The Ideal of Religious Purification:

A Critical Enquiry into Hume's two Concepts of True Religion

Yongguang Nong

PhD by Research in Philosophy

The University of Edinburgh

2019

TO MY PARENTS AND MY LOVE

Table of Contents

Declaration

6

I, Yongguang Nong, hereby declare the following. The present thesis, submitted for examination in pursuit of a PhD by Research in Philosophy, has been entirely composed by myself, and it has not been submitted in pursuit of any other academic degree, or professional qualification.

Signature:

Date:

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis explores the implications of Hume's puzzling concept of true religion. The existing literature tends to either take it as entirely tactical or to read it from a theistic perspective. Focusing mainly on the *Dialogues*, this dissertation takes another route, arguing that while Hume is serious about the notion of true religion, his concern is pragmatic rather than theistic. The central argument is that Hume has, in fact, provided two very different versions of true religion in the *Dialogues*: Philo's version is a minimized theology for "the learned", while Cleanthes proposes an ideal of regulated popular religion for "the vulgar". Overall, Hume attempts to find a proper position for religion in a modern society by restricting theology to a limited academic sphere and regulating the priestly power under the civil authority.

In particular, Chapters 1 and 2 investigate the arguments and difficulties of the atheistic and theistic readings of Hume's true religion, showing that true religion is likely to be Hume's own idea and that his concern about the topic is secular in nature. Chapter 3 presents a textual reading of the statements of true religion by Philo and Cleanthes in the *Dialogues*, suggesting that their differences originate from Hume's distinction between "the learned" and "the vulgar", which is of great significance in his philosophy, as well as throughout his personal life. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the implications of Philo's and Cleanthes' concept of true religion respectively, showing that the former admits to a limited form of theism that rests on an epistemological "remote probability", while the latter explores the potential benefits of popular religion in the moral and political sphere. Chapter 6 reconstructs three approaches to achieving the ideal of true religion from Hume's texts: a philosophical cure, a tolerant state church, and historical education for the progress of moral taste. Finally, Chapter 7 evaluates the implications of Hume's pragmatic concern and functional accounts of true religion, both historically and contemporarily.

Lay Summary

Is believing in God reasonable? What is the proper role of the church in a modern society? These are two questions we often ask in terms of religion. David Hume is a Scottish philosopher who lived in the 18th century. Like Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, Hume is widely seen as a famous critic of religion. He claims that most teachings of theology are false, and that the influence of priests and the church is generally very negative. However, this study shows that the well-known religious sceptic, David Hume, also considers these two questions in a positive light. He develops a concept of "true religion", which is not, in fact, a religion or a theology but an exploration of the suitable functions of theology and church in a secular world.

Hume's central arguments are as follows: the existence of God still has a limited basis in our rational inference, and religious practice has deep roots in our passions; because of that, we cannot entirely remove theology and religion from the world we live in; what we must do is to treat them pragmatically by limiting theology to a proper sphere and regulating public worship in an effective manner.

Many theologians have said that they can prove the existence and the perfection of God. For instance, natural theologians claim that the existence of God and his nature can be proved by our experience and natural science. An effective and beautiful watch, they say, must have a creator. Likewise, they argue, such a delicate and beautiful universe must be the production of a great creator: God. For Hume, this inference is largely wrong because the similarity between a watch and the whole universe is very limited, and we have little experience about the connection between God and the creation of the world. His conclusion is not that God as the designer of the universe is impossible but that this hypothesis can only be a remote theoretical possibility. Although this possibility can be a reason for some to believe in a religion, Hume advocates limiting theological enquiry to a purely academic realm in order to avoid its harmful impact.

Concerning the proper role of the church and priests in society, Hume continues his pragmatic strategy. He believes that popular religion or public worship is mainly a result of our passions, especially fear and hope. These religious passions can develop to be rather violent, which challenges the stability of moral and political order. On certain occasions, religious passions also promote the power of the

church, and the abuse of this power, in turn, threatens the authority of the government. Popular religion is so dangerous that Hume has to consider possible ways of regulating it. His first suggestion is to recommend philosophy to the public. By doing that, he hopes that we will be less influenced by superstition. In order to ensure the peace of society, his second suggestion is that the power of the church must always be controlled and monitored by the power of the government. Ideally, he prefers to have a tolerant state church, which allows small religious groups to exist while limiting them to the arm of the ruling church. The ruling church, like the Church of England, must be supervised by the government and the King or Queen. Thirdly, Hume recommends that we do some historical reading (church history in particular), in order to have a better sense of how to transform church, priests and religious ceremonies useful to society.

Because the theology of philosophers and the religious worship of the public are fundamentally different, Hume chooses to consider them separately. This is why he has two concepts of true religion. His notion of true religion is not a specific religion or a new type of theology, but a general study of the suitable sphere and functions of theology and religion. Hume may personally have no religious beliefs, and his distaste for their negative consequences is obvious. However, as a philosopher, he tries to find a proper position for religion and theology since both will endure.

Abbreviations

References to Hume's writings cited in this paper are taken from the following editions:

D   *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.* D. Coleman (ed.),   Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

E   *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* P. Millican (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

EMPL   *Essays: Moral, Political, Literary.* E.F. Miller (ed.), Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987.

H   *The History of England.* Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983.

L   *The Letters of David Hume.* J.Y.T. Greig (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932.

NHR   *The Natural History of Religion.* Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010.

NL   *New Letters of David Hume.* R. Klibansky, E.C. Mossner (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932.

SE   *David Hume: Selected Essays.* S. Copley and A. Edgar (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

T   *A Treatise of Human Nature.* D.F. Norton and M. J. Norton (eds.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

M   *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.* J. B. Schneewind (ed.), Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.

ME   "Hume's Early Memoranda, 1729-1740: The Complete Text". E.C. Mossner (ed.), *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 9(4), 1948.

Introduction

And surely, nothing can afford a stronger presumption, that any set of principles are true, and ought to be embraced, than to observe, that they tend to the confirmation of true religion, and serve to confound the cavils of atheists, libertines, and freethinkers of all denominations.

——Cleanthes to Philo, the *Dialogues*, p. 16.

But we must treat of religion, as it has commonly been found in the world.

——Philo to Cleanthes, the *Dialogues*, p. 98.

For many centuries, David Hume has been well-known as a sceptic, and his accounts of both philosophy and religion are commonly seen as negative. Many of his contemporaries, such as T. Reid and J. Beattie, considered his philosophy, particularly his theory of causation, a serious threat to scientific knowledge, as well as to daily beliefs. This trend of reading Hume continued in the 19th century when he was constantly criticized by the British idealist movement led by T.H. Green. But the works of N.K. Smith have convinced many commentators that Hume's philosophy has its constructive sides (cf. Smith, 1941). Likewise, given that Hume has extensively criticized religious miracles, natural theology, the morality of religion, superstition and enthusiasm etc., one might wonder: is there anything positive in Hume's thoughts on religion? Hume's reference to the concept of true religion has led some commentators to reconsider the traditional impression of Hume's philosophy of religion. The aim of this dissertation, therefore, is to examine whether Hume's concept of true religion is positive, and if so, how positive it is. To be specific, is Hume genuine about true religion? If he is not, why does this category appear in his works? If he is, then what are the implications?

0.1 The Image of Religious Critic

Despite the fact that Hume was raised in a typical Calvinistic family in Scotland, he seems to have developed a sceptical attitude towards religion at an early age. As he confessed to J. Boswell that, during his university days in Edinburgh, he "never had entertained any belief in religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke"

(Mossner, 1970, 51). In his *Early Memoranda*, the youthful Hume started to collect arguments against traditional theology. For instance, he quotes Bayle that the arguments of theists, atheists, Epicureans and idolaters are equally incredible in explaining the first cause of the world, and that the a priori argument for the existence of God is simply a contradiction in itself (M, 500, 501).

One cannot deny that Hume's criticism dominates his narrative of religion, both in his philosophical and historical writings. For reason of caution, Hume removed most accounts of religion from his *Treatise*, but this work was still read by many of his contemporaries as an anti-religious book due to the sceptical principles developed in it. As a result, Hume had to write an anonymous letter, i.e. *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*, to argue against these anti-religious charges (Hume, 1754). When Hume rewrote Book One of the *Treatise* to be the first *Enquiry*, two controversial essays were added: "Of Miracles" and "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State", which criticize revealed and natural religion respectively. "Of Miracles" offers two arguments against religious miracles: the a priori argument states that a miracle by its definition is a conception against the laws of nature, and thus cannot be supported by the general experience of human life; the a posteriori argument states that reported religious miracles are either contradictory to each other or simply unreliable. In particular, Hume takes the resurrection of a man (one of the most famous miracles in the *New Testament*) as a typical example of a miracle (E, 83) and points out that "the Christian Religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one [miracle]" (ibid., 95). In the essay "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State", Hume speaks in an Epicurean tone, launching an attack on the argument from design, a cornerstone of the philosophy of deism.

Hume's main works on religion are the *Dialogues* and the *Natural History of Religion*. As Hume himself comments, the former investigates the religious "foundation in reason", while the latter is focused on "its origin in human nature" (NHR, 134). Philo's systematic criticism of natural religion in the *Dialogues* contributed to the decline of this form of theology, which flourished in 17th and 18th century Britain. The NHR, on the other hand, targets popular forms of religion, concluding that they are merely "sick men's dreams" (NHR, 184).

Hume's hostility towards religion continues, as the essay "On Suicide" states that suicide does not offend any moral or sacred duties, while the essay "On the

Immortality of Soul" criticizes the old teaching of theism about the eternal existence of the human soul (SE, 315-331). In another essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", Hume reveals the detrimental consequences of these two corrupted forms of religion, as well as their origins (ibid. 38-43). Ecclesiastical history accounts for a considerable part of the six-volume *History of England*, in which Hume presents how priestly power has disrupted social and political order, and how hypocritical monkish virtues have been throughout history. The following is an example of his comments:

> Had this abject superstition produced general peace and tranquillity, it had made some atonement for the ills attending it; but besides the usual avidity of men for power and riches, frivolous controversies in theology were engendered by it, which were so much the more fatal, as they admitted not, like the others, of any final determination from established possession. The disputes, excited in Britain, were of the most ridiculous kind, and entirely worthy of those ignorant and barbarous ages (H, I, 53).

These critical points made in Hume's writings can be good reasons for painting him as a harsh religious critic. According to Mossner's record, at Hume's funeral on 29 August 1776 in Edinburgh, a voice within the crowd whispered: "Ah, he was an Atheist", followed by a reply from someone else: "No matter, he was an honest man" (Mossner, 1970, 603). Some of his contemporaries, such as J. Boswell, have called him the "great infidel" (cf. Graham, 2006). To some extent, this reputation has overshadowed Hume's philosophical insights as expressed in the *Treatise* during the course of his life. As L. Stephen puts it, "his popular reputation, indeed, is almost exclusively based on it [his criticism of religion]; he is known as the author of this particular dilemma; all else that he wrote is ignored" (Stephen, 1962, 263).

This trend of reading continues to recent days. The majority of Humean scholarship still focuses on studying his criticism of religion, which repeatedly appears in the works of his admirers, as well as that of his critics. J.C. Livingston remarks that "all subsequent philosophical theology, that dares to call itself by that name, has had to take Hume's enquiries into account" (Livingston, 2006, 49). In his introductory pamphlet on Hume, A.J. Ayer says that Hume's criticism of religion is "discrediting not only of superstitious types of theism but of any form of religion itself" (Ayer, 1980, 23). Similar comments can be widely found in general works on philosophy of religion, as well as in specific studies specialised in Hume, such as J. Hick's *Philosophy of Religion* (Hick, 1990, 24), K. Yandel's *Hume's Inexplicable Mystery*

(Yandel, 1990, 33) and T. Holden's *Spectres of False Divinity: Hume's Moral Atheism* (Holden, 2010, 1-18).

The most significant reading that strengthens the image of Hume as a religious critic was recently offered by P. Russell, who highlights that the core of Hume's philosophy is "irreligious". According to his observation, apart from empiricism, there is another compelling trend within British philosophy in the 17th and 18th century, that is, the irreligious tradition. Russell divides the philosophers of the age of the Enlightenment in Britain into two camps: "religious philosophers" who defend the rationality of religion, such as S. Clarke, J. Locke, and G. Berkeley, and "speculative atheists" who suspect the philosophical and social justification of religion, such as T. Hobbes and D. Hume (Russell, 2008, 25-34).

0.2 True Religion and the Setting of the *Dialogues*

Hume's best-known work on religion is the *Dialogues*, in which he introduces three imaginary figures: the "rigid inflexible" orthodox Demea, the "accurate philosophical" Cleanthes and the "careless" sceptic Philo (D, 5). As Hume uses the form of dialogue, scholars have struggled to find his true intention in the work and do not agree on which of the three participants represents Hume, or who they represent in reality. The mainstream reading sees Philo as Hume since his speech occupies about two thirds of the conversations and he is a sceptic - the only title Hume accepted for himself and that most people attribute to him. But Philo's scepticism has been characterized by Pamphilus, the narrator, as "careless", while Cleanthes' natural religion is labelled as "accurate" philosophy, which eventually wins the conversations (D, 102).

Even if Philo is Hume, commentators have no common ground on who Cleanthes and Demea stand for. For Mossner, Demea is S. Clarke and Cleanthes is J. Butler (Mossner, 1977, 1-22); for Penelhum, Demea is the orthodox force in the Church of Scotland whilst Cleanthes represents moderate clergymen (Penelhum, 2000, 196-200); but for Hendel, Cleanthes is "the follower of Locke", while Demea "speaks in the manner of French thinkers" (Hendel, 1925, 315).

Over the first eight parts of the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes is defending natural religion with great enthusiasm, while Philo constantly fights against his arguments. In part 9 of this work, Philo focuses his criticism on the a priori argument concerning the existence of God, while in parts 10 and 11, he targets the problem of evil. Overall, Philo's standpoints are harsh as to the religiousness of both Cleanthes and Demea. But with the absence of the strictly orthodox Demea in part 12, Philo seems to tone down his aggressive attitude and starts to embrace some theistic doctrines; this is widely known as "Philo's reversal" or "Philo's confession".[1] He has confessed the following: (1) he has a deeper sense of religion than any other individuals (D, 94); (2) the frame of the universe obviously suggests the existence of a designer (ibid.); (3) he venerates a true religion (ibid., 89); (4) true religion, unlike popular religion, poses no harm to society (ibid., 98); (5) scepticism is the first step towards being a sound Christian (ibid., 102).

With these statements, Philo seems to defend the appropriateness of natural religion, something he constantly attacked in previous sections. Philo gives no obvious hints on how these points relate to each other, but my reading is that his confession of true religion, i.e. points (3) and (4), serves as the key to his reversal. There are two reasons for this claim: firstly, only by illustrating the contents of true religion (if Philo's confession is genuine) can we know what his deeper sense of religion is, why he accepts the argument of design, and why scepticism is crucial to being a good Christian; secondly, as I will show in chapter three and four, points (1), (2) and (5) are likely parts of what Philo called true religion.

More interestingly, Cleanthes also describes the "proper office of religion" (D, 95) and an agreeable "genuine theism" (ibid., 99), which, according to my reading, speaks on behalf of popular religion. Most commentators have denied these statements are Hume's, while some regard them as his endorsement of natural religion. However, a close reading of paragraphs 10 to 31 of the last part of the *Dialogues* shows that Philo constantly criticizes popular religion in favour of a philosophical theism, while Cleanthes, on the contrary, considers the possible salutary consequences of popular religion. Considering that Cleanthes speaks mainly as a deist in the *Dialogues*, it is puzzling that he suddenly defends popular religion, which he previously thinks has no rational justification and contains

---

[1] To my knowledge, the term "Philo's reversal" is first used by W.H. Austin in his paper (1985, 103-111).

countless superstitions. "Cleanthes' reversal", as I shall call it, is no less puzzling than "Philo's reversal".

Understanding Philo's as well as Cleanthes' statements of true religion is key to situating the intention of the *Dialogues* in particular, and Hume's philosophy of religion in general. As these statements are significantly different from the traditional image of Hume, one could ask: which position is true? Or which is truer? Cleanthes' true religion is largely ignored by Humean scholars. In considering Philo's accounts of true religion, there are various interpretations: many have simply refuted his sincerity, suggesting that Philo (and Hume) is entirely a religious critic, which can be called the *negative reading* or the *tactic-based reading*. However, in recent decades, some scholars suggest that Philo is sincere in this regard, which can be called the *positive reading*. Among the positive readings, the majority asserts that Hume embraces some (new) religiousness, which is the *theistic reading*.

0.3 Claims and Overview of the Dissertation

Hume's accounts of true religion are far from clear. This dissertation aims to reconstruct his story of true religion as a whole, from its basis and contents, through its approaches, to its historical and present-day implications. In so doing, I will make the following claims: (1) contrary to the negative readings, I will show that, given the fact that Hume has repeatedly referred to true religion in various works with multiple terms ("true", "pure", "genuine", "philosophical" etc.), true religion is likely to be Hume's sincere idea; (2) however, unlike the theistic readings, which consider Hume's true religion as a (new) religion or theology, I argue that Hume's concern on this matter is pragmatic, aiming to limit the sphere of theology and regulate the authority of popular religion for the purpose of social peace and secular interests; (3) Hume proposed two different concepts of true religion through the mouths of Philo and Cleanthes in the *Dialogues*: one for the learned and one for the vulgar; (4) Philo's version of true religion is a philosophical position that a minimized theology is acceptable on the basis of an epistemologically "remote probability" for an intelligent designer of the world, which has no influence on morality and social practice; (5) Cleanthes' concept of true religion speaks for the public, calling for the "proper office" of a regulated popular religion, which is expected to be salutary to both moral and

political interests; (6) in his texts, Hume suggested three methods of reaching his ideal of true religion: a philosophical cure, an ideal state church, and historical education for the promotion of moral taste; (7) Hume's pragmatic concern on the concept of true religion makes it different from the "true religion" of his contemporaries, the religion of humanity of A. Comte as well as the pragmatic religion advocated by B. Pascal and W. James.

Given that Hume's statements of true religion are limited and unclear, my model of interpretation is expected to encounter the following questions: (1) What evidence can support the claim that true religion is Hume's genuine concept? (2) Why are there two versions of true religion? (3) What are the differences between Philo's and Cleanthes' true religion? (4) How do the two versions of true religion relate to each other? (5) Why can Philo's true religion only be applied to a few philosophers? (6) Considering that Hume has detached morality from religion, how can we explain that popular religion can promote morality? (7) What is the relationship between Hume's scepticism and true religion? (8) Why would Philo, as a sceptic, suddenly defend the rationality of theology, and why would Cleanthes, as a deist, consider the proper role of popular religion?

In order to answer these questions and to elaborate on the seven above-mentioned claims, this dissertation is structured into the following seven chapters:

In Chapter one, I discuss the arguments as well as the difficulties of the negative or tactic-based reading. To start with, I assess the *ironical reading*, a claim that Hume's true religion is nothing but an example of the many ironies in his writings, as advocated by E.C. Mossner and J.V. Price. Then, I consider the *reconciliatory reading*, a claim that true religion is a mere reconciliatory tactic of Hume to the then-authorities (P. Millican, R. John and S. Manning), to his moderate cleric friends (T. Penelhum) or to Cleanthes' natural religion (D. O'Connor). Afterwards, I examine the *deconstructive reading*, which ascribes Hume's true religion to be a strategy of deconstructing all existing religions (N.K. Smith, A. Flew and X.L. Zhou). Finally, I present evidence to show that true religion is highly likely to be Hume's sincere concept and, thus, requires serious consideration.

In chapter two, I move on to the theistic reading, which interprets Hume's true religion from a theological perspective. Depending on how much religiousness they ascribe to Hume's true religion, the theistic readings can be divided into the *weak theistic reading* and the *strong theistic reading*. The former is typically exemplified by

J.C.A. Gaskin's "attenuated deism", T. Penelhum's and W.L. Sessions' "minimal deism", D.W. Livingston's and T.S. Yoder's "philosophical theism" and J. Immerwahr's "aesthetic theism", as well as the "basic theism" described by A.C. Willis. All the weak theistic readings regard Philo's true religion as a limited form of theism, although they differ on its implications.

The latter suggests that Hume's true religion provides a new concept of God or a strong theology: N. Pike thinks that Philo's true religion accepts an "irregular argument" for natural religion; G. J. Nathan believes that Hume has provided an "immanent God", which is grounded in our private and internal sentiments; L. Hardy reminds us that the religiousness within Hume's true religion might be close to some Calvinist teachings; the famous German philosopher J.G. Hamann reads it as Hume's conviction of fideism as does the recent commentator D.J. Hanson. Finally, I will show that while the weak theistic readings have some valuable insights, the strong theistic readings (especially the fideistic reading) have largely overstated Philo's acceptance of theism.

Most commentators have either ignored Cleanthes' speech on true religion or mixed it with Philo's accounts. Chapter three presents the different statements of Philo and Cleanthes on the topic of true religion, summarizes their features and examines Hume's reason for the distinction between the two concepts of true religion. First, I will show that while Philo's true religion applies solely to a few philosophers, Cleanthes' true religion is for "the vulgar"; also, Philo's true religion is free from morality and religious practice, but Cleanthes' concept promotes morality and social order; while Philo's true religion is harmless to society, Cleanthes' is salutary; Philo's true religion is "a species of philosophy", but Cleanthes' version is concerned with traditional religion. Then, I will suggest that Hume's two versions of true religion originate from his distinction between the learned and the vulgar, which is linked to his physical and mental crisis in 1729.

Chapter four focuses on Philo's concept of true religion. It is noticeable that in part 12 of the *Dialogues*, Philo has different comments on the true type of theism: at the outset, he states that an intelligent designer of the world is *obvious* to our *senses*, whereas, at the end of the same part, he highlights that the belief that God exists is merely an *ambiguous* and *philosophical* proposition. In this chapter, I attempt to reconcile these apparent inconsistencies by arguing that they are different responses to a supreme deity as the "remote probability" for the first cause of the

universe. Also, I suggest that this can serve as the key to understanding Philo's puzzling claim that the dispute between atheism and theism is merely verbal. Overall, Philo's acceptance of a limited theism does not necessarily mean that he is a theist, for the probable deity, as the ultimate cause of nature, allows different hypotheses (theistic and nontheistic) and different responses (sense or reason).

Chapter five examines Cleanthes' concept of true religion. The first half of this chapter considers the positive and negative sides of popular religion. Then, I compare Cleanthes' statements of the "proper office" of religion to the same phrase used by Hume in the *History*, showing that their statements overlap significantly, and that the moral and political usefulness of popular religion is their main concern. Lastly, I will explain why Hume would think that popular religion can promote morality, showing that the traditional establishment of religion can be seen as a part of custom and as an "artificial virtue", which leads people's restless religious passions into a common course, and restrains the enthusiasm of religious sects.

The purpose of chapter six is to reconstruct Hume's approaches to achieving his ideal of true religion. Three methods will be presented: the first one is what I call a "philosophical cure", a healing of superstition by replacing false theological and philosophical opinions with true philosophy (a "moderate", "accurate", "cautious" and "sceptical" philosophy exemplified by Hume's own philosophy). The second method is the establishment of a moderate and tolerant state church, which allows small religious parties to exist while ensuring religious order through the ruling church under governmental supervision. Thirdly, as Hume believes that historical knowledge can effectively promote our moral taste concerning the proper role of religion in our society, he encourages historical reading and highlights the educational meaning of historical study.

In chapter seven, Hume's pragmatic concern about true religion and its implications are considered. Having presented the contents and the methods of true religion, I argue that Hume's intention is to purify existing religion and theology by limiting theology within a purely academic discussion and regulating popular religion by the authority of the government. As usefulness is the core of Hume's two concepts of true religion, I explore the possible reasons for Hume to use the term "true", showing that he may use it conventionally, tactically or pragmatically. Also, as Hume's concern is not religious, his concept of true religion is different from the "true religion" that is widely found in the authors of the Enlightenment, and from Comte's religion of

humanity, as well as from the pragmatic religion endorsed by Pascal and James. Finally, I consider the possible contributions of Hume's true religion to the interreligious dialogue.

0.4 Methodology

Working on the history of philosophy, misreading and misunderstanding often occur when interpreters isolate one specific text or consider only a part or parts of a philosophical system while ignoring the rest. As the *Dialogues* is a record of imaginary conversations on natural religion, it is difficult to situate Hume's intention without the help of his other writings. To avoid these potential dangers, I consider other texts besides the *Dialogues* in exploring the implications of Hume's concept of true religion.

The interests of this dissertation are mainly interpretive and philosophical, not historical. The aim is to explore what Hume says in his texts and the philosophical basis of his statements. Therefore, this work is a textual and philosophical reconstruction of Hume's two concepts of true religion. Because of that, the historical context of Hume's philosophy, including the background of the Scottish Enlightenment as well as Hume's personal life, is less important in my discussion.

0.5 Contributions and Limitations

This dissertation intends to make two main contributions: first, it carefully classifies different readings on Hume's true religion into various categories. Although Hume's true religion has become a topic of debate in recent years and new materials have emerged, it seems to me that, unfortunately, no overall introduction to different readings on this topic is available. I hope that the first two chapters of this dissertation will compensate for this.

The second contribution is that the dissertation offers a new mode of understanding concerning Hume's true religion that is different from the existing positive and negative readings. My understanding of Hume's true religion may be helpful to

understand the intention of the *Dialogues* and to reconsider the value and legacy of Hume's philosophy of religion. I will largely leave it to the readers to judge whether Hume's proposal and his arguments are plausible.

It is important to note that my intention here is not to suggest that other interpretations are not possible. Hume's statements of true religion are far from clear and they allow for different readings, although I believe that my understanding has its merits.

It is also important to note that Hume's true religion, in my opinion, is not a complete theory and involves several aspects: epistemology, morality, history, politics and religion. His accounts of two concepts of true religion are not only presented in the *Dialogues*, but also appear in other texts. Unifying these different statements into a comprehensive frame is not an easy task and in some parts of his writings, Hume's underlying argumentation remains obscure. With this dissertation, I hope to shed some light on the story of Hume's true religion, but certain aspects, such as his discussion on religious miracles and his theory of probability, are only briefly presented.

Chapter One

Hume's True Religion: Genuine or Tactical? The Negative Readings and their Difficulties

Truth, 'tis suppos'd, may bear all Lights: and one of the those principal Lights or natural Mediums, by which Things are to be view'd, in order to a thorow Recognition, is Ridicule it-self, or that Manner of Proof by which we discern Whatever is liable to just Raillery in any Subject.

——3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, p. 38.

1.1 Introduction

Before exploring the contents of Hume's true religion, we need to consider whether he is genuine about it. As Hume does not clearly describe this concept in his texts, some have simply and famously viewed it as wholly tactical. I call the stance that repudiates true religion as Hume's own idea the *negative reading* or the *tactic-based reading*. Key arguments of this interpretation and its difficulties will be summarized and analysed in the first section of this chapter, followed by a reconsideration of Hume's sincerity on true religion.

The negative readings can be divided into three types: the first is *the ironical reading*, which sees Hume's true religion as an example of his ironical writings; the second is the *reconciliatory reading*, which considers true religion as a compromise to the then-authorities, to his moderate friends in the Church of Scotland, or to Cleanthes' deism; the third is *the deconstructive reading*, which suggests that Hume's true intention is to destroy all existing religions by repeating an empty concept of true religion. I will examine these three negative readings in sections 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 respectively. In 1.5, I will provide evidence that true religion is likely to be Hume's sincere concept. Section 1.6 summaries the main points made in this chapter.

1.2 The Ironical Reading: Mossner and Price

The artfulness of the Dialogues. Hume confesses in *My Own Life* that he "was seized very early with a passion for literature, which has been the ruling passion of my life, and the great source of my enjoyments" (Hume, 2007, 170). Hume's "ruling passion" for literary fame was partly fulfilled over his lifetime. In his later years, thanks to the extraordinarily successful *History of England* and his popular essays, Hume's reputation as a historian and an essayist was widely accepted by the republic of letters in Europe. Nevertheless, his philosophical writings, which he personally valued and cherished most in his lifetime, were rarely approved by his contemporaries. In the 20th and 21st centuries, however, the situation changed significantly. While his historical works and general essays are no longer as popular, Hume is today commonly seen as the greatest philosopher of Scotland and arguably the greatest among English-language philosophers. His reputation as a philosopher mainly rests on two works: his first work, the *Treatise of Human Nature,* and his posthumous work, the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

Compared to the *Treatise*, the *Dialogues* adopts a more accessible and readable way of writing. Hume was proud of both works as the former includes most of his philosophical insights while the latter is the "most artful" of his writings. Hume comments on his *Dialogues* that "nothing can be more cautiously and more artfully written" (L, 538). For most commentators, the artfulness of this work refers to the adoption of the literary form of dialogue.

The *Dialogues* consists of conversations between three fictional figures: the representative of deism – Cleanthes, the sceptic – Philo, and "the rigid inflexible" orthodox – Demea (D, 5). No direct evidence can decisively show that Hume's acceptance of this literary genre is inspired by a particular work. Some scholars, such as P. Jones (1982, 29-40), C. Battersby (1979, 239-253) and P.S. Fosl (1994, 103-120), have argued that this work is an imitation of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*. Indeed, considerable similarities can be found between these two works: both take God and religion as their main topic; both take the form of dialogue; both advocate a certain type of scepticism. Cicero is one of the academic heroes Hume admired most and he enjoyed reading Cicero's works when he was a student at university (Hume, 2007, 170).

However, it is still hard to say that the *Dialogues* directly imitates the form of the *De Natura Deorum*. Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (published in 1731) also takes the form of dialogue, within which God is also a central topic of the conversations. But this possibility is limited, as Hume never mentions this work in all his writings.[2] The most famous philosophical dialogues are those of Plato, such as his *Apology of Socrates*, *Meno*, *Republic* etc. But other than occasional mentions of Plato in his texts, Plato's influence on Hume is largely unknown to us.[3]

Another possibility is the influence of Shaftsbury. For Shaftesbury, the purpose of philosophy is to help people to live better or to improve themselves. As an art of self-improvement, philosophy should dispense with the traditional form of writing and ought to adopt a more accessible method of enquiry and writing. For Shaftsbury, dialogue is an ideal alternative to the standard form of philosophical writing, for it can present both sides of an argument in a vivid format without the author's ideology dominating, leaving space for readers to make their own judgement.[4] Shaftsbury trialled this method of composition in *The Moralist*, which consists of conversations on various topics of morality and natural religion between Theocles, a philosophical theist, and Philocles, a sceptic (Shaftsbury, 1999, Vol.2, 1-126).[5]

In his "abstract" to the *Treatise*, Hume acknowledges that Shaftsbury is one of the main sources of his experimental philosophy (Hume, 1965, 7). In the *Dialogues*, he is well aware of the merits of the form of dialogue as stressed by Shaftsbury. Through the voice of Pamphilus, the narrator of the conversations, Hume presents the advantages of dialogue as follows:

> "The form of dialogue […] To deliver a system in conversation scarcely appears natural; and while the dialogue-writer desires, by departing from the direct style of composition, to give a freer air to his performance, and avoid the appearance of author and reader, he is apt to run into a worse

---

[2] Many years ago there was a debate about whether Hume ever read Berkeley, which concluded that Hume did indeed read Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (cf. R.H. Popkin, 1959, 67-71, 1964, 773-778; P. Wiener, 1961, 207-209; A. Flew 1961, 50-51; E.C. Mossner, 1959, 50-51; R. Hall, 1967, 276-277, 1968, 278-280; M. Michael, 1973, 310-315).However, there is no evidence to show that Hume was aware of the existence of Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*.
[3] In his *Early Memoranda*, Hume refers to Plato three times, simply recording some opinions of Plato's philosophy without comments. For example, he mentions Plato's accounts of idealism (ME, 501), eternality of soul (ibid.) and historical claims in the *Alcibiades* (Ibid. 518).
[4] For a more detailed analysis of Shaftsbury's theory of dialogue, see M. Prince (1996, 47-66).
[5] For the possible influences of Shaftsbury's "art of dialogue" on Hume, see M. Malherbe (1994, 201-223).

inconvenience, and convey the image of pedagogue and pupil. Or if he carries on the dispute in the natural spirit of good company, by throwing in a variety of topics, and preserving a proper balance among the speakers; he often loses so much time in preparations and transitions, that the reader will scarcely think himself compensated, by all the graces of dialogue, for the order, brevity, and precision, which are sacrificed to them" (D, 3).

For Shaftesbury, another significant factor of writing is the adoption of humour and irony in philosophical writings. "Ridicule, the test of truth" has been widely seen as one of the most striking elements of Shaftsbury's belief in liberal forms of writing and speech.[6]

Hume paid attention to his writing style, and his writings are generally elegant and delicate. Irony is also often used by Hume to express his ideas. The following is an example of Hume's humour or irony expressed by Philo in the *Dialogues*:

I will allow, that, pain or misery in man is compatible with infinite power and goodness in the deity, even in your sense of these attributes: What are you advanced by all these concessions? A mere possible compatibility is not sufficient. You must prove these pure, unmixed, and uncontrollable attributes from the present mixed and confused phenomena, and from these alone. A hopeful undertaking! (D, 77).

The ironical reading. Some commentators consider that Hume's use of humour and irony is of great importance to understand his philosophy.[7] E.C. Mossner, Hume's biographer, believes that Hume's use of irony is crucial for the interpretation of Philo's reversal in the closing part of the *Dialogues*.

Irony is a category of written and spoken expression that is commonly seen in our daily lives. With irony, one can express an idea in an indirect but effective way, persuading an audience with an alternative or opposing perspective. To my understanding, there are two categories of irony. The first one is the *direct irony*, which attempts to reveal absurdity in an exaggerated and direct way. Philo's speech on the problem of evil mentioned above is an example. Another irony takes an *indirect form,* which pretends to agree on the stances of one's opponents, but the real intention is to show their logical shortcomings or unreasonableness. Both can evoke aversion towards something or someone, and strengthen our belief in the opposite sentiment.

---

[6] Though some argue that Shaftsbury never clearly said so, see A. Aldridge (1945, 129-156).
[7] Hume's possible intentions in utilizing the form of dialogue, according to S. Clark, include "just play", "self-concealment", "taming his opponents", "self-effacement", "causal operation", "self-discovery", "dramatization" of an ideal politics" (Clark, 2013, 61-76).

Mossner understands the irony in Hume's texts as "a figure of a speech wherein the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the words used" (1977, 1-2). If Mossner is right, then Hume's use of irony belongs to the indirect category mentioned above. As Mossner observes, Hume is a man with a great sense of humour who often displayed his wit at salons, as well as in his books. This fact, Mossner believes, is an essential hint for a deeper understanding of Hume's works, especially the *Dialogues*. In the paper "Hume and the Legacy of the Dialogues", he claims that Hume's use of irony can explain the "basic teachings" of this work. These "basic teachings" include: (1) in the prologue, Pamphilus, the narrator of the conversations, deems Philo's scepticism to be "careless" but Cleanthes' philosophy to be "accurate" (Mossner says Philo's scepticism on deism is not careless and Cleanthes' defence of deism is also not accurate); (2) in the last paragraph, Pamphilus calls Cleanthes the hero of their dialogues, not Philo (Mossner regards Philo as the only winner of the dialogues); (3) in Part 12 of the *Dialogues*, Philo confesses that he has a deep sense of religion and a veneration for true religion (for Mossner, Philo never has such beliefs).

By stating that the above claims are ironies, Mossner intends to show that Philo is Hume's sole statesman and a consistent sceptic. By seeing Philo's "reversal" in part 12 as an irony, Mossner dismisses the incompatibility of Philo's scepticism and his statements of true religion. The following is what he says about Philo's confession:

> A deeper sense of religion? Profound adoration to the divine Being? No. These pious feelings, or rather passions, are totally alien to the man David Hume. They derive solely from faith, and by his own avowal David Hume ever since youth was devoid of religious faith. They are ironically presented here only as precautionary accommodation to the convention of the times, in accordance with the philosopher's standard practice when writing on religion, and are fully, though still ironically, nullified at the close (Mossner, 1977, 13-14).

In another paper, "The Religion of David Hume", Mossner asserts that Hume's assaults on religion are increasingly severe from the *Treatise* to the *Dialogues*. Since the being of God or the non-being of God has never been proven by human reason, Mossner concludes that Hume is absolutely a sceptic (Mossner, 1987, 653-663). According to this reading, Hume is unlikely to hold a concept of true religion that potentially contains religiousness.

Following Mossner, J.V. Price attempts to collect the ironical writings in his *The Ironic Hume,* in which he suggests that Hume's true religion is one of the most obvious ironies in his works. As Price states, "a feeling that many of Hume's

concessions to religion were ironic led me to correlate his writings with his life and his intellectual milieu. Consequently, one of the assumptions of this book is that the text alone is not enough in determining an author's meaning" (Price, 1965, vii). According to Price, irony appears frequently in Hume's writings, from the *Treatise*, through the NHR and the *History*, to the *Dialogues* and his essays. Particularly, Price takes a less-known work of Hume, *Account of Stewart*, as the best sample of Hume's ironical writing, claiming that it "reveals Hume's irony at its most, matched only by his discussions of 'true religion'" (Price, 1965, 45).[8] Unfortunately, Price does not clarify why Hume's true religion is an obvious irony and he may take Mossner's comments on true religion for granted.[9]

Now let us consider the plausibility of the ironical reading. Although Mossner's and Price's claims concerning the relationship between Hume's irony and his notion of true religion are not very logically drawn in their works, they can be summarized as follows: (1) Hume's works are full of ironies and witty phrases; (2) Hume showed an impressive sense of humour in his personal life; (3) Hume's attacks on religion are increasingly severe, from his earlier works to the later writings; (4) but at the end of the *Dialogues*, Philo seems to have a confession of faith and an endorsement of true religion without explanation. It seems that (3) and (4) are irreconcilable, i.e. Hume's criticism of religion is incompatible with this confession of true religion. If (3) is true, Mossner argues, then (4) must be wrong, i.e. true religion cannot be Hume's sincere belief. Furthermore, he uses arguments (1) and (2) to exemplify why (4) cannot be genuine: just as Hume's writings are full of irony, true religion is simply an example of Hume's humour.

The ironical reading assumes two premises: that Philo's true religion and his scepticism are incompatible, and that true religion is an irony. However, these claims have the following difficulties.

Firstly, Hume never implies that true religion is incompatible with his philosophical principles and conclusions. The ironical reading assumes that the inconsistency between true religion and Hume's philosophy is obvious. But this is beyond the

---

[8] The full name of this work is *A True Account of the Behaviour and Conduct of Archibald Stewart, Esq: Late Lord Provost of Edinburgh, in a Letter to a Friend* - a letter written by Hume to defend his friend A. Stewart (1697-1780), Lord Provost and the organizer of the defense of Edinburgh against Prince Charles Edward in 1745, for his failure on the defense of Edinburgh. For a full account of Hume's attitude to the Jacobite rebellion and to the failure of Stewart, see E.C. Mossner (1970, 177-186).
[9] In fact, Price's *The Ironic Hume* is written based on Mossner's works.

direct evidence. Conversely, as I will show in chapter four, true religion can be seen as an example of Hume's moderate scepticism.

Secondly, as we have said, in all his writings, Hume never suggests that irony is the primary element that makes the *Dialogues* "artful".

Thirdly, sometimes it is not easy for us to tell an irony from humorous or witty expressions or even from a normal phrase. Direct irony apparently shows the ridiculousness or wrongness of its object in an exaggerated way. But when it comes to indirect irony, it can be difficult to judge whether an expression is an irony or a normal and humorous phrase without knowing the intention of the speaker or author. To my understanding, the difference between irony and a humorous expression is that the former has a negative intention while the latter does not. As the first two chapters of this dissertation show, there are different interpretations concerning Hume's real intention in the *Dialogues*. Without knowing Hume's final intention, we cannot decisively say that the concept of true religion in this work is an irony.

1.3 The Reconciliatory Readings

Another tactic-based interpretation of Hume's true religion is the reconciliatory reading, which proposes that the appearance of this term in the *Dialogues* is largely due to the pressure on Hume from his contemporaries. Before looking into their arguments, it might be helpful to recall the religious atmosphere of Hume's time. In the 17th and 18th centuries, religious tolerance did not reach its mature state in Europe as the church authorities still often used their power to suppress the unorthodox views. Being called an atheist at that time still sounded very much like something uncultivated and barbaric, which was unacceptable for most people from all walks of life.

Locke is famous for his appeal to religious tolerance, but in the influential *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, he does not suggest tolerance for atheists (Locke, 2010, 52-53). Spinoza was widely known as an atheist for he openly criticized the traditional concept of God, which brought major inconvenience and trouble to his personal life.[10] Another notorious critic of religion is Hobbes who, in his most celebrated work

---

[10] For instance, Spinoza was forced to leave his Jewish community in Amsterdam in 1656

the *Leviathan*, reduces the origin of religion to psychological weakness and fear (Hobbes, 1996, 37). Hume's naturalistic accounts of the roots of religion have many similarities to those of Spinoza and Hobbes but Hume seems to carefully avoid mentioning them in his works.[11]

In this context, Hume had reason to be cautious and it is evident that he was under pressure from his surroundings. In a letter to his intimate friend H. Home (later Lord Kames) in 1737, Hume confesses that in order to reduce the potential offensiveness, he cut out religious content from the *Treatise*, especially the essay on miracles:

> Having a frankt Letter I was resolv'd to make use of it, & according enclose some Reasonings concerning Miracles, which I once thought of publishing with the rest, but which I am afraid will give too much Offence even as the World is dispos'd at present […] I beg of you show it to no Body, except to Mr Hamilton, if he pleases; & let me know at your Leizure that you have receiv'd it, read it, & burn it. I wou'd not even have you make another nameless Use of it, to which it wou'd not be improper, for fear of Accidents. Your thoughts & mine agree with Respect to Dr Butler, & I wou'd be glad to be introduc'd to him. I am at present castrating my Work, that is, cutting off its noble Parts, that is, endeavouring it shall give as little Offence as possible […] (NL, 2-3).

These confessions clearly indicate that Hume is well aware of his religious circumstances. Although he does not clearly point out what these "nobler parts" refer to, most commentators have related them to the articles "Of Miracles" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul", which deliver critical comments on religion. While the essay "Of Miracles" appears as section 10 of the *Enquiry* in 1748, "Of the Immortality of the Soul" was published many years after Hume's death. As it is well-known, due to the sceptical principles of his philosophy and his critical comments on religion, Hume failed to be appointed a professor in either Edinburgh or Glasgow. Humean scholars are also familiar with the fact that Hume's *Dialogues*, his most important work on religion, did not reach its audience during his lifetime due to his fear of potential persecution.[12]

---

when he was only 23 years old. Hume's criticism of religion shares some common points with Spinoza: both point out the groundlessness of traditional theology and enquire into the existing religions from a natural and historical point of view. For a detailed comparison between Hume's and Spinoza's natural accounts on religion, see H.D. Dijn (2012, 3-21).

[11] Hume refers to Spinoza in a few places in his works, but his comments on Spinoza seem to be critical (T, 378, 382).

[12] The composition of the *Dialogues* dates to the period 1751-1755, roughly the same time as the writing of the NHR. Hume revised the *Dialogues* twice, once around 1761 and again in the year of his death, in 1776. For many years, Hume was very concerned with the publication of the *Dialogues* but eventually followed his friends' advice to leave it unpublished in his lifetime. Before his death, Hume first requested Adam Smith to publish the *Dialogues*. Later on, as Smith voiced some concerns, Hume considered publishing the book himself. However, he was too weak to do so. Eventually, he added a codicil to his will, stating

Accordingly, some have interpreted Philo's phrase of true religion as a necessary trick on the part of Hume to deal with the pressure he was under. In doing so, they find another way to explain the apparent incompatibility between Hume's non-religious impression and Philo's confession of true religion. The reconciliatory readings differ from each other in terms of what Hume attempted to reconcile. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, the Church of Scotland came to include two parties: the orthodox and the moderates. Correspondingly, some commentators have read Hume's true religion as a compromise to either the orthodox or moderate power in the Church of Scotland. In addition, D. O'Connor provides the third reconciliatory explanation, saying that Philo's true religion is a compromise to Cleanthes' deism. I will now examine the three reconciliatory readings in turn.

A. Reconciliation between Hume and the Orthodox: Millican, John and Manning

Having emphasized Hume's hostility towards popular religion, P. Millican concludes that "his reason to use the phrase [true religion] is largely prudential: by drawing a contrast between 'true' and 'popular' religion, he can freely attack the excesses of the later without exposing himself as an atheist" (Millican, 2002, 37). Similarly, after providing a detailed description of the offensiveness of Hume's writings to the conservatives of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, R. John and S. Manning propose that Hume's intentions in the *Dialogues* may be better understood against the historical backdrop, suggesting that Philo's statements of true religion are mere strategies of reconciliation (John and Manning, 1990, 415-426).

Indeed, it is not a secret that Hume has a hostile attitude towards what he called popular religion, including existing forms of Catholic and Protestant religions. On numerous occasions, Hume accuses Catholics and Protestants of intolerance, enthusiasm, superstition and being the main root of political disorder in history. After the reform of the church led by J. Knox in the 16th century, Scotland was dominated by Presbyterian teachings. Hume tends to relate Catholicism to superstition while

---

that if the work did not appear within two and a half years of his death, his nephew would be responsible for the publication of the *Dialogues*. In 1779, his nephew faithfully published the *Dialogues* in accordance with Hume's instructions.

considering Presbyterianism as a typical example of fanaticism, which naturally infuriated pious ministers in his home country.[13] The following are his comments on the founder of the Reformed Church of Scotland, J. Knox, and his followers:[14]

> In this critical time, John Knox arrived from Geneva, where he had passed some years in banishment, and where he had imbibed, from his commerce with Calvin, the highest fanaticism of his sect, augmented by the native ferocity of his own character. He had been invited back to Scotland by the leaders of the reformation; and mounting the pulpit at Perth, during the present ferment of men's minds, he declaimed with his usual vehemence against the idolatry and other abominations of the church of Rome, and incited his audience to exert their utmost zeal for its subversion […] They attacked the priest with fury, broke the images in pieces, tore the pictures, overthrew the altars, scattered about the sacred vases; and left no implement of idolatrous worship, as they termed it, entire or undefaced (H, IV, 22-23).

Obviously, these comments together with Hume's extensive criticism of popular religion are a challenge to the conservatives in the Church of Scotland. A remarkable piece of evidence that demonstrates the intense relationship between Hume and the orthodox clergymen of Scotland was the effort in the mid-1750s by conservatives in the Church of Scotland to excommunicate Hume and Lord Kames[15]. Thanks to the effective defense of Hume and Lord Kames by the moderates, including Hugh. Blair's statements in the *Edinburgh Review*, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland did not agree to excommunicate them.

However, although the tension between the conservative power in the church and Hume is apparent, it does not automatically lead to the conclusion that Hume's concept of true religion is the product of this tension. In fact, no direct link between them can be found in Hume's texts. Meanwhile, it seems to me that the use of the term "true religion" cannot make Hume's religious criticism less harsh. We can take Spinoza's new concept of God as an example. With the rise of modern sciences and

---

[13] In the *History*, Hume frequently combined Catholic Rome with superstition, using phrases like "Catholic superstition" and "Romish superstition" (e.g. H, III, 324, 380, 384; IV, 188, 291; V, 223, 224; VI, 507, 521).

[14] In volume IV of the *History*, Hume constantly presents the zealousness of the Presbyterians, yet in the essay on "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", he gives a more dialectical view: while the zealous Presbyterians seriously threaten social peace and political order, they can be salutary to the pursuit of independence and freedom (SE, 38-43).

[15] It began with the publication of a pamphlet called *An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments contained in the Writings of Sopho [Henry Home], and David Hume, Esq; Addressed to the consideration of the Reverend and Honourable Members of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (published in 1755 after the general assembly), which charged the two for their infidelity. Hume is accused due to the sceptical opinions developed in his works, especially the *Treatise,* while H. Home (Lord Kames) is charged because of his discussion of free will in the *Essays on Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (Kames, 2005). For a fuller record of this campaign, see E.C. Mossner (1970, 336-355) and R.B. Sher (2015, 65-74).

philosophy, Spinoza finds that the traditional idea of God is full of superstition, unnecessary sacrifices and harmful ceremonies. Opposing traditional Christian thoughts, he advocates a rational idea of God and a certain kind of "obedience" to him. However, this distinction did not diminish his offensiveness to the orthodox authorities. On the contrary, it brought him the notorious name of "atheist" and "infidel" and led to his expulsion from the Jewish community and the mainstream literati.

Moreover, as the *Dialogues* was arranged by Hume to publish posthumously, it would be strange to say that he was very concerned about possible persecutions on him. Before his death, Hume wrote a letter to his publisher, W. Strahan, saying that compared to the *Enquiry*, the *Dialogues* is "much less obnoxious to the law and not more exposed to popular clamour" (L, II, 525). In this letter, he also writes that Strahan should have no hesitation and worry in publishing the *Dialogues*.

B. Reconciliation between Philo and Cleanthes: O'Connor

At the end of part 11 of the *Dialogues*, Demea leaves the conversations due to Philo's aggressive comments on the problem of evil, leaving Philo and Cleanthes to continue their dialogues alone in part 12. For D. O'Connor, the departure of Demea creates a chance for Philo and Cleanthes to find possible common grounds. In their previous conversations, Philo and Cleanthes debate fiercely on the design argument, creating an unpleasant and intense atmosphere between the two friends.[16] As O'Connor observes, Philo and Cleanthes, in the concluding part of the *Dialogues,* are trying to understand each other and to repair their relationship, which is believed to be the key to understanding Philo's "reversal" and his mention of true religion. Crucially, however, O'Connor thinks that Philo's concession is very limited and his true religion, as a result of his compromise, is largely a tactical phrase. As O'Connor puts it, "it does not supersede his scepticism. Indeed, I will suggest that it is his scepticism by another name […] In the end, there is a balance among the four – his concession to deism, his scepticism, his naturalistic hypothesis, and his hypothesis

---

[16] Cleanthes seems to be patient throughout his debate with Philo. Occasionally, he even praises Philo' sceptical spirit (D, 56-57).

of indifference (his moral atheism) –that reflects what Philo ironically (and perhaps mischievously) calls 'true religion'" (O'Connor, 2001, 194).[17]

To call Philo's true religion a tactical reconciliation is to suggest that he is a consistent sceptic. O'Connor provides three impressions to support his reconciliatory reading:

> first, that Philo's concession is excessive and too fulsomely expressed; second, and contributing to the first impression, that no new evidence whatsoever has been offered to warrant capitulation to Cleanthes' position; and third, that this exchange between Philo and Cleanthes is less about the truth and falsity of the design hypothesis than about re-establishing an amiable and sociable atmosphere. This third impression is that Philo and Cleanthes, Philo especially, seem to be acting in a way that is fairly common among friends or friendly acquaintances when an informal conversation has become too sharp, sharper than was intended or expected (O'Connor, 2001, 195).

O'Connor is right in saying that the two friends are trying their best to alleviate the pain and tension derived from their deep disagreements in terms of natural religion. At the very beginning of part 12, Cleanthes says to Philo that "your spirit of controversy, joined to your abhorrence of vulgar superstition, carries you strange lengths, when engaged in an argument", while Philo acknowledges immediately that his previous comments on the topic of natural religion are "less cautious" (D, 89). Later, when Philo launches attacks on the superstitions of popular religion and their pernicious consequences, Cleanthes reminds him "take care: Push not matters too far: Allow not your zeal against false religion to undermine your veneration for the true" (D, 99).

O'Connor's reading suggests that Philo and Cleanthes have failed to search for common grounds or that Philo does not want to have any agreement at all. Thus, by ostensibly confessing to a true religion, Philo is playing a trick on Cleanthes. The potential difficulties of O'Connor's reading are as follows. Firstly, O'Connor's explanation is limited in the *Dialogues*. Given that Hume also refers to the concept of true religion in other texts, O'Connor's interpretation is unable to explain Hume's true religion in general. Secondly, it implies that Cleanthes is not smart enough to recognize Philo's tactic, which is contrary to the impression that Cleanthes is featured as an "accurate" philosopher (D, 5).

---

[17] In this sense, O'Connor's reading can also be categorized as an ironical reading, allying with the reading of Mossner and Price aforementioned.

C. Reconciliation between Hume and his Moderate Friends: Penelhum

Like O'Connor, Penelhum also reads true religion as a reconciliatory tactic between Philo and Cleanthes. However, unlike O'Connor, Penelhum goes one step further in his assumptions, reckoning that this reconciliatory tactic proves Hume's attempt to maintain a good relationship with his moderate friends in the Church of Scotland. In this interpretation, Cleanthes speaks for the moderates while Philo stands for Hume. Let us first consider the subtle relationship between Hume and the moderates.

In most cases, Hume's affinities to the moderate clergy are obvious. Some of the moderate clerics, such as Hugh Blair, William Robertson, John Home and Adam Ferguson were Hume's lifetime friends. It is evident that Hume and the moderates shared common grounds. Firstly, in theory, the moderates shared the values of Enlightenment that are enthusiastically expressed in Hume's works, such as the criticism of superstition and enthusiasm and the advocacy of religious tolerance. Secondly, they also supported one another in practice. When Hume finished writing a manuscript, he usually circulated it among his moderate friends, asking for their comments and suggestions. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, the moderates played a crucial role in protecting Hume from charges by the campaign instigated by the orthodox clerics. The close relationship between Hume and his clerical friends has also demonstrated again in the affair of the *Douglas*, in which Hume wrote an article to defend the young moderate minister J. Home, who had written a theatrical play at a time when many viewed the theatre as immoral.[18]

Against this backdrop, Penelhum, in his early writings, asserts that Philo's true religion accepts a minimal deism, which is the result of Hume's intention to maintain the friendship with the moderates (Penelhum, 1975, 166; 2000, 197-200). Hume

---

[18] In 1754 the young moderate minister, John Home, presented a manuscript of drama called *Douglas*. It was positively accepted by the literati in Edinburgh. With confidence, Home sought to put it on stage in London, but it was rejected by the actor and theatrical manager David Garrick of Drury Lane. Home returned to Edinburgh in frustration, hoping that he could make the performance of this play work in the capital city of his homeland. Unfortunately, this controversial drama encountered strong objection from the orthodox clerics led by J. Witherspoon. The orthodox accused it of violating the spirit of religion and tried to block the performance of the *Douglas*. In this conflict, Hume was clearly on the side of his moderate friends. Early at the outset of 1757, Hume wrote an open letter to the author of *Douglas*, stating that it was an interesting and prominent play, which should be freely performed in the theatre. At this time, the moderates developed to be the leading force in the Church of Scotland, which ensured their ultimate triumph in the case of the *Douglas*. For a fuller account of this affair, see T. Ahnert (2008, 375-383) and R.B. Sher (2015, 74-92).

allied himself with the moderates in the common battle against the orthodox Presbyterians, which, in Penelhum's view, are exemplified by Demea.[19]

However, some signs indicate that Hume also felt disappointed with his clerical friends. The first is that Hume felt intellectually isolated and misunderstood by his Scottish fellows. It is true that the moderates were Hume's friends, but it seems they did not truly understand his scepticism and even did not take it seriously. When Hume finished writing his *Treatise*, he sent several copies to his moderate friends in Edinburgh. But most of them did not really understand its contents and no genuine reviews were given.

The second impression that reveals the disharmony between Hume and the moderates is the affair of Hume's professorship.[20] With the vacancy of the chair of moral philosophy at Edinburgh University in 1744, Hume saw a good opportunity to secure this honourable and well-paid position. With encouragement from his friends, Hume soon announced his application with confidence. But this time he overestimated the support from his moderate friends. Surprisingly, besides the strong disapproval from the orthodox side, Hume also encountered significant resistance from the moderate camp. W. Wishart, Principal of Edinburgh University and a professor of Divinity, considered Hume an unsuitable candidate, expecting moral philosophy to be closely tied to religion. Two other powerful figures in Scotland's intellectual world also made a significant contribution to Hume's failure to become a professor: F. Hutcheson, a Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University, and W. Leechman, a Professor of Divinity at the same university. The two told the town council that Hume was "a very unfit person for such an office" (Mossner, 1970, 157). Later in 1751, Hume also failed to secure the Chair of Logic at Glasgow University for similar reasons.

Hume felt quite disappointed and frustrated with the intolerance in the intellectual atmosphere of his home country in general, and with some prominent figures in the moderate camp in particular:

---

[19] Interestingly, Penelhum revises his opinion after receiving criticism from W. Lemmens. In his essay, Lemmens argues that viewing Philo's true religion as a sign of Hume's respect for his moderate friends is misleading, for Hume actually had a "mild despair" for both the orthodox and the moderates (Lemmens, 2012, 183-197). In his reply, Penelhum revises his opinions, saying that Philo is better identified as an atheist and that there is no reconciliation between Hume and the moderates in the *Dialogues* (Penelhum, 2012, 209-210).
[20] For a detailed record of this affair, see E.C. Mossner (1970, 153-162) and R.L. Emerson (1994, 1-22).

This affair indicates a crucial difference and underlying crack between Hume and his moderate friends. As J. Harris puts it, "Hume's principal opponents, in the 1740s at least, did not come from the ranks of the 'orthodox', but were rather the forebears of the 'moderate literati' who dominated Scottish intellectual life during the second half of the eighteenth century" (Harris, 2015, 155).

Now, let us come back to examine the reconciliatory reading offered by Penelhum. He is right in saying that Hume allied himself with the moderates in the common battle against the orthodox Presbyterians. But whether Hume and the moderates shared a minimal theism is questionable, for the moderates seemed reluctant to accept Hume's scepticism, and Hume also suffered from his intellectual loneliness in the moderate literati in Scotland.

Also, in Penelhum's narration, Demea represents the conservative Calvinists of the Church of Scotland, while Philo and Cleanthes are supposed to be Hume and the moderates respectively. This assumption might be reasonable but not decisive. For instance, as I mentioned in section 1.2, Mossner takes Demea as S. Clarke whilst considering Cleanthes as J. Butler. As a matter of fact, Hume never gives clear hints as to whom the three characters stand for in reality. In the *Dialogues*, Philo claims that Locke is the first Christian who rests the basis of religion on reason, which might suggest that he regards Locke instead of the moderates of Scotland as the representative of Deists (D, 14).

In addition, Penelhum does not make it clear whether Hume's reconciliation with the moderates sincerely aims to share a theological common ground or his compromise is merely tactical. The early Penelhum suggests that they share common points in a type of minimal deism, while later Penelhum declares that true religion, as a means of reconciliation, is merely tactical. Furthermore, in his latest article, Penelhum withdraws the previous two interpretations, saying that there is no reconciliation between Hume and the moderates in the *Dialogues* (Penelhum, 2012, 206-211). Indeed, it seems to me that these three claims are contradictory to each other in nature.

1.4. The Deconstructive Reading: Smith, Flew and Zhou

In his introduction to the *Dialogues*, N.K. Smith provides insightful comments on Hume's accounts of religion - an essential secondary reference for students and scholars who work on Hume's philosophy of religion. Without any doubt, Philo's true religion cannot be omitted from his narrative. He observes that the true religion of Philo (and Hume) contains little religiousness, and its existence in Hume's writings only serves a deconstructive function towards existing religions.

As I said in the introduction to this dissertation, Hume grew up in a strict Calvinistic family but gained his mental independence from religion at an early age. This independence and maturity are of central importance for the development of Hume's thoughts on religion, as they enabled him to see religion from a natural and philosophical perspective. According to Smith's observation, the excessiveness and gloominess in the early period of 18th century Scotland left Hume with a rather negative impression, which in turn drove him away from religion in general.

In fact, we have little knowledge of Hume's life in his early years, especially his childhood in Ninewells of Berwickshire. His *My Own Life* is a short autobiography, which provides nothing about the religious status of his family or his mind. J. Boswell's records of his interview with Hume on Hume's deathbed provide more information in this regard:

> I asked him if he was not religious when he was young. He said he was, and he used to read the *Whole Duty of Man*; that he made an abstract from the Catalogue of vices at the end of it, and examined himself by this, leaving out Murder and Theft and such vices as he had no chance of committing, having no inclination to commit them. This, he said, was strange Work; for instance, to try if, notwithstanding his excelling his school-fellows, he had no pride or vanity (Cited from Smith, 1947, 76).

Smith argues that religion in Scotland in Hume's early years was a rather extreme variety, which represented Calvinism in a "distorted and exaggerated form", and was "bleak and gloomy" in both theology and practice (Smith, 1947, 2-3). Smith believes that the orthodox religion of Scotland might have shaped Hume's understanding of religion and his aversion for this form of religion has been a key reason for Hume's critical comments on religion in his later years.

In his texts, Hume carefully avoids criticising religion directly, and stresses that the target of his accusation is what he called "popular religion". Smith notices that, in the *Enquiry,* true religion is declared "a species of philosophy" (E, 106). What is not immediately obvious, and what Smith tries to explain, is why or how true religion can be a form of philosophy. He reminds us that although Hume constantly attacked the traditional concept of religion and God, he still retains these two words in a special and philosophical meaning.

In the *Dialogues*, Philo presents various systems of cosmology, indicating that Cleanthes' design argument is only one of many hypotheses concerning the ultimate source of the universe. Thus, as Smith shows, Hume accepts a concept of "God" or "religion" as a philosophical assumption for the interpretation of the origin of nature.

Accordingly, with the reference to true religion in the *Dialogues*, Smith argues that Hume gives "a virtual denial" to the existence of the Divine, and does not believe in its moral attributes. Smith draws his conclusions as follows:

> What he called 'true religion' is, as we find, little more than a repudiation of all superstition, alike in belief and in practice […] Hume's attitude to true religion can therefore be summed up in the threefold thesis: (1) that it consists exclusively in intellectual assert to the 'somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition', 'God exists'; (2) that the 'God' here affirmed is not God as ordinary understood; and (3) as a corollary from (1) and (2), that religion ought not to have, and when 'true' and 'genuine' does not have, any influence on human conduct -beyond, that is to say, its intellectual effects, as rendering the mind immune to superstition and fanaticism (Smith, 20-24).

This reading actually suggests that Hume's true religion, as a purely philosophical term, simply intends to demonstrate how ridiculous all existing religions are. According to this understanding, Hume is better regarded as an atheist who wishes nothing but the downfall of ordinary religion.

One of the most famous atheists in the last decades in Britain is A. Flew, who wrote a great number of works criticizing theism.[21] It is natural for him to view Hume, the great critic of religion, as his precursor. Unlike Smith who admits that Hume has a special and vague notion of God, Flew simply regards Hume as an atheist, whose career in religious enquiry seeks to destroy the existing religions of his day. Flew concludes his deconstructive reading of Hume's reference to true religion as follows:

---

[21] It is remarkable that Flew withdraws his atheistic standpoint and confesses in the last years of his life that he believes the existence of a God. This *volte-face* is decisively made in his *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed his Mind* (Flew, 2008).

David Hume (1711-1776) was a complete unbeliever, the first major thinker of the modern period to be through and through secular, this-worldly, and man-centered. He was always too prudent, too tactful in his concern to preserve smooth relations with his many friends among the Moderate faction of the Scottish clergy […] The most, however, that Hume was prepared positively to affirm was the bare existence of a Deity, about the essential nature of which nothing whatever can be known; and which could, surely, not be identified as an entity separate and distinct from the Universe itself. The "true religion", to which Hume professed his devotion, was persuasively defined to exclude all actually religious belief and practice. For he made no bones about his disbeliefs in both human immortality and ant kind of Divine interventions, miraculous of otherwise, in the ordinary course of life (Flew, 1999, vii).

Likewise, the Chinese scholar X.L. Zhou asserts that there are two approaches to understanding the meaning of Hume's true religion: either Hume intends to disprove all religions and thus true religion is only a tactic for attacking false or ordinary religion, or he indeed wants to establish a new, substantial kind of religion, within which nothing is left except a "philosophical assent" to the proposition "God exists". "No matter what ways we would take", says Zhou, "what is left when he deprives true religion of all religious implications except a philosophical approval? Human nature, only the philosophy of human nature is left!" (Zhou, 363-364). Slight differences between Smith's and Zhou's accounts can be discerned: while the former simplifies Hume's true religion as an entirely philosophical expression, the latter suggests that he intends to reduce all religions to human nature with the specific category of true religion.

The reconciliatory reading treats true religion as a tool that serves Hume's infamous criticism of religions. Like the previous negative readings, this kind of interpretation does not regard Philo's true religion as a substantial term. It is true that it fits well with the mainstream understanding of Hume's philosophy of religion. Yet the arguments of this reading are not unquestionable. Whether such a barren idea could serve as an effective tool to destroy existing religions as Smith, Flew and Zhou propose is doubtful. Usually, the best way for a philosopher to turn down a theoretical system is to build another system against it. As Hume puts it in the introduction to the *Treatise*, "nothing is more usual and more natural for those, who pretend to discover anything new to the world in philosophy and the sciences, than to insinuate the praises of their own systems, by decrying all those, which have been advanced before them" (T, 7). In this sense, even if true religion is a deconstructive tool, it might not be effective.

Now, let us summarize the features and common difficulties of the tactic-based readings. The first common point of these interpretations is that they all, more or less, ignore Cleanthes' statements of true religion. This is because they assume that

Cleanthes' statements are not Hume's own views (e.g. Smith, 1947, 22). The second feature of the negative readings is that they all, implicitly or explicitly, regard Hume as an atheist who wishes the demise of religion. But, as a matter of fact, Hume is reluctant to call himself an atheist. When he visited Paris, he told his friends that he did not believe that there were genuine atheists (Mossner, 1970, 483). Hume also disagreed with the *Philosophes* of France on their optimistic perspective that religion will soon wither away. Lastly, most tactic-based readings, except O'Connor's, are external interpretations, which base their understandings of Philo's true religion mainly, or merely, on historical contexts rather than the texts themselves.

1.5 Hume's Sincerity: A Demonstration

Given the fact that Hume is well-known as a sceptic and a critic of traditional theology, and given the pressure he received from religious authorities, it is natural and understandable for the negative readings to conclude that his true religion is a necessary trick or tactic. But upon a closer consideration, this conclusion is arguable and some evidence, both internal and external, shows that it is highly likely that Hume is serious about what he says on this topic. My arguments for Hume's veneration for true religion are as follows:

1. While his disappointment with traditional theology is apparent, Hume never clearly denies the possibility of the existence of the Divine. After criticizing the problems within natural theology, Philo points out that a designer of the world still remains a low probability and that there could be a "remote resemblance" between God and human intelligence (D, 101). In several places, Philo has made it clear that he has no problem with the existence of God - only with his nature. His conclusive comments on our probable knowledge of the divine and its nature are as follows:

   > Nothing exists without a cause; and the original cause of this universe (whatever it be) we call God; and piously ascribe to him every species of perfection. Whoever scruples this fundamental truth deserves every punishment, which can be inflicted among philosophers, to wit, the greatest ridicule, contempt, and disapprobation. But as all perfection is entirely relative, we ought never to imagine, that we comprehend the attributes of this divine being, or to suppose, that his perfections have any analogy or likeness to the perfections of a human creature. Wisdom, thought, design, knowledge; these we justly ascribe to him; because these words are honourable among men, and we have no other language or other conceptions, by which we can express our adoration of him (D, 18-19).

   In the NHR, Hume also presents that the idea of a supreme designer is

philosophically acceptable (NHR, 14, 53). These comments, if we take it seriously, give me an impression that although the design argument contains various difficulties, it is not an entire implausible hypothesis. Concerning revealed religion, Hume harshly attacks religious miracles, which are commonly seen as the result of the intervention of a supernatural God. Although Hume sees many religious miracles as the results of mere credulity and delusion, a few scholars argue that his position is not that religious miracles are impossible in empiric probability (cf. Pritchard and Richmond, 2012, 227-244) or that they are incoherent in logic (Millican, 2011, 15). Rather, Hume seems only to show that no miracle could support a "system of religion". In other words, his intention is only to indicate that the testimony of religious miracles is usually too weak to be the foundation of religion.[22]

Hume identifies himself as a moderate sceptic rather than an atheist (especially a radical one). Moderate or "mitigated" scepticism is unlikely to refute the possibility of religion as a whole, otherwise it would slip into radical atheism. In his *Early Memoranda*, Hume distinguishes between three classes of atheists: (1) those who deny the existence of a God, such as Diagoras and Theodorus; (2) Those who deny a providence, such as the Epicureans and the Ionic Sect; (3) those who deny the free will of the Deity, such as Aristotle and the Stoics. It is noticeable that throughout his texts, Hume never identifies himself as any of these types of atheists. [23]

D. Fergusson also suggests that Hume's position in religion is more nuanced than that of so-called new atheists, whose slogan is "there is probably no God, now stop worrying and enjoy your life" (Fergusson, 2013, 82).[24] Like the new atheists, Hume criticizes the detrimental social consequences of religion. But unlike them, he does not explicitly say that there is probably no God, or that atheism is better than theism in practice. In the following chapters, I shall argue that Hume's position might be as follows: there is probably a God, but, in order to make such a notion beneficial, we need to limit theology and to regulate public worship. Hume's moderate scepticism

---

[22] A detailed analysis of Hume's arguments on miracles would beyond the scope of the dissertation. A considerable amount of literature has emerged on this topic. The book-length work against Hume's arguments on religious miracles is J. Earman's *Hume's Abject Failure* (Earman, 2000), and a systematic response to Earman is R.J. Fogelin's *A Defence of Hume on Miracles* (Fogelin, 2003).
[23] The distinction of three types of atheists originates from Plato and it also appears in one of Hume's letters (L, I, 50).
[24] "New atheism" is a label to describe a group of thinkers and writers in the 21st century, led by the so-called "four horsemen" (S. Harris, R. Dawkins, C. Hitchens and D. Dennett), who advocate the view that we shall clearly embrace reason and science while abandoning any teachings of superstition, religion and other irrational systems, which are not only groundless but also harmful.

leaves room for the possibility of religion, and for discussion of a true or sound form of religion.

2. Hume refers to true religion several times, not only in the *Dialogues* but also in other writings and even in his correspondence, implying his seriousness on this issue. In the *Dialogues*, true religion and similar terms appear more than ten times. Most of them are presented by Philo in the final section, but one fact most commentators have overlooked is that the term "true religion" is first offered by Cleanthes in the last paragraph of part 1:

> It is very natural, said Cleanthes, for men to embrace those principles, by which they find they can best defend their doctrines; nor need we have any recourse to priestcraft to account for so reasonable an expedient. And surely, nothing can afford a stronger presumption, that any set of principles are true, and ought to be embraced, than to observe, that they tend to the confirmation of true religion, and serve to confound the cavils of atheists, libertines, and freethinkers of all denominations (D, 16).

According to my reading, this paragraph indicates that the intention of the conversations between Philo, Cleanthes and Demea is to explore whether there are true principles of religion that are suitable to teach the youth. They all agree that religion is so important a subject that it should be taught at an early age, although they diverge on which are the proper tenets of religious education. For Demea, "to season their minds with early piety" is his "chief care" (D, 7); for Cleanthes, his interest is refuting scepticism and searching for "certainty" and "evidence" for theology in experience (D, 10); for Philo, his intention is to "erect religious faith on philosophical scepticism" (D, 8) or to stress that a moderate scepticism is always necessary for true religious beliefs (D, 102). If this reading is correct, then the *Dialogues* is a textbook for the youth (exemplified by Pamphilus and Hermippus) on the topic of religion and Demea, Cleanthes and Philo are mentors who searching for true religious principles (i.e. true religion) that are suitable for religious education. As we have said, both Philo and Cleanthes provide their ideal of true religion in the last section of the *Dialogues.* Demea seems to have no a concept of true religion. Or, maybe his departure in the penultimate part of the *Dialogues* gives him no chance to clarify his understanding of true religion. In any case, from the central topics set in part 1 of the *Dialogues*, the aim of the trio is to explore a potential type of true religion through their conversations.

As the narration of the *Dialogues* takes the form of dialogue, scholars sometimes have doubts about whether Philo is genuine on certain statements or whether Cleanthes is the voice of Hume in his statements of the proper office of true religion. However, one cannot deny that true religion or similar terms also appear in many of Hume's texts, including *The History of England* (H, III, 135-136), The *Natural History of Religion* (NHR, 14, 53), The *Enquiry* (E hereafter, 106) and the essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" (SE, 38). Even in his private letters, Hume provided similar statements, saying that he objects to "Devotion & Prayer & indeed to everything we commonly call religion, except the Practice of Morality, and the Assent of the Understanding to the proposition that God exists" (NL, 12). This evidence strongly suggests that true religion is not an isolated concept in the *Dialogues*, but an ideal that Hume holds throughout all of his writings.

3. It is noticeable that Hume's usage of terminology on true religion is diverse, suggesting that true religion contains various dimensions. Besides the term "true", he also stresses that it is a type of religion or theism, which is "pure" (D, 95; NHR, 15-16), "genuine" (Dialogues, 99; HNR, 14, 53), and "philosophical" (D, 95, 98, 101; Enquiry, 106). The diversity of terminology, against the assertions of the negative interpretations, suggests that Hume's true religion might have different aspects.

    Similarly, it is of great significance that Hume's terminology on the opposite concept of religion also varies: "false religion" (D, 99; SE, 38, 39, 41, 315), "vulgar superstition" (D, 89, 94, 95, 97; NHR, 31,) and "the corruption of religion" (SE, 38). This also demonstrates that there are multiple aspects in Hume's accounts of both the true and false religion. The diversity of Hume's use of terminology on this topic might suggest that his true religion is "something" rather than "nothing".

4. The distinction between "true" and "false" can be commonly found in Hume's texts. Apart from the true and false religion, Hume also distinguishes "true philosophy" and "false philosophy", "true scepticism" and "false scepticism", suggesting that it is natural for him to apply the same distinction on the subject of religion. At the very beginning of the *Enquiry*, Hume tells us that there are two types of philosophy, each with its advantages and disadvantages. The "easy and obvious philosophy" is usually popular and welcoming as people think it is easier

to understand and more useful. Taking an easy and familiar form, this kind of philosophy fits well with our imagination and affection. Conversely, the "accurate and abstruse philosophy" is generally too abstract and sophisticated for ordinary people, who have little leisure time to engage themselves in profound philosophical or scientific enquiry, and find the principles advanced by abstract philosophers too distant from common sense and daily things. Thus, the majority of people is inclined to regard this academic philosophy as useless and vague. However, popular philosophy, though more accessible, contains no true principles and thus cannot promote our knowledge and enhance the understanding of the human race. Academic philosophy, though difficult and elusive, plays a key role as a stepping-stone for our progress of human understanding. It is certainly true that Hume is disappointed with both types of philosophy. Especially, he wants to improve the academic philosophy, which he thinks is always struggling with remote hypotheses and endless disputes without ever achieving authentic progress. Thus, Hume expects that a revision of academic philosophy can be true philosophy:

> The only method of freeing learning, at once, from these abstruse questions, is to enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and shew, from an exact analysis of its powers and capacity, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects. We must submit to this fatigue, in order to live at ease ever after: And must cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate. Indolence, which, to some persons, affords a safeguard against this deceitful philosophy, is, with others, overbalanced by curiosity; and despair, which, at some moments, prevails, may give place afterwards to sanguine hopes and expectations. Accurate and just reasoning is the only catholic remedy, fitted for all persons and all dispositions; and is alone able to subvert that abstruse philosophy and metaphysical jargon, which, being mixed up with popular superstition, renders it in a manner impenetrable to careless reasoners, and gives it the air of science and wisdom (E, 8).

Since false philosophy has already cheated people with unjustified hypotheses and has sometimes even allied with superstition, it is essential for Hume to have feasible and effective approaches to true philosophy. Taking Newton's system as the model, Hume conceives of true philosophy as delicate and cautious experimental reasoning, which contains as few hypotheses as possible. As he comments in the *History of England*, the "cautious" and "secure" method of Boyle and Newton is the only road to true philosophy (H, VI, 541).

When it comes to scepticism, Hume also provides a similar distinction. In the last section of Book One of the *Treatise*, as well as in the closing section of the *Enquiry*, Hume refers to two kinds of scepticism: the false or excessive

scepticism as exemplified by Cartesian and Pyrrhonic Scepticism and Hume's moderate form of scepticism (E, 109-120; T, 289-427).[25] While the false or radical form of scepticism is harmful in practice and useless in theory, true and moderate scepticism is beneficial to both spheres.[26] Consequently, Hume suggests that "the sceptic, therefore, had better keep within his proper sphere, and display those philosophical objections, which arise from more profound researches" (E, 11).

Similar to the distinction concerning philosophy and scepticism, I argue that Hume wished to separate true religion from many false forms. Just as Hume seriously intends to remedy the illusions, immaturity and errors in philosophical reasoning, he also wants to overcome the oddities, dangers, superstitions, fanaticism, chaos and groundlessness of existing religion and traditional theology, hoping for a wholesome form of religious believing. If Hume's use of "true" and "false" on philosophical topics is sincere (as seems to be accepted by Humean scholars so far), it is natural for him to also apply the same distinction in the sphere of religion.

5. Exploring a type of true religion is a common theme in the republic of letters in the Enlightenment. It is remarkable that "true religion" appears in many authors of the Enlightenment: Kant in his *Religion within the bounds of Bare Reason* (Kant, 2009, 118, 146, 168); Locke in the beginning of *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Locke, 1998, 3, 6, 8, 22, 26); Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 1998, 38, 78); and Rousseau in the "confession of faith" of the *Emile* (Rousseau, 1979, 381). Besides these classical philosophers, "true religion" also appears in the writings of representatives of British deism, such as *Christianity as Old as the Creation* by M. Tindal (Tindal, 1730, 218) and J. Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* (Toland, 1702, I). Simultaneously, Hume's contemporary and a moderate Scottish clergyman, W. Robertson, claims that true religion is the product of reason and science, which is the way to reach supreme perfection in

---

[25] Hume's reading of Pyrrho might not be exactly correct and his skeptical standpoint seems to me close to Pyrrho's. For more comments on this point, see section 4.5
[26] For a deeper analysis of Hume's distinction between "true" and "false" on philosophy and scepticism, see D.C. Ainsile's *Hume's True Scepticism* (Ainsile, 2015), D.W. Livingston's paper "The First Conservative: David Hume Uncovered the Roots of Revolution in False Philosophy" (Livingston, 2011, 32-37), as well as J. Green's paper "Hume's 'False Philosophy' and the Reflections of Common Life" (Green, 2010, 108-117).

this age of progress (Robertson, 1794, 303). [27]

Moreover, as G. Graham notices, "true religion" can also be commonly found in the writings of other Scottish contemporaries of Hume, such as the works of A. Smith (the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*), Lord Kames (the *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* and the *Sketches of the History of Man*) and T. Reid (some unpublished lectures on theology) (Graham, 2016, 350). A reasonable explanation for this phenomenon is that with the rise of science and philosophy in early modern Europe, many philosophers and theologians rethought the social role and the philosophical basis of religion. With this observation in mind, it is legitimate to say that Hume's true religion might also be part of this tendency.

Possible objections: one might object that Hume's sincere usage of "true" and "false" in philosophy and scepticism does not mean that his usage of the same terms in religion is also genuine; similarly, one may also argue that the wide use of "true religion" in the writers of the Enlightenment does not necessarily entail that Hume's true religion is part of this tendency. Most importantly, one might say that the variety of terminology on true religion in multiple works by Hume does not decisively demonstrate his sincerity, as it is still possible that he is playing a trick on all occasions when he refers to this term. I admit that these assumptions are still possible. But my thesis is not that the negative reading is entirely wrong but that, with the five above-mentioned arguments in mind, it is more likely that Hume is serious about what he called "true religion".

1.6 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I considered whether Hume is serious about what he says on true religion and investigated the arguments as well as the difficulties of the negative readings, showing that true religion is likely to be Hume's own idea.

The first part of this chapter examined three types of negative readings: the ironical reading (exemplified by Mossner and Price), the reconciliatory reading (exemplified

---

[27] I will present the original texts of their statements on true religion in section 7.3.

by Millican, O'Connor, and Penelhum) and the deconstructive reading (exemplified by Smith, Flew and Zhou). The reconciliatory readings were further divided into three types: the reconciliation between Hume and the orthodox; the reconciliation between Philo and Cleanthes; and the reconciliation between Hume and the moderates. Throughout his texts, Hume never clearly says that true religion is merely a temporary tactic, no matter ironical, reconciliatory or deconstructive. As the *Dialogues* was published posthumously, it is questionable to say that Hume still worried about the possible persecutions from the orthodox and his friendship with the moderates. The negative readings also largely, if not completely, ignore what Cleanthes says about true religion in the *Dialogues.* Although this set of readings is an easy way to root out the apparent incompatibility between true religion and Hume's infamous scepticism, as well as his constant attacks on religion, it is, after all, an external interpretation, which bases its explanations and conclusions mainly on the historical background rather than the internal evidence within the text itself.

The second part of this chapter demonstrated Hume's seriousness on true religion. Five arguments were provided to support Hume's sincerity on this specific category: that Hume's moderate scepticism never clearly denies the possibility of the Deity (which leaves room for his discussion on true religion); that true religion appears in many of Hume's writings and even in his private letters; that true religion in Hume's writings is expressed in various terms, such as "genuine", "pure" and "philosophical"; that the distinction of "true" and "false" is a common distinction in Hume's works; and that true religion is widely found in authors of the Enlightenment, implying that exploring a certain type of proper religion is a common theme in early modern Europe.

The conclusion of this chapter is not that the negative readings are impossible, but that in light of the analyses above, true religion is highly likely to be Hume's genuine ideal. If this is true, then Hume's philosophy of religion needs to be reconsidered and many puzzles regarding his true religion need to be explained, which will be the contents of the following chapters.

What is True? The Theistic Readings and their Limitations

But before there can be any profitable discussion of the religious value of what Hume calls "true religion", we must have a clear picture of what he meant by it. This is not easy to arrive at because Hume does not discuss the notion of true religion in any depth in any one place.

——Livingston, "Hume's concept of true religion", in *In Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, p. 34.

2.1 Introduction

Contrary to the negative readings, which judge the tenet of Hume's true religion to be an utterly tactical notion, some commentators have reconsidered it seriously in recent decades, proclaiming that Hume's true religion is not an empty concept. We can call this type of interpretation the *positive reading*. In the positive reading camp, most hold that Hume's true religion points to a special type of theism, which can be called the *theistic reading*.[28] The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the arguments as well as the limitations of the theistic reading.

I divide the theistic readings into two categories: the *weak theistic reading* and the *strong theistic reading*. The former argues that the religiousness within Hume's true religion is very limited, while the latter assumes that Hume advocates a robust theism with this notion. I will examine their arguments in turn, showing that the weak theistic reading has some insights, while the strong theistic reading is largely misleading.

2.2 The Weak Theistic Readings

Let us consider the weak theistic readings first. It is remarkable that, on several occasions, Hume has affirmed the existence of a deity. In the *Dialogues*, the obviousness of the existence of God is first stated by the recorder of the conversations, Pamphilus (D, 4). Then, it is repeated by Demea in Part 2, followed

---

[28] Note that not every positive reading is theistic, however. D. Garret has illuminated Hume's true religion as an "epistemological probability" (Garret, 2012, 199-220), while G. Graham and D. Ferguson explore this concept in the context of Scottish Enlightenment (Graham, 2016, 345-360; Ferguson, 2013, 69-85). Garret's arguments are considered in 4.4, while Graham's and Ferguson's theses are presented in 7.3 and 1.5 respectively.

by Philo's instant approval: "the question can never be concerning the being but only the nature of the deity" (D, 18). Similarly, at the very beginning of the *NHR*, Hume asserts that the existence of an intelligent author of the universe is clearly demonstrated by the "whole frame of nature" (NHR, 14). These claims, together with Philo's confession in part 12 of the *Dialogues*, lay the foundation for the weak theistic readings, which regard Hume's true religion as a thin form of theism. Their opinions, however, diverge on how thin Hume's theism is and how to define it. To my knowledge, the weak theistic readings include: the "attenuated deism" of J.C.A. Gaskin, the "minimal deism" of W.L. Sessions and T. Penelhum, the "philosophical theism" of D.W. Livingston and T.S. Yoder, the "aesthetic theism" of J. Immerwahr and the "basic theism" of A. Willis.

A. Gaskin's "Attenuated Deism"

Gaskin's *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* provides an overall examination of Hume's thoughts on religion and has become a must-read for scholars and students who work on Hume's philosophy of religion. He reads Hume's final position on religion as an "attenuated deism", which I will now examine.

Similar to the negative readings, Gaskin also believes that Hume's hostility to religion is beyond any doubt, and that his critique of natural religion is devastating. But Gaskin does not consider Hume to be an atheist:

> Thus I conclude that Philo is Hume and that Philo does challenge the argument for design. But his challenge does not affirm atheism. Instead it leaves open a deistic possibility which falls short of any sort of religiously significant affirmation: belief in god in the sense of the term which Philo allows at the end of the *Dialogues* would carry no duty, invite no action, allow no inference, and involve no devotion (Gaskin, 1995, 63).

Key to this passage is that Philo's true religion is a purely philosophical position that has little impact on individual and social life. Gaskin's conclusion relies on the examination of Hume's criticism of religion and his accounts of natural beliefs. He disagrees with J. Noxon, who sees Hume as an agnostic who "has left his readers to wonder about his personal convictions on the greatest questions of religion" (Noxon, 1964, 248). For, Gaskin, Hume is theoretically and personally "almost wholly critical of almost every aspect of religion" (ibid, 56). Although Hume's disdain of all existing religions and theologies is apparent, God still survives as a source of the regularities

of nature in his philosophy.

The central point Gaskin makes concerning Philo's bland belief in God is that it is a reasonable belief and not a natural belief. To begin with, Gaskin considers what kind of beliefs could be defined as natural in Hume's texts. In his *Treatise*, Hume launches his theoretical scepticism toward various beliefs that are commonly seen as real or substantial, such as the beliefs of causation, self and the external world. But meanwhile, as N.K. Smith famously shows, Hume points out that we human beings have a strong inclination to believe those ideas, although they lack rational foundations. It is nature, not reason, that forms the basis of our daily beliefs, which are indispensable for normal living and action. In this sense, compared to philosophical justification, natural properties provide another explanation or justification for sustaining these beliefs.

But, according to Gaskin, religious beliefs are not "natural" in Hume's philosophy. His observation is that there are four criteria in Hume's accounts of natural beliefs: (1) a natural belief must be an ordinary belief in common life; (2) a natural belief has no rational basis; (3) it must be unavoidable and very necessary for our daily life; (4) it must be universally held (Gaskin, 1978, 121-122). It is true that a religious belief is an essential factor for many individuals, but for some, a religious belief is not indispensable. Therefore, according to criteria (1) and (2), religious beliefs can be natural, but points (3) and (4) block that possibility.

Now, we have Gaskin's overview of his understanding of Hume's final stance on religion: he not only highlights that Hume's critique of religion is fatal to the design argument but also demonstrates that religious beliefs are not natural beliefs. Eventually, the argument from design remains a thin and vestigial deism in Philo's confession, which contains little religiousness and social influence:

> I shall try to show that Hume's critique as a whole moves steadily towards a consistent position which is short of atheism but has chilling consequences for personal religion. This position is that a vestigial design argument establishes a weak probability that natural order originates in the activity of something with intelligence remotely analogous to our own. This feeble rational datum is united with an insistent feeling in most of us that natural order springs from a designer. When our philosophical assent to the existence of this designer has been given (that is to say our assent qualified by the exercise of mitigated scepticism) we recognise that it has no moral claim upon us, nor we upon it. I call this position 'attenuated deism' (Gaskin, 1978, 6-7).

Thus, Philo's true religion, his final position on religion, is still a deistic standpoint,

which is based on reason instead of our feeling or nature. However, the thesis that a religious belief is not natural is controversial. Among Gaskin's critics, the most influential is K.E. Yandell, and the most recent is C.M. Lorkowski. Although the two commentators diverge from Gaskin at this point, they largely share his accounts of Hume's final position on natural religion.

Yandell's book *Hume's Inexplicable Mystery: His Views on Religion* aims to provide a competing interpretation to Gaskin's assertion, proclaiming that Gaskin's thesis that religious belief is not natural is highly misleading. Based on his reading of the NHR, Yandell wants to explain why religion, which has no rational evidence to support, can still widely spread in the world.

In the NHR, Hume presents that religion initially stems from our passions instead of reason, indicating that natural propensities are the true origin of religion. Contrary to Gaskin, Yandell suggests that the key reason why religious beliefs are widely (though not universally) held is that they have root in our natural propensities. Yandell separates natural propensities of religious beliefs to be two categories: the first-order propensities and the second-order propensities.

What Yandell called first-order natural propensities in terms of religion include the belief in an invisible power, the projection of our understanding to that power, and the description of the infinite power as intelligent and perfect etc. (Yandell, 1990, 11). These inclinations are believed to be basic to human nature. The second-order propensities, however, require reflections, which "leads into a system that gives them [those who are capable of philosophical reasoning] some satisfaction" (NHR, 20) and thus drives us "from idolatry to theism" (NHR, 34). Yandell points out that compared to the primary propensities, although the secondary propensities are not universally found among us, they are still part of human nature.

Having clarified these two kinds of natural propensities of religious beliefs, Yandell moves on to explain the puzzling confession of Philo in part 12 of the *Dialogues*. Although his standpoint on the nature of religious belief in Hume's philosophy is starkly different from Gaskin's, his comments on Philo's confession are actually quite similar:

> Hume ascribes belief in invisible, intelligent power as cause of natural order to a propensity which

he describes as "universal but "secondary". It is efficacious – called into effect by experience of the natural order-in almost everyone. In some, it leads to polytheism, in others to monotheism, in each case in a variety of formulations and versions. It is clear that the so-called theism to which secondary propensity is said to lead as a very thin theism. Omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence are not in view; neither is creation or providence. The 'power' is not Judge or Savior. No revelation, and no action in history, is ascribed to this power. Morality is not based on appeal to this power's nature or to its will. Even a deist deity who creates a world and leaves it alone is religiously 'thicker' than the power this propensity posits. So the use of "theism" for the view in question is clearly challengeable, although I shall retain it for sheer convenience (Yandell, 1990, 25).

This is Yandell's version of "attenuated deism", though he might not be happy to accept this definition from his rival. Similar to Yandell, Lorkowski tries to convince us that Gaskin's criteria for natural belief are too strict and that with Hume's weaker concept of natural belief, religious beliefs could be appropriately considered as natural beliefs.[29] Unlike Yandell, who concentrates his discussion on the NHR, Lorkowski explores Hume's theory of natural belief based on the *Treatise*, especially Books Two and Three.

Lorkowski takes Hume's accounts of ethics as his example, showing that although the propensity of self-love is universally found in human nature, Hume still allows the propensity of fellow-feeling to be a common tendency in human beings. Thus, the propensity of fellow-feeling is a natural belief in Hume's accounts, although it does not meet the criteria (3) and (4) set by Gaskin. Lorkowski also distinguishes two levels of natural belief: the first is a universal instinct of physical or psychological propensities, whereas the second is a *weaker* inclination that does not necessarily have roots in our psychological nature but is still commonly held. In order to ascribe religious belief as natural, Lorkowski revises Gaskin's criteria (3) and (4):

Gaskin's criteria for natural belief are therefore accurate in some cases, i.e. those that meet the level of psychological necessity, but they fail to capture the second level, psychological propensity, in which it is the propensity to believe, and not the belief itself, that is universal. We now see that, while Gaskin's first two criteria will still hold for them, we must reject (3) and qualify (4) so that it is only the propensity for their belief that is universal. Criterion (3) would then be replaced with something weaker, something to the effect that the beliefs are very important to living in the world, but not absolutely necessary in cases of mere propensity (Lorkowski, 2014, 66).

Although Yandell and Lorkowski have an opposite view to Gaskin on whether a religious belief is natural, their overall accounts of Philo's theism contain little difference. They agree that Philo's theism is a type of design argument and that it has little relevance to the traditional concept of God as well as to morality.

---

[29] Though Lorkowski does not refer to Yandell, their interpretations of two kinds of natural belief are similar.

B. Penelhum and Sessions: "Minimal Deism"

We have mentioned that Penelhum changes his mind three times on the topic of Philo's true religion: in his early works, he believes that Philo's confession actually accepted a minimal type of theism, which was shared with the moderates (Penelhum, 1975, 163-170 and 2000, 196-200); in his later paper, he revises his opinions, claiming that Philo's true religion is a reconciliation to the moderates and that Hume is, in fact, a "closet atheist" (Penelhum, 2011, 323-337); more recently, he amends his view again, saying that the reconciliation between Hume and the moderates was not in the *Dialogues* but in his life (Penelhum, 2012, 206-211). As I have examined his later views on this topic, I can now consider his early view concerning Philo's minimal deism.

Penelhum's deistic reading of Philo's true religion dates to his book *Hume* in 1975, and in 2000 he provides further explanation as to his standpoint in the *Themes in Hume*.[30] In *Hume*, Penelhum believes that Hume's position in the *Dialogues* is not wholly negative. At this stage, his ideas on this topic seem to be not very advanced as he has little space to clarify why Hume holds a certain type of deism or how to describe it. He simply writes that "he [i.e. Hume] does grudgingly come to accept some part of the deistic position […] How positive this is I am not sure at all" (Penelhum, 1975, 166).

Moving to *Themes in Hume*, Penelhum has more confidence in his judgement. In this work, Hume's final conclusion in the *Dialogues* is regarded as a modification of his scepticism. Unlike the atheistic readings, Penelhum confesses that "I incline to view that these considerations show Philo (that is, Hume) to be genuine in his acceptance of this conclusion of natural theology, in part because it does not seem to matter whether one accepts it or not" (Penelhum, 2000, 197). The premise of natural theology, Penelhum says, is shared with Cleanthes who represents the moderates in the Church of Scotland.

In part 1 of the *Dialogues*, Philo's scepticism is stated to be "careless" (D, 5) and in the last part, Philo confesses that his preceding speeches on natural religion are

---

[30] The contents of these two books are almost the same, but in the later work Penelhum adds further comments that were developed over a number of years.

"less cautious" due to his "love of singular arguments" (D, 89). Unlike Mossner, who views those statements as ironies, Penelhum takes them seriously. For him, Philo's attacks on natural religion are radical and are not in accordance with Hume's moderate scepticism and thus, require serious revision. Philo's confession of theism in the conclusive part of the *Dialogues* is a sincere amendment to his over-strict criticism of natural religion. According to this reading, Philo's true religion is a reasonable result of Hume's modification of Philo's less cautious and radical criticism of religion in the first eleven parts of the *Dialogues*.

Penelhum also considers how far Philo revises his scepticism in the context of Hume's account of common life. In the *Enquiry*, after revealing the weakness of philosophical inference, Hume famously declares that it is custom, not reason, that is the great guide of life (E, 32). He treats common life as an effective remedy for the feebleness and arrogance of reason, which, for Penelhum, is another reason for Hume to restrict Philo's scepticism. Penelhum also mentions that Philo's deism may stem from a pragmatic concern, that is, having a "philosophical assent" to the harmless deistic principle is better than struggling between a status of indecision and believing in false religion (Penelhum, 2000, 200-201).

Penelhum's accounts of Philo's confession are multiple: he views it as Hume's modification of Philo's excessive scepticism and believes that this modification originates from Hume's consideration of the limit of human reason as well as the benefits of common life. Penelhum concludes his consideration on this topic as follows:

> I suggest that the minimal deism of Part XII is accepted by Philo as the inescapable conclusion of an argument which he has shown, and knows he has shown, to be a complete philosophical failure – except in the one respect that when we encounter it we cannot help to its conclusion! In this respect minimal deism is like natural beliefs: we can be momentarily disturbed by skeptical objections, but not seriously shaken from holding it (Penelhum, 2000, 210).

Similar to Penelhum, Sessions also views Hume's true religion as a minimal deism. Differing from commentators who consider Hume's final position on religion against the historical backdrop, Sessions considers it in the text of *Dialogues* alone. The disadvantage of external readings, as Sessions observes, is that in interpreting the puzzles of the *Dialogues*, they tend to distrust what Hume says in the raw text. As a remedy, Sessions' internal reading pursues a unified explanation within the text and assumes that the text of the *Dialogues* is more informative and more consistent than

we commonly suppose.

His book is entitled "*Reading Hume's Dialogues: A Veneration for True Religion*". As the title suggests, it is a book-length reading on the *Dialogues,* and as the subtitle suggests, Sessions views true religion as the core purpose of the whole *Dialogues*. He is conscious of the fact that both Philo and Cleanthes have an endorsement of true religion. Agreeing on the existence of God, according to Sessions' reading, Philo's and Cleanthes' true religion differ merely on the degree to which the designer of the universe can be understood by reason. On one hand, Philo insists that true religion is only applied to a few people who have excellent philosophical training while seeing existing religions in the world to be detrimental. On the other side, Cleanthes tries to show that the design argument is apparent to everyone.

Sessions provides five arguments to explain why a minimal deism is acceptable for Philo: (1) human beings have a universal tendency to believe in teleology; (2) this teleological sense is high for us in human affairs; (3) there is an inclination to extend the teleological sense from human affairs to natural objects; (4) we tend to trust our teleological sense and its conclusions even if they have no basis in reason; (5) the premise of deism, i.e. there is a God who is the designer of the universe, is a result of this teleological sense and if the God has inserted some codes or signs in nature, then the design from God can possibly be recognized (Sessions, 2002, 214-215). The following is Sessions' conclusion:

> So it is not that Philo lacks a natural teleological sense or that in using this sense he perceives no purpose in the world. When he is not playing the role of skeptic, Philo is neither a complete atheist nor a pure naturalist but rather a natural theist. But what kind of God does Philo discern? Philo thinks such purpose as he can make out bears scant resemblance to human purpose (it is barely intelligible to us) and is in fact considerably closer to human indifference than to human benevolence (it does not seem at all friendly toward us). His theism therefore is a deism that is extremely "attenuated," "minimal," or even "anaemic" (Sessions, 2002, 215-216).

C. Livingston and Yoder: "Philosophical Theism"

One feature of Philo's confession of theism is that true religion is "a species of philosophy" that only very few philosophers are capable of (D, 98). This claim is repeated by Hume in section 11 of the *Enquiry* (E, 106). The "philosophical" feature of Philo's true religion is highlighted by D.W. Livingston and T.S. Yoder, who view it as a philosophical theism. Further, they contend that the content of Philo's true

religion is roughly equivalent to Hume's "true philosophy". Livingston's interpretation is based on Hume's philosophy of common life whilst Yoder presents that there is a general providence in Hume's philosophical concept of God.

Livingston provides a simple parallel: Hume's true religion is his true philosophy and Hume's false religion is his false philosophy. To understand Livingston's ideas on this topic, we need to consider Hume's distinction between true philosophy and false philosophy. In the first section of the *Enquiry*, Hume features true philosophy as a "cautious", "accurate", "experimental" philosophy (E, 5-11). In the *History*, he views the natural philosophy of Newton and Boyle as the model of true philosophy (H, VI, 541). Hume's idea of true philosophy is closely connected with common life. As he puts it, "philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected" (E, 118). This statement can be seen as his definition of true philosophy. Hume reminds men of letters that both philosophical and theological enquiry shall not be detached from common life:

> What we imagine to be a superior perfection, may really be a defect. Or were it ever so much a perfection, the ascribing of it to the Supreme Being, where it appears not to have been really exerted, to the full, in his works, savours more of flattery and panegyric, than of just reasoning and sound philosophy. All the philosophy, therefore, in the world, and all the religion, which is nothing but a species of philosophy, will never be able to carry us beyond the usual course of experience, or give us measures of conduct and behaviour different from those which are furnished by reflections on common life (E, 106).

Hume's statements concerning the close relation of philosophy to common life form the grounds for Livingston's interpretation of Hume's true religion. What Hume has said is that true philosophy is an experimental enquiry, which keeps a moderate association with common life. What he did not clearly say is what factors lead to false philosophy and false religion, which is the work Livingston undertook. According to Livingston's enquiry, philosophy is governed by two principles: the ultimacy principle and the autonomy principle. The former is a principle that requires the understanding of things in the light of the ultimate substance, while the latter is a principle that demands philosophy to be a completely self-governed and self-sufficient enquiry (Livingston, 1986, 34-35).

Livingston tells us that Hume accepts the ultimacy principle but rejects the autonomy principle, which is the source of false philosophy and false religion.[31] Philosophers

---

[31] The textual evidence Livingston selects to support the claim that Hume accepts the

who embrace the radical autonomy principle will turn out to be arrogant, seeing philosophy as the only authority in explaining the world while denying the authority of contentions, customs and education in common life, making philosophical enquiry to be a closet reasoning and an isolating meditation. As false religion originates from false opinions in philosophy, naturally, the right way to reach true religion is to develop a true philosophy, which restricts its enquiry to a proper sphere and respects the authority of conventions.

Moving on to Yoder's accounts of Hume's philosophical theism, he says less about the origins of false philosophy but has more to say about the nature of Hume's philosophical God. Like Livingston, Yoder sees Hume's true religion as his true philosophy. Yoder's understanding of Hume's philosophical God is threefold: minimal explicability, general providence and moral irrelevance. Like most previous commentators, Yoder rejects morality as the attribute of Hume's deity and he also asserts that this deity shows little "knowability" to us (Yoder, 2008, 128-137). The third claim is Yoder's innovative interpretation and is worthy of examination.

According to Yoder, the distinction between the particular providence and the general providence of God is Calvin's. The general providence is God's guidance over the universe in accordance with his plans, whereas the particular providence is a direct intervention in human affairs for divine governance (Yoder, 130-131). But for what reason does Yoder think that Hume's God includes a general providence? The following is the textual evidence in section 11 of the *Enquiry* cited by Yoder:

> I deny a providence, you say, and supreme governour of the world, who guides the course of events, and punishes the vicious with infamy and disappointment, and rewards the virtuous with honour and success, in all their undertakings. But surely, I deny not the course itself of events, which lies open to every one's enquiry and examination […] You tell me, indeed, that this disposition of things proceeds from intelligence and design. But whatever it proceeds from, the disposition itself, on which depends our happiness or misery, and consequently our conduct and deportment in life, is still the same. It is still open for me, as well as you, to regulate my behaviour, by my experience of past events. And if you affirm, that, while a divine providence is allowed, and a supreme distributive justice in the universe, I ought to expect some more particular reward of the good, and punishment of the bad, beyond the ordinary course of events (E, 102).

I am afraid that Yoder might have misread this paragraph. In this section of the *Enquiry*, Hume repeatedly denied the providence of God. Yoder says that what Hume has denied is only the particular providence, not the general one. Yet it seems

---

ultimacy principle is this sentence: "reason first appears in possession of the throne, prescribing laws, and imposing maxims, with an absolute sway and authority" (T, 125).

to me that this paragraph shows no sign of approval of the so-called "general providence". In this paragraph, Hume only presents (in the voice of Epicurus) that we cannot deny the regularities of nature. It is Epicurus' friend who said that the order of nature stems from an intelligent designer, which is the contention that Epicurus (that is, Hume) objects to. In his quotation, Yoder has omitted the phrase "you tell me", which is a crucial mistake for him to think of it as Hume's statement.

D. Immerwahr: "Aesthetic Theism"

Another weak theistic reading is held by J. Immerwahr who defines Hume's true religion as a type of "aesthetic theism". Reading Hume's true religion from an aesthetic perspective is innovative. For Immerwahr, Hume's true religion is not better than false religion concerning its rational justification. What tells true religion from a false one is that true religion is beneficial to morality with calm passions while false religion is detrimental because of its violent passions. In saying so, like Sessions, Immerwahr mixes the statements of Philo on true religion and that of Cleanthes.

The question is why true religion can be based on calm passions while popular religion cannot. Inspired by Hume's use of aesthetic terms in his texts, Immerwahr gives the answer in Hume's "aesthetic theism". Recognizing the beauty of the universe from natural events, one can keep a calm endorsement for it, which in turn promotes the peace of mind and keeps morality in our hearts. Indulging in this calm passion, one can have a religious belief that is immune to the corruptions of the priesthood and the violet passions derived from our desire. Immerwahr points out that Hume frequently used aesthetic terms like "beauty", "magnificent" and "glorious appearance" to describe the uniformity of the universe. Consider the following paragraphs:

> From the *beautiful* connection [...] and rigid observance of established rules, we draw the chief argument for theism (NHR, 329, italics added).

> Adam, rising at once in Paradise, and in the full perfection of his faculties, would naturally, as represented by Milton, be astonished at the *glorious appearances of nature*, the heavens, the air, the earth, his own organs and members; and would be led to ask, whence this wonderful scene arose (NHR, 311, italics added).

> Such a *magnificent* idea is too big for their narrow conceptions, which can neither observe t*he beauty of the work*, nor comprehend the grandeur of its author (NHR, 317, italics added).

> In many views of the universe and of its parts, particularly the latter, the *beauty* and fitness of final causes strike us with such irresistible force, that all objections appear (what I believe they really are) mere cavils and sophisms (D, 201, italics added).

Indeed, Hume occasionally uses aesthetic terms to describe natural order. At this point, Immerwahr's interpretation is plausible. But it is questionable whether Hume utilizes these terms in an aesthetic sense. On specific occasions, we use these words in a non-aesthetic sense. For instance, when we say "today is a wonderful day" or "today is a beautiful day" we do not mean it in an aesthetic way. The words "wonderful" and "beautiful" in this case are used to express our good mood. Thus, Hume's occasional use of these words may also be an expression of his acceptance of the existence of regularities in nature rather than indicating that nature is beautiful.

Even if the beauty of nature in Hume's texts should be understood in an aesthetic sense, as D. Garret points out, Hume does not suggest that the beauty of nature is related to a deity (Garret, 2012, 203). One cannot deny that in the *Dialogues*, Philo approves of the existence of natural order in many places. But he also reminds Cleanthes that the explanations of natural order can be multiple: except for the design argument of monotheism, the generation of animals and the vegetation of plants are equally credible explanations concerning the source of natural order. Put it in another way, the "beauty" of nature can also be a work of Darwinian evolution, Greek gods or ancient Chinese legends. Consider the following sentences stated by Philo:

> Yet I cannot see, why the operations of a world, constituted, arranged, adjusted, can with any propriety be extended to a world, which is in its embryo-state, and is advancing towards that constitution and arrangement. By observation, we know somewhat of the economy, action, and nourishment of a finished animal; but we must transfer with great caution that observation to the growth of a foetus in the womb, and still more, to the formation of an animalcule in the loins of its male parent. Nature, we find, even from our limited experience, possesses an infinite number of springs and principles, which incessantly discover themselves on every change of her position and situation. And what new and unknown principles would actuate her in so new and unknown a situation, as that of the formation of a universe, we cannot, without the utmost temerity, pretend to determine (D, 25).

Immerwahr also claims that a Humean aesthetic theism can create "calm passions" in our mind and thus can promote the morality of religion or the "proper office" of religion presented by Cleanthes. In this way, Immerwahr connects Philo's theism with Cleanthes' true religion. As far as I know, this is one of a few attempts to explain the two types of true religion in the *Dialogues* within a unified framework. But this

attempt may encounter a difficulty: one of the central doctrines of Cleanthes' "proper office" of religion is that it can promote political order and social peace, which is something completely absent in Philo's statements of true religion.

E. Willis：Basic Theism, Moderate Hope and Practical Morality

A. Willis' *Toward a Humean True Religion* is the first book-length research on this topic. He situates Hume's true religion in a "middle path" between "militant atheists and evangelical theists" (Willis, 2014, 8) and sees it as a positive alternative to false religion, the deconstructive force in religion. Highlighting the "proper office" of religion presented by Cleanthes in the last part of the *Dialogues* and by Hume in the introduction to the second volume of *History*, Willis considers Hume's true religion to be a practical tenet rather an epistemological position. In explaining this category, Willis seems to consider the statements of Philo and Cleanthes together, presenting Hume's true religion as a rare religion, which is different from the existing religions in many aspects. Three fundamental cornerstones are believed to be the contents of Hume's true religion.

Basic theism. "Genuine theism", as mentioned by Cleanthes, rests on the basis of what Willis called "basic theism", which is "a sense of order and regularity" concerning the author of nature (ibid. 52). Willis' basic theism is close to Gaskin's "attenuated deism" and Livingston's "philosophical theism". If I understand correctly, the difference is that while Gaskin and Livingston think of Hume's thin theism as reasonable and philosophical, Willis believes that this basic theism cannot be philosophically explained. Crucially, Willis thinks that this weak sense of design, although it is the philosophical foundation of true religion, can also develop to be a false religion.

Moderate hope. The concept of moderate hope is central to Willis' interpretation of Hume's true religion, which is a concept borrowed from J. Godfrey's *A Philosophy of Human Hope* (Ibid, 89-90). Willis' analysis is based on Hume's theory of passions, which classifies human passions into four types: direct or indirect, calm or violent. Hume regards the main religious passions, i.e. fear and hope, as the direct passions without explicitly illustrating whether they are calm or violent. Willis infers that fear

and hope can be either calm or violent and that a calm or moderate hope can serve as the basis for Hume's true religion.

Practical morality. Willis sees the "proper office" of religion as the final intention of Hume's true religion and rephrases it as "practical morality", which "could have a positive impact for the development of character, the increase of personal happiness, and the stability of the social order" (ibid, 132). According to this reading, Hume was considered as "a thinker who values the Ciceronian approach to morality and emphasized the development of character traits against the modern focus on duty" (ibid. 139).

With this trio, Willis offers a comprehensive and unified interpretation of Hume's true religion. Readers may ask how the three tenets can relate to each other in a philosophical manner, as they seem to be very different. Indeed, they are the positive sides of Hume's accounts of religion, yet their logical and practical connections are not apparent in Hume's texts. As Willis also notices, Hume neither uses the term "moderate hope" by himself in his writings nor does he links it to true religion. But this is not a problem as, logically speaking, if all passions are either calm (moderate) or violent, so shall religious hope. That is to say, at least in principle, religious passions can be calm and moderate, which can potentially be a basis for a sound religion.[32]

2.3 The Limitations of the Weak Theistic Readings

One the one hand, the weak theistic readings consider Philo's accounts of theism to be a certain type of deism or theism, which is assumed to be different from the traditional concept of God. On the other hand, their opinions diverge largely on how to define and to describe this special type of theism. As we can find, some claim that Philo's theism is "natural", while others see it as "philosophical" or "reasonable"; some regard morality as the core concern of this theism, but others state that Hume's God is a "minimal" deity which has no relation to morality; while some state that Hume's theism provides a general providence, others say that it contains little religiosity. It is remarkable that the weak theistic readings have no agreement on

---

[32] For further comments on Hume's accounts of religious passions, see sections 5.3, 5.5 and 6.3.

any aspect of this topic, from how thin this theism is to what religiousness it includes.

Without consensus on Philo's thin theism, though, the weak theistic readings have their insights. I would agree that after the examination of Philo's scepticism, a very limited theism still survives. It is not easy to define this kind of theism and the weak theistic readings explore the possible implications from different perspectives. However, I have doubts about the contention that Philo believes in a special type of theism. As I will show in chapter four, what Philo has confessed in part 12 of the *Dialogues* is not very different from Cleanthes' design argument in its contents. Also, that a limited theism is acceptable to Philo does not entail that he is a theist. One can think that something is acceptable without being an adherent to it.

2.4 The Strong Theistic Readings

Compared to the weak theistic reading, the strong theistic reading suggests that Hume's true religion has more religious implications. Like the weak theistic readings, the strong theistic readings also have different opinions on the contents of Hume's theism. Based on the so-called "irregular argument", N. Pike contends that Philo's theism is Cleanthes' deism in nature; J. Nathan tells us that Hume has provided us an "immanent god", which is different from the external concept of God offered the design argument; the German philosopher J.G. Hamann, who translated Hume's works and introduced them to Kant, believes firmly that Hume's scepticism is the right way to faith and a true fideism; L. Hardy also suggests that some of Hume's affirmative comments of fideism are close to Calvinism. In what follows, I will examine these arguments in turn and will provide a different and non-theistic explanation for Hume's accounts of fideism.

A. Pike: Deism from the "Irregular Argument"

N. Pike observes that Cleanthes develops two types of arguments for his natural religion: the "regular" or "scientific" argument and the "irregular" argument. Throughout the *Dialogues*, Philo attacks the scientific argument but keeps silent about the irregular argument when it is presented by Cleanthes in Part 3. Later, in

the closing part, Philo gives an obvious assent to the irregular argument, which forms the basis for his beliefs on true religion (Pike, 204-238). In order to consider the plausibility of those claims, we need to come back to Part 3 of the *Dialogues*.

At the very beginning of this part, Cleanthes seems to shift the perspective of his reasoning. He starts by comparing natural theology with the theory of Copernicus, stating that natural religion is as self-evident as Copernicus' system, which for him is an obvious truth without the need for further inference. Cleanthes, then, provides examples to show the obviousness of the deity:

> Suppose, therefore, that an articulate voice were heard in the clouds, much louder and more melodious than any which human art could ever reach: Suppose, that this voice were extended in the same instant over all nations, and spoke to each nation in its own language and dialect: Suppose, that the words delivered not only contain a just sense and meaning, but convey some instruction altogether worthy of a benevolent being superior to mankind: Could you possibly hesitate a moment concerning the cause of this voice? And must you not instantly ascribe it to some design or purpose? (D, 29).

Central to this statement is that Cleanthes seems eager to show that we can immediately "feel" the signs of design from the example he presents. Indeed, when we hear a voice from somewhere we can immediately know that someone is there. According to Cleanthes' analogy, if the voice is an extremely articulate one, then its source must be superior to human beings in all aspects. Similarly, Cleanthes offers two more examples to "prove" the obviousness of design by feeling: the example of a library and that of our eye. For the first example, Cleanthes says, when we step into a library, none of us could doubt its order, beauty and delicacy within the volumes and we can naturally and instantly image that it is the product of a great librarian. If we see the universe as such a library, then the delicacy of nature also demonstrates the existence of its designer, God. Similar logic is also applied to the example of the well-ordered structure of the human eye. In short, with these examples, Cleanthes intends to show that we clearly *feel* the design from God on certain occasions.

This is Pike's two-argument thesis. When comparing the regular and irregular argument, it is clear that their common basis is the order and contrivance of the world. The difference is that the regular argument is reason-based but the irregular argument is feeling-based. It is also true that Philo feels "a little embarrassed and confounded" after Cleanthes presented these examples and leaves no comments on the irregular argument (D, 33).

Let us now move on to consider whether Philo accepts the irregular argument in Part 12 of the *Dialogues*. At the outset of this part, Philo makes the puzzling concession that he has a "deeper sense of religion" and that a designer of the world "strikes" everyone. Like Cleanthes, Philo also presents the system of Copernicus and the good structure of the human body as examples to show the obviousness of the design from God. At first glance, as Pike suggests, Philo seems to repeat what Cleanthes has said in Part 3. But they might not be exactly the same, as Philo's reminds us that the confessions he makes are based on the "principles of any man of common sense" (D, 89). In this case, Philo may have made these statements from common sense rather than from his own principles. Even if the two-argument thesis is plausible, Philo's confession does not accept all teachings of natural religion endorsed by Cleanthes. In fact, Philo says nothing about the benevolence of God and his influence on human society in his confession. As I will show in chapter four, Philo only considers the designer of the world as a probable hypothesis, which is competing with other theistic and non-theistic hypotheses.[33]

B. Nathan's "Immanent God"

Pike tells us that Philo's theism is Cleanthes' natural religion in nature, whereas J. Nathan tells us that Philo provides us with an "immanent God", which is largely different from Cleanthes' deism. He features Cleanthes' design argument as external and rational while characterizing Philo's God as internal and sentimental. We shall now present Nathan's arguments and see if Philo really accepts such a new concept of deity.

Hume has seemingly provided two conflicting contentions. On the one hand, in the *Dialogues* as well as in the NHR, Hume repeatedly confirms that the existence of

---

[33] The irregular argument is close to the interpretation that Philo thinks of deism as a "natural belief", as exemplified by the reading of Yandell and Lorkowski I have presented. Scholars who support the idea that Philo endorses the irregular argument include B. Logan (Logan, 1992, 483-500) and T. Black & R. Gressis (Black & Gressis, 2017, 244-264); scholars against this contention include J.C.A. Gaskin and P.S. Wadia. Gaskin argues that the irrational or irregular argument cannot provide evidence to indicate whether a belief is true and cannot give a justification for religious adherents to act as if the belief is true (Gaskin, 1978, 118-119). A similar critique is held by Waida, who believes that Hume does not think religious belief is natural, or that Cleanthes provides a new argument in Part 3 of the *Dialogues* (Waida, 1978, 325-342).

God is beyond doubt and that the designer of the universe is obvious. On the other hand, in his *Treatise*, Hume shows that the final cause of the world is beyond human understanding. But, on closer consideration, Nathan believes that these two contentions are compatible in Hume's texts. According to his reading, although we have no knowledge of the attributes of the final cause of nature, we are able to recognize its existence. This capability rests on internal principles rather than external inferences based on human experience. Concerning the cause of nature, he claims that "reason, instinct, generation, and vegetation are seen to be principles because we observe the regular production of their typical effects. However, in no case can we know the principle itself or how it operates" (Nathan, 1966, 397).

But how can we recognize the existence of these principles without knowing its nature? Nathan recalls the design argument presented by Cleanthes in Parts 2 and 3 of the *Dialogues*, claiming that the design argument is an external explanation for the natural world, which Philo has refuted. But for Nathan, what Philo refuted is the externality of the cause of the world in Cleanthes' interpretation, not the design argument *per se*. The external principle of Cleanthes's design argument assumes "an accurate adjustment of the parts to each other" and "an adaption of means to ends" (ibid. 399). Nathan states:

> Philo is defending the principle of an internal cause of order in the universe. Cleanthes is positing an external cause which is itself internally ordered. Both seek to avoid the infinite regress. To prevent the regress……it is necessary that there be an internal principle of order somewhere in the series. If the internal principle is necessary, then an external principle is impossible (ibid., 412-413).

Having made these claims, Nathan moves his discussion on to explain Philo's confession in part 12 of the *Dialogues*. According to Nathan's reading, the intention of Philo's confession is to modify Cleanthes' concept of the existence of God to be an internal principle. The following is his conclusion:

> Since this internal, rational cause is the ultimate explanation for all order in the universe, it is, in a sense, also entitled to be called God. This God has only the remotest connection with the one traditionally conceived. Hume's God is immanent in the world as its structuring force and not transcendent to it as a designer (ibid., 421).

Now, let us move on to evaluate Nathan's interpretation of Hume's "Immanent God". Nathan is right to note that Philo does not deny the being of God and that he also does not discredit the design argument in every single aspect. But to my knowledge, Nathan's theistic reading of Philo's confession contains the following difficulties.

Firstly, as Philo admits that there can be an internal cause of order in the universe, Nathan infers that Philo accepts a certain form of the design argument, which is questionable on a closer reading. Although Philo accepts that there is "internal machinery" (D, 47) and "internal structure" (D, 54) within the universe, their cause or causes can be multiple and are not necessarily linked with the deity. In part 9, he considers "why may not the material universe be the necessarily existent being, according to this pretended explication of necessity [i.e. the deity is a necessarily existent being]?" (D, 65). This statement implies that there can be an internal cause of the orderly world, which relates to necessity and not to the design from God. In part 2 of the *Dialogues*, Philo asserts more explicitly that compared to the design argument, it is possible that matter contains the source of order originally within itself, or that different elements of the world can fall into the exquisite arrangement "from an internal unknown cause" (D, 23).

More importantly, Nathan exaggerates Philo's intention in terms of his positive comments on natural theology. Philo confesses that "were I obliged to defend any particular system of this nature [i.e. the design argument] (which I never willingly should do), I esteem none more plausible, than that which ascribes an eternal, inherent principle of order to the world" (D, 50). Philo acknowledges that the internal principle has its merits and is superior to the external cause in explaining the regularities of the universe, yet he is evidently reluctant to be a defender of natural theology. Clearly, Nathan omits the sentence "which I never willingly should do" and inappropriately supposes that Philo believes in an "immanent God" based on the design argument.

In the *Dialogues*, four possible principles that are available for us in interpreting the internal order of the universe: reason, instinct, generation and vegetation. Philo regards these alternative hypotheses as competing with Cleanthes' design argument, as he says that "no one of them has any advantage over the others" (D, 51). Consider his clarification:

> But reason, in its internal fabric and structure, is really as little known to us as instinct or vegetation; and perhaps even that vague, undeterminate word, nature, to which the vulgar refer everything, is not at the bottom more inexplicable. The effects of these principles are all known to us from experience: But the principles themselves, and their manner of operation, are totally unknown: Nor is it less intelligible, or less conformable to experience to say, that the world arose by vegetation from a seed shed by another world, than to say that it arose from a divine reason or contrivance, according to the sense in which Cleanthes understands it (D, 54).

Secondly, Nathan's "immanent God" is something similar to Spinoza's pantheism. The motto of Spinoza's pantheism is that God is nature and nature is God. The reason why Spinozism is widely seen as atheism is that it implies that God is not transcendent. Likewise, Nathan also claims that Hume's "immanent God" is internal to nature and not transcendent. As Hume provides no positive remarks on Spinoza's pantheism in the *Treatise* (T, 157-160), identifying Philo's confession as a pantheism is strange to students of Hume's philosophy.

Slightly different from Nathan's thesis that Hume's God is internal to the natural world, P. Jones claims that Hume's God is internal, not to the universe but to the human mind:

> I shall show that there are two concepts of God in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, both of which conform to the main epistemo- logical tenets in his earlier writings. Firstly, Hume considers the notion of God as an explanatory cause, and rejects it; secondly, he considers the notion of God as the name of a private sentiment, and whilst not rejecting the notion, emphasises that it has no explanatory power (Jones, 1995, 84).

Jones' central argument is that we have "several senses" concerning the "order" of nature: a symmetry of parts, an adjustment of means to ends, a tendency to self-preservation etc. (Jones, 1995, 92). In saying that Hume has rejected the concept of God as an explanatory cause, Jones is allied with Nathan. As discussed, it is true that in parts 3 and 12 of the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes and Philo tell us that we can feel that there is a designer. However, the basis for Philo to make this statement is controversial and he never clearly points out that this feeling is a private sentiment.[34]

C. Hamann's Fideistic Reading

I. Berlin remarks that Hume's scepticism became a source and a basis for the defense of religious faith for apologists in the German Counter-Enlightenment, of which J.G. Hamann is a striking figure (Berlin, 1977, 93-116). Anyone who is familiar with the history of western philosophy knows that Hamann is a famous anti-enlightenment philosopher who translated Hume's works into German. Both theoretically and personally, Hamann is deeply influenced by Hume and is among

---

[34] Of course, feeling can only be personal, but that does not mean private in all cases. Some feelings are commonly shared, such the feeling of homesickness. As Philo confesses that the feeling of the existence of a designer strikes everyone with common sense, this feeling seems to me a common one rather than a private one.

the earliest figures to introduce Hume's philosophy into German academia. Unlike Kant, who sees Hume's philosophy as a serious threat to both philosophy and morality (though he takes Hume as a main source of his philosophical enquiry), Hamann finds Hume's sceptical arguments very positive to faith. His *Socratic memorabilia* is deeply indebted to Hume, as he confesses, "I was full of Hume when I was writing the *Socratic Memoris* […] Our own existence, and that of all things outside us must be believed, and cannot be demonstrated in any other fashion" (Cited from Berlin, 1977, 101). In another place, he writes that "[in comparing Hume to Kant] Hume is always my man, because he at least paid homage to the principle of faith, and incorporated it in his system" (Cited from Alexander, 1966, 46). His fideistic reading of Hume has two grounds: Hume's demonstration of the limit of reason and his occasional reference to fideism. We shall now consider whether Hamann's interpretation is correct.

The 17th and 18th century are widely called the Enlightenment Age, which is a period marked by the rise of reason, both in philosophy and science. The majority of philosophers in this period believe that reason is the main or even the sole authority in the enquiry of both natural and moral philosophy, resulting in a serious challenge to traditional theologies. The French *Philosophes* tend to replace religion with philosophy as a whole, while British deists and Kant are inclined to revise the traditional theology with either experimental reason or "pure reason". In this context, Hamann's philosophy and the so-called German anti-rationalism are unique. On the one hand, Hamann is well-aware of the attacks of faith from sceptics and atheists, but on the other hand, he does not think reason can find a solid base for religion. Eventually and interestingly, he finds a new life for theism in the works of Hume, the infamous sceptic and religious attacker.

Firstly, he values Hume's criticism of reason. It is well-known that in the *Treatise*, Hume has demonstrated that reason cannot prove the existence of causation, the self, the external world etc. In the *Dialogues*, through the voice of Philo, Hume also shows that reason cannot prove the nature of God. Hamann finds that Hume's emphasis on the limit of reason and his scepticism not only produce no harm to faith but actually form the basis for genuine religious belief. Inspired by Hume, Hamann highlights that reason is not capable of finding the legitimation for belief in God and thus, he refutes rational theism of any kind. Hamann is right in his interpretation of

Hume concerning the limit of reason. But whether Hume's criticism of the limits of human understanding can lead to fideism is not as clear as Hamann supposes.[35]

Secondly, Hamann moves forward to claim that Hume is a witness of the truth of faith. As reason is incapable of reaching the genuine principles of religion, only revelation can guide us to them. Hamann's true religion in the *Socratic memorabilia* is a fideism, in which God is believed to reveal himself in the languages and cultures of human beings and hence, through faith and the history of culture, we can reach true religious belief.[36] In so writing, he reads Hume as the founder of this type of fideism, which, as C.W. Swain remarks, is certainly unfamiliar to the readers of Hume (Swain, 1967, 350). H. Graubner also remarks that Hamann's reception of Hume is "a conscious transformation of empiricism into a theology of language" (Graubner, 1989, 378).

Similar to Hamann, D.J. Hanson in his book *Fideism and Hume's Philosophy* asserts that Hume is not a sceptic but a fideist in nature (Hanson, 1993). According to Hanson, early in the *Treatise* Hume accepts several metaphysical doctrines without rational justification, such as the belief in the external world and causation. Similar to these beliefs, Hanson claims that religious belief also has no rational basis and can only be grounded in our feeling. Like Hamann, he goes so far as to declare that revelation is the proper method of believing the true tenets of religion and that Philo's confession is an example of fideism.

It is true that occasionally, Hume presents seemingly positive statements about fideism, which forms the foundation for Hamann's as well as Hanson's interpretation. At the end of the *Dialogues* and of the *Enquiry*, Hume writes that compared to reason, faith and divine revelation are the proper foundation of religious belief (D, 102; E, 120). Hamann sees these statements as the logical result of Hume's scepticism and as his genuine expressions.

I would comment that both Hamann and Hanson have exaggerated Hume's

---

[35] M. Remond also states that Hamann has exaggerated Hume's criticism of reason to be an extreme kind (Remond, 1987, 95-107).

[36] For a detailed study of Hamann's philosophy of religion in English, see W.M. Alexander's *Johann Georg Hamann: Philosophy and Faith* (Alexander, 1966). In this work, Alexander particularly points out that Hamann's use of "reason" and "faith" diverges largely from Hume's understanding (ibid. 44-50).

accounts of fideism. Hanson considers Hume's acceptance of metaphysical doctrines from a fideistic point of view, which is highly inappropriate. Hume has clearly said that we accept these beliefs because they are unavoidable in human nature and are absolutely necessary to routine life. He never relates our beliefs in these metaphysical doctrines to religious faith. Also, unlike the belief in the external world, religious belief is not unavoidable in common life. Compared to habits and common sense, religious motives and principles are "infinitely small" (D, 96). But if Hume is not a fideist, his affirmative comments on revelation require another interpretation, which I will attempt to do in section 2.5.

D. Hardy's Calvinistic Reading

In his recent paper "Hume's defense of True Religion", L. Hardy reads Hume's true religion in the same direction to Hamann. In this paper, Hardy attempts to defend Philo's "volte-face" in the last part of the *Dialogues*, making two seemingly inconsistent claims: that Philo's theism is a philosophical and thin theism, and that this is a theism close to Calvinism. At the outset of NHR, Hume favours a genuine theism over vulgar forms of theism, which, for Hardy, is parallel to Philo's confession of the design argument at the beginning of part 12 of the *Dialogues*. Philo's and Hume's true religion is philosophical theism that "limits belief in God to only what is licensed by empirical reason" (Hardy, 2012, 264). Hardy's accounts of the philosophical theism of Philo have little difference from those of Livingston, Sessions, Gaskin and Yoder. What makes his narrative unique is the claim that there is "Hume's Calvinism".

According to Hardy's observation, Calvinist approaches have made an "unmistakable mark on Hume's philosophy of religion" and "If we turn to the founding text of the Calvinist Movement, John Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*, we find themes strikingly familiar to any student of Hume's work" (Hardy, 2012, 269). As mentioned previously, Hume grew up in a strict Calvinistic family, yet we have little idea of whether, to what extent, and how this circumstance has influenced him. N.K. Smith thinks, as was shown in chapter one, that Calvinism left a negative impression on Hume, which led him to advance a hostile attitude towards religion. Contrary to Smith, Hardy states that Hume does share common grounds with Calvin. The similarities between Hume and Calvin, as Hardy finds, include the following:

First, both Hume and Calvin claim that we have a "built-in" awareness of the divine, by which we can develop the knowledge of God. According to Hardy, the design argument not only has a rational basis but also has its root in our sense. In the latter sense, he believes that Hume's position is close to Calvin, who asserts that there is a "natural instinct" of religion and an "awareness of divinity" in the human mind (ibid.).

Second, both Hume and Calvin believe that our religious awareness has been corrupted by ignorance and vice. It is evident that Hume criticizes the corruption of religion in many places (superstition and enthusiasm in particular), which is believed by Hardy as similar to Calvin's contention that the corruption of religion leads true monotheism to idolatry.

Third, they both reject superstition, which is "the attempt to influence divine powers through morally irrelevant means," including unnecessary ceremonies, rites and sacrifices (ibid., 270).

Fourth, they are both well aware of the limit of human reason. Hume's criticism of the capability of religion is widely known, but Hardy, by citing Philo's positive comments on fideism at the very end of the *Dialogues*, claims that Philo calls for "a turn from reason to revelation," which is a Calvinist stance (ibid. 271).

However, I do not think that reading Hume's accounts of religion as a Calvinistic theism would be appropriate. It would be strange to relate Philo's philosophical theism to the revealed religion of Calvinism. Hume might have made statements that are similar to Calvin's, but their concerns, as well as their arguments for those statements, are far from each other. After all, Calvin is a theologian and a clergyman whilst Hume is a philosopher and a critic of religion. Unlike Calvin, Hume does not believe that a "built-in" awareness of the divine universally exists in the human mind. As he states, religious principles are secondary to human nature and some nations "entertained no sentiments of Religion" (NHR, 14). As mentioned, Hume made various harsh comments on Calvinism in general, and on the founder of the Reformed Church of Scotland, J. Knox, in particular. Also, the criticism of superstition can be found in numerous authors in early modern Europe and the

awareness of the limits of reason is shared by many authors, such as Kant and Hamann. Likewise, the attack on superstition is also widely found in the writings of Hume's contemporaries, especially the freethinkers and the moderate clergymen. In this sense, the similarities between Hume and Calvin are likely to be superficial.

2.5 Hume's Fideistic Accounts: A New explanation

In proclaiming that the fideistic or Calvinistic reading is wrong, I need to explain why Hume has made positive statements on the revelation of the deity. I shall first present Hume's affirmative statements on fideism, and then, provide a non-theistic explanation. Hume's positive accounts of fideism appear in the *Enquiry*, the *Dialogues* as well as the essay "On the Immortality of the Soul":

> Divinity or Theology, as it proves the existence of a Deity, and the immortality of souls, is composed partly of reasonings concerning particular, partly concerning general facts. It has a foundation in reason, so far as it is supported by experience. But its best and most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation (E, 120.)

> A person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity: While the haughty dogmatist, persuaded, that he can erect a complete system of theology by the mere help of philosophy, disdains any farther aid, and rejects this adventitious instructor (by Philo, D, 102).

> Nothing could set in a fuller light the infinite obligations which mankind have to Divine revelation, since we find that no other medium could ascertain this great and important truth (SE, 331).

At first glance, these positive statements of revelation or fideism are as puzzling as Philo's confessions of natural religion. Actually, as showed in the second citation, the affirmative statements of revelation in the closing paragraph of the *Dialogues* are offered by Philo. So, does Philo (and Hume) actually applaud Demea's orthodox point of view? D. Berman and J. Harris suggest that he is not and that these statements are purely a tactic.

Berman simply calls it a "theological lie", in which Hume merely provides an irony rather than any affirmation to revelation (Berman, 1987, 70-71). This interpretation is similar to the aforementioned ironical reading of Mossner and Price. In using such an insinuation, Berman says, Hume intends to show that both natural religion and revealed religion have little basis.

Harris goes further to make it a more complicated tactic. I mentioned in the previous

chapter that the relationship between Hume and the moderates was not always stable and close. Harris infers that Hume must have felt extraordinarily disappointed when seeing that some of the moderates, who were usually Hume's friends and allies, blocked him from getting a position in universities. The leading opponents were F. Hutcheson and W. Leechman, who, according to Harris, were influential moderates. In this context, Harris states that the "Calvinistic rhetoric" used by Hume is an outcome of his disappointment with the moderates, or even his revenge on them:

> My suggestion, then, is that at least part of the reason why Hume is ostentatious in his claims about the value of Revelation is that he knew that therein lay a way to make out that it was the modernizers, and not he himself, who threatened the cause of traditional religion. The suggestion is not, to repeat, that Hume sincerely and earnestly sought to vindicate his philosophy by highlighting its affinities with Calvinism. Hume's use of the language of Calvinism is to be understood, rather, as a means of casting aspersions on the pretensions to religious wholesomeness frequently made by those who had frustrated his academic ambitions (Harris, 2005, 146-147).

Against the background of the Scottish Enlightenment, Harris regards Hume's fideistic accounts as a subtle tactic: by seriously attacking natural religion and pretending to ally with the orthodox power in the Church of Scotland, Hume pushes the moderates into an awkward situation, implying that it is the theology of the moderates instead of his scepticism that threatens the true principle of traditional religion. Thus, the fideistic accounts of Hume are merely a vengeful vehicle in Harris' interpretation.[37]

Alternatively, I would argue that another non-theistic interpretation is possible. Hume not only makes affirmative claims for fideism but also has positive statements for other cosmological hypotheses, such as the design argument, generation, vegetation, polytheism, materialism etc. According to my reading, Hume's occasional affirmations for these teachings concerning the cause of the universe stem from his moderate scepticism, which cannot completely eradicate these cosmological hypotheses. In particular, as I will show in chapter four, the religious hypotheses, including fideism, remain a low probability in Philo's epistemology. There are different responses to this undefined probability of a God, who is the creator of the world. Fideism can be seen as one of the understandings of the probable deity. If this is true, Hume's positive remarks of fideism are genuine, yet he

---

[37] A similar stance is also held by T.H. Huxley, who believes that by praising the teachings of popular religion, Hume sarcastically shows that dogmatic theology is as less plausible as popular religion (Huxley, 1881, 140-141).

is not a fideist. His positive comments on fideism are philosophical, not religious.

In the *Dialogues*, Demea and Cleanthes have different religious hypotheses: Cleanthes insists that the being and nature of God can surely be proved by experience, whereas Demea holds that the nature of God remains mysterious to us. In showing the difficulties of Cleanthes' rational theism, Philo allies with Demea, claiming that reason is not capable of demonstrating the perfect attributes of the divine (D, 7-8). But Demea's orthodox religion, as an alternative understanding of the deity, is not better than Cleanthes' rational theology. The reason is that Demea's mysticism have the problem that, without knowing its nature, we do not know whether the deity is worthy of worship (D, 35). For Philo, there is a weak probability for the existence of a deity, to which different understandings and responses are allowed. If this is the case, the reasons for Hume to present the affirmative comments on fideism are twofold: negatively speaking, it is a strategy of criticizing rational theism (just like his affirmative statements of generation and vegetation); positively speaking, Hume's mitigated scepticism prevents him from eliminating any cosmological hypotheses, including fideism.

2.6 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the arguments as well as the limitations of the weak and the strong theistic readings. The weak theistic readings propose that Hume's true religion is a limited theism, although they have different perspectives in considering its implications. While the weak theistic readings rightly point out that a thin theism still survives under Philo's scepticism, the thinness and specialness of this type of theism still need some reconsideration, which I will discuss further in chapter four.

The strong theistic readings suggest that Hume believes in a traditional deism, an immanent or private religion or even a fideism, which I think is misleading. It is true that Hume has pointed out the limits of reason in understanding the nature of the deity. It is also true that in several places, he presents affirmative comments on revelation. But the limit of reason in religious epistemology does not necessarily entail the contention that Hume's true religion is a fideism. Importantly, his positive comments on fideism can be explained in a non-theistic way.

On the whole, I argued that Hume's positive accounts of religion, no matter the natural or the revealed kind, are philosophical rather than theological. In the *Dialogues*, Philo clearly presents that a variety of hypotheses can possibly explain the first cause of the world. Natural religion and revealed religion, in this context, are "religious hypotheses" which enjoy a very limited probability in their understanding of the ultimate cause of nature.

Chapter Three

Two Versions of True Religion: For the Learned and for the Vulgar

We ought to think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar.

——Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, p. 45.

Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.

——Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 6.

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I showed that true religion is likely to be Hume's own concept and that his concern is not theistic. From this chapter onwards, I will provide an interpretation of Hume's true religion that differs largely from both the negative and the theistic readings. To begin with, this chapter presents the different features of Hume's two concepts of true religion as well as his reason for such a distinction.

Section 3.2 considers the contents of what Hume called "false religion", suggesting that the dogmatism of theology and the superstition and enthusiasm of popular religion are two types of false religion in Hume's texts. Features of Philo's and Cleanthes' statements of true religion will be summarized and analysed in sections 3.3 and 3.4 respectively, showing that both statements are endorsed by Hume. In particular, unlike the existing literature, I argue that Cleanthes' true religion in part 12 of the *Dialogues* defends the proper role of popular religion. In section 3.5, I investigate why Hume would have two different concepts of true religion, claiming that this is derived from his distinction between the vulgar and the learned, which has a close relation to Hume's mental crisis in 1729. Section 3.6 summarises the main arguments of this chapter, highlighting the relationship between the true and false religion in Hume's context.

3.2 Hume's Description of False Religion

A. False Religion: the Corruption of Religion

A consideration of Hume's accounts of false religion will be helpful to our discussion of his true religion. At the outset of the NHR, Hume defines religion as "the belief of invisible, intelligent power", which "has been very generally diffused over the human race, in all places and in all ages" (NHR, 14). This definition might not be suitable for all religions in the world, for the object of some religions are neither invisible nor intelligent.[38] Hume seems to take the one true God of Abrahamic religion as the model of his understanding of religion. In all his writings, he constantly criticizes false religion either for its philosophical groundlessness or its detrimental consequences.

But what is false religion in his accounts? Hume fails to give a clear definition in his writings. In the essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", superstition and enthusiasm are defined as "two species of false religion" (SE, 38, 39, 41). In another essay, "On Suicide", he sees philosophy as the antidote to "superstition and false religion" (ibid. 315).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, commentators who consider Philo's true religion as a minimal theism or a philosophical deism tend to read popular religion as a false religion. It is true that Hume occasionally calls false religion "vulgar superstition" (D, 89, 94, 95, 97; NHR, 31) or "popular superstition" (D, 101), but superstition is not popular religion *per se* and is only one type of false religion (that is to say, there are other types of false religion). In fact, as I will show in 3.4, popular religion can have beneficial functions in an ideal situation.

In a Humean context, false religion might be better defined as the corruption of religion. As he claims, "the corruption of the best of things produces the worst, is grown into a maxim, and is commonly proved, among other instances, by the pernicious effects of superstition and enthusiasm, the corruptions of true religion" (SE, 38). The corruption of religion is frequently presented in many of his works. For example, he asserts in the NHR that "I may venture to affirm that few corruptions of

---

[38] For instance, in southwest China, some farmers worship frogs due to their strong reproductive capacity and their benefits to rice planting. Obviously, frogs are neither invisible nor intelligent.

idolatry and polytheism are more pernicious to political society than this corruption of theism" (NHR, 37). In the last part of the *Dialogues*, both Philo and Cleanthes agree that popular religion is highly corrupted and detrimental.

The claim that false religion is the corruption of (true) religion suggests further implications. Firstly, It indicates that false religion in a Humean context is not a specific religion or theology as corruption can occur in all forms of religion, including polytheism, monotheism and philosophical theology. Hence, Hume's false and true religion are not two different religions but only different statuses of religion. Secondly, if false religion is "the corruption of religion", then I would define true religion as "the purification of religion", as the title of this dissertation suggests. I will show in the next chapters that "true" and "false" are used by Hume to describe the proper function and suitable sphere of religion. If my understanding is correct, then most of the theistic readings have taken a wrong turn in considering Hume's true religion to be a special kind of theism that differs from existing religions.

B. Superstition and Enthusiasm of Popular Religion

Having classified the definition of false religion, we can now consider what it includes. In the NHR, Hume uses two "proofs" to demonstrate the maxim that "the corruption of the best things gives rise to the worst" (NHR, 38-39): firstly, the corruption of monotheism tends to be more detrimental and less tolerant than that of paganism or polytheism; secondly, the corruption of theology is more absurd than the teachings of popular religion.[39] These two corruptions of religion, I believe, are the main targets of Hume's religious attacks and hence, can be seen as the contents of false religion.

Concerning the corruption of popular religion, which includes polytheism and the vulgar form of monotheism, Hume observes that the corruption of monotheism is worse than that of polytheism:

---

[39] This maxim is a little confusing. The corruption of monotheism and philosophical theology may make them to be "the worst", but Hume does not give obvious reasons why they can be "the best". What he has said in the NHR is only that the theology of monotheism is more advanced than polytheism in general.

> Where the deity is represented as infinitely superior to mankind, this belief, though altogether just, is apt, when joined with superstitious terrors, to sink the human mind into the lowest submission and abasement, and to represent the monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility, and passive suffering, as the only qualities which are acceptable to him. But where the Gods are conceived to be only a little superior to mankind, and to have been, many of them, advanced from that inferior rank, we are more at our ease in our addresses to them, and may even, without profaneness, aspire sometimes to a rival ship and emulation of them. Hence activity, spirit, courage, magnanimity, love of liberty, and all the virtues which aggrandise a people (NHR, 38).

Scholars have no disagreement on Hume's sincerity in attacking the harmful influence of the corrupted popular religion, which is occupied by superstition and enthusiasm. Hume regards superstition and enthusiasm as "two forms of false religion" (SE, 38-43). But, to be exact, what he means is that superstition and enthusiasm are two forms of religion in popular religion. In his criticism of popular religion, superstition and enthusiasm are his main targets. It is noticeable that these two categories of false popular religion have different origins in our nature and different consequences to society, which I will present at length in chapter five.

C. Dogmatism of Theology

Another "proof" Hume mentions to show that the corruption of the best things brings the worst is about the corruption of theology, which can be more absurd than the principles of popular religion. The following are his accounts of the corruption of theology:

> But as these appearances [the consistence and uniformity of theology] are sure, all of them, to prove deceitful, philosophy will soon find herself very unequally yoked with her new associate [Church and its sacred books]; and instead of regulating each principle, as they advance together, she is at every turn perverted to serve the purposes of superstition […] For besides the unavoidable incoherences which must be reconciled and adjusted, one may safely affirm that all popular theology, especially the scholastic, has a kind of appetite for absurdity and contradiction. If that theology went not beyond reason and common sense, her doctrines would appear too easy and familiar. Amazement must of necessity be raised; mystery affected; darkness and obscurity sought after; and a foundation of merit afforded the devout votaries, who desire an opportunity of subduing their rebellious reason, by the belief of the most unintelligible sophisms (NHR, 39).

From the above citation, we can learn that theology corrupts in two ways: either it is utilized by the church as a mere tool and hence, "serve[s] the purposes of superstition"; or it goes so far as to ignore "reason and common sense" and thus, creates groundless and absurd tenets. The first type of corruption is actually due to the abuse of the power of church and is not the problem of theology itself. The

second type of corruption is due to theology *per se* and is derived from the abuse of reason by theologians and philosophers in terms of exaggerating their philosophical inference.

We can call this corruption of theology the dogmatism of theology, which is the main target of Hume's criticism in the *Dialogue* and in part 11 of the *Enquiry*. The philosophical reasoning about the existence and nature of the deity usually falls into two categories: the a prior argument and the a posteriori argument. Unlike Kant, who takes the a priori (or ontological) argument as the fundamental argument for all philosophical inference concerning the existence of God (Kant, 1998, 563), Hume does not think it is important in this regard. When the a priori argument is suggested by Demea in part 9 of the *Dialogues*, both Cleanthes and Philo claim that it is "obviously ill-grounded" since "whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent" (D, 64). For Hume, only natural theology is worthy of serious consideration, as the reasoning concerning the existence and the attributes of the deity is an inference that "is derived from the order of nature" (E, 99). But even for this type of theology, Hume gives systematic criticism, showing that most of its claims are untenable.[40] That is to say, the existing philosophical theologies are largely dogmatic in nature because their conclusions are beyond what can be admitted by reason and experience.

T.H. Huxley remarks that "Hume seems to have had but two hearty dislikes: the one to be the English nation, and the other to all the professors of the dogmatic theology" (Huxley, 1881, 140). The bigotry and arrogance of philosophers and theologians in terms of religion can be ridiculous as well as dangerous. As Hume puts it, "this pertinacious bigotry, of which you complain, as so fatal to philosophy, is really her [i.e. philosophy's] offspring, who, after allying with superstition, separates himself entirely from the interest of his parent, and becomes her most inveterate enemy and persecutor" (E, 97).

Hume's different accounts of the false forms of religion are very helpful for understanding his concept of the two versions of true religion. Superstition and enthusiasm are more related to the vulgar, while the dogmatism of theology is associated more with theologians and philosophers. As we shall see in the following sections, Philo's true religion attempts to provide a remedy for the dogmatism of

---

[40] For Hume's arguments against natural theology, see section 4.4.

theology, whereas Cleanthes' statements on this notion aim to overcome the excessiveness within the religious practice of the public.

3.3 The Features of Philo's True Religion

In criticizing the design argument, Philo concludes at the end of part 4 of the *Dialogues* that "general causes themselves should remain in the end totally inexplicable" and that "an ideal system, arranged of itself, without a precedent design, is not a whit more explicable than a material one" (D, 40). If he held this position until the end of the *Dialogues*, he would be a consistent sceptic, and I believe most scholars would have no dispute on who stands for Hume and what his intention is in this work. However, everything becomes vague and puzzling because of Philo's confession of theism in part 12.

From part 2 to part 8 of the *Dialogues*, Philo tries to convince Cleanthes that the design argument is largely inappropriate and that there are competing hypotheses to explain the cause of the universe. Philo's scepticism continues in part 9 where he attacks and ridicules the a priori argument for the existence of God. His scepticism of religion goes on more harshly and bitterly in parts 10 and 11, where he targets his criticism at the morality of the divine. In these parts, Philo tends to make his arguments to be an extreme scepticism, claiming that it is impossible to reconcile the incompatibility between the existence of evil and the benevolence of God, which completely irritates Demea and leads to his departure. During the course of the conversations in the previous parts of the *Dialogues*, Philo also rarely has positive comments on Cleanthes' natural religion.

With the absence of Demea part 12, the conversation between Cleanthes and Philo starts with the presentation of the weakness of Philo's personality. Cleanthes is apparently pleased to see the departure of Demea, as he states that he wishes to discuss the topic of religion separately with either Philo or Demea. He amicably blames the carelessness of Philo's reasoning, saying "your spirit of controversy, joined to your abhorrence of vulgar superstition, carries you strange lengths, when engaged in an argument" (D, 89).

Surprisingly, Philo seems to accept Cleanthes' criticism in this regard, stating that what he has said on the topic of natural religion is "less cautious" and that he has a special love of "singular arguments" (ibid.). It would be understandable if his intention of adjusting his standpoint is simply to make the atmosphere of the conversations between the two old friends more friendly. But what shocks Humean scholars is that he seems to surrender to Cleanthes' natural religion completely and to immediately confess that the existence of the deity is obvious:

> 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 and artifice of nature. A purpose, an intention, a design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it. That nature does nothing in vain, is a maxim established in all the schools, merely from the contemplation of the works of nature, without any religious purpose; and, 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 and intention (D, 89-90).

Philo's confession seems very strong at this point. He then utilizes the example of the Copernican system and Galen's theory of the human body to indicate the obviousness of design from the great author of nature, which is similar to what Cleanthes has presented at the beginning of part 3. If Philo is serious about these statements, his criticism of the design argument in the preceding parts seems to be unnecessary and meaningless. His confession of theism at this place is so strong that Humean scholars have to make choice between his criticism of religion and this confession to theism, resulting in two conflicting readings: some believe that Philo is a consistent sceptic or even an atheist and consider this confession to be fake, whereas others insist that this confession is Philo's genuine thought and regard his criticism of religion as truly "less cautious".

Having made these positive comments on theism, Philo soon stresses the seriousness of his confession by stating his "unfeigned sentiments" concerning a true religion:

> "These, Cleanthes, are my unfeigned sentiments on this subject; and these sentiments, you know, I have ever cherished and maintained. But in proportion to my veneration for *true religion*, is my abhorrence of vulgar superstitions; and I indulge a peculiar pleasure, I confess, in pushing such principles, sometimes into absurdity, sometimes into impiety" (D, 94).

In this citation, Philo explains that what he embraces is true religion and what he attacks is vulgar superstition. If these statements are sincere, then Philo is

restricting his criticism of religion and is trying to find a balance between scepticism and theism. It is important to note that in this passage Philo's focus is popular religion and not Cleanthes' natural religion.

I would argue that the obviousness of natural theology Philo states is partly due to his "careless" personality and partly to his intention to create a friendly atmosphere by flattering Cleanthes. Philo's carelessness is first stated by Pamphilus in the prologue and then. It is repeated by Cleanthes and confirmed by Philo himself in the last part of the *Dialogues*. This gives me an impression that Hume sets carelessness as a central character of Philo. Just as his criticism of religion is "less cautious", Philo also overstates the statement that the design from God "strikes" everyone. His motive for overstating his affirmative comments on natural religion is to maintain the relationship with Cleanthes and to ensure that their conversations can continue. After all, the two friends have debated fiercely on the topic of natural religion for a long time and Demea's has left because of Philo's aggressive attacks on the perfection of God.

Philo never mentions the obviousness of the design from God again in part 12 of the Dialogues. Instead, he gradually revises his confession and in the end, only a minimal type of theism is acceptable to him. In his last speech, natural theology remains only as an ambiguous and undefined proposition - "God exists" (D, 101). I will examine the thinness of Philo's confession in chapter four, but here it is enough to say that a limited theology is still acceptable to Philo.

In part 12, Philo constantly compares his confession of true religion to the detrimental consequences of what he called vulgar superstition:

> And so will all religion, said Philo, except the *philosophical and rational kind*. Your reasonings are more easily eluded than my facts. The inference is not just, because finite and temporary rewards and punishments have so great influence, that therefore such as are infinite and eternal must have so much greater (D, 95, italics added).

> We must farther consider, that philosophers, who cultivate reason and reflection, stand less in need of such motives to keep them under the restraint of morals: And that the vulgar, who alone may need them, are utterly incapable of *so pure a religion*, as represents the deity to be pleased with nothing but virtue in human behavior. The recommendations to the divinity are generally supposed to be either frivolous observances, or rapturous ecstasies, or a bigoted credulity (D, 96, italics added).

> *True religion*, I allow, has no such pernicious consequences: But we must treat of religion, as it has commonly been found in the world; nor have I anything to do with that speculative tenet of theism, which, as it is a species of philosophy, must partake of the beneficial influence of that principle, and at the same time must lie under a like inconvenience, of being always confined to very few persons (D, 98, italics added).

From these statements, compared to popular religion, Philo's true religion contains the following features: (1) unlike popular religion, true religion has no detrimental influence on society; (2) true religion is "a species of philosophy"; (3) only a few philosophers are capable of fully comprehending the concept of true religion; (4) true religion is not related to morality and is free from religious practice.

Furthermore, Philo asserts that while superstition always distorts the notion of the Divine, only philosophical theists can offer a proper concept of it:

> Nor would any of human race merit his favour, but a very few, the *philosophical theists*, who entertain, or rather indeed endeavour to entertain, suitable notions of his divine perfections: As the only persons, entitled to his compassion and indulgence, would be the *philosophical sceptics*, a sect almost equally rare, who, from a natural diffidence of their own capacity, suspend, or endeavour to suspend all judgement with regard to such sublime and such extraordinary subjects (D, 101, italics added).

This passage provides us with another significant point - that is, the true religion of philosophical theists is not only rare but also has a close relationship with scepticism. To reach true religion, one needs to have a sceptical attitude and good philosophical capacity. But unfortunately, Philo does not spell out what "the suitable notions of divine perfections" shall be in this paragraph.

Philo is usually seen by Humean scholars as Hume's mouthpiece, yet one might still doubt whether his statements concerning true religion are really Hume's own ideas, for they seem different from Hume's criticism of religion. Once we find that similar statements also appear in other of Hume's texts, this doubt is dismissed. In the *Enquiry*, Hume also describes true religion as a "species of philosophy" (E 106). In the NHR, he confirms that natural theology is acceptable: "the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflexion, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion" (NHR, 14). Moreover, in the *History*, he highlights the harmlessness of true religion:

> But if we consider the matter more closely, we shall find, that this interested diligence of the clergy is what every wise legislator will study to prevent; because in every religion, except the true, it is highly pernicious, and it has even a natural tendency to pervert the true, by infusing into it a strong mixture of superstition, folly, and delusion (H, III, 135-136).

All these indicate Hume's sincerity of his true religion, although Philo has exaggerated his confession at some points. However, Philo neither explicitly tell us how these features of his true religion are related to each other, nor does he illustrate its philosophical basis, which I will consider in the next chapter.

3.4 The Features of Cleanthes' True Religion

Cleanthes' statements of true religion have been largely ignored by scholars, as he is usually not seen as Hume's primary statesman. Even those of his statements that are noticed are seen as expressions of a deistic standpoint. On a close reading, I would argue that from paragraphs 9 to 31 of the closing part of the *Dialogues*, the central topic of the conversations between Philo and Cleanthes is the social functions of popular religion rather than the rationality of natural religion. While Philo constantly criticizes the numerous detrimental consequences of popular religion, Cleanthes tries to convince him that a true form of popular religion can be beneficial to both individuals and societies.

In fact, Cleanthes is the one who first refers to the notion of true religion in part 1 of the *Dialogues*, in which he claims that it is natural for men to embrace any set of principles that can confirm true religion and can defeat the errors of atheists and freethinkers (D, 16).

From part 2 to part 11, Cleanthes classifies and defends the design argument, trying to convince Philo and Demea that both the existence and the benevolence of God can be fully demonstrated by human experience. In part 12, with Demea's departure, Philo shifts his focus in two aspects: first, he seems to accept the design argument; second, he transfers his criticism from natural religion to popular religion.

Certainly, Cleanthes is happy to see that Philo finally revises his opinions on natural religion. He praises Philo's confession as "so well argued" (D, 91). Afterwards, Cleanthes repeats the advantages of theism without providing a new argument for his favourite natural religion. With Philo's attitude to natural religion becoming moderate or even positive, at least on the surface, the two friends find common ground. But shortly afterwards, they have a serious divergence on the role of popular religion in society.

Philo is inclined to deny any potential value of popular religion due to its overwhelmingly detrimental effects on society in history. He favours the true religion of a few philosophers while attacking all forms of popular religion. As he observes, the superstition and enthusiasm of popular religion are the main sources of political chaos and religious persecutions. Also, as popular forms of monotheism have created a system of punishment and reward with the doctrine of an afterlife, it can "weaken extremely men's attachment to the natural motives of justice and humanity" (D, 97). While Hume, in the NHR and the *History*, still presents a few positive comments on popular religion (e.g. the tolerance of polytheism and the erudition of Catholic priests), Philo, in part 12 of the *Dialogues*, is unwilling to say anything good for vulgar religion.

Cleanthes disagrees with Philo at the very start when Philo begins to attack vulgar superstition in paragraph 9. Philo does not deny his upright disdain of popular religion and says that he considers the principles of popular religion "sometimes into absurdity, sometimes into impiety" (D, 94). Cleanthes, however, clearly refutes the contention that popular religion is all negative:

> My inclination, replied Cleanthes, lies, I own, a contrary way. Religion, however corrupted, is still better than no religion at all. The doctrine of a future state is so strong and necessary a security to morals, that we never ought to abandon or neglect it. For if finite and temporary rewards and punishments have so great an effect, as we daily find: How much greater must be expected from such as are infinite and eternal? (D, 94)

After Cleanthes makes this objection, the dispute between the two friends becomes serious again, and this time it is about popular religion. Cleanthes' position is that although popular religion is highly corrupted, its teachings can still be salutary to human life. In particular, popular religion has actually served as the basis of morality in society. He takes the tenet of the afterlife of monotheism as an example, reminding Philo how agreeable and how influential it can be for the ordinary people. The two friends agree on the philosophical groundlessness of popular religion and its harmful social influences in history, yet unlike Philo, Cleanthes still thinks that even the religion in a popular variety can also be "true".

Philo continues to question Cleanthes' defence of popular religion, asking him "if vulgar superstition be so salutary to society, that all history abounds so much with accounts of its pernicious consequences on public affairs?" (D, 95) As he observes,

87

considerable disasters in human history are due to the spread of vulgar superstition, which should be seen as a devil to human beings.

Having heard the disagreement from Philo, Cleanthes clarifies his position concerning the salutary consequences of popular religion as follows:

> The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience; and as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives. When it distinguishes itself, and acts as a separate principle over men, it has departed from its proper sphere, and has become only a cover to faction and ambition (D, 95).

It is crucial to note that Cleanthes is talking about popular religion rather than natural religion here, as these statements are a reply to Philo attacks on the vulgar form of religion. With various desirable functions, the prospect of popular religion as described by Cleanthes is inspiring. The key and new information Cleanthes provides here is that it is the proper office of popular religion and not all forms of popular religion that can be beneficial. That is to say, true popular religion is an ideal, not reality.

However, Philo refutes that popular religion can have these functions, even in the ideal or proper form. For him, these desirable results can only possibly be produced by a true and philosophical theism (D, 95). The dispute between Philo and Cleanthes concerning popular religion becomes fiercer. Philo continues to show that religious motives within vulgar religion have often suppressed our natural inclination (which is a necessity for normal virtues) (D, 96), that the zeal and hypocrisy of religious exercises are the enemies of a healthy personality (D, 97), and that the extension of the power of the priests is extremely dangerous (D, 97-98).

Once again, Cleanthes cannot accept Philo's biased or one-sided narration of popular religion. He reminds Philo to "push not matters too far" and "allow not your zeal against false religion to undermine your veneration for the true" (D, 99). Cleanthes tries to convince Philo that the concept of God of popular religion can be warm and delightful:

> The most agreeable reflection, which it is possible for human imagination to suggest, is that of genuine theism, which represents us as the workmanship of a being perfectly good, wise, and powerful; who created us for happiness, and who, having implanted in us immeasurable desires of good, will prolong our existence to all eternity, and will transfer us into an infinite variety of scenes, in order to satisfy those desires, and render our felicity complete and durable (D, 99).

The benevolent, omniscient and omnipotent divine who creates the world is not new but is the traditional concept of God in the *Bible*. What Cleanthes emphasizes here is the benevolence of the almighty God, who cares for our happiness with his great love. Having described God as the ultimate guarantor of our happiness, Cleanthes wants to persuade Philo that the notion of the deity in popular religion is agreeable and is worthy of worship.

Cleanthes' defence of popular religion is pragmatic rather than philosophical in nature, which is different from Philo's accounts of true religion. His statements include some outstanding traits that oppose Philo's true religion: (1) while Philo's true religion is restricted to a few philosophers, Cleanthes' true religion is for "the vulgar"; (2) Philo's true religion is free from morality and religious practice, but Cleanthes' concept of the ideal popular religion can purify our hearts and promote social and political order; (3) Philo's true religion is harmless to society, while Cleanthes' is salutary; (4) Philo's true religion is "a species of philosophy", but Cleanthes' true religion is traditional-religion-based.

However, one might have two questions concerning Cleanthes' accounts of true religion. The first is for what reason would Cleanthes, a deist, suddenly speak for the vulgar. In part 2 of the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes and Demea have contrasting views on whether the existence and attributes of God can be proved by reason. While Cleanthes confidently believes that our experience can prove the being of God and his similarity to human intelligence, Demea insists that reason is incapable of knowing the nature of God (D, 20). If Demea is the representative of popular religion, which is opposite to Cleanthes' philosophical theism, it would be unusual for Cleanthes to defend Demea's standpoint in part 12 of the *Dialogues*. My first consideration for this phenomenon is that Cleanthes is very pious in religion and when Philo attacks the traditional concept of God radically, Cleanthes feels anxious and uncomfortable. After all, the concept of God in natural religion and in popular religion overlaps in many basic aspects, such as God's kindness and perfection. My second observation is that Cleanthes has noticed that Philo has a "spirit of controversy" and often develops his argument to an extreme stance in their conversations (D, 89), which Philo himself also admits. If this is correct, Philo is not a very qualified sceptic and both his criticism of natural and revealed religion need to be revised. In attacking the errors and dangers of popular religion in part 12, Philo's radical scepticism and careless personality continue to exist, as he believes that no

merit can possibly found in popular religion. Cleanthes has to remind Philo "push[ing] not matters too far", attempting to show that Philo's excessive hostility to religion is biased and that popular religion does contain beneficial consequences to society.

Another question one might ask is whether Cleanthes' statements of true popular religion are also Hume's ideas, as, for the majority of Humean scholars, Cleanthes is not Hume's (primary) statesman. The mainstream reading is that Philo is Hume since his scepticism of religion is close to Hume's philosophical principles developed in the *Treatise*, the *Enquiry* and elsewhere. Scholars who hold this view include N.K. Smith (Smith, 1947, 59), E.C. Mossner (Mossner, 1977, 4), J.C.A. Gaskin (Gaskin, 1995, 63), J. Noxon (Noxon, 1964, 251) etc. Direct textual evidence that might support this argument is found in one of Hume's letters to G. Elliot:

> You would perceive by the sample I have given you, that I make Cleanthes the hero of the dialogue. Whatever you can think of, to strengthen that side of the argument, will be most acceptable to me […] I have often thought, that the best way of composing a dialogue, would be for two persons that are of different opinions about any question of importance, to write alternately the different parts of the discourse, and reply to each other […] I should have taken on me the character of Philo, in the dialogue, which you'll own I could have supported naturally enough: And you would not have been averse to that of Cleanthes (L, I, 153-154).

From this letter, we know that Hume was asking for Elliot's suggestions concerning Hume's manuscript of the *Dialogues*. He requests Elliot to play the role of Cleanthes and to provide arguments on behalf of Cleanthes, while he himself acts as the character of Philo in their correspondence. But this does not automatically mean that Hume accepts what Philo says and that Philo entirely represents Hume throughout the *Dialogues*. As a matter of fact, the aim of the above message is simply to collect suggestions without explicitly showing which character Hume prefers.

As mentioned, Philo's scepticism is featured as "careless" and "less cautious", while Cleanthes' philosophical theology is regarded as "accurate" (D, 5). It is unlikely that an author would name his own philosophy in this way while admiring his theoretical opponent. At the end of the *Dialogues,* Pamphilus names Cleanthes as the hero of the conversations. One might say that Pamphilus is Cleanthes' student and hence he is prejudiced, or that Pamphilus is too young to make a fair judgement on the advanced subject of religion. But in the same letter, Hume clarifies by himself that "I make Cleanthes the hero of the dialogue" (L, I, 153-154). Due to this, C.W. Hendel suggests that Pamphilus, the narrator of the dialogues, represents Hume and that we should take Pamphilus' final judgement seriously (Hendel, 1925, 306-307). To

say Pamphilus stands for Hume is to say Cleanthes wins the conversations and that his ideas are advocated by Hume. In a letter to W. Strahan in 1776, Hume introduces his *Dialogues* to him, saying that "I there introduce a Sceptic, who is indeed refuted, and at last gives up the Argument, nay confesses that he was only amusing himself by all his Cavils" (L, II, 323). If Hume is genuine about the claim that Philo's scepticism is "indeed refuted", then, as B.M. Laing claims, Cleanthes is Hume and he is a follower of the teleological view of natural religion (Laing, 1937, 175-190).

But there are still other views on this topic. J. Bricke says that "it is a fundamental mistake to assume that one of the characters in the *Dialogues* serves as the author's primary spokesman" (Bricke, 1975, 3). Bricke's argument is that neither Philo's scepticism nor Cleanthes' experimental theology is close to Hume's philosophy, which is more clear, well-argued and consistent than the philosophies of Philo and Cleanthes. For a similar reason, N. Capaldi writes that "no one of the characters but every one of the characters in the *Dialogues* speaks for Hume" (Capaldi, 1970, 233). D. Coleman reminds us that the *Dialogues* is not only a serious philosophical book but also a literary work, which intends to be vivid in its contents and open in its conclusions (Coleman, 2007, XXXIX). N. Yajima, however, believes that Hume has set himself as an audience exemplified by Hermippus (Yajima, 2017, 249-260).

So, we have considerable interpretations in terms of who stands for Hume in the *Dialogues*: (1) Philo is Hume; (2) Cleanthes is Hume; (3) all the three participants represent Hume; (4) none stands for Hume; (5) the narrator, Pamphilus, is Hume; (6) the audience, Hermippus, is Hume. To my knowledge, this issue is unlikely to be finally resolved with the evidence we have. But Hume seems not to take one single character as his mouthpiece. That is to say, it is possible that both Philo and Cleanthes can be seen as Hume on certain occasions. In some places, even Demea's voice is also Hume's, especially when Demea shares common ground with Philo. As we can see, in parts 1 and 2 of the *Dialogues*, Philo and Demea agree on the limit of reason in searching for the truth of religion. Likewise, some points that made by Cleanthes are also evidently Hume's own ideas. For instance, in part 1 of the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes distinguishes the "brutish and ignorant" scepticism from the "refined and philosophical" scepticism (D, 12), which is in accordance with Hume's own distinction between the excessive and the moderate scepticism in the

Treatise and the *Enquiry*. In addition, Cleanthes' methodology of philosophy closely matches Hume's experimental approach, which rests mainly on human experience. Overall, I prefer the view that no single figure in the *Dialogues* constantly stands for Hume and because of that, we need to consider Hume's other texts in order to confirm whether a particular statement in the *Dialogues* is his own thought.

As Cleanthes' statements of true religion reappear in other of Hume's texts, I would argue that they are also the voices of Hume. Some evidence that supports this contention includes:

(1) Almost exactly the same statements are presented by Hume in the introduction to the second volume of the *History of England* in 1756:

> It ought to be no matter of Offence, that in this volume, as well as in the foregoing, the Mischiefs which arise from the Abuse of Religion, are so often mentioned, while so little in comparison is said of salutary Consequences which result from true & genuine Piety. The proper office of religion, is to reform Men's Lives, to purify their Hearts, to inforce all Moral Duties, and to secure Obedience to the Laws & civil Magistrate (Cited from Mossner, 1970, 306).[41]

(2) In a letter to W. Mure of Caldwell in 1743, Hume criticizes Leechman's sermon for he placing too much emphasis on the role of prayers and sacrifices in religious worship. Hume writes in this letter that Leechman needs to answer the objection to "Devotion & Prayers, & indeed to everything we commonly call Religion, except the Practice of Morality & the Assent of the Understanding to the Proposition God exists" (L, I, 50). J.C.A. Gaskin comments that "on this ground alone, apart from the evidence of the repetition of the account in both the *Dialogues* and in the footnote to the *History*, there can be little doubt that Hume speaks sincerely" (Gaskin, 1978, 188). This evidence may not be as strong as Gaskin thinks as the context is not that Hume directly endorses these two forms of religion but that Leechman does not need to answer the objection concerning the argument of these two forms of religion. What is not clear is the reason why Leechman does not need to do so. A possible answer is that Hume has no serious objections to the two forms of religion; that is, they are basically acceptable to him. "The practice of morality" may refer to Cleanthes' statements about the moral functions of the "proper office" of religion, while "the philosophical understanding of the proposition God exists" is an expression that is very close to Philo's claim in his last speech in the *Dialogues* that we should have a philosophical acknowledgement of the proposition that God exists

---

[41] For a detailed comparison between Cleanthes' statements and Hume's own in this regard, see section 5.4.

(D, 102). If this is right, then we can infer that both Cleanthes' and Philo's statements of true religion can be seen as Hume's own ideas.

(3) Although popular religion has considerable pernicious consequences, it still has positive sides, which I will examine at length later in section 5.2. I have mentioned in the first section of this chapter that popular religion is not false religion *per se*. The positive sides of popular religion can be the foundation for Cleanthes (and Hume) to declare that popular religion of the public can have its "proper office".

3.5 The Learned and the Vulgar: The Basis for Hume's Distinction

A. The Learned and the Vulgar

One may ask why Hume would have two different concepts of true religion. L.A. Selby-Bigge infamously claims that in Hume's works, "he says so different things in so many different ways and different connections, and with so much indifference to what he has said before" (Selby-Bigge, 1975, vii). If Selby-Bigge's comment is right, is the case of Hume's two concepts of true religion another example of the inconsistencies or contradictions in Hume's Philosophy? On a careful reading, I suggest that Hume's different concepts of true religion are not incompatible and are derived from his distinction between the learned and the vulgar.

The distinction between the learned (or "men of letters", "philosophers") and the vulgar is commonly found in the literature of early modern Britain. For instance, Locke writes in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that "this is so necessary in the use of language, that in this respect the knowing and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned, use the words they speak (with any meaning) all alike" (Locke, 1975, 406). H. Home (Lord Kames) remarks that only the learned are capable of fully comprehending the deity and that the vulgar "have little capacity to enter into abstract reasoning" (Home, 2005, 69). Similar distinction also repeatedly appears in Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (Hutcheson, 2004, 158, 172, 200, 240 etc.), Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (Reid, 2010, 7, 17, 24, 34, 36, 56, 58, 141, 170, 347 etc.) as well as other contemporaries of Hume. "The distinction between the vulgar and the learned",

B.A.O. Williams remarks, is "fairly commonplace" in the 18th century (Williams, 1963, 83).

In the context of the 17th and 18th centuries, "the learned" or "men of letters" are roughly equivalent to what we call "scholars" or "intellectuals" today. Relating to men of letters, the academia was often called "the republic of letters" (SE, 3) or "the learned world" (Locke, 1975, 272; Home, 2005, 46). "The vulgar", on face value, seems to discriminate against those who are less educated or incapable of philosophical thinking. But in the age of Enlightenment, this phrase was utilized by writers in a more neutral and looser sense. In their use, "vulgar" is a phrase similar to "ordinary", "popular" or "general". As a matter of fact, these words are used by Hume and his contemporaries interchangeably.

This widespread distinction in early modern Britain stems from a special circumstance. On the one hand, compared to the contemporary context, the level of education in the population of Great Britain (as well as in other European nations) in the Enlightenment was still quite low, which led a few people, who had the chance to attend university and to pursue an academic career, to gain a sense of superiority. Naturally, they were keen to call themselves "the leaned" or "men of letters", differentiating themselves from the less-educated. On the other hand, this distinction also implies a lofty mission for the intellectual elites - the obligation to explore truths and to "enlighten" the public. With the rise of natural science and philosophy, most scholars in Great Britain and other European nations in this period not only felt proud of being called "men of letters" but also felt confident in their mission under this title.[42]

Importantly, it seems to me that the distinction between the learned and the vulgar that appears in Hume's writings has a significant role in his philosophy. In almost all his works, we frequently find the terms like "the vulgar", "vulgar opinions", "vulgar

---

[42] H. Chisick describes the "common people" in a Humean context as such: "in the eighteenth century the common people were understood to stand in contrast to social groups that were not 'common'. The juridical mark of un-commonness throughout Europe during this period was privilege, or more correctly, personal privilege. The two groups best defined in terms of their privileges at this time were the clergy and nobility. On this first, rather literal definition, then, the [common] people are all those who were neither nobles nor clerics" (Chisick, 1989, 5). But to my understanding, Hume's distinction between the learned and the vulgar is different from the distinction between the common or lower class and the upper class, which is based on a social and economic perspective. Rather, the learned and the vulgar are distinguished on the basis of educational levels and on different sets of opinions. To be more exact, as Hume equals the learned to philosophers, "the vulgar" are better defined as those who are ignorant of philosophy.

systems", "vulgar apprehensions" and "vulgar sentiments", which are compared to the phrases of "the learned", "men of letters", "the enlightened" and "philosophers". From a common point of view, human beings vary in terms of character, economic and political status, gender, nationality, religious belief, educational level etc. E.C. Mossner comments that for Hume, the most significant difference between human beings seems to be the educated elites and the ignorant public:

> In the Humean view all men are divided into two unequal parts. At the top of the scale, the few, the very few. Down below, the many, the multitude. Those in the lower range are variously called the "generality of men", the "common people", the "ignorant and the thoughtless", the "mere ignorant", the "peasants", and by far the most frequently the "vulgar". I shall lump them all together as "the vulgar". Those in the upper range are variously called "the party of human-kind", the "men of genius", the "learned world", the "judicious and knowing", the "learned and wise", the "men of letters", the "philosopher", the "enlightened", and the "heroes of philosophy" (Mossner, 1978, 659).

The learned and the vulgar diverge largely in terms of their understanding of religion too. In the NHR, popular religion or vulgar religion is exemplified by polytheism and the vulgar form of monotheism. In both the NHR and the *Dialogues*, popular religion is often compared to philosophical religion. The following is one example:

> The learned, philosophical Varro, discoursing of religion, pretends not to deliver anything beyond probabilities and appearances. Such was his good sense and moderation. But the passionate, the zealous Augustin, insults the noble Roman on his scepticism and reserve, and professes the most thorough belief and assurance. A heathen poet, however, contemporary with the saint, absurdly esteems the religious system of the latter so false, that even the credulity of children, he says, could not engage them to believe it (NHR, 43).

However, I would argue that in Hume's context, the vulgar and the learned are mainly identified as different ways of looking at the world. That is to say, this distinction is classified not by the groups of people but by the different worldviews. In the *Treatise*, he writes that we can detect three kinds of opinions: true philosophy, false philosophy and vulgar opinions (T, 147). Consider the following statements:

> The vulgar, who take things according to their first appearance, attribute the uncertainty of events to such an uncertainty in the causes as makes the latter often fail of their usual influence. […] But philosophers, observing, that, almost in every part of nature, there is contained a vast variety of springs and principles, which are hid, by reason of their minuteness or remoteness (E 63).

According to Hume, the conduct and thinking of the learned and the vulgar are so different that he prefers to discuss them separately in terms of religion. Because of that, Hume develops two concepts of false religion (the dogmatism of theology, and the enthusiasm and superstition of popular religion) and two versions of true religion

(Philo's and Cleanthes'). The learned or the philosophers can see the world based on careful reasoning and can develop various forms of rational theology (e.g. deism), while the vulgar think and behave on the basis of common sense and social conventions. The vulgar opinion is simple and nonreflective, seeing things at face value, whereas the approach of the learned pursues a more detailed and specific understanding with the help of particular terms and principles.

Consider the following example: David Hume observes that the sun shines on a rock, which in turn becomes hot. As a common man, he is very likely to conclude that the sunshine is the direct and immediate cause of the rock heating up, yet, as a philosopher, he will not be able to draw this connection without a closer enquiry into the cause and effect of this phenomenon. Therefore, 'vulgar' and 'learned' are two possible categories intrinsic to a person's mind rather than a distinction between two species of people.

B. The Crisis of 1729

According to my observation, the argument that the vulgar and the learned are two competing ways of seeing things is related to Hume's mental and physical breakdown in 1729. Hume enjoyed philosophical thinking and reading when he was at university and developed his new opinions at an early age. The young philosopher was excited with the new principles he found, imagining that he would change the philosophical world with his study. But Hume's personal experience in uncovering his new philosophical world was not pleasant. In 1734, he wrote an anonymous letter to an unknown physician in London, asking him for help and advice. He confessed that he was under a serious physical and mental crisis due to intensive reading, thinking and writing in philosophy. The physician diagnosed it as a "disease of the learned". The following is Hume's description:

> Upon Examination of these [philosophers and critics], I found a certain Boldness of Temper, growing in me, which was not inclin'd to submit to any Authority in these Subjects, but le me to seek out some new Medium, by which Truth might be establisht. After much Study, & Reflection on this, at last, when I was about 18 Years of Age, there seem'd to be open'd up to me a new Scene of Thought, which transported me beyond Measure, & made me, with an ardor natural to young men, through up every other Pleasure or Business to apply entirely to it […] I was infinitely happy in this Course of Life for some Months; till at last, about the beginning of Sep 1729, all my Ardor seem'd in a moment to be extinguisht, & I cou'd no longer raise my mind to that pitch […] Some Scurvy Spots broke out on my Fingers, the first Winder I fell ill, about which I consulted a very knowing Physician

> […] Upon my mentioning to Physician he laught at me, & told me I was now a Brother, for that I had fairly got the Disease of the Learned (L, I, 13-14).

This long letter is of great importance in helping us understand the status of mind when he was preparing the *Treatise*. The letter remained only a draft and perhaps was never sent. We have little information about the address of the recipient, the physician he intended to connect with, and why Hume would write a letter to someone he did not previously know.[43]

Nonetheless, the information within this letter is rich. Hume does not explicitly explain what his "new scene of thought" is and what he planned to do with his philosophical discovery, but he indicates that the abstract principles of his new thoughts drove him too far from conventional ideas and routine life, which has disturbed and challenged his normal understanding of the world and further affected his mental and physical health. His sceptical principles and conclusions in philosophy on the topics of causation, the self, the external world and the existence and nature of God are so strange compared to popular views that if he adhered strictly to his philosophy in daily life, he would not be able to behave like a normal person. From his statements in this letter, I suggest that the illness of the young Hume was due to the conflict between the learned Hume and the vulgar Hume, which had a crucial impact on him, philosophically and personally.

In a letter to G. Elliot in 1751, he states once again the painful struggle between the learned Hume and the vulgar Hume:

> It is not long ago that I burned an old manuscript book, wrote before I was twenty; which contained, page after page, the gradual progress of my thoughts on that head. It began with an anxious search after arguments, to confirm the common opinion: Doubts stole in, dissipated, returned, were again dissipated, returned again; and it was a perpetual struggle of a restless imagination against inclination, perhaps against reason (L, I, 154).

Although Hume does not clarify which old manuscript book he is talking about, the evidence that this struggle happened just before his twenties and that the mental anxiety was due to philosophical enquiry, points to the crisis of 1729. Independent enquiry of philosophy is an adventure, during which doubts and uncertainties

---

[43] The question who is the recipient of this letter is controversial. Hume's early biographer J.H. Burton suggests that the recipient is George Cheyne (Burton, 1846, 42-47). But, based on evidence in an article called "Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" published in 1944, E.C. Mossner claims that it cannot be George Cheyne (Mossner, 1944, 135–152). However, J.P. Wright argues that Mossner's conclusion is not decisive and that Burton's proposal is possibly right (Wright, 2003, 125-141).

challenge one's endurance, and the abstract principles can drag one into philosophical realms unfamiliar to our common understandings. The breakdown happened not only because Hume worked constantly on a hard philosophical adventure but also because his philosophical tenets were strange, or even in confliction with, common ideas in routine life. Also, he confesses in "My Own Life" that his family expected him to be a lawyer, which is different from his dream of being a philosopher (Hume, 2007, 170). E.C. Mossner remarks that "the problem of reconciling his literary ambitions with a practical career troubled Hume constantly and continued to his anguished state" (Mossner, 1970, 71).

According to J. Harris, inspired by Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Hume tried to lead a stoic lifestyle, which turned out to be an unsuccessful experiment (Harris, 2015, 26). Except for the tension between his Stoic philosophical opinion and common sense, M. A. Stewart writes that this breakdown might have had something to do with his reading on religious writings about mysticism (Stewart, 2005, 30). What cannot be denied is that Hume's ambition to live and think in a philosophical way had ruined his common sentiments and normal pleasures. The failure of this philosophical experiment in his personal life, if Harris is correct, forced him to come back to routine life. As a result, in 1734, Hume decided to escape philosophy and to have "a more active scene of life" in Bristol (Hume, 2007, 170).

C. The Relationship between the Learned and the Vulgar

Although the struggle of 1729 did not last long, it has a crucial impact on Hume's mind. In Book One of the *Treatise*, he recalls this crisis as follows:

> I am first affrighted and confounded with that forlorn solitude, in which I am plac'd in my philosophy, and fancy myself some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expell'd all human commerce, and left utterly abandon'd and disconsolate. Fain wou'd I run into the crowd for shelter and warmth; but cannot prevail with myself to mix with such deformity. I call upon others to join me, in order to make a company apart; but no one will hearken to me. Every one keeps at a distance, and dreads that storm, which beats upon me from every side (T, 172).

But surprisingly, Hume recovered soon after 1729 and returned to his philosophical investigation, composing his *Treatise* during 1734-1737 in France. It is interesting

that the struggle between the vulgar Hume and the philosopher Hume seems to have been dismissed when he engaged in the writing of the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* and it seems never raised again in the rest of his life. Without his clear indication, I speculate that Hume might have found a method to relieve the illness of the learned by a moderate separation between philosophical enquiry and common life. In this way, his routine life would not be disturbed too much by the remote and obscure principles of philosophy whilst he could enjoy the freedom and independence of philosophical meditation without worrying about the prejudices of the public. He reflects that it is natural inclination and common life that save him from the danger of the illusion of philosophy:

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther […] These are the sentiments of my spleen and indolence; and indeed I must confess, that philosophy has nothing to oppose to them, and expects a victory more from the returns of a serious good-humour'd disposition, than from the force of reason and conviction. In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism (T, 175-176).

Thus, with a necessary and moderate separation, Hume found a balanced attitude to philosophy and common life and due to that, the tension between the learned and the vulgar was no longer a challenge for him. In the *Enquiry*, he famously states that "be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man" (E, 6). The balanced attitude and the suitable separation ensure that Hume can maintain "a cheerful and sanguine temper" in the rest of his life (Hume, 2007, 170).

It would be misleading to say that the learned are superior to the vulgar, or that philosophical opinions are better than popular understandings. As a sceptic, Hume had a critical attitude towards both types of worldview. Philosophical opinions are different and remote from vulgar sentiments on various topics, such as the existence of causation, the self and the external world (T, 23, 29, 47, 144 etc.).But at some places, he writes, philosophical arguments are not as convincing as conventional opinions. Philosophical conceptions have no authority over vulgar comprehensions, "for as the philosophical system is found by experience to take hold of many minds, and in particular of all those, who reflect ever so little on this subject, it must derive all its authority from the vulgar system; since it has no original authority of its own" (T, 141). In investigating whether there is a full body between two objects, Hume

even prefers the understanding of the vulgar over that of philosophers (T, 47). Although the vulgar opinions contain errors and superstitions, our lives are largely based on these opinions, which form the basis of our sense of morality and frame our understanding of the world.

Hume's sympathy with vulgar understanding might owe something to Berkeley, who famously states that "we ought to think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar" (Berkeley, 1996, 45). In so saying, Berkeley defends the authority of the vulgar use of language. In the introduction to his *Principles of Human knowledge*, Berkeley highlights the errors and dangers of the "abstraction" of philosophers, who produce special terms for their principles which might be groundless.[44] He defends vulgar phrases from a pragmatic perspective: "in the ordinary affairs of life, any phrases may be retained, so long as they excite in us proper sentiments, or dispositions to act in such a manner as is necessary for our well-being, how false soever they may be, if taken in a strict and speculative sense" (ibid. 46).

Like Berkeley, Hume is well aware of the shortcomings of philosophical enquiry. He praises Berkeley's criticism of the abstraction of philosophers, seeing it as "one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that has been made of late years in the republic of letters" (T, 46). A minor difference between the two is that while Hume's distinction is related more to epistemology and psychology, Berkeley's defence of vulgar phrases is associated more with linguistics.[45]

The distinction between the learned and the vulgar plays a central role in Hume's enquiry into religion. As we said, Hume's criticism of religion falls into two categories: the wrongness of theological inference of the learned and the extremeness of religious practice of the vulgar. Likewise, true religion is divided into the philosophical and the vulgar forms. Philo comments that the vulgar are utterly incapable of the true religion of philosophers (D, 96). But the true religion of the learned is not better than that of the vulgar. In fact, they are two different entities, which differ from one another in their origins, features and social consequences.

---

[44] The existence of "matter" is an example. In using the word "matter", philosophers mean something that is different from our daily concept of "matter" (which is similar to the word "thing") and points to a substance of all the things we perceive. Berkley shows that the "matter" of philosophers is not only a special use of language but is also groundless in its arguments. Due to that, philosophers' tenets have no authority over vulgar opinions and routine phrases.
[45] J. W. COOK argues that Berkeley's practical justification for natural language might be close to that of Wittgenstein (Cook, 2007, 213-233).

Hume sees the corruption of religion as false religion and, correspondingly, his true religion can be seen as the purification of religion. The relationship between the false and true religion can be drawn as the following figure:

```
                                                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                                                    │     The learned     │
                                                    │  (Philo's version)  │
                                                    └─────────────────────┘
                                ┌─────────────────┐
                                │  True religion  │
                                └─────────────────┘
                                                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                  Purified                          │     The vulgar      │
                                                    │ (Cleanthes' version)│
┌─────────────────┐                                 └─────────────────────┘
│ Religion mixed  │
└─────────────────┘                                 ┌─────────────────────┐
                                                    │    Dogmatism of     │
                  Corrupted                         │      theology       │
                                                    │    (the learned)    │
                                ┌─────────────────┐ └─────────────────────┘
                                │ False religion  │
                                └─────────────────┘ ┌─────────────────────┐
                                                    │  Superstition and   │
                                                    │     Enthusiasm      │
                                                    │    (the vulgar)     │
                                                    └─────────────────────┘
```
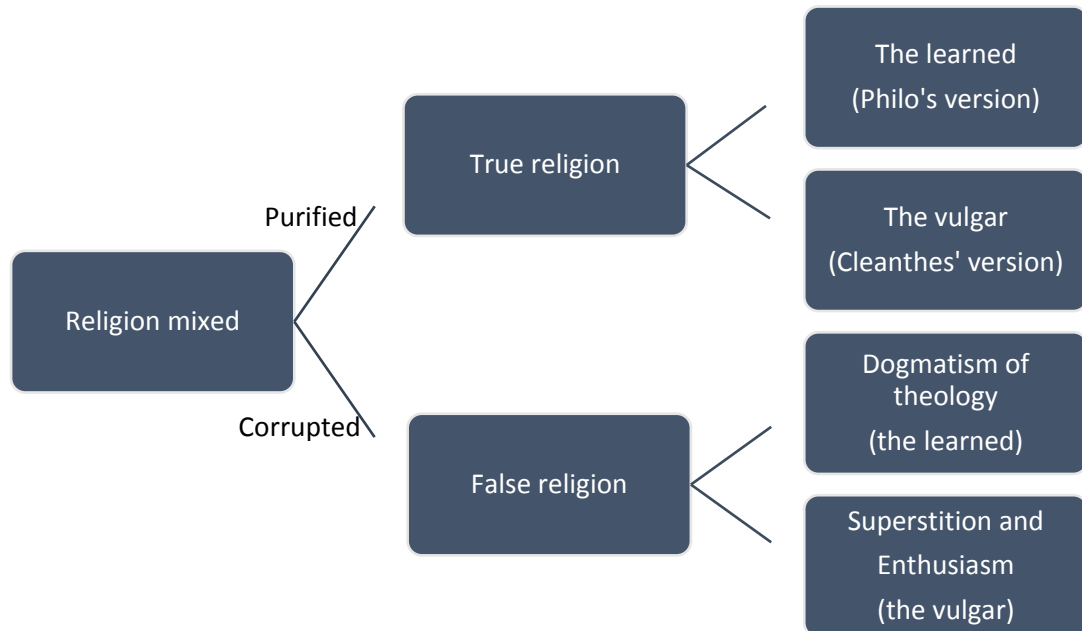
3.6 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter started by presenting Hume's accounts of false religion, showing that the dogmatism of theology and the excessiveness of public worship (including superstition and enthusiasm) are the two types of false religion in his texts. Then, I presented the different features of Philo's and Cleanthes' statements of true religion, arguing that Philo's true religion is a philosophical discussion of the rationality of a limited theism, while Cleanthes' concept defends the proper role of an ideal popular religion. Moreover, I considered the reason for Hume to differentiate between two concepts of true religion, presenting that it originates from his distinction between the learned and the vulgar, which is tightly connected with his physical and mental crisis in 1729.

Briefly, the features of Hume's two concepts of true religion can be summarized in the following table:

	Philo's version	Cleanthes' version
Subject	The learned	The vulgar
Features	- Not related to morality - Not related to practice - Limited to a few philosophers - Purely speculative	- Promotes morality and social peace - Highly practical and pragmatic - Applied to the public - Based on traditional religion

Chapter Four

Minimized Theology: On Philo's True Religion

In every enquiry men judge of the uncertain by comparing it with an object presupposed certain, and their judgement is always approximative; every enquiry is, therefore, comparative and uses the method of analogy. When there is comparatively little distance from the object of enquiry back to the object regarded as certain, a judgement is easily formed; when many intermediaries are required, the task becomes difficult.

——Nicolas Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, pp. 7-8.

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to reconsider the contents of Philo's true religion and to examine its philosophical basis. There are some remarkable puzzles within Philo's statements on true religion in part 12 of the *Dialogues*: firstly, at the beginning of this part, he states that a designer of the universe is obvious to everyone, but in his last speech, the existence of God remains an ambiguous and undefined proposition, which can only be comprehended by a few philosophers; secondly, in one place Philo says that the existence of a designer is evident through individual feelings, while in other places he repeatedly stresses that true religion is "rational and philosophical"; thirdly, he confusingly states in paragraphs 6 and 7 of part 12 that the dispute between atheism and theism is merely verbal. In this chapter I try to reconcile these apparent inconsistencies by showing that an intelligent designer as the first cause of the universe remains a "remote probability", of which we can have different understandings (theistic or nontheistic) and to which we can have different responses (sense or reason). In the end, Philo's true religion is most aptly understood as an example of Hume's moderate scepticism.

It is significant to note that although the remote analogy between God and human intelligence still has a limited basis in reason, Philo's true religion does not favour theism over atheism. The probability of the existence of God is so limited (or "remote" to use Hume's term) and the cause or causes of the universe so ambiguous that an atheistic understanding of these topics is equally possible. This is the key reason why Philo considers that the debate between theism and atheism is merely verbal. Therefore, Philo's final position is permitted rather than prescribed, and his intention is not to adopt a specific form of theism but to minimize theological

inference in order to make it harmless.

To be specific, section 4.2 presents the regular and irregular arguments for natural theology offered by Cleanthes and Philo's responses to them. Section 4.3 examines how rare and thin Philo's true religion is. Section 4.4 investigates the epistemological basis for Philo's true religion, showing that a "remote probability" of the ultimate cause of nature is the philosophical ground for him to accept a minimal level of theology and to claim that the dispute between theism and atheism is only a "verbal controversy". In section 4.5, I read Philo's true religion as an expression of Hume's moderate scepticism, briefly exploring the alternative definitions as limited theism or soft atheism. Section 4.6 concludes that Philo's concern with true religion is largely pragmatic: as theology cannot be entirely removed from human reason, he intends to restrict theological enquiry to a limited academic sphere.

4.2 Natural Theology: the Regular and Irregular Argument

It is widely believed that Cleanthes develops two different types of argument for his natural religion and, correspondingly, Philo has two kinds of confession to theism in part 12 of the *Dialogues*.[46] The two-argument thesis is first offered by N. Pike, who claims that Philo's true religion is a belief of natural religion on the basis of the "irregular argument" instead of the "regular argument", which I briefly presented in section 2.4.[47] Pike's thesis is followed by B. Logan (Logan, 1992, 483-500) and most recently by T. Black and R. Gressis (Black and Gressis, 2017, 244-264). A similar stance on the irregular argument is also held by A. Willis and W.L. Sessions.[48] The regular argument is the rational inference of the argument from design, while the irregular argument is the contention that we have a feeling of the world's design by God. J.C.A. Gaskin, however, insists that the irregular argument offered by

---

[46] A typical example for this distinction is that S. Andre and B. Logan agree that Philo accepts a "limited theism", but their opinions differ on whether it is a result of reason or philosophy (the regular argument), or if it is an outcome of sense or nature (the irregular argument). The former believes that Philo's limited theism is similar to Epicurus, "who denied, not that the Gods exist, but that they intervene in human affairs" (Andre, 1993, 142); the latter claims that it is our nature that stops us from being radical sceptics and enable us to accept the truth of the deity (Logan, 1996, 200).

[47] Similar to Pike, M.J. Fereira believes that Hume also favours the irregular argument over the regular argument in the NHR. According to Fereira, religious beliefs in the NHR are "neither generated reflectively, nor justifiable by argument, nor dislodgeable by 'serious reflection'" but stem from our 'original instincts'" (Fereira, 1994, 580-581).

[48] See section 2.2.

Cleanthes is "not a new argument or a new form of reasoning" (Gaskin, 1978, 51).

Let us consider the regular argument first. Natural religion or natural theology is usually compared with revealed religion, which highlights the Scriptures and the revelation of God as the main or only source of our understanding of religion. Natural religion, on the other hand, emphasises that God is the author of nature and hence, every human being can conceive the Divine by their reason. Natural religion has two central arguments as its basis: first, there are regularities and uniformity within the cosmos, and second, there are considerable similarities between nature and human artifacts, the author of nature (i.e. God) and the authors of artifacts (i.e. Human beings).[49] The first argument is described by Cleanthes in part 2 of the *Dialogues* as follows:

> Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them (D, 19).

He continues to present the thesis of analogy between the designer or designers of artifacts and that of nature:

> The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the author of nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work, which he has executed. By this argument a posteriori, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence (D, 19-20).

As we can see, in Cleanthes' narrative, the first thesis argues that the universe is ordered: it consists of different parts in a coherent structure, which is a central premise of natural theology. But the uniformity within the universe is not automatically linked to the author of nature. Cleanthes' second thesis is more crucial - that there are considerable similarities between nature and human works, and also between the author of the orderly universe and human beings. It is the second thesis that leads deists to declare that the ultimate cause of the orderly world must be an intelligent designer.

---

[49] For a concise introduction to the history of natural theology, see A. Case-Winters (2001, 154-168).

It is obvious that Philo does not deny the first argument. We have all seen the regularities within the world thousands of times in our own experience. For instance, a stone will fall to the ground, a fire will burn at a certain heat, and the earth has some solidity (D, 20). In the essay "Of Liberty and Necessity" in the *Enquiry*, Hume also writes that regularities not only exist in the natural world but also in cultures and even personalities (E, 58-75). Due to that, Hume, in the introduction to the *Treatise*, intends to base the science of man on observations and experimental philosophy (T, 3-6).

It is also noticeable that Philo (and Hume) does not deny the credibility of analogy as a way of inference. "What I chiefly scruple in this subject", Philo says, "is not so much, that all religious arguments are by Cleanthes reduced to experience, as that they appear not to be even the most certain and irrefragable of that inferior kind" (D, 20). For instance, from the observation of the circulation of blood in frogs and fishes, Philo thinks that it is a "strong analogy" for a person to infer that the same phenomenon also takes place in other animals (ibid.). In the *Enquiry*, Hume admits that the analogy of natural theology is "an argument drawn from effects to causes", which is the proper and experimental way of reasoning he always recommends (E, 99).

What Philo intends to criticize the analogy of natural theology is not its method of reasoning but its conclusions. For Cleanthes, the analogy of natural religion has surely demonstrated the being and nature of God. But for Philo, it is only "a very weak analogy" or an "imperfect analogy", which contains many errors and uncertainties (D, 20-21). Thus, Philo's criticism targets the second thesis, i.e. the analogy between nature and human works, as well as God and human beings ("anthropomorphism"). Philo's main objections against the credibility of this deistic analogy can be summarized as follows:

(1) The argument of uniqueness. The analogy of natural theology is grounded in our experience, but Philo points out that we have no experience of the author of nature (if there is one), or of the creation of the world. These are special objects that we cannot possibly experience, according to his accounts. While it is true that we are living in the universe and, thus, have some experience of it, we can only experience a tiny part of the whole universe within the limited timespan of a human life. As Philo

puts it, "a very small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us: And do we thence pronounce decisively concerning the origin of the whole?" (D, 25). The universe as a whole is different from the common things we ordinarily encounter in daily life, such as a watch or a house. The example of a house is utilized in parts 2 and 4 of the *Dialogues*, as well as in part 11 of the *Enquiry,* to indicate that it is not appropriate to compare the universe to common items. Hume concludes that these two objects have "infinite difference" (E, 104) and likewise, Philo claims that "surely you will not affirm, that the universe bears such a resemblance to a house" (D, 21). [50]

(2) The competing hypotheses. In part 7 of the *Dialogues*, Philo tries to convince Cleanthes that apart from the design argument, alternative explanations concerning the cause of laws in nature are possible. The world may be like a plant or an animal and the uniformity of the world can develop from itself. He assumes that this process could resemble "a tree shed[ding] its seed into the neighbouring fields, and produc[ing] other trees" (D, 53) or that it "resembles an animal, therefore it arose from generation" (D, 55). This thesis is a precedent of the theory of Darwinism.[51] Both Hume and Darwin argue that the regularities within nature can be a result of nature itself without an external cause.[52] Yet, for Philo, other religious hypotheses are also plausible in explaining the ultimate cause of nature. The "infinite spider" of Brahmanism, he says, "spun this whole complicated mass from his bowels, and annihilates afterwards the whole or any part of it, by absorbing it again, and resolving it into his own essence" (D, 56). By presenting this example, Philo intends to show that, unlike the analogy of natural religion, the universe can be a self-creating and self-sustaining system.

---

[50] For an analysis of the differences between the universe and a house in Philo's accounts, see C. Shelley (2002, 171-189).
[51] Darwin has read Hume's *Dialogues* and the NHR, and he was familiar with Hume's scepticism of religion. Although Hume does not use the term "evolution" nor gives detailed accounts of natural selection in these two works, his naturalistic accounts of the origins of religion and his scepticism of natural theology inspired Darwin. The hypotheses of the generation of animals and the vegetation of plants require further evidence and investigation, which Darwin endeavoured to do. For the influences of Hume on Darwin, see W.B. Huntley (1972, 457-470) and C. Kemp (2017, 1-26).
[52] Some contemporary atheists who are followers of Darwinism claim that Darwin's theory against the design argument is better and more powerful than Hume's criticism in the *Dialogues*, as: (1) Hume does not offer serious alternative explanations while Darwin does and (2) Hume does not show that the nontheistic alternatives are better than the argument from design while Darwin does (e.g. R. Dawkins, 1986; E, Sober, 2000; J. Mackie, 1982). These claims are challenged by G. Oppy (1996, 519-534).

(3) The argument of insufficiency. It is an objection that even though the analogy of natural theology can indicate an author of nature, it cannot demonstrate most of its central attributes, such as its omniscience, omnipotence and moral benevolence. Part 10 of the *Dialogues* shows that "Epicurus' old questions" concerning the perfection of God are not yet answered: "is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil? " (D, 74). He also argues that the existence of ills in the world implies that nature is not delicate or perfect, which, according to the principles of natural religion, is further linked to the imperfection of its author (D, 78-88). In short, even if Cleanthes' analogy can show that there is an author of nature, it is not sufficient to demonstrate that it is the Christian God or the deistic God, who is perfect in all aspects.

According to Pike, Logan, Black and Gressis, Cleanthes offers a new argument for his natural religion in Part 3, which is not based on rationality but on feeling. Pike summarizes it as follows:

> By the time Dialogue III is completed, Cleanthes has developed two positions regarding the way in which order and contrivance in the natural world are evidentially related to the "hypothesis of design." In Dialogue II he presents the "scientific" version of the argument from design which Philo vigorously criticizes and rejects. In response to Philo's initial criticisms, Cleanthes revises his thinking and offers the "irregular" version of the argument in Dialogue III. At this point, Philo makes no comment on the second version of the argument - in Dialogues IV through XI his critical attentions are still focused on the "scientific" tradition in theology […] However, in Dialogue XII, Philo returns to the "irregular" proof given in Dialogue III. It is this second argument that he accepts (Pike, 1970, 223).

Indeed, Cleanthes seems to change his strategy of demonstration from inductive inference to illustration by examples in Part 3. The first imaginary example he presents is about an "articulate voice were heard in the clouds", from which we can immediately know that the source is a mighty author (that is, God) (D, 29). The second instance is that of a well-ordered library, from which we can immediately see that this is the work of a great librarian. However, Cleanthes does not explicitly point out that the plausibility of these two examples is based on feeling. Instead, the first example is drawn on the basis of the principle that "all conclusions concerning fact were founded on experience", as well as the premise that like effects prove like causes (D, 30). In this case, it is not a new argument but an example of the old argument that Cleanthes already presented in Part 2. The third example might be closer to Pike's irregular argument. Cleanthes says, "consider, anatomize the eye:

Survey its structure and contrivance; and tell me, from *your own feeling*, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation" (D, 31, emphasis added).

It is true that Philo keeps silent throughout Part 3 of the *Dialogues* and after Cleanthes' speech, he feels a little "embarrassed and confounded" (D, 33). But does that mean Philo accepts what Cleanthes has said? The answer is not as clear as Pike supposes. Although Philo gives no comments in this part, Demea refutes Cleanthes' statements on his behalf. Demea's objections are partly his own and partly Philo's: first, instances like hearing a voice or seeing a well-ordered library are familiar to us, while the author of nature is a unique and distant object (Philo's argument) and second, God is perfection and will always remain mysterious to us (Demea's own argument). If Philo agrees with Demea, he will be reluctant to accept Cleanthes' proposal of the irregular argument.

4.3 The Rareness and Thinness of Philo's True Religion

A. The Strong and the Weak Confession

In chapter three, I mentioned that Philo's true religion accepts a philosophical and rational theism, which only a few philosophers are capable of. But according to the reading of the irregular argument, in part 12 of the *Dialogues*, Philo confesses his theism based on feeling instead of reason, which seems to be incompatible with the features of his true religion. For instance, B. Logan claims that what Philo has confessed is "the feeling for design", which is based on "affections and imaginations" (Logan, 1992, 484-498).[53] Indeed, at the beginning of the closing part of the *Dialogues*, Philo states that he has "a deeper sense of religion" than any other individuals and that a purpose and a design of nature "strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker" (D, 89). It seems to me that Philo's confession of

---

[53] Logan compares Philo's irregular defence of anthropomorphism to Kant's "symbolic" account of anthropomorphism, claiming that they are quite similar in that the deity exists not in reasoning but in "irresistible belief" (Logan, 1998, 133-148). Considering that Kant sees the *Dialogues* as a wholly deconstructive work to theism, it is arguable whether Hume has such great sympathy with deism and whether Kant shares this "positive" dimension with Hume. For Kant's criticism of Hume's view of religion, see R. Winegar (2015, 888-910).

theism contains three contradictions: (1) in the first paragraphs, he highlights that the argument from design is apparent to all men, but in all other places, he states that the true form of natural theology is only suitable for a few philosophers; (2) at the beginning he highlights the obviousness of the being of God as the designer of nature, but in the end, this hypothesis remains only an "ambiguous" and "undefined" proposition; (3) he firstly states that the design argument is demonstrated by sense, but later repeatedly says that true religion is rational and philosophical. This section considers the first two issues, leaving the discussion of the third to section 4.4.

I tend to read Philo's strong confession as superficial or at least not significant in his argument. My assumption is that if the design argument was self-evident, as he said, then the criticism of natural religion in the previous parts of the *Dialogues* would be useless. I mentioned in 3.3 that Philo's robust confession to theism is partly an attempt to flatter Cleanthes in order to create a friendly atmosphere and to ensure that their conversation can continue. After making these statements, Philo begins to revise his confession gradually. "That the works of nature bear a great analogy to the productions of art is evident", he says, "but as there are also considerable differences, we have reason to suppose a proportional difference in the causes" (D, 92). In particular, he argues that the understanding of theism is not better than that of atheism concerning the nature of the divine, which I will discuss at length in 4.4.

Another plausible interpretation of Philo's strong confession is that his statements are based on a common point of view rather than his own philosophical conclusions. According to W.H. Austin, the design argument was widely regarded as a sound demonstration in British academia of his day. "He [Hume] must agree on this basic point if he is not to continue to seem to many a mere ingenious player of intellectual games" (Austin, 1985, 107). Thus, the obviousness of the argument from design in Philo's confession is no more than a presentation of the common points "on which all sensible people can agree" (ibid.). Similarly, N. Yajima asserts that Philo makes these statements not as a philosopher but as an ordinary man, who "shows that he has a proper understanding of Cleanthes' theory as 'a man of common sense'" (Yajima, 2017, 256). The interpretation from common sense has its textual evidence, as Philo contends that "no one, I am confident, in whose eyes I appear a man of

common sense, will ever mistake my intentions" (D, 89).[54]

Combining the two interpretations, I tend to read Philo's weak confession to theism as his genuine and philosophical affirmation, and see his strong confession mainly as a presentation of a common point of view, though he may not entirely deny it. It is important to note that the obviousness of the deity in Philo's statements is only about the existence of God. As a matter of fact, in the first paragraphs of part 12, Philo says nothing about the nature of God. Let us now move on to examine the rareness and thinness of his weak confession.

B. The Rareness of True Religion

Philo's true religion is "a part of philosophy and therefore it shares the advantages as well as the disadvantages with philosophy" (D, 98). Philosophical principles can have a beneficial influence but they are "always confined to very few persons" (ibid.). This is also true for Philo's true religion as a species of philosophy. In my observation, the following two reasons can explain why his true religion is confined to a limited number of the learned.

First, philosophers are rare. Vulgar opinions and common sense are essential for our daily life and without them, we are unable to act properly. For instance, we usually assume that the buses and cars on the street are real and that is why we must comply with the traffic rules for our own safety. In other words, vulgar opinions are widely or even universally held. Some vulgar concepts we may fully comprehend while others we may take for granted without reflection. For example, we naturally believe that we live in a real world that is independent of our mind without ever questioning this assumption.

---

[54] The demonstration of the existence of God from common sense is advocated typically by the so-called Scottish common sense school led by T. Reid, who argues that an intelligent first cause is not discovered by reason but revealed by "the common sense of mankind" (Reid, 1827, 323). Following Reid, J. Beattie claims that "the constitution of our nature determines us to believe" (Beattie, 2000). Reid and Beattie were Hume's contemporaries who attacked his sceptical philosophy, and Beattie's criticism in particular angered Hume considerably (Mossner, 1970, 577-588). But confusingly, Hume decided not to reply to them. His reasons remain unknown, but I believe it is possible that he may have agreed with them that common sense can be the source for believing in God.

Philosophy, however, has different characteristics. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle tells us that "all men by nature desire to know" (Aristotle, 1924, 114).[55] Although every human being desires to have knowledge on different issues, not many are willing or able to be a philosopher. Becoming a philosopher, as Aristotle reminds us, requires not only curiosity for the unknown world but also sufficient leisure. Living in the world and surviving in a competitive society, most of us are occupied by daily trivialities, working routines, necessities of life and so forth, leaving only very limited time for serious reflection on philosophical questions. Even when we finally have leisure at weekends or on holidays, we are usually preoccupied with personal hobbies or interests. In addition, as philosophy has developed over many centuries, it has divided into various branches. Thus, serious enquiry on most philosophical questions requires considerable reading and professional training, which are also beyond the capability of many of us. Moreover, the terminology, questions, and principles of philosophy are often rather distant from the common use of language and conventional ideas. Recalling the examples presented in the previous paragraph, a sceptical philosopher may ask whether the external world truly exists or whether the buses and cars on the street are real.[56] These questions are indeed not familiar to those of us who live on common sense. Philo's true religion is for the learned, but as we have seen above, only very few people within our society can ever be categorized as "the learned" or philosophers.

I also mentioned that "the learned" and "the vulgar" can be two worldviews within one person. Even those who are well-educated and armed with rich philosophical reading, or who take philosophy as their profession, may not be able to hold philosophical opinions and principles all of the time. When a philosopher leaves his study and walks on the street, he or she also has to assume that the buses and cars on the road truly exist. In Hume's voice, a philosopher, as long as he returns to natural sentiment and common sense, "secures himself from any dangerous [philosophical] illusions" (E, 4). Rousseau, too, points out that the scepticism of philosophers "is hardly made to last", for "it [i.e. our mind] decides in spite of itself one way or the other and prefers to be deceived rather than to believe nothing"

---

[55] This oft quoted sentence is usually understood to mean that human beings desire to obtain knowledge. But based on Aristotle's own word "eidenai", D. Pritchard claims that Aristotle is not extolling the desirability of knowledge *per se*, but rather of a particular kind of knowledge, which is "essentially involved with seeing" (Pritchard, 2016, 29).
[56] On Hume's theory of the external world, H.H. Price remarks, "is to all appearance purely negative" (Price, 1940, 2).

(Rousseau, 1979, 267-268). Philosophers may indulge in thinking about philosophical issues for a long time, but afterwards, they still have to act based on the vulgar understanding of the world.[57]

In short, Philo's true religion, as a species of philosophy, is rare, as the vulgar are "utterly incapable of so pure a religion" (D, 96) and even philosophers cannot base their lives purely on philosophical principles. As Hume indicates in the *Enquiry*, it is our habit and customs rather than philosophy and reason that serve as the great guide for human life (E, 32).

Second, philosophers who embrace true religion are rarer still. Philo states that not all philosophers are adherent to his notion of true religion. As he puts it, "a very few, the philosophical theists, who entertain, or rather indeed endeavour to entertain, suitable notions of his [i.e. God's] divine perfections" (D, 101). The underlying reason, according to Philo and Hume, is that most philosophers embrace false principles in their systems. Hume writes in the introduction to the *Treatise* that "it is easy for one of judgment and learning, to perceive the weak foundation even of those systems, which have obtain'd the greatest credit, and have carry'd their pretensions highest to accurate and profound reasoning" (T, 3). It seems to me that Hume takes himself as the model of a true philosopher and his moderate scepticism as the ideal of true philosophy. The following is his description of a true philosopher:

> Nothing is more requisite for a true philosopher, than to restrain the intemperate desire of searching into causes, and having establish'd any doctrine upon a sufficient number of experiments, rest contented with that, when he sees a farther examination wou'd lead him into obscure and uncertain speculations. In that case his enquiry wou'd be much better employ'd in examining the effects than the causes of his principle (T, 14).

In 3.2, I showed that the dogmatism of theology is one type of false religion. According to Hume, many religious philosophers ground their principles mainly on mere speculation and hypotheses and for those who explore their tenets on the basis of experience, such as deists like Cleanthes, their inferences tend to be less cautious and less accurate. Philosophers should follow "the slow and deliberate steps" of experimental observation, as the arrangement of things and their relations

---

[57] M. Burnyeat claims that central to Hume's criticism is that whether one can "stop holding the beliefs which his arguments show to be unreasonable" (Burnyeat, 1980, 22). According to Burnyeat, Hume thinks that a sceptic cannot live based on scepticism. D. F. Norton believes that Hume has provided detailed arguments for this assertion (Norton, 2000, 493-513).

are complicated and changeable (D, 24). But not many philosophers are willing to adopt a moderate scepticism because that means to humble their own inferences and conclusions and to always keep "a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty" (E, 118). I will discuss Hume's accounts of true and false philosophy in fuller pages in 6.2, but it is helpful to point out here that there are only very few true philosophers who can and want to embrace Philo's concept of true religion.

C. The Thinness of True Religion

In the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry*, Hume provides a naturalistic account of morality, in which secular morality has nothing to do with religion or its theology. P. Russell calls this a "godless worldview" (2008, 288). Likewise, in part 12 of the *Dialogues*, although the existence of God seems to be accepted by Philo, for him, the deity has no relation to morality and practice. Philo's statements of the thinness of his true religion are best presented in his last speech:

> If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence: If this proposition be not capable of extension, variation, or more particular explication: If it affords no inference that affects human life, or can be the source of any action or forbearance: And if the analogy, imperfect as it is, can be carried no farther than to the human intelligence; and cannot be transferred, with any appearance of probability, to the other qualities of the mind: If this really be the case, what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition, as often as it occurs; and believe, that the arguments, on which it is established, exceed the objections, which lie against it? (D, 101-102).

This passage features five "ifs". Each "if" is a substantial limitation to natural theology. The first "if" is the most important and is Philo's main thesis, which states that a "somewhat ambiguous" and "undefined" proposition that an intelligent God exists is probable. That is to say, the cause or causes of the regularities and uniformity of the universe bear only very distant resemblance to human intellect. This obscure claim, though very weak, does offer a rational justification for the belief in a deity or deities, which is the reason why Philo (and Hume) chooses not to turn down natural theology as a whole.[58] Philo is reluctant to use "God" here but uses "cause" and "causes" of the universe, which is open to other theistic and nontheistic interpretations.

---

[58] As the nature of the first cause remains largely unknown to us, whether the deity is personal is beyond the credibility of this weak justification.

The second "if" says that the proposition that God exists shall always be kept very strictly the same without "extension, variation, or more particular explication". This second "if" provides no new information, but strengthens the first "if". The third "if" clearly declares that the belief in the probable intelligent deity shall have no influence on social activities, which means that it shall only be a tenet discussed by philosophers. The fourth "if" stresses again that the probable resemblance between God and human being is limited to its intelligence. The fifth "if" is conclusive and affirmative, stating that if the proposition that God exists is kept limited, it can be acknowledged in a simple and philosophical way. Why should the assertion to this proposition only be "philosophical"? In so stressing, Philo means to show that it is a "speculative tenet of theism", which has no connection to practice (D, 98).

Similar statements are also presented by Hume in part 11 of the *Enquiry*:

> But this method of reasoning can never have place with regard to a Being, so remote and incomprehensible, who bears much less analogy to any other being in the universe than the sun to a waxen taper, and who discovers himself only by *some faint traces or outlines*, beyond which we have no authority to ascribe to him any attribute or perfection (E, 106, italics added).

Whether Philo's last speech is a confession to theism (deism in particular) is arguable. The negative readings see it from a non-theistic perspective, saying that these claims are too weak to state that Philo believes in a form of theism. The theistic readings, on the contrary, tend to read it as evidence that Philo is a theist. For instance, B. S. Cordry calls it a "soft atheism" (Cordry, 2011, 61-83), while S. Andre sees it as a "limited theism" (Andre, 1993, 141-166).

We may take S. Clarke's Boyle lecture as an example of orthodox religion. The name of his lecture is "Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God", in which he attempts to "prove" the central teachings of Christianity: the existence of a God, who has the attributes of "self-existence", "infinite existence", "omnipresence", "intelligence", "infinite wisdom", "infinite goodness", "infinite power" etc. (Clarke, 1706). Most of the attributes of God, except his intelligence, are excluded from Philo's five "ifs".

Furthermore, according to E. Herbert, the founder of British deism, the common notions that shall be universally held concerning (natural) religion are: (1) that a

supreme deity exists; (2) that this deity shall be worshipped; (3) that virtue combined with piety is a chief part of worship; (4) that men should repent of their sins; (5) that rewards and punishments, both in this life and the afterlife, result from the benevolence of God (Herbert, 1937). These five tenets are widely advocated by Herbert's followers, such as W. Chillingworth, J. Tillotson, A. Collings, M. Tindal, and J. Toland and due to that, we can see them as the standard doctrines of deism. But from Philo's last speech, only the first tenet survives in a very weak sense.[59]

In summary, Philo's position is nuanced and his sympathy with natural religion is limited. The only two tenets of theism that still survive after Philo's harsh criticism are: (1) there probably exists a deity that is the final cause of the universe; (2) this deity may have weak similarities to human intelligence. Defining his last speech is not easy, as it is an "undefined" proposition. But it surely is not the orthodox religion or the standard position of natural theology.

4.4 "Remote Probability"：The Epistemological Basis

A. Remote Probability

One might wonder why Philo, as a religious sceptic, still accepts, or at least does not deny, the design argument of natural theology in his philosophy. In other words, why could religious hypotheses, such as the argument from design, still survive in Hume's sceptical and experimental philosophy? The epistemological basis for Philo's acceptance of the argument from design is something I will call "remote probability", which I shall explain at length in this section.

We have said that there is a limited probability for the existence of the deity in Philo's criticism of religion, yet one striking fact is that Philo and Hume seem never use "limited", "thin", or "low" to describe this minimal level of probability. The term they always use is "remote". Although they do not directly use the term "remote

---

[59] From a historical point of view, J. O'Higgins claims that there is "a considerable gulf" between Hume and the deists of his day (O'Higgins, 1971, 479-501), while G. Gawlick stresses the similarities between them (Gawlick, 1977, 128-138). From a theoretical point of view, what Philo shares with the deists is only the claim that an intelligent designer of the world probably exist, but this may not enable us to call him a deist.

probability", similar terms, such as "remote analogy", "remote principle", "remote object" etc., are widely seen in Hume's texts. Some of his statements of the "remote probability" regarding the cause of nature are as follows:

> Whatever has the air of a paradox, and is contrary to the first and most unprejudic'd notions of mankind is often greedily embrac'd by philosophers, as showing the superiority of their science, which cou'd discover opinions so *remote* from vulgar conception (T, 23, italics added).

> If the whole of natural theology, as some people seem to maintain, resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some *remote analogy* to human intelligence (D, 101, italics added).

> *A remote ancestor*, who has left us estates and honours, acquired with virtue, is a great benefactor, and yet it is impossible to bear him any affection, because unknown to us (NL, 13, italics added).

Here we can learn that Hume uses the term "remote" in two ways. Firstly, it describes something that is unfamiliar and distant from ordinary opinions or vulgar understanding. For instance, Philo states that the principles of philosophy and theology are "so sublime, so abstruse, so remote from common life and experience" that we cannot maintain endurable confidence in them (D, 8).

Secondly, it points to an epistemological implication, which is exemplified by the last two citations presented above. Hume uses the metaphor of "a remote ancestor" to indicate that God is an object that is beyond our affections and emotions. And with Philo's statement of "remote analogy", he intends to show that the similarities between man and God are rather limited. In the *Treatise*, Hume frequently uses "remoteness" as opposed to "nearness" and "contiguousness", which have a significant role in his theory of causation and probability. For instance, he writes that "there is nothing in any objects to perswade us, that they are either always remote or always contiguous; and when from experience and observation we discover, that their relation in this particular is invariable, we always conclude there is some secret cause, which separates or unites them" (T, 53). The focus of my analysis here is on the second sense of "remote" and its relation to Philo's true religion.

First cause. In his accounts of causation in Book One of the *Treatise*, Hume has refuted various justifications (both demonstrative and intuitive) of the general maxim that "whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence" (T, 56). In part 9 of the *Dialogues*, both Cleanthes and Philo believe that there could be an infinite succession without any further cause (D, 64-67). But oddly enough, at some places, Philo and Hume seem to accept this causal maxim and do not deny the final cause

of the universe. In the *Dialogues*, Philo says that "nothing exists without a cause" (D, 18). In the *Enquiry*, Hume also admits that the argument from design for the existence of a divine being is "drawn from effects to causes", which he "never questioned" (E, 18). Similarly, in *A Letter from a Gentleman*, he writes that he is "far from pretending to deny [...] God's being [as] the first cause and prime mover of the Universe" (Hume, 1745, 29). These apparent inconsistencies are not easy to reconcile. M. Cevik distinguishes two concepts of cause in Hume's accounts: the particular cause of something and the general or first cause of all things. While the particular cause is comprehensive, the final cause is not (Cevik, 2013, 151-157). Indeed, Hume seems to consider the cause of the universe as a special cause that is different from common causes derived from the observation of constant conjunctions between two objects. The nature of the first cause and its relation to the world are largely, if not completely, beyond the scope of our observation and, thus, we can know it mainly from reflection. In natural religion, the deity is seen as the ultimate or first cause. As Hume puts it: "whoever learns, by argument, must reason from the admirable contrivance of natural objects, and must suppose the world to be the workmanship of that Divine Being, the original cause of all things" (NHR, 27).[60]

However, given that, in part 9 of the *Dialogues*, both Philo and Cleanthes agree that an ultimate cause is not a "necessarily existent being", how can we understand Philo's statement that the existence of the first cause is obvious? Again, I would argue, like in his speech at the beginning of part 12, the obviousness of the first cause and the clearness of the author of nature are stated from a common point of view. "Nature does nothing in vain", Philo says, "is a maxim established in all the schools" (D, 89). So, although Philo does not deny the first cause, its obviousness is stated on the basis of popular opinion or common sense rather than Philo's philosophical stance.[61] In this case, the philosophical basis for the probability of an intelligent deity in Hume's thoughts requires further discussion.

Probability. In my observation, Philo's affirmative account of the existence of God

---

[60] In Philo's voice, this specific cause is "the original source of all things" (D, 86).
[61] Hume often shifts the perspective of narration from his philosophical standpoints to common sense in his writings. That is not only because he thinks that common sense has its own authority but also because he hopes that his writings can reach the general audience. For instance, in discussing the existence of liberty and necessity, he claims that "all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of liberty as well as in that of necessity" (E, 68).

as the first cause is grounded in Hume's statements of a "remote probability". Following Locke's distinction between *demonstration* and *probability*, Hume further classifies human reasoning into three types: *knowledge/demonstration*, *proofs* and *probabilities* (T, 86; E, 41). Knowledge is derived from logical inference concerning the "relations of ideas", but proofs and probabilities are results of empirical reasoning about "matters of fact". He explains that proofs "are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty", while probability "is still attended with uncertainty" (T, 86).

Hume defines probability as "reasoning from conjecture", which can be divided into the probability of chance and the probability of causation.[62] Chance is "nothing but a secret and conceal'd cause" (T, 89-90) and its influences on the mind are random.[63] Different chances share the same level of probability in Hume's accounts: "an entire indifference is essential to chance, no one chance can possibly be superior to another" (ibid.). It seems that for Hume, chance is not important in explaining the regularities of nature and their ultimate source. As Philo claims, "chance has no place, on any hypothesis, sceptical or religious" (D, 50). Demea, too, sees chance as "a word without a meaning" (D, 64).

In fact, the design argument is seen by Hume as reasoning from "effects to causes" (E, 99). As a method of inference, the nature of causation is nothing but "constant conjunction" between two objects. Another two elements of causal inference are the "contiguousness" and "succession" of two objects (T, 52-55). Although Hume highlights that it is a constant conjunction that enables us to judge which object is the cause and which is the effect, contiguousness and succession still play a crucial role in probable reasoning, for if two objects are not close to each other in space and time, we cannot have a stable impression of their conjunctions.

As I presented in section 4.2, the cause or causes of the universe and the universe itself are two special objects. For the possible cause or causes of nature, we have no experience, and for the universe, we only have a little experience. Moreover, we

---

[62] C. Kemp suggests that Hume's accounts of chance and causation as two categories of probability are a criticism of J. Arbuthnot's paper concerning design argument in the *Philosophical Transactions* (Kemp, 2014, 468-491); P. Russell, however, believes that the target of Hume's account of probability is J. Butler's arguments in terms of a future state (Russell, 2008, 143). It seems to me both contentions lack apparent textual evidence, though they are possible.
[63] In D. Coleman's words, chance in Hume's accounts is "a supposed absence of causation" (Coleman, 2001, 199).

never have observations of the scene of the creation of the universe, which means that we have no experience of conjunctions between the first cause and nature at the very beginning. Because of that, the probable reasoning for the causal relationship between a deity (as the first cause) and the world is largely untenable and only remains as one of the "religious hypotheses". Some signs, such as the delicacy of nature, might be weak clues of an intelligent designer, but that is only one probability among many others. "Nature, we find, even from our limited experience, possesses an infinite number of springs and principles" (D, 25).

A principle Hume values is that "when we infer any particular cause from an effect, we must proportion the one to the other" (E, 99). We have considerable experience of what a watch or a house is like, and hence, we can infer a great number of the attributes of its creator (i.e. its cause). But we have only a little knowledge of the universe, from which we can infer very few attributes of its cause. The first cause of nature is something not "contiguous" to us (that is, remote to us) and because of this, if our inference were to go too far concerning remote objects, it would lose certainty and the vivacity of its ideas (T, 98). In this case, our probable reasoning about the possible divine as the author of nature cannot be as strong as the common causal reasoning concerning normal objects.

The openness of the "remote probability". The credibility of the probable inference depends not only on the characteristics and attributes of objects but also on our senses. As Hume puts it, "all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. This not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy" (T, 72). D. Garrett rightly notes that in Hume's accounts, it is not only moral judgements that are based on sentiments but also our probable reasoning (2015, 117-145). Garrett considers Philo's true religion as an epistemological probability, to which different people can have different impressions in response. The following is his conclusion:

> In not further specifying even a broad range of probability, however, Philo is also leaving open the extent to which two other factors bearing on probability should properly be weighed and how those weights should be expressed […] Because these two quite different dimensions of indeterminacy – degree of resemblance and degree of probability – magnify each other in this case, there results a very large range of blameless diversity concerning judgements of, and even more concerning expressions of, the probability to be ascribed to the existence of a supreme intelligent designer (Garrett, 2012, 217-218).

I agree with Garrett that a sense of probability is the epistemological basis for Philo's

true religion and that different individuals can have different responses to the final cause (whatever it might be). But one may ask: (1) is there any difference between the argument from design and other theistic hypotheses such as the super spider of Brahmanism concerning the explanation of the cause of the cosmos? (2) is there any difference between religious hypotheses and scientific hypotheses such as the Big Bang Theory in this regard?

In the NHR, Hume considers the argument from design to be philosophically superior to the vulgar form of monotheism and polytheism (NHR, 18). But in the *Dialogues*, Philo utilizes considerable materialistic and non-orthodox hypotheses to persuade Cleanthes that the analogy of natural theology is as weak as other nontheistic analogies. Some hypotheses might have a better structure, but in the end, all of their probabilities are similarly low. Occasionally, Philo thinks that the inferences of materialists are more probable than those of natural theologians. As he puts it, "the world plainly resembles more an animal or a vegetable than it does a watch or a knitting loom" (D, 53).

S. Hawking says in his *A Brief History of Time* that our cosmological hypotheses in modern science may not be better than an old lady saying that "the world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise" (Hawking, 1995, 1).[64] Similarly, Hume in his works does not indicate that scientific hypotheses, as the explanations of the cosmological source, are more probable than "religious hypotheses". It is also worth noting that in Hume's time the design argument was widely regarded as a scientific hypothesis with support from Newtonian theory.[65] In this sense, the well-structured scientific hypotheses concerning the ultimate cause of the universe might have a similar probability to other less-structured hypotheses.[66]

B. Understanding the "Verbal Controversy" between Theism and Atheism

---

[64] Although Hawking's main intention here is to show the possibility of falsehood of the Big Bang Theory, this claim does indicate that alternative hypotheses concerning the ultimate cause of the universe are still probable.

[65] For a book-length analysis of Hume's and Newton's opinions on the design argument, see R.H. Hurlbutt's *Hume, Newton and the Design Argument* (Hurlbutt, 1965).

[66] However, whether one can infer that some specific categories of cosmological hypotheses are more probable than others in epistemology is another matter, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

It is not easy to interpret paragraphs 6 and 7 of part 12 of the *Dialogues*, where Philo puzzlingly asserts that the dispute between theism and atheism is merely verbal. What is his intention in making such a claim? I argue that Philo sees atheism and theism as two different responses to a supreme deity as the "remote probability" of the cause of the universe. Atheism highlights the *remoteness* of the deity, while theism stresses the *probability*.

Before Philo makes this claim, Cleanthes confidently tells him that the analogy of natural theology is "so obvious and natural" and that theism "is the only system of cosmogony, which can be rendered intelligible and complete" (D, 91), implying that theism is better than atheism or scepticism. In the first place, Philo seems to flatter Cleanthes' stance, saying that "the works of nature bear a great analogy to the productions of art" and that "a deity is plainly ascertained by reason" (D, 92). But soon, he points out that although it is reasonable to compare nature to art, their differences are blatant.

Philo moves on to state that the quarrel between atheism and theism is merely "about the degree" of the probability of the deity (D, 93). They have no disagreement on the basic level of the hypothesis that there is a low probability that a deity exists as the final cause of the world. The only difference is that the atheists stress the dissimilarities within the deistic analogy while the theists exaggerate the similarities between God and human being. The following is Philo's opinion:

> I ask the theist, if he does not allow, that there is a great and immeasurable, because incomprehensible difference between the human and the divine mind: The more pious he is, the more readily will he assent to the affirmative […] I next turn to the atheist, who, I assert, is only nominally so, and can never possibly be in earnest; and I ask him, whether from the coherence and apparent sympathy in all the parts of this world, there be not a certain degree of analogy among all the operations of nature, in every situation and in every age; whether the rotting of a turnip, the generation of an animal, and the structure of human thought, be not energies that probably bear some remote analogy to each other: It is impossible he can deny it: He will readily acknowledge it (D, 93).

The dispute between atheism and theism occurs not only because the degree of probability in this regard is not "susceptible of any exact mensuration" (D, 93), but also because we do not have clear definitions for words like "atheism" and "theism". As the exact degree of the analogy between the deity and the intelligence of human beings cannot be measured, one can use different words to identify it. Some may use "God or "Deity", others might prefer "Mind" or "Thought" (D, 92). These words, on face value, have different implications and, thus, can lead us in different

directions. But for Philo, they have no essential difference in expressing the probability of an intelligent designer of nature.

I argue that the regular and irregular argument for natural religion can also be seen as different ways of responding to the remotely probable deity. In comprehending the design from a probable deity, one may respond to it by either sense or reason. This can explain why, at the outset of part 12 of the *Dialogues*, Philo's confession to the design argument is based on his own "deeper sense" as well as on "the principles of any man of common sense" (D, 89), while in the rest of this part he shows that the true and limited natural theology is philosophical and rational. The sense-based response can be either private sense or common sense, which are applicable to all regardless of educational level. But responding to the probable deity with strict and sound philosophical reasoning is a task only for a few of the learned. In this way, the robust and the weak confessions of Philo, as well as the regular and irregular arguments in part 12, can be compatible.

4.5 True Religion as an Application of Moderate Scepticism

In the previous section, I argued that Philo's very thin affirmation of theism is situated somewhere between "limited theism" and "soft atheism". But, borrowing Philo's words, the difference between them is mainly a "dispute of words". In the following, I will show that Philo's true religion is better seen as an example of Hume's moderate scepticism.

A. Hume's Moderate Scepticism

For a long time, Hume has been seen as an aggressive sceptic, who "believed himself to have discovered in what is generally held to be reason a deception of our faculty of recognition" (Kant, 1998, 226). In the "abstract" of the *Treatise*, he confesses that "the philosophy contain'd in this book is very sceptical, and tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding" (Hume, 1965, 24). But Hume also sees himself as a scientist of human nature. The subtitle of the *Treatise* indicates that he aims to apply "the experimental method of

reasoning into moral subjects", suggesting that some degree of knowledge concerning human nature is possible. Due to that, he is also called "the Newtonian philosopher" in the science of man (Capaldi, 1975).[67] According to N.K. Smith and his followers, Hume is a naturalist who argues that there are natural inclinations that are unavoidable, which serve as the basis for the essential beliefs in our life (cf. Smith, 1905, 149-173; 1941).[68] It is controversial which interpretation of Hume's general philosophy is correct, but it is obvious that moderate sceptic is the only title that he gives to himself. [69]

Hume's scepticism, according to his understanding and intention, is neither radical nor deconstructive. Rather, it is moderate and beneficial. The radical and deconstructive kind of scepticism he thinks of is Pyrrhonism and Cartesianism, which recommend "an universal doubt, not only of all our former opinions and principles, but also of our very faculties" (E, 109). According to his observation, this kind of scepticism is unlikely to be held by many people, as our natural inclinations are powerful. Radical scepticism might throw us into "a momentary amazement and confusion", but once we leave philosophical thinking and act according to common sense and affections, it will "vanish like smoke" (E, 116). It also cannot have salutary benefits to society, as, if it was universally embraced, all scientific discoveries and social activities "would immediately cease" (ibid.). Conversely, Hume's moderate scepticism is supposed to be "durable and useful" (E, 117).

However, it is worth noting that Hume's reading of Pyrrho might not be exactly correct, for the latter's stance seems to be that we should hold doubts on all non-evident things. Pyrrho thinks that we should accept the notions that rest on human nature and that are indispensable to common life. Due to that, D. Baxter believes that Hume's scepticism is much closer to Pyrrho's than he supposes (Baxter, 2016, 380-395) and R. Popkin sees it directly as a "consistent Pyrrhonism" (Popkin, 1955,

---

[67] This line of reading Hume's philosophy is typically developed by B. Stroud (Stroud, 1977) and A.C. Baier (Baier, 1991).
[68] Most recently, P. Russell has developed a controversial thesis that Hume's intention is consistently "irreligious" in his philosophy, which can accommodate the seemingly incompatible interpretation of scepticism and naturalism (Russel, 2008).
[69] Whether there is a single line that can unify all the aspects of Hume's philosophy is quite doubtful. For example, as this dissertation shows, Hume's two accounts of true religion lack strict philosophical unification, though his concern on both is similarly pragmatic. P. Millican considers Hume's philosophy to be "multi-faceted" (Millican, 2011, 353). A similar stance is also held by J. Harris (Harris, 2015, 13-14).

61-71).

The moderateness of Hume's scepticism. We can understand Hume's scepticism from two perspectives: as a philosophical position, and as an attitude towards life. As a philosophical position, mitigated scepticism is a middle position between the dogmatism of "metaphysical reasonings of all kinds" (T, 3) and radical scepticism exemplified by Pyrrhonism. The former arrogantly develops "abstruse" systems, which "require some attention to be comprehended" (ibid.); the latter combines "the most determin'd scepticism" together with "a great degree of indolence", which tend to abandon all necessary philosophical inferences (ibid.). Both attitudes are harmful to orderly life, as well as to scientific enquiry. Moderate scepticism, however, is "best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding" (E, 118). On the one hand, a moderate sceptic admits the limit of reason while keeping a certain degree of doubt in thinking and enquiry. On the other hand, she will not amplify these doubts or abandon her spirit of investigation.

The mitigation of scepticism is also a middle position between the authority of common life and that of philosophy. Philosophy can not only satisfy our curiosity but also benefit art and profession by promoting "a spirit of accuracy" (E, 6). The easy and obvious type of philosophy can serve as a special kind of entertainment, while abstruse philosophy may find true principles of things. But philosophy has its shortcomings and cannot even prove some basic doctrines, such as the existence of the external world. Also, "it is easy for a profound philosopher to commit a mistake in his subtle reasonings" (E, 4). Philosophy has no superior authority over customs, habits and common concepts, all of which exist in common life. Quite conversely, common life can serve as a remedy to the illusions and the ignorance of philosophers. As Hume puts it, as long as a philosopher keeps a close connection with common sense and natural sentiments, he will "return to the right path" and "secure himself from any dangerous illusions" (ibid.).[70]

More importantly, moderate scepticism suggests us to maintain a relaxed attitude towards life. In chapter three, I mentioned that Hume had a serious mental

---

[70] P. Russell remarks that in philosophical sphere Hume is a pyrrhonian (radical sceptic), but in the sphere of common life he is a "mitigated" or "relaxed" sceptic (Russell, 2008, 207-208). This distinction is frequently presented by Hume in his texts, although whether it is as strict as Russell's consideration is arguable.

breakdown when he was 19 and that this was mainly due to the conflict between his philosophy and his common sense. But the conflict between the learned and the vulgar never seems to have bothered Hume again, and he obviously did not give up his philosophical investigation. To my understanding, adopting a middle or moderate attitude to life contributed significantly to Hume's recovery. Consider the following statements:

> Man is a reasonable being; and as such, receives from science his proper food and nourishment […] Man is also an active being; and from that disposition, as well as from the various necessities of human life […] It seems, then, that nature has pointed out a mixed kind of life as most suitable to human race, and secretly admonished them to allow none of these biasses to draw too much, so as to incapacitate them for other occupations and entertainments […] Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man (E, 5-6).

Similarly, in the essay "Of the Middle Station of Life", Hume argues that a moderate stance towards life is the most satisfying, for it is "the most eligible of all others" and it offers "the fullest Security for Virtue" (EMPL, 296). It is plausible that moderate scepticism is part of this moderate attitude to life, in which philosophy and common life serve as a balancing factor for each other. In this sense, "philosophical decisions are nothing but reflections of common life, methodized and corrected" (E, 118). As the tension between philosophy and common sense cannot be settled by philosophy itself, Y. Michaud remarks that mitigated scepticism is a "psychological fate", which originates from "a steadier and good-humoured disposition" (Michaud, 1985, 40-41). Similarly, B. Stroud states that "the 'mitigated scepticism' Hume recommends is a condition or state of mind, which he regards not only as the most satisfactory outcome of philosophical reflection but also as the best way to live" (Stroud, 2016, 31).

The benefits of mitigated scepticism. Hume's moderate scepticism is expected to be beneficial in many aspects. As Z. Parusnikova remarks, "the Pyrrhonian legacy is particularly visible in Hume's belief that philosophy must help us to achieve happiness" (Parusnikova, 2014, 600). Moderate sceptics take cautious steps with accurate experimental methods in their academic enquiry, through which they can "attain a proper stability and certainty in [their] determinations", though the progress might be "slow" (E, 110). By promoting academic enquiries, moderate scepticism creates "durable good or benefit to society" (E, 116). Moderate scepticism also benefits personal interests by cultivating a moderate personality and keeping tranquility. Hume concludes that:

The most perfect character is supposed to lie between those extremes [the mere philosopher and the mere ignorant]; retaining an equal ability and taste for books, company, and business; preserving in conversation that discernment and delicacy which arise from polite letters; and in business, that probity and accuracy which are the natural result of a just philosophy (E, 5).

B. True Religion as a Moderate Scepticism

The moderateness of true religion. While Philo's true religion can be seen as a limited theism or a weak atheism, I suggest that it is better seen as the outcome of his mitigated scepticism. In saying it is a limited theism, we imply that Philo is a theist; conversely, in claiming that he is a soft atheist, we suggest that he prefers atheism over theism. But, according to my observation, Philo's true religion does not favour either in order to refute the other. The claim that a weak theism is acceptable to Philo does not entail that he actually believes in it.[71] The conclusion that the existence of a deity, as the first cause of the universe, is a "remote probability" suggests that the alternatives are also possible.

I mentioned that mitigated scepticism is a middle stance between dogmatic metaphysics and radical scepticism. Likewise, in the preceding parts of the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes acts as the confident but dogmatic metaphysician, who intends to prove the existence and the attributes of the deity, while Philo behaves as the radical sceptic, who tends to refute whatever Cleanthes had said concerning the analogy of natural religion. As Pamphilus comments, "Philo continued to the last his spirit of opposition, and his censure of established opinions" (D, 88). If this is right, then true religion is a position between Philo's radical scepticism and Cleanthes' dogmatism in the first eleven parts.

In part 1 of the *Dialogues*, the conversations between Demea, Philo, and Cleanthes aim to search for possible true principles of religion that are suitable to teach the youth. But from parts 2 to 8, Philo constantly attacks Cleanthes' natural theology, while Cleanthes criticizes Demea's orthodox stance. When the three participants only think from their own standpoint without sympathy for others, common ground and possible true principles of religion are unlikely to be found. As a consequence,

---

[71] It is possible to judge something as acceptable from a neutral and rational perspective without religiously believing or worshipping it.

when it comes to part 11, Demea cannot stand Philo's radical criticism any longer and chooses to leave.

His departure is a warning that if Philo and Cleanthes want to continue their conversation, they need to consider what is plausible in the view of their opponent. In this context, Cleanthes states that he understands Philo's carelessness, while Philo begins to admit that his real standpoint is not as radical as he has said before and that Cleanthes' design argument has plausible aspects. If I am right, true religion is a position between Philo's scepticism and Cleanthes' dogmatism. In other words, Philo's true religion is a revised, moderate and limited version of natural theology that is tolerant to other religious and nonreligious hypotheses in understanding the first cause of the universe. The following is Philo's conclusion:

> The religious hypothesis, therefore, must be considered only as a particular method of accounting for the visible phaenomena of the universe: But no just reasoner will ever presume to infer from it any single fact, and alter or add to the phaenomena, in any single particular. If you think, that the appearances of things prove such causes, it is allowable for you to draw an inference concerning the existence of these causes. In such complicated and sublime subjects, every one should be indulged in the liberty of conjecture and argument. But here you ought to rest (D, 101).

The benefits of true religion. A feature of Philo's true religion is its practical irrelevance, which leads to it having "no pernicious consequences" to society (D, 98). Like moderate scepticism, Philo's concept of true religion is expected to be beneficial to philosophical enquiry and to social interests. It can be salutary to individuals in two ways: firstly, it can fulfil one's curiosity about the origins of the universe. Of course, what true religion can affirmatively discover is little, but in the process of exploring the probable first cause of the universe, one considers and examines the strengths and weaknesses of different arguments. Demea cites Aristotle that "students of philosophy ought first to learn logics, then ethics, next physics, last of all, the nature of the gods" (D, 6). Eventually, this concept of true religion broadens our knowledge, improves our reasoning, and deepens the understanding of the abilities as well as the limits of human knowledge.

Secondly and more importantly, true religion can alleviate the tension between theism and atheism. After Philo's careful examination, the dispute between atheism and theism is only a controversy of words, as we only have an ambiguous concept of the nature of the probable first cause of the world. The atheists tend to make claims from the negative side of this concept, while the theists like to argue from the

positive side. In this case, Philo asks "where the real point of controversy lies, and if you cannot lay aside your disputes, endeavour, at least, to cure yourselves of your animosity" (D, 94).

4.6 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I made several points: (1) Philo makes a strong and a weak confession to theism in part 12 of the *Dialogue*s: while the strong confession is mainly from the standpoint of common sense, the weak confession is his philosophical position; (2) sense and reason, or the regular and irregular argument in Philo's confession, can be understood as different ways of responding to a probable intelligent designer; (3) a "remote probability" serves as the epistemological basis for Philo's affirmative account of true religion; (4) the "verbal controversy" between theism and atheism can be read as different understandings of the remote first cause; (5) Philo's true religion can be defined as a weak theism or a soft atheism, but it is better understood as an example of Hume's moderate scepticism.

To sum up, Philo's true religion contains no more than the following positive claims: there is probably a God as the first cause of the world, who may have some similarities to human intelligence. Any other claim is open to different understandings and different responses. In the end, Philo's concern on his true religion is largely pragmatic: as the design argument still survives in a limited level of epistemological probability, we cannot eradicate religious hypotheses from reason and, thus, we need to treat them properly. By holding a tolerant and open attitude to the probable ultimate cause of the world and by limiting theology to the sphere of mere philosophy, Philo expects theological debates to be harmless and even beneficial to society.

Chapter Five

Regulated Popular Religion: on Cleanthes' True Religion

Religion, however corrupted, is still better than no religion at all.

——Cleanthes to Philo, the *Dialogues*, 94.

We shall be better enabled to comprehend the subject [of a reformation of the church], if we take the matter a little higher, and reflect a moment on the reasons, why there must be an ecclesiastical order, and a public establishment of religion in every civilized community.

——Hume, *History of England*, III, 134-135.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the implications of Cleanthes' concept of true religion. I argued in chapter three that Cleanthes' statements of true religion in the *Dialogues* are Hume's own thoughts and speak of popular religion. But some questions still need to be answered: considering Hume's extensive attacks on popular religion, why would he still think that popular religion can be true? What are the contents of the "proper office" of religion? Also, given that Hume has detached religion from morality in his moral theory, how can we understand that the true vulgar religion can promote morality? Those are the questions this chapter attempts to answer.

Hume's description of the psychological origin of religion in the NHR shows that popular religion is deeply rooted in our passions, like fear and hope, and suggests that we have a "universal propensity to believe in invisible, intelligent power" (NHR, 53). Likewise, he claims in his *History* that popular religion will continue to exist in "every civilized community" (H, III, 135). For Hume, the difficulty is that on the one hand, popular religion will endure but on the other hand, the existing popular religion is largely dangerous and detrimental. His proposal is pragmatic: in order to keep churches and priests in their "proper office", we ought to strictly regulate them with civil power.

Thus, Hume's and Cleanthes' account of the "proper office" of religion is a normative claim but not an endorsement of the existing popular religion. It provides an ideal situation in which religious passions are well guided by the establishment of religion, and religious institutions are further regulated by the government. In this way, the

regulated popular religion may produce good results for both individuals and society.

To begin with, section 5.2 states that, unlike the conventional reading, popular religion in Hume's narration is not entirely negative. The negative as well as the positive sides of popular religion will be summarized in this section. Section 5.3 discusses how popular religion has decayed, exploring the roots of its corruption in religious institutions (church, priests, and religious ceremonies) and the violence of religious passions. Next, in section 5.4, I provide a textual reading on Hume's and Cleanthes' statements of the "proper office" of popular religion, collecting and comparing their main contents. Section 5.5 tries to explain that Hume's detachment of religion from morality in philosophy is not inconsistent with the potential moral effects of popular religion in practice. Lastly, section 5.6 concludes that as popular religion has deep roots in our passions, and has extensively and profoundly influenced many societies, Hume does not expect the demise of popular religion but rather attempts to give it a proper position in a secular and modern world, bringing its beneficial or "true" sides into effect.

5.2 The Negative and Positive Sides of Popular Religion

As I mentioned in chapter three, false religion is the corruption of popular religion but is not popular religion *per se*. Scholars have no disagreements on the detrimental consequences of popular religion in Hume's writings. Some have argued that for Hume, popular religion is entirely negative. As J.C.A. Gaskin puts it, Hume has "a distorted and one-sided picture of the psychology of religious practice" (1978, 193). L. Hardy also says that "Hume makes no secret of his disdain for polytheism" (2012, 260). Indeed, Hume attacks the follies, obscurities, conflictions, superstitions and absurdities of popular religion in almost all of his texts, leaving a strong impression that popular religion is false religion and is wholly negative. This picture, however, is incorrect and needs to be revised. Despite the harmful aspects of popular religion, Hume, in some places, explicitly provides positive accounts, laying a foundation for his consideration of the true popular religion.

Let us consider the negative sides of popular religion first. Hume uses "popular religion", "vulgar religion", "popular superstition", and "vulgar superstition" interchangeably. He identifies two kinds of popular religion in the NHR: "a traditional

mythological religion" and "a systematical scholastical one" (NHR, 46). The former is polytheism or idolatry, while the latter is monotheism exemplified by the vulgar forms of Judaism and Christianity. Both types of popular religion are further divided into numerous sects and branches according to the descriptions in the NHR. Hume's disdain for the rationality of the principles of popular religion is so obvious that he simply calls them "sick men's dreams" (NHR, 54). Polytheism and popular forms of monotheism are different in their social influences, but they share many commonalities. According to my observation, the negative sides of popular religion in Hume's texts include:

1. Philosophical ignorance. The NHR tells us a story that the first religion to emerge in human history had to be polytheism, which is naïve in philosophy compared to monotheism. The philosophical hypotheses of religion, such as the design argument, were beyond the "narrow capacities" of our ancient ancestors (NHR, 19). Ancient gods were results of our passions such as fear and hope, and our desires such as the pursuit of power, safety, and happiness. Most systems of polytheism are so immature that sometimes Hume is even reluctant to call them "theism" (NHR, 24) and for him, some tenets of polytheism are atheistic in nature (NHR, 26). Although monotheism is more advanced and systematic in its theology, it still rests "upon irrational and superstitious opinions" (NHR, 31). Philo in the *Dialogues* also believes that the vulgar are incapable of comprehending the design argument (D, 96). In short, both forms of popular religion lack philosophical justification.

2. Immoral actions. "In every religion", Hume writes in section 14 of the NHR, "however sublime the verbal definition which it gives of its divinity, many of the votaries, perhaps the greatest number, will still seek the divine favor, not by virtue and good morals, which alone can be acceptable to a perfect being, but either by frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous ecstasies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinions" (NHR, 50). In the process of believing and worshiping the deity or deities, some actions by the followers of popular religion have proven to be immoral and even inhuman, which is not only a violation against common virtues but has also been responsible for numerous disasters in history. Hume uses many examples to demonstrate that excessive or brutal behavior exists extensively in the practice of Christianity, ancient Greek religion, Brahmanism, Islam etc. Also, in Hume's *History of England,* a great number of the crimes of popular religion are presented at length. One example familiar to us is Queen Mary of

England's persecution of Protestants (H, III, 435-443). The immoral actions of popular religion were not only savage but also had a negative and profound influence on society.

3. The disruptive nature of religious motives. In part 12 of the *Dialogues*, having heard Cleanthes' statement that religion is fundamentally important to morality, Philo points out that religious motives, though sometimes helpful to carry out moral duties, are easily abused and can disturb natural inclinations or moral sentiments, which are the real basis of morality. Philo strongly objects to the contention of theologians that "the motives of religion [are] so powerful, that, without them, it was impossible for civil society to subsist" (D, 95). As he observes, religious motives are not a necessity for morality but, on the contrary, may at times interfere with common virtues.

4. The futility of monkish virtues. In his second *Enquiry*, Hume considers monkish virtues, such as celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence and solitude as useless for our happiness and benefits. Instead, they can "stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper" and hence, we shall "place them in the catalogue of vices" (M, 74).[72] The central concern of Hume's one-sided narrative is that monkish virtues disturb common virtues and are useless to society. Another point that Hume criticizes is the hypocrisy of priests' virtues. A striking example Hume mentions in the *History* is the hypocrisy of St. T. Becket's false honesty, piety, and justice in his dispute with Henry II, stating that these "pretended saints", though their virtues and teachings are fake and detrimental, have gained greater praise than "the wisest legislator and most exalted genius in the world (H, I, 337).[73]

5. Terror and fear. Polytheism and the popular forms of monotheism originate from the passions of fear and hope, but Philo remarks that "terror is the primary principle of religion, it is the passion which always predominates in it [i.e. popular religion]" (D, 100). While a future state might be agreeable for some, uncertainty and fear of the future is decisive in the religious practice of others. When thinking about the unknown future, "every image of vengeance, severity, cruelty, and malice must occur, and must augment the ghastliness and horror which oppresses the amazed

---

[72] Hume may be biased here because whether those "virtues" are beneficial to the one who follows them is a highly personal matter.

[73] In writing the infamous conflict between Henry II and St. Becket, Hume is obviously partial to the King. The underlying reason is his disdain for the abuse of priestly power, which challenges the civil authority. As I will show in section 6.3, Hume expects that the civil power is always superior to that of priests.

religionist" (NHR, 48). The psychological pressure of fear can lead believers of popular religion to imagine and worship a powerful but barbaric God, who prepares eternal punishment for them. "Thus it may safely be affirmed that popular religions are really, in the conception of their more vulgar votaries, a species of dæmonism" (NHR, 49).

6. Superstition and the "dominion of priests". In many of his writings, Hume simply calls popular religion a popular or vulgar superstition. Attacking superstition is one of the main tasks of Hume's religious works. Before his death, Hume even joked to his friends that if he could buy a few years from Charon, he would see the downfall of superstition (Mossner, 1970, 600-601). But popular religion *per se* is not superstition. "Superstition is a considerable ingredient in almost all religions, even the most fanatical" (SE, 40). Without providing a definition, Hume describes the origins of superstition as "weakness, fear, melancholy together with ignorance", which result in the heavy dependence of common people on preaching, ceremonies, and observances of priests (ibid. 38-39). This dependence, in turn, helps the growth of priestly power. With numerous instances in his *History of England*, Hume has shown how the abuse of power by priests has thrown political operations into chaos throughout history.

7. Enthusiasm and the "disorder in human society". According to Hume, enthusiasm is different from superstition in its nature and characteristics. It is rooted in the psychological tendency of "elevation and presumption", which leads to abandonment of the Scripture and of priestly solemnizations. An enthusiast rests his beliefs on the direct revelation of the deity. "Hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance, are the true sources of enthusiasm" (SE, 39). The result of the blind confidence of enthusiasts is that they have a tendency to have a distaste for any other authorities in the world, both secular and religious, which in turn challenges the orderliness and stability of society. In the *History*, the enthusiasm of religion and its destructive effects are typically exemplified by Puritanism in England and Presbyterianism in Scotland.

However, the conventional opinion that Hume's accounts of popular religion are entirely negative is unfair. It is true that the negative comments dominate his narrative of popular religion both in his philosophical and historical works. But just as theology has its reasonable as well as its unjustifiable or even wrong elements,

popular religion also has two sides. Marx infamously calls religion "spiritual opium" and Freud sees it as a mere projection of sexual desire; Hume's criticism of religion is no less harsh than that of Marx and Freud in many respects, but his opinions on the topic are more balanced.[74] In the following, I will argue that Hume has also explicitly presented the positive aspects of popular religion, which form a basis for his further discussions on the positive or "true" form of popular religion.

1. The learned priests and the spread of knowledge and jurisprudence. People who blindly follow the preaching and sermons of priests are frequently labeled by Hume as "the superstitious" or "the ignorant". However, many who give sermons are rather knowledgeable and Hume has called them "the learned priests", who played a positive role throughout the Middle Ages. "It must be allowed that the Roman Catholics are a very learned sect and that no one communion but that of the Church of England can dispute their being the most learned of all the Christian Churches" (NHR, 41). Similarly, in the *History,* Hume praises the learned Catholic clergy, saying that they are knowledgeable and have the leisure to do deep research. He stresses that the learned priests played a crucial role in maintaining ancient knowledge and classics after the Norman Invasion in 1066 (H, II, 409-420). The Catholic priests also promoted the study and spread of Roman jurisprudence and arts that were inherited from ancient ages (ibid., 419-421). While attacking many wrongdoings of priests, Hume is evidently pleased with the positive role of those priests who kept preserved and spread civilization through the entire duration of the Middle Ages.

2. Priests, church and the connection of societies and nations. On several occasions in his *History*, Hume praises the positive role of priests and church in connecting and uniting states and individuals. In the early stage before the reign of Henry II, European states were relatively isolated from each other as poor infrastructure and prevalent ignorance limited mutual exchange between nations. According to Hume, it was not commerce, war or politics but religion that became the connection between states, and it was religion that widened people's perspectives beyond their own narrow knowledge. In this way, popular religion promoted connection and communication among states (H, I, 297). Moreover, church and priests sometimes also played a crucial role in connecting different classes of citizens within a society. One example is that under the reign of Henry III, an archbishop and several prelates

---

[74] Considering that opiates were legal and popular in Victorian Britain, Marx's phrase "spiritual opium" in describing religion might not be as critical as we understand today.

successfully reconciled serious tensions between the king and the barons, preventing them from going to war. Hume comments that, "it must be acknowledged, that the influence of the prelates and the clergy was often of great service to the public" (H, II, 14). The proper use of the power of the clergy, therefore, can be the prevention of violent conflictions and a constant call for peace between nations. Hume even stresses that without "those secret links it is impossible for human society to subsist" (ibid.). In short, the power and authority of priests, when used properly, can be significant and salutary in connecting states and individuals.

3. Promotion of freedom by enthusiasts. Enthusiasm and superstition are two forms of false religion, but Hume seems to have more positive comments on enthusiasm than on superstition. For him, the excessive zeal of enthusiasts is one of the most dangerous and destructive factors in the world, and is the main source of various disorders in human society. But Hume revises this picture at two points: first, he says that the furiousness and violence of enthusiasts become gentle and moderate "in a little time" (SE, 41); second, for him, enthusiasm can be "a friend" to civil liberty (ibid., 42). With bold and ambitious tempers together with the spirit of liberty, enthusiasts can challenge old regulations and restrictions imposed by the authorities.[75]

4. Hope in religion. "It is true", Philo admits, "both fear and hope enter into religion" (D, 100). Although fear is set as the "primary principle of religion" and usually lasts longer in a human mind than hope (ibid.), the acknowledgment of the existence of hope in religion is affirmative, which can be a solid basis for religious belief. In chapter two, we presented Willis' thesis that a "moderate hope" can serve as a reasonable element of true religion, although Hume does not explicitly use this term (Willis, 2005). Gaskin points out that, in reality, the influence of fear overshadows the potential benefits of hope. We know that fear is not good for our spiritual health, but Gaskin says that the harmfulness of fear is so remote that the adherents of popular religion prefer to ignore it for immediate interests (Gaskin, 1978, 202-203). But the common point here is that the origin of popular religion has two sides: fear and hope. And, at least in principle, hope in religion can be agreeable, as Cleanthes believes, and a good basis for religious beliefs (D, 94-100).

---

[75] Thus, Hume considers religious enthusiasm as both deconstructive and constructive. But this raises the question of how it can be both moral vice and virtue at once? For an analysis in this regard, see J.B. Coleman (2012, 221-235).

5. Tolerance in popular religion. Hume admits that tolerance exists in both polytheism and the vulgar form of monotheism. Regardless of the disadvantages concerning its theological and philosophical naïveté, polytheism is more tolerant than monotheism in the NHR. Hume's reason is that when the doctrine of only one true God is set, "the worship of other deities is regarded as absurd and impious" (NHR, 36). This gives a reason for monotheism to ban other forms of religion and to justify persecution. On the contrary, "the tolerating spirit of idolaters, both in ancient and modern times, is very obvious to anyone who is the least conversant in the writings of historians or travelers" (ibid.). Similarly, Hume praises the spirit of tolerance of the Anglican Church, within which different religions and their ceremonies can basically coexist under its moderate regulations (H, IV, 110). It is significant to note that Hume's acknowledgement of the existence of tolerance in polytheism and the Anglican Church does not entail that he believes in these two forms of religion. But this acknowledgement does suggest that popular religion can be tolerant in certain conditions. In other words, although popular religion is largely intolerant in history, tolerance among the vulgar forms of religion can still be achievable; I believe this is a central element of Cleanthes' concept of true religion.

To sum up, although the critical account of popular religion takes up more pages than the positive comments in Hume's texts, popular religion *per se* is not entirely bad. Instead, like many things in the world, popular religion is a multi-faceted mixture. As we discussed in the previous chapter, theology has true and false parts and so does popular religion. This is why Cleanthes still considers that popular religion can also be "true" or salutary. Here is Hume's own conclusion in the closing section of the NHR:

> Good and ill are universally intermingled and confounded; happiness and misery, wisdom and folly, virtue and vice. Nothing is purely and entirely of a piece. All advantages are attended with disadvantages. An universal compensation prevails in all conditions of being and existence. And it is not possible for us, by our most chimerical wishes, to form the idea of a station or situation altogether desirable. The draughts of life, according to the poet's fiction, are always mixed from the vessels on each hand of Jupiter; or if any cup be presented altogether pure, it is drawn only, as the same poet tells us, from the left-handed vessel (NHR, 53).

5.3 The Corruptions of Popular Religion

Although popular religion has positive sides, it has been highly corrupted in history and also in reality, according to Hume's observation. He defines false religion as

"corruption of religion" and stresses that "the corruption of the best of things produces the worst" (SE, 38). Understanding how popular religion has been corrupted in the past is helpful to comprehend the "proper office" of religion stated by Cleanthes and Hume. Hume describes the corruption of popular religion mainly in the *History* and the NHR. To my knowledge, the sources for the corruption of vulgar religion contain external and internal aspects: the corruption of religious institutions, and the violence of religious passions.[76]

1. The corruption of religious institutions. In his introduction to Volume II of the *History* in 1756, Hume praises the Church of England for being "the most happy medium" due to its "spirit of moderation" (Cited from Mossner, 1970, 307). But according to Hume, religious mediums, including churches, priests, and religious ceremonies, are highly corrupted in general. The abuse of priestly power is the main source for the corruption of religious institutions and stems from the extension of the ambitions and greed of priests. A typical example of the detrimental ambitions of the church is reflected in the peremptory power of popes against medieval kings. Here are some of the consequences:

> When the usurpations, therefore, of the church had come to such maturity as to embolden her to attempt extorting the right of investitures from the temporal power, Europe, especially Italy and Germany, was thrown into the most violent convulsions, and the pope and the emperor waged implacable war on each other. Gregory dared to fulminate the sentence of excommunication against Henry and his adherents, to pronounce him rightfully deposed, to free his subjects from their oaths of allegiance […] the most durable and most inveterate factions that ever arose from the mixture of ambition and religious zeal. Besides numberless assassinations, tumults, and convulsions, to which they gave rise, it is computed that the quarrel occasioned no less than sixty battles in the reign of Henry IV (H, I, 215-216).

For Hume, the greed of the court of Rome is no less detrimental than its ambitions. Many Catholic priests levied taxes and enlarged church property for their own profit. The following are the citizens' complaints about the greed of the Roman Catholic Church under the reign of Henry III:

> The avarice, however, more than the ambition of the see of Rome, seems to have been in this age the ground of general complaint. The papal ministers, finding a vast stock of power amassed by their predecessors, were desirous of turning it to immediate profit, which they enjoyed at home, rather than of enlarging their authority in distant countries, where they never intended to reside. Every thing was become venal in the Romish tribunals; simony was openly practised; no favours and even no justice could be obtained without a bribe; the highest bidder was sure to have the

---

[76] Note that the two aspects are interrelated: the violence of passions (especially fear) can be a root of the corruption of religious institutions. Likewise, the abuse of the power of the church and some improper sermons and ceremonies can also stimulate the violence of religious passions.

preference, without regard either to the merits of the person or of the cause; and besides the usual perversions of right in the decision of controversies, the pope openly assumed an absolute and uncontroled authority of setting aside, by the plenitude of his apostolic power, all particular rules and all privileges of patrons, churches, and convents (H, II, 23).

Apart from the abuse of the power of the church and priests, Hume also pronounces his distaste for religious devotions and ceremonies. In his letter to William Mure in 1743, Hume criticizes W. Leechman's sermon as an atheistic speech because of its heavy emphasis on the role of prayers, scarifies and religious ceremonies (L, I, 51). Hume has two main reasons for his distaste for religious rites: first, in theory, a deity is not an object of affection and hence, religious rites are useless; and second, in reality, these rites are often used by priests as a tool to fool and deceive worshippers. Even though Hume has at times commented positively on church and priests, religious rites are rarely praised throughout his writings. He summaries his opinion as follows:

> It must be acknowledged that Nature has given us a strong Passion of Admiration for whatever is excellent, & of Love & Gratitude for whatever if benevolent & beneficial, & that the Deity possesses these Attributes in the highest Perfection & yet I assert he is not the natural Object of any Passion or Affection […] First The Addressing of our virtuous Wishes & Desires to the Deity, since the Address has no Influence on him, is only a kind of rhetorical Figure, in order to render these Wishes more ardent & passionate. This is Mr. Leechman's Doctrine. Now the Use of any figure of Speech can never be a Duty. Secondly this Figure, like most Figures of Rhetoric, has an evident Impropriety in it. For we can make use of no Expression or even Thought, in Prayers & Entreaties, which does not imply that these Prayers have an Influence. Thirdly this Figure is very dangerous & leads directly & even unavoidably to Impiety & Blasphemy (L, I, 51-52).

2. The violence of religious passions. While superstition has a close relationship with religious institutions, enthusiasts rest their religious beliefs mainly on direct passions, thinking that they are "sufficiently qualified to approach the Divinity, without any human mediator" (SE, 40). While the *Dialogues* deals with philosophical theology, Hume's discussion of religious passions is mainly found in the NHR, which investigates the "origin in nature" of religion (NHR, 14).[77] According to Hume's

---

[77] However, whether the NHR criticizes or threatens the rational justification of religion is controversial. L. Falkenstein asserts that the NHR is not fundamentally critical to the reasonableness of religious belief, and that the "project" of the NHR is to explain why the false forms of religious belief are so widespread (Falkenstein, 2003, 1-21). Likewise, M. Webb considers the purpose of the NHR as disdain for traditional religion and an encouragement for the religious adherents to "embrace sounder principles" (Webb, 1991, 141-159). But P. Kail believes that in the NHR, religion (especially polytheism) is mainly seen by Hume as a projection of fear and anxiety and that as the NHR has classified the natural roots of popular religion as psychological and historical, it is, like Marx and Freud, a deconstruction and a reduction of religion (Kail, 2007, 190-211;2007, 7-14). Against these two interpretations, J. S. Marusic takes a middle path, claiming that the main purpose of this work is to show the incompatibility of popular religion and "genuine theism" (design

speculative history of religion, the first form of religion to appear was polytheism, which is a mere product of fear and hope (ibid., 19). The popular forms of monotheism, too, mainly stem from these two passions in human nature (ibid., 21).

In Book Two of the *Treatise*, Hume defines passions as "secondary or reflective impressions", which "proceed from some of these original ones, either immediately or by the interposition of its idea" (T, 181).[78] He further divides passions into four categories: direct or indirect, calm or violent. In this classification, religious passions, i.e. fear and hope, are direct passions, which "arise immediately from good or evil, from pain or pleasure" (T, 182).[79] Yet Hume does not clearly show whether fear and hope are calm or violent.

In section 9 of Book Two, Hume explains how fear and hope appear and operate. According to him, the appearance of these two passions is associated with three factors: the probability of an object, imagination, and a feeling of grief and joy. When the existence or nature of an object is uncertain or only has a low degree of probability, our imagination "fluctuates betwixt the opposite views" (T, 281). In shifting between different probabilities, our mind produces either painful or pleasurable feelings. Hume summarizes that "hope and fear arise from the different mixture of these opposite passions of grief and joy, and from their imperfect union and conjunction" (T, 283).

Hume's accounts of the operation of fear and hope have a direct application in religion. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that religious hypotheses about the origin of the cosmos are a "remote probability", which allow us to have various responses to it. That is to say, we have different feelings according to how we understand that probability. Consider the following remarks:

---

argument), although Hume's arguments put "significant pressure" on the adherents of popular religion (Marusic, 2012, 715-737).
[78] This definition seems to me not very clear as it does not spell out whether passions are the result of individual feelings or an outcome of social activities. It also does not indicate whether passions in the moral and political sphere are different from the passions in Hume's epistemological discussion. A.C. Willis comments that compared to "original impressions" (which are our immediate bodily feelings), passions are "the matrix of historical, natural, and social environments" (Willis, 2015, 95).
[79] Hume admits that this division of violent and calm passions "is far from being exact" (T, 181). J.L. McIntyre shows that apparent inconsistencies also exist in Hume's division of direct and indirect passions (McIntyre, 2000, 77-86).

> We are placed in this world, as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event are entirely unknown to us; nor have we either sufficient wisdom to foresee, or power to prevent, those ills with which we are continually threatened. We hang in perpetual suspense between life and death, health and sickness, plenty and want, which are distributed amongst the human species by secret and unknown causes, whose operation is oft unexpected, and always unaccountable. These unknown causes, then, become the constant object of our hope and fear; and while the passions are kept in perpetual alarm by an anxious expectation of the events, the imagination is equally employed in forming ideas of those powers on which we have so entire a dependence (NHR, 20).

But, how does the operation of fear and hope in religion relate to the corruption of popular religion? After all, the mere fact that we can have different responses and feelings towards the deity is not negative in itself. The key element that evokes the violent passions of fear and hope is the establishment of religion. Compared to the abstract teachings of metaphysics, an established religion provides more accessible as well as more vivid ceremonies, sermons, statues etc., and in this way, the distant idea of a deity becomes more tangible to its adherents. In the *Treatise*, Hume mentioned that Catholics have the tradition of venerating the remains of their saints, such as their clothes or bones. For him, the reason is that those images can bring religious ideas to life. With those remains as mediators, the passions of fear and hope gain a lively impression and can become more stable and strong (T, 70-71). But when the dependency on those relics goes too far, people will easily believe in the superstition that those clothes and bones themselves are sacred. The situation of religious ceremonies is similar:

> The ceremonies of the Roman Catholic religion may be consider'd as experiments of the same nature. The devotees of that strange superstition usually plead in excuse of the mummeries, with which they are upbraided, that they feel the good effect of those external motions, and postures, and actions, in enlivening their devotion, and quickening their fervour, which otherwise wou'd decay away, if directed entirely to distant and immaterial objects (T, 70).

Hence, the exaggerated fear and the dependency on religious institutions are responsible for the appearance of superstition, while the passion of hope is associated with enthusiasm and usually occurs without the need for a mediator. The excessiveness of religious hope and the overdependence of enthusiasts on revelation are responsible for allowing religious belief to become violent and destructive.[80] In the essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", Hume explains which

---

[80] In chapter two, I presented that both A.C. Willis and J. Immerwahr base their accounts of Hume's true religion on the "calm passion" of religion. According to them, true religion is associated with calm passions whilst false religion stems from violent passions. They have different opinions on what the key factor for gaining calm passions in true religion is: Willis thinks it is "moderate hope" or "fundamental hope" while for Immerwahr, it is peaceful and aesthetic responses to the deity. The point on which I differ from them is that while they relate calm passions to Philo's discussion of a limited theology, I believe Hume's discussion

factors lead religious hope to become violent: "a warm imagination", a personality of "presumptuous pride and confidence", and a dependence on revelation (SE, 39-42). Their good imagination gives many enthusiasts the feeling that the probability of the existence of a deity is high, their optimistic personality allows them to link this to joy, while their reliance on revelation confirms and strengthens the previous two beliefs.[81]

5.4 The "Proper Office" of Popular Religion

Having shown that popular religion has negative and positive sides, and how popular religion is corrupted, I will now consider the dimensions and implications of Cleanthes' statements of true religion. He has two concepts of true religion in his mind: one is his natural religion, another is the "proper office" of popular religion. Natural religion is *already* true for Cleanthes as he constantly and enthusiastically defends it in the preceding parts of the *Dialogues*, yet he thinks that popular religion *can* also be true in an ideal situation. Based on the analysis of the positive and negative effects of popular religion and its corruptions, I argue that Cleanthes' concern regarding the true form of popular religion is practical rather than philosophical in nature, aiming at maintaining its beneficial sides while overcoming the negative aspects.

Cleanthes' statements on the proper office of popular religion are largely repeated by Hume in his introduction to the second volume of *History* in 1756.[82] Comparing the similarities of Hume's and Cleanthes' statements about the ideal functions of popular religion is crucial to identifying the contents of Cleanthes' concept of true religion. I partly presented their opinions in chapter three, but for the current purpose, it is worth repeating them here again in full:

> The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience; and as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked, and confounded with these other motives. When it distinguishes itself, and acts as a separate principle over men, it has departed from its proper sphere, and has become only a cover to faction and ambition (Cleanthes to Philo, D, 95).

of religious passions is mainly related to popular religion.
[81] For a fuller analysis of Hume's account of the enthusiasm of religion, see J. Passmore (1989, 85-108).
[82] For unknown reasons, Hume removed these statements when this volume of the *History* was published in 1770.

It ought to be no matter of Offence, that in this volume, as well as in the foregoing, the Mischiefs which arise from the Abuse of Religion, are so often mentioned, while so little in comparison is said of salutary Consequences which result from true & genuine Piety. The proper office of religion, is to reform Men's Lives, to purify their hearts, to inforce all moral Duties, and to secure Obedience to the Laws and civil Magistrate. While it pursues these useful Purposes, its Operations, tho' infinitely valuable, are secret & silent; and seldom come under the Cognizance of History. That adulterate Species of it alone, which inflames Faction, animates Sedition, & prompts Rebellion, distinguishes itself on the open Theater of the World. Those therefore who attempt to draw Inferences disadvantageous to Religion from the Abuse of it mentioned by Historians, proceed upon a very gross & a very obvious Fallacy. For besides, that every thing is liable to Abuse, & the best things are most so; the beneficent Influence of Religion is not to be sought for in History: That principle is always the more pure & genuine, the less figure it makes in those Annals of Wars, & Politics, Intrigues, & Revolutions, Quarrels & Convulsions, which it is the Business of an Historian to record & transmit to Posterity (Introduction to Vol. II of *History of England*, Cited from Mossner, 1970, 306).

As we can see, these two passages are very similar, which indicates that Cleanthes' understanding of the ideal role of popular religion is also Hume's. Cleanthes' statements in this regard are limited, while the paragraph in the introduction to Volume II of *History* ("introduction", hereafter in this section) is more informative. The following information collected from these statements can be seen as the implications of Cleanthes' version of true religion.

1. "The abuse of religion" as starting point. The proper office of religion is something opposite to "the abuse of religion", which is detrimental to society. Cleanthes describes the abuse of religion as religion leaving its "proper sphere" and "act[ing] as a separate principle over men". But he does not provide any clarification about what "proper sphere" and "separate principle" mean. Fortunately, in a later paragraph of the "introduction", Hume explains that religious rites, institutions and ceremonies in history have "often been found to degenerate into the most dangerous fanaticism" (ibid. 307). "Degeneration" is a similar word to "corruption" and, hence, we can understand the abuse of popular religion as the corruption of religious institutions and the abuse of priestly power. Cleanthes' and Hume's considerations of the ideal form of popular religion originate from their disappointment with the abuse or corruption of popular religion, which has led to extensively detrimental effects.

2. "Salutary" or "useful" effects of religion as chief concern. Cleanthes says that corrupted popular religion is better than atheism, for the teaching of a future state is good for morals, and the notion of a benevolent God of genuine theism is agreeable. Similarly, the "introduction" points out that true and genuine piety shall have "salutary consequences" and "useful purposes". This indicates that Cleanthes' and

Hume's use of "true" and "genuine" concerning the ideal popular religion is functional, practical and pragmatic rather than philosophical in nature. Indeed, we find no epistemological discussions or comments in Cleanthes' statements of true religion and, unlike Philo, he also never uses the word "philosophical" to describe it. The reason for Cleanthes and Hume to highlight the useful purpose of popular religion is the recognition that the existing establishment of popular religion is largely negative to the individual and social interests in history, as well as in reality. That is to say, the usefulness of popular religion is an ideal, not a reality.

3. Moral and political convenience as main purpose. The "salutary consequences" and "useful purposes" of popular religion are divided into two parts: moral and political. For Hume, the purpose of the former is "to purify their hearts" and "to enforce all moral duties". Cleanthes' descriptions are quite similar, but he uses "regulate" to replace "purify" and "motives of morality" to replace "moral duties". From their literal meanings, "regulate" is related to external regulations while "purify" is a method that is internal. But literally, the term "motive of morality" is more internal whilst "moral duties" in the "introduction" is more external, for motive is immanent to us but duties come from society and we have to comply with them. Overall, apart from the different uses of terms, the moral functions of true popular religion in the statements of Cleanthes and Hume have no real difference. But one thing that needs to be pointed out here is that Cleanthes' and Hume's expectation is not that religious motive is the basis of morality but that popular religion should be helpful in enforcing moral duties or moral motives. As Cleanthes reminds us, moral motives should not be "confounded with these other motives".

Another part of the "proper office" of popular religion is its political benefits, which, for Cleanthes, is "infusing the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience". In Hume's voice, a regulated popular religion can "secure obedience to the laws and civil magistrate", which further indicates that the spirit of obedience from popular religion can be helpful in enforcing regulations from the secular authorities. But some questions related to this description need to be answered: how can popular religion promote our sense of complying with social laws and regulations of the government? Given that Hume has claimed in his *History* that the extension of the power of Roman Catholic priests was the main source of many wars, chaos and persecutions in the Middle Ages, it is puzzling that popular religion can be

constructive to the political process. The secret is found in Hume's positive accounts of a state-controlled church exemplified by the Reformed Church of England, which we shall elaborate on in the next chapter. The basic idea is that religious passions, especially the violent hopes of enthusiasts, are so dangerous that they need restrictions from a dominant church.

4. The interchangeable use of terms. In the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes uses "true religion" (D, 16), "true piety and religion" (D, 64), "genuine theism" (D, 99) and "proper office of religion" (D, 95) to describe his understanding of true religion. He does not spell out the contents of "true religion" in part 1 or "true piety and religion" in part 9, but since he defends natural religion in these parts, we can infer that these terms refer to the principles of the design argument. I presented in chapter three that Cleanthes' use of "genuine theism" and "proper office" of religion in part 12 refers to his ideal of popular religion. Similarly, in the "introduction", Hume also uses "true and genuine piety", "true and genuine principle", "proper office of religion" interchangeably. Cleanthes and Hume do not provide any distinction between those terms, suggesting that they roughly point to the same thing.[83] It is significant to note that while Philo stresses that his true religion is a "philosophical theism", neither Cleanthes nor Hume utilize the word "philosophical" to describe the true popular religion.

5. The "silent" operation of true religion. Both Cleanthes and Hume emphasize that the operation of the proper functions of popular religion is "silent" (for Hume, it is also "secret"). Without further explanation, this contention is difficult to comprehend. In the Middle Ages, according to Hume's records in his *History*, the abuse of power by religious authorities had extended to factors of public life, such as political, moral and educational areas, as well as to personal affairs, such as marriage.[84] Likewise, motivated by over-heated passions, religious enthusiasts could challenge any authorities in the world (cf. SE, 40-41). In such cases, popular religion influenced the public as well as private areas *openly* and *violently*. In this context, we can speculate that Cleanthes' and Hume's intention in keeping the useful functions of popular religion silent means restricting the scope of religious activities in a way that

---

[83] L. Falkenstein suggests that, literally, the term "genuine theism" implies a moral normativity that the deity is worthy of worship in morality (Falkenstein, 2009, 171-201).

[84] The most famous instance is probably the dispute between Henry VIII and the authorities of the Roman court concerning his divorce from Catherine of Aragon (H, III, 170-209).

will not disturb the normal course of daily life or political operations.[85]

6. "The cognizance of history". In the "introduction", Hume makes the point that historical knowledge can facilitate our recognition of the proper office of religion, which is absent from Cleanthes' statements. In the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes never provides clear suggestions as to how to differentiate true religion from false religion. One may comprehend Philo's concept of true religion by excellent philosophical education and enquiry, but the proper role of popular religion in society is complex and cannot be understood merely by academic discussion. It involves individual as well as public interests, theology, the relationship between church and state, customs etc. So how can we know which actions of the church are appropriate in which situation? After all, words like "useful", "salutary" and "beneficial" are too general to be specific guidelines in telling true religion from the false. In section 6.4, I will show that for Hume, the public recognizes the difference between true and false functions of popular religion mainly through their moral taste, to which historical reading and education make a crucial contribution.

Based on the information above, I can now conclude what true popular religion is. Popular religion is largely, if not completely, unjustifiable by reason, yet it has deep roots in human nature. Unlike many French *philosophes* of the time, Hume does not believe that the established religion will vanish imminently. Instead, it will continue to exist as long as we still have the passions of hope and fear. Throughout centuries, according to Hume, the influence of popular religion has been overwhelmingly detrimental, both to individuals and to society. But still, it also has positive sides, which, if kept well in check, can be salutary to morality and politics. As the origins of religion cannot be eradicated from human nature, Hume considers that we have to find a suitable place for popular religion in a modern society. Cleanthes and Hume not only use "true", "genuine" and "pure" to describe the ideal situation of popular religion, but also utilize terms like "proper office of religion", "useful purposes", "salutary consequences" and "beneficent influence of religion", indicating that their concern on this matter is pragmatic.

---

[85] Note that Hume does not expect popular religion to be a merely private matter as he thinks of religious establishments as a necessary public factor.

5.5 The Morality of Popular Religion: A Reconsideration

A remarkable feature of Hume's theory of morality that distinguishes him from other Scottish moral theorists of his time is that he rests the basis of morality on a solely secular basis, i.e. social and individual interests, as well as relevant psychological propensities. However, as just discussed, true popular religion can promote morality. In the following, I will show that Hume's detachment of morality from religion in philosophy is not necessarily contradictory to the possible moral consequences of popular religion in practice. In other words, although religion is not the foundation of morality in theory, it *can be* moral in practice according to its potential "useful" functions and consequences.

Hume's detachment of morality from religion. In both the *Treatise* and the second *Enquiry,* Hume offers a naturalistic account of morality, detaching it from religion. His accounts of the relationship between religion and morality are three-fold: his criticism of God's moral attributes, his attacks on the immoral behaviour of existing popular religions, and his naturalistic accounts of the basis and operation of morality. As I have already presented the vicious historical abuses of power by church and priests, I shall now briefly consider the other two aspects.[86]

Let us start with Hume's refutation of the morality of the deity. Philo's attacks on the analogy of natural theology threaten the notion of the existence of the deity, which in turn undercuts the basis of its moral attributes. Obviously, if there was no God, then his (its) morality cannot exist. In part 10 and 11 of the *Dialogues*, Philo offers two arguments against the morality of the deity: the first is a priori, arguing that the benevolence of God is incompatible with his omniscience and omnipotence, which he illustrates with "Epicurus' old questions" (D, 74). The second is a posteriori, which is considered by Philo as more valuable and plausible: if considerable ills and miseries are truly part of the world, it indicates that nature or the existing universe is deficient, which, according to the analogy of natural theology, further suggests that God is not benevolent or even is vicious (D, 86-87).[87]

---

[86] Hume's stance that our moral principles do not depend on religion has led to many of his contemporaries calling him an infidel or an atheist. Concerning how Anglicans and dissenters responded to Hume's religious opinions, see I. Rivers (2001, 675-695).
[87] M.C. Bradley calls it "Hume's chief objection to natural theology" (2007, 249-270).

However, these two arguments are not strong enough to exclude the possible moral attributes of God. Philo's conclusion is that the benevolence of God cannot be demonstrated by reason. As he puts it, "the whole [universe] presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature" (D, 86).[88]

Hume's naturalistic analysis of morality is more fundamental and decisive in separating religion from morality. According to his narrative, it is our passions, interests and social interactions that form the basis of moral approval and disapproval and thus, without religion, virtues of common life will continue to work as usual.[89] Hume's disregard for religion in considering the foundation and elements of morality leads T. Holden to call Hume's moral theory a "moral atheism" (Holden, 2010). Apart from that, Hume holds a consistently hostile attitude to traditional monkish virtues, and before his death, he told J. Boswell that "the morality of every religion was bad, though some instances of very good men being religious" (cited from Smith, 1947, 76).[90]

Utility and Morality. In considering the principles of morality, there were two opposing theories available to Hume: one is the Machiavellian-Hobbesian strand, arguing that human nature is self-interested; another strand is the tradition following Shaftesbury and Hutcheson that believes that benevolence is an essential part of human nature. Hume takes a middle route, believing that human nature is twinned: selfish, as well as altruistic. On the one hand, he claims that "to have the sense of virtue" is to "feel a satisfaction of a particular kind" (T, 303), promoting the personal, egoistic quest for pleasure. In Hume's accounts, "pleasure" and "pain" are roughly equivalent to "virtue" and "vice".[91] On the other hand, he explores the psychological

---

[88] Based on this claim, D. O'Connor suggests that Philo has a preference for moral atheism over theism (O'Connor, 2003, 267-282), but N. Pike claims that the existence of evil in Philo's analysis is not sufficient to disprove the morality of God (Pike, 1963, 180-197). Similar to Pike's stance, N. Capaldi argues, if God can be seen as the possible cause of nature, moral events in the world can also be seen as the possible effects of that cause (Capaldi, 1970, 236).

[89] Dostoevsky declares that if God is dead, then everything is allowed. The new atheists wrote the slogan on London buses in 2009 that "There's probably no god. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life". But K.R. Merrill and D.G. Wester rightly comment that, "if God is dead, Hume says - in substance if not in exactly these words - then, morally speaking, it is business as usual" (Merrill and Wester, 1980, 272).

[90] For a detailed account of Hume's death and his attitude towards the morality of religion in his dying days, see S. Miller (1995, 30-39).

[91] Whether seeing virtues and vices as feelings of pleasure and pain leads to egoism is controversial among Humean scholars (cf. Hedenius, 1937, 388-389).

mechanism of sympathy, which he believes to exist universally in human nature. Apart from these two categories, utility plays a central role in Hume's theory of morality, which is also important to his consideration of the morality of popular religion. The following is Hume's statement concerning the fundamental role of utility in morals:

> It appears to be matter of fact, that the circumstance of utility, in all subjects, is a source of praise and approbation: That it is constantly appealed to in all moral decisions concerning the merit and demerit of actions: That it is the sole source of that high regard paid to justice, fidelity, honour, allegiance, and chastity: That it is inseparable from all the other social virtues, humanity, generosity, charity, affability, lenity, mercy, and moderation: And, in a word, that it is a foundation of the chief part of morals, which has a reference to mankind and our fellow-creatures (M, 50).

Although Hume does not explicitly say that utility is the standard for praise or criticism of an action, he regards it as an essential element in all virtues. Hume identifies four kinds of virtues: useful, agreeable, individual or public. In his second *Enquiry*, he shows us that utility can please in various ways, and that all virtues are directly or indirectly related to usefulness. In this sense, Hume is a utilitarian and a consequentialist. In this context, we can consider the morality of popular religion from its beneficial consequences on personal and public utility.

According to the "introduction" and Cleanthes' statements, the morals of true popular religion consist of two aspects: the first is to "regulate the heart of men", "humanize their conduct" and "inforce moral duties"; the second is to "infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience" or to "secure obedience to the laws and civil magistrate". In so saying, the intention of Cleanthes and Hume is not to suggest that morality requires religion as a condition, or even a basis. Instead, they expect that popular religion, in an ideal situation, can be moral from a consequential point of view. According to my reading, the first aspect relates to personal utility, whereas the second is associated with public utility.

Restless passions and religious establishment. One of the most famous doctrines in Hume's *Treatise* is the claim that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (T, 265). In so saying, Hume sees passions instead of reason as the mover of human conduct and the foundation of moral judgment. He explains that morality is different from reason, and that reason alone cannot motivate us to

act.[92] In Hume's classification, direct passions arise immediately from good or evil, from pleasure or pain (T, 182), including desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair and security. Conversely, passions like pride, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, envy, pity, malice and generosity are indirect and are created in a more complicated way. Hume takes the sense of beauty as an example of calm passions, as it is a frail sentiment and we sometimes do not even feel it. Violent passions include love and hatred, grief and joy, pride and humility, which can easily rise to great heights. In the *Treatise*, Hume does not suggest that one type of passion from the four is particularly morally good or socially beneficial. In fact, he seems to describe them in a neutral tone. For instance, violent passions may at times become destructive, while the strong passions from great poetry and music are also "violent" but can be agreeable (T, 181). In Hume's terminology, hence, "violent" is equivalent to "strong", which is not a negative word in itself.

According to Hume, the main religious passions are fear and hope, which are direct passions. Both can develop to be very strong but, unlike the strength of passion raised from music or poetry, the energy or violence in religious passions is always negative in Hume's account: when religious fear rises to a high level, it can easily lead to a deep psychological depression (NHR, 48); when religious hope grows strong, it can become the source of enthusiasm (SE, 40-41).[93]

Not only is the *violence* of religious passions destructive, but its *restlessness* can also throw our minds into disorder. Our passion is like water, which can be either calm or violent, and can also flow in countless directions. It is capricious, depending on its objects and our customs, as well as individual feelings, interests, and imaginations (T, 268-274). The following is one of Hume's accounts of the restlessness of passions:

> 'Tis certain nothing more powerfully animates any affection, than to conceal some part of its object by throwing it into a kind of shade, which at the same time that it shows enough to pre-possess us in favour of the object, leaves still some work for the imagination. Besides that obscurity is always attended with a kind of uncertainty; the effort, which the fancy makes to compleat the idea, rouzes the spirits, and gives an additional force to the passion (T, 270).

---

[92] This does not mean that reason is not important. In the process of moral decisions and actions, reason is conditional and necessary, which helps us to recognize the conditions and surroundings. As A. T. Nuyen comments, "reason is the track on which the human train is running, passions the engine. Without passions, we go nowhere, but without reason, we go nowhere in particular" (Nuyen, 1984, 44).

[93] Although he also points out that enthusiasm can be beneficial to the pursuit of freedom, its detrimental influences are dominant in Hume's accounts.

Hume takes a soldier who is going to battle as an example to show the changeability of passions. When he thinks of his friends and fellow soldiers, he is motivated by encouragement and confidence; when he considers the enemies' forces and dangers, he is easily captured by fear and terror (T, 269). Similarly, religious passions are also restless and changeable. Taking a future state as an example, if we imagine a paradise, we may be filled with joy and happiness; but if we think of hell, we suffer the fear of possible (eternal) punishment (Smith, 1779, 76-79). The restlessness of religious passions goes deeper than usual passions. The ambiguity within religious teachings, the uncertainty of the future, as well as the different understandings of the deity, can lead religious believers down many possible paths, potentially endangering the normal peace of mind as well as common virtues of individuals. Popular religion, if it is moderated and regulated, at least in principle, can lead our passions in a socially acceptable and wholesome direction, restricting the unsettled religious passions within a limited sphere. In this way, moderated popular religion can itself "regulate the heart of men" and "humanize their conduct".

Obedience and political orderliness. According to Cleanthes, apart from the promotion of "morality", true popular religion can also be beneficial to social "justice", which is an "artificial virtue" in Hume's system of moral theory.[94] Cleanthes and Hume believe that popular religion can benefit public utility by "infus[ing] the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience", or in Hume's voice, by "secur[ing] obedience to the laws and civil magistrate". But the link between the spirit of obedience and public order requires some explanation.

Like Hutcheson, Hume has set the basis of morals on passions and sentiments. But unlike Hutcheson, Hume does not think that all morals are naturally derived from human nature. In particular, he considers justice not as a natural but an artificial virtue. His reason is that there are no motives in our nature to cooperate with other people and to follow the regulations set by social authorities.[95] The sense of justice, Hume says, is produced by conventions, politics, and education:

---

[94] Although "morality" in a 18th century context includes most subjects of humanity and social sciences, in separating morality from political justice, Cleanthes is using the term "morality" in a narrow sense, which is compared to politics, economics, religion etc.
[95] For the significance of motives in distinguishing artificial virtues from natural ones, see G. Sayre-Mccord (2016, 435-469).

> From all this it follows, that we have naturally no real or universal motive for observing the laws of equity, but the very equity and merit of that observance; and as no action can be equitable or meritorious, where it cannot arise from some separate motive, there is here an evident sophistry and reasoning in a circle. Unless, therefore, we will allow, that nature has establish'd a sophistry, and render'd it necessary and unavoidable, we must allow, that the sense of justice and injustice is not deriv'd from nature, but arises artificially, tho' necessarily from education, and human conventions (T, 311).

Religious institutions have become part of our customs and conventions, which for Hume are artificial virtues.[96] According to Hume, customs have great influence on our passions and can "increase all active habits, but diminish passive" (T, 272). They are an effective approach to leading the restless passions to a stable "tendency or inclination" (T, 271).[97]

Hume does not apparently say that a religious establishment is a custom or an artificial virtue, but from what he says about the positive consequences of popular religion, it *can* be an artificial virtue. As a matter of fact, what conventions are included in artificial virtues is far from clear in Hume's accounts. In the *Treatise*, Hume regards politics, education as well as activities of priests as sources of supra-individual reliability and cooperation, which is the starting point for the establishment of a government. G. Sayre-Mccord remarks that "the conventions that underwrite artificial virtues are restricted to those that are mutually advantageous" (2016, 447). Although not all conventions are virtuous, religious institutions can be seen as an artificial virtue according to Hume's argument that whether a custom can be categorized as an artificial virtue depends on its benefits.[98]

In addition, obedience plays a crucial role in maintaining valuable conventions, as well as the normal operation of society. Hume does not approve of frequent revolutions for "such a practice tends directly to the subversion of all government, and the causing a universal anarchy and confusion among mankind" (T, 354). Stability is crucial for the authority of the government, and a moderate spirit of

---

[96] A similar stance is also held by T.W. Merrill, who states that Hume's respect for tradition and authority is based on the recognition that "one must start where one's fellow citizens are, even if one wishes to move them to someplace new" (Merrill, 2014, 331).

[97] Hume's account of passions is naturalistic, and due to that, S. Buckle asserts that it aims to criticize orthodox religious values (Buckle, 2012, 189-213). This might be true but it is not necessarily in conflict with my thesis that, consequentially, a leading church can guide religious passions to virtuous paths.

[98] N. McArthur remarks that Hume's attitude toward "superstition" is double-edged: on the one hand, he attacks what he frequently calls "superstition", including many forms of Christianity; on the other hand, he sees superstition as "a pillar supporting the authority of the state" (McArthur, 2016, 499).

obedience is essential to social and political peace. Hume writes that obedience is firstly derived from "obligation of promises" and later on is strengthened by the authority of the government (T, 347). Although Hume does not consider religious authority as a source of obedience in the *Treatise*, he does so in his treatment of superstition in his essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", where he mentions that superstitious people are often so obedient to priestly sermons that this form of allegiance helped the power of religious authorities to grow significantly (SE, 38-42). Theoretically speaking, if the spirit of religious obedience is moderated, it can become a source of compliance with "the laws and civil magistrate". As K. Haakonssen remarks, "in society and in politics, the superstitious person is disposed to accept established forms and powers as inherent in the nature of things and to see society as a hierarchical structure with a monarch as the unitary source of authority and sovereignty as a divine right" (Haakonssen, 1993, 183).

5.6 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter discussed the contents and intentions of Cleanthes' concept of true religion. I argued the following points: (1) popular religion is not wholly negative as is conventionally supposed - its good sides serve as a basis for Cleanthes and Hume to reconsider the proper office of popular religion; (2) the sources of the corruption of popular religion are divided into external and internal types - the corruption of religious institutions and the violence of religious passions (i.e. fear and hope); (3) Cleanthes' statements of true popular religion in the *Dialogues* are highly similar to Hume's description of the proper office of religion in the *History of England*, which highlight the usefulness of religious institutions to moral and political interests; (4) a regulated religious establishment can lead restless religious passions to a common course of worship, and can be seen as a custom and an artificial virtue.

In the end, Hume's concern about Cleanthes' concept of true religion is mostly practical and pragmatic: as vulgar religion has deep roots in human passions and has been deeply imprinted in many societies, we cannot expect or even demand the demise of popular religion but have to treat it properly and pragmatically. Cleanthes' and Hume's intention is to regulate popular religion with suitable restrictions, and to find its proper position in a modern world. In so doing, it can be expected to be "true", i.e. "salutary" and "useful".

Chapter Six

Hume's Approaches toward True Religion

Of all the sects, into which Christians have been divided, the Church of England seems to have chosen the most happy medium.

——Hume, introduction to Volume II of *History of England*[99]

One considerable advantage that arises from philosophy, consists in the sovereign antidote which it affords to superstition and false religion. All other remedies against that pestilent distemper are vain, or at least uncertain […] superstition being founded on false opinion, must immediately vanish when true philosophy has inspired juster sentiments of superior powers.

——Hume, "On Suicide", SE, p. 315.

6.1 Introduction

Having explored the contents and intentions of both Philo's and Cleanthes' versions of true religion, this chapter examines Hume's approaches to achieving them. Although in the *Dialogues* Philo and Cleanthes do not explicitly provide their methods for realizing the ideal of true religion, some hints can still be found in other of Hume's texts, especially the *History of England*. I suggest that three methods can be found in Hume's texts to reach the goal of true religion: a philosophical cure, a tolerant state church, and a historical education to promote moral taste.

To begin with, section 6.2 presents Hume's first remedy for false religion, which I call a "philosophical cure". The basis, methods and limits of this philosophical cure will be examined. After that, section 6.3 discusses Hume's advocacy of an established form of religion, exploring his suggested reasons and methods for building a moderate and tolerant state church. Section 6.4 considers the significant role of historical education in the process of improving our moral taste with regards to the appropriate role of religion in society, and links it to the writing process of Hume's *History*. Section 6.5 summarizes the main points made in this chapter.

---

[99] Cited from *The Life of David Hume* (Mossner, 1970, 307).

6.2 A Philosophical Cure

In his seminal work on the interpretation of the Enlightenment, P. Gay remarks that "David Hume proclaimed philosophy the supreme, indeed the only, cure for superstition" (Gay, 1967, 129). It is true that the philosophical cure is an approach of restricting superstition and of reaching true religion, but Gay's contention requires some serious revisions. Firstly, in Hume' own account, what can cure superstition is true philosophy rather than philosophy in general; secondly, the *philosophical cure* is likely to be effective mainly for the learned and not the vulgar. Let us first illustrate Hume's usage of "superstition" and its relationship to philosophy.

A. The Competition between Superstition and Philosophy

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, superstition is a "belief that is not based on human reason or scientific knowledge, but is connected with old ideas about magic, etc." [100] According to the *Collins English Dictionary*, superstition is "belief in things that are not real or possible, for example, magic".[101] Both take magic as an example but do not provide further hints on how to differentiate religion from superstition. S. Bruce's description of this term is more informative than the definitions in the abovementioned dictionaries:

> The category of 'superstition' is broad. Generally it refers to supernatural influences on our fortunes and the rituals adopted either to harness or to deflect such influences. The supernatural forces imagined in superstition differ from those of religions in lacking a consistent ethical thrust. The fates periodically intervene in our lives in ways for which the wise would do well to prepare […] Superstition also differs from religion in being chaotic and inconsistent. It is an accumulation of diverse elements rather than the product of ideological work by religious leaders and organizations. Superstition sometimes comes close to magic in the sense that one can engineer good fortune by performing certain ritual acts, but it is rarely as directed and specific as, for example, the inflicting of injury on an enemy by sticking pins in a wax effigy. Much superstition is concerned with divination or foresight (Bruce, 2011, 121).

Hume sees philosophy as something competing with superstition. He refers to the word "superstition" in almost all of his works, but he never seems to provide a clear definition. In the *Dialogues*, he often equates "vulgar superstition" with popular

---

[100] See: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/superstition. Accessed on 20/4/2018.
[101] See: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/superstition. Accessed on 20/4/2018.

religion (e.g. D, 89, 94, 95); In the NHR, he frequently calls polytheism and the vulgar form of monotheism "superstitious"; in many places, superstition is associated with the Catholic church, as well as its priests, saints, and ceremonies. Hume also gives this title to ancient Greek and Egyptian understandings of gods, Zoroastrianism and Manicheism etc. Thus, he uses the term "superstition" in a broad sense, as for him superstition exists, more or less, "in almost every sect of religion" (SE, 40).

In the essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", Hume considers the origins of superstition from certain psychological propensities such as weakness, fear or melancholy (SE, 39). Apart from these psychological roots, ignorance is also of great significance for the development of a superstitious character. According to C. J. Berry's observation, Hume's "science of man" is superior to superstition, even its antidote, for it can not only find the true principles for morality, politics, and history but also can tell good religious institutions from bad ones (Berry, 2009, 70-74). Another perspective offered by M. Bell is that in the context of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "superstition" is often used "to describe and explain religious beliefs and practices which they, the authors, rejected" (Bell, 1999, 153). This is true, as Catholics and Protestants often used to call each other "superstitious sect" while proclaiming their own side as "true religion".

In the essay "On Suicide", Hume regards true philosophy as the best antidote to superstition and claims that, "when sound philosophy has once gained possession of the mind, superstition is effactually excluded" (SE, 315). In this essay, Hume intends to show that the popular opinion of suicide being criminal is a superstition as, philosophically speaking, suicide does not violate any duty either to God, or to our neighbour, or to ourselves.[102] According to Hume, true philosophy and superstition are enemies fighting against each other in our minds. As he puts it, "the contest is here more equal between the distemper and the medicine" (ibid.). In this sense, we can call true philosophy a "philosophical cure" for the ills of popular religion. But it is important to note that, as Hume clearly says, what can cure superstition is true philosophy and not general philosophy.

---

[102] For the structure of Hume's arguments in this regard, see T. Holden (2005, 189-210).

Of course, not all philosophical principles are true or sound. So, what happens if false philosophy conquers our minds? Is it better than superstition? Hume's answer is yes. His reason is not that false philosophy is more justified than superstition but that, practically and consequentially speaking, the errors of false philosophy are less dangerous than those of superstition. Both philosophy and superstition can drive us far away from daily life, but Hume clearly favours (false) philosophy over superstition:

> But even suppose this curiosity and ambition should not transport us into speculations without the sphere of common life, it would necessarily happen, that from my very weakness I must be led to such enquiries. 'Tis certain, that superstition is much more bold in its systems and hypotheses than philosophy; and while the latter contents itself with assigning new causes and principles to the phænomena, which appear in the visible world, the former opens a world of its own, and presents us with scenes, and beings, and objects, which are altogether new. Since therefore 'tis almost impossible for the mind of man to rest, like those of beasts, in that narrow circle of objects, which are the subject of daily conversation and action, we ought only to deliberate concerning the choice of our guide, and ought to prefer that which is safest and most agreeable. And in this respect I make bold to recommend philosophy, and shall not scruple to give it the preference to superstition of every kind or denomination. For as superstition arises naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind, it seizes more strongly on the mind, and is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions. Philosophy on the contrary, if just, can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments; and if false and extravagant, its opinions are merely the objects of a cold and general speculation, and seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities (T, 176).

As the human mind is usually limited within the narrow scope of common life, we have a tendency to either take philosophy or superstition as a guide for life and, thus, the two are often in fierce competition. Hume recommends philosophy from a pragmatic point of view, for it is more moderate and has fewer detrimental influences on ordinary life. No matter whether philosophical principles are right or not, they cannot usually change the routine course of life. However, superstition is generally not only bolder in its theory but also more influential and popular in practice.

In brief, what Hume said is that only true philosophy can cure superstition, and that, from a consequential point of view, popular forms of philosophy (including obviously false philosophies) are better than superstitions. But even though Hume generally prefers philosophy over superstition, he stresses that what can cure superstition is true philosophy rather than false philosophy.

B. The Philosophical Cure and its Limits

The reason why true philosophy can cure superstition is that "superstition [is] being founded on false Opinion" (SE, 315). That is to say, true philosophy can eradicate superstition from its theoretical roots by defeating false philosophy and offering "juster sentiments" (ibid.). We have said that the worldviews of the learned and the vulgar are different. As a matter of fact, we have three strands of opinions as the philosophy of the learned falls into true and false categories: "these opinions are that of the vulgar, that of a false philosophy, and that of the true; where we shall find upon enquiry, that the true philosophy approaches nearer to the sentiments of the vulgar, than to those of a mistaken knowledge" (T, 147). The opinions of false philosophy are worse than vulgar opinions, for the latter is usually restricted and corrected by common life and conventions while the former is "apt to fancy such a separation to be in itself impossible and absurd" (ibid.). Thus, false philosophy is a significant root of superstition, and once true philosophy dominates our minds, all false opinions, as well as the superstition based on them, will vanish. Unlike D.W. Livingston, who sees true philosophy as true religion *per se*, Hume himself thinks of true philosophy as a good method to defeat superstition and achieve true religion (SE, 315).

Let us start by briefly examining the implications of false and true philosophy. Hume distinguishes true and false philosophy in the *Enquiry* as follows:

> We must submit to this fatigue [serious study of human nature], in order to live at ease ever after: And must cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate. Indolence, which, to some persons, affords a safeguard against this deceitful philosophy, is, with others, overbalanced by curiosity; and despair, which, at some moments, prevails, may give place afterwards to sanguine hopes and expectations. Accurate and just reasoning is the only catholic remedy, fitted for all persons and all dispositions; and is alone able to subvert that abstruse philosophy and metaphysical jargon, which, being mixed up with popular superstition, renders it in a manner impenetrable to careless reasoners, and gives it the air of science and wisdom (E, 8).

Thus, true philosophy is featured as accurate, sufficient and scientific, while false philosophy is careless, adulterate and deceitful. In a Humean context, I would argue that false philosophy has the following errors:

(1) Totality. Some critics of the Enlightenment, such as T. W. Adorno and E. Levinas, see "totality" as a feature of western philosophy in general or a feature of European

Enlightenment in particular, which is believed to be responsible for many social and political disasters in the twentieth century (cf. Adorno, 2002 and Levinas, 1979). Hume, though a philosopher of the Enlightenment, is well aware of the inappropriateness of a total philosophical system. In the introduction to the *Treatise*, Hume accuses philosophers who favour "systems" of having "drawn disgrace upon philosophy itself", for their systems are full of flaws (T, 3). Apart from that, in order to integrate many thoughts into a complete and all-encompassing system, philosophers tend to accept or create hypotheses that cannot be verified by human experience. Hume confesses his serious distaste for hypotheses and his willingness to limit his conclusions within the scope of experience. As he puts it in the "abstract" of the *Treatise*, "though we can never arrive [at] the ultimate principles, it is a satisfaction to go as far as our faculties will allow us" (Hume, 1965, 6). Certainly, Hume does not object to the enquiry of philosophy, as he believes that general principles can be found in human nature. But he refutes the tendency of making philosophy to be a complete and closed system, within which diversity and exceptions are not allowed. As he puts it in the essay "The Sceptic", "they confine too much their principles, and make no account of that vast variety which nature has so much affected in all her operations" (SE, 95). In extreme cases, the arrogance and bigotry of false philosophy can even ally with superstition, as both have no rational justifications for their speculations (E, 97).[103]

(2) Privilege. In his introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant remarks that for centuries, since the birth of philosophy in Greece, metaphysics has been regarded as the supreme "queen of all the sciences" (Kant, 1998, 99). In this regard, a typical example is Plato's famous ideal that the king of a country shall also be a philosopher. Hume reminds us that we need to be on the alert to the inclination of philosophers to see the authority of philosophy as the ultimate truth or to consider philosophy as higher than common sense regarding its authority. "That grave philosophic endeavour after perfection", Hume writes in the essay "Of Moral Prejudices", "strikes at all the most endearing Sentiments of the Heart, and all the most useful Byasses and Instincts, which can govern a human Creature" (EMPL, 292).

---

[103] The totality of false scepticism in Hume's texts is also highlighted by D. C. Ainslie in *Hume's True Scepticism* (Ainslie, 2015, 19-41).

(3) Autonomy. The third error of false philosophy is highlighted by D. W. Livingston as the autonomy principle. False philosophy confidently but blindly believes that philosophical enquiry is independent from the concepts and opinions of common life and from other academic disciplines (Livingston, 1984, 272-275). This purely ontological tendency is, indeed, inconsistent with Hume's experimental philosophy, which pays attention to gaining inspiration and insights from ordinary observations. As a result, the principles of false philosophy have no support from experience and are a product of mere imagination. As Hume puts it, "the imagination of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without control, into the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it" (E, 118).

Having presented the frame of false philosophy, we can expect that Hume's true philosophy limits itself to the proper sphere of reason (anti-totality), admits the authority of common sense (anti-privilege), and bases its reasoning on experience (anti-autonomy). The following is Hume own voice of what true philosophy should be like:

> Those who have a propensity to philosophy, will still continue their researches; because they reflect, that, besides the immediate pleasure, attending such an occupation, philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected. But they will never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations (E, 118).

We also said that true philosophy in the *Enquiry* is described as "cautious" and "accurate" (E, 8). In the introduction to the *Treatise*, Hume points out that the method of his reasoning is "experimental" (T, 6). Moreover, we should not forget that in both the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise*, Hume highlights that the conclusions of true philosophy are "moderate" and "sceptical" (T, 148; E, 117). Hume does not offer an apparent definition of true philosophy but these claims opposing false philosophy are enough to consider its relation to true religion.[104]

Hume's moderate scepticism is the model of true philosophy, which has a close relationship with Philo's accounts of true religion. At the end of the *Dialogues*, Philo makes the puzzling proposition that "to be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of

---

[104] For a book-length study of Hume's true and false philosophy, see D.W. Livingston's *Philosophical melancholy and delirium: Hume's pathology of philosophy* (Livingston, 1998); for a detailed research into Hume's true scepticism, see D. C. Ainslie's *Hume's True Scepticism* (Ainslie, 2015).

letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian" (D, 102). Many consider this an ironic statement, but according to my reading, it can be seen as another expression of the philosophical cure to the misconceptions and delusions of theology. That is to say, a moderate scepticism is the best antidote against the dogmatism of theology and its superstitions.

However, to my understanding, the philosophical cure is neither the only nor the best way to heal the ills of superstition. The limit of philosophy in overcoming superstition rests on the fundamental differences between philosophy and superstition, as well as on the shortcomings of philosophy itself.

Philosophy and superstition have different sources. In both the NHR and the essay "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm", Hume points out that superstition is mainly a result of our passions, especially fear. Inversely, philosophy is based on reason and abstract enquiry, which is driven by our curiosity. The origin of superstition is "not speculative curiosity" or "the pure love of truth" because they are "too refined" for the "gross apprehensions" of the vulgar (NHR, 19).[105] In the *Treatise*, Hume famously argues that it is passion and not reason that drives us to act, and that reason is the slave of passion. In this case, the true philosophical cure for superstition is limited merely to those who are interested in, or capable of, philosophical enquiry. In Hume's own voice, "the reflections of philosophy are too subtle and distant to take place in common life, or eradicate any affection. The air is too fine to breathe in, where it is above the winds and clouds of the atmosphere" (SE, 107).

Therefore, my conclusion is similar to that of J. Dye, who comments that "eventually, Hume's position is that philosophical critique can banish superstitious belief only in those rare individuals who enjoy the opportunity and disposition to philosophizing, and then only episodically" (Dye, 1986, 130). In fact, I think Hume's approaches toward curing superstition are multiple. The philosophical cure is limited to the theological superstition of some men of letters, but for the vulgar, Hume appeals to the development of external regulations and the progress of moral taste.

---

[105] M. Bell suggests that apart from our passions, Hume's theory of imagination can explain why people believe in superstition (Bell, 1999, 153-170).

6.3 An Ideal State Church

Hume holds a hostile attitude towards priesthood or "priestcraft" throughout his writings. However, it is also widely acknowledged that he advocates an established form of religion, which is a central element for social peace. This section reads Hume's advocacy of a moderate and tolerant state church exemplified by the Church of England as a crucial means of achieving his ideal of true popular religion. By briefly examining the questions *what*, *why* and *how* in relation to Hume's idea of religious establishments, I argue that Hume is both an attacker and a reformer of religious institutions.

A. Hume's Advocacy of Religious Institutions

Let us start with *what* is advocated in Hume's account of religious establishments. In *The Invisible Religion*, T. Luckmann famously asserts that with the decline of established forms of religion in modern society, religion continues to exist in an "invisible" state that people "believe without belonging" (Luckmann, 1967). In his *Religion within the bounds of Bare Reason*, Kant endorses an invisible and purely spiritual church as the universal and true religion (Kant, 2009, 118, 146).[106] Contrary to these statements, Hume does not think of the demise of religious institutions as an inevitable tendency, as for Hume, an established religion is a necessity "in every civilized community" (H, III, 134-135).[107]

---

[106] In his comments on Philo's true religion, V. A. Harvey thinks that the limited theism of Philo is a modern type of religious belief that is held by "someone who cannot repress genuinely religious feeling but who so distrusts all rational theology and organised religion that he defensively states his opinion in terms that are misleading" (Harvey, 1999, 68).

[107] Hume's advocacy of religious establishments has led some scholars to conclude that he is a conservative in politics – for example, D.W. Livingston (see Livingston, 1984, 306-342; 1998; 2011, 32-37), S. Wolin (Wolin, 1954) and J. Muller (Muller, 1997). But conservatism is not the only interpretation for Hume's political theory; some scholars prefer to call him a liberalist for his endorsement of a free market in economics, his criticism of religion, as well as his belief in the progress of history. For example, D. Forbes calls Hume a "scientific Whig" and S. Holmes sees him as a modern liberal theorist (Forbes, 1975, 142-144; Holmes, 1993, 188). The third category of reading regards Hume as a political reformer, such as J.B Stewart (Steward, 1992, 194-223) and N. McArthur (McArthur, 2007, 124-130). In my opinion, these ascriptions are all right to a certain degree. In the essay "Of the Parties of Great Britain", Hume prefers a moderate government between conservative and liberal, which provides a balance between freedom and authority (SE, 32-38).

Of course, Hume does not endorse every form of religious establishment, but promotes a specific, moderate and tolerant state church exemplified by the Anglican Church. In his introduction to volume II of the *History of England* in 1756, Hume declares the Anglican Church "the most happy medium", for it has a "spirit of moderation" between religious superstition and enthusiasm (cited from Mossner, 1970, 307). From Volumes III to IV of the *History*, he lavishes praise on the Church of England formed by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I:

> The acknowledgement of the King's [Henry VIII] supremacy introduced there a greater simplicity in the government by *uniting the spiritual with the civil power*, and preventing disputes, which never could be determined between the contending jurisdictions. A way was also prepared for checking the exorbitances of superstition, and breaking those shackles, by which any human reason, policy, and industry had so long been encumbered (H III, 206-207, italics added).

> Of all the European churches, which shook off the yoke of papal authority, no one proceeded with so much reason and moderation as the church of England; an advantage, which had been derived partly from *the interposition of the civil magistrate* in this innovation, partly from the *gradual and slow steps*, by which the reformation was conducted in that kingdom. Rage and animosity against the Catholic religion was a little indulged as could be supposed in such a revolution: The fabric of the secular hierarchy was maintained entirely: The ancient liturgy was preserved, so far was thought consistent with the new principles: Many ceremonies, become venerable from age and preceding use, were retained: The splendour of the Romish worship, though removed, had at least given place to order and decency: The distinctive habits of the clergy, according to their different ranks, were continued: No innovation was admitted merely from spite and opposition to former usage; And the new religion, by mitigating the genius of the ancient superstition, and rendering it more compatible with the *peace and interests of society*, had preserved itself in that happy medium, which wise men have always sought, and which the people have so seldom been able to maintain (H, IV, 119-120, italics added).

In Volume IV of *History*, Elizabeth's moderate and tolerant reform is confronted with the brutal persecutions of Queen Mary I of England (H, IV, 6-8), with the intolerant policies of the King Philip of Spain against Protestants (ibid., 53-56), with the enthusiasm of the Scottish religious reform led by J. Knox (ibid., 40-42), and with the extreme anti-establishment pursuits of Puritans (ibid, 121-124).

Although Hume's accounts of the ideal established church are fragmentary, from the statements above we can still learn that he imagines a state-controlled church, which is "moderate" in its religious policies, "gradual" in its reform, tolerant to other religious factions in its attitude, and that is subject to secular authorities in its power. Most importantly, the chief mission of the ruling church is maintaining "the peace and interests of society". Hume praises the Anglican Church not for its theological doctrines but for the way it treats other religious parties, and for its proper relationship with the government. As R. Susato remarks, "there is no doubt that

Hume's support of an established church was motivated not by religion, but by a purely civil desire of peace and order" (Susato, 2012, 275).[108]

B. The Reasons for Hume's Advocacy of Religious Establishments

Hume's reasons for the endorsement of established forms of religion are historical and philosophical. Historically speaking, D. Forbes believes that Hume's approval of a state church was inspired by *The Old Whig,* an English journal published in 1738 (Forbes, 1975, 214). R. Susato argues that Hume's endorsement of religious institutions "was heavily indebted to his predecessors Shaftesbury, Mandeville, and Burnet" (Susato, 2012, 293). However, my interest here is not the historical background of Hume's thoughts but his philosophical arguments in this regard.[109]

We discussed in 5.5 that religious institutions can be an artificial virtue and a salutary custom. The underlying reason is that religious establishments, if properly regulated, can lead the restless religious passions to a common course of worship. But Hume's willingness to establish a state church originates more directly from his observation of the conflicts between religious sects. As a historian, Hume gives numerous examples of how political disorders have been caused, directly or indirectly, by different opinions of theologians. One of the most striking examples is the Thirty Years' War that in large part was a result of different religious standpoints between Catholics and Protestants. From the reign of Henry VIII, through Mary I, Elizabeth I, to James I (that is, volumes 3-6 of Hume's *History*), different religious opinions of the monarchs were the main source of instability in the country. Rivalry and at times downright hatred between religious parties can easily become an excuse for persecution. As an illustration, Hume presents the famous example of Calvin burning Servetus at the stake in Geneva (H, III, 434).

In the Essay "Of the Balance of Trade", Hume writes that competition in international trade can naturally reach a balance within a certain time frame (SE, 188-203). But

---

[108] Similar points are also made in Susato's book *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment* (Susato, 2015, 131-176).

[109] For a concise account of the historical background of Hume's thoughts on religious establishments, see section III of G.J.A. Pocock's *Barbarism and Religion* (Pocock, 1999, 163-257).

unlike international trade, the rivalry between religious sects can be endless and will not reach a natural state of harmony without regulation. For Hume, there is no better way to settle theological disputes between religious parties than introducing governmental regulations.

> Where sects arise, whose fundamental principle on all sides is to execrate, and abhor, and damn, and extirpate each other; what choice has the magistrate left but to take part, and by rendering one sect entirely prevalent, restore, at least for a time, the public tranquillity? The political body, being here sickly, must not be treated as if it were in a state of sound health; and an affected neutrality in the prince, or even a cool preference, may serve only to encourage the hopes of all the sects, and keep alive their animosity (H, III, 434).

Furthermore, religious groups are often tightly connected with political parties. In the essay "Of Parties in General", Hume explores various types of parties or factions (he uses these two terms interchangeably), claiming that they are either based on principles or interests. Both origins of parties can have a close relationship with religion. It is normal that people have different opinions and, in most cases, these differences do not lead to conflict. As Hume puts it, "two men travelling on the highway, the one east, the other west, can easily pass each other, if the way be broad enough: But two men, reasoning upon opposite principles of religion, cannot so easily pass" (EMPL, 53). For Hume, religious enthusiasm is the fatal element that pushes religious parties into serious conflict. According to the *History*, the establishment of Christian institutions makes the situation worse:

> Religions, that arise in ages totally ignorant and barbarous, consist mostly of traditional tales and fictions, which may be different in every sect, without being contrary to each other; and even when they are contrary, every one adheres to the tradition of his own sect, without much reasoning or disputation. But as philosophy was widely spread over the world, at the time when Christianity arose, the teachers of the new sect were obliged to form a system of speculative opinions; to divide, with some accuracy, their articles of faith; and to explain, comment, confute, and defend with all the subtilty of argument and science. Hence naturally arose keenness in dispute, when the Christian religion came to be split into new divisions and heresies: And this keenness assisted the priests in their policy, of begetting a mutual hatred and antipathy among their deluded followers. Sects of philosophy, in the ancient world, were more zealous than parties of religion; but in modern times, parties of religion are more furious and enraged than the most cruel factions that ever arose from interest and ambition (EMPL, 54).

There are three options for civil magistrates faced with the furious conflicts in social and political areas that are derived from the zeal of religious sects. One extreme option would be total toleration, allowing all religious parties to compete against each other freely, while the other extreme is a total governmental control that only allows a certain religious movement to exist. The middle way is for the civil authority only to intervene when necessary. A. Smith's proposes the first route, T. Hobbes favours the second, while J. Locke takes the third. Hume's proposal for the

regulation of popular religion by civil power is different, calling for a moderate and tolerant policy under the leadership of a dominating state church. As W. R. Jordan remarks, this policy can bring religious sects into "the arms of a middling established church" and "is capable of unifying believers and strengthening [their] recognition of similitude" (Jordan, 2002, 700).

C. Ways to the Ideal State Church

In his influential *The Stillborn God*, M. Lilla remarks that "a great separation" took place in early modern Europe, which decisively shaped the features of the modern political structure of the western world until today (Lilla, 2007, 58). This separation is the separation between church and state, and between naturalistic political narration and theological premises. It had its starting point in the Lutheran Reformation, and the central Lutheran doctrine is that, against the Catholic emphasis on the mediation of priests, faith alone can connect a believer to God. Thus, religion is intrinsic and spiritual rather than instrumental and institutional in nature and due to that, faith is, to a large extent, a private matter, which has no essential relationship with secular authorities. The separation between state and church is further developed by J. Locke in his well-known letter concerning toleration, where he claims that we must "distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion", for the task of the former is "a care of the commonwealth" while the mission of the latter is about the "interest of men's souls" (Locke, 2010, 12). A. Smith develops the separation between church and state even further, wishing to establish a "free market", in which different religions can coexist freely without interference from the civil power. He believes that – like the "invisible hand" in economics – a natural balance between factions can be expected by means of free competition between religions (Smith, 1976, 792-794).

T. Hobbes takes a different route in considering the relationship between church and state. Regardless of the fact that he is widely called an atheist, a naturalist or a secularist, two thirds of the contents of his *Leviathan* is actually about how to understand religion and the Bible.[110] In ascribing the foundation of civil power to

---

[110] How to read Hobbes' view of religion is controversial. The conventional view is that he is an atheist and secularist, but today some scholars read him as a moderate theist or even an

natural origins, Hobbes encounters a difficulty: what is the relationship between the authority of priestly power and the ruling government? He does not seem to deny the authority of God, but interestingly, the priestly authority is not seen as an agent of divine power but as a concession by the civil magistrate. P. Springborg remarks, "for this reason, Hobbes argues that teaching and governing are mutually dependent functions of the sovereign power different from that of God" (Springborg, 2006, 356).

Hume also considers that priestly power should be controlled by the civil power.[111] But unlike Hobbes's emphasis on the supreme authority of the sovereign, Hume's ideal of a state church allows a large degree of toleration for many different religious groups. Taking away all freedom from religion is an effective way of maintaining political stability, but this policy has serious side-effects: it not only "exposes for ever the people to all the abject terrors of superstition" (H, III, 432) but also restricts the independence of science, reason or industry (D, 98). Of course, Hume's open-mindedness is moderate, as "an unlimited toleration, after sects have diffused themselves and are strongly rooted, is the only expedient, which can allay their fevour" (H, VI, 322). Therefore, Hume's ideal of a moderate and tolerant state church is a strategy treading the middle ground between Smith's free market and Hobbes' absolute government sovereignty.[112] To achieve this goal, Hume provides three suggestions.

"Philosophical indifference". For Hume, theological disputes between different religions are not easy to settle. But if the government or the state church hurriedly engages in theological disputes, things can easily become worse. "A wise magistrate", Philo suggests, "must preserve a very philosophical indifference to all of them, and carefully restrain the pretensions of the prevailing sect" (D, 98). But this suggested philosophical indifference should be maintained only while the disputes are still harmless to social peace. As soon as a conflict between religious groups becomes a potential threat to social or political order, a wise magistrate is required

orthodox Christian (cf. Martinich, 1992, 1-2).

[111] Hume's view on religion has some similarities to that of Hobbes, such as: both consider religion, politics and morality from a naturalistic perspective, and both believe that the authority of the church should always be controlled and monitored by the government.

[112] Of course, this contention is merely philosophical and not historical. Hume wrote his *History* before the publication of Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which was first published in 1776, the year of Hume's death. So Smith's opinions on this topic might have had no influence on Hume when he was writing on the ideal relationship between church and state, although Hume's accounts of a state church had evidential impact on Smith.

to take action and "carefully restrain" them. Otherwise, "he can expect nothing but endless disputes, quarrels, factions, persecutions, and civil commotions" (ibid.) That is to say, the proposed neutral attitude of the government towards theological disputes does not diminish its crucial role as the monitor of all existing religions within a state.

"*Bribing their indolence*". Hume's second suggestion to regulate popular religion is for the government to provide a decent salary for priests. By doing so, Hume expects priests will be satisfied with their financial situation, preventing them from expanding their ambitions into other social and political fields. This policy is highly tactical and pragmatic, and Philo even calls it a "saving game" (D, 98). This strategy is also not unfamiliar to us today, as many companies and governments pay a high salary to prominent and ambitious workers or officials in order to keep them calm, satisfied and, thus, restrained in their positions. Likewise, Hume expects priests who are financially well provided for to do their jobs within the scope of the "proper office" of religion. Consider the following sentences:

> In every religion, except the true, it is highly pernicious, and it has even a natural tendency to pervert the true. […] And in the end, the civil magistrate will find, that he has dearly paid for his pretended frugality, in saving a fixed establishment for the priests; and that in reality the most decent and advantageous composition, which he can make with the spiritual guides, is to bribe their indolence, by assigning stated salaries to their profession, and rendering it superfluous for them to be farther active, than merely to prevent their flock from straying in quest of new pastures (H III, 135-136).

"*King's supremacy*". One reason for Hume to think that the government ought to pay priests a decent salary is to make it clear that the authority of the church must always be subservient to the civil government; this is the most significant principle of Hume's proposal of an ideal state church. Philo states that "both the number and authority of priests should be confined within very narrow limits, and that the civil magistrate ought, forever, to keep his fasces and axes from such dangerous hands" (D, 97-98). Hume consequentially praises Henry VIII for taking the supreme power of the church from the hands of the Roman court:

> Thus the authority of popes, like all exorbitant power, was ruined by the excess of its acquisitions […] The acknowledgement of the king's supremacy introduced there a greater simplicity in the government, by uniting the spiritual with the civil power and preventing disputes about limits, which never could be exactly determined between the contending jurisdictions. A way was also prepared for exorbitances, and breaking those shackles, by which all human reason, policy, and industry had so long been encumbered. The prince, it may be supposed, being head of the religion, as well as of the temporal jurisdiction of the kingdom, though he might sometime employ the former as an engine

of government, had no interest, like the Roman pontiff, in nourishing its excessive growth (H, III, 206-207).

In summary, Hume's theory of toleration is complicated and fragmentary, and a detailed analysis of his accounts of toleration would be well beyond the scope of this dissertation. But it is important to note that toleration is one of the central tasks of his concept of true religion. As we have discussed, the "remote probability" of God as the ultimate cause of the universe allows different understandings and responses, which form an epistemological and theoretical basis for religious toleration. Hume's ideal of a state church can then provide the institutional conditions and guarantees for the toleration of religions in practice.[113]

6.4 Historical Education and the Progress of Moral Taste

Hume seems to believe that human nature is unchangeable or at least, practically speaking, beyond our powers to change. In the second *Enquiry*, he uses the metaphor that virtue to human beings is like "a fixed star" to the sun, and claims that our sympathy, as well as the sentiment of friendship, are "necessary and infallible consequences of the general principles of human nature" (M, 50). In the *Treatise*, he writes that although people in different nations vary widely in terms of their appearances and behaviours, "the necessary and uniform principles of human nature" remain the same (T, 258). Similarly, the differences between the two genders are obvious in many aspects, but nature has imprinted both sexes "with constancy and regularity" (E, 62).[114]

Although the structure of human nature seems to be fixed, our moral sentiments are variable and often easily changeable. In the essay "Of the Standard of Taste", Hume

---

[113] R.H. Dees argues that there are three interrelated lines of argument in Hume's accounts of toleration: the sceptical argument concerning the limit of human understanding of religious knowledge; the argument from his contempt for the harm to society by organized religion and its practitioners; the pragmatic argument concerning the proper governmental interference with religious events (Dees, 2005, 145-164). Close to my position, A. Sabl considers toleration as "the last artificial virtue", which is instrumental and consequential (Sabl, 2009, 511-538). For a historical and political account of how toleration can be achieved in mid-eighteenth century England, see G. Conti's article "Hume's Low Road to Toleration" (Conti, 2015, 166-191).
[114] D.F. Norton insightfully points out that as Hume founds morality on human nature, the inalterability of human nature is "a primitive element" to his moral theory (Norton, 1993, 158-160).

utilizes a significant number of examples to demonstrate this proclaimed "great variety of taste" (SE, 133). Although human sentiments vary in people of different age, heritage, customs, culture or language, there always remain considerable similarities, which form the basis for common opinions. Hume tries to persuade his readers that "amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind" (SE, 140).

The uniformity of tastes cannot be rationally demonstrated but can only be observed with the help of examples. Taking the sense of beauty as an example, the judgement "beautiful" or "ugly" rests not only on the structure and delicacy of an object but also on individual feelings and passions. Similarly, from a Humean point of view, we judge an event as good or bad based on our personal moral taste instead of philosophical principles. Although utility is the central tenet of Hume's accounts of morality, it is not always easy to evaluate whether something is useful or good to us.

The proper function of the church and priests in our society is also mainly recognized by moral taste rather than philosophical tenets. On the one hand, it is difficult for the public to know what the "proper office" of religion is not only because of the complexity of religious events, but also because of the prejudices and passions within individuals. Philosophy can do little in this regard, as it can rarely influence our passions and "the feelings of our heart, the agitation of our passions, the vehemence of our affections, dissipate all its conclusions, and reduce the profound philosopher to a mere plebeian" (E, 4).

On the other hand, people can make progress in their moral judgement concerning religion through historical education. Although Hume does not seem to believe in the optimistic four stages of human history, a prevalent opinion held by his Scottish contemporaries, he still has a moderate and positive vision of the progress of human society, believing that the behaviour of human beings will eventually evolve from "barbaric" to "polite" or "civil".[115] In the essay "Of the Delicacy of Taste and Passion", Hume writes that our sentiments can be cultivated to become delicate:

---

[115] Note that Hume does not think that the optimistic progress of human history is unavoidable. For instance, as he shows, the development of monotheism from polytheism is

> Whatever connection there may be originally between these two species of delicacy, I am persuaded that nothing is so proper to cure us of this delicacy of passion, as the cultivating of that higher and more refined taste, which enables us to judge of the characters of men, of the compositions of genius, and of the productions of the nobler arts […] And this is a new reason for cultivating a relish in the liberal arts. Our judgment will strengthen by this exercise (SE, 11-12).

Education plays a crucial role in the progress of moral taste:

> Not to mention, that general virtue and good morals in a state, which are so requisite to happiness, can never arise from the most refined precepts of philosophy, or even the severest injunctions of religion; but must proceed entirely from the virtuous education of youth, the effect of wise laws and institutions (EMPL, 51).

Compared to the shortcomings of philosophy in promoting our moral sentiments, history has various advantages in cultivating delicate moral tastes. In the essay "Of the Study of the History", Hume particularly recommends historical reading to women, "as it amuses the fancy, as it improves the understanding, and as it strengthens virtue" (EMPL, 307). While he perceives philosophy to be too abstract for most people, history, which is rich in imagery, can be taught vividly and is thus much more instinctively accessible to the public. He summarizes the advantages of historical reading as follows:

> I must add, that history is not only a valuable part of knowledge, but opens the door to many other parts, and affords materials to most of the sciences […] which extends our experience to all past ages, and to the most distant nations; making them contribute as much to our improvement in wisdom, as if they had actually lain under our observation […] There is also an advantage in that experience which is acquired by history, above what is learned by the practice of the world, that it brings us acquainted with human affairs, without diminishing in the least from the most delicate sentiments of virtue (EMPL, 307).

Thus, historical education is crucial in promoting moral taste, which is one of human's natural faculties. Unlike the sense of beauty, moral sentiment is about the judgement of "good" or "bad", as well as "right" or "wrong". When it comes to religion, the progress of moral taste can help us to tell the "true", "pure", "genuine", "useful" aspects of religion from their "false", "deceitful", "impious" counterparts. But historical reading and education require reliable and readable historical materials, which in turn require good historians. In this sense, historians play a significant role in

---

not a one-directional process but subject to "flux and reflux" (HNR, 34-35). The four-stage theory argues that the development of human history goes through four stages: hunting, pastoralism, agriculture and commercial society. This theory was widely advocated by a host of famous Scottish writers in the eighteenth century, such as Adam Smith, William Robertson, Henry Home (Lord Kames) and John Miller etc. (cf. Bowles, 1984, 619-638).

promoting moral taste, and because of that, Hume goes on to claim that historians are "true friends of virtue" (EMPL, 308).

Unfortunately, as Hume observes, "no post of honour in the English Parnassus [is] more vacant than that of history. Style, judgement, impartiality, care - everything is wanting to our historians" (L, I, 170). So, he himself strived to fill that perceived vacancy and to be a good historian, trying his best to keep an impartial and moderate attitude towards historical events. As Hume puts it, historians can provide "a just medium" for their readers and should "have no particular interest or concern to pervert their judgment" (EMPL, 308). In his letter to J. Clephane, Hume also confesses that, in the *History*, he has no allegiance to any religious sect and is "very moderate" to both the Whigs and the Tories in political matters (L, I, 237). Hume himself seemed to be satisfied with the impartiality and readability of his historical writings, and the *History,* which was highly successful, did not only make him rich but also forged his image as a great historian among his contemporaries.[116]

6.5 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarized Hume's three approaches to achieving his ideal of true religion: a philosophical cure, a tolerant state church, and historical education for the progress of moral taste. As Hume regards philosophy and superstition as competing opinions fighting against each other in our minds, the more true philosophy occupies our mind, the less superstition will be accepted. But due to the shortcomings of philosophy, Hume's philosophical cure is mainly limited to those who are already familiar with philosophical enquiry (i.e. the learned). For the vulgar, a certain established form of a ruling church will be more effective, as it can lead their religious passions to a common course of worship and restrict religious enthusiasm. Hume suggests that the civil authority should maintain a philosophical indifference and neutrality in theological disputes, pay priests a decent salary, and ensure that

---

[116] Hume would have pleased to see his portrait painted by L. Carrogis, entitled "the historian Hume". A copy can be seen in R. Graham's *The Great Infidel: A Life of David Hume* (Graham, 208-209). E. Gibbon, the author of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, sees the historical works of W. Robertson and Hume as "perfect composition" (Gibbon, 1966, 98-99). And even the great leader of French Enlightenment, Voltaire, praised Hume highly and stated that "nothing can be added to the fame of this *History*, perhaps the best ever written in any language […] Mr. Hume, in his *History*, is neither parliamentarian, nor royalist, nor Anglican, nor Presbyterian" (Cited from Mossner, 1970, 318).

the authority of the church is always monitored and supervised by the government. Also, Hume believes that historical education and reading can promote the progress of moral taste, helping us to tell the "true", "pure", "genuine", "salutary" aspects of religion from its "false", "pernicious" and "deceitful" counterparts and to recognize the "proper office" of religion.[117] These strategies are very pragmatic and I will consider the historical and contemporary implications of Hume's pragmatic concern on true religion in the next chapter.

---

[117] However, the plausibility and feasibility of Hume's approaches are not considered in this dissertation. His intimate friend, A. Smith, criticizes his proposal of the state church and calls for a complete toleration to religious sects in Book Five of The *Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1979). A. Szymkowiak also points out some difficulties regarding Hume's proposal of a state church (Szymkowiak, 2017, 95-117).

Chapter Seven

Hume's Pragmatic Concern and its Implications

Truth makes no other kind of claim and imposes no other kind of ought than health and wealth do. All these claims are conditional; the concrete benefits we gain are what we mean by calling the pursuit a duty. In the case of truth, untrue beliefs work as perniciously in the long run as true beliefs work beneficially. Talking abstractly, the quality 'true' may thus be said to grow absolutely precious, and the quality 'untrue' absolutely damnable. The one may be called good, the other bad, unconditionally. We ought to think the true, we ought to shun the false, imperatively.

—— W. James, "Pragmatism's Concept of Truth", *Pragmatism*, p. 110.

7.1 Introduction

In his response to A. Flew, F.H. Cleobury boldly claims that Hume's whole treatment of religion is "outmoded", for throughout the past two centuries the theists "have made a far deeper analysis of the moral consciousness and of the whole human situation than did Hume or any eighteenth-century writer" (Cleobury, 1962, 261). Contrary to Cleobury's comments, Hume's treatment of religion remains central to today's discussion of religion and theology, spanning most subjects from the design argument and religious miracles, through religious language and religious toleration, to religious establishments etc. This chapter explores the possible implications of Hume's pragmatic concern on his concept of true religion in a historical and a present-day context.

From the story of Hume's two concepts of true religion told in the previous chapters, it can be found that its contents, as well as its approaches, are highly pragmatic: as theology and religion cannot be entirely eradicated from our reason and our passions, we have to limit and regulate them so that they can be harmless or even beneficial. But "beneficial" is different from "true". The questions this chapter tries to answer include: in what sense is Hume using the term "true" in the case of true religion? If his concern is functional and pragmatic, why does he still frequently use the phrase "true"? Does Hume's concept of true religion contain any religiosity? What are the implications of his pragmatic concern in this regard?

To begin with, section 7.2 explores the three possible reasons for Hume to use "true" in discussing his ideas of limiting theology and regulating popular religion:

conventional use, tactical use, and pragmatic use. Section 7.3 considers his true religion in the context of the Enlightenment, indicating that although true religion is commonly mentioned by his contemporaries, Hume's entirely secular and pragmatic concern is unique. In section 7.4, the differences between Hume's true religion and "pragmatic religion" as advocated by B. Pascal and W. James, and the "religion of humanity" of A. Comte will be briefly examined. In this section, the possible contributions of Hume's true religion to the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue will also be considered. Lastly, section 7.5 concisely summarizes the main points made in this chapter.

7.2 Hume's Pragmatic Concern on True Religion

In his narration of true religion, Hume tells us little about what religious contents are substantially true and worthy of believing in. His true religion is not the advocacy of a specific religion or particular religious doctrines. In this sense, the negative reading is right in saying that Hume's true religion is quite empty in its religious contents. Although Philo admits that the argument from design (as well as other religious hypotheses) still remains a "remote probability", its implications remain undefined and ambiguous. Likewise, Cleanthes' statements on the "proper office" of popular religion are focused on practicability, containing no preference for any particular religious sect. As a whole, Hume's concern on both statements of true religion is pragmatic rather than theological, and suggests little religiousness - it neither advocates a specific religion nor implies that theism is preferable over atheism.[118]

But if Hume is considering the potential usefulness of religion, why does he still use the word "true"?[119] After all, utility is not the same as truth, and all true things are not necessarily useful, and vice versa. As F. Nietzsche argues in the *Beyond Good and Evil*, falsehood or untruth sometimes can even be more useful than truth (Nietzsche, 2002, 7). For example, flattering someone is to say something nice and cheerful with

---

[118] Hume's preference for the Church of England is due to its proper relationship between church and state, not because of its theological standpoints. That is to say, if other religions took on a similar organisational structure, Hume would be pleased to endorse them too.

[119] One might also wonder why he still uses the term "religion" in this case. My assumption is that although Hume is not advocating a specific theological tenet, he is considering the suitable role of religion in general. So, here "religion" is viewed as a natural social phenomenon and a research subject, which is different from economics, politics and psychology etc.

incorrect information. Likewise, J.S. Mill writes in *The Utility of Religion* that religion, even if it is false, can be useful to individuals and society (Mill, 1958, 45). As far as I am concerned, there are three possible reasons for Hume to use the term "true" when talking about his concept of true religion.

(1) Conventional use. The first possibility is that Hume uses "true religion" conventionally without careful consideration. It is natural for people adherent to a faith to claim their beliefs to be "true religion" while dismissing their opponents as "superstitious", "pagan" or "atheistic".[120] In Hume's *History*, "true religion" is also used in several places to refer to whatever a particular person believes to be the right form of religion. For instance, Hume writes that the followers of J. Knox defended "the true religion of Christ Jesus" by fire and sword (H, IV, 24) and that before the execution of Queen Mary of Scotland, some noblemen and bishops tried to "instruct her the principles of true religion" (ibid. 245). Certainly, those statements are expressions of particular historical figures rather than Hume's own thoughts. It may be possible that Hume also utilizes "true religion" to identify what he thinks true religion should be without considering its differences from the traditional religious use. That is to say, Hume may use "true religion" in a conventional way without his own distinction, although his understanding of true religion is actually different from the traditional concept of Christianity's true religion.

(2) Tactical use. The second possibility is that Hume intentionally and tactically uses the term "true religion", although he is well aware of the differences between his intentions and those of the conventional meaning. When Hume uses "true", he means "useful", "salutary", "beneficial", "pure", "genuine" or "philosophical" (which are alternative words Hume uses to refer to his true religion). In this case, his use of "true religion" is a tactic, with which he pretends to advocate one thing but actually means to say something else. As I have shown in chapter one, some of the negative readings have stressed this possibility and I do not deny that this could be a plausible reason for Hume to use "true religion". However, what I disagree on with regard to the negative readings is the contention that Hume's true religion is entirely tactical, as his accounts are functional, but still sincere.

---

[120] For a detailed record of the "true religion" of Christianity and various "false" forms of Christianity, see G. R. Evans's *A Brief History of Heresy* (Evans, 2003). A vivid account of the notorious conflict between the true religion of Calvin and the "false" understanding of Servetus can be found in S. Zweig's biographical novel, *Erasmus and the Right to Heresy* (Zweig, 1951).

（3）Pragmatic use. The third possible reason is that Hume's use of "true" in this case can be understood in a sense similar to the pragmatic theory of truth. I am not the first one to propose this possibility, as A.C. Willis also remarks that Hume "has the flavour of American pragmatism in the mode of William James and John Dewey" (Willis, 2015, 180). But this claim requires further interpretation. The oldest concept of truth is "the correspondence theory of truth", which believes that an idea or proposition is true when it authentically reflects the quality of an object or a fact. Another theory of truth is "the coherence theory of truth", insisting that something is true when we can incorporate it into a larger and more complex system of beliefs in a logical manner. "The pragmatic theory of truth", however, neither thinks of truth as fixed qualities in external objects or facts, nor believes that truth exists in abstract sets of thought. Instead, truth is a function and a process of interaction with the world and utility is the most significant mark of truth.[121] W. James famously regards truth as a verification process for a proposition, which proves to be true when the expected results emerge, and otherwise is considered false. So the expected consequences are the most important factor in telling truth from falsehood. He famously claims:

> You can say of it then either that 'it is useful because it is true' or that 'it is true because it is useful'. Both these phrases mean exactly the same thing, namely that here is an idea that gets fulfilled and can be verified. True is the name for whatever idea starts the verification-process, useful is the name for its completed function in experience. True ideas would never have been singled out as such, would never have acquired a class-name, least of all a name suggesting value, unless they had been useful from the outset in this way (James, 1975, 98).

In short, if a person acts according to what he believes to be true, and when the consequences (whatever they may be) are proven to be useful, helpful or productive as expected, then this belief has to be considered "true". Otherwise, it is "false". [122] Popular religion has often claimed to be good for morality and the interests of society, yet in many cases it turns out to be detrimental. This may be the reason why Hume has frequently called it "false religion", as "true religion" is supposed to have the expected consequences for individuals and society.

---

[121] Of course, this does not mean to say that the pragmatic theory of truth is better than the others. It also has some serious problems and many critics (such as B. Russell). Our purpose here is merely to explore in what sense Hume uses the term "true".
[122] Note that this summarization is made only for our convenience. The understanding of the pragmatic theory of truth is different among the three classical representatives of pragmatism - Peirce, James, Dewey (cf. Bernstein, 2010, 1-70).

This is the case for Cleanthes' concept of true religion, while Philo's concept is a little different. As discussed, his acceptance of a minimal theology has a limited epistemological basis in Hume's theory of probability, implying that Philo's use of "true" is at least partly epistemological. But as Philo's intention is to limit theology within a philosophical realm in order to guide it to become harmless and even beneficial, his use of "true" in this regard is also pragmatic.

To summarize, the abovementioned three possibilities can explain why Hume uses "true" in discussing his functional and pragmatic accounts of true religion. The first two possibilities are not necessarily contradictory to the third. That is to say, it is possible that Hume uses "true religion" in the sense of the pragmatic theory of truth and at the same time, he may casually keep the common use of "true religion" or consciously retain it as a tactic for obscuring his own thoughts. As Hume never clarifies which implication he refers to in using the word "true" in his texts, all three possible answers are mainly based on speculation. But this does not affect my conclusion that Hume's concern on the two concepts of true religion is pragmatic and secular.

7.3 Pragmatic Concern and True Religion in the Enlightenment

I mentioned in chapter one that Hume is not the only writer in the Enlightenment who refers to true religion. As a matter of fact, this term is widely found in the authors of that era. A detailed comparison of Hume's true religion to similar concepts of his contemporaries is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is helpful to concisely examine the uniqueness of Hume's true religion in the context of the Enlightenment.

Let us begin by briefly summarizing the different accounts of true religion by Hume's contemporaries. M. Weber famously characterizes modernity as "disenchantment", which refers to the rationalization of thinking and the devaluation of religious worldviews that was decisively triggered by the Enlightenment (Weber, 1963). Weber's account of the essence of modernity and the Enlightenment is widely accepted. The Enlightenment is also frequently called "the age of reason" or "the age of progress", which, explicitly or implicitly, suggests that it is an anti-religious movement. However, in current decades, many scholars have considered this

narrative to be too simplistic, for the attitudes towards religion were fairly diverse among the authors of the Enlightenment. As S.J. Barnett remarks, "most of the enlightened still retained a belief in God, even if they were hostile to the Church" (Barnett, 2003, 2). The widespread use of "true religion" is an example to support this contention.

At the outset of the *English Deism: Its Roots and Its Fruits*, J. Orr comments that in 17-18th century Britain, traditional religion was criticised more harshly than ever before in history, but also produced the most volumes of apologetic works (Orr, 2011, 1-5). Similarly, P. Russell divides philosophers of this time into the anti-religious group of "speculative atheists" and the pro-faith "religious philosophers" (Russell, 2008, 25-34). According to Russell, Spinoza, Hobbes, Collins and Hume belong to the attackers of religious, while many others play as defenders. If we were to further separate the defenders of religion into the orthodox and the moderates, there would be three categories of writers in the Enlightenment: Orthodox religious philosophers, moderate religious philosophers, and the critics of religion. The orthodox have widely called their beliefs "true religion". The moderates, too, frequently gave their new theologies the same title. But it would have been highly unusual for religious critics, such as Hume and Spinoza, to elaborate on a concept of true religion.

The moderate defenders of religion usually offer a new theology or develop new tenets different from tradition, claiming the title "true religion" for themselves. Natural theology is popular among these moderate defenders of religion in the Enlightenment and they attempt to rest their true religion on reason and experience. J. Toland remarks in *Christianity Not Mysterious* that "the true religion must necessarily be reasonable and intelligible" (Toland, 1702, XXV) and insists that true religion can be found in nature by means of our reason. Toland intends to prove, as the subtitle of the work shows, "that there is nothing in the Gospel contrary to reason, nor above it and that no Christian doctrine can be properly called a mystery". Simultaneously, in the so-called "deist's bible", *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, M. Tindal claims "that there's but one True Religion, which has existed from the Beginning; and that God at all Times has given Mankind sufficient Means of knowing whatever he requires of them; and what those Means are" (Tindal, 1730, 7). Tindal's true religion is not only rational but also universal. As S. Lalor says, Tindal's true religion "is plain and simple to everyone and does not accept the claims of others to

have authority over it" (Lalor, 2006, 118-119). W. Paley, too, writes in his influential *Natural Theology* that "false religions usually fall in with the natural propensity: true religions, or such as have derived themselves from the true, resist it" (Paley, 2006, 230). Thus, natural theologians consider their rational "natural religion" as "true religion" as opposed to the traditional "revealed religion".

Moving on to the most classical philosophers of the Enlightenment, it can be found that many of them have developed an idea of true religion based on their philosophical principles. In the "Confession of Faith" of his *Emile*, Rousseau writes that "the true duties of religion are independent of the institutions of men; that a just heart is the true temple of the divinity" (Rousseau, 1979, 311) and that "this is the true religion; this is the only one which is susceptible of neither abuse nor impiety nor fanaticism" (ibid., 381). Rousseau's true religion is a revised natural religion, which regards morality in our heart as the best proof of the existence, as well as the benevolence, of God. Kant follows Rousseau with more well-structured inferences in his *Religion within the bounds of Bare Reason*, as for him, religion is not a basis or condition of morality, but rather morality leads inescapably to a religious goal. Kant's intention in this work is to explore what can be established in religion under this premise and after the scrutiny of pure reason. He advocates an invisible church, which is as an ethical community and a purely moral kingdom. Meanwhile, due to the weakness of human nature, he believes that an established church as the outwardly visible banner of the "pure" or "true" religion is also necessary (Kant, 2009, 102-164). Locke also refers to true religion frequently in his *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, where he simply uses "true religion" or "sound religion" as another name for the "National Religion [that] was establish'd in England" (Locke, 2010, 85). Of course, what Locke advocates is a tolerant Anglican Church.[123] Oddly enough, Spinoza, who was widely called "atheist" in his time, also proposes an idea of true religion.[124] He develops a philosophical concept of true religion, in which "an intellectual love of God" is the central tenet (Graham, 2014, 7-11).[125]

---

[123] In both *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures*, Locke tries to demonstrate that Christianity can be proven by reason (cf. Nuovo, 2011).
[124] Because of this, some have argued that Spinoza is not atheistic but religious (cf. Berkowitz, 2007, 83-91).
[125] For a detailed analysis of Spinoza's true religion, see A. Topolski's paper "Spinoza's True Religion: The Modern Origins Of A Contemporary Floating Signifier" (Topolski, 2014, 41-59).

In referring to the concept of true religion, Hume is also not alone among his Scottish fellows. A. Smith, though he disagrees with Hume's proposal of a state church, also desires a "pure and rational religion", which is "free from every mixture of absurdity, imposture, or fanaticism" (Smith, 1976, 793). Like Hume, Smith considers the proper relationship between church and state; but unlike Hume, Smith is a pious religious believer who regards religion as the basis of morality and prefers a free market for religious factions over a ruling state church. Moreover, as G. Graham notices, J. Henry, T. Reid, J. Edwards and H. Scougal also mention the concept of true religion in their works based on their respective religious or philosophical principles (Graham, 2015, 350; 2014, 7-11).

To my understanding, the most significant feature of Hume's concept of true religion in this context is that while his contemporaries sincerely advocate a (new) religion or theology, Hume's true religion is not religious in its contents, but a general scheme of treating religion properly in a secular world. His sympathy for the role of religion is limited in his secular and pragmatic concern, and is based on the fact that theology still remains a probability in reason and that (popular) religion will always have deep roots in our passions. Underlying his advocacy of true religion is his deep motive of limiting the dogmatism of theology and regulating the superstition and enthusiasm of popular religion. Hume is not interested in developing his own concept of God nor does he want religion to become more influential or extensive, so his true religion is instrumentally constructive, but religiously negative.

Thus, the story of Hume's true religion does not challenge his traditional image as a hero of secularisation. Instead, it strengthens this impression in its own way. In Hume's works, he encourages us to consider morality and politics in an entirely naturalistic way, and appeals for theology to be confined to a limited sphere of academia; his proposal for a state church reminds the government to always keep an eye on priestly power and keep it under control. Hume expects religion to be beneficial but that does not mean that he encourages religious activities. In *A Secular Age*, C. Taylor classifies three categories of secularisation: that the state is free from the influence of religion; that religion retreats from public squares and becomes a private matter; that the belief in God is no longer an axiomatic but an alternative option (Taylor, 2007, 1-4). Although Hume does not encourage popular religion to be a merely private matter, he stresses that by setting the supremacy of the state over the church, the state is self-governing and the role of the church in

public areas is monitored. In the end, religious hypotheses are not the only "remote probability" concerning the final cause of the universe, and are also not the only narration of the nature of morality and justice.

Of course, the differences between the "true religion" of Hume and that of his contemporaries do not entail that Hume's proposal is better or that there is no common ground. Attacking the corruptions of religion is the common ground among all the aforementioned writers of the Enlightenment. Also, Hume's consideration concerning the proper function of the established church from the perspective of the "science of man" is, more or less, shared by Locke, Smith, and Spinoza. The differences and similarities help us to consider Hume's true religion against a historical background.

7.4 Hume's True Religion in a Present-day Context

The implications of Hume's true religion in a contemporary context are still an open issue and there can be many possible interpretations concerning his importance for the present. His "true religion" involves several aspects, such as the epistemology of religion, the relationship between church and state, religion and morality, religious toleration, religion and secularism etc. Readers and scholars can find different insights from his accounts on these topics. In this section, I will briefly provide a comparison of Hume's true religion to the *religion of humanity* of A. Comte and to the *pragmatic religion* advocated by B. Pascal and W. James. They share some similarities but also differ significantly from one another. In so doing, we may have a better understanding of Hume's true religion. In addition, I will explore the possible contributions of Hume's true religion to the interreligious dialogue.

A. Comparison to the *Religion of Humanity*

The religion of humanity is a new religion first expounded in the later works of A. Comte, a French philosopher and the founder of modern positivism. His theology does not rest on unverifiable metaphysical hypotheses but merely on the merits of humanity. According to his three-stage theory, human society has developed from

the theological stage, through the metaphysical stage, to the positive stage, in which the belief in a supernatural power and theistic hypotheses is no longer necessary. But he also realizes that a form of religion has the function of helping people to cohere in a community, which he thinks is significant but cannot be fulfilled by science. Thus, in his later years, Comte considers the possibility that humanity, as a replacement for traditional religion, may be able to undertake this function. He even sees himself as the high priest of this new religion that includes universal love, order, altruism, and progress as its central tenets. T.R. Wright remarks that it is "a kind of experiment in religion, an attempt to see whether a totally humanistic creed could satisfy the hearts and minds of those who found Christianity, for whatever reason, inadequate" (Wright, 1986, 6). Until today, Comte's religion has had a small number of adherents, has trained priests, created rituals and built chapels in France and Brazil.

Comparing Hume's true religion to the religion of humanity is interesting, as Comte's religion is a result of secularism triggered by the Enlightenment, in which Hume is a significant figure. In his works, Hume has recommended philosophy over superstition and has encouraged his readers to consider morality, politics, economics, art and even religion from the perspective of the "science of man". At least three striking commonalities can be found between Hume's true religion and Comte's religion: first, both advocate secularism and the spirit of science; second, both highlight the merits of humanity and the advantages in human nature; third, both consider the proper functions of religion in a modern world. E.C. Mossner comments that "Hume holds the religion of man, a religion that is freed of the supernatural, as well as from reliance on the benignity of nature, in the highest esteem: recognition of worth, of service beneficial to mankind, and of the augmentation of knowledge" (Mossner, 1978, 662). If Mossner is right, Hume's standpoint is very close to Comte's. But the two also have fundamental differences: firstly, Comte wants to be the pope of a new religion, while Hume's true religion is not a religion and he does not intend to become a religious leader; secondly, Comte is more optimistic than Hume regarding the demise of traditional religion - while he believes that conventional forms of religion will be replaced by humanity, Hume confesses that popular religion will continue to exist in human society as long as religious passions exist. In short, their concerns may be close, but their methods are

radically different: Comte pursues secularism by replacing traditional religion with a new religion, while Hume prefers to impose limits and regulations on it.

B. Comparison to the *Pragmatic Religion*

The pragmatic religion, or to be exact, the pragmatic argument for the belief in God, was most famously advanced by B. Pascal in the 17th century.[126] Pascal argued that reason cannot decide whether God exists or not, so human beings have to take a gamble. The core of this so-called Pascal's wager, according to M. Rota, is that "you should commit to living a devout religious life, because there is so much to gain and comparatively little to lose" (Rota, 2017, 1). The following are Pascal's own statements:[127]

> What harm will befall you in taking this side [wagering for the existence of God]? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury; but will you not have others? I will tell you that you will thereby gain in this life, and that, at each step you take on this road, you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognize that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing (Pascal, 1910, 86-87).

Pascal's intention is not to search for the rationality of religious belief nor to prove the existence or nature of God. His concern is that even if we have no rational justification for the belief in God, there are good reasons and arguments for us to acquire and maintain this belief. Those reasons, as can be seen in the citation, are largely pragmatic: in wagering for the existence of God, one gains much more than one loses.

In justifying the belief in God, W. James takes a similar route. He states that as long as the hypothesis of God "works" as expected, we have a reason to believe, even though the reason might not be rational (James, 1975, 143). In *The Will to Believe*,

---

[126] I use the term "pragmatic religion" based on J. L. Middleton's article "Pragmatic Religion" (1948, 75-78). This phrase is not exactly correct, for Pascal's wager is not a specific religion. But as it is concise, I still retain it as the label of Pascal's and James' argument for belief in God.

[127] Note that there are considerably variant interpretations of Pascal's wager. I. Hacking summarizes the wager into three arguments: dominance, expectation, and dominating expectation (Hacking, 1972, 168-192). Hacking's three-argument thesis is influential on this topic. J. Jordan finds that there is a fourth argument in Pascal's wager (Jordan, 2006, 24-25). There are also considerable types of objection to Pascal's arguments. For relevant papers and debates, see *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's wager* (Jordan, 1994).

James tries to defend the view that even if there were no sufficient evidence for the existence of God, religious belief could still be justified. For him, whether or not to believe in a religion is a choice, which is a matter of willingness and desire. Having decided to believe, one takes certain actions seeking verification for the chosen belief. If the results and consequences of believing in a religion are better than giving it up, then there is justification for religious belief. "Do you like me or not?", James writes, "whether you do or not depends, in countless instances, on whether I meet you half-way, am willing to assume that you must like me, and show you trust and expectation" (James, 1919, 23). In short, the willingness to believe in a religion can be justified by pragmatic arguments.[128]

Several similarities between Pascal's and James' argument for the belief in God and Hume's accounts of true religion can be clearly discerned: first, their theories do not endorse any specific religion or religious doctrine; second, their arguments are highly pragmatic. However, their starting points vary: while Pascal and James aim to provide a justification for believing in God, Hume's primary concern is to consider the proper role of theology and religion. Although religious hypotheses remain a "remote probability" in Hume's experimental philosophy, Pascal's and James' defense of individual religious belief does not follow this epistemological route. Hume also justifies proper popular religion as a public factor from a pragmatic perspective, but he does not use the same strategy to justify individual religious beliefs. That is to say, the concern of Pascal's and James' pragmatic religion is theistic and religious in nature, while Hume's concern on true religion is secular.

C. Possible Contributions to the Interreligious Dialogue

In his influential essay "Of Miracles", Hume states that different testimonies from different religions have weakened the plausibility of reported religious miracles. He claims that "all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidence of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other" (E, 88).[129] Moving on to the globalized age of the 21st century, the

---

[128] For a detailed discussion of the format and plausibility of Pascal's wager and the "Jamesian wager", see J. Jordan's *Pascal's Wager: Pragmatic Arguments and Belief in God* (Jordan, 2006).
[129] For an analysis of Hume's arguments against religion based on this point, see I. Immerwahr (1995, 26-35).

differences and conflictions of religions do not only exist in theory but also in practice. Wars fuelled by religious disagreements and violent conflicts occur in many areas of this planet and our neighbours, colleagues and friends may come from a variety of religious backgrounds. Interfaith dialogue, then, becomes an important issue for global peace, as well as for personal communication, which has led scholars to consider a possible theoretical basis for interreligious understanding. Most advocates of this form of dialogue propose a theological common ground for different religions, but their results are not very satisfying due to the fundamental divergences of religious systems. Hume's pragmatic concern on the notion of true religion may contain some new insights in this regard.

The theory of the interreligious dialogue is often called "theology of religions", which is now generally categorised into three types: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Exclusivism, exemplified by the German theologian K. Barth, believes that there is only one true religion (that is, Christianity) and belief in other religions cannot be part of the right path to salvation. This stance can easily nip in the bud any form of religious dialogue, for it has no sincere respect for other religions in its premise. Inclusivism insists that there is only one true religion, but its expressions can be multiple in different areas and cultures. The well-known Catholic theologian K. Rahner is the most influential representative of inclusivism and believes that while Christianity is the "absolute religion", those who believe in other religions can be seen as "anonymous Christians" (cf. D'Costa, 1985, 131-148). However, scholars have agreed that it is difficult to have an equal and genuine interfaith dialogue within Rahner's theoretical frame, for other religions are not considered to be independently and equally true. Religious pluralism is "now slowly but steadily gaining its momentum" (Huang, 1995, 127) and is very vividly described by J. Hick's metaphor: the ultimate truth is like the peak of a mountain, and while different religions may climb this mountain via various paths, their ultimate destination is the same (Hick, 1980). However, Hick's pluralism still implicitly regards the God of the Abrahamic tradition to be the model of the ultimate truth, as the title of one of his books "God Has Many Names" also suggests.

The classical theories of interreligious dialogue are still categorised within the subject of "theology" of religions. Thus, one may ask whether it is possible that religious dialogue can still take place without theological hypotheses. In his speech "What Is True Religion", H. Küng considers that all world religions must find a

fundamental consensus on values, norms, and general ethics, which should become the standard criterion for "true religion" (Küng, 1987, 237-250). Küng's proposal of "global ethics" had a considerable impact, leading to the publication of the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* by the Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago in 1993. Similar to Küng's practical proposal, P. Knitter suggests a "globally responsible model", which calls for different religions to interact and cooperate in common crises and fatal disasters on the planet (Knitter, 1995).

Hume's pragmatic concern on true religion can promote the consideration of religious dialogue in a practical way, as discussed by Küng and Knitter. For Hume, the differences in theologies between different religions are likely incommensurable and thus, he is unlikely to be optimistic toward a purely theological dialogue. One possible contribution of Hume's true religion is that his account of the "remote probability" of a deity allows different religions to have equal, yet minimal, rational justification. Different religious groups can have different responses to a deity as the ultimate cause of the universe, which, in theory, can support the notion of religious pluralism. But pluralism on this basis may still be too ideal, as many religious adherents will most likely not be satisfied in claiming their own beliefs to be a mere probability. Another possible contribution, which I think is more realistic, is that Hume's pragmatic concern on true religion inspires us to rest the dialogue and collaboration of religions on a pragmatic and practical basis instead of searching for theological common ground. This does not necessarily mean that religious believers should think about their own religious "truth" in a purely pragmatic sense, as Hume does. His pragmatic proposal for interfaith dialogue might be: different religions can keep the understanding of the truth within their own religious traditions, but when it comes to common ills or humanitarian crises, they ought to temporarily suspend theological debates and enter into pragmatic and purposeful conversations in order to reach constructive conclusions on behalf of all human beings. Thus, this pragmatic proposal for interfaith dialogue is not incompatible with inclusivism, exclusivism or pluralism, and can support the practical approach to interfaith dialogue advocated by Küng and Knitter.

7.5 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter considered Hume's pragmatic concern on the concept of true religion and its historical and present-day implications. Based on the contents and approaches of Hume's two concepts of true religion discussed in the previous chapters, I suggested that the usefulness of religion is Hume's central and consistent intention. In section 7.2, I explored three possible reasons for Hume's use of "true" in regard to religious matters, suggesting that Hume may use this term conventionally, tactically or pragmatically. Then, in section 7.3, I compared Hume's true religion to the "true religion" in writings of other authors of the age of Enlightenment, showing that while Hume's concern is entirely pragmatic, his contemporaries try to develop a new or specific religion. Similarly, in section 7.4, I claimed that although Hume's notion of true religion has similarities to Comte's religion of humanity, as well as to the pragmatic religion of Pascal and James, their concerns are fundamentally different. Also in this section, I explored how a Humean proposal for interreligious dialogue inspired by his concept of true religion might encourage world religions to base their conversations and collaborations on a practical and pragmatic basis rather than on theological grounds. Such a pragmatic approach can support a practical model of religious dialogue and may become a complement or alternative to the traditional categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

REFERENCES

Adorno, T. W. & Horkheimer, M. (2002). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. G. S. Noerr (ed.), E. Jephcott (translated), Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ainsile, D. C. (2015). *Hume's True Scepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Aldridge, A. (1945). 'Shaftesbury and the Test of Truth'. *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 60(1), pp. 129-156.

Alexander, W.M. (1966). *Johann Georg Hamann: Philosophy and Faith*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Andre, S. (1993). 'Was Hume an Atheist?'. *Hume Studies*, 19(1), pp. 141-166.

Aristotle. (1924). *Aristotle's Metaphysics*. W.D. Ross (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Austin, W. H. (1985). 'Philo's Reversal'. *Philosophical Topics*, 13(2), pp. 103-111.

Ayer, A. J. (1980). *Hume*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Battersby, C. 'The Dialogues as Original Imitation: Cicero and the Nature of Hume's Scepticism'. In *McGill Hume Studies*, D. F. Norton, N. Capaldi and W. L. Robison (eds.), San Diego: Austin Hill Press, pp. 239-253.

Baxter, D.L. M. (2016). 'A Pyrrhonian Interpretation of Hume on Assent'. In *Scepticism: From Antiquity to the Present*. D. E. Machuca and B. Reed (eds.), London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 380-395.

Bell, M. (1999). 'Hume on Superstition'. In *Religion and Hume's Legacy*, D.Z. Phillips and T. Tessin (eds.), Macmillan Press, pp. 153-170.

Berkeley, G. (1996). *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues*. H. Robinson (ed.), Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Berkowitz, P. (2007). 'Spinoza's religion'. *Policy Review*, 143, pp. 83-91.

Berlin, I. (1977). 'Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism'. In *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, G.P. Morice (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 93-116.

Berman, D. (1987). 'Deism, immortality, and the art of theological lying'. In *Deism, Masonry, and the Enlightenment*, J. A. L. Lemay (ed.), Newark: Delaware University Press, pp. 61-78.

Bernard, C. (1994). 'Hume and the madness of religion'. In *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, M.A. Stewart and J.P. Wright (eds.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 224-238.

Bernstein, R.J. (2010). *The Pragmatic Turn*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Berry, C. J. (2009). *David Hume*. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing.

Black, T. & Gressis, R. (2017). 'True religion in Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion'. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy,* 25(2), pp. 244-264.

Bowles, P. (1984). 'John Millar, the Four-Stages Theory, and Women's Position in Society'. *History of Political Economy*, 16(4), 619-638.

Bradley, M. C. (2007). 'Hume's Chief Objection to Natural Theology'. *Religious Studies*, 43(3), pp. 249-270.

Bricke, J. (1975). 'On the Interpretation of Hume's Dialogues'. *Religious Studies*, 11(1), pp. 1-18.

Bruce, S. (2011). *Secularization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buckle, S. (2012). 'Hume on the Passions'. *Philosophy*, 87(340), pp. 189-213.

Burnyeat, M. F. (1980). 'Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?'. In *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*, M. Schofield, M. Burnyeat and J. Barnes (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burton, J.H. (1846). *Life and Correspondence of David Hume*. Edinburgh.

Butler, R. J. (1960). 'Natural Belief and the Enigma of Hume'. *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 42, pp. 73-100.

Calvente, S. (2017). 'One of the Most Incomprehensible Mysteries of Religion. The Problem of Evil in Pierre Bayle and David Hume'. *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, 34(2), pp.411-431.

Capaldi, N. (1970). 'Hume's Philosophy of Religion: God without Ethics'. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 1(4), pp. 233-240.

—— (1975). *David Hume: the Newtonian Philosopher*. Boston: Twayne.

Case-Winters, A. (2001). 'The Argument from Design: What is at Stake Theologically?'. *Cosmic Questions*, 950, pp. 154-168.

Cevik, M. (2013). 'The "First Cause" in Hume's Philosophy'. In *Beytulhikme: An International Journal of Philosophy*, 3(1), pp. 151-157.

Chisick, H. (1989). 'David Hume and Common People'. In *The 'Science of Man' in the Scottish Enlightenment*. P. Jone (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 5-32.

Clarke, S. (1706). *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. London.

Clarke, S. (2013). 'Hume's Use of Dialogue'. *Hume Studies*, 39(1), pp. 61-76.

Cleobury, F. (1962). 'Hume's Attack on Theism'. *The Modern Churchman*, 5(4),

pp. 261-266.

Coleman, D. (2007). 'Introduction' to *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.
D. Coleman (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—— (2001). 'Baconian Probability and Hume's Theory of Testimony'. *Hume Studies*, 27(2), pp. 195-226.

Coleman, J. B. (2012). 'Hume and the Enthusiasm Puzzle'. *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 10(2), pp. 221-235.

Conti, G. (2015). 'Hume's Low Road to Toleration'. *History of Political Thought*, 36(1), pp. 165-191.

Cook, J. W. (2007). 'Did Wittgenstein Speak with the Vulgar or Think with the Learned? Or Did He do Both?'. *Philosophy*, 82(2), pp. 213-233.

Cordry, B. S. (2011). 'A More Dangerous Enemy? Philo's "Confession" and Hume's Soft Atheism'. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 70(1), pp. 61-83.

N. Cusanus. (1954). *Of Learned Ignorance*. G. Heron (translated). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Dawkins, R. (1986). *The Blind Watchmaker*. London: Penguin.

D'Costa, G. (1985). 'Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian – a Reappraisal'. *Modern Theology*, 1(2), pp. 131-148.

Dees, R. H. (2005). '"The Paradoxical Principle and Salutary Practice": Hume on Toleration'. *Hume Studies*, 31(1), pp. 145-164.

Dijn, De H. (2012). 'Spinoza and Hume on Religion as A Natural Phenomenon'. *Hume Studies*, 38(1), pp. 3-21.

Dye, J. (1986). 'Hume on Curing Superstition'. *Hume Studies*, 12(2), pp. 122-140.

Earman, J. (2000). *Hume's Abject Failure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Echelbarger, C. (1975). 'Hume's Tacit Atheism'. *Religious Studies*, 11(1), pp. 19-35.

Emerson, R. L. (1994). 'The "Affair" at Edinburgh and the "Project" at Glasgow: The Politics of Hume's Attempts to Become a Professor'. In *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, M.A. Stewart and J.P. Wright (eds.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 1-22.

Evans, G.R. (2002). *A Brief History of Heresy*. Malden: Blackwell Pub.

Falkenstein, L. (2009). 'Hume on "Genuine", "True", and "Rational" Religion'. In *Eighteenth Century Thought*, Vol.4, New York: MAS Press, pp. 171-201.

—— (2003). 'Hume's Project in "The Natural History of Religion"'. *Religious Studies*, 39(1), pp. 1-21.

Fergusson, D. (2013). 'The Absence of God and its Contextual Significance for Hume'. *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 11(1), pp. 69-85.

Ferreira, M. J. (1994). 'Religion's "Foundation in Reason": The Common Sense of Hume's Natural History'. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 24(4), pp. 565-581.

Flew, A. (1992). 'Introduction' to *Writings on Religion*. A. Flew (ed.), La Salle, IL: Open Court.

—— (1961). "Did Hume ever Read Berkeley". *The Journal of Philosophy*, 58(2), pp. 50-51.

—— (2008). *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind.* New York: HarperCollins.

Fogelin, R. J. (2003). *A Defense of Hume on Miracles*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Forbes, D. (1975). *Hume's Philosophical Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fosl, P.S. (1994). 'Doubt and Divinity: Cicero's Influence on Hume's Religious Scepticism'. *Hume Studies*, 20(1), pp. 103-120.

Garret, D. (2012). 'What's True about Hume's "True Religion"?'. *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 10(2), pp. 199-220.

—— (2015). *Hume*. London and New York: Routledge.

Gaskin, J. C. A. (1978). *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*. London: The Macmillan Press.

—— (1995). 'Hume's Critique of Religion'. In *David Hume: Critical Assessments*. S. Tweyman (ed.), London: Routledge, pp. 56-75.

Gawlick, G. (977). 'Hume and the Deists: a Reconsideration' In *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, G.P. Morice (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 128-138.

Gibbon, E. (1966). *Memoirs of My Life*. G.A. Bonnard (ed.), London: Nelson.

Graham, G. (2015). 'Smith and Hume on Natural Religion'. *Philosophy*, 91(3), pp. 1-16.

—— (2014). *Wittgenstein and Natural Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Graham, R. (2004). *The Great Infidel: A Life of David Hume*. East Linton: Tuckwell.

Graubner, H. (1989). 'Theological Empiricism: Aspects of Johann Georg Hamann's Reception of Hume'. *Hume Studies*, 15(2), pp. 377-385.

Green, J. (2010). 'Hume's "False Philosophy" and the Reflections of Common Life'. *Humanitas*, 23 (1/2), pp. 108-117.

Gay, P. (1967). *The Enlightenment: an Interpretation*. Vol.1, New York: Knopf.

Haakonssen, K. (1993). 'The Structure of Hume's Political Theory'. In *Cambridge Companions to Hume*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 182-221.

Hacking, I. (1972). 'The Logic of Pascal's Wager'. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 9(2), pp. 186-192.

Hall, R. (1967). 'Did Hume Read Some Berkeley Unawares?'. *Philosophy*, 42(161), pp. 276-277.

—— (1968). 'Hume's Actual Use of Berkeley's "Principles"'. *Philosophy*, 43(165), pp. 278-280.

Hanson, D. J. (1993). *Fideism and Hume's Philosophy: Knowledge, Religion and Metaphysics*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Hardy, L. (2012). 'Hume's Defense of True Religion'. In *The Persistence of the Sacred in Modern Thought*, C. Firestone and N. Jacobs (eds.), South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, pp. 251–272.

Harris, J. A. (2015). *Hume: An Intellectual Biography*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

—— (2005). 'Hume's Use of the Rhetoric of Calvinism'. In *Impressions of Hume*, M. Frasca-Spada and P. J. E. Kail (eds.), New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 141-159.

Harvey, V. A. (1999). 'Is There Anything Religious about Philo's "True Religion"?'. In *Religion and Hume's Legacy*, D.Z. Phillips and T. Tessin (eds.), Macmillan Press, pp. 68-80.

Hawking, S. (1995). *A Brief History of Time: from the Big Bang to Black Holes*. London: Bantam Books.

Hedenius, I. (1937). *Studies in Hume's Ethics*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksells boktryckeri-a.-b.

Hendel, C. W. (1925). *Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume*. Princeton: Princeton University.

Herbert, E. (1937). *De Veritate*. Meyrick H. Carré (translated). Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith ltd.

Hick, J. (1990). *Philosophy of Religion*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

—— (1980). *God Has Many Names*. London: Macmillan Press.

Hobbes, T. (1996). *Leviathan*. J.C.A. Gaskin (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Holden, T. (2010). *Spectres of False Divinity: Hume's Moral Atheism.* New York: Oxford University Press.

—— (2005). 'Religion and Moral Prohibition in Hume's "Of Suicide"'. *Hume Studies*, 31(2), pp. 189-210.

Holmes, S. (1993). *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Home, H. (2005). *Essays on Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Huang, Y. (1995). 'Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Dialogue: Beyond Universalism and Particularism'. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 37(3), pp. 127-144.

Hume, D. (1967). *A Letter From a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

—— (1965). *An Abstract to A Treatise of Human Nature*. J.M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (eds.), Hamden: Archon Books.

—— (2007). 'My Own Life'. In *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, P. Millican (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 169-175.

Huntley, W. B. (1972). 'David Hume and Charles Darwin'. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33(3), pp. 457-470.

Hurlbutt, R. H. (1965). *Hume, Newton, and the Design Argument*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Hutcheson, F. (2004). *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Huxley. T. H. (1881). *Hume*. J. Morley (ed.), London.

—— (1889). 'Agnosticism'. In *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature*, 49(4), pp. 433-450.

Immerwahr, J. (1996). 'Hume's Aesthetic Theism'. *Hume Studies*, 22(2), pp. 325-337.

—— (1995). 'David Hume on Incompatible Religious Beliefs'. In *David Hume: Critical Assessments*, S. Tweyman (ed.), London: Routledge, pp. 26-35.

James, W. (1975). *Pragmatism and the Meaning of Truth*. London: Harvard University Press.

—— (1919). *The Will to Believe*. New York and London: Longmans, Green.

John, R & Manning, S. (1990). 'David Hume's "Dialogue concerning Natural Religion": Otherness in History and in Text'. *The Journal of Religion*, 70 (4), pp. 415-426.

Jones, P. (1982). *Hume's Sentiments: Their Ciceronian and French Context*. Edinburgh: University Press.

—— (1995). 'Hume's Two Concepts of God'. In *David Hume: Critical Assessment*s. S. Tweyman (ed.), London: Routledge, pp. 84-96.

Jordan, J. (2006). *Pascal's Wager: Pragmatic Arguments and Belief in God*. Oxford: Clarendon.

—— (1994). *Gambling on God: Essays on Pascal's wager*. J. Jordan (ed.), Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jordan, W. R. (2002). 'Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration of David Hume and Religious Establishment'. *The Review of Politics*, 64(4), pp. 687-713.

Kail, P. J. E. (2007). 'Understanding Hume's Natural History of Religion'. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 57(227), pp. 190-211.

—— (2007). *Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kant, I. (2009). *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*. W.S. Pluhar and S.R. Palmquist (eds.), Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

—— (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason*. P. Guyer and A.W. Wood (eds.), New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kemp, C. (2017). 'Dewey's Darwin and Darwin's Hume'. *Pluralist*, 12(2), pp. 1-26.

—— (2014). 'The Real "Letter to Arbuthnot"? A Motive For Hume's Probability Theory in an Early Modern Design Argument'. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22(3), pp. 468-491.

Knitter, P. F. (1995). *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Küng, H. (1987). 'What is the True Religion? Toward an Ecumenical Criteriology'. In *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, L. Swidler (ed.), New York: Orbis Books, pp. 237-250.

Laing, B. M. (1937). 'Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion'. *Philosophy*, 12(46), pp. 175-190.

Lemmens, W. (2012). 'The "True Religion" of the Sceptic: Penelhum Reading

Hume's Dialogues'. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 42(sup.1), pp. 183-197.

Lévinas, E. (1979). *Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority*. Alphonso Lingis (ed.), Boston: M. Nijhoff Publishers.

Lilla, M. (2007). *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Livingston, D.W. (2011). 'The First Conservative: David Hume Uncovered the Roots of Revolution in False Philosophy'. *The American Conservative*, 10(8), pp. 32-37.

—— (1986). 'Hume's Concept of True Religion'. In *Hume's Philosophy of Religion: The Sixth James Montgomery Hester Seminar*. A. Flew (ed.), Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University, pp. 33-73.

—— (1984). *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

—— (1998). *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume's Pathology of Philosophy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Livingston, J. C. (2006). *Modern Christian Thought*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Locke, J. (2010). *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

—— (1975). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. P.H. Nidditch (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Logan, B. (1992). 'The Irregular Argument in Hume's Dialogues'. *Hume Studies* 18(2), pp. 483-500.

—— (1996). 'Why Hume Wasn't an Atheist: A Reply to Andre'. *Hume Studies*, 22(1), pp. 193-202.

—— (1998). 'Hume and Kant on Knowing the Deity'. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 43(3), pp. 133-148.

Lorkowski, C. M. (2014). 'Attenuated Deism and Hume's Propensity to Believe'. *Societate si Politca*, 8(1), pp. 60-77.

Luckmann, T. (1967). *The Invisible Religion*. New York: The Macmillan Company.

Mackie, J. (1982). *The Miracle of Theism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Malherbe, M. (1994). 'Hume and the Art of Dialogue'. In *Hume and Hume's Connexions*, M.A. Stewart and J. P. Wright (eds.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 224-238.

Martinich, A.P. (1992). *The Two Gods of Leviathan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marusic, J. S. (2012). 'Refuting the Whole System? Hume's Attack on Popular Religion in The Natural History of Religion'. *Philosophical Quarterly*, 62(249), pp. 715-736.

McArthur, N. (2007). *David Hume's Political Theory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

—— (2016). 'Hume's Political Philosophy'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 489-504.

McIntyre, J. L. (2000). 'Hume's Passions: Direct and Indirect'. *Hume Studies*, 2000, 26(1), pp. 77-86.

Merrill, K. R. & Wester, D. G. (1980). 'Hume on the Relation of Religion to Morality'. *The Journal of Religion*, 60(3), pp. 272-284.

Merrill, T. W. (2014). 'Hume's Politics: Coordination and Crisis in the "History of England"'. *The Review of Politics*, 76(2), pp. 330-332.

Mill, J. S. (1958). *Nature, and Utility of religion*. New York: Liberal Arts Press.

Michaud, Y. (1985). 'How to Become a Moderate Sceptic: Hume's Way Out of Pyrrhonism'. *Hume Studies*, 11(1), pp. 33-46.

Miller, S. (1995). 'The Death of David Hume'. *The Wilson Quarterly*, 19(3), pp. 30-39.

Millican, P. (2002). 'Introduction' to *Hume on Human Understanding: Essays on the First Enquiry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Mossner, E. C. (1980). *The Life of David Hume*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

—— (1977). 'Hume and the legacy of the Dialogues'. In *David Hume: Bicentenary Papers*, G.P. Morice (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 1-22.

—— (1959). 'Did Hume ever Read Berkeley? A Rejoinder to Professor Popkin'. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 56(25), pp. 992-995.

—— (1943). 'Hume's Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot, 1734: The Biographical Significance'. *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 7(1), pp. 135-152.

Muller, J. (1997). *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Nathan, G. J. (1968). 'Hume's Immanent God'. In *Hume*. V. C. Chappell (ed.), London: Notre Dame University Press, pp. 396-423.

Nietzsche, F. (2002). *Beyond Good and Evil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norton, D. F. (2000). 'How a Sceptic May Live Scepticism'. In *Hume: General*

Philosophy, D.W.D. Owen (ed.), Aldershot: Dartmouth & Ashgate, pp. 493-513.

—— (1993). 'An Introduction to Hume's Thoughts'. In *Cambridge Companions to Hume*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-32.

Noxon, J. (1964). 'Hume's Agnosticism'. *The Philosophical Review*, 73 (2), pp. 248-261.

Nuovo, V. (2011). *Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment: Interpretation of Locke*. New York: Springer.

Nuyen, A. T. (1984). 'David Hume on Reason, Passions and Morals'. *Hume Studies*, 10(1), pp. 26-45.

O'Connor, D. (2001). *Hume on Religion*. London and New York: Routledge.

—— (2003). 'Scepticism and Philo's Atheistic Preference'. *Hume Studies*, 29(2), pp. 267-282.

O'Higgins, J. (1971). 'Hume and the Deists: A Contrast in Religious Approaches'. *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 22(2), pp. 479-501.

Oppy, G. (1996). 'Hume and the Argument for Biological Design'. *Biology and Philosophy*, 11, pp. 519-534.

Parusnikova, Z. (2014). 'Hume's Scepticism Revisited'. *Philosophy*, 89(4), pp. 581-602.

Pascal, B. (1910). *Blaise Pascal: Thoughts, Letters, Minor Works*. W.F. Trotter, M. L. Booth, and O.W. Wight (translated.), New York: P.F. Collier & Son Corporation.

Passmore, L. (1989). 'Enthusiasm, Fanaticism, and David Hume'. In *The 'Science of Man' in the Scottish Enlightenment*, P. Jone (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 85-108.

Penelhum, T. (1975). *Hume*. London: The Macmillan Press.

—— (1983). *God and Scepticism*. Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing.

—— (1992). *David Hume*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.

—— (2000). *Themes in Hume: The Self, the Will, Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

—— (2012). 'Hume's Atheism and the Role of Cleanthes'. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 42(sup.1), pp. 206-211.

Pike, N. (1970). *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. N. Pike (ed.), New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.

—— (1963). 'Hume on Evil'. *The Philosophical Review*, 72(2), pp. 180-197.

Pittion, J. P. (1977). 'Hume's Reading of Bayle: An Inquiry into the Source and Role of the Memoranda'. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 15(4), pp. 373-386.

Pocock, J. G. A. (1999). *Barbarism and Religion*. Vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Popkin, R. H. (1959). 'Book Reviews: Dominant Themes of Modern Philosophy'. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 56(2), pp. 67-71.

—— (1964). 'So, Hume Did Read Berkeley'. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 61(24), pp. 774-778.

—— (1955). 'The Sceptical Precursors of David Hume'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 16(1), pp. 61-71.

Price, J. V. (1965). *The Ironic Hume*. Austin: Texas University Press.

—— (2011). 'Twenty Questions about Hume's "Of Miracles"'. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 85(68), pp.151-192.

—— (2011). 'Book Reviews: The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Scepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion'. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 19(2), pp. 348-353.

Price, H. H. (1940). *Hume's Theory of the External World*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Prince, M. (1996). *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics and the Novel*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pritchard, D. (2016). 'Seeing it for Oneself: Perceptual Knowledge, Understanding, and Intellectual Autonomy'. *Episteme*, 13(1), pp. 29-42.

Pritchard, D. & Richmond, A. (2012). 'Hume on Miracles'. In *The Continuum Companion to Hume*, A. Bailey and D. O'Brien (eds.), pp. 227-244.

Reid, T. (2010). *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Remond, M. (1987). 'The Hamann-Hume Connection'. *Religious Studies*, 23(1), pp. 95-107.

Rivers, I. (2001). 'Responses to Hume on Religion by Anglicans and Dissenters'. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 52(4), pp. 675-695.

Robertson, W. (1794). *A Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge Which the Ancient Had of India*. London.

Rota, M. (2017). 'Pascal's Wager'. *Philosophy Compass*, 12(4), pp. 1-11.

Rousseau, J.J. (1979). *Emile*. A. Bloom (ed.), Basic Books.

Russell, P. *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise: Scepticism, Naturalism and Irreligion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sabl, A. 'The Last Artificial Virtue: Hume on Toleration and Its Lessons'. *Andrew Political Theory*, 37(4), pp. 511-538.

Sayre-McCord, G. (2016). 'Hume on the Artificial Virtues'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 435-469.

Selby-Bigge, L.A. (1975). 'Introduction' to *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and the Principles of Morals*. L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Sessions, W. L. (2002). *Reading Hume's Dialogues: A Veneration for True Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Shaftesbury, 3rd Earl of / Ashley-Cooper, A. (1999). *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. L. E. Klein (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Shelley, C. (2002). 'The First Inconvenience of Anthropomorphism: The Disanalogy in Part IV of Hume's "Dialogues"'. *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 19(2), pp. 171-189.

Sher, R. B. (2015). *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: the Moderate Literati of Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Smith, A. (1976). *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.

Smith, N. K. (1947). 'Introduction' to *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. N.K. Smith (ed.), New York: Clarendon Press.

—— (1941). *The Philosophy of David Hume*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

—— (1905) 'The Naturalism of Hume'. *Mind*, 14(54, 55), pp.149-173; 335-347.

Sober, E. (2000). *The Philosophy of Biology*. Colorado: Westview Press.

Springborg, P. (2006). 'Hobbes on Religion'. In *Cambridge Companions to Hobbes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 346-380.

Stephen, L. (1962). *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Rupert Hart-Davis.

Stewart, J. B. (1992). *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Stewart, M. A. (1991). 'The Stoic legacy in the early Scottish Enlightenment'. In *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity*, M. J. Osler (ed.), Cambridge:

      Cambridge University Press, pp. 273-96.

——   (2005). 'Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711-1752'. In *Impressions of Hume*, M. Frasca-Spada and P. J. E. Kail (eds.), New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 11-58**.**

Stroud, B. (1977). *Hume*. London and New York: Routledge.

——   (2016). 'Naturalism and Scepticism in the Philosophy of Hume'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*, P. Russell (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 21-31.

Susato, R. (2012). 'Taming "The Tyranny of Priests": Hume's Advocacy of Religious Establishments'. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 73(2), pp. 273-293.

——   (2015). *Hume's Sceptical Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Swain, C. W. (1967). 'Hamann and the Philosophy of David Hume'. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 5(4), pp. 343-351.

Szymkowiak, A. (2017). 'Hume on Church Establishments, Secular Politics and History'. *Diametros*, 54, pp. 95-117.

Taylor, C. (2007). *A Secular Age*. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Tindal, M. (1730). *Christianity as Old as the Creation*. London.

Toland, J. (1702). *Christianity not Mysterious*. London.

Topolski, A. (2014). 'Spinoza's True Religion: The Modern Origins of a Contemporary Floating Signifier'. *Societate si Politica*, 8(1), pp. 41-59.

Wadia, P. S. (1978). 'Professor Pike on Part III of Hume's Dialogues'. *Religious Studies*, 14(3), pp.325-342.

Webb, M. R. (1991). 'The Argument of the Natural History'. *Hume Studies*, 17(2), pp. 141-159.

Wiener, P. P. 'Did Hume ever Read Berkeley?'. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 58(8), pp. 207-209.

Williams, B.O.A. 'Hume on Religion'. In *David Hume: A symposium*. London: Macmillan & Co Ltd.

Willis, A. C. (2014). *Toward A Humean True Religion: Genuine Theism, Moderate Hope, and Practical Morality*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

——   (2015). 'The Potential Use-value of Hume's True Religion'. *Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, 13(1), pp. 1-15.

Winegar, R. (2015). 'Kant's Criticisms of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion'. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 23(5), pp. 888-910.

Wolin, S. (1954). 'Hume and Conservatism'. *American Political Science Review*, 48(4), pp. 999–1016.

Wright, J. P. 'Dr. George Cheyne, Chevalier Ramsay, and Hume's Letter to a Physician'. *Hume Studies*, 29(1), pp. 125-141.

Yandel, K. E. (1990). *Hume's Inexplicable Mystery: His Views on Religion*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Yoder, T. S. (2008). *Hume on God: Irony, Deism and Genuine theism*. London: Continuum.

Zhou, X. L. (1999). *A Research of Hume's Philosophy*. Beijing: People's Press.

Zweig, S. (1951). *Erasmus: the Right to Heresy*. E. Paul and C. Paul (translated), London: Cassell.