The Quest for Natural Religion

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Edward's Prayer

Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury

This eloquent and heart-felt prayer shows how Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648) fused religious piety and intellectual interests – much as did many of the great minds of his age, such as Isaac Newton, and even his famous brother, the Metaphysical poet George Herbert.

Source: Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, *The Autobiography of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury*, ed. H. Dircks (London: Walter Scott, 1888), pp. 190–1.

O God! Thou, by whose power and wisdome all things at first were made, and by whose providence and goodness they are continued and preserved, still behold, from thy everlasting dwellinge above, me thy creature and inhabitant of this lower world, who from this valley of change and corruption, lifting up heart and eyes to Thee, his eternal God and Creator, does here acknowledge and confess these manifold blessings, these vast gifts bestowed on me;

As namely, that before I yet was, when I could neyther know nor consent to be great or good Thy eternal providence had ordained me this being, by which I was brought into this world, a living, free, and reasonable creature, not senseless or bruitish, but capable of seeinge and understandinge thy wondrous works herein;

And not only so, but of usinge and enjoyinge them, in that plentifull measure wherein they have been hitherto afforded me.

O Lord, with all humbleness I confess, that were there no other pledge of thy favour than this alone, it were more than any of thy creatures in this life can possibly deserve.

But thy mercies go farther yet. Thou hast not only made me see, know, and partake thy works, but hast suffered me to love Thee for the blessings shewed us in them.

I say, Thou hast admitted fraile dust and ashes to so high a dignity as to love Thee, the infinite and eternall Beauty. And not only disdainest it not, but acceptest, yea, and rewardest the same:

And whence can this come, but from thy everlasting goodness, which, had it not vouchsafed to love me first, I could not have had the power (than which man has no greater) of loving Thee againe.

Yet here thy mercies stay not. Thou hast not only given mee to know and love Thee, but hast written in my heart a desire even to imitate and bee like Thee (as farre as in this fraile flesh I may), and not only so, but many ways inabled me to the performance of it.

And from hence, Lord, with how much comfort do I learne the high estate I received in my creation, as beinge formed in thine owne similitude and likenesse.

But, O Lord, thy mercies (for they are infinite) are not bounded even here. Thou hast, then, not only given mee the means of knowinge, lovinge, and imitatinge Thee in this life; but hast given the the ambition of knowinge, lovinge, and imitatinge Thee after this life; and for that purpose hast begunne in mee a desire of happinesse, yea of eternal bliss, and from thence proceeded to give mee hope; and not only so, but also a faith which does promisse and assure mee, that since this desire can come from none but Thee, nothing Thou doest can be in vain.

What shall I say, then, but desire Thee, O Lord, to fulfill it in thy good tyme, to mee thy unworthy creature, who in this flesh can come no nearer Thee than the desireing that mortality both keeps mee from the abode, and makes me most unlike Thee here. Amen.

Common Notions Concerning Religion

Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury

Perhaps the first attempt to define the essential tenets of an authentic religion, Herbert's list of five common notions can also be seen as a statement of the nature of what later came to be called Natural Religion.

Further reading: Roger Johnson, "Natural Religion, Common Notions, and the Study of Religions: Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648)," *Religion* 24 (3) (1994), pp. 213–24; Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); ch. 8; J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), ch. 2.

Source: "Common Notions concerning Religion," in *De Veritate*, ed. and trans. Meyrick H. Carré, University of Bristol Studies, vol. 6 (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1992), pp. 289–303.

Before I proceed to discuss revelation, I think that certain assumptions which underlie our notions of revelation ought to be examined. Every religion which proclaims a revelation is not good, nor is every doctrine which is taught under its authority always essential or even valuable. Some doctrines due to revelation may be, some of them ought

to be, abandoned. In this connection the teaching of Common Notions is important; indeed, without them it is impossible to establish any standard of discrimination in revelation or even in religion. Theories based upon implicit faith, though widely held not only in our own part of the world but also in the most distant regions, are here irrelevant. Instances of such beliefs are: that human reason must be discarded, to make room for Faith; that the Church, which is infallible, has the right to prescribe the method of divine worship, and in consequence must be obeyed in every detail; that no one ought to place such confidence in his private judgment as to dare to question the sacred authority of priests and preachers of God's word; that their utterances, though they may elude human grasp, contain so much truth that we should rather lay them to heart than debate them; that to God all the things of which they speak and much more are possible. Now these arguments and many other similar ones, according to differences of age and country, may be equally used to establish a false religion as to support a true one. Anything that springs from the productive, not to say seductive seed of Faith will yield a plentiful crop. What pompous charlatan can fail to impress his ragged flock with such ideas? Is there any fantastic cult which may not be proclaimed under such auspices? How can any age escape deception, especially when the cunning authorities declare their inventions to be heaven-born, though in reality they habitually confuse and mix the truth with falsehood? If we do not advance towards truth upon a foundation of Common Notions, assigning every element its true value, how can we hope to reach any but futile conclusions? Indeed, however those who endeavour to base their beliefs upon the disordered and licentious codes of superstition may protest, their behaviour is precisely similar to people who with the purpose of blinding the eyes of the wayfarer with least trouble to themselves offer with singular courtesy to act as guides on the journey. But the actual facts are otherwise. The supreme Judge requires every individual to render an account of his actions in the light, not of another's belief, but of his own. So we must establish the fundamental principles of religion by means of universal wisdom, so that whatever has been added to it by the genuine dictates of Faith may rest on that foundation as a roof is supported on a house. Accordingly we ought not to accept any kind of religion lightly, without first enquiring into the sources of its prestige. And the Reader will find all these considerations depend upon Common Notions. Can anyone, I beg to ask, read the huge mass of books composed with such immense display of learning, without feeling scorn for these age-long impostures and fables, save in so far as they point the way to holiness? What man could yield unquestioning faith to a body which, disguised under the name of the Church, wastes its time over a multitude of rites, ceremonies, and vanities, which fights in so many parts of the world under different banners, if he were not led to perceive, by the aid of conscience, some marks of worship, piety, penance, reward and punishment? Who, finally, would attend to the living voice of the preacher if he did not refer all his deeds and words to the Sovereign Deity? It would take too long to deal with every instance. It is sufficient to make clear that we cannot establish any of them without the Common Notions. I value these so highly that I would say that the book, religion, and prophet which adheres most closely to them is the best. The system of Notions, so far at least as it concerns theology, has been clearly accepted at all times by every normal person, and does not require any further justification. And, first of all, the teaching of Common Notions, or true Catholic Church, which has never erred, nor ever will err and in which alone the glory of Divine Universal Providence is displayed, asserts that

There is a Supreme God

No general agreement exists concerning the Gods, but there is universal recognition of God. Every religion in the past has acknowledged, every religion in the future will acknowledge, some sovereign deity among the Gods. Thus to the Romans this supreme Power is Optimus Maximus; [...] to the Jews He is Jehovah; to the Mahomedans, Allah; to the Indians of the West, Pachama Viracocha, etc. The Eastern Indians have similar names for Him. Accordingly that which is everywhere accepted as the supreme manifestation of deity, by whatever name it may be called, I term God. I pass on to consider His attributes, using the same method. And in the first place I find that He is Blessed. Secondly, He is the end to which all things move. Thirdly, He is the cause of all things, at least in so far as they are good. From which follows, according to His providence that, in the fourth place, He is the means by which all things are produced; for how could we pass from the beginning to the end but by the means provided? We need not be deterred by the type of philosophers who have refused to grant the medium any share of providence. Since circumstances seldom fall out in accordance with their wishes, they make a desperate attempt to abolish particular Providence as though the course of events were ordained by themselves and not by the Divine will. We must realise that writers of this kind are only wrangling about the means by which Divine Providence acts; they are not, I think, disputing Providence itself. Meanwhile the utmost agreement exists concerning Universal Providence, or Nature. But every religion believes that the Deity can hear and answer prayers; and we are bound to assume a special Providence – to omit other sources of proof – from the universal testimony of the sense of divine assistance in times of distress. In the fifth place, He is eternal. For we are taught by a Common Notion that what is first is eternal. In the sixth place a Common Notion tells us that the Deity is good, since the cause of all good is supremely good. In the seventh place, He is just; a Common Notion, experience and history bear witness at every point that the world is ruled under His Providence with absolute justice. For as I have often observed, Common Notions, which solve the most difficult questions of philosophy and theology, teach us that all things are governed with righteousness and justice, though their causes may be hidden from us. In the eighth place, He is wise; for marks of His wisdom do not only appear in the attributes of which I have spoken, but are manifest daily in His works. [...]

This Sovereign Deity ought to be Worshipped

While there is no general agreement concerning the worship of Gods, sacred beings, saints, and angels, yet the Common Notion or Universal Consent tells us that adoration ought to be reserved for the one God. Hence divine religion – and no race, however savage, has existed without some expression of it – is found established among all nations, not only on account of the benefits which they received from general providence, but also in recognition of their dependence upon Grace, or particular providence. Hence, too, men have been convinced, as I have observed above, that they can not only supplicate that heavenly Power but prevail upon Him, by means of the faculties implanted in every normal man. Hence, finally, what is a more important

indication, this Power was consulted by the seers in order to interpret the future and they undertook no important action without referring to it. So far the peoples were surely guided by the teaching of Natural Instinct. The All Wise Cause of the universe does not suffer itself to be enclosed within its own sphere, but it bestows general Grace on all and special Grace on those whom it has chosen. Since everyone can experience this in himself, would it not be unjust to refuse the same power to God? God does not suffer us to beseech Him in vain, as the universal experience of divine assistance proves, to pass over all other arguments. Although I find that the doctrine of special providence, or Grace, was only grudgingly acknowledged by the ancients, as may be gathered from their surviving works, yet since the worship of the Divine Power was recognised in every age, and carried with it this doctrine of Grace or Special Providence, I assert that this doctrine is a Common Notion. From this source spring supplications, prayers, sacrifices, acts of thanksgiving; to this end were built shrines, sanctuaries, and finally for this purpose appeared priests, prophets, seers, pontiffs, the whole order of ministers. And even if their activity has been equally evident in human affairs as in the affairs of God, since they have often been a crafty and deceitful tribe, prone to avarice, and often ineffective, this is because they have introduced much under the pretext of Religion which has no bearing upon Religion. In this way with extraordinary skill they have confused sacred matters with profane, truth with falsehood, possibility with probability, lawful worship with licentious ceremonies and senseless superstitions; with the result, I make bold to say, that they have corrupted, defiled, and prostituted the pure name of Religion. However necessary the priests were, whenever they brought contempt upon themselves, the fear of God and the respect due to sacred things diminished in proportion. Accordingly we must give them the honour which is due to them. I obtain, then, proof of this external aspect of divine worship in any type of religion from every age, country and race. It is therefore a Common Notion. It is no objection that temples or regions sacred to the Gods are not found among savages. For in their own fashion they consulted oracles and undertook no serious task without propitiating their Deity. [. . .]

The connection of Virtue with Piety, defined in this work as the right conformation of the faculties, is and always has been held to be, the most important part of religious practice

There is no general agreement concerning rites, ceremonies, traditions, whether written or unwritten, or concerning Revelation; but there is the greatest possible consensus of opinion concerning the right conformation of the faculties. The way in which this right conformation of the faculties may be established I have discussed at length above, and the Reader is invited to refer to that passage. There he will learn how Conscience guided by Common Notions produces virtue combined with piety, how from this there springs true hope, from such true hope, faith, from true faith, love, from true love, joy, and from true joy, Blessedness. Thus we now see that no faculty which leads to piety, purity of life, holiness and virtue, is not included under this heading. If I am to make some survey of these faculties, in respect of a person's years and the degree of wisdom which it has pleased God to give him, I would say that children recognise and seek God in their own way in the form of happiness, and acknowledge Him in the spontaneous gratitude which

they accord their benefactors. No trait, therefore, is so excellent as gratitude, nothing so base as ingratitude. And when gratitude is expressed by more mature persons and the Common Notions gradually reveal their objects more clearly, Religion becomes enriched and appears in a greater variety of ways, though no practice emerges which is more admirable than this gratitude. With the advantage of age, piety and holiness of life take deeper roots within the conscience, and give birth to a profound love and faith in God. [. . .]

The minds of men have always been filled with horror for their wickedness. Their vices and crimes have been obvious to them. They must be expiated by repentance

There is no general agreement concerning the various rites or mysteries which the priests have devised for the expiation of sin. Among the Romans, ceremonies of purification, cleansing, atonement, among the Greeks, rites of expiation and purging, and in nearly all races, sacrifices, even of human victims, a cruel and abominable device of the priests, were instituted for this purpose. Among the Egyptians and all the heathen races observances of a similar kind prevailed. I have referred to many of them in my book "On the Religion of the Gentiles" and also in my work, not yet published, "On the Causes of Errors." Among the Mohammedans, Ramadan is held twice each year after the manner of our Forty Days. But above all other races the Eastern Indians display the most energy in exercises of this kind. At a certain sacred period of the year they gather in the forests, and taking a piece of sharp rock or stone, let forth a quantity of blood, until their spirits are on the point of leaving them, protesting at the same time that the root-causes of their sins had lain hidden in their blood and that by allowing it to gush forth they atone for their sins. But we may pass over such rites, some of which may well appear ridiculous. General agreement among religions, the nature of divine goodness, and above all conscience, tell us that our crimes may be washed away by true penitence, and that we can be restored to new union with God. For this inner witness condemns wickedness while at the same time it can wipe out the stain of it by genuine repentance, as the inner form of apprehension under proper conditions proves. I do not wish to consider here whether any other more appropriate means exists by which the divine justice may be appeased, since I have undertaken in this work only to rely on truths which are not open to dispute but are derived from the evidence of immediate perception and admitted by the whole world. This alone I assert, whatever may be said to the contrary, that unless wickedness can be abolished by penitence and faith in God, and unless the Divine goodness can satisfy the Divine justice (and no further appeal can be invoked), then there does not exist, nor ever has existed any universal source to which the wretched mass of men, crushed beneath the burden of sin, can turn to obtain grace and inward peace. If this were the case, God has created and condemned certain men, in fact the larger part of the human race, not only without their desire, but without their knowledge. This idea is so dreadful and consorts so ill with the providence and goodness, and even the justice of God, that it is more charitable to suppose that the whole human race has always possessed in repentance the opportunity of becoming reconciled with God. And as long as men did not cut themselves off from it their damnation would not have been due to the benevolent will of God, but to their own sins, nor could God have been charged with blame if they failed to find salvation. All the teaching of the greatest preachers

concerning eternal salvation coincides on this issue, since every means of redress is useless except penitence and becomes, as they tell us, empty and futile. [. . .]

There is Reward or Punishment after this life

The rewards that are eternal have been variously placed in heaven, in the stars, in the Elysian fields, or in contemplation. Punishment has been thought to lie in metempsychosis, in hell (which some describe as filled with fire, but the Chinese imagine pervaded with smoke), or in some infernal regions, or regions of the middle air, or in temporary or everlasting death. But all religion, law, philosophy and, what is more, conscience, teach openly or implicitly that punishment or reward awaits us after this life. Religion teaches us this explicitly when it uses the terms which I have mentioned. It teaches the same doctrine indirectly by establishing the immortality of the soul or by proving that God avenges crimes which are committed with impunity in this life. In this sense there is no nation, however barbarous, which has not and will not recognise the existence of punishments and rewards. That reward and punishment exist is, then, a Common Notion, though there is the greatest difference of opinion as to their nature, quality, extent and mode. It is no objection that the soul perishes with the body, as some people assert. For they refer this very fact to punishment for sin, or else they mean only that part of the soul with which they have been familiar, namely, the physical senses; or finally they must be ignored since they talk sheer nonsense; for there is nothing in the faculties of the mind to suggest such ideas. That the soul could be immortal if God willed it is clearly a Common Notion in that among the most distant races, seething with every type of superstition, there exists a general conviction that purity of life and courage of mind promote happiness. It is on this account that they are said to honour the bones of those who have died bravely in battle. But I do not trouble myself about such matters, since I am not concerned with superstitions and sacred rites; it is not what a large number of men assert, but what all men of normal mind believe, that I find important. Scanning the vast array of absurd fictions I am content to discover a tiny Common Notion. And this is of the utmost importance, since when the general mass of men have rejected a whole range of beliefs which it has found valueless, it proceeds to acquire new beliefs by this method, until the point is reached where faith can be applied.

It follows from these considerations that the Dogmas which recognise a sovereign Deity, enjoin us to worship Him, command us to live a holy life, lead us to repent our sins, and warn us of future recompense or punishment, proceed from God and are inscribed within us in the form of Common Notions. But those dogmas which postulate a plurality of Gods, which do not forbid crimes and sins, which rail against penitence, and which express doubts about the eternal state of the soul, cannot be considered either Common Notions or truths. Accordingly every religion, if we consider it comprehensively, is not good; nor can we admit that salvation is open to men in every religion. For how could anyone who believes more than is necessary, but who does less than he ought, be saved? But I am convinced that in every religion, and indeed in every individual conscience, either through Grace or Nature, sufficient means are granted to men to win God's good will; while all additional and peculiar features which are found at any period must be referred to their inventors. It is not sufficient that they should be old if they have once been new. Ideas which are superfluous or even false may be not only novel but ancient, and truths which are only seized by a few cannot be essential to all. The truth

which belongs to revelation occupies a special place here; and no faith in it is in any way disparaged by the principles which I have described. On the contrary whatever it adds to them I hold to be valuable. The fundamental principles of Revelation itself are here established, so that it is possible to reduce all disputes to the question, On what faculty does the argument depend? Accordingly so far from these views conflicting with ordinary beliefs or depending on new principles, I have asserted nothing but the symbol of Common Notions and what has been universally accepted by every religion, age and country. I do not deny that sacred ceremonies can form part of religion; on the contrary I find that some ceremonies are included in every religion and serve to embellish it; so far they are valuable. But when they are made by the priests the essential elements of divine worship, then religion, and we who practise it are the victims of imposture. Rites must be kept within bounds. We can only accept them on the understanding that religion is chaste and only requires such ornaments as render a matron more venerable and respected. When she paints and dyes herself, her appearance is too suggestive of the harlot.

Such, then, are the Common Notions of which the true Catholic or universal church is built. For the church which is built of clay or stone or living rock or even of marble cannot be claimed to be the infallible Church. The true Catholic Church is not supported on the inextricable confusion or oral and written tradition to which men have given their allegiance. Still less is it that which fights beneath any one particular standard, or is comprised in one organisation so as to embrace only a restricted portion of the earth, or a single period of history. The only Catholic and uniform Church is the doctrine of Common Notions which comprehends all places and all men. This Church alone reveals Divine Universal Providence, or the wisdom of Nature. This Church alone explains why God is appealed to as the common Father. And it is only through this Church that salvation is possible. The adoration which has been bestowed on every particular Church belongs to it. Every Church, as I have pointed out above, is the more exposed to error the further it is separated from it. Anyone who courts uncertain doctrines in place of the sure truths of divine providence, and forges new articles of Faith, forsakes this Church. If, however, anyone receives some truth by revelation, which I think can occur both in the waking state and in sleep, he must use it as occasion warrants, remembering that unless he is entrusted with a message of interest to all, he should reserve it to himself.

from *The Natural History of Religion*

David Hume

A sharp radical skeptic, David Hume (1711–76) was one the most influential philosophical voices of the eighteenth century and also an accomplished historian. He might well be identified as the first historian of religions for his *Natural History of Religion* (1757), a short selection of which is anthologized in this volume. Hume's philosophical works on

theory of knowledge, morality, and esthetics are classics of philosophical literature, and major points of departure for modern-day forms of empiricism. His controversial six-volume *History of England* (1754–62), from Roman times to the reign of James II, stands as a major accomplishment in political history. This selection from Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (1757), written during the same period as Hume's *History of England*, likewise adopts a sharp critical position on the nature of 'authentic' religion, especially Herbert of Cherbury's conception of Natural Religion. Declaring that his history of religion proceeded according to strict naturalistic principles, he felt that the empirical data available to him at the time indicated that polytheism was the oldest religion known to humanity.

Further reading: Isaiah Berlin, "Hume and the Source of German Anti-Rationalism," in *Against the Current*, ed. H. Hardy (London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 162–87; J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), ch. 5.

Source: *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. James Fieser (Library of the Liberal Arts) (New York: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 4–9.

I. That Polytheism was the Primary Religion of Men

It appears to me, that, if we consider the improvement of human society, from rude beginnings to a state of greater perfection, polytheism or idolatry was, and necessarily must have been, the first and most ancient religion of mankind.[1] This opinion I shall endeavour to confirm by the following arguments.

It is a matter of fact incontestable, that about 1700 years ago all mankind were polytheists. The doubtful and sceptical principles of a few philosophers, or the theism, and that too not entirely pure, of one or two nations, form no objection worth regarding. Behold then the clear testimony of history. The farther we mount up into antiquity, the more do we find mankind plunged into polytheism. No marks, no symptoms of any more perfect religion. The most ancient records of human race still present us with that system as the popular and established creed. The north, the south, the east, the west, give their unanimous testimony to the same fact. What can be opposed to so full an evidence?

As far as writing or history reaches, mankind, in ancient times, appear universally to have been polytheists. Shall we assert, that, in more ancient times, before the knowledge of letters, or the discovery of any art or science, men entertained the principles of pure theism? That is, while they were ignorant and barbarous, they discovered truth: But fell into error, as soon as they acquired learning and politeness.

But in this assertion you not only contradict all appearance of probability, but also our present experience concerning the principles and opinions of barbarous nations. The savage tribes of AMERICA, AFRICA, and ASIA are all idolaters. Not a single exception to this rule. Insomuch, that, were a traveller to transport himself into any unknown region; if he found inhabitants cultivated with arts and science, though even upon that supposition there are odds against their being theists, yet could he not safely, till farther inquiry, pronounce any thing on that head: But if he found them ignorant and barbarous, he might beforehand declare them idolaters; and there scarcely is a possibility of his being mistaken.

It seems certain, that, according to the natural progress of human thought, the ignorant multitude must first entertain some groveling and familiar notion of superior powers, before they stretch their conception to that perfect Being, who bestowed order on the whole frame of nature. We may as reasonably imagine, that men inhabited palaces before huts and cottages, or studied geometry before agriculture; as assert that the Deity appeared to them a pure spirit, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, before he was apprehended to be a powerful, though limited being, with human passions and appetites, limbs and organs. The mind rises gradually, from inferior to superior: By abstracting from what is imperfect, it forms an idea of perfection: And slowly distinguishing the nobler parts of its own frame from the grosser, it learns to transfer only the former, much elevated and refined, to its divinity. Nothing could disturb this natural progress of thought, but some obvious and invincible argument, which might immediately lead the mind into the pure principles of theism, and make it overleap, at one bound, the vast interval which is interposed between the human and the divine nature. But though I allow, that the order and frame of the universe, when accurately examined, affords such an argument; yet I can never think, that this consideration could have an influence on mankind, when they formed their first rude notions of religion.

The causes of such objects, as are quite familiar to us, never strike our attention or curiosity; and however extraordinary or surprising these objects in themselves, they are passed over, by the raw and ignorant multitude, without much examination or enquiry. ADAM, rising at once, in paradise, and in the full perfection of his faculties, would naturally, as represented by MILTON, be astonished at the glorious appearances of nature, the heavens, the air, the earth, his own organs and members; and would be led to ask, whence this wonderful scene arose. But a barbarous, necessitous animal (such as a man is on the first origin of society), pressed by such numerous wants and passions, has no leisure to admire the regular face of nature, or make enquiries concerning the cause of those objects, to which from his infancy he has been gradually accustomed. On the contrary, the more regular and uniform, that is, the more perfect nature appears, the more is he familiarized to it, and the less inclined to scrutinize and examine it. A monstrous birth excites his curiosity, and is deemed a prodigy. It alarms him from its novelty; and immediately sets him a trembling, and sacrificing, and praying. But an animal, compleat in all its limbs and organs, is to him an ordinary spectacle, and produces no religious opinion or affection. Ask him, whence that animal arose; he will tell you, from the copulation of its parents. And these, whence? From the copulation of theirs. A few removes satisfy his curiosity, and set the objects at such a distance, that he entirely loses sight of them. Imagine not, that he will so much as start the question, whence the first animal; much less, whence the whole system or united fabric of the universe arose. Or, if you start such a question to him, expect not, that he will employ his mind with any anxiety about a subject, so remote, so uninteresting, and which so much exceeds the bounds of his capacity.

But farther, if men were at first led into the belief of one Supreme Being, by reasoning from the frame of nature, they could never possibly leave that belief, in order to embrace polytheism; but the same principles of reason, which at first produced and diffused over mankind, so magnificent an opinion, must be able, with greater facility, to preserve it. The first invention and proof of any doctrine is much more difficult than the supporting and retaining of it.

There is a great difference between historical facts and speculative opinions; nor is the knowledge of the one propagated in the same manner with that of the other. An

historical fact, while it passes by oral tradition from eye-witnesses and contemporaries, is disguised in every successive narration, and may at last retain but very small, if any, resemblance of the original truth, on which it was founded. The frail memories of men, their love of exaggeration, their supine carelessness; these principles, if not corrected by books and writing, soon pervert the account of historical events; where argument or reasoning has little or no place, nor can ever recall the truth, which has once escaped those narrations. It is thus the fables of HERCULES, THESEUS, BACCHUS are supposed to have been originally founded in true history, corrupted by tradition. But with regard to speculative opinions, the case is far otherwise. If these opinions be founded on arguments so clear and obvious as to carry conviction with the generality of mankind, the same arguments, which at first diffused the opinions, will still preserve them in their original purity. If the arguments be more abstruse, and more remote from vulgar[2] apprehension, the opinions will always be confined to a few persons; and as soon as men leave the contemplation of the arguments, the opinions will immediately be lost and be buried in oblivion. Whichever side of this dilemma we take, it must appear impossible, that theism could, from reasoning, have been the primary religion of human race, and have afterwards, by its corruption, given birth to polytheism and to all the various superstitions of the heathen world. Reason, when obvious, prevents these corruptions: When abstruse, it keeps the principles entirely from the knowledge of the vulgar, who are alone liable to corrupt any principle or opinion.

II. Origin of Polytheism

If we would, therefore, indulge our curiosity, in enquiring concerning the origin of religion, we must turn our thoughts towards polytheism, the primitive religion of uninstructed mankind.

Were men led into the apprehension of invisible, intelligent power by a contemplation of the works of nature, they could never possibly entertain any conception but of one single being, who bestowed existence and order on this vast machine, and adjusted all its parts, according to one regular plan or connected system. For though, to persons of a certain turn of mind, it may not appear altogether absurd, that several independent beings, endowed with superior wisdom, might conspire in the contrivance and execution of one regular plan; yet is this a merely arbitrary supposition, which, even if allowed possible, must be confessed neither to be supported by probability nor necessity. All things in the universe are evidently of a piece. Every thing is adjusted to every thing. One design prevails throughout the whole. And this uniformity leads the mind to acknowledge one author; because the conception of different authors, without any distinction of attributes or operations, serves only to give perplexity to the imagination, without bestowing any satisfaction on the understanding. The statue of LAOCOON,[3] as we learn from PLINY,[4] was the work of three artists: But it is certain, that, were we not told so, we should never have imagined, that a groupe of figures, cut from one stone, and united in one plan, was not the work and contrivance of one statuary. To ascribe any single effect to the combination of several causes, is not surely a natural and obvious supposition.

On the other hand, if, leaving the works of nature, we trace the footsteps of invisible power in the various and contrary events of human life, we are necessarily led

into polytheism and to the acknowledgment of several limited and imperfect deities. Storms and tempests ruin what is nourished by the sun. The sun destroys what is fostered by the moisture of dews and rains. War may be favourable to a nation, whom the inclemency of the seasons afflicts with famine. Sickness and pestilence may depopulate a kingdom, amidst the most profuse plenty. The same nation is not, at the same time, equally successful by sea and by land. And a nation, which now triumphs over its enemies, may anon submit to their more prosperous arms. In short, the conduct of events, or what we call the plan of a particular providence,[5] is so full of variety and uncertainty, that, if we suppose it immediately ordered by any intelligent beings, we must acknowledge a contrariety in their designs and intentions, a constant combat of opposite powers, and a repentance or change of intention in the same power, from impotence or levity. Each nation has its tutelar deity. Each element is subjected to its invisible power or agent. The province of each god is separate from that of another. Nor are the operations of the same god always certain and invariable. To-day he protects: To-morrow he abandons us. Prayers and sacrifices, rites and ceremonies, well or ill performed, are the sources of his favour or enmity, and produce all the good or ill fortune, which are to be found amongst mankind.

Notes

1. [Hume uses the words "idolatry" and "polytheism" interchangeably to refer to the belief in a multiplicity of gods or divine beings. "Idolatry" was the designating term prior to the eighteenth century. The English deists rejected this in favor of "polytheism." Hume uses the word "theism" to refer to the belief in a single powerful creator of the world (usually called *monotheism*). Traditionally, monotheism was thought to be the original religion and polytheism a corruption of that.]
2. [By "vulgar" Hume means common or ordinary as pertaining to the masses. Accordingly, Hume contrasts superstitious *vulgar religion*, held by the masses, with refined *rational religion*, held mainly by a small educated group.]
3. [The statue of Laocoon is attributed to Athenodorus, Agesander, and Polydorus of the school of Rhodes and dates to the first century B.C. The statue depicts Laocoon, a legendary priest of Apollo at Troy, and his two sons enwrapped and bitten to death by serpents.]
4. [Pliny the Younger (c.62–113 A.D.), Roman historian and naturalist known for his *Letters* which vividly describe events of his day, such as the eruption of Vesuvius.]
5. ["Particular providence" refers to particular acts of divine intervention by which good human deeds are rewarded and evil deeds are punished. The issue involves whether God works only in the most general ways, through regular laws which affect humanity at large, or whether he intervenes in particular cases according to each person's merits.]

Hume's *Natural History of Religion* and the Beginning of the Social Scientific Study of Religion

Robert A. Segal

A widely published expert in theory and method in religious studies, Robert Segal shows how Hume's *Natural History of Religion* anticipates modern-day approaches to the study of religion in a number of ways.

Source: "Hume's *Natural History of Religion* and the Beginning of the Social Scientific Study of Religion," *Religion* 24 (3) (1994), pp. 225–34.

The Origin of Religion

David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* (1757) is commonly touted as a pioneering work in the history of the study of religion, but the originality of that work is sometimes missed. Hume is typically credited with providing a nonsupernatural account of religion. For example, Louis Henry Jordan, in his classic work on *Comparative Religion*, states that 'Hume abandoned the theory of Revelation altogether, and tried to show how purely natural causes completely accounted for man's religious beliefs and practices' (Jordan, 1986 p. 216). But there were others in Hume's day who replaced a human source with a divine one.[1] Hume's true originality lies in the particular human source he proposes.

Hume asserts that religion stems not from intellect but from passion. Following his overall view of human nature, which downplays the clout of reason and plays up the power of feeling, Hume attributes religion not to wonder at the beauty and orderliness of the world but to joy and, far more, fear before the chaos and unpredictability of the world. Hume is arguing against the Deists, for whom religion originated in the recognition of the design of the world and therefore of the necessity for a designer.[2]

In rejecting the deistic as well as the revelationist account of religion, Hume severs the heretofore taut kinship assumed by both camps between explanation and justification. Prior to Hume, the proffered origin of religion – be it the perception of order or the

receipt of revelation – simultaneously provided validation for religion. Causes were also reasons. Hume replaces reasons with sheer causes. While the ascription of religion to ordinary emotions does not argue against the reality of god, it does not argue for the reality of god either. Emotions disclose much about human beings but little about the world.

Hume thus opens his *Natural History of Religion* by distinguishing two questions concerning religion: 'its foundation in reason' and 'its origin in human nature'. Not coincidentally, Hume writes distinct tracts on each question: the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779) and *The Natural History of Religion*. In *The Natural History of Religion* he is prepared to acknowledge that 'The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author, [so that] no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion' (*Natural History of Religion* [hereafter *NHR*], p. 21). Whether the endorsement in the *Natural History* of the very argument from design that the same author seemingly refutes in the *Dialogues* is meant seriously is not germane here.[3] What counts is that Hume still differentiates the issue of origin from the issue of truth. That differentiation helps demarcate what will become the social scientific study of religion from the philosophy of religion.

By the origin of religion Hume does not mean the historical, one-time origin. He means the recurrent origin: the origin of religion whenever and wherever it surfaces. Thus he refers to the origin of religion 'in human nature' rather than in any particular time or place. In seeking the recurrent origin of religion, Hume helps to extricate what will become the focus of the social sciences from the focus of history.

Elsewhere Hume argues that various non-religious beliefs – notably, the beliefs in causality and in the existence of the external world – are ineluctable. It is not that these beliefs are correct. It is that human beings simply cannot imagine doubting them, which makes them inherent in human nature and in that sense 'natural'. By contrast, religious belief is avoidable, for it has been avoided: Hume cites evidence that religious belief, while pervasive, has been less than universal. The 'naturalness' of religion therefore means only its human rather than revealed origin, not its innateness in human nature.[4]

In denying the universality of religion, Hume is denying another traditional use of the cause of religion as a reason for its veracity. More important, he is denying the existence of a religious instinct, which by definition would be universal. Here Hume is denying the other main deistic argument: that religion arises from a spontaneous awareness of god – the alternative to its origin in rational inference. To qualify as an instinct, religion not only would have to be universal but also would have to be a feeling, or an 'impression'. Instead, religion is a *response* to a universal feeling: fear. Religion is not the feeling of the presence of god. It is the feeling of the presence of a threatening world. Belief in god is a mere inference from that feeling. It is an idea rather than an impression (see Preus, pp. 93–5). Hume's refusal to ascribe religion to an irreducibly religious instinct introduces what will become the reductive stance of the social scientific study of religion vis-à-vis the irreducibly religious stance of what will become the history of religions.

To determine the origin of religion, Hume seeks the original form of religion. Contrary to the Deists, he deems that pristine form to have been polytheism rather than monotheism. The deistic origin is tied to the design argument: the orderliness of the world entails a single orderer. The Deists appealed to the symmetry in nature that earliest humanity could and should have beheld. Hume, by contrast, appeals to the conflicting forces of nature that earliest humanity probably did behold:

> Storms and tempests ruin what is nourished by the sun. The sun destroys what is fostered by the moisture of dews and rains. War may be favourable to a nation, when the inclemency of the season afflicts with famine. Sickness and pestilence may depopulate a kingdom, amidst the most profuse plenty. . . . In short, the conduct of events . . . is so full of variety and uncertainty, that if we suppose it immediately ordered by any intelligent beings, we must acknowledge a contrariety in their designs and intentions, a constant combat of opposite powers, and a repentance or change of intention in the same power, from impotence or levity (*NHR*, p. 27).

Hume's argument for polytheism is inductive and is meant to hover as close to the facts as inference permits. He amasses the reports of ancients and moderns alike about earliest religions. His sources may be limited and dubious – he necessarily relies almost wholly on ancient Greeks and Romans and on untrained modern travelers – but he does use whatever data are available.

Having established polytheism as the original form of religion, Hume considers next what caused polytheism. Sounding strikingly like Bronislaw Malinowski (1926) in his scorn for the image of our forebears as sublimely ethereal, Hume contends that polytheism stemmed from trepidation before the power of nature rather than from 'contemplation of the works of nature' (*NHR*, p. 26).

For Hume, as for Malinowski, 'men scrutinize' the world not to explain it but to control it (*NHR*, p. 28). Human beings do seek to know the causes of the events that beset them, but only as a means of preventing or tempering those events. Knowing nothing about the causes, humans automatically assign human causes to events. Hume does not go so far as to suggest that humans anthropomorphize the causes of threatening phenomena in order to make those phenomena more tamable – an argument made by, among others, Freud, whose account of religion in *The Future of an Illusion* (1964) is otherwise notably similar to Hume's. But Hume does assert that humans seek to appease the gods they hypothesize:

> [E]very disastrous accident alarms us, and sets us on enquiries concerning the principles whence it arose: Apprehensions spring up with regard to futurity: And the mind, sunk into diffidence, terror, and melancholy, has recourse to every method of appeasing those secret intelligent powers, on whom our fortune is supposed entirely to depend (*NHR*, p. 31).

So resolved is Hume to reject a scrupulously intellectual cause of religion that he emphasizes the absence of creator gods from the first pantheons – the issue of creation being too abstract and distant a concern for earliest humanity.

Hume refuses to ascribe even monotheism, which develops after polytheism, to the eventual contemplation of nature by early humanity. For him, ordinary humanity is constitutionally incapable either of recognizing the orderliness of nature – the design argument – or of being moved by it. Monotheism, which he calls 'theism', thus not only evolves out of polytheism but is spurred by the same brute anxiety about life:

> [T]he same anxious concern for happiness, which begets the idea of these invisible, intelligent powers, allows not mankind to remain long in the first simple conception of them; as powerful, but limited beings; masters of human fate, but slaves to destiny and the course of nature (*NHR*, p. 47).

In Hume's reconstruction, polytheists come to single out one god as either their patron deity or the chief deity in the cosmos. To garner his favour they desperately bestow on him every possible laud:

> In proportion as men's fears or distresses become more urgent, they still invent new strains of adulation; and even he who outdoes his predecessor in swelling up the titles of his divinity, is sure to be outdone by his successor in newer and more pompous epithets of praise. Thus they proceed; till at last they arrive at infinity itself, beyond which there is no farther progress . . . (*NHR*, p. 43).

The impetus to the conception of a single, omnipotent, and omniscient god is therefore no inference from the cohesiveness of the world but a scampering to cope with the dread of earthquakes, fires, plagues, and other woes. Philosophical arguments arise only afterwards, to support the desired beliefs.[5] For Hume, reason can at most bolster passion but, antithetically to the deistic conviction, can never lead passion, much less overcome it (see Yandell 1976, pp. 112–15).

When Hume speaks repeatedly of the 'unknown causes' of events – 'These unknown causes, then, become the constant object of our hope and fear' (*NHR*, p. 29) – he seems incongruously akin to those contemporary historians of religions who envelop divinity in mystery in order to insulate it from explanation. But Hume is actually waxing sceptical, not devout. It is not the ultimate nature of god but the ultimate nature of the world which is unfathomable. If, then, Hume is no theist, he is no atheist either. He is an agnostic – here, too, a pioneering one (see esp. Box, p. 213, n. 62). Like most modern social scientists, he readily places non-empirical questions beyond his ken – if also, in his case, beyond the ken of anyone else as well. As he states in the final paragraph of his book:

> The whole is a riddle, an aenigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny, concerning this subject (*NHR*, p. 76).

The Effect of Religion

Budding social scientist that he is, Hume raises the issue of not only the origin but also the effect of religion. For all his interest in the origin of religion, he, like most modern social scientists, is even more concerned with the effect. Hume's analysis of effect is much more sociological than his analysis of origin, which is entirely psychological. For Hume, as for Edward Tylor and James Frazer, individuals invent religion for themselves.[6] All human beings may fear the world, but the collective nature of their fear has no bearing on the creation of religion. When, however, Hume turns to the effect of religion, he concentrates far more on its effect on society than on its effect on individuals. And in uncanny anticipation of modern functionalism, he investigates the unintended, not the intended, effect of religion.

Hume is especially eager to contrast the effect of polytheism on adherents to the effect of monotheism. Exactly because he segregates the issues of origin and effect from the issue of truth, he is able to judge polytheism false yet more functional than monotheism, which by his formal embrace of the design argument he considers true. Polytheism is so protean

in character that it can accommodate any belief or practice, 'however barbarous or corrupted' (*NHR*, p. 48). But

> by limiting the powers and functions of each of its deities, it naturally admits the gods of other sects and nations to a share of divinity, and renders all the various deities, as well as rites, ceremonies, or traditions, compatible with each other (*NHR*, pp. 48–9).

Monotheism yields the opposite consequences. Because its sole deity is 'the perfection of reason and goodness', 'it should, if justly prosecuted, banish every thing frivolous, unreasonable, or inhuman from religious worship, and set before men the most illustrious example . . . of justice and benevolence' (*NHR*, p. 49). But monotheism brooks no *modus vivendi* with other religions, which it dismisses as 'absurd and impious' (*NHR*, p. 49). In fact, it often persecutes its rivals. From polytheism emanates toleration; from monotheism, fanaticism. Not surprisingly, Hume's multi-volume *History of England* (1754–62) is replete with recountings of the unpleasant consequences for society of monotheistic fanatics (see esp. Siebert, pp. 65–104, 119–31).

Because the gods in polytheism are 'only a little superior to mankind' and may even be believed, in euhemeristic fashion, to have once been humans, they serve as models for humans. Because the monotheistic god is 'infinitely superior to mankind' (*NHR*, p. 53), humans can never envision themselves measuring up and consequently 'sink . . . into the lowest submission and abasement' (*NHR*, p. 52).[7] In self-depreciation and solipsistic self-scrutiny monotheists cultivate 'the monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility, and passive suffering' (*NHR*, p. 52). The more confident, more extroverted polytheists nurture concern for others.

Where polytheism, ever relaxed, makes no effort to enlist philosophy on its behalf, the far more driven monotheism does. But in so doing, it begets beliefs that ironically are even less rational than those of polytheism:

> [P]hilosophy will soon find herself very unequally yoked with her new associate [i.e. monotheism]; and instead of regulating each principle, as they advance together, she is at every turn perverted to serve the purposes of superstition. For besides the unavoidable incoherences, which must be reconciled and adjusted; one may safely affirm, that all popular theology, especially the scholastic, has a kind of appetite for absurdity and contradiction. If that theology went not beyond reason and common sense, her doctrines would appear too easy and familiar. Amazement must of necessity be raised: Mystery affected: Darkness and obscurity sought after: And a foundation of merit afforded to the devout votaries, who desire an opportunity of subduing their rebellious reason, by the belief of the most unintelligible sophisms (*NHR*, p. 54).

Zealous as he is to keep religion and philosophy apart, Hume maintains that any miscegenation contaminates philosophy rather than, in deistic fashion, elevates religion.

For Hume, the most scandalous social effect of religion is the dimunition of ethics. First of all, religion substitutes rituals for ethics:

> It is certain, that, in every religion, however sublime the verbal definition which it gives of its divinity, many of the votaries, perhaps the greatest number, will still seek the divine favour, not by virtue and good morals, which alone can be acceptable to a perfect being, but either by frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous extasies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinions (*NHR*, p. 70).

The castigation of religion for caring more about rituals than about ethics is, of course, a standard stereotype of one religion (e.g. Judaism) by another (e.g. Christianity) and of one variety of a religion (e.g. priestly religion) by another (e.g. prophetic religion). Hume goes further and maintains that human beings are by nature ethical, so that religion can take scant credit for fostering ethics:

> The duties, which a man performs as a friend or parent, seem merely owing to his benefactor or children; nor can he be wanting to these duties, without breaking through all the ties of nature and morality. A strong inclination may prompt him to the performance: A sentiment of order and moral obligation joins its force to these natural ties: And the whole man, if truly virtuous, is drawn to his duty, without any effort or endeavour. Even with regard to the virtues, which are more austere, and more founded on reflection, such as public spirit, filial duty, temperance, or integrity; the moral obligation, in our apprehension, removes all pretension to religious merit; and the virtuous conduct is deemed no more than what we [naturally] owe to society and to ourselves (*NHR*, pp. 71–72).

Worse yet, Hume avers that religion outright discourages ethics precisely because believers, desperate to evince their devotion to the figure on whom their fate depends, feverishly devise unambiguous expressions of loyalty – expressions that cannot be taken as motivated by anything else. Because ethics would be practised anyway, believers turn instead to rituals, which therefore become more important than ethics:

> In all this [i.e. ethics], a superstitious [i.e. religious] man finds nothing which he has properly performed for the sake of his deity, or which can peculiarly recommend him to the divine favour and protection. He considers not, that the most genuine method of serving the divinity is by promoting the happiness of his creatures. He still looks out for some more immediate service of the supreme Being, in order to allay those terrors, with which he is haunted. And any practice, recommended to him, which either serves to no [ethical] purpose in life, or offers the strongest violence to his natural [ethical] inclinations; that practice he will the more readily embrace, on account of those very circumstances, which should make him absolutely reject it (*NHR*, p. 72).

Believers thus prove willing not simply to ignore but even to violate ethical obligations in order to curry divine good will.

In short, religion is egregiously anti-social in its effects, with monotheism a far worse offender than polytheism. Hume's characterization of religion as anti-social might seem banal today, especially in light of a crude Marxist critique of religion, but it was revolutionary at the time. It represented the reversal of the hoary classical view, which sought to shore up religion in order to foster ethics. Hume's praise of polytheism for its socializing effects is tame compared with the classical insistence on the indispensability of religion for social order (see Danford, p. 165).[8]

Hume professes to be confining his analysis to popular religion (the religion of the 'vulgar' and 'barbarous') and to be ignoring the religion of the philosophical elite. He can consequently maintain that he is exposing only impure, not true, religion and can thereby circumvent the furor of his devout nemeses. Yet it is scarcely clear how philosophical religion is more than an ideal type or, better, a null set.

First, original religion is the polytheism of the masses, not the monotheism of philosophers. Second, even monotheism comes to be espoused by the benighted. Third, the

god-producing mechanism to which Hume objects – the projection of human qualities onto inanimate forces – holds for deistic, philosophical religion as well as for popular religion: 'There is an universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves . . . Nay, philosophers cannot entirely exempt themselves from this natural frailty' (*NHR*, pp. 29–30).

Fourth, it is hard to see what for Hume deistic religion comprises beyond belief in a creator god. That god does not intervene in human affairs and does not communicate with humans. Hume spurns all efforts at communication as the pathetic consequence of popular religion. Once again, he credits any ethical deeds by believers to innate human sentiment rather than to religious instruction. Furthermore, philosophical religion precludes revelation and so any Bible. Finally, Hume's refutation in the *Dialogues* of the linchpin of philosophical religion, the design argument, renders tenuous even the sole tenet of that religion: belief in a creator god.[9] When, in the famous closing line of *The Natural History*, Hume declares that 'we ourselves . . . happily make our escape [from the feuding among religions] into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy' (*NHR*, p. 76), he may well be forsaking religion *per se*, not merely lowbrow religion, for philosophy. Certainly what in the *Dialogues* he calls 'true religion' is likely equivalent to secular morality, nothing more.[10]

Hume's *Natural History of Religion* is a pioneering work not only because of the answers it offers to the questions it broaches but, even more, because of the questions themselves. The trend today is to fuse disciplines – the 'blurring of genres', in Clifford Geertz's phrase – but disciplines must first be differentiated. Hume strives to differentiate what will become the questions of the social sciences from the questions of history and philosophy. His attempt to disentangle the question of recurrent origin from that of historical one, the question of effect from that of intent, and above all the question of explanation from that of justification, together with his differentiation of an empirical from a non-empirical approach to these questions, foreshadows the emergence of the social scientific study of religion.

To praise Hume as a founding father is not, of course, to place him beyond criticism. One can fault him for the constricted range of his ethnographic sources, for his uncritical and superficial use of those sources, for his lopsidedly emotivist conception of human nature, for his polarity of philosophers and masses, for his contempt for ordinary humanity, for his notion of the source of ethics, for his equation of the object of worship with personal gods, for his native Calvinist attribution of religion to fear, for his preoccupation with only the negative effects of religion, and for his stress on the similarities rather than the differences among religions. Yet whatever the shakiness of Hume's assumptions and data, his deployment of them to answer the questions he raises is remarkable.

Notes

1. See the argument by Popkin that Hume's theory of belief, including religions belief, derives *from* a supernatural theory.
2. On the Deists see Manuel 1959; 1983, esp. chapter 2. On Hume versus the Deists see O'Higgins. But see also Gawlick.
3. On Hume's position in the *Natural History* see Yandell 1990, pp. 16–24; Gaskin 1993, pp. 319–22. On whether Hume in the *Dialogues* espouses scepticism, see, yes, Kemp Smith, introduction to Hume 1962, pp. 57–75, 97–123; Gaskin 1976, pp. 301–6, 309–10; Mossner 1977; no, Noxon 1964; Capaldi 1970; 1975, chapter 9; Pike, commentary to Hume 1970, pp. 204–38; in between, Penelhum 1975, pp. 180–96.

4. On Hume's multiple uses of the term 'natural belief' see Yandell 1990, pp. 71–77. For an argument that religious belief for Hume is natural like the beliefs in causality and in the external world see Butler; for a rejoinder see Gaskin 1988, pp. 115–26; in between see Penelhum 1983.
5. Stewart states the point bluntly: 'Hume's basic argument here is that popular religion does not begin with truth, and does not lose any of its inherent falsity when it has all the visible signs of truths. Its causes are always ignorance and self-interest. When it seems to approach the truth, it does so not through wisdom, but inadvertently, through transcendent adulation' (p. 276).
6. As Yandell (1979) puts it, '[T]he system is psychological and individualistic; any role social or economic or socio-psychological or anthropological factors might have, singly or in combination, in the origin or the shape of religious beliefs is ignored. Each person is treated by Hume as an autonomous set of belief-producing propensities, whether it is religious belief or causal belief or external object belief or enduring self belief that is being accounted for' (pp. 97–98).
7. Manuel (1959) aptly compares Hume's view of popular Christianity with Nietzsche's (p. 180).
8. On Hume's severance of ethics from popular religion see Gaskin 1979; Capaldi 1970, pp. 235–40; 1975, pp. 192–7; Merrill and Wester; Streminger; Yandell 1990, pp. 25–30; Siebert, pp. 98–102.
9. Yandell (1990) characterizes Hume's 'pure theism' as 'a view with almost no content' (p. 30). See also Kemp Smith, introduction to Hume, 1962, p. 24; Mossner, 1977, p. 18. But see as well Andre, esp. pp. 159–61.
10. On 'true religion' for Hume see, for example, Gaskin 1976, pp. 307–9; Gaskin, 1988, pp. 187–91; Livingston, pp. 331–4. On what Mossner calls Hume's 'religion of man' see Mossner 1978, pp. 659–63. On Hume's ideal religion for the masses see Siebert, pp. 131–5.

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