THE STATUS OF THEOLOGICAL FIRST PRINCIPLES

ACCORDING TO HUME AND KANT

DISSEPTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University
1957

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In this study I try to accomplish two major objectives. I attempt first to state as clearly as I can the religious philosophies of David Hume and Immanuel Kant. In order to do this, I examine their various comments on religion within the problem of the existence of God and immortality, the two points I take to be the first principles of theology. My purpose in doing this is to free their philosophical systems from that aura of obscurity, vagueness, and ambiguity which often surrounds their opinions concerning religion. "Did Hume or Kant believe in God?" seems to me to be a perfectly legitimate question for which the history of philosophy ought to provide the answer. I hope to show in this study that in Hume's case the answer is "no" and in Kant's case it is "yes" but with such extensive qualifications as to make his position quite divergent from traditional theism.

The second and perhaps more important objective which I set for myself in this study is the precise elucidation of two of the three alternatives that I consider significant in the philosophy of religion. Each of these alternatives is founded upon a very negative analysis of the capacity of human reason to discover absolute metaphysical
truths. Each regards the speculative pronouncements of Descartes, Leibnitz, and Hegel as illegitimate flights of fancy and contends that the basic structure of reality is not available to rational inspection. Each of these alternatives also recognizes that questions concerning the validity of religious beliefs must ultimately relate to the most basic issues of morality and ethics. Thirdly, each takes a stand on whether or not it is possible that some religious truths are immediately revealed in human experience.

These three alternatives are (A) Hume's denial that religious principles have any cognitive or moral value, (B) Kant's claim that although the performance of moral acts does not require religion at all, a complete and consistent view of moral values requires the belief in God and immortality, and (C) the assertion that God is immediately present in certain types of experience and that faith provides meaning and truth for some religious principles which are otherwise completely unknowable. This last view is represented in the eighteenth century by John G. Hamann, a contemporary and personal friend of Kant who also knew Hume's philosophy.¹ In the nineteenth

¹See below, Chapter I.
century this position was forcefully advocated by the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, and since then his views have had a wide influence among philosophers and theologians, first in Europe and in the last twenty-five years in America as well. I do not include Kierkegaard in this study because I believe it is absolutely necessary to have the positions represented by Hume and Kant clearly in mind before Kierkegaard's views can become meaningful. I therefore restrict myself to a discussion of the first two alternatives with only the briefest of comments in the concluding chapter on the problem of faith and religious experience. I regard these comments only as expressing the need for further investigation of the problem of religious faith and not as offering any arguments designed to solve it.

The presentation of the religious views of Hume and Kant in this study proceeds in the following manner. Chapter I relates some of the factors in the personal experiences of Hume and Kant which influenced their attitudes toward religion. I also seek in this beginning chapter to set the stage for the rest of the paper by specifying the attitudes of Hume and Kant toward popular religious belief and the church. In Hume's case this results in the problem of interpreting his pious confessions
of faith, a problem to which I attempt to offer a definitive solution in Chapter VIII.

Chapters II and III begin the analysis of Hume's and Kant's formal reflections on the question of God's existence with a discussion of the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs. I state these proofs as fairly as I can, often supplementing the incomplete versions Hume and Kant suggest. I then argue that between them Hume and Kant present completely adequate refutations of these proofs and contend that none of the usual objections to their arguments are really valid.

In Chapters IV and V, on the empirical evidence for God's existence, my task is somewhat different from that of the preceding two chapters. The difficulty here is not in judging whether or not Hume's and Kant's arguments are valid, but in deciding just what those arguments are. The Argument from Design and the claims of special revelation are handled rather carelessly by both of these authors, and my main purpose in these two chapters is to collect their various comments on these issues and organize them into consistent and complete arguments. In the course of doing this, I also seek to show that their case against the empirical "proofs" of religion is quite sound.

Chapters VI and VII investigate the locus of disagreement between Hume and Kant over the moral and ethical
value of religion. In Chapter VI I discuss Hume's arguments concerning the Problem of Evil and the societal effects of religion. I also analyse his attempt to construct a moral theory without reference to theological principles and find this attempt unsatisfactory. In Chapter VIII I am mostly concerned with Kant's moral theology and seek to show that objections to his doctrine concerning the final union of virtue and happiness are founded on a misunderstanding of his position. This chapter also contains evidence from his works that he was in essential agreement with Hume on the Problem of Evil and the baneful effects of traditional religion upon society. For Kant, however, these issues are not sufficient to negate the ethical value of all religious principles. Kant proposes in opposition to traditional ecclesiastical faith a "pure religion of morality."

Chapter VIII, as I have mentioned, concludes this study with a discussion of the problem of faith. I argue that Hume and Kant reject faith as a mode of knowing without adequately investigating it and suggest the possibility of its being a further ground for the justification of theological first principles.

Throughout this study certain works of Hume and Kant occupy the greater part of my attention. For Hume I draw mostly from *The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
(which I usually refer to as the Dialogues), An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (the Enquiry), and A Treatise of Human Nature (the Treatise). For Kant I am concerned mainly with The Critique of Pure Reason, The Critique of Practical Reason, The Critique of Teleological Judgment (referred to as the first, the second, and the third Critique respectively), and Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone (the Religion). The particular editions and translations of these and other works of Hume and Kant which I employ are fully indicated in the relevant footnotes.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to the Department of Philosophy of The Ohio State University for the Assistantship and University Fellowship that enabled me to continue with my formal philosophic studies. I also wish to thank in particular Professors Marvin Fox, D. Luther Evans, Virgil Hinshaw, Jr., and Morris Weitz for the stimulation and encouragement tendered to me during the preparation of this study.
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CHAPTER I

FACTORS IN THE PERSONAL LIVES OF HUME AND KANT WHICH INFLUENCED THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD RELIGION

In discussing any philosopher's views on religion, it is absolutely essential to be aware of his reaction to the religious milieu in which these views developed. Passages in a philosopher's formal writings which appear ambiguous or inconsistent can often be clarified by giving attention to the relevant details of his biography. This principle is nowhere more useful than in the case of Hume and Kant. An examination of their relationships with the organized religion of their day reveals that the motives behind their castigation of traditional theology embrace more than purely rational considerations. Both Hume and Kant express an aversion to popular Christianity which arose from their own personal experiences of its vices. In this chapter I want to indicate some of the details of these experiences and in so doing, establish the attitudes which are reflected in their analysis of the first principles of theology.

Although the religious philosophies of Hume and Kant are similar in many respects, a great disparity is encountered in the patterns of their personal lives. Hume was a personable, well-liked, and well-traveled man of
letters who published a major philosophical work at the age of twenty-seven. He was idolized by the literati of both England and France and was constantly being denounced by a theologian or other "defender of the faith" in Edinburgh and London. Kant, on the other hand, was a crotchety, fanatically routine, almost reclusive university professor whose major philosophical work did not appear until he was nearly sixty. His intimate friends hardly ever exceeded a dozen in number, and his relationship with the world outside the university seems to have been a personification of that state of affairs connoted by the phrase "ivory tower." Neither Hume nor Kant ever married, but that is the limit of the similarity between their attitudes toward the opposite sex. Hume was a ladies' man, especially in Paris, and frequently had more than one feminine admirer. Kant was a bachelor par excellence and never gave any serious thought to being otherwise.

Despite the great difference in the courses of their lives, their concern with religion reveals a common struggle to escape the effects of the intense religious training of their childhood days. For Hume, this struggle led to a disavowal of all religious principles and practices. For Kant, it led to the subordination of these principles and practices to the requirements of the moral law as he conceived it. In the course of reaching these decisions, both men expressed publicly, in conversation and writing, opinions
and attitudes critical of the prevailing forms of traditional religion—for Hume, Scottish Calvinism and for Kant, German Pietism. Similarly, because of their heterodox views both suffered attack and censure at the hands of the governing clerical authorities which gave further impetus to their negative opinions concerning the value of organized religion. In discussing these aspects of their lives, I shall divide this chapter into two sections—the first dealing with Hume and the second with Kant—and shall in each case indicate the religious atmosphere of their early home-life, the development of their discontent with traditional theology, their controversies with the church, and some of the most important informal expressions of their religious attitudes.

I

It is my contention that any study of the life of Hume which fails to portray his fundamental opposition to all forms of popular religion either seriously neglects or distorts several major facts of his biography.¹ Both Hume himself and those who knew him best have testified to his lack of religious belief and scorn for those who allow it

¹The error of all such attempts is discussed at the end of this section; see below, pp 22-23.
an important place in their lives. "When we have to do
with a man who makes a great profession of religion and
devotion," he asks, "has this any other effect upon several
who pass for prudent than to put them on their guard,
lest they be cheated and deceived by him?" No remark
better characterizes what I take to be Hume's personal
feeling toward religion, unless it is one reported by
Boswell from their last conversation together:

He said he never had entertained any belief in
Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke.
He then said flatly that the Morality of every
Religion was bad and... "that when he heard
a man was religious, he concluded he was a
rascal, though he had known some instances of
very good men being religious."

Hume's antagonism toward religion was founded upon two
factors—hatred of its dogmatism and revulsion at the
immoral and amoral actions it encouraged. Most of the
religiously-oriented events of his life are indications of
the justice of these sentiments.

As a youth, Hume experienced one of the few positive
religious influences of his life in the sincere devotion

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2Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Norman
Kemp Smith, ed. (2nd ed., New York: Social Science

3James Boswell, Private Papers of James Boswell from
Malahide Castle, eds. G. Scott and F. A. Pottle (New York:
1928-34), XII, 227-32. Quoted in Ernest Campbell Mossner,
The Life of David Hume (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons,
of his mother, as manifest in her well-trained children and in the strict form of Calvinism practiced in the family home at Ninewells. The young David appears to have been serious about his religious duties and not to have rebelled at the severe restrictions of the "Scottish Sabbath" with its long and frequent prayers, longer sermons, and fasting. Later in life he told how, as a youth, he even tried to attain an evangelical "sense of sin" by the "strange work" of testing his character against a list of vices catalogued in The Whole Duty of Man, "leaving out Murder and Theft and such vices as he had no chance of committing, having no inclination to commit them." Kemp Smith conjectures with reason that the teenage Hume—shy, serious-minded, introspective, and earnestly seeking to be religious—"may, quite conceivably, have tasted of the experiences of conversion." Despite his serious and sincere intent, these early religious experiences of Hume did not endure. The task of conforming his actively inquiring mind to the rigidly

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4Richard Allestree, The Practice of Christian Grace, or the Whole Duty of Man (1658).

5Boswell Papers, XII, 227-8; quoted by E. C. Mossner, The Life of David Hume (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1954), p. 34.

crystallized doctrines of Original Sin, Total Depravity, Predestination and Election and of acquiring that spirit of enthusiasm of which he was to be so critical in later life, became too much for the young man who left home to study at Edinburgh. Freed from the personal religious influence of his home life, Hume began to let loose the reins of his mind and explore alternative modes of living and thinking. As early as his sixteenth year his literary preferences centered mostly on "Books of Reasoning and Philosophy, and Poetry and the polite Authors." During his college days his religious beliefs were definitely on the wane and were replaced by a passionate interest in metaphysical and moral philosophy. The a priori argument for God's existence was given up entirely and even the Argument from Design, always Hume's favorite, was questioned. In his concern over personal morals, the catalogue of vices in The Whole Duty of Man was replaced by the "more humane evaluations of the pagan philosophers, Cicero in particular." "I desire," he declared, "to take my Catalogue of Virtues from Cicero's Offices, not from The Whole Duty of Man."  

8 Ernest Campbell Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 64.
It must not be imagined, however, that the process of rationally educating himself away from religion was a natural or easy one for Hume. He gave up religion only after many an intellectual tussle with himself. In 1751, he wrote as follows:

Any Propensity you imagine I have to the (skeptical) other Side crept in upon me against my Will: And tis not long ago that I burn'd an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty; which contain'd Page after Page the gradual Progress of my Thoughts on that head. It begun (sic,) with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the common Opinion: Doubts stole in, dissipated, return'd, were again dissipated, return'd again; and it was a perpetual Struggle of a restless Imagination against Inclination, perhaps against Reason.⁹

These doubts, twice dissipated, returned again to stay and became a part of that new-found boldness of temper which resulted in the discovery of a "new Medium, by which truth might be establish'd"¹⁰ and in his writing of A Treatise of Human Nature.

By the time the Treatise was published in 1739, Hume's attitude toward religion was no longer a strictly private matter. He had decided to write and converse in a manner designed to "provoke the zealots," but had also grudgingly assented to the advice of his friends to publish

⁹Greig, op. cit., I, 154.

¹⁰Ibid., I, 13.
the Treatise without the section on miracles. Omitting this essay seemed to him an instance of cowardice on his part, which, he said, amounts to the "castrating of my work, that is, cutting off its noble parts." He acquiesced, however, under the sound reasoning of his friends among the liberal ministers of Edinburgh who persuaded him that he should "give as little offense as possible" in his first attempt to gain the attention of the learned world.

Despite his attempt to temper the anti-religious features of the Treatise, Hume was soon in trouble with the church. In 1745 he was denied a position at Edinburgh University as Professor of Pneumatics and Moral Philosophy primarily because of opposition from the Evangelical Party among the clergy. During his candidacy for this position Hume had the support of the "Moderates" of the church, but their chief defense of him appears to have been, "He really is not as bad as he seems!" The Evangelicals won the day, however, and succeeded in having the dull but orthodox William Cleghorn appointed in place of Hume. This was the last and only victory over Hume for the Evangelicals. In his succeeding struggles with the church

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over his "infidelity" the Moderates were much stronger and more committed to the justness of their cause in defending him.

In 1755 and 1756, one of the most serious of these struggles occurred when a concerted effort was made to excommunicate Hume and his cousin Lord Kames. This attempt was stimulated by a tract in which Hume's philosophy was summarized under the following six propositions:

(1) All distinction betwixt virtue and vice is merely imaginary. (2) Justice has no foundation further than it contributes to public advantage. (3) Adultery is very lawful, but sometimes not expedient. (4) Religion and its ministers are prejudicial to mankind, and will always be found either to run into the heights of superstition or enthusiasm. (5) Christianity has no evidence of its being a divine revelation. (6) Of all the modes of Christianity Popery is the best, and the reformation from thence was only the work of madmen and enthusiasts.

That only about half of these propositions can be derived by implication from Hume's works is an indication of the antagonism toward him among the orthodox. He became for them the chief "devil's advocate" in Edinburgh, and they were determined to make an example of him. The Moderates were more than equal to their task of defending Hume, however, for they believed that he should be shielded by the principle of the freedom of inquiry and debate. By

13Mossner, op. cit., p. 342.
castigating the vicious attacks upon Hume while at the same
time regretting his "errors," and by vigorously defending
the principle that "the proper objects of censure and re-
proof are not freedom of thought, but licentiousness of
action; not erroneous speculations, but crimes pernicious
to society,"^{14} the Moderates secured the defeat of the
recommendation of excommunication by a vote of 50 to 17.
Many clergymen absented themselves because of the distaste-
fulness of the whole procedure, and thus Hume escaped
official censure, though personal antagonism toward him
increased among the clergy.

Interestingly enough, Hume's remarks during the
height of this controversy reveal a nonchalance over the
matter rather than the vindictive reaction which might be
expected. His words on this occasion give a taste of the
scorn and biting sarcasm with which all of his works on
religion abound. To Allan Ramsey he wrote the following:

The last Assembly sat on me. They did not
propose to burn me, because they cannot. But
they intend to give me over to Satan, which
they think they have the power of doing. My
friends, however, prevailed, and my damnation
is postponed for a twelvemonth. But next
Assembly will surely be upon me. Meanwhile I
am preparing for the Day of Wrath, and have
already bespoken a number of discreet families,
who have promised to admit me after I shall be
excommunicated.\(^{15}\)

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^{14}Tbid., p. 342.

^{15}Tbid., p. 343.
The development of Hume's anti-religious principles had apparently proceeded far enough to allow him calmly to regard this event as but another instance of the baleful effects of religion upon society.

These religious controversies did, nevertheless, have a determining effect upon Hume's life. He was not one to recant his unpopular religious views, nor in most cases could he be persuaded not to publish them. His brush with the orthodox did, however, cause him to pursue a course of increased caution. Essentially he was a man who loved peace and shunned heated argument whenever possible.

His hatred of enthusiasm and superstition in religion was tempered by a desire to be accepted by men like Butler, Hutcheson, and Wallace. Though these liberal theologians were not susceptible to Hume's most vigorous attacks against orthodox dogmatism, they still affirmed elements of that "religious hypothesis" which Hume felt called upon to criticize severely. Thus there are several instances where his works were altered or withheld because of his desire to avoid a contentious dispute with the "bigots" and his wish not to embarrass or antagonize his friends among the Moderate party.16

16 The following are representative examples: (1) The exclusion of the section on miracles from the Treatise, (2) The withholding of the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion from publication until after (cont'd on page 12)
This aversion to dispute is also revealed in his adoption of a principle which has proved unfortunate for students of his philosophy. Contrary to Descartes, who earnestly sought out all objections that he might answer them, Hume resolved not to enter into print in defense of any of his views once these had been formally stated.\(^1\)

With minor exceptions\(^2\) he adhered to this rule and thus deprived the world of some valuable aid in interpreting his works.

Besides influencing his decision to make his works less skeptical and his refusal to answer objections to them, the conflict over his religious views helped to shape Hume's character in another way, namely, in the use of ambiguous and inconsistent modes of expression when speaking of religious belief. Because of this, a cursory reading of many of his works (the best response he felt he could expect from the orthodox) might lead one to infer that he was not seeking to discount religion altogether but

\(^{16(\text{cont'd})}\) his death, (3) The revision of two passages in the "Natural History of Religion" which were severely critical of the Old Testament (See Mossner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 619.), (4) The apology to traditional religion inserted in the preface of one edition of Volume II of the History of England (See John Hill Burton, \textit{Life and Correspondence of David Hume} (Edinburgh: 1846), II, 11 and Kemp Smith, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 22n.), (5) The cancellation of a projected ecclesiastical history (See Burton, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 130.).


\(^{18}\) Two exceptions are his abstract of the \textit{Treatise} in 1740, and his defense against Rousseau in 1766. Mossner, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 123-4 and Burton, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 347-9.
only to purify it. Many of his statements concerning true religion, the Gospel, faith, and revelation—if taken alone—could easily be accepted into a religious position. At other times when the critical force of his philosophy could not be mistaken, he inserted statements indicating that the effect of his views upon religion would not be detrimental, but helpful in dispatching those non-essential false supports with which he was concerned.

Without at this time attempting to ask why Hume employed these pious utterances, it is necessary to dispute a fanciful interpretation of his character to which they have given rise. This is the illusion that Hume was secretly pious. It received its main impetus from James Boswell in the same way as that other fanciful illusion about Hume—that he was secretly vicious—originated with


21 This problem is discussed in Chapter VIII below, wherein it is argued that the reason usually given, i.e., that they are intended as irony, is as insufficient as that they indicate a religious faith on Hume's part.
Rousseau: from a passionate determination to regard it as true despite all evidence to the contrary.

For Boswell, Hume was an enigma. It was impossible, thought Boswell, for the philosopher to be, as he appeared, both virtuous and an infidel; he must be either secretly wicked or secretly pious. Boswell was determined to prove the latter because Hume, the infidel, represented the basis of Boswell's deepest anxiety, the dread that at death he himself would cease to exist. If only he could prove that Hume really believed in an after-life and in its religious foundation—or else that he was at least uneasy about the possibility of a future existence, a very powerful threat to his own peace of mind would be removed. Thus the story of the relationship between these two men of letters is a series of successively conflicting attitudes of the biographer toward the philosopher—first, fond admiration for Hume's grace and wit: "a most discreet, affable man as ever I met with...a very proper person for a young man to cultivate an acquaintance with"; next, puzzlement over the enigma of the virtuous infidel: "It was curious to see David such a civil, sensible comfortable looking man, and to recollect this is the Great Infidel...I allways regret to him his unlucky principles and he smiles at my

22 Mossner, op. cit., p. 586.
faith. But I have a hope which he has not, or pretends not to have; \(^{23}\) finally, rancor because of the failure to resolve the paradox of Hume or avoid his religious skepticism: "He had by long study in one view, brought a stupor upon his mind as to futurity;\(^{24}\) and an entreaty to Johnson to "knock Hume's and Smith's heads together, and make vain and ostentatious infidelity exceedingly ridiculous."\(^{25}\)

Boswell pursued his attempt to draw from Hume some confession of faith up to a month before the philosopher's death. The following conversation which he records as occurring at Hume's house on July 7, 1776, provides quite convincing evidence of Hume's lack of religious belief:

I know not how I contrived to get the subject of Immortality introduced. He said he never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke. I asked him if he was not religious when he was young. He said he was. . . . He then said flatly that the Morality of every Religion was bad, and, I really thought, was not jocular when he said "that when he heard a man was religious, he concluded he was a rascal, though he had known some instances of very good men being religious." . . . I asked him if it was not possible that there might be a future state.


\(^{24}\) Quoted by Mossner, *op. cit.*., p. 585.

He answered It was possible that a piece of coal put upon the fire would not burn; and he added that it was a most unreasonable fancy that we should exist forever. I asked him if the thought of Annihilation never gave him any uneasiness. He said not in the least; no more than the thought that he had not been, as Lucretius observes. I tried him... saying that a future state was surely a pleasing idea. He said No, for that it was allways seen through a gloomy medium; there was allways a Phlegethon or a Hell.26

These plain words forced Boswell to acknowledge that Hume the man, even with death before his eyes, persisted in believing the skeptical conclusions of Hume the philosopher. In this fact Boswell recognized the dissolution of his fondest hope. "I was like a man in sudden danger," he exclaims, "and I could not but be assailed by momentary doubts while I had actually before me a man of such strong abilities and extensive inquiry dying in the persuasion of being annihilated."27 But the wish, or rather the demand, for immortality was stronger in Boswell than any objections he was forced to admit against it. His aspiration for a future existence merely retreated momentarily in the face of Hume's denial of any after-life—only to reassert itself, after sufficient time had elapsed to allow the


27 *Loc. cit.*
contrary evidence to become dim, in the form of an irrational solution to the moral enigma of Hume's character.

This solution began to take possession of Boswell's mind when he was plunged to the depths of despair immediately following Hume's death. From this despair he could not be aroused even by Samuel Johnson's dogmatic proclamation that Hume or any other man, facing death's approach, who claimed to be "quite easy at the thought of annihilation," was a liar. For eight years Boswell struggled with the conflicting compulsions of admiration for Hume as a man and horror at the consequences of his religious skepticism. In 1784, Boswell's need to believe in immortality at last gained the victory over his reason by fabricating its own evidence that Hume was not really an infidel or skeptic but really a secret Christian. Boswell gives the following account of the manner in which this "evidence" presented itself:

Awaked after a very agreeable dream that I had found a Diary kept by David Hume, from which it appeared that though his vanity made him publish treatises of skepticism and infidelity, he was in reality a Christian and a very pious Man. He had, I imagined, quieted his mind by thinking that whatever he might appear to the World to show his talents, his religion was between God and His own conscience. (I cannot be sure if this thought was in sleep.) I thought I read some beautiful passages in his Diary.

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28 Mossner, The Forgotten Hume, p. 185.
I am not certain whether I had this dream on Thursday or Friday night. But after I awaked, it dwelt so upon my mind that I could not for some time perceive that it was only a fiction.29

Although the content of the dream (the finding and reading of Hume's diary) was obviously illusory, may not the interpretation of Hume's character which it recommends be true? Discounting the fact that it was only a dream, is it not possible to produce legitimate evidence for the claim that Hume really was a Christian or at least a Deist? If such evidence can be produced and maintained in the face of the generally negative import of his religious philosophy, then the interpretations of Hume's character may become as variant as the theories about the real Socrates—philosophers making the man conform to what their principles or interpretation dictate he ought to have been.

What, then, is there in Hume's life and writings that lends support to the assertion of his secret piety, and what evidence can be produced to conclusively counteract this claim? This seems to me to be one of the most fascinating biographical questions connected with the history of philosophy, and I shall therefore state both sides as fairly as I can. I hope, however, that one of

the effects of this study will be to make it abundantly clear that Hume had absolutely no respect for traditional religious belief.

The evidence in the matter of Hume's secret piety falls into two classes: first, those anecdotes and remarks in which the genuineness of the account or the seriousness of Hume's intentions may be doubted; and second, those passages from his works and correspondence which appear, at least, to represent his true beliefs. Of the evidence of the first kind which supports the thesis of Hume's piety, the least creditable is the account of his conversion to Roman Catholicism.\textsuperscript{30}\ The story is told by George Nichol in \textit{The Edinburgh Magazine} for 1802, in which Hume is said to have professed himself a sincere Roman Catholic and participated in the sacraments of confession, penitence, absolution, and extreme unction. All this supposedly occurred when Hume was taken ill with a fever at Nice.\textsuperscript{31}\ Hume never denied the truth of the report, so Nichol claims, but violently asserted that he was delirious at the time and did not know what he said or what they did with him.

\textsuperscript{30}Burton, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 8; and Mossner, \textit{Life of Hume}, p. 218.

\textsuperscript{31}See Burton, \textit{op. cit.}, II, p. 9n.
Such an account cannot be any more support for a secret piety on Hume's part than the story that he once repeated "the Lord's Prayer and the Belief" in order to get out of a bog by the help of an old fishwife who doubted the propriety of aiding Hume "the Atheist." At any rate, any propensity on Hume's part toward Catholicism was counteracted by his censure of the Papists, who, he says, "deal much in penitence, but neglect extremely les bonnes oeuvres."

We may also disregard as evidence in the case of Hume's piety his remarks to Blair that "there is not a single Deist among" the learned of Paris, to d'Holbach "that he did not believe in atheists, that he had never seen any," and to Sharp that he had always "defended the cause of Providence when [you] attacked it, on account of the headaches you felt after a debauch." These remarks are patently intended to be facetious and cannot imply any real earnestness on Hume's part. This same lack of seriousness is revealed in the accounts of his refusal to sit down to breakfast until the "enemy," by which he meant

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33 Burton, *op. cit.*, I, 316.
36 Burton, *op. cit.*, I, 178.
the Bible, be removed from the room, and his expression of an intention to "write no more History; but proceed directly to attack the Lord's Prayer and the ten Commandments and the single Catechism; and to recommend Suicide and Adultery." 

More seriousness must be attributed and more attention given to remarks made by Hume when the occasion to display his wit was not present. One such remark occurred upon hearing of his mother's death. He was at the time in London and the news caused "deepest affliction and a flood of tears." When a friend attributed Hume's grief to his having discarded the principles of religion, he replied, "though I threw out my speculations to entertain and employ the learned and metaphysical world, yet in other things I do not think so differently from the rest of mankind as you may imagine." Another such remark, though for my part I cannot believe it was ever made by Hume, is reported by Burton. One clear and beautiful night, he says, when Hume and a friend were walking home, Hume stopped, gazed up at the stars and exclaimed, "Oh, Adam, can any one

37 Mossner, Life of Hume, p. 246.
38 Klibansky and Mossner, New Letters of David Hume, p. 43.
contemplate the wonders of that firmament, and not believe there is a God!"  

Important as these quotations may be in shedding light on the conflict in Hume’s character, their value as evidence of his piety is diminished by equally serious expressions which seem to directly contradict them. Among such expressions are Hume’s vigorous denials of being a Deist, his last conversation with Boswell, the opinion of such an astute judge as Carlyle that Hume was “a sceptic, though by no means an atheist,” and the lament of his friend, George Dempster, “It seems difficult for me . . . to believe that he can have a great regard for even the best mode of religion and the least extravagant, if we consider how destitute he is of that only support of it, Faith.”

By turning from this weak type of evidence, in which many of the questions concerning authenticity, import, and

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40 Burton, op. cit., II, 451. There is no authority given for this account except the son of Hume’s friend, Ferguson, who remembers his father telling about it.

41 Mossner, Life of Hume, p. 395; Klibansky and Mossner, New Letters of David Hume, p. 43 and 43n.

42 See Mossner, Life of Hume, pp. 597-98; quoted above, p. 15-16.

43 Ibid., p. 245.

intention must remain unanswered, to the stronger kind found in Hume's works and correspondence, the case for and against his being secretly religious can be definitively stated. This evidence, like the former, reveals a real problem in the interpretation of some of Hume's statements, but it also presents conclusive empirical data for the denial of any pious commitments on Hume's part—a denial which the formal analysis of his philosophy in the succeeding chapters will serve to corroborate.

The evidence supporting Hume's piety is scattered liberally throughout his letters and works. In a letter to Reverend Hugh Blair, Hume protests George Campbell's interpretation of his essay on miracles:

I could wish your friend had not denominated me an infidel writer, on account of ten or twelve pages. ... Is a man to be called a drunkard, because he has been seen fuddled once in his lifetime? 145

Not only does he deny being an infidel, he also denies being an atheist or skeptic. In the Dialogues he says:

To what pitch of pertinaceous obstinacy must a philosopher in this age have attained, who can now doubt of a supreme intelligence? ... Could I meet with one of this species (who, I thank God, are very rare) I would ask him:

145 Greig, Letters of Hume, I, 351. See also Hume's Letter to Andrew Millar in the same volume, page 265.
Supposing there were a God, who did not discover himself immediately to our senses; were it possible for him to give stronger proofs of his existence, than what appear on the whole face of nature? 

Despite the fact that Hume himself seems to argue against the Argument from Design in the Dialogues, he affirms his respect for it in the Treatise:

The order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind; that is, a mind whose will is constantly attended with the obedience of every creature and being. Nothing more is requisite to give a foundation to all the articles of religion.

He also supports an empirical argument for God in "The Natural History of Religion":

The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.

Even if his arguments against the metaphysical capacities of human reason do weaken the rational proofs of God to some degree, he is still aware that the real supports of religion are faith and revelation. In the Dialogues he has the skeptic Philo conclude as follows:

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46 Dialogues, p. 215.


48 Essays, ed. by Green and Grose, II, 309. See also p. 362: "The universal propensity to believe in invisible, intelligent power... may be considered as a kind of mark or stamp, which the divine workman has set upon his work."
The most natural sentiment, which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion, is a longing desire and expectation, that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance, by affording some more particular revelation to mankind. . . A person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity . . . To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian. 49

All these positive statements concerning religion and faith were interpreted in a straightforward, literal manner by John G. Hamann, a contemporary of Hume, who translated the Dialogues into German. 50 He was the first of a long line of commentators who have sought to read Hume as a defender of the pure religion of faith and revelation against the unlawful encroachments of reason.

Unfortunately for Hamann and for those who agree with his interpretation, there are just as important passages in Hume's letters and works which reveal his complete lack of religious belief. Although he objected to Campbell's denouncing him an infidel, in the same

49Dialogues, p. 227-228. See also Enquiry, Selby-Bigge ed., pp. 130-1 and 165; and "Of the Immortality of the Soul," Essays, II, 406.

letter he reported that he was no longer capable of instruction in matters of religion, having put all such inquiries behind him as a youth. And in a letter to James Cawdell he asserted that he failed to see that any bad consequences must happen to him just because his irreligious opinions became generally known. In tabulating a list of national vices he grouped Christianity with stupidity and ignorance, and he made it clear that he regards all popular religion as so much demonism. We are so accustomed to the doctrines of popular religion, he said, and so emotionally and culturally conditioned to respect them that we never wonder at them, "though in a future age, it will probably become difficult to persuade some nations, that any human, two-legged creature could ever embrace such principles." Instead of being deceived by imagining that some religion is pure, men ought to examine the religious principles, which have, in fact, prevailed in the world, "You will scarcely be persuaded," he declares, "that they are any thing but sick men's

51 Letters, ed. Greig, I, 351.
52 Ibid., p. 106.
53 Ibid., p. 498.
55 Ibid., p. 344.
dreams: Or perhaps will regard them more as the playsome whimsies of monkies in human shape, than the serious, positive, dogmatical asseverations of a being, who dignifies himself with the name of rational. Neither philosophy nor religion, which rightly conceived is nothing but a part of philosophy, he concludes the Enquiry by saying, will ever be able to carry us beyond the usual course of experience, or give us measures of conduct and behavior different from those which are furnished by reflections on common life.

The cumulative effect of these quotations coupled with a general knowledge of Hume's life is more than sufficient to counteract any inclination or desire to attribute to him a secret commitment to some form of popular religion. I want to make it clear that the mere listing of quotations does not solve the two most perplexing problems involved in this issue, namely, the identification of Hume with one or more characters in the Dialogues and the explanation of the reasons for his apparently inconsistent affirmations of religious sentiments. Considering only the place of religion in his personal life, it may be safely concluded, however, that any attempt to label Hume

56 Ibid., p. 362.

57 Selby-Bigge ed., p. 146.
a theist, deist, atheist, or anything other than a skeptic implies a serious distortion of the facts. The struggle to attain a successful attitude toward religion caused in Hume several vacillations of thought and character, but of its final outcome he speaks with conviction:

Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny, concerning this subject. But such is the frailty of human reason, and such the irresistible contagion of opinion, that even this deliberate doubt could scarcely be upheld; did we not enlarge our view, and opposing one species of superstition to another, set them a quarrelling; while we ourselves, during their fury and contention, happily make our escape into the calm, though obscure regions of philosophy. 58

II

Turning now to Kant, we find that, like Hume, he had a strong aversion to the doctrines and practices of the church but that, unlike Hume, he felt that religion could be purified of its dross by the proper application of reason. "Pure religion"—the religion that Kant advocated and practiced—was identified by him with morality. 59 By this he did not mean that only religious people can be moral or that morality to be worthwhile requires a theological system of rewards and punishments as incentives.


His book on religion begins with the following careful specification of his concept of moral theology:

For its own sake morality does not need religion at all . . . by virtue of pure practical reason it is self-sufficient. . . . But although for its own sake morality needs no representation of a(religious) end, . . . it is quite possible that it is necessarily related to such an end. . . Morality thus leads ineluctably to religion, through which it extends itself to the idea of a powerful moral Lawgiver.

Although this statement must wait until Chapter VII for the explication it demands, it is sufficiently clear to reveal an ambivalent attitude on Kant's part toward religion which characterized his personal life as well as his formal doctrines. He possessed a profound respect for the basic elements of simple piety while at the same time refusing to grant a place in the value-pattern of human life to any but moral considerations. The first of these attitudes derived from the peace, morality, and piety of his early home life; the second arose from his convictions concerning the moral law and the failure of the church to inculcate that pure morality consistent with it.

The strictness and self-denial which characterized Kant's boyhood were never able to dim the cherished memories of the excellent training he received from his parents.

60Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, trans. Theodore M. Greene (Chicago: 1934), pp. 3-5.
He spoke of them as "models of moral propriety." "They gave me," he said, "a training which, in a moral point of view, could not have been better, and for which at every remembrance of them, I am moved with the most grateful emotions."\(^61\)

Kant's father was stern, conscientious, and possessed a firm regard for truth as the highest virtue, while his mother was more affectionate and religious and made a greater impression upon the young Immanuel. At his birth his mother recorded these pious words: "In the year 1724, on Saturday the twenty-second of April at five in the morning my son Immanuel was born into the world and on the twenty-third received holy baptism. . . . May God preserve him in His Covenant of grace unto his blessed end, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."\(^62\) Late in his life, Kant spoke of her part in his early training with reverence and tenderness:

My mother was a lovely, affectionate, pious, and upright woman, and a tender mother, who led her children to the fear of God by means of pious instruction and a virtuous example. Often she took me outside of the city, directed my attention to the works of God, spoke with pious rapture of His omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness, and impressed on my heart a deep reverence for the Creator of all things.\(^63\)

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\(^63\) Stuckenber, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
Kant's parents belonged to the then-declining Pietistic movement within the Lutheran Church, and the basis of their children's training was taken directly from its principles. This movement was begun by Spener in 1675 as an attempt to revitalize the spiritual fibre of an otherwise coldly intellectual Lutheran orthodoxy. The name "Pietism" originated, as did "Christian," "Methodist," and "Baptist," as a term of reproach. It was intended as a slur upon the announced purpose of the movement to inject greater spiritual, ethical, and emotional piety into religious experience and to reduce the emphasis upon mere intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions. In the first few decades of its existence Pietism was able to rise above its detractors through the excellence of the moral and religious earnestness which it encouraged. By the first half of the eighteenth century, however, the movement had degenerated to such an extent as to lay itself open to serious charges. Its emphasis upon righteousness and emotion often produced hypocritical affectation and spiritual pride. An extreme opposition to amusements and frequent disparagement of learning helped cause it to lose respect especially among the young and the scholarly. 

64 Ibid., p. 15.
65 Ibid., p. 17-18.
In 1732 when Kant enrolled in the Collegium Frederickianum he began an eight year encounter with those elements in Pietism—bigotry, hypocrisy, and fanaticism, which fortunately had been absent from his home life. The school day began and ended with half-hour devotions and was liberally interspersed with periods of prayer. The students were "assembled frequently to be warned of the evil state of their souls and encouraged to discover and confess their sins." The Bible was the sole text book even for secular studies, and Sunday possessed all the austere characteristics contained in the connotations of the Pietist sabbath. Needless to say, it was during these years that Kant began to shed his early religious beliefs. Imbued with a strong sense of honesty and love for the truth, he was unable to tolerate that unnatural zeal which "fostered a spirit of hypocrisy" and caused the youths of the school to affect a form of piety, "often from very low motives."

His experiences at the Collegium caused him to turn from Pietism with aversion. His opinion of it was often bitter:

But it is not contempt for piety which has made Pietism a name to designate a sect, with which

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66 Greene, op. cit., p. xxiii.
67 Ibid., p. xxviii.
a certain degree of contempt is always associated; but it is the fantastic and, with all appearance of humility, proud assumption that they are distinguished as the supernaturally favoured children of heaven, though their conduct, as far as can be seen, has not the least advantage over those who are called by them the children of the world.68

Later, however, he was able to overcome such bitterness and, fortified by the memory of his mother, to attain a more moderate estimate of Pietism. He expressed his sincere, though qualified appreciation of its virtues in the following terms:

One may say of pietism what one will; it suffices that the people to whom it was a serious matter were distinguished in a manner deserving of all respect. They possessed the highest good which man can enjoy—that repose, that cheerfulness, that inner peace which is disturbed by no passions. No want or persecution rendered them discontented; no controversy was able to stir them to anger or to enmity. In a word, even the mere onlooker was involuntarily compelled to respect.69

Kant's parents, prompted by their own religious devotion, had earnestly desired him to prepare for the ministry and thus, when he entered the University of Konigsberg in 1740, he enrolled in the faculty of theology. His interests, however, lay elsewhere. At different times during his student days he showed a preference for the classics,


philology, science, and medicine. But he did not neglect theology completely. For a time he attended the lectures of his old friend and benefactor, Dr. Friedrich Schulz, who was the foremost theologian in Konigsberg. Kant's success in this course prompted Schulz to promise him his choice of pastorates if at any time he should declare himself for the ministry. Kant declined this offer, saying that he had heard the theological lectures only because of a desire to complete his education.70

Kant’s decision against the ministry as a vocation and against theology as an intellectual course was influenced by many factors. The strife between faculties71 occasioned by the overbearing authority of the theologians, the fanatic excesses of Pietistic zeal, and the failure of Schulz's "apologetics" to answer his religious doubts all played a part in this decision. More important than these, however, was his introduction to philosophy by way of Martin Knutzen's lectures. Professor Knutzen, only seven years Kant's senior, was professor of philosophy and physics at Konigsberg. His breadth of intellect and exceptional teaching ability soon caused Kant to become his disciple. Kant listened avidly to all his lectures, ...

70 Stuckenberg, op. cit., pp. 42-47.

71 See Kant's Essay, "Der Streit Der Facultaten," Berlin edition of Kants Werke, 1922, VII.
conversed with him privately on learned subjects, and borrowed extensively from his library. This contact with Knutzen allowed Kant to surmount the provincial and arbitrary dictates of Pietism and seek the universal and necessary principles of philosophy. Released from devoting his life to inculcating a mode of conduct with which he had lost sympathy, he began his search for a practical principle of conduct which would subsume all particular actions under its authority, the principle he later found in the categorical imperative.

During his student days, Kant showed little inclination for the theoretical side of philosophy. He was primarily occupied with physics, ethics, and mathematics. By 1744, when he left the university, he was fully decided on a career in the university. In his first book, published in 1747, he states, "I have marked out for myself the course which I have determined to take; I shall begin my career, and nothing shall keep me from continuing it." Unlike Hume, Kant does not reveal in this first work any of the considerations which prevailed in his struggle with his religious beliefs, but he did manifest the critical and independent conviction that dogmatic authority is not a proper method for settling disputed questions.73

73Ibid., pp. 54-55.
Kant's personal life after he left the university as a student was singularly uneventful and is characterized by the fact that the limit of his travels was the city of Arnsdorf, sixty miles from Königsberg. The more active pursuits which Hume sought, partly for the sake of health, Kant found pale when compared to intellectual pleasures. "The discernment of the understanding," he declared, "when it possesses the proper degree of completeness and clearness, has far more lively charms than sensuous allurements have, and is able to conquer these completely and trample them under foot."\(^7\) The progress of his career was slow. For ten years he served as a private tutor and then for fifteen more as lecturer in the university of Königsberg. During this time, he became very popular with the students but aroused considerable suspicion among the faculty as to his theology. In 1758, when he applied for a professorship, his old friend Schulz was sufficiently disturbed to question him concerning his belief in God. Although he satisfied Schulz as to this basic minimum, he was denied the position. In 1770 he finally attained a full professorship and began a regular series of lectures which lasted until 1797. It was at this time that Kant's life began to be dominated by that fanatic sense of the routine

\(^7\)Quoted in Stuckenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.
for which he is so well known. The following report is an illustration of this compulsion to undeviating sameness:

After returning from his walk, he was in the habit of reading till twilight. Then, in winter and in summer, he would stand before the stove and fix his eyes on a certain tower, while his mind was occupied with reflections. In the course of time the poplars in a neighbouring yard grew so high as to hide his favorite tower. This so disturbed and annoyed him that he was anxious that the trees should be topped; and the owner, to gratify him, did as he desired, thus enabling the philosopher again to pursue his meditations uninterruptedly.75

Kant, unlike Hume who from the first publication of the Treatise, had been in open conflict with the religious authorities, escaped serious public censure until the publication of Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone. Because his theological views were always couched in a profound philosophical terminology, very few, even among professional theologians, were fully aware of the religious import of his principles. He held that a person has a duty to obey the institution which he represents and to support its principles publicly, but at the same time he must be free to express himself as an independent thinker in whatever manner his reason dictates. Thus Kant's religious views were probably much more orthodox in his lectures than they are in his formal philosophy and, despite his failure to participate in the usual religious

75Stuckenberg, op. cit., p. 321.
ceremonies of the university, he was able to avoid official criticism from the religious authorities.

By 1791 conditions had changed so as to make the continuance of his intellectual peace impossible. After Frederick William II succeeded Frederick the Great as king of Prussia in 1786, a more strict policy toward religious publications was adopted. Under the influence of Johann Woellner, the new Minister of Religion, edicts were published demanding adherence to the doctrines of the Church and placing a censorship upon all literature. Kant ran headlong into these two edicts with the publication of the Religion. In 1791 Book I of this work had passed the Berlin censors as being "mainly philosophical in character and addressed only to scholars." Book II, however, when submitted later, was rejected by the same censors as being unscriptural. Since Book I had already been published separately and since the censors, contrary to law, had refused to give a reason for their act, Kant determined to publish Book II despite their prohibition. Accordingly, he submitted the whole work to the philosophical faculty.

76 See Greene, op. cit., p. xxixn. When inaugurated as a new rector of the university, Kant led the academic procession, as was customary, but deserted it at the church.

77 Greene, op. cit., p. xxxiv.
at Königsberg who promptly gave the permission for publication. In 1793 the Religion was published, and in 1794 Woellner, backed by the king's authority, issued the following ultimatum to Kant:

We demand of you immediately a most conscientious answer and expect that in the future, towards the avoidance of our highest disfavor, you will give no such cause for offense, but rather, in accordance with your duty, employ your talents and authority so that our paternal purpose may be more and more attained. If you continue to resist, you may certainly expect unpleasant consequences to yourself.

Kant's reaction to this decree was one of ready compliance--on the surface. He wrote a lengthy defense of his views and reiterated his principle that as a citizen he was bound by the form of religion of the state, but, as a thinker, he had a right to develop alternative principles. He maintained that the Religion was not anti-Christian but merely an attempt to make natural religion more practical. Finally, he contended that the work is of no interest to anyone but speculative thinkers and is no concern of the public or of popular teachers. With respect to any future publication of his views Kant acquiesced and sent to the king the following promise:

78 Greene, op. cit., p. xxxiv, and Paulsen, op. cit., p. 49 say Jena.

79 Greene, op. cit., p. xxxiv; trans. from the forward to Streit der Facultaten.
As far as the second point is concerned— not to be guilty in the future of a distortion and degradation of Christianity similar to that of which I am accused—I think it safest, in order to forestall the least suspicion in this respect, as your Royal Majesty's most faithful subject to declare solemnly, that henceforth I will refrain altogether from all public discussion of religion, whether natural or revealed, both in lectures and in writings. 80

That Kant's compliance with the royal decree was only superficial is revealed by the following facts. First, the Religion is anti-Christian, and Kant made no attempt to conceal or weaken its heterodox principles. Second, Kant did not regard his promise to the king as binding upon a second edition of the Religion nor as continuing in effect after the king's death in 1797. In this whole matter it is hard to avoid charging Kant with duplicity or at least with being inconsistent with his own principles. It is not difficult to find excuses for his conduct. He was old, he had a tremendous intellectual task to complete, and the edicts of Woellner were not worthy of respect. These circumstances perhaps justified Kant's desire to avoid controversy, but they cannot remove the suspicion that he intentionally deceived the king by the wording of his promise.

80 Stuckenber, op. cit., p. 363; trans. from the Forward to Streit der Facultaten.
Against the charge that Kant had no right to void his promise to the king after the latter's death, it may be stated in defense that he regarded the duty to obey authority as binding only so long as that authority prevailed. Thus, for example, a minister who no longer believed the church doctrine was duty bound to teach it until the church excused him or revised the doctrine. Therefore, in 1797, when the king died, Woellner was dismissed, and the edicts of censorship repealed, Kant's allegiance to the previous authority ceased.

Against the accusation that Kant had intentionally concealed the truth by artfully constructing his promise so that it would appear to grant what he himself was not prepared to acknowledge; however, little defense seems possible. The only defense Kant offered was found among some loose papers after his death. "Recantation and denial of one's inner convictions is base," he recorded, "but silence in a case like the present is a subject's duty. And if all that one says must be true, it does not follow that it is one's duty to tell publicly everything which is true." This seems to violate, in spirit if not in letter

81 The words "as your Royal Majesty's most faithful subject" Kant interpreted to mean "henceforth, as long as I am your . . . subject, I will . . .". Whereas taken in a straight forward manner they seem to say, "I, your . . . subject, promise that henceforth I will . . . "

82 Quoted in Paulsen, op. cit., p. 50.
the categorical imperative to which he had given absolute authority in matters of conduct. The following words, which express his own interpretation of the categorical imperative in reference to promise-keeping must indeed have been a reproach to him:

The shortest but most infallible way to find the answer to the question as to whether a deceitful promise is consistent with duty is to ask myself: Would I be content that my maxim (of extricating myself from difficulty by a false promise) should hold as a universal law for myself as well as for others?... If not, it must be rejected... because it cannot enter as a principle into a possible universal legislation... To duty every other motive must give place.

It is indeed unfortunate that this lapse of moral resolution has to mar the last major episode of Kant's public career. In 1797, the same year that Frederick II died and Woellner was dismissed, Kant was forced by the frailty of old age to discontinue his lectures. Unlike Hume, Kant the philosopher ceased to exist long before Kant the man died. The last decade of his life revealed a continued progress of those effects of senility which may in part account for his lack of fortitude in the face of governmental oppression.

Except for his struggle with the censors, Kant's attitude toward the church was generally one of indifference.

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He retained an intellectual appreciation for some elements of his childhood belief, but he had concluded all personal relationship with the church by the time he had reached majority and neglected all serious study of theology after leaving Schulz's lectures at the university. Christianity meant for him the Pietism of his youth, and in refreshing his knowledge of doctrine before writing his book on religion, he consulted an old catechism published in 1732. In his mind popular Christianity was a detriment to the realization of the pure religion of mankind. This attitude is distinctly expressed in some of his comments concerning beliefs and practices of the church. In an early book directed against the Swedenborg cult he expresses his opinion of mystics. "I do not blame the reader," he comments, "if instead of regarding the ghost-seers as semi-citizens of another world, he treats them summarily as candidates for an asylum, and thus relieves himself of all further need of investigation." Popular forms of the worship of God he regards as dangerous practices which subordinate virtue to reverence for God whose favor men hope

84 See Stuckenberg, op. cit., p. 359.

85 "Traume eines Geistersehers erlautert durch Traume der Metaphysik," 1766; This passage translated in Stuckenberg, op. cit., p. 115.
to gain by means of adoration and flattery instead of by means of a moral course in this world. 86

He also expressed a strong aversion to emotion in religion and felt that singing and praying were but convenient avenues in which to parade a false affectation of piety. "To kneel or prostrate himself on the earth," he says, "even for the purpose of symbolizing to himself reverence for a heavenly object, is unworthy of man." 87 Pulpit oratory is condemned just as strongly because it is "the deceitful art which persuades people to form, in weighty affairs, conclusions which lose all significance on calm reflection." 88

Kant, nevertheless, did recognize certain elements of popular religion because of their amenability to the development of a pure religion of morality. He had a great respect for the Bible as a popular means of inculcating moral laws. The Gospel is a real aid to reason because it first taught general moral laws in all their purity at a time when reason was unable to apprehend them so clearly. The Bible must also be respected "as a book for the people" which has, more than any other, "exercised


87 Quoted in Stuckenberg, op. cit., p. 468, n. 144.

88 Stuckenberg, op. cit., p. 144.
an influence for good upon the hearts and lives of men.\textsuperscript{89}

This did not mean, of course, that the Bible was superior to reason's knowledge of the moral law. Kant's interpretation of Scripture was governed strictly by the dictates of practical reason. No passage was to be employed unless it could be given a moral significance, even if this meant violating its literal meaning. Similarly, faith was reinterpreted to signify simply reason's recognition of the moral necessity for the postulates of God and immortality and not an emotive commitment to beliefs which transcend the limits of knowledge.\textsuperscript{90}

Kant's personal attitude toward traditional religion was a direct expression of the principles of his religious philosophy. He viewed "ecclesiastical faith: as a practical moral device to be dispensed with as soon as one's reason and conscience is fully developed, and as soon as he himself attained this level of moral maturity, the church ceased to play a significant part in his personal life. It became, in fact, mainly a sociological phenomenon whose beliefs and practices were to be either rejected or accommodated according to the independent principles of the Critical Philosophy.

\textsuperscript{89}Paulsen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{90}See Chapters VII and VIII for further discussion of these points.
In this chapter I have indicated some of the grounds of Hume's and Kant's personal prejudices against religion. I do not, of course, want to argue that these grounds are in any way sufficient to determine the value of their religious philosophies. I do think, however, that they provide a necessary background for understanding their formal analysis of theological first principles. In the following two chapters I shall begin an examination of this analysis with their objections to the a priori proofs of God's existence.
CHAPTER II

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A PRIORI KNOWLEDGE
OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

Part I: Hume

Religion, for Hume and Kant, is first and foremost an epistemological issue. Theologies are primarily sets of knowledge claims which require analysis according to established epistemological principles. Both Hume and Kant concentrate the main force of their analysis on two basic presuppositions of religious knowledge: (A) There is a God, and (B) God is intimately related to the moral order of the universe. Upon these two presuppositions depend all that Hume and Kant intend to call religion. Although the meaning of these principles is sufficiently ambiguous to include a wide range of theological opinion, they delineate the basic requirement of any religious position. This requirement is a belief in the existence of some superior non-natural intelligence who is the source, ground, preserver, judge, or rewarder of moral virtue. Other views of life and the universe such as humanism are recognized by Hume and Kant, but confusion rather than clarity would be the result of considering these positions as included in their discussions of religious knowledge.
Also excluded from religion by this requirement is the purely metaphysical concern with theological concepts which neglects their relationship to moral theory. Although much that Hume and Kant have to say is directly applicable to humanism and theological metaphysics, the main import of their religious philosophies is directed toward this minimum presupposition of religious belief as it has been traditionally identified in western culture.

Before moving on to the details of Hume's and Kant's analysis of religious knowledge, the outline of the argument in which these details will be presented should be mentioned. This argument concerns the two first principles of religion just noted. It begins with the question of God's existence and ends with the problem of the relationship between morality and religion. Concerning God's existence, Hume and Kant are in essential agreement. Neither a priori proof nor empirical evidence is sufficient to establish it. After rejecting all attempts at the rational demonstration of religious truth, Hume and Kant turn to the problem of the possible vindication of the belief in God as a requirement of morality. In deciding whether or not a satisfactory moral theory must include religious principles, Hume and Kant reveal the main difference between their philosophies of religion. Hume
denies the need for any religious principle and enunciates a moral theory which recognizes no such principle. Thus, for him, religious belief is unjustifiable, except by means of an emotional appeal which is detrimental both to reason and to virtue. Kant opposes these conclusions of Hume by repudiating all Humean-type ethical systems and arguing that a complete ethical theory requires God and immortality. Thus, after taking away most of what theology has traditionally claimed, he provides some justification for a limited concept of religion—"within the limits of reason alone."

I have chosen to begin the analysis of this argument by examining Hume's and Kant's views on the possibility of a priori knowledge of God's existence. "A priori" is used here as Hume and Kant use it in referring to knowledge of God. It designates what are commonly known as the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs. These proofs seek to demonstrate the existence of God without reference to any particular data of experience and to reason respectively solely from the idea of God or from the existence of a causal series. In this manner they differ from the more empirical Argument from Design, or the Physico-Theological Argument as Kant calls it, which requires experience of order or purpose in the world. Although
both Hume and Kant feel that the a priori proofs because of their abstract and complex structure are inferior to the Argument from Design in persuasive force, their attempts to refute these proofs require the application of their most important epistemological principles concerning the limits of human reason. In the following discussion I shall try to indicate what these principles are and examine their use in Hume's rejection of a priori religious knowledge. In the next chapter I shall do the same for Kant. In each case I shall take up first the Ontological proof and then the Cosmological.

I

The a priori arguments for God's existence are treated rather superficially by Hume. Part IX of the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, in which these arguments occur, is perhaps one of the weakest single sections of his philosophy. The usual criticisms of this section center upon two points. (1) It is a digression whose omission would not in any way detract from the continuity of the Argument from Design. (2) The speeches of Demea and Cleanthes are inconsistent with their positions as revealed in the rest of the Dialogues. Demea, who from the first has denied the ability of reason to solve problems
of theology, claims in this section to prove by reason alone, not only the being, but also the attributes of God. Cleanthes, in his use of Hume's most fundamental epistemological principles to refute Demea, reveals a philosophic acumen which he lacks completely in his arguments with Philo.¹

Although these criticisms of Part IX of the Dialogues are not without foundation, they are not completely accurate, nor do they cover the most important weaknesses of Hume's discussion of the a priori arguments. Significant reasons can be suggested to explain the inclusion of this section and the speeches of Demea and Cleanthes.

If the Dialogues seek only to discredit the Argument from Design, Part IX may surely be judged irrelevant and a digression. But Hume is concerned not only with the Argument from Design, but also with all possible grounds for the basic principles of natural religion. Though he grants greater popular appeal to the a posteriori argument, he recognizes that the a priori arguments constitute part of the purpose of natural religion. This purpose is to provide, either from experience or from the internal

sources of reason, sufficient evidence for the belief in God.

By the close of Part VIII of the Dialogues, the Argument from Design appears quite unstable, and the natural defense of the orthodox position would be an appeal to other grounds for religious belief. The a priori arguments of Part IX are the first of such appeals, and as such they demand analysis. But Hume knows that he cannot stop merely with attacks upon the Argument from Design and the a priori arguments. His truly orthodox readers would continue to grasp any straw of support—miracles, prophecies, answers to prayer, advantages to society, transformations of character, etc., until his critique of religion would degenerate into that "multitude of connected arguments" which makes even the certainties of mathematics only probable. After allowing Demea to introduce in Part X one more basis of religious belief, namely, each man's "consciousness of his imbecility and misery," Hume attempts to render all such arguments ineffective. His position is that since the Argument from Design is inconclusive and the a priori arguments fallacious, all other grounds for religious belief are negated by the antagonism

\[A \text{ Treatise of Human Nature, p. 144.}\]

\[\text{Dialogues, p. 193.}\]
between religion and morality. God's existence is incompatible with the presence of evil, the effects of religion upon society have in the main been pernicious, and the inclusion of theological principles is neither necessary nor beneficial to a complete moral theory.

If Hume had neglected to consider the a priori arguments, his criticism of natural religion would have been incomplete, since a major approach to the being and nature of God would have been left open. Thus, these arguments play an integral part in the scheme of the Dialogues, and the truth of the objection, that their consideration is a digression, lies not in the assertion that their omission would not materially effect Hume's argument, but in the fact that his summary treatment of them makes Part IX appear superfluous.

The other criticism of this section on the a priori arguments charges an inconsistency to the characters of Demea and Cleanthes. I doubt that this charge can be avoided, but there are some considerations which ought not to be overlooked in judging the issue. In the first place, Demea, at least in Part IX, represents the position of Samuel Clarke whose Boyle Lectures Hume had read as a young man.⁴ Demea's arguments in this section are a

direct, though abbreviated, paraphrase of a section of Clarke's *A Discourse Concerning The Being and Attributes of God.* In stating these arguments Demea is supposedly inconsistent with his earlier assertion of the incapacity of reason in questions of theology, but a closer look at his statements in Part II reveals that he denies the demonstrability not of God's being but of His nature or essence. In this he echoes, but overstates, Clarke's own position. The fourth proposition of Clarke's argument for God is: "What the Substance or Essence of that Being, which is Self-Existing, or Necessarily-Existing, is; we have no Idea, neither is it at all possible for us to comprehend it." Hume violates Clarke's position by making Demea assert that all of God's attributes are "mysterious to men". Clarke carefully distinguishes between demonstrating God's essence and knowing some of His attributes. His fifth proposition maintains that "though the Substance or Essence of the Self-existent Being, is in itself absolutely incomprehensible to us; yet many of the Essential Attributes of his Nature, are strictly Demonstrable, as well as

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5London, 1728.
8*Dialogues*, Kemp Smith ed., p. 141.
his Existence.9 Hume failed to see, or did not choose to recognize, that the fact that we cannot demonstrate all the attributes of God (His essence) does not entail that we cannot know any of them. Thus, Demea's inconsistency does not lie in his introducing the a priori proofs in Part IX, for these he had demanded as early as Part II.10 It consists, rather, in making the nature of God completely unknowable and, hence, playing into the hands of the skeptic for whom "God" is practically meaningless.11

Concerning Cleanthes' inconsistency in Part IX, little need be said except to ask why Hume allowed Cleanthes, rather than Philo, to refute the a priori arguments. It may be that Hume intended this section to be a dramatic interlude which would further distinguish the positions of

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9Clarke, op. cit., p. 40.
10Dialogues, p. 143.
11Philo says in Part II, "Our ideas reach no farther than our experience. We have no experience of divine attributes and operations. I need not conclude my syllogism you can draw the inference yourself." (p. 143)

Demea is inconsistent in other less serious respects. Two of these, which Kemp Smith mentions on page 62 are Demea's appeal to Malebranche (p. 141) and his exposition of Hume's restricted doctrine of the self (p. 159). A third inconsistency, which Hume probably intended, concerns the strange situation which he notes in introducing Part XII of the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Selby-Bigge ed.), page 149. Demea in Part II of the Dialogues (p. 141) is an example of the many theologians who hold the existence of God to be "a truth so certain and self-evident" that no man of common sense ever seriously doubted it. Yet, these theologians, with Demea, are quick to introduce complex arguments to prove this same truth.
Demea and Cleanthes and relieve Philo of the burden of the negative position. Or it may be that just as Demea represents Clarke, Cleanthes is Hume's spokesman and, hence, the natural one to enunciate Humean principles.

Without at this time explicitly denying these answers, I should like to suggest that Cleanthes' speech was due to Hume's desire to dispatch the a priori arguments in as short a space as possible. The analysis of the Argument from Design was already becoming unwieldy, and he could not afford to enter into a similar examination of the indefinite variety of Ontological and Cosmological Proofs. Hume clearly felt that his theory of knowledge immediately eliminated the possibility of any such proof, but he could not allow Philo to pronounce this verdict ex cathedra from the sanctuary of Hume's own epistemology. Cleanthes, on the other hand, could very well perform this function. Whereas the pattern of Philo's dialectic had been a detailed examination of premises, the suggestion of alternatives, and the illumination of difficulties, Cleanthes favored the enunciation of conclusions with little or no

12 Cleanthes' explanation of his action gives some clue to Hume's motives in constructing this section. "It (the a priori argument) seems so obviously ill-grounded, and at the same time of so little consequence to the cause of true piety and religion, that I shall myself venture to show the fallacy of it," (p. 189). Hume expresses the same opinion through Philo's comment at the end of Part IX, "...men ever did, and ever will, derive their religion from other sources than from this species of reasoning." (p. 192).
argument in defense. By allowing Cleanthes to pursue this method together with some examination of premises, Hume is able to present the principles of his refutation without unduly prolonging the discussion. The expression of the Humean philosophy sounds strange in the mouth of Cleanthes, it is true, but the absence of detailed analysis which this expression reveals would be even more strange if attributable to Philo.

I have said that neither the criticism concerning the non-essential nature of Part IX nor that charging its characters with inconsistency covers the main defects of this section of Hume's *Dialogues*. The major weakness of Part IX is not a lack of literary cohesiveness but an incomplete statement and analysis of the a priori arguments. The main symptoms of this weakness are Demea's sketchy version of Clarke's proof and Cleanthes' fallacious use of unsupported principles to refute Demea. Additional symptoms are Demea's failure to reply to Cleanthes and Philo's confusing comments on mathematical necessity. If sense is to be made of Hume's discussion of the a priori arguments for God's existence, the analysis of these arguments must exceed the limits of the *Dialogues*. An attempt must be made to account for the neglected essentials of Clark's argument and to seek support for Hume's refutation
from the broader principles of his other philosophical works. Before beginning this attempt, however, it is necessary to have in mind the main points of Hume's argument in Part IX of the Dialogues.13

After admitting the many difficulties which attend the attempt to infer God from nature, Demea introduces the "common" a priori argument which he claims has many advantages and conveniences and "cuts off at once all doubt and difficulty." A step-wise statement of this argument takes the following form:14

1. "Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence, it being absolutely impossible for anything to produce itself or be the cause of its own existence."

   a. For everything that exists, there must be a principle to account for its existence.
   b. If it is of finite duration, this principle takes the form of a temporally prior cause.
   c. If it is of infinite duration, this principle takes the form of a logically prior reason.

13 A brief statement of the cosmological argument is given by Philo in Part II, page 142, but no discussion of it occurs there.

14 The main propositions (1, 2, 3, etc.) form in order a complete quotation of Demea's speech in Part IX (pp.188-9). Necessary explication of each proposition is given in the sub-sentences (a,b,c, etc.). I have adopted this form in the hope of making Hume's too condensed version more coherent and consistent without departing materially from the text.
2. "In mounting up, therefore, from effects to causes, we must either go on in tracing an infinite succession, without any ultimate cause at all, or must at last have recourse to some ultimate cause that is necessarily existent."

a. The causal series is either finite or infinite.

b. If it is finite, an ultimate first cause is necessary.

c. If it is infinite, it either requires an ultimate cause (reason) or it does not.

3. "Now that the first supposition (an infinite causal series with no ultimate reason for its existence) is absurd may thus be proved. In the infinite chain or succession of causes and effects, each single effect is determined to exist by the power and efficacy of that cause which immediately preceded; but the whole eternal chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by anything, and yet it is evident that it requires a cause or reason, as much as any particular object which begins to exist in time. The question is still reasonable why this particular succession of causes existed from eternity, and not any other succession or no succession at all. If there be no necessarily existent Being, any supposition which can be formed is equally possible; nor is
there anymore absurdity in nothing's having existed from
eternity, than there is in that succession of causes which
constitutes the universe."

a. If the causal series is infinite a principle
to account for its existence is still required.
b. If there is no principle to account for this
particular causal series rather than any other or
none at all, then the concept of an infinite causal
series is as unintelligible as the notion that nothing
exists or that a finite causal series does not re­
quire an ultimate cause which is eternal.

4. "What is it, then, which determined something to
exist rather than nothing, and bestowed being on a particu­
lar possibility exclusive of the rest? External causes,
there are supposed to be none. Chance is a word without
meaning. Was it nothing? But that can never produce any­
thing."

a. An infinite causal series requires a principle
of intelligibility.
b. This principle cannot be a cause because all
internal causes are dependent and none is prior to
the series and also because there are no causes
external to the series.
c. "Chance" and "nothing" are not principles of
intelligibility but admissions of the lack of such a
principle.

5. "We must, therefore, have recourse to a necessarily existent Being who carries the reason of his existence in himself; and who cannot be supposed not to exist without an express contradiction. There is consequently such a Being, that is, there is a Deity."

a. The only possible ground to account for the existence of a causal series, whether finite or infinite, is by means of the concept of a necessarily existent Being.

b. The nature of this Being must be such that the denial of his existence is impossible, in the sense that anyone who understood the concept of this Being and denied his existence would be guilty of a self-contradiction.

c. Only God is such a Being.

d. Therefore, God exists.

Hume's refutation of this argument, which combines the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs, contains six major points. Four of these come from Cleanthes. The last two are made by Philo and are comments rather than arguments.

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15 *Dialogues*, pp. 189-192.
1. It is impossible to demonstrate any matter of fact a priori.

2. This proof does not demonstrate that God necessarily exists.

3. This proof could just as well support the notion that the material universe is the necessary existent.

4. No ultimate cause or reason is required for an infinite series.

5. The necessity of the universe may be due to the nature of its elements, as in mathematics, rather than the consequence of an ultimate cause or principle.

6. Religious belief has never been much affected by such obscure reasoning which appeals only to metaphysicians.

1. Cleanthes' contention that no matter of fact can be demonstrated a priori depends for its support directly upon Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* and *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Nothing is demonstrable unless its contrary implies a contradiction. Since the non-existence of any being is as conceivable as its existence, no demonstration of existence is possible. Demonstrative knowledge is possible only concerning relations of ideas,

16 *Enquiry*, Selby-Bigge ed., p. 25.

as in mathematics, where a clear conception of terms renders the contrary of any true proposition unintelligible. But existence cannot be a term in the relation of ideas since it is not an idea but the manner in which we conceive ideas. We can know with certainty that some things, such as square-circles, do not exist because the ideas of them are unintelligible. "But that Caesar, or the angel Gabriel, or any other being never existed, may be a false proposition, but still is perfectly conceivable, and implies no contradiction."  

Cleanthes appeals to this argument "as entirely decisive," and he is willing "to rest the whole controversy upon it." Unfortunately, as it stands, Cleanthes' speech is not an argument, at least not a legitimate one. Hume appears to be guilty of employing a petitio principii in this part of his refutation, since part of what the a priori argument claims is that at least one matter of fact is demonstrable, namely, God's existence.

18Tbid., pp. 25 and 164.
19Treatise, Selby-Bigge ed., pp. 94-5, and 108.
20Tbid., pp. 29, 43, and 87.
21Enquiry, p. 164.
22Dialogues, p. 189.
Samuel Clarke began his proof with the proposition, "Something now is," and if his reasoning is valid, he proceeded to demonstrate that something else, a necessary being, also exists. Clarke's conclusion that there is one being whose non-existence implies a contradiction can hardly be refuted by Cleanthes' mere statement of its contradictory.

Hume, of course, is not left without support in this issue. All forms of the Cosmological Argument presuppose that something exists, and the most natural identification of that something is a world of objects governed by the laws of cause and effect. Hume had much earlier cut the ground from under this presupposition when he declared the existence of the external world to be a meaningless question. He asserted in the Treatise, "... 'tis in vain to ask, Whether there be body or not?" for "... nothing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or

24 Clarke, op. cit., p. 8. Clarke uses this assertion to prove the proposition he designates number I: "Something has existed from eternity."

25 An impossible task according to Hume: "There is no object, which implies the existence of any other..." Treatise, p. 86.

26 Ibid., p. 187.
impressions and ideas, and . . . external objects become known to us only by those perceptions they occasion."27

Nor is the situation improved by an appeal to the existence of the self. By "self" we mean either the experienced series of impressions and ideas,28 or an indubitable first principle, such as Descartes' ego, which is presupposed in any theory of knowledge.29 If we mean the first, the same problem presents itself as with the external world, namely, "that we have no notion of it, distinct from the particular perceptions."30 If the second is meant, we are unable to employ it in any cosmological proof, since the present state of our faculties prohibits us from determining the relationship between the causal principle and the "ultimate original qualities of human nature."31

Cleanthes' assertion that no matter of fact is demonstrable a priori has gained some support from Hume's denial of any certain knowledge concerning the existence of the external world or of the self. These denials,

27 Ibid., p. 67. Hume nowhere denies the existence of the external world. The belief in reality is a natural effect of the force and order of our perceptions. Treatise, p. 108; Enquiry, p. 151.
28 Treatise, p. 252, and p. 277.
29 Enquiry, p. 150, and Treatise, p. 286.
30 Treatise, p. 635.
31 Ibid., p. XXI.
however, do not by themselves seriously challenge the a priori arguments for the existence of God. A weakened form of the Cosmological Proof—if anything exists, God exists—and the Ontological Proof, which argues from the nature of our ideas, are still possible. In the Meditations, Descartes claims to prove the existence of the self, the world, and God.\textsuperscript{32} Hume's critique of the a priori arguments is incomplete until he has shown the last of these to be at least as uncertain as the first two.

2. Cleanthes, in his first direct objection to Demea's argument, charges that the Ontological Proof in its final step does not demonstrate that God necessarily exists. Demea had not explicitly stated this proof but had argued that the causal series of events required as a reason some eternal principle which carries the reason of its existence in itself. The Ontological proof specifies this principle as a necessarily existent being "who cannot be supposed not to exist, without an express contradiction."\textsuperscript{33} Since Demea had neglected to explain just why a denial of God's existence engenders a self-contradiction, Cleanthes offers his own interpretation, "...this

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Meditations}, II, VI, III, and V.

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Dialogues}, p. 189.
necessity of his existence is attempted to be explained by asserting that, if we knew his whole essence or nature, we should perceive it to be as impossible for him not to exist, as for twice two not to be four. He then argues that because the limited state of our faculties does not allow us to know God's whole essence or nature, we cannot determine by means of such knowledge, whether or not His existence is necessary. The mind can conceive without contradiction the non-existence of God just as well as it can conceive the non-existence of anything else, though it may be that everything which exists, exists necessarily. Thus, though it may be impossible for God not to exist, it is not a contradiction to suppose that He doesn't. The mind contradicts itself when it denies that twice two is four, because of the necessity which governs the relations of ideas. The attempt to apply this notion of necessity to matters of fact results in the words "necessary existence" having no meaning "or, which is the same thing, none that is consistent."

If Cleanthes was guilty of petitio principii in asserting the indemonstrability of any matter of fact,

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34 Dialogues, pp. 189-190.

35 Dialogues, p. 190.
this objection to the Ontological Proof contains a most glaring use of *ignoratio elenchii*. He states the proof in such a way as to presuppose a knowledge of God's "whole essence or nature" and then refutes it on the basis of the impossibility of such knowledge. In the first place, none of the major proponents of this proof ever claimed knowledge of all of God's attributes, nor did they regard the Ontological Proof as requiring it. Duns Scotus36 and Leibnitz37 worried about whether some of the attributes ascribed to God might not be contradictory, but neither of them held that a complete knowledge of God was necessary to solve the problem. In the second place, Cleanthes' statement and refutation completely overlook the Ontological step in Clarke's argument,38 and in the third place, "necessary existence," as I shall argue shortly, is not only meaningful, but, in one sense, God can be said to be a necessary existent.

In re-examining Hume's argument in the light of these criticisms it would be best to begin with the second point,


37 Discourse on Metaphysics, proposition XXIII, and Monadology, Par. 45.

38 Clarke, op. cit. Prop. III.
Clarke's use of the Ontological Proof, and then proceed to examine the basis upon which Hume rejected the more traditional forms of this proof.

After declining to infer God's existence from the definition of a most perfect being, Clarke argues in the following manner. In order to think about things, we must think of them in spatial and temporal relationships. Space and time are either limited or unlimited. If we think of them as limited, we think of something eternal and infinite as bounding them. The objection that they are bounded by an infinite and eternal nothing is invalid because "nothing" is the absolute negation of all ideas and, thus, "infinite and eternal nothing" is meaningless. If we think of them as unlimited, we regard them as eternal and infinite themselves. Thus ideas of eternity and infinity are presupposed by all our ideas of things. But eternity and infinity are modes or attributes, not substances. There consequently must be some eternal and infinite Being whose existence cannot be denied without destroying the basis of all thought.

It does not require any great insight to imagine why Hume neglected to state or consider this argument. It

39 Ibid., pp. 20-21.
40 Ibid., pp. 15-18 and 489-502.
resembles in part Descartes' argument in Meditation III that the idea of infinity is logically prior to the idea of finitude.\textsuperscript{41} Descartes gives this argument a twist which Clarke does not, namely, that the idea of God is innate since it can arise neither "adventitiously"--from the world, nor "factitiously"--from myself. The main point of Clarke's argument is that the ideas of eternity and infinity are necessarily presupposed by all other ideas, and, therefore, an eternal and infinite substance cannot be denied without implying an express contradiction.

Hume's answer to Descartes and Clarke on this issue is entirely decisive in destroying the basis of their arguments. Against Descartes' claim that the idea of an infinite Being must derive from such a Being, Hume, in the Enquiry, declares that our idea of God "arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit those qualities of goodness and wisdom."\textsuperscript{42} Against Clarke's use of infinity and eternity, Hume contends in the Treatise, that the ideas of space and time are not primary impressions but are rather the "manner or order" in which perceptions and their objects occur.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41}Haldane and Ross, V. 1, p. 166.

\textsuperscript{42}Enquiry, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., pp. 37-40.
Infinity and eternity are not positive attributes but merely negations of the spatial and temporal limits common to experience. As such they provide no basis for inferring the existence of an infinite and eternal substance.44

When we turn to consider Hume's critique in relation to the more traditional forms of the Ontological Proof, we encounter greater difficulty in Justifying his contention that the necessary existence of God has not been demonstrated.45 The Anselmian and Cartesian versions have frequently been taken as paradigmatic representations of this proof, and though there are significant differences between them, I shall regard them as essentially the same. Both Anselm and Descartes begin with the idea of God. For Anselm this idea is of a Being "than which none greater can be conceived."46 For Descartes it is of a "supremely perfect Being."47 Anyone who understands the idea of God,

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44This argument is essentially the same as Kant later used in denying the Ontological significance of space and time. Critique of Pure Reason, A20; B34--A46; B73.

45Hume certainly knew of the main historical occurrences of this proof. In his notes he recorded, "Three proofs of the Existence of a God; 1st some thing necessarily existent, and what is so is infinitely perfect. 2nd the Idea of Infinite must come from an infinite Being. 3rd The Idea of infinite Perfection implies that of actual existence." John Laird, Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature, (London: 1932), p. 303.


they contend, cannot deny His existence. Such a denial would mean, for Anselm, that something can be conceived to be greater than God—in that it exists and God does not—and, for Descartes, that God is not supremely Perfect since He does not exist. In either case, a self-contradiction results. Since God's existence cannot be significantly denied without self-contradiction, His existence is necessary. God, therefore, must exist.

Hume replies that this proof fails to demonstrate that God is a necessarily existent Being because, first, we cannot know enough about God's nature to determine His necessity and, second, the words "necessary existence" are meaningless. Neither of these points is a valid refutation of Anselm or Descartes since both are false and the first is irrelevant as well.

To begin with the second point, Hume in asserting the meaningless or inconsistent character of the words "necessary existence" apparently intends to reject this phrase as an infraction of categorial boundaries, of the same type as "hungry square-root." Both "necessary" and "existence" are meaningful, but for Hume their domains of reference are mutually exclusive. Necessity can only be

48 Dialogues, p. 190.
demonstrated in mathematical "propositions of quantity and number,"\(^49\) and the principles of mathematics are independent of "what is anywhere existent in the universe."\(^50\)

Unfortunately, for Hume's argument, the phrase "necessary existence" has two perfectly acceptable meanings, though he is probably correct in charging the Ontological Proof with using them inconsistently. "X is a necessary existent" may mean either (A) X is not contingent—if X exists, it never began to exist nor will it ever cease to exist—or (B) X cannot be significantly denied to exist without self-contradiction. Hume may be right in denying that (A) can ever be known or that (B) can ever be demonstrated, but he is wrong in claiming "necessary existence" has no meaning.

Hume's other point—that we can never know enough about God's nature to determine whether His existence is necessary or not—is both false and irrelevant to the main purpose of the Ontological Proof. His justification for this point is that "it will still be possible for us, at any time, to conceive the non-existence of what we formerly conceived to exist; nor can the mind ever lie under a necessity of supposing any object to remain always in

\(^{49}\)Treatise, p. 70.

\(^{50}\)Enquiry, p. 25.
being. . . . 51 Hume seems to be concentrating here upon the meaning of "necessary existence" expressed in (A) above, to the neglect of the main purpose of the Ontological Proof which is to prove God's necessary existence in sense (B). Both Descartes and Clarke expressly assert that they have proved the denial of God's existence to be as impossible as the denial that twice two is four, 52 but Hume chooses to refute, instead, the claim that God's existence is not contingent. Even in this he is unsuccessful since God, as defined by Anselm and Descartes, is certainly a necessary existent in sense (A). If the mind once admits God's existence, (in Anselm's or Descartes' sense) it is compelled to suppose Him "to remain always in being," Hume's hypothesis of a superannuated deity (who created the world and then died) to the contrary notwithstanding. 53 Mr. P. T. Geach's example of the Phoenix illustrates this point adequately. 54 The Phoenix is a bird that never dies but periodically renews its strength and vigor. Although, as far as we know, such a creature

51 Dialogues, p. 189.


53 Dialogues, p. 169.

does not exist, if it did, its existence would be necessary in sense (A). It could not then be supposed to cease to exist. To say that the Phoenix or that God is a necessary existent is like saying that a centaur is a contingent existent, and the denial of God's necessary existence in this sense fails to understand one meaning of the term "God" as well as the main claim of the Ontological Proof.

This is undoubtedly a harsh criticism of Hume or, rather, of Cleanthes, but it is necessary to have the deficiencies of the argument of the Dialogues clearly in mind before attempting a reconstruction of Hume's case from the broader foundation of his whole philosophy. This reconstruction must concern itself primarily with justifying the denial of God's necessary existence in sense (B), that is, in refuting the claim that God cannot be significantly denied to exist without self-contradiction. Cleanthes gives some indication of recognizing this problem when he asserts that in questions of existence the mind is not bound as it is by the necessity "of always conceiving twice two to be four."55

Hume draws most of the support for this assertion from his theory of existence. The Ontological Proofs of Anselm and Descartes presuppose that existence is an attribute.

55Dialogues, p. 190.
predicate or, in Hume's terms, an idea. Descartes allows existence to be an attribute and by this means asserts the impossibility of denying that God, who by definition possesses all possible positive attributes, possesses the attribute of existence. For Anselm, anything which is conceivable exists in the understanding, but something which exists both in reality and in the understanding is greater than something which exists in the understanding alone. By definition, God is that than which none greater can be conceived. God must therefore be conceived to exist in the understanding and in reality, since if He is not so conceived, something else can be conceived to be greater than God—which is a self-contradiction. Thus, both Anselm and Descartes share a platonistic presupposition that all objects of thought (in particular, God) are subsistent entities which can be compared with respect to possession of the property of (real) existence.

Hume's theory of existence attacks this foundation of the Anselmian and Cartesian proofs by maintaining that "no object can be presented resembling some object with respect to its existence, and different from others in the same particular; since every object that is presented, must necessarily be existent." Hume anticipates Kant in

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56Treatise, p. 67.
denying that existence is an idea, that is, a predicate or attribute. Everything we conceive we conceive as existent. Existence is not an idea that can be joined with or separated from other ideas, since it neither adds nor detracts from the content of any idea. Existence is not a predicate or attribute but the manner in which we conceive certain ideas because of their constancy and coherence.

Hume applies these principles directly to the question of God's existence. "Thus, when we affirm, that God is existent," he concludes, "we simply form the idea of such a being, as he is represented to us; nor is the existence, which we attribute to him, conceived by a particular idea, which we join to the idea of his other qualities, and can again separate and distinguish from them. . . . When I think of God, when I think of him as existent, and when I believe him to be existent, my idea of him neither encreases nor diminishes." In this way Hume is able to support his contention that the Ontological Proof does not and, in fact, cannot demonstrate the necessary existence of God. We may hold against Cleanthes in deciding that the Ontological proof does establish that if God exists,
He is necessary, but insofar as this proof attempts to maintain the impossibility of denying that there is a God, Hume has shown it to rest upon an untenable theory of existence and to lack the force of a complete demonstration.

3. After maintaining that the Ontological Proof fails to demonstrate God's necessary existence, Cleanthes brings forth a further objection to this part of Demea's argument. Even if the principle that there is a necessary existent be allowed, he argues, "why may not the material universe be the necessarily existent Being...?"60 God is not the only being which can satisfy the requirement of necessary existence, since "for aught we can determine, (matter) may contain some qualities which, were they known, would make its non-existence appear as great a contradiction as that twice two is five."61 This objection embodies the same argument as Gaunilo's less plausible assertion that Anselm's proof guarantees the existence of a perfect island as well as it proves the existence of God.62 Descartes had to face a similar reproof from Caterus who argues that "existent lion" is no less an arbitrary concept than "most

60 Dialogues, p. 190.
61 Ibid., p. 190.
perfect Being", and if existence follows from essence in the latter case, it also does in the former.63

In considering a possible answer to this type of objection, Hume passes over the replies of Anselm64 and Descartes65 and turns again to Samuel Clarke's Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God.66 Clarke's argument resembles Anselm's more than Descartes' in that the existence of a necessary being is first demonstrated and then a most perfect God is proved to be the only possible being who could fulfill the requirements of necessary existence.

Hume condenses Clarke's argument that the material world is not the necessary being to the following form:

"Any particle of matter. . .may be conceived to be annihilated, and any form may be conceived to be altered. Such an annihilation or alteration, therefore, is not impossible."67 Hume's refutation consists simply in the

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63Descartes' Works, Haldane and Ross, eds., II, pp. 7-8. Gassendi makes essentially the same criticism in the fifth set of Objections (II, p. 187), "I might also... say that in the idea of a perfect Pegasus, there was contained not only the perfection of Having Wings, but also that of existing."

64Proslogium, p. 172.
65Works, II, p. 21.
66Tbid., pp. 22-29.
67Dialogues, p. 190.
affirmation that "the same argument extends equally to the Deity. . ." 68 Whatever unknown qualities make God's existence necessary might be equally well attributed to matter. Since we cannot know what these qualities are, we cannot prove they are incompatible with matter, nor can we justify the claim that God's non-existence or the alteration of His attributes is impossible.

This objection fails completely to refute the argument that the material universe cannot be the necessary existent. No material body, say both Descartes and Clarke, need be conceived as necessarily existent because all bodies are corruptible. At least corruptibility is not incompatible with the essence of materiality. Thus, any material body can be conceived as non-existent. But God cannot be conceived to be non-existent, according to the Ontological Proof. The material universe, therefore, which need not be conceived either as existent or, if it exists, as always existent, cannot rival God for the position of the necessarily existent Being. Hume is correct in saying that the universe may possess unknown qualities which make its existence necessary, but this assertion adds nothing to his refutation of the Ontological Proof. This proof claims to demonstrate the existence only of a completely perfect

68 Ibid., p. 190.
being and the supposition that the existence of an island, a lion, or the material universe is thereby also proved can only be maintained by fallaciously attributing to these entities a perfection inconsistent with their status as material objects. Hume fails to see that the fact that other things may be conceived to exist necessarily is no proof against the proposition that God is the only Being which must be so conceived.

In his second and third criticisms of Demea's argument, Cleanthes has argued the failure of the Ontological Proof to demonstrate either that God is a necessary existent or that He is the only necessary existent. Hume might better have omitted this second charge and concentrated on bolstering the first. If the Ontological Proof is valid, he is wrong in asserting the equal possibility of imagining God's non-existence and imagining the annihilation of the universe. If the Ontological Proof is invalid, a more adequate analysis of 'existence' would have provided a more relevant refutation than the argument concerning the necessary existence of the material universe.

II

After his comment on the necessary existence of the material universe, Cleanthes turns his attention to the
cosmological portion of Demea's argument. This portion seeks to argue from the existence of a causal series to the cause or reason which can then be identified as God. I have said that Hume's denial of certain knowledge with respect to the existence of the world or the self removes the ground from this proof by making its first premise, "Something now exists," indemonstrable. Hume still, however, must contend with a weak form of this argument. This weak form seeks to prove the proposition, "If anything exists, an ultimate cause or reason also exists," by means of a simple constructive dilemma. The causal series, if it exists, must be either finite or infinite. If it is finite, it requires a first cause. If it is infinite, it requires an ultimate reason. Therefore, either a first cause or an ultimate reason is required by the existence of the causal series.

4. Hume could well have attacked the Cosmological Proof by means of his general restriction upon going beyond experience to investigate "secret causes," but he chooses rather to escape the dilemma by refuting the premise that an infinite causal series requires an ultimate cause or

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69 If the existence of the external world is once doubted, Hume says in the Enquiry, no proof of God is possible. (Selby-Bigge ed., p. 135.)

70 Treatise, pp. xx1, xxii, 13, and 64.
reason. In the first place, he argues, "in tracing an eternal succession of objects it seems absurd to inquire for a general cause or first author," for cause implies a priority in time. In the second place, to require a reason for an infinite series is only a dialectical trick which blurs the distinction between the universe as a whole and any finite event within it. Granted that every event must have a cause, the causal series itself is not an event requiring a cause. If it were, only an infinite number of causal series would be generated, since each cause of a causal series would itself be a member of another causal series. Such a regress is more sophisticated but no more intelligible than Locke's example of the Indian philosopher and his world-supporting elephant.  

It is doubtful, however, that Hume has yet faced the full force of Demea's question, "What is it, then, which determined something to exist rather than nothing, and bestowed being on a particular possibility, exclusive of the rest?" Why is there a causal series at all, and why this particular one? Demea is not asking, as Hume seems

71 *Dialogues*, p. 190.


73 *Dialogues*, p. 189.
to think, for a first cause but rather for a principle of intelligibility. If every element of the causal series is dependent and no necessary being be allowed, there is no rational explanation for the existence of anything.

Hume attempts to dispatch Demea's objection by arguing that the question itself is inappropriate and presupposes the very thing to be proved. He borrows an example from the Treatise\(^7\) to show that, though we may regard a group of men, the earth, and even the whole universe as a unit, to request a cause of the whole, after the cause of each element has been specified, is quite unreasonable. We talk about the causal series and the universe, but such concepts are only fictions of the mind. We only experience particular events and objects, and the "reason" for each of these is completely contained in its causal antecedents. The assumption of an infinite series of objects or events does not in the least alter the fact that the existence of each of these could also be accounted for solely on the grounds of a preceding cause. The request for a further principle of explanation is inappropriate because positing an infinite causal series is not positing a finite contingent event but declaring the absence of any such event for

\(^7\)\textit{Ibid.}, p. 30.
which a completely adequate prior cause could not theoretically be found.

5. Hume reinforces Cleanthes' criticism of the Cosmological Proof by allowing Philo to comment on the two basic weaknesses of all such reasoning. Hume undoubtedly felt that Cleanthes had provided a sufficient refutation of all forms of the a priori arguments, but he could not close this section of the Dialogue without noting that instead of reinforcing the natural religious belief inspired by the order and design in nature, the a priori arguments tend to impede such sentiments by diverting men's attention away from common experience to abstruse speculation.

Philo's first comment concerns the concept of necessity which is part and parcel of all a priori proofs of God's existence. Hume had some difficulty in deciding whether or not to include this paragraph, probably because its exact meaning and relevance to the preceding arguments are somewhat obscure. Philo's main point seems to be that it is dangerous to introduce the idea of necessity into the

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75 As Norman Kemp Smith reports (Hume's Dialogues, p. 191n.), Hume added the first paragraph of Philo's speech in Part IX sometime after finishing the section. On later revising the Dialogues, he scored out the whole paragraph, and then finally, deciding to reinsert it, he wrote on the margin, "Print this passage."
question of God's existence, since its further analysis could well "afford an inference directly opposite to the religious hypothesis."\textsuperscript{76} By the casual observer of arithmetic, the fact that the sum of the integers of any product of 9 is always equal to 9 or some multiple of 9 is admired as a wonderful effect of either chance or design. A skilled mathematician, however, recognizes such regularity to be a necessary consequence of the nature of these numbers. Since we really know nothing of whatever necessity governs the universe, it may be that this necessity is also completely entailed by the nature of its elements and, hence, that it is absolutely impossible for the universe to be different from what it actually is.

Such a conclusion would undermine completely the inference from either the necessity or the order of the universe to the existence of God.\textsuperscript{77} If the necessity of the universe derives entirely from its elements, no ultimate cause or principle is required.\textsuperscript{78} Also, if it is as

\textsuperscript{76}\textit{Dialogues}, p. 191.

\textsuperscript{77}Unless one recognizes Spinoza's identification of the completely deterministic universe with God. At any rate such a concept of God is surely not the one employed in traditional a priori proofs of His existence.

\textsuperscript{78}This is essentially what Cleanthes maintains in supposing the material universe to be a necessary existent and in denying the need of a necessary being to explain an infinite causal series. Philo merely emphasizes the impossibility of employing the mathematical concept of necessity, which is the only one available, to prove the existence of God.
impossible that there be any other order among natural bodies as it is that twice nine be other than eighteen, it is also impossible to admire this order as the wise providence of a good God. Thus, introduction of the concept of necessity not only weakens the a priori arguments, but also impedes the a posteriori inference of God's existence from His effects in nature.

6. Hume's final comment on the a priori proofs resembles his opinion of Bishop Berkeley's arguments. Even those who are "of good sense and best inclined to religion," he concludes, "feel always some deficiency in" such arguments, though they are not perhaps able to explain distinctly where it lies. People to whom the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs appeal are those who have allowed abstract reasoning to lead them beyond their depth into the sea of metaphysical speculation and have subsequently been overwhelmed by the force of logical subtleties. The rest of mankind, satisfied with the testimony of common experience, remain unconvinced even though they cannot always dispel the dialectical illusions which would compel their assent.

79 *Enquiry*, p. 155n., "They admit of no answer and produce no conviction."

80 *Dialogues*, p. 192.
In indicating Hume's final estimate of the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs, it will be helpful to note a passage which in the *Enquiry* refers to the doctrine of Occasionalism but which might just as well have closed Part IX of the *Dialogues*. The a priori approach to God, Philo might have concluded,

is too bold ever to carry conviction with it to a man, sufficiently apprized of the weakness of human reason, and the narrow limits to which it is confined in all its operation. Though the chain of arguments which conduct to it were ever so logical, there must arise a strong suspicion, if not an absolute assurance, that it has carried us quite beyond the reach of our faculties. . . . We are got into fairy land, long ere we have reached the last steps of our theory,; and there we have no reason to trust our common methods of argument, or to think that our usual analogies and probabilities have any authority. Our line is too short to fathom such immense abysses.\(^\text{31}\)

Hume's lack of sympathy for all forms of a priori reasoning may be a main reason for his failure to adequately consider the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs. His opinion of the relative unimportance of these proofs for natural religion prompted him only to *suggest* and not to *perform* an analysis of them—leaving to those interested the task of justifying his conclusions from the broader resources of his total philosophy. When we turn to Kant's

\(^{31}\) *Enquiry*, p. 72.
treatment of the a priori arguments, we find a much different picture. Kant agrees with Hume that the a posteriori Argument from Design is much more natural and popular than the a priori proofs, but his appreciation of the a priori element in human knowledge dictated a more complete examination of this method of establishing God's existence.

Hume, however, must not be denied his share of the credit. Many of the points which he merely indicated, Kant expands into complete arguments. Hume, for example, states the a priori proofs so as to imply the dependence of the Cosmological upon the Ontological—a point which Kant makes a part of his formal refutation. Hume also argues that existence is not a predicate and that an infinite causal series does not require a necessary being. Kant more than likely knew Hume's views on these topics and realized their significance for any adequate critique of transcendent knowledge. We shall now have to determine whether or not Kant's modification of Hume's arguments provides a complete and consistent refutation of the a priori proofs for God's existence.
CHAPTER III

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF A PRIORI KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S EXISTENCE

Part II: Kant

In presenting Kant's analysis of the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs, I shall follow a slightly different procedure from that employed in discussing Part IX of Hume's Dialogues in the preceding chapter. I felt that Hume's abbreviated treatment of the a priori arguments required an examination of the points of his case in the order in which they occur in the text. By this means I could be sure of not omitting anything and could also suggest, wherever possible, additional support from the general principles of his total philosophy.

Such a plan, however, would not be feasible in presenting Kant's views for two reasons. (1) The order in which Kant discusses the proofs for God can easily be more confusing than enlightening. He seems to be trying to juggle three different ways of approaching these proofs: the psychological, beginning with experience; the epistemological, beginning with reason's ideal; and the logical, beginning with the concept of the ens realissimum. He finally adopts the logical order and begins a formal
analysis of the Ontological Proof but not before he has stated several points which properly belong to a discussion of the Cosmological Proof. (2) Much of the force of Kant's analysis can be missed by restricting one's attention to the particular sections in which he states and examines each proof. This restriction is especially dangerous in relation to the Ontological Argument. It has caused some critics to confine Kant's refutation to the cliche, "Existence is not a predicate," or to the trivial suggestion that dollars in the head are not the same as dollars in the pocket. These errors can be avoided only if all that Kant has to say concerning the a priori arguments is considered, no matter in what order it occurs. I shall, therefore, slightly revise his mode of procedure and, in discussing first the Ontological and then the Cosmological Proof, I shall present the version of the argument Kant had in mind before explicating his criticisms of it. This will allow a more systematic presentation of his views which I shall then examine in the light of some possible objections.

Before beginning this task, some mention must be made of Kant's pre-Critical opinion concerning the existence of God. Almost every commentator who discusses in detail Kant's refutation of the proofs of Deity notes that he once
held the Ontological Proof to be valid. In his essay, "The Only Possible Ground for the Demonstration of God's Existence," he contends that this argument, and only this one, is a satisfactory demonstration of a divine Being. This is, of course, understandable since in 1763 when he wrote this essay, Kant was still entangled in the meshes of Wolffian rationalism. He had not yet evolved the complete epistemology of the Critique of Pure Reason which was almost two decades away from publication.

A direct acquaintance with this early essay unfortunately suggests some doubts that Kant had held a purely interim theory of knowledge which was later completely repudiated in the first Critique. In the first place, the Ontological Proof which he refutes in the Critique is not the same as the one he maintained in "The Only Possible Ground for a Demonstration of God's Existence". In the second place, he had already rejected in this early essay the Cartesian proof from the idea of a perfect being. In the third place, he had also developed the argument that existence is not a predicate and, in the fourth place--a

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2Translated by A. F. M. Willich in Kant's Essays and Treatises (London: 1789), Vol. II.
point which will concern us in the next chapter—he had performed an extensive examination of the Physico-Theological Proof—maintaining that it was not a rigorous demonstration but a summary of a very powerful body of empirical evidence.

Two further comments upon this essay are necessary. The first is to note the form of the Ontological Argument which Kant held to be valid. He had already arrived at the basic division of the proofs of God's existence which appears in the first Critique, but he argued that two very different forms of the Ontological Proof are possible. The first is the type which reasons from the idea of a most perfect Being to His existence. This is the proof of Anselm, Descartes, and Leibnitz which Kant holds to be invalid. The second type argues not from the possible existence of a perfect Being but from the necessary ground of all possibility itself. The gist of the proof is that if anything can be thought to be possible, something must be thought to be actual. This something must ground all possibility and, hence, must be the ens realissimum. This form of the Ontological Proof seems to resemble most

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3 "The Only Possible Ground", Kant's Essays and Treatises, p. 355.
some of the post-Kantian versions such as that of Hegel and other idealists. Its main support lies in the epistemological necessity of a union between thought and reality. By the time he wrote the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant probably felt this version was too abstract and artificial to be seriously considered as a proof for God. He does mention it, however, in describing reason's approach to its ideal, but discounts its significance in a very brief statement. Reason, he concludes, "is yet much too easily conscious of the ideal and merely fictitious character of such a presupposition to allow itself, on this ground alone, to be persuaded that a mere creature of its own thought is a real being."

The second and final comment I wish to make on "The Only Possible Ground" is merely to notice two of Kant's remarks on the logical status of existence predicates. In denying that existence can function as a logical predicate, he argues that 'God exists' should really be stated as "Something is God." He also contends in the same essay

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6Critique of Pure Reason, Kemp Smith trans., A534; B612.

7"The only Possible Ground," p. 234.
that "God is omnipotent," although it cannot be denied by anyone who understands the meaning of the words, does not at all entail "God exists" or "There is a God." In the first Critique these two points are expanded to form the core of his attack upon the claim that the idea of the ens realissimum fully authenticates the existence of its object.

I

Returning now to Kant's discussion of the a priori arguments in the Critique of Pure Reason, we find his statement of the traditional Ontological Proof:

It is declared that (the concept of the ens realissimum) possesses all reality, and that we are justified in assuming that such a being is possible. Now "all reality" includes existence; existence is therefore contained in the concept of a thing that is possible. If, then, this thing is rejected, the internal possibility of the thing is rejected—which is self-contradictory.

Kant undoubtedly intended this version to be an accurate representation of the proofs of Anselm, Descartes,

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8Ibid., pp. 233-4.

9"...thing that is possible"—"von einem Möglichen," not any thing that is possible, but one thing.

10Critique, A596-7; B624-5.
and Leibnitz. I shall later have occasion to discuss the objection that Kant said little that was relevant to Anselm, but at least it is not difficult to see in his version the proofs of Descartes and Leibnitz, whom Kant explicitly mentions in this section. Descartes' "most perfect Being" is transformed by Kant into the "all real Being." In either case the proof depends upon existence being included in the concept. Leibnitz adds a slightly different twist to Descartes' proof by arguing that since God is defined as most perfect, "if He be possible, He must necessarily exist." We can know God is possible because most perfection (or, all reality) implies no negation. Since God is either impossible or necessary, to admit His possibility and deny His necessary existence is a self-contradiction.\(^{11}\) Allowing for some difference in terminology, Kant's statement of the proof does not differ essentially from this version of Leibnitz.

In order to portray more clearly the Ontological Proof against which Kant directed his attack, I have expanded his statement of it into the following three steps:

S1) God is possible.

S2) The concept of God contains existence as a predicate.

\(^{11}\) *Monadology*, Par. 45.
S3) The denial of God's existence results in a self-contradiction.

Demonstration of each of these steps is as follows:

Proof of S1: God is possible.
   a) The concept of God as the most real being is the concept of a being who possesses all reality.
   b) If the concept of any object does not contradict itself, its object is internally possible.\(^\text{12}\)
   c) The concept of a being who possesses all reality does not contradict itself.\(^\text{13}\)
   d) ••. A being who possesses all reality (God) is internally possible.

Proof of S2: The concept of God contains existence as a predicate.\(^\text{14}\)
   a) The concept of God is the concept of a being who possesses all reality.
   b) The concept of a being who possesses all reality contains existence as a predicate.

\(^{12}\)"Internally possible" means "possible considered in itself independent of relations to possible or actual external conditions." Kant's terminology may be roughly equivalent to the more recent distinction between "logical" (internal) and "physical" or "practical" (external) possibility.

\(^{13}\)Kant inserts a misgiving concerning this premise, "The fact that a concept does not contradict itself by no means proves the possibility of its object." (A596; B624).

\(^{14}\)It is difficult to replace the ambiguous metaphor, "contains," without greatly reducing the force of the argument.
c) The concept of God contains existence as a predicate.

Proof of S3: The denial of God's existence results in a self-contradiction.

a) The concept of God contains existence as a predicate.

b) If God's existence is denied, the concept of God would contain non-existence as a predicate.

c) If God's existence is denied, the concept of God is self-contradictory, since it contains existence and non-existence as predicates.\footnote{Kant's words are, "If, then, this thing is rejected, the internal possibility of the thing is rejected." By itself this assertion is false, since it is not the case that denying the existence of something entails the internal (logical?) impossibility of that something, i.e., centaurs are "rejected" but the internal possibility of centaurs is not thereby rejected.}

d) If the concept of an object is self-contradictory, the object of this concept is not internally possible.

e) If God's existence is denied, God is both internally possible and not internally possible.

f) The assertion that the object of a concept is both internally possible and not internally possible is a self-contradiction.

g) The denial of God's existence results in a self-contradiction.
In his critique of this proof, Kant concentrates on premise S2b, "The concept of a being who possesses all reality contains existence as a predicate," or, simply, "'All reality' includes existence." His refutation consists of denying the necessity of affirming this statement. In the first place, he contends, Leibnitz has failed to prove that "all reality" or "all real being" is not a self-contradictory concept which could not possibly refer to any existent. In the second place, the statement, "All reality' includes existence," is either analytic or synthetic. If it is analytic, it can be rejected without self-contradiction, and if it is synthetic, it cannot support an a priori proof of God's existence, since existence cannot function as the logical predicate of a synthetic judgment.

Leibnitz argued that the concept of God could be proved to be consistent in two ways. The first way, a *contingentia mundi*, from the dependence of the world, Kant discusses in his critique of the Cosmological Proof.

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16 *Critique*, A603; B630.
19 *Monadology*, paragraphs 36-45.
The second way was by means of the a priori concept of ultimate perfection. Since ultimate perfection (or, reality) contains only positive properties (no one of which could limit or negate another), there is no possibility of incompatibility between them. Hence, God is possible.

Kant objects to this argument by saying that we have no way of really affirming that the properties combined in an all real being are compatible nor that such a being is possible, since the only reliable criterion of possibility is experience. Also, how are we to decide whether or not the supposed properties of God are compatible? God's wisdom, goodness, and power may be incompatible with each other, or together they may be incompatible with the existence of something else, as is maintained in the problem of evil. At any rate, the fact that a concept apparently does not contradict itself by no means proves the real possibility of its object. In fact, God's attributes are so vaguely understood that His existence may be as logically impossible as that of a square-circle, though we are unable to specify the exact locus of that impossibility. "And thus," Kant concludes, "the celebrated Leibnitz

\[20\text{Critique, A602; B630.}\]

is far from having succeeded in what he plumed himself on achieving--the comprehension a priori of the possibility of this sublime ideal being."\textsuperscript{22}

But Leibnitz failure to insure the meaningful character of the concept of an all real or all perfect being is not the only vulnerable point of the Ontological Proof. All versions of this proof require that some form of the premise "'All reality' includes existence" be undeniable. Even if this premise be accepted as meaningful, it must be determined to be either synthetic or analytic.\textsuperscript{23} Kant proceeds to examine each of these alternatives, showing that in either case the undeniable character of this premise is an illusion.

Every reasonable person must admit, Kant contends, that all existential propositions are synthetic. If this be the case with the premise, "'All reality' includes existence," then it cannot be a self-contradiction to deny it, since only in analytic propositions is it a self-contradiction to affirm the subject and deny the predicate.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Critique}, A602; B630.

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Tbid.}, A597; B625. "Analytic judgments are those in which the connection of the predicate with the subject is thought through identity; those in which this connection is thought without identity should be entitled synthetic." (\textit{Critique}, A7; B11.) For a discussion of Kant's ambiguous distinction between analytic and synthetic, see A. C. Ewing, \textit{A Short Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), p. 42f.
It may be maintained, nevertheless, that this premise possesses the universal and necessary character of a synthetic a priori judgment. "All reality" includes existence, it might be argued, in somewhat the same manner as "7 plus 5" includes the predicate "equal to twelve." Thus, God's existence would be as undeniable as the Categories of the Understanding.

Kant's objection to this way of interpreting the Ontological Argument is contained in his famous statement, "'Existence' is obviously not a real predicate." Although "existence," like any other term, can be a grammatical predicate, it is not a real predicate—that is, "it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing." Since the synthetic interpretation of "'All reality' includes existence" requires that "existence" function as a real predicate, such an interpretation cannot yield a true conclusion for the Ontological Argument.

Kant elicits the following reasons for denying that existence can function as a real predicate: (1) Existence

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24 Ibid., A598; B626.

25 Kant's word is "logical", but his distinction of logical and real is nearly the same as the more recent "grammatical" and "logical."

26 Critique, A598; B626.
adds nothing to the concept of the subject; (2) Existential propositions merely posit an object to which the concept refers.

1. Existence adds nothing to the concept of the subject because if I conceive of something as possessing the properties X and Y and then assert that this object exists, I do not by that assertion predicate another property Z of it. "I conceive of God as omnipotent and omniscient, and He exists "does not entail "I conceive of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and existent "," but only asserts that there is a being which stands in a certain relation to my concept. The atheist who denies the existence of God is not saying that the concept of God contains one less predicate, nor does his denial imply this. What the atheist contends is that the concept of God with all its predicates does not denote any real object. If the theist's and atheist's concepts of God differed in possession of the predicate of existence, they could never refer to the same concept by the word "God," since a concept with the predicates X, Y, and Z is not the same as a concept with only the predicates X and Y.

To put this point another way, Kant says, "The real contains no more than the merely possible." His illustration of this point is the 100 real thalers and 100 possible
thalers. The real thalers stand in certain relations which the possible thalers, in fact, do not, but real thalers cannot possess **and** properties which could not be predicated of merely possible thalers. But if existence were a predicate, the real would possess this one property which the merely possible lacked. If this were true, the merely possible could never be said to become actual since a complete determination of the possible must omit one property which the actual would possess. Hence, no plan, however rigorously executed, would ever be adequate to its object.

2. These considerations, Kant thinks, ought to be sufficient to indicate clearly the fallacy of taking existence to be a real predicate. Yet, it cannot be true that to say "X exists" is to say **nothing** about X. Existential propositions do impart some information, and Kant seeks to account for their function by taking a clue from the context of empirical knowledge. "Were we dealing with an object of the senses," he says, "we could not confound the existence of the thing with the mere concept of it. For through the concept the object is thought only as conforming to the **universal conditions** of possible empirical knowledge in general, whereas through its existence it is
thought as belonging to the context of experience as a whole. Existential propositions do not predicate a property of an empirical object but merely posit that object with all its properties in relation to a possible perception. We know what empirical assertions of existence mean because we know how to verify them either through perception or through inferences based on perception. Thus it is a matter of no great concern whether these assertions take the form "X exists," "X is existent," or "There is an X," since we never expect to determine the truth of any such proposition merely from the a priori analysis of its terms. But in dealing with objects of pure thought all a posteriori methods of verification are closed to us, and hence we attempt to determine a matter of existence in a completely a priori manner. In order to accomplish this, existential propositions are distorted into a subject-predicate form, existence is made a property, and a comparison is attempted between things which have this property (existents) and "things" which lack it (non-existents). Such strange procedures cannot be justified independently of their necessary presupposition in the

27 Critique, A601; B629.

28 Critique, A601; B629.
Ontological Argument, and it hardly seems legitimate to justify the conditions of a proof solely on the grounds that they make the proof possible.

For these reasons, then, existence cannot be a predicate. Because it cannot, the premise "'All reality' includes existence" cannot be interpreted as a synthetic statement without becoming meaningless. This leaves only the alternative that it is analytic. Kant approaches this alternative quite differently from the way he attacked the synthetic interpretation of this premise.

His criticism consists of the following three points:

1. It is improper to introduce the concept of existence into the concept of a thing "which we profess to be thinking solely in reference to its possibility." 29

2. The necessity of a judgment has no bearing upon the necessity of a thing. 30

3. It is possible to reject an analytic proposition without engendering a self-contradiction. 31

1. Kant's first question is to ask what it means to conceive the premise "'All reality' includes existence" as an analytic statement. Since in an analytic judgment

29 *Critique*, A597; B625.

30 *Critique*, A594; B622.

31 *Critique*, A594; B622.
the predicate adds nothing to the subject, it may only mean that the concept "all reality"—that is, the thought in us—exists. But this interpretation could hardly satisfy the requirements of the Ontological Proof. No, it must mean instead that existence is a necessary property of an all real being, just as having three sides is a necessary property of a triangle. But if this is the case, the Ontological Argument amounts to nothing but a "miserable tautology." We first proved, or rather assumed, the possibility of a Being which we had defined as existing and then pretended to deduce His existence from His possibility alone. The use of the different words 'reality' and 'existence' for the subject and predicate does not void the fact that we have drawn out of the concept only what we at first put into it.

2. Even if the tautological character of this way of interpreting the Ontological Proof is passed over, the ambiguous character of the concept of necessity must be exposed. Descartes and others have maintained that God's existence is as necessary as a triangle's having three sides. Kant expands Hume's contention that "necessary" in this case is used ambiguously. It is an attempt to identify the necessity of the judgment "A triangle has three sides" with the supposed necessity of a thing. The necessary
judgment "All men are male," when applied to things, becomes the conditional statement "If anything is a man, it is male." It is Kant's contention that the logical necessity of a proposition "S is P" cannot be identified with the supposed existential necessity of its subject "S," nor can it even guarantee that the application of modal predicates to anything but propositions is meaningful.

3. The last of Kant's points, which I wish to cite in refutation of the Ontological Argument, is his denial that the rejection of an analytic existential proposition must result in a self-contradiction. Let it be supposed, Kant says, that existence is contained analytically as part of the meaning of the concept "all reality." Once this is granted, it is then claimed that by the law of identity it cannot be denied that an all real being (God) exists. In beginning his refutation of this claim, Kant admits that it certainly is a contradiction to affirm the subject and deny the predicate of an analytic statement, i.e., "A triangle does not have three angles." It is not, however, a contradiction to reject both the subject and predicate of an analytic statement, and this is what may

32 "Identical proposition" for Kant.
be done in the case of "'All reality' includes existence" or "God, a most perfect being, exists."

In order to explicate clearly Kant's argument, it would be best to reformulate the premise in question so as to emphasize its analytic character. If we take as an example of an analytic existential proposition the statement "God (an existent Being) is an existent Being," it must still be determined whether the term "God" functions as a class-concept or as the name of an individual. If it is a class-concept, the statement in question may be reformulated as "If anything is God (an existent Being), then it is an existent Being." Thus it cannot be a contradiction to conjoin to this statement the assertion, "But there is nothing which is God."

If, on the other hand, "God" functions as the name of a particular object, the statement in question may be reformulated as a definite description, "The existent Being which is God is an existent Being." If Kant's argument is now stated in terms of either of two contemporary theories of description, his point becomes clear, for on the basis of either of these theories it is still possible to assert, "God does not exist." For Russell's part of what "The

33Introduction to Mathematics, Chapter 16.
existent Being which is God is an existent Being" asserts is that there is one and only one Being which is God. The assertion that there is no Being which is God entails, on Russell's theory, that the above statement is false—just as, if there is no present king of France, the statement "The present king of France is the present king of France" is false. Thus, again no contradiction results from denying God's existence.

Strawson rejects Russell's analysis by maintaining that definite descriptions do not assert existence but only presuppose it. Unless the existence of God can be legitimately presupposed, the statement "The existent Being which is God is an existent Being" is "pointless", a "pseudo-proposition", and cannot be used to assert anything. Thus, on this theory as well, no contradiction results from denying (or at least refusing to assume) God's existence.

In either case, we may now safely conclude that the basic premise of the Ontological Argument, "All reality includes existence," is unsound—whether it be taken synthetically or analytically. Before passing on to his refutation of the Cosmological Proof, I should like to make certain comments on the Ontological Proof in the light of some perennial criticisms of Kant's analysis.

The most important of these criticisms fall into three main groups. Although I know of no one who has stated them all in this way, the following series of arguments express the main objections to Kant's refutation:

1. Kant's argument against the Ontological Proof is invalid.

2. Even if it were valid, this argument would be irrelevant.

3. Even if his criticisms were valid and relevant, Kant would be grossly inconsistent since a major portion of his philosophy depends upon an ontological-type proof. Each of these objections, it seems to me, ultimately proves to be untenable, but they contain the basic principles frequently employed in attempts to reinstate the Ontological Proof. They are thus particularly relevant to the final success or failure of Kant's critique of rational theology.

1. Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof is invalid, it is declared, because his argument that existence cannot be a real predicate is specious. Kant, of course, was not the first to be concerned with the function of "existence" in the Ontological Proof. As has been noted, Hume treats the concept of existence rather fully in his Treatise.\(^{34}\) Descartes also had to face the problem in

\(^{34}\)Book I, Part II, Chapter 6.
reply to an objection to his proof in the Fifth Meditation. Gassendi had remarked, "For though you properly enough compare essence with essence, in your next step it is neither existence with essence, nor property with property that you compare, but existence with property."35 To this Descartes summarily replied, "I do not see to what class of reality you wish to assign existence, nor do I see why it may not be said to be a property as well as omnipotence, taking the word "property" as equivalent to any attribute or anything which can be predicated of a thing, as in the present case it should be by all means regarded."36

We may find an excuse for Descartes' reply in the fact that no one had clearly argued the impossibility of existence being a predicate or property. Since the publication of the Critique of Pure Reason, however, surely no one who knew his Kant at all could defend the Ontological Proof by a similar statement. Unfortunately, there are still those who seem to have missed Kant's point completely. In a paper read before the Aristotelian Society in 1916, Albert A. Cock declared, "The (Ontological) Argument is


36 Ibid., p. 228.
wrongly represented as implying the addition of existence as a predicate. It is rather a demonstration of the invalidity of the subtraction thereof. . . ."37 He concludes this on the basis of the following considerations:

The argument does not attempt to add existence or reality to the content of the idea, though this is the usual (and Kantian) criticism of it. Rather it shows that for this one Idea the attempt to subtract reality from the content fails, for that content is reality. The onus is on the "Fool", by denying God he is attempting to subtract reality from reality, which is impossible. . . . If, then, Kant urges that the Ontological Argument is an unwarrantable, impossible, or meaningless addition, the answer is that the Fool's denial is the precedent cause; it is impossible and meaningless subtraction which is at fault.38

It is clearly evident from this that Cock completely misses Kant's point. Part of Kant's argument is that existence can neither be added nor subtracted. The "Fool" surely deserves his name if he allows that what he is trying to do is "subtract reality from reality".

Despite this glaring lack of insight, I find in Cock's statement the germ of an objection often urged against Kant. It is contended that all of Kant's arguments fail to prove that existence cannot be a predicate at least in


38 Ibid., p. 373.
the one case of importance to the Ontological Proof. Olle Herrlin, for example, begins his quite complete discussion of the Ontological Proof by maintaining that "existence does not belong to the content of concepts except for a single concept of God." W. R. Sorley makes the same point in his assertion that Kant's parable of the hundred dollars, like all examples of empirical existence, has no bearing whatever on the idea of God, a non-empirical existent.

Now it seems to me that this objection is completely fallacious since it fails to demonstrate a distinction between the idea of God and the idea of an empirical object which would require existence to be a predicate only in the case of the former. Kant's argument is not, as seems to be supposed in this objection, that existence need not be included in the concept of an empirical object, for this would surely provide a ground for discriminating between any such concept and the concept of God. His argument is that it is meaningless to speak of existence as a predicate or as included in a concept. The burden of proof thus


rests on the defenders of the Ontological Argument to specify some justification for speaking this way, except that it makes the Ontological Argument to specify some justification for speaking this way, except that it makes the Argument possible.

Before leaving this objection, it is necessary to mention two closely related senses of existence in which existence is a predicate. Neither of these senses can guarantee the conclusion of the Ontological Proof, but they do play a major part in the confusion which has generated this proof. In both of these senses it is impossible to separate the existence of God from the idea of Him, and this is what led Anselm and Descartes to suppose they had proved the very different proposition, "There is a God."

The first of these two senses is one in which the statement "God is a necessary Being, in the sense that His essence involves existence" is a perfectly sound theological proposition. "God is a necessary existent" is a perfectly meaningful assertion, and part of its function is to eliminate the propositions "There is a God, but there might not have been," and "There is no God, but there might have been." All that "God is a necessary existent" asserts is that if God exists, He necessarily exists. And this no more entails "There is a God" than "A centaur is a

contingent existent" entails "There is a centaur," or "The bombing of New York is an event" entails "New York is being or has been bombed." Part of the force of the Ontological Proof lies in the confusion of "God is a necessary existent" with "It is necessary that God exists." The first follows analytically from the definition of God; the second Kant argues, and I believe successfully, cannot be determined a priori.

The other sense of existence in which it sometimes functions as a predicate is closely related to the sense just mentioned. Both C. D. Broad and P. T. Geach point out the fact that it is possible to name an individual and then assert that the individual named is not—that is, does not exist. This is true when the individual once existed but no longer exists. We may say "Jones does not exist" and mean by this not "There is nothing which is Jones," but "The person named Jones is no longer alive." Geach's example is Jacob's statement in Genesis, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not." We cannot, however, say of God that He does not exist in this sense, namely, that He once existed but no longer does. This, of course, is

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42 Suggested by Willus Doney in a lecture on the Ontological Argument, Ohio State University, February 24, 1956.
45 Nietzsche's statement, "God is Dead" cannot be considered a contradiction of this conclusion since by this he means only that the belief in God is no longer legitimate. (continued on page 117.)
again a long way from proving that there is a God. Broad correctly points out that the most this sense of existence can do is to tempt us to compare a living person with a non-living one and then illegitimately imagine we have grounds for comparing an existent God with a non-existent one. A non-living person is a dead body and hence may be compared with other things, but a non-existent God cannot be compared with an existent one unless both are presumed to be entities which differ only in possessing the property of existence. This presumption Kant has successfully disallowed.

2. The second criticism frequently leveled against Kant's refutation is that it is irrelevant to one or more forms of the Ontological Proof. It is a common opinion among proponents of this proof that their own version is exempt from criticisms applicable to the rest. Duns Scotus and Leibnitz felt they had avoided Anselm's and Descartes' pitfall of not proving God to be possible. Descartes recognized Thomas Aquinas' criticism of Anselm, but regarded his own proof as exempt because he referred to concepts rather than to the meaning of words. Samuel Clarke, in turn, proposed a proof which in his estimation far surpassed that based on the nominal definition of a

most perfect Being. Even Kant, as we have seen, advocated in an earlier essay a form of the Ontological Argument not subject, he thought, to the defects of his predecessors' reasoning. Since Kant, philosophers like Bosanquet,\(^{47}\) W. E. Hocking,\(^{48}\) A. S. Pringle-Pattison,\(^{49}\) and R. G. Collingwood\(^{50}\) have expressed the opinion that the Ontological Argument properly interpreted is safe from the destructive force of Kant's Critique.

A complete treatment of this last claim would require an examination of almost the whole history of modern epistemology and metaphysics. I think it originated with Hegel's identification of The Truth, All-Reality, and Self-completed Thought and is the special concern of idealists generally.\(^{51}\) The Ontological Argument which Hegel advocates (except where it directly contradicts

\(^{47}\) The Principle of Individuality and Value (London: 1912), p. 80n.


Kant's conclusions is not an argument at all, it seems to me, but only a grand assertion of a basic philosophical presupposition concerning the ultimate intelligibility of the real. Also, whatever "notion" of the Absolute derives from Hegel's speculation, it is doubtful that it could be specifically identified as the God of the traditional Ontological Proof.

Rather than pursue this issue any further, however, I shall restrict myself to discussing the two-fold assertion that Kant's refutation is irrelevant to (1) the original Anselmian version of the Ontological Argument, and (2) a reconstruction of that argument as made by Charles Hartshorne.

In discussing Anselm, I do not want to enter the controversy over whether or not he intended his statements in the Proslogium to be a formal demonstration. For my own

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52 Hegel's statements about the "Notion" of Pure Being being a mere abstraction and requiring specification by means of the attributes of God does not seem to me to avoid at all Kant's restriction of knowledge of the transcendent by way of the Ontological Proof. (Hegel's version of this proof is given in Hegel's Encyclopedia, pp. 49-51, "The Second Attitude of Thought towards the Objective World," Wallace translation, quoted by Wm. T. Harris in "Kant's Refutation of the Ontological Proof for the Existence of God," Journal of Speculative Philosophy, XV, p. 427.)

53 See Herrlin, op. cit., pp. 31-41.
part, I am convinced that he did. I am more interested in the claims that Kant could not have had Anselm's proof in mind when he wrote the Critique, and that his own epistemological position would have kept him from seeing the truth of this proof had he considered it.

In a sense, I want to admit the truth of these claims without granting them any serious effect upon Kant's analysis. Kant clearly had in mind the Descartes-Leibnitz-Wolff version of the Ontological Proof. He nowhere refers to Anselm nor suggests his form of the proof. Yet Kant must have known of Anselm's argument and regarded it as equally subject to his restrictive comments. And he was right in this, despite the fact that his own epistemology prohibited him from appreciating Anselm's reasoning.

Anselm's argument depends upon a platonistic solution to the paradox of reference, a solution which Kant could never accept. When we say, "X does not exist," the paradox

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54 In the preface Anselm states that he had earnestly sought "a single argument which...alone would demonstrate that God truly exists," and after despairing of ever attaining this goal, he finally discovered such a proof which he offers in the opening chapters. (pp.1 and 2) Also, Anselm did not feel it necessary to rebuke his contemporary critic, Gaunilo, when the latter saw fit to consider his statements as a demonstration.

55 Herrlin, op. cit., p. 17.

56 Cock, op. cit., p. 368.
of reference arises from the apparent logical fact that if the sentence is meaningful, it is false, since there must be something to which "X" refers. From a close look at Anselm's argument, it is clear that he would solve this paradox by positing a realm of subsistent entities which exist "in the understanding." The "fool" who denies God's existence understands the meaning of the term "God"—a Being than which none greater can be conceived. What the fool is asserting, Anselm argues, is that God, who exists in the understanding, does not also exist in reality, because this is what the denial of any existent amounts to. The fool is a fool because he does not realize that if God exists only in the understanding, then a Being greater than God can be conceived. A Being which exists in the understanding and in reality is certainly greater than one which exists only in the understanding. If God does not exist in reality, therefore, something greater than "a Being than which none greater can be conceived" can be conceived, which is an express contradiction.

It can be seen that Anselm's argument depends upon the possibility of comparing an existent with a non-exist­ent categorically. X in reality is greater than X in the understanding only. Despite Broad's contention that such

57 Proslogion, Open Court ed., p. 7.
a comparison can be performed only conditionally, Anselm could claim justification by means of his presupposition that "'X' is meaningful but X does not exist in reality" entails "X exists in the understanding". Now I see no reason, beyond its use in the Ontological Argument, for accepting this presupposition, nor do I see how its use at all exempts Anselm's argument from Kant's refutation. Kant would solve the paradox of reference by maintaining that "X does not exist" means simply "There is no X." Besides this, Anselm wants to compare subsistent entities with respect to existence and, hence, his proof would still be subject to Kant's denial that existence can be a predicate.

The other attempt to avoid Kant's refutation, that I wish to mention is a relatively recent one given by Charles Hartshorne in his book, Man's Vision of God. Hartshorne's version of the Ontological Proof certainly is not new (that anything to do with this proof should be really new is quite

58 Op. Cit., p. 23, i.e., "If there were a centaur, it would be faster than any man and more rational than any horse."

59 See Kant's essay, "The Only Possible Ground for the Demonstration of God's Existence," Essays and Treatises, p. 234; See also, The Critique of Pure Reason, A599; B627.

60 (New York: Willett, Clark and Co., 1941), pp.299-341.
unlikely). It is at least as old as Duns Scotus and is best known in the works of Leibniz. Cudworth, however, probably stated the argument in its simplest form in 1678. We rightly believe, he argues, that self-contradictory things are impossible, and therefore they "never were nor will be." Things not impossible but only imperfect, we pronounce to be contingent and say that "they might be, or might not be." In like manner it is only reasonable to conclude that a perfect being, known to be neither impossible nor contingent, but necessary, "certainly is, and cannot but be." Square-circles cannot exist; a man may or may not exist; God must exist.

Hartshorne's argument is not essentially different from Cudworth's. It is more complex, since it tries to make use of a Hegelian-type presupposition that "at some point potentiality and actuality must touch, and at some


point meaning must imply existence." What is really worth noting in Hartshorne's argument is his denial of Kant's objection that all that is proved is the hypothetical tautology, "If the necessary Being exists, it exists necessarily". Hartshorne admits that the Ontological Argument is hypothetical. It says, "If 'God' stands for something conceivable, it stands for something actual." But, he goes on to say, Kant's objection not only makes the argument appear ludicrous, but is itself based

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64 Op. cit., pp. 306-7. The argument is complex for other reasons as well. For example, "If all individuals are contingent, . . . it might be true (though nonsensical) that there was nothing of which any proposition would be true." (p. 310.) If the proposition after the word "that" is nonsensical, I fail to see how "it might be true."

65 I do not mean to imply that this is Hartshorne's only interesting point. A line by line analysis of his whole ninth chapter would provide an excellent illustration of the treachery involved in trying to juggle the concepts employed by the Ontological Proof. As an example, I cite the following paragraph from pages 317 and 318 on perfection and existence. "It is said by logicians to be absurd to say, 'The such and such (or the perfect) exists'. We must say, There is an X, an individual, such that it has a certain property. Thus: there is an X such that X is perfect (omniscient, etc.). Now the Ontological Argument merely holds that if this proposition is false, then perfection is imperfection. For if there is no perfect X, then perfection is either a meaningless term, or it means the mere possibility of perfection; but the mere possibility of perfection implies that perfection could come into being, or be produced or have its being derivatively from whatever it is that constitutes its 'possibility' and this amounts to saying that perfection could come into being as imperfection."
on a self-contradictory assumption, which states, "If the necessary Being happens to exist, that is, if as mere contingent fact, it exists, then it exists not as contingent fact but as necessary truth." Instead of this nonsense," Hartshorne argues, "we must say, 'If the phrase necessary Being has a meaning, then what it means exists necessarily, and if it exists necessarily, then, a fortiori, it exists.'

Only the briefest of comments is required to point out the fallacy in Hartshorne's argument. It consists of the same amphibolous use of terms that Kant attacked in the application of the necessity of judgments to the existence of things. Descartes confused the propositions "God is necessary" and "It is necessary that God is." Hartshorne makes the same mistake with "God might not exist" and "It might be that God does not exist." Let it be granted that God is neither impossible nor contingent. All that the arguments of Cudworth, Leibnitz, and Hartshorne prove is that if there is a God, there always was and ever will be, and if there isn't, there never was nor never will be. Let it also be granted (though this is conceding more than Kant would allow) that we cannot say "God does not exist" or "God might not exist". It is still perfectly meaningful

66 Hartshorne, op. cit., p. 312.

67 Ibid., pp. 312-13.
to assert that the proposition "There is a God" is possibly false, even though we cannot know that it is actually false. The Ontological Argument which argues the necessary truth of this proposition, is refuted just as completely by a demonstration that there are no good grounds for believing it as by a proof of its falsity. Hartshorne's restatement of the argument is as susceptible as all earlier versions to Kant's comment that God's existence "while not indeed such as we can declare to be absolutely impossible, is of the nature of an assumption which we can never be in a position to justify." 68

3. The first two assertions that Kant's refutation of the Ontological Proof is invalid and irrelevant have thus proved to be groundless. The last point of attack is to insist on Kant's inconsistency in repudiating an argument which he himself uses on other occasions. This surely is a weak defense of the Ontological Proof even if it is true that Kant's philosophy requires the validity of such a proof. Nevertheless, it does weigh heavily on the value of Kant's complete position and, thus, deserves to be considered.

This objection maintains that Kant employs ontological-type arguments in two places. The first of these is in

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68 *Critique*, A601; B629.
positing the noumenal world of things-in-themselves in the first *Critique*,\(^{69}\) and the second is in postulating a moral lawgiver in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.\(^{70}\) It is true, of course, that Kant does arrive at the existence of a noumenal world a priori. This world is necessary to ground the world of appearance and shares the transcendental reality of the forms of intuition and the Categories of the Understanding. Kant makes his mistake in saying more about the noumenal than his principles allow\(^{71}\) and, thus, implying a transcendent application of the Categories. But, excepting these slips of the pen, things-in-themselves are no more ontological existents than the categories. Both are only transcendentally real—that is, principles necessary to a complete determination of the knowledge-situation. Kant effectively repudiates any attempt to specify properties either of the objective world or of the transcendental "I" of apperception in his discussion of the Antinomies.

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\(^{69}\) Herrlin, *op. cit.*, p. 54 ff.


\(^{71}\) For instance, that phenomena are "affected" by things-in-themselves and that space and time are not "objective determinations inherent in things." (A38; B55). Kant recognizes the apparent similarity between the Concepts of Reason's Ideal and the Thing-in-itself, but he denies that the latter requires a transcendent use of the categories. *Critique*. A696; B724.
and the Paralogisms of Pure Reason. Any supposed Ontological Argument concerning these entities is thus doomed from the start to produce only empty concepts which cannot increase our knowledge one degree.

The other part of this objection—that Kant employs an ontological-type proof in the Critique of Practical Reason—will have to wait until the discussion of the "moral argument" for God in Chapter VII. Let it merely be said here that I think this objection arises from a misconception. This misconception supposes that "if Kant's criticism of the Ontological Argument is to stand, then it must be consistently extended and applied to everything a priori, and particularly to that a priori which he valued above all else, viz., the moral law." This is a misconception because, in the first place, the moral law, for Kant, is necessary to render the unique experience of moral obligation intelligible and, hence, its foundation is not at all the same as reason's attempt to spin a transcendent existent out of the yarn of its own ideas alone. In the second place, Kant expressly rejects the possibility of any theoretical use of practical reason's postulate of God. To say that Kant allows God's existence to be inferred from the concept of the highest good is to distort the moral

72Cock, op. cit., p. 372.
argument into an ontological form. The Ontological Proof claims to prove the noumenal reality of a transcendent object, but the moral argument makes no such exalted claim. Its only task is to justify the postulation of this object. And this postulate is not a proof but the decision to affirm a wise Author of the world, determined by a subjective need for a consistent moral theory. I leave any further amplification this point requires to the discussion of Chapter VII.

II

I have tried thus far in this section to indicate why I consider Kant's analysis to contain a complete and adequate refutation of the Ontological Proof—something I could not conclude in the preceding discussion of Hume. I pass on now to the Cosmological Proof which Kant took much less pains to refute, believing as he did that it required the Ontological Proof to be complete and, thus, was subject to all the objections already raised against that argument.

The Cosmological Proof, Kant says, attempts to employ no non-empirical premise but to reason solely from the conditions of all possible experience to the existence of

73 Critique of Practical Reason, V, 146.
God. Like the Ontological Proof, his statement of it may be given in three steps:

S1) If anything exists, there must be an absolutely necessary Being.

S2) There must be a necessary Being.

S3) God necessarily exists.

Demonstration of these steps is as follows:

Proof of S1: If anything exists, there must be an absolutely necessary Being.

a) Anything which exists must be either a necessary Being or a contingent being.

b) If whatever exists is a contingent being, it is dependent upon some other being which is itself either contingent or necessary, and so on.

c) A series of contingent beings requires a necessary Being for completeness.

d) .*. If anything exists, there must be an absolutely necessary Being.

Proof of S2: There must be a necessary Being.

a) If anything exists, there must be a necessary Being.

b) I, at least, exist.

c) .*. There must be a necessary Being.

Proof of S3: God necessarily exists.

a) There must be a necessary Being.
b) The necessary Being must possess one out of every pair of possible predicates.

c) There is only one Being which can be said to possess one out of every pair of possible predicates—namely, the *ens realissimum*, God.

d) * God must be the necessary Being.

e) * God necessarily exists.

Kant has three main criticisms of this proof. The first is that the notion of a necessary Being may be meaningless. The second is that it covertly assumes the validity of the Ontological Proof in the final step, although it professes to be independent of this proof. The third is that the first step, which seeks to demonstrate that if anything exists, there must be an absolutely necessary Being, is based upon an illegitimate use of the Categories of the Understanding.

1. In introducing the Ontological Proof of God's existence, Kant noted a difficulty in the concept of a necessary Being which weighs heavily against the Cosmological Proof.\(^7\) We ought to ask, he says, whether the mere possession of a verbal formula of a necessary unconditioned object warrants the belief that such a concept possesses positive meaning? The verbal definition of this concept

\(^7\) *Critique*, A593: B621.
is easy to give—"something the non-existence of which is impossible or unthinkable." The difficulty arises when the attempt is made to specify the exact meaning of this concept. The verbal formula certainly does not reveal any of the properties of a necessary Being which make its non-existence unthinkable. In fact, these properties seem rather to be merely the conditions of reason's demand for completeness.

Does the concept of the unconditionally necessary have any meaning at all? Descartes would certainly answer affirmatively since he claims knowledge of the finite presupposes knowledge of the infinite; knowledge of the limited presupposes knowledge of the unlimited; and, thus, knowledge of the conditioned presupposes knowledge of the unconditioned—thereby guaranteeing the meaningfulness of the unconditioned.\(^75\) Kant, however, has strong doubts concerning this method of determining the meaning of the unconditioned. His analysis is close to Hume's\(^76\) and states that our knowledge of the infinite may be obtained by "augmenting" our idea of the finite and our knowledge of the unconditioned by "diminishing" the "conditions which the understanding indispensably requires in order to regard

\(^75\)Meditation III, Dover, I, 166.

\(^76\)Enquiry, Selby-Bigge ed., p. 19.
something as necessary."77 Thus, the question must be faced as to whether I am thinking anything in the concept of the unconditioned except the conditioned with all conditions removed--that is, nothing.

2. Even if we allow the concept of a necessary Being to be meaningful, Kant continues, the Cosmological Proof by itself is unable to demonstrate the existence of God. Steps one and two of the proof yield only the "concept of absolute necessity, but are unable to demonstrate this necessity as belonging to any determinate thing."78 In order to accomplish this, reason (in step three) must fall back on the Ontological Proof to determine from an examination of concepts alone that the idea of the ens realissimum is the only one which is completely adequate to the concept of a necessary Being. Against this step all the force of Kant's critique of the first proof may be brought to bear. He thus concludes that, since the Cosmological Proof "owes any cogency it may have to the Ontological Proof," it cannot succeed where the other has failed.

3. Besides this deceptive appearance of being an independent proof, the Cosmological Argument has the added

77Critique, A593; B621.

78Critique, A607; B635.
defect of concealing a "whole nest of dialectical assumptions." Kant merely mentions four of these. The first two express an attempt to make the principles of empirical knowledge reach beyond experience to determine the limits of reality. It is this very attempt which Kant has criticized in the Antinomies. In order to arrive at a necessary Being, reason first assumes that every contingent event must have a cause and then infers a first cause from the impossibility of an infinite series of causes. Although the arguments in support of these principles are formally valid, their presumptive character is revealed in the possibility of constructing equally valid and equally plausible arguments to prove just the opposite conclusions.

The third and fourth assumptions of the Cosmological Proof depend upon reason's hypostatization of the principle of necessity into the concept of an individual Being. As Kant previously points out, for all we know, the necessity seemingly required by the totality of conditioned events may reside in some limited being and not in God at all.\(^7^9\) Reason, however, seeking a complete determination of this concept, first removes all limitations from it and then

\(^7^9\)As Kant allows in discussing the 1st, 3rd, and 4th Antinomies.

\(^8^0\)C*rite*que*, A588; B616.
infers, from the logical possibility of an all real Being, the unity of unconditioned necessity and all reality in a single individual. Although this process is quite natural, it is not, therefore, certain. The addition of the empirical premise, "I at least exist," does not alter the fact that "the concept of an absolutely necessary Being is a concept of pure reason, that is, a mere idea the objective reality of which is very far from being proved by the fact that reason requires it. For the idea instructs us only in regard to a certain unattainable completeness, and so serves rather to limit the understanding than to extend it to new objects." 

Although there have been many criticisms of Kant's refutation of the Cosmological Proof, only one appears to me to be worth mentioning here. This is the objection

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81 Critique, A615; B643.

82 Critique, A592; B620.

83 Two others are interesting because, although made by usually competent critics, they are incorrect. (1) Olle Herrlin argues that Kant failed to see that the statement "ens necessarium is ens realissimum" is an existential, not a logical judgment. "Metaphysics can show," he says, "that the existence of finite things implicates the existence of ens necessarium and can later give this being such determinations as satisfy the expression 'ens necessarium is ens realissimum'." (Op. cit., p. 49) Kant, of course, did not "fail" to see this. The only way "ens necessarium is ens realissimum" can be justified is by an (continued on page 136)
that Kant was mistaken in regarding the Cosmological Proof as only a veiled form of the Ontological Argument.  

Traditional proponents of these arguments have frequently held them to be independent and have not regarded the determination of the necessary Being as the most perfect Being as a necessary step in the Cosmological Proof. It is true, of course, that this proof alone does not yield an essentially monotheistic conclusion. Kant is correct in maintaining that it cannot prove there is only one Supreme

83(cont'd) a priori examination of pure concepts, and this Kant argues cannot succeed.

(2) Norman Kemp Smith criticizes Kant for contradicting himself in discussing the force the idea of necessity has as a regulative principle. (A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, London: 1918, pp. 536-7.) Kant, he says, in discussing the "Dialectical Illusion in all Transcendental Proofs" allows that reason requires only the principle of necessary cause as its ideal, whereas in the introductory sections of "The Ideal of Pure Reason" reason required the idea of a personal God. I think this fact, while true, is perfectly explainable in light of the context of these assertions. Within the limits of empirical knowledge and its foundations, reason need seek completeness only through some principle of necessity which grounds the contingent events of experience. (A617; B645.) But reason is impelled by other motives beside the desire for epistemological completeness. It must also recognize the pleas of moral experience and the need for a complete moral theory. When it does so, the principle of necessity is transformed into the necessary personal Being, God.


Being, but he is wrong in asserting that even if valid, it does not prove the existence of any determinate being.\textsuperscript{85} We may conclude, then, that Kant has shown that, even if it were valid, the Cosmological Proof would be incomplete without the Ontological, but he has not shown that it would be worthless.

In this chapter I have attempted to present the arguments of Hume and Kant against the possibility of a priori knowledge of God in their most complete and decisive form. Hume's reasoning I have found to be less satisfactory than Kant's but, on the other hand, none of Kant's arguments are incompatible with Hume's principles. They both regard the a priori proofs of God's existence as completely barren, and in my judgment the reasons they put forth for believing so cannot be seriously challenged. Their arguments, however, concerning the empirical evidence for religious knowledge, to which I now turn, reveal neither the same degree of agreement nor the same precision in analysis as were evident in the present and preceding chapters.

\textsuperscript{85}\textit{Nelson, op. cit.}, p. 286.
CHAPTER IV
THE INSUFFICIENCY OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE
FOR RELIGIOUS TRUTH

Part I: Hume

In pursuing their examination of religious knowledge, Hume and Kant both realize that there is a large area of justification for such knowledge which is not completely subject to the logical techniques so successfully employed by them in refuting the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs. Despite the wide variety of forms which particular arguments within this area take, they can all be characterized by the appeal to some ultimate data of empirical evidence. By "empirical evidence" I mean "identifiable segments of experience which compel belief". The accent in this definition is on the word "experience". The a priori proofs of God's existence attempted to demonstrate their conclusion with as little reference to experience as possible. A posteriori reasoning concerning God seeks instead to ground its conclusions upon the evidence of observable facts which are subject, in principle, to the usual methods of empirical verification.

Is there any such evidence for religious truth? At least the belief that there is is as old as man's interest
in religion. What aspect of nature or life did the primitive animist not regard as a sign of supernatural agents? The sun and the moon, thunder and lightning, birth and death, sickness and health all revealed to him the undeniable presence of spirits who required homage in the form of sacrifice and offerings. As the human race matured in rationality, the value of simplicity exercised a natural prerogative over man's religious beliefs, and the notion of a great number of immediately present divinities was gradually exchanged for a broader concept of a single Deity usually acting through intervening natural laws.

But the popular belief that the supernatural is definitely confirmed by empirical evidence persisted through this refinement of doctrine. In the Old Testament, Elijah and the prophets of Baal are willing to place the whole issue of God's existence on an empirical basis. The test conditions are agreed upon: alters are built on Mount Carmel, and "The God that answers by fire, let Him be God." Since it is Elijah's offering that is consumed, it is concluded by all observers that Jehovah and not Baal is really God.1 The Psalmist, though less dramatic than

1I Kings 18:19-39.
Elijah, was just as convinced that God's existence is an empirical matter: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork."

These two quotations from the Old Testament not only indicate the long history of the empirical approach to God's existence, but also characterize the two main paths which this approach has taken. The first of these paths is basic to natural religion's claim to provide knowledge of God founded solely on reason and experience. It regards as evidence of God's existence the general character of nature and the universe. From the design, order, and purpose in the world we can infer the existence of a divine Planner or Designer. The second path of the empirical approach is exemplified in Elijah's appeal to a particular event which disrupts the usual course of nature. This method is less direct than the argument from the general order of the world because it usually is employed to authenticate a particular revelation which in turn testifies as to the existence and nature of God. Miracles play the most prominent part in this way of reasoning, but prophecies and answers to prayer must also be considered.

2Psalms 19:1. The writer of the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament records his faith in the Argument from Design (Chapter 3, Verse 4): "For every house is builded by some man; but He that built all things is God."
In discussing Hume's and Kant's comments on the empirical evidence for God's existence, I shall try to keep these two different paths separate. In Hume's case, at least, this is not entirely possible because much of his argument against miracles depends upon a prior rejection of all other grounds for religious belief. In discussing Hume, therefore, I shall reverse the order in which he published his comments on the empirical approach to God and discuss first his criticism of the Argument from Design and then his examination of the evidence for miracles. The same procedure will be employed for Kant in the next chapter.

I

Before beginning the discussion of Hume's criticism of the Argument from Design, it is necessary to indicate briefly the general plan of his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. The Dialogues are divided into twelve parts, but the course of the discussion seems to indicate five major steps in the argument. The first step is comprised of Pamphilus' brief remarks to Hermippus concerning the appropriateness of the dialogue form for the subject of natural religion and most of Part I in which complete skepticism is ruled out as a legitimate basis of reasoning. The important point of Part I is, I think, Philo's subtle
attempt to disassociate his criticism of natural religion from the much broader skeptical principles of Hume's epistemology. Cleanthes tries to force the issue at hand into a choice between only three alternatives: (1) skeptical dogmatism which refuses to trust reason in empirical matters yet at the same time affirms "the most absurd tenets which a traditional superstition has recommended," (2) plebeian skepticism whose devotee, secluded from common life, works himself into an enthusiasm of doubt and disbelief but on leaving his study, cannot "persevere in this total skepticism or make it appear in his conduct for a few hours," and (3) "experimental theism" in which assent is proportioned "to the precise degree of evidence which occurs" not only in all "natural, mathematical, moral, and political science," but in theology and religion as well. After agreeing that Cleanthes' first and second alternatives are unsatisfactory, Philo seeks in the remaining parts of the Dialogues to refute the belief that a sensible confidence in the adequacy of reason and experience for matters of common life warrants their employment in theological speculation.

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3Dialogues, p. 136. Cleanthes clearly would like to put Demea in this class.

4Ibid., pp. 132-2. This is not an unfair characterization of Hume himself as he appears in the "Conclusion" of Book I of the Treatise. (Selby-Bigge ed., pp. 263-4.)

5Ibid., p. 137.

6Ibid., pp. 134-5.
In Part II of the Dialogues Cleanthes states the main Argument from Design which is then examined and re-examined up through Part VIII. This is the second step of the argument and is that portion of the Dialogues with which this chapter will be directly concerned. Step three is the discussion of the a priori arguments and objections to them in Part IX which I treated in Chapter II. The problem of evil and its consequences for natural theology in Parts X and XI comprise the fourth step, and step five is the re-evaluation of the notion of natural design and its relevance to the principles of religion.

These five steps I take to embody the essential points of Hume's case against natural religion. Put as simply as possible, his argument consists of this. (A) The Argument from Design is incapable of proving the existence of God even if the logical foundation of empirical principles be granted. (B) Although the Argument from Design is invalid, the belief in a Designer is not without authority. (C) The concept of God which derives from the belief in design is without theological significance: no practical or speculative consequences ought to issue from it. (D) Whatever consequences do issue from it are injurious both to reason and to morality.

Points C and D of this argument properly concern Hume's view of the relation between morality and religion.
and, thus, will be deferred until Chapter VI. I am interested here only in his analysis of the Argument from Design. In discussing this argument, I shall first present the main points of Cleanthes' analogy between the universe and a machine and then list what I regard as Philo's primary criticisms of this analogy. Following this I shall argue that Hume suggests in the Dialogues not one Argument from Design but three—or, rather, two arguments and another consideration which is not an argument at all. I shall indicate how he handles each of these and discuss some of the objections which can, and some which cannot, be made against his reasoning.

In Parts I and II of the Dialogues Cleanthes manifests some amusement but more irritation over Demea's pious, and Philo's pseudo-pious, declarations of the "adorable mysteriousness" of God. God is unknowable for Demea and Philo because they both deny the relevance of empirical fact to a proper conception of Him. But this denial, Cleanthes claims, is a falsification of the actual case.

7I shall also draw from Section XI of the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding for amplification of the objections to the Argument from Design.

8Throughout my discussion of the Dialogues I take Hume's position to be represented mainly by Philo. I am postponing any defense of this assumption until Chapter VIII. At any rate, the argument I have stated above in the four steps, A, B, C, and D, is what I regard as the logical outcome of the Dialogues, and this is what I identify as Hume's position.

9Dialogues, pp. 132 and 143.
The principles of theology are on an equal footing with those of science. No truly rational person would deny the sufficiency of human reason to discover laws of nature, because belief is proportioned to evidence in matters of science. Why then, he asks, should this rule of procedure be rejected in matters of theology and religion. Let experience be the judge and the usual modes of inferring unknown causes from their effects be the method, and knowledge of God will be as reliable as "the arguments of Copernicus and Galileo for the motion of the earth."

Cleanthes then proceeds to state the empirical Argument from Design. This argument has four principle propositions:

1. An unbiased inspection of nature reveals immediately the curious adaptation of means to ends throughout the whole universe.

2. The presence of such order and harmony in nature reveals the universe to be "nothing but one great machine" which "resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance."

3. By the rule of analogy, "From similar effects we infer similar causes," we know that effect (1), the world, is to cause (1), God, as effect (2), a machine, is to

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10Ibid., p. 136.
11Ibid., p. 143.
12Ibid., p. 146.
cause (2), man.

4. Therefore, "the Author of nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man" in design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence; "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," Cleanthes concludes, "we do prove at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence." 13

Should anyone be disposed to quibble about this argument, Cleanthes adds, to refute him it would only be necessary to cite numerous illustrations, examples, and instances. The similarity of the works of nature to those of human art is self-evident and undeniable. He then gives two illustrations to prove his point. The first is the supposition of a voice from the sky, speaking to every nation in its own language and expressing a message of great importance. 14 The inference of an intelligent cause of this voice would be no less certain that inferring the presence of some person upon hearing a voice in a dark room. An objection can be raised concerning the lack of similarity between the heavenly voice and a human one just as the

13 Ibid., p. 146.

14 Ibid., pp. 152-3.
same objection is directed toward the similarity of nature and a machine, but this objection is really irrelevant, since only certain similarities are required to make the inference of an intelligent cause valid. These similarities surely would be manifest in a rational, wise, and coherent speech, no matter how unusual the voice might be in other respects.

By his second illustration, the vegetable and animal library, Cleanthes seeks to prove that regardless of the immediate cause, some facts require the ultimate influence of design and intelligence. Suppose, he says, that books grew on trees or arose from the usual methods of animal reproduction. Still it would be absurd, upon reflecting on the intricacies of a particular volume, to deny that its original cause possessed some degree of thought and design. This absurdity is even greater in the actual case of design in nature. Vegetation and generation are two of the immediately operating causes in nature, but their effects, plants and animals, reveal even stronger instances of design than books do. The conclusion is clear. The skeptic must choose between the alternatives: "assert either that a rational volume is no proof of a rational cause, or admit of a similar cause to all the works of

15Ibid., p. 153.
nature." If he chooses to disregard design and deny a Designer, he reveals his objections to be as artificial as those which deny the general validity of sense perception. The feeling of design which arises from examining the structure of the eye, the propagation of each species, and the course of the planets possesses an irresistible force like that of sensation. "To what degree, therefore, of blind dogmatism must one have attained," Cleanthes asks, "to reject such natural and such convincing arguments?" 17

At the conclusion of Cleanthes' speech near the end of Part III, Pamphilus remarks that Philo appeared "a little embarrassed and confounded." And well he might be. Cleanthes' arguments are indeed "natural and convincing", but for all that they are inadequate. Hume's perplexing problem was how to have Philo reply to these arguments with some semblance of completeness and yet not have the discussion degenerate into the citing of instances and counter instances of design in nature. He would like to say, of course, that the traditional notion of God is meaningless, since meaning is dependent upon experience and we have no experience of God. 18 But Philo cannot say this after Cleanthes has specified an apparently empirical

17 Ibid., p. 154.

18 Ibid., pp. 142-3.
meaning for the concept of God. He must instead begin a
detailed criticism of that part of Cleanthes' argument
which he himself had emphasized in a restatement of the
analogy between the universe and a machine.\(^\text{19}\) This argu­
ment depends upon the following points:

1. *By experience* we know there is design in nature.

2. *By experience* we know from human productions that
design arises only from intelligence.

3. *By analogy* we infer a divine Mind from nature
just as we infer a human mind from a machine.

Philo's objections to this argument concern two points:
the basis of the inference and its consequences. The
basis of the inference he criticizes for four reasons:

1. Its similarity to the usual inductive methods of
determining causes is an illusion since the universe is
not a repeatable instance of a species.

2. The analogy is weak because of a disparity be­
tween the effects—the universe and a machine.

3. The analogy is inconclusive because other analo­
gies equally faithful to experience are possible.

4. The inference of a divine Mind is invalid because
other sources of order besides mind are observed in ex­
perience.

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 146. I shall comment later on the fact
that Philo's restatement rules out one whole argument for
God's existence from the order in nature. See p. 146, below.
In addition to these defects, the consequences of the Argument from Design, Philo argues, are all unfavorable to the purpose for which it is employed. He makes the following three points:

5. The inference from design results only in the dilemma of an infinite regress of causes or an arbitrary halt at a divine Mind.

6. Even if a divine Designer be proved, He cannot be legitimately identified with the God of theology.

7. The conclusion of the argument has no religious or speculative value.

The presentation and defense of these criticism carries the discussion up through Part VIII. I shall briefly state the main reasons for each and note Cleanthes' objection before passing on to a critical examination of the structure and validity of Hume's case against the Argument from Design.

1. Part of the force of Cleanthes' inference is its similarity to the ordinary inductive procedure of determining a cause from the observation of its effects. When we see a house, we justly infer a builder because we have had repeated experiences of houses being built by men. But this cannot be the case with regard to the universe because we have not experienced many universes nor have we

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20 *Dialogues*, p. 144.
been directly aware of the creation of natural order by intelligence. Causal inference requires knowledge of the relation supposedly holding between a species of a certain effect and the species of its cause. If we try to infer a cause or effect from a single experience, we in fact reason a priori and not by experience at all. We can have no more knowledge of the cause or effect of a unique event than Adam could have had of the suffocating power of water when he first observed it. The best we can pretend to in such cases is a guess or conjecture derived from whatever remotely similar situations we may have experienced. That the total universe is even remotely similar to some minute part of it, seems a tenuous claim at best.

Cleanthes' objection that the same criticism would apply equally well against Copernicus' argument for the motion of the earth is quickly dispatched by Philo. Contrary to Cleanthes' assertion, we do have experience of other planets besides the earth. The motion ascribed by astronomers to this earth was confirmed by observation of these other planets, and, conversely, by the same means the uniformity between celestial and terrestrial substances was also proved. But can any such uniformity between the

21 An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Selby-Bigge ed., p. 27.
22 Ibid., p. 151.
universe and a house or machine be argued intelligibly? Such argument would require experience of the creation of worlds and the first arrangement of elements. Philo challenges Cleanthes to cite such experience before he delivers his theory.\(^{23}\)

2. If the Argument from Design is not strictly an inductive inference, what is it? Cleanthes argues that it is an analogy based not on the origin of worlds, but on the undeniable evidence of adaptation in nature. The universe and human contrivances are similar in the fact that the adaptation of means to ends is present in both.

The trouble is, Philo objects, that each closer look at the basis of this analogy weakens it as a foundation of the inference from design to God. In the first place, the adaptation in nature experienced by men is a very small part of the total events in the universe. In the second place, there are other observable aspects of nature besides design. Some of these aspects, such as heat and cold, if not contrary to design, are at least neutral concerning it.\(^{24}\) These two factors weaken the similarity between the universe and a machine and consequently, undermine the analogy based upon such a similarity.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 151.

\(^{24}\)Dialogues, pp. 147-8.
3. A more serious objection still is the possibility of suggesting alternative analogies which appear to be just as faithful to the data of experience. Instead of conceiving the universe as a huge machine, Philo asks in Part VI, why may we not regard it as an animal? The only experience we have of mind is in intimate connection with body. Therefore, if we reason solely from experience, God could only be described as the soul of the universe. Pantheism thus becomes a more probable metaphysical system than traditional theism.

It is at this point (among others) that Cleanthes fails to reveal that "accurate philosophical turn" which Pamphilus accredits to him in the introduction. Instead of objecting to Philo's implicit point that alternative analogies weaken the Argument from Design, Cleanthes proceeds to reject Philo's analogy and suggest a further alternative of his own. The world, he says, cannot be like an animal since it has "no organs of sense; no seat of thought or reason; no one precise origin of motion and action." It bears a stronger resemblance to a vegetable than to an animal. What Cleanthes fails to realize is that

25 Ibid., p. 169.
26 Ibid., p. 128.
27 Ibid., p. 170.
each alternative analogy, which even appears plausible, reduces the probability of his comparison between the universe and a machine. He, in fact, actually succeeds in strengthening Philo's argument which maintains that if the universe is like an animal's body, the order in it is probably due to unconscious inherent principles. This is even more plainly so if the universe is like an overgrown cabbage—as Cleanthes suggests—since we can infer reason in animals but not in a vegetable.

Cleanthes thinks, however, that despite the initial plausibility of these alternative analogies, the attempt to consider the principles of order as inherent in nature requires a presupposition which can be easily refuted. This presupposition is the eternity of the world, and its refutation consists of the fact that if the past history of the world were eternal, every possible event would already have occurred. He cites two examples whose late occurrence cannot be reconciled with infinite past time. The first is the "vulgar argument" against the eternity of the world from the late origin of the arts and sciences. The second and better foundation of this argument is the late introduction of cherry-trees into Europe. To

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28 See "Reason In Animals", An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Selby-Bigge ed., Sec. IX.

29 Dialogues, p. 172.

30 Ibid., pp. 172-3.
suppose that in all the revolutions of a past eternity these natural and almost inevitable events would not have occurred is as ridiculous as imagining that in ten thousand years of wearing stockings no one would think of garters to hold them up.\textsuperscript{31}

Philo, in answering this argument, states two main objections to it. The first is that it is invalid, and the second is that it is irrelevant. It is invalid because it presupposes a finite number of events and a uniform course of history, whereas in fact the second of these is pretty plainly false and the first is at least as uncertain as its contrary. Nature's long delay in producing European cherry-trees is completely compatible with the convulsive history of the earth. Whatever particular examples of order are discoverable in nature now may have occurred and been destroyed innumerable times in the past. Or they may never have occurred before simply because the requisite conditions were always eliminated by natural convulsions. In either case, the late occurrence of any event cannot support an argument against the eternity of the world.\textsuperscript{32}

Cleanthes argument is also irrelevant to Philo's case. Philo is not interested in defending an alternative.

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 173.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 174.
cosmology. His argument is that the very defects of each
of these systems reveal that despite their appeal to
experience, they are not the results of proper inference
but the products of imagination.\(^{33}\) In Part VII Demetri requests Philo to make these alternative analogies more conceivable.\(^{34}\) Philo responds by describing the world as a
seed of a tree, an egg of an ostrich, or the web of a
spider.\(^{35}\) It is true, as Demetri quickly protests, that
these descriptions are nothing but "wild, arbitrary supposi-
tions" with no data to ground them. But what is also
true is that they are no more fanciful than the attempt to
picture the universe as a machine, nor are their princi-
ples less intelligible than that of reason or intelligence.

4. Philo's last major objection to the basis of
Cleanthes' argument is closely related to the preceding
one. Cleanthes' argument runs like this: (1) Experience
shows us that there is order in the universe like that in
a machine. (2) Experience shows us that order comes from
mind. (3) Therefore, the order of the universe must come
from mind. Philo's third objection attacked the first
premise by offering other analogies besides that between

\(^{33}\) I b i d . , p p . 1 7 7 - 8 0 .

\(^{34}\) I b i d . , p . 1 7 7 .

\(^{35}\) I b i d . , pp. 1 7 7 and 1 8 0 .
the order of the universe and the order of a machine. His fourth objection applies this same principle to premise (2) by arguing that experience reveals other sources of order besides mind. In this connection he makes the following points: first, the experiences of non-intelligent causes of order far exceed those of intelligent causes; second, even if reason is experienced as a source of order, generation is experienced as a source of reason; and third, most of the observable order in nature probably arose originally by natural selection.

The first of these points is rather obvious. Philo has restricted the argument to a direct appeal to the data of experience, and experience provides instances of order which does not arise from conscious purpose. There are four principles which are evident in nature: reason, instinct, generation, and vegetation. Each of these is responsible for some of the order in the world. To say that the order produced by the latter three is ultimately due to reason is begging the question and neglecting the contrary testimony of experience.36

Secondly, Philo argues, our experience of mind as a cause of order is countermanded by our further experience of generation as a cause of mind. Whatever instance we

36 Ibid., pp. 178-9.
may cite of the existence of reason, whether in man or in animals, we can always be sure of the prior operation of generation, whereas the reverse is nowhere near so universally supported by experience. It is more probable, therefore, that the world came into being by a process analogous to generation rather than reason—although no hypothesis in this case can ever be more than a conjecture.\(^{37}\)

Finally, Philo concludes, order in the world might have come about by natural selection rather than by any specifiable principle. Philo, or rather Hume, was not aware, of course, of the significance later to be attributed by Darwin to this principle, but he argues on the basis of its plausibility. What sense does it make, Philo asks, to reason about design and adaptation in animals and plants, since no animal can continue to exist unless such adaptation is present?\(^{38}\) If we project this question to the totality of nature, the ancient theory of Epicurus immediately suggests itself. This theory is "justly esteemed the most absurd system," yet some of its basic ideas provide a very meaningful alternative to the hypothesis of a universally active ordering principle. Epicurus made his mistake in supposing an infinite number of original particles. If, instead, there be only a finite number of

\(^{37}\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 180.}\)
\(^{38}\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 185.}\)
possibilities but an infinite number of possible alterations, the probability of the occurrence of the present order becomes significant. We know by experience that disorder is unstable and order relatively self-perpetuating. The universe, therefore, may just as well be characterized as an eternally changing arrangement of elements whose present order is due entirely to the natural elimination of alternative combinations. Such a theory requires a principle of eternal motion or change, but this is no less probable than the alternative of a prime mover.\textsuperscript{39}

Philo has, with this argument from natural selection, concluded his criticism of the basis of Cleanthes' empirical proof for God. This proof cannot succeed in grounding religious belief on the experience of order in nature because first, it lacks the force of a causal inference; second, the lack of similarity between the universe and human devices weakens the analogy; third, the possibility of equally plausible alternative analogies does the same; and fourth, the order that is present in the universe may be accounted for by other principles besides reason. These criticisms do not, however, comprise Philo's entire attack against the Argument from Design. Intermingled with them throughout the discussion are additional objections which concern the consequences of Cleanthes' argument. In presenting these objections, Philo argues that even supposing

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 182.
the argument to be formally acceptable, it fails in the following three ways to satisfactorily establish the existence of God.

5. In the first place, once the postulation of non-natural causes is begun—as this argument requires—it cannot be halted except arbitrarily. We certainly experience reason as a cause, but we no less certainly observe various and subtle causes of reason. Thus, when the order of the material universe is sought in an ideal world, we are left with the unhappy alternatives either of asking what the cause of this ideal order is, or of refusing to recognize that a mental plan requires a cause as much as its final product. Nor is it any answer to say that thought is self-ordered, because experience indicates first that matter is no less self-ordered and also that thought is often quite disordered—as in cases of madness and imbecility.40 An appeal to God's "rational faculty" is begging the question since if this is meaningful, it means a principle of order inherent in God's mind, and such a principle might just as well inhere in matter.41

Cleanthes scoffs at this objection and derides Philo for not realizing "how easy it is to answer it."42 It is

40 Ibid., p. 163.
41 Ibid., pp. 162-3.
42 Ibid., p. 163.
no objection to the ordinary inference of causes, he says, that a prior cause cannot be assigned for every cause discovered. Nor is it an objection in this case. The order and design in nature "bespeak in the clearest language an intelligent cause or Author." Once a Deity has been found, the enquiry after cause may stop. No surer foundation of religion is required. If a cause is requested for God, the satisfaction of this request is not essential to the success of the Argument from Design.\(^43\)

In first writing the *Dialogues*, Hume almost allowed Philo to be taken in by this retort of Cleanthes. The first version of Philo's reply had him commenting that a theology which allowed "that the Deity arose from some external cause" was certain never to gain much respect and, besides, the objection that experience would require a cause for God is still a serious objection to traditional theological principles.\(^44\) Both this reply and Cleanthes' objection, of course, miss the whole point of Philo's charge. Cleanthes' entire argument attempts to prove that God is required as the ultimate cause of the order in nature. Philo's objection in this case asserts that since God cannot be determined to be the ultimate cause but instead an infinite progression is generated, why go beyond

\(^43\text{Ibid.}, p. 163.\)

\(^44\text{Ibid.}, p. 164, note 1.\)
the material world at all? In revising the Dialogues, Hume sharpened Philo's concluding reply in Part IV so as to make this point the central issue. Cleanthes claims to have found a Deity, but what he has found in no way solves the problem that initiated the search. Order in God is at least as unexplicable as order in nature. Instead of solving the problem, the Argument from Design only postpones it and then tries to ignore it. The order in nature is either just as explicable by means of an inherent material arrangement as it is by means of an ideal system or else it is not explicable at all.  

6. As a basis of his last two criticisms, Philo asks—as Hume's Epicurean opponent had asked in Section XI of the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding— even granting that the Argument from Design succeeds in establishing the existence of a divine Mind, what is the nature of this conclusion? His first answer is that it cannot be identified with the traditional notion of God.  

In Section XI of the Enquiry Hume had pointed out that strict adherence to the rule of analogical inference, "like effects demand like causes," provides only a very

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mcagre concept of God. Philo pursues this same thought by arguing that the traditional concept of God is not derivable merely from the experience of order in the world. What usually happens is that this experience is used to establish the analogy between God's mind and man's and then anthropomorphism takes over and attributes to God the noblest attributes of the human soul to an infinite degree. But properly interpreted the Argument from Design cannot determine either God's simplicity, unity, infinity, or perfection since the cause inferred from design can only be in proportion to the effects noted.

Although these consequences strike Cleanthes with no horror since he finds the bare notion of cosmic purpose a sufficient foundation for religion, Hume's point is fatal to the employment of an a posteriori argument as a support for traditional theism. Hume returns to this objection in his discussion of the problem of evil in Parts X and XI.

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48 *Dialogues*, p. 159.
52 *Enquiry*, p. 150.
53 *Dialogues*, p. 169.
54 To be treated in Chapter VI below.
For the moment he is content to pass on to a final attack on the consequences of the Argument from Design.

7. This final attack comes, properly, from the mouth of Demea rather than Philo, but it proceeds logically from Philo's preceding criticism. Demea in this one case, reveals more perspicuity than Cleanthes, since he recognizes that the logical outcome of Philo's argument is a concept of God which can have neither religious nor speculative value.\(^55\) If the only knowledge of God is by inference from design and if such knowledge does not include the determination of one god or many, perfect or imperfect, dead or alive, then, he concludes, "What trust or confidence can we repose in them? What devotion of worship address to them? What veneration or obedience pay them?"\(^56\)

This is essentially the conclusion that Hume wants to appear as the final result of the Dialogues. As I intend to argue shortly, Hume is not interested in refuting the notion of a Designer of nature, but he is intent upon denying any practical or theoretical import to that concept. In this his purpose has not changed since he wrote Section XI of the Enquiry. There he argued that whatever cause be inferable from the order of nature, it cannot be used to infer any new facts or to establish any principles of

\(^{55}\)Dialogues, p. 170.

\(^{56}\)Ibid., p. 170.
conduct. In fact, we cannot even predict effects similar to those already observed since we have no other experience of God beyond the immediately observable effects. The attempt, therefore, to found a theological system on the Argument from Design rests on an illusion. The word "mind" deceives us into attempting to employ the usual habits of inference concerning the motives and actions of other men in speculation about a non-natural mind which only remotely resembles the human.

Philo, with the unwitting help of Demea, thus concludes his attack on the empirical argument for God in much the same way as he began it. Before Cleanthes stated his analogy between the universe and a machine, Philo surmised that the notion of God was really meaningless, since meaning depends on experience and we can have no (verifiable) experience of God. After stating his seven detailed criticisms of Cleanthes' position, he concludes that although "God" is not a completely meaningless concept, it is so vague and unspecifiable that it cannot properly function as a theological or metaphysical principle.

In beginning this discussion of Hume, I said that the Dialogues seem to contain strands of three arguments from

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57 Enquiry, p. 158.
58 Ibid., pp. 161n. and 159.
59 Dialogues, pp. 142-3.
design rather than just one. Up until this point I have presented Hume's case against only the most apparent of these strands—the analogy between the universe and a machine. I want now to consider the other two forms which Cleanthes never quite gets around to stating explicitly. The first of these argues not on the basis that experience reveals mind to be a cause of order but on the basis that experience and reason reveal mind to be the only original cause of order. The second maintains that the Argument from Design is not properly an inference at all but rather an irresistible compulsion to believe determined by an undeniable body of facts.

Philo tries to exclude the first of these arguments by a codicil to Cleanthes' analogy. According to the a posteriori method of reasoning, he says, "It follows that order, arrangement, or the adjustment of final causes is not, of itself, any proof of design, but only so far as it has been experienced to proceed from that principle." Had Cleanthes been on his toes, he would have refused to

60It is necessary to clarify one point here. The Dialogues regard the presence of order or design in nature as incontestable. Perceptions of order are impressions of reflection, but they are no less impressions. When a "proof of design" is mentioned, it refers to the problem of a Designer of nature. "Design" thus means here either "order" or "intelligently planned order". Only in the second sense is design provable or disprovable for Hume.

61Dialogues, p. 146.
acknowledge this addition since it opens the way for all of Philo's alternative principles, each derived "from experience". Instead it is Demea who finally comes forward with the questions, "Whence could arise so wonderful a faculty (of creating worlds from chaos) but from design? Or how can order spring from any thing, which perceives not that order which it bestows?" Unfortunately, by the time he asks these questions Philo has so confused the issue with animal and vegetable cosmogonies that the force of the objection is missed completely.

If we try to reconstruct Cleanthes' argument along the line of this second strand of reasoning, we find it to consist essentially of the following points. We experience order in nature. Order demands a cause. The only original cause of order we know is mind. There must, therefore, be an originally ordering mind for the universe. All of Philo's objections concerning alternative causes of order—generation, vegetation, and natural selection—now become irrelevant. We do not experience these as causes of order but only as transmitters of order already present. Natural selection only seems to create order because its operation is so far removed from the present situation. Even supposing a finite number of original possibilities, 

there is no reason that any more than a relatively few should ever be actualized—unless an antecedent principle of selection is assumed.

The case for mind, however, is different. We commonly experience order arising from reason in the cases of human creativity. Unless an appeal is made to chance, which "has no place, on any hypothesis, sceptical or religious," there is no alternative but to account for the order in matter—or laws which cause it—by means of the activity of mind. Philo's objection that the order of an ideal world requires a cause as much as the order of a material world is founded on the mistaken analogy between the blue-print of a house and God's plan for the world. A better comparison would be between God's plan and the axioms and rules of a deductive system. A blueprint anticipates every major detail of the house, but a deductive system generates theorems without explicitly stating them in its axioms. Mind creates order by consistently applying a single principle, and whatever executes this process with the end of producing an ordered universe deserves the title of divine Mind. Thus, Cleanthes' claim, "I have found a Deity," is a legitimate reply to Philo's cavils.

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63Admitted by Philo, Ibid., p. 174.
64Ibid., p. 163.
If Cleanthes had restated his case in these terms, what could Philo have replied? Hume, we know from the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, had serious doubts about our knowledge of mind as a cause, but it is doubtful that he would have included such a "skeptical" argument among the essentially common-sense inferences of the *Dialogues*. Instead he probably would have had Philo reply that this argument assumes that the order in nature must have been originally put there by some agent. This assumption is very similar to a premise of the Cosmological Proof and shares the same difficulties. In the first place, it is a priori not empirical, and in the second place, it is no more certain than the alternative of an inherent eternal ordering principle in nature. That order is not indigenous to nature but had to be introduced is a principle far from proved.

Besides this, the conclusion concerning a divine Mind which issues from this revised argument does not in the least escape the last two criticisms of the original one. It still does not provide a traditional concept of God nor even one which can be accommodated to the requirements of either religion or speculation.

The third strand of the Argument from Design is one which Cleanthes twice tries unsuccessfully to get Philo to

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*Enquiry*, pp. 92ff.
recognize. It is a consideration which Gilbert Elliot advised Hume not to neglect. Elliot, after reading the manuscript of at least the first three parts of the Dialogues at Hume's request, wrote to Hume urging him to reckon with "the dictates of feeling as well as with the conclusions of reason and the reports of experience, and possibly to reckon with all these together."67

Although Hume recognized the wisdom of Elliot's advice, he decided not to follow it completely. In originally requesting Elliot's opinion, Hume had expressed concern over the informal and irregular pattern of Cleanthes' argument. Although a great deal of the force of Cleanthes' argument depends upon considering the dictates of reason, experience, and feeling together, Philo ignores Cleanthes' references to feeling until he has completely demolished the two more formal strands of the argument. Only in Part XII does Philo deal directly with Cleanthes' implicit belief that the Argument from Design is not so much an argument as a natural belief due to an immediate impression of purpose in the world.

If we go back through the Dialogues with the express purpose of noting Cleanthes' references to the dictates of

66 Dialogues, pp. 154 and 163.
67 Dugald Stewart, Collected Works, I, 606.
feeling, we find three main points which he makes in this connection. The first occurs in Part III. "Consider, atomize the eye," Cleanthes urges, "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." He repeats the same point in Part IV. The intricacies of nature are just too wonderful not to have proceeded from a very wise and intelligent Author. Cleanthes' second instance of intelligent purpose in the world is the superabundance of human conveniences which nature has produced. Despite the logical possibility of a purely mechanistic explanation of the world, like natural selection, the instances in which nature has "gone out of its way" to unnecessarily enrich human existence testify to the benevolence of its Designer.

Thirdly, Cleanthes urges in support of the belief in natural purpose, a modification of the old argument, "Consensus Gentium". He argues, not that a universal belief

69 Dialogues, p. 154.
70 Ibid., p. 163.
71 Ibid., p. 185.
72 Philo mentions, but neither states nor examines, the usual form of this argument—evidence for the belief in God from the universal consent of mankind (p. 160). Pamphilus also alludes to this argument on page 123.
in God proves His existence, but that "the comparison of
the universe to a machine of human contrivance is so obvious
and natural . . . that it must immediately strike all un-
prejudiced apprehensions, and procure universal approba-
tion." Although this looks like a "poisoning of the well"-
i.e., anyone who doesn't admit the comparison is prejudiced,
I do not think Hume intended it to be such. The argument
claims to be an empirical report: most people, not spoiled
by the subtleties of philosophy nor by the desire to be
clever or nasty, would admit to a "trust," if not a
specific belief, in the essentially purposeful structure
of nature. Among those who honestly consider the wonders
of nature, the only ones professing atheism or skepticism
are those philosophers whose natural sentiments have been
beclouded by an inordinate love of disputation—just as it
is only philosophers who deny or doubt the existence of the
external world.

Now it is certain that Hume felt the force of this
argument, although he could not allow the conclusion it
seemed to warrant go unchallenged. In fact, it is Philo,
in Part XII, who suggests the strongest support for this
argument and professes his own confidence in it. For
this reason some have read Part XII as Hume's attempt to

73\textit{Dialogues}, p. 216.
make Cleanthes the hero of the Dialogues. Others find in it only glaring inconsistency prompted by Hume's desire to be ironic or to offer a "sop to the godly." I do not think that Hume intended Cleanthes to be the hero of the Dialogues or, if he did, that Part XII accomplishes this. Nor does it seem proper to read all of Philo's apparently pious remarks as irony or as a sop to the godly. That he intended some of Philo's remarks in Part XII to fulfil these functions is undeniable, but I see good reason to regard the opinions concerning the feeling of design in nature as straightforward serious expressions of Hume's own position. Hume was no atheist for the same reason that he was not a solipsist—both positions entail negative declarations which his conclusions concerning reason and experience would not allow him to make.

If we accept Philo's affirmations of design in nature at their face value, must we not concur with Pamphilus' concluding remark that "upon a serious review of the whole, Philo's principles are more probable than Demea's; but those of Cleanthes approach still nearer to the truth?" That this is not a necessary or even a proper conclusion, I think can be shown by examining Philo's further analysis of the feeling of design as evidence for theism.

75 As Hume stated was the case in his letter to Elliot. (Letters, ed. Greig, I, 154.
76 Dialogues, p. 228.
Hume's final position on this issue is one which, while admitting the basis of the Argument from Design, puts its conclusion in such a neutral light as to render it theologically insignificant. He does not bother to make Philo dispute the facts which Cleanthes has cited. The "universal approbation" of design in nature is probably, within limits, a correct representation of the case. What Hume does protest is the further assertion that these facts warrant a universal conclusion about God. An appeal to "universal approbation" makes an unambiguous conclusion impossible since the variety of interpretations of natural design is legion. This appeal suffers from the same defect which J. M. McTaggert later pointed out against the traditional Consensus Gentium Argument—namely, that it is impossible to find a religion which no one has doubted. An attempt, on the other hand, to specify the concept of a Designer which the facts support cannot result in a notion of God which could serve any religious function. Therefore, the argument from a feeling of design leads us no nearer to a solution of the problem of God's existence.

In support of this conclusion Hume employs two arguments which reveal basic principles of his total philosophy.

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77 Norman Kemp Smith, Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 33.
78 Some Dogmas of Religion, p. 46.
The first of these asserts that the dispute over God's existence based on the empirical evidence in nature is only a verbal one. "The whole of natural theology," Philo concludes in Part XII, "resolves itself into one . . proposition, that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence." In considering this proposition, the skeptic accents the remoteness of the analogy while the theist disregards it, but neither can predict or account for a single empirical fact which the other cannot. Thus, the Argument from Design does not even present a significant problem but only a meaningless squabble over value, which is in principle unsolvable.

Hume's second argument against the feeling of design is not explicitly stated in the Dialogues. It concerns his general view of the imagination. In his letter to Elliot, Hume had admitted that the feeling of design was a natural attitude. Yet, so is "our inclination to find our own figures in the clouds, our face in the moon, our passions

79 Dialogues, p. 227.

80 Ibid., p. 217. The best illustration of Hume's point which I know is given by John Wisdom in his parable of the two people who discover a long-untended garden. The "skeptic" sees only weeds while the "theist" sees evidence of the gardner's patient care. Yet they both see the same garden. ("Gods", Logic and Language (First Series), ed. A.G.N. Flew, Philosophical Library: New York, 1953, Chap. X.).
and sentiments even in inanimate matter." If this is all the feeling of design amounts to, he concludes, it ought to be controlled rather than admitted as a "legitimate ground of assent." The illusions of fancy and superstition are no less universally approved among the "vulgar" than are the order and purpose of nature.

In the Treatise Hume had worried about much this same problem. The basic principles of empirical science—causality, induction, and the uniformity of nature—are without logical foundation; yet, they are natural beliefs which the mind has the strongest propensity to preserve in the face of all doubt. Though they are not beliefs of reason, they seem to be quite inescapable beliefs of the imagination. Hume's problem at the close of Book I of the Treatise was to find a principle which would distinguish between these beliefs of the imagination and others of fancy. He never completely solved this problem, but his reflections upon it anticipated in no small measure some of Kant's most important conclusions concerning the non-empirical foundations of empirical knowledge. The fact that this same problem bothered Hume when he wrote the Dialogues reveals his recognition of its importance. In the Dialogues

\[31\] Letters, I, 155.
\[32\] Ibid., I, 155.
\[33\] Treatise, Selby-Bigge ed., pp. 263-274.
however, it is a support for Hume's position, since it renders the conclusions of natural theology even less certain than those of natural science.

A. E. Taylor makes much of this point in his criticism of Hume's Dialogues. He charges that Hume in writing the Dialogues did not care enough about religion to see that its non-logical principles are as important as those of science. He asserts further that Hume inconsistently assumed the validity of the principle of causality in the Dialogues though he had rejected it in the Treatise. Neither of these objections, though true, seem to me to remove the validity of the conclusions reached in the Dialogues. That Hume did not care enough about religion at the time he wrote the Dialogues does not mean that he never earnestly examined his own position concerning...

85 Ibid., p. 180.  
86 Ibid., p. 179. Taylor also has other points of criticism. He asks, for example, if the cause of the world is not intelligent, how can intelligence discover order in nature?(p. 191.) I think this is part of the attempt since Hume to establish a "wider Teleological Argument" which stresses the harmony between thought and existence. See: F. E. Tennant, Philosophical Theology, vol. II; and Peter A. Bertocci, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (New York Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951), Chaps 13-15. This attempt perhaps presents more forceful evidence of teleology, but I cannot see that it seriously challenges Hume's position.
religion. Many of Philo's conclusions were achieved by Hume in that tortuous period of self-examination before he was twenty. The Dialogues represent a logical re-examination of the evidence for religious principles, just as the Treatise represents a similar analysis of the principles of empirical knowledge. Hume could legitimately assume the validity of empirical principles when discussing those of religion because first, he had discovered the former principles to be in some sense necessary and, second, he wanted the argument of the Dialogues to rest upon an epistemological foundation which would be acceptable to theologians. The Dialogues are ad huminem in this sense, but this fact only reinforces their significance as a critique of natural theology.

In one of his most pious declarations, Philo concludes Part XII of the Dialogues by observing that after recognizing all the difficulties and uncertainties of the Argument from Design, "the most natural sentiment, which a well-disposed mind will feel, is a longing desire and expectation, that Heaven would be pleased to ... afford some more particular revelation to mankind..." 87 Although this can hardly be taken as a serious report of Hume's own "sentiment", it does reveal his awareness of

87 *Dialogues*, p. 227.
a whole separate class of empirical evidence for religion—namely, those events which are used to support a particular revelation.²³ I turn now to his discussion of this topic.

II

Hume states his main conclusions concerning special religious revelations in his famous essay "On Miracles" in the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.²⁹ This essay Hume intended to include in the Treatise but was dissuaded from doing so by the advice of his friends.⁹⁰ He composed most of it while staying at La Fleche in France and held it to be completely decisive in eliminating the use of miracles to support a particular religious system.

²³In "The Natural History of Religion" (Essays, II, 328-9.) Hume mentions the incurable prejudices of people in favor of unusual events rather than natural design as a proof of religion. "Even at this day, and in Europe, ask any of the vulgar, why he believes in an omnipotent creator of the world; he will never mention the beauty of final causes, of which he is wholly ignorant. . . To these he has been long accustomed; and he beholds them with listlessness and unconcern. He will tell you of the sudden and unexpected death of such a one: The fall and bruise of such another: The excessive drought of this season: The cold and rains of another. These he ascribes to the immediate operation of providence; and such events, as, with good reasoners, are the chief difficulties in admitting a supreme intelligence, are with him the sole arguments for it."


In essence the argument proceeds thus: The wise man always proportions his belief to the evidence available for any given factual proposition. Since the evidence in support of miracles is never sufficient to establish their occurrence, the wise man never admits reports of miracles as evidence for religion. The evidence in support of miracles is always insufficient for two reasons. The first is that the logical status of such reports undermines the basis for confidence in human testimony generally. The second is that the circumstances in which these reports occur always allow for the strongest possibility of their falsehood due either to deception or delusion.

Before examining Hume's argument in detail, it is necessary to clarify a point which he failed to specify precisely. This concerns the meaning of the word "miracle." It seems to me that Hume uses this word in several different senses and that things he says about one sense are often not true about the others. I find three distinct uses of "miracle," each of which Hume illustrates and judges differently.

91 *Enquiry*, p. 110.


93 The subject of Part II of the essay, pp. 116-130.
The first meaning of "miracle" is "any marvelous—that is, extremely unusual—event." Hume illustrates this usage by the story of the Indian prince who refused to believe in snow. A further hypothetical example is the case of darkness over the whole earth for a full week in January, 1600. This would indeed be an unusual event which would require a great deal of competent testimony to establish it. Yet, it would not be incredible, since it is not contrary to a possible (though unknown) combination of natural forces.

The second sense of "miracle" resembles the first but is stronger. "Miracle" means in this sense "a violation of the laws of nature." By this Hume means an event which is impossible according to the presently known laws of nature. His example of this sense is a report that Queen Elizabeth was seen alive one month after her death. Concerning this report, Hume says that even if it was completely authenticated, we could only feel astonishment and not belief. It violates what is held to be

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94 Ibid., pp. 113-114.
95 Ibid., pp. 113-114.
96 Ibid., pp. 127-128.
97 Ibid., p. 114.
98 Ibid., p. 128.
one of the surest laws of nature, "the dead rise not."
That such an event is absolutely impossible cannot be
proved, but its improbability is felt to be so great as
to be almost insurmountable even by the strongest testi-
mony.

Thirdly, Hume defines "miracle" in a specifically
religious sense as "a transgression of a law of nature by
a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposi-
tion of some invisible agent." An example of this would
be a resurrection (such as Christ's) attributed to God's
intervention in the normal course of nature for the
purpose of establishing the authority of a certain person
or doctrine. Concerning the report of such an event,
Hume says that it is incredible and obviously untrue.

If we return now to look at the reasons Hume had for
reaching such a negative conclusion concerning miracles
in this third (religious) sense, we find he gave two.
The first concerns the logical consequences of reports of
all such events, and the second deals with the empirical
circumstances in which these reports occur. In Part I of
the essay Hume allows it to be supposed that a report of
a miracle should attain the authority of a proof. That is,

99 Ibid., p. 115n.
100 Ibid., p. 129.
instead of reaching us by a long line of devious witnesses, the testimony is so sure as to exceed mere probability. The consequence, Hume argues, could not initially be more than indecision and bewilderment. The custom of expecting conformity between well-authenticated testimony and reality is counter-balanced by the custom of relying on the conformity of nature to law. Thus, the antecedent improbability of a miracle occurring is at least equal to the antecedent improbability of a given testimony being false.

This, of course, does not mean that no miracle could possess sufficient evidence to compel belief. What it does mean is that this evidence must be such that its falsity would be more unusual than the event itself. Of course, the probability of an event termed miraculous is increased if there is any ground for suspecting that the law supposedly violated is not a law of nature at all—that is, that the event has a perfectly natural cause. This case, however, would not apply to a miracle in the religious sense, since no natural cause is allowed to be possible in such instances. If the evidence for a religious miracle did amount to a complete proof, we would face the consequence of one proof contradicting another. In such a case, the wise man would probably suspend judgment, but if forced to choose, he would weigh the possibility
of error in the evidence against the possibility of the violation of natural law and reject the greater "miracle."\textsuperscript{101}

In point of fact, Hume argues in Part II of the essay, the supposition in the foregoing reasoning that the evidence of a miracle may amount to an entire proof was far too liberal. "There never was," he says, "a miraculous event established on so full an evidence."\textsuperscript{102} All the reports of religious miracles suffer from the same general defects. Either there is a deficiency in the number or character of the witnesses, or their manner of delivering their testimony leads to a doubt concerning the truth of their reports. In support of this charge Hume cites several historical facts:

1. The origin of religious miracles always has taken place without a sufficient number of witnesses of sufficient good sense and integrity to insure against deception or delusion.\textsuperscript{103}

2. The "gross and vulgar passions" of surprise and wonder, coupled with the awe and fear inspired by religion, motivate men to believe in stories of miracles contrary to good sense.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{101}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{102}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{103}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{104}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, p. 117.
3. The source of reports of miracles is always vastly removed from centers of civilization, and as a given area approaches intellectual enlightenment these reports decrease.\textsuperscript{105}

4. It is a recognized fact that a modest account is often so magnified in retelling that it soon bears little or no resemblance to the original report.\textsuperscript{106}

5. The temptation to appear as a prophet or ambassador from heaven or to magnify one's country, family, or oneself has often led to the violent asseveration of imaginary events sometimes even to the convincing of the fabricator\textsuperscript{107}

A further consideration which Hume urges against the evidence for miracles is contained in the contrary testimony of past experience. Instances of supposed miracles which were later proved to have been forged or never to have happened at all, as well as those which are simply too absurd to be believed, all work against the general credibility of testimony concerning such events.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{105}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 119-120.
\textsuperscript{106}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{107}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{108}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 118-9. Examples of forgeries and falsely reported miracles are fairly easy to obtain, but I wish Hume had specified a miracle he considered so absurd as to be immediately incredible. "Absurd" probably means "ridiculous" or "silly", and if this is so, the nearest he comes to offering an example is in his footnote concerning the Abbe Paris. (p. 346.) "For that miracle was really performed by the touch of an authentic holy prickle of the holy thorn, which composed the holy crown, which etc."
Besides this, advocates of the miracles of any particular religion must face all the counter testimony concerning the miracles of opposing systems. Hume is arguing ad hominem here against the Christians who are faced with the dilemma of either denying the actuality of pagan miracles and, hence, weakening the belief in those of Scripture or else denying the divine origin of all non-Scriptural prodigies and, consequently, questioning the character of the gospel miracles as evidence for Christ's deity.

Although Hume's case against miracles is generally sound, he stated it rather carelessly. There are certain fairly obvious objections which critics have not ceased to voice since the time the essay first appeared in print. I think, however, that these objections lose most of their force if viewed in the light of certain basic principles which Hume intended to convey but which he frequently misrepresented in his desire to be convincing. These principles are: (1) It is impossible to prove that miracles (in sense three) have never occurred; (2) It is logically possible (though highly improbable) that a miracle could possess sufficient evidence to establish it with some slight

109 Ibid., p. 121.

110 The first alternative was naively adopted by the monk at La Fleche (See: Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 101.). The second is a traditional answer of theologians who assert that Satan can also work miracles.
degree of probability; and (3) In actual fact no religious miracle has ever possessed such evidence.\(^{111}\) I should like now to employ these principles in a brief examination of some of the main objections to the "Essay on Miracles".\(^{112}\)

\(^{111}\) Hume would have liked to make the case against miracles a logical one. In the first edition of the *Essays*, principle (3) read, "No religious miracle can ever possess such evidence." (John Hunt, "David Hume," Contemporary Review, XI (1869), pp. 90-91.) This, of course, is more than Hume could legitimately conclude. This earlier edition also included a passage in the same vein, which Hume later scored out. On page 114, to the sentence which begins "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature," Hume appended, "and if so, it is an undeniable consequence that it cannot be surmounted by any proof whatever derived from human testimony." (F. J. Lamb, "Studies in Theology" and Hume's 'Essay on Miracles'," Bibliotheca Sacra, LXXI (1914), p. 107.

\(^{112}\) I list here some of the objections which I feel do not warrant a reply:

1. T. H. Huxley (by no means alone in this) (Hume, New York: 1902, p. 131.) chastizes Hume for thinking he could prove the impossibility of miracles.

2. A. E. Taylor ("David Hume and the Miraculous," Philosophical Studies, London: 1934, p. 331.) asserts that Hume's argument cannot be seriously considered since the whole section on miracles is entirely superfluous to the *Enquiry* and was prompted solely by an inordinate desire for notoriety.

3. An anonymous writer in the Southern Review ("Hume's Philosophy," XI, 310.) dismisses Hume's arguments as the disgruntled mumblings of an old bachelor who had forgotten that most of the truths worth knowing must be received "as a little child".

4. The same author (p. 333.) condenses Hume's reasoning into the following propositions: A. Whenever there is a conflict of testimony, the fact in dispute must be false; B. Our ordinary experience does not attest extraordinary events, therefore extraordinary events cannot occur; C. Some alleged miracles are unquestionably false, therefore all miracles must be discredited. He then concludes, "So stated, Hume's positions and arguments are simply ridiculous, and we deem ourselves fully justified in having denied at the outset his pretensions to profundity and logical acumen."(continued on page 188)
A little over a century after the "Essay on Miracles" appeared, a commentator remarked, "No writer on miracles omits to notice Hume; to refute him has been the ambition of every Christian apologist for the last hundred years; but what could really be said in reply was said in his lifetime." In reviewing the objections against Hume on miracles and their almost limitless repetitions, I have tried to trace them back to their origin during Hume's lifetime. The most notable exception to this is A. E. Taylor's essay, "David Hume and the Miraculous," which revives some of the best criticisms in a very forceful manner. I have also tried to organize these major objections under the heading of three general types of criticism. These criticisms are first, the usual one, that Hume is inconsistent, second, that he propounds an absurd theory of belief and evidence, and third, that he is incorrect in denying a sufficiency of evidence for every historical miracle. In order to be brief, I shall

112 (cont'd.)

5. F. J. Lamb (Op. cit., pp. 119ff.) accuses Hume of illegitimately comparing the evidence provided by "human beings--souls endowed with intelligence, freedom of will, conscience, . . . capable of ethical virtue" and that founded on "lifeless, soulless, conscienceless, insentient creations and their so-called laws. . . ."


simply list the relevant objections under each of these headings and then suggest what I would consider to be an adequate reply.

1. In the "Essay on Miracles" Hume is inconsistent because:

   a. He assumes the validity of natural law, which he has no right to do according to the preceding sections of the *Enquiry*.\(^{115}\) Reply: Hume is obviously arguing *ad hominem* here, as he does in the *Dialogues*. Although there is no logical ground for natural law, there are strong non-logical considerations for believing in it. Also natural laws are descriptive principles not metaphysical forces, and as such they may be incorrect or incomplete.

   b. When he states that a hypothetical proof of a miracle would be cancelled out by a proof of the regularity of natural law, he forgets that no empirical statement can be more than probable\(^{116}\) and also that if there is proof for anything in Hume's sense, there cannot, by definition, be proof against it.\(^{117}\) Reply: Locke's division of all knowledge into certain and probable is formally correct, but it is more in conformity with ordinary


\(^{117}\)Leland, *op. cit.*, p. 292.
usage to recognize that some empirical arguments (i.e.,
that the sun will rise tomorrow) are proofs—that is, such
as "leave no room for doubt or opposition." It would
be logically possible for evidence of a miracle to possess
such a high degree of antecedent probability so as to
attain the stature of a proof, except for the fact that
it is opposed by the equally high degree of improbability
that a natural law could be violated. Taken alone, either
would be a proof. Taken together, they are only "proofs." 119

c. When Hume states that we ought to accept the
lesser miracle—either the event itself or the falsity of
the testimony concerning it, he admits that belief in
miracles is necessary. 120 Reply: "Miracle" in its first
use in the preceding sentence means not "an act of Deity"
but "an improbable event." It is true that we must often
decide between propositions on the basis of which is the
least improbable, but if the least improbable turns out
to be the falsity of the testimony, then the miracle in
the religious sense should be denied.

118 Enquiry, p. 56n.

119 See Hume's letter to Rev. Hugh Blair in reply to,
and reprinted in, A Dissertation on Miracles, by George
Campbell (Edinburgh: 1797), I, 16.

120 Campbell, op. cit., I, 123.
d. After arguing vehemently against all religious miracles, Hume offers three in which he apparently believes. Reply: Hume overstates the case for these miracles probably with the intention of demonstrating (1) that despite the apparently sufficient evidence, no one believes the first and no non-Catholic the second or third, and (2) that Protestant theologians by taking great pains to disprove these miracles would advance his case against the much less available evidence for the miracles of Scripture. He was right on both counts.

2. In the "Essay on Miracles", Hume propounds an absurd theory of belief and evidence because:

a. He believes that evidence comes in homogeneous units which may be separated into two piles, the "for" and the "against". Whichever pile turns out larger, that is the true position. Reply: Unfortunately, this is a valid criticism of Hume. He was a long way from

121Vespasian's curing of a blind man (Enquiry, p.122.), the cathedral doorkeeper at Sargossa who regained an amputated leg (p. 123-4.), and the miracles wrought on the tomb of Abbe Paris (pp. 124-5 and 344-6.).


123See Campbell's and Paley's replies, loc. cit.

anticipating Mill's inductive methods. The theory of belief assumed in the "Essay on Miracles" was taken over practically unchanged from the Treatise, and it depends upon a faulty mathematical metaphor. The probability of natural law is $X$, and the probability of a miracle is $Y$. $X = 1$, and if the miracle is completely attested, $Y = 1$. Therefore, the probability of a miracle could never exceed $Y - X$, or $0$. In actual fact, $Y$ never equals 1. Therefore, the probability of a miracle is always some $m/n$. Although this notion of evidence is unacceptable, Hume's argument stands without it. All that Hume really needs to maintain is that there is an extremely high antecedent probability that for any given event the principle of the uniformity of nature holds true, and that sufficient evidence to prove the contrary is almost impossible.

b. Hume's argument would destroy science as well as religion. Revision of natural laws would be impossible since no evidence could be sufficient to challenge those already held. 125 Reply: It is probably true that for Hume science is as much a myth as religion, yet it is not true that he held these myths to be equally valuable. Natural laws are abbreviations for the observed constant conjunction

of certain types of events which the mind has a "propensity" to expect will reoccur. In proportion to the uniformity of past experience concerning a particular law, a greater amount of evidence is required to warrant its revision. Such evidence, however, is not impossible. What is impossible is that evidence for a miracle of religion should ever be sufficient to establish the conclusion that no natural law operated in a certain instance.

c. Hume's argument rests upon a faulty notion of experience. The only experience Hume can appeal to without presupposing the validity of human testimony is his own personal experience. If all he is maintaining is that he has never experienced a miracle, then his argument is insignificant.126 Reply: When Hume claims "uniform experience" for natural laws, such as gravity, he is, of course, referring to more than his own experience. As such, he presupposes the general validity of human testimony, but this validity is well supported by evidence which is strictly available to direct observation. Testimony concerning a natural law (i.e., unsupported heavy objects fall) is corroborated not only by my own observations, but also by the evidence that in such matters testimony is

usually valid. The case for miracles, however, suffers from an absence of both of these supports.

d. Hume fails to notice that distinctions must be made between the value of different kinds of testimony. It is possible to prove that certain kinds of testimony are valid. Some testimony (that of experts) may, in fact, be more dependable than that of our own senses.  

Reply: Hume would not deny the distinction between kinds of testimony. What he asserts is that concerning a report of a miracle the possibility of fraud or illusion is sufficient to discredit a witness who would be readily believed in another matter. The fact that some witnesses lie or are deceived throws suspicion on most. The fact that most witnesses lie or are deceived concerning religious miracles throws suspicion on all.

3. In the "Essay on Miracles" Hume is wrong in denying that there has ever been a miracle which possessed sufficient evidence for proof because:

a. His definition of "miracle" rules out a whole class of very probable events. An event need not be a "violation of nature" to be counted as a sign of divine intervention.  

Reply: An event which is reported

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as a miracle may be judged in any one of five ways. It did not occur: it was (1) a fraud or (2) an illusion. It did occur: it was (3) the product of a coincidence, (4) the effect of a previously unsuspected natural cause, or (5) a violation of well-established natural law. If a miracle can be suspected to be due to any of reasons (1) through (4), its value as a sign of Deity is obviously greatly weakened. Since it is the evidential character of miracles in which Hume is interested, the possibility that the Deity acts in apparent accordance with natural law is not his concern. Also, Hume is cognizant of the impossibility of ever proving that any event is due to the volition of Deity, but this is not part of his attack against miracles. If a violation of the laws of nature in the context of a religious miracle is ever sufficiently authenticated, the wise man ought seriously to consider the religious system which it supports. Hume admits that there may be violations of the usual course of nature, but he denies that such a violation which is claimed as the foundation of a religious system can ever be proved.

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129 That is, a product of the conjunction of well-known natural causes at a very opportune moment. See Huxley's account of the fortress walls destroyed by an earthquake on the eve of a battle (op. cit., p. 136).

130 Campbell, at least, recognized this (op. cit., pp. 33-34).
This is not because it could not be proved to be a sign of Deity (which it could not), but because the circumstances which surround the reporting of such an event make its reality highly improbable. 131

b. Hume is guilty of advocating the neglect of significant evidence. He argues that the wise man proportions belief to evidence and then declares the falsity of every historical account of miracles without examining the evidence for each. 132 Reply: Hume partially replied to this criticism himself: "Does a man of sense run after every silly tale of witches, or hobgoblins, or fairies, and canvass particularly the evidence? I never knew any one, that examined and deliberated about nonsense who did not believe it before the end of his inquiries." 133 There is no need to examine every piece of evidence if every kind of evidence has been proved faulty. A meteorologist does not predict tomorrow's rain on the basis of picnics planned for that day because he has judged such "evidence" to be untrustworthy. Hume argues that the kind of evidence offered for miracles are all insufficient. I think

131 Enquiry, p. 127.


his point is correct, although his defense of it requires further examination of the kinds of evidence for miracles and the reasons against their validity.

c. Hume fails to realize that the antecedent probability of miracles is greatly increased by the truth of the religion in which they occur. If there is a God and if He chooses to reveal Himself to men, it is probable that He does so through miracles.\textsuperscript{134} Reply: If the Christian religion is true, then it may be probable that Christ worked miracles, but in this case the religion becomes evidence for the miracles and not the reverse, which is the issue in the "Essay". Also, since the only knowledge of God is through His effects and since the Argument from Design produces no definitive conclusion, knowledge of God cannot support, but must depend upon a particular revelation through miracles.\textsuperscript{135}

d. There is sufficient evidence for the miracles of the Gospel. The fact that other religions claim miracles has no bearing on the issue of whether or not the events recorded in the New Testament took place. Christ's


\textsuperscript{135}Hume should have put Section XI of the \textit{Enquiry}, "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State," before the section on miracles, since his refutation of miracles depends heavily upon it—although his refutation of miracles as \textit{evidence of Deity} does not.
miracles were attested by great numbers of people\footnote{The feeding of the five thousand, for example.} and frequently by his persecutors and those antagonistic to Christianity.\footnote{The resurrection.} They were performed in an orderly fashion, were publicly verifiable, and were faithfully recorded by more than one witness.\footnote{Chalmers, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 104. Campbell, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 133 and 170. Taylor, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 338. De Quincy, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 92.} 

Reply: It is safe to say that Hume would never have replied directly to this criticism. Even the scathing scorn he heaps upon the Old Testament miracles at the close of the "Essay" exceeds the limits of good taste which he apparently set for himself.\footnote{In "The Natural History of Religion" he scored out a passage which cited the absurd accounts in the Old Testament of God "wrestling with a man, walking in the cool of the evening, showing his back parts," etc. (\textit{Essays}, II, 332 and 332n.)} 

Hume would probably have answered simply that it was not his responsibility to disprove Scripture miracles but the responsibility of theologians to prove them, without assuming the truths of religion for which they were considered as evidence. That such proof is not possible follows from his general criticism of all religious testimony and the remoteness of the events in question. The difficulty with the founding of any new religion is that no competent critic regards the reports of miraculous events as important enough to investigate. By the time
their importance is recognized, the necessary data has become unavailable.\textsuperscript{140} When reports of contemporary miracles produce so little conviction and are so easily refuted,\textsuperscript{141} it is no great wonder that accounts of similar events, removed from us by hundreds of years and thousands of miles, fail to convince us even though we cannot determine a particular error in their testimony.

Although these are not all the objections which have been made against Hume's "Essay on Miracles", they are the major ones in my opinion. Hume's preference for a strictly empirical form of argument leaves him open to criticisms which often miss the point of his argument. Hume's case against natural design and miracles as empirical evidence for religious truth is not that the facts appealed to are illusory, but that the interpretation which these facts assume in a religious system is unwarranted. The feeling of design is a perfectly legitimate sentiment, but it lacks cognitive significance. Violations of nature are possible, but when they are reported as religious miracles, they become highly improbable. As we turn now to consider Kant's views on the empirical evidence for

\textsuperscript{140}Enquiry, p. 119-121.
\textsuperscript{141}Campbell (op. cit., pp. 208ff.) and Paley (op. cit., I., 369ff.) easily refute Hume's best examples of well-attested modern miracles, especially those of Abbe Paris.
God's existence, we find that for him the problem of teleology is more than a question of feeling and the inquiry concerning the claims of a special revelation is more than a factual issue.
CHAPTER V
THE INSUFFICIENCY OF EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE
FOR RELIGIOUS TRUTH
Part II Kant

In his excellent article on the proofs for the existence of God, C. D. Broad comments, "The Argument from Design has been criticized very fairly and thoroughly by . . . Hume and Kant. . . . I have seen nothing in the writings of those who have tried to rehabilitate the argument which effectively rebuts their adverse verdict."¹ That Hume deserves this tribute, I think cannot be denied, but that equal praise is due to Kant is not as clearly discernible. Anyone who has read the Critique of Pure Reason is aware of Kant's four main criticisms of the Physico-theological Argument, as he calls it. These criticisms for the most part comprise a valid and complete refutation of at least one form of the Argument from Design. Two questions must be asked, and answered, however, before Kant can take his place beside Hume as a foremost critic of this argument. In the first place, what has Kant really added of importance to Hume's analysis of the Argument from Design, and, in the second place, how are his apparent vacillations concerning the importance of teleology to be explained?

I shall attempt to answer the first of these questions in the course of examining Kant's views on the Argument from Design by indicating two points in which he goes beyond Hume's analysis in the Dialogues. Both of these points seem to me to express fundamentally new approaches to the problems of metaphysical and theological knowledge. The first is Kant's policy of not only refuting an argument or theory, but also indicating why it has been believed. Throughout the "Dialectic of Pure Reason" in the first Critique, Kant is careful to point out just what it is in the knowledge situation that tempts metaphysicians and theologians to employ the categories of experience in a quest for non-empirical realities. Claims of transcendent knowledge are illusions, and Kant proves this by showing how reason requires but cannot provide such knowledge.

The other point in which he surpasses Hume is only indirectly suggested by Kant but has become in the hands of recent positivists a major device in the attack on metaphysics. This is the insistence that certain propositions or beliefs are not empirical at all, no matter how much they are made out to be so. "God exists" as conceived in the Argument from Design is one of these propositions. I intend to show how Kant expands and improves Hume's uncertain analysis of this fact.
The second question, concerning Kant's vacillation on matters of teleology, is either one that strikes at the root of the Critical Philosophy or else it is based on a mistake. It may be that Kant in his three Critiques operates with principles which are not ultimately consistent with each other. This is a problem for a much broader Kantian study, and I do not choose to consider it here. I shall rather argue that Kant's opinion of Physico-theology, the Argument from Design, is not inconsistent. I shall show this by examining Part II of The Only Possible Proof for the Existence of God and the concluding sections of the Critique of Judgment as well as the relevant sections of the Critique of Pure Reason already mentioned.

Following this examination of the Argument from Design, I shall examine in Section II Kant's views on the empirical evidence for a special revelation. This topic is best judged as a corollary to Kant's ethico-theology since that is the way he regarded it, but some notice of his comments on miracles, prophecies, Scripture, etc. is necessary in this chapter. Although he rejects all such "evidence" rather summarily because of his antipathy to

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3 Translated by J. H. Bernard (London: 1892), pp. 334-413.
religion founded on anything but pure respect for moral law, the principles he suggests in the course of this rejection reveal his essential agreement with Hume on this issue. He does not add anything to Hume's basic analysis, but supplements it with a separate argument against the religious value of historical events—miraculous or not.

Kant's love for the a priori puts him at a disadvantage in the question of the empirical evidences for religion. Perhaps his greatest achievement in this issue is his appropriation of Hume's principles and conclusions. Most of the following analysis will be devoted to indicating how Kant adapted Hume's arguments to a more a priori approach and augmented them with considerations of his own.

I

Kant gives his most concise and formal analysis of the Argument from Design in the Critique of Pure Reason. This analysis is deficient in two major respects: first, it forces the Argument from Design into an a priori form like that of the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs. Second, it scarcely notices the important epistemological function of teleological principles as discussed in the Critique

\[4\] Chapter III, "The Ideal of Pure Reason," Section 6, "The Impossibility of the Physico-theological Proof."
Despite these deficiencies, this section of the first Critique expresses in a clear fashion many of Kant's principle reasons for rejecting Physico-theology. I shall, therefore, begin the discussion with this section and then indicate the additional aspects of Kant's position as expressed in *The Only Possible Proof* and the *Critique of Judgment*.

After an introductory comment on the evident impossibility of any a posteriori metaphysics, Kant begins his discussion of the Physico-theological Proof by trying to account for its prominence and authority down through the history of thought. Why, he asks, has this argument, which possesses even less formal validity than the Ontological or Cosmological Proofs, produced such irresistible conviction among mankind? Part of the answer, he argues, can be given in terms of psychological reasons. The Argument from Design is popular because (1) it is the simplest to understand—it rests upon a common experience of harmony in nature and a common reason concerning the cause for such harmony, namely, an intelligent plan; (2) it enlivens the study of nature by suggesting "ends and purposes where our observation would not have detected them by itself;" and (3) it strengthens the religious

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belief in a beneficent personal Author of natural events and human destiny.6

More important than these psychological motives, however, is the epistemological need for such a proof. The Physico-theological Argument is an illusion, as Kant intends to demonstrate, but before he does so, he makes it clear that reason's demand for an intelligent ordering cause of nature is not an illusion. This is an important part of Kant's position and one of the places in which he surpasses Hume. Hume has Philo ignore Cleanthes' appeal to feeling until the formal inadequacies of the Argument from Design have weakened the force of this appeal beyond repair. Kant makes his major point7 against non-formal support of the proof at the very beginning: reason's demand for a Physico-theological Proof is legitimate, but its substitution of this demand for the proof itself is a "dialectical illusion."

Reason's normal procedure from nature to God is portrayed by Kant in the following steps:8

6 Critique of Pure Reason, A623; B651.

7 I say "major point" because Kant later discusses the difference between feeling and proof in the Critique of Judgment, see below p. 120.

8 Critique of Pure Reason, A622-3; B650-1.
(1) Experience presents to us a world of immeasurable "variety, order, purposiveness and beauty."

(2) When we realize the magnitude of this natural harmony in the infinitely large and its complexity in the infinitely small, all rational thought and speech is overcome by a sense of awe and wonder.

(3) Ordinary causal explanations are ineffectual in accounting for the totality of order in the universe. Things themselves cannot be ultimately responsible for this order.

(4) Unless we are to abandon the origin of the universe to an "abyss of nothingness," we must assume an original ordering principle.

(5) Certain properties must be ascribable to this principle:

a. It must be superior to any and all things in the world. Since we do not know either the whole content of the world or its magnitude, we can ascribe to this principle "a degree of perfection that sets it above everything else that is possible"—hence, a Supreme Being.

b. It must be a single substance. This is in accord with the principle of parsimony and is justifiable on the basis that such a Being is not self-contradictory,
that it is never decisively contradicted by an experience, and that the order and unity of purpose in the world demand a single cause.

(6) We thus are led to an irresistible belief in a wise Author of the world.

Before explaining in detail his objections to this natural process of reason, Kant feels it necessary to restate the chief points of the Physico-theological Proof. I think this is an error prompted by his desire to make the Argument from Design conform to the deductive procedure of the a priori proofs. His restatement does not add any new principle to those which I have listed in the six steps above. He does, however, clarify two important points in the process of making these steps more rigorous. The first is that the cause of the world must be both intelligent and free. That is, the purpose and order in nature can only be due to deliberative choice and not to instinct. This is a point he questions in the Critique of Judgment. The second point is that the cause of the world must be one because the world is an artfully

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9 This brief phrase is the only indication in the whole Critique of Pure Reason that Kant recognized the problem of evil. He seems to assume here that it is not decisive in refuting the Argument from Design.

10 See below, p. 224.
arranged structure." This is proved first by the partial verification of observation and then inferred with probability through analogy. This is the essence of the attempt to conceive the Argument from Design as a semi-empirical theory—an attempt which Kant later rejects.

In stating his criticisms of the Argument from Design, Kant makes it explicit that he objects to the proof only insofar as it claims to be a demonstration. When it is conceived, in Hume's terms, as a "natural belief," Kant holds the argument to be beyond doubts suggested by "subtle and abstruse speculation." The evidences of purpose in nature are so manifold and the mind ascends so readily from them to the idea of a supreme Author that it would be both uncomfrting and vain to cast aspersion on this belief. As a means of inculcating an admiration for the greatness, wisdom, and power of the Author of the world (provided there is one, we must still say at this stage of the game) Kant has nothing but respect for the Argument from Design.

As a claim to transcendent knowledge of God's existence, however, Kant finds the Physico-theological Proof at least as invalid as the Ontological and Cosmological Proofs. In the Critique of Pure Reason he limits his refutation of it to the following four points:

11 *Critique of Pure Reason*, A624; B652.
(1) Empirical experience can never be adequate to prove the validity of the concept of God.\textsuperscript{12} The concept of God is a transcendental idea of an all-sufficient and necessary Being. The experience of natural order and purpose is incapable of substantiating this idea on two counts: (a) empirical things are always conditioned and thus, by themselves, provide no basis either individually or through synthesis for inferring the unconditioned;\textsuperscript{13} (b) experience is always limited to a part of the world so that we cannot justifiably reason from the whole of nature to its cause, nor can we estimate the degree of purpose and order in the world since we cannot compare it to other possible worlds.\textsuperscript{14}

(2) The analogy between the universe and an artfully arranged structure could not withstand a searching transcendental criticism.\textsuperscript{15} This analogy depends upon conceiving nature to be like a watch, ship, or house and, hence,

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., A621; B649.

\textsuperscript{13}I take it Kant means that we do not meet the unconditioned in experience nor can we infer it on the basis of any possible observation according to the rules of empirical inference.

\textsuperscript{14}These two points are essentially summaries of two of Hume’s arguments in the \textit{Dialogues}. See also \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}, Beck ed. pp. 240-2.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A626; B654. Such criticism, Kant says, need not be made—that is, even allowing the basis of the analogy to be valid, a further criticism (3) is fatal to it.
the cause of nature to be like man—free and intelligent. Each of these conceptions illegitimately assumes the applicability of empirical categories to transcendent entities—the world as a whole and God.

(3) Even if the analogy between the universe and an artfully arranged structure be allowed to stand, the consequence is not a religious concept of God. If we are to specify a cause at all by means of analogy, we must adhere to those elements of human art which we know. None others are valid for an inference from human art to a divine Artist. If we do adhere to the known elements of human art, we discover the analogy to have proved only that the form and not the matter of the universe is created, since man creates only the form and not the matter in human art. Thus, the Physico-theological Proof does not demonstrate God's existence but only that of a very great, powerful, and wise architect who is limited by the materials available.

(4) The Physico-theological Proof requires the Cosmological and Ontological Arguments. As stated in (3), the Physico-theological Proof cannot prove the existence

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16 *Ibid.* A627-30; B655-58. This is essentially the same as Hume's argument in Section XI of the *Enquiry*.

of a supreme Author of the world because either it proves a cause or causes of the world which cannot be further specified or it determines the Author of the world to be God which it then cannot prove to exist. Yet both reason and religion require the determinate concept of a Being supreme in greatness, wisdom, power, etc. Therefore, the Physico-theological Proof implicitly falls back on the Cosmological Proof to determine the existence of a necessary being and then it employs an ontological step to specify this being as all real. Having attained in this way the concept of God, the attempt is then made to cite as further evidence examples of purpose in nature, thus concealing the non-empirical premises of the original inference. Without these premises, Physico-theology cannot produce a concept of God from which either practical or speculative consequences can be deduced.

I see very little in these points which requires additional comment beyond that given in reference to Hume. Points (1), (2), and (3) are merely summaries and adaptations of some of his arguments. (4) is due partly to Kant's viewing the Argument from Design in the light of the a priori proofs. His criticism, while essentially true, is only so because he reads into the Physico-theological Proof greater formal rigor than needs to be there. The force of this proof, as Kant himself admits, does not lie
in its power to entail the certainty of God's existence but in its ability to account for certain unique features of the world in terms of principles generated from moral and/or religious experience. Both before and after Kant occupied himself with the strictly a priori matters of the first Critique, he saw more clearly than he expresses there the real issues of Physico-theology. In The Only Possible Proof for the Existence of God and in The Critique of Judgment he reaffirms his basic criticisms of the Argument from Design while also expanding his analysis to include aspects of the problem which he at best only suggests in the first Critique.

In The Only Possible Proof Kant reveals the impressions which prompted his respect for the Argument from Design. These impressions derive from an immediate sense of harmony in nature. After reading Hamann's translation of Hume's Dialogues, Kant was forced by his recognition of Hume's decisive arguments to minimize the cognitive value of this sense of harmony, but in this earlier work he allowed feeling and sentiment a greater role in determining correct belief.

It must not be imagined, however, that Kant even in this pre-critical work allowed the Argument from Design to be a proof of God's existence. The "only possible proof" of which the title of the essay speaks is a strange
version of the Ontological Argument. He was already fully aware that the Argument from Design possessed no geometrical strictness in its conclusion. Most of the criticisms which he later found in Hume and stated in the Critique of Pure Reason can be found at least suggested in this earlier work. The failure of Physico-theology to produce mathematical certainty and exactitude is completely fatal to its purpose as viewed from the a priori bias of the first Critique. This failure is not nearly so fatal if the non-discursive sources of true belief are also recognized. "It is absolutely necessary to convince oneself of the existence of God," Kant concludes by saying, "but it is not just so necessary that it should be demonstrated."19

Unlike Hume, who recognized the importance of the feeling of natural design because of its universal appeal to mankind, Kant experienced in his own heart an undeniable admiration for the Author of nature's wonders. Flashes of poetic inspiration are rare in Kant's rigorous philosophy, but none are more dramatic than the confession of his feeling when confronted by nature's majestic mysteries.


19 Ibid., p. 366.
A powerful conception, he says, of the "wisdom, care, and potency of the adorable Being" fills his soul with "astonishment, humility, and awe."20 The force of this conception is attested in one of the most moving passages in his whole philosophy:

When I see the tricks, the violence and the scene of dissention in a particle of matter, and elevate my eyes in order to behold the immense space filled with worlds like clouds of dust, no human language can express the feeling, which such thought excites, and all subtle metaphysical dissections fall far short of the sublimity and dignity peculiar to such an intuition.21

A few pages later this intuition appears so evident to him that he allows himself a brief dogmatic assertion:

... In the make of an animal, members of sensation are so artfully conjoined with those of voluntary motion and of the vital parts, that one must be wicked, (for nobody can be so unreasonable,) as soon as he is led to mistake a wise Author, who hath brought the matter of which an animal body is composed into such excellent order.22

The sense of these statements appears quite incommensurable with the opinions expressed in the first Critique. I do not think that Kant is really inconsistent with his complete view of the Argument from Design because

20 Ibid., p. 299.
21 Ibid., p. 298n.
22 Ibid., p. 309.
in *The Only Possible Proof* he goes on to an examination of the cognitive import of the feeling of design which is very close to his later argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Before indicating how he handles this examination I should like to present his discussion in the *Critique of Judgment* of teleology as a concept required by an empirical study of nature. Following this, I shall draw from both *The Only Possible Proof* and the third *Critique* Kant's principle criticisms of the Argument from Design regarded either as a nondiscursive dictate of sentiment and feeling or as a metaphysical extrapolation of a principle of empirical science.

It would, of course, be unwise to obscure the essential simplicity of the Argument from Design by submerging it under the often artificial complications of the *Critique of Teleological Judgment*. What is necessary to notice, however, is Kant's basic reasons for regarding the concept of purpose as necessary to the study of nature and the relation of this concept to the aim of Physico-theology. Nature, Kant argues, cannot be successfully explained solely in terms of mechanical causes. The reason for this is that no known combination of mechanical causes is sufficient to account for the origin and existence of certain natural entities, namely, living organisms. Living things are not only organized to a degree exceeding the
limits of mechanistic explanation, they are also self-organizing. That is, they apparently act according to purpose. In order to account at all for these phenomena of life, we must have recourse to the principles of teleology—final causes or purposes.

Kant is careful not to attribute equal status as scientific principles to both mechanism and teleology. Reason, he says, cannot prove either to be the sole principle of natural events, but mechanism has a foundation as a necessary category of empirical knowledge, while teleology depends for its status upon the limitations of our knowledge—that is, upon the fact that we cannot fully explain the complicated structure of living creatures. Teleology is indispensable for science because it generates two necessary rules for the study of living beings: (a) Nothing in such a being exists in vain; and (b) Nothing happens merely by accident in an organism.

In this way the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment is generated. Mechanism is neither satisfactory not refutable;

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23 *Critique of Judgment*, pp. 279ff, Bernard translation.

24 Ibid., pp. 295 and 260ff.

teleology is necessary but unprovable. In the history of philosophy only four solutions to this antinomy have been proposed. Purpose in nature has been regarded either as ideal (illusory) or as real. Democritus denied the reality of purpose in favor of pure mechanism, and Spinoza denied it in favor of metaphysical fatalism. On the other side, purpose alone can be affirmed as real in the sense that every event is due to the conscious intent of some spirit. This is termed hylozoism by Kant. Or mechanism may be permitted, always conditional upon some ultimate purpose. This is the position of theism. Of these four views, Kant finds that of theism the least objectionable, but points out that it is faced with the prima facie weakness of being unable to disprove mechanism as an ontology.

The Physico-theological Argument may now be restated in terms of the concept of natural teleology. Some things in nature demand the application of the concept of purpose. If the presence of particular purposes in nature is assured, we may extend the application of this concept to nature as a whole and, thus, unite the ideas of individual artificers into the notion of an architectonic Understanding.

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26 *Critique of Judgment*, paragraphs 69 and 70.

Hume's objection that the purpose, order, and unity attributed to such an Understanding still demands an explanation is without weight. Purpose, order, and unity is an internal relation between the "parts" of mind, whereas it is externally related to particles of matter. The latter, therefore, requires an explanation while the former does not.

Kant has now presented three forms of the Argument from Design, though he does not distinguish between them. The first is the usual argument from the analogy between natural products and human art. The second is based on the immediate impression of a beneficent Author of nature's wonders. And the third is the metaphysical extension of the empirical concept of purpose, as just described. I shall now state what I take to be Kant's main criticisms of these three forms of the argument as presented in The Only Possible Proof and The Critique of Judgment, omitting for the most part any which I have already drawn from the Critique of Pure Reason.

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30 Kant made a preliminary attempt to enumerate three foundations of Physico-theology in _The Only Possible Proof_ (p. 295). The first foundation was miraculous events; the second was teleology in nature, and third was the metaphysical ground of natural law. He never employed this classification and probably soon recognized its artificiality.
The dictates of feeling, Kant argues, though in themselves practically inescapable, do not justify the traditional belief in God. In the first place, there are no grounds in experience for positing a single supreme Creator as cause of the world's order and harmony. We experience design not creation, and if we subtract the influence of natural beliefs inherited as part of the religious tradition of Western culture, we sense not a single universal purpose in nature but many partial purposes not necessarily related. Nor do we experience these purposes as always good. Nature may be the object of a divine beneficence, but uncritical experience of natural surdities seems to point rather to a belief in polytheism whose gods need not agree nor be equally devoted to goodness.31

The feeling or sentiment of design must also be questioned as evidence for God's existence because of its reliance upon psychological persuasion rather than logical conviction. Intuition may, perhaps, be a better method than either deductive or inductive inference for the appropriation of some truths, but unless some reasons can be given to justify intuition as an acceptable method, there

can be little ground for accepting or rejecting its conclusions except purely subjective preference or some even less rational consideration. The mind's movement from innumerable instances of natural harmony to an admiration of the Author of nature is surely a natural one, but neither the instances nor the movement supply adequate grounds for a conclusion concerning God's existence. The best use such a process has is as a propadeutic to the worship of God, whose existence has been established through other principles—if that is possible.32

Kant's next criticism of the Argument from Design concerns a restriction upon the empirical status of the concept of purpose. The Argument from Design (in one of its forms) claims that since purpose is necessary to explain some natural events, God is necessary to explain purpose. Kant says that such an inference is invalid in the very beginning because it depends upon a misconception of the role of teleology in empirical science. Teleology can only be a regulative idea for the study of nature. It cannot be taken to warrant the actual attributing of particular purposes to individual events. It is not a category like causality since it can have no schematization—that is, no rule for its application. The regular succession

32Critique of Judgment, pp. 369 and 395.
of events is the condition of the application of the category of causality to experience, but teleology functions only as a heuristic maxim encouraging science to believe in and seek natural order even where none has yet been found. The necessity of a teleological view of nature is due to the limited state of our knowledge. If we were omniscient, we could in principle explain all phenomena strictly in terms of mechanical causes. Thus purpose is necessary to our view of nature as a whole, but it can play no part in a complete explanation of particular events. 33

If instead of recognizing the purely regulative function of teleology, we attempt to regard it as a constitutive scientific principle, a consistent study of nature becomes impossible. Anthropomorphism soon destroys rational inquiry concerning causes, and laziness under the guise of devotion replaces the arduous task of trying to understand and predict the course of events. 34 "If the Physico-theological writers are listened to," Kant comments

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sarcastically, "one is inclined to represent to himself that the beds of rivers were all excavated by God."\(^{35}\) The logical result of the Physico-theological approach to nature is a Hyperphysic of teleology which can dispense with all natural explanations and find in everything (even abortions!) an admirable purpose.\(^{36}\) For these reasons the concept of natural purpose required by the Physico-theological Proof cannot be justified by an appeal to empirical science.

Kant's final criticism of the Argument from Design concerns its status as an empirical inference. In this connection he makes two major points. (1) Even if it be allowed to be an empirical inference, it is invalid, and (2) in actual fact it is not an empirical inference at all.

(1) It is invalid because, first of all, it seeks to move from the experience of particular purposes in nature to a single purpose of nature. Now whatever the status of the judgment concerning purposes in nature may be, it is certain that we have no sufficient empirical ground for positing a purpose of nature adequate to the concept of God. We neither experience the totality of

\(^{35}\) *The Only Possible Proof*, p. 301.

\(^{36}\) *Critique of Judgment*, p. 344.
nature nor observe a unity of purpose in those parts of it which we do experience. Therefore, even granting that nature exhibits particular purposes, there is no authority for the conclusion that the world as a whole is the object of a divine Intelligence.\(^3\)

Secondly, the inference from purpose to God's existence is invalid because it fails to discredit alternative principles of order. The unique feature of nature which demands the concept of purpose is the presence of living organisms. But organisms are not only organized they are self-organizing. Why is it not reasonable, therefore, to attribute the order in nature as a whole to a principle analogous to the art-instinct in animals which does not imply even wisdom, much less the supreme wisdom attributed to God.\(^3\) Moreover, the possibility still stands that order in animals now admired as the effect of an intelligent plan may someday be accounted for in terms of natural selection. It is true, Kant believes, that a theory of natural selection does not obviate the need for an original ordering principle, but it does point up the fact that this principle need not be conceived as God.\(^3\) We attribute to

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 363-4.
\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 272-280 and 369.
the world-cause supreme wisdom and goodness because moral theology requires such concepts, but they cannot be justified by an appeal to empirical evidence.40

(2) The Argument from Design is really not an empirical argument at all, Kant argues, because it fails to satisfy the necessary conditions of such an argument. Kant distinguishes four kinds of proof in connection with this point: syllogism, analogy, probable opinion, and hypothesis.41 All but the first may in some sense be called empirical, but the Argument from Design cannot be any one of these. Analogy and hypothesis he dismisses rather shortly. There is too great a dissimilarity, he argues following Hume, between natural products and human art and between a world intelligence and man's mind to allow an inference by analogy.42 Hypothesis also fails as a basis for believing in God's existence since there are no empirical grounds for determining the possibility of such a Being and, hence, no reasons for accepting this hypothesis and rejecting other fancies which might be suggested.43

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40 Critique of Judgment, p. 343.
41 Ibid., p. 398.
42 Ibid., pp. 399-400.
43 Ibid., p. 402.
Kant's most interesting analysis concerns his rejection of the Argument from Design as a matter of probable opinion. In effect, he says that the proposition "God exists" is outside the domain of probability since there is no possible set of empirical observations which could either confirm or disconfirm it.\(^4^4\) This point is also mentioned in the \textit{Critique of Practical Reason}. It is entirely certain, Kant says, "that no one can refute the propositions, "There is a God". For where could this insight be obtained? Thus the situation with respect to a rational belief is different from that of a historical (i.e., empirical) belief, for in the latter it is always possible that proofs to the contrary may be found."\(^4^5\)

It is not possible either to infer God's existence inductively even from an infinite number of observations of natural order, or to deduce from His existence consequences which are verifiable in experience.\(^4^6\) God is not a part of the world, according to traditional theology, but a non-natural existent related to the whole of nature. But both God and the totality of events, which might testify of Him, are beyond the range of sensible experience.

\(^4^4\)\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 401-2.


\(^4^6\)\textit{Critique of Judgment}, p. 326.
The empirical approach of the Argument from Design, therefore, cannot help but be bankrupt as an attempt to justify the first principle of theology. The failure to realize this generates the illusion that reason can claim in this one case a theoretical knowledge of the transcendent and then, expecting further successes where one has been achieved, open the way to all the sophistries of dogmatic metaphysics.\textsuperscript{47} Kant has tried, not without some measure of success, to execute the difficult task of dispelling this illusion without also destroying its foundation, the appreciation of purpose, order, and beauty in nature.

II

For Kant the problem of the historical evidence for a particular revelation possesses a dimension which it does not have for Hume. For Hume it is only an epistemological issue concerning the validity of certain knowledge claims. For Kant it also involves a question concerning the religious value of traditional beliefs. Whereas Hume sets out to destroy miracles, prophecies, visions, etc. as a basis for justifying traditional religious doctrines, Kant is concerned less with denying the factual character of these historical events than with showing that

\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p. 393.
they are not necessary or even desirable as a foundation for true religion. Hume denies on logical grounds that we can support religious principles by an appeal to miracles. Kant denies on religious grounds that we ought even to try. Although he grants to historical creeds an important function in the original development of a moral faith which Hume could not appreciate, Kant agrees with Hume's thesis that the factual reliability of such creeds is open to a great deal of suspicion.

Although Kant did not see fit to embody his views on the empirical evidences for a particular revelation in a single treatise, sufficient principles and comments can be drawn from his philosophy to permit a general indication of his position on this issue. I shall first suggest his reasons for discounting the value of miracle reports as religious evidence and then mention his reasons for rejecting belief in a special revelation as a logical foundation for moral theology.

Kant first suggests principles which legislate against the belief in miracles in his Inaugural Dissertation of 1770. In Section V of this work he lists three "principles of convenience" which, though not metaphysically certain, are necessary for an intelligible description of any given object of experience. These are (1) "everything in the universe is done according to the order of nature;"
(2) "principles are not to be multiplied beyond supreme necessity;" and (3) "matter neither originates nor perishes." 48

It is only the first of these principles which directly concern the topic of miracles, and in discussing this principle Kant explicitly excludes all non-natural causes from a rational account of the universe. This is not done, he says, because anyone can claim a complete knowledge of natural events nor because supernatural events have been proved impossible or even improbable. The justification of this principle is the fact that its denial would leave the intellect with no basis on which to rationally explain and predict the course of experience, "the rash citation of the supernatural being the couch of lazy understandings." 49 For this reason we must shut out from the exposition of any given phenomenon—no matter how unusual it appears—the appeal to "comparative miracles," 50 that is, the appeal to the influence of spirits. The natural scientist, therefore, has a very strong a priori reason for rejecting the report of any supposed miracle.

48 Kant's Inaugural Dissertation of 1770, trans Wm. J. Eckhoff (New York: 1894), pp. 84-5.
49 Ibid., p. 84.
Kant recognizes as well as Hume does, of course, that an appeal to the uniformity of nature is not sufficient to decide the question of miracles as evidence of a particular revelation. Such an issue demands some examination of the history of religion. Since for Kant the history of religion is equivalent to the history of Christianity, the problem of miracles is accordingly restricted to those found in Christian tradition.\(^{51}\) His discussion of this problem in no way equals Hume's, but his comments on it are sufficient to indicate his essential agreement with Hume's conclusions.

It must be noted, however, that Kant accepts the Scriptural account of Christ's miracles, but he does so without violating any of Hume's reasons against their historical accuracy. As I shall shortly indicate, Kant allows historical creeds to function as instructive myths while at the same time denying that such creeds could ever be evidence in support of knowledge of the supernatural.

Kant's definition of the word "miracle" bears some resemblance to the second sense in which Hume uses it. Hume often speaks of miracles which violate all known laws of nature.\(^{52}\) Kant says that miracles are "events in the world

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\(^{52}\)I.e., the resurrection of Queen Elizabeth I, *Enquiry*, p. 128.
the operating laws of whose causes are, and must remain, absolutely unknown to us.53 This definition explains only what miracles are for us and not what they are in themselves, since this is unknowable. It is stronger than Hume's second definition since, for Kant, the causes of miracles must always remain unknowable. We may, however, think these causes in three different categories. Miracles may be either "theistic" or "demonic"—that is, God caused or spirit caused. Demonic miracles may be either "angelic" (of good spirits) or "devilish" (of bad spirits).54 These categories are not very meaningful, he concludes, although we do have a kind of negative criterion to apply to theistic miracles. If in the report of any miracle there are elements contrary to morality, we know that it cannot, despite all appearances, be of God. His example is the story of God's command to Abraham to slay his innocent son, Isaac.55

Operating on the basis of this definition of miracles, Kant examines the question of whether or not such events can function as evidence for the truth of Christianity.

54Ibid., p. 81.
55Ibid., p. 82.
A special revelation, he says, requires extraordinary signs to facilitate its acceptance. It is natural, therefore, that the beginnings of Christianity should be accompanied by reports of miracles. Our belief in these miracles depends upon our faith in historical testimony concerning them, and this testimony requires validation by scholarship. Thus, the status of miracles as evidence for the Christian revelation depends in turn upon the evidence that these events were recorded by contemporary writers, that these writers were not in collusion with the disseminators of the miracle reports, and that they are connected with present-day scholarship by a continuous tradition of accuracy. Unfortunately, Kant concludes, such evidence is almost wholly lacking in the case of the Christian miracles. Their recording in writing was delayed for a generation, collusion cannot be decisively disproved, and disinterested authorities among the learned Roman public fail to corroborate the Scripture accounts.

Besides this, Kant believes that no sensible man today really believes that miracles happen. Religious people, at least, allow them to be possible in theory, but not even they grant this possibility any determining effect.

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56 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
in their thought or action. The judge who readily affirms his belief in miracles while in church, regards the delinquent's claim to have been tempted of the devil as if he had said nothing at all. The doctor who des­pairs of a patient's life and predicts that he will die “unless a miracle occurs” does not expect such an event to happen, and if it does, he attributes it instead to unknown or unpredicted natural causes. Likewise, the scientist must eliminate the possibility of miracles even though he cannot completely explain the forces at work in nature nor deny what non-natural causes we might experience if we possessed another sense.

Kant accounts for this prejudice against present-day miracles by showing its derivation from an enlightened confidence in reason's power to understand the world. The occurrence of a miracle entails the interruption of natural law. Since reason can know only natural causes, the occurrence of a miracle means the crippling of reason. It is restricted from an explanation involving known causes and yet not instructed in any new ones.

58 Ibid., p. 82.
59 Ibid., p. 82.
60 Ibid., p. 82.
61 Ibid., p. 81.
It is for this reason that the report of a real miracle produces such a different reaction in the man of reason from the report of an unexplained natural event. Unusual natural events reveal a basic ignorance of nature's principles, but they also excite the mind with an expectation of new knowledge strictly in terms of order and law. Miracles, on the other hand, produce only a feeling of dejection and a fear that reason and the common habits of experience will be useless in determining correct action. Thus, despite his pious affirmations to the contrary, modern man, Kant concludes, does not really believe in the actual occurrence of miracles.

What shall be said then concerning theologians who claim the Gospel miracles as evidence of the Christian revelation? We can say of this claim, Kant answers, that it is unsupported, and we can also charge these teachers of religion with being inconsistent. They are inconsistent when they say that miracles occurred many centuries ago in the beginning of the Christian era but that those now reported are not true. A denial of present-day miracles they recognize as a requirement of reason. It is an expression of the objective knowledge that there really are no miracles. But they refuse to make the natural application of this conclusion to the miracles of antiquity.63

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62Ibid., p. 83n.
63Ibid., p. 80n.
In defense theologians sometimes argue that though modern miracles are nonexistent, ancient ones are credible because miracles seldom happen and the need for them ceased with the acceptance of the Christian belief. Kant replies that it certainly is true that "the age of miracles is passed" in the sense that no new religion could be founded on them today. But the proposition "miracles seldom happen" is either a tautology or nonsense and cannot be used to brace up belief in the events of Scripture. It is either obvious that miracles seldom happen, since if they were common they would not be accounted miracles, or it makes no sense because no grounds are possible to answer the question, "How seldom?". Reports of miracles are frequent and there is no factual basis for distinguishing the false accounts of today from the supposedly true ones of ancient times. "Thus," Kant concludes, "miracles must be admitted as occurring daily or else never. . . Since the former alternative (that they occur daily) is not at all compatible with reason, nothing remains but to adopt the latter maxim."65

In this last comment Kant reveals an a priori bias which clouds not only his discussion of miracles but also

64 Ibid., p. 79.
65 Ibid., p. 84n.
his whole examination of the empirical evidences for religion. Miracles might be relatively infrequent and possess certain characteristics which could be determined empirically as non-natural. I do not know what such characteristics might be, but Kant should have investigated the claim that some miracles possess sufficient evidence to be distinguished as non-natural events. It is imaginable, for example, that a person should suffer a serious accident—say a broken neck—and be given up by the examining physicians and then, after concerted prayer is made on his behalf, this same person should completely healed long before natural recovery was possible. It is impossible to prove such an event to be God caused, but its unnatural character could be well-established. This, of course, is an empirical issue concerning the kinds of evidence in support of miracles. The reliability of various kinds of witnesses (i.e., experts in a relevant field, unbelievers, civilized public, etc.) and the possibility of the influence of unsuspected natural agencies (i.e., the power of suggestion in "faith-healing") requires an intense analysis of the empirical factors involved. Kant had too meagre an opinion of both empirical theology

66 I have been acquainted with a religious person who sincerely testifies that just such a miracle happened to him.
and the religious significance of miracles to regard even an examination such as Hume performed in the "Essay on Miracles" as worth his while.

Despite this defect, Kant has offered at least the structure of a pretty good case against the use of miracles as religious evidence. The Gospel miracles lack historical credibility. No rational man believes in the present-day reality of miracles. No legitimate basis can be given for distinguishing reports of present-day miracles from those of ancient times. Faith in miracles, he concludes, is a delusion derived from "overstepping the bounds of our reason in the direction of the supernatural." It is "the belief in knowing through experience something whose occurrence, as under objective laws of experience, we ourselves can recognize to be impossible." If we preface this remark with the thoroughness of Hume's analysis, its truth becomes inescapable.

As previously mentioned, Kant's view of miracles is best understood in the light of his general position on the validity of special revelation. Hume seems to feel that if there ever were a religious miracle sufficiently verified, the wise man ought to seriously consider it as evidence for the theological claims it supposedly supports.

\[67\] "Ibid., p. 182."
Kant, on the other hand, regards the whole question of miracles together with visions, prophecies, Scripture, and prayer as superfluous to a rational view of religion. In the first place, the idea that any experience or set of experiences could prove the existence of an infinite Being is just plainly false. We must first believe in God before any revelation of Him in experience becomes meaningful. Reason's concept of God is prior in authority to any special appearance, intuition, or revelation because no experience is adequate to provide this concept and also because any such experience must be judged by comparison with it in order to determine if the experience does not in fact contradict the rational concept. To deny reason's prerogative in this matter is to open wide the gate to fanaticism and superstition. Ultimately, for Kant, God is either discoverable by reason (including its practical function), or He is not discoverable at all.

The belief in miracles and a special revelation, moreover, is dispensable and often becomes a fetter to true moral religion. True religion must be universal. That is, it must be attainable by anyone who will make the

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69 Ibid., pp. 301-2.
proper use of his reason. The very nature of a special revelation, however, rules out its universality. Historically, claims of special revelation have been made by small groups of unknown people, usually located in some out of the way area of civilization. This, plus the fact that despite the noblest efforts of missionaries, no doctrine can be universally proclaimed, makes the belief in certain factual propositions an absurd prerequisite of true religion.\(^{70}\) Kant summarizes his case against a religion of special revelation with these words, "Belief in propositions of which the unlearned can assure themselves neither through reason nor through Scripture (inasmuch as the latter would first have to be authenticated) would here be made an absolute duty, and . . . it would be elevated to the rank of a saving faith even though this faith lacked moral determining grounds of action."\(^{71}\)

If Kant depreciated both the epistemological and religious grounds for the belief in miracles and a special revelation, what function could he assign to the Christian Scriptures? S. Koerner reports a letter from Kant to Lavater in which Kant confessed, "I revere the reports of

\(^{70}\) *Religion*, pp. 95, 100, and 105.

the evangelists and apostles and put my humble confidence in that means of reconciliation of which they have given us historical tidings."72 But concerning questions of their historical validity, he adds, "I am not near enough to the times from which they have come to make such dangerous and arrogant decisions."73 Miracles are useful "trappings" of a new religion, he comments in the Religion, but once true moral faith comes, it is useless to debate the accuracy of miracle narratives.74 The proper function of the Christian Scriptures is as an introduction to moral religion. Interpreted strictly according to the ethical principles of practical reason, they can serve as a vehicle of moral teaching and thus provide reason with moral commandments which it would not have discovered as soon by itself.75 The Scriptures can also be utilized to provide some expression of religious concepts in experience and to afford a basis for unity of belief among men joined together into a moral commonwealth.76 In these senses, then, a special revelation, like the awareness of design in nature, can serve as a useful aid to true worship without in the least furthering the search for empirical evidence of theological principles.

72 Koerner, op. cit., p. 171.
73 Loc. cit.
74 Ibid., p. 79.
75 Religion, pp. 103-5.
76 Ibid., pp. 96 and 100.
This mention of true moral religion leads us directly to the question, How Kant could affirm the possibility of any religion at all while Hume could not, since they agree essentially on the failure of all traditional proofs for the existence of God? The answer to this question I propose to discuss in the next two chapters, beginning with a topic which is intimately associated with the Argument from Design, namely, the Problem of Evil. Hume wants to conclude that the failure of traditional proofs of God makes belief in Him unjustifiable and the Problem of Evil makes such belief absurd. We must now seek to explain his reasons for the second conclusion and a further reason for the first. We must also investigate Kant's reasons for denying both of Hume's conclusions.
A review of the argument of the preceding chapters reveals that Hume builds his case against the first principle of theology, God's existence, on the following premise: Any belief for which no good reasons can be suggested ought not to be allowed in a rational view of the universe.¹ His reason for rejecting the religious belief in God is that none of the grounds offered in justification of it are valid or adequate. I have thus far examined his refutation of two areas of this justification, the a priori arguments and the empirical evidence of the Argument from Design and miracles. Hume realizes, however, that he cannot rest his case against religion simply on the refutation of these two kinds of support for it. As such his argument would be incomplete. He would leave a large area of possible justification unexamined and hence be unable to conclude that there are no grounds for religious belief. He must, therefore,

¹"Good reasons" in Hume's sense include appeals to natural sentiment, custom, and habit as well as strictly deductive and inductive arguments.
investigate the further claim that a belief in God's existence is justified on the grounds that it is necessary to morality. His discussion of this topic occupies the concluding three parts of the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.

Morality, it is argued by those who claim an ethical justification for their belief in God, requires religion for two reasons. First, moral values must be reinforced by the religious belief in a supreme Judge if society is to maintain any degree of stability, and second, no moral theory is adequate which ignores or denies the divine origin of moral laws. In reply to this argument, Hume raises the following three issues which I intend to make the subjects of the three sections of this chapter and the next:

I. The Problem of Evil.

II. The Pernicious Effects of Religion upon Society.

III. The Independence of Ethics and Theology.

Hume's intention is to show that (I) the religious conception of God is faced with the dilemma of either denying the rules of right reasoning or ignoring the testimony of common experience, (II) the history of religion is an argument against, rather than for, the moral value of religious belief, and (III) ethics, either as an attempt to account for moral experience or as a practical guide
to right action, is rendered meaningless by an appeal to theological principles. Hume's discussion of the first of these points, to which I now turn, is best presented in Parts X and XI of the *Dialogues*.

I

Hume contrives to have the Problem of Evil introduced by Demea at the beginning of Part X. After being thoroughly thrashed by Cleanthes in the matter of the a priori arguments, Demea makes no reply but appeals instead to each man's "consciousness of his [own] imbecility and misery" as the best support for religious truth.² Life and the universe are so full of ills, he argues, that despite the lack of formal proof, man finds it necessary to believe in a benevolent Deity who will rectify the injustices of this life by fulfilling man's desire for happiness in a future existence.

Although Demea obviously intends his portrayal of natural evil as evidence of man's psychological need for God, Philo quickly reverses this intention and presents the existence of evil to Cleanthes as a serious obstacle to his argument for theism. The problem as Philo presents it is two-fold: (1) Natural evil is incompatible with the

existence of a Being supreme in wisdom, power, and goodness, (2) Natural evil renders an inference from nature to God impossible. If God is infinitely wise, powerful, and good, there should be no evil. Since there is evil, God either allows it, in which case He is not all-good, or He does not know about it, in which case He is not all-wise, or He cannot prevent it, in which case He is not all-powerful. Also, the Argument from Design, which claims to infer both the being and attributes of God from His effects in nature, cannot assert that the cause of the world is morally superior to the mixture of good and evil within it. The beauty and fitness of final causes present almost irresistible testimony of the intelligence of the world's Author, Philo admits, but the prevalence of pain and misery render His moral attributes entirely incomprehensible.

Cleanthes quickly recognizes the serious import of Philo's argument. "To what purpose establish the natural attributes of the Deity," he complains, "while the moral are still doubtful and uncertain?" Both he and Demea, however, feel that the Problem of Evil as Philo states it,

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3 Ibid., pp. 198, 201-2.
4 Ibid., pp. 201, 202, and 211.
5 Ibid., p. 199.
is not unsolvable. Between them they attempt three
general solutions: (A) Evil is not real, (B) God is not
infinite, and (C) Human reason is not capable of under­
standing the mystery of God's purposes. I shall mention
some of the details of these points and indicate Hume's
reply to each.

(A) The first protest that evil is not real comes
from Cleanthes who maintains that though some few men
may complain of nature's malevolence, these few are mal­
contents who give reign to a "repining anxious disposi­
tion." Most men, who are not afflicted with a wretched
temper, view the world as essentially good. There will
always be a small minority who will discover ill in the
most happy circumstances and accent the evil in normal
experience, but their bias should not be considered a
legitimate claim against the goodness of God.6

In reply to this argument, Philo says that it is
only a philosopher, like Leibnitz, who sitting in his
study aloof from the world can deny the reality of evil.7
In the experience of ordinary men the awareness of pain
and misery is quite common. Philo had tried to prove
this point, with Demea's unwitting help, even before he

6 Ibid., pp. 196-7.
7 Ibid., pp. 194.
stated the Problem of Evil to Cleanthes. Testimony to
the reality of evil is abundant, he had shown by citing
the universal witness of human experience and feeling,
the proverbial phrases concerning suffering and unhappi-
ness which occur in all languages, and the prevalence of
the topic of human misery throughout all literature, both
sacred and profane. Besides this, evidence of evil is
readily available to every man's inspection. All living
creatures are engaged in a perpetual struggle for exis-
tence. "Necessity, hunger, want, stimulate the strong and
courageous," Demea adds, and "fear, anxiety, terror,
agitare the weak and infirm." Nor is man, in spite of
his advantage over the animals, exempt from the miseries
of life. Though men avoid some of the terrors of exis-
tence by uniting in society, they create new enemies in
the forms of superstition, violence, and war. This, plus
the fact that man is subject to physical and mental dis-
orders which animals apparently do not suffer, makes the
reality at least of human misery undeniable. It is not
just a few malcontents of irascible temper, but men of
greater sensibility who are most aware of the real pain
and pleasure in life.10

8Ibid., p. 193.
9Ibid., p. 194.
10Ibid., pp. 195-7.
Although Cleanthes is far from satisfied with Philo's representation of human misery, he lets the issue rest while he repudiates Demea's version of the claim that evil is not real. The Problem of Evil, Demea asserts, is really solved very easily, and its solution is the common one which theologians and religious people have always held. The miseries of this life are necessary means to future goods. They only appear evil because we do not judge them in the light of the larger whole. The pains of this life, which is but a "moment in comparison of eternity," are fully rectified in the hereafter, and "the eyes of men, being then opened to larger views of things, see the whole connection of general laws, and trace, with adoration, the benevolence and rectitude of the Deity, through all the mazes and intracacies of his providence."\(^{11}\)

Hume has three general comments to make on a claim such as this one of Demea's, and he lets Cleanthes make the first point. The "porch" or "probation" view of human destiny, Cleanthes retorts, though sound theologically,\(^ {12}\) cannot be used as evidence for God's moral attributes. Immortality is an hypothesis whose only justification is that it solves the problem of evil.\(^ {13}\) But

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 199.
\(^{12}\)Cleanthes later supports this view himself, see Ibid., pp. 219 and 224.
\(^{13}\)See Hume's view of immortality in section III of this chapter, pp. 287-9.
If this is allowed, one hypothesis is explained in terms of another, and the whole issue becomes unverifiable.\textsuperscript{14} To argue that God's existence is inferable from empirical data and then to discount the negative instance of natural evil by postulating a future blessedness is like supporting the claim that there are little elves in one's watch by the statement that their bashfulness causes them to disappear whenever the watch is examined. If our purpose is to propound conjectures and fictions, then one fairy-tale may be more plausible than another, but no rational cosmology can forsake the facts of experience, as this solution to the Problem of Evil proposes to do.

Hume's second point against the notion of evil being a part of a larger good is made by him in The Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding in connection with the theological implications of determinism. The answer of theologians, he says, who assert that "every physical ill makes an essential part of this benevolent system, and could not possibly be removed, even by the Deity himself, considered as a wise agent, without giving entrance to greater ill, or excluding greater good, which will result from it," seems at first obvious and convincing.\textsuperscript{15} In

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 199-200.

\textsuperscript{15} Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Selby-Bigge, p. 101.
actual fact, however, it is completely contrary to human experience. The evils of pain and injustice are just too real to be classed as illusions by anyone who has experienced misfortune. Appeal to the general harmony of an orderly system may, in a moment of ease and security, please the imagination, but it cannot appear as other than sophistry to a man inflicted with the miseries of disease or adversity. With but rare exceptions, experience reveals neither the ultimate good which evils are supposed to promote nor the necessity of those ills from which benefits just happen to result.\textsuperscript{16}

Thirdly, Hume argues, through Philo in the \textit{Dialogues}, the postulation of an ultimate system of benevolent ends is irrelevant to the Problem of Evil. The evil that exists or the inescapable illusion that it does is sufficient to make the world less than we would expect from infinite wisdom, power, and goodness. The question still remains, "Why is there any misery at all in the world?" or, "Why is the illusion that there is so persistent?" If God is infinite in wisdom and power, why does He find it necessary to employ evil as an instrumental good? The necessity of evil for good is itself an evil for which no intelligible reason can be offered. Evil and an infinite God

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 101-2.
appear incompatible, and if they in fact are compatible, the grounds of this compatibility are unavailable to human reason.\(^{17}\)

(B) Philo's argument that misery and an infinite God are incompatible prompts Cleanthes to propose, in Part XI, a second solution to the Problem of Evil. Evil is real, he says, but this is no obstacle to "experimental theism" because God is not infinite. The word "infinite" as used in theology has very little meaning and only leads to absurdities. We can never prove, on the basis of empirical evidence, the infinite attributes of Deity nor reconcile them with the mixture of evil in the universe. We know from nature that God is very wise, very powerful, and very good, and this is sufficient for all the purposes of religion. "By supposing the Author of nature to be finitely perfect," Cleanthes asserts, "a satisfactory account may then be given of natural and moral evil."\(^{18}\) Explanations which are invalid in reference to infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, now become plausible. That some evil is necessary as a means to greater good and that present inconveniences must be endured in order to attain a desirable end are, on the

\(^{17}\) Dialogues, p. 201.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 203.
supposition of a finite Deity, principles of a consistent cosmology. "And in a word," he concludes, "benevolence, regulated by wisdom, and limited by necessity, may produce just such a world as the present."\(^{19}\)

Philo's reply to this argument is that although the supposition of a finite Deity is consistent with the presence of evil in the world, an inference concerning the existence of such a Being is still not permissible. This is so because, in the first place, there is a greater amount of evil in the world than would be expected of a benevolent and wise Author and, in the second place, there is more evil than can be justified as necessary to the well-ordered functioning of the universe. A being who was antecedently convinced that the universe was the production of a very wise, powerful, and good—though finite—God would not be prepared, upon reviewing the parts of the world, to discover the degree of vice, misery, and disorder which is the common experience of mankind.\(^{20}\)

The evidences of evil in the universe are not sufficient to destroy the belief in a World Intelligence prompted by the feeling of natural design, but they are sufficient to cast suspicion on the identification of this Intelligence

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 203.

\(^{20}\)Ibid., pp. 203-4.
with the God of traditional theology—even if conceived as only finitely perfect.

Secondly, it is said by those favoring a finite God, that the evil in nature is necessary to the over-all harmony of the universe. An examination of the four principal causes of natural evil, however, reveals that none of them can be justified as necessary to the production of desired ends. The four causes are: (1) pain as a stimulus to self-preservation, (2) the operation of nature according to general laws, (3) the frugality with which powers and faculties are distributed among living creatures, and (4) the excesses of natural forces. Each of these causes, Philo argues, could be eliminated by a beneficent Deity without destroying the order of the universe. Instead of pain, the simple diminution of pleasure could function as a stimulus to self-preservation, and instead of general laws, nature could be governed by particular volitions of God—thus ensuring that every good cause would meet with favorable natural circumstances and every evil one with unfavorable. Also, God could have acted less like a "rigid master" and more like an "indulgent parent" in distributing powers and faculties to His creatures. Instead of providing the bare minimum necessary to preserve a

\[21\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 205-210.}\]
species, He could have supplied each individual with sufficient capacities to guard against accidents and prevent each false step from becoming a catastrophe. Finally, if it is necessary for the great machine of nature to have general springs and principles, the Author of the world should have taken more care in adjusting them so as to keep them "precisely within those bounds in which their utility consists." Instead, the universe, if it is a machine, resembles one that was hastily constructed, "so little finished is every part, and so coarse are the strokes, with which it is executed." Wind, rain, heat, bodily functions, and passions of the mind, so useful and advantageous, are all apt on any occasion to reach such extremes of excess or defect as to cause the greatest convulsions in nature and society. Though these four causes are perhaps consistent with the existence of a finite Deity, they rule out all possibility of inferring this existence from His effects in nature.

(C) After arguing, through Philo, that neither the claim that evil is not real (or "ultimately" real) nor the supposition of a finite Deity is capable of completely dispatching the Problem of Evil, Hume suggests a solution

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\(^{21}\) *Loc. cit.*
which he identifies with the mystics. The solution of the Problem of Evil, so the mystics say, is that no solution is possible because human reason is so limited it cannot understand the incomprehensible relationship between God and the world. Hume recommends this same conclusion at the end of his discussion of the Problem of Evil in the Enquiry. Concerning the problems of conceiving God as the original cause of all things and yet not holding Him responsible for sin and misery, he says, "These are mysteries, which mere natural and unassisted reason is very unfit to handle; and whatever system she embraces, she must find herself involved in inextricable difficulties, and even contradictions, at every step which she takes with regard to such subjects."  

Although Philo states this solution as if he himself shared the mystic's interpretation of it, Hume is quick to have him point out its negative import for the question of God's existence. The appeal to human ignorance to avoid charging the Author of the world with moral turpitude makes any empirical inference concerning Him impossible and renders the question of His existence meaningless. We

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25 Philo speaks of "we mystics," in Dialogues, p. 199.
must form an inference from what we know, not from our ignorance. The more we are forced by such considerations as the Problem of Evil to confess our ignorance of God's being and attributes, the more we must suspect that "these subjects exceed all human capacity, and that our common measures of truth and falsehood are not applicable to them." That which the mind cannot know, which is neither true nor false, and which is full of unsolvable obscurities and perplexities, is a boundless ocean of doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction which reason had best assign to the domain of pure fancy.

Despite our inclination to find design in nature and to posit an ontological referent for our highest moral aspirations, the mixture of good and evil in the universe indicates that the source of the world is indifferent to moral values. The cause or causes of the universe cannot be perfect goodness or perfect malice because there is both good and evil in the world. Nor can they be both goodness and malice in conflict, such as the Manichaen system proposes, because of the existence of natural harmony and law. Whatever designed or created the world

26 Ibid., p. 204.
27 Ibid., p. 201.
28 Enquiry, p. 103.
must have no more regard for good above evil than for heat above cold. If it were possible to be convinced on a priori grounds of the existence of a benevolent Deity, the phenomena of evil would perhaps not be sufficient to undermine this conclusion, but since such a priori grounds are not available, the belief in such a being is unjustifiable in the face of the morally indifferent course of nature.

I think this is the limit of the structure which can be given to Hume's informal analysis of the Problem of Evil. His argument, in summary, is this. Evil is real, and those who attempt to deny it contradict the plainest testimony of experience. The reality of evil and the supposition of a supremely perfect Cause of all things issue in a logical contradiction. The hypothesis of a finite Deity removes the contradiction but can neither account for the presence of evil nor justify the inference from nature to God. The true solution is to say, with the mystics, that God's relation to the world is "incomprehensible," and this, rightly understood, means "meaningless." If a choice must be made between alternative cosmologies, the best choice is one that finds the universe morally indifferent.

29 *Dialogues*, p. 212.
In concluding this section I should like to mention three defects which I find in Hume's discussion and then comment on two criticisms which A. E. Taylor makes of it. The first defect I find is Hume's overportrayal of the presence of evil in the world. I do not think this materially affects his argument, but it does leave him open to one of Taylor's criticisms which I shall examine. Hume seems to be carried away with the attempt to convey the impression that the dullest, morally responsible human being could have done a better job in creating the world than God is supposed to have done. Thus, he has Demea say, "All the goods of life united would not make a very happy man: But all the ills united would make a wretch indeed."30 In the same vein, Demea wonders where he could conduct a visitor to this world in order to reveal to him the pleasures of life, after he has seen hospitals, prisons, wars, and famines as specimens of its ills.31 Philo also expresses a very dismal view of the world. "The whole," he says, "presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without

30Ibid., p. 196.

31Ibid., p. 196.
discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children.\textsuperscript{32}

Now it is certain, from all that we know of his life, that Hume himself did not share these views. If Cleanthes ever speaks for Hume, it is when he replies to Philo, "I can observe something like what you mention in some others: But I confess, I feel little or nothing of it in myself; and hope that it is not so common as you represent it."\textsuperscript{33} We may, perhaps, justify Philo's and Demea's speeches as a dialectical device by which Hume sought to undercut Demea's later claim that evil is a necessary part of some ultimate good. As such they report not a true view of the world but the inconsistent one by which theologians often attempt to motivate religious devotion.\textsuperscript{34}

A second defect in this section of the Dialogues is Philo's proposed remedies for the four causes of evil.\textsuperscript{35} These speculations of how the universe could be reordered in line with the supposition of a finite, but benevolent, Deity sound strange in the mouth of Philo. The argument

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 211. The paragraph in which this sentence occurs was inserted by Hume sometime after he originally completed Part XI. (Norman Kemp Smith, \textit{Dialogues}, p.211n.)

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 197.

\textsuperscript{34}See \textit{Ibid.}, p. 193.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 205-10.
he is making is necessary to his claim that the hypothesis of a finite God is still unable to explain evil, but the suggestions that diminution of pleasure could be substituted for pain and that nature could be governed by particular volitions of the Deity rather than general laws reveal too much of that "careless skepticism" by which Hume "artfully contrived" the character of Philo.  

Finally, Hume's discussion of the Problem of Evil is deficient, from my point of view, in that it completely neglects the question of moral evil, except for Philo's brief comment that what has been said concerning natural evil "will apply to moral, with little or no variation." In the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, where his topic is the will, Hume does mention that the problem of moral evil involves reconciling human sin, predestination, and God's goodness and also human freedom and God's fore-knowledge, but he neither explains these relationships nor suggests any possible solutions. The existence of moral evil is at least as great a difficulty for a theist as that of natural evil. And perhaps it is even a greater problem since the two solutions—that moral evil is not


38 Selby-Bigge ed., p. 103.
real and that God wills it as instrumental to a greater good—are obviously inadequate. We can only speculate that Hume would have rejected the Kantian position that sin is due solely to human freedom. Hume would assert that freedom of the will is not an empirically justifiable hypothesis, and therefore can no more explain sin than the hypothesis of immortality can account for natural evil. Kant’s reply to this claim will be dealt with in the next chapter.

In his examination of Hume’s Dialogues, A. E. Taylor makes two criticisms of the discussion of the Problem of Evil in Parts X and XI. The first, which I have already touched upon, is that Hume’s arguments are “common-places of the pessimists of all ages” which “can in substance be condensed into a single sentence.” If all that Taylor means is that Hume’s portrayal of evil is overly pessimistic, then, as I have argued, he is right. He is wrong, however, in further intending to agree with a statement

39Hume, in fact, says that the notion that the will is less causally related to antecedent conjuncts than external objects is without foundation in experience. (Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Selby-Bigge, pp. 92-94.)

40See below, Chapter VII,

which Hume had imagined as a possible reply to his portrayal of evil--namely, that it is only the disgruntled grumbling of a malcontent with a wretched temper. Pessimists may see too much ill and optimists too little, but anyone who faithfully consults experience sees enough to generate the Problem of Evil.

Taylor's second criticism is more serious. Hume, he says, "assumes that if nature has a moral purpose at all, that purpose can only be the Hedonistic one of providing as much enjoyment for everyone and everything as possible." That Cleanthes allowed this assumption to pass and that Philo grounded it upon the desire for a "sort of paradise of the indolent" are indications of Hume's superficiality.

Only two comments are necessary in reply to this criticism. The first is that Taylor has missed the point of Hume's allowance that if God is, evil may make sense. Thus, a perfect paradise is not demanded by Hume for theism to be meaningful. What Hume denies is that theism is justifiable on the basis of an inference from nature. Secondly, it is not unhappiness alone that is evil, but undeserved unhappiness. God need not be a hedonist, but He must be just. Hume's examples of natural evil are all

\[42\] Ibid., p. 203.

\[43\] Ibid., pp. 203-4.
drawn from cases in which misery is coupled with innocence (and virtue) or in which suffering exceeds in degree any possible vice for which it might be construed as punishment. Hume does not charge God with the failure to maximize happiness but with the failure to maximize justice—that is, the equality of happiness and the worthiness to be happy. Hume is arguing here *ad hominem*, of course, since absolute justice is not a part of his own moral theory but a necessary theorem of any moral theism. For Hume, unhappiness is itself an evil, but he recognizes that the Problem of Evil arises only when the instances of undeserved misery are attributable to the will of the moral Author of the world. Taylor's criticism thus fails to undermine Hume's argument, but it does reveal Hume's neglect in unequivocally specifying injustice, rather than simply unhappiness, as the source of all natural evil.44

II

At the close of Part XI of the *Dialogues* after Philo has conclusively shown that none of the proposed solutions

\[44\text{In the essay, "Of a Particular Providence and A Future State," Hume recognizes the Problem of Evil to be inconsistency between the positing of a Divine Providence who guarantees supreme distributive justice and the actual reward of good and punishment of bad revealed in the ordinary course of events. (Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed., Selby-Bigge, p. 140.)}\]
to the Problem of Evil are satisfactory, Demea realizes that theology, in any sense which could interest him, has long since gone by the board, and as Pamphilus remarks, "He took occasion soon after, on some pretence or other, to leave the company." Cleanthes, however, is determined to stick it out. He believes that the "injudicious reasoning of our vulgar theology" has allowed Philo to push his skeptical argument to extremes. After all, he argues, even corrupted religion is still better than none at all. Although neither logical demonstration nor empirical evidence is sufficient to establish the existence of God, religion has brought such evident benefits to mankind and has proved itself so indispensable to the well-being of both the individual and society that the sensible man will accept these advantages as justification in lieu of the strictness of formal proof. The existence of a benevolent Deity and the reality of a future state are principles so natural to human reason and so universal in human history that neither the corruptions of "vulgar theology" nor the excesses of "careless skepticism" ever have been, or ever will be, able to destroy completely their proper influence upon belief and conduct.

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45 *Dialogues*, p. 213.
Cleanthes has in this argument appealed to an aspect of the philosophy of religion which must have given Hume no little concern. The problem must have presented itself to him in somewhat this form. If, as the slightest bit of philosophical reflection reveals, the rational support offered for theological first principles is nothing but a flimsy web spun from error, illusion, and obscurity, why has religion had, and more, why does it continue to have, such a powerful influence in human history? Why, in a word, is there still among civilized peoples any religion at all? Hume allows Cleanthes to state the wrong answer to these questions in its most effective form.

Religion, Cleanthes says in effect, is a valid interpretation of human experience because of (A) its historical success, (B) its necessity as a motive to moral order in society, and (C) its usefulness to the individual as a comfort from the ills of life.

We can see more clearly the force of Hume's problem if we compare these suggested grounds of the first principles of religion with the grounds which he himself offers for

48 Ibid., p. 216.
49 Ibid., pp. 219-220.
50 Ibid., p. 224.
the first principles of science. Induction, necessary connection, and the uniformity of nature are believed because of (A) custom, (B) their necessity for communicable knowledge, and (C) the impossibility of anyone seriously doubting them in common life. If the man of common sense, even one who is fully aware of the limits of human understanding, believes in science, he should, according to this argument, also believe in religion.

In meeting this problem, Hume suggests the basic principles of his view of the history, sociology, and psychology of religion. 1. The history of religion reveals that its success is not an argument for the validity of its first principles. 2. The sociology of religion reveals that it is neither necessary nor conducive to morality. 3. The psychology of religion reveals that it magnifies rather than eases the ills of life. I shall briefly indicate his arguments under each of these points.

1. The historical success of a religion is no proof of its validity, Hume argues, until the reasons for this success have been examined. In the "Natural History of

51 See: Section VII, Book I of the Treatise of Human Nature: The three principles which govern belief are habit, imagination, and experience. See also, on custom, the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Selby-Bigge; on the impossibility of skepticism, Ibid., pp. 159-60; pp. 43ff; on necessary principles of knowledge, Ibid., p. 22 (and references to induction).
Religion he sets out to show that the origin and development of religious belief is due mostly to the influence of the disagreeable passions and not at all to the agency of proper reasoning. Religion originates, he says, from the fear and hope of a future life, and its first form is polytheism. Ignorance of natural causes and the anthropomorphic tendency to see conscious purpose behind every event produces in the minds of unlearned savages a god for every distinct element in experience. The desire to avoid misfortune then dictates that each deity receive due obeisance. Ignorance of the true springs and causes of events coupled with the "anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future miseries, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries" is, thus, responsible for religion's first hold upon mankind.

The situation with respect to theism, Hume continues, is no more favorable to the conclusion that its acceptance

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is an argument for its truth. Theism is more sophisticated in its description of deity, but its motives among the vulgar are the same as those of their polytheistic ancestors. Theism arises from polytheism though the magnification of divine attributes as a form of praise. The gods of polytheism were originally very limited in both power and goodness but, since it is obviously not propitious to refuse to recognize a more magnificent idea of one's deity, man's religious notions soon far exceeded the testimony of his experience. Certain gods of polytheism were exalted to the superior deities of henotheism and then finally to the Supreme Being of theism. Having reached infinity, no further magnification is possible and, thus, the vulgar unite in professing belief in a single absolutely perfect Deity—though this concept has little or no meaning for them.

Religion as a universal phenomenon cannot be denied, Hume concludes, but that this fact establishes its principles as proper conclusions of reasoning and argument is far from evident. In fact, the more popular a particular religion is, the more probable is it that its success is due to the existing varieties of sentiment, fancies of the imagination, and prejudices of education.

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57 Ibid., pp. 328-30.
58 Ibid., pp. 330-33.
59 Ibid., p. 349.
2. More important than the fact of the historical success of religion is the argument that it is necessary for morality. In Section XI of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Hume represents himself as arguing that certain tenets of philosophy which deny "a divine existence, and consequently a providence and a future state, seem to loosen, in a great measure, the ties of morality, and may be supposed, for that reason, pernicious to the peace of civil society." If religion is a prerequisite of moral order in society, this argument maintains, then its principles should be allowed despite their incomplete justification in reason and experience.

Hume's reply to this argument is best introduced by a comment which occurs earlier in the *Enquiry*. After discussing the problem of liberty and necessity in Section VII, he says, "There is no method of reasoning more common, and yet none more blameable, than, in philosophical disputes, to endeavor the refutation of any hypothesis, by a pretence of its dangerous consequences to religion or morality." We ought to be careful, Hume observes, of the manner in which we loosen any restraint upon undesirable

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61 Ibid., p. 96.
passions, but the undesirable consequences which the knowledge of a particular principle may have does not in the least mitigate against the truth of that principle.

We ought not to tell a man engaged in a dangerous act that a great tragedy has befallen his family, but this neither makes the report of the tragedy false nor compels anyone to believe that it is false. It may be that some people ought not to be told that the religious basis of morality is an illusion, but this only means a satisfactory replacement for this illusion must be provided and not that the illusion itself must be preserved.

In actual fact, Hume continues, the sociology of religion reveals that it is neither necessary nor conducive to moral order. In the first place, more often than not moral sentiments and motives are indifferent to the truth of religious principles. In the second place, religion substitutes an artificial sense of values for those useful in society. And, in the third place, religion has, almost without exception, had baleful effects upon morality.

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62 Ibid., p. 147. See, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, Selby-Bigge ed., p. 279: "Though the philosophical truth of any proposition by no means depends upon its tendency to promote the interests of society; yet a man has but a bad grace, who delivers a theory, however true, which, he must confess, leads to a practice dangerous and pernicious."

63 Ibid., p. 96.

64 See Section III below, Hume on moral theory without theology.
In support of the first point, Hume offers the following reasons. Morality is often indifferent to religion in that:

a. The concern for present reality is more powerful than religious motives. How inconsistent it is of theologians to complain that the great attachment which men evidence for the objects of this present life is so universal that almost all human kind is "sunk into the deepest lethargy and unconcern about their religious interests" and yet to seek to refute their philosophical opponents by supposing "the motives of religion to be so powerful, that, without them, it were impossible for civil society to subsist."\[65\]

b. Man's natural inclination for honesty and benevolence is so much more effective than his devotion to theological theories that, when these are in conflict, he employs every ingenuity of the mind to set his religious duties aside.\[66\] In ancient Egypt it was both a mortal sin and a civil crime to kill one of the cat-gods. Yet men, being sensible that under such a rule it would soon be

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easier to find a god than a man and that the gods would finally starve the men and "leave themselves neither priests nor votaries remaining," adopted the sound policy of reserving all their worship for the full-grown divinities and drowning the "holy spawn or little sucking gods without any scruple or remorse." 67

c. It is evident that among philosophers and those who cultivate reason and reflection, the need for religious motives to undergird the restraint of morals grows less and less as the natural motives of justice and humanity receive their due consideration. 68

d. The value of religion for stabilizing social order, such as in the taking of judicial oaths, is overrated and is counteracted by the wise political practice of remaining indifferent to all religious factions. The value of an oath in court derives from the solemnity of the circumstances and not from the religious phrases employed. 69 The wise magistrate realizes that the best policy for the state is to allow many competing religions

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68 Dialogues, pp. 223-4.
69 Ibid., p. 224 and Enquiry, p. 135.
or sects but to refuse political power to all and remain indifferent to their special demands.70

Religion is not only indifferent to morality, Hume asserts, it is also inimical to it, in that religion encourages an artificial sense of values which are morally useless. Chief among these are the "monkish virtues"—celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, and solitude—which "neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company nor increase his power of self-enjoyment."71 Instead, these "virtues" detract from the rightful place of truly moral purposes and ought, therefore, to be transferred to the catalogue of vices.72

This fault of encouraging morally useless virtues is not just one that happens to be present in the history of religion. It is one which is contained in the very purpose of religious service. Simple moral action can never be accounted sufficient worship of God since religion

72 An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 270. See also the "artificial life" of piety as characterized by Pascal in Hume's "A Dialogue," ed. Selby-Bigge, The Enquiries, pp. 341-3.
must advocate duties which go beyond those of mere morality. There must, in a word, be uniquely religious virtues which alone can render man completely worthy in the eyes of God.\textsuperscript{73} Since moral duties are almost exhaustive of the acts useful to man and society, religion has had to advocate duties which consist wholly in the notion of sacrifice and self-abasement. Circumcision, hair-shirts, and human sacrifice become the chief delights of the Supreme Being.\textsuperscript{74} Since morality has "usurped" all better ways of doing God service, men must resort to doing themselves injury, and all presents are delivered to the Deity by destroying them and rendering them useless to men—"by burning what is solid, pouring out the liquid, and killing the animate."\textsuperscript{75}

Finally, Hume argues, the claim that religion is necessary for morality is confuted by the evidence of its baleful effects upon human society. First of all, religion encourages not only artificial virtues, but also immoral acts as religious duties. Religion must claim to possess final truth, and hence it encourages the use of any means for the propagation of that truth. Lying, breaking of promises, hatred, and physical violence are

\textsuperscript{73} "Natural History of Religion," Essays, II, 357-59.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., pp. 333-4.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 338n.6.
possessed of countless examples in the history of religion. The end of all traditional religion is an other world salvation, and any measure which may be unacceptable to a this-world morality is justified by the sacredness of its cause. Religion has its own standards of duty, and if these conflict with the normal ideas of honesty, justice, or benevolence, no moral motive is "forcible enough to bind the enthusiastic zealot."^77

Secondly, religion not only commands immoral acts, but also causes immoral consequences in society. Three of the most notable of these are hypocrisy, intolerance, and the subjection of reason to credulity and dogmatism. Hypocrisy is a natural fruit of religion because men feel compelled to affirm a greater degree of devotion and belief than they actually experience. Intolerance is a special fault of theism since if there is only one God, alternative views of Him must be rejected as false and combatted with every means available. The subjection of reason to credulity and dogmatism results in the charge of


^77Dialogues, p. 222.


"heresy" and "infidel" against all who, prompted by knowledge and a love of liberty, utter principles contrary to the theologically approved nonsense and obscurities.80

After Philo suggests these points to Cleanthes, Hume has him conclude that, contrary to the claim that morality requires religion, "the motives of vulgar superstition have no great influence on general conduct; nor is their operation very favorable to morality in instances where they predominate."81

3. In reply to Philo's conclusion, Cleanthes cautions him not to go too far in denying the usefulness of religion. It still remains, he says, "the chief, the only great comfort in life; and our principle support amidst all the attacks of adverse fortune."82 The most agreeable and optimistic view of life and the universe that man can suggest is that of genuine theism. The belief in a wise and powerful Creator who will prolong our existence into an infinite eternity of happiness is sufficient to carry man through the most unfortunate circumstances.

Hume's reply to this assertion is that the psychology of religion reveals that it magnifies rather than eases the ills of life. Although both happiness and sorrow play

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80 Ibid., pp. 339-40.
81 Dialogues, pp. 222-3.
82 Ibid., p. 224.
a part in religious motivation, devotion is stimulated much more by the latter than by the former. The terrors of religion, in the form of God's judgment, far exceed its comforts. The best example of this is the gloomy view of God and immortality which all religions enunciate—the damned always being represented as numerically superior to the elect. Because of this, religion creates in man added discomfort in the form of secret horrors and guilt which allow him no rest but require the continual recourse to religious rites and ceremonies as expiations for his sins. Because fear is the basic motive of religion, the Deity is ascribed with every kind of barbarity, and then in order to escape the terrors resulting, He is credited with every kind of caprice according to the methods we employ in appeasing Him.

Hume's little essay, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," reinforces his point concerning the negative implications of the psychology of religion. In it he argues that religious belief and devotion are unable to preserve a balanced course of serious reflection and calm action but

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83 Ibid., pp. 224-6. See, Treatise, p. 115: "In matters of religion men take pleasure in being terrified, and no preachers are so popular as those who excite the most dismal and gloomy passions."

must always run to the extremes of superstition and enthusiasm. As superstition, religion is marked by the dogmatism of crystallized doctrines and by the uniformity of ritualistic ceremonies. As enthusiasm, religion becomes a spontaneous zeal with little doctrinal form but with great accent upon other-worldly purposes and commands. Superstition builds upon man's self-degradation and need of some external aid to attain worthiness. It is less violent than enthusiasm but is more persistent and is an enemy of civil liberty and intellectual freedom. Enthusiasm exalts the individual to a place of favoritism with God. It encourages self-piety and is more furious in its beginnings but soon becomes moderate and even innocuous. Both superstition and enthusiasm are pernicious, Hume contends, and both reveal that religion corrupts human nature either by accenting its terrors and apprehensions or by inspiring it with blind frenzy and misguided whimsy. Man has strong psychological impulses to religion but they ought to be cured rather than revered.

Although Hume has been careful, in these three arguments drawn from the history, sociology, and psychology of religion, to criticize only the "corrupt religion of

85 Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," Essays, I, 144-150.
the vulgar," he is also careful to point out that the appeal to the benefits of religion for mankind must stand or fall on religion as it has actually been practiced in human history.\textsuperscript{86} It will do no good to imagine an ideal system of theology, for we must examine the religious principles which have in fact prevailed in the world. When we do this, Hume contends, we can never persuade ourselves that they are anything but "sick men's dreams," nor that no matter how pure a theological system may appear, it will result in more good than ill for mankind.

In commenting upon Hume's conclusion, I want to mention first that the cumulative effect of his arguments seems to me to be quite fatal to religion in general. If Hume can make his point hold that religion as an historical, sociological, and psychological phenomenon is a single homogeneous unit, then his charge that it in fact does not make men better morally is an important link in the refutation of theological first principles. There is nothing more disturbing to a religious person of moral sensitivity than the awareness that, almost without exception, every sect or branch of his religion has been guilty of persecution, intolerance, and obscurantism. Contemporary religion appeals for much of its support to the universal desire for a good life either as an end itself or as a means to eternal felicity, and Hume's contention that this

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Dialogues}, p. 224.
desire not only does not require religion, but also is thwarted by it is surely a serious obstacle to continued religious belief.

In fairness to Hume's critics, however, it must also be noted that Hume's arguments against the moral value of religion are defective on two counts. First, they lack completeness, and second, they are marred by overgeneralization. Anyone who is antecedently convinced of the truth of a particular religious system would surely react violently to Hume's cursory examination of religious history and his conclusion that all religion is morally injurious. John Leland penned a very strong reply to Hume on these points during Hume's own lifetime. Hume, he says, is guilty of the same fallacy in his view of religious morality as he is in his argument against religious miracles. He neither examines all the evidence nor carefully excludes those aspects of religion which are not subject to his criticisms. Religion is not a single phenomenon even in the sense in which the reign of the Stuart or Tudor house is. A distinction between the pure piety of the New Testament and all the corruptions that

87 _A View of the Principal Deistical Writers that have Appeared in England in the Last and Present Century_, 3rd ed. (London: 1757), II, 360ff.
have accrued to it in the two millennia since is purposely concealed by Hume. 88

I think Leland is right in this criticism. Hume's failure to recognize the moral value of self-denial, humility, and the other virtues recommended in the Sermon on the Mount and his refusal to distinguish these from the "monkish virtues" of celibacy, silence, fasting, etc. is a defect in his argument. 89 This defect coupled with the apparent identification of true virtue with polite manners and social graces leaves him open to the serious charge of superficiality. Hume's position would have been more defensible if he had been satisfied with demonstrating that any religion, no matter how pure its moral theory, has resulted, and will ever result, in immoral practices. His further attempt to conclude that religion contains no impetus to moral heroism is, I think, unjustifiable.

III

Thus far, Hume has rejected the moral significance of religion on two counts. First, theology generates the logical absurdities expressed in the Problem of Evil, and second, the effects of religion upon society have, in the

88 Ibid., pp. 359-60.
89 See Ibid., pp. 362ff.
main, been pernicious. I come now to what I take to be his third point in this regard, namely, the assertion that a complete and consistent moral theory is possible without any reference to theological principles. This is a fundamental point of disagreement between Hume and Kant, and most of what I have to say in this section is intended to establish the grounds of this disagreement. I have no intention, of course, of attempting even a resume of Hume's moral theory. For my own part, I find his position quite unsatisfactory and, therefore, I shall only briefly indicate the basic principles of his system and his reasons for rejecting moral theology before stating my own objections to his moral theory.

The first question which must be asked of Hume here is, What is the function of a moral theory? I think two fundamentally different answers can be given to this question. The first is that moral theory seeks to explain the existence of moral attitudes and judgments in terms of motives. This is the function of moral psychology and sociology. The second is that moral theory endeavors to provide a ground for obligation in terms of universal laws. This is the function of moral philosophy. Kant favors the second alternative, but Hume neglects this almost entirely in favor of the first approach. Hume's purpose is to introduce the science of human nature into
moral theory and thereby seek to reduce the variety of moral attitudes and feelings to a few primary principles of behavior.\textsuperscript{90}

In the \textit{Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals}, Hume states what he takes to be the two elements of morality for which moral theory must account:

\begin{quote}
The notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all mankind, which recommends the same object to general approbation, and makes every man, or most men, agree in the same opinion or decision concerning it. It also implies some sentiment, so universal and comprehensive as to extend to all mankind, and render the actions and conduct, even of persons the most remote, an object of applause or censure, according as they agree or disagree with that rule of right which is established.\textsuperscript{91}
\end{quote}

For Hume, then, the problem is how to account for the empirical fact that people make moral judgments which are more or less uniform for all mankind. His answer is that all ethical phenomena can be explained in terms of three basic principles: immediate pleasure, utility (usefulness in promoting pleasure), and humanity or sympathy.\textsuperscript{92}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{90}Treatise, ed. Selby-Bigge, pp. xxii-xxiii; An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Selby-Bigge, p. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{91}Selby-Bigge ed., p. 272.
\item \textsuperscript{92}For brevity I shall be concerned only with the positive terms in ethical relations. Bad, pain, pain-producing, and inhumanity will be assumed to follow a similar pattern in this discussion.
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Whatever is approved or recommended as good by all or almost all persons is either (a) immediately pleasant to the individual, (b) useful in producing pleasure for the individual, (c) immediately pleasant to others, or (d) useful in producing pleasure for others. Each of these springs of action is a matter of moral sentiment to which all questions of obligation ultimately reduce and for which no further reasons can, or need, be provided.

These are the basic principles upon which Hume grounds his moral theory. In establishing these principles he is quite explicit in rejecting alternative systems. Ethical rationalism, he says, is false because reason alone cannot be a motive to action, and psychological egoism is also false because we do, in fact, approve actions which are irrelevant to our own happiness. More important than his rejection of rationalism and egoism, both for purposes of this study and to the learned public of his day, is Hume's repudiation of theological ethics. He refuses to (1) go beyond human

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93 An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. Selby-Bigge, pp. 213, 286ff; A. K. Rogers, Morals In Review (New York: 1927), p. 236; C. D. Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory (London: 1930), pp. 85-91. As Broad mentions (p. 89), points (b) and (d)—and perhaps (c) as well—should be prefaced by "believed to be" to be accurate.

94 Ibid., p. 293.

95 Ibid., pp. 286-8.

96 Ibid., pp. 215-18.
nature as a ground for moral principles, (2) attribute a supernatural authority to conscience, or (3) include a duty to God among our obligations. His attitude toward the traditional mixture of ethics and theology is expressed in no uncertain terms. "As this latter science (theology) admits of no terms of composition," he comments, "but bends every branch of knowledge to its own purpose, without much regard to the phenomena of nature, or to the unbiassed sentiments of mind, hence reasoning, and even language, have been warped from their natural course, and distinctions have been endeavored to be established where the difference of the objects was, in a manner, imperceptible."

Despite the truth of this remark, Hume must still defend his position against the charge that only theological principles can insure a ground for moral values and duties beyond the mere contingent psychological fact that human nature seems to be the same almost everywhere. If there is a God and a future state, we have a motive and obligation to virtuous conduct which would otherwise not.

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98 Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 322.
be present. The common human demand for a universal and ultimate distributive and rectificatory justice cannot be met if the existence of either God or immortality be denied.

Hume's answer to this argument takes approximately this form: The attempt to ground morality on the belief that the universe or its cause is morally oriented in the direction of human values is as unjustifiable as the demand that empirical science presuppose a doctrine of substance. In defence of this statement Hume employs all the force of his arguments concerning the Problem of Evil. Both the theist and the atheist, he argues, must account for the same empirical facts in their moral theories. The atheist does not deny the course of events, but he does deny that it supports the belief in a supreme justice, that is, the belief that there is further reward and punishment beyond that visible in the world. If the course of events reveals the complete operation of justice in the world, then there is no need of a God to compensate for the lack of it. If there is no justice in the world, then there is good ground for denying the existence of a just God. And if (as is the case) the world appears partly just and partly not, there is no reason for believing that justice will ever exceed the particular extent at which it now exerts itself.  

99 Ibid., pp. 140-143.
We may add to this argument Hume's views concerning the problem of immortality as expressed in the Treatise and in his unpublished essay, "Of the Immortality of the Soul." Immortality, he says, has been traditionally supported by three types of arguments. (1) Metaphysical: since the soul is immaterial, simple, and indivisible, it cannot be destroyed. (2) Moral: God's justice requires reward's and punishments in a future life. (3) Empirical: nature provides many examples of life continuing beyond the destruction of a particular material form. The metaphysical argument, he continues is faulty because the problem of the soul's nature is unintelligible. We can have no meaningful concept of a bodiless soul, and besides if the soul is incorruptible, it is also uncreatable. If there is immortality, therefore, there must be pre-existence. Since we are not interested in the latter, why concern ourselves with the former? The empirical argument is also incapable of guaranteeing a future state because the analogy between mind and body, if fully developed, reveals that the soul and body are inseparable.

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100 Section V, Part IV of Book I.
102 Treatise, pp. 233 and 250.
103 "Of the Immortality of the Soul," Essays, II, 400.
Mental weakness and disorder are closely correlated with physical illness, and the soul's death, therefore, probably accompanies the body's dissolution.\textsuperscript{104}

In his criticism of the moral argument for immortality, Hume supplements his repudiation of theological ethics. Besides the fact that we have no basis to infer God's plan for future rewards and punishments from His acts in the world, he argues, we know neither the standard nor the purpose of divine reward and punishment. The distinction of men into all-good or all-bad makes the theological measure of blame and approbation non-empirical and, hence, unknowable. Also, the doctrine that eternal retribution is meted out as punishment for temporal offences reveals the theological notion of justice to be both illogical and vicious. "The damnation of one man," Hume charges, "is an infinitely greater evil in the universe than the subversion of a thousand millions of kingdoms."\textsuperscript{105} The implication of theological ethics is that if there is a moral order in the universe, it is governed by the arbitrary standards of a vindictive vengeance. Upon a serious consideration of this implication, a man of common sense cannot help but judge the supposedly advantageous concepts

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., p. 404.
\textsuperscript{105}Ibid., pp. 402-3.
of God and immortality to be both unnecessary for moral theory and incompatible with the basic moral sentiments of all mankind.

I find Hume's arguments which I have just stated to be unsatisfactory on two counts. First, his criticisms of theological ethics are directed almost exclusively against that narrow brand of Scottish Calvinism with which he was surrounded from the time of his youth. "Divine justice" means for Hume the morally reprehensible doctrine of double predestination, and thus the notion that morality must include concepts of heaven and hell is inconceivable to him. He is totally unaware of the refined form which the Moral Argument for God can take, and has taken since Kant. More than this, he is incapable of appreciating that type of moral experience which dictates the demand that the moral universe as well as the physical be ultimately rational, and he is devoid of that sort of consciousness which embraces both, what Kant calls, "radical evil" and the supreme authority of moral values, and issues in religiously oriented, if not constituted, ethical principles.

Second, the moral theory which Hume recommends in opposition to theological ethics seems to me to be unacceptable. I said in beginning this section that there are two ways of approaching moral theory--either as an
attempt to explain moral experience or as an endeavor to provide valid principles for obligation. I do not know how one decides between these alternatives except by finding greater defects in one than in the other. Hume chooses the first method and reduces ethics to a branch of psychology and sociology. Stated as briefly as possible, here are the major defects I find in his view. (1) Hume adopts from the ontologists a metaphysic of human nature for which he has no authority. His purpose is to state the principles of morality so that they are entirely subject to empirical method, but he fails to form an adequate conception of this method. The principle that human nature is everywhere the same is neither proved by Hume nor, I think, true in the sense in which he uses it. (2) The consequence of Hume's analysis of the problem of free will in the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding is that he has no basis upon which to attribute moral responsibility to men. To say, as Hume does, that moral approbation and blame require only hypothetical liberty—that is, the absence of external


107Ibid., p. 87.

108Section VIII, pp. 80-103.
compulsion or constraint\textsuperscript{109} is to be guilty either of a failure to understand the problem or of an attempt to avoid it. For "X is blameable (or praiseworthy)" to be meaningful it must be meaningful to say "X could have done other than he did," and this "could" must be categorical. Hume's denial that such is the case means (1) that X's action was initiated by causal antecedents bound necessarily to events before his birth, (2) that Y's blaming of X is itself determined, and (3) that the philosopher's decision concerning freedom of the will is ultimately due not to correct reasons but to the relevant circumstances of his past history. That rational thought or action is intelligible in view of such consequences seems to me to be impossible.\textsuperscript{110}

(3) It is incredible, as Broad says, that every ethical issue is completely decidable by an appeal to psychological statistics.\textsuperscript{111} Yet this is a necessary consequence of Hume's moral theory. In order for questions of moral right and wrong to be meaningful, ethical

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid., pp. 95-6, and An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 322.

\textsuperscript{110}The alternative, that man has categorical liberty, I shall examine briefly in connection with Kant in the following chapter. See Chapter VII, Section I.

\textsuperscript{111}Five Types of Ethical Theory, pp. 114-115.
disagreement must be possible, and Hume provides a basis for such disagreement by his principles of utility and humanity. The difficulty comes when it is realized that, on his view, the solution of an ethical problem depends upon the latest report of the sentiments and prejudices of mankind. Broad's comment expresses my own reaction to this situation: "To me this kind of answer seems utterly irrelevant to this kind of question." 112

In fairness to Hume, it must be admitted that the defects of his moral theory do not in any way establish the necessity of theological principles for ethics. His analysis of the Problem of Evil, the societal effects of religion, and the moral implications of the concepts of God and immortality remains a serious objection to the ethical validity and function of theological principles. The want of a single supporting argument for a given position, Hume says in his essay on immortality, is a completely effective reason against acknowledging its claims. 113 Since neither the a priori, empirical nor moral arguments for the existence of God can withstand searching criticism, the proper course for a rational man is to forsake the riddles and obscurities of vulgar

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112 Ibid., p. 115.
113 Essays, II, 405.
superstition and adhere solely to the principles of "true religion." True religion is nothing but a species of philosophy which will never "carry us beyond the usual course of experience, or give us measures of conduct and behavior different from those which are furnished by reflections on common life."\(^{114}\)

This remark I regard as expressing the final outcome of Hume's reflections on religion, freed from the pseudo-pious utterances with which he embroidered them in his works. As we turn now to Kant's analysis of the relation between ethics and theology, the main problem will be to see clearly his reasons for rejecting Hume's conclusion, after agreeing with him on the bankruptcy of the a priori and empirical arguments for God.

\(^{114}\)An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, p. 146.
CHAPTER VII

THE POSSIBILITY OF ETHICAL JUSTIFICATION
FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

Part II: Kant

The fundamental epistemological conclusions of both the Humean and Kantian philosophies dictate that the final appeal of theology rests with the need of morality for a belief in God and immortality. The differences between these two philosophical systems are perhaps nowhere greater than in their reaction to this appeal. In the preceding chapter, I indicated how Hume rejects the ethical justification of theological principles by citing the Problem of Evil and the pernicious effects of religion upon society, and by constructing a moral theory whose standards are strictly determined by human values of pleasure and pain. Kant shares Hume's aversion to theological ethics but denies his contention that the Problem of Evil and the societal effects of religion prohibit the ascription of any moral significance to the ideas of God and immortality. This denial depends strictly upon Kant's further claim that no adequate ethical theory can ignore the moral necessity for God's existence. In discussing Kant's view of the relation between the first principles of theology and ethics, therefore, I shall modify the order employed in the preceding chapter and direct most of my
attention to his so-called "Moral Argument," and then mention briefly his comments on the Problem of Evil and his evaluation of the history of religion.

In the section of the Critique of Practical Reason entitled "The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason," Kant concludes that "it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God." Previously he had concluded the same for the postulate of immortality. By this statement Kant says he intends to indicate that the belief in God and immortality is neither logically demonstrable nor empirically attestable. The Moral Argument is not to be considered a further species of the traditional proofs for God which he examines in the Critique of Pure Reason. He also wants it clearly understood that the moral necessity attributed to the postulates of God and immortality is not to be confused with a duty prescribed by the moral law, such as always telling the truth. A righteous man will never lie, but he may

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2 Ibid., p. 226.
3 See On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives, in Ibid., pp. 346-350.
not believe in God. If he does not, he has not forsaken his duty but simply failed to recognize a necessary corollary implied by a consistent view of the moral law itself. He may perform his duty without believing in God, but he cannot have a clear understanding of the grounds of duty without this belief. "Hence for its own sake morality does not need religion at all," Kant remarks, but it "leads ineluctably to religion." 4

It is my belief that an attempt to understand what Kant means by the necessary relation between morality and religion and the steps by which he establishes this relation requires a serious review of most of his Critical and post-Critical works. Beginning with the first Critique, he mentions and slightly alters the Moral Argument for God in each of his major works, excepting the Foundations of the Metaphysic of Morals. The seven major references 5 to it occur in each of the three Critiques, 6 Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, 7 the essay


7Preface to the First Edition," PP.4-6, and 96.
"What is Orientation in Thinking," his lectures on the philosophy of religion, and the final entries in his Opus Postumum. Most of the unfair criticism which has been leveled against Kant's postulates of God and immortality can, I think, be attributed to a careless and incomplete knowledge of his total position on moral theology as it is revealed in these works. I cannot, of course, here attempt a complete analysis of each of these works. I shall, rather, state briefly the basic steps of his arguments for God and immortality as they occur in the second Critique, and then seek further explication of his position in the light of certain objections made against it.

For Kant, the Moral Argument for God and immortality has four primary steps. These concern the concepts of (A) moral experience, (B) the moral law, (C) freedom of the will, and (D) the highest good. (A) Moral experience, Kant asserts, is the ultimate data of moral theory. As such it is not to be explained away in terms of

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8 In the Beck ed. of the Critique of Practical Reason, pp. 298ff.
11 Critique of Practical Reason, pp. 141-2, 146, and 181ff.
conditioned desires and sentiments but rather given significant meaning in terms of its own principles. Every man's moral experience impresses him with a sense of obligation—that certain acts are right and others wrong—and with a sense of freedom—that both the possibility and the responsibility for right action is his. Men may, and probably most often do, disagree about the particular content of moral duties, but the sense of duty itself is universal. The belief in obligation is just as fundamental as the belief in fact, and if the latter deserves to be formalized by the principles of empirical science, the former deserves to be formalized by the principles of moral theory.

(B) If morality is to be intelligible in itself and not simply regarded as a set of psychological and sociological phenomena, some principle must be adduced whereby obligation can acquire a universal and necessary character. This principle Kant finds in the moral law. Duties must be determined neither by immediate inclination, rules of prudence, or some arbitrary external standard, but solely by reason's examination of the moral law. The highest moral law Kant calls the "categorical imperative,"

12Such as God's will or the approval of society, Ibid., pp. 151-2.
although subordinate moral principles such as "Lying is wrong" are also categorical. The ultimate categorical imperative adjudicates between actions by designating only those as duties which are both universal and necessary—that is, those which would be obligatory for any rational being in similar circumstances and which would depend not on some "accidental" empirical condition like the uniformity of human nature but on the a priori dictates of reason alone.

(C) Moral experience thus requires that universal judgments concerning obligation be possible, and this possibility is provided by the moral law. But if the moral law is to be intelligible, it, in turn, must presuppose that the duties it recommends are in fact real alternative courses of action open to human beings. To say that "X ought to have been done" entails "X could have been done," and this latter presupposes the possibility of human freedom. Man must be able to choose between the dictates of his inclinations and those of his reason when these two are in conflict. Since, however, empirical observation can reveal no exceptions to the law of causality, moral theory seems to contradict this most basic principle of experience. It is no solution to this contradiction to ground human responsibility upon the mere absence of external compulsion as Spinoza and Hume attempt
to do. Man at the moment of action must be able to disre­
gard the influence of his past and present inclinations and allow his choice to be governed solely by reason. Freedom of the will is thus a valid postulate despite the empirical evidence to the contrary. Its denial would mean that the moral law is absurd in recommending duties contrary to desires and that moral experience which demands obligation and freedom is illusory.\(^\text{13}\)

(D) Kant continues to rely heavily on his assump­
tion that morality must be made intelligible in his move­
ment from freedom and the moral law to the postulates of God and immortality. It is at this point that he introduces the concept of the highest good.\(^\text{14}\) The highest good is defined as the equality of perfect virtue and happiness. Virtue is the determination of the will solely by reason's apprehension of the moral law, and happiness is the satisfactory fulfillment of our every will and wish. The highest good exists when external circumstances completely correspond to the desires of a will determined by reason alone. The impossibility of complete and equal virtue and happiness occurring in the realm of earthly

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}, pp. 157ff and 205.}\)

\(^{14}\text{Ibid.}, pp. 214–235.\)
experience dictates the necessity of the postulates of God and immortality.

Kant's argument for immortality is as follows. The moral law commands that the will attain perfect virtue—that is, that it choose between moral alternatives without any reference to particular inclinations. In actual fact, however, perfect virtue is unattainable by a will subject to the passions and desires of its body. The moral law, therefore, inasmuch as it commands the impossible, is absurd. The only solution, Kant argues, is to postulate an endless progress in virtue beyond the limits of this life. Since the good will is the only intrinsic good and striving for virtue, creates in us an increased desire for a good will, either the demands of a virtuous will are delusions or immortality is the case. But to say that the demands of a virtuous will are delusions is to deny intelligibility to morality. The righteous man, therefore, has the right to hope that his efforts to conform to the moral law are not limited to the experiences of this life but will continue in a future state.

Just as immortality guarantees one part of the highest good, virtue, the existence of God guarantees the second part, happiness. There is no necessary connection, as far as we can see, between virtue and happiness. Virtue does not mean happiness, nor does morality always result in
the most happy consequences. Yet, the moral law commands that the highest good be promoted, and the highest good entails that virtue—as the worthiness to be happy—and happiness be equal. Unless the moral law is to be conceived as commanding the impossible, some ground whereby the equality of virtue and happiness can be postulated is necessary. This ground can only be a supreme cause of the whole of external circumstances (nature) who will correlate the consequences of morality with the righteous man's intentions. The postulate of God, therefore, is necessary in order to conceive an end of morality which is consistent with its purposes. For this reason, and despite the failure of all theoretical proofs, the righteous man may say, "I will that there be a God."

If, as moral men, we must believe in God and immortality, what can we know about the nature of each? Kant is very explicit in declaring that we cannot know anything about them. We cannot even know that our beliefs are true, since it is possible that morality may in fact be unintelligible. There is no proof that it is or is not intelligible, and we therefore determine that it shall make sense. On this ground God and immortality become meaningful postulates.

15 Ibid., p. 245.
and we may determine something of their content on the basis of their relation to morality.\textsuperscript{16}

Immortality will be the continuation of our struggle for virtue and will be determined by our progress in this respect during our lifetime. The notion of eternal punishment and reward contained in the traditional concepts of heaven and hell, however, must be rejected. These concepts inspire the morally injurious belief in death-bed repentance and in the limitation of moral effort to this life.\textsuperscript{17} There will, of course, be a difference between the fortunes of the righteous and the unrighteous in a future life, because the consequences of adhering to the moral law in the case of the former and of following inclination in the case of the latter will continue, but this difference will be one of degree which can be predicted by each man upon a serious review of his own moral history.

We can also, for practical purposes, determine something about the nature of God, Kant asserts, by noting His relationship to the highest good. If God is to make


\textsuperscript{17}Religion, p. 63n. See also the essay, Das Ende Aller Dinge, in which Kant lists several religious fancies concerning immortality, and Streit Der Facultaten (Berlin Edition of Kant's works, Vol. VII, p. 40.) in which he disparages the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.
the highest good possible by uniting complete virtue and happiness, He must possess certain attributes. He must be omnibenevolent in order to desire the union of virtue and happiness— that is, His moral relations to man must be those of Holy Legislator, Benevolent Ruler, and Righteous Judge. Also, He must be omniscient in order to know the virtuous intentions of each man, and He must be omnipotent in order to correlate the circumstances of nature and the consequences of moral action. In the same way the eternity, omnipresence, and other attributes of a supremely perfect Being can be affirmed as necessary to moral theology. Thus, the existence of the *ens realissimum*, which theoretical reason can regard only as an hypothesis, becomes through the principles of practical reason a necessary postulate of morality.¹⁸

In examining the criticisms of Kant's arguments concerning moral theology, I do not intend to take much notice of the objection that he has failed to produce a proof for God and immortality. This is really not an objection at all, since it merely reaffirms Kant's own position. Man's right to be religious, he contends, stems

not from the logical or empirical provability of the first principles of theology but from the authority of the moral law. If reason could disprove God and immortality, then no consideration would be sufficient to warrant a belief in them. But since reason can neither prove nor disprove them, the decision concerning their acceptance or rejection must rest on other grounds. These grounds both Hume and Kant recognize as being the implications of religion for morality and moral theory, and it is no objection against Kant's acceptance of God and immortality to assert that he did not produce a formal demonstration of their reality.

The real criticism of Kant's Moral Argument which I intend to examine in some detail seems to concern four major points: (1) the unintelligibility of his concept of freedom, (2) the weakness of his argument for immortality, (3) the hedonistic emphasis of his argument for God, and (4) his repudiation of the Moral Argument in the Opus Postumum. Of these four, only the first seems to me to be in a sense unanswerable, and therefore I have decided to consider it while remembering that freedom is more a prerequisite than an integral part of Kant's moral theology. The other three are also serious and important objections.

\[19\] *Critique of Teleological Judgment*, p. 409n.
to Kant's position, but I believe that a careful consideration of his views will remove most of the difficulties which they present. I shall now proceed to an examination of each of these points.

(1) Freedom of the will, Kant argues, must be possible if moral action and responsibility are to be meaningful. As I indicated in the preceding chapter's discussion of Hume, I think this is correct. I do not think, however, that Kant has made sense out of his doctrine of freedom. He tries to do so by postulating the dual nature of man as its ground. Man as an object of empirical observation is completely determined by causal necessity. There are no original causal antecedents observable within the limits of human experience. At the same time, the self in all its moral decisions is free to follow the dictates of inclination or to choose according to reason's understanding of the moral law. Regardless of the domination of inclination over an individual's past choices, in each new decision he is free to act from a sense of duty alone. How this is possible, Kant admits, is unexplainable, except to say that the real self which chooses is not bound by empirical laws of causality even though the acts which issue from its decisions appear to conform strictly to those laws.  

20 *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 204-5.
The greatest difficulty which this doctrine presents for moral theory seems to me to be the impossibility of making the notion of an evil act intelligible. A good act is one done from a sense of duty, and an evil act is, supposedly, one done from inclination in opposition to duty. But how can the will ever freely choose to be governed by inclination? As Broad comments, if it is a delusion that my choice is ever determined by irrational impulses, then it is also a delusion that I ever act wrongly. But, on the other hand, if I ever really do act wrongly, either I am ultimately governed by inclination and hence not free, or I choose wrongly not from inclination or reason but purely arbitrarily. In either case, Kant has failed to make the grounds of moral decision intelligible.

In his book on religion, Kant revises his account of human evil by asserting that the real self remains aloof and allows inclination to have full sway in matters of decision. Our acts are thus determined by inclination, but we are still morally responsible since we could at any time have interrupted the course of inclination and chosen according to rational principles alone. I think

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22*Bellglon*, pp. 32ff.
this version is more defensible than the earlier one which asserts every act is freely chosen, but the problem of why the real self interrupts or refrains from interrupting the natural course of irrational impulses remains as great an obstacle to the intelligibility of Kant’s moral theory as the whole notion of the dual nature of man is to his metaphysics.  

This is not to assert, however, that Kant has failed where other philosophers have succeeded, for as far as I know, no one has made the freedom of the will intelligible without denying its possibility. The merits of Kant’s position are his recognition that uncrITICAL experience seems to impress us with a real sense of freedom and that the ability to do or refrain from doing a given act is an indispensable condition of moral obligation. A further merit may be his admission that he has not given a satisfactory explanation of freedom and that, in fact, under the dominance of the category of causality no such explanation can be offered without engendering some self-contradiction.  

(2) The second set of criticisms of Kant’s moral theology which I want to examine is directed against his...
argument for immortality. The three major objections to which this doctrine is subject are, first, that it contradicts Kant's conclusions concerning the soul in the first Critique; second, that the notion of endless progress is neither necessary to, nor consistent with, the ideal of complete virtue; and, third, that the concept of the highest good is an insufficient basis upon which to justify the postulate of a future life. The second and third objections are important criticisms of Kant's position, though I do not regard them as unanswerable. The first objection, that Kant contradicted his own arguments concerning the soul, seems to me to disregard completely his view concerning the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical faith.25

The postulate of immortality does not in the least extend our knowledge of the soul as a single, simple, transcendent substance. Such knowledge Kant proved to be impossible in "The Paralogisms of Pure Reason,"26 and the moral necessity of believing that something survives the death of the empirical self in no way reopens the door to metaphysical speculation. The same holds true, of course

25 Critique of Pure Reason, Part II, Book II, Chapter I.
for the belief in the existence of God. The sole ground of these beliefs is their necessity for a consistent and complete view of the basis of moral action. Their authority is limited to this moral function on Kant's view, and thus their status is more that of transcendent values than of metaphysical "facts." A priority, for Kant, includes not only theoretical necessity, but moral necessity as well, and denial of the former need not be inconsistent with affirmation of the latter for one and the same proposition.

The second criticism of Kant's argument for immortality concerns two points. First, if the empirical self perishes at death, so do all inclinations which (in some inexplicable way) hinder the real self from being completely virtuous. Why then does Kant find it necessary to postulate endless progress toward complete virtue in the after-life? Second, the ground upon which Kant justifies the belief in immortality is the moral necessity of complete virtue being attainable. But if immortality consists in endless progress toward complete virtue, this goal can never actually be attained. The command of the moral law is thus impossible to fulfill, and the postulate of immortality threatens rather than ensures its intelligibility.

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28 Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory, p. 141.
Kant's reply to both points of this criticism may be given in terms of four principles explicit in his philosophy. First, there is no basis upon which to infer that the future life will be radically different from the present one.\(^29\) Evil is the substitution of any other motive for that of duty as defined by the moral law. Even if physical desires and impulses cease at death, there is no reason to suppose that their cessation entails the end of all inclination and self-will. Second, it would be presumptuous to imagine that progress in virtue is less than endless although, for all we know, it may be.\(^30\) Third, progress toward complete virtue, which to us appears as an endless process, is seen by God as "a whole conformable to the moral law"\(^31\)—just as mathematicians recognize the possibility of an infinite series being given without a last member.\(^32\) Fourth, the notion of "endless time" is a phenomenal idea which is really without reference to the noumenal self.\(^33\) The assertion that progress in virtue requires endless duration must be taken to signify only

\(^{29}\) *Vorlesungen*, p. 150.

\(^{30}\) *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 226-7.


\(^{33}\) *Critique of Pure Reason*, "The Ideality of Space and Time," A35-41; B52-58.
that such progress is not confined to the limits of temporal existence. Since this is all that is required for the moral function of the postulate of immortality, the objection to the idea of endless progress in virtue is without weight.

The third objection to Kant's argument for immortality concerns the concept of the highest good upon which this argument is based. C. D. Broad gives one form of this objection in his comment that Kant's Moral Argument depends upon a confusion of two senses of "ought." "X ought to have been done" entails "X could have been done," he says, but "X (the highest good) ought to exist" does not entail "X (the highest good) does exist." All it entails is that it is not logically impossible for X to exist and that any being who could bring about its existence should do so. Kant mistakenly assumes, he argues, that since the moral law says that the highest good ought to exist, it is necessary to assume the reality of God and immortality without which the equality of complete virtue and happiness would be impossible. All Kant has really proved is that if God and immortality are real, the highest good does, or will, exist.\(^{34}\)

Broad's criticism weighs equally against the arguments for God and immortality, and consequently what I

\(^{34}\)Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, pp. 141-2.
have to say in defense of the latter argument will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the former.

The objection seems to me to be due to a failure to understand the structure of Kant's reasoning. If moral judgments are to make sense, it must be meaningful to say "X ought to have been done." And for it to be meaningful to say this, it must be meaningful to say "X could have been done."35 This, in part, is the structure of Kant's argument for freedom of the will. Broad errs in trying to interpret the argument for immortality in the same way. It is not sufficient for the purposes of morality, on Kant's view, to be able to say "Complete virtue ought to exist," since as Broad points out, this is perfectly consistent with "Complete virtue does not and never will exist." Kant's argument is that the moral law commands every man to attain complete virtue. If, as is the case in this life, it is impossible for men to attain complete virtue, the moral law commands the impossible and hence is absurd. But the moral law is not absurd. Therefore, complete virtue must be attainable. Therefore, man's pursuit

35The usual addition of "though it was not" to these statements seems to me to be unnecessary. If I say "X ought to (or could) have been done," this *presupposes* that I believe it was not.
of it must extend beyond this life, and consequently immortality is a necessary postulate. Similarly, Kant's argument for God is not that the union of complete virtue and happiness ought to exist but that this union must exist, and since it is impossible without God (as far as we know), we must postulate His existence.

Two other criticisms of Kant's use of the concept of the highest good in his justification of immortality need to be mentioned briefly. These are (1) the command to attain complete virtue cannot be interpreted literally and (2) the notion of an immortal soul without emotions is inconsistent with the idea of final happiness. The first of these criticism charges that the command to holiness, upon which the argument for immortality depends, cannot be recognized as satisfiable. "Seek complete virtue" is only a rhetorical way of saying "Never be satisfied with your present level of moral achievement." But for Kant this would surely be a distortion of the concept of duty. Holiness or complete virtue is for him the state of a will solely determined by the moral law, and this is a literal command of morality. The very impossibility

36 Korner, op. cit., p. 166.

37 Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory, pp. 142-3, and Theodore M. Greene, "Introduction", in Religion, p. xiv.

38 Ibid., p. 140.
of satisfying this command is the ground upon which one must believe in the existence of a future life.

The second criticism attempts to equate happiness with physical and emotional pleasure. Since perfect virtue is attained only when all inclination has been made subject to the motives of pure duty, happiness and perfect virtue are incompatible. I think this objection is founded on two misconceptions of Kant's position: (a) duty must always oppose inclination, and (b) happiness is equivalent to the satisfaction of desire and impulse. Although Kant's language sometimes gives the impression that he believes these principles, they are not necessary to his ethical doctrine. Inclination and duty often do unite as motives to the same act, and it may be that part of the meaning of the highest good is the final union of these two through the agency of God as the cause of nature. Whether or not this is a solution consistent with Kant's position I shall now discuss in connection with the general charge that he is guilty of an inconsistent appeal to hedonism in his argument for God.

(3) The most serious objection to Kant's moral theology is the assertion that in the argument for God he violates his own restriction upon moral value. Happiness, either my own or that of others, plays no part in his ethical system. Yet, when he comes to postulate God's
existence, happiness is made an essential part of the highest good which only God can guarantee. Despite the exalted position which he gives to "duty for duty's sake," he is forced to recognize the hedonist imperative that ultimately "good" and "pleasant" must concur. This interpretation seems to be abundantly substantiated by statements in his lectures on the philosophy of religion. "Why should I make myself worthy of happiness by means of moral conduct," he asks, "if there exists no Being who can secure me this happiness?" And further on he comments: "if morality can offer me no prospect that my need to be happy will be satisfied, neither can it command me."

Kant has been castigated from all sides because of this appeal to happiness. J. E. Walter contends that his moral theology amounts to only a "faith in an unknown God who is assumed as a necessary cause only to procure the happiness the finite agent has of himself decreed as a reward for his entirely self-acquired virtue." A. E. Taylor charges that Kant confuses the relation between God and morality and offers only a "half-hearted version" of the

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moral proof. Both C. D. Broad\textsuperscript{42} and A. C. Ewing\textsuperscript{43} decide that Kant should have come right out and said that there are two intrinsic goods: the good will and the pleasure of a good man. J. Korner argues that even on Kant's view, it is not a duty to promote final happiness and therefore its existence is not essential to the intelligibility of the moral law.\textsuperscript{44} I think that perhaps the severest criticism of Kant's appeal to happiness, however, is expressed in the following passage from George Galloway's \textit{Religion and Modern Thought}:

\begin{quote}
... The reality and value of my moral duties in no way depend on their being regarded as commands of God. As for happiness, it is a minor matter which pertains to the phenomenal world. An empirical and sensuous product which, on your own showing, does not belong to the real world at all, is a slender and uncertain basis on which to ground the momentous inference that God exists. I therefore decline to make the inference and maintain that religion is not essential, for it is neither the ground of moral obligation, nor does it affect the inner worth of the man who reverently obeys the moral law.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

In considering Kant's possible reply to these criticisms, I was first tempted to follow the recommendation of Broad and Ewing and see if Kant could be made to hold

\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Five Types of Ethical Theory}, p. 134.

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Paradoxes of Kant's Ethics}, \textit{Philosophy}, 1938 (XIII), p. 41.

\textsuperscript{44}\textsc{Op. cit.}, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{45}(Edinburgh: 1922), p. 63.
happiness to be an intrinsic good. This would not, of course, go very far in explaining the bold hedonistic emphasis of the quotations from his lectures. I do not, in fact, see how these can be given any explanation, except that the lectures were designed to present a more popular and hence less rigorous view of Kant's theological doctrines. Disregarding these popular statements, I can see some validity in arguing that Kant recognized the need for happiness, as well as the awareness of moral obligation, to be basic ingredients of human experience which must be accommodated by any satisfactory moral theory. Since the desire for happiness is at least as immediate as the desire for goodness (or truth), the principles of virtue, while autonomous—that is, not determined as instruments to happiness, must not result in the ultimate denial of this desire. The demand that happiness and worthiness to be happy be commensurate is antecedent even to a recognition of the moral law. It is the natural human commitment to a sense of justice. If the desire for happiness is legitimate and if justice demands that virtue and happiness be ultimately united, then the postulate of God's existence has some authority.46

46 See a note added to the second ed. of the Critique of Teleological Judgment, ed. Bernard, p. 381n.
I say, this argument seems to me to make sense. It does not, however, appear to be consistent with Kant's position. For Kant, the pure moral law has no need of happiness (in the sense of pleasure) either as a motive or as a duty. The only intrinsic good is the good will, and happiness, as part of the highest good, is not necessitated by an independent demand for it but only as a consequence of morality.\footnote{Critique of Practical Reason, p. 223.} This means that the happiness which God ensures is not that prompted by particular emotions and desires but is definable strictly in terms of virtue itself. For this reason, I think the proper interpretation of the argument for God depends upon an understanding of what Kant means by moral happiness.

Moral happiness—that is, the happiness which is a necessary counterpart of complete virtue—means for Kant neither the positive pleasures of feeling, intellectual contentment, consciousness of moral progress, nor the happiness of others.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 221-3. See also, Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory, p. 142 and Greene's introduction to Religion, p. xiii.} He gives his best definition and analysis of this concept in his book on religion. By moral happiness, he says there, "I do not mean that assurance of the everlasting possession of contentment with one's physical state (freedom from evils and enjoyment of..."
ever-increasing pleasures) which is physical happiness; I mean rather the reality and constancy of a disposition which ever progresses in goodness (and never falls away from it).” 49 A little further on he adds another dimension to this definition: “The concept of the Deity really arises solely from consciousness of His laws and from the need of reason to postulate a might which can procure for these laws, as their final end, all the results conformable to them and possible in a world.” 50

I see in these statements two essential elements of his notion of moral happiness. The first is the consciousness that our efforts to attain virtue will meet with success, and the second is the knowledge that the acts which the moral law commands will produce in the end the proper consequences. In the preface to his book on religion Kant makes explicit use of these concepts in explaining his Moral Argument for God. It is not a necessary prerequisite to the performance of duty to know what the end of our act will be either in ourselves or in its external consequences. Yet we have a “natural need to conceive of some sort of final end for all our actions and abstentions,” and this end must be one which is

49 *Religion*, p. 61.

conformable to morality and not a hindrance to its intelligibility. The determination of our will cannot be without any effect whatsoever, and therefore the question, "What is to result from this right conduct of ours?" demands an answer. If the only answer possible is that the ends of morality are ultimately subject to morally neutral principles of an unconscious universe, then the moral law is indeed "fantastic, directed to empty imaginary ends, and consequently inherently false." 

By giving his argument for God this interpretation in the book on religion, Kant has removed from it the charge of hedonism. Kant is not always careful to restrict himself to this concept of moral happiness in his discussions of the highest good, but when he does so, his argument for God becomes perfectly consistent with the rest of his ethical system. The happiness which God assures is not that of physical pleasure as opposed to pain but that of confidence as opposed to despair—confidence that the duties and values prescribed by the moral law are an integral part of the ultimate structure of reality.

51 Ibid., pp. 4-5.

(4) The final criticism of Kant's moral theology which I intend to examine concerns his supposed repudiation of the argument for God in the *Opus Postumum*. I think this idea has been pretty well exploded as an error in interpretation on the part of Erich Adickes, but its great influence on both Theodore M. Greene and Norman Kemp Smith, two of the best Kant scholars, demands that some mention be made of it here. The same misconception has also prompted other commentators to depreciate Kant's argument for God. Hans Vaihinger holds that Kant came to recognize the idea of God to be only a moral fiction, and A. Seth Pringle-Pattison comments that Kant's God up to the *Opus* is a *deus ex machina* introduced solely to shore up the useless notion of the highest good. The severest comment, however, comes from Heinrich Heine who asserts that Kant never put any more stock in the Moral Argument than in the speculative proofs of the first

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53 In his "Kant's *Opus Postumum*, dargestellt und beurteilt," *Kant-Studien*, L, pp. 720ff.

54 Introduction to *Religion*, pp. LXVff.


Critique but only introduced it so that his poor servant, Lampe, might have some encouragement in his desperate hope for future happiness.  

The two most important interpretations of Kant's moral theology in the Opus Postumum are those which argue that in it he discards the notion of the highest good and makes God either equivalent to the moral law of immediately present in moral experience. These interpretations are based on such statements as the following drawn from the first and seventh entries of the Opus:

- God is not a thing subsisting outside me; but my own thought. It is absurd to ask whether a God exists.

- God is not a being outside me, but merely thought in me. God is the morally practical self-legislative reason.

The categorical imperative leads directly to God, yes, serves as a pledge of His reality.

In morally-practical reason and in the categorical imperative God reveals Himself.

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61 Adickes, op. cit., p. 789.
62 Ibid., p. 819.
63 Ibid., p. 801.
64 Ibid., p. 806.
The refutation of this charge, that in the *Opus Postumum* Kant so revised his view of God as to completely discard the argument from the highest good, is given by George Schrader in his essay, "Kant's Presumed Repudiation of the Moral Argument in the Opus Postumum." Schrader's argument may be summarized in terms of five principles.

1. The *Opus*, especially the final first and seventh entries, consists of a series of disconnected jottings in which contradictory statements are often found side by side without further clarification. (2) None of the entries written before 1800 give any grounds for the belief that Kant had repudiated the Moral Argument.

3. In interpreting the *Opus*, Adickes rightly employs the principles of Kant's critical works in deciding between conflicting passages; yet, in his view of Kant's theology he forsakes these principles in favor of a new theory.

4. Vaihinger is wrong in regarding God as a moral fiction in Kant's system. When Kant says that the belief in God is subjective or that God is merely an idea and not

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69 As he does in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 223-229.
a substance outside me, he is not discussing the existence of God but his relation to moral duty. In the Opus, Kant himself denies the charge that the earlier versions of the Moral Argument were hedonistic.

I think that these principles are at least sufficient to cast doubt on the belief commonly accepted among Kant scholars that he recognized the serious objections to his own arguments for God and immortality and rejected these arguments as indefensible. It is my opinion that not only did Kant hold fast to these arguments, as is shown by his frequent restatement of them, but also that, if his original assumption concerning the a priori necessity of a rational structure for moral experience be granted, the postulates of God and immortality acquire an authority for human thought which neither metaphysical proof nor empirical evidence can provide for them. For this reason I have devoted so much space to this section on Kant's moral theology. The Problem of Evil and the societal effects of religion, to which I now turn, require only a relatively brief indication of Kant's answer to Hume's charge that these issues defeat the imputation of positive moral value to religion. A discussion of these

70 Schrader, op. cit., pp. 231 and 233.
71 Ibid., p. 235.
topics also reveals how little Kant's moral theology resembles the doctrines of traditional theism.

II

As I mentioned in criticizing Kant's concept of transcendental freedom, the Problem of Evil first presents itself in his system as the difficulty of making the possibility of human sin intelligible. Sin is due to the will's harkening to the dictates of inclination rather than following the commands of pure duty, but it is a mystery why the will ever chooses to subject itself to the causal influence of emotions and irrational impulses. 72 The Problem of Evil as a serious challenge to the postulation of God's moral attributes, on the other hand, seems to be hardly noticed in Kant's major ethical and religious works. If it were not for a short essay, published two years before Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, there would be good grounds for the suspicion that Kant never faced the Problem of Evil in the form in which it occurs in Parts X and XI of Hume's Dialogues. Kant's essay, "On the Failure of All Philosophical Attempts in Theodicee," 73 however, shows that he

72 For a full treatment of this problem, see A. E. Teale, Kantian Ethics (Oxford University Press: 1951), Chapter XIII.

was aware of both the history and importance of this question. This essay is one of the most interesting of Kant's minor writings both because it presents a very thorough analysis of the Problem of Evil and because it reveals many of Kant's objections to the metaphysical foundations of traditional theistic interpretations of ethics. I shall, therefore, briefly indicate its major points before examining Kant's final position on evil in the universe.

Kant begins the essay by distinguishing three aspects of the Problem of Evil: sin, pain, and the disproportion between crime and punishment. Each of these, he says, challenges one of the three aspects of God's moral nature. The existence of sin seems contrary to God's holiness as Legislator, the presence of pain in the world appears to detract from His goodness as Governor, and the disproportion of crime and punishment challenges His justice as Judge. Kant finds none of the traditional answers to this problem satisfactory. The structure of his argument is as follows.

1. Moral evil has been explained in three ways:
(a) Sin is only evil from a human point of view. To God

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74 Ibid., p. 192.
75 Ibid., p. 192.
76 Ibid., pp. 194-203.
it may be the best means to good. Refutation: This answer is worse than the original charge. It not only makes the moral concept of God worthless but denies the reality attested to by moral conviction. (b) Moral evil is real, but it is grounded in the necessary limitations of human nature and thus is inevitable. Refutation: This answer would excuse men but not God. Or else it would fall back on the first solution and claim that, since God created men with finite capacities, there must be a good purpose for moral evil. (c) Moral evil is real, and men are guilty. God does not approve of sin but permits it so that men can have free choice. Refutation: What possible meaning can be given to the notion that the sole Author of everything "permitted" evil? If God could not hinder evil without detracting from a higher good, then either moral evil is not really evil (solution a.) or it is due to the nature of things (solution b.)

2. Physical evil (pain) has also been accounted for in three ways: (a) Evil is less than good, which is attested to by the preference of even the most miserable for life rather than the insensibility of death. Refutation: It is still quite possible to imagine a life with less pain. (b) Pain is due to man's nature. Refutation: Why did God create us with such a nature then? (c) The evil circumstances of life are intended as tests to prove our
worthiness for future happiness. Refutation: There is no answer as to why God requires a period of probation before that of happiness.

3. Three reasons have also been given for the disproportion of crime and punishment: (a) Every crime carries its own punishment in the torments of conscience. The wicked are not really happy. Refutation: The influence of conscience is in proportion to virtue and, therefore, as experience reveals, the vicious man lacks any tormentor and is rewarded by the gratification of his sensual desires. (b) The wicked are really happy, but this is no reflection on virtue since its nature is to be heightened by suffering over evil. Refutation: This cannot hold true of the end of life since suffering can have no corrective value then— (c) The unjust situation in which the wicked rejoice and the righteous suffer will be rectified in a future state. Refutation: Reason has no basis upon which to hope for a different situation in the next life. If this world is judged by God to be satisfactory as it is, why may not the next world resemble it?

Kant’s refutations of each of these proposed solutions to the Problem of Evil provide additional evidence that the moral grounds upon which he bases the belief in God and immortality do not include the necessity of providing a fitting reward for a virtuous life. Yet Kant
affirms the moral necessity of attributing complete goodness, power, and wisdom to God. If then can his own doctrine escape the negative implications of the Problem of Evil for the uniting of these attributes in a single Supreme Being? If the Moral Argument requires the existence of God in order to make the final harmony of nature and morality possible, how is it that God does not accomplish this in the present world? Nature operates through impersonal general laws which often conflict with our highest moral purposes. Why did God not create the world in such a way that natural causality would immediately institute the highest good wherever and whenever it was deserved?

Kant's answer to these questions is that the presence of natural and moral evil becomes a problem only when the attributes of God are made the subject of metaphysical speculation. The failure of all attempts in theodicee is due to the mistaken effort to decide questions of theology by means of theoretical reason. God's existence cannot be established by theoretical reason, nor can the Moral Argument provide sufficient content to the concept


78Religion, p. 130.
of God to make comprehensible the unity of supreme moral wisdom and a supreme wisdom of creation in a single being. Since the Problem of Evil presupposes a claim to knowledge which practical reason neither requires nor justifies, it ceases to be a valid objection to pure moral theology.

Kant nevertheless makes some comment on the relation between the moral idea of God and the existence of evil. The notion of physical evil as a punishment for moral evil is not theoretically defensible, he says; yet it is useful as a regulative idea. It teaches us that we are to seek to become better men before we can expect to be freed from the ills of life or be compensated by a preponderance of goods.79 Also physical evil ought not to be judged a priori as contrary to God's goodness. The moral concept of God directs His beneficence toward our efforts to attain virtue rather than toward the happiness of all sentient creatures.80 That God is not concerned with our present happiness cannot, of course, be known, but the contrary is not essential either to the performance of our duty or to the existence of the highest good. Finally, moral evil not only in its first instance, but in every case where it occurs, is the responsibility solely of the individual

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79 Ibid., p. 67n.
involved. This is a necessary implication of the postulate of freedom. How or why man first acquired his propensity to "radical evil" is incomprehensible beyond noting that it is due to his being created part way between the animals, who are wholly subject to desires and impulses, and God, whose will is determined solely by the moral law. 81

Kant's position on the Problem of Evil, insofar as he expresses it in these comments, is a consistent application of his restriction of theological principles to their moral function. It reveals how little sympathy he has for traditional attempts to extend these principles into a system of theological metaphysics. He is no less critical of such attempts than is Hume, as is shown by his essay on theodicee. His disagreement with Hume comes over the ethical validity of religious truth, Kant arguing that if morality is made both the sole end and the only justification of religion, such difficulties as the Problem of Evil cannot hinder the belief in God and immortality from providing added encouragement in the cause of virtue. Additional evidence of his disagreement with Hume over the value of moral theology is provided in his discussion of the history of religion.

III

Since for Kant religious principles are strictly subordinate to moral ones, the history of religion consists of ferreting out those parts of traditional religious systems which foster a pure respect for the moral law from those which generate only ecclesiastical superstition. Hume argues that the evils perpetrated upon the world in the name of religion are sufficient justification for the rejection of its claim on human belief. Kant's reply is that the pure religion of morality must not be confused with particular religious faiths whose prime motive is to win divine favor even if this entails immoral practices. Kant thus has a principle whereby to distinguish between the positive practical effects of religion and those which, on Hume's view, completely negate its value for social and individual morality.

This principle is the foundation of Kant's Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone. "Whatever, over and above good life-conduct, man fancies that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious illusion and pseudo-service of God." All historical religions have been guilty of illusion and pseudo-service, since they

32 *Religion*, p. 47.
have substituted an ecclesiastical faith of divine worship for the pure religion of morality. Either they have imagined man could secure eternal happiness without becoming morally better, or that God would make a man morally better simply by his wishing for it, or that divine favor could be procured only through the execution of certain a-moral and immoral practices.

Christianity alone, Kant contends, shows evidences of becoming a pure religion of morality. But even here the history of religion's effects upon society serves in no way to recommend Christianity as a moral religion. Kant summarizes the evils of Christendom in a single sentence:

For history tells how the mystical fanaticism in the lives of hermits and monks, and the glorification of the holiness of celibacy, rendered great masses of people useless to the world; how alleged miracles accompanying all this weighed down the people with heavy chains under a blind superstition; how, with a hierarchy forcing itself upon free men, the dreadful voice of orthodoxy was raised, out of the mouths of presumptuous, exclusively "called", Scriptural expositors, and divided the Christian world into embittered parties over credal opinions on matters of faith (upon which absolutely no general agreement can be reached without appeal to pure reason as the expositor); how in the East where the state meddled in an absurd manner with the priests and with priesthood, instead of holding them within the narrow confines of a teacher's status (out of

83Religion, p. 47.
84Ibid., p. 118.
85Which, as is not unusual in Kant's writings, occupies an entire page!
which they are at all times inclined to pass
over into that of ruler)—how, I say, this state had
finally to become, quite inescapably, the prey
of foreign enemies, who at last put an end to
its prevailing faith; how, in the West, where
faith had erected its own throne, independent
of worldly power, the civil order together with
the sciences (which maintain this order) were
thrown into confusion and rendered impotent by
a self-styled viceroy of God; how both Christian
portions of the world became overrun by barbar¬
ians, just as plants and animals, near death from
some disease, attract destructive insects to com-
plete their dissolution; how, in the West, the
spiritual head ruled over and disciplined kings
like children by means of the magic wand of his
threatened excommunication, and incited them to
depopulating foreign wars in another portion of
the world (the Crusades), to the waging of war
with one another, to be rebellion of subjects
against those in authority over them, and to
blood-thirsty hatred against their otherwise-minded
colleagues in one and the same universal Chris-
tendom so-called; how the root of this discord,
which even now is kept from violent outbreaks
only through political interest, lies hidden in
the basic principle of a despotically command-
ing ecclesiastical faith and still gives cause
for dread of events like unto these—this his-
tory of Christendom (which indeed could not
eventuate otherwise if erected upon an historical
faith), when surveyed in a single glance, like a
painting, might well justify the exclamations:
\textit{tantum religio potuit suadere malorum}, 56 did not
the fact still shine forth clearly from its found-
ing that Christianity's first intention was really
no other than to introduce a pure religious faith,
over which no conflict of opinions can prevail;
whereas that turmoil, through which the human race
was disrupted and is still set at odds, arises
solely from this, that what, by reason of an evil
propensity of human nature, was in the beginning
to serve merely for the introduction of pure
religious faith, i. e., to win over for the new
faith the nation habituated to the old historical
belief through its own prejudices, was in the

\begin{footnote}
56 Lucretius, \textit{De Rerum Natura}, I, 101: "Such evil deeds
could religion prompt!"
\end{footnote}
sequel made the foundation of a universal world-religion.  

I doubt that even Hume could have stated the moral evidence against religion as decisively as Kant puts it in this passage. All the evils of religion, he goes on to say, are due to seven factors: 

1. anthropomorphism, which makes God in a form convenient for appeasement; 
2. the attempt to please God by penances, castigations, pilgrimages, and sacrifices instead of by virtuous conduct; 
3. the substitution of belief for moral effort as the grounds of salvation; 
4. fanaticism, the illusion of special communion with God; 
5. fetishism, the attempt to use to one's own advantage the invisible power that presides over the destinies of men; 
6. clericalism, in which the people are robbed of their moral freedom by subservience to a church; and 
7. hypocrisy which, under the assumption that it is better to believe too much than too little, things are affirmed as certain which by their very nature cannot be. All these stem from the false identification of religion with ecclesiastical faith, and even the purest moral doctrine is soon obscured wherever their influence remains unchecked.

87 *Religion*, pp. 121-122.

Despite his recognition of these defects of historical Christianity, Kant refuses to concur with Hume's conclusion that all traditional religion is morally worthless. The explanation for this is that Kant holds the New Testament, especially the life and teachings of Jesus, and the ethical doctrines of the church to be important aids in the inculcation of virtue.89 If kept strictly "within the limits of reason alone," religion can be useful to morality in five ways. (1) It identifies our duties as divine commands and thus reinforces their universal and necessary character.90 (2) It provides a hope that our determination to attain virtue will not be thwarted even if our own efforts prove insufficient.91 (3) Moral truths often are conveyed more successfully to ordinary men by means of revelation than by reason alone, although once these truths are known, reason can discover their validity without aid.92 (4) The Bible, as a book demanding authority and respect, is a useful

89Ibid., pp. 118-120, 55-56.
90Ibid., pp. 142 and 90n.
91Ibid., p. 47. This is the limit of Kant's application of the Christian concept of divine grace. It is neither necessary nor desirable, he says, to know what God does (if anything) to complete our salvation from radical evil. It is only necessary to know what we must do to be worthy of it. (pp. 47-49, 122-123.)
92Ibid., p. 144.
vehicle for the unity of moral instruction, providing its teachings are always interpreted in the light of morality and never the reverse.93 (5) Finally, the notion of a church can be employed as the concept of an ethical commonwealth in which men unite to gain mutual encouragement in virtue.94

Religion, if defined strictly in terms of these functions, cannot issue in immoral attitudes and practices without also issuing in a logical contradiction. There are no religious duties, on Kant's view, which are not completely subject to the commands of the moral law. Hume's assertion that all religion is, or tends to become, injurious to morality is thus refuted by Kant. Hume's mistake is in not recognizing the difference between conceiving of ethics as a function of theology and conceiving of religion as a function of morality. Of course, for Hume morality is itself derivative, whereas for Kant it is a unique aspect of experience which demands its own independent principles of interpretation.

As I have argued, this difference in their views of moral experience and moral theory lies at the root of the divergence between the Humlan and Kantian philosophies of

93Ibid., p. 97f. and 101, 123.

94Ibid., p. 92.
religion as well. As I have also indicated, the advantage in this disagreement seems to me to lie on the side of Kant. Hume's moral sense theory does not produce a positive ethical system any more than his doctrine of the imagination answers his skeptical doubts concerning epistemology. Kant surpasses Hume in the philosophy of religion, just as in epistemology, not by being content with exposing the bankruptcy of traditional dogmatism but by proceeding to provide a cognitive status for our most basic inquiries concerning the rational structure of belief and conduct. I know of no way to prove that Kant is right and Hume is wrong in this issue, except to say that Hume himself soon realized the barrenness of his own philosophical conclusions and turned from them to the writing of history and popular essays. Kant, on the other hand, seems to me to have approximated more closely to the demands which experience makes upon philosophical reflection. Such demands are not always satisfiable nor even consistent with each other, but neither are they meaningless. Kant's merit, for purposes of this study, is to have shown that although metaphysical theology is mostly error and delusion, the moral significance of the first principles of religion cannot be denied.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION: THE PROBLEM OF FAITH, AN OMISSION IN THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHIES OF HUME AND KANT

The burden of the preceding chapters has been to show that between them Kant and Hume conclusively refute the attempt to ground the first principles of theology, the existence of God and immortality, either on logical demonstration or on empirical evidence. I have argued further that Kant's reasons for imputing moral significance to these principles are superior to Hume's reasons for denying it. In concluding this study, I want now to comment briefly on a problem to which neither Hume nor Kant give sufficient attention. This is the problem of the cognitive status of religious faith. By this I mean the question, Is there in religious experience a unique element which warrants the belief in God as the ground of its interpretation? Although both Hume and Kant write a great deal about faith, it is my contention that neither of them really recognize the possibility of religious experience being itself a veridical testimony to religious truth. I take this to be a serious defect in their religious philosophies and will indicate in this chapter some aspects of the problem of faith in relation to their positions.
The first point to be clarified in this connection is the proper interpretation of Hume's pious utterances concerning faith made in each of his works on religion. After mentioning this problem in Chapter I, I have postponed a decision concerning it until now because it can only be properly handled after the full impact of Hume's views on religion has been carefully specified. This problem has two aspects. The first is the identification of Hume with one of the characters in the Dialogues, and the second is the elucidation of the reasons for his insertion of apparently inconsistent professions of faith in the Dialogues, "Miracles," "The Natural History of Religion," and "The Immortality of the Soul."

Concerning the first aspect of this problem, it is certain that of the five characters in the Dialogues, Hume is neither Demea or Hermippus. The other three—Philo, Cleanthes, and Pamphilus—have all been identified as Hume's spokesman by one or more commentators. Philo is the favorite on this score, but Cleanthes runs a close

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(continued on page 342.)
second.² Charles W. Hendel has even made a plausible case out of the assertion that Pamphilus represents the mature Hume reflecting back on his own youthful struggles with religious doubts.³ There has also been, to a lesser extent, some conjecture as to whom Cleanthes and Demea


²Dugald Stewart, Collected Works, 1854, I, 605.
John Hill Burton, Life and Correspondence of David Hume (Edinburgh: 1846), I, 329f.

are intended to represent. Cleanthes has been identified as Locke, Berkeley, Butler, and Gilbert Elliot, and Demea has been said to represent Samuel Clarke and Hugh Blair.

The definitive answer to the question of whether Philo or Cleanthes speaks for Hume, has been given by Norman Kemp Smith in his introduction to the Dialogues. Pamphilus' concluding comment that Cleanthes' principles "approach still nearer to the truth" than Philo's and Hume's declaration to Gilbert Elliot that he makes Cleanthes the hero of the Dialogues cannot be taken as serious expressions of Hume's position. Cleanthes is definitely not the hero of the Dialogues, nor do his principles stand up in the least against Philo's searching criticisms. Cleanthes represents Hume only in his arguments against the a priori proofs of God's existence in Part IX and in his rejection of Demea's appeal to the "porch" view of life in Part X. Demea also represents


6 Pp. 57-62 and Appendix D.

7 Kemp Smith ed., p. 228.

Hume in his recognition that the religious belief which Philo is willing to allow is for the purposes of traditional theism, practically meaningless. It is Philo, however, who states the arguments and declares the conclusions which Hume wants to convey.

If Hume is Philo in the Dialogues, what is his final position on religious belief? Is he an atheist, skeptic, agnostic, deist, or mystic? I think the arguments which I have stated in the preceding chapters reveal him to be somewhere in between an atheist and a skeptic. He is not an atheist because he does not hold the proposition "There is no God" to be justifiable. He is more than a skeptic because he thinks there are good reasons for rejecting all traditional religious belief, namely, its lack of rational support and its harmful effects upon morality, and because he recommends a completely naturalistic moral theory as an alternative to theological ethics. J. S. Boys Smith calls him a positivist, and I think this would be not an inaccurate label except for some of Philo's speeches in Part XII. I mean not so much his apparent agreement with Cleanthes concerning the Argument from Design, which

9Dialogues, p. 170.

is really not at all an admission of its traditional significance, but his appeal to faith. The Dialogues conclude, just as the essay on miracles does, with the statement that skepticism is really the best propaedeutic to Christian faith and that an immediate revelation of God is superior both to the "proofs" of traditional dogmatism and to the cavils to careless skepticism. The second aspect of our problem thus presents itself: How are Hume's references to pure unsupported religious faith to be explained?

Among the answers to this question which I once thought plausible is one given by John G. Hamann in a letter of 1751 comparing Hume and Kant. "Hume," he writes, "is always my man, because he at least ennobles the principle of faith, and has received it into his system. Hume's dialogues," he continues, "close with the Jewish and Platonic hopes of a coming prophet." According to Hamann, Hume's references to mysticism in the early parts of the Dialogues and his confession of faith in the essay on miracles are serious declarations of his own position. If this interpretation is followed out, Hume's purpose must be identified as the refutation of all attempts to prove religious principles by reason, in order

to clear the way for the truths of religious experience. Thus, Hume's complete epistemology would include four basic modes of knowing: **reason** for a priori matters of logic and mathematics, **experience** for empirical question of fact, **sentiment** for ethics and aesthetics, and **faith** for religion and theology. The goal of his philosophy, on this view, becomes that of carefully contravening the belief that reason alone can function as the cognitive interpretant of all experience. Religion, like science, art, and morals, has its own grounds in the intricacies of human nature, and these grounds are not reducible to rational arguments any more than is the uniformity of nature, the utility of goodness, or the universal appeal of beauty.

That this interpretation of Hume's philosophy is completely specious should be fully evident from the

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12 Hume concludes the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* by mentioning each of these four principles and asserting the necessity of distinguishing between their respective domains of reference. (pp. 164-5, Selby-Bigge ed.)

13 This interpretation seeks to extend Hume's notion of "animal faith"—a taking-for-granted—to the realm of religious belief. The ability to profit from past experiences, Hume says, is in man and the animals founded not on reason but on instinct. ("Reason in Animals," *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Selby-Bigge ed., p. 108.) Even when we attempt to deny the reality of the external world or the principle of induction we are forced by "nature" to readmit them into our system of belief. Such is certainly not the case, for Hume, with religious principles.
arguments of this study. Hamann himself soon came to realize that his view of Hume’s appeal to faith was founded mostly on wishful thinking. The problem still remains, however, of explaining Hume’s use of those phrases which have led Hamann and others to misconstrue Hume’s position on religion.

The most popular explanation has been that these passages are intended by Hume as pure irony. After conclusively showing that miracles, the Argument from Design, and immortality are without rational justification, he appeals to faith as an irrational support—not in the honorific sense in which custom, habit, and the propensity of the mind are made the grounds of the belief in causality, but in the disdainful sense in which credulity is recognized as the natural fruit of ignorance and superstition. When beliefs of reason and common sense conflict with those of religion, it is for Hume not the conflict of a lion and a tiger nor even of a lion and a whale—each having its own proper sphere which ought not to intrude upon the other’s. It is rather the absurd


15 See Aiken, op. cit., p. ix; Boys Smith, op. cit., p. 343; John Laird, op. cit., p. 207.
struggle of a lion with a hippogriff, one of whose members is real and the other a mere product of fancy and imagination. Thus, on this interpretation, Hume intends solely as a sneer such comments as, "Whoever is moved by Faith to assent to it (the Christian religion), is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience." Whoever regards a remark like this as a true expression of Hume's own position cannot have taken seriously the negative import of his total philosophy of religion.

This explanation must be recognized as a valid interpretation of some of Hume's professions of religious faith. It must be admitted, however, that if Hume intends his pious utterances to convey biting sarcasm, he certainly conceals this fact well in several instances. When he speaks of the belief in God in the Treatise and in "The Natural History of Religion," and when he credits the Gospel with being the sole ground for the belief in


17 Selby-Bigge ed., p. 633n.

18 Essays, II, 309.
immortality\(^{19}\) his statements have a straightforward earnestness which is quite compatible with the conclusions of the works themselves.

Because of this, I think that the usual assignment of Hume's religious language to the desire to be ironic must be supplemented by at least three other considerations. Two of these considerations are not very complementary to Hume, but they do, nonetheless, play a part in the complete picture. These concern the fact that he inserted in his works phrases which were intended as "sops to the godly" in order to (1) stimulate the sale of his books\(^{20}\) and (2) avoid as much controversy with the ecclesiastical authorities as possible.\(^{21}\) That Hume was motivated by these concerns cannot be denied. His apology in the second edition of his History of England for attacks made on religion in the first edition, his agreement not to publish the section on miracles with the rest of the Treatise, and his suppression of the Dialogues and the essays on suicide and immortality are further indications of this fact.

\(^{19}\)Essays, II, 399 and 406.

\(^{20}\)Mossner, The Life of David Hume, p. 308.

\(^{21}\)Ibid., pp. 306-7, 326; Mossner, "The Enigma of David Hume," p. 347.
A further reason for Hume's pious language, more important than either the desire to be sarcastic or the intention of offering a "sop to the godly," is his decision not to offend those to whom his arguments are addressed. This is a philosophic purpose, totally distinct from the question of whether or not the general public would read his books or like what they read. The best examples of it are his sanction of the Argument from Design in "The Natural History of Religion" and his support of the Gospel in the essay on immortality. The purpose of these passages, it seems to me, is to prevent the negative impact of his total philosophy of religion from prejudicing his readers against the particular arguments at hand. Hume is well aware of the fact that religious people will often listen to the arguments of a critic whom they regard as sympathetic to the significance of religion, but will reject without hearing the views of an irreligious skeptic. Thus throughout his works he speaks of "true religion," faith, Scripture, and the church in such a way as to avoid, if possible, the labels "atheist" and "infidel" which would weaken the influence of his arguments among the people of moderate religious belief whom he sought to convince. If

22 *Essays*, II, 309.

this fact is recognized along with his inclination to irony and his desire to avoid controversy and to make his works popular, a proper interpretation of Hume's affirmations of religious belief can be had without making him into a fideist or neo-supernaturalist who advocates skepticism only as a preparatory step to the "leap of faith." Hume's oft-repeated censure of religious enthusiasm makes it impossible to identify his position with that form of dynamic irrationalism represented in his mind by Blaise Pascal and expressed in our day by the theology of Karl Barth.

Before stating my own comments on the problem of faith, I want to take time to clarify Kant's use of this concept. Kant has even more to say about faith than Hume and, in fact, he declares its justification to be the ultimate purpose of his philosophy. In the Preface to the Second Edition of the Critique of Pure Reason he reports, "I have found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith. 24 The faith that Kant makes room for, however, is not religious faith as traditionally conceived. It is not an awareness of God as immediately present in human experience but the moral necessity of postulating His existence along with immortality. Kant does not recognize a unique religious experience as he

24B xxxi.
recognizes a unique moral one. The nearest he comes to it is in the Opus Postumum where he hints that God is immediately present in our awareness of the categorical imperative. But even here our right to believe is grounded solely on the necessity of making moral experience intelligible and not on the strength or character of the intuition. Anything over and beyond moral experience which people might claim as a personal revelation of Deity is denounced by Kant as "schwärmerisch"—pure delusion.

Even the belief that a direct revelation is possible is disparaged by Kant. If such a revelation did occur, we could never recognize it as such without comparing it with the moral law and thus rendering its revelatory character superfluous. "For if God actually spoke to man," he says, "the latter could never know that it is God who has spoken to him." Religion is a purely rational affair for Kant, and faith consists simply in


recognizing our duties as divine commands. Kant expresses as great a distaste for subjectivity in religion as Hume does for the excesses of enthusiasm which issue from it, and thus the possibility of an irrational a priori, derived from mystical intuition or from Pietistic devotion, is ruled out of his religious philosophy.

I have tried in the preceding paragraphs to show that neither Hume nor Kant allows any significance to the possibility of the immediate awareness of God in human experience. I take this to be their answer to the problem of religious faith. I want in the remainder of this chapter to indicate briefly my own reactions to their religious philosophies in the light of this problem. I shall first mention what strikes me as of greatest value in their systems and then suggest why I find their answers to the problem of faith unsatisfactory.

I see as the major advantage which the philosophy of religion receives from Hume and Kant the possession of arguments which ought to silence forever those misconceived traditional attempts to justify the first principles of theology. These attempts have abounded in the history of thought since Plato but especially since the development of Christian theology. The belief in the existence of God has been misconstrued as a necessary conclusion of logical demonstration and as an empirical hypothesis.
attested by the evidence of natural design and miracles. It has been commanded by the infallible authority of Scripture and the church and recommended as the "best bet" in a wager whose stakes involve one's eternal destiny. And in our own day we are seeing the not-so-subtle use of God as a psychiatric device employed by pseudo-clergymen to enrich "interpersonal competence." Now whatever value these methods might have for Sunday Schools, seminaries, or women's magazines, it is certain that they can no longer be considered as legitimate epistemological principles. Credit for this must in large part be given to the Humean and Kantian arguments that a priori metaphysics is impossible, that the empirical evidence of God's existence is inconclusive, that no revelation is verifiable, and that the psychological and sociological benefits of religion are at least equaled by its evils. It is not my contention that because of these arguments the justification of religious belief has ceased to be an epistemological issue, but rather that it is the merit of Hume and Kant to have conclusively revealed that the solution to this problem can never be achieved by the methods traditionally employed.

Secondly, I think it is to the credit of Kant and, to a lesser extent, Hume, to have insisted that an examination
of the relation between ethics and theology plays an integral part in the question of the validity of religious knowledge. It is not enough to exclude theological first principles from the realm of fact, either metaphysical or empirical. One must also decide as to their relevance to the realm of value. In this issue Hume and Kant have produced two quite distinct alternative views of moral theory. Hume affirms the reality of moral experience and denies the egoist attempt to reduce it to selfish desires, but he explains it solely as the influence of natural tastes and sentiments. Kant, on the other hand, takes seriously the demand of moral experience for grounds of intelligibility beyond the purely relative and transient principles operative in human nature. If it is possible to elicit good reasons for preferring Kant's position here, then, as I have argued, there is some basis for affirming the validity of religious belief. And even if such reasons are not completely specifiable, Hume and Kant have at least shown where two of the real alternatives in the philosophy of religion lie.

My chief criticism of their positions is that they fail to recognize the possibility of a third alternative or else that they fail to devote sufficient attention to it. This alternative is the one which generates the
problem of religious faith and it, as well as the other two, is intimately related to questions of moral theory. I think it is possible to agree with the negative conclusions of the Humean and Kantian epistemologies and still maintain that religion is a valid interpretation of human experience. Just as Kant assumes the reality of unique moral experience in justifying the categorical imperative, it may be possible to argue from the assumption of unique religious experience to the existence of God as revealed in it. Such experience is identifiable as the sense of moral inadequacy, the awareness of help in attaining virtue, and the consciousness of immediate communion with the holy—or, in traditional terminology, sin, grace, and prayer.

The history of religion certainly contains abundant instances in which religious experience attained such heights among mystics as to lead them to affirm the presence of God as more real than that of the physical world. Though the content of the experiences which mystics have reported has been quite varied in detail, there is enough of a common nucleus to require serious examination as to its cognitive significance. Any theory which denies such religious experience is plainly false, and any theory

which fails to show its connection with other facts of reality is inadequate. There is still a possibility that faith, as the immediate awareness of God, along with empirical and (for Kant) moral experience provides meaningful epistemological data. This possibility demands greater deliberation than either Hume or Kant gives to it.

I do not mean to imply by this remark that the problem of faith has not been advanced by the efforts of Hume and Kant. I have already indicated the debt the philosophy of religion owes to them for removing the metaphysical and empirical supports upon which faith was often regarded as dependent. Implicit in their philosophies are also principles which would affect the argument from religious experience quite adversely. Hume and Kant would ask for example, How is it ever possible to determine that religious experience is veridical and not just the effect of an illusion, like seeing faces and figures in the clouds? The trouble with faith is that the only ones who have religious experience are those who already believe that God is immediately revealed in experiences of repentance, grace, and prayer. The man of faith, like the wildest lunatic, can suggest neither an intersubjectively valid test for his belief nor appropriate

procedures which would allow others to share in the same kind of experience. There is, Hume and Kant would agree, no more reason for listening to the mystic when he speaks of God than to the madman when he claims to be Napoleon.

It must be admitted, in answer to this argument, that whoever appeals to faith as a foundation of religious principles cannot also appeal to a faith in faith. Somewhere a stop must be put to the regress and reasons be given for holding religious experience to be a valid area of human cognition. Whether or not there are such reasons and consequently whether or not religious faith is a mode of knowing that must be accommodated along with reason and experience—these are questions I feel Hume and Kant neglect to examine sufficiently. For this reason, I suggest that in the problem of the status of theological first principles there may be a third alternative to the religious skepticism of Hume and the moral rationalism of Kant. This alternative would, with them, acknowledge the impossibility of both a priori and a posteriori metaphysics but would insist that an immediate awareness of God is possible which puts to flight all skeptical doubts concerning His reality.

The choice between these alternatives seems to me to be the most fruitful subject of any philosophy of religion which would seek to function within (to my mind) the proper
limits imposed by the Humean or Kantian epistemologies. This choice entails a decision concerning the basic categories of experience which one is willing to recognize as ultimate—a decision which neither Hume nor Kant clearly saw. The precision of their arguments and the significance of their conclusions, however, cannot be ignored by anyone who sincerely hopes for answers to the problems of religious philosophy or who honestly seeks clarification of his own most vital attitudes toward life and the universe.
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