

5

I have argued that Hume's employs his skeptical and naturalist theses to launch the skeptical and deception challenges against a large set of defenders of the Christian religion—but primarily against the established Newtonian orthodoxy at this time. The weak form of the skeptical thesis, which claims only that we lack any justification for our belief in the material world, suffices, by itself, to undermine both the arguments a priori and a posteriori, as advanced and defended by many prominent thinkers, such as Clarke, Cheyne, Baxter, and Maclaurin. Although elsewhere in the *Treatise* Hume launched a direct, frontal assault on the argument a priori (see chapter 10), there is nothing of this kind directed against the argument a posteriori (i.e. the argument from design). Hume left this task until he published section 11 of the first *Enquiry*, followed by the more detailed critique in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.[95] The criticism in these works turns primarily on the use of analogy by defenders of the design argument (e.g. EU, 11.26, 27, 30/144, 146, 148; and D, 44, 105, 118; but compare T, 1.3.12.25/142). The line of criticism Hume advances

in these works does not rely on any direct questioning of our knowledge of the existence of the material world. It is surprising to find, nevertheless, that commentators, most of whom have long recognized the strength of Hume's skeptical arguments on the subject of the material world, have not taken note of the evident relevance of all this to his skeptical critique of the design argument.[96] Hume's own contemporaries, who were familiar with the hostile reaction Berkeley's "scepticism" had received from Newtonian critics, such as Baxter, were not so blind to these links. On the contrary, from their perspective, Hume's use of Berkeley to embarrass all systems of natural religion that depend on our knowledge of the material world was nothing less than "a shrewd argument in favours of atheism."[97]

Hume's use of the skeptical challenge to discredit both the argument a priori and a posteriori is consistent with his overall skeptical objective to show the weakness and limits of human understanding as it relates to all arguments that aim to prove the existence of God. With respect to this general skeptical objective, however, it is not Hume's aim to prove that God does *not* exist. His deception challenge is of particular interest and significance because it aims at this bolder conclusion. The combination of his strong skeptical thesis, which claims that (vulgar) belief in the existence of body is false, and his naturalist thesis, which claims that this belief is nevertheless inescapable for all human beings, lays the foundation for an argument that if God exists he is a deceiver or he does not exist. This was an implication that all the leading parties in this debate—including Descartes, Malebranche, Berkeley, Locke, Clarke, and Baxter—were careful to avoid in their own work. Hume embraces the natural deception of the senses without any apology or evasion, and he leaves it to his audience to draw their own conclusion.

Hume's deception challenge is obviously of some relevance to his discussion of the problem of evil in the *Dialogues* (parts 10, 11). More specifically, the "Epicurean" challenge concerning God's existence proceeds by way of reviewing the evidence of unnecessary and avoidable evil in this world viewed as evidence against God's moral attributes. Although Hume considered this argument in the *Dialogues* (D, 100), he is nevertheless content to make a more limited point. That is to say, Hume (in the voice of Philo) argues not that the reality of evil proves there is no God, but only that we cannot *infer* God's existence when we are presented with "mixed and confused phenomena" (D, 103).[98] Clearly, then, Hume's objective with respect to the argument from evil is not to prove that God cannot exist (given the reality of evil) but only that we cannot infer his "unmixed" moral attributes when we are presented with "mixed" phenomena in nature. In contrast with this, the deception challenge remains closer in form to the original version of the "Epicurean" challenge. The suggestion that human beings are systematically and inescapably deceived in their beliefs is taken to be *inconsistent* with God's existence. This conclusion is reached, as noted, on the basis of the premise that God cannot be a deceiver—a premise, Hume knew, almost all the major defenders of theological orthodoxy (i.e. Descartes et al.) accepted. It follows, therefore, that Hume's deception challenge, so interpreted, has a *unique* status in the arsenal of irreligious arguments he advances in his various philosophical writings. The deception challenge, as presented in *Treatise*, 1.4.2, is the only argument Hume advances whereby he aims to show that God—on any orthodox interpretation of the divine attributes—*cannot exist*.[99]

Any adequate interpretation of Hume's intentions in *Treatise*, 1.4.2 must make some effort to explain how Hume's intentions in this section relate to his more general aims and objectives in the *Treatise*. On any interpretation, Hume's skeptical and naturalistic arguments clearly generate awkward problems for defenders of theological orthodoxy. No plausible interpretation of Hume's intentions on this subject can simply turn its back on the relevance of problems of natural religion to the debate about the material world as Hume and his contemporaries understood it. At the very least, therefore, those who reject the irreligious interpretation that has been advanced are obliged to provide us with some alternative account of the theological significance of Hume's discussion of the material world. As things stand, the irreligious interpretation not only succeeds in fully integrating Hume's arguments with the relevant debates and controversies he was concerned with but also succeeds in integrating his views on this subject with his more general irreligious or "atheistic" aims and objectives throughout the *Treatise* and his philosophical work as a whole.

Immateriality, Immortality, and the Human Soul

But as religion implies a future state, any presumption against such a state, is a presumption against religion.

Butler, *Analogy of Religion*

[T]here scarce are any, who believe the immortality of the soul with a true and establish'd judgment.

Hume, A *Treatise of Human Nature*

Hume's skeptical commitments as they concern the material world indicate that he differs from other prominent irreligious thinkers or "unbelievers" of the period with respect to his (nonmaterialist) ontological commitments.[1] It is no less obvious, however, that there is a considerable difference between Hume's skepticism about material substance and Berkeley's "immaterialist" ontology. This is, indeed, an observation that is central to the traditional skeptical interpretation of Hume's philosophy, which presents Hume as extending Berkeley's skeptical arguments against matter and applying them to all *immaterial* substance (i.e. the soul, God). According to this account, Hume

> proceeds upon the same principles [as Berkeley], but carries them to their full length; and, as the Bishop undid the whole material world, this author [Hume], upon the same grounds, undoes the world of spirits, and leaves nothing in nature but ideas and impressions, without any subject on which they may be impressed.[2]

Both Reid and Beattie, along with other early critics, are very clear about the tendency of this line of reasoning "to atheism and universal scepticism."[3]

Among more recent commentators, including some who have explicitly argued that the *Treatise* has little of significance to say on issues of religion, it is generally accepted that Hume's discussion of the immateriality of the soul obviously contains an irreligious message.[4] For the purpose of this chapter, therefore, my aim is not to labor this point (i.e. that Hume's views about the soul, immaterial substance, and personal identity are of irreligious significance), as it is obvious to almost all readers of the *Treatise*. My main concern will be to indicate, first, the *specific* way Hume's

arguments on this subject are related to the main debate between theists and atheists during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and second, to show how Hume's arguments are related and consistent with his wider irreligious objectives throughout the *Treatise*.

1

The problem of religion, as debated in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was in no way a narrow theoretical problem solely concerned with the question of the existence of God. On the contrary, from any orthodox perspective, the problem of religion was understood as a *practical* problem concerned with our human accountability to God and the implications of this for human happiness and misery.[5] The main debate was, therefore, crucially concerned with questions of not just cosmology but also of philosophical anthropology. Two closely related issues that were considered of particular importance were the nature of the soul and free will. Unless human beings had free will, there could be no moral accountability either in this world or the next.[6] Similarly, if the soul is mortal, we can neither hope for nor fear a future state of rewards and punishments.[7] The question of the immortality of the soul was itself intimately connected with the question of the *immateriality* of the soul. Since Plato, it had been widely held that the best proof for the immortality of the soul was the argument that the soul is immaterial and, therefore, simple, indivisible, and incorruptible.[8]

The early modern debate about the immortality of the soul turned on a set of questions that relate to the existence or nonexistence of immaterial substance and whether a material being is capable of thought and consciousness. Defenders of religious orthodoxy maintained that immaterial souls or spirits must exist, on the ground that material beings are incapable of thought and consciousness.[9] In the context of the main debate—and more specifically in the British context during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—the principal threat of the opposing materialist philosophy came from Hobbes. According to Hobbes's philosophical principles, thought and consciousness are qualities or properties of bodies, not of any immaterial "spirits" or "souls." More generally, he was skeptical about the existence of immaterial substance in any form. Hobbes's most prominent philosophical critics identified this claim as a clear threat not only to the Christian doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments but also to belief in the very existence of God (i.e. understood as a being who is *distinct* from the material world).

The main components of Hobbes's monistic materialism are presented at both the beginning and end of his *Leviathan*. He argues that the world (i.e. the universe) is entirely corporeal or made up of body.[10] Apart from bodies, there is *nothing*. He explains the nature of mind and its operations in these materialistic terms. The operations of the mind, such as sensation, imagination, and willing, are all interpreted in terms of the motions of bodies.[11] In Hobbes's system, therefore, there is no place for immaterial beings and spirits or any associated "powers" that are supposed to belong to them. Hobbes grounds his materialist commitments in his empiricism. We can, he maintains, "have no thought representing any thing, not subject to sense.

No man therefore an conceive any thing, but he must conceive it in some place; and endued with some determinate magnitude." From this observation, he concludes that all talk of immaterial substances involves "senseless speech."[12]

> And therefore if a man should talk to me of a *round quadrangle*; or *accidents of bread in cheese*; or *immaterial substances*; or of *a free subject*; *a free-will*; or any *free*, but free from being hindered by opposition, I should not say here were an error; but that his words were without meaning, that is to say, absurd.[13]

According to Hobbes, once we engage in "senseless speech" about incorporeal beings or spirits, we fall into a number of insoluble perplexities—such as trying to explain whether or not all the soul is in every part of the body. "Can any man think," Hobbes asks, "that God is served with such absurdities? And yet all this is necessary to believe, to those that will believe the existence of an incorporeal soul separate from the body."[14]

The irreligious implications of Hobbes's skepticism about immaterial substance were evident to both his own contemporaries and the generation that followed. Nevertheless, Hobbes's critics were themselves sharply divided in the way they set about refuting his materialist philosophy. Their particular understanding of the nature of the soul and, more generally, the distinction between immaterial and material beings were points of considerable controversy. The most important and influential defender of dualism among Hobbes's own contemporaries was, without doubt, Descartes. In the *Meditations*, Descartes argues for "a real distinction between mind and body" (*Meditation* 6). His argument turns on the claim that since he can clearly and distinctly conceive of mind apart from body, it follows that they are really distinct.

> Thus, simply by knowing that I exist and seeing at the same time that absolutely nothing else belongs to my nature or essence except that I am a thinking thing. . . . I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.[15]

Along with this argument based on the clear and distinct idea that we have of mind and body, Descartes also argues for substance dualism on the basis of divisibility. Whereas body is by its very nature infinitely divisible, Descartes claims, "the mind is utterly indivisible.[16] By itself, he says, this argument from divisibility is enough to show him that mind and body are entirely distinct. In the *Meditations*, he does not directly use his argument for the immateriality of the soul as a basis for demonstrating its immortality. However, in his reply to objections (from Mersenne) he makes clear that this is indeed his view.[17]

In Britain, dualism and the doctrine of the immateriality and immortality of the soul found a number of prominent defenders. Locke was clearly of the opinion that there was a basic distinction to be drawn between material and immaterial substance, but his account of this introduced a number of skeptical themes that disturbed his more orthodox contemporaries. One of these was that our ideas of both bodies and spirits are limited to our ideas of their relevant, contrasting properties or qualities.

> So that, in short, the *Idea* we have of *Spirit, compared with the Idea* we have of *Body*, stands thus: The substance of Spirit is unknown to us; and so is the substance of Body, equally unknown to us: Two primary Qualities, or Properties of Body, viz. solid coherent parts, and impulse, we have distinct clear *Ideas* of: So likewise we know, and have distinct clear *Ideas* of two primary Qualities, or Properties of Spirit, viz. Thinking, and a power of Action; i.e. a power of beginning, or stopping several Thoughts or Motions.[18]

What we lack, according to Locke, is any idea of "pure substance in general"; we have no idea of the *substratum* that is supposed to support the powers and qualities of bodies and spirits.[19]

Locke also differs from Descartes, as well as many other influential British philosophers of this period, in holding that we cannot *demonstrate* that matter cannot think.[20] This claim is made in the form of allowing for the possibility (i.e. conceivability) that God could create a material being that thinks.

> We have the *Ideas* of *Matter* and *Thinking*, but possibly shall never be able to know, whether any mere material Being thinks, or no; it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own *Ideas*, without revelation to discover whether Omnipotency has not given to some Systems of Matter fitly disposed, a power to perceive and think.... It being, in respect of our Notions, not much more remote from our Comprehension to conceive, that GOD can, if he pleases, superadd to Matter a Faculty of Thinking, than that he should superadd it to another Substance, with a Faculty of Thinking; since we know not wherein Thinking consists, nor to what sort of Substances the Almighty has been pleased to give that Power.[21]

Locke's suggestion concerning the possibility of "thinking matter" raised considerable controversy, which lasted well into the eighteenth century.[22] As Yolton explains it, what Locke's critics (e.g. Browne and Stillingfleet) could not accept was his "contention that immateriality was irrelevant to the doctrine of immortality."[23] It is important to note, however, that Locke makes very clear, later in his *Essay*, that matter cannot be the first, original being, on the ground that "it is as impossible to conceive, that ever bare incognitive Matter should produce a thinking Intelligent Being, as that nothing should of it self produce Matter."[24] To this extent, Locke's arguments, whatever his critics may have claimed, cannot be assimilated to those of Hobbes.

Locke also defends another thoroughly unorthodox view on the related subject of personal identity. Consistent with his skepticism about providing any demonstration that the soul is immaterial (and immortal), Locke argues that the *identity* of a *person* does not depend on any sameness of soul or immaterial substance.[25] Personal identity, on his account, does not depend on sameness of substance of *any* kind, but rather depends on consciousness and memory.

> But though the same immaterial substance, or Soul does not alone... make the same Man; yet 'tis plain consciousness, as far as ever it can be extended, should it be to Ages past, unites Existences, and Actions, very remote in time, into the same Person.... So that whatever has the consciousness of present and past Actions, is the same Person to whom they both belong.[26]

As Locke's discussion makes clear, the position he takes on the subject is of direct and immediate relevance to the question of rewards and punishments in a future state. What concerns his critics is that by denying that personal identity consists in sameness of immaterial substance or soul, Locke in effect brings into question the credibility of the whole doctrine of future rewards and punishments.[27]

2

Although Descartes and Locke are, from our contemporary perspective, the most prominent representatives of the late seventeenth century dualist alternative to Hobbes's materialism, a number of other influential philosophical figures argued in defense of the immateriality (and immortality) of the soul during this period. This was especially true in the British context, where Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, both leading figures among the Cambridge Platonists, criticized Hobbes's materialism.[28] According to More, if we accept Hobbes's claim that "the very notion of spirit or Substance Immaterial is a perfect Impossibility and pure Non-sense," it follows

> [t]hat it is impossible there should be any God, or Soul, or Angel, Good or Bad; or any Immortality, or Life to come. That there is no Religion, no Piety nor Impiety, no Vertue nor Vice, Justice nor Injustice, but what it pleases him with the largest Sword to call so. That there is no Freedom of Will... but that all that is, is nothing but *Matter* and *Corporeal Motion*.[29]

It is important to keep in mind that More took the view, along with other Cambridge Platonists, that the world of "spirits" included devils and witches. Whereas Hobbes had treated all belief in ghosts and witches as simply fictitious, More and his associates took the view that "if one believed in spirits, then he must also believe in evil spirits; and if one denies evil spirits, then he will be led to deny all spirits, and ultimately to deny the Godhead itself."[30]

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, the most influential attacks on Hobbist materialism were coming from the Boyle lecturers. These broadsides against Hobbes began with the first sermons given by Richard Bentley in 1692, wherein he set out to prove that "matter and motion cannot think."[31] One of Bentley's first tasks in these sermons was to "prove that there is an immaterial substance in us, which we call soul and spirit, essentially distinct from our bodies."[32] To demonstrate this point, Bentley takes it as self-evident that we are all aware of thinking, willing, and perceiving. He continues:

> 'tis as self-evident, that these faculties and operations of thinking, and willing, and perceiving, must proceed from something or other as their efficient cause; mere nothing being never able to produce any thing at all. So that if these powers of cogitation, and volition, and sensation, are neither inherent in matter as such, nor producible in matter by any motion and modification of it, it necessarily follows, that they proceed from some cognitive substance, some incorporeal inhabitant within us; which we call spirit and soul.[33]

Bentley makes this argument the centerpiece of his proof of the immateriality of the soul. He takes it as so self-evident that "clashing of atoms" can never produce thought and understanding of any kind that he ridicules the "credulity" of "infidels" for supposing that this is even possible.[34]

Bentley's proof of the immateriality of the soul plainly follows similar lines of argument to those found in Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*.[35] It was, however, Clarke who took this line of argument and developed it into its most influential and powerful form. Two of Clarke's particular objectives in his first series of Boyle Lectures were to prove—in opposition to Hobbes and his followers—the immateriality of the soul and that human beings possesses free will (i.e. human action is not subject to causal necessity). Both these doctrines, he holds, are essential to religion and morality.[36] There is, according to Clarke, an intimate connection between the question of whether or not the soul is *immaterial* and the question of whether or not man is a necessary or free agent. If human beings are simply material, he argues, then all his actions would be the necessary outcome of the mechanical laws that govern the material world. Only immaterial substance, Clarke maintains, have active power, the power of beginning motion or initiating action.[37] Clearly, then, Clarke's defense of the immateriality of the soul is motivated by concern not only for the doctrine of immortality and accountability in a *future state* but also the issue of moral accountability in *this world*.

Following similar lines to those Cudworth, Bentley, and others laid down, Clarke argued against Hobbes and other materialists that it is impossible to conceive how matter and motion could ever give rise to thought and perception.[38] Perception or intelligence, he claims, is a "distinct quality or perfection," and thus it could never be "a mere effect or composition of unintelligent figure and motion." As noted, Clarke maintains that "nothing can ever give to another any perfection which it has not it self":

> whatever can arise from, or be compounded of any Things; is still only those very Things, of which it was compounded. . . . All possible Changes, Compositions, or Divisions of *Figure*, are still nothing but *Figure*: And all possible compositions or Effects of *Motion*, can eternally be nothing but mere *Motion*.[39]

Hobbes's view that matter in motion may give rise to thought and volition is, according to Clarke, simply absurd. It is no more sensible than suggesting "motion to be blue or red, or for a triangle to be transformed into a sound."[40] Such objects have no resemblance whatsoever, and thus the former can never give rise to the latter. Having shown that "thinking and willing are powers entirely different from solidity, figure and motion: and that if they be different, that they cannot possibly arise from them, or be compounded of them," Clarke concludes that it "certainly and necessarily" follows that thinking and willing are "faculties or powers of immaterial substances."[41]

Anthony Collins vigorously challenged Clarke's efforts to refute the (Hobbist) doctrines of materialism and necessitarianism. The series of exchanges between Clarke and Collins on these issues were the most influential and philosophically significant among the many exchanges that took place between the freethinkers and the Newtonians. The immediate occasion for their first exchange was Clarke's attack

on Henry Dodwell's claim that the soul was naturally mortal but was immortalized by baptism. This was a thesis that Clarke believed lent itself to skepticism and irreligion. Clarke's reply to Dodwell was published in 1706, and Collins replied in the same year. In the space of less than two years, there followed from Clarke four "defences" of the original letter and from Collins three further "replies" to Clarke. T. H. Huxley comments on this debate in the following terms.

> [In the year 1700] it was thought that it conduced to the interests of religion and morality to attack the materialists with all the weapons that came to hand. Perhaps the most interesting controversy which arose out of these questions is the wonderful triangular duel between Dodwell, Clarke, and Anthony Collins, concerning the materiality of the soul, and—what the disputants considered to be the necessary consequence of its materiality—its natural mortality. I do not think that anyone can read the letters which passed between Clarke and Collins, without admitting that Collins, who writes with wonderful power and closeness of reasoning, has by far the best of the argument, so far as the possible materiality of the soul goes; and that, in this battle, the Goliath of Freethinking overcame the champion of what was considered orthodoxy.[42]

The discussion and presentation of arguments in this debate—especially in the first series concerning the *Letter to Dodwell*—is often repetitious and fragmented. Nevertheless, two basic issues dividing these thinkers are very clear:

1. Is it impossible that matter can think or produce thought?
2. Is a person a simple, indivisible immaterial substance?

Clarke, as his Boyle Lectures make plain, believes that these questions are all inseparably related, and that the answer to each of them is (demonstratively) yes. Collins maintains, by contrast, that the answer to each is no.[43]

In his *Letter to Dodwell*, Clarke argued that if matter were conscious, every particle of matter would have a distinct consciousness and that, therefore, the system made up of such particles could not have individual consciousness, but must be a complex of consciousnesses. Consciousness, however, is unitary and therefore cannot reside in the particles of the brain. Accordingly, Clarke argues, consciousness must be a quality of some immaterial substance.[44] Collins's reply to Clarke is that it is possible that a system of matter, considered as a conjoined whole, may become a subject of thinking. It is possible, Collins says, that the whole system may possess qualities or powers that its individual parts do not possess. In support of this thesis, Collins points out that the arcs of a circle may together form a circle without each being circular.[45] Clarke claims that this is absurd. A distinctive quality such as consciousness can never arise from any combination of qualities that are without consciousness. That is to suppose that something comes out of nothing.[46]

The gap between Clarke and Collins on the subject of personal identity is, as several commentators have noted, akin to the gap between Butler and Locke on this subject.[47] Clarke holds (as Butler does) that the soul or the self is simple and indivisible. Personal identity based on a transient, impermanent series of conscious states is a mere illusion, and no basis on which the distribution of rewards and

punishments can be justified.[48] Personal identity depends on strictly identical and unchanging substance. If consciousness were merely a mode of matter in motion, then a constant alteration of that matter would lead to an accompanying alteration in the identity of the person.[49] Collins, in line with Locke, takes the contrary view.[50] He compares the identity of a person with that of an oak tree or an animal, as such identity "consists in a Participation of a continued Life, under a particular organization of Parts."[51] Personal identity does not depend on a continuity of an unchanging substance. Rather, it depends solely on consciousness and extends through memory.[52] The self is complex in nature, and it is subject to continual change—like the system of matter that supports it.[53] Clearly, then, contrary to Clarke, the identity of the self does not depend on "the same numerical Being, with the same numerical consciousness."[54] We have no idea or experience of a simple, unchanging self of this kind.[55] The self must be understood, therefore, in terms of a succession of conscious states (i.e. "acts of thinking") connected through memory.

For at least two decades, if not longer, the Clarke–Collins debate served as the centerpiece for the British debate about thinking matter and the immateriality of the soul. Both Clarke and Collins found their defenders. In the case of Collins, the most important of these was Samuel Strutt, who published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Springs of Human Actions* (1732).[56] Strutt begins his *Enquiry* by praising Toland's *Letter to Serena* and declaring that Collins had triumphed over Clarke in their debate.[57] Strutt takes it as self-evident that we have no idea of immaterial substance and so proceeds to argue, on this basis, that man is "nothing but matter under a peculiar modification" and that there is nothing in the nature of matter "which is incompatible with thinking."[58] All of this leads on to the further argument that soul or immaterial substance can never produce movement of bodies and that only another body can cause a body to move.[59]

The "direct antithesis to Strutt's analysis" is found in Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*.[60] Baxter places the question of the immateriality and immortality of the soul at the very heart of his philosophy in this work.[61] Many prominent contemporaries regarded him, along with Clarke, as one of the most able defenders of this doctrine.[62] In his *Reflections* on Dudgeon's freethinking doctrines in *The State of the Moral World*, Baxter argues that Dudgeon aims to undermine the whole doctrine of future rewards and punishment. "The Immortality of the Soul," Baxter claims, "is the weightiest Truth within the Compass of human Enquiry…weightier than even that of the Existence of the Deity itself, since if all is extinguished at once, we cannot have extream much Concern whether there is a God or not."[63] Baxter's proofs concerning the immortality of the soul follow similar lines of argument to those Cudworth and Clarke pursued. His principal argument, which he applies in various ways, is that matter is essentially inactive and therefore we must account for all "activity and perceptivity" in terms of some immaterial substance.[64] Much of this argument turns on a contrast between infinitely divisible matter and the indivisible, simple nature of any substance that is capable of supporting active powers.[65] Having proved that the human soul has no parts and is "indissoluble in its nature," Baxter goes on to conclude that the human soul is "naturally immortal," since only "an immediate act of the omnipotent Creator" could annihilate it.[66]

The most interesting of Baxter's arguments, as they relate to the question of immaterial substance, are not those he advances to prove the immateriality/immortality of the soul, but rather his critical observations on Berkeley's attempt to refute the atheistic materialism of Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers. Berkeley's approach, as noted (chapter 13), was to deny the *existence* of matter—an approach that is, in effect, the inversion of Hobbes's skeptical arguments against the existence of *immaterial* substance. It was Baxter's general view that Berkeley's strategy played directly into the hands of the atheists. The particular objections I have already considered are that Berkeley, by discrediting all knowledge of the material world, discredits the most important proofs we have for God's being and attributes (i.e. the arguments a priori and a posteriori). Baxter has, however, a further line of criticism against Berkeley's scheme.

The general argument Berkeley uses to show that material substance is impossible, Baxter claims, can just as easily be turned against *immaterial* substance—and thus against Berkeley's own effort to refute atheism and vindicate the principles of religion. If Berkeley's argument succeeds in demonstrating "matter out of existence, it equally demonstrates all substance out of existence, save the mind thus percipient, without excepting the Deity himself."[67] Baxter interprets Berkeley's argument against the existence of matter as beginning with the premise that "you perceive nothing but your perceptions."[68] Matter, the (supposed) cause of these perceptions, is something that is not perceived. On this basis, Berkeley concludes, according to Baxter, that "*this cause of your perceptions is not at all*; or is but the same thing with those very perceptions."[69] This argument, Baxter suggests, tells equally against Berkeley's alternative hypothesis (i.e. that God is the cause of our perceptions).

> But D. B. [Dean Berkeley] doth not perceive any thing but his own perceptions, more than other men: and if his not perceiving the *cause* of his perceptions, is a sufficient ground of *denying* such a cause, or of making it the same thing with the very perceptions themselves; then, God, not being perceived, either is not; or is but a very perception of the mind of man: *Absit blasphemia!*[70]

In other words, according to Baxter, if Berkeley's argument against the existence of matter is valid, then it can also be applied to immaterial substance, and thus to God, which serves the purposes only of skeptics and atheists.[71]

3

The issue of the immateriality of the soul was, of course, an especially significant battle within the wider war of the main debate between theists and atheists. By the time Hume joined the fray, the principal figures involved were Clarke and Collins. More locally, in the Scottish context, the champion of the Clarkean view was Baxter, who shared Clarke's aim to (demonstrably) refute the atheistic materialism of Hobbes and his followers. It is crucial, therefore, that Hume's specific arguments in *Treatise*, 1.4.5 and 6 be considered with a view to this particular set of debates. A casual examination of the detail of Hume's discussion of the issues raised in the Clarke–Collins controversy, as it relates to both the immateriality of the soul and

personal identity, makes plain that Hume was indeed familiar with these debates and was in no way reluctant to take sides.

When we consider Hume's discussion of the immateriality of the soul and personal identity, a common pattern or structure begins to appear: the critical or skeptical arguments he advances serve to undermine or discredit the positions taken by Clarke, and the constructive arguments he presents are consistently in broad agreement with the doctrines defended by Collins. Consider, first, Hume's approach to the question of the immateriality of the soul. His discussion in *Treatise*, 1.4.5 turns on an important distinction between two questions. "We must," he says, "separate the question concerning the substance of the mind from that concerning the cause of its thought" (T, 1.4.5.30/248). He interprets the first question as concerning whether or not our perceptions inhere in a material or immaterial substance. His position on this issue is, quite simply, that we have no "satisfactory notion of substance" (considered as entirely different from a perception) and that this consideration provides "sufficient reason for abandoning utterly that dispute concerning the materiality and immateriality of the soul" (T, 1.4.5.6/234). The general point Hume is concerned to make in this context is that both the materialists and the immaterialists are mistaken in their efforts to show that our perceptions require some (further) substance to support their existence. Some objects—such as a sentiment, a smell, or a sound—"*may exist and yet be nowhere*" (T, 1.4.5.10/235). It is absurd to suppose that perceptions of this kind are capable of being conjoined "in place with matter or body, which is extended and divisible" (T, 1.4.5.11/236).[72] Similarly, it is also (equally) absurd to suppose that perceptions of sight and touch, which are extended, can be incorporated into a "simple and indivisible substance" (T, 1.4.5.15/239). In this way, Hume says, "the free-thinker may now triumph in his turn" (T, 1.4.5.16/240). The fact is, Hume maintains, that any perception may exist by itself and may, in this sense, be regarded as a substance (T, 1.4.5.5/233). Clearly, then, on the question of the substance of the mind, Hume accepts neither the materialist nor the immaterialist position.

According to Hume, the *important* and *intelligible* question on this subject concerns not the substance of thought but rather the *cause* of our perceptions (T, 1.4.5.29/246). He begins by restating an argument Clarke and others had put forward against the materialist position: namely, that it is impossible (i.e. absurd) to imagine that, for example, mere motion of a circle should produce a passion, or that the collision of two globular particles should become a sensation or pain (T, 1.4.5.29/246). Hume says that while few "have been able to withstand the seeming evidence of this argument," yet "nothing in the world is more easy than to refute it" (T, 1.4.5.30/247). Hume's counterargument depends on his preceding analysis of causation. When we "consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing." Therefore, he argues, we shall never discover any reason why one object (e.g. matter and motion) may not be the cause of any other (e.g. thought), even though there may be "little resemblance" between them. These considerations, it is claimed, destroy the immaterialist's reasoning concerning the causes of thought or perception. In light of these considerations, Hume argues that it is an empirical question whether we perceive "a constant conjunction of thought and motion" or whether "a different position of parts give rise to a different passion or reflection." Experience reveals, he says, that "the different dispositions of the body"

do produce a change in our thoughts and sentiments. Accordingly, he concludes that his account of the nature of causation "gives the advantage to the materialists above their antagonists" and shows that "matter and motion may often be regarded as the cause of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation"(T, 1.4.5.33/250; my emphasis).

A clear implication of Hume's discussion of this issue is that our existence as thinking subjects depends on our bodily existence. When, therefore, our bodies die, it seems reasonable to suppose, the mind will also perish. Although Hume does not explicitly draw these (obvious) conclusions in the *Treatise*, these implications of his position are openly asserted in his posthumously published essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul" (ESY, 591–2, 596–8).[73] In the *Treatise*, he concludes his discussion of this issue by noting simply that *any* object, including an immaterial spiritual substance, can be "annihilated in a moment" (T, 1.4.5.35/250; compare 1.3.15.1/173). It is little wonder, therefore, that he *pretends* that his arguments "take nothing" from religion (T, 1.4.5.35/250).[74]

In his discussion of personal identity (T, 1.4.6), Hume begins by noting that there "are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; and that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity" (T, 1.4.6.1/251). He proceeds to try and demolish this notion of the self; arguing that he finds no such impression in himself but, rather, discovers only "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (T, 1.4.6.4/252). Hume's particular concern in this section is to provide a psychological explanation of our mistaken belief in the existence of a simple, invariable soul or self (T, 1.4.6.6/253–5). He concludes that "the identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies" (T, 1.4.6.15/259).[75] The identity we attribute to plants and animals, he maintains, bears "great analogy … [to] the identity of a self or person" (T, 1.4.6.5/253). Hume also suggests, famously, that the human mind or soul can be compared "to a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts."[76] Hume argues that memory is the principal (although not the only) means by which these discreet perpetually changing parts that make up the human mind are bound together through the association of ideas (T, 1.4.6.17–20/260–2).

It could hardly be more evident that Hume's position, once again, accords closely with that of Collins and is flatly opposed to Clarke's. It is, of course, probable that the prime target of Hume's skeptical arguments in this section was Butler rather than Clarke (Butler being the most eminent of the recent contributors to the ongoing debate concerning personal identity). Nevertheless, it is significant that in his dissertation "Of Personal Identity" Butler cites Collins's *Answer* to Clarke's *Third Defence* as being the position that he (Butler) is especially concerned to refute.[77] This makes plain that from any perspective, the Clarke–Collins debate is an especially important point of reference in terms of which Hume's own contribution must be interpreted and judged.

It is evident that Hume's position on this subject turns on the following claims:

1. The dispute between "theologians" and "freethinkers" concerning the substance of the mind—whether it is material or immaterial—is both unintelligible and unimportant. We have no (perfect) idea of any substance, nor is anything required to support the existence of our thoughts and perceptions (which may, in this sense, themselves be considered substances: T, 1.4.5.5/233). Clearly, then, Hume rejects all attempts to prove that the soul is an *immaterial* substance, which was widely understood as a key premise for proving that the soul is (naturally) *immortal*.
2. The important and intelligible question that concerns Hume on this subject is about the *cause* of our perceptions. Hume's position is that insofar as we have any idea of this relation, "matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought" (T, 1.4.5.33/250). This is an observation that plainly "gives the advantage to the materialists above their antagonists" (T, 1.4.5.32/250).
3. With respect to the issue of personal identity, Hume emphatically denies that he has any impression or idea of the self, understood as a simple, invariable, uninterrupted object distinct from our particular perceptions. He proceeds to explain why we mistakenly suppose that we have an idea of this kind and argues that "the identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies" (T, 1.4.6.15/259) or "to a republic or commonwealth" (T.1.4.6.19/261).

With respect to the last two claims, Hume unambiguously sides with the general position of Hobbes, Collins, and other freethinkers and is squarely opposed to the views of Clarke, Baxter, Butler, and other defenders of the "theological" position. With respect to the first claim, however, things are not so straightforward, insofar as Hume's position is also at odds with the "materialist" commitments of his freethinking predecessors. How is this to be accounted for? My analysis of Baxter's critique of Berkeley's "immaterialism" makes clear what is going on here. As already explained, Baxter argued that Berkeley's immaterialist principles—his critique of matter—could be put to use on behalf of atheists and skeptics (i.e. the opposite of Berkeley's actual aim). Berkeley's argument, Baxter says, "demonstrates all substance out of existence, equally with material substance."[78] This is the very same general strategy that Hume employs in the opening sections of *Treatise* 1.4.5. Instead of embracing the materialist principles of Hobbes and Collins, Hume pursues the *immaterialist* principles of Berkeley—taking them to the *irreligious* consequences Baxter had explicitly complained about and warned against.[79]

4

The controversy concerning the immateriality/immortality of the soul was intimately connected, in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century context, with the question

concerning the relationship between human and animal souls. The relationship between these issues is explained and examined in some detail in Bayle's *Dictionary* article "Rorarius," wherein Bayle discusses Descartes's view that animals ("beasts") have no souls and are simply "machines."[80] Bayle describes the following problem that we run into on this issue. Everyday observation suggests that the human soul does not differ substantially from that of animals (i.e. they closely resemble each other in their operations and causes). We may consider, therefore, whether animal souls are material or immaterial. If they are material, then it is reasonable to conclude that they are mortal, and so, too, are human souls. On the other hand, if animal souls are immaterial, then, like all human souls, they must all be immortal. It appears to follow from this that in order to show that human souls are not mortal, we must accept that there are a vast number of immortal animal souls populating the world—which is absurd.[81] The only way to avoid this dilemma is to join the Cartesians in supposing that animal and human souls are substantially different from each other, but everyday observation tells against this view.

Bentley maintains that religion faces no such dilemma. He says:

> If brutes be said to have sense and immaterial souls, what need we be concerned, whether those souls be immortal, or annihilated at the time of death? This objection supposes the being of God; and he will do all things for the wisest and best ends. Or, if brutes be supposed to be bare engines and machines, I admire and adore the divine artifice and skill in such a wonderful contrivance. But I shall deny then that they have any reason or sense, if they be nothing but matter. Omnipotence itself cannot create cogitative body. And 'tis not any imperfection in the power of God, but an incapacity in the subject.[82]

When Collins subsequently came to criticize Clarke's views on this subject, which were similar to Bentley's, he claims that this dilemma cannot be so easily escaped. If we maintain that human souls are immortal on the basis of their immateriality, Collins observes, then we run into the following (familiar) difficulty. Either we argue that animal souls are not immortal, on the ground that all animals are merely material machines, and so have no immaterial and immortal soul (i.e. they differ from humans in *both* these respects); or animals do have *immaterial* souls, but they are "annihilated upon the dissolution of their bodies."[83] According to Collins, experience shows us that animals are like men insofar as they, too, perceive, think, and experience pleasure and pain that guides their actions. If animals are material machines, then the operations of human beings are not sufficiently different to prove that they have immaterial and immortal souls.[84] On the other hand, if animals have immaterial souls that "are annihilated upon the dissolution of their bodies, then the proof of the natural immortality of men's souls from their immateriality, tends not to prove that their souls shall really be immortal; because mere natural immortality is not a security from annihilation."[85]

Clarke replies to this that although "all sensible creatures have certainly in them something that is immaterial, yet it does not at all follow, either that they must needs be annihilated upon the dissolution of their bodies, or else that they must be capable of eternal happiness as well as man." An omnipotent and infinitely wise God, Clarke maintains, may either annihilate animal souls or leave them "to fall

into a state of entire inactivity"—but none of this would show that human souls are not in their own nature immortal.[86] Collins responds:

> [I]f from the power of thinking we can prove the immateriality of the Soul of Man, and from its Immateriality prove its natural Immortality, and consequently its Capacity of Eternal Happiness; the Power of Thinking must prove the Immateriality of the Souls of Brutes, the Immateriality of their Souls must prove their natural Immortality, and consequently their Capacity for Eternal Happiness. If it be supposed that the Souls of Brutes may sometime or other [be] annihilated, then this Argument is not useful to the End for which it is intended; because the natural Immortality will then be no Proof of the real Immortality of the Soul of Man.[87]

In general, Bentley, Clarke, and other Newtonians were unwilling to accept the Cartesian suggestion that animals had no soul and were merely "machines." As Baxter suggests, it was "probably Cartes's opinion that there was nothing but matter and motion in brutes, [that] hath been one reason among others, why so many of late have thought it not impossible but that it might also be so in men."[88] To avoid this dangerous suggestion, Baxter argues, we must acknowledge that animals have immaterial souls as well as human beings. However, it is a mistake to try and prove animal souls to be immortal and designed for eternal happiness on this basis. This further step can only be taken if we follow the "sceptics" and exaggerate the similarities between animal and human souls. There is, Baxter goes on to argue, "a great variety of immaterial souls both in nature and degree," and since human souls are rational, and capable of moral agency, they alone are suitable to immortality.[89]

It is evident from the nature of the debate about animal and human souls as it concerns immortality that the key issue turns on the extent to which we judge animal and human souls to *resemble* each other. As Bayle and Collins make clear, if we accept that there is a *close* resemblance, then we will get caught in the basic dilemma: either both animals and humans are (material) machines, or they both have (immaterial) immortal souls. Defenders of the orthodox view, in either the Cartesian or Newtonian form, attempt to avoid this dilemma by denying that there is any (close) resemblance. The freethinkers forced this dilemma on their adversaries by insisting on the obvious empirical evidence concerning this resemblance. When we turn to Hume's views in the *Treatise* about animal and human souls, we find that he is squarely in line with the freethinkers' position on this subject.[90]

Hume discusses the resemblance between humans and animals in two sections of the *Treatise:* 1.3.16 and 2.2.12 (and also, more briefly, at 2.3.9.32). In both these sections, he insists on one fundamental point: that there is a resemblance between the soul of humans and animals. In *Treatise*, 1.3.15 he argues that "no truth appears to me more evident, than that beasts are endow'd with thought and reason as well as men" (T, 1.3.16.1/176). This doctrine, he says, "is as useful as it is obvious," and it serves to expose the fallacy of many philosophical systems:

> 'tis from the resemblance of the external actions of animals to those we ourselves perform, that we judge their internal likewise to resemble ours; and the same principle of reasoning, carry'd one step farther, will make us conclude that since our internal actions resemble each other, the causes, from which they are deriv'd, must also be resembling. *When any hypothesis, therefore, is advanc'd to explain a mental*

> *operation, which is common to men and beasts, we must apply the same hypothesis to both*. (T, 1.3.16.3/176; my emphasis)

With respect to the passions, Hume argues that we discover love, grief, fear, courage, envy, and malice in animals no less than humans. We also find that the communication of passions among animals through sympathy occurs. (T, 2.2, 12/397–8; compare 2.3.9.32/448).[91]

The significance of Hume's view about the resemblance between humans and animals with respect to both reason and passion would be clear to any reader familiar with the literature of the time on this subject. As Bayle, Collins, and others pointed out, once we allow that there is a close resemblance between humans and animals with respect to the causes and operations of their thoughts, feelings, and actions, we must conclude that either both are mortal or that both are immortal—as there is no basis for arguing that the human soul is immortal while animal souls are not. The general debate about the analogy between human and animal souls revolves around this basic issue. Hume's position of this subject (i.e. that there is a close resemblance between humans and animals) is entirely consistent with his (independently argued) skepticism about the immaterial substance and "souls." The clear implication of his observations is that they lend support to the mortalist view—insofar as we reject the assumption that the souls of animals are immortal. That Hume was aware of this specific implication is made entirely evident in his essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul."[92]

In this essay, Hume begins by noting the two basic points he has already established in *Treatise*, 1.4.5. These are (1) that both matter and spirit "are at bottom equally unknown: and we cannot determine what qualities may inhere in the one or the other," and (2) that we cannot determine a priori whether matter may or may not be the cause of thought. Hume goes on to argue in some detail that "the physical arguments from the analogy of nature are strong for the mortality of the soul."

> Judging by the usual analogy of nature, no form can continue, when transferred to a condition of life very different from the original one, in which it was placed. Trees perish in the water; fishes in the air; animals in the earth.... What reason then to imagine, that an immense alteration, such as is made on the soul by the dissolution of its body and all its organs of thought and sensation, can be effected without the dissolution of the whole? (ESY, 596)

Hume then observes that the "souls of animals are allowed to be mortal; and these bear so near a resemblance to the souls of men, that the analogy from the one to the other forms a very strong argument [for the mortality of the human soul]" (ESY, 597).[93] Beyond all this, Hume repeats his observation that animals "undoubtedly feel, think, love, hate, will and even reason, tho' in a more imperfect manner than man" (ESY, 592). Having made this point, he then asks, with obvious sarcasm, if the souls of animals are "also immaterial and immortal?" Clearly, then, Hume uses the premises he has established in the *Treatise* concerning the close resemblance between humans and animals with respect to their reason, passions, will, and actions to draw the *mortalist* conclusion. All this is entirely consistent with his more direct criticism of the metaphysical arguments for the immateriality and immortality of the soul at *Treatise*, 1.4.5.

5

There can be no doubt that it is a central concern of Hume at *Treatise*, 1.4.5 to discredit the "metaphysical arguments" that had been advanced in support of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Nor can there be any reasonable doubt that the arguments of Clarke (and his Scottish disciple Baxter) are especially obvious and prominent targets of Hume's skeptical arguments on this topic. It is also clear that in the *Treatise*, Hume argues for the (close) resemblance between humans and animals with respect to both their nature and causes of their operations and that these claims lend themselves to the moralist conclusions that he (subsequently) explicitly draws out in his essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul." The reaction of his own contemporaries, therefore, including the charges the author of the *Specimen* presented against the *Treatise*, as well as the criticism of Reid and Beattie many years later, is well founded—since Hume's irreligious intentions on this subject are very evident.

My observations about Hume's irreligious intentions with respect to his discussion of the immaterial soul and personal identity are not surprising in themselves, but they do serve to correct some influential myths that continue to find some support. In the first place, it is clear that Hume's irreligious intentions on this subject are in no way an isolated or incidental example of his concern with problems of religion in the *Treatise*. On the contrary, they are part of a much larger, systematic skeptical assault on the whole edifice of metaphysical commitments, as defended by a wide range of Christian thinkers (among whom Clarke is especially important). Furthermore, contrary to the view that Hume "castrated" the *Treatise* before it was published (i.e. removing any passages that might" offend" religiously minded thinkers such as Butler), it is evident not only that Hume did no such thing but that he actually directly or overtly attacked the very doctrine that Butler and many of his contemporaries (e.g. Baxter and Warburton) viewed as constituting part of *the essential core of religion*—the doctrine of immortality and a future state.[94] This doctrine was widely regarded as being of particular importance because it concerned the *practical influence of religion* for human life and conduct. As already noted (chapter 11), the irony here is that while Hume included these skeptical arguments in the *Treatise*, it was in his later *Enquiries* that they fell victim to a process of "castration."[95]

Another important feature of my discussion of *Treatise*, 1.4.5 and 6 is that it makes plain that although Hume's ontological commitments can neither be labeled "materialist" nor "immaterialist," this should not be taken to imply that they are "innocent" with respect to the main debate. On the contrary, Hume was careful to advance and develop his own brand of substance skepticism along the very lines Baxter had warned would lead directly to "atheism." That is to say, Hume uses the ("sceptical") arguments of both Locke and Berkeley to remove "all substance out of existence... without excepting the Deity himself."[96] What Hume leaves us with is a brand of ontological naturalism in which he rejects any fundamental dualism between thinking, active immaterial beings (that are immortal) and inert, passive, material beings (that are corruptible or mortal). Human beings, on his account, are part of the *seamless natural order* of causes and effects in which there is no

categorical divide that distinguishes human beings from the rest of nature, much less preserves their existence for all eternity.

For Hume's contemporaries, several labels would fit this set of ontological commitments as it concerns the place of human beings in the natural order of things. Warburton referred to Hume's general effort "to establish a naturalism, a species of atheism, instead of religion."[97] Although Warburton was not referring to Hume's views in the *Treatise* (he was attacking Hume's essay "Natural History of Religion") the label is nevertheless a good fit for Hume's general position on this subject. Another pair of labels that would also fit for this purpose is "Spinozism" and "pantheism" (both of which were widely discussed in the middle of the eighteenth century).[98] A central idea in Spinozist/pantheist doctrine, as understood by Hume's contemporaries, is that human beings, like plants, animals, and other living things, are transitory parts of the natural order of things. There is no basis for hope or expectation that we transcend this order and can secure some form of eternal existence. Nor does our happiness in this life depend on any hopes or expectations of this kind. It is this worldview that is fundamental to Hume's philosophy, whatever label we place on it—be it "naturalist," "Spinozist," "pantheist," or "atheist."

The Practical Pyrrhonist

It is therefore only religion that has anything to fear from Pyrrhonism.

Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Pyrrho"

[T]he reader will easily perceive, that the philosophy contained in this book is very sceptical, and tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding.

Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*

I noted earlier (chapter 5) that among Hume's contemporaries it was widely held that there was a close connection between "skepticism" and "atheism." In several different contexts, Hume endorses this view. He makes remarks to this effect, for example, in the "Early Memoranda," and he repeats this general view in later works such as the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*. Hume's replies to his critic in the *Letter from a Gentleman*, however, claim that the charges presented against him, suggesting a close connection between skepticism and atheism in the *Treatise*, are not well founded. Some may take this to support the widely held view that the *Treatise* is not directly or substantially concerned with problems of religion—much less specifically aiming to discredit it.[1] My basic concern in this chapter is to provide a general overview of Hume's understanding of the relevance of (his) skeptical principles to problems of natural religion. I begin with an examination of Hume's discussion in the *Letter*, and I follow the evolution of his position on this subject in both the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*. I then return to the *Treatise* and indicate the way the structure of his skeptical commitments in this work are illuminated when seen in light of his *later* works.

1

Hume's critic in *A Letter from a Gentleman*, (i.e. the author of the *Specimen*) places "universal scepticism" and "atheism" first and second in his summary of the list of "charges" against Hume (LG, 17). With respect to the first charge, Hume's critic cites several passages from the conclusion of book 1 of the *Treatise* (LG, 4–7). The force of this passage, the critic says, is that Hume "doubts of everything (his own

existence excepted) and maintains the Folly of pretending to believe any Thing with Certainty" (LG, 17). The charge of "universal scepticism" is further specified through the other charges relating to Hume's views on causation, the soul, and morality—all of which are shown to lend themselves to "downright Atheism." Hume replied to the first pair of charges, as noted (chapter 2), by arguing that his critic exaggerates his skeptical intent and fails to show that the skeptical "frame of mind" is "prejudicial to piety" (LG, 20). What Hume emphasizes, in this context, are the *practical* consequences of his skeptical principles. The doctrine of the Pyrrhonist or Skeptics, he argues, can never result in "universal doubt." Its influence is, rather, to show "that even with regard to Principles which seem the clearest, and which are necessitated from the strongest Instincts of Nature to embrace, [we] are not able to attain a full Consistence and absolute Certainty" (LG, 19). Skeptical reflections, in other words, discourage "too great a Confidence in mere human reason," and this results in some measure of "modesty" and "humility" (LG, 19, 21). Only a dogmatist, who aspires to *certainty*, will be troubled by this.

Hume also points out that many Christian thinkers have embraced "the Doctrines of the ancient Scepticks or Pyrrhonians" in order to "abate the Pride of mere human reasoners" (LG, 19, 21). One consequence of "too great a Confidence in human Reason," Hume says, has been "the various Tribes of Heretics, the Arians, Socinians and Deists," who have made reason "the Standard of every Thing."[2] Having made these points, he presents his skeptical principles as *consistent* with the views of sincere Christians (such as Huet), and lacking any irreligious intent. He reinforces this interpretation of his skeptical doctrines when he argues, in reply to the second charge of atheism, that his arguments threaten only Clarke's "metaphysical argument *a priori*" for the existence of God, but leave other arguments unaffected. He suggests, for example, that the argument a posteriori, and even Descartes's metaphysical argument(s), "retain their full force upon the Author's Principles" (LG, 22–4). He goes so far as to suggest that the (moral) *certainty* of these arguments is not compromised by his skeptical principles. If all this is accepted at face value, then it is evident that Hume is not *any* sort of *religious* skeptic—since his philosophy leaves "the solid arguments of Natural Religion" (with the notable exception of Locke's and Clarke's reasonings) unaffected, and certain.

Hume's way of defending himself, in this context, against the general charge of "impiety" involves a mixture of claims. They are that (1) Pyrrhonianism may be used to *support* Christianity (and its "great mysteries") against the dangers of excessively confident human reasoners;[3] (2) no skeptic can really doubt everything, so the *extravagant* skeptic, "by destroying every Thing, really affects *nothing*" (LG, 20)—including religion; and (3) his arguments present a threat only to a narrow range of proofs for the existence of God (i.e. Clarke's argument a priori), and the other arguments remain unaffected, and no less certain than our everyday beliefs based on the senses and experience (LG, 20). There are, however, obvious tensions within this set of claims. On the one hand Hume wants to deny that the claims of natural religion are systematically affected by his skeptical principles; on the other he puts himself in the company of religious skeptics who repudiate *all* such arguments, in order to base religion on faith (as opposed to reason). Similarly, Hume wants to avoid the suggestion that he denies all certainty to questions of religion, but at the same time

he grants that his skeptical principles expose the "weaknesses and uncertainty of human reason" and thereby show the impossibility of attaining "absolute certainty" about *anything*.

To this extent, therefore, Hume's replies in this context show a fundamental ambivalence about how he wants to present his skepticism in the *Treatise*. (Although, clearly, this ambivalence may be consciously adopted to serve his immediate practical ends in the *Letter*—securing the chair at Edinburgh.) The bolder strategy is to present himself as a religious skeptic, like Huet, who seeks to expose the "weakness and uncertainty of mere human reason" in order to make room for *faith* as the relevant foundation for religion. The more cautious strategy is to argue that his skepticism is limited only to some *kinds* of argument relating to natural religion, and that most reasonings on this subject are entirely unaffected by what he has to say. On neither account, however, does he want to suggest that his skeptical intent is *irreligious* in character. He is, then, content to slide between the role of a religious skeptic who places no confidence in mere human reason and the role of one who is a friend to most forms of natural religion and aims only to refute "one kind of Argument for the Divine Existence." On neither of these interpretations is he "an enemy of religion." Suffice it to note, however, that Hume's early critics did not interpret his skeptical intentions either of these ways—since they viewed him as a (blunt) irreligious skeptic who was no friend to religion.

2

When it came time to publish the *Enquiry* three years later (1748), Hume presented his account of the relationship between his skeptical principles and natural religion in a clearer and bolder light. There is, in particular, no ambivalence about the implications of his skeptical principles for natural religion. The skeptic, Hume says, is "another enemy of religion, who naturally provokes the indignation of all divines and graver philosophers" (EU, 12.2/149; compare EU, 5.1/41). The first and last sections of the *Enquiry* are devoted to explaining why this is so.

In both the opening and closing sections of the *Enquiry*, Hume is concerned with the *practical* value of his investigations into human understanding—the way it guides our attention and energies into some areas and away from others. In the opening section, he argues that the most obvious and important benefit of his enquiries into human understanding is to show "from an exact analysis of its powers and capacity, that it is by no means fitted for...remote and abstruse subjects" (EU, 1.12/12). The subjects he is concerned with are, more specifically, the metaphysical speculations that are encouraged by "popular superstitions" (EU, 1.11/11). He does not, however, endorse a *systematic* skepticism in this context. On the contrary, he insists that there have been genuine "successes" and discoveries in the natural sciences, and we have good reason to suppose that the moral sciences may, likewise, be "brought nearer to their perfection" (EU, 1.13–5/13–5). These general claims are provided with more precise theoretical backing in the closing section of the first *Enquiry*.

Hume concludes the *Enquiry* by way of reviewing the significance of skepticism for his account of the limits of human understanding. From a theoretical point of

view, he makes clear that it is impossible to *refute* the skeptic. That is to say, there are no *arguments*, according to Hume, that could prevent us from collapsing into a condition of "universal doubt." If we relied on reason for this purpose, we would be unable to overcome Pyrrhonism (EU, 12.23/159–60). This is not, however, our situation. He makes two related points to explain why this is so. First, skeptical principles of this kind (i.e. leading to universal uncertainty and doubt) cannot have any *durable* or *constant influence* on the mind. Human beings are, inescapably, distracted from all such skeptical reflections by the "occupations of common life," and in these circumstances, even "the most determined skeptic" will find that he "must act, reason, and believe" like other mortals (EU, 12.23/159–60). Second, even if we could live such an (extreme) skepticism—as we cannot—no *benefit* would come of it. Indeed, were skeptical principles of this kind to prevail, "all human life must perish" (EU, 12.23/160).

Clearly, then, we must reject Pyrrhonism or excessive skepticism as both unlivable and undesirable. Hume goes on to argue, however, that the reflections of the Pyrrhonian do indeed have *some* beneficial effects. The first of these is that by revealing "the strange infirmities of human understanding" we can put a check on the natural tendency to be "dogmatical in [our] opinions," (EU, 12.24/161). Faced with the arguments of the skeptic, all just reasoners will develop a degree of doubt and modesty—something that can act against the influence of pride, which lends itself to dogmatism (EU, 12.24/161–2).[4] This point is certainly consistent with Hume's remarks about the influence of skepticism in the *Letter from a Gentleman* (LG, 19).

The second benefit of Pyrrhonian reflections is that they place a check on the *scope* of our investigations. In particular, when we become conversant with the force of the skeptic's arguments, and acknowledge the weaknesses of human understanding, then we will limit "our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of the human understanding" (EU, 12.25/162). These subjects, as Hume observed in the opening section of the *Enquiry*, are those that "fall under daily practice and experience" (EU, 12.25/162). Once "thoroughly convinced of the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt," those who "have a propensity to philosophy," although they will not abandon their researches, "will never be tempted to go beyond common life" (EU, 12.25/162).

Hume's account of the skeptical philosophy is one that operates in two "spheres." In the *philosophical* sphere (compare EU, 12.23/159), the Pyrrhonian cannot be refuted. There are no *arguments*, for example, that could prevent us from coming to doubt the existence of external objects or the inferences that we draw on the basis of experience. Nevertheless, these reflections are "subverted" by the force of nature, when we return to the sphere of "common life." In this sphere, the arguments of the skeptic fail to produce any systematic doubt or uncertainty (EU, 12.21/158–9). All they produce is "momentary amazement" (EU, 12.16n, 12.23/155n, 160).

The two spheres are, nevertheless, related. Mitigated skepticism is "the natural result" of Pyrrhonism (EU, 12.25/162). That is to say, when we are exposed to the reflections of the Pyrrhonist in the philosophical sphere, this, according to Hume, leads us to embrace the "mitigated scepticism or academical philosophy" in

the sphere of "common life." He is clear, therefore, that the *point* or *purpose* of Pyrrhonian skepticism is that it leads to a "durable and useful" philosophy in the sphere of common life—namely, the skepticism of the academic philosophy.

In the context of explaining his "sceptical solution" to the "sceptical doubts" he raised concerning (causal) reasoning about "real existence and matters of fact," Hume observes that the *mitigated* skeptic will be stigmatized as "libertine, profane and irreligious" (EU, 5.1/41). Why? Because this (moderate) skepticism resists the "rash arrogance" and "lofty pretensions" that are natural to us, and are further encouraged by "superstitious credulity" (EU, 5.1/41; compare EU, 1.11/11). However, while this philosophy discredits the aims and ambitions of "superstition" (i.e. various systems of natural religion), no similar restriction is imposed on our enquiries concerning common life (EU, 5.2/41; compare EU, 1.14–5, 12.25–34/13–5, 162–5).

Hume's skepticism, in sum, operates in two distinct spheres, and takes two distinct forms, one being a *product* of the other. In the philosophical sphere, he is a Pyrrhonian. In the sphere of common life, however, he is an academic skeptic. His project of providing a "natural geography" that delineates the "distinct parts and powers of the mind" (EU, 1.13/13) is undertaken in the sphere of common life—where his investigations are guided by the principles of *moderate* skepticism (thus allowing for some further advancement of human knowledge with respect to this matter). At the same time, the academic skeptic, as a result of exposure to Pyrrhonist reflections in the philosophical sphere, is never tempted to return to (theological) speculations that take him "beyond common life."

Hume concludes his discussion of skepticism in the first *Enquiry* by way of delineating boundaries of human understanding and identifying those investigations and enquiries that are specifically excluded on his (moderate skeptical) principles. He maintains that all legitimate enquiries—where some contribution to human knowledge can be expected—fall into one or other of the following categories. The first is demonstrative or a priori reasoning (which depends on relations of ideas, EU, 4.1/25). We can never pursue this beyond the bounds of quantity and number (EU, 12.27/163). It is, therefore, a fundamental mistake to suppose that we can use demonstrative reason to establish any matter of fact or existence. We can conceive of "any being, without exception" as not existing (EU, 12.28 164; compare T, 1.3.7.2/94; LG, 26). In every case, if we can conceive of a being existing, then we can conceive of it as not existing. Any effort to *prove* some being exists by means of demonstrative reasoning (i.e. a priori) is "nothing but sophistry and illusion" (EU, 12.34/165). In the context in which Hume was writing, the obvious significance of this claim is that it discredits the argument a priori for God's existence—as defended, most prominently, by Clarke.

The second category of enquiry is when we concern ourselves with matters of fact and existence, and must reach beyond the confines of demonstrative reason. Here, we must reason by arguments from cause and effect, which are based on experience (EU, 12.29/164). Experience, then, "is the foundation of moral reasoning, which forms the greater part of human knowledge, and is the source of all human action and behaviour" (EU, 12.29/164). Moral reasoning comprehends a number of subjects, including history, geography, astronomy, politics, and chemistry (EU, 12.30–1/165). Theology, as it aims to prove the existence of God or the immortality

of the soul (i.e. considered as matters of fact and existence) must be based on moral reasoning, as supported by experience (EU, 12.32/165).[5] Hume points out, however, that "the best and most solid foundation" for these theological claims is "*faith* and divine revelation" (EU, 12.32/165). This is, of course, consistent with the extended discussion of the argument a posteriori for the existence of God in the previous section (*Enquiry*, sec. 11), where he shows how weak and unconvincing all such causal reasoning on this question must be. To this we must also add that in the section before these (*Enquiry*, sec. 10), he argues that reason cannot support the claims of revealed religion—which must also rely on (mere) faith.[6] The obvious implication is that the claims of religion—both natural and revealed—lack any firm support or foundation in *reason*.

The last area of enquiry Hume considers is that of morals and criticism. He has already made clear—contrary to the claims of Locke and Clarke (among others)—that morality is not among the sciences capable of demonstration.[7] The only standard we have with respect to moral and natural beauty, he maintains, are "the general tastes of mankind" (EU, 12.33/165). Insofar as we can reason on this subject, it must take as its object facts about human taste and sentiments—a view he defends at greater length in the second *Enquiry*.

Hume's discussion of skepticism in the last section suggests two fundamental questions of interpretation. First, does Hume defend Pyrrhonism, or only a (more limited) academic or mitigated skepticism? Second (and related), are his skeptical principles directed at a particular target? That is, is his skepticism "subject-*sensitive*" or "subject-*neutral*"? More specifically, are his skeptical arguments—as some of his remarks about the relationship between the skeptic and the atheist suggest (EU, 12.2/149; compare EU, 5.1/41)—targeted particularly against the theological speculations of "the religious philosophers"?

1. The answer to the first question is that Hume is *both* a Pyrrhonist *and* a mitigated skeptic. What is necessary, in order to understand his philosophy, is to appreciate how these two modes of skepticism are related to each other in his system. In the philosophical sphere, insulated from the demands of the ordinary occupations and concerns of common life, Pyrrhonism is irrefutable and leads to uncertainty and doubt about even the most obvious and familiar matters (compare LG, 19, 21). When, however, we return to common life, these principles are unlivable, and our doubts and uncertainties disappear. In this sphere, "the more powerful principles of our nature" (EU, 12.21/159) put a check on all our skeptical reflections, and place limits on our "undistinguished doubts" (EU, 12.24/161). The influence of Pyrrhonism, nevertheless, remains. It takes the form of encouraging a "modesty and reserve" that corrects our natural tendency to dogmatism, and it also takes the form of discouraging all (vain) efforts to extend enquiries beyond the "narrow reach" of common life.

What is crucial, on this interpretation, is to appreciate the *dynamic* nature of Hume's skeptical commitments.[8] To describe Hume's philosophy as either Pyrrhonian or academic skepticism is to present it as static—but this is something he explicitly rejects. On his account, the influence of skeptical reflections on human life is a function of the extent to which the influence of *reason* governs us. If we relied on reason *alone*—as we do in the sphere of philosophy—we would be driven

into a state of Pyrrhonian doubt and uncertainty. In common life, however, reason and nature are forces that are (to a greater or lesser degree) balanced against each other, and thus even "the most determined sceptic" returns to a condition where he "must act and reason and believe" (EU, 12.23/159–60). The extent to which an individual moves from the philosophical sphere to the sphere of common life will vary, depending on his temperament, circumstances, and education.[9]

The *value* of the Pyrrhonian philosophy, on this view of things, is that it serves as the most effective way to sustain and support our commitment to the principles of *mitigated* skepticism in the sphere of common life. By cultivating the Pyrrhonian philosophy, we are able to live according to the principles of the *academical* philosophy—which is both durable and useful—when we return to our everyday occupations and researches. Clearly, then, Hume's Pyrrhonism and mitigated skepticism have complementary roles to play in their respective spheres, and it would be a mistake to suggest that he recommends one in favor of the other. This would be to misrepresent his understanding of the dynamic relationship that holds between them.

2. In relation to the question whether Hume's skepticism is targeted at "superstition" or is more sweeping in character, we may begin by observing that the Pyrrhonist philosophy would subvert all knowledge. From this perspective, our enquiries into the natural and moral sciences are no less uncertain and doubtful than the "airy science" of "divinity or school metaphysics" (EU, 1.12, 12.34/12, 165). This is not true, however, from the perspective of mitigated skepticism (i.e. as embraced and practiced in common life). From that perspective, we have demonstrative knowledge relating to quantity and number, and we have moral knowledge, based on experience, with respect to those subjects that lie close to us—such as history, geography, physics, chemistry, and so on. When it comes to those questions that lie beyond this—for example, "the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to eternity" (EU, 12.25/162)—we expect that nothing certain can be established. The claims of divinity and school metaphysics, therefore, are particular targets of the *academic* philosophy, which is itself "the natural result of the Pyrrhonian doubts and scruples" (EU, 12.25/162). In this way, Hume's Pyrrhonian commitments *indirectly* target the "rash arrogance" and "lofty pretensions" of the theologians and divines who aim to use either demonstrative or moral reasoning to establish their (dogmatic) claims. Whereas Pyrrhonian skepticism is subject-neutral, the mitigated skepticism that is its natural result is *subject-sensitive*, since it checks our inclination to pursue *theological* speculations that take us beyond the reach of common life.

3

Part 1 of Hume's *Dialogues* makes plain the deep relevance of skepticism to issues of natural religion—something he already addressed in both the *Letter* (discussing the *Treatise*) and the first *Enquiry*. In the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes and Philo cover the key claims Hume established in the closing section of the *Enquiry*. Philo, who has been introduced as a "careless sceptic" (D, 30; compare T, 1.3.7.14/273), opens his

remarks by observing "the weakness, blindness and narrow limits of human reason," even as it concerns the "subjects of common life and practice" (D, 33). When we consider "abstruse" questions that are "remote from common life and experience," we can hardly retain any "confidence in this frail faculty of reason" (D, 33). The sort of questions Philo specifically has in mind are those suggested by theological speculations—such as those "concerning the origin of worlds, or [tracing] their history from eternity to eternity" (D, 33–4; compare EU, 2.25/162).

In reply to this, Cleanthes—whose role in the *Dialogues* is to defend the argument a posteriori—suggests that Philo's (supposed) aim "to erect religious faith on philosophical skepticism" cannot be taken seriously, since skeptical principles would be impossible to live by (D, 34, 38–9). Philo accepts this criticism, but replies that the reasoning of the skeptic, like that of the Stoic, has some influence on "his conduct in common life" (D, 35). The skeptic will acknowledge, Philo says,

> that from our earliest infancy we make continual advances in forming more general principles of conduct and reasoning; that the larger experience we acquire, and the stronger reason we are endowed with, we always render our principles the more general and comprehensive; and that what we call *philosophy* is nothing but a more regular and methodical operation of the same kind. (D, 36)

These observations about the limits of skepticism are entirely consistent with what Hume says about mitigated skepticism in the *Enquiry* (EU, 12.25/162; compare EU, 1. 13–5/13–5).

Clearly, then, the mitigated skepticism—which is the result of Pyrrhonianism—will not put an end into our investigations into those subjects that concern common life. Nevertheless, as Hume made plain in the *Enquiry*, skeptical reflections continue to have some (considerable) influence.

> But when we look beyond human affairs and the properties of the surrounding bodies: When we carry our speculations into the two eternities, before and after the present state of things; into the creation and formation of the universe; the existence and properties of spirits; the powers and operations of one universal spirit, existing without beginning and without end; omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, infinite, and incomprehensible: We must be far removed from the smallest tendency to skepticism not to be apprehensive, that we have here got quite beyond the reach of our faculties. (D, 36–7)

Philo goes on to say what, according to his (limited) skeptical principles, we are capable of acquiring knowledge of, and what is excluded.

> 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 familiarised to our apprehension. (D, 37)

The position Philo takes up in this passage is the same as that which Hume defends in the *Enquiry*. Although Pyrrhonianism cannot be refuted by any (philosophical) argument, it is subverted by the force of nature, since the skeptic must act, live, and converse like other men (D, 36). The principles of Pyrrhonism do have, nevertheless, some influence on our conduct and reasonings in common life, by imposing limits on our speculations—particularly as they concern theological questions.

Cleanthes' reply to this is that Philo cannot defend the distinction he seeks to draw between religious speculations, and those in other areas, such as mathematics and natural and moral sciences (D, 38–9). The reasoning and arguments involved in these subjects are of a similar nature and character, and, if anything, "the advantage lies entirely on the side of theology and natural religion," since "very abstruse reasoning" can be found in many other areas of scientific investigation (D, 38–40). The fact is, Cleanthes says, "the religious hypothesis," far from being difficult and abstruse, "is founded on the simplest and most obvious arguments" (D, 40). The bulk of the *Dialogues* is, of course, devoted to showing that Cleanthes' confidence in this view is misplaced.[10]

Having raised his objection to Philo's skeptical strictures against natural religion, Cleanthes makes some observations about the relations between religion and skepticism over the centuries. He points out that when Christianity was first established, it was usual for "religious teachers" to adopt the views of the skeptics concerning the weaknesses of human understanding. The same tendency to insist on "the excellency of faith" and to denigrate natural reason was present among the first Reformers, as well as some Catholic thinkers, such as Huet.[11] This changed, Cleanthes notes, with Locke, who was the first "to assert, that *faith* was nothing but a species of *reason*, that religion was only a branch of philosophy, and that a chain of arguments, similar to that which established any truth in morals, politics, or physics, was always employed in discovering all the principles of theology, natural and revealed" (D, 40–1). At the same time, the "philosophical scepticism of the Fathers and first Reformers" was put to "ill use [by] Bayle and other libertines." The result of all this, Cleanthes suggests, is that "all pretenders to reasoning and philosophy, [accept] that atheist and sceptic are almost synonymous" (D, 41).

Philo elaborates further on these historical observations as they relate to the current (i.e. eighteenth-century) understanding of the relationship between skeptic and atheist. He begins by noting that skepticism may be either "religious" or "irreligious" in form (D, 41). In the early days of Christianity, the "priests" took the view that "a belief that human reason was equal to everything" was likely to encourage "atheism, deism or heresy" (D, 41). With changes in education and commerce, Philo says, "our sagacious divines" have changed their whole system of philosophy" (D, 41–2). They are no longer Pyrrhonians and Academics, but now "talk the language of Stoics, Platonists and Peripatetics." Instead of distrusting reason as a source of atheism, "we have now no other principle to lead us into religion" (D, 42). In general, priests and divines use whatever philosophy "best suits the purpose of these reverend gentlemen, in giving them an ascendant over mankind" (D, 42).[12]

It is evident that the central themes concerning the relationship between skepticism and natural religion are similar in the *Dialogues* and first *Enquiry*. The *Dialogues*, however, clarifies a point the first *Enquiry* leaves somewhat

obscure: why Hume says that the skeptic is, like the atheist, "another enemy of religion, who naturally provokes the indignation of *all* divines and graver philosophers" (EU, 12.2/149; my emphasis). This comment is especially puzzling in the context of the *Enquiry*, since Hume goes out of his way to suggest that religion may be founded on *faith*, and not reason (EU, 10.41, 12.32/131, 165). This issue is clarified in part 1 of the *Dialogues*. As Philo explains, "sagacious divines" now—that is, after Locke—take the view that religion is "only a branch of philosophy" and that reason will "lead us into religion," not away from it (D, 40–2). So it is *now* the view of the clergy and their associates "that atheist and sceptic are almost synonymous" (D, 41). Whereas skepticism once served the interests of religion (i.e. the early Fathers, the first Reformers, etc.), it is now deemed "irreligious" because it opposes the dogmatism the "priests" have embraced. The general point Hume is making, therefore, is that in an age when the defenders of Christianity are dogmatists whose aim is to found religion on reason, the skeptic will naturally be regarded as "the enemy of religion," and philosophy of this kind will be judged "irreligious" (D, 41; compare EU, 5.1/41; 12.2/149). From any perspective, what is clear is that the skeptic—whether "religious" or "irreligious"—is no friend of any theology that aims to secure religion on the foundations of reason. Those who conceive of religion in these terms (i.e. Locke et al.), cannot but deem the skeptic "the enemy of religion."

4

The question I now want to ask is to what extent Hume's skeptical aims and ambitions in the *Treatise* are consistent with the views advanced in the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*. In a number of different contexts, he asserts the view that the fundamental philosophical principles in the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry* are the same.[13] If this is correct, then it reasonable to assume that the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* have the same general skeptical commitments and objectives. On any account, Hume certainly made little effort to hide the skeptical character of his philosophy in the *Treatise*. In the *Abstract*, for example, he asserts: "the philosophy contained in this book is very sceptical, and tends to give us a notion of the *imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding*" (TA, 27/657; my emphasis). He points out that in this work he "insists upon several other sceptical topics; and upon the whole concludes, that we assent to our faculties, and employ our reason only because we cannot help it. Philosophy would render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it" (TA, 27/657). This summary of his skeptical commitments accords entirely with the basic themes of the *Enquiry* and *Dialogues*: skepticism is irrefutable from the philosophical perspective, but when we return to *common life*, we continue to act, reason, and believe. Clearly this is a theme that would not be welcome to those philosophers and divines who hold that "religion is only a branch of philosophy" (D, 40) and that the reasonings involved are no less reliable or different in character from those relating to common life (i.e. morals, politics, physics, etc.).

Hume's most detailed and systematic account of his general skeptical commitments, as presented in the *Treatise*, is found in the conclusion to book 1. (The author of the *Specimen* cites passages from this section are at length, with a view to

showing Hume's "universal scepticism": LG, 4–7.) Hume's discussion of the human understanding ends—as it does in the first *Enquiry*—with an account of the *practical* significance of his skeptical principles. Human understanding, he says, "when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life" (T, 1.4.7.7/267–8). We are saved from this "total scepticism" (i.e. Pyrrhonism; TA, 27/657) only by the force and influence of the imagination. That is, "since reason is incapable of dispelling these [skeptical] clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium" (T, 1.4.7.9/269). When we "relax," and withdraw from the "intense view" suggested by skeptical reflections, then we must "live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life" (T, 1.4.7.10/269; compare EU, 12.23/160). In these circumstances, we cannot *sustain* our Pyrrhonism, and "must yield to the current of nature," and submit to our senses and understanding (T, 1.4.7.10/269).[14]

The question Hume raises at this point is what *end* or *purpose* is served by trying to resist "the current of nature." To reject all reasoning in science and philosophy would have dangerous, if not fatal, consequences (T, 1.4.7.7/267). When the skeptical reflections that are required to resist the force of the imagination produce no good consequences, then there is no reason or obligation to impose the "intense view" on ourselves. Moreover, since we may acquire *pleasure* from pursuing our investigations into morals, politics, and human nature, and we are aware of our "deplorable ignorance" on these matters, there is no reason to abandon these studies (T, 1.4.7.14/272). These are, then, the limits to (extravagant) skepticism: we cannot avoid reasoning and believing when we relax in the sphere of common life, and if we could, skepticism of this kind would not only deny us the pleasures of science and philosophy, it would likely have "fatal consequences."

This leads Hume to ask about speculations that reach beyond the sphere of common life, and the "narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action" (T, 1.4.7.13/271). He draws this contrast in terms of a choice between the speculations of "philosophy" and "superstition." Philosophy, on this account, concerns itself "with assigning new causes and principles to the phenomena, which appear in the visible world" (T, 1.4.7.13/271). In contrast to this, superstition "opens a world of its own, and presents us with scenes, and beings, and objects, which are altogether new" (T, 1.4.7.13/271; compare T, intro. 4; 1.4.7.8/xix, 269). Faced with a choice about which kind of speculation to pursue, Hume makes "bold to recommend philosophy"—that is, as it relates to common life—and says he "shall not scruple to give it the preference to superstition of every kind or denomination" (T, 1.4.7.13/271). This recommendation is based on the observation that religious speculations and hypotheses have a stronger influence on the mind, and are "often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions" (T, 1.4.7.13/272).[15] Philosophical speculations, by contrast, have less influence over our passions and the conduct of life, and "seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities.… Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous" (T, 1.4.7.13/272).

The fundamental force of Hume's skeptical philosophy in the *Treatise*, as he explains it in the conclusion to book 1, comes to this. Hume does not aim to interest

those who are occupied with the objects of the senses and visible world with the more remote and ambitious speculations that are encouraged by "superstition." On the contrary, he aims to direct philosophers' attention *away* from these "flights of the imagination" (T, 1.4.7.6, 1.4.7.12/267, 271) and return their attention to problems of *common life*, where they may expect to "contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge" (T, 1.4.7.14/272–3). He recommends, in particular, that philosophers should devote their energies to the "science of man," a subject that has hitherto been "most neglected" (T, 1.4.7.14/273). In other words, instead of pursuing systems of speculative theology (the "demonstrations" of Locke and Clarke are especially obvious targets of this), we ought to pursue the project of the "science of man"—as modeled after Hobbes's works. This would give a "different turn to the speculations of philosophers, and [point] out to them more distinctly those subjects, where alone they can expect assurance and conviction" (T, 1.4.7.14/273).[16]

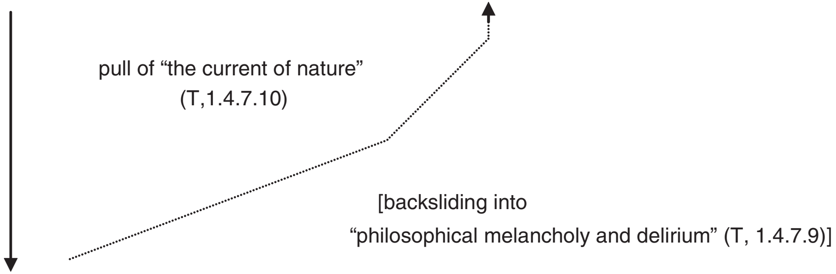
It is evident that in the conclusion to book 1, Hume does not characterize the relationship between his Pyrrhonianism and his mitigated skepticism as clearly and precisely as he does in the *Enquiry*. Nevertheless, the same general set of commitments is present. Hume makes clear that "philosophy wou'd render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it" (TA, 27/657). There is, however, no reason or obligation to try to live these (extreme) skeptical principles unless some end or purpose is served. There is no need, therefore, to abandon our speculations and investigations concerning the questions of common life (e.g. morals, politics, human nature, etc.), since these activities are both pleasurable in themselves and can be subject to "critical examination"(T, 1.4.7.14/272). These speculations, as they relate to common life, serve to advance knowledge and contribute to human happiness. The same cannot be said, however, of the more remote and ambitious speculations encouraged by "superstition." The hypotheses they embrace "disturb the conduct of our lives and actions" and often prove "dangerous." With this, Hume arrives at the same outlook in the *Treatise* he later endorses in the *Enquiry*: a mitigated skepticism that *discourages theological speculation, but encourages the "science of man."*

The diagram shows the two most important features of Hume's skeptical system (fig. 15.1). The first concerns the *dynamic* aspect—the progress—of Hume's skeptic, who travels from Pyrrhonism ("the intense view") to mitigated skepticism ("the relaxed view").

As the diagram illustrates, Pyrrhonian reflections are "fatal" to *all* knowledge, not just to religion (T, 1.4.7.7/268; compare D,38). For this reason, Pyrrhonianism may be described as "subject-neutral" skepticism. It is Hume's view that this kind of skepticism cannot be refuted, but also that it cannot be lived (T, 1.4.7.7–11/267–70). The force of "the current of nature" moves us to reason, believe, and act like other people (T, 1.4.7.9/269; compare 1.4.1.7, 1.4.2.1, 1.4.2.53, 1.4.2.57/183, 187, 216, 218). When we return to the speculations of ordinary life, however, the influence of the Pyrrhonian reflections remains with us. In particular, since we are persuaded of "the weakness and uncertainty of mere human reason" (T, 1.4.7.1/264; LG, 21), we restrain our (prideful) disposition to speculate about those matters that lie beyond the "narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action" (T, 1.4.7.13/271). For this reason, Hume recommends, consistent with his moderate skepticism, that we should turn away from the remote speculations that are encouraged

"Intense View"

Pyrrhonism or Extreme Scepticism → "subverts entirely the human understanding" (T, 1.4.7.7)



"Relaxed View" → (i) Permits speculations concerning "the sphere of common life":
Mitigated or Moderate e.g. "science of man" (T, 1.4.7.13, 1.4.7.14)
Scepticism

*** *Recognized Limits of Human Understanding* *****

→ (ii) Prohibits all speculation beyond the confines of common life:
e.g. hypotheses and speculations of "superstition" (T, 1.4.7.13)

FIGURE 15.1. A skeptic's progress: The dynamic interpretation

by superstition, and take up the "most neglected" subject of the "science of man" (T, 1.4.7.13, 1.4.7.14/271, 273). He does allow that—depending on our temperament and situation—we may fall back into the "intense view," and despair of all enquiries (T, 1.4.7.8/268; compare 1.4.2.56–7/217–8). Nevertheless, even the "extravagant sceptic," he claims, cannot always doubt everything, and to this extent need not be taken seriously (T, 1.4.1.7, 1.4.2.1, 1.4.2.57/183, 187, 218, 273–4; LG, 20).

The second important feature of Hume's skeptical system (see fig. 15.1) involves the *limits* of human understanding when we take up the (relaxed) view of mitigated skepticism. This view, as I have explained, results from the influence of Pyrrhonian reflections when combined with the force of the "current of nature." That is to say, it is a *causal product of the influence of reason and the imagination*. Reason, acting by itself, would entirely subvert the human understanding (T, 1.4.7.7/268; TA, 27/657), and so everything would be placed beyond the scope of human knowledge. But this is not where Hume leaves us, since we are, he argues, swept along by the "current of nature," and continue to reason, believe, and act like everyone else. Nevertheless, some boundaries are erected to our investigations, and limits placed on the "flights of our imagination" and our speculative ambitions, as a result of (the "melancholy") observations regarding the weaknesses of human reason. From the perspective of the "relaxed view"—which we (inevitably) return to when we step back from "intense" skeptical reflections—there is an important *boundary* to be recognized between the

speculations of "superstition" and "philosophy" (T, 1.4.7 13/271). Only someone who has failed to learn the lessons of Pyrrhonism, Hume says, will persist in trying to reach beyond this boundary, and pursue hypotheses relating to questions about the origin of the world, invisible beings, and our future condition beyond this world (compare T, 1.4.7.8, 1.4.7.13–4/269, 271–3; compare EU, 8.1/81). This opposition between the dogmatic and "lofty pretensions" of the "religious philosophers" and the skeptical lessons relating to the scope and limits of human understanding lie at the very heart of Hume's skeptical intentions in the *Treatise*.

5

In the *Letter*, as already explained, Hume represents his skeptical principles as consistent with the teachings of (sincere) religious skeptics, such as Huet (LG, 21). In the *Dialogues*, through Cleanthes, Hume takes note of "religious teachers" who made use of the lessons of skepticism but goes on to point out that, in his own age, philosophical skepticism has become associated with "libertines" such as Bayle, to the extent that the "atheist and sceptic are almost synonymous" (D, 40–2, 60). Earlier I noted that during the first half of the eighteenth century, prominent defenders of the Christian religion (as Hume's remarks indicate) generally regarded the skeptical philosophy as a *weapon* "modern atheists"—most notably, Hobbes and Bayle—were using *against* the claims of natural religion. Given these considerations, we ought to ask how Hume's skeptical principles relate to the views of Hobbes and Bayle, considered as skeptical critics of natural religion.[17]

The affinities between Hume's conclusions regarding the influence of Pyrrhonian reflections and Bayle's remarks on the same subject are obvious. In note B of his article "Pyrrho," Bayle suggests that it is "only religion that has anything to fear from Pyrrhonism." The reason for this, he says, is that religion ought to be based on certainty," but when "the firm conviction of its truths is erased from the mind," then its aims, its effects, its usages will "collapse." In contrast with this, neither Pyrrhonism nor Academic skepticism poses any "danger" to the natural sciences or to the state. All good scientists of the time, Bayle says, are "convinced that nature is an impenetrable abyss," and they are satisfied to look only for "probable hypotheses and collecting data."[18] Similarly, all skeptics should accept that a person "should conform to the customs of one's country…and act upon matters on the basis of probabilities without waiting for certainty."[19] Beyond this, faith, education, ignorance, and natural inclination all serve to "constitute an impenetrable shield against the arrows of the Pyrrhonists."[20] Hume's skeptical commitments—which involve the (natural) movement from Pyrrhonism to "mitigated skepticism"—accord closely with Bayle's view of the role and limits of Pyrrhonist principles.

On the face of it, Hume's skeptical philosophy may seem poles apart from that of Hobbes, who is generally viewed as a clear example of a "dogmatic" thinker.[21] This view of things, however, ignores the significant skeptical themes in Hobbes's philosophy with respect to the claims and ambitions of natural religion. More specifically, both Hobbes and Hume are agreed that the scope of human knowledge is *limited*, and that while we may acquire (some degree of) knowledge regarding the

"science of man," questions of *theology* are too "remote" from human experience to give any hope of expanding our knowledge in this area. For both Hobbes and Hume, therefore, empiricist principles serve to cut off natural theology at its roots. Whatever disagreements these two thinkers may have on other questions of methodology and epistemology, on this most basic issue they are agreed. For several generations after the publication of Hobbes's major works, British philosophy was preoccupied with the efforts of a wide variety of thinkers who aimed to show that Hobbes's skeptical claims against natural religion could not be sustained.[22] It is, therefore, very significant that Hume comes down—decisively—on the side of Hobbes on this fundamental issue.

6

How do these conclusions about the general character of Hume's (dynamic) skeptical commitments relate to the *methodology* of the *Treatise*? Discussions of the methodology in the *Treatise* almost always focus on Hume's attempt, as asserted in the subtitle, "to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects." It is characteristic of "naturalistic" interpretations of Hume to place heavy emphasis on this aspect of Hume's methodology, along with the associated view that Hume aims to be the "Newton of the moral sciences."[23] Other scholars have pointed out, however, that considerable caution needs to be exercised when attributing Hume's references to the "experimental method" to the influence of Newton.[24] They have also pointed out, related to this, that it is important not to conflate the *project* of the "science of man" with the *method* by which Hume aims to carry it out.[25] What is especially striking about most discussions of Hume's methodology in the *Treatise* is that so little has been said about his skeptical techniques in this work. This is especially puzzling since he makes clear that his "philosophy in this book is very sceptical" (TA, 27/657), and it is well known (to both Hume's contemporaries and our own) that the skeptics employed distinctive methods to discredit the aims and ambitions of dogmatists.

The most important skeptical method is that of "opposition." This strategy involves showing that for every argument that seeks to establish a point dogmatically, "there is another argument opposed to it which seeks to establish a point dogmatically and is equal to it in point of credibility and incredibility."[26] This procedure, Sextus says, leads the skeptic "to a suspension of judgment and then to mental tranquility."[27] This method of "opposition" or "antithesis" is applied by the skeptic to the question of God. For example, the skeptic points out that the (dogmatic) theists disagree among themselves about the understanding of "the notion of God," and that they advance different and conflicting arguments in support of their claims.[28] Sextus sums up the skeptic's position on this subject as follows.

> Well now, such are the arguments attempted on both sides, for the existence of gods and for the non-existence of gods. Their logical consequence is the Skeptics' suspension of judgment, especially since in addition to them there is also the diversity of views on the part of ordinary people about gods. For different people

> have differing and discordant notions about them, with the result that it is possible neither to believe all of them, as they are conflicting, nor to believe some of them, on account of their being equal of force.[29]

The result of this process, therefore, is not any (dogmatic) denial of the existence of god(s), but rather doubting all claims on this subject, since none has greater force than its contrary or rivals. While Sextus allows that most dogmatists are theists, he acknowledges that some are atheists, and that their claims are no less vulnerable to the method of "opposition." Clearly, then, the skeptic's procedure does not result in dogmatic atheism, but only in refusing to affirm the existence of God.[30]

All parties involved in the main debate at the turn of the eighteenth century were well versed in the method of opposition as it applied to issues of natural religion. Freethinkers such as Collins, for example, made much of the "many different ideas of the Deity" advanced by priests and other theologians.[31] Similarly, on the other side of the debate, John Edwards suggested that divisions of this kind among theists was a primary cause of atheism.[32] Other defenders of Christian orthodoxy, such as Cudworth, tried to turn the tables on the atheist camp by making much of the divisions within their ranks. In the same context in which he describes the "four kinds of atheist" (as cited by Hume, MEM, no. 40), Cudworth suggests that "the kingdom of Darkness [is] Divided, or Labouring with an Intestine Seditious War in its own Bowels, and thereby destroying itself."[33] In this way, Cudworth attempts to take advantage of the "civil war(s)" in the atheist camp, much as they did with their theist opponents. The skeptic, however, differs from all approaches of this kind, since his object is to use the method of opposition to produce a "suspension of judgment," not to advance one or other of the (dogmatic) claims.

This distinction is important, since, as Shaftesbury observes, it separates two "very different" kinds of atheist. One sort of atheist, he says, "absolutely denies," and the other "only doubts."[34] According to Shaftesbury, the second sort—who are "the more discreet and sober part of unbelievers"—should not be subject to the coercive punishments of the magistrate, since they pose no threat to society. On this general view of things, therefore, the skeptic or Pyrrhonist is a "doubter" but not a "denier," and atheists of this sort should be tolerated in society. Clearly, then, although the distinction between "deniers" and "doubters" was familiar to the eighteenth-century debate, prominent thinkers such as Shaftesbury did not conclude that this established a categorical difference between "skeptic" and "atheist" so much as a distinction between *two different kinds of "atheist."* This point is obviously of considerable relevance when trying to assess the relevance of Hume's skepticism to the claim that he should be read as an "atheist"—and it is a point that would not be lost on Hume.

To the extent that Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* is "very sceptical," we should expect to find some evidence that he employs the method of "opposing" the claims of the dogmatists. The best way to appreciate how Hume implemented this method is to look closely at the specific "oppositions" that appear in the course of the *Treatise*. For present purposes, however, it will suffice to note the extent to which his remarks and observations in the *Letter* reveal that this general methodology is at work. Throughout the replies given in the *Letter*, he emphasizes the extent to which

orthodox and sincere "religious philosophers" are themselves divided on the particular issues his critic has raised against him (i.e. relating to the "charges"). Hume's strategy, as noted, is to play off Christian skeptics against Christian dogmatists; defenders of the a priori argument against defenders of the argument a posteriori; Cartesians against Newtonians; moral rationalists against the moral sense school; and so on. The general force of this strategy is to show that, on any given issue, the arguments he advances are already endorsed by orthodox thinkers, and there is therefore no consensus among these thinkers about which of these arguments are compelling or doubtful. This approach enables Hume to discredit the dogmatic "pretensions" and "ambitions" of the defenders of Christian theology simply by taking advantage of their *internal divisions*. This is a basic methodological strategy he employs throughout the *Treatise*.

There is, then, much more to Hume's methodology in the *Treatise* than simply his use of "the experimental method" in pursuit of the "science of man." His skeptical objectives—to limit our investigations to the sphere of "common life"—are secured by means of his use of (the familiar) skeptical method of "opposing" arguments of dogmatists. A complete account of Hume's methodology should not overlook this aspect of his thought, and the way it relates to his general skeptical aims and objectives in the *Treatise*.

7

In this chapter, I have provided an interpretation of the irreligious character of Hume's general skeptical intentions in the *Treatise*. His basic aim, I maintain, is to reveal the "weakness and uncertainty of mere human reason" (LG, 21), so that he can show that all speculations that reach beyond "the common affairs of life"—specifically, those that are encouraged by "superstition"—should be abandoned. On issues of this kind, he says, we cannot expect any assurance or conviction (T, 1.4.7.23–4/271–3). This is the principal lesson of the conclusion of book I. He claims that we can draw a valuable *practical* conclusion from this skeptical lesson. Once we properly recognize the weaknesses and limits of human understanding, we ought to direct our investigations away from the speculations and hypotheses encouraged by "superstition" (T, 1.4.7.13/271–2). Instead, we should turn our attention to fields where we can expect to advance human knowledge—most notably, the "hitherto neglected" subject of the science of man (T, 1.4.7.14/273).

This general interpretation of Hume's skeptical commitments in the *Treatise* enables us to answer the difficulties associated with the "riddle" of the *Treatise*, as described in chapter 1. The two related questions that are fundamental to the riddle of the *Treatise* are these: (1) What is the *extent* of Hume's skeptical commitments in the *Treatise*? and (2) How can we *reconcile* Hume's (extreme) skeptical principles and commitments with his aim to pursue the project of a "science of man"? The answers to these questions can now be provided. Regarding Hume's skeptical commitments, it is essential to take note of their *dynamic* nature. More specifically, it is Hume's concern to use his extreme (Pyrrhonist) skeptical principles in order to bring us to, and sustain, the principles of a more moderate (academic) skepticism.

Hume undertakes his (Hobbist) project of a science of man from the position of a moderate, academic skepticism (i.e. as secured and sustained through his Pyrrhonist exercises). A "true sceptic," Hume argues, "will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction" (T, 1.4.7.14/273) and will never refuse the "innocent satisfactions" of investigations that are pursued in this "careless manner." Whereas extreme, Pyrrhonist principles would "cut off entirely all science and philosophy" (T, 1.4.7.7/268), the principles of academic skepticism pose no such barrier to the investigations Hume recommends to us.

In response to this interpretation, it may be argued that, however faithful it may be to Hume's intentions in the *Treatise*, it nevertheless leaves a serious *incoherence* at the heart of his philosophical system.[35] Granted that he aims to pursue his project of a science of man from within the set of commitments provided by a moderate, academic skepticism, we may now ask (of Hume) how *secure* these foundations are. His own answer to this question, the critic argues, is plainly less than reassuring. Hume makes the point himself that "philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it" (TA, 27/657). It is evident, therefore, that Hume cannot *justify* the philosophical principles of his moderate skepticism but adopts them only because we "must yield to the current of nature" and because we find that it is *pleasurable* to pursue our (modest) philosophical investigations (T, 1.4.7.12, 13/270–1). Clearly, however, naturalistic and pragmatic considerations of this kind cannot provide any *philosophical* answer to the skeptic—the relevant basis of his skepticism has not been removed. It follows that Hume's project of a science of man rests on foundations that he "subverts entirely" by his own (extreme) skeptical principles.

There are, I believe, two possible ways of replying on Hume's behalf to this line of criticism. The first is to say, simply, that our critic has not said anything more than Hume says himself. Hume makes clear that "the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason" (T, 1.4.2.1/187). In this way, if we are looking for secure *philosophical* foundations for the project of the "science of man," immune from any skeptical doubts, then Hume must agree with his critic that this cannot be done. Only the practical requirements of human life, and the pleasures of our "philosophical researches," can pull us back into these investigations and keep us committed to their pursuit. Hume has, however, another line of reply that does more to meet the critic's objection on its own terms. According to Hume, as noted, "a true sceptic will be *diffident of his philosophical doubts*, as well as his philosophical conviction" (T, 1.4.7.14/273; my emphasis). To this extent, *the principles of Pyrrhonism become self-subverting*. The academic skeptic, Hume suggests, is a *more perfect* skeptic because he turns his skeptical principles on themselves (T, 1.4.7.10/269). In contrast with this, the Pyrrhonist is more rash and dogmatic "than even the boldest and most affirmative philosophy" (EU, 1.15/15).[36] It follows from these observations that although philosophical reflection may *momentarily* "disturb" our willingness to reason and believe, *further reflection* will bring us to doubt our own doubts—thereby returning us to a more moderate, academic skepticism. What pulls us back from the abyss of "philosophical melancholy and delirium," therefore, is not only "the current of nature" but also the force of skeptical reflection itself. It is within this *philosophical dynamic* that

Hume undertakes to pursue his (Hobbist) project of a "science of man." From this perspective, there is no conflict between the principles of the "true sceptic" and the aims of a "science of man."

8

On the reading provided in this chapter, Hume is *both* a skeptic and a naturalist. However, in order to fully understand Hume's (dynamic) skeptical commitments, and how they relate to his naturalism, we need to interpret these elements in his philosophy in terms of his more fundamental *irreligious* aims and objectives. It is only from this perspective that we can see how his skepticism and naturalism are related to each other and the way in which they are motivated by a common irreligious source. This interpretation differs, not only from those who would emphasize one side of the skepticism/naturalism dichotomy at the expense of the other, but also from those who attempt to reconcile Hume's skepticism and naturalism in the *Treatise* without any reference to his (fundamental) irreligious aims and ambitions.[37] According to the irreligious interpretation, neither Hume's skeptical nor his naturalistic commitments can be properly understood outside this framework; much less is it possible to explain how they are related to each other or why Hume's philosophical system contains such a set of paradoxical commitments. The basic intent of Hume's skeptical principles and arguments, as here explained, is to discredit the metaphysical and epistemological ambitions of the "religious philosophers," while *at the same time* leaving some adequate foundation upon which to pursue his (Hobbist) project of a "science of man." I return to these issues in chapter 18.

THE ELEMENTS OF VIRTUOUS ATHEISM

Fain would they confound licentiousness in morals with liberty in thought and action, and make the libertine, who has the least mastery of himself, resemble his direct opposite.

Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*

Atheists plainly make a distinction betwixt good Reasoning and bad. Why not betwixt Vice & Virtue? Baille.

Hume, *Early Memoranda*

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Freedom within Necessity

Hume's "Clockwork Man"

[T]here can be no Religion without Freedom of Will.

Clarke, *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*

[Religion]... has been very unnecessarily interested in this question.

Hume, A *Treatise of Human Nature*

In this chapter, I will consider Hume's views on the subject "of liberty and necessity" in light of the relevant debate(s) that situate and structure his own contribution (T, 2.3.1–2). My primary concern will be to show that, contrary to the orthodox view, Hume's arguments on this subject are highly relevant to problems of religion as Hume and his contemporaries understood and debated them. More specifically, his necessitarian commitments, I maintain, contain features that are systematically irreligious in character—which is consistent with his deeper and wider irreligious intentions throughout the *Treatise*.

1

The orthodox view that the *Treatise* has little or no direct or substantial concern with problems of religion and that concerns of this kind were not introduced until the first *Enquiry* has a direct bearing on the interpretation of Hume's intentions in *Treatise*, 2.3.1–2. Although Hume's two versions of "liberty and necessity" closely resemble each other, they are not identical. Most of the elements that are common to both appear to lack any obvious irreligious or anti-Christian significance. In fact, it appears that Hume does not address *any* point of particular religious significance until he comes to describe religion's "unnecessary interest in this question" (T, 2.3.2.3/409). In dealing with this specific matter, he maintains that his views about necessity are not only "innocent," they are actually "advantageous to religion and morality" (T, 2.3.2.3/409). In the *Enquiry*, however, there is a significant shift in his way of dealing with this issue. In this context, he repeats the claim that both necessity and liberty, as he has defined them, "are not only consistent with morality,

but are absolutely essential to its support" (EU, 8.26/97), but he does not suggest that necessity is "advantageous" to religion. Instead, he adds a long discussion in which he describes the *difficulties* the doctrine of necessity presents for religion (EU, 8.32–6/99–103). This discussion has no counterpart in the *Treatise*. The general conclusion Hume reaches in this passage is that religion faces an insuperable dilemma on this subject. More specifically, the doctrine of necessity must imply either that God is the author of sin or that there is no real (moral) evil in this world, since all (human) action derives ultimately from "so good a cause" (i.e. God; EU, 8.32/99). Moreover, any attempt to evade this dilemma by embracing the free will position encounters other difficulties relating to God's foreknowledge (EU, 8.36/103). Although Hume presents himself as (innocently) puzzled by these theological "perplexities," the overall force of these additional passages is to show that it is not clear how religious doctrine can be reconciled with *any* coherent or plausible system.[1]

In the *Enquiry*, the reader is led to the conclusion that while necessity is "absolutely essential" to morality, religion encounters "inextricable difficulties, and even contradictions" (EU, 8.36/103; compare EU, 8.26/96, where he points out that "when any opinion leads to absurdities, it is certainly false"). This shift in both presentation and substance obviously lends support to the general claim that Hume *introduces* irreligious themes in the *Enquiry* that are otherwise (entirely) absent in the *Treatise*.[2] What this interpretation takes for granted, however, is that the elements of Hume's discussion that are common to both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* are without any irreligious significance. A careful examination of Hume's arguments, considered in the relevant context of the main debate, shows that this view of things is mistaken.

2

Insofar as commentators make any observation about Hume's predecessors and debts on this subject, the most common is that his compatibilist position is very similar to the position Hobbes defended in the previous century.[3] Hendel points out that Hume's title "Of Liberty and Necessity" seems to have been taken from the essay of the same title that is included in Hobbes's *Tripos*.[4] Clearly, then, on any reading, given the particular relationship between Hobbes and Hume on this subject, it is important to understand the significance and reputation of Hobbes's necessitarianism in the context of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Hobbes's necessitarianism, with its associated denial of free will, was widely regarded as a key element of his "atheistic" philosophy. The most prominent of Hobbes's contemporary critics on the subject of liberty and necessity was Bishop Bramhall, who wrote a vigorous reply to Hobbes and defended the (libertarian) free will position.[5] The influence of the Hobbes–Bramhall debate extended well into the eighteenth century, by which time a number of other important contributions had been made. Among the major participants at this time were figures such as Locke, Bayle, Leibniz, and William King.[6] Without any doubt, however, in the context of early eighteenth-century British philosophy, the most important and influential response to Hobbes's necessitarianism came from Samuel Clarke—as part of his more general response to Hobbes's "atheistic" philosophy.

In his Boyle Lectures, Clarke claims that the problem of free will is "the question of the greatest concern of all, in matters of both religion and human life."[7] If man is simply a material being, he argues, then all his actions and activities would be the necessary outcome of the mechanical laws that govern the material world. That is to say, if man were a material being, then he would not enjoy "liberty of choice." His actions, Clarke suggests, would all be as necessary as the motions of a clock.[8] Only immaterial substance, Clarke claims, has active power, the power of beginning motion or initiating action.[9] Experience and observation shows that we have "a power of self-motivation." Indeed, the arguments based on experience and observation "are so strong that nothing less than strict demonstration that the thing [free will] is absolutely impossible . . . can make us in the least doubt that we have it not."[10] What motivates Clarke's assault on "clockwork man" is, clearly, his belief that if man does not possess free will, then he cannot be justly held accountable for his actions, either to other human beings here on earth or to God in a future state.[11]

Clarke's arguments against the necessitarianism of Hobbes (and Spinoza) were developed in further detail when he entered into his controversy with Collins.[12] This debate, as noted, began in 1707 with a series of exchanges between Clarke and Collins arising out of Clarke's criticisms of Henry Dodwell's views about the human soul. A second stage of this debate evolved in 1717, when Collins published his *Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* and Clarke replied to this work in his *Remarks* on Collins's *Human Liberty*.[13] These exchanges between Clarke and Collins on the subject of free will came to dominate the eighteenth-century discussion of this topic.[14]

The most basic points of controversy between Clarke and Collins as they relate to free will are as follows.

1. In the preface to *Human Liberty*, Collins asserts that although he denies "liberty in a certain meaning of that word; yet I contend for *liberty*, as it signifies, a power in man, to do as he wills, or pleases."[15] The mistake that is commonly made is to confuse this kind of liberty with "liberty from necessity," which Collins claims does not have any existence and is contrary to experience.[16] Clarke rejects Collins's account of liberty as "false" and argues that this kind of liberty belongs to "clocks and watches."[17] True liberty must exclude necessity, as "a necessary agent or a necessary action is a contradiction in terms."[18] In his *Demonstration*, Clarke argued that the real question is not whether a person can do as he pleases, but whether or not he has "liberty of will" or a power of agency or free choice.[19] This idea of liberty involves the "power of beginning motion."[20] To be an agent, in the true sense, is to have this power to begin motion or "self-moving power," which is genuinely active and not a passive reaction to external, efficient causes.[21]

2. Collins denies that experience provides any evidence for free will. On the contrary, he argues that the "vulgar" mistakenly conclude that they have a freedom of this kind only because they "either attend not to, or see not the causes of their actions."[22] Clarke's position is diametrically opposed to this. In the *Demonstration*, he claims that "the arguments drawn from continual experience and observation" that we have "liberty of will" or a "power of beginning motion" are so strong that nothing less than a demonstration that it is impossible or implies a contradiction "can make us in the least doubt of it."[23] In response to Collins's arguments, Clarke

maintains that, although there is a "bare possibility" that we are deceived by God about this issue, "no man in his senses" doubts that his experience is not proof that he has free will.[24]

3. A central point of disagreement between Clarke and Collins is the issue of causation. Both thinkers are agreed that everything must have a cause.[25] What they disagree about is whether every cause is such that it is an *antecedent efficient* cause that *necessitates* its effect. Collins maintains that if a cause does not necessitate its effect in such a way that in the same circumstances its effect must follow (i.e. could not be otherwise) then the cause is not "suited to its effect," and so is "no cause at all."[26] Against this view, Clarke argues that it is essential to distinguish "moral necessity" from "physical efficients."[27] Collins, Clarke says, is guilty of a "double absurdity."

> *First*, in supposing *Reasons or Motives*...to make the same *necessary Impulse* upon *intelligent* Subjects, as *Matter in Motion* does upon *unintelligent Subjects*; which is supposing *abstract Notions* to be *Substances*. And *Secondly*, in endeavouring to impose it upon his Reader as a thing taken for *granted*, that *Moral Necessity* and *Physical Necessity* do not differ intrinsically in their *own Nature*, but only with Regard to the *Subject* they are applied to: When on the contrary he well knows, that, by *Moral Necessity*, consistent Writers never mean any thing more than to express in *a figurative Manner* the Certainty of such an Event, as may in Reason be fully depended upon, though *literally* and *in philosophical Strictness of Truth*, there be *no Necessity at all* of the Event.[28]

Since motives or reasons "determine" our actions only in a figurative or metaphorical sense, or as mere "occasions," it is the *active power* of the *agent*—understood as an *immaterial*, intelligent substance—that is the proper cause of action.[29]

4. In *Human Liberty*, Collins argues that necessity, far from being destructive of morality, is essential to it. He uses two specific arguments to defend this position. First, he argues that if humans are not necessary agents, and pleasure and pain are not causes that determine our will, rewards and punishments would not have any influence on our conduct.[30] Second, he argues that necessity does not destroy the distinction between virtue and vice or morality and immorality. "Morality or virtue," he says, "consists in such actions as are in their own nature, and upon the whole pleasant; and immorality and vice consists in such actions as are in their own nature, and upon the whole painful."[31] More specifically, as a conscious being who understands good and evil, a person can judge his own conduct as immoral or vicious, and feel shame in response to it.[32] Clarke rejects both these arguments. Against the first, he argues that a being "with a Power of Self-motion or Action" is in no way "indifferent" to reasons or motives, as "indifference to power" should not be confused with "indifference to inclination."[33] Against the second, he argues that if human beings are subject to necessity, then they are no more deserving of rewards and punishments than clocks or watches.[34]

5. Clarke devotes the final sections of his *Remarks* to explaining why necessity is destructive of religion. His basic point, which he also asserts in the closing sections of his earlier debate with Collins, is that necessity erodes all moral *desert*, and so there would not be "any *Justice* in God's final Distribution of rewards and Punishments."[35] In the *Demonstration*, Clarke makes the further point that *moral*

evil is a consequence of humans' "abuse of liberty," which proves that God is not the source of evil, which would otherwise compromise his moral attributes (i.e. infinite goodness and justice).[36]

In *Human Liberty*, Collins argues that "if any future were contingent, or uncertain, or depended on the liberty of man...God himself could only guess at the existence of such things."[37] Divine foreknowledge, therefore, must presuppose "the necessary existence of all things future."[38] Collins also points out that his views on this subject are in line with those of other thinkers (e.g. Luther) who are not tainted with the reputation of irreligion or atheism.[39] Earlier in his *Answer* to Clarke's *Third Defence*, Collins summarized the situation this way:

> I know the Doctrine of *Necessity* is too generally supposed to be irreligious and atheistical; and I must confess, I cannot but wonder at it, considering that the Predestinarians are so numerous in all Sects of Christians....And if, in the Church of *England*, its Members incline to Arminianism, yet it is affirmed by many, that our Articles are Calvinistical, and acknowledged by all, that they are not designed to exclude a *Calvinistical* Meaning: which is a sufficient Ground to presume, that the Compilers were *Calvinists*, or at least, they did not think *Calvinism* led to Irreligion.[40]

Clarke's response is that God's foreknowledge neither has any influence on the course of things nor necessitates them.[41] While it is impossible for us to explain how God can foresee the future, his foreknowledge does not itself "cause the course of things."[42] Clarke is also clear that the doctrine of necessity—whatever a given author's intentions may be—"takes away all Foundation of Religion."[43] This is consistent with the general claim that he makes repeatedly in the *Demonstration* that the question of "liberty of will" is "of the greatest consequence to Religion and Morality."[44]

Early on in this controversy, Collins challenged Clarke to show that his thesis concerning the immateriality of the soul was of "any use to the ends and purposes of religion." Clarke replied:

> If the *Mind* of Man, were nothing but a certain *System of Matter*; and *Thinking*, nothing but a certain *Mode of Motion* in that System: It would follow, that, since every *Determination* of Motion depends *necessarily* upon the *Impulses* that cause it, therefore every *Thought* in a Man's Mind *must likewise be necessary*, and depending wholly upon external Causes; And there could be no such thing in Us as *Liberty*, or a Power of *Self-Determination*. Now what *Ends and Purposes of Religion* mere Clocks and Watches are capable of serving, needs no long and nice Consideration.[45]

The image of "clockwork man" and its incompatibility with "the ends and purposes of religion"—particularly as it relates to the doctrine of future rewards and punishments—was fundamental to Clarke's entire objection to the materialism and necessitarianism of "atheists" such as Hobbes and Spinoza. Clarke's position, in this respect, was entirely orthodox among the leading lights of the Anglican clergy at this time.[46] Butler claims, for example, that "the opinion of necessity seems to be the very basis, upon which infidelity grounds itself."[47] Berkeley takes the same view, using his freethinking character "Alciphron" to describe the issue from the other side.

> Religion it is evident, implies the worship of God, which worship supposeth rewards and punishments, which suppose merits and demerits, actions good and evil, and

> these suppose *human liberty*, a thing impossible: and, consequently, religion, a thing built thereon, must be an unreasonable absurd thing. There can be no rational fears where there is no guilt; nor any guilt where there is nothing but what unavoidably follows from the structure of the world and the laws of motion.... There is therefore no foundation for praise or blame, fear or hope, reward or punishment; nor consequently for religion, which, as I observed before, is built upon and supposeth those things.[48]

As Berkeley's observation (as presented by "Alciphron") makes clear, it was widely held by Anglican divines in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century that the doctrine of necessity was a core feature of the philosophy of atheism, as found in its most prominent representatives (namely Hobbes, Spinoza, Collins, et al.). Any philosopher participating in this debate at this time would have been well aware that this was the orthodox view. It would, therefore, be incumbent on any necessitarian who had no irreligious intent to fend off all objections of this kind in a careful and explicit manner.

An important strand of the free will debate led right to Hume's doorstep in the Scottish Borders during the early 1730s. The central figures in this, as already noted (chapter 4), were William Dudgeon and Andrew Baxter. In 1732, Dudgeon published *The State of the Moral World Considered*. In this work he presents a dialogue in which he defends a necessitarian view along the lines of Collins, fusing this with (optimistic) themes from Shaftesbury and Leibniz. He defends this position against criticisms that are plainly of a broadly Clarkean character. Baxter's *Reflections* on Dudgeon's work criticizes him in the sharpest terms, including the claim that Dudgeon advances "down right Anarchy and Atheism" and that he is a "seditious reasoner."[49] Baxter explicitly associates Dudgeon's necessitarianism or "scheme of unaccountableness" with the views of Leibniz and Collins, and he opposes them with his own defense of Clarke's doctrine.[50] One of Baxter's fundamental objections to Dudgeon's necessitarian scheme is that it makes God the author of "sin and moral evil" in this world and makes it impossible to account for moral evil in terms of the abuse of "liberty of indifference"—the only explanation, he claims, for moral evil that is consistent with God's (perfect) moral attributes.[51] Baxter's hostile attack on Dudgeon—which pays considerable attention to his views about rewards and punishments in a future state—was closely connected with the prosecution of Dudgeon by the local clergy in the Presbytery of Chirnside. Since Hume's uncle, Rev. George Home, was directly involved in these proceedings, it is not credible that Hume had no knowledge or interest in this debate during the period when he was preparing and writing the *Treatise*.

Dudgeon replied to Baxter in his *Vindication of the Moral World*, published in 1734, wherein he returns to his criticism of "the absurdity of the doctrine of hell-torments, as commonly taught."[52] He wrote another reply to Baxter's *Reflections* in a pamphlet entitled *A Discourse Concerning the Deity*.[53] In this work, Dudgeon summarizes his view that moral distinctions do not depend on an (illusory) "liberty of indifference" as defended by Baxter, but rather on a distinction between pleasant and painful actions and dispositions as identified by our moral sense.[54] In 1737, Dudgeon's philosophical correspondence with Clarke's disciple John Jackson was published in London.[55] In these letters, Dudgeon defends the necessitarian position

against Jackson's (Clarkean) critique. The Dudgeon–Jackson *Philosophical Letters* were favorably reviewed in the *History of the Works of the Learned*—the same journal that published an early review of Hume's *Treatise*.[56] Dudgeon's controversy with Jackson, though it reflects the divide between a freethinker in the stamp of Collins and Shaftesbury on one side and an orthodox follower of Clarke on the other, has none of the animus of the dispute with Baxter. The same cannot be said, however, of Dudgeon's subsequent controversy with William Warburton (who was Baxter's admirer and friend).

In 1739, Dudgeon published *A View of the Necessitarian or Best Scheme*, in which he defends Pope's *Essay on Man* against Jean-Pierre Crousaz, who had interpreted Pope as a necessitarian and criticized him on this basis.[57] In 1738 and 1739, Warburton had contributed several letters to the *History of the Works of the Learned* defending Pope in very different terms, arguing that he is not a necessitarian at all. These letters were brought together and published in 1740 under the tile *A Vindication of Mr. Pope's Essay on Man*.[58] According to Warburton, it is evident that religion depends on freedom of the will, something that "may be demonstrated to all but the downright atheist."[59] Warburton continues:

> [I]t is not the looking *within* only [i.e. impressions of reflexion], that assures the Theist of his *freedom*. What he may observe *abroad* of the horrid mischiefs and absurdities arising from the *Doctrine of Fate*, will fully convince him of this truth. It subverts and annihilates *all Religion*: For the belief of rewards and punishments, without which *no Religion* can subsist, is founded on the principle of Man's being an *accountable* creature; but when *freedom of will* is wanting, Man is no more so than a Clock or Organ. It is likewise highly injurious to *Society*: For whoever thinks himself no longer in his own power, will be naturally inclined to give the reins to his passions, as it is submitting to that *fate* which must at last absolutely turn and direct them.[60]

Warburton also states that his observations on Pope's *Essay on Man* are directed against "the tribe of Freethinkers," among whom he lists both Collins and Dudgeon.[61] All this is evidence that Warburton's and Baxter's hostile disagreement with Dudgeon is based on their shared view that freedom of will is essential to the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, which is itself an essential component of the Christian religion.[62]

These observations concerning the relevant historical context in which Hume's arguments concerning free will in *Treatise*, 2.3.1–2 were presented can be summarized as follows. (1) Much of the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century debate about free will focused on Hobbes's necessitarianism, which was widely regarded as a key component of his "atheistic" philosophy. The most influential criticism of Hobbes's necessitarianism was presented in Clarke's *Demonstration* (i.e. as part of his more general critique of Hobbes's "atheism"). Moreover, throughout the eighteenth century Clarke was widely recognized as the most distinguished champion of "liberty of will." (2) Collins defended the necessitarian view in a series of highly influential exchanges with Clarke. His views on this subject are closely in line with Hobbes's. On the basis of these and other writings, Collins was widely viewed as an "atheistic" freethinker and an enemy of the Christian Religion. (3) In the early 1730s, Hume was living in Chirnside and at work on the *Treatise*, which was still in

its early stages. At this time Dudgeon and Baxter, both near neighbors of Hume, were vigorously debating the free will issue, following the general lines laid down by Collins and Clarke. The debate they were involved in was highly acrimonious, steeped in religious controversy, and directly involved Hume's uncle in the Presbytery of Chirnside. It is not credible that Hume was either unaware of or uninterested in this controversy—not the least because it directly involved a set of philosophical issues he was himself thinking about and working on.

3

The relevant question that now needs to be asked is how do Hume's views on free will, as presented in *Treatise*, 2.3.1–2, stand in relation to the arguments and debates described above. There are six elements of Hume's discussion in these two sections that are especially important.

1. The feature of Hume's discussion "Of Liberty and Necessity" in the *Treatise* that most commentators have given particular prominence to is his famous distinction between two kinds of "liberty."[63] One kind is "liberty of indifference," which means "a negation of necessity and causes" (T, 2.3.2.1/407). Being free, on this account, means not being causally necessitated to act. The other kind is "liberty of spontaneity," which is "oppos'd to violence" or constraint and force. According to this view, being free means being able to act according to the determination of one's own will, as opposed to "external causes" of some kind (e.g. unlike a prisoner behind walls and bars: T, 2.3.1.17/406). Hume indicates that this distinction was familiar and well established when he was writing, and that it can be traced back to "the schools."[64] He also argues that it is liberty of spontaneity that is "the most common sense of the word" and that it is "only that species of liberty, which it concerns us to preserve" (T, 2.3.2.1/407–8).[65]

2. If liberty of spontaneity is the only kind of liberty we actually care about and want to preserve, why is the doctrine of liberty of indifference so "prevalent"? One explanation Hume gives for this is that there is "a false sensation or experience" of liberty of indifference. This is accounted for by the different perspective we have on action depending on whether we are an agent or a spectator. When we are performing an action, "we feel that our actions are subject to our will on most occasions, and imagine we feel that the will itself is subject to nothing" (T, 2.3.2.2/408). The fact remains, however, that "a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation" (T, 2.3.2.2/408–9). Clearly, then, we can "never free ourselves from the bonds of necessity" (T, 2.3.2.2/408). According to Hume, therefore, there is no experimental basis for claiming that human action manifests "free will" (i.e. understood as some form of indifference or chance).

3. A more important reason Hume gives for the "prevalence" of the doctrine of liberty of indifference is our natural tendency to suppose that necessity implies constraint or violence of some kind. If this were true, then it would follow that if our actions were caused, we would not only lack liberty of indifference but also

liberty of spontaneity. The source of our confusion here, according to Hume, is a mistaken understanding of the meaning of "necessity." There are, he claims, two things that are essential to necessity: (1) the "constant union" of objects, and (2) "the inference of the mind" from one object to another (T, 2.3.1.4/400; compare TA, 32/660). Wherever we discover a regular succession of objects and make inferences from one object to another on the basis of our observation of these regularities, we must conclude that the objects are indeed governed by necessity. Hume devotes the whole of *Treatise*, 2.3.1 to arguing that experience and observation shows that necessity governs human motivation and action no less than it does "the operation of external bodies" (T, 2.3.1.3–4/399–400). Human life is as regular and uniform as the movement of bodies in the natural world, which allows us to anticipate and predict how other people will act in the future.[66] As long as Hume's definition of "necessity" is properly understood, it is simply an observable fact that human life is subject to causation and necessity of the same kind we discover in the rest of nature. Beyond this, the free will debate is "a dispute of words" (T, 2.3.1.16/406; compare EU, 8.1–3/80–1).[67]

4. Hume's views on necessity and causation plainly involve several negative claims, as well as a positive account of what "causation" and "necessity" (really) mean. In the first place, as Hume has already made clear in his discussion of causation in book 1, "all causes are of the same kind" (T, 1.3.14.32/171). He denies, for example, that there are any "final causes." There are only efficient causes as he has defined them (i.e. in terms of precedence, contiguity and regularity). Hume also denies that there is any distinction between "causes" and "occasions."

> For the same reason we must reject the distinction betwixt *cause* and *occasion*, when suppos'd to signify any thing essentially different from each other. If constant conjunction be imply'd in what we call occasion, 'tis a real cause. If not, 'tis no relation at all, and cannot give rise to any argument or reasoning. (T, 1.3.14.32/171)

Hume goes on to say that "there is but one kind of *necessity*, as there is but one kind of cause, and that the common distinction betwixt *moral* and *physical* necessity is without any foundation in nature" (T, 1.3.14.33/171; his emphasis):

> 'Tis the constant conjunction of objects, along with the determination of the mind, which constitutes a physical necessity: And the removal of these is the same thing with *chance*. As objects must either be conjoin'd or not, and as the mind must either be determin'd or not to pass from one object to another, 'tis impossible to admit of any medium betwixt chance and an absolute necessity. (T, 1.3.14.33/171; his emphasis)

Hume concludes this paragraph by arguing that there is no basis for the distinction that is sometimes drawn between *power* and the *exercise* of it (T, 1.3.14.34/171; compare 2.1.10.5/313).[68]

5. Hume's skepticism regarding "moral necessity" and "unexercised powers" is intimately related to his skepticism concerning the immateriality of the soul (T, 1.4.5). In particular, he rejects the suggestion that thought is in some way "more active than matter" (T, 1.4.5.31/249). We have, he says, no *idea* of (any) immaterial beings, understood as a simple, indivisible, identical substances, that are supposed to possess "active powers" of some kind (T, 1.4.5.1–6/232–4; more generally, 1.4.6).

All these claims, as presented in the earlier sections of the *Treatise*, lay the foundation for the central argument of *Treatise*, 2.3.1, which is that we discover that human thought and action is subject to causation and necessity in the same way as the operations of matter, and that there is no significant difference between them in this respect.

6. There is a further reason why the doctrine of liberty of indifference "has generally been better receiv'd in the world than its antagonist" (i.e. the doctrine of necessity). This is because religion "has been very unnecessarily interested in this question" (T, 2.3.2.3/409). Hume observes that it is a common, but blameworthy, practice to try to refute an opinion by pointing to its "dangerous consequences to religion and morality" (T, 2.3.2.3/409). Moreover, while any opinion that leads us into absurdities is certainly false, an opinion cannot be proved false simply because of its dangerous consequences. Be this as it may, Hume sets about to show that the doctrine of necessity "is not only innocent, but even advantageous to religion and morality" (T, 2.3.2.3/409).

According to Hume, both human and divine laws are founded on rewards and punishments, which serve to motivate obedience. The influence of rewards and punishments is causal; they produce good actions and prevent evil ones. As such, they involve necessity as Hume has defined it, and without necessity of this kind, both human and divine laws would be subverted (T, 2.3.2.5/410). Hume pays particular attention to God's role in inflicting punishment on criminals. Clearly, insofar as we view God as a "legislator," such punishment (i.e. in a future state) is designed to produce obedience (T, 2.3.2.6/410). Moreover, even if we consider God in his "magisterial capacity," exacting retribution for crimes, this is possible only if there is some "necessary connexion of cause and effect in human actions" (T, 2.3.2.6/410–1). The basis for this claim, however, needs careful articulation in terms of Hume's more general commitments.

If there was no necessary connection of cause and effect between human thought and action, not only would rewards and punishments be ineffective, they would also be unjust. More important, it would never "enter into the thoughts of any reasonable being to inflict them" (T, 2.3.2.6/411). Why does Hume make this claim? The standard account of why he believes that necessity is essential to morality is that he is making a logical or conceptual point. We can attribute an action to an agent only if it is something that he does. If actions were not caused, they would be entirely random, so there would be no basis for saying that the agent produced or brought them about. Clearly, then, if there is no causal connection between the agent and his actions, we would never consider him an object of approval or disapproval. Chance is not a reasonable metaphysical foundation on which to rest our analysis of responsibility.[69]

The difficulty with this interpretation of Hume's argument is that it fails to take proper account of both the specific role of necessity (as he defines it) and the way it relates to the mechanism that produces our moral sentiments. The relevant passage reads:

> The constant and universal object of hatred or anger is a person or creature endow'd with thought and consciousness; and when any criminal or injurious actions excite

> that passion, 'tis only by their relation to the person or connexion with him. But according to the doctrine of liberty or chance, this connexion is reduc'd to nothing...a man is as pure and untainted, after having committed the most horrid crimes, as at the first moment of his birth, nor is his character any way concern'd in his actions; since they are not deriv'd from it, and the wickedness of the one can never be us'd as a proof of the depravity of the other. 'Tis only upon the principles of necessity, that a person acquires any merit or demerit from his actions, however the common opinion may incline to the contrary. (T, 2.3.2.6/411)

These remarks must be understood within the framework of Hume's (complex) account of the indirect passions and the way they are aroused (i.e. as described in T, 2.1.2). Fundamental to Hume's position is that virtue and vice, considered as pleasant or painful qualities of mind, arouse calm forms of love and hate, which are (moral) approval and disapproval. To hold a person responsible is to regard him as an object of approval or disapproval. Unless we are able to infer these qualities of mind on the basis of our experience of regularities of the relevant kind between action and character, no moral sentiments would, as a matter of psychological fact, be aroused in us. It follows that without necessity—understood in terms of the relevant regularities and inferences—morality would be impossible. Hume's claims about necessity being essential to morality are, therefore, deeply embedded in his detailed account of the mechanism of the indirect passions and the way our moral sentiments are generated.[70]

The resemblance between Hume's views and Collins' (Hobbist) necessitarianism is so obvious that it hardly needs further comment. On every one of the basic issues in dispute between Clarke and Collins, Hume comes down firmly and unambiguously on Collins's side. Hume's account of liberty of spontaneity is the same as the one Collins contends for, while he rejects any notion of liberty of indifference of the kind that Clarke advocates. Whereas Clarke maintains that experience proves that we have a liberty that involves the absence of necessitating (efficient) causes, Hume contends that experience shows us that the very opposite is true—all our actions are governed by necessity in the same way as the operations of external bodies. According to Hume, the distinction between moral and physical necessity, which lies at the heart of Clarke's position on this subject, is "without any foundation in nature." Similarly, Hume denies that there is any evidence that "thought is more active than matter," and he undercuts the whole ontology of immaterial souls on which Clarke's account of free agency rests. Hume maintains, as Collins does, that both the justice and efficacy of the system of rewards and punishments depends on our conduct being causally necessitated. Clearly, then, Hume is *systematically* opposed to the free will position of Clarke and those who followed him. Given the circumstances that the *Treatise* was written and published in, it is only reasonable to suppose that Hume and his contemporaries were perfectly aware of the irreligious significance of the position he took up and defended in the *Treatise*.[71]

Two features of Hume's (irreligious) intentions on this subject require some further comment. Consider, first, his particular account of why necessity is essential to morality, where he assimilates our understanding of merit and demerit as it relates to human beings and God (T, 2.3.2.7/411). From a theological point of view, his account is highly problematic. More specifically, according to his system, our

ability to hold people responsible depends on our moral sentiments. Our accountability to God, therefore, presupposes that God is subject to (moral) passions of the same general kind we observe in human beings. This would include passions such as "hatred or anger" that can motivate God's retributive practices in a future state (i.e. when he acts "as a avenger of crimes" and sends people to Hell). While Hume does not explicitly comment on these problems in the *Treatise*, he does raise them in a letter to Francis Hutcheson written in March 1740.

> I wish from my heart, I coud avoid concluding, that since Morality, according to your Opinion as well as mine, is determin'd merely by Sentiment, it regards only human Nature and human Life. This has been often urg'd against you, & the Consequences are very momentous. . . . If Morality were determined by Reason, that is the same to all rational Beings: But nothing but Experience can assure us, that the Sentiments are the same. What Experience have we with regard to superior Beings? How can we ascribe to them any Sentiments at all? (LET, 1:40, no. 16)[72]

In his *Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*, Hutcheson argued that this difficulty can be dealt with if we are willing to assume that "the Deity has something of a superior kind, analogous to our moral sense."[73] Hume's reference to Hutcheson's critics would certainly include John Balguy, a prominent follower of Samuel Clarke, who placed this criticism at the head of his polemics against Hutcheson.[74] What this indicates is that Hume's account of the way necessity is essential to morality involved the operation of moral sentiments, and he was well aware that this presents a fundamental difficulty in accounting for the existence and nature of God's moral sentiments. In general, his theory of responsibility, which involved necessity in the workings of our moral sentiments, was far from "innocent" from the point of view of religion. Although he was well aware of this—as his letter to Hutcheson indicates—he makes no effort to show how religion can deal with it. He leaves this problem sitting at the surface of his discussion, where it would be easy for his contemporary audience to spot it.

The other obvious "gap" in Hume's discussion was his studied silence on the issues he subsequently addressed directly in the closing passages of *Enquiry*, sec. 8. In the *Treatise*, while Hume condemns religion's "unnecessary interest" in the free will question, he makes no attempt to deal with the problems of evil and foreknowledge—issues that were *central* to the debate as discussed by his own contemporaries. Nor can there be any doubt, given the relevant background debate, that Hume was aware of these fundamental points of contact between the free will problem and theological systems.[75] The fact that he makes no effort in the *Treatise* to deal with these issues makes clear that his remarks about religion's "unnecessary interest" in this subject is less than sincere, and that his intentions are by no means "innocent."[76]

4

In criticism of the irreligious interpretation on this subject, it may be objected that many defenders of the necessitarian doctrine are entirely orthodox Christian believers (e.g. Luther and Calvin—as Collins points out). Moreover, later in the

eighteenth century necessitarians such as Jonathan Edwards and Joseph Priestley appeared on the scene, and they are plainly not irreligious freethinkers of any kind.[77] Why, then, *presume* that Hume should be read this way? To answer this objection, we must consider how Hume's own contemporaries distinguished religious from irreligious necessitarians.

Priestley's preface to his 1790 edition of Collins's *Human Liberty* directly addresses the difficulty that faces the religious necessitarian. "It has," he says, "been unfortunate for the doctrine of necessity, that some of its first and ablest defenders were either unbelievers in Christianity, or at least generally considered as such. This was the case with Mr. Hobbes in an early period of the business, of Mr. Hume in a later, and also Mr. Collins who came between them."[78] It is, however, a mistake to suppose that all necessitarians are unbelievers.[79] Although Priestley was careful to take steps to put distance between himself and Hobbes, Collins, and Hume in this respect, denials of this kind were met with a degree of skepticism by contemporary defenders of the free will position. Beattie observes, for example, that the doctrine of necessity would be fatal to *his* religious and moral principles but allows that it may not have the same effect on every other person. Nevertheless, it is, he says, "remarkable, that some of its most distinguished advocates, of whom I shall mention Spinoza, Hobbes, Collins, Hume and Voltaire, were enemies to our faith; whereas of the modern defenders of liberty I do not recollect one who was not a Christian."[80] Dugald Stewart is also concerned with this connection between the doctrine of necessity and irreligion. He suggests that "it will not be denied, that in the History of Modern Philosophy, the schemes of Atheism and Necessity have hitherto, always been connected together." "Not that I would by any means be understood to say," he continues, "that every Necessitarian must *ipso facto* be an Atheist, or even that any presumption is afforded by a man's attachment to the former sect . . . but only that every modern Atheist I have heard of has been a Necessitarian."[81] Clearly, then, from the perspective of Hume's contemporaries, and the generation that followed, the relationship between necessitarianism and "atheism" was a close one. At the very least, a commitment to the doctrine of necessity provides some ground for suspecting an author of having irreligious intentions. Whether an author's necessitarianism is in fact irreligious must be judged, in the first place, by his explicit effort(s) to disown associations and intentions of this character (e.g. as we find in Edwards and Priestley). The *sincerity* of these efforts of this kind, however, must be judged in terms of the relations that hold between the author's necessitarianism and other themes and objectives in his work. It is, therefore, from this perspective that Hume's necessitarian commitments in the *Treatise* should be considered.

It is evident that the wider irreligious interpretation of Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise* puts his discussion of free will in a new light. Hume is not simply a "skeptic" about (metaphysical) free will; nor is he simply a "naturalist" who describes human thought and action in the wider fabric of causes and effects. There is, of course, truth in both these claims, but they miss the more fundamental connection between Hume's views on this subject and the general irreligious aims of his project in the *Treatise*. In the first place, as already noted, Hume makes no effort in the *Treatise* to *clear* the doctrine of necessity of the significant difficulties that it presents for the theological view with respect to the issue of the origin of evil

(difficulties he explicitly draws attention to and emphasizes in the first *Enquiry*). More importantly, however, Hume's necessitarianism is both metaphysically and methodologically a core part of his entire (Hobbist) project to establish a secular, scientific account of moral life. Beyond this, one of the central lessons of his discussion of free will in the *Treatise*, and of his more extended views about the nature and conditions of moral responsibility is that these are issues we can make sense of *only within the fabric of human nature and human society*. Hume's naturalistic framework explicitly excludes not only the metaphysics of free will (e.g. modes of "moral" causation by immaterial agents) but also all the further theologically inspired metaphysics that generally accompanies this (i.e. God, the immortal soul, a future state, etc.).[82] The metaphysics that religious doctrine requires, Hume suggests, obscures and misrepresents the real character of human freedom and moral responsibility, and the way they are grounded and structured in human motivation and passions.[83] It was precisely this secular perspective and the extension of scientific naturalism to the study of (human) moral life that Clarke and other Christian critics of Hobbes found to be especially "dangerous" for religion and morality.

Morality without Religion

And if Atheism should be supposed to become universal in this nation... farewell all ties of friendship and principles of honor; all love for our country and loyalty to our prince; nay, farewell all government and society itself, all professions and arts, and conveniences of life, all that is laudable or valuable in the world.

Richard Bentley, *Folly of Atheism*

Sense of right and wrong therefore being as natural to us as natural affection itself, and being a first principle in our constitution and make, there is no speculative opinion, persuasion, or belief, which is capable immediately or directly to exclude or destroy it.

Shaftesbury, *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*

In this chapter, I provide an irreligious interpretation of Hume's fundamental aims and objectives in the *Treatise* as regards his moral theory. According to the irreligious interpretation, there are two key claims Hume seeks to establish in the *Treatise* with respect to morality. The first is the "autonomy of morality" in relation to religion. The foundations of moral and political life, he holds, rest with our *human nature*, not with the doctrines and dogmas of (Christian) religion. The second claim, closely connected with this issue, is that "speculative atheism" does not imply "practical atheism" or any kind of "moral licentiousness." Taken together, these two components of Hume's moral system make up a defense and interpretation of "virtuous atheism." These issues concerning the relationship between morality and religion, I maintain, are not peripheral or incidental to Hume's fundamental aims and objectives throughout the *Treatise*. On the contrary, they are central to what his *entire project* in the *Treatise* aims to establish and argue for.

1

Interpretations and assessments of Hume's moral theory in the *Treatise*, as we have noted, are almost always presented within the more general framework of the skepticism/naturalism dichotomy. Both these major schools of interpretation aim to show that Hume's more specific views on the subject of morality cohere with his overall

project and wider commitments throughout the *Treatise*. Although the two camps disagree about which side of this dichotomy deserves the strongest emphasis, they are nevertheless agreed that religion plays, at most, a minor or secondary role with respect to Hume's concern with moral theory in the *Treatise*. From the perspective of the irreligious interpretation, this general neglect of religion as it concerns Hume's moral theory is indicative of a failure to grasp not only his specific concerns in relation to morality but also his more fundamental aims and objectives in the *Treatise* as a whole.[1]

Let us begin with a brief review of the central features of the rival skeptical and naturalistic interpretations of Hume's moral theory. The view that Hume was a moral skeptic can be traced back to the earliest replies and responses to the *Treatise*. Among the several charges made against him by the author of the *Specimen* in 1745, the last was that he was chargeable with "sapping the foundations of morality, by denying the natural and essential difference betwixt right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice; making the difference only artificial, and to arise from human conventions and compacts" (LG, 18). Thomas Reid presents a very similar view of Hume's moral theory in his *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (1788). Reid criticizes Hume's moral theory primarily on the ground that in his system, moral approval and disapproval "is not an Act of the Judgment, which, like all acts of judgment, must be true or false, it is only a certain Feeling, which, from the constitution of human nature, arises upon contemplating certain characters, or qualities of mind, coolly and impartially."[2]

Reid also criticizes Hume's view that justice depends on what we find to be agreeable or useful.[3] In contrast with this view, Reid maintains that there are natural rights (e.g. not to be injured) and that these rights do not depend on what we find agreeable or useful but on our innate sense of right and wrong, just and unjust. According to Reid, Hume's views on justice are too narrowly restricted to issues of property and promises or contracts. It is this narrow view of justice, Reid suggests, that allows Hume to present it not as a natural virtue but as artificial and depending on its public utility.[4] From Reid's perspective, Hume's views on justice are generally consistent with the views of both Epicurus and Hobbes on this subject.[5]

Reid was not the first, or the last, of Hume's critics to find Hobbist elements in his theory of justice. On the contrary, one of the earliest reviews of book 3 of the *Treatise* concludes with the observation that Hume's account of justice is simply "Hobbes's system presented in a new form."[6] In much the same way, the author of the *Specimen*, when presenting his charges against Hume's views on morality, points out that Hume "takes great pains" to prove that "justice is not natural, but an artificial virtue" (LG, 14). He goes on to say that while Hobbes was willing to leave promises as a natural obligation, Hume strikes an even "bolder stroke" and "shakes loose all our natural obligations"—including promises (LG, 16). The same general theme regarding the affinities between Hobbes's and Hume's moral theories surfaces in a number of more recent commentaries.[7] It is clear, then, that both Hume's contemporaries and our own have identified a significant "Hobbesean side" to Hume's moral theory and that this is intimately linked with various skeptical arguments Hume advances on this subject.

Hume's specific skeptical arguments concerning the role of reason in morality were obviously aimed primarily at Samuel Clarke and William Wollaston (a rational-

ist follower of Clarke).[8] Clarke's brand of moral rationalism was itself, of course, aimed primarily at "Hobbes's false reasonings" on this subject.[9] According to Clarke, Hobbes's account of morality, understood as a system of rules artificially created to serve each person's own self-interest, would reduce humans to the condition of animals who are incapable of governing their conduct on the basis of reason.[10] In opposition to Hobbes's moral skepticism, Clarke argues that there exist eternal and different *relations* of things in the world in virtue of which we may *demonstrate* the unalterable obligations of morality.[11] The discovery of these immutable and eternal obligations can serve, Clarke maintains, "to determine the wills of all rational beings."[12] In sum, it is Clarke's view that reason is capable of discovering moral relations that serve as a basis for identifying our moral obligations and providing sufficient motivation for us to guide our conduct on this basis, without any view to our private or public advantage.

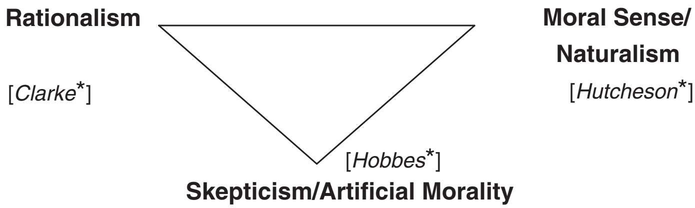
Hume's skeptical arguments against Clarke's key claims are well known and familiar. They appear primarily in *Treatise*, 2.3.3 and 3.1.1. These two sections of the *Treatise* are often presented as containing the core doctrine of Hume's ethical system (i.e. which is understood to be skeptical in character). In 2.3.3 he argues, famously, that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (T, 2.3.3.4/415).[13] It follows from this observation that it is an error to suppose that any "rational creature . . . is oblig'd to regulate his actions by reason" (T, 2.3.3.1/413). Similarly, in *Treatise*, 3.3.1 he denies that we discover any moral relations that can serve as "immutable measures of right and wrong" or impose any obligation on us. It is impossible, therefore, for morality to be based on any form of demonstrative reason that presupposes the existence of relations of this kind (T, 3.1.1.18–25/463–8). Related to this point, Hume also argues that we discover no matter of fact, as existing in objects as distinct from our feelings, that corresponds to virtue or vice. The distinction between virtue and vice, therefore, in not discoverable by any form of reasoning and must depend on those feelings that lie within ourselves (T, 3.1.1.26/469).[14]

It is evident that in relation to the dispute between Hobbes and Clarke, as it concerns moral motivation and the possibility of demonstrating moral truths on the basis of discoverable moral relations, Hume plainly sides with Hobbes's skeptical position. It is no less clear, however, that there is an important dimension that is largely neglected by this skeptical account. Both Hume's early critics and recent commentators have recognized that Hutcheson's moral theory greatly influenced Hume.[15] This claim, as noted (chapter 1), is central to Norman Kemp Smith's "naturalistic" interpretation of Hume's philosophy. According to Kemp Smith, the foundation for Hume's whole philosophical system is Hutcheson's key claim that moral and aesthetic judgment depend on feeling and not reason.[16] Hume, it is argued, simply "entered into philosophy through the gateway of morals" and went on to apply Hutcheson's key insight (i.e. "the primacy of feeling") to the various "chief problems to which Locke and Berkeley had drawn attention, but to which they had not been able to give a satisfactory answer."[17] Although skeptical and antirationalistic arguments are certainly present in Hume's moral theory, this should not obscure the *constructive* and *positive* side of his thought, which rests with his description of the "primacy of feeling" in human life. In the case of Hume's ethical system, therefore, what is especially significant and important is not so much his skeptical arguments against moral rationalism as his constructive account of the role of moral sense or moral feeling in this sphere.

From almost any point of view, it is obvious that there are important similarities between Hutcheson's and Hume's moral theories and that Hume was well aware of this.[18] For this reason, any simple skeptical reading that presents Hume as embracing Hobbist principles in his moral philosophy cannot be *entirely* correct. A closer examination of how Hutcheson stands in relation to Hobbes brings this out. There are two related respects in which Hutcheson rejects the fundamentals of Hobbes's skeptical ethical system. First, Hutcheson holds that the distinction we draw between good and evil in morality is in no way artificial or dependent on social conventions or the (positive) laws that are enforced by a sovereign authority. Our moral sense provides us with sentiments of approval and disapproval whereby the conduct of any agent is subject to moral evaluation of this kind.[19] Clearly, then, there is, for Hutcheson, an identifiable distinction between virtue and vice, moral good and evil, but it depends on feeling and not reasoning of any kind.[20] Second, Hutcheson stands directly opposed to Hobbes on the doctrine of egoism or self-love, arguing that we do in fact discover real benevolence or altruism in human conduct. Indeed, on Hutcheson's account, benevolence is exactly what *constitutes* virtue (i.e. this is what our moral sense approves of). In other words, according to Hutcheson, it is when we discover benevolence in the conduct of an agent that we *feel approval* toward that person.[21]

There can be no doubt that the two fundamental themes we have described in Hutcheson's moral philosophy (i.e. moral sense and benevolence) both play a prominent role in Hume's moral philosophy, and to this extent, Hume plainly sides with Hutcheson *against* Hobbes on these two important issues. Having noted this, however, important qualifications need to be made on both these issues. Hume argues, for example, that *justice* is an *artificial* virtue that must be accounted for in terms of social conventions that serve both the private and public interest. Similarly, he also qualifies Hutcheson's view that human beings are not *entirely* selfish and capable of a *degree* of benevolence. It is Hume's position that while we do discover genuine benevolence in human conduct, it is also true that human beings are *predominantly* selfish and capable only of *limited* generosity to others.[22] Insofar as we are capable of such benevolence and generosity, we are (due to the influence of sympathy) *partial* to family, friends, and acquaintances (T, 3.2.2.6/487). More important, Hume explicitly denies that there is any such "passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such" (T, 3.2.1.12/481). He is, therefore, skeptical about the existence of virtue as Hutcheson understands it (i.e. *qua* universal benevolence).[23]

It is evident that the two major traditional accounts of Hume's moral theory emphasize quite different aspects and features of his commitments. The difficulty for both these views is not so much to find evidence in support of their own accounts, but to explain why Hume appears to be committed to intentions that run contrary to the preferred view. Clearly, Hume's commitments on this subject fall *between* those of Hobbes and Hutcheson. This is problematic, not only from the point of view of understanding Hume's moral theory but also for our understanding of how his moral theory relates to his wider and more general objectives and intentions throughout the *Treatise* as a whole. That is to say, whether one accepts the skeptical or alternative naturalistic interpretation, it is problematic that Hume's views about morality do not fit in neatly with either of these two (rival) schemes.



{* *key representative figures at each corner*}

FIGURE 17.1. Traditional framework for assessing Hume's moral theory

From the perspective of traditional interpretations, what all parties are agreed about is the general framework in which Hume's arguments relating to morality should be assessed and interpreted. This framework is three-cornered (as shown in fig. 17.1). The fundamental question concerning Hume's moral theory, from this perspective, is where he ought to be placed on the triangle. It is obvious, from any point of view, that Hume attacks the moral rationalism of Clarke and his followers. There is no doubt that he is skeptical about moral theory of *this kind*. The crucial question is, therefore, where Hume belongs on the continuum between the skeptical principles of Hobbes (artificial morality, egoism, etc.) and the moral sense "naturalism" of Hutcheson. General skeptical interpretations of Hume's intentions in the *Treatise*, as noted, usually emphasize Hume's overall affinities with Hobbes. Those who defend the naturalistic interpretation place emphasis on Hume's affinities with Hutcheson and his "positive" or "constructive" aims in moral theory (e.g. his "primacy of feeling" doctrine). The pressure of the alternative general interpretations is to insist that Hume must belong at one end or the other (i.e. either on the skeptical or naturalistic pole)—not somewhere in between.[24]

2

From the perspective of the irreligious interpretation, this "three-cornered" framework distorts and misrepresents the context and problematic in which Hume's arguments and aims should be understood and assessed. In the first place, as noted, the traditional skeptical and naturalistic interpretations maintain that issues of religion have little or no role to play in Hume's central concerns in the *Treatise*. This assumption is (inevitably) carried through to their more specific understanding of Hume's moral theory. Hume's real concerns, it is argued, are captured by the skeptical/naturalist alternatives, where Hume is taken to pursue either systematic skepticism or to be trying to establish a "constructive" alternative that shows the role of feeling in human life. On both these accounts, problems of religion are at most incidental

or peripheral to Hume's fundamental concerns on this subject. More specifically, issues of religion do not shape and structure Hume's basic arguments and aims as concerns his moral theory.[25]

Contrary to this view, the irreligious interpretation begins with the observation that the whole seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debate concerning moral theory was itself deeply embedded in the wider debate between "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists." No adequate interpretation of Hume's discussion of morals can afford to ignore this important dimension of the debate about morality in the context in which he was writing the *Treatise*. This view of things is apparent, above all, in Clarke's systematic critique of Hobbes's "atheism," wherein he regards Hobbes's moral skepticism as a key component.[26] Moreover, in the *Discourse* Clarke's aims to go well beyond a defense of the principles of moral rationalism. He also aims to *prove* the essential and necessary relationship between morality and religion. Two further doctrines are especially important to him. The first is that we require the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments in order to ensure that there is a suitable correlation between virtue and happiness and between vice and misery.[27] The other important doctrine is the necessity of revealed religion in relation to moral life. Clarke argues that many of our obligations are "not discoverable by bare reason unassisted with revelation."[28] Clearly for Clarke, therefore, any attack on revealed religion is also an attack on the specific *content* (i.e. message) of *Christian morality*.

Clarke's view that religion is an essential foundation for morality and society was entirely typical of Christian apologists at this time. As noted, Richard Bentley, Clarke's friend and fellow Newtonian, described the devastating effects of atheism on society in the following terms.

> And if Atheism should be supposed to become universal in this nation . . . farewell all ties of friendship and principles of honor; all love for our country and loyalty to our prince; nay, farewell all government and society itself, all professions and arts, and conveniences of life, all that is laudable or valuable in the world.[29]

On the other side of this dispute, however, were a group of thinkers who argued that not only does morality not need the *support* of religion, it is in fact highly vulnerable to *corruption* and *distortion* by "false religion" or "superstition." Among the most influential thinkers who argued for this view were Pierre Bayle and the third Earl of Shaftesbury.

According to Bayle, religion is neither necessary nor sufficient for moral practice.[30] Religion is not necessary for morality, because a society of atheists may still be governed by a desire for honor or reputation, as well as by rewards and punishments.[31] Consistent with this hypothesis, Bayle points to the existence of virtuous atheists and, on the other side, to the corruption, hypocrisies, and distortions of morality by "superstition." Observations of this kind were prominent enough throughout Bayle's works that they earned him the reputation of providing nothing other than "an apology for atheism."[32] Another thinker Hume's contemporaries frequently associated with Bayle's views on this subject was Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury's *Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* consists of two books.[33] The first is primarily concerned with the relationship between religion and morality, and the second with the relationship between virtue and happiness. One of the central tenets Shaftesbury defends in the

first book is that while religion may corrupt our sense of morals, this is not the case with atheism. Our sense of right and wrong, Shaftesbury argues, is "as natural to us as natural affection itself, and being a first principle in our constitution and make, there is no speculative opinion, persuasion, or belief, which is capable immediately or directly to exclude or destroy it."[34] On Shaftesbury's system, the real support we derive from virtue does not come from the doctrine of a future state, but from a mind that can "freely bear its own inspection and review" and, through sympathy, secures happiness from the esteem of other members of society.[35]

Shaftesbury's arguments explain how and why virtuous atheism is possible. The basis of moral life rests not with the dogmas and doctrines of religion (e.g. a future state) but with the fundamental elements of human nature.[36] More specifically, it is our innate human capacity for *sympathy*, *pride*, and *moral sense* that secures and motivates moral conduct and provides some reliable correlation between virtue and happiness. At the same time, however, the same elements serve to distinguish sharply his account of morality from that of Hobbes. Indeed, the same key criticisms of Hobbes that are presented in Hutcheson's writings are anticipated in Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*. For example, against Hobbes, Shaftesbury insists that there is a real standard of right and wrong, good and evil, and that our moral sense makes us aware of "beauty and deformity" in this sphere.[37] Shaftesbury also insists, against Hobbes (and in partial agreement with Hutcheson), that the virtuous person is one who is able to find a due balance between self-concern and concern for the public. Such a person is, moreover, able to derive the greatest happiness through the effects of sympathy and the sense that he is loved by others and approved by himself.[38]

Given the anti-Hobbist features of Shaftesbury's system, it is not surprising that many Christian moralists found his principles attractive and were able to set aside the irreligious elements in his writings.[39] Nevertheless, despite these more orthodox admirers, Shaftesbury was also widely regarded as a proponent of anti-Christian or irreligious doctrine. His close contacts with radical freethinkers, such as John Toland, added further credibility to this reputation.[40] By the 1730s, Shaftesbury was regularly cited as a prominent example of "freethinking" and "deism," and he drew sharp, critical attention from a number of influential defenders of Christian orthodoxy. This included, most notably, George Berkeley and William Warburton.[41] Shaftesbury's reputation as an anti-Christian freethinker certainly posed problems for his more orthodox Scottish followers. This is especially apparent in the case of Hutcheson, who found it necessary to repudiate explicitly (i.e. in print) Shaftesbury's "prejudices against Christianity."[42]

Ironically enough, some of the most severe and telling criticism of Shaftesbury's philosophical doctrine came not from the ranks of his Christian critics but from Bernard Mandeville, an even more infamous irreligious freethinker. In his *Fable of the Bees*, Mandeville presents Shaftesbury as having the "design of establishing heathen virtue on the ruins of Christianity."[43] Mandeville is, however, wholly unconvinced by Shaftesbury's optimistic account of the social world, which is supposed to operate like a harmonious beehive.[44] Whereas Shaftesbury describes a "morality of nature" in which individuals, motivated by their love for others and for the welfare of the public, are able to reap the benefits of mutual esteem and happiness, Mandeville sees social reality in much more pessimistic terms. Mandeville's "unmasking" of

human morality and the motivations lying behind it trades in a series of widely discussed and debated paradoxes.

The most notorious of these is that virtue and benevolence are in fact motivated by a desire for praise and flattery.[45] It is self-love, as encouraged by the artifice of politicians, that explains the origins of moral conduct or virtue.[46] At the same time, Mandeville also argues that our private vices—indulging our passions such as greed, ambition, and lust—in fact serve the public interest and make for a more prosperous and thriving society. Virtue, on the other hand, becomes an impediment to greatness, empire, and achievement.[47] The general upshot of Mandeville's critique of Shaftesbury's optimism is to insist on psychological observations about human nature that are more consistent with Hobbist pessimism. Insofar as morality springs from our human nature, we must deal in harsh realities. Human beings are selfish and vain; moral conduct does not show that we can transcend these selfish dispositions but shows only that we must use vanity and flattery to restrain our other passions; the optimistic assumption that virtue will secure happiness and promote the general welfare is without any foundation, as the truth is quite otherwise. These are the lessons of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, and they served to convince many apologists for the Christian religion that morality founded on the principles of human nature (e.g. our desire for honor and happiness) would produce a society of hyper-Hobbism of just the sort Mandeville described.

The significance of Mandeville is often presented in terms of the narrow debate between Hobbist pessimism and Shaftesburyean optimism regarding human nature. From this perspective, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson belong on the same side and stand opposed to Hobbes and Mandeville. However, as our observations on Shaftesbury's scheme make clear, the situation was not so simple and straightforward as this. A crucial aspect of Shaftesbury's entire project was his (anti-Christian) message concerning the autonomy of morals, the possibility of virtuous atheism, and the potential dangers and corruptions of "superstition," such as the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. This was a side of Shaftesbury's thought that Hutcheson plainly tried to distance himself from.[48]

The observations I have made in this section concerning the debates and discussion of moral theory during the first half of the eighteenth century show that the "three-cornered framework" of rationalism, skepticism, and naturalism fails to provide a full and accurate picture of the issues that were under debate at this time. More specifically, problems of moral theory, as discussed by Hume in the *Treatise*, were intimately and deeply connected with wider problems of religion. Religious philosophers, such as Clarke and his followers, argued that any sound account of moral theory had to (demonstrably) refute the several forms of deism that led directly to "downright atheism." This included, on his account, those who denied any governing providence, design, or order in the world (i.e. denied any final causes); those who denied any real difference between good and evil or supposed these distinctions depended on "the arbitrary constitution of human laws"; those who denied the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of future rewards and punishments; and those, finally, who believed that there was no need for divine revelation to discover all our duties and obligations, as the "light of nature" will suffice for this.[49] According to Clarke's moral system, all these forms of deism were destructive of morality and society.

Throughout the early eighteenth century, the doctrines of a number of radical freethinkers challenged these assumptions of orthodoxy. This is apparent, as we have seen, in the writings of a wide range of thinkers such as Bayle, Shaftesbury, and Mandeville. Among the various defenders of Christian orthodoxy, there was no clear agreement about how the challenge of deist morality should be met. Clarke and his school represented the rationalist alternative. There were, however, other defenders of the orthodox view, such as Hutcheson, who held that the principles of moral sense could be used to defeat the skeptical and atheistic doctrines of Hobbes and his followers. In much the same way, similar divisions existed among the freethinkers. Moralists like Shaftesbury (and his Scottish follower Dudgeon) had fundamentally optimistic views about human nature and moral motivation that were plainly directly opposed to the schemes of Hobbes and Mandeville. Nor did they share the Hobbist view that there were no natural distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust or that all such distinctions were artificially created by means of human compacts and conventions. What these observations show is that the three-way division of the rationalists, the moral sense school, and the skeptics does not itself serve to mark the significant division between those moralists who held that religion was essential to morality and those who denied it. We need, therefore, a different picture of the framework of the eighteenth-century moral debate that will properly accommodate this other significant dimension of the debate.

The picture we now have of this debate has two "tiers" (levels), as well as the three corners of rationalism, skepticism, and naturalism. As figure 17.2 indicates, the issue of religion adds a dimension of *depth* that is absent in the original three-cornered framework. At the top tier are those thinkers who accept the autonomy

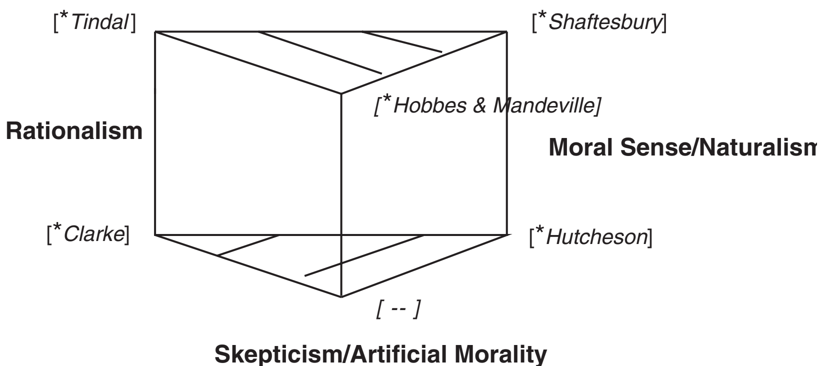


FIGURE 17.2. The irreligious framework for assessing Hume's moral theory

thesis (i.e. deists, freethinkers, etc.). On the bottom are the various religious philosophers who reject the autonomy thesis. From this perspective, the moral sense school divides between thinkers such as Shaftesbury and a thinker like Hutcheson. Shaftesbury was careful to argue for the autonomy of morals and the possibility of virtuous atheism. Hutcheson expresses explicit discomfort about these "prejudices against Christianity."[50] Although most rationalist moralists were, like Clarke and his followers, also defenders of Christian orthodoxy, Tindal argued that Clarke's rationalist principles served to show that we have no need of either revelation or the doctrine of a future state for moral life (i.e. properly understood, Clarke is a "true deist").[51] The significant divide among those freethinkers and irreligious philosophers (i.e. at the top tier) who defend the autonomy thesis is not about the foundations of moral life in human nature but about what our human nature, in relation to morals, is actually like. The most important divide here, as noted, is between Shaftesbury's "optimism" and the "pessimism" of Hobbes and Mandeville.[52] Clearly, then, it is within this two-tiered framework that Hume's own commitments on the subject of moral theory must be interpreted and assessed.

3

In the previous section I argued that we need an alternative framework for analyzing and assessing Hume's most basic aims and objectives on this subject. On the alternative account I have described, two tiers divide moralists of Hume's period on the basis of their understanding of the morality/religion relationship. On the bottom tier are religious moralists, such as Clarke, who maintained that moral life required the specific teachings of the Christian religion (e.g. revealed religion, the doctrine of a future state, etc.). Related to this, these thinkers also denied the possibility of virtuous atheism. On the top tier are the various freethinkers and irreligious philosophers who argued against this view and aimed to explain how morality without religion and virtuous atheism were possible. These thinkers maintained that morality depends not on the principles of religion, but rather on the fundamental features of our human nature—such as we discover from describing the essential elements of human reason and the passions.

Before we consider Hume's place in the continuum between "skepticism" and "naturalism," we must first review the evidence there is to show that he belongs in the tier with those who defend the autonomy of morals. The most important and fundamental evidence for this rests not simply with this or that section or argument in the *Treatise*, nor indeed with any single book of the *Treatise*, but rather with a proper understanding of the nature of Hume's *entire project* in the *Treatise*, considered as a whole, complete, work. The key consideration here is the fact that Hume's project in the *Treatise* is modeled or planned after Hobbes's similar project in *The Elements of Law* and the first two parts of *Leviathan*.

As already explained (chapter 6), Hume's "science of man" is planned and structured along the same lines as Hobbes's works. The overall aim of this project is to provide a *secular, scientific* account of the foundations of moral and social life in human nature. The structural parallels between Hobbes's works and Hume's

Treatise are indicative of the fundamental similarity of their projects. That is, Hume, following Hobbes, believes that moral and political philosophy must proceed on the same methodology as that which is appropriate to the natural sciences (although they disagree about the nature of that methodology). Further, Hobbes and Hume are agreed that this scientific investigation of morals must begin with an examination of human thought and motivations, it being assumed by both these thinkers that the minds of men "are similar in their feelings and operations" (T, 3.3.1.7/575). The immediate significance of this similarity between the *Treatise* and Hobbes's works is that it reveals the *unity* of the project of the *Treatise* and casts serious doubt on the historical foundations of the traditional skeptical and naturalistic interpretations.

The significance of the Hobbist nature of Hume's project in the *Treatise*, as it relates specifically to morality, clearly goes much deeper than these initial observations. Hume's various skeptical arguments presented in book 1 are in no way irrelevant to his defense of the autonomy of morals. On the contrary, throughout book 1 Hume launches a series of skeptical attacks on the metaphysical doctrines that are essential features of religious morality. (The dogmatic arguments Clarke advances in his *Discourse*—in criticism of Hobbes—serve as a particularly obvious and prominent target of Hume's battery of skeptical arguments in this direction.) In general, it was Hume's primary objective in book 1 to show the narrow scope and limits of human understanding, especially as it concerns our ideas and beliefs about religion. These limits have *practical* consequences for the influence of religious doctrine and dogma. Where our ideas are weak and obscure (e.g. God and a future state), our passions will not be strongly or consistently influenced, and this, in turn, leaves our conduct irregularly and unreliably guided by these (religious) ideas.

In books 2 and 3, Hume goes on to employ a related set of arguments to show the limits of human reason with respect to free will, motivation and action, and moral distinctions. His analysis of the passions, and their causes and effects, is developed in a way that aims to show how moral motivation and distinctions depend on our (human) feelings and sentiments—as opposed to any form of transhuman powers of reason. It is, as Páll Árdal has argued, impossible to understand the detail and structure of Hume's specific concerns in book 3 of the *Treatise* without any reference to his theory of the passions in book 2.[53] What needs to be added to this observation, however, is that this reflects the *systematic unity* of Hume's entire (Hobbist) project. The point here is that the general structure of Hume's project, along with its methodological commitments to a naturalistic and necessitarian understanding of human nature, is fundamental to understanding his *particular way* of defending the autonomy thesis. His general aim is to provide an account of the scope and limits of human reason, and the way in relates to the role of the passions in human life, such that we can account for the basis of our moral and social practices without leaving any role for (belief in) God or a future state. In this way, Hume's defense of the autonomy of morals from religion is what the *whole project* of the *Treatise* is fundamentally about. For this reason, it is a serious mistake to present Hume's defense of the autonomy thesis as an incidental or peripheral feature of his (narrower) views about morality as presented in book 3. Similarly, it is a serious mistake to describe Hume's most basic intentions in the *Treatise* without giving due prominence and weight to his concern with the autonomy of morals.

4

I have suggested that the edifice and structure of Hume's project—what we may call the Hobbist *form* of the *Treatise*—is indicative of his unifying aim to discredit various theological doctrines and dogmas that are essential to religious morality (most notably as presented in Clarke's system) and to replace them with an account of human nature that serves as a secure, secular account of the foundations of moral life. The general nature of this project, with its commitment to the autonomy thesis, needs to be carefully distinguished from the *specific content* (i.e. doctrines and components) that Hume incorporates into his system. The significance of this form/content distinction is evident in relation to the work of both Hobbes and Shaftesbury. Both these thinkers, as noted, are committed to the autonomy thesis.[54] They are, nevertheless, deeply divided on issues concerning human nature and "moral science." Hume's commitment to a secular, scientific account of moral and political life, based on a *causal* analysis of the elements and operations of human nature, does not commit him to Hobbist views about either egoism or the artificial nature of morality. Similarly, insofar as Hume plainly accepts significant elements of Shaftesbury's system (e.g. pride, sympathy, moral sense), this should not obscure the ways his project in the *Treatise* aims at a "scientific" character that is entirely alien to Shaftesbury's own project and commitments in the *Characteristics*.[55]

Clearly, then, while the overall form or structure of Hume's "science of man" is fundamentally Hobbist in character, this leaves *open* the question as to where Hume stands with respect to the content or component elements he builds into his own system of "virtuous atheism." As already indicated, Hume plainly borrows extensively from Shaftesbury and other prominent critics of Hobbes (including Hutcheson, Shaftesbury's most prominent Scottish follower). The general point that emerges from this is that it is a mistake to assume that the Hobbist *form* of the *Treatise* commits Hume to any *systematic* set of Hobbist doctrines or principles in his moral theory (i.e. with respect to its *content*). What may tempt some to suppose that this is so is the fact that there are indeed a considerable number of Hobbist elements and features in Hume's own moral system (as Reid and many others have noted). Nevertheless, as I will explain, it is one of Hume's major objectives in book 3 of the *Treatise* to put significant *distance* between himself and Hobbes and his followers on the subject of morals.[56]

I have already noted that within the group of thinkers who defend the autonomy thesis (i.e. in the top tier) there was considerable disagreement about the actual *content* of the system of secular morality. One major fault line here remains the divide between "skepticism" and "naturalism" (e.g. Hobbes v. Shaftesbury). The Hobbist character of Hume's project in the *Treatise*, as I have explained, does not itself settle this major controversy about the nature of Hume's commitments along this specific divide. Closely related to the skepticism/naturalism divide is the debate concerning "pessimism" and "optimism" as regards rival accounts of human nature. Optimists such as Shaftesbury held that human nature is not entirely selfish and that we are capable of genuine benevolence (a view that was shared by the theologically more orthodox). Pessimists such as Hobbes and Mandeville took the contrary view, with Mandeville going so far as to maintain the cynical view that any appearance of

benevolence in human conduct is actually motivated by (a selfish) vanity and love of praise. What seems clear, from the analysis of Hume's views already provided, is that he cannot be neatly placed in either one or the other these two opposing camps.

The particular importance of the divide between skeptic and naturalist and between pessimist and optimist for the wider debate about morality and religion is that it reveals an obvious *vulnerability* for the autonomy thesis. More specifically, it was a common strategy of religious moralists (e.g. Clarke in the *Discourse*) to present the hypothesis of the autonomy of morals as inevitably relying on or collapsing into a *skeptical* view of ethics and *pessimism* about human nature (e.g. as per Hobbes's system). From this perspective, the account of morality Hobbes and his followers provided is nothing better than a system of "moral licentiousness" or "practical atheism." When morality is grounded in the features of human nature, without any support from religion, we will end up denying the possibility of any real benevolence, justice, or virtue in the world. We are, these critics argue, left with nothing more than a system where the rule that governs us is might rather than right.[57] Plainly, the significance of Shaftesbury's system is that he wanted to reject any claims of this kind with respect to the autonomy thesis. He aimed to show that there could be *genuine* "virtuous atheism." Closely related to this point, he also argues that liberty of thought should not be confused with "licentiousness in morals."[58] Shaftesbury's own philosophical style and commitments, however, would not permit him to argue for this in terms of a "mechanistic" methodology of the kind Hobbes had employed. That is to say, Shaftesbury had no interest in "a science of man" understood in causal or scientific terms. The significance of Hume's project, therefore, is precisely that it aims at Shaftesbury's general objective with respect to *content* within a Hobbist *form* (i.e. viewed as a contribution to the "science of man").

The problem that irreligious thinkers such as Hume faced in the period following the publication of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1723) was that Mandeville had turned his ridicule, irony, and paradoxes against one of his own—namely, Shaftesbury. The dynamics of this was that the irreligious or freethinking position would again be identified with the hyper-Hobbism of Mandeville. Any irreligious thinkers who wanted to block this dynamic would naturally employ the arguments of Hutcheson, who was both a follower of Shaftesbury's moral sense doctrine and a sharp critic of Mandeville's Hobbist pessimism.[59] The challenge Mandeville posed, as seen from this perspective, falls into three key claims or theses that Mandeville maintained:

1. All moral distinctions are artificial and a product of education and political manipulation. That is, Mandeville denies any real or natural distinction between good/evil, right/wrong or just/unjust. Call this his *skeptical* claim.
2. All conduct that appears to be benevolent or virtuous is actually motivated by our love of praise. The skill of the politician, therefore, is to take advantage of human vanity and to guide our conduct by this means. Call this Mandeville's *cynical* claim.
3. Finally, contrary to the optimistic view, society frequently benefits from human vices (e.g. fraud, luxury, and pride), and any system of perfect virtue is incompatible with prosperity, empire, and achievement. In general,

> there is on Mandeville's account no neat fit between virtue and happiness or vice and misery of the kind Shaftesbury had proposed. Call this Mandeville's *pessimistic* claim.

Let us call these three connected claims the essential elements of "moral licentiousness." When we turn to Hume's system of secular morals, these are the key issues that will determine the significance of its *content*. On all three of the key issues of moral licentiousness, Hume's basic strategy is to defend Shaftesbury against Mandeville. Put another way, it is Hume's aim to vindicate the possibility and reality of genuine "virtuous atheism," in opposition to the *undiluted* "moral licentiousness" of Mandeville.

The right place to begin with our analysis of Hume's commitments with respect to the content of his moral theory is with the basic features of his system that he shares with Shaftesbury. These features are sympathy, pride, and moral sense. Hume's account of sympathy is first introduced in book 2, where he is explaining the operation of the indirect passions—specifically, pride and humility and love and hate. Hume's description of the "regular mechanism" that produces these passions is complex, and we need not follow all its details.[60] The basic principles are, nevertheless, clear enough. Any quality or object that is pleasurable and related to oneself will give rise to pride and, if related to another person, will produce love. Both pride and love are themselves pleasurable passions. Similarly, any quality or object that is found to be painful and related to oneself will give rise to humility and, if related to another person, will produce hate. Both humility and hate are themselves painful passions. Hume points out that virtue and vice are able to produce the relevant pleasant or painful indirect passions in us (T, 2.1.7.2/295). A virtue is any mental quality or character trait that produces an independent pleasure in ourselves or others. Similarly, a vice is a mental quality or character trait that is found to be independently painful or unpleasant.

> Now since every quality in ourselves or others, which gives pleasure, always causes pride or love; as every one, that produces uneasiness, excites humility or hatred: It follows, that these two particulars are to be consider'd as equivalent, with regard to our mental qualities, *virtue* and the power of producing love or pride, *vice* and the power of producing humility or hatred. (T, 3.3.1.3/575; his emphasis; compare 2.1.7.5/296)

As this passage (and others) indicates, it is Hume's view that our moral sentiments of approval and disapproval are "nothing but a fainter and more imperceptible love or hatred" (T, 3.3.5.1/614). That is to say, approbation and blame are, for Hume, calm forms of love and hate.[61]

The importance of the indirect passions as they relate to virtue and vice should now be clear. Virtue and vice arouse approval and disapproval in others or pride and humility in ourselves. Due to the influence of sympathy, approval and disapproval may serve as a "secondary" source of our sense of pride and humility (T, 2.1.11.1/316). Clearly, then, it is Hume's view that our moral sentiments serve not only to distinguish virtue and vice—by way of making us feel a satisfaction or uneasiness on the contemplation of a character (T, 3.1.2.3/471)—but also to motivate virtue and sanction vice by producing a general correlation between virtue and happiness and

vice and misery. The virtuous person's good character makes him happy, just as the vicious person's bad character will make him miserable. On this view of things, our moral sense serves as an independent (and natural) system of rewards and punishments, insofar as a person contemplates his own character or is made aware of the sentiments of others (T, 2.2.5.15–21; 3.3.1.9; 3.3.1.30; 3.3.6.8/362–5, 576–7, 591, 620).[62] This system of incentives and sanctions in support of moral life, as described by Hume, is entirely consistent with the accounts of Bayle and Shaftesbury pointing to the role of honor or pride in support of virtue—specifically, virtuous atheism.

Hume makes clear that in order for us to feel good about ourselves, through the mechanism of pride, others must support our positive self-evaluations (T, 2.1.11.9/321; compare EM, 9.10/276). He also argues, however, that we derive little or no pleasure from praise either when we know that it is based on a false understanding of our qualities or character or when it comes from individuals for whose opinions we have little regard (T, 2.1.11.11–3/321–2). This account of the way pride supports virtue by securing our happiness presupposes that there is some *real distinction* between well-founded and groundless praise concerning our moral character. (Otherwise, any form of praise or flattery would please us and make us happy.) Clearly, then, there is for Hume a real, natural "standard of merit and demerit" (T, 3.3.1.18/583; compare EM, 1.2/169; ESY, 567). The standard we rely on, as with other qualities and objects that produce the indirect passions (e.g. beauty, riches, etc.), is that of pleasure and pain as it relates to human happiness and misery.[63] Hume holds that this "sense of morals is a principle inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful that enters into the composition" (T, 3.3.6.3/619). In this way, he plainly *rejects* the view that all moral distinctions depend on artificial conventions or socially constituted rules. On the contrary, all our natural virtues and vices—which Hume describes at some length in *Treatise*, 3.3—influence our sentiments and happiness independent of any convention or artifice of this kind.[64]

Although Hume claims that our standard of morals depends on our subjective feelings (i.e. as a form of "moral taste": T, 3.3.1.15/581), he also argues that this standard is by no means arbitrary or unconstrained by reason in its operation and influence. He begins by pointing out that we do indeed encounter some psychological difficulties because of the way sympathy operates in us. More specifically, because "sympathy is very variable, it may be thought, that our sentiments of morals must admit of all the same variations" (T, 3.3.1.14/580–1).[65] It is, nevertheless, possible for us to converse together on "reasonable terms," because we are able to escape our own "peculiar point of view" and arrive "at a more stable judgment of things." We do this, he says, by fixing "on some *steady* and *general* point of view; and always, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation" (T, 3.3.1.15/581–2). By this means we learn to "correct our sentiments," just as we learn to correct our senses (otherwise common language and communication would be impossible). Hume emphasizes the role of reason in removing us from our particular perspective and attachments and enabling us to consider a character in a way that avoids any distortions of this kind. Reason, therefore, *corrects* our passions and sentiments in these respects (T, 3.3.1.15–23/581–7).

We may now return to Mandeville and the challenge of "moral licentiousness." There are, we noted, three essential elements of the "licentious system." On all

three, Hume plainly stands with Shaftesbury in opposition to Mandeville. With respect to the *skeptical* claim, Hume explicitly rejects the suggestion that "all moral distinctions [are] the effect of artifice and education" (T, 3.3.1.11/578; compare 3.2.2.25/500). The sense of morals is entirely natural and universal in human nature. In a state of nature ("that imaginary state which preceded society": T, 3.2.2.28/501) we would still be able to distinguish qualities of character that produce approbation from those that produce blame. Hume is, therefore, no moral skeptic, insofar as this is understood in terms of the claim that all moral distinctions are artificial or conventional in origin. This is precisely the gap that separates Shaftesbury from Hobbes and Mandeville.

With respect to the issue of *cynicism*, the claim that all moral conduct is motivated by self-interest and, in particular, by a love of praise or fame, it is equally clear that Hume rejects this doctrine. As noted, he maintains that groundless or ill-founded praise secures little happiness for us. When we judge that our qualities of mind are not truly virtuous (i.e. produce no pleasure for ourselves or others) we will feel no pride—not even if others praise us. On the other hand, it is also Hume's view that well-founded praise is important to us and that without praise from others it will be difficult to sustain our sense of our own virtue. The happiness we derive from virtue does require (external) social support. In this way, we want to be more than simply praiseworthy, as we are influenced and affected by the opinions of others as this relates to our "reputation" (e.g. T, 2.2.1.9; 3.2.2.25–7; 3.3.6.11; 3.3.2.9–17/331–2, 500–1, 533–4, 597–601). Hume agrees with Bayle, Shaftesbury, and Mandeville that we all naturally care about our reputation and our sense of honor. What Hume does not accept, however, is Mandeville's claim that all we care about is praise or fame, even if it is groundless or misdirected. According to Hume, this claim is false to human experience.

Finally, it is also clear that Hume rejects the suggestion that there is no reliable correlation between virtue and happiness or vice and misery. In particular, there is no truth in the pessimistic and paradoxical view that "private vices are public benefits." On Hume's account it is simply absurd to suggest that vices can in any way be advantageous or productive of happiness. The general mechanism of the indirect passions makes clear that virtues, being pleasant qualities of mind that give rise to approval and pride, will generally promote our own happiness. The virtuous mind is able to "bear its own survey," and this secures our "peace and inward satisfaction" (T, 3.3.6.6/620). In the case of the vicious, the effects will be the opposite. Clearly, on Hume's account, there may be other sources of happiness and misery, and we may well discover that the virtuous are not always happy any more than the vicious are always miserable. To this extent, therefore, he is a *qualified* optimist, in that he does not endorse the more extreme optimist doctrine that virtue is somehow *sufficient* for human happiness (i.e. no matter what our other circumstances may be). Nevertheless, insofar as we are virtuous, this will, Hume maintains, naturally promote our happiness. Similarly, insofar as we are vicious, this will tend to make us miserable. This is all we need to show that Mandeville's (extreme) pessimism is also false to human experience.[66]

The important conclusion we may now draw from these various observations is that although Hume does not endorse any form of extreme optimism about virtue

and happiness (i.e. the supposition that virtue is sufficient for happiness), he nevertheless plainly rejects every one of the essential elements of Mandeville's "licentious system" or hyper-Hobbism. The significance of this reaches well beyond the (narrow academic) debate about skepticism and naturalism. The more fundamental and important point is that Hume uses his scientific analysis of human nature to show that "speculative atheism" does not imply any form of "practical atheism" or "moral licentiousness" of the kind associated with Hobbes and Mandeville. Religious philosophers are mistaken, therefore, when they claim that the autonomy of morals can be secured only by embracing skeptical and pessimistic views about human nature and morality. In this way, Hume's "science of man" serves to vindicate the possibility and reality of (genuine) virtuous atheism.[67]

5

The argument of the previous section makes clear that it was Hume's aim to put significant distance between his own moral theory and the undiluted "licentious" doctrines associated with Hobbes and Mandeville (i.e. skepticism, cynicism, pessimism). As I have also argued, however, these non-Hobbist features of the content of Hume's moral theory should not obscure the significance of the character of his Hobbist *project* in the *Treatise*, along with its necessitarian and naturalistic philosophical anthropology. Beyond this, it would be a further mistake to interpret the *content* of Hume's moral theory as including no significant Hobbist elements.[68] The observations I have already provided in relation to the various skeptical interpretations of Hume's moral theory show that any view of this kind would be one-sided and incomplete. The Hobbist elements in Hume's moral system are found, most notably, in Hume's account of the origin and foundations of justice as presented in *Treatise*, 3.2.

It was a crucial aim for Hobbes's critics to establish that morality was not merely artificial or a product of human conventions and compacts. This included not just the distinction between (moral) good and evil, right and wrong but also the core distinction between just and unjust. More specifically, Clarke was not alone in trying to prove that the distinctions we make concerning property and promises (i.e. contracts, oaths, etc.) are based on real, discoverable moral relations that exist antecedent to all human conventions. For example, this is also a prominent and fundamental feature of Locke's political philosophy as presented in his *Two Treatises on Government* (1689).[69] Plainly it was Locke's view, in direct opposition to Hobbes, that even in a state of nature, antecedent to both society and government, obligations and rights exist regarding both property and promises. The views of Locke and Clarke concerning the *natural* foundations of justice were widely shared by religious moralists (not least because the Hobbist account presents skeptical problems concerning God's moral attributes).

Hume's account of the origin of justice begins with the observation that there is no obvious natural motive to particular acts of justice. Acts of this kind may serve neither the agent's private interest nor any public interest. Nor can we suppose that either private or public benevolence is the motive behind these acts (T, 3.2.1).

As noted, Hume specifically denies that there is any "passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such" (T, 3.2.1.12/481). In order to explain the motive lying behind just acts, Hume suggests, we must first explain the *circumstances* in which justice *arises*.

According to Hume, there are two basic features to be accounted for with respect to the circumstances that give rise to justice. The first is the "selfishness and limited generosity" of human beings (T, 3.2.2.16/494). Throughout this section, he avoids any suggestion that we are *wholly* selfish or *incapable* of benevolence. This strong form of egoism is not necessary for his purposes. The more limited point he insists on is that our affections are highly *partial* and our capacity for generosity or benevolence to strangers or those who are distant from us very *weak* (T, 3.2.2.8/488–9). The other circumstance of justice that he draws attention to is that external goods or possessions are both *scarce* and *easily transferred* from one person to another (T, 3.2.2.7; 3.2.2.16/487–8, 494). Both these circumstances are liable to generate competition and conflict and may produce social instability unless some remedy to these obstacles to social cooperation and harmony can be found. Without any such remedy, we will be denied the considerable benefits we receive from society.

The remedy, Hume maintains, rests with the artifice of human conventions. These conventions aim to put external goods "on the same footing with the fix'd and constant advantages of the mind and body" (T, 3.2.2.9/489). There is, however, no promise involved in the creation of these conventions. On the contrary, it is by way of our experience and sense of advantage in following certain rules regarding the possession and transfer of goods that these conventions gradually get settled and established (T, 3.2.2.10/490).[70] It is only *after* a convention of this kind is established, Hume says, that the ideas of justice and injustice arise, as well as those of property, right, and obligation (T, 3.2.2.11/490–1). On this view of things, "property is nothing but those goods, whose constant possession is establish'd by the laws of society" (T, 3.2.2.11/491). Locke and others are mistaken, therefore, when they try to account for the foundation of property rights without any reference to the conventions of society (compare T, 3.2.3.6n/505n).

Hume makes clear that the basis of our commitment to the conventions of justice rests not with the utility of each act of justice, since it is possible that in some cases neither the public nor the private interest will be served, but rather with the utility of the *rules* involved.

> But however single acts of justice may be contrary, either to public or private interest, 'tis certain, that the whole plan or scheme is highly conducive, or indeed absolutely requisite, both to the support of society, and the well-being of every individual. (T, 3.2.2.22/497)

Hume goes on to observe that although "self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice" (T, 3.2.2.24/499), we find, nevertheless, that we take a *moral* interest in acts of justice and injustice even when our own welfare is not directly concerned.

> Nay when the injustice is so distant from us, as no way to affect our interest, it still displeases us; because we consider it as prejudicial to human society, and pernicious to every one that approaches the person guilty of it. We partake of their uneasiness

> by *sympathy*; and as every thing, which gives uneasiness in human actions, upon the general survey, is call'd *Vice*, and whatever produces satisfaction, in the same manner is denominated *Virtue*; this is the reason why the sense of moral good and evil follows upon justice and injustice. (T, 3.2.2.24/499; his emphasis)

It is, therefore, by means of this "progress of sentiments," as founded on our natural sentiments and the principles of sympathy, that our sense of justice becomes moralized and extends to cases and circumstances that are far removed from us in space and time.

Hume uses the same resources, as they concern the role of conventions and their foundation in human selfishness and the need to develop a system for social cooperation, to account for our practice concerning promises. Here too, he begins with a puzzle. What is the basis of our sense of obligation of promises? Why should we feel bound by the mere words "I promise"? Once again, it would seem that considered as an isolated, individual act, there is no natural motive that can explain this other than the sense of duty itself. But this does not explain *why* we feel any such sense of obligation (T, 3.2.5.6/518). The answer to this question rests, he argues, with the mutual advantage we secure when we establish a convention of promise keeping. We need not suppose any mutual kindness or benevolence. In the situation of a harvest, for example, we help each other and thus both benefit from being able to trust each other to return the service provided. If a person fails to keep his promise, he can never be trusted again and loses all future advantage of cooperative activity based on trust and promise keeping (T, 3.2.5.10/522–3). As with the case of justice and property, we find that by means of the influence of sympathy and the "sentiments of morals," we may take an interest even in cases that do not directly concern us (T, 3.2.5.11/523).

At the end of his discussion of promises, Hume goes out of his way to indicate how his account diverges from the view of "theologians." He contrasts his account of promises, "an invention for the interest of society," with the "monstrous doctrines" that are "merely priestly inventions" that have "no public interest in view" (T, 3.2.5.14/524). The specific doctrines he has in mind include transubstantiation, holy orders, and baptism, "where a certain form of words, along with a certain intention, changes entirely the nature of an external object, and even of a human creature" (T, 3.2.5.14/524–5). It is exactly Hume's point that the act of promising does not involve any "mysterious and incomprehensible operation" of this kind.

Hume applies this account of promises to his explanation of the source and basis of political obligation. It is one of his particular objectives in *Treatise*, 3.2.8 to show that our obligation to obey the government does not depend on any act of promising or oaths. The importance of government is that it is necessary "to maintain peace, and execute justice" (i.e. enforce the rules and conventions of justice as legally established; T, 3.2.8.3/541). It is, therefore, our interest in maintaining and enforcing justice that serves as the basis of our obligation to obey the government. It follows from this that political obligation does not depend on the act of promising itself but on our *distinct interest* in supporting the conventions of society that are essential to social cooperation (although it is also true that promising is among those conventions we have an interest in supporting and maintaining through established government). It is, therefore, "entirely erroneous" to hold, as have Locke and others,

that all government must be based on some act of *consent* because apart from this there is no (independent) basis for political obligation.[71] It may be true that promises, as already established in primitive societies without any government, were first used to establish government (i.e. in its early stages). However, with the establishment of government and the enlargement of society, promises and consent cease to play this (foundational) role.[72]

Hume's skepticism about the role of contract and promises has considerable religious significance in the context of its time. Locke had argued in his influential *Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) that atheists should not be tolerated precisely on the ground that they are incapable of obeying or keeping promises or oaths. "Those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the Being of a God. Promises, Covenants and Oaths, which are the Bonds of Humane Society, can have no hold upon an Atheist. The taking away of God, tho but even in thought, dissolves all."[73] Hume's account of promises shows that Locke is wrong about both promises and society. An atheist has the same interest in promising and being considered trustworthy as any theist may have. Moreover, Locke is wrong to suppose that the "bonds of society" depend on promising of any kind. The bonds of society depend either on our close relations with family and friends, as based on sympathy (e.g. T, 3.2.2.4/486), or on our sense of mutual interest in the scheme of justice and the established government that supports and maintains it. There is no basis, therefore, for Locke's suggestion that atheists should not be tolerated because promises have no hold on them and cannot bind them to society.[74] Atheists are no more incapable of being good and reliable *citizens* than they are incapable of being good and reliable friends, colleagues, partners, or parents.

There are, of course, other features of Hume's account of the artificial virtues and vices that have a tendency to undermine and discredit religious morality and the teaching of Christianity in particular.[75] The important point, for my purposes, is to identify the *considerable extent* of Hume's Hobbist commitments as they concern not just his project in the *Treatise* but the *content* of his moral theory. Although it is evident that Hume travels far down the path laid out by Shaftesbury (and his follower Hutcheson) in repudiating the doctrines of "moral licentiousness" as associated with Hobbes and Mandeville, he by no means rejects *all* Hobbes has to say. On the contrary, Hume places Hobbes's theory of justice at the heart of his own moral system, and his account of justice plainly contains a number of obvious Hobbist elements. The most important of these are the claim that justice originates with selfish motivations and that it is established by means of human conventions that (artificially) *create* the distinction between just and unjust with respect to the institutions of property and promising. Clearly, then, there is as much basis for claiming that Hume stands close to Hobbes as there is for claiming that he stands close to Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.[76] Even here, however, some careful qualifications need to be made, as Hume's position is nuanced. He does not hold, for example, that we are wholly selfish or that society is in any way unnatural to us. He also argues that even the artificial virtues are founded on and evolve on the basis of our "natural sentiments" and capacity for sympathy (T, 3.2.3.25/500). Nevertheless, be this as it may, the extent of Hume's Hobbist commitments was as obvious to his contemporaries as it is to (most) of our own. Moreover, the positions he takes on this subject were directed against not only the rationalist moralists such as Clarke and Locke but also

several prominent members of the moral sense school. This includes, most notably, Hutcheson. In a letter written to Hutcheson, Hume directly criticizes him for being "so much afraid to derive any thing of Virtue from Artifice or Convention."[77] It was certainly clear to Hume, therefore, that on this important issue he and Hutcheson were sharply divided.

The upshot of these observations is that no adequate account of Hume's moral system can fail to acknowledge the extent to which he follows Hobbes on the subject of justice. This observation is of considerable significance for understanding the *mixed* character of Hume's commitments as they relate to the skepticism/naturalism dichotomy (i.e. suggested by the traditional framework of analysis and interpretation). Any interpretation of Hume's moral theory that presents him as simply aiming to refute Hobbes's moral skepticism or as an unqualified follower of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson is clearly seriously misleading. Hume's moral theory cannot be pigeonholed in this way. The truth of the matter is that Hume *blends together* the "optimistic" elements found in Shaftesbury and Hutcheson along with the "pessimistic" elements he found in Hobbes's work. His moral system is, therefore, both *mixed* and *complex*. Evidently, this is a conclusion that will be found uncomfortable for both the skeptical and naturalistic interpretations of Hume's overall intentions in the *Treatise*, as any mixture of this kind within Hume's moral theory suggests that *neither* of these general interpretations of Hume's *Treatise* can be *entirely* correct.[78]

6

In a letter written to Francis Hutcheson in March 1740, Hume made clear that he was well aware that his moral theory subverted and discredited religious morality on points of fundamental importance.[79] More specifically, it is evident that on Hume's system praise and blame are a matter of moral sentiments, understood as particular forms of (human) love and hate. In the absence of any emotions of this kind, there is no basis for praising or blaming or holding *people* responsible for their conduct or character. Since the distinction of rewards and punishments depends on moral sentiments of praise and blame, there can be no known basis for rewards and punishments for any being(s) who lack (moral) emotions of this kind.[80] As noted (chapter 16), the clear implication of all this is that Hume's account of the role of moral sentiments generates severe skeptical problems for the whole notion of accountability to God and the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. Unless we assume that God has an emotional structure analogous to our own—which commits us to a highly questionable anthropomorphic conception of God—the notion of accountability to God in a future state is simply *unintelligible*.[81]

The problem Hume raises in his letter to Hutcheson suggests that the difficulties we face regarding knowledge of God in relation to morality work in *two directions*. That is to say, it is problematic not only to ask on what basis God can hold us (humans) responsible but also to ask on what basis we are supposed to form and direct our moral sentiments at God. The standard of morals for human beings depends on us discovering some relevant pleasurable or painful mental quality in an agent (person) before a moral sentiment can be aroused in us. In order to do this, we must

have some experience of the effects of the person's mental qualities on themselves and others (i.e. other human beings with whom we can sympathize). The way this mechanism of the indirect passions is supposed to operate in relation to God is, to say the least, mysterious and puzzling. It is not obvious, for example, how we can know or identify the relevant set of mental qualities (motives, intentions, purposes, etc.) God may possess. Nor is it clear what the scope or frame for judging the effects of divine moral character ought to be. Should it cover all of creation, all sentient creatures, or only human life (i.e. as we know and experience it)? Plainly, there is no natural or obvious moral *standard* that applies to the *deity*. Hume makes no effort in the *Treatise*, or any of his other writings, to suggest any solution to these obvious puzzles for the theological view. His letter to Hutcheson makes clear why this is so. Hume believes that our understanding of *human* moral life leaves us without any relevant understanding of how we can relate to God as members of a *shared moral community*. The very principles and elements that serve to bind people together as a moral community serve to *separate* the human from the divine. It is a short step from this position to the conclusion that religious morality, insofar as it is based on language that we use to describe and interpret human moral life, is simply *unintelligible*.

Hume's specific views on *justice* raise similar problems for understanding God's moral attributes. According to Hume's system, our idea of justice presupposes the existence of conventions that are established gradually, over time, with others and with a general view to our mutual benefit and advantage. Outside of this framework, however, all talk about "justice" (property, promises, etc.) is entirely without any meaning or application.[82] Given this, what *sense* can we attach to the notion of God's "justice"? Clearly, we do not enter into or share conventions with God. Nor is there any basis for understanding divine justice in these terms. The only content we can give to God's moral actions, therefore, must be with reference to benevolence and retribution—both of which, I have already noted, are highly problematic, given the rest of Hume's analysis.

What these observations indicate is that Hume's account of *human* morality does much more than simply defend the possibility of virtuous atheism. On the other side of his constructive program, there is a significant *negative* message: namely, that the assumptions of religious morality (i.e. wherein we stand in some moral relationship with God) are wholly unintelligible and mysterious—and often corrupting. Perhaps what is even more significant and destructive, from an orthodox religious perspective, is that this analysis undermines the *intelligibility* of God's *moral* attributes. As Hume was well aware, any attack on God's moral attributes (i.e. benevolence, justice, etc.) was tantamount to bringing into doubt belief in the very *existence* of God.[83] The conclusion we must draw, therefore, is that Hume's defense of virtuous atheism is not only a critique of religious morality but also provides a critique of belief in the existence of God under any conception that includes the moral attributes.

7

The core claim of this chapter is that Hume's moral theory in the *Treatise* should be read primarily within the framework of his fundamental irreligious intentions

throughout the *Treatise*. That is to say, according to this interpretation, it is a mistake to present Hume's moral theory within the framework of the traditional skepticism/naturalism dichotomy, as this obscures what is really basic to his concerns. This traditional framework, I maintain, fails to capture not only his specific irreligious aims and objectives in relation to his moral theory but also the way his irreligious aims as regards moral theory relate to his project in the *Treatise* understood as a whole, unified work. In this way, although I am not the first to argue that Hume's moral theory involves the aim of defending the possibility of virtuous atheism and the autonomy of morals from religion, my specific approach and interpretation of his commitments in this sphere differs in a number of important respects from the other accounts currently on offer.[84]

On the account of Hume's moral theory I have described, it is essential that we draw an important distinction between two issues that structure his aims and objectives relating to moral theory. The first concerns the question of the autonomy of morals with respect to religion, and the second concerns the challenge of moral licentiousness (especially as presented by Mandeville's writings). These two issues are closely related but distinct. It was the general view of religious moralists, such as Clarke and his followers, that any effort to separate morality from religion (as speculative atheists such as Hobbes aimed to do) would lead to "moral licentiousness" or "practical atheism." (Although it is true that the autonomy thesis does not itself imply speculative atheism, speculative atheism certainly leaves morality without any religious foundations.) Any thinker who defends the autonomy thesis must, therefore, take a stand on the question concerning the implications of this thesis as it relates to the *content* of his moral system.

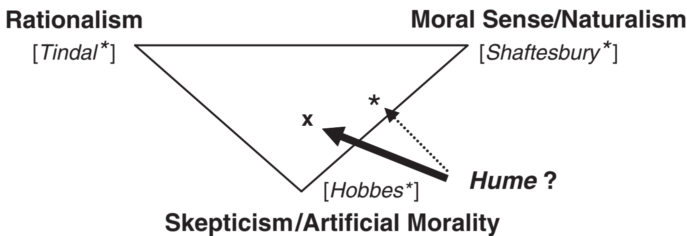
In light of this analysis, Hume's approach, I argue, must be understood in relation to the form/content distinction. Hume's project in the *Treatise* takes a Hobbist form or structure. More specifically, Hume's *plan* in this work is modeled after Hobbes's similar attempt to develop a scientific, secular account of morality as founded on his analysis of the essential elements of human nature. Hume's specific way of defending the autonomy thesis must be understood in these terms. Moreover, there is an intimate relationship between the battery of skeptical arguments Hume launches throughout the *Treatise* and his effort to defend a system of secular, scientific morality. His numerous skeptical arguments, as presented in the *Treatise*, are directed primarily at the various metaphysical and moral doctrines of religious philosophers (especially Clarke) who set about to refute (dogmatically) any irreligious project of the kind Hobbes and Hume pursued. Hume's skeptical arguments aimed against these religious philosophers and theologians are, therefore, simply the other side of the same irreligious or anti-Christian coin.

Having established the importance and relevance of Hume's Hobbist project for his defense of the autonomy thesis, we are, nevertheless, still left with the problem of the *content* of his moral theory. Some commentators have presented him as more or less a follower of Hobbes's scheme of egoism and artificial morality, while others have argued that his intentions run in exactly the opposite (antiskeptical, naturalistic) direction. The significance of this issue, from the perspective of the irreligious interpretation, is that it remains unclear if Hume's Hobbist project in the *Treatise* commits him to principles of "moral licentiousness" as associated

with Hobbes and Mandeville. The correct answer to this question, I have argued, is that no one-sided account can be entirely accurate. Hume certainly stands with Shaftesbury and Hutcheson in rejecting the three fundamental claims of Mandeville's "licentious" system: skepticism, cynicism, and pessimism. At the same time, however, Hume endorses neither Shaftesbury's extreme optimism nor Hutcheson's views about universal benevolence and the nature of moral virtue. Furthermore, Hume is plainly committed to a number of key Hobbist elements as regards his views on *justice*. Nevertheless, whatever affinities exist between the moral schemes of Hobbes and Hume, Hume remains firmly committed to the central tenet of Shaftesbury's scheme that "liberty of thought" in no way implies "moral licentiousness." The skeptic and atheist, no less than their theist counterparts, are capable of *genuine* virtue, as guided by the fundamental principles of human nature.

It is evident, then, that Hume's views cannot be neatly assimilated to those of either Hobbes or his moral sense critics (Shaftesbury and Hutcheson). Hume's moral theory is a *complex blend* of elements from Hobbes, Shaftesbury, and others, with a view to defending a more *nuanced* account of the principles of (genuine) virtuous atheism. With these observations in place, we may now reconsider where Hume belongs on the top tier among the other defenders of the autonomy thesis (fig. 17.3). It is tempting to think of Hume as being located somewhere close to the middle of the line running between Hobbes's moral skeptical position and Shaftesbury's moral sense position. It is arguable, however, that we should resist this temptation. In particular, insofar as the moral sense position is closely associated with Kemp Smith's account of Hutcheson's "primacy of feeling" doctrine, it is clear that Hume's position allows for a much greater role for reason in moral life. For this reason, therefore, the most accurate representation of Hume's moral theory is one that presents him securely on the *top tier*, among the defenders of the autonomy of morals and virtuous atheism, but taking a *middle position* that accommodates all the rival elements in the various alternative moral theories on offer.[85] In other words, when

Autonomy of Morals (Virtuous Atheism) *[Top Tier]*



{ key representative figures at each corner}*

FIGURE 17.3. Hume's location identified

we consider the various proposed dichotomies in this field: skepticism versus naturalism, egoism versus benevolence, reason versus feeling, artificial versus natural, optimism versus pessimism, and so on, what we find is that Hume, faced with almost every one of these dichotomies, consistently takes a middle or moderate view. The location identified on the diagram (fig. 17.3) accounts for this.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the argument and analysis in this chapter are focused on one (major) work—the *Treatise of Human Nature*. Clearly, the scope and structure of Hume's *Treatise* is very different from that of his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751). That said, many of the observations that have been made in this chapter also apply to Hume's commitments and intentions in the second *Enquiry*, as well as to other later works. What is especially important and significant about the *Treatise*, however, is that the scope and structure of this work make it far more ambitious, complex, and comprehensive than any of Hume's other (later) writings. Moreover, for reasons already explained, Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise*, considered as a whole, unified work, must be accounted for with specific reference to his objective to provide a defense and interpretation of a secular, scientific moral system. It follows from this that no adequate account of Hume's defense of virtuous atheism should overlook the relevance that his Hobbist project in the *Treatise* has for this important aspect of his philosophy of irreligion. Similarly, no adequate account of Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise* can overlook the central importance of his defense of virtuous atheism for what he aims to accomplish in this particular work. We may conclude, therefore, that Hume's defense and interpretation of (genuine) virtuous atheism serves as a *key to his whole project* in the *Treatise* and constitutes a uniquely important contribution to his wider philosophy of irreligion.[86]

PART V

HUME'S PHILOSOPHY OF IRRELIGION

God is a gross answer, an indelicacy against us thinkers—at bottom merely a gross prohibition for us: you shall not think!

Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

What I have to say, since it is itself a piece of philosophy, is an example of what I take philosophy to be, part of a more general attempt to make the best sense of our life, and so of our intellectual activities, in the situation in which we find ourselves.

Bernard Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline"

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The Myth of "Castration" and the Riddle's Solution

> *Socrates could not be suppos'd to have made Notions, or Speculations, or Mysteries, any parts of his Religion, when he* demonstrated all Men to be Fools who trouble themselves with Inquiries into *Heavenly* things, and ask'd *such Inquirers* whether they had attain'd a perfect Knowledge of Human things, since they search'd into Heavenly things; or if they could think themselves wise in neglecting that which concern'd them, to employ themselves in that which was above their Capacity to understand.
>
> Collins, *Discourse on Freethinking*

> *For my part, my only hope is, that I may contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge, by giving in some particulars a different turn to the speculations of philosophers, and pointing out to them more distinctly those subjects, where alone they can expect assurance and conviction. Human Nature is the only science of man; and yet has been hitherto the most neglected.*
>
> Hume, A *Treatise of Human Nature*

In the concluding part of this book I have three general and related aims. The first is to provide an overview and summary account of the irreligious interpretation of the *Treatise* and its significance. The second is to provide an account of the way the irreligious interpretation of the *Treatise* provides us with a deeper and wider understanding of Hume's commitments on the subject of religion—especially as this concerns the question of whether or not he was an "atheist." The last is to consider the extent to which Hume's irreligious aims and objectives throughout his philosophy cohere with each other. More specifically, I will consider the general criticism that Hume's own views about the origins and roots of religion, primarily as developed and described in his later writings, serve to refute and discredit his aim and ambition to use philosophy as a means to free humankind from the yoke of religion. This chapter is devoted to the first of these three aims: to provide a summary account of the nature and significance of the irreligious interpretation of the *Treatise*.

1

Throughout the twentieth century, it has been a well-established orthodoxy among Hume scholars that the *Treatise* has little direct or substantial concern with problems of religion. According to this view, there are two dominant themes that shape and structure Hume's intentions and commitments in the *Treatise*: skepticism and naturalism. Although both these themes are relevant to his views on religion, it is only in his later works that he applies his skeptical and naturalistic principles to this subject in any detailed or systematic manner. Before he published the *Treatise*, he may well have intended to include material that was directly concerned with religion (e.g. his discussion of miracles). He decided, however, to "castrate" his work and removed all discussion in it that might give "offense" to the orthodox. Only a few traces of his original concern with these problems are still present in the *Treatise*. Clearly, then, his major contributions to the subject of religion are to be found almost entirely in his later writings. This begins with the first *Enquiry*, where he includes a discussion of miracles and the design argument (secs. 10 and 11), and culminates with his *Natural History of Religion* (1757) and posthumous *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779)—generally regarded as his greatest work on this subject. Whatever Hume's aims and objectives in the *Treatise* may have been, religion was not central to his philosophical intentions in this work. This view of the *Treatise* has gone almost entirely unchallenged and continues to enjoy wide acceptance.

Although there has been general agreement that the *Treatise* lacks any significant interest in problems of religion (i.e. as per the "castration" hypothesis) there is, nevertheless, a deep schism within Hume scholarship as to how his fundamental intentions in the *Treatise* should be characterized. This schism falls on either side of the skepticism/naturalism dichotomy and presents us with a fundamental problem for any acceptable interpretation of this work. The obvious difficulty here is that although Hume is plainly committed to *both* skeptical and naturalistic aims and objectives, these two sides of his thought seem to pull in opposite directions. The worry here is not simply that the *Treatise* is Janus-faced but that it is philosophically *broken-backed*. On the one hand, Hume presents a set of skeptical arguments that are understood to discredit systematically our common sense beliefs about the world (i.e. undermine even our most ordinary and everyday claims to knowledge). On the other hand, he is understood to aim at being "the Newton of the moral sciences" by way of introducing "the experimental method of reasoning" to the study of human nature. These ambitions do not just diverge from each other; the former *defeat* the latter. In other words, Hume "the skeptic" appears to saw off the branch that Hume "the Newton of the moral sciences" is sitting on. Nor will it help (*pace* Kemp Smith) to appeal to any form of "naturalism" that teaches "that reason, as traditionally understood, has no role in human life." Clearly this does nothing to answer the skeptic, nor does it serve as a secure philosophical basis on which to make (scientific) claims about the principles and operations of human nature, considered as a contribution to human knowledge. These conflicts and tensions between Hume's skepticism and naturalism make up what I have referred to as "the riddle of the *Treatise*." In order to solve this riddle, we must look beyond the skepticism/naturalism dichotomy.

The solution to the riddle of the *Treatise*, I maintain, begins with a critique of the "castration" hypothesis, which in its unqualified form is simply a *myth*. Contrary to this hypothesis, the *Treatise* is *systematically* concerned with and directly relevant to issues of religion. This observation holds not only for a few isolated, disjointed sections of the *Treatise* (e.g. Hume's discussion concerning the soul) but for almost every single topic and issue that falls within the scope of this work. Hume's discussion of these various particular issues, as I have explained, must be understood in relation to the more general and wider debate between "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists." Clearly, then, the established interpretations presuppose the flawed and seriously misleading hypothesis that religion plays little or no role in Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*. No credible reading of the *Treatise* can rest on this assumption. The immediate significance of this is that it invites us to reconsider the nature of Hume's skeptical and naturalistic intentions and how they should be characterized and understood (i.e. as they relate to questions of religion).

The relevant place to begin, as regards this way of reconfiguring Hume's basic aims and objectives, is with the overall *plan* of the *Treatise*. I have argued that the *Treatise* is modeled or planned after Hobbes's similar project in *The Elements of Law* and the first two parts of *Leviathan*. The metaphysical foundation for this project is their shared naturalistic and necessitarian conception of human nature. The common aim of their projects is to develop a secular, scientific account of the foundation of moral and social life. This scientific investigation of moral life, they are agreed, rests on an analysis of human thought and motivation (i.e. the understanding and the passions). The Hobbist plan of Hume's *Treatise*—what I have described as the *form* of his overall project—manifests Hume's general commitment to the *autonomy* of morals (from religion). This does not, however, commit him to a wholly Hobbist account of the *content* of morals. On the contrary, Hume makes clear that his principles of skepticism or "speculative atheism" in no way imply a system of "moral licentiousness" of the kind associated with Hobbes and Mandeville. In order to do this, he draws on the work of several other leading freethinking moralists, most notably Shaftesbury, to show the way moral life and human society are shaped by the basic principles and forces of human nature, such as pride, sympathy, and moral sense, as well as by our ability to create and follow conventions. It is these irreligious claims that make up the fundamental constructive or positive teachings and lessons of Hume's *Treatise*.

It is evident, however, that the account provided so far cannot be the *whole truth* about Hume's aims and objectives in the *Treatise*. It leaves out the entire skeptical dimension of his thought—which is clearly negative in content. According to the irreligious interpretation, an *intimate* and *intricate* relationship exists between this skeptical dimension of Hume's work and his constructive project of a "science of man." More specifically, in order to clear the ground to build the edifice of secular morality, Hume had to undertake a systematic skeptical attack on those theological doctrines and principles that threatened such a project. The varied and seemingly unrelated skeptical arguments Hume advances in the *Treatise* are in fact held together by his overarching concern to discredit and refute Christian metaphysics and morals. In this way, the principal targets of his skepticism in the *Treatise* were the most current and influential arguments presented by various

"religious philosophers" who sought to prove (demonstratively) the fundamental articles of the Christian religion: the being and attributes of God, the immortality of the soul, the reality of free will, and so on. One of the most prominent and obvious of these targets was the philosophy of Samuel Clarke (especially as presented in his hugely influential Boyle Lectures, which aimed to provide a dogmatic defense of the Christian religion and a refutation of the "atheistic" philosophy of Hobbes and his freethinking followers). Clearly, then, so considered, the critical or destructive side of Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* is simply the other side of the same anti-Christian coin that directs and shapes his Hobbist program concerning the "science of man." The skeptical and naturalistic themes in Hume's *Treatise* have, therefore, this common source.

The immediate significance of the irreligious interpretation, as described, is that it accounts for the fundamental *unity* and *coherence* of Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*. This should be understood, in the first place, in terms of the overall "plan" of Hume's (Hobbist) "science of man." Contrary to the accounts suggested by the established interpretations, there is a close and intimate link between *all three* books of the *Treatise*. (Consequently Kemp Smith and those who follow him are seriously mistaken when they treat book 2 on the passions as of peripheral or marginal relevance to Hume's project—this being a claim that shows a deep misunderstanding of what he is doing *throughout* the *Treatise*.) At the same time, there is a shared or common purpose uniting the skeptical and naturalistic themes that appear throughout the *Treatise*. What holds these dimensions of Hume's thought together, as I have explained, is the mission to discredit religious philosophy and morals and to replace them with a secular, scientific understanding of moral and social life. (A similar combination of features is also found in Hobbes's philosophy.) In this way, the irreligious interpretation provides a unified and coherent account of Hume's basic intentions and recognizes the role and importance of *both* his skeptical and naturalistic commitments in this work. The irreligious interpretation identifies a common source for these (distinct) features in Hume's philosophy and thereby presents a *balanced* interpretation of his skeptical and naturalistic commitments that avoids a one-sided emphasis on one theme at the expense of the other.

The irreligious interpretation, as I have described it, plainly serves to explain the character of Hume's motivation in the *Treatise* as it relates to both his skeptical and naturalistic commitments. It also serves to explain what unites or relates the highly varied component arguments and discussions that appear throughout this work (in contrast with the established accounts, which leave us with a work that is disjointed and fragmented). The question may still be asked, however, whether this irreligious interpretation of the two main dimensions of Hume's thought succeeds in solving the core riddle of the *Treatise*. The riddle, we may recall, involves the objection that Hume's strong skeptical commitments in the *Treatise* undermine and discredit his project of "a science of man." The answer to this riddle, I have argued, rests with a proper understanding of the *dynamic* nature of Hume's skeptical commitments. Hume employed his extreme (Pyrrhonist) skeptical principles in order to bring us to, and to sustain, the principles of a more moderate, academic skepticism. Hume undertakes his (Hobbist) project of a "science of man" from the position of a moderate, academic skeptic (i.e. as secured and sustained by his Pyrrhonist exercises).

Although Pyrrhonist principles would entirely subvert and "cut off entirely all science and philosophy" (T, 1.4.7.7/268), the principles of academic skepticism pose no such barrier to the investigations Hume recommends to us.

In the conclusion of book 1, consistent with commitments and claims made in his later works (e.g. in the first *Enquiry*), Hume suggests that the immediate *value* of Pyrrhonist reflections is that they expose the weaknesses and narrow limits of human understanding. Hume maintains that this general lesson of Pyrrhonism has two significant and valuable implications for us. The first is that it serves to check our tendency to dogmatism (e.g. as manifest in all efforts to demonstrate or prove as certain the doctrines of the Christian religion). The second is that it should encourage us to confine our philosophical investigations to "common life" and discourage all speculation beyond this sphere. More specifically, according to Hume, we should turn our philosophical attention away from theological systems and hypotheses and toward those areas where we can expect to "contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge" (T, 1.4.7.14/272–3). The particular area of investigation Hume recommends to his readers is the "science of man," which has hitherto been "most neglected" (T, 1.4.7.14/278). This is the central lesson of Hume's *skeptical* observations and exercises in the *Treatise*.

For present purposes, the crucial point is that a "true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction" (T, 1.4.7.14/273). It follows from this that a "true sceptic" will not permit his skepticism to erect a barrier or general prohibition against investigations of the kind Hume pursues in the form of his "science of man." So interpreted, there is no fundamental incoherence or contradiction between Hume's skeptical commitments and naturalistic ambitions in the *Treatise*. We may conclude, therefore, that the riddle of the *Treatise* has been solved. The key to solving this riddle rests with a full and proper understanding of the irreligious motivations that direct and shape Hume's intentions as manifest in these two (distinct but closely related) aspects of his work.

Figure 18.1 illustrates the nature and significance of the irreligious interpretation. The established interpretations present Hume's fundamental aims and intentions in the *Treatise* in terms of the simple skepticism/naturalism dichotomy (which invites us to emphasize one side of this split at the expense of the other). Along with this view, it is also suggested that religion has no significant or substantial role to play in the *Treatise*. This leads to a deep tension between the two major components of Hume's project and a puzzle about his disjointed and fractured motivation.

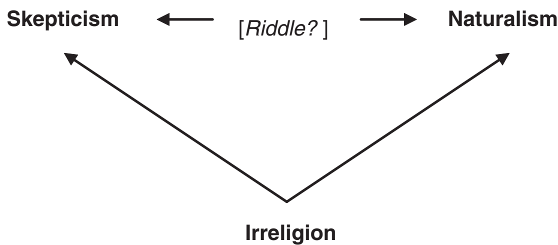

FIGURE 18.1. Hume's skepticism and naturalism have common roots in his irreligion

The irreligious interpretation maintains that both the skeptical and naturalistic components have their roots in Hume's irreligious motivation. On one side, Hume argues for the weak and narrow nature of human understanding. His general aim, on this side of things, is to curb and discourage dogmatism and to turn our philosophical speculations away from theological systems and their associated doctrines and to confine our investigations to areas of "common life—such as the "science of man." On the other side of Hume's project, his naturalism takes the form of a secular, scientific account of moral and social life based on an analysis of the main elements of human nature (i.e. as per the "science of man"). These sides of Hume's thought are complementary and have common roots, as manifest in his irreligious or anti-Christian aims and objectives.

2

The irreligious interpretation involves a *plurality* of claims about Hume's aims and intentions in the *Treatise*. The various claims involved should be carefully distinguished from each other. Let us begin with the claim that the *Treatise* has a substantial and significant concern with problems of religion. This is a claim, as noted, that a wide range of commentators on Hume's philosophy have explicitly or implicitly denied. Indeed, the only major commentator to argue explicitly that Hume's *Treatise* is deeply influenced by problems of religion has been Charles Hendel.[1] As also noted, however, Hendel maintains that Hume's views on the subject of religion bring him close to the views of religious apologists such as Berkeley, Butler, and "Cleanthes" (i.e. from the *Dialogues*). Clearly, then, we need to distinguish the claim that the *Treatise* is a work that is deeply concerned with problems of religion from the further, distinct claim that the *Treatise* has specifically irreligious or anti-Christian motivation (a view that is directly opposed to Hendel's reading). The irreligious interpretation should not, therefore, be confused with Hendel's related but very different claims about the importance of Hume's early interest in religion for his philosophy in the *Treatise*.

The irreligious interpretation makes clear that Hendel's claims about Hume's attitude to religious philosophy are on the wrong track, since Hume's attitude to religion is plainly thoroughly *critical* and *hostile*. It is important, nevertheless, to distinguish various degrees of *strength* that may be given to the irreligious interpretation. On a *weak* reading, the irreligious interpretation may be taken to claim only that the *Treatise* contains many more irreligious or anti-Christian arguments and polemics than is generally recognized. Various particular passages and sections of the *Treatise*, as I have interpreted them, bear this out. We find, for example, that Hume's specific arguments on space and time, causation and induction, the external world, and so on are all directly relevant to irreligious arguments and positions he develops in further detail in his later writings. Since these features of the *Treatise* have generally been overlooked or ignored, it is important to fill these gaps in our understanding of Hume's philosophy of religion and the way it evolved (e.g. contrary to the "castration" hypothesis). All of this may be accepted, however, without making any stronger claims about Hume's basic intentions in the *Treatise*. In other

words, one could accept the irreligious interpretations for a number of particular passages and arguments in the *Treatise* but still insist that the *Treatise* should be read in terms of the original skepticism/naturalism dichotomy as suggested by the established interpretations.

A *moderate* version of the irreligious interpretation will reject this reading as too weak. According to this version, Hume's irreligious arguments and aims in the *Treatise* amount to something more significant and substantial than a series of piecemeal but otherwise unrelated irreligious passages and arguments. Hume's irreligious aims and objectives are not so fragmented and disjointed as this. They are, on the contrary, as fundamental and important to the structure and frame of the *Treatise* as any of his skeptical or naturalistic aims and objectives. At the same time, according to this view it would be a mistake to confine Hume's skeptical and naturalistic aims and objectives within a strictly irreligious framework. While his philosophical concerns show substantial interest in religion (i.e. as per his anti-Christian objectives), he also has "other fish to fry" in the *Treatise*—so he is not *exclusively* concerned with questions of religion as described. On the moderate account, therefore, we need to include irreligion as an *equal partner* with skepticism and naturalism in the *Treatise*. We should not, however, allow irreligion to "swallow up" *everything* in the *Treatise*. Irreligion is an important but not a *comprehensive* theory of Hume's fundamental intentions in this work.

From the perspective of the *strong* version of the irreligious interpretation—the version that I have advanced and defended in this book—the moderate view misrepresents the situation and options we are faced with. The irreligious interpretation does not in any way deny the importance and significance of Hume's skeptical and naturalistic commitments—it is no part of the irreligious interpretation to "downgrade" the role these two themes play in the *Treatise*. On the contrary, what the (strong) irreligious interpretation maintains is that it is impossible to understand or characterize adequately either of these two major components of Hume's thought without making full and proper reference to his irreligious intentions. That is to say, contrary to the moderate view, there is no proper or convincing way to explain Hume's skeptical and naturalistic motivations that is *entirely independent* of his irreligious aims and objectives. More important, any effort to do this (as per the moderate account) will bring us back to the fundamental problem of the riddle. That is to say, unless we understand Hume's skeptical and naturalistic commitments in relation to his irreligious aims and objectives, we will not be able to account for the underlying *unity* and *coherence* of Hume's project in the *Treatise*. For this reason, we must accept the strong version of the irreligious interpretation, which takes irreligion to be the unifying and comprehensive theme that holds the *Treatise* together as a coherent whole. It is a mistake to make any concessions to the traditional or established interpretations beyond this.

Let us now turn to the role the claim that Hume's *Treatise* is modeled after Hobbes's works plays in the irreligious interpretation. I have argued that this observation is the most obvious avenue or point of entry for the irreligious interpretation. It is evident, nevertheless, that this claim concerning the Hobbist nature of Hume's plan in the *Treatise* is not essential to the irreligious interpretation *in any form*. In the weak form, irreligious interpretations of various particular passages and

sections can be defended without any reference to Hume's overall plan in the *Treatise*—much less to its specific (Hobbist) origins. Beyond this, even the strong version of the irreligious interpretation can be described and defended without any specific reference to Hume's debts to (or affinities with) Hobbes. We may still explain the unity of the *Treatise* in terms of the project of a secular, scientific account of moral and social life as grounded in human nature.[2] Obviously, these aims and ambitions, as such, need not have been inspired by Hobbes's similar project in *Leviathan* and *The Elements of Law*. It remains true, however, that these parallels are both obvious and highly significant and that the evidence for Hume having a general debt of this kind is overwhelming.

The importance of Hume's debt to Hobbes rests not so much with an understanding of the philosophical structure of his project (as this can be independently described) as with making sense of the *historical context* in which his project evolved and emerged. The irreligious interpretation is not only philosophically more satisfying and comprehensive than the other accounts on offer, it is also historically better grounded in the details of the relevant debates and controversies Hume would have been exposed to as a young student in Scotland in the first half of the eighteenth century. A clear understanding of the Hobbist roots of Hume's project puts all this (complex and varied) detail into proper focus. The fact remains, nevertheless, that the strong version of the irreligious interpretation can be articulated and defended independent of the hypothesis about the Hobbist origins of Hume's project in the *Treatise*.

3

The philosophical significance of the irreligious interpretation is obvious. Considered simply in its weak form, the irreligious interpretation provides a *series* of alternative readings of central passages and sections of the *Treatise*. This includes some of the most famous contributions Hume has made to philosophy, such as his views on induction, causation, and the external world. However, it also includes several other less well known sections of the *Treatise* that are often overlooked, such as his discussion of space and time. These parts of the *Treatise*, as understood on the relevant irreligious readings, are in a number of cases directly relevant to Hume's (better known) contributions to the subject of religion as presented in his later writings. This is true, for example, of his critique of absolute space and time, which is directly relevant to his criticisms of Clarke's argument a priori as presented in the *Dialogues* (part 9). It is also true of Hume's argument concerning the external world,within which worries about God being a deceiver are very relevant to similar worries about the problem of evil—also discussed in the *Dialogues* (parts 10, 11). Many other irreligious readings of particular passages and sections of the *Treatise* could be cited for the further light that they shed on Hume's overall commitments on the subject of religion. Even without any reference to the specific claims of the strong version of the irreligious interpretation, this represents a *total transformation* of the way the specifics of Hume's arguments must be read on the basis of the various particular interpretations that have been provided (i.e. considered in a piecemeal, case-by-case basis).

There can be no doubt, however, that the primary importance of the irreligious interpretation rests with the strong version and the way it serves to provide *unity and coherence* to Hume's fundamental intentions in this work. In doing this, the irreligious interpretation not only solves the riddle of the *Treatise*, it provides a very different picture of the unity of Hume's philosophical thought as a whole—not just in the *Treatise* but in *all* his philosophical writings.[3] With the irreligious interpretation, we no longer have a serious discontinuity between Hume's earliest work and his later works. According to the established accounts, Hume's interest in religion was either suppressed or undeveloped in the *Treatise*, and it was only in his later work that religion came to play a prominent role in his philosophy. This view of things introduces an enormous *irony* into Hume's philosophical development and influence. The *Treatise* is, without doubt, Hume's greatest work. It is not only his most influential work, judged in terms of its impact on the history of philosophy, but also plainly his most ambitious work, judged in terms of the scope, complexity, and depth of the contributions involved.[4] None of his other works—significant as they are—can be compared with the *Treatise* in these terms. At the same time, he is also widely recognized as providing the most influential and important statement of the skeptical or irreligious position on the subject of religion. Few, if any, other thinkers have had as great an impact as Hume on this subject. The irony of all this is, however, that on the established accounts the *Treatise* is more or less *irrelevant* to the enormous contribution Hume made on the subject of religion. The irreligious interpretation shows that this view is fundamentally mistaken and no such irony holds true for Hume's philosophy.

It would be a mistake to present the philosophical significance of the irreligious interpretation simply in terms of providing a solution to "the riddle of the *Treatise*" or as providing supplementary material for Hume's (subsequent) contributions to the philosophy of religion. This would be too modest and understates what is at stake here with regard to getting an accurate and complete account of Hume's aims and objectives in the *Treatise*. What Hume aims to provide in the *Treatise* should be understood as a *complete system* of irreligion or "atheism." (I will discuss the specific significance of these terms at more length in the next chapter.) In his various other writings, Hume offers no such complete system or worldview. The *Dialogues* is exclusively concerned with arguments for and against the existence of God; the two *Enquiries* sever Hume's epistemological and metaphysical concerns from his moral philosophy, presenting each separately and without the intricate detail of the parallel discussions in the *Treatise*. Only in the *Treatise* do we find Hume's philosophy presented in *one complete system*, in which all the parts are woven together. This provides us with an insight into the overall structure of his philosophy of an *entirely different order*.

The established interpretations not only neglect the (crucial) irreligious dimension of Hume's concerns, they fragment and disconnect his overall project—reducing it to bits and pieces that lack the systematic order and overarching structure he seeks to impose on his philosophy in the *Treatise*. Whatever the merits of his later philosophy—and whatever attitude he may subsequently have taken toward the *Treatise*—it is only in the *Treatise* that we find his philosophy presented as a complete system of irreligion or "atheism."[5] The importance of the irreligious

interpretation rests with *recovering the integrity of Hume's philosophy* in the *Treatise* understood in these terms.

4

From a historical perspective, the irreligious interpretation is no less significant. The established interpretations are not agreed about the tradition and context in which Hume's thought in the *Treatise* should be located. There have been, nevertheless, two dominant accounts, falling on either side of the skepticism/naturalism dichotomy. The classical skeptical interpretation has painted Hume as an empiricist thinker following in the footsteps of Locke and Berkeley. (In the most extreme version of this view, as presented by Grose and Green, there are no other major influences on Hume's thought.) According to the naturalistic interpretation, as developed by Norman Kemp Smith, Hume should be seen in a very different framework: namely, as a follower of the philosophy of Francis Hutcheson. Kemp Smith also emphasizes the influence of Newton as providing a model for Hume's project of a "science of man" based on the experimental method—a suggestion a number of other scholars have followed up on. Whereas the classical skeptical interpretation places particular emphasis on issues of metaphysics and epistemology as they arise in the philosophy of Locke and Berkeley, the naturalistic interpretation begins with the influence of Hutcheson's moral philosophy (as found in book 3), the principles of which Hume is understood to have then applied to problems of metaphysics and epistemology as they arose for Locke and Berkeley. The irreligious interpretation sees both these accounts, and similar views that are derived from them, as well wide of the mark.

According to the irreligious interpretation, there is no one thinker, or pair of thinkers, who will alone provide us with a *comprehensive* insight into *all* aspects of Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*. No proposal of this kind is credible for a work of the complexity and multifaceted character of the *Treatise*. Where we need to begin, for the purpose of the irreligious interpretation, is with the enormously influential debate between "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists" (as Hume describes these two philosophical parties at EU, 12.1/149). This general debate—which I have labeled the "main debate"—stretches back to the ancients. Nevertheless, this debate came to dominate British philosophy for a period of at least a century, beginning in the middle of the seventeenth century. The key figure who ignited this debate was Hobbes. It was Hobbes's "atheistic" philosophy and its associated doctrines (e.g. materialism, necessitarianism, skepticism about morality and religion, etc.) that produced scores of replies and refutations from a wide range of Christian apologists. Hobbes, as noted, was not without his followers and disciples. The doctrines and commitments of this group of skeptics, atheists, deists, and freethinkers varied greatly, but within their ranks we may certainly include figures such as Spinoza, Bayle, Shaftesbury, Toland, Collins, Mandeville, Dudgeon, and many others. (Groupings of this kind are evident in the writings of influential defenders of orthodoxy, such as Warburton.) On the other side of this divide, we also find a considerable divergence of strategies and commitments. Again, however, among the most influential apologists for the Christian religion we can readily group together

thinkers such as Descartes, Malebranche, Cudworth, Locke, Clarke, Berkeley, Butler, and Baxter. Whatever fault lines may surface within each of these camps, they are nevertheless clearly distinct from each other (as Hume's division between them suggests). This division between "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists" is, above all, apparent in the influential writings produced by the Boyle lecturers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Although Clarke was the most prominent and influential of these thinkers, others such as Bentley, Gastrell, Harris, and Gurdon combined to set the philosophical agenda in Britain for much of the first half of the eighteenth century. The Boyle lecturers were very clear that the atheistic philosophy of Hobbes, Spinoza, and their freethinking followers was their immediate and primary target. It is within this matrix of the main debate that the irreligious interpretation locates Hume's central philosophical aims and objectives in the *Treatise*.[6]

Although the irreligious interpretation insists on the complex and varied character of the two main camps involved in the main debate, and makes no claims for any single thinker serving as an *exclusive* and *comprehensive* key to unlocking Hume's intentions in the *Treatise*, there is nevertheless an important emphasis to be placed on the relevance of Hobbes and Clarke for an understanding of Hume's basic project. Hobbes and Clarke are pivotal figures on either side of the main debate. Hobbes was the key representative of the philosophical agenda of atheism. Clarke was widely recognized by Hume's own contemporaries as providing the most convincing and influential demonstrative defense of the Christian religion, by way of refuting Hobbes and his followers. It is impossible to understand the various particular debates Hume is involved in without giving the Hobbes–Clarke dispute *suitable prominence* in this context. This is true not only of the specific components of Hume's philosophy (soul, free will, morals, etc.) but also of his project considered as a whole. Clearly, the significance of the Hobbist character of Hume's plan must be understood in terms of this debate. Similarly, the fact that Clarke serves as a principal target of Hume's battery of skeptical arguments spread throughout the *Treatise* should also be considered in these terms. In sum, it is Hobbes and Clarke who serve as the pivotal figures for understanding the way Hume's *Treatise* meshes with the context and framework of the main debate between "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists." Clearly, however, to make this claim is not to suggest that Hobbes and Clarke are the *only* figures who are needed to make sense of Hume's various aims and arguments in the *Treatise* (as this would be a plain misrepresentation of the irreligious interpretation as I have argued for it in this book).

In presenting the irreligious interpretation, I have been careful to show that the Hobbes–Clarke dispute continued on a variety of fronts throughout the first three decades of the eighteenth century. Among the more important sets of battles that were fought in this philosophical war were those that involved the circle of radical freethinkers that included Toland, Collins, and Tindal. As noted, Hume enjoyed some direct personal contact with this circle through his association with Pierre Desmaiszeaux—an active member of this circle (and close friend and associate of Toland and Collins). A number of features of Hume's philosophy show clear and strong affinities with the philosophical principles and aims of the radical freethinkers—including his systematic opposition to Clarke's brand of dogmatic

Newtonian philosophy and theology. Beyond this, I have also noted that these battles between "Newtonians" and "freethinkers"—considered as offshoots of the parties of "religious philosophers" and "speculative atheists"—found their way right to Hume's doorstep in Chirnside in the early 1730s (i.e. at the very time that the project of the *Treatise* was beginning to take shape). At the forefront of this dispute were Andrew Baxter and William Dudgeon. Baxter, who lived nearby in Duns and had both personal and philosophical contacts with Hume's early mentor Henry Home (Lord Kames), was a prominent and aggressive defender of Clarke's philosophy. Dudgeon, who also lived nearby in Coldstream, was a freethinker with "Spinozistic" tendencies. He was also deeply impressed by the doctrines of Shaftesbury, Collins, and Tindal. The Baxter–Dudgeon dispute reached boiling point in Chirnside in 1732, when the local clergy, including Hume's uncle, charged Dudgeon with heresy. The immediate relevance of these various disputes and controversies for both Hume's life and his philosophy is beyond dispute. The significance of these further observations concerning Hume's context, in both Scotland and London, is to show the extent to which the irreligious interpretation is deeply woven into the fabric of Hume's context *at every level*. This is something the alternative established interpretations cannot claim to achieve.

In light of all these observations, it seems clear that the irreligious interpretation invites us to place Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* in an entirely different tradition from those that have hitherto been suggested (i.e. by the established accounts). Hume's *Treatise* belongs in an irreligious or "atheistic" tradition of thought in which his main predecessors were Hobbes and Spinoza.[7] What characterizes this tradition—which can be traced back at least as far as Lucretius—is the fundamental aim to free humankind from the yoke of "superstition." Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* should be recognized as a particularly distinguished and substantial contribution to this tradition of irreligious thought. One major objective of the irreligious interpretation is to ensure that the *Treatise* is securely and properly placed in this appropriate tradition (and not in other alien traditions that seriously misrepresent his fundamental aims and ambitions in this work).

Finally, insofar as we consider the place of Hume's *Treatise* in relation to his own age and near contemporaries, it clearly belongs in a broadly Hobbist and anti-Newtonian tradition of thought that came into prominence with the rise of the radical freethinkers in early eighteenth-century Britain. The most prominent representatives of this tradition, as noted, were Toland and Collins (along with other members of their "pantheist" society). Viewed from this perspective, Hume's Hobbist project in the *Treatise* should be considered the *jewel in the crown* of the Radical Enlightenment.[8]

Was Hume an "Atheist"?

[W]hat is this but a mere verbal controversy?

Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

At the beginning of this book, I noted that a number of Hume's contemporaries regarded him as an "atheist." Moreover, several of Hume's earliest critics embraced the view that he was an atheist solely on the basis of their reading of the *Treatise*, without *any* knowledge of his later writings (including the posthumous *Dialogues*). In contrast with this assessment,more recent scholarship has suggested that these early critics of Hume's *Treatise* ought to be dismissed as intolerant bigots and religious fanatics who have not understood Hume's philosophy. Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*, they maintain, has little or no concern with religion, and so the charge of "atheism" (as it relates to the *Treatise*) is misplaced.[1] The irreligious interpretation shows that this reading of the *Treatise* is itself mistaken, and so the charge of atheism cannot be dismissed on these grounds. Even if Hume's early critics were intolerant bigots and religious fanatics—and it is not obvious that this is true of all of them—it does not follow that they were mistaken about the character of Hume's intentions in the *Treatise*. Clearly, then, the question of Hume's (alleged) "atheism" in the *Treatise* remains an open issue that still needs to be settled. In this chapter, I consider to what extent the irreligious interpretation of the *Treatise* supports the charge of "atheism" and how this relates to Hume's philosophical commitments in his later writings insofar as they concern religion.

1

As noted, our own contemporaries generally regard the *Dialogues* as the principal and most comprehensive statement of Hume's views on the subject of religion.[2] For this reason, they assume that the *Dialogues* is the right work to turn to in order to settle the question of whether he was an *atheist* or not. Let us, therefore, begin with this work. In the case of the *Dialogues*, Hume is almost exclusively concerned with arguments relating to proofs for the existence of God. There are three arguments that dominate the *Dialogues*. Two of these arguments aim to prove the existence

of God, and the third aims to prove that God cannot exist. The two arguments that aim to prove that God exists are the argument a priori (i.e. cosmological argument) and the argument a posteriori (i.e. argument from design). The argument that aims to show that God cannot exist is the argument from evil. There is wide agreement about Hume's attitude to the cosmological argument and the argument from evil. However, in the case of the argument from design, there is considerable disagreement about the exact nature of Hume's final conclusion(s) in the *Dialogues*.

In relation to the cosmological argument, Hume's position in *Dialogues* part 9 is straightforward. Whatever is demonstrable is such that its contrary implies a contradiction. However, whatever we conceive as existing can also be conceived as nonexistent, without contradiction. Since there is no being "whose non-existence implies a contradiction," it follows that there is "no Being whose existence is demonstrable" (D, 91). Beyond this, Hume also maintains that the notion of "necessary existence" has "no meaning" (D, 91–2). (These arguments, as I noted in chapter 10, are in fact both anticipated and developed in more detail in the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*.) Clearly, then, Hume holds that theism secures no support from the cosmological argument or any argument of this general form.

In order to understand Hume's exact position on the problem of evil, we need to distinguish between a strong and a weak version of this argument. The strong version begins with "Epicurus's old questions," which remain "unanswered" (D, 100). The existence of evil in this world implies either that God is unable to prevent evil, in which case he is not omnipotent, or that he is unwilling, in which case he is malevolent or at least less than perfectly good. Either way, it follows that it is impossible to vindicate all of God's attributes. In response to this argument, Hume allows that it is *possible* that all the evil in this world is necessary or essential for a perfectly good whole (D, 96; compare EU, 8.34/101). All that this proves, however, is that for all we know—and we know little or nothing about such matters—the existence of evil "is *compatible* with infinite power and goodness in the Deity" (D, 103; his emphasis). Hume goes on to point out that this "concession" is hardly of any help to the theist. The significant difficulty remains that we are in no position to *infer*, much less prove, God's attributes of perfect goodness and infinite power in these circumstances. There can, he says, "be no grounds for such an inference, while there are so many ills in the universe, and while these ills might so easily have been remedied, as far as human understanding can be allowed to judge on such a subject" (D, 113). This is all that this weak version of the argument from evil aims to establish.[3]

Throughout his philosophical writings, Hume suggests that he regards the argument from design as being the most plausible and convincing argument for theism. Moreover, in a number of different contexts, Hume *endorses* this argument (see, e.g., T, 1.3.14.12n/633n; LG, 25–6; NHR, 134, 183; D, 116–7). The fact is, however, that despite his endorsement of this argument, Hume's plain intention is to *expose its weaknesses and limitations*. The basic faults in the argument from design are first identified and analyzed in the first *Enquiry* (sec. 11). The fundamental weakness in this argument, Hume maintains, rests with the analogy it relies on. The argument from design begins with evidence we have of order, harmony, and beauty in this world. When we discover objects that possess these features, where their parts are adjusted to each other in order to fulfill some end or purpose (e.g. as in a watch, house, etc.),

we infer the existence of some (human) intelligent, designing mind. We do not assume that objects with these features could just come into existence by chance, or without any intelligent creator to account for them. Given the obvious *analogy* between order, harmony, and beauty as we discover them in the universe (e.g. in plants, animals, solar system, etc.) and objects that have been created by "human design, thought, wisdom and intelligence," we must conclude that the universe has also been created by a cause that "is somewhat similar to the mind of man" (D, 45). Hume objects to this argument on the ground that the analogy involved—between the universe and human artifacts—is "very weak" (D, 46). The difference between the types of causes and effects in question is "vast" (D, 119). The analogy involved, Hume suggests, is weaker than that of "the sun to a waxen taper" (EU, 11.27/146). As a result of this, we are left with a *hypothesis* about the cause of the world that "is both uncertain and useless" (EU, 11.23/142). It is uncertain "because the subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience," and it is useless because we are unable—insofar as we are limited by reasoning—to "establish any new principles of conduct and behaviour" (EU, 11.23/142). While Hume elaborates on this basic objection in both his first *Enquiry* and throughout the *Dialogues*, it is evident that the general conclusion he reaches is that this argument fails to prove the existence of God in *any significant form*. All we are left with is an obscure *hypothesis* about the existence of a being that must be "infinitely different" from human minds (EU, 11.25/143). So considered, the religious hypothesis is both theoretically empty and practically useless.[4]

This reading of Hume's attitude to the argument from design is certainly consistent with his general skeptical principles and commitments on this subject (e.g. as explained in the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*). On this account, all hypotheses and conjectures about the origins of this world are beyond the scope of human understanding, and so we should turn our philosophical attention and energies to other matters. Interpreted this way, Hume is committed to neither theism nor atheism, since his position is that we cannot settle the question concerning the existence of God one way or the other. However, this (skeptical) way of reading Hume has been objected to on the ground that at the end of the *Dialogues* (part 12) he makes a number of "concessions" to the argument of design that indicate, it is said, that he accepts some *weak* version of it. The evidence for this is supposed to be manifest in the final exchanges between "Philo," the skeptic, and "Cleanthes," who defends the argument from design throughout the *Dialogues*.

At the beginning of part 12, Philo says that no one can be so stupid as to reject the view that there are signs of intention and design in this world and that it is evident, as Cleanthes has argued, "that the works of nature bear *a great analogy* to the productions of art" (D, 119; my emphasis). Immediately after this, however, Philo proceeds to reverse his reversal (i.e. he performs a double reversal). He insists, in particular, on the verbal or trivial nature of the whole dispute about whether we should call God a "mind" or "intelligence" and emphasizes, once again, "the *vast difference*, which may reasonably be supposed between him and human minds" (D, 119; my emphasis). In an especially important passage, which was inserted into the *Dialogues* shortly before Hume died, Philo elaborates on his view. The truly pious, he argues, will acknowledge "that there is a *great and immeasurable*, *because incomprehensible*,

difference between the *human* and the *divine* mind" (D, 120; my emphasis). On the other hand, the atheist may allow that there is some "remote analogy" among the various operations of nature, including "the rotting of a turnip, the generation of an animal, and the structure of human thought" (D, 120). In other words, the atheist can concede that there is some *remote analogy* between the first principle of the universe and *several* other parts of nature—only one of which is human thought and mind (D, 120; and compare part 7). Hume's point is that there are other analogies no less plausible than the one Cleanthes has suggested. These other analogies do not suggest that the cause of this world is something like mind or human intelligence. Clearly, then, the atheist may concede that there is some *remote* analogy between God and human minds and still insist that there remain *other analogies* and hypotheses that are no less plausible. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that *all* such analogies are so weak and "remote" that God's nature and attributes remain well beyond the scope of human understanding (D, 120, 129–30).

2

In *The Natural History of Religion*, Hume is careful to point out that "genuine theism" involves more than just a belief that there exists invisible, intelligent power in the world (NHR, 144).[5] He suggests that those who believe in fairies, goblins, elves, and beings of this kind are more like "superstitious atheists" than "genuine theists." The genuine theist, he maintains, believes, at a minimum, that there exists some "supreme" intelligence that is the origin, creator, and governor of this world (NHR, 145). So described, "genuine theism" involves what we may call a *thin* conception of God. There is, on this account, no commitment to some further, more specific, set of attributes. In contrast with thin theism, *thick* theism presupposes a richer set of attributes, such as infinity, omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection. From the perspective of thick theism, the believer in thin theism may be viewed as an atheist, on the ground that God's essential attributes are either denied or put in doubt. In fact, whether we are judged an *atheist* or not may depend not only on whether the *standard of theism is thick or thin* but also on what *particular* set of thick attributes are considered as essential for belief in God.[6]

It is evident that orthodox religious doctrine (e.g. Christianity) requires a *thick* conception of God (i.e. of some relevant kind). From this perspective, thin theism is no more acceptable as an account of "true religion" than belief in fairies and goblins. It may also be argued, from the orthodox perspective of thick theism, that thin theism is more or less indistinguishable from plain theological skepticism. Although a loose and vague commitment to the existence of an intelligent creator and governor of the universe is allowed, the *content* of this is so thin and obscure that it is theoretically *empty* and of little or no *practical* importance (D, 129; EU, 11.23/142). That is to say, thin theism fails to qualify as having any *real religious significance* for how we live or understand our own existence. This is, indeed, one important point that Hume has Cleanthes and Philo establish in criticism of Demea's brand of (abstract) theological "mysticism" (D, 61). When religious belief becomes this diluted, the theist and the skeptic cease to have any significant point of disagreement to divide them.

With these distinctions in hand, it is evident where Hume stands on the issues of substance (i.e. as opposed to verbal disputes about what label we should use to describe his commitments). Clearly, he is sharply critical of *thick* theism in all its forms. The claims of theism to establish God's particular attributes—especially when conceived in anthropomorphic terms—are entirely groundless. None of the arguments advanced by thick theists succeed in proving, or even making probable, the existence of a being with the rich set of attributes orthodoxy generally requires. With respect to the moral attributes, Hume goes further and suggests that there are *strong grounds for doubting* that a being of this kind (i.e. omnipotent and morally perfect) can be the creator and governor of the universe. Clearly, then, it is not just that Hume does not believe the claims of thick theism or simply "suspends judgment" about their claims. His skeptical attitude is much stronger than this. He doubts the claims of thick theism and suggests that they are *false* or at least highly improbable (i.e. they are "*incredible*"). We may conclude, therefore, that with respect to thick *theism*, Hume is not just a skeptic, he may be legitimately described as an *atheist*.[7]

Hume's attitude to thin theism is not so sharply drawn or well defined as this. For example, as noted, Philo's remarks at the end of the *Dialogues* appear to allow that a reasonable person (e.g. Cleanthes) may conclude "that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence" (D, 129). To this extent, Hume appears willing to make some"concession" to theism. It is important, however, to stress (again) two points in relation to this. First, he makes clear that this mode of theism leaves us still in a state of "profound ignorance" and that it provides us with "no inference that affects human life" (D, 129–30). Second, even though he may grant that thin theism of this kind has some basis in the "remote analogy" between human intelligence and the cause(s) of order in the universe, he also points out that there are *other analogies* that provide (similar) support for different hypotheses and conjectures. Thin theism of this kind has, therefore, no particular claim on us, and Hume shows little or no interest in it as an instructive or informative hypothesis. The point he insists on is that *all* such conjectures and hypotheses are equally arbitrary and groundless and lack any firm foundation in human reason. The only sensible conclusion we ought to reach on this subject, as Hume maintains elsewhere, is that "the whole is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery" (NHR, 185).

As Hume presents it, religion based on thin theism is *refined into nothing*. Although he does not actually deny the hypothesis of thin theism, he leaves us with nothing to believe in—much less any doctrine or teaching we can guide our lives by. To paraphrase his remarks elsewhere, we are left with "a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worthwhile to contend against it" (EU, 12.16/155). In sum, although Hume's attitude to thin theism does not involve any suggestion that it is false or doubtful (i.e. in contrast with his attitude to anthropomorphic, thick theism), it is still inappropriate to present Hume as believing or accepting thin theism. On the contrary, the basic point he aims to make in this context is that skeptical reflections of the kind he engages in leave us with *nothing of any significance to believe in*.[8] Clearly, then, the distinction between thick and thin theism should not be construed in terms of a form of theism that Hume rejects in contrast with a form of theism that he accepts or endorses. Hume embraces and endorses *no kind of*

theism—thick or thin. Rationally speaking, thick theism is improbable, if not incredible; thin theism is simply empty and useless.[9]

Does it follow from these considerations that Hume is an "atheist"? Critics may argue that it does not follow from the fact that Hume was *not a theist* that he must have been an *atheist*. While it is true that he rejects thick theism as philosophically groundless, if not incredible, his attitude to thin theism is more circumspect than this. More specifically, even if he does not *endorse* thin theism, he does not *deny* it either. Consistent with his general skeptical principles, he simply "suspends" judgment about all such matters (NHR, 185; compare 167; EU, 12.25/162; D, 36–8) on the ground that all such hypotheses are beyond the scope of human understanding. From this perspective, labeling Hume an "atheist" is misleading because it fails to distinguish properly between his attitude to thick and thin theism. For all his skepticism, he leaves the door open regarding the *possible truth of thin theism* (under some interpretation)—however much we may be unable to conceive of its content or be guided by it. In light of these considerations, therefore, we are better advised to describe Hume as simply a "skeptic" or "agnostic" as concerns his fundamental views on religion.[10]

Although there is some basis for this alternative suggestion, the labels "skeptic" or "agnostic" are themselves, in important respects, highly misleading. In the first place, these labels fail to identify properly and highlight the wholly *hostile* and *critical* character of Hume's general attitude toward religious doctrine and dogma. More specifically, they incorrectly suggest that on this issue his position is one of intellectual "neutrality"—taking no stand for or against religion. This clearly gets Hume's fundamental commitments and intentions wrong.[11] Related to this point, it is a mistake to represent his general attitude to *all religious hypotheses* as one of simply "suspending judgment," on the ground that claims of this kind are beyond the scope of human understanding. This way of speaking fails to indicate the extent to which he regards thick theism as making claims that are *doubtful*, if not *incredible* (i.e. probably false).

Another label is available to us, however, that avoids all these difficulties. The most accurate and informative label for describing Hume's views on this subject, I suggest, is *irreligion*—which is the label I have been using to describe his fundamental intentions throughout the *Treatise*. "Irreligion" is a term that both Hume's contemporaries and our own would understand and can apply to his arguments and outlook without any serious misrepresentation. Calling his views on this subject irreligious avoids on one side attributing any form of *unqualified* or *dogmatic* atheism to him, while on the other it also makes clear that his fundamental attitude toward religion is one of *systematic hostility* and *criticism* (i.e. he believes that we are better off without religion and religious hypotheses and speculations).

Two further specific advantages are attached to the term "irreligion" that should also be mentioned. First, the term "irreligion" captures the *full strength and scope* of Hume's skeptical stance concerning the metaphysical claims of orthodox religion. This covers not just his views about the being and attributes of God but also his views about the origins and consequences of religion, the soul and a future state, miracles, and the foundations of morality. Hume's core arguments are intended to leave religious doctrine without any solid philosophical grounds or significant

content—much less any practical value or influence. The label of irreligion serves effectively to identify these *wider* concerns and places appropriate emphasis on Hume's *destructive* intent with respect to religious systems. Related to this point, by widening our scope of interest in relation to Hume's views on religion, and avoiding a narrow focus on arguments concerning the existence of God, we are encouraged to consider works other than the *Dialogues* when assessing the nature and character of his views on this subject. Even if we set aside, for the moment, his fundamental irreligious aims and intentions in the *Treatise*, we still have to give his varied and wide-ranging irreligious concerns in his other works their due weight.[12] To use the label "skepticism" or "agnosticism" for these features of Hume's writings is plainly misleading and misrepresents the character of his (hostile) attitude to religious beliefs and practices as generally understood.

3

In this book, I have interpreted Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* as fundamentally an effort to discredit the metaphysical and moral paraphernalia of orthodox religious systems and to redirect human investigations to the study of the "science of man," whereby we may develop a secular, scientific account of the foundations of moral and social life. I have suggested that we should characterize Hume's aims and intentions in this regard as his "*philosophy of irreligion*" and that, so considered, his irreligious intentions in the *Treatise* are both continuous and consistent with his irreligious aims and commitments in his later writings. In light of these points, it is tempting to simply set aside the issue of "atheism" in the *Treatise* and rely on the term of "irreligion" for our understanding of Hume's philosophical commitments in this work. There remain, however, a number of outstanding issues relating to "atheism" in the *Treatise* that still need to be considered.

Two issues are especially important. First, we need to consider the possibility that there exist some relevant *differences* between Hume's irreligious commitments in the *Treatise* and his later writings. It could be, for example, that there are several features of Hume's philosophy of irreligion in the *Treatise* that are much *stronger* than anything that appears in his later writings—which may go some way to justifying the label of "atheism" as applied to the *Treatise*. Beyond this, we also need to consider to what extent the label "atheism" is appropriate from the perspective of Hume's own contemporaries. That is to say, in order to assess whether the suggestion that Hume's *Treatise* is a work of "atheism" is true or not, we need to consider the significance of his irreligious commitments in relation to the problem of "atheism" as understood in the context of the "main debate." Otherwise our evaluation of Hume's early critics will plainly be anachronistic.[13]

Much of what Hume has to say in the *Treatise*, as read on the irreligious interpretation, is entirely consistent with his commitments on this subject as presented in his later works. Irreligious arguments appear in *all* these works, although no single work contains *all* Hume's (varied and diverse) irreligious arguments. Nevertheless, for my purposes, the important point has been to show that the *Treatise* contains a *considerable* amount of irreligious material, most of which has been

overlooked or ignored. Moreover, at least some of this material is *unique* to the *Treatise* and has no counterpart in Hume's later writings. This certainly includes some of his arguments in the *Treatise* relating to proofs for the existence of God. Hume's own contemporaries, as noted, were especially aware of and sensitive to arguments in the *Treatise* relating to causation and necessity that present problems for the argument a priori. There is, nevertheless, a great deal of material in the *Treatise* that presents further skeptical difficulties for theism. It has been noted, for example, that Hume's empiricist account of the origin of our ideas is routinely applied to various ideas involved in the divine attributes (e.g. omnipotence). This serves to provide a systematic skeptical critique of the nature of our *idea* of God—a fundamental problem for natural religion that Hume leaves unanswered (and unanswerable, given his particular philosophical commitments). Hume's views on space and time present additional difficulties for the argument a priori, which was clearly a primary target of his skeptical attention in this work. I have also identified features of Hume's discussion of the material world that present fundamental difficulties for all arguments that aim to move from knowledge of the material world to knowledge of God—presenting difficulties for both the argument a priori and a posteriori. Although all these skeptical assaults on proofs of the existence of God are of a piece with Hume's skeptical arguments in his later works, they do not all reappear in his later works. For this reason it would be a mistake to dismiss the irreligious arguments in the *Treatise*, as they relate to the existence of God, as little more than anticipations and extrapolations of arguments that appear in a more developed form in his later writings.[14]

There is one argument in the *Treatise* that is especially relevant to the question of "atheism," insofar as this is understood in terms of *denying* the existence of God (as opposed to simply raising skeptical objections to proofs for the existence of God). I have noted that in the *Dialogues*, when Hume discusses the problem of evil, he stops short of endorsing the *strong* version of this argument—which aims to prove that God cannot exist, given the existence of evil in this world. What is significant about this argument is that it may be taken to prove that God does not exist. Clearly any argument of this type takes us much further in the direction of atheism, understood in these terms. Although Hume is plainly of the view that the existence of evil provides *weighty support* for the view that God, conceived with moral attributes, cannot exist, he nevertheless allows that we are in no position to prove that there is some inconsistency here (i.e. it remains *possible* that *all* the evils we have experience of in this world are necessary for the good of the whole, etc.). In the *Treatise*, there is an argument that goes beyond this. According to Hume, we are all naturally and inescapably *deceived* as regards our (natural) beliefs concerning the existence of body. This argument, suitably supplied with premises that were widely accepted by Hume's theologically orthodox contemporaries, leads directly to the conclusion that God is a deceiver or—if God cannot be a deceiver—that God does not exist. What is significant about this argument is not only that it is unique to the *Treatise*, it is also the strongest argument Hume presents in any of his writings leading to the conclusion that God does not exist. More specifically, this argument does not just develop objections to proofs that God exists, it purports to find evidence to prove that God *does not exist* (i.e. along the same general lines as the argument from evil

in its *strong* form). From the perspective of *thick* theism, this argument constitutes plain *atheism*.

One of the most important differences between the *Treatise* and the *Dialogues*, as I have pointed out, is that the scope and range of Hume's irreligious arguments in the *Treatise* is much *broader*. Whereas the *Dialogues* takes up only arguments concerned with the existence of God, the *Treatise* covers many other issues of central concern to (orthodox) religion. The wider scope of Hume's concerns in the *Treatise* is certainly relevant to the issue of "atheism" considered from this broader perspective. This consideration is especially true in regard to his skeptical critique of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and a future state. Hume's criticism of this doctrine takes several different forms. The most obvious of these are his skeptical arguments relating to the immateriality of the soul and personal identity (T, 1.4.5–6). However, it also includes his views concerning the problem of induction (e.g. as directed against Butler's *Analogy*), as well as his various observations concerning our preference for the present over the future and the motivational difficulties this natural bias presents for us.[15]

Closely related to Hume's skeptical arguments concerning the soul and a future state is his defense of the doctrine of necessitarianism. As noted (chapter 16), Hume's orthodox contemporaries—such as Clarke, Berkeley, Baxter, and Butler—viewed the doctrine of necessity as destroying the foundations of all moral accountability—both in this world and the next. The crucial point, from their perspective, was that religion was not just a question of accepting or rejecting the claims of *theism*. On the contrary, religion, as they understood it (i.e. in the form of Christianity) concerns our conduct in this world as it concerns our prospects for misery or happiness in a future state. For this reason, they viewed the doctrine of future state, along with the conditions of moral accountability that it presupposes, as part of the *essential core* of religion—not some optional extra. (It was this general attitude that explained much of their strong opposition to Hobbes's "atheistic" philosophy.) From the perspective of those thinkers, Hume's assault on the doctrine of a future state, combined with his necessitarianism, served to discredit and undermine the *practical influence of religion*. As such, it was viewed as a threat to society. In other words, Hume's skeptical views concerning the soul and free will are not just a matter of "speculation" but a matter affecting *moral practice*. It is essential, therefore, that the general charge of "atheism," as leveled against Hume's doctrines in the *Treatise*, should not be assessed simply in terms of the question of theism—as this is too narrow an understanding of the problem. With respect to the doctrine of a future state and free will, Hume's commitments are not simply "skeptical." He is a *mortalist* and a *necessitarian*, and, as such, he provides a constructive alternative to Christian philosophical anthropology.

Another, related, feature of Hume's constructive alternative, in the *Treatise*, to Christian philosophy is his account of secular morality as based on his analysis of the principles and operations of human nature. According to Hume's system of morals, virtuous conduct in no way depends on the (obscure and groundless) metaphysical and moral claims of the Christian religion. Beyond this, he also advances a conception of moral life and conduct that runs directly against many core teachings of Christianity (e.g. his views about pride and humility, chastity, etc.)

The important point here is that, in this sphere, Hume provides a clear, positive alternative to Christian morality (without collapsing into the scheme of "moral licentiousness" of the kind associated with Hobbes and Mandeville).

In the *Treatise*, Hume does not just *criticize* Christian philosophical anthropology and its associated system of morality; he provides a *worked-out alternative* to it. This alternative constitutes a *constructive*, *positive* side to his philosophy of irreligion. In none of his later works is this alternative system worked out in similar detail or complexity. The alternative scheme Hume presents in the *Treatise* may well be described as a "godless worldview." This alternative worldview renders religion *superfluous* and *unnecessary* for the purpose of human life. In an important sense, the label "atheism" captures the full significance of this more effectively that "irreligion." One reason for preferring "atheism" to "irreligion," in this respect, is that "irreligion" places emphasis on the negative or destructive aspects of Hume's philosophical agenda. As such, it draws (one-sided) attention to the critical features of Hume's philosophy of irreligion at the expense of the constructive features I have identified and described. In the case of the *Treatise*, the constructive, positive side of Hume's project—developing a "godless worldview"—is an *equal partner* with the critical side of his philosophy of irreligion. To this extent, therefore, a good case can be made for preferring the label "atheism" as applied to the *Treatise*, on the ground that it does proper justice to the *constructive* dimension of Hume's thought in this work.

4

The foregoing observations regarding the question of "atheism" in relation to the *Treatise* are obviously relevant to the way Hume's own contemporaries understood and described the philosophy contained in this work. As noted (chapter 5), those thinkers and contemporaries of Hume who were familiar with the main debates were familiar with two dominant modes of "atheism." The first involved the close relationship between "atheism" and "skepticism." With this in mind, it is worth quoting, once again, the remarks John Harris made on this subject in his Boyle Lectures, while discussing the theological skepticism of Sextus and Hobbes:

> [I]t appears plain enough, that though these Men did in Words pretend to own and acknowledge a God, yet in Fact they were Atheists, and had no true Belief of any such Being. For a Deity without the Attributes of *Understanding* and *Wisdom*, without *Ends* or *Designs*, none of which Mr. *Hobbes* asserts expressly, *can be in God*, is a ridiculous stupid Being, an Idol that every rational Agent must despise.... To assert, therefore, that the Attributes of God are *not discoverable by Reason, nor agreeable to philosophical Truth*, but may be *declared to be any* Thing, which the *sovereign Power* pleases to make them; this is designedly to expose the Belief and Notion of a Deity, and render it so precarious, that it can be the Object of no rational Man's Faith.[16]

Harris goes on to argue that atheism in this (disguised) form is more dangerous than a direct denial of God's existence. It is very clear that Hume's skeptical

commitments, in both the *Treatise* and the *Dialogues*, fall into this general pattern of "atheism."

The other important form of "atheism" Hume's contemporaries were familiar with is described by Bayle as "Stratonic Atheism" (a form of atheism that attracted Hume's attention in the "Early Memoranda"). Bayle, as noted, closely associated this form of atheism with Spinoza's philosophy. The basic features of this metaphysical system involve presenting nature as self-existing, self-ordering, and self-moving. Human beings are regarded as part of the natural order and, as such, governed by necessity—like everything else in nature. Moreover, the natural order of things is governed by efficient causation and is not conceived or understood in terms of final causes of any kind. Finally, on this view of things (i.e. "Stratonic" or "Spinozist" atheism), moral life does not require the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and a future state. Clearly, then, Hume's contemporaries would regard any metaphysical outlook that fits this general profile as "atheistic" in character.[17] Hume's metaphysical commitments in the *Treatise*—as shaped and structured by his naturalism—fit this profile very neatly. From this perspective, therefore, his naturalistic commitments in the *Treatise* broadly justify the view that this work presents a system of "atheism" understood in these terms.

Where do these observations concerning "atheism" in the *Treatise* leave us? For Hume's contemporaries, it was obvious that his various arguments in the *Treatise* were directly relevant to problems of religion and that the arguments and aims involved manifested *systematic hostility and opposition* to the doctrines and principles of the Christian religion. As Hume's early critics saw it, the label "atheism" was an obvious and natural fit, given these features of his work. Many of our own contemporaries have denied that the label "atheism" fits the *Treatise* and have suggested that Hume's early critics used this label because they were intolerant bigots and religious fanatics. The fact is, however, that by and large, our own contemporaries have failed to recognize and appreciate properly the considerable extent of Hume's irreligious aims and objectives in this work. In consequence of this, these scholars have (seriously) underestimated the degree to which the attribution of "atheism" to the *Treatise* fits its contents (i.e. relative to understandings of this term that were familiar to Hume's own contemporaries). Beyond this, however, whether we choose to label Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* "irreligious" or (more strongly) "atheism" is—as Hume suggests himself—little more than a "verbal dispute" (D, 119–21).[18]

Hume's Lucretian Mission

Is It Self-Refuting?

In your well-marked footprints now I plant my resolute steps.

Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*

In this work, I have argued that both the skeptical and naturalistic components of Hume's thought in the *Treatise* are shaped and held together by his fundamental irreligious aims and objectives. The primary aim of Hume's series of skeptical arguments, as developed and distributed throughout the *Treatise*, is to discredit the doctrines and dogmas of Christian philosophy and theology with a view to redirecting our philosophical investigations to areas of "common life," with the particular aim of advancing "the science of man." The primary aim of Hume's project of a "science of man" is to provide a secular, scientific account of the foundations of moral life in human nature. These irreligious aims and objective are by no means entirely theoretical in character. On the contrary, Hume's philosophy of irreligion has an evident *practical* objective, which is to discredit and dislodge the role of religion in human life.[1] Taken together, these two components of Hume's thought serve to advance what we may describe as his "Lucretian mission."

Whatever the merits of the irreligious interpretation of the *Treatise*, it may be argued significant puzzles and problems remain relating to the *coherence* of Hume's Lucretian mission when we try to accommodate developments and additions that appear in his *later* writings. More specifically, it may be argued that Hume's own observations about the origins and roots of religion in human nature, primarily as presented in his *Natural History of Religion*, show that his Lucretian mission is *neither wise nor achievable*. If this general line of criticism is correct, then Hume's Lucretian mission is both theoretically self-refuting and practically self-defeating. Moreover, considered in this light, Hume's project in the *Treatise* is fundamentally flawed, as judged by *his own claims and hypotheses* concerning religion. It is to criticism of this kind that I now turn.[2]

1

As noted, according to Hume, the only feature all religions have in common is the belief that there exists some invisible, intelligent power in the world (NHR, 144).

Moreover, even this very minimal (shared) belief is not entirely universal or an "original instinct" (e.g. unlike attraction between the sexes), and for this reason, he claims, religious principles must be judged "secondary" to human nature (NHR, 134; compare NHR, 184). He contrasts minimal belief of this general kind with what he calls "genuine theism." The genuine theist believes that some invisible, intelligent power exists who is the *creator* and *governor* of this world (NHR, 145). One question of fundamental importance for Hume's philosophy is what basis there is for "genuine theism" and whether beliefs of this kind arise from reason or some other source. Clearly, it is Hume's position that the various forms of "genuine theism," as we discover them in the major monotheistic religions that exist in the world, arise not from reason but from other aspects of human nature. This is, indeed, the central theme of the *Natural History of Religion*. Given this, however, we need some alternative explanation of how it is that religion arose and why it is so prevalent in human life.

In the *Natural History of Religion*, as well as several of his other works, Hume provides such an explanation.[3] He approaches religion as just another form of natural phenomenon, which has its own relevant set of causes and effects. The details of his account of the origins and causes of religion are very familiar. According to Hume, "polytheism or idolatry was, and must necessarily have been, the first and most ancient religion of mankind" (NHR, 135).[4] What are the sources of polytheistic belief? Our human fears, hopes, and anxieties about future events, insofar as they may affect our happiness and welfare, combined with our ignorance of the causes that govern these events, produces in the "ignorant multitude" (NHR, 135, 141) a belief that these events depend on invisible, intelligent agents who may be influenced and controlled by means of prayer and sacrifice. As a result of this process, as shaped by human fears and ignorance, the world becomes populated with human-like, invisible, intelligent beings who become objects of our worship. According to Hume, the same general dynamics propel us into monotheism.

The forces propelling us to believe in intelligent, invisible power in the world are, Hume maintains, inherently unstable. More specifically, we find an opposition between on the one side our need to anthropomorphize these gods so we can "address" and control them and on the other side our tendency continually to "magnify" them in the process of worshiping and placating them. The latter propensity leads, Hume argues, to one, dominant God, whose attributes become greater and greater until eventually this God is regarded as infinite and incomprehensible (NHR, 155). At the end of this process, we arrive at an "abstract" God that corresponds with the conception of God suggested by philosophy, although shaped by the same principles of fear and ignorance that originally gave rise to polytheism. However, because this abstract God is too remote for the vulgar, who need some image of God (for the purpose of worship), there is also a tendency "to sink again from theism into idolatry" (NHR, 158–9). So go, according to Hume, the unstable dynamics of religious belief as we discover them in human nature. Reason has little or no influence over this process, except to provide "cover" and "credibility" to beliefs that originate in human weaknesses and vulnerabilities.[5] It is, nevertheless, a plain mistake to suppose that the source of religion—be it polytheism or monotheism—rests with reason. This is the primary lesson of Hume's *Natural History of Religion*.

2

Although Hume denies that religious belief (much less "genuine theism") is universal or an "original instinct," he does describe it as having roots in human nature and the human predicament that are more or less universal and make it a *natural propensity* for human beings and their societies. Moreover, several of his observations about the functional role of religion in human life suggest that, contrary to some of his other remarks, religion may be *justified* in these terms. The analogy with his own account of justice brings this out.[6] In *Treatise*, 3.2 he famously provides an account of justice that presents it as a product of "artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessities of mankind" (T, 3.2.1.1/477). According to Hume, human beings establish conventions regarding both property and promises that are developed and arrived at as a solution to problems of social cooperation and conflict we encounter in social life. Hume identifies two circumstances that force human beings to *create* the conventions or rules of justice as a way of promoting and maintaining peace and social cooperation. The first of these is internal to human nature itself. This is our inherent "selfishness and limited generosity" (T, 3.2.2.16/494). The other circumstance of justice has to do with our "outward" or external situation. We find that various possessions that we seek and enjoy are both scarce and easily transferred from one person to another (T, 3.2.2.7, 3.2.2.9, 3.2.2.17–8/487, 489, 495). In these circumstances, competition and conflict are inevitable, and we require some remedy for this; otherwise, we cannot secure any of the considerable advantages of society (T, 3.2.2.3/485–6).

The remedy, Hume says, "is not deriv'd from nature, but from *artifice*; or more properly speaking, nature provides a remedy in the judgment and understanding, for what is irregular and incommodious in the affections" (T, 3.2.2.9/489; his emphasis). This "remedy" involves "a convention enter'd into by all the members of the society to bestow stability on the possession of those external goods, and leave every one in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry" (T, 3.2.2.9/489). These conventions of justice, or rules that create and determine property rights within society, may vary greatly from one jurisdiction to another (EM, 3.35/197–8). It does not follow from this, however, that these conventions are in any way arbitrary or without their own relevant standard or principles of justification (T, 3.2.1.19/484). On the contrary, the relevant standard is provided by the *utility* of these conventions, insofar as they provide an *effective remedy* to the problems I have identified and described.

How are these observations about Hume's theory of justice of any relevance to his critique of religion and his Lucretian mission? The answer to this is that there exists a significant analogy between justice and religion *as Hume describes them*. Moreover, this analogy may be taken to show that religion can be justified along lines similar to the ones Hume uses to explain the *legitimacy* and *necessity* of conventions of justice and the practices and institutions associated with them. According to Hume's account, religious beliefs and practices arise from two general circumstances. In the first place, there are the "internal" circumstances of our human nature that are relevant to the origins of religious belief. These include, in

particular, fear, anxiety, hope and ignorance. The other set of circumstances involve our "outside" or external situation. This is the human predicament or condition as it relates to our vulnerability to disease, famine, war, weather, and many other hazards of human existence that we have little control over and do not fully understand. Hume suggests that these circumstances present difficulties for us for which religion serves as a *remedy*. That is to say, religion serves to allay our fears, support our hopes, and provide us with some sense of control over events that otherwise surpass both our understanding and powers. To this extent, religion serves the *important and essential purpose* of consoling human beings in difficult and trying circumstances we all inevitably must anticipate and confront. From both an individual and social point of view, therefore, religion is a stabilizing and consoling force in human life. So considered, religion is a human artifice or invention that serves a crucial functional role and may, therefore, be judged as no less "justified" than the conventions of justice (which are also artificially created, variable, and nevertheless directly responsive to basic human needs). This is a conclusion, the critic may argue, that we are driven to by way of Hume's own observations on this subject.[7]

We are now in a position to see what looks to be a serious weakness or vulnerability in Hume's Lucretian mission. Given his own account of the origins of religion, and the obvious and significant analogy that holds between justice and religion, as Hume understands them, it is not at all clear why he should aim to *discredit* and *dislodge* religion and the (important) role it plays in human life. More specifically, there is no more reason, the critic may argue, to "disturb" or "undermine" religion in general, than there is to aim at disturbing or undermining the conventions of justice in general. While it may be granted that some religions—like some conventions of justice—fail to perform the sort of role that justifies them (i.e. providing consolation, stability, etc.), this is not an argument for getting rid of *all religion* (any more than it would be for getting rid of all conventions of justice). Hume has, therefore, provided us with an effective refutation of his own Lucretian ambitions. Moreover, this refutation of his own practical aims as regards religion does not in any way depend on refuting or responding to Hume's *skeptical* critique of religious philosophy. All that it relies on are the very set of *naturalistic* claims and observations Hume has supplied us with himself concerning the origins and roots of religion in human life.

In the second *Enquiry*, Hume makes some passing remarks about the justice/religion analogy that indicate how he might respond to this criticism.[8] He notes that justice, which he presents as artificial and variable in its particular forms, may be ridiculed by philosophers in the same way they "ridicule vulgar superstitions" (EM, 3.36/198). The doctrines and practices of superstition are plainly variable and arbitrary (e.g. in their prohibitions concerning what we may eat, etc.), and so, too, are the restrictions and constraints of justice.The conventions of justice, therefore, also seem liable to the same ridicule and skeptical doubts. Hume says:

> But there is this material difference between *superstition* and *justice*, that the former is frivolous, useless, and burdensome; the latter is absolutely requisite to the well-being of mankind and existence of society. When we abstract from this circumstance (for it is too apparent ever to be overlooked) it must be confessed, that all regards to right and property, seem entirely without foundation, as much

> as the grossest and most vulgar superstition. Were the interests of society nowise concerned, it is as unintelligible why another's articulating certain sounds implying consent, should change the nature of my actions with regard to a particular object, as why the reciting of a liturgy by a priest, in a certain habit and posture, should dedicate a heap of brick and timber, and render it, thenceforth and for ever, sacred. (EM, 3.38/199; his emphasis)

Hume is, evidently, alive to the significance of the analogy between justice and religion (superstition) and has something to say in defense of the utility of *justice*. However, his remarks about "superstition" still leave it unclear why its institutions and practices are not *also justified*, given the (important) role they play in human life. More specifically, contrary to Hume's remarks cited above, religion cannot be *entirely* "frivolous, useless and burdensome"; otherwise, as he points out himself in the *Natural History of Religion*, we would have no relevant *explanation* for why it has arisen and is so prevalent in human society.

Clearly, then, something more needs to be said on Hume's behalf to explain why he pursues his Lucretian mission in the face of his own observations about our *natural human need* for religion. A reply may be provided for Hume (i.e. an "apology for Hume") using elements from his own writings and philosophical system. Let us begin by noting that he might well agree with Marx that religion is, indeed, "the heart of a heartless world."[9] It does not follow from this, however, that religion is the *right* or *most effective* remedy for the kinds of human needs it is a response to.[10] From Hume's point of view, religion is not only not the right remedy, it may itself (as it often does) become an *obstacle* to the very sorts of remedies we *really need* to ameliorate the human condition in the face of the sorts of difficulties that give rise and momentum to the religious impulse. Insofar as this analysis is correct, religion may be compared to false or fraudulent "cures" for our medical needs. At best, these cures do little to help us. At worst, they stand in the way of genuinely effective remedies and may even make us sicker than we would be without them. Clearly, this is exactly what Hume believes concerning religion in the form we generally find it. Not only does it fail to make us healthy, it makes us *even sicker* (i.e. more fearful, more anxious, and less able to cope with the various challenges we may face).[11]

Consider again Hume's account of the two basic circumstances of religion. With respect to human nature and our vulnerability to fear and anxiety, we cannot do much to change these basic elements of life. However, we can *improve* our lot with respect to the features of our condition that leave us vulnerable, fearful, and anxious about the future. What sort of remedies ought we to be looking for? In the first place, ignorance can be reduced through education, learning, and the advancement of knowledge. It is, therefore, essential to promote and encourage learning, as well as to direct our energies and investigations into areas where we can expect to advance our knowledge and understanding of the world (T, 1.4.7.12–4/271–3; EU, 1.12, 5.2, 12, 25/12, 41, 162).[12] At the same time, when we use knowledge to increase our prosperity, and to produce wealth and goods that can satisfy our needs and alleviate our suffering, then clearly this will reduce and inhibit those fears and anxieties that arise with deprivation, famine, disease, and disaster. Beyond this, Hume also points out that the development of the arts and sciences, as well as commerce, requires conditions of "liberty." This is, indeed, a recurrent theme throughout Hume's writings.[13]

In order to encourage and promote knowledge and prosperity as a way of overcoming ignorance and deprivation, it is essential that society promote and preserve the liberty of its subjects. All too often, Hume observes, religion becomes a significant *obstacle* to conditions of liberty and, thereby, a barrier to the goods and benefits we secure from liberty. While religion may present itself in the guise of comforting and supporting humanity, its clergy, its churches, and its doctrines usually serve to *shackle us* and prevent us from taking the measures that are truly necessary to satisfy our needs and keep our fears and anxieties at bay.[14] This is certainly one important message Hume seeks to convey in the form of his Lucretian mission.

3

Let us grant, for now, that Hume is right in maintaining that religion is not "absolutely requisite to the well-being of mankind" (and may well be "frivolous, useless and burdensome"). This concession, the critic may argue, only postpones further difficulties that are internal to Hume's Lucretian mission. Even if his mission is justified, in terms of the benefits it aims to secure for humanity, his own commitments on this subject call into question the *method* he employs in pursuit of these aims and objectives. More specifically, given his hypotheses and claims about the *foundations* of religion, his entire approach must be judged naïve and doomed to failure. In the *Natural History of Religion*, as well as in his other writings, Hume argues that religious belief is not rooted in reason or philosophical arguments of any kind. On the contrary, according to Hume, the evolution of religion depends on processes and forces that are unguided by reason (and generally result in beliefs that are *irrational* in character).[15] However, if this is correct, then *philosophical arguments*, as well as complex psychological and historical theories about the roots of religion, will never be able to resist, much less eradicate, all religion from human life. The "ignorant multitude" will never be influenced by Hume's writings. They have neither the leisure nor the ability to take in his message—however philosophically convincing and sound his arguments may be. Clearly, Hume is not directing his work at a "popular" or mass audience. But if that is so, why should he waste his own time and energy pursuing his Lucretian mission using such an *inappropriate instrument*? In sum, if Hume's account of the roots of religion is correct, then abstract philosophical arguments of the kind he gives to the world can hardly serve the *practical* purpose he aspires to. To use a method so unsuited to its end is, indeed, like "pretending to stop the ocean with a bullrush" (NHR, 166).

Are Hume's writings on religion a useless and ineffective instrument for stemming the tide of "superstition"? Do his own observations about the sources and dynamics of religion discredit the method he employs to achieve the goals of his Lucretian mission? In a number of contexts, Hume shows that he is well aware that *philosophers* may be guilty of "enthusiasm" or "extravagance."[16] There are any number of philosophical doctrines and sects—such as the Stoics and Skeptics—who pursue (hopeless) aims and objectives that are easily defeated by more powerful principles in human nature. Caution, prudence, and modesty are required, therefore, in any undertaking as bold and ambitious as his Lucretian mission.

Nevertheless, since Hume is one philosopher who is *particularly aware* of the limits of philosophy in human life, we should not be too quick to assume that he is naïve about this problem and the (practical) difficulties that he faces.

The strategy Hume pursues by means of his writings on religion is *indirect* and (frankly) *elitist*. He is under no illusion that ordinary people (the "ignorant multitude") will be converted to his irreligious principles by way of reading his difficult and complex philosophical writings. The emancipating effect of his work must reach these people by some other route. Hume aims to influence ordinary members of society indirectly by way of first reaching an educated and reflective audience who have an established interest in these problems and the leisure and understanding to think about them.[17] Furthermore, as Hume often points out, the first stage of his irreligious mission can only be accomplished in social circumstances or conditions where there *already* exists a tolerable degree of liberty (as was more or less the case in mid-eighteenth-century Britain). It was Hume's aim to persuade his more enlightened readers of the narrow limits and weaknesses of the human understanding and, thereby, to turn their attention and energies to matters of "common life," where *real remedies* for improving the human condition can be found. This is, indeed, the primary aim and objective of Hume's various skeptical arguments as presented in both the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*(as well as the *Dialogues*; T, 1.4.7; EU, 1; 12).

Hume's ambition to turn our investigations and speculations away from problems well beyond the reach of human understanding (e.g. "the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to eternity": EU, 12.25/162) and toward problems of "common life" serves the important purpose of placing a *check* on the religious impulse. More important, it secures this end not only by (directly) discouraging speculations along these lines but also, more important, by encouraging *real improvements* in human knowledge that will, in turn, *dull* our (natural) propensity to superstition. That is to say, if Hume is able to redirect the intellectual energies and attention of the most able and gifted members of society to areas where they may make more effective contributions to knowledge, wealth, and human happiness, this process will itself weaken the very conditions that encourage and promote religion in society. Clearly, then, according to this view, Hume's strategy, as it concerns the *practical* aims and hopes of his Lucretian mission, is both indirect and elitist. He does not assume that there is any easy and direct way of converting the "ignorant multitude" by preaching the gospel of skepticism to them. Nothing about his Lucretian mission, as he pursues it, should lead us to suggest that he was so naïve as to suppose that his writings would somehow have the (magical) effect of directly engaging a mass, popular audience who would be convinced by his irreligious message and arguments.[18]

4

Even if Hume was justified in holding that he might have some degree of success in pursuing his Lucretian mission by means of his philosophical work, the critic may turn to another objection. Let us grant, the critic says, that Hume's arguments and observations concerning religion may influence a select audience and eventually,

by an indirect route, dull the forces that propel human beings into religion. Nevertheless, even on the most optimistic assumptions about how these results may be achieved, the same forces that Hume describes will return and propel us back into religious belief whenever ignorance and a lack of control over future events arouse our fears, hopes, and anxieties. The features of human nature and the human predicament that Hume identifies and describes as relevant here can never be *fully transcended*. It would be wild optimism to suppose otherwise—as wild as anything Hume can find in the superstitions that he ridicules. Clearly, then, however accurate he may be about the unfortunate influence and consequences of religion, we cannot escape the fact that "the superstitious will always be with us." In this way, we may take his own naturalistic observations to show that superstition is really a kind of "original sin" in human nature—there is no hope of us entirely purging humanity of these propensities and tendencies. The *practical* aspect of Hume's Lucretian mission is, therefore, founded on delusion. Its aims and objectives are every bit as utopian as any fantasy or "golden age" proposed by the superstitions he hopes to help us transcend.[19] At least this must be true if Hume's own observations about the causes and dynamics of religious belief are generally correct.

The force of this criticism depends on a particular interpretation of Hume's *practical* aims and objectives as concerns his Lucretian mission. It presupposes that Hume's ambition (indirect though it may be) is to help humanity overcome their own religious propensities, in the sense that we may ultimately *eradicate all forms and traces of religion* in human life. So conceived, the problem we face involves not simply skeptical doubts about the influence of *philosophy* in human life, but the very notion of creating or securing conditions that will (somehow) purge humanity of all its religious tendencies by fundamentally transforming the circumstances and conditions that create and fuel these tendencies. This is a project that seems to be every bit as utopian as aiming to transcend the need for distinctions of property or conventions of justice, on the assumption either that human motivation can be radically altered or that our powers of wealth and production can be expanded to such an extent so that there exists no scarcity of goods in society. These are, by Hume's own lights, vain and idle hopes. So, too, therefore, is his ambition to liberate humanity from the yoke of religion.

It is a well-known feature of Hume's political philosophy that he was skeptical of any and all extreme utopian schemes (see, e.g., T, 3.2.5.9/521; EM, 3.24–7/193–4). With respect to human nature and the human condition, he was no extreme optimist, and he firmly embraced an outlook that we have no reason to expect that this world is capable of perfection, much less that it has been made for human happiness (NHR, 183; D, 114). Imperfection and some degree of suffering and unhappiness are, as Hume sees it, the natural and inescapable features of the world that all of us must live in. It is, therefore, quite alien to his thought in general, and his Lucretian mission in particular, to present him as some sort of irreligious utopian who aims to free all humanity from all forms of religion. This is, indeed, to miss the *more specific* content and purpose of his Lucretian mission.

Hume would certainly dismiss the ambition to "transcend all religion" as a hopelessly vain and unfortunate example of "philosophical extravagance." However, it does not follow from this, Hume would point out, that our only alternative in the

face of the causes and dynamics of religion is some form of "quietism" or passive acceptance. On the contrary, it is Hume's position that a practical attitude of this kind is *ethically* unacceptable. From one point of view, it is feeble and cowardly, and from another, it is confused and shows a misunderstanding of our practical options. Consistent with his more general philosophical outlook as it concerns the human condition, Hume is neither an extreme optimist (i.e. an "irreligious utopian") nor an extreme pessimist (i.e. fatalistic or passively resigned to the influence of religion in human life). The view he embraces, considered as the practical aspect of his Lucretian mission, may be best described as "moderate optimism." It is, therefore, Hume's *moderate optimism* that we need to articulate and explain.

It is clearly Hume's view that the forces and dynamics of religion will always be with us. Moreover, since both human nature and the human condition are far from perfect, we must, on his account, reconcile ourselves to these inescapable features of human existence and society. Nevertheless, the *circumstances* of religion can certainly be *tamed* in the manner we have already described. We have, therefore, no reason to despair or abandon all hope that we can *improve* our lives by *resisting* the religious propensity in those forms that are most destructive and most influential in human life. As we have seen, and as history shows us, *secular remedies* are available for many of the anxieties and vulnerabilities that encourage religion to evolve and prosper. This is a cycle of cause and effect in which human activities—including philosophical work—can have some significant impact and role to play. This does not commit us to the (wildly optimistic) view that these forces for superstition will somehow eventually altogether disappear from the face of the earth, much less that philosophy alone can bring this about. No sensible version of the Lucretian mission, insofar as it is guided by Hume's own insights, can have this extreme end in view. It would more than suffice for Hume to feel satisfied with his achievements in this area, if his philosophical work serves the purpose of simply holding back the (rising) tide of superstition in its *most pernicious forms*. Hopefully, through its successes, these efforts will encourage others to see the progress that can be made and encourage them to take up this cause. However, any one following in the footsteps of Hume's Lucretian mission, as described, must see his efforts to stem the tide of religion as an *ongoing, constant struggle*. It is not a process or project that can be carried through over a limited period of time and then finally, when it secures its end, set aside.[20]

As I have explained, Hume's observations concerning human nature and the human condition suggest that we must *always struggle* against the religious propensity. Since religion takes different forms that have different effects and consequences for human life and society, it is important to Hume's Lucretian mission that we choose our targets carefully. Some forms of religion—and here Hume uses the expression "superstition" in a narrower and more specific sense—are especially destructive in their influence on human life.[21] Hume's philosophy of irreligion is particularly directed against these specific forms of religion/superstition. It is his view that the major monotheistic religions—he has Christianity primarily in mind—typically take the form of *pernicious superstition*. His irreligious aims and objectives, therefore, pursue the more limited and modest end of putting a *check* on these *particular forms* of religion. As he was well aware, this is no easy task, so it is unwise

and unnecessary to propose any larger or more ambitious goal for ourselves. In light of these observations, the sensible philosopher will confine his Lucretian mission within these particular bounds.[22]

5

My primary concern in this chapter has been to consider the general objection that Hume's Lucretian mission is fundamentally self-refuting or self-defeating. It may be argued, for example, that Hume's own naturalistic commitments show that religion plays a valuable and essential role in human life and society—one that it is plainly unwise to disturb and dislodge. It may also be argued that if Hume is about the natural roots of religion, then the method that he employs in pursuit of his Lucretian mission (i.e. abstract philosophical argument) is poorly chosen and displays a naïve form of "philosophical enthusiasm." Related to this point, it may also be argued that Hume's Lucretian mission manifests "utopian" ends that are impossible to achieve on his own principles. I have argued that with respect to all these charges, Hume is not guilty of any inconsistency or self-refutation.

Hume's Lucretian mission, I maintain, should be characterized as manifesting "moderate optimism." Hume does hold that there are features of human nature and the human condition that will always tend to propel us into religious beliefs of various kinds. Given the imperfect nature of the human predicament, it would indeed be extravagant and utopian to aim at *eradicating all forms of religion* from human life. However, this is not a (practical) objective Hume aspires to or recommends—whatever *philosophical* doubts he has about religion in general. Hume directs his irreligious efforts at the more destructive forms of religion, as judged by the moral standard of human happiness *in this world* (the only intelligible standard that is available to us). It is certainly true that most forms of Christianity Hume was familiar with would fall into this category.

Hume's Lucretian mission, although it plainly contains a significant *negative* message, has nevertheless a *positive* end in view. That is to say, his aim is not simply to "unmask" and "debunk" religion. In itself, this is just a means to a further end. It is Hume's belief that religion, in the forms he is primarily concerned with, serves as a barrier and obstacle to the kinds of secular remedies to our fears, anxieties, and hopes that give rise to religion in the first place. To the extent that we can remove religious barriers to education and knowledge, commerce and wealth, and liberty and tolerance, to that extent we may expect to dull and weaken the *need* for religion in human society. Having said this, it is no part of Hume's message to hold out hope for a perfect world of human contentment where religion is wholly unnecessary and has no traction. From Hume's perspective, any irreligious program of this kind contains within itself flawed ingredients of religion.

Although the need and propensity to religion will always be with us (i.e. *qua* "original superstition"), Hume is no fatalist in face of these natural forces. By "unmasking" religion, both with respect to its absurdities and corrupting tendencies, we can help ourselves overcome many of the difficulties we must inevitably encounter, given the human predicament. To this extent, Hume is an optimist.

This optimism is checked, however, by an acceptance that this is an imperfect world in which we find ourselves to be vulnerable and limited beings. When we aspire to some state of perfection, Hume maintains, it is more likely that we will succeed only in making this an even *less* perfect world.[23] So long as we are willing to *live within human horizons*, and reconcile ourselves to the *imperfections of human existence*, we will for the most part secure a reasonable measure of happiness for ourselves and others. This is the central (positive) message of Hume's Lucretian mission.

When Hume was dying, his close and esteemed friend Adam Smith came to pay him a final visit. In a letter to William Strachan, Smith describes his last conversation with Hume. Hume told Smith that he had recently been reading Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*. Among the excuses he said he might give to Charon, in order to postpone his departure before being ferried over the river Styx to Hades, Hume proposed the following:

> But I might still urge, "Have a little patience, good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of the public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition." But Charon would then lose all temper and decency. "You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years. Do you fancy I will grant you a lease for so long a term? Get into the boat this instant, you lazy loitering rogue."[24]

These remarks are very relevant to my discussion, from several points of view. First, they indicate that the optimism with which Hume pursues his Lucretian mission is limited and moderate. On the one hand, it is indeed Hume's aim "to open the eyes of the public" concerning "superstition," with a view to bringing about its "downfall." On the other hand, he qualifies these remarks to say that he is specifically concerned with "some of the *prevailing systems* of superstition." He has no general, open-ended concern to liberate humanity from *all* forms of religion. Second, Charon's reply to his proposal reveals that Hume's moderate optimism on this subject is accompanied with a fair measure of pessimism, based on his recognition that the Christian religion is deeply entrenched in his own society (just as other forms of monotheism are deeply entrenched in other societies). Hume is, in other words, under no illusion about the difficulty of the task at hand, limited though it might be.

6

When Hume's coffin was taken from his house on St. David Street, to be buried on Edinburgh's Calton Hill, someone in the large crowd who were watching remarked, "Ah, he was an Atheist." A companion replied: "No matter, he was an honest man."[25] These remarks serve not only to sum up Hume's life, they also show that he lived his life in a way that was consistent with his philosophy. The core of Hume's philosophy is constituted and guided by his fundamental irreligious commitments and objectives, as first laid down and developed in the *Treatise of Human Nature*. The *Treatise* provides an account of how virtuous atheism should be understood and practiced. Hume's life provides a model of how this may be done.[26]

Appendix

Cato's Speech at the Oracle of Ammon

Thou that to vertue ever wer't inclin'd,
Learn what it is, how certainly defin'd,
And leave some perfect Rule to guide Mankind.
Full of the Gods that dwelt within his Breast,
The Hero thus his secret Mind express'd,
And inborn Truths reveal'd; Truths which might well
Become ev'n Oracles themselves to tell.
Where would thy fond, thy vain Enquiry go?
What mystick Fate, what Secret wouldst thou know?
Is it a doubt if Death should be my Doom,
Rather than live till Kings and Bondage come,
Rather than see a Tyrant crown'd in Rome!
Or would'st thou know, if, what we value here,
Life, be a Trifle hardly worth our Care?
What by old Age and Length of Days we gain,
More than to lengthen out the Sense of Pain?
Or if this World with all its Forces join'd,
The universal Malice of Mankind,
Can shake or hurt the brave and honest Mind?
If stable Virtue can her ground maintain,
While Fortune feebly threats and frowns in vain?
If Good in lazy Speculations dwell,
And barely be the Will of doing well?
If Right be independent of Success,
And Conquest cannot make it more or less?
Are these, my Friends, the Secrets you would know?
Those Doubts for which to Oracles we go?
'Tis known, 'tis plain, 'tis all already told,

FIGURE A.1 *Cato at the Oracle of Jupiter Ammon*. Illustration in Nicholas Rowe's translation of Lucan, *Pharsalia* (London: 1718).

And Horned AMMON can no more unfold:
From God deriv'd, to God by Nature join'd,
We act the Dictates of his mighty Mind:
And tho the Priests are mute and Temples still,
God never wants a Voice to speak his Will:
When first we from the teeming Womb were brought,
With inborn Precepts then our Souls were fraught,
And then the Maker his new Creatures taught.
Then when he form'd and gave us to be Men,
He gave us all our useful Knowledge Then.
Canst thou believe the vast Eternal Mind,
Was e'er to Syrts and Lybian Sands confin'd?
That he would chuse this waste, this barren Ground,
To teach the thin Inhabitants around,
And leave his Truth in Wilds and Desarts drown'd?
Is there a place that God would chuse to love
Beyond this Earth, the Seas, yon Heaven above,
And virtuous Minds, the noblest Throne of JOVE?
Why seek we farther then? Behold around,
How all thou seest does with God abound,
JOVE is alike in all, and always to be found!
Let those weak Minds that live in Doubt and Fear,

To juggling Priests for Oracles repair;
One certain Hour of Death to each decreed,
My fix'd, my certain Soul from Doubt has
freed:
The Coward and the Brave are doom'd to fall;
And when JOVE told this Truth, he told us all.

Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 9

Translation by Nicholas Rowe; as first printed in Anthony Collins, *A Discourse of Freethinking* (London, 1713).

The emphasized opening lines serve as an epigram on the title page of book 3 of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*.

Notes

Chapter 1. *The Riddle*

1. For a brief account of the significance and influence of Kemp Smith's study see Garrett's new introduction to this work. See, in particular, Garrett's remarks on "the central interpretive question about Hume," which concerns the relationship between Hume's skepticism and naturalism.

2. This dichotomy is a feature of almost all general accounts of Hume's philosophy. Roger Scruton, for example, begins his brief survey of Hume's philosophy as follows: "There are two ways of reading Hume. The first is as a sceptic who defends, from empirical premises, the view that the standard claims to knowledge are untenable. The second is as the proponent of a 'natural philosophy' of man. . . . The two readings are not incompatible, although the second has been emphasized in recent commentaries, partly because it parallels recent developments in philosophy" (*Short History of Modern Philosophy*, 115–6).

3. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, esp. 3–8. Rev. Sydney Smith provides a neat and concise summary of the skeptical interpretation of Hume: "Bishop Berkeley destroyed this world in one volume octavo; and nothing remained, after this time, but mind; which experienced a similar fate from the hand of Mr. Hume in 1739" (Introduction, *Sketches of Moral Philosophy*).

4. Grose, "History of the Editions," in Hume, *Essays*, 1:39–40. Compare Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:36–7, making similar claims about Hume.

5. A representative statement of this view is given in Seth, *English Philosophers*, pt. 2, chap. 2. Seth, citing the German historian of philosophy Wilhelm Windelband, claims that Hume's objective in the *Treatise* is to work out "the logical consequences of the empirical point of view" as presented in Locke and Berkeley (p. 150). See also Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:36–7.

6. Stewart, *Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy*, 437–9. Recent accounts of the skeptical interpretation (e.g. Popkin and Fogelin) have placed some emphasis on the importance of Bayle for understanding Hume's skeptical intentions in the *Treatise*.

7. Stewart, *Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy*, 439.

8. MacIntosh, *Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy*, 221; compare Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:266.

9. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 11.

10. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 546; and Hume, T, 183.

11. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 45.

12. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 84.
13. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 12–3; compare 17–8, 79–85.
14. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 53–8.
15. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 71–2. Compare Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 140, who notes that Hume suggests association is akin to (Leibniz's) "preestablished harmony" (EU 5.21/54).
16. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 73–6, 550.
17. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 76, 550–1; compare 533, 536, where Kemp Smith argues that in regard to his ambitions for the doctrine of association Hume's "enthusiasm had markedly cooled."
18. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 160.
19. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 160. See Árdal, *Passion and Value*, for a convincing refutation of these claims.
20. Huxley, *Hume*, chap. 1. For some reason, Kemp Smith does not comment on Huxley's (nonskeptical) interpretation.
21. Huxley, *Hume*, 71; Seth Pringle-Pattison, *Scottish Philosophy*, p. 68, criticizes Huxley, complaining that Hume's "scepticism disappears altogether in Professor Huxley's account."
22. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 43; compare Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 20.
23. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 2.
24. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 3–4. The same view is endorsed by Mossner, *Life*, 72–5, 132.
25. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 43; compare 156.
26. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 4–8; compare 156–8.
27. Copleston, *Modern Philosophy*, 66; Scruton, *Short History*, 116; Hamlyn, *Western Philosophy*, 188–9; Woolhouse, *Empiricists*, 134–6. See also, e.g., Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, 33–9, and Dicker, *Hume's Epistemology and Metaphysics*, 2–3.
28. Capaldi, *David Hume*, 49, argues that "an understanding of the exact nature of Newton's influence on Hume can serve as the key to understanding Hume's philosophy as a whole." See also Noxon, *Hume's Philosophical Development*, esp. pt. 2, sec. 1: "Hume: 'The Newton of the Moral Sciences?'" Noxon's study is more sensitive about the significant points of *opposition* between Hume and "Newtonianism," especially as it relates to theology. Compare 77–81, where Noxon observes that "Hume's relations with Newtonianism were too complex and equivocal to be adequately expressed by calling him the Newton of the moral sciences."
29. Stroud, *Hume*, 2–8.
30. Stroud, *Hume*, 14. It has been argued that those who defend some version of Kemp Smith's naturalistic interpretation are less concerned about the "tensions" between these aspects of Hume's philosophy than they should be. See, e.g., Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism*, 1–4.
31. "There was at one time some scholarly dispute as to whether Hume was better seen as a philosophical sceptic or a scientific naturalist. It is a question that never should have been argued, since the truth is manifest that he wanted always to be something of both. What may more reasonably be asked is how far he ever succeeded in reconciling these two claims. . . . The tension between scepticism and science is there right from the start"; Flew, *David Hume*, 52.
32. Reid, *Works*, 1:102a. (See also MacIntosh's remarks, as cited in note 8.)
33. Stroud, *Hume*, xi.
34. Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism*, xii; also Penelhum, *Hume*, 17–8, for a similar view. For a more historically grounded perspective see Popkin, "Bayle and Hume" (158): "Hume inherited Bayle's skeptical weapons and, alone of all the major figures of the Enlightenment, saw no new methods or data that provided any protection from the devastating force of Baylean skepticism. . . . Hume was Bayle's heir in the sense that he took over his skeptical work, lock, stock, and barrel."

35. However, in his preface to *Hume's Skepticism* (xii), Fogelin mentions the importance of Richard Popkin's work in convincing him that "a patronizing and dismissive attitude toward skeptical arguments is antithetical to a sympathetic and just reading of much early modern philosophy including the philosophy of David Hume."

36. Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 4–5.

37. Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 177.

38. Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 4–5.

39. Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 7. One implication of this view is that, in the *Treatise*, Hume is not particularly concerned with issues of Newtonian theology, including the doctrines of Samuel Clarke.

40. Norton, *David Hume*, 9.

41. Norton, *David Hume*, 11. Norton is also influenced by the work of Popkin, who discusses various aspects of the "crise pyrrhonienne" in his *History of Scepticism*. See also Popkin's articles "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism," and "David Hume and the Pyrrhonian Controversy."

42. Norton, *David Hume*, 4–8; compare 17, 231–8.

43. Norton, *David Hume*, 8, 235. On this aspect of Norton's interpretation Annette Baier comments: "The 'scepticism' Hume has for natural beliefs turns out to be a willingness to subject them to rational criticism, to revise them so that they are better supported by both argument and ascertainable matter of fact. How is this 'scepticism'?" (review of *David Hume* by David Norton, 128).

44. Norton, *David Hume*, 150–1. For a very different view of Hume's relationship with Hobbes see Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 151, who presents Hume as more or less a follower of Hobbes on morals. I discuss the relationship between Hobbes and Hume's moral theory at length in chapter 17.

45. Popkin, "Hume's Intentions," 267.

46. Stroud, *Hume*, ix.

47. Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*. For a more detailed discussion of Baier's valuable book see my "Critical Notice of Baier's *Progress of Sentiments*," esp. 117–22.

48. Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 282–3. Laird is referring to a letter Hume wrote to Henry Home (Lord Kames) in December 1737, wherein Hume says that he is presently "castrating" his work and cutting off its "nobler parts" in order to avoid giving any "offence" (LET, 1:24–5, no. 6). Hume's plan at this time was to show his work to Joseph Butler, who would certainly have been alive to its wider theological significance. For details on this episode see Mossner, *Life*, 111–2; Ross, *Kames*, 35–6. (I discuss Hume's remarks in his 1737 letter in more detail in chapter 11.)

49. Laird seems to be confused about the later discussion. The specific theological implications of determinism are barely mentioned in the *Treatise*, although they are discussed at some length in the first *Enquiry* (esp. EU 8.32–6/99–103). Compare Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, 6–7, 160–5. See, however, my discussion in chapter 16 as regards the relevance of the free will problem to religion.

50. Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 283. Laird's comments are particularly directed against Charles Hendel's claim (discussed below) that Hume's early philosophical development was significantly influenced by problems of religion and that this is manifest in the content of the *Treatise*.

51. Mossner, *Life*, 113; my emphasis. Compare also 319, where Mossner suggests that Hume did not "apply his philosophical tenets to religion" until he published the first *Enquiry* in 1748. Mossner claims elsewhere that Hume, "although a great exponent of the freedom of the press, desired neither controversy, notoriety, nor martyrdom" (*Life*, 325). As I show later, Hume was less shy about causing controversy than Mossner suggests.

52. Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, 11. In his later study (*David Hume*, 50) Flew says that in the "castrated *Treatise*" there are only a "few hints" of his (subsequent) efforts to discredit the traditional arguments of natural theology. Compare Woolhouse, *Empiricists*, 158: "Having looked at his science of man, we must now look at some of what he says about religion. Apart from a piece on 'Miracles,' which, though it was written for the *Treatise*, made its first appearance in the First *Enquiry*, this is contained in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*."

53. Popkin, "The Early Critics of Hume," 202.

54. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 1–2. In the first edition of his book Gaskin says that Hume was not "*directly* concerned with religion" in the *Treatise*.

55. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2. In taking this line, Gaskin is following a well-trodden path. For other examples of this pattern of excluding the *Treatise* from the list of Hume's significant contributions to the philosophy of religion, see: Norton's remarks ("David Hume," 346): "Hume's trenchant critique of religion is found principally in his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, *Natural History of Religion*, and *Dialogues* . . ."; and Basson (*David Hume*, 15). Basson places the topics covered in Hume's philosophy under five different headings: "epistemology," "psychology," "morals," "politics," and "religion." Under each of these headings he indicates the relevant texts among Hume's writings. The *Treatise* is mentioned under each one of them except religion.

56. Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 27.

57. Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 411; and compare 345–7.

58. Much of the debate concerning the nature of Hume's commitments on the subject of religion has focused on the debate about which character speaks for Hume in his *Dialogues*. Kemp Smith's claim "that Philo [the sceptic], from start to finish, represents Hume" is now widely accepted (introduction to *Hume's Dialogues*, 59). A helpful discussion of this debate is presented in Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 209–18.

Chapter 2. Hume's Early Critics

1. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 3.

2. LET, 1:375–6, no. 21. Mossner, *Life*, 297–300, writes: "Thomas Reid was the sole philosopher worthy of the name who dealt at any length with the *Treatise of Human Nature* during the lifetime of its author."

3. Reid, *Works*, 2:95, 98, 103. By this time, Hume was also subject to criticism for his "Philosophical Essays" (i.e. *Enquiries*), not just the *Treatise*. See Mossner, *Life*, chap. 22.

4. Reid, *Works*, 1:96. Reid repeatedly includes Malebranche in his list of Hume's predecessors in the "(Cartesian) ideal system." Reid, *Works*, 1:99–103, 204. Kemp Smith tends to drop Malebranche off this list.

5. Reid, *Works*, 1:101. In his *Dictionary*, Bayle devotes articles to "Pyrrho," "Zeno of Elea," and "Hobbes," and this influential work would have done much to color their reputations in the eighteenth-century context. Bayle makes particular note of how the skepticism of these thinkers relates to questions of religion.

6. Reid, *Works*, 1:101.

7. Reid, *Works*, 1:103; compare 1:207–8.

8. Reid, *Works*, 1:103.

9. Reid, *Works*, 1:432–3.

10. Reid, *Works*, 2:627–8.

11. Esp. Reid, Works, 2:651, 657, 660–1.

12. Reid, *Works*, 2:601, 623–4, 628.

13. This difference reflects, among other things, the fact that Reid and Hume had a number of friends in common, most notably Hugh Blair and Lord Kames. Beattie, by contrast,

was on good terms with several individuals with whom Hume had come into conflict, including James Burnet (Lord Monboddo) and Sir David Dalrymple (Lord Hailes). Some of the details are provided in Mossner, *Life*, esp. chap. 38.

14. In a letter to his publisher, William Strahan (LET, 2:301, no. 509) Hume refers to Beattie as "that bigotted silly Fellow." It is in this context that Hume says that the "Advertisement" to the forthcoming edition of his "Essays and Treatises" (published in 1777)—where he "disowns" his *Treatise of Human Nature*—is a "complete Answer" to Reid and Beattie.

15. Cited in Wood, "Science and Virtue," 147. See also Beattie's remarks in *Elements*, where he recommends his readers to avoid all books by "pick-pockets, gamblers, and atheists" (1:259–60); and compare his remarks on the "abuse" of the free press and the need to answer "wicked books" (2:236–7).

16. See Beattie, *Essay on Truth*; on Descartes, 221 and 234; on Locke, 244; on Berkeley, 292, 298, 415, 499.

17. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 499.

18. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 11–2, 14–6, 118–20, 164–5, 267, 298, 316, 320–1, 389, 455–8, 460–1, 463, 487n, 494, 501.

19. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 487n.

20. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 488.

21. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 494.

22. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 463.

23. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 163, 492.

24. "The Castle of Scepticism," as described in Mossner, *Life*, 577; "Lectures," cited in Wood, "Science and Virtue," 142–3; *Elements*, 1:153; and *Essay on Truth*, 453. Along with Hume and Hobbes, Beattie also mentions Spinoza, Collins, Voltaire, and Helvetius as other prominent skeptics and atheists. In contrast with this, Beattie regarded Clarke as one of the most distinguished defenders of natural religion (*Elements*, 1:280–2, 289, and compare 2:84).

25. *History of the Works of the Learned*, art. 26, November 1739, 353–390; December 1739, 391–404, reprintd in Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:1–39.

26. Mossner says that it is possible that William Warburton was the author of this review (*Life*, 123–4, 617–8). MacIntosh (*Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy*, 218n) traces this suggestion to Chalmers's *Biographical Dictionary*, but says that it is "certainly without foundation."

27. *History of the Works of the Learned*, 377; Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:20–21.

28. *History of the Works of the Learned*, 377; Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:21.

29. *History of the Works of the Learned*, 379, 383–4; Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:22, 25–6.

30. *History of the Works of the Learned*, 397; Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:35.

31. Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 9–10.

32. Mossner, "Continental Reception," 37.

33. Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:62.

34. Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:63.

35. Fieser, *Early Responses*, 1:10.

36. *History of the Works of the Learned*, 364; Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:11.

37. Mossner, "Continental Reception," 40.

38. Berkeley, *Alciphron*, advertisement (in *Works*, 3:23).

39. Berkeley, *Alciphron*, 1, 10 (in *Works*, 3:46–7).

40. The "minute philosophers" were all necessitarians, a doctrine that Clarke, Berkeley, and many other (Anglican) divines at this time associated with atheistic materialism. The review of the *Treatise* in the *History of the Works of the Learned* begins by noting that Hume "has framed a System of human Nature" on the "[principle of] Necessity, in Opposition to Liberty or Freedom" (*History of the Works of the Learned*, 353; Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:4)

and also points out that in this respect Hume is a follower of Collins, and opposed to Clarke. The same general point is made in another early review in *Common Sense*, July 1740 (Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:86). See my discussion in chapters 14 and 16.

41. The *Letter* was lost for many years, until 1966, when a copy came into the possession of the National Library of Scotland (see LG, xxv).

42. See Hume's remarks in NHR, 190 (note G), where he speaks of "Newton, Locke, Clarke, &c. being Arians, or Socinians." Clarke's anti-Trinitarian doctrine played an important role in the protracted church prosecution (1725–29) of John Simson, professor of divinity at Glasgow. I discuss the relevance of this prosecution to the intellectual background of the *Treatise* in chapter 4.

43. Hume's remarks in this context, like much else he says in the *Letter*, are patently evasive and insincere. See, for example, his letter to Hutcheson (LET, 1:40, no. 16) on the theological implications of resting morality on feeling and not reason.

44. Hume makes a similar point in the *Dialogues* (D, 40), where he refers to Huet as both a Christian and a pyrrhonist. In the same context, however, Hume also notes the "ill use, which Bayle and other libertines made of... philosophical scepticism." Hume would be aware that prominent orthodox divines in Scotland, such as Thomas Halyburton, had a high regard for Huet's work (*Natural Religion Insufficient*, 35). Halyburton was William Wishart's father-in-law.

45. However, as I explain in note 47, some aspects of Mossner's account, as it relates to Wishart's associations and ideology, have been sharply criticized.

46. NHL, 15. The relevant passage reads: "... the Charge was so weak, that it did not require much time to answer it, if the matter had been to be judg'd by Reason. The Principal found himself reduc'd to this Dilemma; either to draw Heresies from my Principles by Inferences & Deductions, which he knew wou'd never do with the Ministers & Town Council. Or if he made use of my Words, he must pervert them & misrepresent them in the grossest way in the World." As I will explain, these remarks could be read as showing that Hume believed that Wishart was in fact the *author* of the *Specimen*. However, these remarks may also be read as showing only that Hume believed that Wishart *used* material that "perverted" and "misrepresented" his philosophical principles. It is entirely consistent with what Hume actually says in this letter that the author of the *Specimen* was someone other than Wishart.

47. Robbins, *Commonwealthman*, 202–3; and several contributions by M. A. Stewart: "Berkeley and the Rankenian Club"; "Kirk and Infidel"; and "Principal Wishart." According to Stewart, Mossner's ("overrated") *Life of Hume* is the source of "many prevalent errors about the Scottish Enlightenment," including the way Wishart has been "typecast as one of the obstacles to the kind of social and intellectual progress that many associate with the Scottish Enlightenment" ("Principal Wishart," 60). Stewart is especially concerned to correct Mossner's suggestion that Wishart belonged to the "'Popular' or Evangelical Party" (Mossner, *Life*, 160; and compare Greig's similar claim in his notes at LET, 1:62n). According to Stewart, "throughout [Wishart's] career his liberal theology, anti-evangelical style, and espousal of the Moral Sense philosophy, made him an object of suspicion and mistrust among the Calvinists in the kirk" ("Berkeley and the Rankenian Club," 30). Stewart, in my view, overstates the case for Wishart's "liberalism" (as I document in "Wishart, Baxter and Hume's *Letter*").

48. See, e.g., Wishart, *Charity* and *Unchangeable Difference*.

49. On the Simson case and Wishart's role in it see McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, 51–3; Mathieson, *Scotland and the Union*, 224–34, 258–61; Cameron, "Theological Controversy," 121–3; Jones, "The Scottish Professoriate," 98. A few years later, in 1737, when Wishart was appointed principal of Edinburgh University, he was himself charged with heresy. Wishart's association with Simson played a role in all this.

50. Wishart was directly involved in Hutcheson's election as professor at Glasgow University in 1729.

51. These include Thomas Amory and George Benson.

52. "Indispensable Necessity of a Holy and Good Life," published in Wishart, *Discourses*.

53. The number of editions of Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* that appeared by 1745 is clear evidence that this work enjoyed considerable influence at this time—not least in Scotland itself. Baxter was also the author of *Matho*, which was published in 1740, with second and third editions following in 1745 and 1765. Advertisements for new editions of Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* (3rd ed.) and *Matho* (2nd ed.) appeared in the *Edinburgh Caledonian Mercury* on 27 and 28 May, the day before and the day of an important meeting of Edinburgh ministers who were to advise the town council on this appointment. (Exactly a week before, a similar advertisement had appeared in the same journal for Hume's *Letter*.) The advertisements for Baxter's works included praise coming from William Warburton.

54. Among Wishart's closest friends at Edinburgh was John Stevenson, who was professor of logic. During the late 1730s and early 1740s, Stevenson's students were drawing heavily on Baxter's work for criticism of Berkeley's doctrines; and as early as 1740, some of his students were also making reference to Hume's *Treatise* in relation to the work of Berkeley and Baxter. The work of these students was presented before the faculty, where Wishart would be present. See Davie, "Berkeley's Impact."

55. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:357–61. I discuss the disagreement between Baxter and Hume on causation and the argument a priori in detail in chapter 10.

56. Winkler, "Our Modern Metaphysicians"; Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 99–100. (See also chapter 4, note 61 following.) I should emphasize that it is not my view that Baxter is Hume's *only* target in this context, but simply that he is a particularly obvious and prominent target (a view that agrees with both Winkler and Yolton).

57. The year before Hamilton published Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*, he published Baxter's *Reflections* on *The State of the Moral World Considered*, a work written against the Scottish freethinker William Dudgeon. (I discuss this significant exchange in chapter 4.) Hamilton's father was William Hamilton, the divinity professor at Edinburgh, who was a defender (with Wishart) of Simson and mentor to the Rankenians.

58. For more detail on the Warburton–Baxter relationship and its significance in this context, see chapter 4. See also note 53 earlier.

59. Mossner, *Life*, 580.

60. Sir David Dalrymple to Thomas Balguy, 17 September 1778, Beinecke Library, Yale University, Osborn shelves, Balguy box. Dalrymple also observes that Baxter, who died in 1750, did not live to see Hume "in the height of his literary glory." (I am grateful to Professor David Raynor, who drew my attention to this significant letter.)

61. The Baxter–Kames correspondence, Scottish Records Office, GD 24/1/546; and see Ross, *Kames*, 65–7, 174–5.

62. Compare Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:80–2. Baxter was also a central figure in proceedings, based in Chirnside, that were launched against the Scottish freethinker William Dudgeon during 1732–33. This church prosecution has a direct bearing on Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* and involved people in Hume's own family. I describe the details of this case in chapter 4.

63. Hume was living near London when he wrote his reply to the charges in the *Specimen*; so Baxter's physical absence from Edinburgh no more proves that he did not write the *Specimen* than Hume's absence from Edinburgh shows that he did not write the *Letter*.

64. My discussion in the last section of this chapter draws heavily from my article "Wishart, Baxter and Hume's *Letter*." M. A. Stewart has recently (sharply) criticized this

article, calling it "fantasy," "whimsical," "sophistry," "pyrrhonianism," etc. (See Stewart, "Two Species of Philosophy," 85n34, and "Principal Wishart," 87n39.) In my view, Stewart fails to present anything resembling either argument or evidence in support of these comments. With respect to Stewart's own work, I would make the following observations. Stewart fails—especially in his earlier articles—to identify properly several important ambiguities and complexities regarding Wishart's philosophical and theological commitments and associations. In particular, as I have already indicated (note 47), Stewart's account exaggerates Wishart's "liberalism." Ironically, Stewart's analysis relies on Mossner's (flawed) polarization between "Calvinists" and "liberals," a dichotomy that fails to do justice to the middle ground that thinkers such as Wishart aimed to defend. More important, Stewart fails to appreciate the considerable significance of the philosophy of both Clarke and Baxter in the specific Scottish context that Wishart and Hume belong to. Stewart has made some effort in his more recent work (i.e. written *after* my earlier article) to correct this, but these efforts remain partial and incomplete. Despite his dismissive attitude to the hypothesis that Baxter might have been the author of the *Specimen*, Stewart provides no solid evidence against this hypothesis—much as he fails to respond effectively to the difficulties relating to his view that Wishart was the author. I made clear in my original article (as I have in this chapter) that Wishart *might well* have been the author of the *Specimen*. However, what I have argued is that *if* Wishart was the author of this work, then he must have had substantial Clarkean commitments (i.e. of the kind we find in Baxter). Stewart simply overlooks this important set of issues. Finally, the weaknesses just noted are indicative of Stewart's more general and fundamental misunderstanding of the *philosophical significance* of the various debates and issues that shape the *Treatise* and the early responses to it—including the 1745 *Letter*.

Chapter 3. Religious Philosophers and Speculative Atheists

1. Hume took the view that several of his early critics who objected to the "atheistic" or anti-Christian content of the *Treatise* (e.g. Warburton, Beattie, et al.) were "bigotted" and "silly." Be that as it may, the question remains whether these critics were *right* about the nature of his fundamental intentions. Clearly one may accept that Hume's intentions in the *Treatise* can be characterized as "atheistic," under some interpretation, without accepting (with his early critics) that this warrants *censure* of some kind.

2. Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:66.

3. Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:67: "In England, the great representative of destructive opinions was Hobbes, a man whose influence in stimulating thought it would be difficult to overestimate. Whatever may have been Hobbes' real sentiments . . . he was universally set down as an atheist." I discuss Hobbes's theological views and reputation as an "atheist" in more detail in chapter 5.

4. Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, vii. As I will explain, Hobbes's influence extended well into the eighteenth century.

5. Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 153.

6. Edwards, *Thoughts concerning Atheism*, 128–9. See also Gildon's remarks in his dedication to *The Deist's Manual* (1705): "I know . . . that many have asserted, that there are no Speculative Atheists, yet . . . I cannot agree with those Gentlemen, because my Conversation has frequently afforded me Proofs of the contrary in the Hobbists of the Times; the very Foundation of whose System is Atheism in Speculation." Many theologians argued that there was no such thing as a speculative atheist, on the ground that the existence of God was obvious and evident to all reasonable people, as is shown by the universality of belief in God. See, e.g., Harris, *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:385.

7. Leland, *Principal Deistical Writers*, 1:31–5. See also Skelton, *Ophiomaches*, 2:274–5: "The first to distinguish himself in England as a successful adversary to religion was Hobbes. . . . His system was attacked from the press and pulpit, in numberless answers; and the Clergy, in particular, thought they could never be too opposite to the principles of Hobbes: he was, however, much read, much admired, and followed by all that sort of men who are ever glad to see religion struck at with any kind of weapon, and who, in those days, were furnished with no other, or no better."

8. Colie, "Spinoza and the English Deists"; Colie, "Spinoza in England"; Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 57–9; Jacob, *Newtonians*, 169–71; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, esp. 599–608. See, in particular, Israel's claim: "Spinoza, then, to a considerable extent came to displace Hobbes as the chief intellectual bogeyman and symbolic head of philosophical deism and atheism in Britain and Ireland, as well as on the continent, even if modern British historiography does not acknowledge this." Although Israel is right to correct the relative neglect of Spinoza's influence in the early eighteenth-century British context, it is important not to go too far in this direction and understate the *continued importance and influence* of Hobbes during this period.

9. See, e.g., Colie's remarks on Boyle: "For [Boyle] both Hobbes's mechanism and Spinoza's pantheism were the same form of atheism, expressed in slightly different language" ("Spinoza in England," 198).

10. See, e.g., Gurdon, *Pretended Difficulties*, in *Defence of Religion*, 3:331: "And both Spinoza and Hobbs, who could neither of them endure the Belief of Immaterial Beings"; and Berkeley, *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, 6, in *Works*, 1: 253–4: "That atheistical principles have taken deeper root, and are farther spread than most people are apt to imagine, will be plain to whoever considers that pantheism, materialism, fatalism are nothing but atheism a little disguised; that the notions of *Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Bayle* are relished and applauded." By the early eighteenth century, it was not unusual to regard Spinoza as "the most celebrated Patron of Atheism in our Time" (Clarke, *Works*, 2:532); and Leland, *Deistical Writers*, 3:21.

11. More's works written against Hobbes include *Antidote against Atheism* (1653) and *Immortality of the Soul* (1659). On the Cambridge Platonists and Hobbes see Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, esp. chap. 5. Mintz says (81): "The Cambridge Platonists believed in a spirit world, in absolute ideas, free-will, an absolute and eternal morality, a psychology based upon the doctrine of innate goodness and selflessness. As the Platonists were Christian philosophers, they adopted all of these positions with a view towards clarifying and solidifying the essentials of Christian belief. The broad irenical tendencies of their programme led them to emphasize practical morality, that is to say, a truly Christian way of life, as the *unum necessarium* of a man's creed; it also led them to combat Hobbism as the greatest danger of that creed."

12. Robertson, *Dynamics of Religion*, 82.

13. Shaftesbury, *Characterisitics*, 2:50. See also Collins, *Discourse on Free-Thinking*, 84, who observes that Cudworth is "charged with being an atheist for that very book."

14. Warburton, *Works*, 4:31–2 (*Divine Legation*, preface 1741).

15. Warburton, *Works*, 4:31–2 (*Divine Legation*, preface 1741).

16. It is, therefore, significant that the young Hume carefully studied Cudworth's work and took particular note of his classification of types of atheist. (Hume, "MEM," 2.40.)

17. Other substantial works continued to be produced against Hobbes; see, e.g., Lowde, *A Discourse Concerning the Nature of Man* (1694) and Gildon, *Deist's Manual* (1705). In general, the polemics against Hobbes, Spinoza, and their followers were not confined to the Boyle lecturers. Berkeley's *Principles* and *Dialogues* were written specifically against "scepticism, atheism, and irreligion," and Berkeley cites Hobbes and Spinoza as among the chief representatives of this "system" (e.g. *Principles*, 85; *Dialogues*, 98).

18. Boyle was, of course, an active and important adversary of Hobbes's philosophy—particularly on the subject of the vacuum. See Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*.

19. Jacob, *Newtonians*, 162–3. The Boyle lectures were published as a complete set under the title *A Defence of Natural and Revealed Religion* in 1739.

20. On Newton's role in selecting Bentley as the first Boyle lecturer, and advising him about them, see Jacob, *Newtonians*, 151–6.

21. Harris, *Atheistical Objections Against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:363.

22. Koyré and Cohen, "Newton and the Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence," 63. Koyré and Cohen also note that "as a philosopher Dr. Clarke is almost completely forgotten today; but in his own time he enjoyed a very high reputation" (65). The relevance of the Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence for Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* is discussed in more detail in chapter 9.

23. Among Clarke's significant contributions to Newtonian science were his Latin translations of Rohault's *Physics* (1697) and Newton's *Optics* (1706). Hume likely used Clarke's edition of Rohault when he attended Robert Stewart's classes in natural philosophy at Edinburgh University, 1724–25. For details see Barfoot, "Hume and the Culture of Science"; see also Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism*, 25–30.

24. Clarke, *Works*, 2:524. Ten editions of Clarke's *Demonstration* were published by the end of the first half of the eighteenth century, which attests to the extent of its influence and significance at this time.

25. Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:3, 27.

26. Clarke, *Works*, 2:596.

27. Vailati, introduction to Clarke, *Demonstration*, xiii.

28. Vailati, introduction to Clarke, *Demonstration*, xiii–xiv.

29. Clarke, *Works*, 2:607.

30. Voltaire, *Letters on England*, no. 7. Compare D'Holbach, *System of Nature*, 353: "Dr. Clarke has adduced the strongest arguments which have yet been advanced to support the existence of a Deity."

31. Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica*, 3:607.

32. Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica*, 3:608.

33. Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion*, 100–103.

34. Carroll, *Remarks*, 5.

35. Princess Caroline to Leibniz, 26 November 1715, cited in Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 190.

36. On Locke's philosophy of religion see, e.g., Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge"; Wolterstorff, "Locke's Philosophy of Religion." On the controversies generated by the religious aspects of Locke's philosophy see Yolton, *Locke and the Way of Ideas*. (Yolton's study tends to downplay the importance of Hobbes's philosophy as it relates to the debates concerning Locke's theological views.)

37. Locke, *Essay*, 530–630 (4.2–10). See especially his remarks at 534 (4.2.9): "It has generally been taken for granted, that Mathematics alone are capable of demonstrative certainty…"

38. Swift, "Abolishing Christianity," 236.

39. See Desmaizeaux, "Life of Toland," xv–xxvi; xlvii–l.

40. For brief accounts of Toland's work see Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:88–100; Orr, *English Deism*, 116–21; Yolton, *Locke and the Way of Ideas*, 118–26; Daniel, *Toland*, esp. 40–4; and Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 609–14.

41. Locke's *Reasonableness* was published in 1695, prior to Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*. Locke had, however, a copy of Toland's manuscript before he began his own work. For further details see Jacob, *Newtonians*, 213–6; Daniel, *Toland*, 42–3.

42. Peter Browne, an early and important (Irish) critic of Toland, answered as follows (*Letter in Answer to Christianity Not Mysterious*, 33): "the design of this book [i.e. *Christianity Not Mysterious*] is to strike at the root and foundation of all revealed religion. . . . For we know all religion, natural and revealed, is founded upon the belief of a deity, of the immortality of the soul, and of rewards and punishments in another world; but it is impossible for us now to have clear and distinct ideas of these, and therefore upon [Toland's] principles we must utterly reject them all." (For more on this debate and its relevance to Hume's empiricist principles, see chapter 8.)

43. See Leland, *Deistical Writers*, 44–7.

44. Leland, *Deistical Writers*, 43. Toland seems to have been the first person to coin the term "pantheist," in 1705 in his *Socinianism Truly Stated* (*Oxford English Dictionary*). See Sykes's discussion of Toland's *Pantheisticon* in *Natural and Revealed Religion*, chap. 4—which is reviewed and discussed in the *History of the Works of the Learned*, art. 19, April 1740.

45. Jacob, *Newtonians*, 234–50; Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 152–3; Daniel, *Toland*, 188–90, 195, 206–10; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 609–14: and Beiser, *Sovereignty*, 227–8. See, however, Beiser's claim (*Sovereignty*, 229–30) that it would be wrong to consider Toland anti-Christian—a view at odds with Jacob (and most of Toland's contemporaries).

46. In certain respects, as Leibniz observed, Toland's view that matter was active puts him much closer to Hobbes than Spinoza. (See Daniel, *Toland*, 194–5.) Toland's doctrines in *Serena* had particular influence on D'Holbach, who translated this work into French and incorporated large sections of it into his *System of Nature* (1770). On this see Torrey, *Voltaire and the English Deists*, chap. 1.

47. Clarke, *Works*, 2:531; Gurdon, *Pretended Difficulties*, Sermons 6 and 7, in *Defence of Religion*, 3:315–20;323–4; Sykes, *Natural and Revealed Religion*, chap. 4.

48. Jacob, *Newtonians*, chap. 6; Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, chaps. 3 and 5; Hazard, *European Mind*, 304–5; O'Higgins, *Collins*, 12–18; Daniel, *Toland*, 218–21.

49. Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 151–7.

50. Jacob, *Newtonians*, 208.

51. Clarke, *Works*, 3:719–909; 4:711–35. See Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 614–9.

52. Bentley, *Remarks* (1713); Hoadley, *Queries Recommended* (1713). The Boyle Lectures of 1713–14, given by Benjamin Ibbot, were devoted to a refutation of Collins on freethinking. Mossner notes that it was Collins's use of the term "Freethinker" that gave it its specifically irreligious or anti-Christian connotation (Mossner, *Butler*, 55–6). In the same context, Mossner also points out that one of the earliest uses of the term "freethinker" was by Locke with reference to Toland.

53. See, e.g., Leland's observations on Collins's writings in Leland, *Deistical Writers*, vol. 1, letter 7; also Berman, *Atheism in Britain*, chap. 3.

54. See Leland, *Deistical Writers*, vol. 1, letter 9: "[Tindal's design] was to set aside all revealed religion, and entirely to destroy the authority of the Scriptures. Others have attacked particular parts of the Christian scheme, or of its proofs. But this writer has endeavoured to subvert the very foundations of it" (1:115). See also Skelton, *Ophiomaches*, 1: 344–7.

55. Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:113.

56. Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:114; compare 88, 93–4.

57. Tindal's argument is summarized in Mossner, *Butler*, 74–8; Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:113–21.

58. Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, chap. 14.

59. Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:119.

60. For details see Leland, *Deistical Writers*, vol. 1, letter 9.

61. Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 60, 189.

62. Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 189–93; on the Collins–Desmaizeaux friendship see O'Higgins, *Collins*, 15–8, 237–41; on Toland–Desmaizeaux see Daniel, *Toland*, 147.

63. Stephen, *Dictionary of National Biography*; for a detailed account of Desmaizeaux's activities see Broome, "An Agent."

64. "One of the reasons why Bayle exercised such a strong influence on the early stages of the Enlightenment is that, thanks to Des Maizeaux, his works were more widely available in English than in any other language soon after their publication" (Larousse, *Bayle*, 90).

65. On Desmaizeaux's role see Koyré and Cohen, "Newton and the Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence," where it is noted that Newton helped Desmaizeaux prepare this edition of the *Correspondence* (94–5, 122–3).

66. Desmaizeaux edited Toland's *Collection of Several Pieces* (1726) and, according to Broome, "actually helped Collins to write his books, and may have been on similar terms with Toland" ("An Agent," 343); but compare O'Higgins, *Collins*, 237–41.

67. Grean, *Shaftesbury's Philosophy*, 60.

68. See Walford, introduction to Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry*, viii–xi.

69. Balguy, *Letter to a Deist* (1726); Berkeley, *Alciphron*, third dialogue; Warburton, *Works*, 1:150–90 (*Divine Legation*; "Dedication to the Freethinkers"); Leland, *Deistical Writers*, vol. 1, letters 5 and 6.

70. Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 189; Daniel, *Toland*, 147; O'Higgins, *Collins*, 210; Broome, "An Agent," 294–5, 324, 331, and 439.

71. Hume, LET, 1:29–30, no. 10. See also Mossner, *Life*, 119–20. Hume distributed copies of the *Treatise* to several other individuals, including Butler.

72. Compare Mossner: "By no means totally ignored, the *Treatise* was yet totally misunderstood and badly misrepresented by all who dealt with it publicly and, what was worse, it failed to stimulate comment from any of the minds competent to deal with it" (*Life*, 133).

73. As Hume's own remarks indicate (EU, 12.1/149), as cited at the beginning of this chapter.

74. The debate concerning the question of atheism also involved and expanded into the French context, where Hume was living and working during the mid-1730s. See Kors, *Atheism in France: Orthodox Sources of Disbelief*, which provides a detailed account of the related debates and controversies in France. Kors discusses the relevance of this material as it relates to Hume's philosophy (especially the *Dialogues*) in "The French Context of Hume's Philosophical Theology."

Chapter 4. Hume's Scottish Context

1. Mossner, *Life*, 611.

2. In these letters, Hume expresses regret about his "haste" in publishing the *Treatise*. This is first indicated in LG, 33, and is repeated in his famous "Advertisement" to the (posthumous) 1777 edition of the "Essays and Treatises" (EU, 1); as well as in "My Own Life" (Mossner, *Life*, 612). A letter dating from the same period, when Hume was writing his *Dialogues*, alludes to his early interest in issues of religion, as recorded in an "old manuscript book" written before he was twenty, and which he had just burned (LET, 1:153–4, no. 72).

3. Mossner, *Life*, 74.

4. This is not to suggest, of course, that Hume's stay in France had no influence on the substance of the *Treatise*. On the contrary, as I have already indicated (chap. 3, note 74), the main debate had a French dimension or aspect to it, and Hume certainly had the opportunity and occasion to draw from the relevant philosophical literature associated with it. Nonetheless, Hume's interest in (Continental) thinkers such as Bayle, Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, and others should not be presented as simply a function of his presence

in France. The important point is that the formative period for Hume's *project* in the *Treatise* predates his French context. Although Scottish intellectual life was highly cosmopolitan in outlook and orientation, and enjoyed close contacts with both Holland and France, it was nevertheless still dominated by the debates and controversies taking place south of the border. It is these debates and controversies that are fundamental to the shape and structure of the *Treatise*.

5. Although Hutcheson was educated at Glasgow University (1710–16), he was Irish by birth. After graduating, he returned to Ireland until 1729, when he was appointed to the chair of moral philosophy at Glasgow. In general, there were close connections between Irish and Scottish intellectual circles at this time, and this had some influence in the specific characteristics and development of Scottish philosophy during the early Enlightenment. On this see, e.g., Robbins, *Commonwealthman*, chap. 5.

6. McCosh suggests that it was Shaftesbury, not Locke, "who exercised the most influence on the earlier philosophical school of Scotland" (*Scottish Philosophy*, 29). See also Sefton, "'Neu-lights and Preachers Legall,'" 188, who claims that "it is clear that the writings of Shaftesbury were read and admired in Scotland long before Hutcheson settled there."

7. These individuals include Robert Wallace, George Turnbull, and William Wishart, all of whom had a strong interest in Shaftesbury's work. See Robbins, *Commonwealthman*, 167–76; 185–211, and Stewart, "Berkeley and the Rankenian Club."

8. Kemp Smith's "contextualism" in his *Philosophy of David Hume* is, in general, both thin and highly selective. In particular, his account leaves a large gap concerning Hume's (early) concern with the question of atheism. See, however, Kemp Smith's remarks on Hume's "Calvinist Environment"; introduction to *Hume's Dialogues*, 1–8.

9. Cited in Mossner, *Life*, 49.

10. Compare Bracken, *Early Reception*, esp. 31–2, and chap. 5. Several leading members of the Rankenian club were correspondents of Berkeley and, as noted, Berkeley's ideas were being discussed and debated at Edinburgh University in the 1730s (see chap. 2, note 54).

11. Several of Newton's most distinguished disciples were Scots with connections to Edinburgh University (e.g. David Gregory, George Cheyne). On Hume's interest in (Newtonian) metaphysics and science see Mossner, *Life*, 42–3; Noxon, *Hume's Philosophical Development*, chap. 5, sec. 1. Peter Jones has argued (*Hume's Sentiments*, 11–9, 42) that Hume's knowledge of Newton was limited and does not reflect any deep interest in science. A response to this view is provided by Force, "Hume's Interest in Newton and Science."

12. Much of this work was completed by the 1730s, if not earlier. It is likely that this work reflects the general content of Maclaurin's lectures, which Hume may have attended when he was an Edinburgh student.

13. There is also criticism of Baxter, which is significant, since it shows that the (Scottish) Newtonian camp had internal divisions (of which critics, such as Hume, took advantage).

14. Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 3.

15. Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 381. Compare Hume, D, 56 (Cleanthes): "Now the arguments of natural religion . . ."

16. Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 386; and compare 22–3. See also Cheyne, *Philosophical Principles of Natural Religion*, esp. chapter 3.

17. Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 388–90; and compare 95.

18. Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 4.

19. Cameron, "Theological Controversy"; Sefton, "'Neu-lights and Preachers Legall.'" While Hutcheson is sometimes referred to as the "father" of the Scottish Enlightenment (compare Campbell, "Francis Hutcheson: 'Father' of the Scottish Enlightenment," 167), he did not become professor at Glasgow until 1729, so his influence on early developments was limited. In any case, Hutcheson's own education at Glasgow owed much to Simson, who was his teacher.

20. Including William Wishart and Hutcheson's protégé William Leechman. See, e.g., the articles by Cameron and Sefton cited in note 19, and Watson, *The Scot of the Eighteenth Century*, chap. 7; Mathieson, *Scotland and the Union*, chap. 7.

21. See Wallace's remarks (cited in Stewart, "Berkeley and the Rankenian Club," 27) indicating his contemporaries' strong interest in the debates "for and against the Christian religion." Among Wallace's and Turnbull's earlier works were pamphlets against the free-thinker Tindal (and defending Clarke).

22. McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, 161–2. This interest in issues of natural religion and related debates is reflected in library purchases at the time. Ross notes, for example, that acquisitions by the Advocates' Library during the 1730s included works by, among others, Toland, Collins, Woolston, Locke, and Berkeley, and the Boyle Lectures (Ross, *Kames*, 27–8).

23. The correspondence is now lost. Hutcheson, of course, rejected the central doctrines of Clarke's philosophy, including his rationalist ethics and his a priori theology.

24. Stair, *Physiologia Nova Experimentalis* (1686), 16–7, cited in Dugald Stewart, *Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy*, 217n.

25. Cited in Robertson, *Freethought*, 2:742.

26. Cited in Robertson, *Freethought*, 2:760. See also Hunter, "'Aikenhead the Atheist,'" 226, 239–40, on the relevant legislation.

27. See *State Trials*, 13:917–38; quoted in Hunter, "'Aikenhead the Atheist,'" 224, where more detail is provided. Robertson observes that "a victim was very much wanted" and suggests that Aikenhead was used as an example to others (*Freethought*, 2:760). Note that Aikenhead was born in 1676; had he lived, he would have been thirty-five years old when Hume was born, and not more than sixty-three when the *Treatise* was published. Many of Hume's own contemporaries around Edinburgh would remember the case, and it is entirely possible that Hume knew people who could remember Aikenhead.

28. The execution proceeded despite the fact that Aikenhead repented, and there were calls for leniency on the grounds of his youth. Hunter notes ("'Aikenhead the Atheist,'" 237) that while Aikenhead awaited his execution, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, then in session at Edinburgh, wrote to the king urging "the vigorous execution" of the "good laws" that existed to "the abounding of impiety and profanity in this land." Hunter says that "Aikenhead's expression of extreme anti-Christian views was both outspoken and sustained," and it was probably this that "earned Aikenhead his severe sentence" ("'Aikenhead the Atheist,'" 241).

29. Halyburton, *Natural Religion Insufficient*, 52–3. According to Robertson, however, that "Scottish freethought would seem to have gone further, in private, than English at this point in question" (*Freethought*, 2:761).

30. Halyburton, *Natural Religion Insufficient*, 130–6. Halyburton defends the execution of "this inconsiderable trifler, whose undigested notions scarce deserve the consideration we have given them; and much less did they become the awful gravity of the place they were delivered [i.e. at the scaffold]." It is worth noting the affinity between Aikenhead's doctrines and the views of William Dudgeon, Hume's freethinking contemporary in the Borders area of Scotland during the early 1730s (as I will describe).

31. For a brief account of the development of the religious parties in Scotland at this time see Mathieson, *Scotland and the Union*, esp. chaps. 6 and 7. It should also be noted, however, that these (ideological) divisions were not clear-cut, and they evolved and mutated in a variety of ways as the eighteenth century progressed.

32. Although there was greater toleration in England than Scotland at this time, there were nevertheless strict limits to this. Thomas Woolston, for example, was tried and imprisoned in 1729 for publishing his views on miracles, and Peter Annet suffered the same fate for his freethinking views in 1763.

33. Mossner's *Life*, for example, is notably sketchy about this (important) period in Hume's life.

34. Mossner, *Life*, 58–9; Ross, *Kames*, 75–87.

35. Hume is quoted in Kemp Smith's introduction to *Hume's Dialogues*, 76; and in Mossner, *Life*, 597; and on Kames see Ross, *Kames*, 369.

36. See Ross, *Kames*, chap. 4; and Ferguson, *Clarke*, 88–9.

37. See esp. Kames, *Essays*.

38. Scottish Records Office, GD 24/1/547. Mossner suggests that this "exchange ended amicably" (*Life*, 58), but this misrepresents the character of the correspondence (and the way it ended).

39. Baxter, as noted, was also the author of other successful works, such as *Matho* (see chap. 2, note 53). His *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* was quoted and cited extensively by, among others, Clarke's critic (and Jackson's opponent) Edmund Law, in his *Enquiry into the Ideas of Space, Time, Immensity, and Eternity* (1734). Even after Hume's death, Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* continued to enjoy some prominence in philosophical debates. It is, for example, discussed in some detail in Priestley's *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777), a work that gave rise to the famous exchange between Price and Priestley on this subject.

40. On the Jackson–Clarke relationship see, e.g., the relevant references in Ferguson, *Clarke*, 67–70, 76–7; Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy*, 110–22; and Young, *Religion and Enlightenment*, 100–112.

41. Jackson, *Dissertation on Matter and Spirit*, 12, 14.

42. Jackson, *Dissertation on Matter and Spirit*, 40–1. Jackson's observations make clear that the title of Baxter's work is rather misleading, since its fundamental aims and objectives reach well beyond the subject of the human soul.

43. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:79–80.

44. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:81.

45. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:98–9n, 100–101n, 178, 188–9. McCosh obse rves that Baxter belongs "to the school of Samuel Clarke, to whom he often refers, and always with admiration" (*Scottish Philosophy*, 42).

46. Popkin, "Berkeley and Pyrrhonism," and "Hume and the Pyrrhonian Controversy"; Bracken, *Early Reception*; Davie, "Berkeley's Impact." A selection of Baxter's criticism of "Dean Berkeley's scheme" is presented in McCracken and Tipton, *Berkeley's Principles and Dialogues: Background Source Materials*, 193–207.

47. Bracken, *Early Reception*, 59.

48. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:278–80, 284–6, 290–3.

49. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:82; 2:260–1.

50. Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 95, 388–9.

51. See, e.g., Baxter, *Appendix*, 106–13, 195–204. The fundamental issue between Maclaurin and Baxter—which indicates a deep split in the Newtonian school—concerns the status of Newton's conjectures about a "rare elastic aetherial medium" as a "mechanism" to explain the phenomenon of gravity. Maclaurin objected to those—such as Cotes, Clarke, Cheyne, Pemberton, and Baxter—who overlooked Newton's conjectures about an "aetherial medium" and drew theological conclusions that lacked any experimental basis. On this see Lauden's introduction to Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, xxiii–xxv.

52. Warburton, *Works*, 3:173 (*Divine Legation*, Bk. 3, Chp. 4). Quote is from the 1738 ed., which varies slightly from the *Works* version.

53. See, e.g., Warburton, *Works*, 6: 241,349 (*Divine Legation*, Bk. 9, Chp. 1); *Works*, 11:55 (*Commentary on Pope's Essay on Man*, Letter 1); *Works*, 12:139–41, 193, 197 (*Bolingbroke's Philosophy*);"Study of Theology," in *Unpublished Papers*, 365–6. In his notes to Pope,

Works, Warburton argues that whereas Berkeley's reputation as "a great genius" is undeserved, his critic Baxter "was truly such." (I cite Warburton's remarks at greater length at chap. 13, note 72.)

54. On Warburton's close friendship with Baxter, see the article on Baxter in Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica*, 2:26. The Warburton–Hume antagonism is documented in Mossner, *Life*, esp. 121–4, 224–5, 617–8. In "My Own Life," Hume refers to "Dr. Warburton's railing"—remarks that attest to the depth of ill-feeling between the two men.

55. See, in particular, Baxter's remarks in his *Reflections*, 18–9.

56. Warburton, "Study of Theology," 362–4. Warburton's "Study of Theology" was never published during his lifetime, but it was intended to teach students of divinity "first principles in which are laid the foundations of religion." The first principles that particularly concern Warburton are those that relate to God, the soul, and free will. The existence of God, he suggests, may be demonstrated a priori (Cudworth's *System* and Clarke's *Discourse* are particularly recommended) and a posteriori (he recommends Nieuwentyt, Ray, Derham, and especially "the popular explanations of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy by Pemberton and Maclaurin"). For knowledge of the existence of the soul, and a demonstration of its immateriality, he recommends "Clarke and above all Baxter."

57. Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica*, 3:608.

58. Lowman and Chandler belonged to the English dissenting circles that Wishart was close to (as discussed in chapter 2).

59. Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica*, 3:608.

60. Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica*, 3:608.

61. See also the article on Baxter in Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica* (2:25), which points out the opposition between Baxter and Hume on the subject of the *vis inertiae* of matter.

62. On Dudgeon see my "William Dudgeon"; also McCosh, *Scottish Philosophy*, 11–3; Berman, introduction to Dudgeon, *Works*; Carabelli, *Hume e la Retorica dell' Ideologica*, 197–206.

63. Wallace was one of the "Neu-lights" in the Church of Scotland, and later in life he was a friend and associate of Hume. Wallace supported Hume's application for the Edinburgh Chair in 1745 (i.e. in opposition to Wishart et al.), and Mossner describes him as "one of the leaders of the Moderate Party" (*Life*, 159). Compare, however, Sher's observation that Wallace (like Wishart) was among those "Neu-lights" who "did not feel completely comfortable with the Moderates' ultra-liberal elitist vision of politeness and enlightenment" (*Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*, 153). See also Cameron, "Theological Controversy," 123–4.

64. Dudgeon, *Works*, 44.

65. Dudgeon, *Discourse Concerning the Deity*, 28. Dudgeon refers to Collins and Leibniz, along with St. Paul and Calvin, as sharing his necessitarian views.

66. Recently a letter from Baxter to Warburton, dated 16 May 1740, has been discovered and published by Heiner Klemme ("Anmerkungen zur schottischen Aufklärung"). This letter confirms Baxter's authorship of *Reflections* and shows that Baxter and Warburton were corresponding shortly after Hume published the first two books of the *Treatise*—and not long after the "Warburtonian" review appeared in the *History of the Works of the Learned*. It is also significant that in this letter Baxter implies that Dudgeon was in league with others when writing his reply to Baxter.

67. Baxter, *Reflections*, 8, 11–8. Compare the remarks on Hume, LG, 14–7, 18.

68. Baxter, *Reflections*, 49–50.

69. Baxter, *Reflections*, 14–5, 18–9, 50.

70. Scottish Records Office, CH2/516/3 (29 August 1732).

71. See also Dudgeon's reply to Baxter in his *Vindication*, reprinted in *Works*, 137–9, where he speaks of "the absurdity of the doctrines of hell-torments, as commonly taught" (and compare 146–55).

72. Scottish Records Office, CH2/265/2 (pp. 299–301); CH1/3/22 (pp. 204, 412, 495).

73. Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* was published in 1733, and the Dudgeon prosecution was active at Chirnside during 1732–33. The subscribers in question are Veitch, Landreth, and George Home of Hilton (not George Home of Chirnside). Baxter was the tutor and senior servant of the Hay family, based at Duns castle, who were involved in a number of "presentations" of the local clergy (including, later on, that of Abraham Home, son of George Home of Chirnside, and Hume's cousin).

74. See Dudgeon's *Vindication*, where he refers to "the names and insinuations" Baxter has mixed with his criticisms (*Works*, 48). In his *Discourse Concerning the Deity*—which is not included in the *Works*—Dudgeon more emphatically condemns Baxter's "mistaken zeal" and efforts "to discourage all free inquiry" and links Baxter with persecutors among the clergy (pp. 9–10). A few years later, in 1737, Dudgeon tells Jackson that his friends are "apprehensive" that the clergy will "renew [his] Prosecution," and Jackson responds, saying that he hopes "there are none amongst your Clergy, so unchristian as to attempt to trouble you" (*Additional Letters*, 1, 10). In the following letter, Dudgeon remarks that he has "suffer'd much already for well-meant *Free-thinking* from our Clergy.... Who are just now prosecuting a Gentleman for publishing two excellent moral Discourses, preach'd in *London*" (20). The gentleman in question is, of course, William Wishart. Ironically, Wishart's critics used Dudgeon's remarks against Wishart by mentioning that he had "already been sufficiently complimented for his Sermons by the Author of the Deistical Catechism, in his Letter to Mr. Jackson." See *A Vindication of the Synod of Lothian and Tweedale* (1738), 14.

75. There are two separate volumes of the Dudgeon–Jackson correspondence, both published in 1737. The first contains letters 1–9, and the second letters 10–3. Berman's recent edition of Dudgeon's *Works* (1994) contains only the second set, whereas the original edition of 1765 contains only the first set.

76. *History of the Works of the Learned*, April 1737, art. 26, 318–9. Another brief notice of the Dudgeon–Jackson *Letters* appears in *Bibliotheque Raisonnée* (April/May/June 1737). The author of this notice was Pierre Desmaizeaux—with whom Hume was in contact not long after—and it is highly favorable. (I am grateful to Professor David Raynor for pointing this notice out to me.)

77. Berman, introduction to Dudgeon, *Works*, vii.

78. Dudgeon, *Works*, 240–1 [Letter 3]. There are obvious parallels between Dudgeon and Hume on this subject.

79. The review in the *History of the Works of the Learned*, February 1738, art. 11, 120, ends with a discussion of Dudgeon's effort to pose "the Epicurean dilemma"; why God permits evil, if he is both all-powerful and perfectly good. It is noted, in this context, that on this subject Dudgeon is "following Lord Shaftesbury in this part of his Scheme, as he does Spinoza in another, and the present Bishop Berkley in a third."

80. Dudgeon's letter appears in the *History of the Works of the Learned*, art. 23, May 1740. In 1738 Dudgeon also contributed a letter to the *History of the Works of the Learned* criticizing Clarke on free will, art. 46, December 1738.

81. Warburton, *Works*, 11:22. In the same work, Warburton (again) refers to Baxter and praises this "excellent author" who "wrote expressly against Spinozism" (p. 55).

82. Witherspoon, *Works*, 6:183. Witherspoon, in a note, alludes to Hume, but excludes him from the "catalogue" on the ground that he is a "sceptic," whereas the "moderate" is a "severe dogmatist."

83. There are some interesting parallels between the trio of Kames, Baxter, and Dudgeon and the three characters in Hume's *Dialogues*, Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo (with Hume corresponding to Pamphilus). Whether Hume intended to model his characters after these individuals remains a matter of conjecture; nevertheless, whether he intended this or not, the parallels are highly significant. (On the Baxter–Demea relationship see Turco, "Un 'ipotesi sull' occasione dei *Dialoghi sulla religione naturali* di David Hume," esp. secs. 3 and 4.)

84. T, 1.3.14.9–10/159–60; TA, 26/656–7; and compare LG, 10–1; EU, 7.22–5/71–3. I discuss this issue in more detail in chapter 12.

85. Mossner conjectures that Hume's relations with his uncle, Rev. George Home, were amiable enough (*Life*, 33). However, given the circumstances of the Dudgeon case—which Mossner does not mention, much less discuss—Hume's own philosophical views and activities likely produced (serious?) tensions within his own family.

86. Mossner, "Early Memoranda," 495.

Chapter 5. The Monster of Atheism

1. Mossner, "Enlightenment of Hume," 57; Mossner, "Religion of David Hume," 653; Norton, *David Hume*, 10, 50, 246–9.

2. Mossner, "Hume and the Legacy of the *Dialogues*," 22n38.

3. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 219–23; and compare "Hume's Attenuated Deism"; see also Andre, "Was Hume an Atheist?" presenting a view similar to Gaskin's. Both Gaskin and Andre, following Kemp Smith (see chap. 1, note 58), identify Philo with Hume's own voice in the *Dialogues*. Several other scholars, however, have identified Cleanthes as "Hume's mouthpiece" in the *Dialogues*. For example, Hendel argues that Cleanthes is "the hero" of this work and claims that this reflects the fact "that Hume appreciated the meaning of the anthropomorphic theism defended by [religious authors such as Berkeley and Butler]." Hendel goes on to say that Hume "was no atheist, nor a complete sceptic. He was simply being tossed between a belief and the difficulties he discerned in all beliefs" (*Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 411; and compare chap. 11, esp. pp. 345–7).

4. Gaskin, "Hume's Attenuated Deism," 163.

5. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 219–23. Compare Andre, "Was Hume an Atheist?" 142, describing Hume as a "limited theist," one who "rejects standard theism but is not an atheist *simpliciter*."

6. Another reason given for denying that Hume is an "atheist"—consistent with either of the two views already described—is that on at least one occasion Hume remarked that he did not believe in atheists, and had never met one. On this basis, it is said to be "certain Hume did not regard himself as an atheist" (Mossner, "Hume and the Legacy of the *Dialogues*," 22n38). See also Gaskin's discussion in *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 220–1. I discuss the significance of Hume's denial of atheism further in chap. 19, note 18.

7. Williams, "Hume on Religion," 267; and compare Penelhum, who similarly describes Hume as "a closet atheist" ("Comments and Responses," 255).

8. A notable exception to this is Berman, *Atheism in Britain*, esp. 101–5.

9. As already noted (chap. 2), Hume's remarks about skepticism and atheism in the *Letter* suggest that religious skeptics such as Huet rejected these ambitions of contemporary theology and philosophy (e.g. as advanced by "Arians, Socinians, and Deists") but were nevertheless evidently sincere Christians (LG, 21).

10. See Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1.203.

11. Hume cites Bayle's *Dictionary* article "Spinoza" at T, 1.4.5.22n/243n, where he refers to his "hideous hypothesis" (T, 1.4.5.19/241). For further evidence of Hume's (early) interest in Bayle see, e.g., his letters to Michael Ramsay, March/April 1734 (LET, 1:12, no. 2) and 26

August 1737 (reprinted in Mossner, *Life*, 626–7). See also Popkin, "Bayle and Hume"; and Pittion, "Hume's Reading of Bayle."

12. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Spinoza," note A (in Beller and Lee, *Selections*, 291).

13. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Pyrrho," note B (Popkin, *Selections*, 194–5); my emphasis.

14. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Rufinius," note C (Popkin, *Selections*, 263–4).

15. Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Third Clarification," iv (Popkin, *Selections*, 429); and compare v (Popkin, *Selections*, 430), "Nothing is more necessary than faith . . . ," and viii (Popkin, *Selections*, 435): "It is through a lively awareness . . . "

16. In the article "Pyrrho" (note E) Bayle points out that philosophers like Pascal "have said that in order to convert the libertines they should make them realize the weakness of reason and teach them to distrust it" (Popkin, *Selections*, 206). He goes on to observe: "Be this as it may, there are some able men [he cites Jean la Placette] who claim that nothing is more opposed to religion than Pyrrhonism." See also the remarks of La Mothe le Vayer, quoted by Bayle (Popkin, *Selections*, 208): "Consequently, since they did not have . . . " On the enormous importance of Pyrrhonism—through the discovery of the writings of Sextus Empiricus—for theological debates in the early modern period see Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*; Allen, *Boundless Sea*, esp. chap. 3: and Kors, Atheism in France: *Orthodox Sources of Disbelief*, esp. chap. 6.

17. It is a central theme, for example, in Berkeley's writings, as the subtitle to his *Dialogues* makes clear. See also Shaftesbury's remarks about "two sorts of atheist" in his *Characteristics*, 2:48–9.

18. This includes Hume's immediate Scottish context. The view that Pyrrho's skepticism is a dangerous weapon that has been used against Christian theology is a prominent theme in Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*, where the "followers of Pyrrho" are subject to harsh rebuttal (see, e.g., 2:272–6). See also Anderson, *Profit and Loss of Religion*, 63–5.

19. Harris, *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:368–71, 407, 415.

20. Harris, *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:407.

21. Harris, *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:408. See also Anderson's remarks making the same point in the context of his criticism of "atheists (and specifically "pantheists") who "abuse terms, to perplex a debate of so much importance to mankind" (*Profit and Loss of Religion*, 58–63).

22. Harris, *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:368–74, 388.

23. I expand here on the more general remarks on Hobbes's reputation I already provided in chapter 3. Hobbes's views on the subject of religion have been a subject of considerable debate in recent years. Among the most important contributions are the following: Berman, *History of British Atheism*, 64–7; Martinich, *Two Gods of Leviathan*; Cooke, *Hobbes and Christianity*; Curley, "Calvin and Hobbes"; Martinich, "Interpretation of Hobbes's Philosophy," and especially Jesseph, "Hobbes's Atheism." I agree with Jesseph's claim that "it makes more sense to read Hobbes as a sly, ironic, and interesting atheist rather than a confused, bizarre and ultimately incoherent Christian" (p. 164). Berman's discussion describes Hobbes's efforts (and need) to "disguise his atheism" by employing an "esoteric technique."

24. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 3.12; *Human Nature*, 11.2; *Citizen*, 15.14.

25. Hobbes, *Human Nature*, 11.2; *Leviathan*, 11.25.

26. Hobbes, *Citizen*, 15.14; *Leviathan*, 31.15.

27. Hobbes, *Human Nature*, 11.3; *Leviathan*, 31.25–8; *Citizen*, 15.14. See also Collins's remarks on Socrates' criticism of anthropomorphism, in *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 123–6.

28. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 31.33; compare *Leviathan*, 32.2–4. Compare also the (long) passage from Pierre Charron cited in Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Simonides," note G (Popkin, *Selections*, 284–6): "The true knowledge of God is perfect ignorance of him. . . ."

29. Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 1.2.

30. Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 1.8.

31. Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 26.1. It follows from this that we can have no knowledge of "the first cause of things" (or of creation), as this is strictly beyond the scope of human understanding.

32. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 3.12; 4.21; 34.2, 24.

33. But compare Hobbes, *Human Nature*, 11.5. Note also that Hobbes claims that the universe is the "aggregate of all bodies," which would seem to imply that God cannot be distinct from the universe, and therefore cannot be its cause.

34. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 11.16–26; *Leviathan*, 12.6–11.

35. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 6.36.

36. Hobbes, *Citizen*, 5.14. Hobbes was not only a (deep) skeptic with respect to the claims of natural religion but also a keen (if cautious) critic of revealed religion, and helped to advance skepticism relating to miracles, prophecies, and the authority of scripture. See esp. *Leviathan*, 32–7. Hobbes's attack on the credentials of revealed religion was further developed by Spinoza, and then by freethinkers such as Blount, Toland, Collins, Tindal, and Woolston.

37. John Trenchard, in one of his contributions to *Cato's Letters* (2:778–86, no. 111, 12 January 1722), presents a skeptical account of theological knowledge that closely follows Hobbes on this subject. Trenchard emphasizes the "narrowness of our capacities" and argues that all we can ever know about God is that he *exists*. As already noted, Trenchard belonged to the circle of radical freethinkers that included Collins, Toland, and Desmaizeaux, as well as Thomas Gordon, his principal collaborator in *Cato's Letters*.

38. Bayle acknowledges (*Dictionary*, art. "Hobbes," note M [Beller and Lee, *Selections*, 137–8]) that Hobbes "has passed for an Atheist" but argues that "there is no accusation that is fallen into greater abuse than that of Atheism." According to Bayle, Hobbes was a man of "sincere piety" and "solid virtue," who believed "that there is one God who is the origin of all things, but who ought not to be circumscribed in the sphere of our narrow reason." However, as Hume's remarks in the *Dialogues* indicate (D, 41), throughout the early eighteenth century Bayle was generally viewed as an "*irreligious* sceptic" and an "apologist for atheism." (This is evident, for example, in the sermons of Boyle lecturers, such as Harris and Gurdon, and is a pronounced feature in works by Warburton and Baxter.) For this reason, Bayle's effort to clear Hobbes of the "horrible slander" and "accusation" of *atheism* would have been read simply as another example of irreligious dissembling. The important point, for our purposes, is that Hobbes's reputation as an "atheist" was well established and his doctrines were closely associated with those of Spinoza.

39. Citing Bayle, *Continuation des pensées diverses*, no. 106. The relevant section of *Continuation des pensées diverses* is reprinted in Kemp Smith's introduction to *Hume's Dialogues*, 81–6.

40. Cited in Kemp Smith, introduction to *Hume's Dialogues*, 85.

41. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Spinoza," note A (Beller and Lee, *Selections*, 291). Bayle also notes "that Seneca represents Plato's doctrine and that Strato, as two opposite extremes: one of them deprived GOD of a body, and the other deprived him of a soul." *Dictionary*, art. "Spinoza," note A (Beller and Lee, *Selections*, 294), and compare art. "Simonides," note F (Popkin, *Selections*, 280).

42. Bayle's view that Spinoza was "the first who reduced Atheism into a system" contrasts with his more circumspect remarks concerning Hobbes. See note 38.

43. Bayle, *Continuation des pensées diverses*, no. 149; translation from Anderson, *Profit and Loss of Religion*, 334–5. Anderson's work, published in 1753, charges Hume and Kames with "atheism" and encourages both the magistrates and church authorities to take some appropriate action against them (sec. 11). Anderson was an admirer and defender of Locke and Clarke and was especially hostile to the philosophy of Shaftesbury and Bayle. On Anderson's activities against Hume, see Mossner, *Life*, 340–1.

44. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Spinoza," note E (Popkin, *Selections*, 293–4).

45. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Spinoza," note E (Popkin, *Selections*, 295).

46. See esp. *Dictionary*, 1st clarification; *Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, esp. secs. 133–9.

47. Cudworth *System of the Universe*, 1:144–55, 199. The fact that Hume (unlike Bayle) draws a distinction in the "Early Memoranda" between the "Stratonic" and the "Spinozist" atheists perhaps indicates the influence of Toland's important discussion of Spinoza's doctrine in *Serena* (letters 4 and 5). In this context, Toland, under pretext of criticizing Spinoza, advances the ("Stratonic") view that motion is essential to matter. (Clarke explicitly criticizes Toland's doctrine in his *Demonstration*.) In his *Pantheisticon*, Toland takes the bolder step of explicitly identifying God and Nature, as part of the "pantheist's" ideology. In general, Toland's "pantheism" is a variant of Spinozist and Stratonic atheism, as Bayle describes it. By the 1720s/1730s, the doctrine(s) of "Spinozism" and "pantheism" were well established in the literature, and served as prime targets for defenders of natural religion.

48. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:200. Cudworth also argues that the immaterial being that is denied by all atheists has three principal attributes: infinite goodness, infinite wisdom, and infinite power (*System of the Universe*, 1:316).

49. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:300.

50. Hume's remarks in his *Natural History of Religion*—a work that is too often overlooked—indicate that he accepts Cudworth's particular understanding of the difference between "genuine theism" and "atheism." (In contrast with the *Dialogues*, there is no difficulty identifying Hume's "true voice" in his *Natural History of Religion*.) In the fourth chapter of this work, Hume begins his discussion by noting that the "only point of theology, in which we shall find a consent of mankind almost universal, is, that there is invisible, intelligent power in the world" (NHR, 144). He maintains, however, that a "genuine theist" is a person who acknowledges "one, supreme God," understood as an intelligent being, who both *created and governs Nature*, and who moves and directs it according to some intelligent purpose or design (NHR, 144–8). The theist–atheist divide, on this account, should be understood primarily in terms of rival hypotheses about "the origin and fabric of the universe"—matters that never enter "into the imagination of any polytheist or idolater" (NHR, 147; and compare D, 126–7).

51. Bayle points out that this is also the view of Epicurus and the "atomists": *Dictionary*, arts. "Leucippus," and "Jupiter," notes G and N. Compare Collins, *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 90, on Lucretius and his "one complete Ancient System of Atheism."

52. Anderson discusses the distinction between the "theist" and "atheist" and relates this to the place of the "sceptic." According to Bayle, Anderson says (*Profit and Loss of Religion*, 63–4), all mankind can be divided into those who "are persuaded of the being of a God, and such as are not persuaded." The first group has many "different notions and ideas of the divine and supreme being." The second group, insofar as they have considered the question, can be divided between those who decide in favor of atheism and those who "decide nothing." This last subgroup are either skeptics or acataleptics. Skeptics "keep their judgement in suspence, but go on in their enquiry, in the hopes of finding truth at last." Acataleptics "give up all examination, because they judge the subject to be incomprehensible." Anderson regards Spinoza as a "dogmatic atheist" but does not mention Hobbes or Hume in this context.

53. Clarke, *Works*, 2:543.

54. Clarke, *Works*, 2:521–2.

55. Clarke, *Works*, 2:534. The issue here, Clarke says, is not about the *eternity* of the world but whether the material world can possibly be the "Original, Independent and Self-existing being: Which is a very different Question."

56. Clarke, *Works*, 2:532–7, 585. This includes not only Spinoza's opinion (532–4) but also the "Epicurean Hypothesis" (547). Compare Hume, D, 84.

57. On this view, therefore, the atheist is a person who "believes nothing of a designing principle or mind." Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:240; and compare, e.g., Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:216, 297. The basic issue here, as Cudworth's observations make clear, is whether the existence of this world must be explained in terms of "final causes."

58. Clarke, *Works*, 2:587.

59. Clarke, *Works*, 2:605; compare 697–8; 3:760, 792, 846–9.

60. Clarke, *Works*, 2:600–608. See Force, "The Newtonians and Deism"; and Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton and the Design Argument*, chap. 4, esp. pp. 75–8.

61. Clarke, *Works*, 2:600. Compare Hume, EU, 11.10/135.

62. Clarke, *Works*, 2:601, 697–8. As noted, Clarke's doctrine that matter is entirely *inert* and incapable of any (active) powers (*Works*, 2:545, 563, 582) is the foundation of Baxter's entire system in his *Enquiry into the Human Soul* (see, e.g., 1:80, where Baxter describes God as "being the powerful *Creator* and *Mover* of Matter).

63. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 14. Clarke is responding to Leibniz's objection that according to Newton and his followers (e.g. Clarke), "God Almighty wants to wind up his watch from time to time: otherwise it would cease to move.... Nay, the machine of God's making, is so imperfect, according to these gentlemen; that he is obliged to... mend it, as a clockmaker mends his work" (*Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 11).

64. Clarke puts his alternative view this way: "But God is present to the world, not as a part, but as governor; acting upon all things, himself acted upon by nothing. He is not far from every one of us, for in him we (and all things) live and move and have our beings" (Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 24).

65. Clarke, *Works*, 2:602–3.

66. Clarke, *Works*, 2:603.

67. Clarke, *Works*, 2:604.

68. Clarke, *Works*, 2:605.

69. Clarke, *Works*, 2:605.

70. Clarke, *Works*, 2:606–7.

71. Clarke, *Works*, 2:607.

72. Harris, *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:366–7; and compare Bentley, *The Folly of Atheism*, sermon 1, in *Works*, 3:4–7; Gastrell, *Certainty and Necessity of Religion*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:327, 348, 350–2; Prideaux, *Letter to the Deists*, 7–14.

73. Freethinkers such as Tindal used the ambiguities involved in the term "deism" to embarrass religious philosophers such as Clarke. More specifically, Tindal claims that Clarke's own arguments lead to "true Deism" and show that revealed religion is unnecessary, if not directly opposed to the principles of natural religion (*Christianity as Old as Creation*, 363–8). It should also be noted that "Arianism" and "Socinianism"—which involve denying the (full) divinity of Christ—were often associated with "deism" (e.g. Hume, LG, 21), and Clarke was certainly vulnerable to this charge.

74. Harris, *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:406–8; Berkeley, *Alciphron*, 5, 27, (in *Works* 3,205–6), and *Theory of Vision Vindicated* 2, 3, (in *Works*, 1:251–2); Gildon, *Deist's Manual*, 100–104; and Leland, *Deistical Writers*, esp.

1:1–3, 7–8. Leland notes that "deists" are "no friends to revealed religion" and that this stance is generally a cover for a more systematic opposition to all religion.

75. It is significant that Hume tends to closely associate "deism" with "atheism" (and "scepticism") in a variety of contexts. See LET, 1:57, no. 24; 165, no. 77; 510, no. 281; 165, 510; D, 41. Hume, as Gaskin points out, did not welcome the title of "deist" any more than that of "atheist" (*Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 244–5, and "Attenuated Deism," 166–9). See also Mossner, *Life*, 395.

76. Clarke, *Works*, 2:573, 597, 604, 646–8, 659.

77. Clarke, *Works*, 2:556, 648, 662; 3:730, 760, 791.

78. Esp. Clarke, *Works*, 2:559–68, 651; 3:905–6; 4:721–35.

79. Clarke, *Works*, 2:573, 602–3, 608.

80. Following Mintz, we could describe "atheism" during this period as a "hydra-headed term" (*Hunting of Leviathan*, 39).

81. Warburton's views about "atheism" also suggest a complex framework for understanding this issue. In his work on the study of theology, Warburton indicates what he regards as the core issues separating theist and atheist (*Selection from Unpublished Papers*, 360–68). As mentioned above (chap. 4, note 56), he suggests students of divinity be taught "the first principles in which are laid the foundation of religion, or what more properly constitute the thing itself; I mean GOD and the SOUL." The existence of God, he suggests, may be demonstrated a priori (Cudworth's *True Intellectual System* and Clarke's *Discourse* are particularly recommended) and a posteriori (he recommends Nieuwentyt, Ray, Derham, and especially "the popular explanations of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy by Pemberton and Maclaurin"). For knowledge of the existence of the soul, and a demonstration of its immateriality, he recommends "Clarke and above all Baxter." To the fundamental issues of God and the soul, Warburton adds the issue of free will, since "a being destitute of freedom, we apprehend, can be no subject of religion, that is, have merit or demerit." Regarding the existence of atheists, Warburton has no doubts: "Bad philosophy made some men atheists, and then again bad philosophy made others call in question the very existence of such a kind of monster."

Chapter 6. *A Hobbist Plan*

1. See also the second EM, 3.1.15n/189n and app. 2.4/296.

2. Compare editors' annotations, T, p. 450. Hume's use of Hobbes's title for his own discussions, "Of Liberty and Necessity," is also pointed out by Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 289.

3. Hobbes, *Human Nature*, 3.7 [*English Works*, 4:12–3]; see also *Leviathan*, 2.3.

4. I discuss the importance of Hobbes's views in shaping Hume's account of imagination and belief, the association of ideas, and causal inference in more detail in chapter 8.

5. See, for example, Dugald Stewart's observation that Hobbes's *Treatise of Human Nature* had "plainly been studied with the utmost care both by Locke and Hume" (*Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy*, Chp. 2 in *Collected Works*, 1:83–4). It would, of course, be most surprising if Hume had not studied Hobbes "with the utmost care," given that Hobbes was widely recognized as "one of the greatest geniuses of the seventeenth century" (Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Hobbes" [Popkin, *Selections*, 125–42]).

6. Tönnies suggests that it was Seth Ward who was the "friend" who published *Elements* in the form of two separate treatises in 1650 while Hobbes was in exile in Paris. Tönnies also notes that Hobbes's original manuscript of 1640 was one unified work and that its unity was concealed by the format of the two separate treatises. Nevertheless, it should be noted that three passages in *De Corpore Politico* explicitly refer to the connection between these two treatises and that these connections would be quite obvious to anyone who was familiar

with *Leviathan*. Tönnies points out "that the text of the printed editions of the work (of which several appeared before the Molesworth edition...) has a great many errors and omissions." For this reason Tönnies decided to publish "a new edition of the entire work, in its original form," based on one of the original manuscripts of 1640.

7. Hobbes's *Tripos* was published in 1684. In 1705, Charles Gildon referred to the considerable influence of Hobbes's "system of atheism in speculation" (described earlier). Gildon goes on to refer to Hobbes's *Tripos*—"particularly his Treatise in it of *Human Nature*, and *de Corpore Politico*"—as among those books that are treasured like the Bible by Hobbes's followers and that are evidently in "vogue" and enjoying "extravagant success" (*Deist's Manual*, 192–3). In 1772, Hume's friend Baron D'Holbach published a French translation of Hobbes's *Human Nature*. (D'Holbach translated a number of other works by various freethinkers, including Toland, Collins, Woolston, and Hume.)

8. This is not to deny that there are also some important differences between these two works by Hobbes. See, e.g., McNeilly, *Anatomy of Leviathan*.

9. Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico*, 2.1.1 [*English Works*, 4:125–6].

10. The connection between the titles of Hobbes's and Hume's work has been pointed out by Raphael, *British Moralists*, 1:v.

11. It is, for two reasons, important to note that Hume would have been familiar with *Elements* in the form of the two treatises as published by Seth Ward rather than the original manuscript of 1640, which was not published until 1889. First, in the original manuscript of 1640 (i.e. the Tönnies edition) the references to the "Treatise of Human Nature" do not appear. Second, the passage just quoted is one of the flawed passages to which Tönnies refers. For a more accurate version see *Elements*, 83.

12. There is, of course, one very important respect in which Hume's "plan" diverges from Hobbes's. Unlike Hobbes (and Locke), Hume offers no lengthy account of language or "speech." However, this divergence can be accounted for. Hobbes argued that both man and "beast" form expectation on the basis of experience, and therefore "prudence" cannot distinguish man from the animals. Unlike animals, however, man possesses language and is therefore capable of reasoning (i.e. "the adding and subtracting of the consequences of general names"). Against this, Hume held that "prudence" is a form of reasoning (i.e. probabilistic reasoning). Since probabilistic reasoning is Hume's greatest concern in the *Treatise* (see *Abstract*, 4/646–7) and language plays little or no role in his account of such reasoning, no such study is required.

13. As already indicated (chap. 1), there is considerable disagreement among commentators concerning the relationship between Hobbes's and Hume's ethical views. I discuss this issue in more detail in chap. 17.

14. This passage was deleted from the 1777 edition of the *Enquiry*, and therefore does not appear in the Selby-Bigge edition.

15. See, in particular, Kemp Smith, introduction to *Hume's Dialogues*, 60; and Price, *Ironic Hume*, 128; and O'Connor, *Hume on Religion*, 23. It is also widely accepted that Hume's *History of England* was modeled after the works of the ancient historians he admired, most notably Tacitus (see Wooton, "Hume, 'The historian,'" 283). See also Pollock, *Spinoza: His Life and Philosophy*, 300, who argues that Hume's essay "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth" is "not unlike [Spinoza's] *Tractatus Politicus* in design and arrangement." In general, it seems to have been Hume's established practice to seek out (admired) models that could serve as plans for his own work.

16. See, e.g., Richard Bentley's mocking comments on Collins's *Discourse of Free-Thinking* (in his *Remarks* written in 1713): "O, the glorious nation you be, if your stiff parsons were once displaced, and *freethinkers* appointed tutors to your young nobility and gentry! How would arts, learning, manners, and all humanity flourish in an academy under such

preceptors! Who, instead of your Bible, should read Hobbes's *Leviathan*" (Bentley, *Works*, 3:391). For some other examples of this kind, see note 7 earlier on Gildon; and the remarks about Hobbes's reputation in Edwards, *Thoughts Concerning Atheism*, 128–9 (quoted at the beginning of this chapter).

17. Dugald Stewart notes that "opposition to Hobbes" was "not confined to the controversialists of his own times.... The most eminent moralists and politicians of the eighteenth century may be ranked in the number of his antagonists, and even at the present moment, scarcely does there appear a new publication on Ethics or Jurisprudence, where a refutation of Hobbism is not to be found" (*Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy*, Chp. 2, in *Collected Works*, 1:79–80).

18. It has been claimed recently that my argument (i.e. points 1–7) that Hobbes's *Elements of Law* serves as the model for Hume's plan in the *Treatise* is "unduly simplistic" (Serjeantson, "Hume's General Rules," 192n21). The argument I have advanced is, indeed, simple enough. However, the criticism offered confuses a *simple argument* with an argument that is "unduly simplistic" (a rather simple mistake). Suffice it to say, beyond this, that Serjeantson offers no alternative suggestion of any kind for the model for Hume's "plan" in the *Treatise*—a puzzling and egregious omission, given the criticism made.

19. Evidence of the general neglect of consideration of Hobbes's philosophy as a major source for Hume's project in the *Treatise* is apparent in a number of the most influential studies concerning Hume's philosophy. Perhaps the most important of these is Kemp Smith's hugely influential study *The Philosophy of David Hume*—which has dominated Hume scholarship throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that the first of the four parts of Kemp Smith's book is devoted to identifying "the origins of Hume's philosophy," he does not mention Hobbes *once*. This must surely have misled many scholars into underestimating the importance of Hobbes when studying the origins of Hume's thought. The same shortcoming is apparent in Mossner's *Life of Hume*. Mossner gives no information, one way or the other, about the influence of Hobbes (or "Hobbism") on the philosophical development of the young Hume. There are, of course, several other works, contemporary with Kemp Smith's study, that do give more careful attention to the relationship between Hobbes and Hume. (See, e.g., Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*; and Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*.) The important point for present purposes, however, is that although many commentators have identified Hobbes as a major source for Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*, none—that I am aware of—have specifically identified Hobbes's work as the model for Hume's project in the *Treatise*, despite the obvious structural similarities between them. It is this particular blind spot that needs to be accounted for.

20. At least one commentator has pointed out that the omission of Hobbes's name from the list of "late philosophers" is puzzling: Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 8.

21. The phrase is Mossner's; *Life*, 325. It is also important, however, not to exaggerate Hume's "prudence" or "caution" in presenting his ideas in the *Treatise*. As I will explain in more detail, given the general climate of intolerance at this time, Hume was remarkably "bold" about what he was willing to put into print—in the *Treatise* no less than his later writings.

22. Skinner, "The Context of Hobbes's Theory of Political Obligation," 125. Also relevant here are von Leyden's remarks in his introduction to *Locke's Essays on the Law of Nature*: "The reasons why Locke appears elusive whenever he broaches a subject connected with the name of Hobbes are not far to seek. In cases where he agreed with Hobbes and borrowed his views... he could not have easily acknowledged his debt for fear of being decried as a Hobbist. In cases where he argued against him, the questions under discussion had won such notoriety in connexion with the controversies around Hobbes that to mention his name would have been superfluous... anyone attempting to study the relation between Locke and

Hobbes would have to view it in its proper historical setting, against the seventeenth-century battle against Hobbes" (37–8).

23. Gay, *Enlightenment*, 314.

24. Gay, *Enlightenment*, 99.

25. See, e.g., Mossner, *Life*, Chps. 12, 25, 38.

26. See my discussion in chapter 2 as it relates specifically to the early reception of the *Treatise*, and in chapter 4 as it relates to the climate of intolerance in Scotland in the early eighteenth century.

27. Gay, *Enlightenment*, 402.

28. Boswell, *Journal of a Tour of the Hebrides*; the entry for these remarks is dated 30 September 1773. For more details see my "Hobbist Tory."

29. Hume's remarks, not surprisingly, show some sign of being influenced by Bayle's *Dictionary* article on Hobbes. Like Hume, Bayle speaks highly of Hobbes's personal character.

30. The similarities between Hobbes's and Hume's remarks on the unscientific character of moral and political philosophy is quite striking. For Hobbes's views see especially *Human Nature*, 13–3 (in *English Works*, 4:71–3; see also *English Works*, 1:7–10). For Hume's views see TA, 1/645: "Most of the philosophers of antiquity..."; and LET, 1:13, no. 1: "Every one, who is acquainted"; and "I found that the moral philosophy transmitted to us..." (p. 16).

31. On Hobbes's views concerning scientific method see McNeilly, *Anatomy of Leviathan*, chap. 4.

32. As also noted by Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 188.

33. Noxon, *Hume's Philosophical Development*, 28, 188; and Capaldi, *David Hume*, 72. On this matter see Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 196–7, who argues that it is Bacon, as much as Newton, who is the model for Hume's understanding of scientific method.

34. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, introduction, 3.

35. As the editors remark: "no single writer or philosophical tradition can be relied upon to provide a comprehensive key to [Hume's] thought. Hume was an independent intellect struggling to come to grips with a wide range of complex philosophical problems and systems.... [Readers] should be wary of commentators who claim to unlock the secrets of Hume's thought by reference to one or two authors or to a single intellectual tradition." (Editors' introduction. T, I 12.) See the similar remarks in Norton, *Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2–3.

36. As I make clear in the chapters that follow, there is a rich array of thinkers whom we must call on to make complete sense of the wider significance of Hume's Hobbist project.

37. Some commentators maintain that Hobbes is of limited importance for Hume's philosophical project in the *Treatise* simply on the ground that these two thinkers diverge on some key issues (e.g. egoism, philosophical method, etc.). (See, e.g., Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment*; vol. 2, *Shaftesbury to Hume*, 245.) As I have explained, however, there is no reason to suppose that because Hume modeled his project in the *Treatise* after Hobbes's "science of man" there cannot be any important points of disagreement between them. The relevant problem we face is to identify carefully the issues where they do and do not agree, allowing for the possibility of nuance and complexity even on the specific issues (e.g., egoism, philosophical method, etc.).

38. Our situation is like that of a person who has been shown the picture on a box containing a jigsaw puzzle. With the picture before us, we can see how the whole puzzle ought to look when it is all put together; but we still have the (complex and detailed) task of sifting through all the pieces to see how this can be done. Needless to say, while some parts are easy to identify and it is obvious where they should go, other parts appear not to belong and are hard to fit in.

39. See, e.g., Moss, "Thomas Hobbes's Influence on David Hume," 589: "In 1985 Russell established that Hobbes was one of the most important influences on Hume. In as much as some of Hume's strongest admirers seldom mention Hobbes at all, Russell's argument now opens a new chapter in Hume scholarship." Moss applies this hypothesis to the interpretation of Hume's views on the subject of public choice economics (a subject I do not discuss in this book).

40. In the final analysis, what Hobbes's critics particularly objected to was his attempt to deliver is a *secular* account of moral and political life. As they saw it, Hobbes's project rests on philosophical foundations that are entirely inconsistent with the fundamental metaphysical and moral doctrines of the Christian religion. Hobbes's critics (e.g. Clarke) focused primarily on four doctrines: skepticism regarding natural and revealed religion; materialism and naturalism; necessitarianism; and an Epicurean account of morals (i.e. relativism, hedonism, etc.). Given the Hobbist nature of Hume's project in the *Treatise*, the obvious question we need to ask is where does Hume's philosophy stand on these important matters?

Chapter 7. Atheism under Cover

1. Noxon, *Hume's Philosophical Development*, 28, 188; and Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 20; Capaldi, *David Hume*, 35–9, 72.

2. Tacitus, *The Histories*, I.

3. Translation by Nicholas Rowe. I will discuss the particular significance of Rowe's translation further below.

4. Hume's remarks in the first *Enquiry* seem to suggest that Tacitus enjoyed a reputation as something of a freethinker. In the famous section on miracles, Hume describes Tacitus as a writer "noted for candour and veracity . . . and so free from any tendency to credulity, that he even lies under the contrary imputation, of atheism and profaneness" (E, 10.25/123). Bayle's *Dictionary* article "Tacitus" (in Desmaizeaux, trans., *Dictionary*, 5: 279–84) would likely have been among Hume's sources on Tacitus's reputation. In this article Bayle refers to Tacitus's epigram (note D). In the same article Bayle mentions the "atheistic" reputation of both Tacitus and Lucan (note H).

5. The affinities between Hobbes and Spinoza are, as noted, particularly obvious in the *Theological-Political Treatise*.

6. "The *Theological-Political Treatise* was certainly the one book of Spinoza's that had many readers in England in the eighteenth century" (Pollock, *Spinoza*, 123). See also Colie, "Spinoza in England"; Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 48–53; and Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, chap. 33. The influence of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* was still felt in England in the early nineteenth century. For example, in 1819 Rev. George Burges says that "infidels" use the *Theological-Political Treatise* as their "text book" with a view to "unsettling the common creed and common polity of the state." Among the infidels Burges cites in this context are Collins, Shaftesbury, Toland, Tindal, and Hume (*Reflections on the Present Spirit of the Times*, 152–3).

7. Here I follow Elwes's translation.

8. "The main thesis of the *Theological-Political Treatise* as summed up by the author is that 'in a free commonwealth it should be lawful for every man to think what he will and speak what he thinks'" (Pollock, *Spinoza*, 94). Note that Spinoza repeats this pungent epigram in another important context: namely, at the end of his summary of his argument in the preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise* (*Chief Works*, 1:11; compare also 1:265).

9. In the first *Enquiry* (EU, 11.2–5/131), Hume presents a discussion of this issue (i.e. liberty of thought and speech). In the preceding section of the *Enquiry* he discusses miracles—a subject that is also discussed in the *Theological-Political Treatise* (also titled "Of Miracles"). On both these topics Hume takes up positions that closely accord with those of Spinoza.

10. Cited in Mossner, *Life*, 120.

11. Grose, "History of the Editions," in Hume, *Essays*, 1:40. See also, e.g., Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 325; and Popkin, "Hume and Spinoza," 66, 99.

12. Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 163–4.

13. For a long time, little serious consideration was given to Spinoza's influence on Hume's thought. More recently, however, a few interesting articles on Hume's debt to Spinoza, especially as it relates to the *Ethics*, have appeared. See, e.g., Klever, "Hume Contra Spinoza?"; and Baier, "David Hume, Spinozist." Both Klever and Baier argue that Spinoza's influence on Hume was considerable and that there are significant affinities between their views. Suffice it to say that this is what we *ought* to expect from a philosopher who pursued a Hobbist project with a Hobbist title and a Spinozist epigram on his title page.

14. On the relationship between Hume and Andrew Ramsay see Mossner, *Life*, 93–6, 104–5, 626–7.

15. Henderson, *Chevalier Ramsay*, 215.

16. Clarke, *Works*, 2:532.

17. Halyburton, *Natural Religion Insufficient*, 52–3.

18. "Spinoza's [*Theological-Political Treatise*] provoked some of the most violent reactions to any published work of the seventeenth century.... Hostile reaction began in the United Provinces immediately after the work was published"; Gregory, introduction to Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 27.

19. Clive, "The Social Background of the Scottish Renaissance," 228–44.

20. For further details see Jacobson's introduction to Trench and Gordon, *English Libertine Heritage*.

21. Hume had an established interest in the subject of civil and political freedom. Hume says in his introduction to the *Treatise* that "the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and of liberty" (T, intro. 7/xvii). More important, in 1741, not long after the *Treatise* appeared, Hume published his *Essays*, one of which was entitled "Of Civil Liberty" (originally entitled "Of Liberty and Despotism") and another "Of the Liberty of the Press." Hume's defense of liberty, however, is more guarded and qualified than the position developed by radical Whigs such as Gordon.

22. See, e.g., Colie, "Spinoza and the English Deists," 44: "it is Spinoza's strengths, rather than his faults, that seem to have impressed John Toland."

23. Toland explains this distinction in greater length in "Clidophorus," the second part of *Tetradymus* (London, 1720); see esp. 94: "We ought in the meanwhile..." Toland's use of "double doctrine" is mentioned with (characteristic) derision by Warburton, *Divine Legation*, 3.2 in *Works*, 3:28–9). David Berman provides a useful account of Toland's views on esoteric communication and the way it was employed by his contemporaries: "Deism, Immortality, and the Art of Theological Lying."

24. Toland refers to the members of his "Socratic Society" as both "Pantheists" and members of the "brotherhood."

25. Toland, *Pantheisticon*, 108. It is perhaps worth noting that the epigram from Tacitus continued to be used in the next century for related free-thinking purposes. See, e.g., Marx, "Comments on Prussian Censorship," in *Writings of the Young Marx*, 92.

26. *Pantheisticon* was not translated and published in English until 1751. It first appeared in printed form in Latin in 1720. Toland, apparently, printed only a relatively small number of these works, and they were distributed largely to his friends (as one might expect, given the practical advice contained). Desmaizeaux, or someone in his circle, could have made a copy of *Pantheisiticon* available to Hume. Hume would, in any case, have been familiar with the existence of *Pantheisticon*, as well as the general nature of its contents, through Desmaizeaux's "Life of Toland" (in Toland, *Collection of Several Pieces*, lxxviii.) It is also

possible that Hume came across *Pantheisticon* in France, where copies were widely circulated. (Simms, "John Toland," 318.)

27. See, e.g., Ahl, *Lucan*, chap. 7. Ahl describes Lucan's Cato as "the oracle of civilized man, the wise man *par excellence*. But he is also something more. He is the last repository of Roman greatness, the shrine of *libertas*" (266).

28. In a variety of contexts, Hume points out the importance of models of virtue for moral reflection and practice. See, e.g., "A noble emulation"; ESY, (135); and "Let a man propose..." (170); "Frame the model..." (EM, 5.10/216); and "A philosopher might..." (EM, 9.2/270). In the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*, Hume contrasts the (differing) virtuous characters of Cato and Caesar (T, 3.3.4.2/607–8; EM, app. 4.6/316). See also Hume's contrast between the Christian Pascal and the pagan Diogenes considered "as models of imitation" (EM, A Dialogue 54–6/342–3).

29. Arnold, *Roman Stoicism*, 396, refers to this passage and notes that "Lucan emphasizes the pantheistic interpretation of the divine nature." On Stoic cosmology and natural philosophy see Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 147–78. Long says: "Fundamentally, Stoic theology is pantheist" (150).

30. These core themes in Cato's speech suggest that Cato could serve as a "model of virtue" along the lines described in Spinoza's *Ethics* (see esp. preface to pt. 4).

31. Among the sources who discuss Cato's life and character, Hume and his contemporaries would have looked to Plutarch and Sallust, and Montaigne's essay "Of Cato the Younger" (*Complete Essays*, no. 37 (1:233–7). Montaigne follows Lucan (and Plutarch) in saying that Cato "was truly a model chosen by nature to show how far human virtue and constancy could go." A particularly hostile account of Cato, as being both vain and foolish (i.e. "proud blindness"), is presented in Malebranche, *Search*, 2.3.4.

32. "In England under the reign of Queen Anne a remarkable secular interest in Cato developed.... [I]n early eighteenth century England [Cato] was used as a symbol of political 'liberty' as well as moral virtue.... The English Augustan writers particularly admired the Roman Republic and Cato provided a focus for their neo-classical ideals." Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 240–1.

33. The manner of Cato's death was a topic of some considerable discussion and comment at this time. Cato committed suicide rather than surrender and submit himself to Caesar's rule. The problem of suicide was, of course, widely debated in eighteenth-century Britain. Sprott notes that at this time "Cato's death still marked a battle-ground in the debate about suicide" (*English Debate on Suicide*, 114, and more generally, chap. 4). Christian moralists, for example Clarke (*Works*, 2:623), opposed suicide as an immoral act. Hume, famously, took a different view in his essay "On Suicide." (Hume, indeed, specifically refers to Cato in a footnote at the end of this essay: ESY, 588–9.) The important point, for present purposes, is that the debate on suicide was itself firmly embedded in the wider controversy concerning Christian morality and metaphysics—the significance of which I will explain.

34. For further details on the impact of *Freethinking* in Britain and abroad, see Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:170–9; and O'Higgins, *Collins*, chap. 6.

35. Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 2:346 ("Misc. Refl.," chap. 3).

36. Collins, *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 141–7.

37. Rowe published his translation of the ninth book of *Pharsalia* in 1710. The complete translation did not appear until 1718.

38. Collins, *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 141.

39. The relevance of Cato's speech at the oracle of Jupiter Ammon for Spinoza's pantheistic metaphysics would have been evident to those who read Bayle's *Dictionary* article on "Spinoza" (as Hume did). In note A of this article, Bayle observes that Spinoza was "the first to reduce Atheism into a system, and formed it into a body of doctrine...but otherwise his

opinion is not new." Bayle goes on to catalogue a number of other thinkers who anticipate his doctrine. His list includes Strato, Seneca, and Cato, as presented by Lucan in book 9 of *Pharsalia*. Bayle quotes several of the lines cited earlier, beginning with "Is not the seat of Jove, earth, sea, and air" (note A of Bayle's article "Spinoza" is reprinted in Beller and Lee, *Selections*, but not in Popkin, *Selections*).

40. Collins, *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 32.

41. Collins, *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 36–7.

42. Collins, *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 39–40. In this passage, Collins also refers to the "useless and unintelligible Speculations" of such superstitious individuals. A footnote suggests that he has Clarke's Boyle Lectures primarily in mind.

43. Bentley [Phileleutherus], *Remarks* (London, 1713).

44. Bentley, *Remarks*, 16 (*Works*, 3:302).

45. Bentley, *Remarks*, 14 (*Works*, 3:300).

46. Bentley, *Remarks*, 46 (*Works*, 3:332). There are interesting parallels and overlapping themes between Collins's *Discourse of Free-Thinking and* Toland's *Pantheisticon*. The metaphysical and moral outlook of Toland's Pantheistic brotherhood, for example, is elegantly and neatly summed up in the form of Cato's speech at the oracle. Similarly, in *Pantheisticon* Toland reiterates, in several different contexts, the central point of Collins's *Discourse of Free-Thinking*: namely, freedom of thought is not to be confused with moral licentiousness. "[Pantheists] not only steadfastly assent and hold to a Liberty of Thought, but also of Action, detesting, at the same time, all Licentiousness" (*Pantheisticon* 57—compare 84 and 94). In his "Life of Toland" (ixxxiii), Desmaizeaux quotes a passage from Toland's "Mangoneutes," the last tract contained in *Tetradymus*: "Civil Liberty and Religious Toleration, as the most desirable things in this World, the most conducing to peace, plenty, knowledge, and every kind of happiness, have been the two main objects of all my writings. But as by Liberty I did not mean Licentiousness, so by Toleration I did not mean Indifference, and much less an Approbation of every Religion that I cou'd suffer." Given that Toland and Collins were close friends and collaborators, these parallels and affinities between their works are in no way surprising.

47. It appeared in a completed form for the first time in the eighth edition of 1743.

48. Bentley, *Remarks*, 7th ed. (London, 1737), 292–4. Details on the problems surrounding the publication of the seventh edition are supplied at the end of the eighth edition (Bentley, *Works*, 3:473–4).

49. J. H. Broome, "Une Collaboration: Anthony Collins et Desmaizeaux." Broome's claims are discussed in O'Higgins, *Collins*, 237–41. O'Higgins documents in some detail the close relations between Desmaizeaux and Collins.

50. Bentley and others observed that Hobbes's writings served as the "Bible" or "Scripture" for atheists and freethinkers (see chap. 6, note 16). Clearly Hume's epigrams—with their links to Spinoza, Toland, Collins, and Gordon (i.e. "Cato")—are entirely consistent with this.

Chapter 8. *Blind Men before a Fire*

1. Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, 51. See also Stroud, *Hume*, 17.

2. Kemp Smith suggests that Hume's use of the term "perception" follows Descartes and Hutcheson (*Philosophy of David Hume*, 105).

3. Hume gives the example of imagining a golden mountain at both (T, 1.2.2.8/32, and EU, 2.5/19). This example also appears in Hobbes's *Human Nature*, 3.4.

4. Hume's example of "that impression which strikes our eyes in sunshine" resurfaces later at T, 1.4.2.24/199. Compare these passages with Hobbes's observation concerning "the great impression made in sense: As from gazing upon the Sun, the impression leaves an image of the Sun before our eyes a long time after" (*Leviathan*, 2.4).

5. See, e.g., *Leviathan*, chaps. 4 and 5.

6. Locke, *Essay*, 119–32 (2.2–7).

7. See Hobbes's parallel distinction in his account of the mechanism that produces the passions, on the basis of sense experience and the pleasures/pains that arise from this: *Human Nature*, 7; *Leviathan*, 6.

8. Locke, *Essay*, 159–60 (2.11.9–11).

9. Locke, *Essay*, 596 (4.7.9).

10. Berkeley, *Principles*, introduction, 10, 13–7.

11. Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 1.2.9; *Human Nature*, 5.6–7; *Leviathan*, 4.6–9. The example of a triangle, which Hume cites at T, 1.1.7.8; 1.3.1.7/21, 72, also appears in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 4.9. Laird observes (*Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 60) that Hume's views on this subject owe more to Hobbes than Berkeley.

12. Hobbes, *Human Nature*, 3; *Leviathan*, 2.

13. Hobbes, *Human Nature*, 4 and 8.3; *Leviathan*, 3.

14. Further discussion of Hume's debt to Hobbes's system of ideas in these respects is provided in, e.g., Stewart, *Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy*, 84; Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 75–6; Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 38–9, 45–6; and especially Connon, "Examination of Hume's *Treatise*," 4:5, 6.

15. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 3.12.

16. Hobbes, *Human Nature*, 11.2; *Leviathan*, 11.25; *De Cive*, 15.14. (Compare *Human Nature*, 6.1.)

17. Hobbes, Objections, no. 5, in Descartes, *Writings*, 2:127. See also Objection no. 10 (Descartes, *Writings*, 2:130–3), where Hobbes questions particular attributes and the ideas associated with them.

18. For references see note 16. See also Montaigne, *Essays*, 2:290 (*Apology for Raymond Sebond* ["The Senses are Inadequate"]).

19. Hobbes, *De Cive*, 15.14.

20. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 31.13–33; *De Cive*, 15.14. Hobbes does allow, however, that since God is "the cause of the world" and "first cause of all causes," we may conclude that he is both eternal and omnipotent, but nothing more can be concluded about his nature.

21. Harris, *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:407. The full passage is cited in chap. 5 (at note 20).

22. Descartes, *Writings*, 2:31.

23. In the Fifth Meditation, Descartes advances the ontological argument for God's existence, which also proceeds from our idea of God. Descartes's first proof, however, is based on the assumption that only God can be the cause of our idea of God. Malebranche argues that by the word "God" we mean infinitely perfect being, and that since nothing finite can represent the infinite, we know God must exist (Malebranche, *Selections*, 239–42/*Dialogues*, 8; and compare 42–5, 77–85, 159–67/*Search*, 3.2.6; eluc. 6; *Dialogues*, 2).

24. See esp. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, chaps. 4 and 5.

25. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 2:515.

26. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:285.

27. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 2:487.

28. Clarke, Works, 2:537.

29. According to Clarke, although we have "no image" of God's infinite substance, "we perceive its Existence by its Effects; and the Necessity of that Existence, by the Necessity of certain Attributes; and by other Arguments of Reason and Inference" (*Works*, 2:753; and compare 2:538).

30. Locke, *Essay*, 314 (2.23.33).

31. Locke, *Essay*, 445 (3.6.11).

32. Jeffner points out that "one of the main theological questions in eighteenth-century England was that of the idea of God" and that "the deistic controversy was in part a dispute concerning the concept of God." He also points out that this debate "in view of its theological importance has been accorded too little attention" (*Butler and Hume*, 175). Jeffner provides some useful observations on this debate, particularly as it relates to Toland and his Irish critics (i.e. Browne and King).

33. This takes a step well beyond Locke's intentions in the *Essay* (687, 694 [4.17.23; 4.18.7, 8]), where he specifically argues that while religion contains nothing contrary to reason, some doctrines may be *above* reason (e.g. the resurrection of Christ). Toland's views also contrast with those of Boyle, who argues in his *Discourse of Things above Reason* "that it is allowable to contemplate and even to discourse of things above reason, since we may have some conceptions of them, though they be but dim and imperfect" (239–41).

34. Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 58.

35. Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 63.

36. Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious*, 84. On this see Berman, "Irish Freethinker," 224: "In *Christianity Not Mysterious* Toland applied the Lockean theory of meaning to religious mystery, arguing that since mysteries such as the Holy Trinity do not stand for distinct ideas, Christianity must either employ meaningless doctrines, or else be nonmysterious. Thus the Christian mysteries were for Toland as meaningless as 'Blictri'—a traditional nonsense word—because like 'Blictri' they do not stand for any distinct ideas."

37. Browne, *Procedure, Limits and Extent of Human Understanding*, 29. See also Browne's related remarks, "Deists and Freethinkers of all ranks and degrees..." (38–40).

38. Browne, *Procedure, Limits and Extent of Human Understanding*, 2. Berman describes the "common theory" this group of Irish theologians defendeds as "theological representationalism" and suggests that it was "the most wide, influential and central theory in Irish philosophy" ("Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment in Irish Philosophy," 155). See also Berman's introduction to King, *Sermon on Predestination*.

39. Browne, *Procedure, Limits and Extent of Human Understanding*, 11–29; *Things Divine and Supernatural Conceived by Analogy with Things Natural and Human*, 140, 143, 442, 449, 452, 491.

40. Browne, *Procedure, Limits and Extent of Human Understanding*, 3–4; Browne is quoting here from a passage of his earlier *Letter in Answer to Christianity Not Mysterious*, 41. Berman observes that the "similitude of the blind man is more than a mere illustration. It is the root metaphor, as it were, of Irish philosophy. And it is hardly an accident that the Molyneux problem, with which it is clearly associated, was very much an Irish problem. It was the Irishman Molyneux who first asked whether a blind man made to see would recognize by sight alone objects which he had formerly known only by touch" ("Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment in Irish Philosophy," 154–5).

41. Synge, appendix to *A Gentleman's Religion*, 224–5.

42. King, *Sermon on Predestination*, 12, 13.

43. Collins, *A Vindication of the Divine Attributes*, 18–20.

44. Collins is yet another contributor to this debate who uses the illustration of a blind man who is unable to frame any idea of colors. See his *Essay on the Use of Reason*, 7–8, 22. When we talk to a blind man about colors, Collins says, "the blind man's assent is confined to this; that the words red or white stand for a general undetermin'd Idea of something, to which he adds a general undetermin'd Idea of Relation, without any Ideas of the thing or its particular relation.... The misapprehensions about this matter have been the occasion of a great deal of wrangling in the Controversy of Mysterys."

45. See Collins, *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, 46–52.

46. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 2. See Berkeley's reply to Collins's view on this subject; *Alciphron*, 7.1–15 in *Works*, 3:286–309.

47. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 2.

48. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 4.

49. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 5.

50. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 6. Toland makes the same point in *Christianity Not Mysterious*.

51. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 7.

52. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 8. Collins goes on to give an example of this: Malebranche's "opinion of seeing all things in God." He also quotes Bayle's comment that after reading Malebranche's books "he less comprehends his notions from the last book than ever" (*Human Liberty*, 10; Bayle's remarks are cited from a letter to Desmaizeaux).

53. This is, of course, the position of "deists and freethinkers" as Browne describes it in *Procedure, Limits and Extent of Human Understanding* (as cited in note 37).

54. Law, notes in *King, Origin of Evil*, 67.

55. Law, notes in King, *Origin of Evil*, 68.

56. Berkeley, *Alciphron*, 4, 21, 22 (in *Works*, 3:169–71); and compare Berkeley's remarks in his *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, 6, where the doctrine of analogy is also criticized (in *Works*, 1:254).

57. Browne, *Things Divine and Supernatural*, 20, 22, 408–25. Browne mentions the specific example (413) of a blind man who is trying to conceive the color of scarlet by analogy with the sound of a trumpet. The same example appears in Locke, *Essay*, 126, 425 (2.5.5; 3.4.11) and Hume, T, 1.3.14.27/168.

58. Jackson, *Answer to Things Divine and Supernatural*, 5.

59. Jackson, *Answer to Things Divine and Supernatural*, 28–9.

60. Jackson, *Answer to Things Divine and Supernatural*, 6.

61. Although the writings of Hobbes, Cudworth, Clarke, Locke, and Toland are generally familiar to us today and the works of Browne, Synge, Law, and Jackson are regarded as more "marginal," it is important to keep in mind that in Hume's context this group were widely read and discussed. We know from the "Early Memoranda," for example, that Hume was reading Law's edition of King's *Origin of Evil*, where he would have come across Law's discussion of Browne's *Procedure, Limits and Extent of Human Understanding*. Regarding Jackson's work and influence, Hume's immediate neighbors in the vicinity of Chirnside (i.e. Baxter and Dudgeon) were involved in published exchanges with him. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that Jackson's work was well known in this context. Quite apart from anything else, these observations make clear that Hume would be familiar with the debate concerning the doctrine of "theological representionalism" as his contemporaries were debating it.

62. Compare Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 36. Laird suggests that a musical example (i.e. deriving an idea of an intermediate note) would have better served Hume's purposes. This suggestion assumes, however, that Hume does not attach particular significance to the specific example of blindness and ideas of color.

63. Descartes, *Writings*, 1:56–7.

64. At T, 1.3.14.10/160, Hume observes that "if every idea be deriv'd from an impression, the idea of a deity proceeds from the same origin." Hume uses this principle, however, to show that we have no idea of God's (infinite) power.

65. One obvious gap in Hume's account of our idea of God, in this context, is that he does not mention our idea of (active) power. As I will explain, in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* Hume directly criticizes Locke's suggestion that we can derive an idea of power from reflection on our own will. Hume's omission of power from his list of God's attributes, therefore, is not without significance.

66. Hume's remarks to Mure about prayer are occasioned by William Leechman's *Sermon on Prayer*, which had just been published.

67. See esp. D, Pts. II–V (43–71). See also NHR, where Hume explains the evolution and permutations of our idea(s) of God(s): particularly NHR, 141 (sect.3), where Hume points out that there "is an universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object those qualities with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious."

68. The most obvious example of this is the "charges" leveled at Hume by the author of the *Specimen* in 1745. Hume's critic quotes passages from both T, 1.3.14.10 and T, 1.4.5.31 and goes on to charge Hume with "Errors Concerning God's Being the First Cause, and Prime Mover of the Universe" (LG, 12–3, 18). See also Beattie's observations (*Essay on Truth*, 164, 308–16, 320–2) on Hume's views on power as presented in the *Treatise*.

Chapter 9. *"Almighty Space"*

1. This trend of relative neglect as it concerns Hume's discussion of space and time is particularly noticeable in more recent work.

2. This is, for example, Rosenberg's general assessment: "Hume and the Philosophy of Science," 82–4. Compare Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 64: "Hume commentators often say that his talents were unsuited to an adequate discussion of space, time and mathematics in their relation to physics."

3. See, e.g., Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing;* and Baker, *English Space and Time Theories*.

4. In the discussion that follows, I will focus my attention on the issue of space and will not examine the issue of time in detail. However, my observations concerning Hume's opposition to Clarke on the subject of space apply, by parity of reasoning, to the issue of time.

5. Koyré and Cohen, "Newton and the Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence," 63. On the Newton-Leibniz "war" see Hall, *Philosophers at War*.

6. Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 247–48. Grant observes that Clarke "was in fact the storm center of disputes about the existence of God and space in the first half of the eighteenth century" (416n25).

7. For relevant background see Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, esp. chaps. 5 and 6; Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, chap. 8; Baker, *English Space and Time Theories*.

8. See Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 90: "We must remember however that behind More's dispute with Descartes over the nature of space lies the spectre of Hobbist materialism, since More believed that if Descartes were correct in affirming that spirit is unextended he would succeed in refining spirit out of existence altogether, and would thus play directly into the hands of Hobbes."

9. Newton was, famously, very evasive and secretive about his theological views, and left the public defense of doctrines to which he privately subscribed to Clarke and other disciples. Locke, in his *Essay*, accepts most of More's critique of Cartesian views on matter and space, including the identification of space with God's immensity (*Essay*, 179–80; 196–8 [2.13.26; 2.15.2–4, 12]). He is unwilling, however, to declare whether "space void of Body, be substance or accident" (*Essay*, 174 [2.13.17]), and to this extent the status of infinite void space is left uncertain. See Baker, *English Space and Time Theories*, chap. 5; Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 238–39.

10. Clarke, *Works*, 2:532–33, 537, 585.

11. The classical statement of the "atheistic" doctrine of the eternal existence of matter is found in Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, bk. 1 (on matter and space).

12. Clarke, *Works*, 2:530.

13. Clarke, *Works*, 2:531.

14. Clarke, *Works*, 2:531–2. The debate about the vacuum, and the role of the experimental method in proving its existence, was a major theme of seventeenth-century science. Two of the major protagonists in this debate were Hobbes and Robert Boyle. For interesting background see Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*.

15. Clarke, *Works*, 2:532.

16. Clarke, *Works*, 2:527; compare 2:753. Clarke and Newton generally avoid using the term "attribute" to describe space because of its Spinozistic connotations. See Koyré and Cohen, "Newton and the Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence," 93n70; Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 413n94; and the passage from Desmaizeaux's 1720 edition of the *Correspondence* (Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, xxviii–xxix).

17. Compare Clarke, *Works*, 3:908.

18. Clarke, *Works*, 2:753.

19. Clarke, *Works*, 2:753; compare 2:538, 541.

20. Clarke, *Works*, 2:537–8; compare 2:525–6, 582.

21. Clarke, *Works*, 2:752; compare 2:528.

22. Clarke, *Works*, 2:743. Compare, however, Locke's (more cautious) remarks at *Essay*, 173 (2.13.16–7): "Either this Space is something or nothing..."

23. Clarke, *Works*, 2:745.

24. Clarke, *Works*, 2:749; and also in Butler, *Works*, 2:355.

25. Another critic of the view that space is a property or mode is Isaac Watts, in his *Philosophical Essays* (1734). Space cannot be nothing, Watts says, because it has "real properties." Nor can space be a mode of being, "because it seems to carry in it an idea that subsists of itself." This drives us to the conclusion that space is an uncreated substance and, therefore, "space is God." However, Watts expresses considerable discomfort that "the great God, in any views or aspect, [can] ever appear to be so thin, so subtle, so empty and unsubstantial a thing as to look like nothing" (Watts, *Works*, 8:339–41).

26. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 31. Clarke closely follows Newton's position in the General Scholium (Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 167).

27. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 47; compare 34; Clarke, *Works*, 2:539–41, 569, 756–8. Berkeley argued that if we accept the doctrine of "real space" then we face the "dangerous dilemma": either "Real Space is God, or else there is something beside God which is eternal, uncreated, infinite, indivisible, immutable" (*Principles*, 117). The same dilemma is presented by Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Zeno of Elea," note I (Popkin, *Selections*, 380). Clarke tries to find a way between the horns of this dilemma.

28. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 104, 108; compare Clarke, *Works*, 2:740, 745. See also Locke, *Essay*, 179 (2.13.26).

29. Although Clarke variously describes space as an "attribute," "property," "consequence" and so on, these terms should not be regarded as equivalent. For relevant criticism see James Ferguson, *Clarke*, 99.

30. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 25, 38, 68.

31. Clarke, *Works*, 2:540–1. Compare Locke, *Essay*, 201–3 (2.15.9–10). Locke's claim that space is "justly reckoned among our simple ideas" was a point of considerable controversy. Locke tries to reconcile his claim that space is both simple and has parts by arguing that the parts of space are all of the same kind and are not separable even in thought.

32. Clarke, *Works*, 2:563; and compare 2:541, 561; and Newton's view at Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 162–4.

33. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 39.

34. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 26; compare 63.

35. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 71; compare 64, 70.

36. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 25–6; my emphasis: compare 42, 64, 69–71.

37. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 70, 71.

38. Clarke, *Works*, 2:752; compare 2:528). Compare Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Zeno of Elea," note I: "But if it is contradictory that nothing, or nonentity, have extension or any other quality..." (Popkin, *Selections*, 381).

39. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 48, 52, 108, 120; compare 104, 120n; Clarke, *Works*, 2:753.

40. An important part of Leibniz's criticism of Clarke is based on his use of the principles of sufficient reason and the identity of indiscernibles (Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 15–6, 26–7, 17, 38–9). I will not, however, discuss this aspect of the debate.

41. Clarke, *Works*, 2:756–7.

42. See, in particular, Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, chap. 14; and Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism*, chap. 3. Both Kemp Smith and Fogelin place great emphasis on the relevance of Bayle for Hume's discussion of space, although neither commentator makes any reference to Clarke (or Leibniz).

43. Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, chap. 5; and Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, chap. 3. Hendel and Laird point out that Clarke's views on space are an important part of the background for Hume's discussion, but they provide no account of how it relates to the details of Clarke's argument for the existence of God. Ferguson, however, does give a sketch of this in *Clarke*, 112–3.

44. This claim will be further documented in the chapters that follow.

45. Hume's contemporaries would be well aware of these related considerations through "popular" accounts of Newton's philosophy, such as Voltaire's *Elements of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy* (London, 1738), chap. 17: "[He] who maintains the Impossibility of a Void, ought not, if he reasons consequentially, to admit any other God than Matter. On the contrary, if there be a Void, then Matter is not a necessary self-existing Being, consequently, it was created; consequently, there is a God" (184).

46. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 25.

47. Accounts of these debates can be found in Ferguson, *Clarke*, 22–121; Baker, *English Space and Time Theories*, 58–67; Grant, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 416–17n425; and John Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, chap. 4.

48. Baker, *English Space and Time Theories*, chap. 6; see esp. the remarks at pp.4–5 concerning the religious dimension of the British debate and the particular significance of Clarke's views during the 1730s.

49. Baxter's allegiance to the doctrine of absolute space is apparent in his *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, where he claims that "when we dispute Space out of existence, we endeavour to obscure one of the clearest ideas we have of necessary existence.... I am apt to think every man finds in his own breast that this is impossible to be effected" (2:350–1n). Baxter's strong commitment to the doctrine of absolute space also plays a prominent role in his (posthumous) *Evidence of Reason*. Beyond this, Baxter wrote an (unpublished) dialogue called "Histor" that takes up issues in the *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*. In general, Baxter's entire philosophical orientation is built around "the principles of natural religion and philosophy" (i.e. the subtitle of the *Correspondence*), and his sympathies are all on the side of Clarke and Newton.

50. Although he gives no specific reference, the relevant passages are: *Works*, 2:530–3; 3:908.

51. Although it is widely recognized that Demea represents Clarke's position in *Dialogues* 9, few (if any) commentators have noted the relevance of T, 1.2 for it.

52. Mossner, *Life*, 118–20; and compare 111–3. Before this, in 1737, Hume had tried (unsuccessfully) to meet with Butler.

53. Clarke, *Works*, 2:735–50. Also reprinted in Butler, *Works*, 2:332–57.

54. *Recueil de diverses pieces sur la philosophie*.

55. Compare Lucretuis, *Nature of the Universe*, 44: "there is an ultimate point in the visible objects which represents the smallest thing that can be seen…"

56. In the context of his explanation of this error Hume observes "that 'tis usual for men to use words for ideas, and to talk instead of thinking in their reasonings" (T, 1.2.5. 21/61–2).

57. Although there are important points of resemblance between Clarke's effort to prove the existence of God from our ideas of space and time and Descartes's effort to prove the existence of God from our idea of God (*Meditations*, 3), there are also significant differences. Descartes, for example, claims that our idea of God "is utterly clear and distinct." Clarke argues, by contrast, that we know space is "not a mere idea" because "no idea of space, can possibly be framed larger than finite; and yet reason demonstrates that 'tis a contradiction for space itself not to be *actually* infinite" (Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 120n; my emphasis). For Clarke, it seems, the *inadequacy* of our *idea* of space constitutes evidence of its *real existence* (i.e. we know space is infinite and all our ideas are finite, hence space is not a mere idea). Hume's views, obviously, stand opposed to both Descartes's and Clarke's arguments.

58. Ferguson points out that for Hume any argument for the existence of God, based on speculation about absolute space is as uncertain and inconclusive as its basis, and for this reason, Ferguson says, Hume does not discuss, or even mention, Clarke's proof (*Clarke*, 113). While this is true, it may mislead. Hume's audience would (easily) recognize the significance of Hume's views about space for Clarke's proof, making it unnecessary for Hume to point explicitly to Clarke's argument in this context.

59. Clarke, *Works*, 2:753.

60. Hume's "separability principle" is obviously relevant to this issue. According to Hume, "whatever objects are separable are also distinguishable, and…whatever objects are distinguishable are also different" (T, 1.1.7.3/18). Hume makes use of this principle as it applies to our idea of space and time (T, 1.2.1.3; 1, 2, 3.10; 1.2.4.3/27, 36, 40) to show that our ideas of space and time are always distinguishable into parts.

61. Hume, however, accepts "that an object may exist, and yet be no where," although this maxim "is condemn'd by several metaphysicians [e.g. Clarke]" (T, 1.4.5.10/235). Objects and perceptions derived from senses other than sight and touch, on this view, since they "exist without any place or extension," cannot relate to other objects by "conjunction in place" (T, 1.4.5.12/237).

62. Clarke, *Works*, 2:541; compare 525, 538.

63. As we have noted, Clarke is firmly opposed to the empiricist epistemology that Hume employs against the claims of natural religion. In general, the Newtonian philosophy is committed to the view that in so far as space is known it is grasped, not by the senses and imagination, but by the understanding or reason. It is evident, therefore, that the ontological issues that divide Hume and Clarke reflect divergent epistemological commitments.

64. In general, Hume's view of the finite and limited nature of our ideas systematically cuts off all claims to knowledge of God's (infinite) attributes. This skeptical theme is apparent in other parts of the *Treatise*. See, e.g., Hume claim that "we have no idea of a being endow'd with…infinite power" (T, 1.4.5.31/248; my emphasis; and compare Clarke, *Works*, 2:553–4).

65. Hume's skepticism about knowledge of the infinite in relation to the claims of natural religion has many sources apart from Hobbes. See, e.g., Pascal, *Pensees*, 15 ("Transition from knowledge of man to knowledge of God").

66. Clarke, *Works*, 2:525; 541; 753; 3:761–3; Compare Locke, *Essay*, 216, 313 (2.17.12; 2.23.31]. Although Clarke accepts the doctrine of infinite divisibility of matter, he also accepts

Newtonian "atomism" (or "corpuscularianism"). On this view, there are "original and perfect solid Particles of Matter, which are, (not indeed absolutely in themselves, but) to any Power of Nature, indiscerpible" (Clarke, *Works*, 3:762; compare 3:774–5, 795, 813–5). The infinite divisibility of matter, therefore, is to be understood in terms of divisibility relative to the "power of God," and is consistent with "indiscerpibility by natural causes." There is, as Leibniz indicates, an irony in the fact that Newtonian natural philosophy is based on an "Epicurean" ontology of "a vacuum and atoms" (Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 15–6, 36, 43–4).

67. Clarke, *Works*, 2:563; compare 545, 561.

68. Clarke, *Works*, 2:753.

69. Descartes, *Writings*, 1:231 (*Principles*, 2, 20)].

70. See, e.g., Descartes, *Meditation*, 6.

71. Clarke, *Works*, 3:770.

72. Clarke, *Works*, 2:753.

73. Clarke, *Works*, 2:563, 753; 3:730, 761–2; 790–1; 813. See also Descartes, *Meditation*, 6. Clarke's view is that because matter lacks any principle of unity (there is no subject), it cannot support "positive powers"—such as perception, intelligence, will—and thus possesses only "negative qualities" (*Works*, 2:545, 562–3, 582; 3:761).

74. Clarke, *Works*, 2:750. Compare Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:232.

75. Clarke's argument for the immateriality and natural immortality of the soul was imitated and followed by many of his contemporaries. See, e.g., Grove, *A Demonstration of the Soul's Immateriality*. In his preface, Grove says: "The Argument from the Divisibility of Matter, which I have chiefly insisted on, tho' an old one, . . . hath of late Years been manag'd to greater Advantage than ever; particularly by the learned Dr. Clarke in his admirable Letters, which for strength of Reasoning, and fair Controversy, have not been often equal'd" (p. 5).

76. E.g., Descartes, *Writings*, 1:201–2 (*Principles*, 1:25, 26); Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, vol. 4, chap. 1.

77. Clarke, *Works*, 2:525; compare 538; my emphasis.

78. Clarke, *Works*, 2:525.

79. Clarke, *Works*, 3:794, 814–5, 849–50. The general point that Collins put to Clarke is that "if there are any such Demonstrations, from whence any Contradictions or Absurdities follow in our way of conceiving Things, those Absurdities and Contradictions should affect a Demonstration so far that I ought to suspend my Assent" (*Works*, 3:814).

80. It is worth repeating that although Clarke is Hume's most obvious and prominent target in this context, he is by no means Hume's only target. Nevertheless, a proper appreciation of Clarke's particular significance in this context makes the theological dimension of Hume's concerns very apparent.

81. Although Bayle influenced Hume's views on space, I do not accept Fogelin's suggestion that Bayle's "conceptual skepticism concerning extension . . . sets Hume his problem, and his constructive account of these notions is formulated explicitly as an answer to [Bayle's] skepticism." (See Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism*, chap. 3; the relevant argument is in Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Zeno of Elea," note G [Popkin, *Selections*, 359–62].) This claim, I believe, is misleading about both Bayle and Hume. Bayle's basic objective in the "Zeno" article is not to defend "conceptual scepticism concerning extension," but to argue that extension exists only ideally (*Dictionary* [Popkin, *Selections*, 353; 366; 385]). What Bayle and Hume share is a general skepticism about the possibility of natural religion, and for this reason Bayle was an obvious source for Hume's critique of real space and the theology associated with it. (See *Dictionary*, art. "Zeno," note I [Popkin, *Selections*, 377–85], and art. "Leucippus," note G [Popkin, *Selections*, 135–9].) Hume was not the first to use Bayle to criticize Clarke's doctrines. This was also done, most notably, by Edmund Law in his notes to his translation of King's *Origin of Evil* (which we know Hume studied).

82. Hobbes, *De Corpore*, 7–8; Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt. 1, prop. 15. Hobbes argues that space is "imaginary" or a "mere phantasm." See esp. *De Corpore*, 7.2 (and on time: 7.3).

83. Clarke, as I have noted, singles this work out for criticism in the *Demonstration* (*Works*, 2:531).

84. Jacob argues that Toland's *Serena* was one of two texts (the other was the *Traite des trois imposteurs*) his circle of radical freethinkers (i.e. Collins, Desmaizeaux, et al.) employed "to propound the pantheism of the radicals" (*Radical Enlightenment*; see esp. 216–7).

85. Beiser, *Sovereignty*, 227.

86. Beiser, *Sovereignty*, 227.

87. Beiser, *Sovereignty*, 227.

88. Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 145. Toland's (important) discussion of space is not referred to in the works of Baker, Grant, or Yolton, cited earlier.

89. Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 145.

90. In his controversy with Clarke, Collins follows Toland and describes space as "nothing but the mere Absence or Place of Bodies" (in Clarke, *Works*, 3:775; and Clarke's reply, *Works*, 3:794). Much as Hume sides with Toland against Clarke on the issue of space, so, too, he sides with Collins against Clarke on the issues of materialism and necessity that they debated (as I will discuss in chapters 14 and 16).

91. Toland, *Collection of Several Pieces*, 1:lvii.

92. Toland, *Serena*, 218 (my emphasis); compare Hume, T, 1.2.3/33–9. Toland goes on to ridicule the doctrine of real space and the theological uses it has been put to. He suggests that while he believes that the defenders of real space do sincerely believe in "the existence of a Deity . . . in my Opinion their unwary Zeal refin'd him into a mere Nothing, or (what they wou'd as little allow) they made Nature or the Universe to be the only God" (*Serena*, 219–20). After this passage, Toland cites the short poem that appears at the head of this chapter.

93. The basic tenet of "atheistic" cosmology, so interpreted, is well expressed in the words of Lucretius: "nature is free and uncontrolled by proud masters and runs the universe by herself without the aid of gods" (*On the Nature of the Universe*, 92).

94. See note 2 above.

Chapter 10. *The Argument a Priori*

1. Pears, *Hume's System*, 63.

2. This is not only true of general studies of Hume's philosophy but also of most specialized studies that are specifically concerned with Hume's theory of causation.

3. For background see Rowe, *Cosmological Argument*, esp. chap. 1.

4. In the early eighteenth century, it was standard practice to link Cudworth with Clarke in connection with the argument a priori. For example, Warburton cites Cudworth and Clarke as the principal representatives of the argument a priori ("Study of Theology," 362–3). Similarly, Baxter (*Evidence of Reason*, 5) recommends Cudworth, Clarke, and Wollaston to those readers "who may want to see a regular proof and demonstration" that "there is a necessarily existing Being, infinite in all perfections, who is the Author of all Being else etc."

5. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:54.

6. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:56. On the importance of Cudworth, considered as a predecessor of Locke and Clarke on this issue of causal hierarchy, see MacIntosh, "The Argument from the Need for Similar or 'Higher' Qualities." MacIntosh notes that Bentley could also be added to the list of (British) thinkers of this period who pursued a general argument of this kind.

7. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:57–8.

8. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:59.

9. Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*: "Nothing can be created out of nothing nor any existing thing be summed back into nothing" (43; compare 31–3). Related "atheistic" arguments against the creation of matter include: Pyrrho, cited in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:511; Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt. 1, prop. 6; Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 2:70; and Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:884.

10. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:79; 3:121. See also Cicero, *Nature of the Gods*, where "Balbus" (the Stoic theist) argues that nothing can produce or create perfections (e.g. intelligence) that it does not itself possess (132, 137, 158).

11. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:90–1.

12. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:108.

13. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:96.

14. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:107.

15. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:121.

16. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:122.

17. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:122.

18. See Ayers, *Locke*, 2: 170–6, 314n71. Locke was also influenced by Pierre Nicole's demonstration in *Essais de Moral*, which he translated. According to Ayers, there are significant points of divergence, as well as similarity, between Locke and Cudworth on this subject.

19. Ashcraft, "Faith and Knowledge in Locke's Philosophy," 214.

20. Locke, *Essay*, 619 (4.10.1); his emphasis. Locke is, of course, widely represented as a thoroughgoing "empiricist," free of any rationalist elements or commitments. This perspective on his philosophy is grounded primarily in his empiricist account of the foundations of human knowledge (i.e. as based on ideas derived from sensation and reflection). It is important to keep in mind, however, that Locke's views on both religion and morals rely, methodologically, on rationalist principles (i.e. demonstrative reasoning). In general, misrepresenting Locke's views on religion as "empiricist," in contrast with the views of "rationalists" such as Clarke, is liable to obscure our understanding of Hume's relations with Locke on matters of this kind. Locke is a prime target of Hume's criticisms of "rationalist" proofs for the existence of God.

21. Locke, *Essay*, 87–90, 619 (1.4.8–10; 4.10.1).

22. Locke, *Essay*, 537–8, 552–3, 618 (4. 2.14; 4.3.21; 4. 9.2).

23. Locke, *Essay*, 534 (4.2.9).

24. Locke, *Essay*, 549; compare 516, 565, 643 (4.3.18; compare 3.11.16; 4.4.7; 4.12.8). It is worth emphasizing the point that on Locke's account, God is the *only* being whose *existence* can be *demonstrated*.

25. Locke, *Essay*, 531–2 (4.2.2–3).

26. Locke, *Essay*, 620, 622 (4.10.3, 8).

27. Locke, *Essay*, 620 (4.10.3).

28. Locke, *Essay*, 620 (4.10.4).

29. Locke, *Essay*, 624 (4.10.10). It is a well-known problem in Locke scholarship to explain how this claim in 4.10 can be squared with Locke's remarks at 4.3 "that God can, if he pleases, superadd to Matter a Faculty of Thinking" (*Essay*, 541; and compare 627). Ayers provides a helpful discussion of this issue: *Locke*, 2: chaps. 12, 14.

30. Locke, *Essay*, 624 (4.10.10). Compare Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:80.

31. Locke, *Essay*, 622 (4.10.8).

32. Compare Wolterstorff, "Locke's Philosophy of Religion": "When compared to other variants..." (189).

33. See the article "Clarke," in Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica*; and also Rowe, *Cosmological Argument*, 8. Rowe says that Clarke's *Demonstration* is "the most complete, forceful, and cogent presentation of the Cosmological Argument we possess."

34. This analysis follows Rowe, *Cosmological Argument*, 5, 57–8.

35. In Hume's *Dialogues* (pt. 9), "Demea" presents a version of "that simple and sublime argument *a priori*" (D, 90), where it is subject to criticism by both "Cleanthes" and "Philo." Demea's version of this argument is primarily concerned to establish that there is 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" (D, 91). The distinction between a priori and a posteriori arguments raises some significant problems, and not all philosophers today would categorize the cosmological argument as clearly belonging to the a priori set. (See, e.g., Rowe, *Cosmological Argument*, 3–5.) However, Hume's own contemporaries, although they were not always clear about the basis of the a priori/a posteriori distinction, were almost all agreed in labeling Clarke's cosmological argument "*a priori*." For example, Beattie says: "In evincing the being of God, two sorts of proof have been employed: which are called the proofs *a priori* and *a posteriori*. In the former, the being of God is proved from this consideration, that his existence is necessary, and that it is absurd and impossible to suppose that he does not exist. This argument is fully discussed by Dr. Clarke, in the first part of his excellent book on the evidence of natural and revealed religion. The proof *a posteriori* shews, from the present constitution of things, that there is, and must be, a supreme being of infinite goodness, power, and wisdom, who created and supports them" (*Elements*, 1:280).

36. Clarke, *Works*, 2:524; my emphasis.

37. Clarke, *Works*, 2:526.

38. Clarke, *Works*, 2:527.

39. Clarke, *Works*, 2:527.

40. Clarke, *Works*, 2:527. Compare Wollaston, *Religion of Nature Delineated*, 67: "Suppose a chain hung down out of the heavens from an unknown height, and tho every link of it gravitated towards the earth, and what hung upon was not visible, yet it did not descend, but kept its situation; and upon this a question should arise, *What supported or kept up this chain*?" (This passage is reprinted in Clarke, *Works*, 2:526n.)

41. Clarke, *Works*, 2:527.

42. Clarke, *Works*, 2:527.

43. Clarke, *Works*, 2:527.

44. Clarke, *Works*, 2:527.

45. Clarke, *Works*, 2:528.

46. Clarke, *Works*, 2:530.

47. Clarke, *Works*, 2:530–1.

48. In particular, Clarke must still prove that this immaterial being is an *intelligent* being—a point that is crucial to the case for theism.

49. Clarke, *Works*, 2:585.

50. Clarke, *Works*, 2:543.

51. Clarke, *Works*, 2:543.

52. Clarke, *Works*, 2:543.

53. Clarke, *Works*, 2:543; my emphasis.

54. Clarke, *Works*, 2:543.

55. As already noted, some passages from Wollaston's work are cited in the 1738 edition of Clarke's *Works* (2:526n).

56. I have provided details concerning this in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

57. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:357–8.

58. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:358.

59. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:358–9; my emphasis.

60. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:359; his emphasis.

61. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:359.

62. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:361; my emphasis. In the final section of his *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, Baxter uses his fundamental causal principle to make the case that matter is not eternal and uncreated but must be caused by an infinitely powerful immaterial being [God]. Baxter pays particular attention to Lucretius's great maxim "From nothing nothing can be produced," considered as a basis for denying that God could have created matter. Baxter maintains, against Lucretius (and Pyrrho and Shaftesbury), that this maxim has "no force when asserted in opposition to the efficacy of *infinite power*; unless it could be shown that the creation of matter implies a contradiction, which cannot be done" (*Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:419–20; his emphasis).

63. Compare Clarke, *Works*, 2:527.

64. Compare Locke, *Essay*, 622 (4.10.8). As noted, the same argument appears prominently in both Cudworh and Clarke.

65. The relevant argument can be found in Hobbes's work *Of Liberty and Necessity* (*English Works*, 4:276).

66. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 27.

67. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 16.

68. Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 20–21.

69. One particular reason for supposing that Hume has the Leibniz–Clarke correspondence in mind here is that at T, 1.3.3.8/82, Hume concludes his discussion by considering the "frivolous" suggestion that "every effect necessarily pre-supposes a cause; effect being a relative term, of which cause is the correlative." This "frivolous" suggestion appears in the passage cited earlier from Clarke's second reply to Leibniz (Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 21).

70. See also Hume's remarks LET, 1:187, no. 91.

71. In Hume's critical discussion of the argument a priori in the *Dialogues*, he places little or no emphasis on the problematic status of the causal maxim. In this context, he relies primarily on difficulties associated with the idea of "necessary existence." Moreover, he also points out in this context that there are difficulties with determining the scope and application of the causal principle as it relates to cosmological concerns. In particular, he argues that *with respect to* a series of objects we may be able to identify a proper cause for *each member* of the series, but asks why we should assume that we must also be able to identify a (distinct) cause for the *whole series* (D, 92–3).

72. A particularly important background debate concerning the question of whether matter and motion can give rise to thought is the exchange between Clarke and Collins earlier in the eighteenth century. Hume's discussion is largely structured around this debate, and his position closely accords with Collins's views on this subject (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 14).

73. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:80.

74. Descartes, *Writings*, 2:28, 34 (*Meditation*, 3). The causal adequacy principle is fundamental to Descartes's first proof of God's existence, which relies on the assumption that our *idea* of God can only have God as its cause.

75. In contrast, for example, with other (contingent) beings such as the material world; Clarke, *Works*, 2:528–9.

76. This critique applies, obviously, not only to all versions of the argument a priori but also to all versions of the ontological argument. (See, e.g., Descartes, *Writings*, 2:44–7 [*Meditation*, 5].) On this see Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 91–2.

77. In the same context, as noted (chap. 4, note 59), Kippis points out that Andrew Baxter "could not bear to have the argument *a priori* treated with contempt."

78. E.g., Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 3:79.

79. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:359.

80. The expression "downright" appears quite frequently in Baxter's writings, which is indicative of an intensity of style of that Baxter was well aware. In his correspondence with John Wilkes (21 August, 1747), Baxter acknowledges that the source of this is his "animosity against irreligion"; British Library, London, Add. MSS., 30, 867, fol. 23.

81. Baxter, *Reflections*, 15. In language that follows closely the sixth charge laid against Hume in the *Specimen*, Baxter also claims that Dudgeon "pulls up the Roots of morality, takes away the Distinction betwixt Just and Unjust, Right and Wrong, Good and Evil" (*Reflections*, 12). Baxter's rationalistic account of morals is most apparent in his (posthumous) *Evidence of Reason*. See also the tenth dialogue of *Matho*. Fundamental to Baxter's moral theory is the view that morality and society are founded on religion and especially on the doctrine of future rewards and punishments (a view shared by Baxter's friend William Warburton).

82. The significance of Baxter's use of the expression "downright atheism" does not turn on the claim that this expression is unique to his style. (This expression appears, for example, in the work of both Cudworth and Clarke in several different passages.) Its significance rests, rather, with the *comparative* merits of the case for Baxter and for Wishart. It is the fact that the use of this expression is consistent with Baxter's rhetorical style but not with Wishart's that gives us reason to suppose that the author of the *Specimen* was Baxter rather than Wishart.

83. It is worth noting, however, that several serious obstacles remain for the Wishart hypothesis. One of the more obvious of these is that Wishart was indeed a follower of Shaftesbury's moral sense philosophy, which is hard to square with Hume's reply to his critic, whom he presents as a follower of the ethics of Clarke and Wollaston (LG, 30)—a description that (again) fits Baxter neatly.

84. There are, of course, a few passages sprinkled throughout Hume's later writings where he gives some perfunctory endorsement to the argument from design (Compare, e.g., NHR, 134, 183; D, 116–7, 129). The only remarks that come close to this in the *Treatise* appear in the appendix in a passage inserted into T, 1.3.14.12n/633. However, Hume's tepid endorsements of the argument from design need to be considered in relation to his other (systematic) efforts to expose the weaknesses and limitations of this argument.

85. It is worth noting that just as Hume's skeptical critique of the causal reasoning involved in the argument a priori relies on principles Baxter identified as leading to "downright atheism," so, too, Hume relies on skeptical arguments relating to the existence of the material world that Baxter also identified as having irreligious implications.

86. Compare Hume's remarks at EU, 12.29n/164n: "That impious maxim of the ancient philosophy, *Ex nihilo, nihilo fit*, by which the creation of matter was excluded, ceases to be a maxim according to this philosophy. Not only the will of the supreme Being may create matter; but, for aught we know *a priori*, the will of any other being might create it, or any other cause, that the most whimsical imagination can assign." Clearly, the real intent of these remarks is not so much to refute Lucretius but rather those Christian thinkers (i.e. Cudworth et al.) who tried to turn Lucretius's "impious maxim" against his own atheistic views (i.e. with a view to *proving* that God must have created matter).

Chapter 11. *Induction and a Future State*

1. Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:113. For a more recent perspective on the deism controversy at this time see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, esp. chap. 33. Other useful accounts of the deist controversy at this time include Mossner, *Butler*; Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton and the Design Argument*, esp. chap. 4; and Force, "Newtonians and Deism."

2. Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, 78, 125, 145–6, 341. Samuel Clarke was an especially prominent target of Tindal's arguments in *Christianity as Old as Creation*. In the second part of Clarke's influential *Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God*

(1705), he presents an elaborate critique of deist doctrines, and defends both revealed religion and the doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments. In the last chapter of *Christianity as Old as Creation*, Tindal argues that Clarke's own doctrines lead to "true deism." On Clarke's critique of deism see Force, "Samuel Clarke's Four Categories of Deism."

3. John Leland reports that Tindal's book "made a great noise" and "many good answers were returned to it" (Leland, *Deistical Writers*, 1:122.) See also Robertson, *Freethought*, 2:728. Robertson estimates that Tindal's work produced over 150 replies. There was, moreover, an immediate and strong interest in the Tindal debate in Scotland. In 1731, Robert Wallace, an influential "Rankenian," published *A Sermon Containing Some Remarks on Christianity as Old as Creation*, in which he criticized Tindal's doctrines. William Dudgeon gave a reply to Wallace in *The Necessity of some of the Positive Institutions of Ch——ty Considered* (1731), which defended Tindal's views. As already noted (chap. 4), Dudgeon was a Scottish freethinker, based at Coldstream, not far from Chirnside, where Hume was living at this time. The year after this, in 1732, Dudgeon's writings and deistic doctrines led to a church prosecution, based at Chirnside. The local minister involved was Hume's uncle (Rev. George Home). We may assume, therefore, that Hume likely felt the impact of the Tindal debate, in a direct and immediate way, while he was still in the early stages of writing the *Treatise*—long before he left for France in 1734. (See also note 81.)

4. Although Butler's principal target in this work is Tindal's *Christianity as Old as Creation*, the deist doctrines of Toland, Collins, and Shaftesbury are also targets of his reasoning. Butler's particular concern with Tindal may have been encouraged by the fact that Tindal refers to Butler (approvingly) in *Christianity as Old as Creation* (p. 278) as a source of the doctrine that the law of nature is obvious to all rational beings.

5. Butler, *Works*, 1:3, 33, 148, 156, 279.

6. Butler, *Works*, 1:303—the point is made in the opening sentence of Butler's dissertation on personal identity, which was published with the *Analogy*, along with the dissertation on the nature of virtue. Butler's emphasis on the practical, prudential importance of the doctrine of a future state strongly resembles Pascal's line of reasoning in the wager argument, presented a century earlier. The resemblance between Pascal and Butler is mentioned by Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:260, and discussed at more length by Penelhum, *Butler*, 90–1.

7. Butler, *Works*, 1:32.

8. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, 5.

9. Penelhum, *Butler*, vii.

10. Penelhum, *Butler*, 4. One of Penelhum's principal objectives in his important study of Butler's philosophy is to "rehabilitate" his philosophy of religion as presented in the *Analogy*.

11. Penelhum, *Butler*, 4. An article "Butler" (by Andrew Kippis), in Kippis and Towers, *Biographia Britannica* (1784) praises the *Analogy* as "one of the most masterly performances that ever appeared in the world. . . . Some hints and remarks, on the argument from Analogy, in proof of religion, might occasionally have been thrown out before, but Dr. Butler was the first who considered it in a direct treatise, and brought it to such a state of perfection" (3:101). See also Reid's remarks in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), essay 1, chap. 4: "I know no author who has made a more happy use of this mode of reasoning [analogy] than Bishop Butler in his 'Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed'" (reprinted in *Works*, 1:237a.).

12. Although Stephen recognizes the philosophical quality of Butler's *Analogy*, he suggests, nevertheless, that Butler was an "isolated" figure and that his work attracted little critical attention from his own contemporaries (*English Thought*, 1:237). See also Robertson's similar observations: "In the eighteenth century Butler seems hardly to have been publicly discussed at all" (*Dynamics of Religion*, 147).

13. I provide references to these (several) claims later. A rare exception to all this is Charles Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*. Hendel suggests that the *Analogy* influenced Hume's views on probability in the *Treatise* and that Hume "was something of a follower of Butler" on this subject (pp. 189–92; and compare 411 on religion). I will argue that Hendel is right about the *Analogy* being an important influence on Hume's thinking in the *Treatise*, but seriously wrong in suggesting that Hume ought to be considered a "follower of Bishop Butler" on the subject of probability and induction (much less on religion).

14. As already noted (note 6), the two dissertations, on personal identity and virtue, were published along with the *Analogy* in 1736. *Fifteen Sermons* was published ten years earlier in 1726. For evidence of the relevance of these works for the *Treatise*, see the editors' annotations. Regarding interest in Butler's philosophy among Hume's Scottish contemporaries at this time, see the remarks by Ramsay of Ochtetyre cited at the beginning of chapter 4.

15. T, intro. 7/xxi; the reference to Butler reappears in TA, 2/646. As noted, the other authors cited are Locke, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, and Hutcheson.

16. T, 2.3.5.5/424. The reference to Butler's *Analogy* is to *Works*, 1:83 (pt. 1, chap. 5.2). See the editors' annotations, T, p. 527; and John Wright, "Butler and Hume on habit and moral character."

17. Locke's role is generally given particular prominence, whereas Butler often goes unmentioned by most commentators. See, e.g., Owen, "Hume's Doubts about Probable Reasoning." Owen argues that Locke is the particular target of Hume's arguments about probable reasoning and induction. He does not, however, mention Butler at all.

18. Mossner, *Life*, 111.

19. Mossner, *Life*, 111n, and compare 319. Mossner defends this view at more length in his article "Enigma of Hume."

20. See, e.g., Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton and the Design Argument*, chap. 9; Jeffner, *Butler and Hume*, 131–2. Hurlbutt and Jeffner suggest some alternative (and more plausible) models for Cleanthes, such as George Cheyne and Colin Maclaurin. See also Sprague, "Hume, Henry More and the Design Argument."

21. Jeffner, *Butler and Hume*, 132. Compare C. D. Broad, "Bishop Butler as a Theologian," 202: "[Butler] is not arguing with atheists, but with Deists. He assumes that his opponents accept the view that the world is due to an intelligent author."

22. Mossner, *Life*, 113.

23. This letter is dated 2 December 1737.

24. Ross, *Kames*, 35–6. At this time, Butler was clerk of the closet to Queen Caroline. The following year, he was appointed bishop of Bristol, and in 1750 he was made bishop of Durham.

25. In his *Essays* (1751), 61, Kames refers to Butler as "a manly and acute writer"; and in his *Sketches of the History of Man*, 4:146, he refers to him as "a writer of the first rank."

26. This letter is dated 4 March 1737/38.

27. Many other Hume scholars (e.g. Laird, Flew, et al.) share this view. I have provided references for this in chapter 1.

28. It is not entirely accurate to claim that the *Treatise* was stripped of all polemics concerning miracles. See, e.g., Hume's (mocking) remarks concerning miracles in several passages of part 3 of book 1. (See the citations I provide later.) Beyond this, however, it is not clear why Hume was *particularly* cautious about publishing his views on miracles. One possibility is the sobering example of Thomas Woolston, the author of six *Discourses on Miracles* (1727–30). These works, which generated a great deal of attention and interest, called into question the resurrection of Christ and ridiculed many other miracles. This led on to a prosecution for blasphemy in 1729. Woolston was fined and, unable to pay his debt, died in prison in 1733. For more details on this case see Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:192.

29. In chapter 14 I discuss the wider irreligious significance of Hume's arguments concerning the soul and personal identity. Hume's discussion in the *Treatise* also refers to "the moral arguments and those deriv'd from the analogy of nature," which he describes (sardonically) as being "equally strong and convincing" (T, 1.4.5.35/250). Hume considers the arguments based on "the analogy of nature" in his essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul" (ESY, 590). Flew suggests that the material in this essay, "which is very obviously although never explicitly directed against the immortalist case made by Butler in the *Analogy*, could well have been one of those 'nobler parts' which had to be excised in order to fit the *Treatise* to be seen by that good Doctor's eyes" (*David Hume*, 90; compare Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 189, who also conjectures that this essay "was one of the parts of the *Treatise* which... earlier [Hume] had decided not to publish for fear of a public outcry.")

30. As already noted, among the various "charges" made against Hume in 1745 when he applied for the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University was the charge that he denied the immateriality of the soul and, in consequence of this, denied the immortality of the soul. See *Letter from a Gentleman*, 13–4, 18, 29–30. See also James Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 165, 263, 494.

31. Mossner, *Life*, 111.

32. In general, it was not unusual in the eighteenth century for book-length replies to appear in print within a year or two of publication. Thomas Chubb's *Equity and Reasonableness of the Divine Conduct in Pardoning Sinners Upon their Repentance Exemplified... Occasioned by Dr. Butler's late Book, entitled, The Analogy of Religion* appeared in 1737, the year after the *Analogy* was published. Nor is it impossible that Hume was able to acquire a copy of the *Analogy* while he was still in France (e.g. his friend and correspondent Kames could have arranged for this to be done).

33. Another related theme of the *Analogy* is to examine the credibility of the evidence for divine revelation (i.e. miracles, prophecy, etc.).

34. Butler, *Works*, 1:1, 288; compare 1:lvii, 282–3.

35. See Butler, *Works*, 1:3; and compare TA, 4/647, 16/652; EU, 4.20/36 (my emphasis). See also the editors' annotations to both the *Treatise* (p. 567) and first *Enquiry* (p. 227)—indicating Hume's debt to Butler in using this expression. Hacking (*The Emergence of Probability*, 11, 82–4) suggests that Butler's "celebrated aphorism" can be traced back to John Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion* (1675).

36. Butler, *Works*, 1:2.

37. Butler, *Works*, 1:4.

38. Butler, *Works*, 1:4.

39. Butler, *Works*, 1:14–5.

40. Butler *Works*, 1:136.

41. Butler, *Works*, 1:2, 4. Compare Hobbes's discussion of prudential reasoning in *Human Nature*, chap. 4, esp. secs. 6–11 (*English Works*, 4:17–8]. The example of day and night following each other appears in this passage. Hume uses this example at T, 1.3.11.2/124; LG, 22; EU, 4.2, 6.1n/25–6, 56n. (See also Tillotson, "Wisdom of Being Religious," where the example of sun rising appears [as in editors' annotations, T, p. 460].) See as well EU, 4.16/33–4, where Hume uses the example of bread nourishing us.

42. In relation to this point see Penelhum, *Butler*, 96.

43. See Butler, "Let us then..." (*Works*, 1:9).

44. Butler claims to be following Origen in this analogical way of defending the particular doctrines of revelation: *Works*, 1:5. See also his conclusion to pt. 1: *Works*, 1:135–42; and 1:278.

45. A useful summary of these analogies can be found in Broad, "Bishop Butler as a Theologian"; see also Penelhum, *Butler*, chap. 4.

46. Butler, *Works*, 1:16–7, and compare 1:137.

47. Butler, *Works*, 1:28–9.

48. Butler, *Works*, 1:17.

49. As already explained, Butler's argument for the probability of life after death based on analogy (as presented in pt. 1, chap. 1) is supplemented by his "Metaphysical arguments" in his dissertation "Of Personal Identity." Compare Butler's remarks at *Works*, 1:308, where he relates continuity of self to our interest in "what is to come" in a "future life."

50. Butler, *Works*, 1:139.

51. Butler, *Works*, 1:140.

52. Butler, *Works*, pt. 1, chap. 5.

53. In this context, Hume refers to Leibniz as making a similar observation. Compare Leibniz, *Theodicy*, prel. diss. no. 28–31.

54. Butler, *Works*, 1:3. As the editors' annotations to the *Treatise* point out. (See note 35.)

55. The question Hume proposes to answer in the *Enquiry* (EU, 4.14–15/32) is: "What is the foundation of all our reasonings and conclusions concerning that relation [cause and effect]?" Hume says that he provides a "negative answer" to this question, which is that "our conclusions from that experience [of cause and effect) are not founded on reasoning, or any process of the understanding."

56. Butler, *Works*, 1:4.

57. Butler, *Works*, 1:4.

58. Butler, *Works*, 1:136; compare 1–2, 5, 15, 30–2, 127–8, 163, 190, 277.

59. Butler, *Works*, 1:6; my emphasis.

60. Compare D, 38: "This species of scepticism is fatal to knowledge, not to religion."

61. See, e.g., Thomas Reid's remarks in his dedication to *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* (1764): "[The author of the *Treatise*] hath built a system of scepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather than its contrary" (*Works*, 1:95.) See also Barry Stroud, *Hume*: "As far as the competition for degrees of reasonableness is concerned, all possible beliefs about the unobserved are tied for last place" (54).

62. The relevant secondary literature concerning skeptical and naturalistic (or nonskeptical) interpretations of Hume on this subject is vast. Among recent studies that provide a good overview of this debate, along with illuminating insights of their own, are: Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, chap. 4; Dicker, *Hume's Epistemology and Metaphysics*, chap. 3; Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, 110–31; Winkler, "Hume's Inductive Skepticism," 183–212; and Millican, "Hume's Sceptical Doubts Concerning Induction." See also the helpful "critical survey" provided by Millican at the end of *Reading Hume on Human Understanding*, sec. 5. (Garrett's contribution to this collection also includes an appendix that gives a particularly succinct and valuable account of his own interpretation: chap. 11, pp. 332–4.)

63. The works cited in note 62 are helpful on this. There is a striking resemblance between Hume's views on this subject and Hobbes's account of "prudence" (see, e.g., *Human Nature*, chap. 4).

64. On this see, e.g., Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 78; Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, 119; and Millican, "Hume's Sceptical Doubts Concerning Induction," 162.

65. In the *Enquiry* passage, Hume specifically criticizes Locke for dividing "all arguments into demonstrable and probable. In this view, we must say, that it is only probable all men must die, or that the sun will rise to-morrow." Hume's alternative division between knowledge, proofs, and probabilities can be found in other authors at this time. (See the editors' annotations at T, p. 461, referring to Andrew Ramsay.)

66. "Naturalist" (nonskeptical) interpretations of the *Treatise*, as I have indicated, vary a great deal in the extent to which they present Hume as retaining any (strong) skeptical

commitments. Briefly put, my own view is that Hume does not entirely abandon his strong skeptical (i.e. Pyrrhonian) commitments. From the perspective of "the intense view," the skeptic cannot be refuted, and reason "entirely subverts itself" (T, 1.4.7.7–8/267–9; TA, 26/657; EU, 12.21/159). On the other hand, Hume is equally clear that this is not a perspective we can remain in. An excessive skepticism of this kind is ("most fortunately") subverted by nature, and the skeptic "still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason" (T, 1.4.2.1, 1.4.7.8–15/187, 268–74; compare EU, 12.22–3/158–60). There is, however, some *practical* value in Pyrrhonist reflections, according to Hume, insofar as they remind us of the "limits" and "weaknesses" of human understanding. The (desirable) effect of this is that it encourages us to confine our speculations to "common life" and to avoid dogmatism (T, 1.4.7.12–5/270–4; LG, 19; EU, 12.25–6/162–3; D, 133–40). These conclusions are entirely consistent with the distinction Hume wants to draw in the *Treatise* between ordinary and religious induction, as I will describe. (For more on the general nature of Hume's skeptical commitments see chapter 15.)

67. Pascal, *Pensees*, 156 (no. 427): "The immortality of the soul is something of such vital importance to us, affecting us so deeply, that one must have lost all feeling not to care about knowing the facts of the matter."

68. Compare Hobbes, *Leviathan*, "But because there is no natural knowledge of man's estate after death . . . " (15.8).

69. Compare T, 3.2.5.14/525: "Men are always more concern'd about the present life than the future . . . " See also T, 2.3.7.3–9, 3.2.7.2/428–32, 535, where Hume discusses the general influence of contiguity/distance on the imagination in relation to the past, present, and future, as well as the practical consequences of this.

70. Berkeley advances the opposite view in *Alciphron*, 7, 10 (in *Works*, 3:301–3).

71. It is important to note that Hume's critique of Butler's defense of the doctrine of a future state does not rely on the claim that the inferences involved are "improbable" or "unreasonable." On the contrary, Hume's argument makes the more modest (and subtle) point that Butler's argument falls short of "a really conclusive practical proof" (Butler, *Works*, 1:288). Since it falls well short of this standard, it inevitably fails in its primary, practical objective. At best, Butler's argument presents us with a weak probability, not a full, convincing proof.

72. Butler, *Works*, 1:3, 156, 279.

73. Editor's annotations, EU, p. 254.

74. See, e.g., Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 115–20; Huxley, *Hume*, 180; Mossner, "The Enigma of Hume," 341; Mossner, "Religion of David Hume," 656–7; Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, chap. 10; Penelhum, *Hume*, 172; Penelhum, "Butler and Hume," 245.

75. Kemp Smith, introduction to *Hume's Dialogues*, 51n.

76. Butler, *Works*, 1:6, 134–5, 290. As already explained, contrary to the views of Mossner (see notes 19 and 21 earlier), Butler is not so much a prominent defender of the argument from design as an exponent of this argument, which he uses to advance his own line of reasoning.

77. See especially Hume's "porch" argument at EU, 11.21–2/141–2; and compare Butler, *Works*, 1:128, 135–6, 277. For a helpful account of this see Penelhum, *Hume*, 189–93. See also Logan, "Aiding the Ascent of Reason by the Wings of Imagination," making the point that the doctrine of a future state is discredited if God's intelligence and benevolence are put in doubt (which is, of course, true). However, the specific argument against the doctrine of a future state that is advanced in the *Treatise* does not rely on this particular line of reasoning, but challenges Butler's reasoning directly on its own grounds (i.e. analogical reasoning from our experience of this life to a future state).

78. It does reappear, however, at D, 121, where Hume notes that the prospect of "infinite and eternal" rewards and punishments in fact fails to motivate human beings. Butler, as we

have explained, is very clear that there is an important difference between the question of the being and attributes of God and the (practical importance of the) doctrine of a future state (e.g. *Works*, 1:30–2, 290).

79. Hume, "My Own Life"; in Mossner, *Life*, 612.

80. Notice that even if we were to suppose, contrary to what I have argued, that Hume's discussion of probability and induction was written and completed *before* he read any of Butler's *Analogy*, Hume would still be *well aware*, when he *published* his *Treatise* in 1739, that his irreligious arguments in T, 1.3, collapse Butler's specific ambitions in the *Analogy*. The only way to avoid this conclusion is to claim that Hume did not read the *Analogy* until after the *Treatise* was published in 1739—and even then, it would still be true that his arguments *apply* to Butler's work.

81. Another early Scottish reply to Tindal came from George Turnbull, who was Robert Wallace's brother-in-law and a member of the "Rankenians." Turnbull is now remembered primarily as Thomas Reid's teacher at Aberdeen. In 1732, Turnbull published *Christianity Neither False nor Useless*. His aim in this work, as asserted in its subtitle, is to "vindicate Dr. Clarke's incomparable *Discourse*... from the inconsistencies with which it is charged by the author of *Christianity as Old as Creation*." Turnbull was clearly well regarded at Edinburgh University, as they awarded him an honorary degree the same year (1732). It is significant that in this work, Turnbull anticipates Butler's use of analogy and probabilities to defend the doctrine of a future state (pp. 8–10). This indicates that Hume was likely familiar with this general form of argument before he read Butler's *Analogy*. (As Kippis's remarks cited in note 11 suggest, Butler's basic argument was not so much original as particularly well presented.)

Chapter 12. *Matter, Omnipotence, and Necessity*

1. Hume is, of course, generally understood as presenting the classical defense of the "regularity" theory of causation (although interpretations of that vary as well). Closely related to this, he is sometimes understood as having denied the existence of any (real) causal powers in the world—this being another dimension of his overall causal skepticism. Recently, however, it has been argued that Hume was a (Lockean) "causal realist" who claimed only that we lack any *knowledge* of (real) causal powers in objects, and that he never doubts, much less denies, the *existence* of these powers. For a good survey of the literature relating to this debate see Millican, *Reading Hume on Human Understanding*, 441–6; see also Richman, introduction to Read and Richman, *The New Hume Debate*; see also my "Review of *The New Hume Debate*."

2. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:214.

3. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:203, 214–5.

4. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:215.

5. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:215. See Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 96–7: "Cudworth's theory of matter rested on one basic assumption: matter is inactive..."

6. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:215–6.

7. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:216.

8. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:217, 223–4.

9. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:223–6, 234, 244–6.

10. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:220.

11. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:220. The more fundamental error here, according to Cudworth, is excluding final causes from nature. There is an "art" to nature that mechanism cannot account for—hence the need for "plastic natures."

12. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:223.

13. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:223.

14. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:223–4.

15. It is not evident that Cudworth sees Descartes in these terms. Cudworth indicates that not all mechanists are atheists and that some may be ranked among "professed theists of later times, who might notwithstanding have an undiscerned tang of the mechanic Atheism, hanging about them" (*System of the Universe*, 1:217).

16. Malebranche believed that his occasionalist views were consistent with those of Descartes, and he cites Descartes's *Principles*, 2.36, 37 (in *Writings*, 1:240–1), in support of this. (Malebranche, *Selections*, 119/*Search*, 677; compare Descartes, *Writings*, 1:240–1.) On the relationship between Descartes and Malebranche as it concerns occasionalism see McCracken, *Malebranche and British Philosophy*, 91–6.

17. Malebranche, *Selections*, 95/*Search*, 449.

18. Malebranche, *Selections*, 95/*Search*, 449.

19. Malebranche, *Selections*, 100/*Search*, 658.

20. Malebranche, *Selections*, 96/*Search*, 450.

21. Malebranche, *Selections*, 95/*Search*, 449.

22. Malebranche, *Selections*, 94/*Search*, 448; his emphasis.

23. Locke, *Essay*, 297 (2.23.3).

24. Locke, *Essay*, 134–6 (2.8.8–11).

25. Locke, *Essay*, 301 (2.23.4). See also Locke's discussion of real and nominal essences: *Essay*, 438 (3.6).

26. Locke, *Essay*, 546 (4.3.14).

27. Locke, *Essay*, 546 (4.3.14).

28. Locke, *Essay*, 548 (4.3.16).

29. Locke, *Essay*, 233 (2.21.1).

30. Locke, *Essay*, 235 (2.21.4).

31. Locke, *Essay*, 235 (2.21.4).

32. Locke, *Essay*, 445 (3.6.11).

33. Locke, *Essay*, 314–5 (2.23.33–5).

34. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:310.

35. Cudworth regards goodness, knowledge, and power as "the three principal attributes of the Deity" (*System of the Universe*, 1:316).

36. Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, 219; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 3.12.

37. It is important to note, however, that Clarke and his followers differ from Malebranche on the question of whether finite *minds* are "real" or "true" agents. Contrary to Malebranche, Clarke maintains that our own experience shows that each of us has a "power of beginning motion" (Clarke, *Works*, 2:558–9; *Works*, 4:726–9). See also Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:186–9, 203–5, 222n.

38. Clarke, *Works*, 2:563.

39. Clarke, *Works*, 2:545. On this basis, Clarke argues that thinking and willing, understood as "positive powers," must necessarily be "faculties or Powers of Immaterial Substance: seeing they cannot possibly be Qualities or Affections of Matter" (*Works*, 2:561).

40. Clarke, *Works*, 2:697.

41. Clarke, *Works*, 2:698. An important objective of Clarke's defense of the Christian religion is the refutation of "Epicurean Atheists" who allow that God created the world but claim that he "does not at all concern himself in the Government of the World" (Clarke, *Works*, 2:600–2). In his later debate with Collins, Clarke places particular weight on gravitation providing evidence of the infinite power of an immaterial being who governs the world. (See esp. *Works*, 3:760, 792, 846–9.) Clarke makes related remarks to Leibniz when he objects to "the notion of the world's being a great machine, going on without the interposition of God, as a clock continues without the assistance of a clockmaker" (Leibniz and Clarke, *Leibniz–Clarke Correspondence*, 14).

42. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:1.

43. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:79.

44. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:79–80. Compare these remarks with the fourth charge against Hume in the *Specimen*: "Errors concerning God's being the first Cause, and prime Mover of the Universe: For as to this Principle, That the Deity first created Matter, and gave it its original Impulse, and likewise supports its Existence, he [Hume] says, 'This Opinion is certainly very curious, but it will appear superfluous to examine it in this Place, &c.'" (LG, 18). The quotation from the *Treatise* provided is "broken and partial" (LG, 33); it omits the phrase "and well worth our attention" (after "curious").

45. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:80. Baxter cites Spinoza's *Ethics*, pt. 1, props. 4, 7, 8, and 33.

46. Baxter cites Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 46.15.

47. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:81; his emphasis.

48. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:81. A notable example of this is Toland's claim that "activity ought to enter into the Definition of Matter, it ought likewise to express the Essence thereof" (*Serena*, 165 [letter 5]). Toland's views on this subject are explicitly criticized in Clarke's *Demonstration* (*Works*, 2:531).

49. Following Clarke's lead, Baxter argues that the infinite divisibility of matter proves that it is incapable of active powers of any kind (i.e. thought or volition) (Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:232–3; compare Clarke, *Works*, 2:582, 753–4; 3:758–9, 790–1.)

50. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:82. Baxter makes clear in this context that his method of reasoning (i.e. denying the activity matter) is more effective than denying the *existence* of matter altogether. The critique of Berkeley's "scheme" that follows is motivated by this consideration.

51. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:98–9n (and compare 1:178–9, 188–9). Baxter refers to Clarke's remarks at *Works*, 2:697–8 (which are also cited earlier). Baxter's general strategy also follows Cudworth's "confutation of atheism," which, as noted, also aims to show that matter is incapable of activity of any kind (*System of the Universe*, 1:215).

52. Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Human Mind*, 3, 388: "The metaphysical doctrine maintained by Baxter, in opposition to Maclaurin, seems to coincide nearly with Malebranche's theory of Occasional Causes"; and compare Stewart's related observations in his *Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy*, 430. See also Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 97, 140.

53. On this see McCracken, *Malebranche and British Philosophy*, 89–94; and Lauden's introduction to MacLaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, xxiv. Other Newtonians of a similar orientation include George Cheyne, Roger Cotes, William Derham, Henry Pemberton, and William Whiston.

54. Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 388.

55. For background on the debate concerning Newton's aether, see Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism*, chap. 5.

56. MacLaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 389. Maclaurin refers his readers to an earlier passage where the same point is made (95).

57. Maclaurin certainly knew Baxter's work, since he was one of the subscribers to Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*. Among other prominent Newtonian thinkers who were subscribers were George Cheyne, Stephen Hales, and Robert Stewart. Stewart, who was professor of natural philosophy at Edinburgh University, was originally a Cartesian but "was finally converted to the school of Newton" (Grant, *Edinburgh University*, 1:349). During the 1724–25 session, Hume attended Stewart's classes. For more details on this see Barfoot, "Hume and the Culture of Science."

58. Baxter, *Appendix*, 19.

59. Baxter, *Appendix*, 108–10. Baxter also maintains that Newton never "formally" opposed the principle of the immediate influence of the Deity in the material universe but left it to the determination of others.

60. Baxter, *Appendix*, 109, 196n. Further on, Baxter suggests that the doctrine of "second causes" is "literally Spinoza's doctrine" (227).

61. Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 99–100; Winkler, "Our Modern Metaphysicians," 35–40.

62. John Wright has suggested that the "modern metaphysician who was probably foremost in Hume's mind was George Berkeley, who denied the existence of all material forces" (*Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 146). In my view, this conjecture is unlikely for two (related) reasons: (1) Hume's modern metaphysicians ascribe a *vis inertia* to matter, whereas Berkeley denies the existence of matter altogether (i.e. not just powers in matter), and (2) as already explained, the relationship between the passages at LG, 28 and EU, 7.25n suggest that Hume's modern metaphysicians are (would-be) followers of Newton, which clearly excludes Berkeley. It is worth noting that Baxter regarded Berkeley's "immaterialist" principles as presenting "the opposite account of nature" from his own (*Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:261).

63. I have provided further details relating to this correspondence in chapter 4. Kames's views on this subject were eventually published in 1754 in his essay "Of the Laws of Motions." (His essay appears in a volume of papers read before the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh that was coedited by Hume.) In this essay, Kames describes the view that God is the source of all the activity we discover in matter as being "a whimsical doctrine, which declares war against our senses" (p. 10). In the same volume Kames received a reply from John Stewart, professor of natural philosophy at Edinburgh University (and son of Robert Stewart, Hume's professor and the subscriber to Baxter's *Enquiry*). The younger Stewart argues that matter is "absolutely inactive" and attributes this view to Newton. Stewart also explicitly cites Baxter's *Enquiry*, which he describes as raising a "question of the utmost importance" (i.e. concerning the *vis inertia* of matter). Stewart's remarks on Baxter follow immediately after (harsh) criticism of Hume's views on causation ("Some Remarks on the Laws of Motion," 117–8). This exchange between Kames and Stewart directly involved Hume. For details on this see Mossner, *Life*, 258–60; and see the discussion in Barfoot, *James Gregory and Scottish Scientific Metaphysics*, chap. 2.

64. Hume refers to Locke's *Essay*, 2.21 (chapter on power); but see also Locke's remarks, *Essay*, 131 (2.7.8).

65. Compare Clarke, *Works*, 2:601, 697–8; as noted, these passages from Clarke are quoted at length by Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:98–9n, 100–101; see also 1:188–9.

66. The *Abstract* was published in March 1740 and book 3 in November 1740.

67. As noted, unlike Hume in book 1 of the *Treatise*, Malebranche did consider the suggestion that we derive our idea of power by reflecting on our own will. Given Hume's obvious familiarity with Malebranche's writings, it seems certain that he would be familiar with Malebranche's views on this issue. It is not surprising, therefore, that Hume's later critique of Locke's suggestion follows Malebranche's general line of criticism.

68. Hume's example of billiard balls in the *Treatise* (T, 1.3.14.18/164), the only example he uses in this section, is a paradigm case of causation as it exists in bodies or the operations of matter. As such, it is indicative of Hume's primary interest. The example is even more prominent in the *Abstract* and is used again in the first *Enquiry*, in those contexts where Hume is concerned with causation as it exists in external objects. Malebranche repeatedly uses the example of colliding balls (e.g. *Selections*, 94, 97, 101, 102, 231), and Locke uses the specific example of billiard balls at *Essay* 235 (2.21.4).

69. On Hume's account, a natural relation is "a quality by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other" (T, 1.1.5.1/13; as explained at 1.1.4 in terms of "the connexion or association of ideas"). The effects of natural

relations (namely, the generation of "connexions" among our ideas) must, obviously, be confined to our perceptions. However, we find philosophical relations whenever there are qualities "which make objects admit of comparison" (T, 1.1.5.2/14). There is no reason, therefore, to suppose that such relations do not exist in the material world among bodies—on the assumption, that is, that our perceptions represent these objects.

70. See, in particular, Hume's remarks at T, 2.3.2.4/410: "Or he will maintain . . ."; and compare EU, 8.23/93: "But as long as we will rashly suppose . . ."

71. Hume's specific point here is that it is impossible for "felt connexions," which can only unite perceptions, to exist among bodies or in the operations of matter.

72. Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 147; my emphasis. According to Wright's "sceptical realist" interpretation, two general components to Hume's philosophy are especially important. First, Hume is a skeptic who denies the possibility of attaining knowledge about the ultimate nature of reality. Second, he is not a Pyrrhonian, as he endorses certain "natural beliefs"; most notably, that external objects exist, and that (real, metaphysical) causation exists. I explain my disagreement with the skeptical realist interpretation as it relates to Hume's views on the external world in chapter 13.

73. Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Powers." This article condenses the much longer defense of this interpretation presented in *The Secret Connexion*. Strawson makes clear that his own interpretation follows closely the skeptical realist account defended by Wright (Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Powers," 39).

74. Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Powers," 34.

75. Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Powers," 35.

76. Strawson's interpretation leans heavily on Hume's discussion in the first *Enquiry*, whereas my primary concern is with Hume's views in the *Treatise*. Suffice it to say, however, that in my view the "causal realist interpretation" also misrepresents Hume's intentions and commitments in the *Enquiry* (i.e. there is no significant shift in his views in the later work).

77. This point is made in Winkler, "The New Hume."

78. This reveals a further inconsistency in the causal realist interpretation. According to Strawson, Hume's skepticism about our *knowledge* of "Causation" does not prevent him from accepting some hypotheses about its nature and rejecting others, even though there is no experimental basis for this preference. More specifically, on the "causal realist" account, as defended by Strawson and Wright, Hume accepts the (Lockean) view that there exist "real powers" in external objects, but nevertheless rejects as "absurd" the occasionalist hypothesis that these regularities manifest God's immediate activity and (infinite) power. It is not clear, however, given the constraints of Hume's "epistemological scepticism," how this difference in attitude toward the principal alternative hypotheses he considers can be accounted for. On the account that I have defended, Hume rejects *all* hypotheses as not only unintelligible and groundless but also irrelevant to his own philosophy and practical life.

79. Throughout the eighteenth century, the issue of the activity/inactivity of matter continued to be (hotly) debated in Scotland, and it was always with a clear view to the fundamental theological debate between theism and atheism. Barfoot provides a good survey of the later stages of this debate in *James Gregory and Scottish Scientific Metaphysics*, chap. 2.

80. The same objection is discussed in Berkeley's *Dialogues*, 119–20; where Hylas objects to Philonous's (immaterialist) system on the ground that "in making God the immediate author of all the motions in Nature, you make him the author of murder, sacrilege, adultery, and the like heinous sins." Philonous replies that he has "denied there are any other agents beside spirits: but this is very consistent with allowing to thinking rational beings, in the production of motions, the use of limited powers, ultimately derived from God, but immediately under the direction of their own wills, which is sufficient to entitle them to all the guilt of their action." Clarke and Baxter give the same general line of reply in response to the

objection that their systems would make God the author of all sin. Hume responds that "'tis easy to perceive, that this is a mere pretext, to avoid the dangerous consequences of that doctrine [i.e. the universal and sole efficacy of God]" (T, 1.4.5.31/249). See also Hume's related discussion at EU, 8.32–6/162–4.

81. Strictly speaking, Hume overstates his case here, since he is making the more limited (epistemological) point that either we have no *idea* of causation in any object *or* it is nothing other than regularity and inference.

82. Early critics of Hume, such as Reid and Beattie, repeatedly present Hume as denying that we have *any idea of power*. As they present it, Hume's (extreme) causal skepticism is intimately connected with his "atheistical" intentions. See, e.g., Reid, *Active Powers*, esp. Essay 1, chaps. 1–7; Essay 4, chap. 9 (*Works*, 2:512–30, 627–8); Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 308–26. Beattie presents this general theme more boldly. The following passage is typical: "To find that his principles lead to atheism, would stagger an ordinary philosopher, and make him suspect his fundamental hypothesis, and all his subsequent reasonings. But the author just now quoted [i.e. Hume at T.1.3.14.23/166] is not staggered by considerations of this kind" (p. 316).

83. There is, of course, the further question how we can *ever* know God's will in *any* circumstances—much less whether it is *always obeyed*.

84. I discuss Hume's views on "liberty and necessity" (free will) at more length in chapter 16.

85. This is particularly true of the Clarke-Baxter variant of the Newtonian philosophy and theology, where the entire edifice is constructed from a fundamental dualism drawn between inactive matter and active immaterial beings. It is important to remember, however, that many other systems of Christian philosophical apologetics also relied on the general claim that only *spirits* or immaterial beings are capable of activity or genuine agency (e.g. Berkeley).

86. Locke gives some prominence to this issue in the context of his discussion of our "knowledge of the existence of God" (*Essay*, 628–30 [4.10.18–9]). In particular, Locke attempts to defuse skepticism about the *intelligibility* of the doctrine of Creation of Matter by way of arguing that our inability to explain how the material world was produced by God's will is no basis for denying its possibility. Our experience of moving our bodies, by means of our own volitions, Locke says, is also hard to explain, but we do not doubt that this can be done.

87. See, e.g., Clarke, *Demonstration*, prop. 4. Clarke argues that because God is infinite and omnipresent, it follows that he "must be *a most Simple*, *Unchangeable*, *Incorruptible Being; without Parts*, *Figure*, *Motion*, *Divisibility* or any other such Properties as we find in Matter" (*Works*, 2:540).

88. Hume's rules governing the cause/effect relationship in the case of Creation could, of course, be satisfied if we accepted a (Newtonian) framework of absolute space/time as well as the (related) assumption that God is an *extended* immaterial being. However, as I have already explained (chap. 9), Hume is careful to demolish this set of ontological assumptions in T, 1.2 before he moves on to discuss causation in T, 1.3.

89. We might put this point in more Kantian terms by saying that we make a kind of "category mistake" when we speak of Creation in causal terms.

90. Compare Clarke, *Works*, 4:722.

91. Reid points out that Hume's account of causation leads to the conclusion that God is incapable of "liberty of action": *Works*, 2:628 (*Active Powers*, Essay 4, chap. 9).

92. I have paid particular attention to the criticism of Hume in the *Specimen* and Hume's response in his *Letter to a Gentleman* (noting how some of this material was eventually incorporated into the first *Enquiry*). See also, however, the early review of the *Treatise* in the *History of the Works of the Learned* (1739), where passages from Hume's discussion at T, 1.3.14 are also cited as evidence of his general irreligious intentions (Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:22–5).

Chapter 13. *The Material World*

1. See, for example, Fogelin (*Hume's Skepticism*, 64), who says that this section is "one of the most perplexing portions of the *Treatise*." See also Bennett (*Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, 313), who notes that this section "is extremely difficult, full of mistakes and—taken as a whole—a total failure; yet its depth and scope and disciplined complexity make it one of the most instructive arguments in modern philosophy."

2. Influential "naturalist" critiques of the skeptical interpretation are presented in Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, esp. 85–8; and Stroud, *Hume*, chap. 5. A contemporary statement of the skeptical interpretation is presented in Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism*, chap. 6; and Fogelin, "Hume's Scepticism." Wright gives a more historically oriented treatment in *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, chap. 2. Among the more interesting recent accounts see Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 209–20; Dicker, *Hume's Epistemology and Metaphysics*, chap. 6; and Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, chap. 4.

3. The only book-length study of Hume's views on this subject is Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*. Price's interests, however, focus sharply on the relevance of Hume's discussion for subsequent developments in empiricist philosophy (e.g. phenomenalism). Price indicates that he has little interest either in the historical background of Hume's arguments or how they relate to other doctrines in the *Treatise*. In general, much of the commentary on Hume's discussion of the external world interprets his aims and objectives with a (narrow) view to twentieth-century preoccupations and concerns.

4. Hume's remarks in the *Enquiry* suggest that *with respect to* proofs of God and the external world, we fall into a "circle" problem. More specifically, without antecedent knowledge that (a nondeceiving) God exists, we have no proof that the material world exists; and without antecedent knowledge that the material world exists, "we shall be at a loss to find arguments, by which we may prove the existence of that being [God] or any of his attributes" (EU, 12.13/153). As I will explain, some (e.g. Descartes) claim to break out of this circle by advancing independent proofs for God's existence, and others (e.g. the Newtonians) claim to escape by denying that the existence of the material world can be put in doubt.

5. Although all these figures are familiar to us, I am not aware of any commentators (including those cited) who have emphasized the importance of problems of natural religion for understanding Hume's intentions on the subject of the external world; much less, any who have argued that his intentions in this area are specifically *irreligious*. Beyond this, as I will argue, there are important gaps in the way the background debate has generally been described—particularly as it relates to Hume's immediate Scottish context.

6. See, in particular, Hume's letter to Michael Ramsay, dated 26 August 1737, which says that to "comprehend the metaphysical Parts" of the *Treatise*, Ramsay should read Malebranche's *Search after Truth*, Berkeley's *Principles*, Descartes's *Meditations*, and "some of the more metaphysical articles of Bailes Dictionary; such as those [of] Zeno & Spinoza" (cited in Mossner, *Life*, 104, 626–7).

7. Descartes, *Writings*, 2:55 (*Meditation*, 6).

8. Descartes, *Writings*, 2:55. See Hobbes's reply: "M. Descartes should thus consider the proposition 'God can in no case deceive us' and see whether it is universally true…" (*Writings*, 2:136).

9. Descartes's two proofs for the existence of God both proceed from our idea of God: *Writings*, 2:31–3, 45–6 (*Meditation*, 3, 5).

10. Malebranche, *Selections*, 82/*Search*, 573.

11. Malebranche, *Selections*, 82/*Search*, 573.

12. Malebranche, *Selections*, 82/*Search*, 573. Further on, Malebranche goes on to say (83/*Search*, 573) that we have "more reason to believe there are bodies than to believe there

are not any. Thus, it seems that we should believe there are bodies.... For since all natural judgments come from God, we can make our voluntary judgments agree with them when we find no means of discovering them to be false; and if we are mistaken in these instances, the Author of our mind would seem to be to some extent the Author of our errors and faults."

13. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Zeno of Elea," note H (Popkin, *Selections*, 373–4). Compare Bayle's remarks on this subject in art. "Pyrrho," note B (Popkin, *Selections*, 197–9).

14. In the same context, Bayle cites a passage from Arnauld that makes exactly this point. Arnauld argued, Bayle says, "that if there are no bodies, we are 'forced to admit in God things that are completely contrary to the divine nature, such as being a deceiver'" (quoted from *Traite des vraies et des fausses idées*; Bayle, *Dictionary*, "Zeno of Elea," note H, [Popkin, *Selections*, 375]).

15. Malebranche, *Selections*, 83/*Search*, 573): "Certainly it is at least possible that there are external bodies..."

16. Locke, *Essay*, 631 (4.11.2).

17. Locke, *Essay*, 632 (4.11.5).

18. Locke, *Essay*, 634 (4.11.8); and compare 537 (4.2.14).

19. Clearly, then, for Locke, unlike Descartes, our knowledge of the existence of the material world does not depend on (prior) proofs of the existence of God. On his account, therefore, we can use our knowledge of the existence of the material world, along with knowledge of our own existence, to prove the being and attributes of God. (Compare Locke, *Essay*, 621 [4.10.7].) I will discuss the significance of this point.

20. Jessop, "Berkeley as Religious Apologist," 96.

21. Berkeley, *Principles*, 92–4; *Dialogues*, 98.

22. Berkeley, *Principles*, 4, 9, 56.

23. Berkeley, *Principles*, 5, 10, 11; *Dialogues*, 106, 108–10. Berkeley's argument is essentially an inversion of Hobbes's argument against the existence of immaterial substance. See Winkler, *Berkeley*, 189.

24. Berkeley, *Principles*, 18, 40, 86, 133: *Dialogues*, 62, 90.

25. Berkeley, *Principles*, 35, 47, 51, 54, 82; *Dialogues*, 109–10, 112–4, 117–8, 126, 141–3.

26. Berkeley, *Dialogues*, 138.

27. Berkeley, *Principles*, 96; compare 133–4, 156; *Dialogues*, 112–4, 138–9.

28. Among the difficulties he has especially in view are: how we explain the (causal) interaction between mind and matter; how we can know that ideas represent objects as they really are—or even if these (represented) objects exist; how we explain the creation of matter by God; and is it possible that a material being can think? Each of these are problems or difficulties that tend, in various ways, he maintains, to cast doubt on the existence and attributes of God, and derogate from his immediate activity and presence in the world.

29. Berkeley, *Principles*, 85–88, 92, 101; *Dialogues*, 97, 98, 141–2.

30. See esp. Berkeley, *Principles*, 149: "It is therefore plain."

31. Berkeley, *Dialogues*, 125–6.

32. Berkeley, *Dialogues*, 143. Philonous's final remarks in the *Dialogues* are "the same principles which at first view lead to scepticism, pursued to a certain point, bring men back to common sense."

33. Berkeley, *Principles*, 34–40, 40; *Dialogues*, 117–8, 126–7.

34. Berkeley, *Principles*, 109, 146.

35. Berkeley, *Dialogues*, 96–7; compare *Principles*, 109, 146. See also Locke's remarks at *Essay*, 563 (4.4.2): "if our knowledge of our Ideas terminate in them, and reach no further..."

36. I discuss Berkeley's Scottish critics later. See also the reference to Grove's work in note 60.

37. Berkeley, *Dialogues*, 125.

38. Berkeley, *Principles*, 54–6; compare 73–5, 149.

39. Berkeley, *Dialogues*, 113–4, 126, 141–2. See Winkler, *Berkeley*, 305.

40. Compare Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Zeno," note H (Popkin, *Selections*, 376), discussing the possibility and implications of God being a deceiver.

41. The qualities of our impressions (of sense) that concern Hume are constancy and coherence (T, 1.4.2.18–20/194–7); and the "trivial" quality of the imagination that is most relevant is the tendency to confuse a series of resembling perceptions with an identical object (T, 1.4.2.35n/205n). Much of the scholarly literature on Hume's arguments is focused on these aspects of his discussion, at the expense of a wider consideration of the theological implications of his position.

42. Wright is among those who claim that Hume "clearly subscribed to a representative theory of knowledge"; *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 19, 50–9, 86–90. For a defense of the contrary view see, e.g., Dicker, *Hume's Epistemology and Metaphysics*, 158–61, 167, 176, 178, who argues that the doctrine of double-existence is a philosophical theory "Hume strongly rejects." There is some resemblance between the "dynamic" interpretation I describe and what Fogelin calls Hume's "radical perspectivism," in "Garrett on the Consistency of Hume's Philosophy,"164. (Fogelin, however, does not comment on the relevance of problems of natural religion for Hume's position.) Also of relevance to my (dynamic) account, see Singer, "Hume's Extreme Skepticism in *Treatise*, I iv 7."

43. Hume does not mention Berkeley by name in the context of 1.4.2 of the *Treatise*, but his reference to "a few extravagant sceptics" at T, 1.4.2.50/214 certainly includes him.

44. See esp. Berkeley, *Principles*, 9–15.

45. Compare Locke, *Essay*, 134–5 (2.8.9–10).

46. Garrett has argued that Hume "does not ever assert the *truth* of the modern philosopher's conclusions about the unreality of secondary qualities. Instead he restricts himself to reporting it as *their* conclusion" (*Cognition and Commitment*, 218). See, however, Hume's remarks at T, 3.1.1.26/469, where he says that the modern philosophy's "discovery" that secondary qualities "are not qualities in objects but perceptions in the mind" should be "regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences."

47. In this context, Hume suggests the analogy that we can no more conceive of an extension that is neither tangible nor visible than we can conceive of a triangle that has no particular length or proportion (EU, 12.15/154–5; compare Berkeley, *Principles*, intro. 15, 16). In his earlier discussion of abstract ideas in the *Treatise*, Hume maintains that "'tis utterly absurd to suppose a triangle really existent, which has no precise proportion of sides and angles" (T, 1.1.7.6/19). The implication of this is that objects that are extended but lacking all qualities of sight and feeling are no more possible in reality than triangles that lack any precise proportion of sides and angles.

48. Hume never explicitly asserts that the philosophical system is "false." (Garrett makes this point; *Cognition and Commitment*, 214, 220; but compare Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, 184–6, and Dicker, *Hume's Epistemology and Metaphysics*, 176.) However, since he does claim that this doctrine either involves an unintelligible and meaningless abstraction or commits us to absurdity and contradiction, his position goes well beyond weak skepticism. While Hume's position regarding the philosophical system brings him close to Berkeley's view, his attitude to vulgar belief in body is quite different from this. In particular, Hume is careful to avoid suggesting that that vulgar belief in body is in any way "unintelligible" or "absurd." On the contrary, he specifically argues that our belief in the continued existence of sensible objects or perceptions, although false, "involves no contradiction" (T, 1.4.2.38–40/206–8). Clearly, then, unlike Berkeley, Hume holds that our original, natural belief in body is neither absurd and incoherent nor the product of philosophical speculation (T, 1.4.2.14, 31/193, 202).

For further discussion relating to this point of contrast see, e.g., Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism*, 76–9; Raynor, "Hume and Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*."

49. Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism*, 78–9. Fogelin's remarks in this context are specifically concerned with Hume's account of the "vulgar" belief in body.

50. Descartes, for example, argued in the opposite direction—i.e. God to world, not world to God. Elsewhere in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume provides reason for rejecting the "metaphysical" proofs advanced by Descartes (see, e.g., T, 1.3.7.2–3/94–5 and EU, 12.28–9/164 on God and existence).

51. Locke's version of the cosmological argument is structurally very similar to Clarke's famous "argument *a priori*," as discussed earlier.

52. Locke, *Essay*, 619–20, 631–2 (4.10.1–2; 4.11.2–3).

53. Locke, *Essay*, 621–2 (4.10.6–7).

54. Locke, *Essay*, 631 (4.11.3).

55. Locke, *Essay*, 628 (4.10.18).

56. I provide a fuller account of Clarke's argument in chapter 10.

57. Clarke, *Works*, esp. 2:524–7 (props. 1–3).

58. Clarke, *Works*, 4:726–7; his emphasis.

59. Quoted by Clarke's friend Bishop Hoadley, in a letter to Lady Sundon, cited in Ferguson, *Clarke*, 249.

60. The followers include, most notably, Andrew Baxter (discussed later). Another relevant figure, however, is Henry Grove, who was a critic of Arthur Collier's *Clavis Universalis* (1713), which defends a version of the immaterialist philosophy. See Grove's preface to *A Demonstration of the Soul's Immateriality* (1718). Grove was an influential dissenter and a defender of Clarke's Newtonian philosophy. He was also, later in life, a notable admirer of Baxter's philosophy.

61. A useful general account of the design argument as developed by these figures is provided in Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton and the Design Argument*, 34–42. See, in particular, Cheyne's remark that "the Existence of Matter, is a plain Demonstration of the Existence of a Deity"; *Philosophical Principles of Natural Religion*, 3, nos. 3–4. Throughout this influential work of Newtonian theology, Cheyne advances a variety of proofs for God's existence that presuppose the existence of matter. (On the resemblance of the views of Cheyne and Maclaurin to those of Cleanthes in Hume's *Dialogues* see Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton and the Design Argument*, 141–6.)

62. Clarke, *Works*, 2:756. Compare Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, who says: "The plain argument for the existence of the Deity, obvious to all and carrying irresistible conviction with it, is from the evident contrivance and fitness of things for one another, which we meet with throughout all parts of the universe" (381). (I discuss Maclaurin's critical comments on Berkeley's immaterialism later.)

63. The Newtonians' strong hostility to Berkeley's philosophy, as I have explained, was largely rooted in these theological concerns. However, this general objection was not articulated in detail until Baxter published his *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* in 1733.

64. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 297–8, 415, 494; and Reid, *Works*, 101–3 *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, 1, v and vi. Both Beattie and Reid stress the skeptical nature of Berkeley's doctrine, but also point out that Berkeley's intentions were not skeptical, much less hostile to religion. In contrast with this, they make clear that Hume did not share Berkeley's general aversion to skepticism, and that he was happy to use Berkeley's doctrine for ends that were contrary to what Berkeley had in mind. This theme is especially apparent in Beattie, who stresses it throughout his *Essay*.

65. Compare Hume's related remarks at T, 1.4.7.9–11/269–70.

66. Hume's way of formulating the deception challenge is really just a variant of a point a careful reader will find in Bayle. Bayle notes that the only proof that we have that bodies exist is "based on the contention that God would be deceiving me if he implanted in my mind the ideas that I have of bodies without there actually being any. But this proof is very weak: it *proves too much*. Ever since the beginning of the world, all mankind except perhaps one out of two hundred millions, has firmly believed that bodies are coloured, and this is an error. I ask, does God deceive mankind with regard to colours? If he deceives them about this, what prevents him from doing so with regard to extension? The second deception would not be less innocent, nor less compatible with the nature of a supremely perfect being than the first deception is" (*Dictionary*, art. "Pyrrho," note B [Popkin, *Selections*, 198]; my emphasis). Hume simply applies this general line of reasoning to vulgar belief in body. The point that is especially significant, however, is that Hume is careful to argue that all of us—including the philosopher and the (professed) skeptic—are subject to the deceptive (vulgar) belief in body. There is no escape from this form of deception, even for those who are capable of the sort of philosophical reflection that can expose it.

67. Hume's deception challenge is obviously of some relevance to his discussion of the problem of evil in the *Dialogues* (Parts X and XI). I return to this issue later.

68. Bracken, *Early Reception*, 31–8.

69. Davie, "Berkeley's Impact," and Stewart, "Berkeley and the Rankenian Club." Mossner points out that some members of the Rankenian Club (e.g. Maclaurin) likely taught Hume when he was an Edinburgh University undergraduate (*Life*, 40). (See chapter 4.)

70. Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 95, 97–9. Maclaurin's views on the existence of matter are confidently Lockean. He dismisses Berkeley's immaterialism as "futile" and "extravagant." One of Maclaurin's principal aims in this work is to provide a "secure foundation for natural religion," based on the design argument. See his remarks at *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 3, 22–3, 381, 386.

71. Bracken, *Early Reception*, chap. 5; Davie, "Berkeley's Impact"; and Popkin, "David Hume and the Pyrrhonian Controversy," and "Berkeley and Pyrrhonism." Although Baxter's work has not been entirely ignored by contemporary commentators, and both Davie and Popkin make some suggestions about Baxter's place in the background of Hume's philosophical work, none of these commentators examines the specific relevance of Baxter to Hume's discussion of the material world, much less to the role natural religion plays here.

72. Among the several points I have already discussed in relation to this (in chapter 4) is the fact that William Warburton, a notoriously hostile critic of Hume, was a close friend and great admirer of Baxter. As already noted (chapter 4, note 53), Warburton compared Baxter favorably to Berkeley in his notes on Pope's *Epilogue to the Satires* (dialogue 2). His remarks are worth quoting at greater length: "how [Berkeley's] metaphysics came to get him the character of a great genius, unless from the daring nature of his attempt, I am at a loss to conceive. His pretended demonstration, on this capital question [the existence of matter], being the poorest, lowest, and most miserable of all sophisms; that is, a sophism which begs the question, as the late Mr. Baxter has clearly shewn: a few pages of whose reasoning have not only more sense and substance than all the elegant discourse of Dr. Berkley, but infinitely better entitle him to the character of a great genius. He was truly such: and a time will come, if learning ever revive amongst us, when the present inattention to his admirable Metaphysics, established on the Physics of Newton, will be deemed as great a dishonour to the Wisdom of this age as the neglect of Milton's Poetry was to the Wit of the past" (Pope, *Works*, 4:343n). Warburton's remarks exaggerate the extent to which Baxter's contemporaries neglected his philosophy—although it is true that his influence and reputation was relatively short-lived. In any case, Warburton's remarks show his own considerable regard for Baxter, and this would

certainly account for his *deep hostility* to Hume's philosophy—which provides a systematic refutation of Baxter's entire (Clarkean) scheme.

73. McCracken and Tipton describe the significance of Baxter's critique of Berkeley in the following terms: "Finally, we may say of Baxter that he expressed more fully than anyone before him the prevailing judgment on Berkeley's immaterialism in the two decades following the publication of the *Principles*" (*Berkeley's Principles and Dialogues: Background and Source Materials*, 206).

74. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:82.

75. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:260.

76. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:260–1; his emphasis.

77. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:286.

78. As noted, Baxter's effort to demonstrably refute "atheism" is modeled after Clarke's project in the *Demonstration*. See, e.g., Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:98n, 178, 189; 2:283.

79. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:314–5; his emphasis. Berkeley, of course, as noted, insists that it is a plain mistake to suppose that his immaterialism "derogates in the least from the reality of things" (*Principles*, 33, 91; *Dialogues*, 113–4).

80. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:317; his emphasis.

81. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:316. Baxter's claim that matter is capable of causing our perceptions is, as Bracken notes, at odds with his view that matter is inactive (compare *Early Reception*, 78–9).

82. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:283.

83. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:283n.

84. *Chambers' Cyclopedia* (1728). This passage is reprinted in Bracken, *Early Reception*, 115.

85. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:285–6. Baxter's specific criticism that Berkeley's philosophy would make God a deceiver is mentioned and discussed by Isaac Watts, an influential contemporary, in his *Philosophical Essays on Various Subjects*, *Essay* 3, sec. 7 (*Works*, 3:370). Watts says: "It is most highly probable, if not sufficiently evident, that [real objects] do exist without us . . . we cannot suppose that God has so formed our natures, that two senses [i.e. touch and sight] should join to deceive us, when we have no way left to undeceive ourselves." Watts goes on to observe that while some "ingenious men" have argued that "the world of bodies in which we dwell . . . must be a mere chimerical and fantastic universe," he can "hardly think that any man ever believed it: A late author of the *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* has refuted this opinion."

86. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:311–3.

87. In chapter 14 I discuss another, distinct criticism Baxter levels against Berkeley: namely, that his skepticism about the existence of material substance leads on to a general skepticism about the existence of *immaterial* substance, hence to "atheism" (Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:279–82, 284–6, 292–3). Suffice it to note, for now, that Hume's discussion of immaterial substance in the sections that follow T, 1.4.2 develop the very sort of "sceptical" argument Baxter warns against.

88. William Dudgeon (discussed in more detail in chapter 4) was also the first Scottish philosopher to endorse immaterialist principles. Moreover, he used his immaterialist principles to support a "pantheistic" philosophical system. Hume's use of immaterialist philosophy for irreligious purposes has, therefore, a precedent in the work of one of his near neighbors at the time that the *Treatise* was being planned and written. On Dudgeon's "pantheistic immaterialism" see Berman's introduction to Dudgeon, *Philosophical Works*.

89. Kames, *Essays*, pt. 2, Essay 3 ["Of the Authority of our Senses"].

90. Kames, *Essays*, 328–9; my emphasis.

91. Kames, *Essays*, 241; my emphasis.

92. Kames, *Essays*, 328–31, 335–4, 386–9.

93. Although Kames is less concerned with the deception challenge than the skeptical challenge in his essay "Of the authority of our senses," he considers the issue of deception at greater length in the preceding essay on "liberty and necessity." According to Kames, human beings experience a "deceitful" feeling of liberty, which nevertheless serves "good purposes" (*Essays*, 202–14,). Among the objections he considers in some detail is that this "seems to represent the Deity, as acting deceitfully by his creatures" and forces them "to act upon a false hypothesis" (*Essays*, 211–4, 235n). Kames tries to explain away the apparent contradiction in his philosophy by arguing that some senses have the "discovery of truth" as their end, while others "aim to make us happy and virtuous." Critics like Beattie were not convinced and argued that God cannot be a deceiver *with respect to* either our belief in matter or our feeling of liberty (*Essay on Truth*, 74, 373–4).

94. As already noted (chap. 2, note 54), essays written at Edinburgh University for Professor John Stevenson's logic class in the late 1730s show that these students were reading Berkeley and using Baxter's *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* to criticize his immaterialist doctrine. Another essay written by a student in 1740 shows signs of influence of Hume's *Treatise*. The same essay provides evidence that "Hume was being read in Edinburgh as a Berkeleyean" (Stewart, "Berkeley and the Rankenian Club," 39; and compare Davie, "Berkeley's Impact," 30). What this shows is that before the *Treatise* was even published, Hume's Scottish contemporaries were discussing Berkeley's doctrine in light of Baxter's criticisms. Moreover, since Hume was being read in Scotland as a (skeptical) follower of Berkeley immediately after the *Treatise* was published, the irreligious significance of his arguments would have been particularly obvious to this audience. This is, of course, entirely consistent with the fact that by 1745 Hume had a well-established reputation in Scotland as "a sceptic and atheist."

95. It is possible that Hume's discussion of the argument from design in sec. 11 of the first *Enquiry* was among the sections that he "cut" from the *Treatise* before it was published.

96. The obvious problem here is that when commentators have discussed Hume's philosophy of religion, the focus has almost always been on the first *Enquiry* and the *Dialogues*.

97. The phrase is Kames's, as cited earlier. While Kames does not explicitly refer to (his friend) Hume in this context, Beattie does make this point explicitly. In his *Essay on Truth*, Beattie refers to Berkeley and Hume as claiming that "the external material world does not exist," and then, paraphrasing Hume's remarks in the *Enquiry*, notes that "if the external world be once called in doubt as to its existence, we shall be at a loss to find arguments by which we may prove the being of God, or any of his attributes" (pp.164–5).

98. See, in particular, passages at D, 103: "But I will be contented . . ."; D, 107: "In short, I repeat the question . . ."; and EU, 11.26/144–5: "The case is not the same . . ."

99. The deception challenge could, of course, be weakened along the same lines as the "Epicurean" challenge in the *Dialogues*. That is, it may be argued that evidence of deception perhaps does not prove that God does not exist, but only that we cannot *infer* the existence of a perfectly good and benevolent God given "phenomena" of this kind. The crucial point to remember, however, is that the premise that deception is *inconsistent* with the existence of God was accepted by almost all of the most prominent defenders of theism to whom Hume was responding (i.e. Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley, Clarke, and Baxter).

Chapter 14. *The Human Soul*

1. Wollheim identifies this as a point of notable difference between Hume and the *philosophes* who belonged to D'Holbach's "atheistic" circle in Paris (introduction, *Hume on Religion*, 28). See also Lange's remarks in *History of Materialism*, 2:8: "The actual head and leader of the

English unbelievers at that time [eighteenth century] was . . . Hume the Sceptic, a man whose views put an end as well to Materialism as to the dogmatism of religion and metaphysics."

2. Reid, *Works*, 1:102–3; compare 1:207 (*Inquiry into the Human Mind*, chap. 1, secs. 5 and 6); see also Reid, *Works*, 1:292–5 (*Intellectual Powers*, chap. 12).

3. Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 298; and compare 499. See also Monboddo's remarks in *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*: "For [Berkeley] thought that, if he could show that *matter* did not exist, it would follow of necessary consequence that there was nothing in the universe but *mind*; not foreseeing, that a philosopher was to arise, who should deny the existence of mind as well as body" (Fieser, *Early Responses*, 1:244–5; his emphasis.) The same general point is made by Sidney Smith, as cited in chapter 1, note 3.

4. See, e.g., Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 282–3; Noxon, *Hume's Philosophical Development*, 168; Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 2; Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism*, 97–8.

5. See, e.g., Butler's opening remarks in his dissertation on personal identity: "Whether we are to live in a future state, as it is the most important question which can possibly be asked" (*Works*, 1:303). Similar statements are made throughout the *Analogy*. See the related discussion in chapter 11.

6. The issue of free will was intimately connected with the debate about the *immateriality* of the soul, on the ground that it was widely held that a material being was incapable of free will, hence free will required that the moral agent was an immaterial being.

7. This point was, of course, made on both sides of the debate. See, e.g., Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, book 3.

8. Plato, *Phaedo*, 78d. Lucretius defends the contrary Epicurean view (i.e. since the mind is material it is composite and therefore perishable).

9. This claim, as I will explain, needs some qualification as it concerns Locke—who took the (unorthodox) view that it is *conceivable* that matter is capable of thinking.

10. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 46.15.

11. Hobbes, *Human Nature*, chap. 2; *Leviathan*, chaps. 1–3; and compare *De Corpore*, chap. 25.

12. It is also Hobbes's view that we have no *idea* of material substance. He says: "I have already frequently pointed out that we do not have an idea of God, or of the soul. I will now add that we do not have an idea of substance. For substance, in so far as it is the matter which is the subject of accidental properties and of changes, is something that is established solely by reasoning; it is not something that is conceived, or that presents any idea to us" (*Third Set of Objections*; in Descartes, *Writings*, 2:130).

13. Hobbes, *Leviathan* 5.5; see also 4.21: "Another [sort of insignificant sounds], when men make a name of two names, whose significations are contradictory and inconsistent, as is the name, an *incorporeal body*, or (which is all one) an *incorporeal substance*."

14. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 46.19.

15. Descartes, *Writings*, 2:54. See also *Meditation*, 2, where Descartes claims to prove that he is a "thinking thing," as distinct from a body. In his *Third Set of Objections*, Hobbes criticizes Descartes's effort to establish a real distinction between mind and body, to which Descartes provides (brief) replies (Descartes, *Writings*, 2:122–4).

16. Descartes, *Writings*, 2:59; compare *Writings*, 2:9–10; see also *Writings*, 1:231 (*Principles*, 2.320).

17. Descartes, *Writings*, 2:91, 109; see also Descartes's remarks in his "synopsis," *Writings*, 2:9–10.

18. Locke, *Essay*, 312–3 (2.23.30). Locke, along with a number of other British philosophers of this period (e.g. Clarke), rejects Descartes's view that extension as such is the essence of body.

19. Locke *Essay*, 295–8 (2.23.1–5). Locke emphasizes the point, however, that our ideas of both body and spirit are in the same situation in this respect—there is nothing uniquely problematic about our ignorance of immaterial substance (*Essay*, 305–6 [2.23.15]).

20. Locke maintains that knowledge concerning the immortality of the soul depends on revelation, not philosophical reasoning of any kind. See Bayle's remarks praising Locke's views on this issue in his *Dictionary*, art. "Dicaerchus," note M (Popkin, *Selections*, 72–4).

21. Locke, *Essay*, 540–1 (4.3.6).

22. As Mijuskovic observes: "Despite the fact that Locke is not the initial nor even the first major philosopher in the seventeenth century to defend the possibility or conceivability of matter to think (for at least Hobbes proceeded him in this) nevertheless he is the author who is most influential in bringing the question into focus...through his influence in the widely read *Essay*" (*Achilles of Rationalist Arguments*, 71). While this observation is true, the significance of the specific reaction to Hobbes should not be underestimated. It was Hobbes's views that served as the principal target of the Cambridge Platonists (e.g. More, Cudworth) and, later on, of the Boyle lecturers (e.g. Bentley, Clarke). Attacks on Hobbes's materialism persisted until well into the eighteenth century.

23. Yolton, *Locke and the Way of Ideas*, 152–3. See also Locke's reply to Stillingfleet in *Works*, 2:400: "any one not being able to demonstrate the soul to be immaterial, takes off not very much, nor at all, from the evidence of its immortality, if God has revealed that it shall be immortal..."

24. Locke, *Essay*, 623 (4.10.10). This is, as noted, a component of Locke's more general cosmological argument leading to the demonstrated conclusion that the first original cause must be an intelligent, omnipotent, *immaterial* being.

25. Locke, *Essay*, 328–48 (2.27).

26. Locke, *Essay*, 340 (2.27.16).

27. See, e.g., Butler's "Personal Identity," esp. *Works*, 1:307: "Mr. Locke's observations upon this subject appear hasty..."

28. On this see Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 83–4: "At the centre of More and Cudworth's quarrel with Hobbes was the doctrine of materialism. From this doctrine flowed all of the evil consequences to religion, which the Cambridge Platonists opposed by their general outlook and which More and Cudworth attacked with Hobbes specifically in mind."

29. More, *Philosophical Writings*, 86 (*Immortality of the Soul*, 1.9.1).

30. Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, 103. Compare Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 2.8.

31. Bentley, *A Confutation of Atheism*, sermon 2, (in *Works*, 3:27–50).

32. Bentley, *A Confutation of Atheism*, sermon 2, (in *Works*, 3:34).

33. Bentley, *A Confutation of Atheism*, sermon 2, (in *Works*, 3:35).

34. Compare Bentley, *A Confutation of Atheism*, sermon 2, (in *Works*, 3:50): "Can any credulity be comparable to this? If a man should affirm, that an ape, casually meeting with pen, ink and paper, and falling to scribble, did happen to write exactly the *Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes, would an Atheist believe such a story."

35. For references see chapter 10, sec. 1.

36. Clarke, *Works*, 2:559; compare *Works*, 3:904–7 and 4:735. This was, of course, an entirely orthodox view among Anglican divines at this time. See, e.g., Berkeley's remarks in his advertisement to *Alciphron* (in *Works*, 3:24): "Whatever they pretend..." Berkeley's remarks in this context allude to the views of Clarke's antagonist Anthony Collins—whom he refers to as "one of the most noted writers against Christianity in our times."

37. Clarke, *Works*, 2:697, 698.

38. One important point on which Clarke diverged from Cudworth (but followed More) was in his view that souls, although immaterial and indivisible, are nevertheless *extended*. (This is, of course, consistent with Clarke's related view that God is the substantial support

of infinite, absolute space and time.) For a discussion of this aspect of Clarke's thought see Vailati, "Clarke's Extended Soul."

39. Clarke, *Works*, 2:545.

40. Clarke, *Works*, 2:545–6; compare 561–2.

41. Clarke, *Works*, 2:555–6, 561.

42. Huxley, *Hume*, 249. For a different assessment of the relative merits of Clarke and Collins in this debate see Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:239–41. A valuable summary of the central points of debate, as seen from an early eighteenth-century perspective, is contained in an appendix by John Maxwell, in his translation and new edition of Richard Cumberland, *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature* (London: 1727), a work that is primarily devoted to refuting Hobbes's philosophy.

43. There was also, as I have indicated, a related third issue: Are human beings free agents with a power of producing motion without being subject to causal necessity? Here, too, Clarke answers yes, and Collins says no. Clarke and Collins debated the free will issue in a second round of exchanges in 1717, when Collins published his influential *Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty*. I discuss this issue in chapter 16.

44. Clarke, *Works*, 3:730, 790–1. Compare Hobbes's similar argument in the opposite direction concerning the "place" of spirit in relation to the body: *Leviathan*, 46.19.

45. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:767–70.

46. Clarke, *Works*, 3:798.

47. See, e.g., Ducharme, "Personal Identity in Samuel Clarke," 370, 377; also Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, 166; and Stephen, *English Thought*, 1:265–7.

48. Clarke, *Works*, 3:851–3; compare 3:740.

49. Clarke, *Works*, 3:844, 851–2.

50. See esp. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:875–81.

51. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:875. The example of the oak appears in Locke, *Essay*, 330 (2.27.4) and in Shaftesbury (*Characteristics*, 2:99. Hume uses the same specific example of the oak (T, 1.4.6.12/257) to make the same general point: namely, personal identity can be assimilated to the (complex) identity of plants and animals. (Hume's examples, and the use he puts them to, are a clear guide to the literature he is concerned with and the position he takes up. See notes 75 and 76.)

52. See Butler's critical remarks on this in his "Personal Identity" (*Works*, 1:307–8).

53. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:807.

54. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:877.

55. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:811; 820, 876–7, 878–9.

56. This book was published anonymously. For the attribution see Robertson, *Freethought*, 2:738; Jacob, *Radical Enlightenment*, 174; Gascoigne, *Cambridge in the Age of Enlightenment*, 135. Strutt belonged to a "deist club" based in London and had followers in Cambridge University in an "atheistical society" that looked to Strutt as their "oracle."

57. Strutt, *Springs of Actions*, 2, 4.

58. Strutt, *Springs of Actions*, 3.

59. Strutt, *Springs of Actions*, 37, 44.

60. Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 139–41. We know that Strutt was being read in the Scottish Borders area in the early 1730s, since Dudgeon cites *Springs of Actions* in his work *A Discourse Concerning the Deity*, 5. Warburton cites Strutt, along with Dudgeon, Toland, Collins, and others, in his list of "the tribe of freethinkers" (*Works*, 11:22 [*Commentary on Pope*, preface]).

61. Baxter is also the author of the posthumous work *The Evidence of the Immortality of the Soul* (1779), which is completely devoted to this issue.

62. As noted earlier, Warburton routinely cites Baxter along with Clarke as a notable defender of the immortality of the soul, as based on the principles of Newton's philosophy.

See, e.g., *Works*, 12:139–41; "Study of Theology," 364. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul (i.e. that it is essential for the existence of civil society) is the foundation of Warburton's argument to defend revealed religion in his *Divine Legation* (1738).

63. Baxter, *Reflections*, 18–9.

64. See Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, esp. 1:218–47. Baxter devotes considerable space to the refutation of Locke's suggestion concerning "thinking matter" (*Enquiry into the Human Soul*, esp. 1:192–5).

65. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:237–41.

66. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:239.

67. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:279–80. Compare Reid's remarks cited earlier concerning Hume's use of Berkeley's principles to "undo" both the material world and the world of spirits, leaving nothing but impressions and ideas. Reid presents Hume as taking not only the specific skeptical steps Baxter warns against, but the further step of "undoing" the self. Compare also Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 266.

68. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:292.

69. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:292.

70. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:292–3. A similar line of criticism is briefly asserted in Maclaurin, *Account of Newton's Discoveries*, 98.

71. In the third edition of *Three Dialogues* (1734), Berkeley seeks to show that this line of criticism misses the mark. He argues, in particular, that he does not "deny the existence of material substance merely because [he has] no idea of it, but because the notion of it is inconsistent" (p. 115–7). M. A. Stewart suggests that these changes are likely a response to Baxter's criticism ("Berkeley and the Rankenian Club," 43).

72. Hume notes that objects that differ in this respect may nevertheless be "susceptible of many other relations." More specifically, he notes that such objects may coexist and be "co-temporary in their appearance in the mind" (T, 1.4.5.12/237). Because we find that certain qualities regularly appear conjointly (in time) with certain extended objects, we are naturally inclined to add the further relation of conjunction in place "in order to complete the union." This, in essence, is the mistake of materialists, and it leads to obvious absurdities that are all a result of "our endeavouring to bestow a place on what is utterly incapable of it" (T, 1.4.5.14/238).

73. The implications of the doctrines of the *Treatise* were, of course, apparent to many of Hume's contemporaries when this work appeared. In *The Specimen* (1745), for example, he is "charged" with "denying the Immateriality of the Soul" and thereby threatening the doctrine of the immortality of the soul (LG, 13, 18). His reply (LG, 29–30) to this "charge" is plainly evasive.

74. The implications of Hume's understanding of the relationship between matter and thought obviously run much deeper than the immediate issue of the immortality of the soul. As already discussed (chap. 10), Hume's argument that matter and motion can give rise to thought and consciousness strikes a direct blow against the efforts of Cudworth, Locke, Clarke, and others to demonstrate the ontological priority of mind in cosmological terms. Clearly this provides considerable support for the opposing "materialist" cosmology of the atheistic thinkers they set out to refute (i.e. Hobbes, Spinoza, Toland, Collins, et al.).

75. As discussed in note 51, Hume's use of the example of an oak tree in this context can also be found in Locke, Shaftesbury, and Collins. In this context, Hume also uses the example of a river (T, 1.4.6.14/258) and of a ship (T, 1.4.6. 11/257). Collins also employs both these specific examples (Clarke, *Works*, 3:844). See also note 76.

76. Hume's specific example of a "republic" appears in Bayle (*Dictionary*, art. "Pyrrho," Note F). The same general example, however, is also found in Hobbes. Hobbes says that it will be "the same city, whose acts proceed continually from the same institution, whether the

men be the same or no" (*De Corpore*, 11.7). In the same context, Hobbes also cites the examples of a ship and a river, along with that of a city, in support of his thesis that "individuation" does not depend on numerically identical matter.

77. Butler, *Works*, 1:307.

78. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:284.

79. As noted, Hume's argument that matter and motion can produce thought depends on a causal principle (i.e. "any thing may produce any thing") that Baxter also explicitly identified as laying the foundation for atheism and skepticism (Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:357–62). Hume's approach *with respect to* substance has, therefore, an underlying consistency and unity of purpose.

80. Compare Descartes, *Writings*, 1:139 (*Discourse on Method*, pt. 5); see also *Writings*, 2:189; 247–8 (*Fifth Set of Objections and Replies*). There is, of course, a tradition of philosophical literature arguing for the resemblance between humans and animals (i.e. with respect to reason, passions, and actions) that extends back to earlier figures such as Montaigne and Plutarch. These would certainly be authors Hume would have looked to on this subject. For a discussion of some of this literature, especially as it relates to Montaigne and the later seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debate in France, see Boas, *The Happy Beast*.

81. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Rorarius," note E (Popkin, *Selections*, 224–5).

82. Bentley, *A Confutation of Atheism*, sermon 2, (in *Works*, 3:45].

83. Clarke, *Works*, 3:752.

84. Elsewhere Collins suggests that one significant difference between animals and humans is that "there are no signs of Religion observable among brutes." He also (wryly) observes, however, that this gives "no advantage to Man over Brutes, but sinks him below them, upon supposition that Religion consists in the Belief of Propositions, either repugnant to one another, or to Propositions which we perceive to be true (*Use of Reason*, 12).

85. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:753.

86. Clarke, *Works*, 3:763.

87. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:777–8.

88. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 1:211.

89. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:241–7.

90. Marvin Fox has argued that Hume's views concerning the resemblance between humans and animals "constitutes Hume's most anti-religious weapon" ("Religion and Human Nature," 564). While it is fundamental to Judaism and Christianity to claim that "man is a special creature, specially endowed by God, and of special concern to God," Fox says, Hume "leaves no room for doubt that he believes that man is nothing more than an animal" (574–5). Fox's discussion draws on passages from the *Treatise* but also places particular weight on Hume's essay "Of the Dignity and Meanness of Human Nature." In relation to this theme, see also Craig, *The Mind of God*, chapter 2. Craig suggests that "a legitimate and illuminating perspective from which to read Hume" is in terms of his destruction of the doctrine "that man was made in the image of God." In its place Hume substitutes "an anthropology which looked not to the divine but to the natural world for its comparisons" (70). Craig's suggestion—insofar as it includes the *Treatise*—serves as something of an exception to the orthodoxy that the *Treatise* has little or no relevance to religion (i.e. as discussed in chapter 1 earlier). Having said this, Craig does not directly or systematically challenge this orthodoxy. Moreover his discussion is not concerned with the general interpretation of the *Treatise*, as such, but with Hume's philosophy as a whole—to which Craig devotes only one chapter of his book. Nevertheless, Hume's concern with a naturalized anthropology is, indeed, a key element of the irreligious interpretation of the *Treatise*.

91. It is also true that Hume acknowledges that there are differences between human beings and animals, insofar as we clearly "surpass" animals with respect to reason (compare

T, 3.3.4.5/610; EU, 9.5n/107n). Beyond this, he also points out that (1) animals have no sense of virtue (T, 2.1.12.5/326), and (2) humans have a "love of truth" that has no counterpart in animals (although it does bear some analogy to hunting; T, 2.3.10). As Fox points out ("Religion and Human Nature," 570), even where Hume observes that there are differences between humans and animals, he still emphasizes the fundamental animal nature that is involved (i.e. in morals and philosophy). In general, it is not Hume's concern to deny that there are any differences but only to insist on the broad and systematic points of *resemblance* between humans and animals. For a helpful discussion of Hume's views on this subject, see Pitson, *Hume's Philosophy of the Self*, chap. 6.

92. As noted, this may well be a "castrated" or discarded section of the *Treatise*, as originally projected. See chapter 11, note 29.

93. This is, of course, the *opposite* of what Butler argues for in his *Analogy of Religion*.

94. It may still be true, of course, that Hume did remove some passages that later went into the essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul."

95. There is little or no discussion of the immateriality of the soul or personal identity in the first *Enquiry*. On this key issue, therefore, the *Treatise* is the work that has retained its (most) "noble parts."

96. Baxter, *Enquiry into the Human Soul*, 2:279–80.

97. Warburton in a letter to Andrew Miller [7 February 1757], reprinted in *Pope's Literary Legacy*, 126.

98. See, e.g., Colliber, *Free Thoughts Concerning Souls*, 5; and Sykes, *Natural and Revealed Religion*, chap. 4.

Chapter 15. *The Practical Pyrrhonist*

1. See the review of alternative accounts in chapter 1.

2. As noted, the thinkers Hume is alluding to are primarily those who are associated with Newton, Locke, and Clarke. See Hume's remarks at NHR, 190 (note G) and also on Locke at D, 40.

3. There were, of course, many works by Christian apologists opposing the efforts of Locke and various "deists" (e.g. Toland) to "rationalize" religion. An especially significant work of this kind in Hume's Scottish context was Halyburton's *Natural Religion Insufficient* (as discussed in chapter 4). In general, Hume is relying on the fact that the Scottish clergy at this time were deeply divided over the question of how reason and religion were related.

4. It was, of course, a common theme of Christian apologists at this time to argue that pride was a root cause of "atheism." (See, e.g., Harris, *Atheistical Objections Against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:356; Edwards, *Thoughts Concerning Atheism*, 31.) Hume, in effect, turns the charge back on the "religious philosophers."

5. Compare Hume, "Immortality of the Soul"; ESY, 591–2.

6. On this subject, Hume stands directly opposed, most notably, to Locke and Clarke, who argued that divine revelation must be judged by human reason (i.e. in terms of the credibility of "testimony," etc.).

7. The specific example Hume cites of "sophistries" of this kind of "pretended syllogistic reasoning" is the proposition "Where there is no property, there can be no injustice" (EU, 12.29/163). The example is given by Locke (*Essay*, 549 [4.3.18]), arguing that morality is capable of demonstration.

8. See my related remarks in chapter 13 about the "dynamic" nature of Hume's views concerning our belief in the external world.

9. Where the influence of reason is strong, and circumstances encourage skeptical reflection, our disposition to doubt and uncertainty will be more pronounced. Where this is

not the case, "vanity" and "pride," combined with the force of instinct, will subdue all such skeptical tendencies, and our propensity to dogmatism, and to speculate about "remote" subjects, will return.

10. The same basic theme appears in the first *Enquiry*, sec. 11. In relation to Cleanthes' objection that abstruse reasoning is by no means confined to theological speculations, see Penelhum's similar response to Hume in his "Comments and Responses," 270.

11. Compare Hume's remarks at LG, 21.

12. Philo's remarks in this context simply echo Hume's remarks in the first section of the *Enquiry* (EU, 1.11/11).

13. In a letter to Gilbert Elliot, written in 1751, Hume asserts that the *Enquiry* (i.e. his "Philosophical Essays") contains "every thing of Consequence relating to the Understanding, which you would meet with in the *Treatise*. . . . The philosophical Principles are the same in both" (LET, 1:158, no. 73). In other contexts, Hume indicated that he was dissatisfied, not with the "matter" of his philosophy in the *Treatise*, but with the "manner" of its presentation. He attributed the lack of interest this work met with to faults of this kind, and so he "cast the first part of [the *Treatise*] anew" in the form of the *Enquiry* (Mossner, *Life*, 612; EU, p. 83/2; and see LG, 33 and LET, 1:187, no. 91). On this see McCormick, "A Change in Manner."

14. Hume's remarks about the connection between "scepticism" and the psychological states of "despair" and "melancholy" (T, 1.4.7.1/263–4) are evocative of Bunyan's description of "Giant Despair" and "Doubting-Castle," as described in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Clearly Bunyan's work, and the themes contained in it, would have been very familiar to Hume and his contemporaries. (See Hume's unflattering remarks on Bunyan at ESY, 231.) Hume's account of how "nature herself" cures our "philosophical melancholy," by *moderating* our skepticism, constitutes an alternative to Bunyan's "cure"—which involves rejecting skepticism, and following the path of Jesus Christ.

15. This is, of course, a central theme in many irreligious writings and, most notably, in Lucretius.

16. Compare Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 31.33: "And that disputing of God's nature is contrary to his honour; for it is supposed that in this natural kingdom of God, there is no other way to know anything but by natural reason, that is, from the principles of natural science, which are so far from teaching us anything of God's nature as they cannot teach us our own nature, nor the nature of the smallest creature living."

17. The particular importance of Bayle's writings on Hume's early philosophical development is, as already noted, evident from the "Early Memoranda," where Hume records a number of Bayle's observations on this subject.

18. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Pyrrho," note B (Popkin, *Selections*, 194–5).

19. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Pyrrho," note B (Popkin, *Selections*, 195).

20. Bayle, *Dictionary*, art. "Pyrrho," note B (Popkin, *Selections*, 195–6).

21. See Hobbes's remarks on scientific method and certainty in *Leviathan*, chap. 5; *Elements*, chap. 6.

22. As indicated earlier, Locke and Berkeley, the most prominent representatives of "empiricism," firmly reject any suggestion that their philosophical principles lead in the direction of skepticism about natural religion. It is a mistake, moreover, to present disagreement of this kind as an incidental debate within the (otherwise homogeneous) tradition of "empiricist" philosophy. In general, it is important to avoid an anachronistic emphasis on issues of epistemology, stripped of their theological significance. This way of looking at things has done much to distort our understanding of how Hume stands in relation to other major figures in the "British empiricist tradition."

23. See the various references in chapter 1. Stroud suggests that Hume's mention of the "experimental method" in his subtitle "gives an excellent indication of what is to be found in

the [*Treatise*]," and that it "should make one suspicious of the traditional 'sceptical' interpretation" (*Hume*, 2).

24. For a critical discussion of this view of Hume's "Newtonian" method see Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, esp. 197—where he suggests that Hume's debts may be to Bacon, not Newton.

25. Wright, *Sceptical Realism of Hume*, 188. Compare Clarke's remarks to Whiston that he used the method of demonstrative reasoning in order to refute atheists such as Hobbes and Spinoza with their own method. On this see Ferguson, *Clarke*, 256–7.

26. Sextus, *Selections*, 85; and compare 32–4.

27. Sextus, *Selections*, 33; compare Barnes, who argues that Sextus's skepticism was restricted by subject matter to "weighty beliefs" ("Beliefs of a Pyrrhonist," 7).

28. See esp. Sextus, *Selections*, 175–8; 190–215.

29. Sextus, *Selections*, 215.

30. Sextus, *Selections*, 187–90. Compare Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:65 (Freedom of Wit and Humour): "The reason, perhaps, why men of wit delight so much to espouse these paradoxical systems, is not in truth that they are so fully satisfied with them, but in a view the better to oppose some other systems, which by their fair appearance have helped, they think, to bring mankind under subjection. They imagine that by this general skepticism, which they would introduce, they shall better deal with the dogmatical spirit which prevails in some particular subjects."

31. Collins, *Freethinking*, 47–52; also his *Vindication of the Divine Attributes*, 17–24.

32. Edwards, *Thoughts Concerning Atheism*, 42–7.

33. Cudworth, *System of the Universe*, 1:142.

34. Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 2:48–50.

35. In other words, the problem of the "riddle" is now presented in the form of a philosophical *objection* rather than simply a puzzle about the nature of Hume's *commitments*. In terms of my earlier discussion (chap. 1), we may say that what we need is a *philosophical* solution to the riddle, not just an *interpretative* solution.

36. Compare Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, 143: "If anyone thinks that nothing can be known, he does not know whether even this can be known, since he admits that he knows nothing."

37. For a recent example of the latter strategy, see Broughton, "The Inquiry in Hume's *Treatise*." Broughton argues that "Hume is both a naturalist and a skeptic: not a seeming skeptic, but a skeptic" (p.537).

Chapter 16. *Freedom within Necessity*

1. For further discussion see Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, 160–5; and Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 69–72. Hume's general position in the *Enquiry* is very similar to Mandeville's in *Free Thoughts on Religion* (1720), chap. 5. See, in particular, Mandeville's summary of his argument in his preface (p. 3). Mandeville's views on this subject were themselves influenced by Bayle's *Dictionary*. Both Mandeville and Bayle were, of course, widely regarded as irreligious and anti-Christian freethinkers in the eighteenth century.

2. See, e.g., Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, 6, 160–5.

3. See, e.g., Stroud, *Hume*, 153; Penelhum, "Hume and Freedom of the Will," 158.

4. Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of Hume*, 289. Hobbes's *Tripos* (1684) contained his *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*, as well as "Of Liberty and Necessity," which was originally published in 1654. (See my remarks on these works in chapter 6.) The close relationship between Hobbes and Hume on this subject is generally regarded as an exception, insofar as Hume's major debts are supposed to lie elsewhere (e.g. Locke and Berkeley; or Hutcheson

and Newton, etc.). In contrast with this, I have argued that Hume's debt to Hobbes was *fundamental*, insofar as Hobbes's work served as Hume's model for the project of the *Treatise*.

5. For more detail on the reception given to Hobbes's necessitarianism see Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, chap. 6.

6. For details on this see O'Higgins's introduction to Collins, *Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (in *Determinism and Freewill*). Leibniz's *Theodicy* (1710) is especially useful for insight into the early eighteenth-century debate, as Leibniz presents discussion and criticism of others such as Hobbes, Bramhall, King, and Bayle.

7. Clarke, *Works*, 2:559; compare 555.

8. Clarke, *Works*, 2:559.

9. Clarke, *Works*, 2:697 and 698.

10. Clarke, *Works*, 2:558; compare 3:726–9.

11. Compare Clarke, *Works*, 3:905–6, and 4:735.

12. Ferguson notes that Clarke makes extensive use of Bramhall's arguments and that Collins "reproduces the position of Hobbes." (Bramhall's replies to Hobbes are presented in *Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance* [in Hobbes, *English Works*, vol. 5].) Ferguson also notes, however, that neither mentions "the two writers to whom they are so much indebted" (*Clarke*, 156). A useful account of this general debate from the early nineteenth-century perspective is presented in Stewart, *Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy* (notes MM and NN).

13. Clarke's *Remarks* were originally published in the same volume with his (hugely influential) correspondence with Leibniz.

14. Evidence of the importance and influence of the Clarke–Collins debate on the subject of liberty and necessity can be found throughout the relevant eighteenth-century literature on this subject (e.g. in the writings of Voltaire, Price, Priestley, Reid, Beattie, and many others). For a general survey of this literature see, e.g., Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*.

15. Collins, *Human Liberty*, ii, 16; compare Clarke, *Works*, 3:872.

16. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 12–5, 115.

17. Clarke, *Works*, 4:721–2; compare 2:559; 3:905–6.

18. Clarke, *Works*, 4:722.

19. Clarke, *Works*, 2:565–6; compare 2:549.

20. Clarke, *Works*, 2:553, 557; compare 4:728–9.

21. Clarke, *Works*, 4:723, 728–9. It is evident that Clarke's views on this matter anticipate important aspects of Reid's agent-causation theory. On the relevance of Clarke's conception of agency for understanding Reid's theory see Rowe, *Thomas Reid on the Morality of Freedom*, esp. chap. 2.

22. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 12. Compare Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt. 1, app.

23. Clarke, *Works*, 2:558–9.

24. Clarke, *Works*, 2:726–8.

25. Clarke, *Works*, 2:552; 4:729; Collins, *Human Liberty*, 58.

26. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:872; *Human Liberty*, 58–9, 82–3.

27. Clarke, *Works*, 2:553, 565, 572; 3:906; 4:723, 725, 729.

28. Clarke, *Works*, 4:725; his emphasis.

29. Clarke, *Works*, 4:723, 728.

30. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 87–9.

31. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 90. In his *Atheistical Objections against the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion* (i.e. Boyle Lectures, 1698), John Harris argues that "two of the strongest Holds of Atheism and Infidelity" are that there is no real distinction between moral good and evil, and that "all Things are determined by absolute Fatality: And that God himself, and all Creatures whatsoever, are necessary Agents, without having any Power of Choice, or any

real Liberty in their Nature at all." The former, Harris claims, "plainly follows" from the latter (*Defence of Religion*, 1:414).

32. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 106; compare Clarke, *Works*, 3:872.

33. Clarke, *Works*, 4:733.

34. Clarke, *Works*, 4:734–5; compare 3:851, 905–6; 2:651–2.

35. Clarke, *Works*, 3:905–6; 4:734–5.

36. Clarke, *Works*, 2:568–9, 573–5.

37. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 83–4.

38. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 84.

39. Collins, *Human Liberty*, 85–7.

40. Collins in Clarke, *Works*, 3:873; his emphasis.

41. Clarke, *Works*, 4:733.

42. Clarke, *Works*, 2:566–8.

43. Clarke, *Works*, 4:734.

44. Clarke, *Works*, 2:555, 559, 567.

45. Clarke, *Works*, 3:851; his emphasis.

46. Other Boyle lecturers and divines routinely employed the metaphor of "clockwork man" to expose the "dangers" of necessitarianism for both religion and morality. See, e.g., Harris, *Atheistical Objections to the Being of God*, sermon 8, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:425–34; and Gurdon, *Pretended Difficulties*, sermon 7, in *Defence of Religion*, 3:326. See esp. Harris's remarks where he suggests that the (atheist's) materialist and necessitarian view of the human soul is like "the wonderful Clock at Strasburgh" (in *Defence of Religion*, 1:401). (See also Descartes, *Writings*, 2:58 [*Meditation*, 6], where he discusses the analogy between the mechanisms of the human body and a clock.)

47. Butler, *Works*, 1:115 (*Analogy*, chap. 6).

48. Berkeley, *Alciphron*, 7.16 (in *Works*, 3:309–10); his emphasis.

49. Baxter, *Reflections*, 15, 50.

50. Baxter, *Reflections*, 27, 35. In this context, Baxter describes Clarke as "a great man" and "the best defender of liberty" (27n).

51. Baxter, *Reflections*, 26, 32–4, 37–8, 41–3. Note in particular that Baxter explicitly identifies the dilemma Hume presents at EU, 8.32/100: "either we cannot be guilty of Sin; or, if we are, [the Deity] is accountable" (*Reflections*, 41). Baxter wrote an unpublished defense of his *Reflections* in reply to Dudgeon (the manuscript, titled *A Vindication of the Principles of Human Liberty*, is in the Edinburgh University Library: La 111, 807.1).

52. Dudgeon, *Works*, 138. The *Vindication* also contains a good summary of the basic issues he and Baxter were debating (*Works*, 49–50).

53. This pamphlet was published in London, but no publisher is named and an incorrect date is provided (1731). Other works by Dudgeon had various London publishers, including Andrew Miller, Paul Knapton, and T. Cooper.

54. E.g., Dudgeon, *Discourse*, 37–42, 51. See also the discussion in *State of the Moral World* (esp. *Works*, 15–22, 33–5); and *Philosophical Letters*, 7 and 8.

55. These letters were written during 1735–37 and appeared in two separate volumes. The first volume, containing nine letters, is *Several Letters to the Revd. Mr. Jackson from William Dudgeon* (1737); and the second volume, containing a further five letters, is *Some Additional Letters to the Revd. Mr. Jackson* (1737). As noted (chap. 4, note 75), when Dudgeon's *Works* were published in 1765, only the first set of letters were included. In the more recent volume, edited by Berman, only the second set of letters is included (i.e. the first set has been dropped).

56. The articles on the Dudgeon–Jackson *Letters* appeared in April 1737, no. 26; January 1738, no. 4; and February 1738, no. 11. The review of Hume's *Treatise* appeared in November

and December 1739, no. 26. Dudgeon also contributed a letter *to the History of the Works of the Learned*, December 1738, no. 46, on the subject of Clarke's views on God's liberty.

57. Crousaz, *An Examination of Mr. Pope's Essay on Man* (London: 1739), trans. from French original, which was published in 1737.

58. Dudgeon submitted a response to Warburton's letters on Pope in the *History of the Works of the Learned*, May 1740, no. 23.

59. Warburton, *Works*, 11:18–9.

60. Warburton, *Works*, 11:20.

61. Warburton, *Works*, 11:22.

62. In May 1740 Baxter, then living at Duns (near Chirnside), sent Warburton copies of Dudgeon's work *The State of the Moral World* along with Baxter's *Reflections* and Dudgeon's *Vindication*. He introduces this work saying that he "will shew [Warburton] part of a Squabble betwixt my Antagonists and me." It is an interesting (and unexplained) point that Baxter uses the plural when referring to his "antagonists" and "their Answer." (Baxter's letter to Warburton is reprinted in Klemme, "*Anmerkungen zur schottischen Aufklarung*," 256–7.)

63. See, e.g., Stroud, *Hume*, 144–6; and compare Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, 12–15.

64. The distinction between liberty of spontaneity and indifference features prominently in Bayle's discussion of the similarities and differences between human and animal souls (*Dictionary*, art. "Rorarius," note F [Popkin, *Selections*, esp. 228]). See also Leibniz, *Theodicy*, secs. 299–325, discussing Bayle's views on "indifference."

65. In the *Treatise*, Hume tends to identify "liberty" with "liberty of indifference" or "chance." In the *Enquiry*, however, he drops the terminology of "liberty of indifference" and "liberty of spontaneity." Instead, he provides a defense of what he terms "hypothetical liberty" (EU, 8.23/95), which belongs "to every one who is not a prisoner and in chains" (EU, 8.23/95). In the same passage, he says that hypothetical liberty is "a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will." It is worth noting that a person may have "liberty of spontaneity," in the sense that he is acting according to the determination of his own will, but still not have "hypothetical liberty," because if he chose to act differently, he would not be able to do so. Hume's discussion fails to bring this out, but the relevant distinction can be found in Locke, *Essay*, 238 (21.10).

66. Hume devotes a fair bit of attention to dealing with the objection that human action is in fact "capricious" and "irregular." He accounts for this by arguing that in these circumstances there are "contrary or concealed causes" at work, and this is something we also encounter when dealing with the operations of body (T, 2.3.11–3/403–4; compare 1.3.12.1–5; 2.1.4.3; 2.1.10.6; 3.3.1.7/130–2, 283, 313, 575).

67. According to Kemp Smith, "Hume adheres, without qualification, to the necessitarian standpoint" (*Philosophy of David Hume*, 433). However, at least two qualifications are called for: (1) this is more accurate about the tone of the *Treatise* than the *Enquiry*, and (2) in both these works Hume is careful to emphasize that his "new definition of necessity" does not imply any "invidious" form of necessity that is supposed by many to lie in matter (T, 2.3.2.4/410; E, 8.21–3/92–4).

68. See Hume's eighth rule for judging of causes and effects, which denies that an object that exists for any time "in its full perfection without any effect" can be the sole cause of some effect. For the effect to be produced, the object requires the assistance of "some other principle" (T, 1.3.15.10/174).

69. For this kind of interpretation see, e.g., Stroud, *Hume*, 149.

70. The details of this account, as I have indicated, are complex. I provide a fuller account and analysis in *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, chap. 4. The role that necessity plays in Hume's account of the generation of the moral sentiments (i.e. considered as a form of the

indirect passions) serves to explain why his discussion "Of liberty and necessity" appears in the context of book 2. It is a mistake to conclude, therefore, as Kemp Smith does, that Hume's discussion of free will is simply "a lengthy digression" that does not belong in the context of book 2 of the *Treatise*. (Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 161, 433.)

71. Early reviews of the *Treatise* indicate that Hume's contemporaries viewed him as a necessitarian who belongs in the "freethinking" company of Anthony Collins. This is apparent in the review in the *History of the Works of the* Learned published in November 1739 (in Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:4). See also another review, printed in *Common Sense* in July 1740. This reviewer begins by praising Collins as "the only one, who has treated the Subject with any order or perspicuity" and goes on to say that he is not sure if he understands the (anonymous) author of the *Treatise*, but he seems to "adopt the Doctrine of Necessity." (Fieser, *Early Responses*, 3:86–7.) What is especially significant about these two reviews is that they associate Hume's necessitarianism with Collins, without any knowledge of Hume's later additions and changes to "Of liberty and necessity" in the *Enquiry*, where Hume discusses the problems of evil and predestination.

72. Books 1 and 2 appeared in January 1739, but book 3 did not appear until November 1740—i.e. six months *after* Hume wrote this letter to Hutcheson. In a letter to William Mure written in June 1743, Hume suggests that God "is no Object either of the Sense or the Imagination, & very little of the Understanding." To avoid this difficulty, "enthusiasts" are liable to "degrade him [i.e. God] into a Resemblance with themselves, & by that means render him more comprehensible" (LET, 1:51, no. 21). This is, of course, a fundamental theme of the *Dialogues*. See, e.g., D, 114, where Hume suggests that we ought to "exclude from [God] moral sentiments, such as we feel them." Compare also D, 56: "All the sentiments of the human mind..."

73. Hutcheson, *Philosophical Writings*, 138 (*Illustrations upon a Moral Sense*, sec. 1).

74. Balguy, *Foundations of Moral Goodness*, pt. 1 (in Raphael, *British Moralists*, 1:390).

75. Hume's "Early Memoranda," which indicates that around the early 1730s, Hume was reading Bayle's *Dictionary* and King's *Origin of Evil*, both of which explore these problems in some detail. Hume's notes on King are specifically concerned with the problem of evil and the free will defense.

76. In other passages of the *Treatise*, Hume refers to the difficulties theological views encounter with respect to evil and God's role in bringing it about or being its source. See, e.g., his remarks about the occasionalist doctrine of "Malebranche and other Cartesians," who render "the supreme being... the real cause of all our actions, bad as well as good, vicious as well as virtuous" (T, 1.4.5.31/249). (See also Bayle's *Dictionary*, art. "Paulicians," esp. notes E, F, and M; and art. "Spinoza," note O [Popkin, *Selections*, 166–93, 314–6].)

77. Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (1754); Joseph Priestley, *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* (1777) and *Free Discussion of the Doctrines of Materialism and Philosophical Necessity* (1778). Kames could also be added to this list, since he, too, is a necessitarian and had no irreligious or anti-Christian tendencies (although some of his critics treated him in these terms). See his *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion* (1751). An illuminating account of the way Edwards's (Calvinistic) necessitarianism relates to Clarke's criticism of the (atheistic) necessitarianism of Hobbes and Collins is presented in Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought*, chap. 6.

78. Priestley, preface to Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty*, xi. Priestley's remarks in this context, of course, were made with full knowledge of Hume's later writings.

79. Compare Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, pt. 4, sec. 6, arguing that a true doctrine should not be rejected because a philosopher such as Hobbes has made "bad use" of it (p. 374; compare 430).

80. Beattie, *Elements*, 1:153–4.

81. Stewart, *Dissertation: Progress of Philosophy*, 574. Stewart goes on to say that "the most consistent Necessitarians who have yet appeared, have been those who followed out their principles till they ended in *Spinozism*, a doctrine that differs from Atheism more in words than in reality."

82. Whatever general interpretation of Hume's intentions in the *Treatise* is advanced, there can be no doubt that his own contemporaries considered his discussion in close connection with the problem of the immateriality and immortality of the soul, since together they serve as the foundation for the general doctrine of future rewards and punishments. As I have shown (chap. 14), in T, 1.4.5–6, Hume advances arguments that cast doubt on "the metaphysical arguments for the immateriality of the soul" and the notion of the soul understood as a simple, indivisible immaterial substance. The position Hume defends on this subject is generally consistent with the views of Collins, and his most obvious targets certainly include the views of Clarke. This general skepticism about the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and the related doctrine of future rewards and punishment, would naturally have encouraged his contemporary audience to view his necessitarianism in an irreligious light.

83. For further discussion of this point, see Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, chap. 11; and chapter 17 following.

Chapter 17. Morality without Religion

1. For a recent study that provides a general survey of the various major debates and contributions relating to Hume's moral theory see Baillie, *Hume on Morality*. Suffice it to note, however, that religion plays little or no role in Baillie's description of these debates.

2. Reid, *Works*, 2:651 (*Active Powers*, Essay 5, chap. 5).

3. Reid, *Works*, 2:651–2, 654 (*Active Powers*, Essay 5, chap. 5).

4. Reid, *Works*, 2:653–7 (*Active Powers*, Essay 5, chap. 5).

5. Reid, *Works*, 2:651, 657, 660, 661, 666, 667 (*Active Powers*, Essay 5, chaps. 5, 6). Reid had already linked Hume's views on liberty and necessity with those of Hobbes; *Works*, 2:601 (*Active Powers*, Essay 4, chap. 1). For a similar line of criticism of Hume's views on justice see Beattie, *Essay on Truth*, 163, 492.

6. *Bibliotheque Raisonnée*, April–June 1741, in Fieser, *Early Responses*, 1:10.

7. See, e.g., Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 151: "It will be obvious that my interpretation of Hume has brought him close to Hobbes . . . "; and Hampton, "Hobbesean Side of Hume."

8. See, for example, the review in *Bibliotheque Raisonnée*, April–June 1741, in Fieser, *Early Responses*, 1:4, where Hume's skeptical concern with Clarke and Wollaston in *Treatise* 3.1.1 is noted. Hume's reply to the charges made against him in 1745 bear this out as well. As noted, the sixth and last charge made by the author of the *Specimen* against Hume was that he destroyed the "foundations of morality, by denying the natural and essential difference between right and wrong, good and evil, justice and injustice; making the difference only artificial, and to arise from human conventions and compacts" (LG, 18). In reply to this, Hume acknowledged that he had "indeed denied the eternal difference of right and wrong in the sense in which *Clark* and *Woolaston* maintained them, viz. That the propositions of morality were of the same nature with the truths of mathematics and the abstract sciences, the objects *merely* of reason, not the *feelings* of our internal *tastes* and *sentiments*" (LG, 30; his emphasis). Hume also points out, in this context, that in taking this position he concurs with Francis Hutcheson, who holds a similar view to his own (LG, 30–1). The clear intent of Hume's remarks in this context is to place himself, as much as possible, in the company of Hutcheson and avoid any direct association with Hobbes. This is done without disowning his skeptical attack on the ethical rationalism of Clarke and his follower Wollaston.

9. Samuel Clarke, *Works*, 2:611.

10. Clarke, *Works*, 2:631–7.

11. John Locke also claims that morality is capable of demonstration: *Essay*, 348–62, 548–50, 672–3 (2.28; 4.3.18; 4.17.4).

12. Clarke, *Works*, 2:596.

13. Compare Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 8.16: "For the thoughts, are to the desires, as scouts and spies, to range abroad, and find the way to things desired."

14. According to the skeptical interpretation, Hume's position on this issue, as presented in this section of the *Treatise*, is similar to Hobbes's "subjectivism." See, e.g., Jean Hampton, "Hobbesean Side of Hume," 67–8. Hampton cites a similar passage in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, 6.7: "For the words good and evil, and contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth: There being nothing simply and absolutely so."

15. See, e.g., the review in *Bibliotheque Raisonnée*, April–June 1741, in Fieser, *Early Responses*, 1:8.

16. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 11–3, 45–7 84–5 154.

17. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 11–3, 44, 63.

18. See, e.g., LET, 1:38, no. 16, and 1:45, no. 19; and LG, 31. See also, however, James Moore, "Hume and Hutcheson," arguing that "Hume's moral philosophy was not at all Hutchesonian in origin or inspiration: it derived rather from a tradition of moral philosophy, the substantive Epicurean tradition adopted by Bayle and other modern skeptics [e.g. Hobbes], which was opposed by Hutcheson in all the separate expressions of his moral philosophy" (53–4). For reasons I explain, I believe Moore's claim is too extreme. It is, however, a useful corrective to the dominant view that exaggerates Hume's debts and affinities to Hutcheson's moral theory.

19. "The quality approved by our moral sense is conceived to reside in the person approved, and to be a perfection and dignity in him. . . . Virtue is then called *amiable* or *lovely*, from its raising good-will or love in spectators towards the agent." Hutcheson, *Philosophical Writings*, 76.

20. Elsewhere, Hutcheson maintains that when rationalists such as Clarke argue that virtuous action is judged as in some way "fit," all this *means* is "that certain affections or actions of an agent, standing in a certain relation to other agents, are approved by every observer, or raise in him a grateful perception, or move the observer to love the agent." This meaning, Hutcheson says, "is the same with the notion of pleasing a moral sense." Hutcheson, *Philosophical Writings*, 142.

21. Hutcheson, *Philosophical Writings*, 88, 110–1, 113.

22. See Hume's essay "Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature," which was published in 1741, shortly after book 3 of the *Treatise*. Hume treats this general debate about human selfishness as being largely "a dispute of words" (ESY, 84–6).

23. According to Hutcheson, it is "universal efficacious benevolence" that constitutes the "best state of rational agents," and it is this moral excellence we attribute to God (Hutcheson, *Philosophical Writings*, 113). This outlook takes Hutcheson well down the path of theological utilitarianism. It is significant that Hutcheson was the first to use the slogan "that action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest number" (90).

24. Although it is true that those who defend the naturalistic interpretation generally place emphasis on Hume's affinities with Hutcheson and his "positive" or "constructive" aims in moral theory, there are, nevertheless, significant disagreements within this camp about the extent of Hume's commitment to the "primacy of feeling" doctrine. More specifically, according to some alternative naturalistic views, Kemp Smith's account of Hume's naturalism in ethics concedes too much to the skeptical and subjectivist view. Those who hold these views point out, for example, that Hume is committed to a "standard of morals" that provides

reason with an important role to play in guiding and controlling our moral sentiments (T, 3.3.1.18–20, 3.3.3.2/583–5, 602–3). Our moral evaluations require reason to operate in *conjunction* with feeling or sentiment. Clearly an emphasis on these features of Hume's moral theory places significant *limits* on the "primacy of feeling" and "subjectivist" features of his moral theory. I discuss this issue in more detail below. See also my "Moral Sense and Virtue in Hume's Ethics"; and *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, chaps. 6–9.

25. Two important exceptions to this generalization are Norton, "Hume, Atheism, and the Autonomy of Morals," and Gaskin, "Hume, Atheism, and the 'Interested Obligation' of Morality." I make some further comments on the relationship between my "irreligious" interpretation and the accounts offered by Norton and Gaskin in the final section of this chapter. See also Capaldi, "Hume's Philosophy of Religion," and Streminger, "Religion a Threat to Morality."

26. I describe the background of this in chapter 3.

27. Clarke, *Works*, 2:645. Clarke explicitly denies that, in our present "corrupted" and "perverted" state, virtue is self-sufficient to its own happiness and a full reward to itself in all cases. Clarke, *Works*, 2:630, 641, 656–66. The hypothesis of "self-sufficiency," that morality does not require religion, was a particular target of later orthodox critics of deism in the eighteenth century. See, e.g., Skelton, *Ophimaches*, 2:279 (and Dialogue 8).

28. Clarke, *Works*, 2:598–9.

29. Bentley, *The Folly of Atheism*, sermon 1, in *Works*, 3:25.

30. Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, esp. no. 133–6, 161–93.

31. Bayle, *Thoughts on a Comet*, no. 172. See also Bayle, *Dictionary*, "First Clarification" (Popkin, *Selections*, 399–400).

32. Several of Hume's most strident critics were also prominent critics of Bayle's atheism. See, e.g., Warburton, *Divine Legation*, Bk. 1, secs. 3–5 in (*Works*, 228–80); Baxter, *Matho*, 349–65; Anderson, *Profit and Loss of Religion*, sec. 3. What Warburton and Baxter especially object to is Bayle's claim that the doctrine of a future state is not necessary for morality and society.

33. The *Inquiry* was published first by John Toland—without Shaftesbury's permission—as a separate work in 1699. It was subsequently published in Shaftesbury, *Characteristics* (1711).

34. Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:260.

35. Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:298–305. Compare Hume, T, 3.3.6.8/620: "The same system may help us to form a just notion of the *happiness*, as well as the *dignity* of virtue. . . . And who can think any advantages of fortune a sufficient compensation for the least breach of the *social* virtues, when he considers, that not only his character with regards to others, but also his peace and inward satisfaction entirely depend upon his strict observance of them; and that a mind will never be able to bear its own survey, that has been wanting in its part to mankind and society?"

36. Shaftesbury does allow that belief in the goodness and beauty of the whole universe, and of a designing mind, helps us endure whatever hardships come our way. Insofar as "piety," understood in these terms, is a support to virtue, it also serves to "complete" it. It is Shaftesbury's view, therefore, that *with respect to* our moral sense, while atheism does not affect it much either way, religion "is capable of doing great good or harm." Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:265, 275–80.

37. Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:251, 256–60, 336.

38. In a passage that clearly echoes themes in Spinoza's *Ethics*, Shaftesbury says of virtue: "And to have this entire affection or integrity of mind is to live according to Nature, and to the dictates and rules of the supreme wisdom. This is morality, justice, piety and natural religion." Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:302 (the editor, Robertson, cites Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt. 4, prop. 35).

39. Among Shaftesbury's most prominent admirers were a number of "liberal" Scottish Presbyterians. Hutcheson is the best known of this group, but it also included several influential Rankenian thinkers, such as William Wishart and George Turnbull. Elements of this circle later evolved into the "moderate party," famously satirized by John Witherspoon in his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (1753)—the title of which alludes to Shaftesbury's influence. See my discussion in chapter 4 for further background.

40. As noted (chap. 3), Toland belonged to a circle of radical freethinkers that also included Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindal, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, and (Hume's associate) Pierre Desmaizeaux. This circle was well known for its anti-Christian and anticlerical activities and publications.

41. Berkeley, *Alciphron*, third dialogue; Warburton, *Divine Legation*, esp. "Dedication to the Freethinkers" (*Works*, vol. 1). A similar view of Shaftesbury as hostile to the Christian religion is presented in Leland, *Deistical Writers*, vol. 3, letter I; and in Skelton, *Ophiomaches*, 2:276, 278, 303–4, 319–20.

42. These remarks appear in Hutcheson's preface to the second edition of his two *Inquiries* (1726). See Hutcheson, *Inquiry Concerning Beauty*, 27.

43. The quotation comes from the last sentence of Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees* (2:357).

44. Mandeville's title *The Fable of the Bees* uses a metaphor that Shaftesbury employs in his *Inquiry* (*Characteristics*, 1:291).

45. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:42–3, 51.

46. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:41–57, 145–7, 208–16.

47. Mandeville, *Fable of the Bees*, 1:36–7. Compare Hume's observations in his essay "Of Refinement in the Arts": "Is it not very inconsistent for an author to assert in one page, that moral distinctions are inventions of politicians for public interest; and in the next page maintain, that vice is advantageous to the public? And indeed it seems upon any system of morality, little less than a contradiction in terms, to talk of a vice, which is in general beneficial to society" (ESY, 280).

48. It is significant that there was at least one freethinker in Scotland at this time (i.e. apart from Hume) who publicly embraced Shaftesbury's more radical anti-Christian views concerning the nature and foundation of morality. This was William Dudgeon, Hume's contemporary and near neighbor in the Borders area of Scotland during the early 1730s. As noted (chaps. 4 and 16), in his early pamphlet *The State of the Moral World Considered* (1732) Dudgeon presented a moral philosophy that blended Shaftesbury's moral sense optimism with Collins's necessitarianism. However, although Dudgeon's work fell squarely on the side of the radical freethinkers, he was careful to align himself with more orthodox figures, such as Hutcheson, and to distance himself from any association with the extreme ("licentious") views of the kind Mandeville had advanced. This is a strategy Hume also adopted when his moral philosophy came under attack (e.g. in his 1745 *Letter to a Gentleman*; see note 8).

49. Clarke, *Works*, 2:600–606.

50. As W. R. Scott observes, Hutcheson is a "follower of Shaftesbury, but he follows independently, not blindly" (*Francis Hutcheson*, 185–6). Hutcheson certainly had reason to worry about being closely identified with Shaftesbury, since some of Shaftesbury's more prominent critics present him as a deist follower of Shaftesbury who "refines" the writings of his mentor (e.g. Skelton, *Ophiomaches*, 2:278, 304). However, one important feature of Hutcheson's moral sense doctrine that makes clear his orthodox Christian commitments is his view that human nature is providentially ordered by a benevolent and well-designing Deity. (See, e.g., *Philosophical Writings*, 110–1, 113, 138.) On this aspect of Hutcheson's moral theory see Norton, *David Hume*, 89–92. Norton also points out that plainly Hume does not follow this feature of Hutcheson's "naturalism" (149, 151).

51. Tindal, *Christianity as Old as Creation*, chap. 14. See esp. p. 368: "If Christianity, as well as Deism, consists, in being govern'd by the original obligation of the moral fitness of things, in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the perfect will of God, then they [deism and Christianity] both must be the same; but if Christianity consists in being govern'd by any other rule, or requires other things, has not the Dr. [Clarke] himself giv'n the advantage to Deism?"

52. These conflicts *within* the "deist" camp are noted by Skelton: "our English Libertines do already in their writings, altho' they have yet little or no temptation to it, run strangely afoul of one another. Shaftesbury's hypothesis destroys that of Hobbes; Mandeville attacks and defeats Shaftesbury; Shaftesbury and Hutcheson place the law of nature in sentiment, Tindal in reason. . . . You, if you have read the performances of these authors, cannot but be sensible I have rightly represented their differences" (*Ophiomaches*, 2:278).

53. Árdal, *Passion and Value*, chap. 5.

54. There is, of course, some debate among Hobbes scholars as to the extent to which his philosophical work aims at establishing the autonomy thesis. It was, nevertheless, widely accepted by Hume's contemporaries that Hobbes aimed to show that God and religion were superfluous to moral conduct and that religion corrupted rather than supported moral practice. On the interpretation of Hobbes's views on religion see my discussion in chaps. 3 and 5.

55. Compare Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 1:190–1. In this context, Shaftesbury argues against any kind of "mechanistic" account of human nature.

56. I have argued that it is a mistake to infer from the Hobbist character of Hume's *project* in the *Treatise* that he must be (systematically) committed to Hobbist *content* about morality and its foundations (e.g. egoism and the view that morality is *entirely* artificial). The converse mistake, however, is to infer that since Hume is not *systematically* Hobbist in his commitments about the *content* morality and its foundations, it follows that his *project* cannot be Hobbist in character. This is a mistake of similar—if not greater—magnitude for understanding Hume's *Treatise*.

57. Compare Bentley, *Folly of Atheism*, sermon 1, in *Works*, 3:25, quoted earlier.

58. In an important passage of his *Characteristics*, Shaftesbury argues that "superstition, bigotry, and vulgar enthusiasm" are especially "ruinous and fatal to the understanding." He goes on to point out that the "artificial managers of this human frailty declaim against free-thought and latitude of understanding. . . . To them freedom of mind, a mastery of sense, and a liberty in thought, and action imply debauch, corruption, and depravity." He censures this outlook, asserting: "Fain would they confound licentiousness in morals with liberty in thought and action, and make the libertine, who has the least mastery of himself, resemble his direct opposite" (*Characteristics*, 2:345–6). This theme was also of central importance to Toland, Collins, and their circle of radical freethinkers. For example, Collins uses this passage from Shaftesbury as one of his epigrams on the title page of his *Discourse of Freethinking* (1713), and Toland makes the principle that "There's as wide a difference between liberty and licentiousness as between liberty and slavery" a central tenet of "Pantheist" doctrine (*Pantheisticon*, 84).

59. The subtitle of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) states that in his two treatises "the principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are explain'd and defended, against the author of the *Fable of the Bees*."

60. For more on this see Árdal, *Passion and Value*, chap. 2; and my *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, esp. chap. 4.

61. Árdal, *Passion and Value*, chap. 6.

62. For a more extended discussion of this aspect of Hume's moral system see my *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, chap. 11.

63. Note that it is not the "reality" of our mental qualities or character traits Hume emphasizes but the reality of "our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness" (T, 3.1.1.26/469). Hume's view on this subject is very similar to that of Anthony Collins: "Morality or Virtue, consists in such actions as are in their own nature, and upon the whole, *pleasant*; and immorality or vice, consists in such actions as in their own nature, and upon the whole *painful*. Wherefore a man must be affected with pleasure and pain, in order to know what morality is, and to distinguish it from immorality" (Collins, *Human Liberty*, 90; his emphasis.) This account of pleasure/pain as the essential element in our standard of morals serves to refute both moral rationalism and moral skepticism.

64. See T, 3.3.1.7/575–6. In this context, Hume makes the point that the "minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations." He advances no form of extravagant relativism or skepticism in relation to these (natural and universal) distinctions. Even in the case of justice, which *does* depend on artifice and convention as the basis for the distinctions that we draw, we still must rely, Hume maintains, on natural and universal features of human nature as they concern our happiness and misery (T, 3.2.2.25; 3.3.6.4–5/500, 619–20; compare LG, 31).

65. The influence of sympathy is variable on us because it depends on how close we stand in relation to the person who we sympathize with. The closer the relationship, the stronger the influence of sympathy. See, e.g., T, 2.1.11.8/320.

66. Note, for example, that the beautiful person is not always perfectly happy, nor the ugly person miserable. Nevertheless, being beautiful will still promote happiness and being ugly will make us miserable. Clearly, *other* factors may also intervene in these operations, and these may well affect a person's overall happiness or misery.

67. Hume's system of virtuous atheism is considerably more radical than Shaftesbury's account in an important sense. Unlike Shaftesbury, Hume makes no concession to religious morality by suggesting that (true) theism somehow "completes" virtue. On Hume's account, virtuous individuals need not suppose or believe that this universe is benevolently ordered or designed. (Moreover, as Hume makes clear in the *Dialogues*, *rational* individuals have little or no reason to believe any such thing.)

68. It is, in particular, a striking omission in Kemp Smith's discussion of Hume's moral theory in his *Philosophy of David Hume* that Hobbes goes *unmentioned*. Clearly, any adequate interpretation of Hume's moral theory has to explain both how it relates to Hobbes's moral system and account for the presence of significant Hobbist elements.

69. Locke, *Two Treatises*, e.g. 2:6, 27, 57.

70. In this context, Hume gives his famous example of two men "who pull the oars of a boat, do it by an agreement or convention, tho' they have never given promises to each other."

71. Locke, "Every man being…" (*Two Treatises*, 2:119). Hobbes also held, of course, that our obligation to obey government depends on consent (*Leviathan*, 14).

72. See also Hume's essay "Of the Original Contract" (1748), esp. ESY, 480–1.

73. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 51.

74. Compare Hume's remarks at D, 126: "Oaths are requisite in all courts of judicature; but it is a question whether their authority arises from any popular religion. It is the solemnity and importance of the occasion, the regard to reputation, and the reflecting on the general interests of society, which are the chief restraints upon mankind."

75. This certainly includes Hume's views on "chastity" and "modesty" in T, 3.2.12, which receive a general analysis similar to that of those of property and promising (i.e. in terms of social conventions and their utility).

76. Compare Mackie, *Hume's Moral Theory*, 151, where Mackie argues that Hume is "closer to Hobbes than to Hutcheson." With respect to the *content* of Hume's moral theory,

this claim goes too far. For a view that contrasts with Mackie's see Baier, *Progress of Moral Sentiments*, 203–4, 220–54.

77. Hume, LET, 1:48, no. 19. He wrote this letter to Hutcheson in January 1743.

78. According to David Norton, Hume's relationship with Hobbes, with respect to moral theory, is fundamentally *critical*. Hobbes, on this account, advances a skeptical view on morals, and it is Hume's primary aim (in both the *Treatise* and second *Enquiry*) to *refute* Hobbes's skepticism about morals. (Norton, *David Hume*, esp. chap. 1; see also Norton, "Hume, Human Nature, and the Foundations of Morality," 151–5.) Contrary to this view, I have argued that Hume's relationship with Hobbes on the subject of morals is not as one-sided as this. Furthermore, this is true, I maintain, with respect to *both the form and the content* of Hume's moral theory. Norton discusses the issue of morality and religion as it appears in Hume's philosophy in more detail in his paper "Hume's Atheism and the Autonomy of Morals." However, he has little or nothing to say about the importance of Hobbes's work in this regard.

79. LET, 1:40, no. 16. The relevant passage of this letter is cited in chapter 16, section 3 (beginning "I wish from my heart"). As mentioned in chapter 16, note 72, this letter was written well before book 3 of the *Treatise* was published (in November 1740).

80. See ESY, 595: "To suppose measures of approbation and blame . . ."; for more on this see my *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, chaps. 10, 11.

81. Compare Hume's remarks at D, 58 and 114, where he raises problems for the view that God shares our human sentiments or moral qualities. See also his essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul," which presents a number of related objections to the doctrine of a future state.

82. Compare LG, 31–2: "The author has likewise taken care . . ."; and also NHR, 178–9: "Nothing can presume . . ."

83. Compare Hume, D, 101; and Reid, *Works*, 2:678–9 (*Active Powers*, Essay 5, chap. 7): "If what we call *moral judgment* be no real judgment, but merely a feeling, it follows, that the principles of morals, which we have been taught to consider as an immutable law to all intelligent beings, have no other foundation but an arbitrary structure and fabric in the constitution of the human mind. . . . And beings of a different structure, according to the variety of their feelings, may have different, nay opposite measures of good and evil." Reid goes on to observe that from this account of morals, "we can conclude nothing concerning a moral character in the Deity, which is the foundation of all religion, and the strongest support of virtue."

84. See the articles by Norton and Gaskin cited in note 25.

85. On the other hand, insofar as we correct Kemp Smith's (exaggerated) "subjectivist" reading of moral sense doctrine, then there is something to be said for putting Hume back on the axis running between Hobbes and Shaftesbury. The diagram is, obviously, somewhat arbitrary in illustrating these issues. The important point is that Hume's moral theory involves a role for both reason and feeling. He decisively rejects moral rationalism (i.e. as per Clarke's theory), but he does not deny that reason has an important role to play in this sphere. (See note 24.)

86. Streminger has argued ("Religion a Threat to Morality") that Hume's philosophy of religion consists of three fundamental problems. The first concerns the foundation of religion in reason, the second concerns its origin in human nature, and the third concerns the relationship between religion and morality. (Streminger points out that in the opening passage of NHR, 134, Hume identifies the first two questions as being of particular importance but does not mention the third.) According to Streminger, Hume never wrote on the topic of the religion/morality relationship "in as systematic a way" as on the first two questions, but he does, nevertheless, have much to say about this issue, scattered throughout his writings. It is significant, however, that Streminger does not mention the *Treatise* in this regard and cites

only Hume's later writings. As the discussion in this chapter indicates, I agree with Streminger that the religion/morality relationship is indeed a topic of considerable importance to Hume's philosophy of religion, but I do not agree with the claim that Hume did not write on this subject in a "systematic way." On the contrary, as I have argued, this issue is *fundamental* to the *whole project* of the *Treatise*.

Chapter 18. *The Myth of "Castration"*

1. See my discussion of Hendel in chapter 1.

2. A corollary of this claim is that even if some other source(s) are found for Hume's plan in the *Treatise* (i.e. sources that are as plausible or more plausible than Hobbes) this will not itself discredit the irreligious interpretation as presented. At the same time, the irreligious interpretation does place further constraints on any plausible alternative candidate (since Hobbes's project fits very neatly with the irreligious interpretation).

3. Clearly, on any interpretation, Hume's *Treatise* serves as the foundation for his later philosophical development. For this reason, the way we interpret the *Treatise* inevitably shapes the way we view his philosophy as a whole. However, this is especially true in the case of the irreligious interpretation, since it denies any (radical) discontinuity in Hume's fundamental aims and intentions between the *Treatise* and his later writings.

4. Although most Hume scholars (and other philosophers) would readily agree with this claim, not all do. See, for example, Millican, "Context, Aims, and Structure of the *Enquiry*," which argues for "the controversial conclusion" that Hume's first *Enquiry* is "*philosophically* superior to Book I of his *Treatise*" (p. 52; my emphasis). Although I cannot respond to Millican's claim in detail in this context, the following remarks will suffice. There is much in Millican's valuable article that I agree with—including his concern to place some appropriate weight on Hume's effort "to attack 'superstition'" (47). I also agree that the first *Enquiry*, with respect to both its content and manner of presentation, has its own *distinct* merits and contribution to make. Millican's claim concerning the relative philosophical strengths of these two works, however, depends on a general portrayal of Hume's intentions in the *Treatise* that remains locked into the traditional skeptical/naturalism dichotomy (see esp. 40–52). On the interpretation I have defended in this book, the philosophical merits and achievements of the *Treatise* rest with the *entire system* of irreligion (or "atheism") it provides. The aims and achievements of the first *Enquiry*, although intimately related to Hume's irreligious program in the *Treatise*, are much narrower and more limited in their scope and ambition. Beyond all this, what matters, from the perspective of scholarship and philosophy of today, is not so much the relative philosophical merits of these two works—as clearly they have *both* made hugely significant and distinct contributions—but how we understand the *relationship* that holds between them (i.e. in terms of Hume's fundamental intentions). It is my particular concern to argue that this relationship should be understood primarily in terms of the *continuity* of Hume's *irreligious* intentions. (Regarding Hume's dissatisfaction with the *Treatise*, see my further remarks in note 5.)

5. In his well-known remarks in his "Advertisement" to the (posthumous) 1777 edition of his *Essays*, Hume "disowned" the *Treatise* and expressed his regret "in going to the press too early." (See also Hume's remarks about the *Treatise* in "My Own Life" [Mossner, *Life*, 611–5] and related remarks in several of his letters: e.g. LET, 1:158, no. 73; 1:187, no. 91.) Hume's views concerning the relative merits of the *Treatise*—much less what its long-term influence would be—have little to be said in their favor. (Indeed, Hume makes the point himself, in "My Own Life," that an author should not be the judge of the relative merits of his own works.) Moreover, his various dismissive remarks about the *Treatise* make clear that his criticism is directed more at "the manner than the matter" of his work. In chapter 20

(note 18) I suggest that his decision to "recast" the *Treatise* in the form of the two *Enquiries* may well have been motivated by his sense that the *Treatise* had failed to reach any relevant audience—which would plainly defeat his aim to damage and discredit religion through his philosophical writings.

6. In chapter 7, I discussed the relevance of Spinoza for Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise*, making particular reference to the *Theological-Political Treatise*. In that context; I also pointed out (note 13) that recently several scholars (e.g. Klever and Baier) have argued that Hume was greatly influenced by Spinoza's *Ethics*, a view that is entirely consistent with the irreligious interpretation and with the related general background observation concerning the close linkage between Hobbes and Spinoza in the main debate.

7. Among the various thinkers who follow *after* Hume in this general tradition, we may include D'Holbach, Marx, and Nietzsche. In several respects, there are particularly interesting points of affinity between Hume's *Treatise* and D'Holbach's *System of Nature* (1770), insofar as both may be understood as presenting complete systems of "atheistic" philosophy (e.g. considered counterparts to Cudworth's *System of the Universe*).

8. We may gauge the extent to which Hume's *Treatise* has been poorly understood by the fact that its place in this (more specific) tradition has been almost entirely overlooked—much less given the sort of prominence it certainly deserves. See, e.g., Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*; although Israel's impressive study serves as something of an encyclopedia for all the relevant literature and thinkers concerned, Hume and the *Treatise* are barely mentioned, much less given any prominence. If the irreligious interpretation is correct, this is a serious omission (although perhaps understandable, given the wide acceptance of the established interpretations and the "castration" hypothesis associated with them).

Chapter 19. *Was Hume an "Atheist"?*

1. See, e.g., Mossner, *Life*, 133; Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, 1–2.

2. Mossner, "Religion of David Hume," 659; Gaskin, "Hume on Religion," 316.

3. Hume is careful to emphasize the extent to which there exists, as far as we can tell, a considerable amount of *unnecessary* evil in this world (D, 107–13). From a (rational) human point of view, therefore, the existence of God must be judged *highly improbable*. At the same time, however, Hume also insists that, given the limits of human understanding, we must be "modest in our conclusions" and accept that these appearances may be *compatible* with the goodness of God (D, 112–3).

4. On this see my "Hume on Religion," sec. 4.

5. According to Hume, "the only point of theology, in which we shall find a consent of mankind almost universal, is, that there is invisible, intelligent power in the world" (NHR, 144–5). Since "genuine theism" involves views that are more specific than this, it has no claim to being universal to human beings—much less natural or an original instinct for us. At the same time, however, Hume also maintains that monotheism has *natural causes* that can be identified and analyzed. (See the discussion in chapter 20.)

6. For this reason, it is not unusual to find that opposing camps of thick theism regard each other as atheists. Although the parties involved agree that there exists only "one God," they do not agree about the *nature* of that God and take their opponents to deny the existence of the (only) *real* or *true* God. On this general point, see Armstrong, *A History of God*, 5.

7. The view that Hume is an atheist, judged in these terms, is also defended in Williams, "Hume on Religion,"267; Penelhum, "Comments and Responses," 255; and Millican, "Context, Aims and Structure of the *Enquiry*," 37.

8. If we allow that Hume's theory of belief, as developed in the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*, is relevant to the discussion in the *Dialogues*, it should be clear that the mechanics

of the human mind, as Hume describes them, make it impossible to *believe* the claims of theism, insofar as they are based in *reason*. Hume makes clear that when the analogy we are reasoning from is weakened, so, too, is belief (T, 1.3.9.13–4; 1.3.12.25/114–5, 142). According to Hume, belief is also weakened when we have obscure ideas or when we are faced with an alternative or contrary hypothesis (i.e. as based on the available evidence). (See, e.g., T, 1.3.8.4/100; EU, 5.16/51–2; and T, 1.3.13.13/140–1; EU, 6.4/57–8.) These circumstances are *all* present when we try to infer some cause of the universe based on the analogy with human intelligence (e.g. as in the case of thin theism). Insofar as this "remote analogy" allows any inference to be made, belief is entirely removed by the process and circumstances involved. Religion without belief is, obviously, *no religion at all*.

9. For a different reading, which presents Hume as an "attenuated deist," see Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, chap. 12. As I explained in chapter 5, Gaskin argues that Hume is an "attenuated deist," on the ground that he "gives some sort of genuine assent to the proposition that *there is a god*" (221; his emphasis). Gaskin goes on to say that this view involves only "the vestiges of the design argument, a god whose sole attribute is an intelligence which may bear some remote analogy to the intelligence of man" (223). Suffice it to note, for now, that even if Hume did give "genuine assent" to a view of this kind (which I have argued he did not), the position taken is almost indistinguishable from Hobbes's skeptical view—a view Hume's contemporaries regarded as *paradigmatic atheism*.

10. See, e.g., Mossner, "Religion of David Hume," 653; and "Enlightenment of David Hume," 57.

11. This general point is made by Kolakowski, *Positivist Philosophy*, 50: "Hume does not suspend judgement on religious belief, but leaves man without any solace, intellectual or affective, any sanctuary where such beliefs would have a legitimate place. His positivism thus does not advocate that we refrain from any kind of judgement pertaining to a metaphysical view of the world, but admits negative judgements concerning every kind of extra-natural reality."

12. This includes Hume's *History of England*, which contains a considerable amount of material that is critical of religion in its various forms and manifestations. On this see the illuminating observations in Siebert, *Moral Animus of David Hume*, chap. 2.

13. Considerations of this kind, of course, also apply to the way we assess the reactions of Hume's contemporaries to his *later* writings.

14. An obvious example of this is Hume's skeptical critique of our knowledge of the material world. Although this discussion is clearly relevant to the argument from design, there is no real counterpart to it in the *Dialogues*.

15. Hume's attitude to the doctrine of immortality did not change even when he was dying (compare NHR, 190 [note H]). Near the end of Hume's life, James Boswell visited him and asked if it was possible that there might be a future state. Hume replied that "it was possible that a piece of coal put upon the fire would not burn; and he added that it was a most unreasonable fancy that we should exist for ever" (quoted in Mossner, *Life*, 597–8).

16. Harris, *Atheistic Objections to the Being of God*, in *Defence of Religion*, 1:407.

17. See, e.g., Anderson, *Profit and Loss of Religion*, sec. 2.

18. Mossner argues that "from the biographical point of view, at least, it is certain that Hume did not regard himself as an atheist. Witness the confrontation in Paris with Baron D'Holbach and his atheistical club, the 'seiks in the Rue Royale.' Hume startled the Baron by observing that 'he did not believe in atheists, that he had never seen any' " ("Hume and the Legacy of the *Dialogues*," 22n38; see also Mossner, *Life*, 482–6). Mossner takes Hume's remarks to be entirely sincere and serious. We have every reason to reject this view. In the *Dialogues*, which were published years *after* this episode, Hume also denies the existence of atheists (D, 120; compare 41). However, as David Berman points out, by this time Hume

had already met at least fifteen atheists at D'Holbach's dinner party (*Atheism in Britain*, 101). Furthermore, in writings that appeared well *before* the D'Holbach dinner party took place (c. 1763), Hume refers to atheists and shows no sign of doubting their existence. See, e.g., MEM, 2, nos. 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 28, 35; NHR, 186 (note B). Among Hume's orthodox predecessors and contemporaries, it was a point of some debate whether atheists existed or not. In the first *Enquiry*, Hume *ridicules* the "contradiction" involved in doubting the existence of these "monsters" while at the same time refuting their fallacies (EU, 12.1/149). (Collins makes the same point in his *Discourse of Freethinking*, 104.) In the contemporary circumstances, as Hume points out in the *Dialogues*, an atheist would have to be "doubly foolish" to express such views openly—since this would be imprudent in the extreme (D, 41). (Collins, Toland, and other influential freethinkers before Hume made the same general point.) Given conditions of repression, simple skepticism about the existence of atheism would plainly be naïve. Related to this point, in the *Natural History of Religion* (sec. 4), Hume observes that throughout history the term "atheism" has been used in a fluid manner. In light of this, any simple denial of the existence of atheists would be both historically and philosophically naïve. Hume's observations in his various writings make clear that he was not naïve about such matters. The subject of "atheism" was a topic Hume was happy to joke about with his friends. See, for example, his remarks to William Mure about William Leechman's "atheism" (LET, 1:50, no. 21). (Leechman, a colleague of Francis Hutcheson at Glasgow University, had just published a sermon on prayer.) Finally, Hume's remarks at D'Holbach's dinner party concerning the existence of atheists should be read in light of D'Holbach's own views on this subject, as presented in his *System of Nature*, (vol.2, chap. 9). See, in particular, D'Holbach's account of atheism (pp. 304–6): "This granted..." In light of all these points, we may conclude that Hume's remarks at D'Holbach's dinner party do not show that he did not believe that atheists exist or that it is certain that he did not view himself as one. What these remarks show is that Hume had a sense of humor (something not all his readers can be accused of).

Chapter 20. *Hume's Lucretian Mission*

1. The final sentence of the *Treatise* makes clear that Hume does not regard his philosophy in this work as being of only theoretical interest or significance. It reads: "And thus the most abstract speculations concerning human nature, however cold and unentertaining, become subservient to *practical morality*; and may render this latter science more correct in its percepts, and more persuasive in its exhortations" (T, 3.3.6.6/621; his emphasis).

2. The problem of "the riddle" of the *Treatise* may be said to concern the *internal* coherence of this work: how Hume's skeptical and naturalist commitments *within* the *Treatise* are supposed to fit together. In contrast with this, the problems I am now concerned with may be said to deal with the *external* coherence of the *Treatise*; how Hume's aims and objectives in the *Treatise* are supposed to fit with the observations and claims he makes about religion in his *later* works (particularly his *Natural History of Religion*).

3. In the *Treatise*, Hume provides some brief accounts of the various psychological and "unphilosophical" features of the human mind that generate religious beliefs of various kinds (e.g. the association of ideas, the influence of the passions on belief, etc.). Similar observations are peppered throughout the first *Enquiry*.

4. Hume points out that not only does the evidence of history make this clear, we know as well that if theism, based on the (obvious and convincing) argument from design, was the original form of religion, then it would be impossible to explain how polytheism could ever have arisen. Since the argument from design would continue to have the same force, we should not expect any deviation from it (NHR, 137).

5. See, e.g., Hume's remarks at EU, 1.11, 11.3/11, 133; and NHR, 11.

6. Hume mentions this analogy at EM, 3.38/199. I discuss this passage later.

7. There are, of course, some obvious differences between justice and religion. For example, the issue of truth and falsehood arises for religion insofar as it makes claims about the existence and attributes of various (invisible, intelligent) beings. However, as the critic sees it, this is not a factor that serves to undermine the relevance of the analogy. What really matters is the relevant *functional* role religion plays (i.e. that it consoles, stabilizes, etc.). For these purposes, what matters is that the doctrines of religion are *believed* to be true—not that they are in fact true.

8. See also Hume's remarks at EU, sec. 11. In this context, the criticism is made of Epicurus's skeptical views concerning God and a future state that, however sound they may be, they nevertheless have "dangerous consequences" for morality (EU, 11.28–9/147). Hume's answer to this objection rests, of course, with his defense of *secular* morality in the *Treatise* and second *Enquiry*. The difficulty raised, however, reaches well beyond the narrower problem of the morality/religion relationship. That is to say, even if moral life does not depend on religion, Hume's own analysis (i.e. in NHR and elsewhere) suggests that the role religion plays is deeper and wider than this. Indeed, Hume's own account of the origins of religion does not place any particular weight on the role religion plays in support of moral life and emphasizes, instead, the role it plays in providing comfort and stability to human beings who are frail and vulnerable beings in an unpredictable and frightening world.

9. Marx, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, 250 ("Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction").

10. In the passage cited in note 9, Marx uses his famous analogy of religion as "the opium of the people." He continues: "The abolition of religion as people's *illusory* happiness is the demand for their *real* happiness. The demand to abandon illusions about their condition is a *demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions*" (his emphasis).

11. "Examine religious principles, which have in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded that they are any thing but sick men's dreams" (NHR, 184).

12. See, especially, Hume's remarks at T, 1.4.7.14/273: "For my part, my only hope is, that I may contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge…"

13. See, e.g., T, intro. 7/xxi; EU, 11.2/132–3; ESY, 89 92, 113–5, 276–8; NHR, 173–4.

14. See, in particular, Hume's observations about "superstition as an enemy to civil liberty" in his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm"; and his remarks about the clergy in a long footnote to his essay "Of National Characters" (ESY, 199–201n). Also relevant are his remarks about intolerance and monotheism in NHR, 160–3.

15. As noted, this is a theme that features in the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*, as well as, more prominently, in the *Natural History of Religion*.

16. See, e.g., T, 1.4.1.7; 1.4.7.13/183, 272; EU, 12. 22/159–60; EM, (A Dialogue) 53–7/341–3; D, 34–5; ESY, 139–41 168–71.

17. One irony here, perhaps, is that Hume's most obvious and natural audience consists of religiously minded people who can be persuaded to *alter* their beliefs by means of philosophical *argument* (otherwise why write for anyone?).

18. It is arguable that Hume's decision to "cast anew" his *Treatise* in the form of the two *Enquiries*, as well as to disown the *Treatise* on the ground that it was poorly presented, may well reflect his view that in the *Treatise* he had in fact targeted his audience *too narrowly*, given his *practical* aims and objectives vis-à-vis his Lucretian mission. See Hume's remarks in "My Own Life" (Mossner, *Life*, 612–3) and his "Advertisement" to the 1777 edition of his *Essays and Treatises* (EU, p. 83/2).

19. See Hume's remarks on the "golden age, which poets have invented" (T, 3.2.2.15/493–4).

20. The moderate nature of Hume's Lucretian mission may be contrasted with the more utopian views of Karl Marx on this subject. Marx entertained the ("scientific") hope that

one day, by means of a fundamental transformation of our powers of economic production, humanity will create a society in which the ideology of religion would fade away and disappear altogether. Whatever we may have to say about the merits of Marx's claims concerning religion, it is evident that Hume holds out no such hopes for us and encourages no such (illusory) aims and objectives by means of his critique of religion.

21. For Hume, "superstition" has narrower and more specific connotations than "religion" as such. Religious belief that has its origins in "weakness, fear, melancholy, together with ignorance" is, on Hume's account, "the true source of superstition" (ESY, 74). He contrasts this with religion that is based in "hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance," which is the root of "enthusiasm." He makes the point in his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" that these two forms of religion not only have different causes but also have different consequences. Superstition is particularly connected with "priestly power," tyranny, and the destruction of civil liberty.

22. Hume's way of targeting "superstition," as opposed to more benign forms of religion, is consistent with the writings of Cicero on this subject. (The influence and importance of Cicero for Hume's philosophy—especially as it concerns religion—is widely recognized.) See, in particular, Cicero's remarks in *On Divination* [sec. 72], where he makes clear that although he aims to "uproot and destroy superstition," he does not aim to "destroy" religion in general. Cicero retains a more refined view of religion, understood as belief "in the existence of some great and eternal Being, to whom mortals owe venerations and reverence." Clearly from Hume's point of view, more refined forms of religion of this kind should not be confused with pernicious superstition.

23. See, e.g., ESY, 539: "There is another Humour, which may be observ'd in some Pretenders to Wisdom, and which, if not so pernicious as the idle petulant Humour above-mention'd [i.e. those who ridicule everything sacred and venerable], must, however, have a very bad effect on those, who indulge it. I mean that grave philosophic Endeavour after Perfection, which, under Pretext of reforming Prejudices and Errors, strikes at all the most endearing Sentiments of the Heart, and all the most useful Byasses and Instincts, which can govern a human Creature."

24. LET, 2:451 (appendix). On the details surrounding Hume's death (and his Lucretian attitude to it) see Mossner, *Life*, chap. 39.

25. Mossner, *Life*, 603.

26. Hume's style and character as a *philosopher* is well described in the following: "Hume was the opposite of a learned pedant. . . . Questions that interested him he formulated with extraordinary clarity, and he weighed the possible answers without unnecessary rhetorical flourishes. . . . There is hard intellectual work behind every sentence he wrote, and his writings touch on everything of importance in the intellectual life of his time" (Kolakowski, *Positivist Philosophy*, 43).

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