

1906

A N I N T R O D U C T I O N
TO THE
"DIALOGUES CONCERNING NATURAL RELIGION."
OF DAVID HUME.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE DIALOGUES
CONCERNING NATURAL RELIGION
OF DAVID HUME.

In professing to call attention to this often forgotten work of the great Scottish Philosopher one cannot help noticing how very similar the reception accorded to it by the outside world has been to its treatment at the hands of the author himself. During his lifetime he kept it in the safe obscurity of his study drawer, where it lay until the day of his death. The plan of the Dialogues had been clearly thought out by Hume as early as 1750 and the active period of his contribution to philosophy proper having closed almost in the same year this excursion of his into natural theology might most fitly have been presented to his readers at once, especially if, as it seems to us now, it may be rightly regarded as the crown and consummation of his earlier speculations. Indeed some such conception of the relation of the Dialogues to his other works underlies the outlining of his scheme upon its first page, where he founds his method "on the saying of "an ancient (Chrysippus) That students of philosophy "bought first to learn Logics, then Ethics, next Physics, "last of all the nature of the Gods."

From that year onwards however his literary

activity was directed into other and less speculative channels, and though the book undoubtedly existed in manuscript and was from time to time submitted to his philosophical friends for their opinion, it was as good as lost for the estimating of his whole position by his contemporaries. In the inner circle of savants who were vaguely aware of its existence, considerable fear prevailed as to what approaching cataclysm the appearance of the 'terrible David' upon the theological horizon might portend, and, as year after year passed safely by, their distrust of the threatened publication of his meaning only increased the more. When a book has such a history behind it there is naturally every reason to expect that its contents may have been varied considerably by corrections, omissions and insertions from the author's own hand. But, provided always that the manuscript copy (now preserved in the library of the Royal Society of Edinburgh), from which it was first published in 1779, was the original draft, there can have been only the most trivial amendments and the main lines of the argument were left untouched. Mr Hill Burton's verdict* on this point is that, "while the sentiments appear to be substantially the same as when they were first set down, the alterations in the method of announcing them are a register of the improvements in their author's style for a period

* Life of Hume, I. p. 328.

"apparently of twenty seven years." From what I have seen of the manuscript I should say first, that the alterations upon the face of it are largely verbal, and secondly, that this particular copy is of later date than that which Hume invited his friend Sir Gilbert Elliott to criticise in 1751.

The question whether the whole work was ever substantially recast in the years, during which Hume kept it by him, cannot be definitely answered here. If however, in at least one letter the author asks for assistance and advice in the endeavour to render the argument on one side or the other "quite formal and regular" the possibility of a more or less thorough redaction having taken place must not be overlooked.* So much is certain that by retaining the book unpublished he had opportunity of bringing it to a higher pitch of perfection, and that, accordingly, its sentiments may safely be regarded as the mature expression of his religious and theological opinions in strict accordance with his empirical philosophy.

The motive that prevailed with him to hinder publication seems to have been a strong sense of the incompleteness of his arguments, and, more particularly, the feeling often voiced by him that he had not done justice to that "genuine Theism the most agreeable

* Dugald Stewart's Works, I, p. 603.

"reflection, which it is possible for human imagination to suggest." He speaks of the 'natural propensity of the mind' towards the theistic argument from design in terms as warm as those of Kant who called it "the oldest, the clearest argument and most in conformity with the common reason of humanity." He had played the sceptic too long in the public eye to care very much for the popular verdict or to share his friends' fear that he might incur increasing odium and obloquy. He knew that any orthodox conclusions he could offer in this theological essay of his would appear to zealous defenders of the faith only as Greek gifts, any that might seem in the light of current opinions to be unorthodox could make him no new enemies. His abstract speculations on the logical methods of Reason had ended in his advocating "a mitigated scepticism" or as it is also designated "an academical philosophy"* and when himself was forced to become the pioneer cultivator of the broad field of human knowledge with the untried implement which he had long chosen for his own, the promise of a harvest of positive results seems to have been difficult of realisation. Whether Hume feared that the Dialogues would offend his readers need not be discussed when we know beyond doubt that they disappointed his own expectations. Many an opus magnum has been utterly lost to the

* Enquiry, XII. iii.

history of literature from considerations exactly similar to those which weighed heavily upon Hume.

So much is conjecture but, whatever the reason may have been, publication was delayed until death overtook the author in 1776. In his will it was found that careful directions were given first to Adam Smith, Professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow, and afterwards by a codicil to William Strahan, publisher in London, to secure the bringing of the book to the light, a sum of £200 being set aside for the necessary expenses. Both these gentlemen were so much averse to accepting the charge that finally Hume's nephew as residuary legatee took it in hand, "His testamentary injunction directing their publication was declined by Adam Smith. But it was too peremptory not to be obeyed by a kinsman whom he had in some measure adopted." * And so in 1779 these long matured Dialogues at last became part of the common inheritance of philosophers.

It is not necessary in this present Introduction to give either particular or general details of Hume's life and philosophy; enough has been said to show how precarious a chance of existence this posthumous literary child of his had, and how tedious the labour was that gave it birth. And the place it was to take in the history of philosophy subsequent to 1779 was entirely in accordance with its past.

* Edinburgh Review, Vol. 85 p. 4.

The first edition appearing early in that year from the press of Robinson in London was rapidly followed by another reprint, with corrections. In 1788 the book was appended to a new edition of Hume's collected Essays printed for Cadell and Elliott, and thereafter it has been frequently republished along with these or other parts of his writings. As a separate work it has appeared once in England, in 1875, when it was used as one of a series of brochures issued privately in London by a Mr T. Scott in the interests of a Society of Freethinkers. It is not too much to say that, with the exception of this reprint unworthy in itself and by reason of the strongly biassed remarks which introduce it "to the reading public," it has been completely ignored by those who have undertaken to supply English libraries of the past century with ready means of access to Hume's far reaching speculations. In the standard edition of Hume's Works by Green & Grose the only analytic notice of the Dialogues is contained in one singularly unsatisfactory sentence:* "Although perhaps the most "finished of its author's productions, it has not "excited general attention, there seems to be a deep-seated reluctance to discuss such fundamental questions." This curt dismissal of the Dialogues constitutes a verdict upon students of Hume rather than

* Volume III, p. 80 (1898)

upon their master, but as a verdict it has ample justification in history. In England it has been generally felt that there is pressing need of an 'answer to Hume' in this particular connection, but the temper of the early nineteenth century inclined to be impatient of such a thorough investigation of the deepest principles of natural theology as was necessary after the sifting criticism to which they had been subjected by the great Scottish sceptic. The watch dogs of the orthodox temple often bark at friends as well as foes. And to express sympathy with the sentiments of Hume, even those admittedly unanswerable, was to incur popular suspicion such as always clings to the name of inquiry. In works professing to be animated with the genuine positive spirit, the easy well worn way of dealing with Hume's theology has been to rank his speculations as a side issue, to dub them "Absolute Agnosticism" or "Universal Scepticism" and the reader having been safely conducted up to the end of this philosophical cul de sac is invited to retrace his steps and pursue his light-hearted journey by some other route.

The attack upon the Dialogues we shall have to consider later but the curious reader may observe here of the timorous method of grappling with Hume's problems that it prevails as much with his friends as his foes. Thus in 1818 a series of 'Dialogues on

Natural and Revealed Religion", with the avowed object of defending, supplementing and enlarging the conclusion of Hume on principles similar to his, was advertised to appear in Blackwood's Magazine* for the month of April. These Dialogues are represented as being conducted by the same Cleanthes, Philo, and Demea, who figured in Hume's work. The anonymous author is described (falsely) as one "who died in youth not without high distinction among his contemporaries;" his papers have come into the editor's hands and it is promised that their publication "shall be continued regularly through twelve Numbers of the Magazine." Only two parts had appeared when on account of the uneasiness they caused the editor saw fit to retract his promise and without one word of explanation or apology to his readers their place in the next issue of the periodical was filled up with other matter. Twelve years later the subterfuge of anonymity was cast aside and the Rev. Dr Robert Morehead † published these supplementary dialogues complete in book form with his own name on the title page.

* Blackwood, 1818. April and May.

† Dialogues on Natural and Revealed Religion by Robert Morehead, D.D., Edin. 1830. (in twelve parts Nos. I and II almost literally from Blackwood April and May 1818.) This book deserves notice as a good commentary upon Hume's Dialogues, the only attempt of the kind known to the present writer. The scope of the argument from design is greatly extended. To the data allowed by Hume there are added as evidencing design "the laws of the procedure of the knowing mind as well "as the laws visible in creation." "the formation of

When Hume's Dialogues appeared in 1779 his philosophy had already found many admirers in Germany and interrupted other slumbers than those of Kant. To quite a large circle of thinkers there this posthumous book was an unexpected but most welcome revelation. One in particular Professor Ernst Platner, afterwards best known for his pungent criticisms of the Kantian doctrines, undertook a translation into the German language immediately and published it with the explanation that it had been forwarded to him anonymously in 1781. The air of mystery so unfortunately associated with this book was increased by his following it in 1783 with a Discourse on Atheism,* which is intended to mitigate the consequences of his translation. In the meantime another translation of importance in the history of philosophy had been prepared by J. A. Hamann. From his correspondence with his publisher we learn

general notions and associations" and even the bare facts of what Dr Morehead calls "external perception." While with Hume there is evidence for the "natural attributes" of God and little or none for the moral, the Philo and Cleanthes of this later book are made to agree "to lay the foundations of the argument for the "moral attributes of the Divine Nature in the moral "perceptions of the human mind." A few years later further Dialogues appeared from the same pen but their tone is entirely apologetic and not at all convincing.

* Gespräch über den Atheismus. E. Platner, 1783. The preface runs: The occasion of this Dialogue is the publication of Hume's Dialogues, its intention, to provide a reply and perhaps to reply to Atheism generally.

that it* was begun on 21st July 1780 and finished on 8th August.

About this time too he heard of the other intended translation and the news caused him to delay. Before September however of 1780 the manuscript of this translation had been submitted to Kant, who was greatly struck with it and urged the sending of it to press at once.† As time went on he wrote deploring its non appearance but now Hamann had taken fright at the prospect of his name being connected with such an infidel book, and after suggesting one or two fanciful descriptions of himself for the title page, he finally intimated to Kant his withdrawal, because he felt another was undertaking "the difficult, dangerous and unpopular task." Only a few days after the passing of this correspondence Kant began the composition of his Critique of Pure Reason and through the history of this suppressed manuscript taken in conjunction with Kant's express references to the Dialogues in the Prolegomena,‡ the historical connection, between Hume's Sceptical Theology and the famous criticism of Rational Theology in the Transcendental Dialectic of the great Critique, is thoroughly well established. In this

* Hamann's Schriften, edited by Roth 1821 - 43. VI, p. 158.

† Hamann VI, 190.

‡ Prolegomena, § 57, 58, 59 et passim.

latter we shall see how a great many of Hume's positions are restated and his conclusions accepted according to Kant's understanding of them - only however to be circumvented in the peculiar fashion of his new philosophy. And although Kant's reconstruction of theology be considered ever so unsatisfactory, it is because of the thorough way in which he and Hume before him had cleared the ground and shewed men the 'real point at issue,'* that the philosophy of either became the starting point for theistic speculation in the subsequent century and a half. Therefore just as it is possible in Germany for a cry to be raised from time to time of a "Return to Kant" so in Scotland there is always opportunity for a Return to Hume.† The result in the two cases will always be widely different for this reason that the Copernican revolution in thought initiated by Kant makes it possible to break entirely with the past. It opened up the way to a brilliant series of speculative deductions in metaphysics and theology which all proceed alike upon one and the same method, namely, a mapping out of the different spheres of consciousness, moral or theoretical, cognitive, or religious, as the case may be.

* Kant and Hume compared in this respect. Flint's Theism, p. 389.

† The question in Germany is Was uns Kant sein kann? The popular question in English refers to the past rather than the present, What has Hume been?

With the Critique of Pure Reason an epoch begins for philosophy, in which every such investigation into the problems of natural theology as is contained in the Dialogues is at once pronounced to be incapable of producing any fruit and the whole argument appears as a beating of the empty air of illusion. But however closely every positive result for theology may be whittled down before the edge of Hume's scepticism, he still stops short of Kant's Transcendentalism just in refusing to make that distinction in our cognitive faculties which places theology on a different plane from all other knowledge and enables Kant to dismiss the question in its older form on the ground of its being misconceived and insoluble, even while in the same moment he addresses himself to its solution under his own restatement. Hume is concerned merely to sift the results of natural theology on his own principles, and not to enter upon what Kant in contrasting his own treatment of the theological Idea with the Dialogues calls, "a careful critique guarding the bounds of our reason with respect to its empirical use and setting limits to its pretensions." To be sure Hume's work limits the results of such use strictly enough; but Kant limits the use itself by denying it in theology altogether.

It is true that one of the interlocutors in the Dialogues contends directly for the inadequacy of human reason to the apprehension of God's Being.* But this, the extreme position, is attributed, it seems designedly, to the weakest of the three disputants and it would be hermeneutically impossible to read the whole book as if it led up to an absolute negation in this form. For although with the exception of the argument in the Dialogues, Hume does almost nothing to illustrate at length his already expressed idea of that system of 'Divinity or Theology', which he would save from the flames when running over the libraries of the past, he prescribes the conditions of such a system in words which are perfectly definite and which there is no good reason to regard otherwise than as sincere.** "It has a foundation in reason so far as it is supported by experience; but its best and most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation." It is only in strict accordance with the first of these conditions that in this later work of his we expect to find an honest endeavour to determine how great or how small is the residuum of theological truth to which Hume will admit that the natural reason working within the sphere of experience

* Demea "The nature of God, I affirm, from the infirmities of human understanding to be altogether incomprehensible and unknown to us" - "The infirmities of our nature do not permit us to reach any ideas, which in the least correspond to the ineffable sublimity of the divine attributes."

** Enquiry IV. p.135.

can attain. The second, again shadowed forth in its closing lines, remains altogether unfulfilled and indeed the appeal to faith and revelation, which he more than once voices in passages where scepticism seems to hold undisputed sway over his formal reasonings on theological subjects, must only be taken to express just such "a natural sentiment" or "propensity" of feeling as may always maintain its place in the clearest mind along with an utterly opposed conviction of the understanding. The inconsistency from a logical point of view may be admitted by others; it may be explicitly present with the author in person as it probably was with Hume.* But if that be so, it can hardly be set down as a futile concession to popular orthodoxy, least of all in the Dialogues, and it remains a fact to be reckoned with seriously in any comprehensive estimate of Hume's opinions. Still in the book itself the action of the dialogue proper stands altogether apart from this short, ill-defined and perhaps misleading reference to faith and a 'revelation' of some sort beyond, it is a plain painstaking attempt on Hume's part to discover what reasoned foundation, if any, he could allow for religion.

* Enquiry IV. 154 on Faith as a miracle "which subverts all the principles of a man's understanding and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."

The literary form into which the argument is cast - that of dialogue, - though once a favourite method of conveying philosophical instruction, has not always been imitated successfully in later times. Two reasons are stated by Hume for its adoption in the treatment of his subject; first, that the conversational method sheds a variety of lights upon a truth 'so obvious' 'so certain' and 'so important' as that of 'the Being of a God'; second, that it allows the utmost play to opposing sentiments in dealing with questions so obscure, doubtful and uncertain as those of His nature and attributes. Both reasons can easily be illustrated and paralleled from numerous passages in Hume's writings. In the Dialogues all parties to the argument agree in holding that of the existence of God there is no question whatever. Even the sceptical Philo following Lord Bacon, compares the Atheists of his time unfavourably with David's fool who said in his heart, 'There is no God' for they are not contented to say it in their hearts, but they also utter that impiety with their lips and are thereby guilty of multiplied indiscretion and imprudence. "Such people, though they were ever so much in earnest, cannot me- thinks be very formidable."* After the same fashion the friend "who loves sceptical paradoxes" and takes the

* Dialogues, Part II.

burden of maintaining the antitheistic argument in Hume's Enquiry, says,* "The chief or sole argument "for a divine existence (which I never questioned) "is derived from the order of nature." In a private letter as early as 1744 he had defined his conception of religion as being,† "The practice of morality and "the assent of the understanding to the proposition "that God exists." This may be culpably scanty as a definition but in all his writings - without exception - this one proposition is always adhered to and often affirmed to be in Hume's view a possibly sufficient foundation for religion. For example in a comparison of historical religions he says, "The "only point of theology in which we shall find a consent of mankind almost universal, is that there is "invisible intelligent power in the world."‡ This last quotation rounds off the other references by introducing a new point of view, but many other parallel passages drawn from Hume's writings might be used to show how firmly rooted is his purpose of making no question of the Being of a God. The theory of existence which underlies them all was first propounded

* Works, IV. p. 112.

† Burton's Life, I. p. 162.

‡ Natural History of Religion, Sec. IV. cf. also Sec. XV, "The universal propensity to believe in "invisible intelligent power."

in the Treatise of Human Nature: "'Tis evident that
 "all reasonings from causes or effects terminate in
 "conclusions concerning matter of fact: that is
 "concerning the existence of objects or of their
 "qualities. 'Tis also evident that the idea of ex-
 "istence is nothing different from the idea of any
 "object and that when after the simple conception of
 "any thing we would conceive it as existent, we in
 "reality make no addition to or alteration on our
 'first idea. Thus, when we affirm that God is exist-
 "ent we simply form the idea of such a being as He is
 "represented to us..... 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 increases nor
 "diminishes."* In thus distinguishing all other
 attributes from the one attribute of existence, on the
 ground that the latter is no new or distinct idea in
 the object, Hume may be understood to minimise the
 theoretical importance of every proposition concerning

* Works, I. pp. 394, 395. The word God occurs twice in the text of the whole Treatise, - in the two sentences given above and once in a note. The phrases Deity, Divine Being, and Supreme Being are used only in discussing the Cartesian certainty of perception, and Spinoza's Pantheism. A great deal of comment on the Treatise can be cast away at once by remembering this fact: e.g., Green's Introduction 339, beginning "From the point that our enquiry has reached we can anticipate the line which Hume could not but take in regard to self and God." The truth is, a discussion of the theology of the Treatise would be quite conjectural and always has been such.

existence. When therefore the distinction is applied specially to the Being and attributes of God, it undoubtedly lessens the positive significance of the assurance so often reaffirmed in his latest work that at least there is a God. But whatever explanation Hume might have at hand to place upon these simple words, his first reason for using the form of Dialogue is amply justified within his own philosophy.

While then our author postulates in this way the validity of a belief in God's existence, he finds that questions of His attributes and His plan of providence in the world lend themselves most easily to argument and discussion. "These," he says, "have been always "subjected to the disputations of men." This historical reflection forms the second reason for his composing the Dialogues. Its sting lies in the truth of it. It came in the middle of a century fruitful in 'proofs' of the Divine attributes, from the pen of one who had made a careful comparison of the religious tenets of men in ancient, in classical, and in modern times. The conclusion of his Natural History of Religion shows how Hume grasped the fact of a widespread divergence of opinion, so that it is possible by "opposing one species of superstition "to another, to set them a quarrelling: while we "ourselves, during their fury and contention, happily

"make our escape into the calm though obscure regions
"of philosophy." Perhaps there is a strain of mali-
cious mockery in these words, but they point to the
possibility of such contrary views as had come under
Hume's notice being set forth just as they are in the
Dialogues with himself to pronounce a judicial ver-
dict upon the merits of each.

These then are the fundamental presuppositions of
the whole book: first, the certainty of God's exist-
ence, and secondly, the right of philosophy to dis-
cuss questions of His attributes.* The two are per-
fectly consistent with his attitude to both points in
his other works, and at the same time they are in
themselves complementary to each other. In a note
added in the Appendix to the Treatise of Human Nature
both principles may be clearly traced, already present
with the author and enabling him after a fashion,
peculiarly satisfactory to himself, to claim to be a
believer even in his most agnostic attitude towards
God's attributes, "The order of the universe proves
"an omnipotent mind:- Nothing more is requisite to
"give a foundation to all the articles of religion,
"nor is it necessary we should form a distinct idea
"of the force and energy of the supreme Being." †

* Cf., the two presuppositions of Butler's Analogy,
"Taking for proved that there is an intelligent Author
"of Nature and natural Governor of the world." "My
"design is to apply analogy to the subject of religion
"both natural and revealed." Introduction.

† Works, I., p. 456.

For the task of advancing from these presuppositions to the systematic criticism of natural theology, Hume introduces to his reader no fewer than three imaginary friends, Philo, Cleanthes and Demea whose conversation together upon Natural religion he records. Whatever classical reference there may originally have been in the names is entirely lost in the essentially modern drama in which they play their part.* In form also the Dialogues have diverged widely from any classical model. Though an echo of Cicero's De Natura Deorum is occasionally heard in Hume's language,† and the subjects are really akin - Hume's plan of having each of the disputants to unfold at length a tenable and complete system precludes the use of that characteristic device by which the Greek and Latin dialecticians punctuate the

* Thus Cleanthes has nothing in common with Zeno's pupil of that name who presided over the Stoic School in the third century, B.C. Almost the only allusion to the nomenclature of the Dialogues occurs in a playful passage of Hamann's Golgotha (1784) where he speaks of "Philo the Pharisee" having conspired with "Cleanthes the Hypocrite, to deny all possibility of understanding God's nature. They looked for a new Paraclete the 'adventitious instructor' to dispel their ignorance by Revelation."

† Cicero sums up thus, "Velleius held Cotta's arguments to be the truest: to me those of Balbus seemed more probable." and Hume's closing sentence is similar, "I confess that upon a serious review of the whole I cannot but think that Philo's principles are more probable than Demea's but that those of Cleanthes approach still nearer to the truth."

arguments of their leading figures with the assents and simple questions of a learner, whose experience of being led on irresistibly from point to point by the master-mind, is supposed to represent the reader's own. In Hume's book Cleanthes, Philo, and Demea do not yield to one another indiscriminately on the essential points of the argument. When they agree in their views they say so, when they differ they expound their differences, but none of them succeeds altogether in convincing either of the others, and therefore at the close of the Dialogues the reader is left with an uneasy feeling that none of the great questions raised have really received an answer. When many diverse views are propounded each so powerfully and all with so little agreement, it is difficult to say precisely which is meant to carry conviction. In consequence of this fact many critics of the Dialogues have not hesitated to ascribe to its author only some mischievous purpose of casting all fixed religious opinions into inextricable confusion, and avoiding every expression of his own. Thus Professor Huxley whose weakness for fathering his own agnosticism upon the great Scottish philosopher is predominant in his analysis of the Dialogues, says,* "One can but suspect that

* Hume, p. 157.

"Hume's shadowy and inconsistent theism was the expression of his desire to rest in a state of mind which distinctly excluded negation, while it included as little as possible of affirmation respecting a problem which he felt to be hopelessly insoluble."

There can be no doubt that the Dialogues contain materials for constructing three perfectly distinct schemes of reflection on the Nature of God, each more or less exclusive of the others and in as much as it is humanly speaking impossible for them all to spring from one brain without their having thoughts and ideas in common, it is easy to see that 'the author had a certain amount of sympathy with all the characters: and that each of them alternately mirrored his own everchanging mood.' Parts too of his general doctrines are worked in at length into the utterances of all three as was indeed unavoidable. Hume himself however helps the inquisitive reader somewhat farther than this. He invites him at the outset to contrast "the accurate philosophical turn of Cleanthes" with "the careless scepticism of Philo" and both of these "with the rigid inflexible orthodoxy of Demea." At the close in the passage already quoted (Note p. 20) he puts into the mouth of Pamphilus, who reports the whole conversation, an explanatory statement that he agrees with Cleanthes rather than Philo and with

Demea least of all. Still it is only by following the argument from point to point, and noting those which are distinctly admitted on each side, that the question of interpretation can ever be satisfactorily solved.

From the very first it has been the usual view of critics to identify the author's theological position with Philo's scepticism and perhaps only with the most virulently sceptical parts of it. The notice of the book in the Gentleman's Magazine of October 1779, after mentioning the names of the characters, runs, "We need not say on which side this "sceptical metaphysician inclines the balance but "must observe that the weapons with which Philo "attacks the moral attributes of the Deity are the "same with those which were employed by Lord Boling- "broke and were most ably parried by Bishop War- "burton." The polemical Priestley in Letter IX. of his Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever published in 1780, quotes "Philo who evidently speaks the sen- "timent of the writer." Kant, in his Prolegomena of 1784, regards Hume as speaking "in the person of "Philo against Cleanthes," and holds that view throughout. And a passage* from a once popular book may be quoted at length to show as early as 1781 how strongly preconceived ideas of Hume's agnosticism

* Milner, Answer to Gibbon and Hume, (1781).

had influenced current verdicts on the Dialogues, "In his dialogues concerning natural religion we have the substance of all his sceptical essays and notwithstanding his declaration at the close in favour of Cleanthes, the natural religionist, it is evident from the whole tenour of the book and still more so from the entire scepticism of his former publications that Philo is his favourite. Sincerity constitutes no part of a philosopher's virtue." This is in that same vein of rejecting Hume's own evidence which prevails generally in criticisms of the self revealed declarations of his position that abound in his writings and letters. Mr Balfour in his Foundations of Belief considers him an absolute sceptic and when confronted with utterances that point the other way he summarises in one sentence the difficulty a whole century of philosophers have experienced in trying to believe him, "I think too well of Hume's speculative genius and too ill of his speculative sincerity." The meaning read into the Dialogues by an exclusive identification of Hume with Philo has maintained its place in the history of philosophy and may safely be said to be the only one that finds acceptance to-day. Once or twice a voice has been raised to protest against it. Dugald Stewart aptly remarks that, "the reasonings of Philo

"have often been quoted as parts of Hume's philosophical system although the words of Shylock or Caliban might with equal justice be quoted as "speaking the real sentiments of Shakespeare."* Professor Campbell Fraser also finds in the Dialogues a groping after a final theistic faith such as he himself advocates. † But these partial acknowledgments of the unfairness of prejudging the effect of Hume's latest and most mature philosophical work stand in almost complete isolation from all other references to him and his speculations; they may serve here as a preliminary warning to the reader that, along with much matter easily recognised to be a recapitulation of the author's earlier opinions, he may find in the Dialogues considerable modifications in their restatement.

The three characters introduced in the Dialogues can be easily defined and classified without identifying any of them with any particular philosophical system known in history. Demea belongs to the class of orthodox theologians who distrust or discredit all attempts to rationalize the existence of God. He praises piety and disparages philosophy. He can cite all the divines, almost, from the foundation of Christianity to support the adorably

* Dissertation note C.C.C.

†

Theism, pp. 7-10. 115 pp.

mysterious and incomprehensible nature of the supreme Being. Human minds are finite, weak, and blind and therefore with regard to reason he is a Sceptic holding fast always to a peculiar religious Sense which alone gives us Truth. With Malebranche he calls God a spirit, not so much in order to express positively what he is, as in order to signify that he is not Matter. Language which has a plain reference to the state and situation of man ceases to have its earthy meaning when applied to the Deity and therefore in religion he is a Mystic. He accepts the ontological proof of an infinite Deity in the form which proceeds by analyzing the idea of necessary existence and he accepts also the cosmological proof in that attenuated form which Kant rightly reduced to the same elements as the other. In his presentation of both there is no specification of the world that actually exists, the premises of his arguments are the abstract ideas of existence in general, which lead the mind back irresistibly in Demea's logic to first Ideas as blank and colourless as themselves. For on his view the present actual order of things could not possibly serve as premise for any reasonable argument. It is nothing but vanity, imbecility and misery, it exists only to be rectified under other dispensations and in some

future period of existence and so with regard to it he is a Pessimist.

This character is perhaps the most perfectly delineated of all three, nevertheless it is not the favourite by any means with the author and indeed it serves "mainly as a foil to the other two disputants."* Hume chooses to regard Demea as a type of the popular philosophizer of his own day and the pictures drawn of him in that rôle may safely be taken to be historically accurate. With consummate literary skill Hume lays special emphasis upon point after point of his self-complacent orthodoxy in which he is implicitly a complete Agnostic.

Cleanthes is a rationalist in the sense that he has confidence in the natural operations of reason and believes in its capacity of attaining truth, provided it confines itself to the sphere of ordinary experience and the interpretation of that experience. When he is confronted as he inevitably is in Hume's plan of the drama with the sceptical theory that all human knowledge is nescience, that 'our senses are fallacious' 'our understanding erroneous' 'our ideas full of absurdities and contradictions,' he reverts to the commonsense point of view that its refutation must be sought by an

* Orr. Hume's Influence on Theology and Philosophy, p. 201.

appeal to the procedure of ordinary life and practice. For such speculative reasoning undermines all positive scientific truths alike. It is sceptical of every received maxim whatever. Therefore Cleanthes brushes it aside in the present task of examining the grounds of a natural theology. For him any system is better than no system at all. At every stage of knowledge belief must be proportioned to the precise degree of evidence available and 'natural propensity' will always incline his assent towards an affirmation, when there are some reasonable grounds for making it, rather than towards a suspense of judgment recommended only by an abstract and general distrust in reason. Having thus grasped the nettle firmly he turns away from these preliminary questions with an obvious measure of confidence to consider the outside world. In its workmanship he finds evidence of design clear and distinct, not dependent upon or needing demonstration, because it is as immediately given as the most vivid impression of the senses. He considers it proof of the existence of a designing Mind which is a sufficient object to satisfy his religious wants. He has found a Deity and therefore he claims to be a Theist.* His natural desire is to predicate infinite benevolence

* Cleanthes' Theism is really a form of Deism.

and love of his God and to this end when he surveys the present order of things he would fain close his eyes and deny absolutely the misery and wickedness of man. By choice therefore he would if possible be a thorough going Optimist, but the facts are too hard for him, and in the end he modifies his conception of God's goodness in creation and falls back upon the pious hope that in other scenes the ills of the present may be rectified and the full fruition of human happiness and good may be attained. Throughout the book the speeches of Cleanthes are touched by a genuine emotion and enthusiasm for his cause, which apparently reflect the feelings with which Hume himself professes to regard him.

For constructing the character of Philo Hume, in the first place, has recourse to all the more sceptical elements, which characterise his analysis of the human mind in his earlier works. To him the natural reason is an object of distrust, it furnishes invincible arguments against itself and all its own conclusions. It has especial difficulties in theology because arguments there run wide of common life, get beyond the reach of our faculties and strive after conclusions which unlike those of political economy, ethics, and 'criticism' - the topics of Hume's later life, be it noted - cannot be verified

and tested by the senses and experience. A natural theology therefore is impossible. Moreover it is meaningless. For it claims to make intelligible in the divine Mind an ordering power, which, as far as our knowledge of human reason goes, is not known to be inherent in reason itself, but may be derived from external principles of orderly arrangement. Other natural powers too, that are altogether irrational are observed daily to issue in order, so that it smacks of partiality to ascribe the origin and maintenance of the universe to any one of them rather than to the others. To Philo it appears at times that the order in Nature is much more easily explicable by natural powers, than the design in Reason by rational powers and an orderly system therefore leads us to seek its cause in itself not in a designing mind. So far he is a 'Naturalist' and the question of a theology does not arise for him. Neither does that of a Theodicy. For in viewing the moral world he holds the balance evenly between regarding it as good or as evil. He leans to no extreme view either of itself or its causes. Morally they are indifferent, right and wrong are illusions; goodness or malice cannot be affirmed of either one or the other.

But this description of Philo's position is

quite insufficient to account for the conclusions to which he eventually comes, it may be, inconsistently. Throughout the last three sections of the argument he expressly makes repeated admissions, that there is evidence for a design, purpose, or intention, in Nature. "It strikes everywhere the most careless, the most "stupid thinker." "The suspense of judgment" which is the triumph of scepticism "is in this case impossible." "All the sciences almost lead us insensibly to acknowledge a first intelligent Author and their authority is often so much the greater as they do not directly profess that intention." "Here then the existence of a DEITY is plainly ascertained by reason." These and other sentences are not the strictly logical result of Philo's original position; in the Dialogues considered as a single book they plainly signify his partial acquiescence in the contentions of Cleanthes. They are not the results we should naturally expect to be propounded by Hume from the standpoint of the Treatise or the Enquiry: therefore in his general philosophy, if they are to be taken as the sincere expression (and I think they must be) of his last word in developing his own doctrine, they denote in Hume a slackening of his earlier scepticism - whether through the mellowing influence of time, or natural inclination, or

reasoned conviction, it is hard to say. In any case both Cleanthes and Philo converge upon this measure of positive assertion and agreement - of course from opposite sides - and to Philo it is the maximum he will allow in natural religion. With the popular faith of his own time Philo has no sympathy whatever, and in this respect too he has Cleanthes with him, both again representing the life long attitude of Hume to what he always terms 'false religion.'

From what has just been said, the Dialogues obviously afford a very pretty question of interpretation. The problem however is simplified in the end by Demea's abrupt disappearance from the stage, leaving the argument between Cleanthes and Philo. The initial alliance between Demea and Philo was one that could only endure, so long as the former remained blind to the consequences, which his friend would infer from their common principles. A theology which starts from a doctrine of human ignorance, adds to that the doctrine that the present order is one of unmitigated evil and illusion and then concludes by affirming the Deity to be absolutely transcendent, is reduced at once under Hume's canons of Truth to absolute scepticism. It is usually unaware of its own implications and Hume represents it so, therefore in any philosophical writing it would naturally be regarded

as an imperfect, and incomplete variation of a more reasoned theory, in Dialogue it can be developed into its final form with especial ease. This is exactly what happens in Hume's treatment of the subject: Demea is a mere puppet in the hands of the more systematic sceptic, and the issue of the whole argument may be said to lie between Philo and Cleanthes.

From this general statement there must always be excepted that section of the Dialogues which deals with the à priori proofs of God's Nature. Part IX. of the book is an interlude in the dramatic action, much shorter than the other parts and quite distinct from them in every way. Its omission would not detract in the least degree from the continuity of the argument, it is complete in itself and may properly be considered and disposed of separately. The à priori Proofs are put into Demea's mouth, and on this one point he receives no support whatever from Philo. He is left alone to defend what is even for him an obviously ill-grounded inconsistency. And in a very few clear and pithy sentences Hume makes Cleanthes and Philo give the whole substance of all the criticisms that have since been directed against the use of à priori reasoning in speculative theology.

Of the usefulness of such reasoning, could it be validly admitted, there is no real doubt and two points with regard to it are absolutely determined in

Hume's analysis. It proves the unity of God's Nature and the Infinity of His Attributes with a directness not to be found in any other topic. At the same time it requires a habit of thinking so special, that it neither commands general assent nor awakens strictly religious feeling. Accordingly there are advantages and conveniences in it for theology if the solidity of its argument be left out of question, nevertheless even on that supposition it is too much out of touch with ordinary life to be very convincing or to buttress up practical religion.

Hume leaves the dissection of the à priori arguments in the hands of Cleanthes. In the speech of Demea setting them forth two lines of proof are inextricably jumbled together, one from the contingency of existence, which impels the mind to trace back the series of causes to a First which is its own cause, and another expounding the implications of the Idea of a first cause who carries the Reason of his existence in himself, whose non-existence therefore is expressly contradictory. This conjoining of the arguments commonly distinguished as the cosmological and the ontological proofs of God's existence foreshadows the Kantian procedure, the ways of stating them being identical and the criticisms passed upon them having considerable analogy in the two philosophers of

Scotland and Germany.* Hume however, so far from introducing any particular preconstituted theory of the causal nexus into his argument, as Kant does, treats the question in the Dialogues without reference to his own analysis of causes and effects or to any other. On the path of all causal reasoning which abstracts from the particular and seeks to predicate a Cause for Existence (or its equivalent the World) he establishes one grand dilemma which bars that path effectually and finally. Two metaphysical presuppositions are possible to him who would prepare premises for the Cosmological Argument, and each is an abstraction from experience. Let that pass. On the first the world is conceived as an eternal succession of objects linked together temporally by a chain of relation, in which each is at once effect of a preceding cause and cause of a succeeding effect. To this Hume objects that it leaves no room for a prius and therefore it seems absurd to enquire for a primum. The regular process of tracing natural causes, which in the Dialogues at least is recognized as quite legitimate, is under this presupposition taken to have universal application while at the same time it is for theological purposes abandoned and the maxim, every effect must have a cause,

* Vide Caldecott and Mackintosh, *Theism*, p. 193 and p. 203. Also specially Kant's first and fourth Antinomies.

is in the end pronounced self contradictory.

On the other presupposition what Hume calls an arbitrary act of the mind unites all the particular parts of the temporal succession into a Whole, which is then said to want a cause. "Did I show you," says Cleanthes, "the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter "I should think it very unreasonable should you afterwards ask me what was the cause of the whole twenty? "That is sufficiently explained, in explaining the "cause of the parts." This impugns directly the logical possibility of conceiving the world as a unity. It is the same argument as occurs in the Treatise.* "Twenty men may be considered as an unite. The whole "globe of the earth, nay the whole universe, may be "considered as an unite. That term of unity is "merely a fictitious denomination." For Hume therefore this form of cosmological argument begins by putting forward most questionable premisses and in addition to this objection, which is urged from his own peculiar standpoint, he proceeds to attack its method of drawing conclusions from them. The object of the argument expressly is to establish the Infinity and Unity of the Deity. But these two qualities are in the first instance surreptitiously ascribed to the

* Works, I. p. 338. Part II. 2.

created world, which accordingly might perfectly well be the only self-existent Being. Whatever argument for the existence of God adopts as its method the ordinary category of cause, is bound to assume for the world the very qualities it wishes to prove for the Deity, and to Hume in his most agnostic mood all such arguments appear reducible to pure naturalism or materialism.

In the Dialogues therefore, the Cosmological argument which as Kant says professes 'to begin with experience and is not completely à priori,' is shown to derive all its nerve and force not from its supposed solid basis in a reference to the real world but from metaphysical presuppositions which have transformed that reference into abstractions, that seem to Hume altogether apart from experience and imaginary. He is not content, however, with merely detecting this sophisticated illusion in the argument but proceeds to give it a turn that is distinctly antitheistical. In endeavouring to link God and the world together as cause and effect, the mind wavers between two views of that relationship as it is evidenced in creation. Either the present order is equated mechanically to its cause, in which case, being the better known, it merits the more adoration in itself and can be so regarded as to exclude any

inference to God, or else it is arbitrarily taken to be contingent and insufficient in its existence to be real, and then Hume holds that this arbitrary judgment may as easily be passed upon God's Being as upon that of the world. In both respects Hume's trenchant criticism is most effective, and while it will still be possible to enquire whether the more refined analysis of the concept of cause in modern times has enabled theology to rehabilitate such argument, it is necessary here once more to emphasise the fact that Hume's treatment of it is in no way dependent upon the limitations either of his own outlook or of that of his time.

The remaining parts of Demea's argument make no pretence of appealing to our experience and are purely a priori. In very few words his reasoning runs, "We must 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." This process of speculation is dealt with in the most summary fashion by Cleanthes whose words so obviously express all that Hume has to say on the matter that they may be quoted in full. "Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing that

"is distinctly conceivable implies a contradiction. "Whatever we conceive as existent we can also conceive as non existent. There is no being therefore whose non existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no being whose existence is demonstrable. I propose this argument as entirely decisive and am willing to rest the whole controversy upon it."

The method therefore of such argument is rejected by Hume almost contemptuously: he is altogether out of sympathy with the very possibility of it. But he also brings his own theory of "necessity" to bear upon the idea of necessary existence as it is predicated of the Deity, his purpose being to prove how naturally it affords an inference directly opposite to the religious hypothesis. Mathematical necessity depends upon ideal relations and for Hume is more easily ascribed to the propositions of algebra (and arithmetic), where the mind deals with its own abstractions, than to those of geometry for which Hume could account only with great difficulty.* And "necessity" in Mathematics is so obviously independent of the question of the existence of objects, that the theological use of that idea to illustrate some occult

* Treatise, Part III., Sec. I.

quality in God involves an application of the term that is altogether new. Both Cleanthes and Philo take their stand upon the nature of Mathematical Necessity, which Kant in a parallel passage calls "this logical necessity the source of the greatest delusions." Cleanthes is content to point out that "necessity" is a term valid only in defining the relations of ideas: "we lie under a necessity of always conceiving twice two to be four." Existence is a term used only in dealing with 'matters of fact.' The words, therefore, necessary existence, have no meaning; or, which is the same thing, none that is "consistent." Philo goes on to point out the danger of introducing the idea of necessity at all into our cosmology where it may lead as easily to a naturalism of necessary laws as to a theism. In mathematics every theorem that is proved states a necessary property of the objects to which it applies, and therefore, however much regularity and order and beauty there may be in any of its problems, it is always possible to demonstrate that every appearance of design is in reality the work of blind necessity. It might easily be the case that, just as the most complex arithmetical series to a skilled calculator is an immediate deduction from the simple uninspiring rule that one and one make two, so the whole economy

of the universe, if we are to ask why it must be as it is and not otherwise, can be referred back to previous states which for natural science render it absolutely impossible that any other disposition than the present should ever have come to pass.

And because science has a perfect right to subject all its objects without exception to the power of thus deducing their necessity, it may with some appearance of justice convert this principle of its own method into a universally valid postulate. A mathematician who observes that the diagonal of a square or the circumference of a circle bear a fixed relation to the magnitude of the circle or the diameter respectively, and are at the same time incommensurable with these latter, considers himself justified in taking this relation to be a necessary one and sets about proving it without any further preliminaries. If as in the à priori argument this same idea of a necessary existence be introduced in a scientific view of the created world, Hume points out that no room whatever is left for a hypothesis of design. This hypothesis being all important for an empirical or natural theology, Hume rejects the ontological argument on every point; his explanation of its common acceptance simply is that 'a habit of thinking' appropriate in mathematics has been "transferred to subjects where it ought not to have place."

Such is Hume's criticism of the cosmological and ontological arguments as he conceived either them or the principles on which they rest. The subsequent history of philosophy may be searched in vain for any attempt to meet it fairly and squarely. It is the final and irrevocable judgment of empiricism upon à priori arguments in theology and even when his general principles or even when other of his conclusions have failed to commend themselves to a later age, it at least has never been formally appealed against. "Theism," says Professor Flint, "is not vitally interested in the fate of the so called à priori or "ontological arguments,"* and this remark well describes the resignation with which modern thought has viewed their disappearance.

Since Hume wrote his Dialogues, argument of an ontological type has been concerned with a question at once more comprehensive in its bearings and more definite in its formulation, namely the investigation of the fundamental relations of all thought and all existence. The primary and necessary principles of knowledge have to be reconciled at every point with the self existence of Reality, if knowledge is to be accepted as true and not illusory. This question

* Theism, p. 267.

includes the older enquiry as to the existence of a Deity corresponding to the ideals of Reason, and like it demands an answer from the analysis of the implications of thought itself not from anything that is given in sense or comprehended by understanding. It is more concerned however to spiritualise the universe as an object of knowledge than to cognise an individual or personal spirit in it. Hume's difficulties for theistic speculation are circumvented therefore by stating them on the grand scale as objections to the apprehension of the most simple matters of fact. When this is done, a dilemma is established between our believing the mind to have a natural credibility in virtue of its own essence and our affirming it dogmatically to be without relation to any real Being whatever. And so all the points touched upon by Hume receive one by one a solution, in which his distinction between "ideas" and facts, between "principles of union among ideas" and "natural relations" disappear. Thus for Herbart, causal connection reduces to a purely logical form, for Lotze it is the evidence directly given of a "supernatural sustaining power immanent in all existence and operative in all change," in the revealing activity of one Person to another, and so for these and all similar systems the whole of the theory of knowledge depends upon

ontological argument. The idea of God like other ultimate truths is intuitive; it is the work of "objective reason;" it is a presupposition of thought; or it is the unity of thought and being on which all individual thought and existence rest. There are many possible alternatives for such speculation when it takes upon itself to become theological but all are linked together through their common starting point in the endeavour to prove consciousness and its real content to be a harmonious and indivisible whole. Suppose now that this basis be granted and that it be found sufficiently trustworthy, then the argument to the existence of God does proceed upon the familiar lines of the old cosmological and ontological proofs and resembles them closely enough to pass for a serious attempt at reconstruction. It proves God's existence by invoking the necessities of human reason, it deduces His Personality from the needed completion of all our conceptions and it ascribes attributes to Him, which are not by any means to be verified in our passive experience of any known objects (the created World), but are implied in our outgoing self-realising activity. And once this stream of à priori reasoning is in full flood it were in Hume's own vivid phrase "to stop the ocean with a "bulrush" to urge the considerations which had sufficed

in the Dialogues for diverting its first course. Nevertheless whenever any serious attempt is made to expound or illustrate or defend the unity and harmony of the ideal with the real, the argument cannot but take upon itself a teleological form. It can easily be classified under this heading and probably such reasoning is invested with its peculiar charm for speculative thought solely through the considerations of design, in mind and external reality, which it undoubtedly contains.

In the Dialogues with the exception of the few sentences of part IX, which deals expressly with the à priori arguments, the treatment of Hume's subject is concerned entirely with an analysis of the teleological argument. The à priori proofs being ruled out, the whole book is dominated by Cleanthes' steady insistence upon this one foundation for his Theism. "By this argument à posteriori and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of a Deity and his similarity to human mind and intelligence,"* (392), accordingly the sole question is as to the possibility and accuracy of this proof. If, however, Cleanthes admits only one form of argument he represents it to be so wide as to be all-inclusive. In

* From this point references to the Dialogues will be given to the paging in Green and Grose directly.

different passages he appeals to "the whole world and "every part of it," "the image of mind reflected on "us from innumerable objects" "our immeasurable de- "sires of good" "the operations of reason" and in fact to all actual phenomena of experience, external and internal alike, as affording material for his hypothesis of design. To begin with, therefore, the scope of his proposed theme knows no limits.

Again an obvious consequence of the book falling into the literary form of dialogue is that the argument for a natural religion in it undergoes a process of gradual development and refinement in the course of the conversation. Simple and ill-defined conceptions are succeeded by others more complex and more accurate as the conversation proceeds each of the speakers contributing something to the final result. On Cleanthes alone lies the burden of maintaining the positive conclusion. The other two are on the negative side. If there is any continuity in the book, an impartial analysis ought not to be adversely affected by the progressive restatement, which naturally ensues, of the position of each. Cleanthes for example gives up a notable part of his original scheme when he abandons the possibility of tracing design in the moral world. Philo in turn by reason of the admissions he makes to him at the close of the argument

cannot be supposed to retain his scepticism unbroken. Each of the two is in many different points corrected by the other.

The drama opens with a very complete statement of the purely sceptical theory of human knowledge from Philo and Demea. Our natural reason is subject to "uncertainty and endless contrarieties" not only in science but "even in subjects of common life and "practice." (381). The science of quantity alone has any pretence of certainty, and, even in it, error and contradictions are more abundant than truth. These are the old commonplaces of Hume in the Treatise when he takes that intense view of reason to which he is impelled as a philosopher and in opposition to it Cleanthes reminds him of the sentiments of his spleen and indolence which he had there confessed to govern his life as a man; how "it is impossible for "him to persevere in this total scepticism or make it "appear in his conduct for a few hours": the bent of his mind relaxes and his conduct is so obviously subject to a necessity to believe that his scepticism appears to others pretended and insincere.

Here then in the Dialogues the two opposing elements in which Hume's theory of knowledge had ended, the enthusiasm of abstract speculative negation and the instinctive determination to live and act by

ordinary maxims are restated exactly - almost in the same language - as in the last section of the Treatise on the Understanding. There Hume in his single person makes no choice, and indeed prides himself upon the fact that because it is a choice 'betwixt a false reason and none at all' he can regard it with indifference. But here and now the choice is made definitely by Philo, the sceptic, himself, and the balance on which judgment formerly was suspended inclines ever so little - to the side of belief "in common life." It is necessary to note exactly how much he will admit because it is through the very first chink in the sceptical armour, so perfect before, that Cleanthes pushes home his thrusts. The words of his present confession are "To whatever length anyone may push his speculative principles of scepticism, he must "act, I own, and live and converse; and for this "conduct he is not obliged to give any other reason, "than the absolute necessity he lies under of so doing." (384) "The sceptical reasonings" are "so refined and "subtile that they are not able to counterpoise the "more solid and more natural arguments, derived from "the senses and experience." Philo therefore lays aside the pretence of absolute scepticism for practical life and conduct, and also, what is more important, for his consideration of the sciences commonly called

'natural'. "So long as we confine our speculations to trade or morals or politics or criticism, we make "appeals, every moment, to commonsense and experience, "which strengthen our philosophical conclusions and "remove (at least, in part) the suspicion, which we "so justly entertain with regard to every reasoning, "that is very subtle and refined." And a few pages later, after Cleanthes has clinched this concession, he refers more boldly still to "those suggestions of "the senses and common understanding, by which the "most determined sceptic must allow himself to be "governed." (389) One cannot help feeling that Hume is here allowing that very ground for an answer to himself which was almost simultaneously being occupied by Reid for his Philosophy of Common Sense.

It is however unnecessary to ask how far this position differs from the doctrine of the Treatise, because it appears that Philo having admitted this much positively in the Dialogues is immediately carried one step further. For a single moment he excludes theology from the favour yielded to other sciences. In theological reasonings we have not the advantage of an appeal to sense and experience. "We know not how far we ought to trust our vulgar "methods of reasoning in such a subject; since even "in common life and in that province which is peculiarly

appropriated to them, we cannot account for them and "are entirely guided by a kind of instinct or necessity "in employing them."

Cleanthes at once questions the validity of this distinction. For him a "natural religion" is bound to put itself strictly into line with all natural sciences whatever. "In vain would the sceptic "make a distinction between science and common life, "or between one science and another. The arguments "employed in all, if just, are of a similar nature, "and contain the same force and evidence. Or if "there be any difference among them, the advantage "lies entirely on the side of theology and natural "religion."

He divides the various systems of scepticism that seem possible to him into three classes. One is fatal to "all knowledge" and not to religion specially. It is absolute agnosticism which discusses no evidence in any particular case but dismisses everything as uncertain or insoluble. Without any breach of courtesy to his companions he can liken this way of thinking to the brutal and ignorant prejudice which the vulgar entertain to everything they do not easily understand. The most generally accepted results in science depend upon elaborate trains of minute reasoning and yet because they are so abstruse,

they are not one whit less securely established than the plainest experimental deduction. And for his own argument he promises by anticipation that it will be of the simplest and most obvious kind. If "the general presumption against human reason" be made a plea against natural religion, there is neither need nor opportunity to proceed further; but this is the very presumption which Philo has put away from himself and therefore the only possible method for "the most refined and philosophical sceptics" is to consider each particular evidence "apart and proportion their assent to the particular degree of evidence which occurs." To the general question of the bare credibility of our knowing faculties Cleanthes has his own answer. If that be allowed to arise a problem is set of which he says, "I have not capacity for so great an undertaking: I have not leisure for it: I perceive it to be superfluous." Superfluous it certainly was in the discussion between himself and Philo, if the latter was willing to abide by the statements he had already made.

Besides this form of total unbelief Cleanthes in considering the possibilities of scepticism makes a distinction between two other forms of it very aptly described by Philo as "religious", and "irreligious" or as the modern phrase is 'antireligious' scepticism.

The first, which exalts the certainty of Theology and distrusts the common sciences is the most objectionable to Hume. It lends itself easily to priestcraft which he held in steady abhorrence and so far as it is the motive of Demea's contentions in the Dialogues it issues in irrational obscurantism and receives the full force of Hume's satire. Philo seems up the verdict for Cleanthes in one sentence, "If we distrust human reason, we have now no other principle to lead us into religion."

There now remains the third form, namely that of "irreligious" scepticism which may depend upon the most varied grounds, but must at least give its reasons when called for. To it Philo declares himself to adhere and he states the considerations which determine him to it as plainly as possible. "In reality Cleanthes there is no need to have recourse to that affected scepticism so displeasing to you in order to come at this determination. 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." (391) With this acknowledgment the preliminaries may be considered settled by mutual consent, and the ground is cleared between the two principal disputants. The question of the natural

fallibility of human reason is waived and remains so even when at various points later Philo indicates implicitly the possibility of reviving it. What remains to be argued is whether Experience, the sole fountain of truth, yields any evidence whatever apposite to the theological inference, and the question if such evidence can be legitimately converted into proof.

For a starting point in his construction of a teleological view of the world Cleanthes adopts one of the popular deistical conceptions of the eighteenth century. The universe is "nothing but one great "machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser "machines, which again admit of subdivisions" apparently to an unlimited degree. This familiar figure of speech is not intended to express more than the fact of ubiquitous order, and because of its common use in contemporary theological essays, both Cleanthes and Philo set themselves to the task of stating the argument depending upon it before the discussion begins. Each gives a short summary and each agrees that the other has not done injustice to its ordinary statement, Philo saying (394) "I must allow that he (Cleanthes) "has fairly represented that argument" while Cleanthes assents (395) that Philo "has made a fair representation "of it." We can therefore draw upon the speeches of both for a formal analysis of its successive steps.

The fact of order in the world is admitted; but this is 'not of itself, any proof of design.' We can only say that as it occurs throughout all nature, order or adaptation or adjustment resembles the productions of human contrivance. Only experience can inform us at all of the causes of such order; and as we find by experience that the plan of any work of human art, a watch, a ship, a house, is first formed in the mind, so we conclude that without this preparation such things would for ever remain uncreated and unknown. Therefore by Analogy we conclude that the original principle of the universe lies in a designing mind. The causes in each case must be of the same kind only proportioned each to its several effect.* The whole argument undergoes considerable development in Hume's hands and obviously it is stated only as a convenient and easily recognised scheme upon which he can graft his own criticisms. In particular the questions of the nature of 'analogy' and of the 'proportion' it involves are

* This representation of analogy as involving 'a proportion' is borrowed from Butler. Kant also, speaking of the physico-theological argument in the Critique, says "We infer from the order and design visible in the universe as a disposition of a thoroughly contingent character the existence of a cause proportioned thereto." In a note to the Prolegomena (§ 58 dealing directly with the Dialogues) analogy is treated in a formal illustration, "As the welfare of children (=a) is to the love of parents (=b) so is the welfare of men (=c) to the unknown in God (=x) which we call love.

left open and admit discussion at once.

The unavoidable uncertainty of analogy in every science is an immediate objection to its use. No stronger evidence than perfect similarity in two cases of the same nature is 'ever desired or sought after,' but wherever there is difference and alteration analogy is weakened and its conclusions do not command confidence in the same degree. It demonstrates only probabilities and therefore it is essentially a method of deduction to be entered upon with the slow and deliberate step of philosophy and not in uncritical haste. Philo questions its validity in the present case for three distinct reasons stated briefly in Part II of the Dialogues. In the first place there is no proof offered of the similarity between the universe and the productions of human contrivance, as there ought to be in face of apparent dissimilitude. In the second place other natural powers than reason are observed at work in the mechanism of the universe and therefore, unless something determines us in favour of one particular principle, we could not pretend to draw an analogy from the operations of any natural power in its own peculiar sphere or infer it to be the First Cause of all. And lastly our experience extends only to a small part of the universe and to a very short period of its existence, the inference

sought to be drawn in theology is one as to the cause of the Whole from the beginning of all time.

The second objection, very briefly stated here, contains the nerve of all Philo's argument in Parts IV-VIII and if its consideration be deferred until we treat of them, we only follow Hume's own plan. The last objection receives its answer at once; for as it is worded in the Dialogues Hume describes it quite justly to be brought forward "somewhat between jest and earnest."

Philo has reached the point of saying that for his opponent "it were requisite that we had experience of the origin of worlds; it is not sufficient, surely, that we have seen ships and cities arise from human contrivance" and demanding how the theistic inference can be confirmed by repetition of instances and experiment. But the conditions imposed by this demand are obviously incapable of fulfilment; they put an impossible meaning upon the word experience and Cleanthes points this out perfectly clearly in reply, "To prove by experience the origin of the world is not more contrary to common speech than to prove the motion of the earth from the same principle." Our experience is limited in space, and in time, and in extent, we cannot better it but this fact alone cannot invalidate our right to infer a meaning in

what we do know.

Philo, like Hume's imaginary opponent in the Essay on Providence and a Future State, has insisted that the singular and unparalleled nature of the act of creation bars all possibility of drawing any analogy between it and other events and Hume in the first person had already met the difficulty by a direct negative, "In a word, I much doubt whether it be possible for a cause to be known only by its effect, or to be of so singular and particular a nature as to have no parallel and no similarity with any other cause or object, that has ever fallen under our observation." And accordingly when stripped of the impossible demand for infinite experience the third objection of Philo to the analogical argument returns upon the first and becomes a call for further explanation of the alleged similarity between human productive activity as we observe it and the generation of an orderly universe. The "reasonings of too nice and delicate a nature" upon which Hume had declined to enter in the Enquiry are forced upon him now when the whole question is being treated expressly.

The method which Cleanthes adopts for overcoming his opponent's first objection is to minimise it. "It is by no means necessary that Theists should prove the similarity of the works of Nature to those of Art; because this similarity is self-evident and undeniable."

The proof, which Philo asks for, is not one that can be reduced to the forms of logic; the first step towards the inference of design must be intuitive. The possibility of arguments of this logically irregular nature is proved says Cleanthes by their universal and irresistible influence. If in the simplest inference from perception, for example, if when we infer from hearing a speech the fact that there was a speaker expressing his meaning in what we hear, it then be objected that our inference cannot be expressed in accordance with the principles of logic and must therefore be rejected, nothing remains but that form of absolute scepticism which both have already agreed to abjure. All conclusions concerning fact are founded upon experience and accordingly the possible validity of intuitive deductions from it, such as are every day drawn in common life, must be admitted by all who take up the positions held by the two leaders in the Dialogues. Self evident intuition always accompanies experience and Cleanthes holds that his opponent's demand for proof of the similarity between creation and a work of human art implies a misapprehension of the essential nature of the only possible assurance on that point.

He gives two examples of immediate deductions which resemble the theistic inference. A voice being

heard, which is not mere sound, but is articulate with meaning and instruction, is rational, wise, coherent, we at once conclude that it proceeds from reason and intelligence and in our conclusion it is a matter of indifference whether the sound be extraordinarily loud and widespread or whether it be of the commonest kind. Again we read a book and find it conveys a meaning and intention we conclude that it sprang from design. Let it be supposed that books could be propagated by natural generation and descent as plants and animals are; even then our reading still justifies our conclusion. Nature is like a library of books addressed to our minds in a universal language. "When it reasons and discourses; when it expostulates argues and enforces its views and topics; when it applies sometimes to the pure intellect, sometimes to the affections; when it collects disposes and adorns every consideration suited to the subject: could you persist in asserting that all this at the bottom had really no meaning and that the first formation of this volume in the loins of its original parent proceeded not from thought and design?" (402) To demand "proof" of the similarity of the meaning of Nature to the meaning of language is to demand the impossible. The self evident is indemonstrable. "Consider, anatomize the eye" says Cleanthes: "survey its structure and contrivance; and

"tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a con-
"triver does not immediately flow in upon you with a
"force like that of sensation." And whatever object
we set before ourselves teleologically, it is the same
idea with the same force that it suggests. The
crucial difficulty for Cleanthes is just the one to
which this ultimate position is a complete answer in
the Dialogues. So far the general current of the con-
versation, as the present writer conceives it, has
been concerned with the important question of the cor-
rect Method in teleological argument. And Hume in his
treatment of the old well worn demonstration of God's
existence from the mechanism of the universe, repre-
sents one at least of the three disputants to have pene-
trated to the fundamental point on which it all depends.
An immediate self evident intuition with the same force
as sensation cannot be demonstrated by the principles
of logic and Cleanthes seems to have grasped to the
full all the bearings of his position just as they were
afterwards grasped, in treating of the theory of know-
ledge generally, by those who replied to Hume. The
power of conviction where evidence of this kind is ad-
duced is so great that logic is required not to dis-
pute it but to account for it or admit it as best it
can. The only question applicable to such evidence
as Cleanthes pins his faith to is that of its occurrence

or non-occurrence in consciousness, and if we carry our survey of the development of the argument to the close of the whole book we shall find that this particular question is always answered in an affirmative way. Cleanthes points out repeatedly that the hypothesis of design cannot be got rid of at any turn and in the end Philo adopts it himself for his own conclusions. The conclusion to design is exceedingly plain and simple according to Cleanthes, it may only give foundation for a very slight fabric of superadded truth, but again even on that supposition both disputants declare themselves satisfied of its sufficiency.

At the point in the Dialogues where this position is reached (in the end of Part III) Philo is represented "as a little embarrassed and confounded" and makes no reply to Cleanthes' final statement of his meaning, the questions which intervene between it and the resumption in the concluding Part of the thread of argument, here dropped deal, with other issues. In the letter to Sir Gilbert Elliott already quoted, Hume himself divides the Dialogues at this point and advises his friend that he need go no farther in order to apprehend his true meaning.

We have already seen that it is Demea who diverts the continuity of the argument at another point by

introducing as a side issue the discussion on the a priori proofs of God's Being; so also it is he who gives the opening later on to the consideration of the moral argument. And at the present juncture it was Demea again who "broke in upon the discourse" and saved Philo's countenance. The interruption which is put into his mouth revives Philo's second objection to the design argument exactly as it had already been expressed by him and to the exposition of it the sceptic naturally turns the whole course of the debate but with Demea's disappearance at the close of Part XI he joins hands again with Cleanthes upon the conclusions reached thus early in the book. If then we are to interpret the Dialogues as expressing any settled opinions at all of the author we must infer that he considered the existence of design in Nature to be established either certainly or, at least, sufficiently by the appeal to what is self-evident.

So far then the author's procedure has been directed simply to prove that design is traced in nature by one of the simplest and most direct inferences of which the human mind is capable. However no sooner has Cleanthes gained this first and most essential point than the difficulties which follow it are brought up with all the force of the author's best style. They are many and very diverse and some of them are so evidently true to Hume's general attitude

on common subjects, they are treated at such length and with so much dialectical skill, that they do undoubtedly constitute a formidable attack from him upon the whole design argument and thus far justify the view ordinarily taken that the Dialogues are directly anti-theistical in their tendency. Still it is only by selecting the finest and most subtle doubts which the hypothesis of design suggests to Philo, by ignoring any positive truths that both he and Cleanthes profess to accept about creating Intelligence and by overlooking altogether the argument which leads up to them, that most of the references to the book in the history of philosophy interpret it in the purely sceptical sense. An impartial verdict ought to hold both the positive affirmations, at least so far as they seem agreed upon, and the negative criticisms together for a proper estimate of this contribution of Hume to the philosophy of theology.

For the teleological argument as Hume conceived it really involves two distinct movements of thought. The first is the argument to, or towards, Design; which is meant to prove no more than that design and a designing Intelligence of some sort must exist in the universe. The second is the argument from Design; which follows the first and depends upon it; which seeks to define further the conception of designing

Intelligence by help of its works and in particular proceeds to enquire whether or not such Intelligence can legitimately have predicated of it such attributes as personality and unity, perfection and infinity, or self-existence and omnipotence. The first movement may be exceedingly simple, the second always is exceedingly involved. That Hume should have distinguished the two and approved of the first while treating the second in a thoroughly sceptical manner does not seem to have occurred even as a possibility either to friendly or unfriendly critics.

Accordingly no sooner has Cleanthes expounded what he calls his "hypothesis of design" than Demea enquires whether it may not "render us presumptuous by "making us imagine we comprehend the Deity and have "some adequate idea of his nature and attributes?" He restates Hume's own doctrine of the human mind just as Philo had done in the, as yet undiscussed, objection to the design argument which we have already noticed. The human mind is nothing more than a succession of ideas united in one subject yet distinct, arranged for one moment yet constantly fleeting away, if Hume can explain it at all it is the product of natural forces. In its beginning it is observed daily to originate in generation and birth, in its course the machinery of thought is altered and even controlled by

external causes and accidental impressions, all that we know of its essence is that it seems dependent and not original or self supporting. If then Cleanthes maintains that there is evidence of the existence of a designing intelligence, both Demea and Philo are quite entitled on Hume's principles to ask how we can possibly suppose this divine Mind of his to be "the model of the universe". (396 and 404) Cleanthes is quite willing to be tied down to affirming the similarity between the divine mind and the human and says so with no uncertain voice. The creating Intelligence is "like the human" and "the liker the better;" twice he declares "I know no other" (412) and courageously taking up this position with all the difficulties attaching to it he allows the epithet of Anthropomorphism to be applied to his doctrine with indifference or even with his express approval. He holds fast to his "first inferences" as Philo terms them later (420) and without reservation declares always for the positive consequences of the resemblance of the Divine to the Human even to the length of affirming of God weaknesses and imperfections and limitation by necessity such as constantly are experienced in man.

Philo on the other hand has no difficult task on the negative side in showing "the inconveniences of that Anthropomorphism" which his opponent has

embraced. It is here that the destructive criticism of the Dialogues is really to be found and here that it is based upon Hume's own settled opinions. It was Kant's accurate and most just verdict upon the book * that "all the arguments in it dangerous to theism "centre round this one point of anthropomorphism" and yet the danger from Philo is not so much to Cleanthes' method of proof as to the meaning to be read into the conclusion. In the winding up of the argument, where Philo acknowledges that the "existence of a "Deity is plainly ascertained by reason" he states quite plainly how much scope he will finally allow to the argument from Design. "If we are not contented "with calling the first and supreme cause a GOD or "DEITY but desire to vary the expression; what can we "call him but MIND or THOUGHT, to which he is justly "supposed to bear a considerable resemblance." (457) This clearly is to admit the bare elements of his opponent's second contention, that the designing Intelligence is like in kind to the human mind, and Philo goes on to define the question between them as one of the degree of resemblance. This presents itself to him conveniently as a species of verbal controversy "which from the very nature of language and of human "ideas is involved in perpetual ambiguity and can

* Prolegomena § 57

"never, by any precaution or any definitions be able
 "to reach a reasonable certainty or precision." *

It is generally admitted that in the history of the teleological argument, the greatest error of its exponents has been their uncritical tendency to press the anthropomorphic analogy to unreasonable lengths, and in this respect their license requires always to be curtailed. When Philo in the Dialogues undertakes this task, it is done thoroughly enough, the argument is confined within limits narrower than those it commonly is inflated to fill, but that process of compression is by no means one of annihilation, although by entering upon a question of degree as "incurably ambiguous" as those referred to by Hume any one may easily persuade himself of the contrary. It is just in conceiving the Deity after the likeness of man that the strength of the teleological argument lies and its weakness. For its proper treatment it is essential that both sides should be accurately displayed and in this respect the Dialogues seem to afford an excellent example of systematic analysis.

The first inconvenience of the anthropomorphic explanation of order in the universe is that it need not be taken to be final or complete. Human reason itself

* For this doctrine in a modern form cf., Bradley, Appearance and Reality p. 533. "It is better to affirm personality than to call the Absolute impersonal. But neither mistake should be necessary.".....

is held by Philo not to be self dependent; we may not know or be able to explain the causes, why its ideas arrange themselves in order to form plans towards its ends, but we have no more right to attribute that power of arranging to a rational faculty inherent in mind than we have to attribute order to an orderly faculty in other natural powers. Philo therefore having no theory of reason as a real entity independent of the ideas passions and sensations, which "succeed each other" in it, has no theory to account for the falling into order of "the different ideas which compose the reason of the Supreme Being." (409). Their order or arrangement require and demand an explanation just as much as the order in the visible world. "The first step we take leads us on for ever. When you go one step beyond the mundane system, you only excite an inquisitive humour which it is impossible ever to satisfy." To him Cleanthes' explanation of the form of the world by a Divine Intelligence appears only "to shove off the difficulty" for a moment and to account for what we observe by means of a cause itself unaccountable. It sets up an infinite series of deductions in which the same thing always remains unexplained. "If the material world rests upon a similar ideal world, this ideal world must rest upon some other and so on without end."

Cleanthes however refuses to be drawn into this discussion of the possibility of an infinite tracing out of the causes of design. "Even in common life, "if I assign a cause for any event; is it any objection that I cannot assign the cause of that cause "and answer every new question which may incessantly "be started?" (410). His first step is not the beginning of an endless journey from hypothesis to hypothesis "entirely in the air," as he terms such procedure in another connection (441), it is an immediate inference to design and a designing Mind and with an obvious hit at his opponent he asks what philosophers could possibly insist upon demanding the cause of every cause, "philosophers who confess ultimate causes to be totally unknown." Cleanthes does not attempt to give a theory of reason in opposition to Philo's,-no doubt the author felt the impossibility of representing him in that rôle,-he only denies that there is any need for him to do so. 'You ask me the cause of my intelligent cause.' "I "know not; I care not; that concerns not me. I "have found a Deity and here I stop my enquiry. Let "those go further who are wiser or more enterprising."

Philo therefore quits this ground of objection in the Dialogues and a little later in the course of his own attempt to give a naturalistic theory of

order when he is asked by Demea to offer some ultimate explanation of the vegetative principle, which he prefers to the intelligent cause of all (424), he explicitly refers to the nature of the agreement reached by Cleanthes and himself. For Cleanthes it was considered sufficient if the first step is supported by experience. He himself takes the same ground, and maintains that it is undeniable that Vegetation and Generation as well as Reason are experienced to be principles of order in nature. "If I rest my system of cosmogony on the former preferably to the latter, 'tis at my choice. The matter seems entirely arbitrary. And when Cleanthes asks me" (which of course he has not done) "the cause of my great vegetative or generative faculty, I am equally entitled to ask him the cause of his great reasoning principle. These questions we have agreed to forbear on both sides; and it is chiefly his interest on the present occasion to stick to this agreement." The dispute between pure naturalism and Theism is not to be decided against either by the respective difficulties of explaining the essential operations and internal structure of natural forces on the one hand or of Reason on the other. In both cases there is the same inconvenience and while Philo is left to say that "an ideal system arranged of itself

"without a precedent design, is not a whit more explicable than a material one," the dispute is not made one whit clearer by this particular method of comparing their merits.

The battle on this point then is left drawn and a lasting truce called by mutual consent. But with the suggestion of the possibility of a naturalistic derivation of reason the way is open for a pure Naturalism to claim an equal right with the most refined spiritual interpretation of the world and the discussion in the Dialogues gradually veers round to a balancing of these two alternatives.

The argument from design is first of all considerably reduced in its weight by the losses, which its conception of the Deity undergoes in direct consequence of its anthropomorphic method of conceiving him. Infinity, perfection, unity and omnipotence, in fact all the transcendent attributes usually connected with the idea of God are implicitly denied in affirming his likeness to man, and in fact no part of the design argument is directed to prove them. It proceeds upon the strictly empirical method and therefore is doomed from the first to fall short of attributes which apply to nothing we experience in observing real things. No combination of the evidences of design can ever prove the "unity" of the Designer,

that very term "unity" being a 'fictitious denomination' and no addition of them can reach to His infinity. To all Philo's suppositions of possible ways of conceiving the Deity or deities without these attributes, Cleanthes accordingly has no answer, save to point out that none of them "get rid of the hypothesis of design." He never abuses his argument by pretending that it proves more than it can reach, indeed he has his own objections to using the word infinite which savours more of panegyric than of philosophy and should be replaced by more accurate and more moderate expressions, (444), in which our knowledge of God approximates to the comprehension of His perfection representing His wisdom and power as greater than any other that we know, without proceeding to define them as infinitely great.* The argument from design reaches a conception of God that may be lofty yet it can never attain to the conception of an Infinite; it defines His qualities by similarity with finite things, and that being its professed aim, it accepts cheerfully those inconveniences which arise from its not attaining a fuller result than it actually seeks after. At this stage of the argument[†] Philo

* An empirical philosophy must always take the idea of infinity to be reached by way of approximation, a method which derives confirmation from its use in Euclidean geometry.

† Part VI.

touches upon the alternative of having recourse to a Pantheism not so much as a possibility for himself as for his opponent. He expresses himself unwilling to defend any particular system of this nature, yet because it is "at least a theory that we must, sooner or later, have recourse to whatever system we embrace" it cannot be overlooked. The classical notion of the Soul of the world is introduced because it has the apparent advantage of representing the form and order of the universe to be coeval and conterminous with the matter. It has therefore many points of kinship with Cleanthes' teleological Theism and is indeed as Philo remarks "a new species of Anthropomorphism." It excels just in emphasising the inherent nature of the eternal principles of order in the world and in treating their connection with it organically rather than mechanically.

But Hume does not discuss the possibilities of a spiritual Pan-theism at any length, he makes Philo accept the suggestion of Cleanthes that "the world seems to bear a stronger resemblance to a vegetable than to an animal" and because it is to the former a matter of indifference whether we hold the original inherent principle of order to be in thought or in matter, he abandons at once the only part which in the doctrine of a World Soul attributes Reason to it. A

spiritual Pan-theism always suggests itself as an easy variation upon Theism and we may shrewdly suspect it was introduced in the Dialogues only as a temporary suggestion in order to lead up to Pan-materialism.

Hitherto Philo has confined himself to pointing out "the inconveniences"* of his friend's Anthropomorphism but now in expounding a purely naturalistic or materialistic hypothesis of order he recognises that his attack is no longer upon 'the consequences' of the design argument but upon 'the first inferences' from which it all depends. The real enemy of Theism is Naturalism. Both start from the same base in the observed fact of the presence of order in the world, but from this common point of agreement they derive principles that are altogether irreconcilable. For one party the first step is to prove that order implies design, for the other it is to point out that order is derived from purely irrational principles, and the divergence which commences with the first step leads on to complete opposition. The two views cannot possibly be combined, one must be allowed and the other denied; and yet the careful reader of the Dialogues will not find them brought forward with the aim of having their respective merits decided. Naturalism is not a system to which Philo is at all

* pp. 407, 411.

inclined to commit himself unreservedly, and his method of discussing it is to point out, how very similar its analogies and inferences are to those of Theism and how little argument the adherents of one theory can bring against the other without destroying the validity of their own reasonings. In his conclusions on this point his inconsistency is more plainly marked than elsewhere in the whole book for while in holding the balance even between Naturalism and Theism, he maintains that "a total suspense of judgment is here our only reasonable resource" (430) and prides himself on having no fixed station or abiding city to defend; his judgment in the end is given without further trial, in favour of one side.

The parallel which Philo draws between methods and grounds of the two opposing schemes is most complete. We have experience, not only of Reason as a principle of order in the world, but of other principles such as Instinct, Generation, Vegetation, and perhaps a hundred more which undoubtedly exist, and also do certainly have some degree of a conserving and developing power, such as is required to maintain the great fabric of the whole. The universe resembles a machine: but it also resembles countless objects which are independent of human agency, a spider's web spun by instinct, a vegetable sprouting up from its seed, an

animal developing out of an egg. The resemblances in each case are striking, all of them have commended themselves to the judgment of mankind in history, who then shall decide between them? None of the analogies drawn from them pretend to be final but stop short of defining the ultimate causes of the world. Reason, instinct, vegetation, even Nature are all alike inexplicable and no one principle can justly claim a preference to the others.

Philo therefore claims the right to be indifferent in choosing whether he will ascribe priority to thought or to matter. Experience can hardly decide the question, abstract Reason is not to be trusted because it is not an impartial judge; no possible touchstone can be brought to bear upon what we observe and therefore we ought to ban all speculation, theistic and naturalistic alike.

This negative conclusion of itself sets limits to pure naturalism but Hume proceeds to show how cautiously, even in the most speculative mood, any advocate of naturalism must approach his questions and how many dangers beset his most familiar paths. Philo undertakes for a moment to expound that evolutionary theory of order, on which modern naturalism is most commonly based, one with which in every age naturalism has been so closely connected as even to

be wholly identified with it. It is attempted to ascribe all the multiplicity and adjustment now observable in the world to an origin in the simplest elements possible and while Philo allows only "a faint appearance of probability" to such a theory, he anticipates its most systematic statement so completely as to contain probably all the essential points in it.

Order is to be evolved out of disorder by blind unreasoning force and if this can be done the grounds of the Theistic inference from design disappear altogether and only a naturalism or a materialism remains.

Only three elements are demanded for his new hypothesis of 'cosmogony'; matter, motion, and eternity in time. The first two, all sciences hold to be constant in their quantity; we turn to experience and "there is not probably, at present, in the whole universe, one particle of matter at absolute rest." An infinite duration in time is perhaps only a supposition but it is a possible one. We turn again to experience and find that there actually is a system, an order, 'an oeconomy of things by which matter can preserve that perpetual agitation which seems essential to it and yet maintain a constancy in the forms which it produces.'

With the possibility of infinite transpositions all orders are possible, unstable positions pass away and decay; total or partial chaos ensues; 'till finite, 'though innumerable revolutions produce at last some 'forms, whose parts and organs are so adjusted as to 'support the forms amidst a continued succession of 'matter;' the present world therefore can be conceived as a stage in the history of matter seeking form and 'by its very nature that order, when once 'established, supports itself for many ages, if not 'to eternity.' Possibility and actuality therefore agree, the conclusion is simple. 'Wherever matter 'is so poised, arranged and adjusted, as to continue 'in perpetual motion and yet preserve a constancy in 'the forms, its situation must of necessity have all 'the same appearance of art and contrivance which we 'observe.' If we turn from the inorganic to the organic in Nature Hume has no theory such as later was used to account for the development of species but Philo shadows forth that very idea, which lies at the root of it, of order being 'requisite for the 'subsistence' of the individual. "It is in vain to "insist upon the uses of the parts in animals or "vegetables and their curious adjustment to each "other. I would fain know, how an animal could sub- "sist unless its parts were so adjusted? Do we not "find that it immediately perishes whenever this

"adjustment ceases and that its matter corrupting
"tries some new form?"

On this line of argument the theory of the evolution of order in the universe by natural laws of self development must inevitably dispense with a reference to design and probably would do so altogether in modern times were it not the case that modern teleology has widened her outlook upon creation, is willing to walk in imagination as far backward along the course of the world's development as the evolutionist is able to lead her, but only demands that he shall not minimize the nature of the primitive elements nor ignore the fact that they really involve all the multiplicity of adjustment in themselves as truly as their latest combinations do. But whatever may be the true way of reconciling the evolutionary and naturalistic explanation of order with the inference to design, the Dialogues indicate one possible reply to the evolutionary theory by which the need for a reconciliation may be avoided altogether. And because the hypothesis of evolution in the Dialogues is admittedly 'incomplete and imperfect' being a side issue 'suggested on a sudden in the course of the argument', we have only to state Hume's partial reply to it - a reply which is perfectly valid in its own place after a century and a half of steady advance in speculation.

The proposition that everything which exists must be subject to order is not convertible directly into this other, that the only purpose of order is to conserve existence. The first is obviously within experience, the second would require confirmation from an analysis of each individual instance of order and could be disproved by one single case in which order is not an indispensable condition of bare life. These, says Hume, though in general very frugal in Nature, 'are far from being rare.' He mentions only the physical conveniences and advantages which men possess but one might add all the aesthetic and intellectual pleasures so profitable, so necessary for the perfection of man's nature and then ask his question: without all these "would human society and the human kind have been immediately extinguished?" And one proved instance of order where existence is not made more secure but rather more pleasurable and more complete by it "is a sufficient proof of design and of a benevolent design which gave rise to the order and arrangement of the universe." But the whole tenour of the evolutionary hypothesis is that all order without exception arises from the natural predisposition of all species that are generative towards the securing of life. Cleanthes does not question that such a power does operate in the world, he only denies that it is sufficient to

account for all of the innumerable forms that are made known to us in experience, and Philo allows his contention without hesitation.

With this partial vindication of design against pure naturalism Hume leaves the question between them apparently undecided. It is not further argued; indeed Philo's view of it is that no amount of argument can ever completely prove the one or completely discredit the other. If it comes to a question of probability, of balancing the reasons for either side, if it is possible in his own phrase to "believe that the arguments on which a theory of design is established exceed the objections, which lie against it," if in fact a definite conclusion is demanded for common life, as conclusions are demanded every moment on questions less lofty than theology, then Philo's judgment is not suspended but becomes a "plain philosophical assent." But that the assent should be so plainly given from the Sceptic's side as it is in the Dialogues, is in itself proof of a distinct positive advance on the speculations of Hume's early years.

There is however one point on which the Dialogues yield only a negative result, and strangely enough it is the very argument from the idea of morality which Kant also excepted from the remainder of his critique of theology, treating it favourably and

endeavouring to give it a deeper setting among the necessary postulates of Reason. Hume recognizes quite fully the need for a conception of God which will harmonize with our highest ethical standards. Cleanthes is made to say expressly, "To what purpose "establish the natural attributes of the Deity while "the moral are still doubtful and uncertain?" In his desire to secure this end he would willingly embrace the only method of supporting divine benevolence which he can conceive possible, namely, "to deny absolutely the misery and wickedness of men." But optimism is not a cloak that will fit Hume as it did Leibnitz. The world never presents itself to him at any time as a scene in which the good preponderates over the evil - even in the least degree - much less is it purely and unmixedly good. It is not a picture in which unpleasant shadows and jarring contrasts are used only in order to accentuate the brightness and harmony of the main subject so that the whole work "is one of beauty, it is rather an unfinished daub, parts of which might possibly be praised in isolation, but the greater proportion of its surface ought to be covered up. And therefore Cleanthes abandons all claim of moral perfection for God; He is 'regulated by wisdom', desires to be benevolent but is 'limited by necessity.' The natural operations that we observe at work in life might easily have been bettered by omnipotent Goodness

and made more conformable to our conceptions of right without any loss to the other products of design. Four ways of morally amending the present order suggest themselves to our author. Pleasure might be employed to excite all creatures to self-preservation in every case where the present means is pain;* general laws might be made less rigid where their effects are cruel and unfair, the powers and faculties for good and happiness might be increased; excessive passions in man and unbridled power in Nature might be regulated and controlled so that all convulsions and revolutions should be impossible. As we read the pages of the Dialogues we seem to hear an echo of the ironical pessimism of Voltaire and Bolingbroke and they evidently express his confirmed and settled attitude to the worth of life in his mature as in his early years. And Hume saw in the light of dispassionate reason, how little this suggests the existence of an indulgent fatherly love ruling the universe with a direct interest in the welfare of its creatures; it is rather "a blind "nature impregnated by a great vivifying principle and "pouring forth from her lap without discernment or

* Only a Paley could base any argument upon the inverse consideration that pleasure seems superadded for purposes which 'might have been effected by the operation of pain;' - which is small consolation for the ills of life. Nat. Theol. Cap. 26.

"parental care, her maimed and abortive children." So far as our experience of Reality goes we cannot lean to any extreme theory of the moral qualities it expresses. We cannot suppose them perfectly good or perfectly bad, we dare not suppose them mixed and opposite for that means conflict and contradiction, we can only suppose that good and evil are illusions and that all real things are indifferent.

This antitheistic conclusion (for Hume admits it to be so) is entirely in accordance with his general theory of morals and his contemporaries were not slow to lay their finger upon the point at issue. All moral judgments for Hume depend upon the natural psychology of man. In political and social ethics we conceive right and wrong only because certain ends are agreed upon, have been customary and are accepted as such. Certain rules of conduct appear 'useful' for these ends and therefore we distinguish them as being right. In the ethics of the individual also, we have no reason for making any judgment except through the arbitrary constitution of the human mind; so that as Reid says* "by a change in our structure, what is immoral might become moral, virtue might be turned into vice and vice into virtue." The unessential nature of moral distinctions for Hume had already been illustrated in his other writings, notably in that one, which

* Active Powers, Essay V. c. 7.

bears the title "A Dialogue", and therefore Reid adds justly, "Mr Hume seems perfectly consistent with himself, in allowing of no evidence for the moral attributes of the Supreme Being whatever there may be for his natural attributes." And therefore it is to the nature of his theory of morals that we must trace the motive of his one objection to Natural Religion.

If then in beholding the natural order of the world Hume is moved to despair, the inward moral order in man cannot bring him relief. For it, according to him, is arbitrary and fluctuating and has no independent authority. "What I have said concerning natural evil will apply to moral, with little or no variation; and we have no more reason to infer that the rectitude of the Supreme Being resembles human rectitude than his benevolence resembles the human." And so his negative to the moral argument in Natural Religion is complete. Probably had his scepticism here been less unmistakeably his own reasoned verdict, it might have been taken for a grand satire upon the popular theology of his own day. In it the wretchedness and wickedness of men were favourite topics and the darkest shadows in Hume's pessimism are bright in comparison to the absolute blackness pictured by

orthodox divines when they referred to the estate of sin and misery that resulted from the Fall. It was only Hume's fearless logic that warned them of the atheism implied in their moanings; he himself seems content to rest in the conclusion he had drawn from premisses, which at least were his own, whether others shared them or not.

In whatever way it may be possible to restate the moral argument, Hume's judgment of it in the form in which he conceived it is unfavourable. Even the earliest direct reply to the Dialogues, that of Milner in 1781, points out how far Hume's general position in ethics is accountable for this phase of his speculation. Conscience and the very intuitive nature of the moral sense are not taken into his view at all, and yet there are "final causes in the moral world as obvious as in the administration of the natural world." * And with the deepening sense of the reality of moral distinctions and moral laws, the nature of the moral argument has changed rapidly in modern times and the ascription of ethical perfection to God is on every side considered to be an indispensable and essential condition of any expression of belief in Him.

With Hume the consciousness of such a necessity

* Milner's Answer, sect. 12.

is not present and in summing up briefly the net result of the Dialogues we must bear his difficulty carefully in mind. The total of agreement between the two principals is not very great in extent. They both accept the argument from design and it alone for all we know of God. They find evidence everywhere of the presence of an active ordering Intelligence, a creative Reason, a Mind; this is all we know of God and therefore in this form it is we must worship Him. If we are pleased to call Him good, it is with this reservation that goodness in God is less like goodness as we know it than His Reason is like ours. "The moral qualities in man are more defective in their kind than his natural abilities." Analogy which formerly enabled us to discover the admitted truth fails us now, to describe the moral qualities of God, there is no evidence for them as there undoubtedly is for His designing Intelligence. Let us therefore call Him Mind and for the rest keep silence and believe. This is the final message of Hume's latest utterance on the greatest question of the ages. We should be wrong if we claimed that it contained more - unjust if we supposed it contained less.

In their closing paragraphs the Dialogues call us away from the speculations of pure theology to the practical application of divine truth in life.

He had as little sympathy as his contemporary, the poet Burns, with the awful doctrines of a God all power and fore-knowledge, ruling by terror of hell and hope of heaven, with "devils and torrents of fire and brimstone," in which "the damned are infinitely superior in number to the elect," all the crude Calvinistic dogma so prevalent among his fellow country-men from which they hoped to derive some guidance for their conduct on The Way. In his opinion it overlooked the importance of the ordinary virtues, neglecting them in order to concentrate attention upon eternal salvation, even holding that they are unessential and unmeaning. To him it serves only as an example of false religion with consequences pernicious in society and utterly demoralising in the individual, only a little better than no religion at all, a superstition with a kernel of truth encased in a shell of doctrines that can and ought to be cast away.

For the false Hume would substitute now as the true that conception of religion running through all his writings from the earliest to the latest, according to which we assent to the existence of God and for the rest give all our energies to the practice of morality. "The proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order and

"obedience; and as its operation is silent and only
 "enforces the motives of morality and justice it is
 "in danger of being overlooked and confounded with
 "these other motives. When it distinguishes itself,
 "and acts as a separate principle over men it has de-
 "parted from its proper sphere and has become only a
 "cover to faction and ambition."* Not concerned
 with dogmatising about the many and mysterious attri-
 butes of God or the incomprehensible decrees of His
 Providence as though some necessity lay upon us to
 profess complete knowledge of Him, religion is for
 Hume in the first place a simple faith and a present
 rule of conduct in the present life. It has a certain
 limited knowledge of God derived by reason working in
 the realm of experience; no doubts can take that much
 away, but out beyond there always lies for Hume when
 he goes deepest in his search for truth the realm of
 faith and revelation. The last word of the Dialogues
 is a cry for it, the only refuge for human reason from
 its ignorance and imperfections. So also ends the
 Enquiry, so also the Essay on the Immortality of the

* Compare with this passage of the Dialogues the following, from the History of Great Britain VII., p. 450:- "The proper office of religion is to reform men's lives, to purify their hearts, to enforce all moral duties and to secure obedience to the laws of the civil magistrate."

Soul. For Religion that has to do with concrete life lived in the clear sense of God's existence must surely end either in a claim of perfect knowledge or else in just such a cry. Though Hume nowhere defines these terms of faith and revelation and nowhere gives an analysis of their use, I see no reason why in choosing the second of these alternatives he should be deemed inconsistent or insincere.

And if from the purely historical point of view the closing lines of the Dialogues be considered their author's last utterance in speculation they may be taken to indicate how to the very end the natural man strove with the philosopher in Hume's thought and left him dissatisfied still.