

Is David Hume an Atheist, an Agnostic or a Deist?

An Interpretation of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

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Natural Religion & the Design Argument

Many people think that scientific progress would inevitably weaken religious faith, but in fact this was not what happened after the scientific revolution in the 17th & 18th centuries. The rapid advance in astronomy & biological sciences had helped people realize more & more the wonder of Nature. The inference from the apparent design in the universe to the existence of a Cosmic Designer or God is called the design argument (DA), which had been quite popular in the 18th century, & it was accepted by many pioneers of modern science. There are two major forms of DA: the DA qua order argues from the natural order (natural laws) to the existence of the Cosmic Orderer, & the DA qua purpose argues from the ingenious purposive structures in biological organisms to the existence of the Cosmic Designer. For example, Newton accepts the DA qua purpose: "Uniformity in the Bodies of Animals... Eyes, Ears, Brain... other organs of Sense & Motion; & the Instinct of ... Insects, can be the effect of nothing else than the Wisdom & Skill of a powerful ever-living Agent" (Newton 1989, 156). Robert Boyle, another pioneer of modern science, accepts the DA qua order, & believes that it is God who set up the laws of nature: "in the beginning, he [God] so guided the various motions of the parts of it as to contrive them into the world he designed they should compose; & established those *rules of motion*, & that *order* amongst things corporeal, which we call the laws of nature" (Boyle 1989, 111; italics mine).

Natural religion is closely associated with natural theology which is the attempt to prove the existence of God by natural reason, rather than by appealing to revelation & miracles. Natural religion does not necessarily conflict with revealed religion, but during the 18th century, many people proposed different forms of natural religion which deviated to a smaller or greater extent from the traditional Christian religion. One major position advocated by these people was called deism. The scientific spirit which animated such deists as Mathew Tindal & John Toland "would be to purify religion of all mysterious & supernatural ingredients." But regardless of the deep theological divisions among the deists, they all had "unshakeable confidence in the design argument" (Noxon 1973, 66). David Hume (1711-1776)'s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (DNR),¹ published posthumously in 1779, was one of the classics of philosophy of religion, & its topic was exactly natural religion. Hume began to write philosophy as a young man only 3 or 4 years after the death of Sir Issac Newton, & he was inspired by Newton's success to have the ambition to become the Newton of the moral sciences. However, DNR was the first lengthy study

¹ In this paper, all texts of DNR are quoted from this version: Hume, David. 1963. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. In Richard Wollheim, ed., *Hume on Religion* (London: Collins), pp. 99-204.

of the design argument (DA), & made the Newtonians' DA the target of ingenious Humean objections, which continue to inspire contemporary philosophical critics of the design argument more than two centuries later. (DNR also studied the cosmological argument in Part IX, & the problem of evil in Parts X-XI, but we won't be able to discuss them in this essay.) In the DNR, the debates happen mainly between Cleanthes, the character defending DA in the dialogues, & Philo, the critic, in the presence of a minor character, Demea, who represents a more traditional religious position. In this paper, Hume's another important book on religion, *The Natural History of Religion* (NHR), will also be discussed.²

The debate between Cleanthes & Philo over DA in DNR is a fascinating one, & numerous scholars have provided in-depth study of this debate. Interestingly, despite all these studies, current Humean scholars do not yet have any consensus about who in DNR speaks for Hume, & what exactly is Hume's position on natural religion, especially on the DA. This paper will investigate this tricky issue. In any case, the issue of DA is still hotly debated in contemporary philosophy of religion. A contemporary philosopher of biology, Elliot Sober, himself a critic of DA, in fact has a very high regard of DA: "Before Darwin's time, some of the best & the brightest in both philosophy & science argued that the adaptedness of organisms can be explained only by the hypothesis that organisms are the product of intelligent design. This line of reasoning- the *design argument*- is worth considering as an object of real intellectual beauty. It was not the fantasy of crackpots but the fruits of creative genius" (Sober 1993, 29). So let us first study how Cleanthes presents this argument.

Cleanthes's Regular Argument from Design & Philo's Objections

Cleanthes' first & longest formulation of DA is contained in Part II: "Look round the world... You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses & faculties can trace & explain. All these various machines, & even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance... Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; & that the Author of nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work, which he has executed" (DNR, 115-116).³

This is an argument from analogy & is sometimes called the regular argument from design. Philo has offered numerous powerful objections to this version of DA. Before discussing these objections,

² All quotations from NHR are taken from this reference: Hume, David. 1963. *The Natural History of Religion*. In Richard Wollheim, ed., *Hume on Religion* (London: Collins), pp. 31-98.

³ Part of Cleanthes' argument is derived from Colin Maclaurin's *An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries* (1748), which developed a substantial argument based on analogy.

we also need to understand Philo's approach to skepticism, which he takes really seriously. With Hume, Philo thinks that there are some skeptical arguments which potentially threaten even our everyday beliefs about the existence of the external world, & the existence of causal regularities, & so on. However, Philo wants to make the distinction between problems of common life, such as "human affairs & the properties of the surrounding bodies" (DNR, 106), & problems of natural theology. In common life, we have a practical answer to skepticism: "he must act, ... & live ... like other men" for no "other reason than the absolute necessity he lies under of so doing" (DNR, 106). However, in theological & metaphysical matters, "we have here got quite beyond the reach of our faculties." Concerning common life, we can "make appeals ... to common sense & experience, which strengthen our philosophical conclusions, & remove ... the suspicion... But in theological reasonings, we have not this advantage" (DNR, 107). To venture into the area of theological matters or ultimate questions, we are "like foreigners in a strange country... We know not how far we ought to trust our vulgar methods of reasoning in such a subject; since, even in common life... we cannot account for them, & are entirely guided by a kind of instinct or necessity in employing them" (DNR, 107). Philo is saying that concerning those beliefs about the existence of the external world, & the existence of causal regularities, we have to accept them due to the force of natural instinct or practical necessity. These beliefs are called natural beliefs (NBs). However, in this remote area or "strange country" of natural theology, the arguments "lose this advantage" (DNR, 108) of a foundation on instinct or necessity. As a result, "the most refined skepticism comes to be upon a footing with them, & is able to oppose & counterbalance them [the positive arguments of natural theology]... The mind must remain in suspense between them; & it is ... the triumph of skepticism" (DNR, 107-108). Philo's position here is often called mitigated skepticism in contrast with Pyrrhonian skepticism which doubts everything.

Philo is saying that natural theology is vulnerable to skeptical doubt, but in this area, these doubts cannot be overcome by "instinct or necessity." So the suspense of judgment is the natural, reasonable or even unavoidable option. In Parts II to VIII, Philo raises numerous objections to Cleanthes' DA, he, together with Cleanthes, attack Demea's cosmological argument in Part IX, & in Parts X-XI, Philo presses the problem of evil against theism. According to Fogelin, Philo's objections basically follow a Pyrrhonist's handbook (Fogelin 2017, 38). For example, Philo's one major criticism of DA is that causal analogy is inapplicable to the universe as a whole since it is unique and no one has had experience of the origin of worlds. But "when the objects [universes or worlds], as in the present case, are single, individual, without parallel, or specific resemblance," Cleanthes' causal inference from universe to God is illegitimate, unless we have "experience of the origin of worlds; & it is not sufficient, surely, that we have seen ships & cities arise from human art & contrivance" (DNR, 123). This is Philo's famous uniqueness objection, which requires all legitimate causal inferences to depend on experiences of constant conjunction. This is the basis of Philo's powerful challenge to Cleanthes: "Have worlds ever been formed under your eye?"⁴

⁴ This uniqueness objection is founded on a theoretical principle advocated by Hume himself: "It is only when two *species* of objects are found to be constantly conjoined, that we can infer the one from the other; & were an effect

Philo also claims that Cleanthes' DA suffers from the weak analogy objection: "But surely you will not affirm, that the universe bears such a resemblance to a house." Instead the "dissimilitude is so striking" that one cannot say that "the analogy is here entire & perfect." So in the end the DA is only "a guess" (DNR, 117). Philo also suggests if we consider analogies, the universe is more like organisms than machines, or perhaps order & design ultimately derived from an immanent principle of order within matter- so there is no need to appeal to an external Designer, & many more. I will evaluate these objections in another paper.

Cleanthes's Irregular Argument from Design

Many commentators believe that Cleanthes has offered a second version of DA, often called the irregular argument, which suggests that the "similarity [between Nature & works of Art] is self-evident" (DNR, 126). This point is established by two illustrative analogies (IAs) presented in Part III of DNR. The first example is the voice in the clouds: "an articulate voice were heard in the clouds, much louder & more melodious than any which human art could ever reach... extended in the same instant over all nations, & spoke to each nation in its own language... the words delivered not only contain a just sense & meaning but convey some instructions altogether worthy of a benevolent being, superior to mankind: could you possibly hesitate a moment concerning the cause of this voice? & must you not instantly ascribe it to some design or purpose?" (DNR, 126)

Cleanthes' second analogy is about a living or vegetating library: "Suppose that there is a natural, universal, invariable language... and that books are natural productions, which perpetuate themselves in the same manner with animals and vegetables, by descent and propagation" (DNR, 127); these "natural volumes, containing the most refined reason and most exquisite beauty: could you possibly open one of them, and doubt, that its original cause bore the strongest analogy to mind and intelligence?... could you persist in asserting, that all this, ... had really no meaning, and that the first formation of this volume in the loins of its original parent proceeded not from thought and design?" (DNR, 127).⁵ To say yes is a glaring absurdity to Cleanthes.

What Cleanthes is saying here is that these examples show that some circumstances will directly evoke in us an intuition about or even belief in design without going through some formal or regular inferences, & we all recognize it to be reasonable in such cases. But Philo's objections against the

presented, which was entirely singular, & could not be comprehended under any known *species*, I do not see, that we could form any ... inference at all concerning its cause... Deity [is] a cause no less singular & unparalleled." In general, "both the effect & cause must bear a similarity & resemblance to other effects & causes, which we ... have found, in *many* instances, to be conjoined with each other" (OPP, 245; italics mine). Since the requirement of multiple instances applies to both cause & effect, the DA from universe to God is doubly defective because both God & the universe are unique. OPP refers to: Hume, David. 1963. "Of a Particular Providence & of a Future State." In Richard Wollheim, ed., *Hume on Religion* (London: Collins), pp. 230-245.

⁵ This IA in fact demonstrates the coexistence of design explanation & vegetation/generation explanation: these two are not incompatible. The admission of the generation principle does not exclude the success of DA- this anticipates Philo's later objection by appealing to other springs or principles like generation.

regular argument seem equally applicable to these IAs.

- A) If Philo's objections can successfully refute the regular DA, they can also refute design inferences in those 2 illustrations. [The 2 cases are basically similar.]
- B) But Philo's objections cannot successfully refute these two IAs. [This is contrary to our intuitions supported by those 2 illustrations themselves- not further derived from other general principles.]
- C) Therefore, Philo's objections cannot successfully refute Cleanthes' regular DA.⁶

So this irregular *argument* is indeed an argument because as explained above, there is some kind of inference behind those 2 illustrations. However, this is *irregular* argument because this inference appeals to an intuition which cannot be derived from general principles. That is why Cleanthes says: "Yet I cannot see but all the same objections ... which lie against the system of Theism may also be produced against this inference... this extraordinary voice by its loudness, extent, & flexibility to all languages, bears so little analogy to any human voice, that we have no reason to suppose any analogy in their causes" (DNR, 126). Despite the apparent applicability of Philo's weak analogy objection to this case, we would not find it reasonable to say that "a rational, wise, coherent speech proceeded ... from some accidental whistling of the winds, not from any divine reason or intelligence." If so, we cannot deem Philo's objections as successful in refuting the regular DA because by parity reasoning, "they cannot possibly have more force in the one case than in the other" (DNR, 126). So Cleanthes thinks that Philo has 2 choices only: "either assert that a rational volume is no proof of a rational cause, or admit of a similar cause to all the works of nature" (DNR, 128).

Many critics again claim that Cleanthes' irregular argument fails because the two IAs are substantially different from the analogies supporting the existence of the Cosmic Designer. But Cleanthes seems to anticipate this kind of criticism. He does admit that differences exist but "if there be any difference between this supposed case & the real one of the universe, it is all to the advantage of the" DA (DNR, 127). It is because: "as there are infinitely fewer parts and less contrivance in the finest composition of eloquence, than in the coarsest organized body, the propagation of an *Illiad* ... is an easier supposition than that of any plant or animal" (DNR, 127). Surely, the "anatomy of an animal affords many stronger instances of design than the perusal of ... Tacitus: and any objection which you start in the former case, by carrying me back to so unusual and extraordinary a scene as the first formation of worlds, the same objection has place on the supposition of our vegetating library" (DNR, 127-128).

Since Philo's objections may seem to be plausible at first sight, Cleanthes further suggests this defence. Even when an argument seems to violate apparently plausible rules of reasoning, the reasonable option may be to revise those rules instead of rejecting that argument given the fact that the argument is intuitively very strong. An example in literary writing is used to illustrate this:

⁶ It seems that many philosophers cannot really understand Cleanthes's logic here, e.g., Bricke, Sessions, Fogelin.

“Some beauties in writing we may meet with, which seem contrary to rules, & which gain the affections, & animate the imagination, in opposition to all the precepts of criticism... if the argument for Theism be, as you pretend, contradictory to the principles of logic; its universal, its irresistible influence proves clearly, that there may be arguments of a like *irregular* nature. Whatever cavils may be urged, an orderly world, as well as a coherent, articulate speech, will still be received as an incontestable proof of design & intention” (DNR, 128-129; italics mine).

The term “irregular argument” is sometimes used but this seems to be misleading. Cleanthes does not say that Philo’s alleged rules of logic are necessarily correct. He is saying that Philo pretends them to be good principles. But even if they look plausible at first sight, they still cannot undermine DA’s intuitive force. So “irregular” here means that not all things can be derived from general principles; sometimes they need to be derived from particular cases. Cf. Chisholm’s discussions of particularism against methodism.

However, Cleanthes’ IAs can be put to use in another way: belief in the design of the world need not be an inferential belief, but a kind of sensation forced on us when we contemplate the wonder of the world. So Cleanthes poses a personal challenge to Philo: “Consider, anatomize the eye... tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation. The most obvious conclusion surely is in favor of design” (DNR, 128). He thinks that the principle behind this argument is that we should “adhere to common sense & the plain instincts of nature; & to assent wherever any reasons strike him with so full a force, that he cannot, without the greatest violence, prevent it... arguments for Natural Religion are plainly of this kind” (DNR, 128).

In fact, even the greatest critic of the design argument, Philo, seems to agree later. Philo has never been speechless when he debates with Cleanthes, but only here, according to the narrator, “Philo was a little embarrassed & confounded” (DNR, 129). He does not provide any reply to Cleanthes’ irregular argument.⁷ Here Cleanthes seems to think that DA is like a Humean natural belief in view of the involuntariness of the formation of belief in God. Yet this belief is not undefeatable- “violence” is possible: critics do need “time, reflection & study to summon up those frivolous,

⁷ According to Fogelin, in Cleanthes’s 2 illustrations, “Cleanthes shifts the grounds of his position by no longer arguing that the signs of order in the world provide *evidence* for an inductive argument... He now puts forward a causal thesis to the effect that the contemplation of the exquisite organization of the eye ... immediately induces in us the idea of a being who contrived it... this new argument is of an ‘irregular nature’... once the position is put on this footing, it becomes completely immune to the pattern of skeptical argument found in the *Treatise*... So ... the groundlessness of the belief is admitted” (Fogelin 1992, 126). Since there is no argument for a skeptic to attack, that is “why at this point ... Philo falls silent” (Fogelin 1992, 126). But even if Philo keeps silent, he does not need to feel “confounded & embarrassed.” What Fogelin says fits with the idea of the experience of design, but he seems to think that the irregular “argument” is completely reduced to this experience. I do not agree with Fogelin here- the irregular argument refers to both (see my analysis above). Cleanthes is appealing to intuitive judgments of an argument’s force. So he is not admitting the groundlessness of the belief in God. Moreover, Philo does not make any response because Philo silently agrees with Cleanthes’ assessment of the intuitive judgments of DA’s force, especially those 2 illustrations. It is not because Philo is not considering DA as an argument- Gaskin seems to be correct here.

though abstruse objections” to DA (DNR, 128).⁸ These seem to refer to Philo’s “greatest errors” which come from his excessively fertile imagination (invention) & “profusion of unnecessary scruples & objections” (DNR, 129).

Cleanthes says, “no language can convey a more intelligible, irresistible meaning, than the curious adjustment of final causes” (DNR, 128). This is using language as an analogy with design in nature; this is further confirmed by modern discovery of DNA as the language of life. This also conforms to Cleanthes’ another formulation of DA.⁹ The intuition about design in Nature can be called the experience of design. Our experience of the natural world often generates a sense of wonder. For example, Lewis Thomas, a distinguished physician, seems to be a non-believer, but he “cannot make ... peace with the randomness doctrine.” This is not a wishful thinking but is based on his in-depth interaction with the natural world in science: “I do not know a place like this place is absurd, when it contains, in front of our eyes, so many billions of different forms of life, each one in its way absolutely perfect, all linked together to form what would surely seem to an outsider a huge spherical organism” (cited in Evans 2010, 98-99).

Many contemporary scientists continue to have this experience of design. James N. BeMiller, a scientist of the Whistler Center for Carbohydrate Research in Purdue University, says, “I marvel at the beautifully ordered complexity and diversity of the universe as we know and understand it (from subatomic particles to complex, living, thinking organisms). When I contemplate the many, many marvels of nature (for example, how one of the enzymes involved in starch biosynthesis in both leaves and nonphotosynthetic storage tissue has the same catalytic unit in both tissues but different regulatory units because of different functions of the starch), I must conclude that God—the all-powerful, our Creator—is the greatest scientist of all” (Anderson 1998, 44).

No One Speaks for Hume?

Many scholars debate about which character in DNR is in fact speaking for Hume, but perhaps no one in particular is in fact speaking for Hume? Those who take this view usually draw our attention to the literary form of DNR, namely a dialogue. For example, Michel Malherbe thinks that “the literary form cannot be severed from the definition of philosophical enquiry & its objects” (Malherbe 1994, 201), & in general we should interpret dialogues as “*authorless*... they should not be interpreted by commentators on the author” (Malherbe 1994, 202). According to Shaftesbury’s standard work on dialogues in 1711, a “real dialogue cannot conclude dogmatically” (Malherbe 1994, 204), & it should be “carried on with the unrestrained freedom of conversation” (Malherbe

⁸ Norman Kemp Smith has a forced interpretation of this text. He thinks that what is said here is that reason can gradually discover reasonable objections to the DA, if given enough time. But obviously the text does not regard those objections as reasonable- they are said to be frivolous.

⁹ “The order & arrangement of nature, the curious adjustment of final causes, the plain use & intention of every part & organ; all these bespeak in the clearest language an intelligent cause” (DNR, 137).

1994, 205). In particular, “a philosophical dialogue should not deceive... dialogue has to paint faithfully people’s real life & the observable diversity of their opinions, sentiments & choices. When a particular side prevails, it is never without being balanced by some opposite reasons” (Malherbe 1994, 209).

Malherbe thinks that Hume “satisfies the conventions with the greatest economy of means... The 12 Parts make up only 1 dialogue, without change of time or place, & with the same characters... the characters are changed into types” (Malherbe 1994, 206). He concludes that “Hume’s art of dialogue appears very clever & refined” in DNR (Malherbe 1994, 207), in contrast with Hume’s dialogues in his 2 Enquiries. “The lack of dogmatism in philosophy thus implies that the author does not intervene in his own dialogue, & gives up the illusory advantage of being what he pleases or doing what he will in his creation.” Hence “the reader should not search for the supposedly concealed purpose of the author, because what he has to discover is not the author, but himself” (Malherbe 1994, 211).

The major Question raised in DNR is about the foundation of religion, & the *Dialogues*’ answer is “that the question cannot be answered. The foundation of religion is something that is prey to endless controversy & irreducible skepticism. Here, the subject itself demands the method of dialogue” (Malherbe 1994, 216). Even in DNR itself, the reasons given for the use of the form of dialogue by the narrator Pamphilus are: “Opposite sentiments, even without any decision, afford an agreeable *amusement*... the book ... unites the 2 greatest & purest pleasures of human life, *study & society*” (DNR, 100; italics mine). If the dialogues are mainly for amusement, then perhaps it is a mistake to see the DNR as presenting a specific message. Malherbe advises us, “*Dialogues* are to be read literally, but not interpreted. There is no hidden claim or tenet. The only purpose is ... faithfully relating a controversy... & of providing the reader with the twofold pleasure of study & society... The debate ... is merely speculative” (Malherbe 1994, 218). Therefore, “no dogmatic teaching, positive or negative, can be derived from it with regard to the existence or nature of God... we do not have to search for a Humean philosophy of religion... There remains an experimental philosophy of religious phenomena, mainly in NHR, &, in the *Dialogues*, a skeptical *deconstruction* of the rationality of religion” (Malherbe 1994, 219).

The above might be one way to interpret the DNR, but the argument is far from conclusive. That the form of dialogue can be used merely for amusement or other similar purposes does not mean that the dialogue has to be used in this way. Obviously, Berkeley’s dialogue, *Alciphron*, has a definite message, & no one doubts that Philonous speaks for Berkeley. Moreover, it seems difficult for Malherbe to hold his position consistently. After telling us that DNR does not tell us Hume’s view on religion, he goes on to assert that there is “a skeptical *deconstruction* of the rationality of religion” in the *Dialogues*. So after all, the DNR does have a message, & this seems to be a contradiction! From my observation, many scholars adopt the above view only because they find it unpalatable to assign any major character in DNR to be the spokesperson for Hume. So they often

impose Hume's views presented in his other writings on DNR.¹⁰ Moreover, when Malherbe talks about the "experimental philosophy of religious phenomena" in NHR, he totally neglects strong evidence in NHR which supports the idea that in fact Hume endorses some form of DA (this evidence will be presented below).

Another example is Richard Wollheim. On the one hand, he emphasizes that it is "a mistake to look for any way of removing or resolving all the inconsistencies that appear in Hume's writings on religion" (Wollheim 1963, 17). It is because "Hume had an inquiring, restless mind, chronically skeptical in its disposition, which no sooner adopted one intellectual position than it tried to see the best in all the arguments that would refute it" (Wollheim 1963, 18). On the other, he later says that "we should ... identify Hume's position with that of Philo" (Wollheim 1963, 18). Obviously, merely from Hume's inquiring, restless mind, we cannot infer that he is incapable of making up his mind on some issue. So I think it is at least reasonable for the readers of a dialogue to try to determine which character roughly speaks for the author, *unless it is impossible to do so*. For this approach, we in fact find support in Hume's letter: "In every Dialogue, no more than 1 person can be supposed to represent the author" (quoted in Malherbe 1994, 222, n.28).

In the end, Malherbe is providing an external reading of DNR which ignores much of the textual evidence. In contrast, a major commentator, William Sessions, wants to pursue an internal reading that resolutely interprets the text on its own terms, tracing the connections between the individual parts of Hume's book and supposing (defeasibly) that the work forms a unity in which nothing is extraneous. In fact Sessions agrees with Malherbe that we do not need to ask the question of which of the characters represents Hume's mouthpiece. If one brackets this question, we may see the dialogues as an artful attempt to embody a living discussion on natural religion in order to stimulate reflections. "Perhaps Hume genuinely thought that natural religion was so deeply perplexing, so ultimately unfathomable by human thought, that rather than enforcing his own views on the subject he chiefly wanted to stimulate thought on the part his readers" (Sessions 2002, 212). However, according to his internal reading, Philo's reversal is real & I find Sessions' respect for the text commendable. Moreover, although we can see the 'message' of the dialogues as more open-ended, it is not necessary to say there is absolutely no message either.

As long as we can understand the whole DNR coherently by regarding some character as Hume's mouthpiece, and can do so without major problems, & this is also supported by Hume's other writings, then it is more reasonable to accept this as the true interpretation of DNR. John Bricke seems to be pessimistic about this project: "it is a fundamental mistake to assume that one of the

¹⁰ James Noxon also thinks that no character in particular speaks for Hume. It seems to me that he already has a preconceived idea that Hume's position is some form of agnosticism or mitigated skepticism. The only character who may fit this idea is Philo, but Philo's reversal seems to suggest he is not entirely an agnostic in the end. So Noxon cannot accept Philo to be Hume's spokesperson (Noxon 1966). So somehow he is forced to accept the "no one speaks for Hume" position.

characters in the *Dialogues* serve as the author's primary spokesman... so many contradictory interpretations of the *Dialogues* have been proposed, that none of these is satisfactory, & that each requires numerous passages to be reconstructed in a seemingly *ad hoc* way... neither Philo nor Cleanthes ... *could be* Hume's spokesman, for each of them is often unHumean in his views, & neither maintains a reasonably clear, well-argued, self-consistent position" (Bricke 1975, 3), I am more optimistic. In this essay, I argue that by taking Philo as Hume's major spokesperson, accepting Philo's reversal as real, & highlighting the limitations & inconclusiveness of Philo's objections to DA, we can achieve a coherent interpretation of DNR without excessively *ad hoc* moves.

Who Speaks for Hume?

The prologue of DNR is supposed to be a letter from the narrator Pamphilus to his friend Hermippus, who was very interested in this debate. Hermippus also provides this description of the major characters of DNR: "accurate philosophical turn" of Cleanthes; "careless skepticism" of Philo; "rigid inflexible orthodoxy" of Demea (DNR, 101). Moreover, Pamphilus concludes the entire DNR in this way: "I cannot but think that Philo's principles are more probable than Demea's; but that those of Cleanthes approach still nearer to the truth" (DNR, 204). This seems to judge Cleanthes to be the winner. The above seems to fit with the view that Cleanthes is the spokesperson of Hume. In fact many scholars in earlier decades of 20th century took this view. Examples include Dugald Stewart, John Burton, the first biographer of Hume, & Pringle-Pattison. A more recent commentator, Nelson Pike, does not explicitly say that Cleanthes speaks for Hume, but he comes close to this: "Hume (in the person of Philo) seems to return to the position he held in the *Natural History*. Taking the 2 works together, ... Hume seems to have passed through the negative portion of his thinking only to emerge in the end as the champion of Natural Theology" (Pike 1970, 207-208). I agree with Pike that we need to consider NHR & DNR together- these are the only two books by Hume on religion. I also think that Philo's reversal is real, but there are in fact two ways to interpret this reversal. One way is to say that while Philo accepts the conclusion of DA as something akin to natural belief (NB), he does not really endorse DA as an *argument*. If this is true, then perhaps it is an overstatement to regard either Philo or Hume as a champion of natural theology. We will further discuss this issue below.

However, it is not sure that we should take the comments of Pamphilus & Hermippus at face value. After all, considering the literary form of a dialogue, the narrator may or may not be identified with the author, & Hume does not directly speak for himself in DNR. Moreover, many scholars point out that Pamphilus is only a young & immature student of Cleanthes. So in addition to doubting his partiality towards his teacher, we can also doubt whether he has the philosophical acumen to judge who is the real winner in this complicated debate.¹¹ So we cannot be sure that Pamphilus does represent Hume. As for Hermippus' comments, the allegedly "accurate philosophical turn" of

¹¹ For example, Nelson claims that "the main reason that Pamphilus thinks Philo's principles are less probable than Cleanthes' is that, like his mentor Cleanthes ... he fails to understand the arguments of Philo" (Nelson 2010, 156).

Cleanthes is far from vindicated in the subsequent dialogues, in which Philo almost wins all the philosophical debates, & shows himself to have better skills in providing accurate & complicated philosophical analyses, whereas Cleanthes often complains about the subtlety of Philo's objections (cavils & sophisms). I indeed agree that some of Philo's objections *are* cavils & sophisms, but the problem is that Cleanthes fails to show this by "accurate philosophical" arguments. Sometimes, he even admits that he hasn't thought of Philo's objection before! So Hermippus' characterization turns out not to be true to the text.¹² In fact Norman Kemp Smith regards all this as just Hume's masking device, which allows him to distance himself from Philo's criticisms of religion & the rational foundation of religion at that time, the DA. Pamphilus' positive comment on Cleanthes is one of the "devices whereby Hume masks his batteries, that they may be the more effectively brought into action in demolishing the positions which Cleanthes is defending" (Kemp Smith 1947, 57).

Although Cleanthes *sometimes* does speak for Hume, e.g., in his advocacy of the empiricist approach, & his criticisms of Demea's cosmological argument, it is Philo who does most of the talking, & when it is Cleanthes's turn, Cleanthes often does not provide very effective replies. Even in some cases which Cleanthes should be the winner, as in their debate about Copernicanism in Part II, Hume gives the last word to Philo. Sometimes Cleanthes even appears to be 'stupid.' For all these reasons, it is natural to take Philo rather than Cleanthes as the spokesperson of Hume, & indeed in recent decades, this is the majority position of Hume scholars. (I won't consider the case for Demea here because basically all agree that he is not the candidate.) But the question is "which Philo?"

For Noxon, it is Philo the Agnostic who represents Hume. The message of DNR is that "the question of natural theology is unanswerable... Hume wrote the *Dialogues* precisely in order to reveal the futility of such theological argument, & to show that the only sensible course is to abandon such topics for what he calls 'the examination of common life'" (Noxon 1966, 378-379), because "they go beyond the point where observation & inference can provide any test of the conclusion reached" (Noxon 1966, 377). Noxon thinks that Philo's agnosticism matches perfectly with Humean principles advocated in his other writings: "we can never explain by reference to an ultimate cause or principle why just these particular causes & principles rather than other operate in the world" (Noxon 1966, 376). This position does fit well Hume's general philosophical position, & Philo's attitudes in most of DNR. However, Noxon totally ignores other texts which suggest Philo to have a somewhat different attitude.

For Norman Kemp Smith, "Philo, from start to finish, represents Hume" (Kemp Smith 1947, 59), & Philo is a radical religious skeptic, though not yet an atheist. DNR "makes much more explicit than in his any of his other writings the quite negative character of his views regarding Divine

¹² Some commentators also point out that the word "careless" may just mean carefree in the 18th century. As for the "rigid inflexible orthodoxy" of Demea, I in fact doubt that Demea's acceptance of the radical incomprehensibility of God is necessarily an orthodox position.

Existence... equally frank in what amount to a virtual denial of religion” (Kemp Smith 1947, 20). Kemp Smith has a very high regard for DNR, which has a “unique place in philosophical literature... they were the first work in our literature to subject DA to a passionless & searching criticism... Hume’s destructive criticism of the argument ... was final & complete... Hume’s indictment of them is now but seldom challenged” (Kemp Smith 1947, 30).¹³

Hume does use the terms God or religion, but if we look carefully, we will discover that their contents are “directly contrary to any in which it is ordinarily employed” (Kemp Smith 1947, 20). Kemp Smith quotes T. H. Huxley approvingly: “Hume’s theism ... dissolves away in the dialectic river, until nothing is left but the verbal sack in which it was contained” (Kemp Smith 1947, 22). Although Hume did not come out as an official atheist, according to Kemp Smith, “What he continued to entitle his theism is little more than a recognition of the mysterious character of all ultimate modes of existence, & a refusal to allow as either possible or needful any asseverations of a more positive nature” (Kemp Smith 1947, 38). Sometimes, Hume speaks of his “veneration for true religion,” but Hume’s true religion is “little more than a repudiation of all superstition, alike in belief & practice” (Kemp Smith 1947, 20). True religion “consists exclusively in *intellectual* assent to the ‘somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined; proposition, ‘God exists’”, & for Hume, “religion ought not to have ... any influence on human conduct- beyond ... its intellectual effects, as rendering the mind immune to superstition & fanaticism” (Kemp Smith 1947, 24).

Philo the Sceptic about Established Religions

There is one point which seems to gain almost consensus among scholars, namely, both Hume & Philo are highly critical of popular, traditional, institutionalized religions. “For Christianity & all existing creeds Hume had, & always displayed, the greatest contempt... the traditional practices of religion ... are quite unjustified” (Wollheim 1963, 28-29). For Hume, polytheism smacks of superstition, but monotheism has the dangerous tendency to become “exclusive & intolerant.” Moreover, “monotheism encourages ‘the monkish virtues’ of mortification & self-abasement” (Wollheim 1963, 20) which in fact have harmful effects on morality. “Examine the 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, 97). Unfortunately, this sickness is deeply rooted in the mind, or even human nature (see discussions of NB below). Hume has serious doubts about the sincerity of religious belief, & he often complains about religious hypocrisy & self-deception.

In Part XII of DNR, Philo gives severe criticisms of religions, which are very similar to Hume’s criticisms in NHR. He mentions both “veneration for true religion” & “abhorrence of vulgar

¹³ This claim might be true in Kemp Smith’s time. But in 1968, Richard Swinburne has published substantial criticisms of Philo’s objections to the DA. Since then, there are many articles which are critical of Hume, including Pearl (1970), Pike (1970), etc.

superstitions” (DNR, 195), but he elaborates a lot on the latter without explaining clearly what is the former.

Hume Was Not an Atheist

Despite Hume’s contempt for religions, he “never called himself an atheist, nor thought of himself as one” (Wollheim 1963, 28-29). In fact Philo says, “Atheists ... have a double share of folly: for they are not contented to say in their hearts there is no God, but they also utter that impiety with their lips...Such people ... cannot, methinks, be very formidable” (DNR, 111). So Philo does not have a very high opinion of atheists- also see Part XII. Why? We need to take note of Hume’s skeptical temperament, which leads him to avoid any claims of certainty. So “Hume felt that there was something intellectually arrogant about the atheism of his Parisian friends, as though they were laying claim to a form of knowledge that essentially lay outside man’s capacities” (Wollheim 1963, 29). Henry Aiken agrees here: “there is nothing in his philosophy which can give support to the view that he was a materialist or even a naturalist in the full metaphysical sense... it is of the essence of his theory of knowledge to deny that any general view of the ultimate nature of things is capable of rational demonstration” (Aiken 1948, viii). So Hume’s argument is in essence a negative one. It is not an argument for atheism but for a suspension of belief, both theistic & atheistic.

The second reason is that atheism in Hume’s time has a strong association with both materialism & the mechanistic philosophy of the universe.¹⁴ “By atheism, 18th century thought had in mind the notion that particles of energy, randomly or lawfully interacting, were responsible for the ordered universe” (Applebaum 1996, 48-49). But for Hume, “such a commitment” is “possibly erroneous & certainly unjustified on the basis of existing knowledge” (Wollheim 1963, 29). Humean philosophy begins with impressions, or what later empiricist philosophers call sense-data, which are mental rather than material entities, whereas the existence of the external world is regarded as beyond rational proof. This kind of philosophy apparently is not compatible with any strict version of materialism. Moreover, at that time atheism “was a term of such general opprobrium that no-one was called upon needlessly to assume it” (Kemp Smith 1947, 37). So Hume attacks not theism, but superstition & idolatry; he questions not the existence of God but only the mistaken arguments for such existence.

Philo’s Reversal

Philo has declared “the triumph of skepticism” or something similar several times during his debate

¹⁴ Hume does not accept mechanical philosophy in its entirety: “He refused to accept the Cartesian dogma of a passive, inert matter. He also refused to accept that laws of motion as supplying the key for an *ultimate* explanation even of physical happenings... no obstacle [for] ... *life* ... as being no less fundamental in reality than ‘matter’ & ‘intelligence’” (Kemp Smith 1947, 33).

with Cleanthes. However, when Philo again declares victory near the end of Part X (“Here I triumph”), the first clear reversal of Philo’s position about DA happens, & this greatly puzzles many commentators:

Paragraph 10.36: “Formerly, when we argued concerning the natural attributes of intelligence & design, I needed all my skeptical & metaphysical subtlety to elude your grasp. In many views of the universe, & of its parts, particularly the latter, the beauty & fitness of final causes strikes us with such irresistible force, that all objections appear (what I believe they really are) *mere cavils & sophisms*; nor can we then imagine how it was ever possible for us to repose any weight on them” (DNR, 176; italics mine).

To the surprise of many readers who are deeply impressed by Philo’s “devastating” criticisms of DA, now Philo seems to accept some form of DA (at least the irregular argument). Moreover, he acknowledges that his earlier objections are “mere cavils”- this is in fact admitting Cleanthes’ charge against these objections after expounding his irregular argument in Part III: “Whatever *cavils* may be urged, an orderly world, as well as a coherent, articulate speech, will still be received as an incontestable proof of design & intention” (DNR, 129; italics mine). This is really astounding to Norman Kemp Smith: “the argument has taken a very strange & indeed bewildering turn. Philo claiming to believe in final causes! Philo declaring all his arguments to have been mere cavils & sophisms!” (Kemp Smith 1947, 69).

In fact even before this, Philo has already hinted at some change of position:

Paragraph 10.26: Philo says, “You ascribe, Cleanthes, (& I believe justly) a purpose & intention to Nature. But what, I beseech you, is the object of that curious artifice & machinery, which she has displayed in all animals? The preservation alone of individuals & propagation of the species” (DNR, 172).

More is to come in Part XI & XII:

Paragraph 11.11: “the inaccurate workmanship of all the springs & principles of the great machine of nature... there are few parts of the universe, which seem not to serve some purpose, & whose removal would not produce a visible defect & disorder in the whole. The parts hang together; nor can one be touched without affecting the rest in a greater or less degree” (DNR, 184).¹⁵

Note that Philo has an idea of nature as the great machine, & this is siding with Cleanthes here! Moreover, he says, “The parts hang together; nor can one be touched without affecting the rest in a greater or less degree.” This is similar to the idea of irreducible complexity proposed by Michael Behe, a famous contemporary defender of the intelligent design movement.

Paragraph 11.13: Philo says, “Look round this universe. What an immense profusion of beings, animated & organized, sensible & active! You admire this prodigious variety &

¹⁵ This great machine is called inaccurate only because it does not, as Philo supposes it should, aim at the happiness of organisms all the time. So this is related to the problem of evil rather than the issue of design.

fecundity” (DNR, 186).

Although this is not a direct endorsement of the DA, it expresses similar experience or feeling of design as in paragraph 10.36. This admiration of the “prodigious variety & fecundity” of the universe certainly fits well with the DA.

Paragraph 11.14: “consider ... the perfect uniformity & agreement of the parts of the universe, we shall not discover in it any marks of the combat of a malevolent with a benevolent being” (DNR, 186).

Again this is not a direct endorsement of the DA, but the emphasis on the unity of nature is of course congenial to the DA. In fact, here Philo affirms the superiority of monotheism over dualism. Similar logic should help to reply to Philo’s own objection that polytheism can equally explain the design of the universe.

Paragraph 12.2: Philo says, “no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind, or pays more profound adoration to the Divine Being as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance & artifice of Nature. A purpose, an intention, a design strikes every where the most careless, the most stupid thinker; & no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it. *That nature does nothing vain*, is a maxim established in all the schools, merely from the contemplation of the works of Nature, without any religious purpose; & from a firm conviction of its truth, an anatomist, who had observed a new organ or canal, would never be satisfied, till he had also discovered its use & intention. One great foundation of the Copernican system is the maxim, *That Nature acts by the simplest methods, & chooses the most proper means to any end*; & astronomers often, without thinking of it, lay this strong foundation of piety & religion. The same thing is observable in other parts of philosophy; & thus all the sciences almost lead us insensibly to acknowledge a first intelligent Author” (DNR, 189-190).

Here Philo again emphasizes the power of the experience of design. Moreover, our *conviction* in design seems to serve as a presupposition for & guide of scientific research. Only this conviction explains why an anatomist firmly believes that even a new organ will have a use & intention which can be discovered. It also leads us to believe that the true astronomical system is the simplest one. Moreover, here Philo is talking about the first intelligent Author- it clearly suggests a singular & external cause.

Paragraph 12.3: Philo says, “It is with pleasure I hear Galen reason concerning the structure of the human body. The anatomy of a man ... discovers above 600 different muscles...what a prodigious display of artifice...The farther we advance in these researches, we discover new scenes of art & wisdom... in the fine internal structure of the parts, in the economy of the brain” (DNR, 190); “to what pitch of pertinacious obstinacy must a philosopher in this age have attained, who can now doubt of a Supreme Intelligence” (DNR, 190-191).

This is the endorsement of the DA qua purpose by appealing to evidence from human anatomy.

Philo emphasizes that the evidence is plentiful.

Paragraph 12.4: Philo says, “were it possible for him [God] to give a stronger proof of his existence, than what appear on the whole face of Nature? What indeed could such a divine Being do, but copy the present economy of things; render many of his artifices so plain that no stupidity could mistake them; afford glimpses of still greater artifices, which demonstrate his superiority above our narrow apprehensions... in the present case, where no human imagination can compute their number [the number of arguments supportive of design], & no understanding estimate their cogency!” (DNR, 191)

This continues the endorsement of the DA qua purpose in the previous paragraph.

Paragraph 12.6: Philo says, “So little do I esteem this suspense of judgment in the present case to be possible... That the works of Nature bear a great analogy to the productions of art is evident: & according to all the rules of good reasoning, we ought to infer ... that their causes have a proportional analogy. But as there are also considerable differences, we have reason to suppose a proportional difference in the causes; & in particular ought to attribute a much higher degree of power & energy to the supreme cause than any we have ever observed in mankind. Here then the existence of a Deity is plainly ascertained by reason... No man can deny the analogies between the effects... the legitimate conclusion is, that the causes have also an analogy; ... what can we call him [the first & supreme cause] but Mind or Thought, to which he is justly supposed to bear a considerable resemblance?” (DNR, 192)

This is basically a restatement of Cleanthes’s analogical argument from design in Part II. The conclusion is that the first & supreme cause bears a *considerable* resemblance to Mind or Thought.

Paragraph 12.9: Philo says, “these, Cleanthes, are my unfeigned sentiments on this subject... But in proportion to my veneration for true religion, is my abhorrence of vulgar superstitions” (DNR, 195)

Paragraph 12.33: Philo says, “If the whole of Natural Theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, *That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*: If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication: If it afford no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance: And if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no farther than to the human intelligence; & cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the other qualities of the mind: If this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, & religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition... ; & believe that the arguments, on which it is established, exceed the objections” (DNR, 203-204).

This paragraph seems to speak of Philo’s attenuated deism most directly.

So the evidence for Philo's reversal from Parts X to XII is impressive- altogether 11 paragraphs, some of them are long explication of Philo's views. According to Sessions' internal reading, Philo's reversal is explained best not as subterfuge or irony but rather as an honest confession of his beliefs (see 12.9), made possible by the exit in Part 11 of Demea and his authoritarian piety. When we consider the different interpretations of these passages, we need to hold the full picture of all these evidence in our minds, because many commentators are just selectively appealing to part of the evidence. Even Fogelin admits, "This seeming reversal [of Philo] is ... quite inexplicable, unless we assume that Philo is here admitting that the contemplation of the wonder of contrivances of nature naturally induces in us the thought of a divine contriver. That is, it is Cleanthes's irregular argument that Philo cannot refute & may, consistently with his stated principles..., accept" (Fogelin 1992, 127).

Noxon also notes the "complete reversal of standpoint made by Philo" but he contends that this cannot represent Hume's viewpoint, because "we must account for Hume's having said that he was [refuted], & for Philo's finally abandoning as defenseless the position for which he had contended throughout" (Noxon 1966, 372). The first point above refers to a letter from Hume to William Strahan, which talked about the skeptic being "indeed refuted" & confessed "that he was only amusing himself by all his Cavils." Noxon asks, "Is it plausible that Hume composed a set of Dialogues in which the spokesman for his own views is 'indeed refuted' & 'only amusing himself'?" (Noxon 1966, 372) He thinks not. However, Noxon's argument is problematic. He seems to assume the early Philo is the *only* real Hume. But perhaps Hume is really the later Philo who, after exploring various objections to DA, in the end abandons his earlier objections as cavils? Some emphasize that Hume is playful: he can pretend to accept attenuated deism while he does not. But this point cuts both ways. Perhaps Hume is merely playful when he pretends to be the severest critic of DA, while in fact he accepts some form of DA (irregular or regular), or at least accepts to some extent the conclusion of DA (while rejecting it as argument). This is also more dramatic, which fits more with the genre of a dialogue. Just like an angel playing the role of the devil's advocate to stimulate discussions, Philo has successfully played the role of the severest critic of DA- too successful perhaps. But we can see that some claims which are put forward by Philo in the process of objecting to DA are not really believed by Hume. For example, Philo seems to be enthusiastic about the polytheistic alternatives but in fact Hume rejects polytheism, & thinks it absurd & pernicious. (See NHR in particular.) Gaskin agrees here.

The Evidence from David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion*

David Hume's *The Natural History of Religion* (NHR) provides us important direct evidence for his belief in the Cosmic Designer. Let us list out all the passages related to DA:

- 1) "The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; & no rational enquirer can, after

serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with respect to the primary principles of genuine Theism & Religion” (NHR, 31). Consider “some invincible argument, which might immediately lead the mind into pure principles of theism ... I allow, that the order & frame of the universe, when accurately examined, affords such an argument” (NHR, 34). In these two passages, Hume seems to put emphasis more on the DA qua regularity than on DA qua purpose.

- 2) The vulgar are “ignorant of astronomy & the anatomy of plants & animals, & ... the admirable adjustment of final causes; they remain still unacquainted with a first & supreme creator, & with that infinitely perfect spirit, who alone, by his almighty will, bestowed order on the whole frame of nature. Such a magnificent idea is too big for their narrow conceptions, which can neither observe the beauty of the work, nor comprehend the grandeur of its author” (NHR, 42). Hume is using both DAs. DA qua order refers to data from astronomy & the bestowed order on the whole frame of nature. DA qua purpose refers to the anatomy of plants & animals, & the admirable adjustment of final causes. Here Hume’s description of God is also more explicitly theistic- first & supreme creator, & infinitely perfect spirit, who has an almighty will. His positive attitude is reflected- “Such a magnificent idea”! Moreover, Hume is also open to the dimension of beauty & grandeur in the universe- this is more intuitive & aesthetic, & more congenial to the irregular DA.
- 3) “Whoever learns by argument, the existence of invisible intelligent power, must reason from the admirable contrivance of natural objects, & must suppose the world to be the workmanship of that divine being, the original cause of all things. But the vulgar polytheist ... deifies every part of the universe” (NHR, 51).
- 4) Concerning the “doctrine of one supreme deity”, we have “invincible reasons, on which it is undoubtedly founded.” We should notice “the beauty of final causes” & “contemplate the suppleness & variety of joints in his fingers, their bending all one way... which render that member fit for the use, to which it was destined” (NHR, 55). This is similar to Paley’s style of DA qua purpose. This is also similar to Philo’s passages about Galen, etc. in DNR.
- 5) “But being taught, by more reflection, that this very regularity & uniformity is the strongest proof of design & of a supreme intelligence” (NHR, 56), even polytheism “can establish it on a firmer & more durable foundation” (NHR, 56).
- 6) We “see a sovereign author in the more obvious works of nature... it scarcely seems possible, that any one of good understanding should reject that idea, when once it is suggested to him. A purpose, an intention, a design is evident in every thing; & when our comprehension is so far enlarged as to contemplate the first rise of this visible system, we must adopt, with the strongest conviction, the idea of some intelligent cause” (NHR, 96).
- 7) “What a noble privilege is it of human reason to attain the knowledge of the supreme Being; & from the visible works of nature, be enabled to infer so sublime a principle as its supreme Creator?” (NHR, 97)
- 8) “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 & order on this vast machine, & adjusted all its parts, according to one regular plan” (NHR, 37). Note that Hume’s DA here is similar to Cleanthes’ in DNR- the universe is considered to be a vast machine with all its parts adjusted to one another. Moreover, it affirms the unity of God.

- 9) True, “several independent beings ... might conspire in the contrivance ... of one regular plan; yet is this a merely arbitrary supposition... 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 1 author; because the conception of different authors ... serves only to give perplexity to the imagination, without bestowing any satisfaction on the understanding... to ascribe any single effect to the combination of several causes, is not surely a natural & obvious supposition“ (NHR, 37). This elaborates the reasons why we should accept monotheism rather than polytheism. So here Hume in fact eloquently replies to Philo’s objection from polytheism. It is strange that he does not put at least this reply in Cleanthes’ mouth!
- 10) Hume later (near the end) affirms this point again: “The uniform maxims ... which prevail throughout the whole frame of the universe, naturally, if not necessarily, lead us to conceive this intelligence as single & undivided, where the prejudices of education oppose not so reasonable a theory” (NHR, 96).

To sum up, there are nine passages which affirm some form of DA: both DA qua order & DA qua purpose are endorsed, with various similarities to passages in DNR. Moreover, in the last three passages, the unity of God is clearly affirmed & defended. These all confirm the idea that Philo’s reversal is real & this also represents Hume’s position.

The Evidence from David Hume’s Other Writings

We can also produce some confirming evidence from Hume’s earliest writings: “This distillation of universal religious belief is present clearly in Hume’s thought, as Philo’s comment echoes Hume’s Early Memoranda: ‘The Center of Unity of all Men with Relation to Religion is, That there is a First Cause’” (Lorkowski 2014, 67). (These memoranda, consisting mainly of notes on reading, were probably written by Hume prior to 1741.) In fact, this is affirmed later in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (THN): “The order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind; that is, a mind whose will is *constantly attended* with the obedience of every creature & 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 & energy of the supreme Being” (THN, 633, n.1).¹⁶

Hume also affirms the DA in his letter: “When I see Order I infer from Experience that *there*, there

¹⁶ In this essay, THN refers to: Hume, David. 1978. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited with an Analytical Index by L. A. Selby-Bigge. 2nd edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

hath been Design & Contrivance. And the same Principle which leads me into this Inference, when I contemplate a Building, regular & beautiful in its whole Frame & Structure; the same Principle obliges me to infer an infinitely perfect Architect, from the infinite Art & Contrivance which is displayed in the whole Fabrick of the Universe.”¹⁷

Can We Explain Away Philo’s Reversal?

Is Philo’s reversal real? For Aiken, this is simply unacceptable. He thinks that Philo’s acceptance of the existence of God, no matter in however attenuated version, “is perhaps disingenuous. The whole drift of H’s analysis suggests that the nature of God is an insoluble riddle... the admission that He exists is wholly vacuous” (Aiken 1948, xiv). We need to “bear in mind Philo’s devastating attack upon the DA- the only 1 to which he concedes any cogency whatever... it is hard to take very seriously the passages in which he seems to avow an attenuated version of theism” (Aiken 1948, viii). Moreover, taking into consideration Hume’s denial of miracles, his disbelief in immortality & his opposition to any religious basis of morality, “it is hard to classify him as anything but a sceptic” (Aiken 1948, ix). However, Aiken does not pay careful attention to the textual evidence as presented above, & does not explain why it is plausible to interpret all these as “disingenuous.” So critics may claim that Aiken’s judgment is only based on his preconception of what Hume’s position must be, & reflects his own bias!

In contrast, while Kemp Smith proposes a similar view that Philo’s reversal only reflects “conventionally required concessions” (Kemp Smith 1947, 63), he at least provides some background information & textual analysis which are supposed to favor this interpretation. He points out that the toleration policy in Hume’s time was “due to necessity & not to choice” (Kemp Smith 1947, 39). “The relaxation tended to increase, until, when Hume was writing his *Dialogues*, freedom of discussion in Britain was complete, subject only to certain agreed limitations- that there be no advocacy of atheism & no direct challenge to the supreme claims of the Christian faith” (Kemp Smith 1947, 39). We also need to notice Hume’s “easy-going sociable temperament” (Kemp Smith 1947, 40). So “outward deference to current beliefs & practices...was a game into which he could zestfully enter” (Kemp Smith 1947, 41). So both due to external pressures as well as in accordance with his own personality, it is likely that Hume would try to meet conformist requirements, & hence avoid direct advocacy of atheism or direct challenge to the Christian faith. So no wonder “Hume had no hesitation in making Philo ... come forward with professions of belief in Revelation!” (Kemp Smith 1947, 41) Philo in Part XII says, “the most natural sentiment... is a longing desire ... [for] revelation ... with the greatest avidity” (DNR, 204). This seems to be obviously insincere. We already note that Hume also endorses the DA & even genuine theism in his NHR, where we can find in the opening of the book. Kemp Smith provides a similar explanation: this is “to guard against the charge of seeming to teach sheer atheism” (Kemp Smith 1947, 42).

¹⁷ David Hume, *A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*, eds. E. C. Mossner & J. V. Price (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967/1745), 138.

While all these are helpful, I doubt whether it is sufficient to establish Kemp Smith's case. We need to note that Hume has already attacked Christian faith, e.g., his mocking of the Lutheran idea of real presence in NHR (73), & his famous attack on the foundation of Christian revelation claims-miracles. So it is odd that he needs to hide his skepticism so deeply, especially in DNR which was planned to be published posthumously. As Noxon points out, "why Hume would pay such deference to social convention in a work planned for posthumous publication when he had shown so little in books published during his lifetime" (Noxon 1966, 374-375). In "Hume's own persistent disparagement of religious institutions, his vitriolic attacks upon intolerance" (Noxon 1966, 375), he has shown no deference for the Church. At least there seems to be no need to feign the acceptance of attenuated deism so many times & in so passionate a way. Moreover, in Part XII, side by side with Philo's reversal, we in fact find the most direct, detailed & longest attack on religions. Philo says, "the terrors of religion commonly prevail over its comforts" (DNR, 201). If Hume was so determined not to infuriate the religious establishment, those attacks would certainly defeat this purpose. The whole arrangement of Part XII would simply be inexplicable. As Nelson Pike points out, "the subterfuge thesis makes dramatic hash of the *Dialogues* as a whole... it looks more like a slapstick comedy in which the audience gets the pie in the face" (Pike 1970, 223). Moreover, it "is a big step to accuse any author of intellectual subterfuge... it is especially awkward since Hume endorsed DA in *both* of his major works on religion... 1 would require overwhelming evidence before accepting a thesis of this sort" (Pike 1970, 224).¹⁸

Kemp Smith's explanation of NHR is especially unconvincing. Hume affirms DA nine times in NHR, which is much more than needed if his purpose is merely to avoid the impression of teaching atheism. Moreover, the DA is also woven into the discussions of theism against polytheism rather than something extraneous imposed on the text. Kemp Smith points out that while Hume attacks miracles, he always concludes with an affirmation of the necessity of Faith rather than reason. So it is supposed to show to others that Hume is only attacking the rational way of defending the Faith, & not denying the Faith itself. I think this distinction is hardly acceptable by the devout then. They may be right because the miracles of Incarnation & those performed by Jesus are not just something used to justify the Faith, but themselves part of the Faith! So Hume's attack on miracles will surely be seen as an attempt to undermine the Faith. (Moreover, in his attack, Hume also highlights the credulity of people who believe in miracles. This may be seen as an attack on religious people as well.)

Kemp Smith does make an effort to explain what is so special about Hume's attack in DNR, where "the problem of expressing his mind freely, while yet not too greatly violating the established code,

¹⁸ Lorkowski also warns "of opening Pandora's Box by appealing to Humean disingenuousness in the work" (Lorkowski 2014, 75). If this kind of appeal is allowed too permissively, it seems any kind of interpretation becomes possible. So Pilke's more cautious approach seems better.

meets Hume in its most difficult form” (Kemp Smith 1947, 43). It is because “he is doing precisely what was above all else forbidden, namely, to make a direct attack upon the whole theistic position” (Kemp Smith 1947, 43). At that time, DA “was regarded as the all-sufficient ground of belief. To attack it was to assault the very citadel of religion... To question the argument was to uphold atheism in its most flagrant form... This ... was precisely what Hume had set himself to do in the *Dialogues*, to the consternation of his friends ” (Kemp Smith 1947, 44).

I find this interpretation dubious. Kemp Smith tries to distinguish the attack on miracles as the rational foundation of Faith from the direct attack on the Faith. But here he fails to distinguish the attack on DA as the rational foundation of theism from the direct attack on the whole theistic position itself. (Moreover, to claim the latter as “precisely what Hume had set himself to do in the *Dialogues*” seems to conflict with much textual evidence we have seen.) In any case, if the above logic holds, I have explained why Hume’s attack on miracles would be seen as attacking the Christian faith itself, & I think Hume should be aware of this. But still he went on to publish that critique in his *Enquiry* despite earlier hesitation when he published *A Treatise of Human Nature* (THN). Interestingly, Kemp Smith adds: “while tenaciously holding to his main purpose, he none the less contrived to conform in outward seeming- & as the after-history of the *Dialogues* shows, almost too successfully” (Kemp Smith 1947, 44). By regarding Hume’s cover-up job as “almost too successful”, Kemp Smith seems to be saying that many people & indeed scholars have been deceived but he himself has the wisdom to see through this. This seems a bit presumptuous, & an underestimation of other scholars’ intelligence.¹⁹

Many scholars who cannot accept Philo’s reversal as real sometimes provide really implausible interpretations of the texts. For example, John Nelson is a supporter of Kemp Smith’s thesis. In response to the evidence of Paragraph 12.2, which concludes: “thus all the sciences almost lead us insensibly to acknowledge a first intelligent Author”, he comments: “Philo may grant that the reasonings of science can *almost* lead one to the conclusion of the DA & still deny that they do” (Nelson 2010, 138). This is a very odd interpretation. When we say that Djokovic the tennis player is *almost* unbeatable, it is certainly a lavish praise. Similarly, we need to look at the sentence in the context of the entire paragraph, & no doubt it is saying something very positive about DA. Nelson also wants to deny the evidence provided by Paragraph 12.3 which talks about human anatomy: “Nature is referred to as a principle of simplicity. But when we look at the actual facts, say the human body itself, we find complexity: for example, six-hundred different muscles” (Nelson 2010, 139). Since this “confutes the scientist’s description of nature acting by the simplest methods,” it would also “confute the claim of an intelligent Author of the universe” (Nelson 2010, 139). So the

¹⁹ Kemp Smith has also provided some interpretation of the texts on Philo to support his position. I won’t go into the details here, but only note that Pike, in my view, has successfully refuted him. To Pike, Smith’s “total argument seems ... unconvincing. It is based on a series of interpretive claims that simply cannot be supported by reference to Hume’s text” (Pike 1970, 222).

whole message is “a master stroke of satire” (Nelson 2010, 138).²⁰

This again is really farfetched interpretation. Nobody ever says that the final product of intelligent design such as a computer has to be simple. Concerning simplicity, Philo is referring to the “great foundation of the Copernican system”, which is “the maxim, *that nature acts by the simplest methods*” - here it is talking about the basic laws which can explain the complex set of astronomical data. We seek the simplest system which can accommodate all the observations & explain the mechanisms of motion, etc. Concerning organisms, it is shown in the efficient organization which serves numerous functions of the body. Although there are so many muscles, they can coordinate perfectly with one another & then achieve wonderful feats. This is to show “the prodigious display of artifice, even in these simple & homogeneous parts? ... how must our astonishment rise upon us, in proportion to the no. & intricacy of the parts so artificially adjusted?” The strongest proof of design is “wonderful variety” & exact propriety” achieved together in an integrated system. So Nelson’s reasons for believing these two paragraphs to be a satire are unconvincing.

Charles Echelbarger is another scholar who insists that “the overall direction of *Dialogues* supports an atheistic interpretation much better than a theistic one... but that his atheism is tacit, subtle, & ironic... The general position argued for by Philo is ... undeniably atheistic” (Echelbarger 1975, 27). How does he explain all the contrary evidence then? He emphasizes that the word “intelligent” can be understood in a purely metaphorical sense without referring to any external intelligent agent. For example, we may refer to a cell phone as an intelligent or smart phone. So “Philo’s belief in the intelligence of the ultimate cause is nothing more than a belief in its *intelligibility*. It implies ... a faith in reason & science” (Echelbarger 1975, 29). In paragraph 12.33, Philo’s “‘Mind or Thought’ refers to a kind of *formal* cause” (Echelbarger 1975, 30). So the “cause of order in the universe is intelligent” can be translated into the “unexciting proposition that the (formal) cause of everything systematic is systemicity” (Echelbarger 1975, 31). This translation is not only unexciting, but really far-fetched! If Philo were to really mean that, it would imply that he is an exceptionally ineffective communicator & it is also inexplicable why he spends so much effort to prove something that “unexciting”!

Moreover, the above interpretation is only relying on paragraph 12.33 without even looking at other evidence. For example, in Paragraph 10.26, Philo talks about “a purpose & intention to Nature” which is not identical to systemicity. In Paragraph 11.11, the phrase “workmanship of all the springs & principles of the great machine of nature” clearly suggest an external workman working on this great machine. In Paragraph 12.2, Philo clearly infers to the “first intelligent Author”, & of course an author is a being external to his book. I won’t belabor other details. Just to point out that this metaphorical itprn will have immense difficulty in explaining the evidence from NHR- which talks

²⁰ Kemp Smith has suggested a similar view: Philo’s passage about Galen is in fact a parody written with “mischievous intent” (Kemp Smith 1947, 70). But he has no clear explanation of this point.

clearly about theism (Creator) in contrast with polytheism. It would also be implausible to interpret the gods of polytheism as a metaphor for intelligibility.

Reich Lou also argues against Philo's reversal as real, & suggests instead that Hume/Philo's position is a kind of religious naturalism: "I do not believe that Hume was a deist, because he did not want to go beyond the universe in his speculations. But to call Hume a pantheist seems too strong." Hume was a religious naturalist: "In contemplating the universe, Hume was struck with wonder at its presence, aesthetic feeling for its apparent evidences of order, horror at its unconcern for its progeny, & curiosity concerning its 'secret springs & principles.' Its presence ... was 'inexplicable mysteries'" (Reich 1998, 43). Reich calls this naturalism 'religious' "because it encompasses both faith & doubt in certain metaphysical truths which are related to overriding ethical concerns... As a firm conviction in a metaphysical view which cannot be proven, this naturalism bespeaks an element of faith. Hume's 'True Religion,' ... is not a supernaturalism of any type, however thin. It is a faith in the 'givenness' of a shared world ordered by natural laws which are, for the most part, 'secret' & 'inexplicable'" (Reich 1998, 48).

Reich is aware of the impressive evidence which can be produced to support seeing Hume as an attenuated deist, & he admits, "One who is reading these quotations alone would probably have little hesitation in concluding that their author was a deist of a rather ordinary type. But, we are dealing with no ordinary thinker" (Reich 1998, 51). He again focuses on Philo's confession in paragraph 12.33: "the cause or causes of order probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence." He thinks that deism or theism is "going far beyond what is logically required of" this statement" (Reich 1998, 53), because other positions like immanent monism, which attributes the cause of the order to some principle immanent in the universe, are also possible.²¹ So Philo's "position was that whatever the 'cause or causes' actually are, the origin of order is immanent within the world & not transcendent to it" (Reich 1998, 56). But Reich is reading his preconceived idea into Part XII, which has never mentioned this idea of immanent principle of order. In contrast, there are affirmations of DA many times. Reich's interpretation is quite forced.

Reich argues that if Philo believes the origin of order to be transcendent, we should "expect many more locutions like 'God'" (Reich 1998, 56). I am not sure how many more we should expect, but Philo definitely talks about God twice & the divine Being in 12.4, & then "the first & supreme cause God or Deity" in 12.6 in addition to the "first intelligent Author" in 12.2 which we have mentioned. In the end, Reich does not claim that his interpretation is the only possibility. He thinks that Hume "can tolerate" attenuated deism, & "the transcendent/monistic possibility of attenuated

²¹ In this section, Reich often confuses the reasons to support a certain interpretation of Philo, with the reasons to support a certain metaphysical position. For example, he claims that immanentism is favored by the principle of simplicity, because it is "not requiring us to postulate another world" (Reich 1998, 53). Even if it were true, this should not be confused with the reason for a certain interpretation of Philo. Reich also suggests many general criticisms of the transcendent options, but again they are irrelevant here.

deism receives some rational support from the” DA (Reich 1998, 61). But he is objecting to those who “arbitrarily closed off possibilities” (Reich 1998, 57). My simple point is that Reich’s interpretation is not well-supported, & indeed contrary to the entire body of evidence. Reich tries to adduce one more argument for his position: “Hume’s many criticisms of religion make it seem antecedently implausible that he himself was a supernaturalist” (Reich 1998, 68). But this point is also weak: we need to distinguish Hume’s rejection of false religion & vulgar superstition from his veneration of true religion (see Sessions; Willis). More on this below.

J. C. A. Gaskin: Hume & Philo’s Attenuated Deism

To make sense of Philo’s reversal, some scholars have proposed to treat belief in God as a natural belief (NB) in Hume’s sense. Hume himself admits that some basic beliefs like the existence of the external world also cannot be proved by arguments, but they are accepted on the basis of natural instinct or practical necessity. If Philo accepts the belief in God as some form of NB induced by the irregular argument from design, e.g., through the contemplation of the ingenious works of Nature, then he does not need to abandon his numerous objections to the analogical argument from design. This approach can then make Hume’s theory of belief & his account of religious belief into a connected whole. “It makes Philo’s apparent confession of belief in god ... into a comprehensible development of his own argument... It makes Hume’s repeated assertions that there is a god into honest reports of his belief rather than prudential insincerities calculated to keep him clear of the charge of atheism” (Gaskin 1988, 121).

However, Gaskin does not think that belief in God is a natural belief. In the end, for Hume “belief in god is a vestigial *rational* belief which has no religious significance... the propensity to believe in god, which we are half-inclined to regard as a natural belief, comes in main part from our *feeling* ... that cosmic design originates in an intelligent agent” (Gaskin 1988, 120).²² Gaskin calls this the feeling of design. Moreover, he thinks that despite Philo’s objections, the DA still has some slight force. So these two things *together* provide a basis for Philo’s belief in Cosmic Designer. Gaskin does not agree with those who interpret Philo’s endorsement of DA as disingenuous. He thinks that this thesis cannot fully explain “the enthusiasm with which Philo ... abandons his skeptical case” (Gaskin 1988, 126). So Philo’s reversal is real.

Some scholars think that Philo’s reversal is *completely* based on this feeling of design or the force of the irregular argument. For example, Penelhum says, “If we read Philo’s speeches ... we find that the reasoning to which he says he is assenting is the analogical reasoning he has attacked all the way through... the minimal deism ... is accepted by Philo as the inescapable conclusion of an argument which he has shown ... to be a complete philosophical failure- except in the one respect

²² David O’Connor also affirms Hume’s “acceptance of a very limited form of deism” (O’Connor 2001, 17). Tarrant believes Hume to be a “very weak theist” (Tarrant 2018, 107).

that when we encounter it we cannot help assenting to its conclusion! In this respect minimal deism is like the natural beliefs” (quoted in Gaskin 1988, 126-127).²³ Penelhum calls Philo’s position “minimal deism” & Gaskin calls it “attenuated deism”- here they basically agree. However, Gaskin does not agree with Penelhum’s entirely non-rational explanation of the origin of this minimal or attenuated deism, because he thinks that “Philo’s positions ... are the result of combining an argument which has *not* shown to be a *complete* philosophical failure, with a propensity of the mind to ‘see’ design in natural order... a *feeling of design*” (Gaskin 1988, 127).

Firstly, if Penelhum’s thesis is correct, then Philo’s reversal is completely based on a non-rational feeling or experience, but this would not be able to explain the language used by Philo, which often mentions “reason.” For example, Philo says, “as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance & artifice of nature. A purpose, an intention or design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker.” The phrase ‘as he discovers himself to reason’ in paragraph 12.2 is significant. Moreover, this crucial phrase is repeated by Philo later in paragraph 12.6: “the existence of a Deity is plainly ascertained by reason.” This “is surely an assent of the reasoning mind to the remote probability that there may be some sort of god” (Gaskin 1988, 128). So it appears that Philo is admitting that belief in god at least has some rational support, even if very slight.

Secondly, “Philo’s objections to the design argument do not show it to be a *complete* philosophical failure because the form of the argument Philo is attacking prevents this... with the design argument Philo is attempting to dismantle not a demonstration, but a *probability*. This means that unless he can show up some hidden incoherence in what is asserted ... all the critic can do ... is to show how weak is the probability which is argued for” (Gaskin 1988, 127). Why? Because from the very nature of an argument from analogy, its evidential force is a matter of degree. Here Gaskin can appeal to Hume’s own view: “there is a 3rd [species of probability] arising from Analogy... 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 & certain. An experiment loses of its force, when transferred 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” (THN, 142).

While Philo’s rules of analogical reasoning enunciated in Part II are excessively stringent, Hume’s view here is more reasonable. He admits that even if there is no exact resemblance, which is in any case well-nigh impossible, an analogical argument will still retain some force at least. Gaskin seems to have the same opinion. As I have argued elsewhere, Philo’s accusation of great dissimilarity is unjustified, & hence the DA should still have some force even on Hume’s own terms. We need to emphasize that Gaskin is an expert on Hume & himself a Humean philosopher, & he has vigorously

²³ Penelhum also emphasizes that this “is *unlike* the natural beliefs in that ... it is not a belief that is *arrived* at without reasoning.” Logan & Lorkowski also adopt a similar position.

defended Philo against Swinburne's criticisms (Gaskin 1978, chapter 2). So his "concession" to the DA does not come from a weak mind or a prior theistic position. Gaskin finally acknowledges that "Philo's final attenuated deism is brought about by philosophical reasoning (unlike natural beliefs) & is not in its final vestigial form dislodged because in that form it is a reasonable conclusion... Philo's deism is not an anomaly in Hume's system. It is a weakly probable belief" (Gaskin 1988, 130).

Gaskin's understanding of "Philo's final attenuated deism" mainly comes from his reading of paragraph 12.33, which says that "the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence." Let us compare this to Philo's earlier confessions in Paragraph 12.6: "That the works of Nature bear a *great analogy* to the productions of art is *evident*: ... the supreme cause ... Here then the existence of a Deity is plainly ascertained by reason... the legitimate conclusion is ...we call him [the first & supreme cause] ... Mind or Thought, to which he is justly supposed to bear a considerable resemblance" (DNR, 192). Here Philo seems clearly committed to a single Deity, the first & supreme cause of the universe, Who bears a considerable resemblance to Mind or Thought! In contrast, 12.33 talks about "the cause or causes of order"- this seems to allow for the possibility of polytheism; this cause or causes only "bear some *remote* analogy to human intelligence." So there is some discrepancy here but Gaskin seems to take 12.33 as the more accurate portrayal of Philo's position.

Gaskin does recognize this problem: "However the fact remains that Philo's initial admissions in Part XII look more generous than his (or Hume's) final & long-meditated conclusion at the end" (Gaskin 1988, 128). For Gaskin, the reason is that since the feeling of design is strong, "Philo can find nothing to say" there (Gaskin 1988, 128). So to account for all the data, Gaskin thinks that we need to appeal to both factors: the non-rational feeling of design and the DA as rational argument. "In the end Hume produced no theory. Instead what he offers us in Part XII of the *Dialogues* is first an acknowledgement of the power of the common *feeling* that natural order is an outcome of design..., then a careful statement of the vestigial rational probability established by the design *argument* ... But the feeling for design is not a new argument, irregular or otherwise, nor does it add any new ground of assent to the old design argument. It is something like the sense of cosmic awe which inspired the Psalmist" (Gaskin 1988, 129). The DA "exists alongside, & is readily & confusingly augmented by, an entirely distinct *feeling for design* which does not have the epistemic status of a natural belief" (Gaskin 1988, 130).

But Gaskin emphasizes that Philo's confession of belief, even if counted as some form of deism, amounts to exceedingly little- so it is only *attenuated* deism. Consider 12.33 again. Philo puts a lot of restrictions on the proposition affirming the existence of cosmic intelligence: not capable of extension; afford no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action; the analogy can be carried no farther than to human intelligence (i.e., we cannot draw moral implications). For Gaskin, here Philo "concedes that belief in a designer is after all a *rational* belief:

one to which the mind has a strong propensity but which is ‘somewhat ambiguous’, probable rather than certain, incapable of rational development or extension, depending upon an imperfect & very limited analogy, & which commits the believer neither to action” (Gaskin 1988, 125-126).

As explained above, Hume “has an objection ‘to every thing we commonly call Religion, except the Practice of Morality & the Assent to the Understanding to the proposition *that God exists*’ (*New Letters*, 13)” (quoted in Gaskin 1988, 126). You can see that Philo’s attenuated deism would not affect this a bit. Moreover, since belief in God is not a natural belief, “to doubt the belief ... would not be excessive skepticism... the belief is subject to the normal reasonable/unreasonable dichotomy... Hume regards belief in a god as reasonable rather than unreasonable... But this reasonable belief amounts to so very little that the theist & the atheist can agree about it... neither is it of any advantage to the religious apologist” (Gaskin 1988, 130). It is because we cannot derive from the belief in a Designer God any significant implications for the moral attributes of this God or for the practice of religion.

I find Gaskin’s position reasonable & roughly acceptable, but I also have some reservations. Among Humean scholars Gaskin already has a relatively high estimation of the force of the DA, but I still think that he has underestimated this force. I find many of Philo’s objections to the DA less than plausible, especially in light of contemporary developments in both science & philosophy of science. Even Hume says: “The only Difficulty is, why the other Dissimilitudes do not weaken the Argument. And indeed it would seem from Experience & Feeling, that they do not weaken it so much as we might naturally expect” (*Letters*, I, 157) (quoted in Gaskin 1988, 129). I think this is an important admission from Hume, which shows that Philo’s weak analogy objection is intuitively not very convincing. I also believe that other Humean objections are not really strong against a carefully articulated form of DA based on all the data we now have. Of course I cannot argue the case here, & this task has to be left for future papers.

I want to come back to the question about the discrepancy between 12.6 & 12.33- which is closer to Philo’s view? Gaskin picks 12.33 as the answer but Pike has an alternative view. Pike points out that the remote analogy statement in 12.33 is conditional statement, not a positive statement about Philo’s belief. Moreover, this “view is explicitly characterized ... as being what ‘*some people* seem to maintain’... the ‘people’ here being referred to are the atheists mentioned above... Philo’s own position on this question was stated earlier... the cause of the universe bears a ‘*considerable resemblance*’ to human intelligence” (Pike 1970, 218; italics added). So the remote analogy claim “should not be taken as a statement of Philo’s own view... What Philo said was that even the atheist must admit *at least* this much. His own view was expressed earlier in the same discussion when he declared it “*evident*’ that the works of nature bear a *great analogy* to the productions of art” (Pike 1970, 218; italics added). “Though their insistence on the remoteness of these analogies may represent a strangely conservative estimate of the facts, they are right so far as they go” (Pike 1970, 219).

If Pike is correct, then Philo's final position is quite similar to Cleanthes' in the end. This view seems to be able to account for all the data, & its merit is that the DNR will come out to have basically the same position as that expressed in NHR- both works of Hume on religion are quite coherent. Pike is also quite insightful because even today many commentators just mention the remote analogy statement but ignore (almost completely) the earlier statement of considerable resemblance. However, I am not sure that Gaskin's view is wrong. He does try to provide a plausible explanation of the data like paragraph 12.6. I find this explanation of 12.6 a bit *ad hoc* because there Philo seems to be talking more about the analogical argument rather than the feeling of design. But Gaskin's view also has a merit- it coheres better with the numerous & apparently powerful criticisms of DA in Parts II to XI of DNR. So I would not come to argue for either view here. My conclusion is that Philo or Hume is *at least* an attenuated deist,²⁴ although this label may still be not entirely satisfactory.²⁵

Second, the idea that a belief in god can have no practical consequences is difficult to sustain. I do think that even very weak deism is anathema to strong naturalists. They just cannot allow anything to harm the self-sufficiency of their ultimate principle of naturalism. If the DA is even remotely plausible, it generates cracks in the armor of naturalism. This should lean one towards the side of theism in the conflict over worldviews. Gaskin thinks that by attributing attenuated deism to Hume, no significant implications would follow, but Reich, a naturalist, disagrees. He thinks that to attribute attenuated deism to Hume "is to attribute to him a quite far-reaching metaphysical position" (Reich 1998, 52). I think this comment is revealing. While many think that Hume's attenuated deism is harmless, I think Reich is correct to say that this position will have important implications for the choice of worldviews. In particular this would be rather unacceptable for a strong naturalist. Practical implications will also follow after a different choice of worldviews.

Third, Gaskin argues that belief in God should not be understood as a NB, but I do not entirely agree. I argue below that in accordance with a broader & more reasonable understanding of NB, we may well count belief in God as NB.

J. C. A. Gaskin: Belief in the Cosmic Designer Not a Natural Belief

²⁴ In line with the discussions above, perhaps we can have a more open-ended answer. One possibility is that Hume himself has some unresolved tension (not necessarily inconsistency) in his view about the DA. He sometimes feel it to be quite strong but at other moments he may be more influenced by his skeptical doubts. This is not impossible because Hume's attitudes towards the existence of the external world, the existence of causal regularity & even the existence of a self can also be said to be ambivalent.

²⁵ James Tarrant points out that it is "difficult to classify Hume... He is inclined to a ... designer but not to a personal or moral God... Yet neither was he a deist, disagreeing with them on a number of counts: the early prevalence of monotheism & on the role of reason in religious belief, maintaining that experience, not reason, was the proper source of causal beliefs. Moreover, Hume resented attempts to call him a deist... It might be more faithful to his position to label him a very weak theist who was vexed at being rather better at attacking arguments for that which he felt inclined to support than he was at defending the same" (Tarrant 2018, 107).

Gaskin proposes four tests of natural belief & applies it to belief in God: first- a NB should be an ordinary belief of common life. So should we regard belief in God as NB according to this criterion? Gaskin thinks that it is difficult to say because in some sense “belief in god often is just such a belief. But it is arguable that the belief is usually inculcated by education or cultural background” as well (Gaskin 1988, 121). So the first criterion does not yield decisive result. The second criterion is that a NB should not be accepted on a rational foundation. Again this criterion cannot give us an unequivocal answer concerning belief in God because even Hume himself does not give us a definite answer. Hume “seems to say in different places that theological reasoning is ‘too sublime for our understanding’ ... & that every reasonable man will believe in god” (Gaskin 1988, 122). For example, in the *Enquiry* “Hume maintains that it is a mistake to try to establish religion ... upon good reasons & arguments” (Gaskin 1988, 124); but in NHR, he says: “The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author” (NHR, 31).

The third criterion for NB is that it is unavoidable- no one can *act* in the world if he lacks this belief. According to this criterion, belief in God is surely not a NB. “Thus skepticism with regard to belief in god would be mitigated skepticism: more like disregarding the thoughts of Chairman Mao than the excessive skepticism of refusing to believe that the past is a guide to the future.” This criterion also shows the “remoteness of theological speculation by contrast with our normal experience” (Gaskin 1988, 122). The 4th criterion for a NB is its universality. Concerning this criterion, the following four quotes from NHR are important:

- 1) “The belief of invisible, intelligent power has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places & in all ages; but it has neither perhaps been so universal as to admit of no exception, nor has it been, in any degree, uniform in the ideas, which it has suggested. Some nations have been discovered, who entertained no sentiments of Religion... no 2 nations, & scarce any 2 men, have ever agreed precisely in the same sentiments. It would appear ... that this preconception springs not from an original instinct or primary impression of nature, such as gives rise to self-love, affection between the sexes, love of progeny, gratitude, resentment; since every instinct of this kind has been found absolutely universal in all nations & ages, & has always a precise determinate object, which it inflexibly pursue.” (NHR, 31)
- 2) “The first religious principles must be secondary; such as my easily be perverted by various accidents & causes, & whose operation too ... may ... be altogether prevented” (NHR, 31-32)
- 3) “The doctrine of one supreme deity, the author of nature, is very ancient, has spread itself over great & populous nations, & among them has been embraced by all ranks & conditions of men” (NHR, 55); however, this is mainly not based on sound reasons such as the DA, but events like “the sudden & unexpected death” (NHR, 55).
- 4) “The universal propensity to believe in invisible, intelligent power, if not an original instinct, being at least a general attendant of human nature, may be considered as a kind of mark or stamp, which the divine workman has set upon his work; & nothing surely can more dignify mankind, than to be thus selected from all other parts of the creation, & to bear the image ... of

the universal Creator” (NHR, 97); but this image is “disfigured in our representations of” God! (NHR, 97)²⁶

According to the first two quotes from Hume above, the “belief of invisible, intelligent power” is not strictly universal, can be prevented, & has been expressed not in a uniform way. So it may not be called an original instinct or the first principle of NB. However, it has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all paces & in all ages, &, though not an original instinct, is at least a “general attendant of human nature.” So Gaskin seems right to think that Hume “comes close to speaking of belief in god as a natural belief but shies off it” (Gaskin 1988, 124). Hume expresses a similar idea in his letter: “The Propensity of the Mind towards it [DA], unless that Propensity were as strong & universal as that to believe in our Senses & Experience, will still, I am afraid, be esteem’d a suspicious Foundation... We must endeavour to prove that this Propensity is somewhat different from our inclination to find our own Figures in the Clouds, our Face in the Moon, our Passions & Sentiments even in inanimate Matter. Such an Inclination may, & ought to be control’d, & can never be a legitimate Ground of Assent” (quoted in Gaskin 1988, 123-124). So the belief in God “seems to start as a natural belief (giving us an otherwise inexplicable addiction to DA), & to survive philosophical objections. But it is not universal... as the historical processes of secularization ... have continued, looks less & less like, an ordinary belief of common life,” & it is “not a precondition of practical life” (Gaskin 1988, 129). So the 3rd & 4th criteria rule out belief in God as NB.

Gaskin agrees that there is indeed something like an intuitive feeling of design which is pretty much natural or even irresistible, once one pays attention to the intricate contrivances in works of nature. So it is indeed possible to accept some conclusion of natural theology like DA on this basis. This interpretation of Philo’s reversal seems to me reasonable because it makes sense of the entire corpus of DNR. The question is only whether we can call this natural belief in Hume’s sense. I do have some reservations about Gaskin’s arguments above.

Gaskin seems to demand strict universality for a NB, but is this really necessary? Would this demand be too stringent? Consider our beliefs about logic- are they natural beliefs? They will only arise given some education or cultural influences, right? Without education, will anyone believe the logical rule of *modus ponens*? Even given a class in logic, I still find that many university students cannot grasp the concept of validity or the difference between sufficient condition & necessary condition. So according to the criterion of strict universality, even many logical beliefs would not qualify as NBs, but in some sense the ability to think abstractly about rules of logic is intrinsic & important to human nature, & is something which accounts for the uniqueness of human beings.

²⁶ It is really surprising to me that Hume seems to accept the doctrine of *imago dei* as well!

Moreover, whether some belief is unavoidable, irresistible or practically necessary is person-relative. For some people, belief in God is obviously dispensable & unnecessary. But for many others, they may find belief in God most intimate to their lives, irresistible because they have strong religious experiences, & also practically necessary. They may strongly feel that only the belief in God can give them a meaning to live, without which they find life hardly tolerable. (Hume has little awareness of such cases.) Why strict universality is so important for a person who finds such a propensity to believe irresistible for her at least? Why can't one go with her deepest & strongest inclination? Why should others' lack of this propensity affect her decision? The burden of proof should be on those who deny her the right to believe.

The question we need to ponder is: what exactly is the epistemic status of a natural belief? Perhaps Hume thinks that it is practically reasonable to accept a NB because "Hume believes he is under no obligation to fight against nature by trying to maintain his skepticism, & instead 'blindly submits.' Therefore, the move seems not only necessitated, but doxastically appropriate" (Lorkowski 2014, 61). Hume expresses vividly the pain of being plagued by skeptical doubts: "Where am I, or what? ... I am confounded with all these questions, & began to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ'd with the deepest darkness" (THN, 269).

In such a situation, reason can't help but nature comes to help: "since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, & cures me of this philosophical melancholy... I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, & am merry with my friends; ... I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold ... & ridiculous... Here then I find myself absolutely & necessarily determin'd to live, & talk, & act like other people in the common affairs of life... my natural propensity, & the course of my animal spirits & passions reduce me to this indolent belief in the general maxims of the world... I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses & understanding; & in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my skeptical disposition & principles" (THN, 269).

At this point, Hume also wonders whether "this blind submission" is reasonable- perhaps he should press his skepticism relentlessly & resist his natural propensity to believe in "the general maxims of the world"? "But does it follow, that I must strive against the current of nature, which leads me to indolence & pleasure, & that I must torture my brain with subtilities & sophistries at the very time that I cannot satisfy myself concerning the reasonableness of so painful an application, nor have any tolerable prospect of arriving by its means at truth & certainty. Under what obligation do I lie of making such an abuse of time? And to what end can it serve either for the service of mankind or for my own private interest? No: if I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe any thing *certainly* are, my follies shall at least be natural & agreeable. Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have a good reason for my resistance; & will no more be led a wandering into such dreary solitudes, & rough passages, as I have hitherto met with" (THN, 269-270).

His answer is that he has no such obligation to insist on skepticism, because this would not do any good- to himself or mankind. So he seems to accept this principle: if one has a strong propensity to believe Q, but to resist this propensity will do no good or there is no other good reason to do that, then it is practically reasonable to go with the propensity to believe Q. To many people, belief in God as strengthened by DA is as strong as Hume's natural beliefs (though others may not have the same belief). But why should they care about the fact that it's not shared by others? Even for natural beliefs, we find it epistemically appropriate to accept them because for each individual S, it does not make sense to ask S to refrain from believing it. It is not because all others also believe it. If so, it's enough that for S, the propensity to believe in God is as strong as the propensity to accept other natural beliefs.

There is also another important question. When Hume is talking about "original instinct," his examples include "self-love, affection between the sexes, love of progeny, gratitude, resentment," & claims that "every instinct of this kind has been found absolutely universal in all nations & ages, & has always a precise determinate object, which it inflexibly pursue." This kind of "primary impression of nature" is supposed to be a contrast with the "belief of invisible, intelligent power." But this claim seems exaggerated because as a matter of fact, the precise expression of "self-love, affection between the sexes, love of progeny, gratitude, resentment" can also be quite various. For example, sexual expressions do vary a lot, including celibacy. Similarly, self-love can be influenced by devotion to other ideals (including religious ideals) a lot. In some cases, the moral ideals may even override self-love & lead to noble actions of self-sacrifice. Of course, in the past Buddhist monks have forfeited their love of progeny, but "as the historical processes of secularization & modernization have continued," the love of progeny looks less & less universal- many ordinary people want to enjoy their own lives rather than devoting a lot of time & energy to take care of children. So Hume's idea of "inflexible pursuit of those determinate objects" does not seem entirely true. Rather there is a matter of degree.

So Gaskin's criteria are not neutral; they seem to depend on controversial value judgments (e.g., what is human nature). I have suggested perhaps for a NB, strict universality is not necessary. Maybe religious belief is not a natural belief as Hume defines it, but it may be a near natural belief (general attendant of human nature) & something distinctive of human beings (a stamp the divine workman has set upon his work). This also seems to be of some significance: to show that human beings are spiritual beings (to dignify mankind). These questions will be followed up below.

Further Debate Concerning Belief in God as Natural Belief

Stanely Tweyman is a scholar who regards belief in God as NB. To circumvent the obvious criticism, he interprets the criterion of universality as "conditional universality" rather than "strict universality": there must be certain qualities present in our impressions in order for nature to give

rise to NB: “To speak of a natural belief as unavoidable, therefore, means that given certain perceptions with certain specifiable characteristics, the imagination will generate the awareness or belief in question- a belief which experience alone can never yield” (Tweyman 1986, 16).

Lou Reich agrees with Gaskin that belief in God is not a NB, & he insists on the criterion of strict universality. For him, conditional universality is not enough. “It would be a mistake to suppose that whether or not a belief was instinctual was not a very important consideration for Hume... our natural beliefs in the external world & causality were considered to be instinctual, & that these instinctive beliefs play a vital role in our survival as a species” (Reich 1998, 18). These instinctive beliefs are in fact shared by animals & humans- they all need to believe in the external world & its causal regularity. Reich even proposes a new criterion for NB: it has to be a belief which is shared by humans & animals (Reich 1998, 22). According to this criterion, of course belief in God is not a NB.

I think Reich has a point here. There may even be two kinds of NB in Hume’s philosophy- some stronger (related to survival) & some weaker. Conditional universality may be a feature of the latter but not the former. But as I argue above, the distinction seems to be a matter of degree & not of kind. Hume’s examples of original instinct in NHR are in fact manifested only in a matter of degree. They can be avoided to some extent or even completely in some cases (e.g. celibacy over the sexual instinct, altruism over self-love). Even Reich himself later admits that “Hume did have a view of religious beliefs as being based on some element of human nature, which he called a ‘secondary principle’ in NHR” (Reich 1998, 37)- which can be prevented. So we can distinguish the primary sense of NB- strongly natural from its secondary sense- weakly natural. And religious belief of some form is weak NB- “‘generally diffused’ but not completely universal & not invariable” (Reich 1998, 38).

Lorkowski also thinks that Gaskin’s criteria are too restrictive, especially the criterion of strict universality. He also thinks that some NBs accepted by Hume do not really satisfy this criterion. For example, in the second *Enquiry*, Hume regards ethical beliefs as NBs, & they obviously meet Gaskin’s first 2 criteria. Hume says, “Self-love is a principle in human nature”, but it is in tension with “humanity or a fellow-feeling” which is also “experienced to be a principle in human nature” (quoted in Lorkowski 2014, 64). But the latter is not strictly universal because sociopaths do exist. “Hume argues for a picture in which both feelings of ‘self-love’ & ‘fellow-feeling’ are principles of human nature. Both have deep roots in our instincts, but they sometimes conflict... Linguistically, he qualifies claims with ‘in general’” (Lorkowski 2014, 65). So “Hume allows that there *are* universal belief-generating propensities, such as fellow-feeling, that are part of human nature, whether or not they are actually instantiated... this propensity *is something we can choose to overcome*” (Lorkowski 2014, 65). Still, such beliefs can be very important to living & human nature. As I have mentioned, even beliefs in principles of logic are not strictly universal, & arguably they

are not so clearly related to common life or essential for survival. But these are also uniquely human capacity, & there is a human propensity to form such beliefs, but they need some drawing out or stimulations for development. Shouldn't we also regard them as NBs in this broader sense?

The point is that we can loosen up Gaskin's criterion of strict universality; we only require the propensity to form a certain kind of belief, & not its instantiation in every human being to be universal. This is not an *ad hoc* move but is conforming to Hume's treatment of moral sentiments like fellow human feelings. If so, the belief in Cosmic Designer can be regarded as a NB in this sense. "We have a universal propensity to believe in an intelligent creator, & it is considering some version of DA that causes this propensity to become an actuality... the thoughts underlying the premises trigger our natural belief. It is non-inferential, & instead something that simply strikes us, akin to sensation." Admittedly, it is not strictly universal: "Not everyone contemplates the thought that trigger it, & we may set other parts of our nature (i.e. reason) against it" (Lorkowski 2014, 66), but still it can be said to be a NB in the broad sense. This understanding of belief in Cosmic Designer also fits with DNR. I basically agree with Lorkowski's proposal.

One reason to resist seeing the tendency to form a belief in Cosmic Intelligence as NB is Hume's comment about its variability in expressions. However, here we can also find a parallel in moral beliefs. In Hume's writings, the concept of NB & the concept of original instinct are closely related; Hume also talks about the "original instinct implanted in our nature" (THN, 368). When he discusses our moral instinct, he also needs to distinguish this kind of instinct from its variable expressions: "as the number of our duties is ... infinite, 'tis impossible that our original instincts should extend to each of them, & from our very first infancy impress on the human mind all that multitude of precepts" (THN, 473). So the "sense of morals is a principle inherent in the soul ... But this sense must certainly acquire new force, when reflecting on itself, it approves of those principles, from whence it is deriv'd" (THN, 619). So we can derive multiple moral principles from the same sense of morals, & these variable expressions of this same sense of morals do not stop Hume from recognizing this sense of morals as "one of the most powerful" "principle inherent in the soul."

Similarly, Hume thinks that our sense of justice cannot be a mere human "invention' because "human inventions are subject to change." In contrast, he believes that the "interest, on which justice is founded, is the greatest imaginable, & extends to all times & places... It is obvious, & discovers itself on the very first formation of society. All these causes render the rules of justice steadfast & immutable ... if they were founded on original instincts, cou'd they have any greater stability?" (THN, 620) So the sense of justice is also an original instinct or NB of the human mind, but as a matter of fact, Hume has exaggerated its steadfastness & immutability. Not only in human history, but also in contemporary political philosophy, we have witnessed a great variety of expressions or formulations of this sense of justice. We conclude that the variability of expressions of our beliefs about Cosmic Intelligence is not a reason to deny this as a kind of NB. Lorkowski believes that "the capacity to discover the existence of the deity is present as a potentiality

imbedded in human nature... it is not a formal DA that persuades us, but rather nature speaking directly to us” (Lorkowski 2014, 69); “nature somehow conveying the requisite idea of design when we contemplate the world” (Lorkowski 2014, 71). This understanding also conforms to Cleanthes’s way of speaking about the DA.²⁷

To sum up, it seems that we can at least argue that belief in God is at least some form of weak NB, but I also find Lorkowski’s solution acceptable & reasonable. Reich may be correct to insist there exists a kind of strong NB which is shared with animals. But to insist that this is the only kind of NB seems to incline one-sidedly to the animal nature of human beings. From a theistic perspective, the strong NBs are related to survival & God cannot give too much freedom for humans to choose (this is something shared by man & animals). In contrast, it is wise for God to give humans some propensity to religious belief of some form. But God wants humans to exercise their freedom to exercise their rational & moral capacities in choosing their religious belief. In fact, in matters more unique to human excellence such as moral or aesthetic capacities, there is more freedom & less determination.

So to decide what is a NB, it depends on how we conceive “natural” or “human nature”. Surely human beings have an animal nature, but in addition they also possess a uniquely human nature which allows them to lead an enriched rather than impoverished life. Examples include aesthetic experience, scientific research, logic, morality & religion. The idea of broad NB sounds better than weak NB. So we can affirm the importance of this kind of broad NB over narrow NBs like belief in external world. These are areas where human freedom is significant & will affect the outcome, & hence diversity in manifestations is to be expected. The belief in God is a NB which especially

²⁷ However, Lorkowski goes on to insist that if “it is the case that the propensity for religious assent is a product of rational argument, then it cannot count as natural” (Lorkowski 2014, 70). I think that even if his analysis is true, it does not mean that the propensity cannot also be justified by rational arguments. The two need not be mutually exclusive. Therefore I also dispute whether Gaskin’s second criterion is really necessary. Suppose we can prove the reliability of sense experiences. Does it mean that our trust in senses is no longer natural? Only if our trust ENTIRELY depends on this proof. Lorkowski insists that in the DNR, “DA itself is *not* inferentially jtfed for the myriad reasons Philo gives... this in no way implies that Philo rejects the conclusion of the argument as a result; only its *rational* jtf function... I hold that Philo accepts no *inferential* DA” (Lorkowski 2014, 74). However, he recognizes that in some passages in NHR, “Hume seems to be tying this passage to reason, not instinct... However, it is important to remember that the former cannot operate without the latter.. the reasoning of DA would not be sufficient to arrive at its conclusion via the rules of just reasoning, but that the propensity to accept a designer sufficiently increases the liveliness of the idea so as to push most of us into accepting the conclusion nonetheless... The argument’s ‘foundation in reason’ is that reasoning sets the stage for nature... even if we are trying to arrive at an answer via reason, it is not reason that answers, but nature” (Lorkowski 2014, 71). Here Lorkowski appeals to Hume’s Title Principle: “When reason is lively & mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us” (THN, 270).

I doubt that this is the whole story. It seems to me undeniable that in NHR & DNR, Hume or Philo sometimes is indeed endorsing the DA as argument. He also talks about the propensity to belief in the Cosmic Designer. Both are true, & on this issue Gaskin is correct. Lorkowski believes that it “would be difficult after reading the *Dialogues* to think that Hume holds that the belief in an original author could be arrived at via the rules of just analogical inference... The sheer power of the criticisms, combined with the lack of adequate non-doxastic naturalist responses to them, gives compelling reason to think that even Attenuated deism, for H, lacks any objective rational basis” (Lorkowski 2014, 71). Now there is a subtle question- is the above true for Hume himself? For me, Philo’s criticisms are by no means decisive Hume may be relying on the irregular DA which goes beyond “the rules of just analogical inference.” But even in Part XII, P seems to endorse the analogical DA as well (paragraph 12.6).

cohere with these broad NBs. For example, it would guide scientific research & is very coherent with our aesthetic experience. In fact the aesthetic dimension of DA is also important & Hume also realizes this point. See my *Rainbow of Experiences* (Kwan 2011).

Hume's Veneration for True Religion?

In the *Dialogues*, natural religion has both a theoretical and a practical dimension. In Part XII, Philo and Cleanthes not only converge on their views of DA, they also have some discussions of true piety or true religion. Although Philo does not clearly explain his idea of true religion, he seems to consent with Cleanthes' claim that the "proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order & obedience... enforces the motives of morality & justice" (DNR, 196). In Philo's reply, he also mentions positively "the philosophical & rational kind" of religion ((DNR, 196). This topic of the Humean view of true religion has been explored in two recent works (Sessions 2002; Willis 2014). The traditional interpretation of Hume's view on religion has been too one-sided, and does not do justice to the finer nuances of Hume's actual position. Hume does direct severe criticisms against traditional & institutionalized religions, but a more careful look at the texts show that Hume/Philo also "has a deeper sense of religion" (*Dialogues*, 12.2).

In fact Hume had written something very similar to Cleanthes' view above: "The proper Office of Religion is to reform Men's Lives, to purify their Hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, & to secure Obedience to the Laws & civil Magistrate." It was prepared for a preface to the second volume of his *History of England*, but was left unused. It was only published later when Mossner included it in his *Life of David Hume*. In NHR, Hume also talks about "primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion' together.

Hume regards the passions, and hope and fear in particular, as the roots of religion. Willis' book argues that, although some passions might indeed lead to false religion, others could yet lead to the true. The key passion in that latter regard is not fear but hope. When Hume provides so many criticisms of religion in NHR, he does remind us twice that the "corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst" (NHR, 68). This seems to suggest that beneath the worst expressions of religion, there does exist the potential for religion to produce the best things. This should give pause to all those who read Hume as unequivocally opposed to every form of religion.

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