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SKEPTICISM AND NATURAL RELIGION IN HUME'S *TREATISE*

BY PAUL RUSSELL

The wise in every age conclude,
What Pyrrho taught and Hume renewed,
That dogmatists are fools.
—Thomas Blacklock

My principal objective in this essay will be to show that the widely held view that Hume's *Treatise*¹ is not significantly or "directly" concerned with problems of religion is seriously mistaken.² I shall approach this issue by way of an examination of a major skeptical theme which runs throughout the *Treatise*, namely, Hume's skepticism regarding the powers of demonstrative reason. In this paper I shall be especially concerned to bring to light the full significance of this skeptical theme by placing Hume's arguments in their appropriate historical context. I shall show that both Hume and his contemporaries recognized that these important skeptical arguments were aimed primarily against the dogmatic Christian rationalism of John Locke and above all Samuel Clarke, and that they were, therefore, well aware that these arguments had considerable theological significance.

¹ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd rev. ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1978). References to the *Enquiries* are to the Selby-Bigge edition, 3rd rev. ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975). First *Enquiry* will be abbreviated as EHU.

² Evidence for the orthodoxy of this view (i.e., that Hume's intentions in the *Treatise* are not significantly concerned with problems of religion) may be found in a number of influential studies of Hume's philosophy: e.g., [1] Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London, 1977), presents a restatement of Norman Kemp Smith's important "naturalistic" interpretation of Hume's philosophy, but he has "nothing" to say about religion (xi). [2] J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion* (London, 1978), states (1) that "The *Treatise* . . . is not directly concerned with religion . . ." (although Gaskin supplies us with good reason for doubting his own claim). [3] E. C. Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (2nd ed.; Oxford, 1980); suggests (113) that when Hume published the *Treatise* he was counting on a "serious consideration of his philosophy as philosophy, rather than as religious controversy." [4] Terence Penelhum, *Hume*, (London, 1975), lists (170f.) Hume's "major works on philosophy of religion, in order of composition," beginning with Sections X and XI of the first *Enquiry*. [5] Antony Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief* (London, 1961), suggests (7-12) that one significant difference between the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* is that in the earlier work "there is no hint at all" of his aggressive polemics against the theological speculations of religious philosophers. [6] Robert J. Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (London, 1985), has little or nothing to say about Hume's skepticism in relation to the problems of religion.

I. Hobbes's "Atheism," Clarke's "Tower of Babel," and the Context of Hume's Philosophical Development

During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries British philosophy gave rise to two powerful but conflicting philosophical outlooks. On the one hand this era has been described as "the golden period of English theology" because of the spontaneous alliance between reason and Christian theology.³ More specifically, it was a major concern of divines at this time to show that theology could be exhibited as a body of necessary truth. In opposition to this Christian rationalism, however, there existed a skeptical tradition of which the great representative was Hobbes.⁴ Throughout this period Hobbes was infamous as the apostle of atheism. Thus Samuel Mintz sums up Hobbes's reputation during this period by noting that the "principal objection to him, the one to which all other criticisms of him can ultimately be reduced, was that he was an atheist."⁵ It was, therefore, a desire to defend the doctrines of the Christian Religion which particularly motivated the numerous attacks on Hobbes's philosophy. It should be noted, however, that Hobbes's influence at this time was not simply destructive and that he had a number of followers—although they tended, prudently, to avoid any direct acknowledgment of debt because of Hobbes's "dangerous" reputation.⁶ Quite apart from Hobbes's skepticism regarding natural and revealed religion there were several other aspects of his philosophy which his contemporaries regarded as overtly atheistic in content. These doctrines can be summarized under three headings: his materialism and naturalism, his necessitarianism, and his "Epicurean" account of morals (i.e., relativism, hedonism, etc.). Considered more generally, however, it was Hobbes's secular perspective and his extension of scientific naturalism to

³ Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876) (London, 1962), I,2,6.

⁴ For Hobbes's skeptical views concerning natural and revealed religion see *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. McPherson (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1968), esp. Ch. 11, 12, 31, 32, and more generally, Part III. Hobbes claimed to be a sincere Christian and some of his theological views could be interpreted as being in the fideist tradition, although in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was not uncommon for freethinking critics of Christian theology to disguise their views as fideist in nature. For our purposes the important point is that by and large Hobbes's contemporaries questioned his sincerity on this matter and they interpreted his philosophy in this light.

⁵ Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leviathan* (Cambridge, Eng., 1962), vii.

⁶ Peter Gay suggests that Hobbes was to the seventeenth century what Lucretius was to the dying Roman Republic, "a disturber of the peace whose work was too great to be ignored but whose name was too disreputable to be praised." *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York, 1966), 99. Gay also notes (532) that Hobbes's reputation is "a fascinating subject which should but has rarely been pursued into the eighteenth century."

the study of man which his contemporaries viewed as especially threatening to religion and morality.⁷

Among the many works attacking Hobbes's philosophy several of the most important came from the flourishing Anglican latitudinarian school of thought. Two of the most important early works directed against Hobbes were written by the Cambridge Platonists Henry More and Ralph Cudworth.⁸ In the 1690s the Boyle Lectures were founded. These lectures were instituted for the purpose of "proving the Christian Religion, against notorious Infidels, viz. Atheists, Theists, Pagans. . . ." By the early eighteenth century these lectures had become the focus for the debate between the Newtonians (the intellectual heirs of Hobbes's early critics) and the radical freethinkers (thinkers in the Hobbesian tradition).⁹ The general significance of the Boyle Lectures is summarized by Margaret Jacob as follows:

The lecture . . . series set the content and tone of English natural religion during the eighteenth century. By 1711 the reading of the Boyle Lectures formed a part of an educated man's knowledge. . . . The lecturers were carefully chosen by the trustees, and they marshalled their arguments in defence of natural and revealed religion with the conviction that their efforts were critically important to the maintenance of the Church's moral leadership and political influence in a society threatened at every turn by atheism.¹⁰

Apart from the Boyle Lecturers, another eminent representative of English theological rationalism at this time was John Locke. Locke was never a Boyle Lecturer, but he shared their general outlook. Indeed, one commentator points out that "the similarity of Locke and the Boyle lecturers is striking: they were the new élite, the new logicians of the clergy and theology, the new natural philosophers with the enlightenment of anti-

⁷ For a brief summary of the various recent interpretations of Hobbes's moral and political philosophy see D.D. Raphael, *Hobbes: Morals and Politics* (London, 1977), Ch. 7 and 8.

⁸ Henry More, *Antidote Against Atheism* (1653). Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678). The subtitle of this work reads: "Wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted; and Its Impossibility Demonstrated." Much of this work is a sustained polemic against Hobbes. It should be noted that Hume's "Early Memoranda" reveals that the young Hume carefully studied Cudworth's work and took particular note of his classification of types of atheist. See Mossner, *Life*, 78-79.

⁹ For a highly illuminating historical account of the background to this debate see Margaret Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution 1689-1720* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1976), and *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London, 1981). The two most important thinkers in the radical freethought tradition during this period were John Toland and Anthony Collins.

¹⁰ Jacob, *Newtonians*, 162-63. Useful background material on the Newtonian theology of the Boyle Lectures is to be found in Robert H. Hurlbutt, *Hume, Newton and the Design Argument* (Lincoln, Neb., 1965), Pt. I., and in James E. Force, "Hume and the Relation of Science to Religion," *JHI*, 45 (1984), 517-36.

atheism in their pens and minds.”¹¹ In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke put forward a “demonstration” of the existence of God.¹² The general strategy of Locke’s “demonstration” is very similar to that which was subsequently put forward by Samuel Clarke in his celebrated Boyle Lectures of 1704-5.

Of the Boyle Lecturers Clarke was the most admired and influential. Indeed, throughout the early eighteenth century he was recognized as the most able defender of the Newtonian philosophy and its theology, and after Locke’s death he was widely regarded as the foremost of living English philosophers.¹³ In his Boyle Lectures of 1704 Clarke endeavored, on the basis of what he describes in his Preface “as near to Mathematical [method] as the nature of such a discourse would allow,” to demonstrate by “one clear and plain series of propositions necessarily connected and following one from another” the “certainty of the Being of God, and to deduce in order the necessary attributes of his Nature, so far as by our finite reason we are enabled to discover and apprehend them.”¹⁴ This “demonstration” is described in the subtitle of his work as an “Answer to Mr. Hobbes, Spinoza, And their Followers”—their followers being various other deniers of natural and revealed religion.¹⁵ In his second series of Boyle Lectures, given in 1705, Clarke uses the same “mathematical” method to demonstrate “the unalterable Obligations of Natural Religion, and the certainty of Divine Revelation.” Once again Hobbes’s philosophy serves as the main target of Clarke’s reasonings. In this way, as Leslie Stephen points out, the two books which constitute Clarke’s Boyle Lectures “form a symmetrical edifice of pure theology, resting on the immovable basis of intuitive truths, cemented and dovetailed together by irrefragable demonstration.” “Like the Tower of Babel,” says Stephen, “it was intended to reach heaven from earth, in defiance of any future deluge of infidelity.”¹⁶ I shall show below that one of Hume’s major concerns in the *Treatise* was to bring Clarke’s “Tower of Babel” crashing back to earth.

¹¹ John Redwood, *Reason, Ridicule and Religion: The Age of Enlightenment in England 1660-1750* (London, 1976), 100-103.

¹² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (4th ed., 1700) ed. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), IV, 9 and 10.

¹³ Given the enormous impact of Clarke’s philosophy on the development of British philosophy at this time, it is surprising that it has received so little close attention from historians of philosophy. See, however, James Ferguson, *The Philosophy of Dr. Samuel Clarke and Its Critics* (New York, 1974).

¹⁴ Samuel Clarke, *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of Christian Revelation* (6th ed.; London, 1725), I, Introduction. Clarke’s *Discourse* contains both series of his Boyle Lectures (cited as I or II).

¹⁵ By the end of the seventeenth century Spinoza was widely regarded as an atheistic disciple of Hobbes.

¹⁶ *English Thought*, I, 3, 27.

There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that at the time Hume began writing the *Treatise*, approximately 1729-34, he and his own immediate circle of friends and acquaintances were deeply interested and active in the debate between Clarke and the radical freethinkers. Hume's profound interest in matters of religion arose very early in life. In 1751, when he was at work writing the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*,¹⁷ Hume wrote to his friend Gilbert Elliot of Minto telling him that he had just "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" (i.e., religion). Hume continues: "It began with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the common Opinions: Doubts stole in, dissipated, return'd, were again dissipated, returned again; and it was a perpetual Struggle of a restless Imagination against Inclination, perhaps against Reason."¹⁸ At the end of his life Hume told James Boswell that he "never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke."¹⁹ In this way it would appear that Hume's "perpetual struggle" in his youth with the problems of religion focused firmly on the doctrines of Locke and Clarke, and that it was through this route that Hume managed to *reason* himself out of religion.²⁰ In spite of this evidence of Hume's early and deep interest in religion, commentators almost universally continue to take the view that the *Treatise* is not significantly concerned with religion and that it is only in his later writings that Hume "directly" addressed himself to these issues. Suffice it to note for our present purposes that it was during this period of "perpetual struggle" with the problems of religion that the project of the *Treatise* began to take shape.

Hume's early interest in the problems of religion was shared with Lord Kames (Henry Home), one of his closest friends at this time. Just as the dying Hume had reported to Boswell his early interest in Locke's and Clarke's attempts to defend the Christian Religion, so too the ageing Kames told Boswell stories of struggling in his youth with the ideas of Locke and Clarke.²¹ Indeed, in 1723 Kames corresponded with Clarke concerning certain "difficulties" he found with Clarke's doctrines in the

¹⁷ Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. and intro. N. Kemp Smith (2nd ed.; Edinburgh, 1947). It is widely accepted that the character Demea, who puts forward the "a priori metaphysical argument," is speaking for Clarke. This is entirely indicative of the general importance of Clarke's philosophy for Hume's thought.

¹⁸ *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig (Oxford, 1932), I, 154.

¹⁹ Quoted in *Dialogues*, ed. Kemp Smith, 76.

²⁰ On Hume's early interest in problems of religion see Mossner, *Life*, 51, 64, and 78-80.

²¹ Ian Ross, *Lord Kames and the Scotland of his day* (Oxford, 1972), 369. See also M. A. Stewart, "Hume and the Metaphysical Argument *A Priori*," in A. J. Holland (ed.), *Philosophy, Its History and Its Historiography* (Dordrecht, 1985), esp. sects. 4 and 5.

Boyle Lectures.²² This correspondence came after seven years of reflection upon Clarke's philosophy, and it was indicative of an interest in Clarke's doctrines which lasted throughout Kames's life. Furthermore, at the same time that Kames was corresponding with Clarke he was corresponding with the Scottish philosopher Andrew Baxter, who was living close to Kames's (and Hume's) family residence in the Borders.²³ Their correspondence, which concerned Clarke's moral philosophy and the problems of matter and motion in Newtonian science (an issue which was full of theological significance at this time), provides yet further evidence of Kames's critical interest in the philosophy of Clarke and the Newtonians.

Another philosopher active in the Borders area during this period was William Dudgeon. Dudgeon, according to McCosh, was influenced by Anthony Collins, the most celebrated of Clarke's English critics.²⁴ The freethinking doctrines of Dudgeon's first work, *The State of the Moral World Considered* (1731), landed Dudgeon in serious trouble with the Church authorities. Dudgeon's most important work, *Philosophical Letters Concerning the Being and Attributes of God*, published in 1737, is concerned with various matters regarding Clarke's *Discourse*. These letters were written to the Reverend John Jackson in reference to Jackson's efforts to "vindicate" Clarke's demonstrations in the *Discourse*. Jackson was a close and prominent associate of Clarke's and a very active defender of his philosophy. There are, as McCosh notes, certain significant affinities between Dudgeon's and Hume's views. McCosh conjectures that as they lived in the same area Dudgeon may have been known to Hume and may have had some direct influence on his development.

In the light of the above historical considerations, it seems clear that prior to 1734, when Hume left Scotland to continue work on the *Treatise* in France, his immediate circle of friends and acquaintances were actively debating the issues raised by Clarke's *Discourse* as well as the freethinking doctrines of Clarke's adversaries. In this way, the historical evidence suggests that this debate constituted an important part of the general framework within which Hume's early philosophical development took place. I will show below that Clarke's philosophy constituted a major preoccupation of Hume's philosophical activity at this time and thus played a significant role in shaping the *Treatise* itself.

²² On this see Ross, *Kames*, Ch. 4 and Ferguson, *Clarke*, 88-89.

²³ James McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy* (London, 1875), 42, describes Baxter as belonging to "the school of Samuel Clarke, to whom he often refers, and always with admiration."

²⁴ McCosh, *The Scottish Philosophy*, 111-13. The Clarke-Collins debate dealt primarily with two issues, the immateriality of the soul and liberty and necessity. Dudgeon follows Collins's necessitarianism.

II. "A Letter from a Gentleman" and the Interpretation of Hume's Skepticism

The various reactions to the *Treatise* written in the period immediately following its publication give us some insight into the ways in which it was viewed by Hume's contemporaries. Probably the most detailed and illuminating evidence of this nature is to be found in *A Letter from a Gentleman*, a pamphlet written by Hume in 1745 in reply to certain accusations made against him while he was applying for the Chair of Philosophy at Edinburgh University.²⁵ The pamphlet to which *A Letter from a Gentleman* was a reply was probably written by Reverend William Wishart, then Principal of Edinburgh University. Wishart brought six specific charges against Hume: (1) "Universal Scepticism"; (2) "Principles leading to downright Atheism, by denying the Doctrine of Cause and Effects"; (3) "Errors Concerning the Very Being and Existence of a God"; (4) "Errors concerning God's being the first Cause, and Prime Mover of the Universe"; (5) "denying the immateriality of the Soul, and the Consequences flowing from this Denial"; and (6) "sapping the Foundations of Morality, by denying the natural and essential Difference betwixt Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, Justice and Injustice; making the Difference only artificial, and to arise from human Conventions and Compacts." Wishart's first accusation regarding Hume's "universal scepticism" is the most general and all-encompassing of his objections, and therefore Hume's reply sheds a great deal of light on his general skeptical intentions in the *Treatise*.

In reply to Wishart's claim that he rejects all claims to certainty Hume states that his aim was only to show the "weaknesses and uncertainty of mere human reason." Nevertheless, in accounting for the nature of his skeptical principles, Hume plainly acknowledges that he rejects the pretensions of certain dogmatic philosophers. Who are the dogmatists in question? Against whom was his skepticism particularly directed? Hume's subsequent replies provide us with unambiguous answers to these questions. However, it is possible to formulate answers to these questions simply on the basis of the evidence of the first reply itself. Hume asks (20): "whence come all the various Tribes of Heretics, the *Arians*, *Socinians*, and *Deists*, but from too great a Confidence in mere human Reason: which they regard as the *Standard* of every Thing, and which they will not submit to the superior Light of Revelation?" Hume's remarks in *The Natural History of Religion* clearly suggest that the Arians, Socinians, and Deists to whom he is referring are none other than Newton,

²⁵ *A Letter from a Gentleman to his friend in Edinburgh* (1745), ed. E. C. Mossner and J. V. Price (Edinburgh, 1967). See also Mossner, *Life*, Ch. 13.

Locke, Clarke, and their followers.²⁶ In the early eighteenth century these thinkers were prominent in the Trinitarian controversy.²⁷ At this time Clarke in particular had a reputation as a Socinian or Arian.²⁸ Voltaire's remarks about Clarke in his *Lettres philosophiques* attest to this. In the Seventh Letter, entitled "On the Socinians, Arians, or Anti-Trinitarians," Voltaire says that "the strongest upholder of the Arian doctrine is the illustrious Dr. Clarke."²⁹ In short, it seems quite clear, given the historical context, that Hume's reference to "the various tribes of Heretics" is a tongue-in-cheek reference to Locke, Clarke, and the Newtonians. Thus, I suggest that it was the dogmatic aspects of their philosophy (e.g., their use of demonstrative arguments in theology and morals) which served as particularly prominent targets of Hume's skepticism in the *Treatise*. A consideration of two other replies which Hume puts forward will confirm this conjecture.

Wishart presents his second objection to Hume's *Treatise* by making the following observation:

'Tis well known that this Principle, *Whatever begins to exist must have a Cause of Existence*, is the first Step in the Argument for the Being of a Supreme Cause; and that, without it, 'tis impossible to go one Step further in that Argument. Now this Maxim he [sc. Hume] is at great pains to explode. . . .(11)

In his reply to this charge Hume openly acknowledges that it is Clarke's "demonstration" of God's existence which is at stake here. He suggests that denying this disputed proposition (viz., "Whatever begins . . .") does not lead to atheism because, first, it does not affect "the arguments a posteriori" and, second, there are other "metaphysical arguments a priori."

I say further that even the metaphysical Arguments for a Deity are not affected by a Denial of the Proposition above mentioned. *It is only Dr. Clarke's Argument which can be supposed to be in any way concerned*. Many other Arguments of the same kind still remain; Des Cartes's for instance. . . .(23—my emphasis)

²⁶ *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London, 1875), II, 351n.: In this context Hume explicitly describes "Newton, Locke, Clarke, etc. [are] . . . Arians or Socinians."

²⁷ On Locke's "Socinianism" or "Deism" see John Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford, 1956), Ch. I and IV, sec.1. For an account of Newton's views and involvement in the Trinitarian controversy see Richard S. Westfall, *Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge, 1980), 649-53 and 828-30. Newton did not directly participate in the controversy, but because of his close association with Clarke and William Whiston he fell under suspicion.

²⁸ In 1712 Clarke published *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*. This work created an uproar within the Church, and Clarke was accused of making "heretical assertions." In the years following there were a large number of pamphlets written concerning Clarke's views on the Trinity.

²⁹ *Lettres Philosophiques* (1734), tr. L. Tancock as *Letters on England* (Harmondsworth, 1980), 42.

Hume suggests that the sixth and last charge (viz., that he destroys “all foundations of morality”) will, “according to the prevalent Opinion of Philosophers in this Age, . . . be regarded as the severest.”³⁰ Hume, once again, acknowledges that his skepticism is directed primarily against Clarke’s dogmatic rationalism. Hume grants that he denies “the eternal difference of Right and Wrong *in the Sense in which Clarke and Wollaston maintain them, viz., That the Propositions of Morality were of the same nature with the Truths of Mathematics and the abstract sciences, the Objects merely of Reason, not the Feelings of our internal Tastes and Sentiments.*”³¹ However, in this opinion, Hume says, he “concur[s] with . . . Mr. Hutcheson.”

It is interesting to note that while Hume is willing to acknowledge that he is concerned to refute Clarke’s ethical rationalism, he is anxious not to accept a much more dangerous charge which is implied by Wishart’s criticism, namely, that he embraces Hobbist principles in his moral philosophy. Wishart states: “Mr. Hobbs, who was at Pains to shake loose all other natural Obligations, yet found it necessary to leave, or pretend to leave, the Obligation of Promises or Pactions; but our Author strikes a bolder Stroke . . .” (16). Wishart also points to Hume’s (Hobbist) view that justice arises from conventions and should be regarded as an “artificial” and not a “natural” virtue. The accusation itself (that Hume’s views on justice and property are essentially Hobbist) is, of course, well-founded. Kames, for example, who was in a position to *know* Hume’s intentions, interprets Hume in this way.³² Hume tries to defuse this issue not by explicitly referring to Hobbes but rather by suggesting that his views are not as “invidious” as Wishart suggests. In particular, Hume draws attention to the fact that on the important issue of whether or not man is by nature selfish, he diverges from the Hobbist position.³³

When the Author asserts that Justice is an *artificial* not a *natural Virtue*, he seems sensible that he employed Words that admit of an invidious Construction; and therefore makes use of all proper Expedients, by *Definitions* and *Explanations*, to prevent it. . . . By the *natural Virtues* he plainly understands *Com-*

³⁰ In 1755 Reverend John Bonar presented six accusations against Hume. The first two, echoing Wishart’s sixth (and “severest”) accusation, are that Hume holds: (1) All distinction between virtue and vice is merely imaginary, and (2) justice has no foundation further than it contributes to public advantage. See Mossner, *Life*, 341-42.

³¹ Hume’s remarks against Wollaston can be found at T, 459-62 (where Wollaston is named in a note) and his remarks concerning Clarke at T, 463-68.

³² Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (2nd ed., 1758), Essay, II, Ch. 7.

³³ Note, however, that even this claim is only partly true. For Hume claims that the *original* motive to *justice* is self-interest, cf. *Treatise*, III, ii, 2 (esp. 491-98). On this see especially R. W. Connon, “Hume’s MS Alterations to *Treatise* III,” in G. P. Morice (ed.), *David Hume* (Edinburgh, 1977), and J. L. Mackie, *Hume’s Moral Theory* (London, 1980), 82f. and 150-51.

passion and *Generosity*, and such as we are immediately carried to by a *natural instinct*; and by the artificial Virtues he means *Justice*, *Loyalty*, and such as require, along with a natural *Instinct*, a certain Reflection on the general Interests of Human Society, and a Combination with others. (31)

In short, Hume's strategy in this context is to present himself as much as possible as a follower of Hutcheson rather than of Hobbes. By means of this strategy he can avoid the uncomfortable imputation of Hobbism and atheism and yet still openly acknowledge that Clarke's rationalism is the primary target of his skeptical arguments in this sphere.

In light of the above examination of Hume's replies in *A Letter from a Gentleman* we may draw the following conclusions: (a) In his first reply Hume indicates quite clearly that his skepticism is directed particularly against the dogmatic features of the philosophies of Locke, Newton, Clarke, and their followers. (b) In his second reply Hume openly acknowledges that his discussion of causation threatens Clarke's "metaphysical argument" for the existence of God. That is to say, Hume acknowledges that his skeptical arguments in this direction pose a threat to Clarke's attempt, in his first series of Boyle Lectures, to demonstrate the Being and Attributes of God. (c) In his sixth reply Hume also acknowledges that his primary concern was to refute the rationalistic ethics of Clarke and his follower Wollaston. In this way Hume accepts that his arguments on the subject of morals threaten Clarke's endeavor to demonstrate "the unalterable obligations of natural religion"—this being the central theme of his second series of Boyle Lectures. (d) Putting the above points together, we may conclude that Hume recognized and publicly acknowledged that one major thrust of his skepticism in the *Treatise* was to undermine the very foundations of Clarke's Boyle Lectures.³⁴ The nature and tone of Wishart's accusations suggest that his accusations are directed against a philosopher whom he perceives to be a radical freethinker in the tradition of Hobbes and his followers.³⁵ In the final section of this essay I will show that Wishart's understanding of Hume's intentions is essentially correct. For our present purposes, however, suffice it to note that Hume's effort to "emasculate" his views and render them innocuous to the Christian Religion was patently insincere and motivated by prudence (as is well attested by Hume's subsequent writings and his private correspondence).

Finally, having established that *A Letter from a Gentleman* reveals that Locke and Clarke were particularly prominent targets of Hume's skepticism in the *Treatise*, we may briefly consider two other sources

³⁴ Note in particular that in his replies to Wishart's objections Hume mentions Clarke more than any other philosopher.

³⁵ In presenting his accusations, Wishart mentions the names of only Hobbes and Spinoza (i.e. Clarke's principal atheistic targets); his intentions here would be quite obvious to his audience.

which will add further evidence that Hume's contemporaries recognized Locke and Clarke as particularly prominent targets of Hume's skepticism in the *Treatise*. In 1739 the *History of the Works of the Learned* reviewed the first two books of the *Treatise*, which had been published in January of the same year. John Laird notes that the reviewer "seems to have considered any criticism of Locke and Clarke as the most shameless effrontery." In one passage, concerned with Hume's views on causation, the reviewer points out that Locke and Clarke are two philosophers whom Hume "particularly names as two of the most superficial Reasoners." Further below the reviewer continues:

Poor Dr. Clarke . . . Shall all thy strong, thy clear and unanswerable Arguments, as so many of the best Judges have esteemed them, be now levelled with the Dust and trampled on with Abhorrence! This is indeed a lamentable Case; but such as is the absolute Pleasure of our Author, and we must submit. Neither Locke, nor Clarke, nor the most venerable Names, shall usurp the place of Truth in his Affections.³⁶

Another review (*Bibliothèque raisonnée*, 1740 and 1741) notes that Hume's "taste for Pyrrhonism" threatens the "proof *a priori* for the existence of God." In Hume's eyes, the reviewer says, "the Locke's and the Clarke's are often . . . but paltry and superficial reasoners in comparison with himself." The reviewer also points out that as regards the origins of justice and property right, Hume's views are simply "the system of Hobbes dressed up in a new taste" (an observation which both Wishart and Bonar were to echo).³⁷

In short, the comments contained in these two early reviews of Hume's *Treatise* further attest to the fact that Hume's contemporaries viewed Locke and Clarke as two of the principal targets of his skeptical arguments. This, as has been noted, accords with the evidence of Wishart's accusations and Hume's replies in *A Letter from a Gentleman*. To this most weighty evidence we may add Hume's remarks to Boswell which suggest that his "perpetual struggle" in his youth with the problems of religion focused on the doctrines of Locke and Clarke. In light of these observations it is, I believe, essential that this significant feature of Hume's skepticism in the *Treatise* be considered within the framework of the philosophical objectives of Locke and, above all, Clarke.

III. Hume's Skepticism and the use of Demonstrative Reasoning in Defence of the Christian Religion

In this Introduction to the second series of Boyle Lectures Clarke

³⁶ *History of the Works of the Learned* (London, Nov. 1739), quoted in John Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature* (London, 1932), 9-10.

³⁷ These details of the *Bibliothèque raisonnée* review are quoted in Mossner, "The Continental Reception of Hume's *Treatise* 1739-41," *Mind*, 56 (1947), 35-39.

states that his objective is, quite simply, to prove or establish “the Truth and Excellency of the whole superstructure of our most Holy Religion.” In this way, throughout the *Discourse*, Clarke’s own fundamental philosophical intentions are two-fold. On the one hand he seeks to defend Christian metaphysical and moral doctrine, while on the other hand he seeks to refute the opposing doctrines of the atheist.³⁸ Clarke regards each link in his series of demonstrations as dependent upon the previous links which he has already forged. He summarizes the total structure of his *Discourse* as follows:

He who believes the *Being and natural Attributes* of God must of necessity . . . confess his *moral Attributes* also. Next: he who owns and has just notions of the moral Attributes of God, cannot avoid acknowledging the *Obligations of Morality and natural Religion*. In like manner; he who owns the Obligations of Morality and natural Religion, must needs, to support these Obligations and make them effectual in practice, to believe a *future state of Rewards and Punishments*. And finally; he who believes both the Obligations of natural Religion, and the certainty of a future State of Rewards and Punishments; has no manner of reason left, why he should reject the *Christian Revelation*. . . . (*Discourse*, II, 28—Clarke’s emphasis)

In this way, Clarke’s philosophy may be succinctly characterized as an attempt to extend demonstrative reasoning into the spheres of metaphysics and morals with a view to defending the “truth and certainty” of the Christian Religion. For our present purposes there is no need to discuss the details of Clarke’s arguments and Hume’s specific criticisms of them.³⁹ However, it is important that we consider, in a more general way, how the major skeptical themes in the *Treatise* stand in relation to Clarke’s Christian rationalism. This issue is best approached by way of an examination of the relationship between Locke’s and Clarke’s philosophies.

As has already been noted, Hume and his contemporaries closely identified the philosophies of Locke and Clarke. There were, of course, some specific and important differences in doctrine between these two philosophers—e.g., they differed over whether or not it was possible to demonstrate the immateriality of the soul. Whatever their differences, however, Locke and Clarke shared the same general philosophical outlook and allegiances. In particular, in his *Essay* Locke anticipated Clarke’s efforts to extend demonstrative reasoning into the spheres of metaphysics and morals in defence of the Christian Religion.⁴⁰ Indeed, the similarities

³⁸ The doctrines which Clarke identifies as the most pernicious, from the Christian point of view, are materialism, necessitarianism, moral relativism, and moral subjectivism.

³⁹ Commentators have generally discussed these issues in piecemeal fashion and have downplayed or ignored their wider theological significance. Among the major commentators John Laird is one of the few even to *allude* to the *systematic* importance of Clarke’s doctrines to Hume’s philosophy in the *Treatise*.

⁴⁰ Cf. Hume’s remarks on Locke in the *Dialogues*, 138.

between Locke's and Clarke's arguments in this direction are quite striking.⁴¹ In the *Essay* Locke maintains that there are only two sorts of certain knowledge, intuitive and demonstrative (*Essay*, IV, 2). In the case of intuitive knowledge the mind immediately "perceives the Agreement or Disagreement of two Ideas." In the case of demonstrative knowledge, however, we first require the intervention of other ideas by way of "proofs." Locke goes on to argue:

It has been generally taken for granted, that Mathematics alone are capable of demonstrative certainty: But to have such an agreement or disagreement, as may intuitively be perceived, being, as I imagine, not the privilege of the *Ideas* of Number, Extension, and Figure alone, it may possibly be the want of due method and application in us. . . . (*Essay*, IV, 2, sec. 9)

In the following chapter Locke proceeds to defend the possibility of extending demonstrative reasoning to morals. He states:

The idea of a supreme Being, infinite in Power, Goodness, and Wisdom . . . and the Idea of ourselves, as understanding, rational Beings, being such as are clear in us . . . afford such Foundations of our Duty and Rules of Action, as might place *Morality amongst the Sciences capable of Demonstration*: wherein I doubt not, but from self-evident Propositions, by necessary Consequences, as incontestable as those in Mathematics, the measures of right and wrong might be made out. . . .⁴²

Further on in Book IV Locke attempts to demonstrate that "we are capable of *knowing*, i.e. *being certain that there is a GOD*" (Locke's emphasis). His strategy in this context, like Clarke's, is simply a variant of the cosmological argument—an argument which draws an *a priori* inference from a particular effect to its cause.⁴³

⁴¹ In this Preface to his second series of Boyle Lectures Clarke denies William Carroll's accusation that his proof of God's existence is taken from Locke. In a letter to Leibniz, Princess Caroline states that "neither Dr. Clarke nor Mr. Newton wishes to be thought a follower of Mr. Locke. . . ." (*The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H. G. Alexander [Manchester, 1956], 190). This reveals that there were differences between Locke and Clarke, but it equally suggests that Clarke's contemporaries recognized significant resemblances in their doctrines.

⁴² *Essay*, IV, 3, sec. 18 (Locke's emphasis). See also *Essay*, IV, 4, secs. 7-10. (Also important in this context are Locke's remarks in his *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Ch. 2.)

⁴³ Clarke's reasonings proceed from the simple observation that "something now is." On the basis of the principle that there must be some cause for everything which comes into existence, he argues that an eternal series of contingent beings would lack any cause or ground of its existence. To suppose that there exists such a series is to suppose that it was "caused by absolutely nothing"—which is absurd. Clarke argues that there must, therefore, be some original, self-existent, or "necessarily-existent" Being whose existence does not depend on any other being. In this way, Clarke's argument, like Locke's before it, makes an *a priori* inference from an effect (i.e., the world) to the existence and attributes of its ultimate cause (i.e., God).

It is in light of these specific observations concerning the fundamental similarities which hold between Locke's and Clarke's dogmatic defence of the Christian Religion that we must consider Hume's skeptical arguments. From this perspective it becomes radiantly clear, as it was to Hume's contemporaries, that one salient skeptical theme that runs throughout the *Treatise* as a whole is that all such attempts to extend demonstrative reasoning beyond the sphere of mathematics into the spheres of metaphysics and morals, with the intention of defending the Christian Religion, are (as Hume put it in the first *Enquiry*) "nothing but sophistry and illusion." Two of the major destructive arguments in the *Treatise* center precisely on this crucial issue. First, one of the principal skeptical arguments of Book I—perhaps the most important skeptical argument in this context—is that all attempts to establish matters of fact and existence on the basis of *a priori* reasoning are entirely illusory.⁴⁴ Hume's arguments in this direction constitute an assault on the very foundations of Locke's and Clarke's efforts to prove God's Being and Attributes. Second, one of the major skeptical arguments of Book III is that all attempts to assimilate morals to mathematics are equally illusory. That is to say, Hume is greatly concerned in this context to show that morality is *not* susceptible of demonstration. In light of these observations we may conclude that two particularly salient prongs of Hume's battery of skeptical arguments are aimed precisely against the two major prongs of Locke's and Clarke's Christian rationalism: viz., their demonstrations concerning God's existence and concerning morality. It would seem, therefore, that an important feature of Hume's skeptical intentions in the *Treatise*, one giving unity and direction to seemingly unrelated skeptical arguments, is an attack on the efforts of Christian rationalists to use demonstrative reason in defence of the tenets of the Christian Religion.⁴⁵

IV. Skepticism, Naturalism and the "Atheistic" Interpretation of the *Treatise*

In my view a proper understanding of Hume's constructive or positive intentions in the *Treatise* requires that we recognize the Hobbist nature of his project of a "Science of Man." I have argued elsewhere, at some length, for the thesis that the *Treatise* is modelled after certain works by

⁴⁴ Hume focuses even more sharply on this issue in the *Abstract* and, especially, in the first *Enquiry*.

⁴⁵ Locke and Clarke, though obviously the principal targets of Hume's skeptical arguments in this direction, were far from being the *only* ones; also of importance in this context are the philosophies of, for example, Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz. (Indeed, it is not unusual for Hume to use the strategy of refuting one champion of the Christian Religion by using the principles advocated by another champion—a strategy which no doubt amused Hume's ironic, skeptical wit.)

Hobbes.⁴⁶ I will, therefore, outline the points which are relevant to this essay very briefly. When we examine the “plan” of Hume’s *Treatise* we discover that it is strikingly similar to that of Hobbes’s *The Elements of Law* (originally published as two separate treatises: *Human Nature* and *De Corpore Politico*) and the first two parts of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*. Hume, like Hobbes before him, begins with a study of human understanding (i.e., sensation, imagination, knowledge, etc.), proceeds to a study of human passions (i.e., emotion, action, other minds, etc.), and finally, on the basis of these investigations, develops his account of moral and political philosophy. These structural parallels between Hobbes’s works and Hume’s *Treatise* are indicative of the fundamental similarity of their projects. That is, Hume, following Hobbes, believes that moral and political philosophy must proceed upon the same methodology as that which is appropriate to the natural sciences (although they disagree about the nature of that methodology). Further, Hobbes and Hume are agreed that this scientific investigation of morals must begin with an examination of human thought and motivation it being assumed by both thinkers that the minds of men “are similar in their feelings and operations.” The immediate significance of this similarity between the *Treatise* and Hobbes’s works is that it reveals the unity of the project of the *Treatise* and casts serious doubt on the historical foundations of various established interpretations.⁴⁷ However, the significance of the Hobbist nature of Hume’s project in the *Treatise* goes much deeper than these initial observations.

As noted in the first section of this essay, Hobbes’s secular perspective and his extension of scientific naturalism to the study of man was regarded by Clarke and other Christian critics as particularly threatening to religion and morals. On the basis of the above observations regarding the affinity between Hume’s and Hobbes’s project of a “Science of Man” we can make perfect sense, both philosophically and historically, of the relationship which holds between Hume’s destructive, skeptical attack on Clarke’s Christian rationalism and his own constructive, Hobbist intentions in the *Treatise*. That is to say, in his Boyle Lectures Clarke endeavored to undermine and destroy Hobbes’s project of a secular, naturalistic

⁴⁶ “Hume’s *Treatise* and Hobbes’s *The Elements of Law*,” *JHI*, 46 (1985), 51-63. Hume’s deep interest in Hobbes’s “atheistic” philosophy was not particularly unusual for a Scottish student of his generation. J. M. Robertson suggests that “Scottish free-thought would seem to . . . have gone further, in private, than English at the period in question.” *A History of Freethought* (2 Vols.; London, 1936), 759-63. In the early eighteenth century Professor Halyburton of St. Andrews speaks of the “great vogue among our young Gentry and Students” of Hobbes, Spinoza and others (*Natural Religion Insufficient*, [Edinburgh, 1714], 31—cited in Robertson, *Freethought*, II, 742).

⁴⁷ For example, on the claims concerning the role of Francis Hutcheson’s philosophy in shaping the project and doctrines of Hume’s *Treatise*, in Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, (London, 1941), 12-14, 41-47.

study of man—a project which Clarke regarded as a threat to the Christian Religion.⁴⁸ Clarke's attack on Hobbes's project and its "atheistic" doctrines posed a significant threat to Hume's own similar project in the *Treatise*. Given this situation it was quite essential that Hume should formulate an answer to Hobbes's eminent and influential Newtonian critic. In other words, in seeking to defend and articulate an essentially Hobbist philosophical project, Hume found it necessary to undertake a skeptical attack against the leading light of the opposing Newtonian tradition.

This account of the relationship which holds between Hume's skeptical attack on Clarke's Christian rationalism and his Hobbist project of a "Science of Man" sheds considerable light on several salient features of Hume's philosophical intentions in the *Treatise*. As has been noted, the reaction against Hobbes's philosophical writings focused primarily on four doctrines on the basis of which Hobbes was accused by his Christian critics of advocating an "atheistic" or anti-Christian philosophy. These doctrines were: (1) skepticism regarding natural and revealed religion; (2) materialism and naturalism; (3) necessitarianism; and (4) an Epicurean account of morals (i.e., relativism, hedonism, etc.).⁴⁹ We find, accordingly, that it was on precisely these issues that Clarke sought to vindicate, by way of "demonstrative" argument, the tenets of the Christian Religion and to refute the atheistic doctrines of Hobbes and his followers. Given the Hobbist nature of Hume's basic project in the *Treatise* we may ask: how does Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* stand on these issues? A detailed reply to this question would take us well beyond the confines of this essay. However, even a brief glance at Hume's position on these issues will provide us with a clearer understanding of his fundamental intentions in the *Treatise*.

There are, I believe, a number of considerations which may be cited in support of the claim that Hume's skeptical attack on Clarke's Christian rationalism must be understood as simply a particularly prominent aspect of Hume's wider skeptical objective in the *Treatise* to undermine natural

⁴⁸ In general, the Newtonians opposed all attempts to assimilate the operations of mind or spirit to the (mechanistic) operations of matter. Clearly Hume, like Hobbes, took a different view.

⁴⁹ The Newtonians, and more generally the Anglican latitudinarians, closely identified Hobbes and Epicurus for reasons which went well beyond their shared materialism. (Evidence for this can be found throughout the writings of, for example, Cudworth, Bentley, and Clarke.) In general, it was the Epicurean outlook—its atomistic and naturalistic view of man and his place in nature, its hostility to established religion, and its secular, hedonistic view of morality—which the Newtonians, explicitly, sought to refute. See Thomas F. Mayo, *Epicurus in England: 1650-1725* (New York, 1934), esp. 115-27 and 142-43, on Hobbes's contemporary reputation as an Epicurean.

(and revealed) religion in general.⁵⁰ Let me mention two points of particular significance. First, as is well-known, the original manuscript of the *Treatise* contained a skeptical attack on revealed religion. Hume's discussion of miracles eventually appeared as Section X of the first *Enquiry*. Before the *Treatise* was published, however, Hume set about "castrating" his work in order that it should "give as little offence as possible."⁵¹ These considerations suggest that at the time Hume wrote the *Treatise* he recognized the need to exercise caution when expressing his views on matters of religion and that he, therefore, out of "prudence": (a) dropped his *explicit* attack on the principles of revealed religion, and (b) presented his skeptical critique against the principles of natural religion in a veiled and discreet manner.⁵² Second, by the time Hume came to publish the first *Enquiry* (1748) he was no longer so concerned to avoid "giving offence" to the orthodox. Accordingly, in the *Enquiry* Hume undertook to present his views in a more succinct and direct manner.⁵³ In this way we find that in the first *Enquiry* a great many of the numerous skeptical arguments put forward by Hume throughout that work are directed against the claims of natural and revealed religion. In the opening section of the *Enquiry* (11-13), for example, we find Hume openly mocking the tendency of "popular superstitions" to "protect their weaknesses" by using the cover of fruitless metaphysical speculations. Hume states that it is his intention to free learning from these "abstruse questions" and "entangling brambles" which are encouraged by "popular superstition" by way of an enquiry into the nature and limits of the human understanding. Hume also chose to conclude the *Enquiry* (Section XII) with a discussion of skepticism which is also openly hostile to the claims of natural religion. Throughout this discussion Hume draws attention to the weaknesses and limitations of the human understanding and emphasizes the significance of these observations to matters of religion. Above all in this context, Hume is concerned to emphasize that all efforts to employ demonstrative reasoning in defence of theological

⁵⁰ This interpretation accords with the general tenor of Wishart's response to the skepticism of the *Treatise* and also with Hume's own remarks in his "Early Memoranda." Hume notes that in addition to Cudworth's four kinds of Atheist we might add "the Pyrrhonian or Sceptic." Mossner, *Life*, 78.

⁵¹ *Letters*, I, 24-25. Hume's discussion of the practical consequences of natural religion, which eventually appeared as Section XI of the *Enquiry*, may also have had some precursor in the original manuscript of the *Treatise*.

⁵² It should not be forgotten that in 1697, just a few decades before the *Treatise* was published, a young Edinburgh student named Thomas Aikenhead was hanged for ridiculing the doctrine of the Trinity. See Robertson, *Free thought*, II, 759f. When Hume published the *Treatise*, considerable caution or "prudence" was still called for regarding any attack on the Christian Religion.

⁵³ On this see Hume's remarks to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, *Letters*, I, 158; also his autobiographical essay "My Own Life" (reprinted in Mossner, *Life*, 612).

doctrines is “nothing but sophistry and illusion” (EHU, 163-65).⁵⁴ In short, it seems evident that in the *Enquiry* Hume put forward, in an open and uninhibited manner, a skeptical attack on natural and revealed religion which was first developed and presented in the *Treatise* in a considerably more cautious form.⁵⁵

The above considerations suggest that in the *Treatise* one of Hume’s overall skeptical concerns was to cast doubt on the claims of natural (and revealed) religion. What, then, of the other three “atheistic” (Hobbesist) doctrines cited above? The second “charge,” regarding materialism and naturalism, may at first glance seem the least promising. That is to say, Hume’s discussion in the *Treatise* “Of the immateriality of the soul” (I, v, 5) seems to suggest that he rejects the “materialist” position. Hume’s view on this matter, however, is more subtle and more careful than this. In particular Hume states that we must be careful to “separate the question concerning the substance of the mind from that concerning the cause of its thought” (T, 248). On the first issue, concerning the substance of the mind, Hume rejects *both* the materialist *and* the immaterialist positions on the ground that the question itself is meaningless (T, 234). However, on the second issue (i.e., the issue of some significance) Hume comes down decisively on the side of the materialists (T, 246-51). Experience shows us, Hume claims, that “matter and motion may often be regarded as the cause of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation.” In other words, Hume vindicates the “naturalistic” view of man which Hobbes’s Christian critics deemed to be overtly atheistic. Concerning the related charge of “necessitarianism,” Hume defends—indeed, in many respects he simply restates—the necessitarian position advocated by Hobbes and his follower Anthony Collins.⁵⁶ Once again, in this context (II, iii, 1-2), Hume puts his unorthodox views on causation to use in order to defend an important “atheistic” doctrine of Hobbes and his followers (Hume uses this same strategy when vindicating the “materialist” doctrine regarding the causes of thought). Finally, the close affinities between Hobbes’s and Hume’s account of morals, especially their views on justice, have rarely been a matter for much dispute.

⁵⁴ Hume’s skeptical assault in the *Enquiry* on natural and revealed religion did not escape the notice of his orthodox contemporaries. On this see Mossner, *Life*, Ch. 22 and 25.

⁵⁵ For a succinct and direct statement regarding the antagonistic relationship between philosophical skepticism and natural religion, see the first Part of the *Dialogues*, especially Philo’s remarks at 131-32, and at 134-36.

⁵⁶ Hume’s discussions concerning the question of the immateriality of the soul and the question of liberty and necessity revolve very largely around the issues raised in the Clarke-Collins controversy, which was one of the most important and influential of the exchanges between the Newtonians and the radical freethinkers. On both these issues Hume unambiguously sides with Collins against Clarke. See James O’Higgins, *Anthony Collins* (The Hague, 1970), Ch. 5 and 7, and David Berman, “Anthony Collins and the Question of Atheism,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 75 (1975), 85-102.

On this subject both Hume's contemporaries and our own seem to be largely agreed.⁵⁷ The labels in virtue of which Hobbes was judged by his contemporaries to be advocating anti-Christian, "Epicurean" morals (viz., relativism, hedonism, etc.) seem, on the whole, with some *moderation* by Hume on certain issues (e.g., egoism), to fit equally well the ethical doctrines of the *Treatise*. The upshot of these general observations is, therefore, that Wishart's perception and presentation of Hume as a radical freethinker following in the "atheistic" footsteps of Hobbes is essentially accurate and that Hume's skeptical attack on Clarke's Christian rationalism must be understood in this wider context (i.e. in the context of his attempt to pursue a Hobbist project).

The above account of the relationship which holds between Hume's constructive Hobbist intentions on one hand and his destructive, skeptical critique of Clarke's influential Christian rationalism on the other hand, suggests that these two aspects of Hume's thought are best understood as two different sides of the same "atheistic" or anti-Christian coin. That is to say, it may be argued that to the extent that these concerns are indicative of Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise* so to that extent the skepticism and the naturalism of the *Treatise* should be viewed not so much as ends in themselves but rather as powerful weapons which Hume wields in order: (a) to refute the claims of Christian metaphysics and ethics, and (b) to construct a secular moral and political outlook. In this way it may be argued that to a considerable extent it is matters of religion—and especially the questions concerning the relations between religion, science and morality—which shape and condition Hume's fundamental intentions in the *Treatise*. This account of Hume's objectives and concerns brings to light not only the unity of his thought in the *Treatise* but, moreover, the unity in his philosophical development as a whole.⁵⁸ If we view the philosophy of the *Treatise* from this perspective then we will discover that Hume's thought is not only more intelligible and coherent than the established interpretations have suggested but also that it is, philosophically speaking, far more profound.⁵⁹

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⁵⁷ For a rather different interpretation of the relationship between Hobbes's and Hume's moral philosophies, see David F. Norton, *David Hume* (Princeton, 1982), Ch. 1.

⁵⁸ On his deathbed Hume maintained that he had not yet completed his "great work" of delivering his country-men "from the Christian Superstition." Cited in Mossner, *Life*, 601. Clearly, this "great work" was for Hume a *lifetime's* project—one which began with the *Treatise*.

⁵⁹ For comments on earlier drafts of this paper, I am particularly grateful to: Jim Force, J. A. C. Gaskin, David F. Norton, D. D. Raphael, M. A. Stewart, and Bernard Williams. I would also like to thank the editor and Lewis White Beck for further helpful suggestions and comments.